

Well & Good: How We Feel & Why It Matters

Richard Eckersley, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2004. RRP \$32.

2nd Edition: Well & Good: Morality, Meaning and Happiness. 2005. RRP \$24.

Available from bookshops or Text at www.textpublishing.com.au

‘...One of the key strengths of this book is his ability to synthesise knowledge from myriad disciplines and arrive at a coherent story...very readable and accessible to a wide audience....I strongly recommend the book as general reading for anyone interested in the future of our society and as specific reading on a variety of public health courses where the teacher wants to encourage students to think beyond the square...’

Professor Fran Baum

Department of Public Health, Flinders University, SA.

Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health

‘Thought-provoking and insightful, this book synthesizes recent research and present a range of perspectives on key social issues...’

The Futurist

‘Handles the complex material beautifully...always clear, succinct and often personal.’

The Age

‘Affirms strongly the power of the human spirit to divert the cultural currents of history.’

The Canberra Times

‘Lucid and thought-provoking...has done an admirable job of addressing issues of importance to our emotional survival in a culture that often values things over people.’

Herald Sun

Is life getting better, or worse?

Today, many more people are living much richer, longer lives than ever before. So is all well and good? Not exactly. There is growing evidence that quality of life is not the same as standard of living, and that how well we live is not just a matter of how long we live, especially in rich nations such as Australia.

In this book, ANU social analyst Richard Eckersley explores what makes a good life. He goes beyond the usual objective indicators by which we measure our situation to examine the subjective aspects of life that are so important to our wellbeing: meaning and purpose, identity and belonging, perceptions and expectations. His concern, then, is with how we interpret the world and our place in it, with what it is to be human – in other words, with cultures and values.

The book approaches the question from a range of perspectives – from global economics, equity and sustainability and the characteristics of modern Western culture, through the sources of health and happiness and the disturbing trends in young people’s wellbeing, to the prospects of human transformation or obsolescence. It examines the cultural roles of science, religion, economics, education, politics and the media. And it demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things, the ways in which the social forces that drive global change also shape the most personal of experiences, so that the things we need to do to improve conditions on earth over the long term are things we need to do to improve our individual wellbeing now.

The book shows that the many paradoxes and contradictions of our situation reflect not just its inherent complexity and our incomplete understanding of it, but also parallel processes of cultural decay and renewal, a titanic struggle as old ways of thinking about ourselves fail, and new ways of being human strive for definition and acceptance.

Its cultural perspective reinforces the need to shift from a worldview framed by material progress, which gives priority to economic growth and a rising standard of living, to one based on sustainable development, with its aim of balancing social, economic and environmental goals to create a high, equitable and lasting quality of life. Fundamentally, this conceptual transformation requires a deep shift in values.

The book argues that hope for the future rests on several crucial developments: a potent synergy between scientific and spiritual understandings of the world and life; our unprecedented potential as individuals to make our own moral choices and to accept responsibility for these choices; and the evidence that the necessary cultural change is already under way.

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