

Scott Webber  
Happiness  
Book Review  
18/04/2016

The American economy is a synthesis of several diverse economic ideologies i.e capitalism, communism, and socialism in concurrence with one another while attempting to emphasise the American Dream ideology and the boot strap mentality. Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, the authors of *How Much is Enough? Money and the good life*, are leaning heavily to the socialist and possibly communistic style of economics. Their predominant thesis, in conjunction with several sub-thesis which add to their predominant goal, is that the wealthiest nations of the world, the top 1% of the sovereign states, if you would, are working at an alarmingly unnecessary pace. The coauthors of the piece, naturally, use extremely hot button phrases to pull in the audience while denoting their own economic ideologies in the meantime; the coauthors reference deals with the devil and psychotic breaks of the individual for a society agreeing that willingly consents to capitalism and those whom choose a life devoted to accruing money as an end, respectively.

The Skidelskys raise several controversial points, and the first one, rightfully so, is raised within the introduction and first chapter of their book. The first point, a rather appealing point, actually, is the goal of diminishing the work week to less than forty hours to a more appealing time, and provide a maximum amount of leisure time. The issue with this particular claim, which is introduced within the first two pages, is that it is not new. Karl Marx, the author of the Communist Manifesto, assigned a prescriptive nature to the economic work which yielded little to no success. The idea of increased leisure time is rather appealing, however, throughout the book he never offers a reason why it should be so appealing. Rather, the authors offer a counter

argument of enjoyable work, which was yet to be established when Keynes, an author whom is regularly referenced throughout the book, was writing his ideas. The authors strictly offer confusion regarding the recent “issue” of stagnation of work hours as a stupefying feat that they do not understand.

Regardless of the formative sections of their argument the ideological argument presented later still stands to scrutiny. The authors present the archaic idea of “the good life” later in the book as something to strive for in the future. Referencing such awe striking philosophers of the Greek era like Aristotle provide legitimacy of their argument; however, the arguments used are a perversion of the ancient philosopher’s ideology considering the lack of practicality of using a philosophy written thousands of years ago. The ancient Greeks, as many whom study philosophy know, did not hold work in a high regard. The Greeks that the authors resonate with so significantly held philosophy in the highest regard along with politics and other limited intrinsic disciplines. For lack of a better term, the authors seems to stem their arguments from quality philosophy in a lack lustre way. The Delphian Knife, although a quality argument against multitasking, seems to yield little results when applied to a practical application of life.

The philosophers go into the practicality of their philosophy later in the book, logically it follows but when offering such a convoluted argument practicality should take precedent over ideology. Regardless, the opening to the chapter regarding what one needs for a truly happy life is what provokes the most thought. The authors quote Omar Khayyam whom stated a jug of wine, a bite to eat and a significant other is all that is needed to be wealthier than the sultan. Immediately, the reader can understand what is actually significant to the authors, whom claim money is not as significant as those whom chase it in a hedonistic sense believe in the chapter

prior to. The authors state criteria for actions which would yield a “good life” The first being the universality of said action. Essentially, this is a loose reference to the categorical imperative written by Kant. The authors are stating if a particular individual chooses to commit an action said action should bring universal happiness to all those whom choose to commit said actions. The secondary condition of a quality action is that it is the final end of said act. An action, such as money making, is not a final good because it is only used to satisfy another good. To be abundantly clear, obtaining money is not a final end because making money is only used to obtain another good which may or may not yield true happiness. The tertiary aspect of a quality actions is the action, or basic good as the authors call it, must be *sui generis*, which means free from another good. The reference used in the chapter is being free from cancer, albeit a great event and final and universal, the action is not actually a basic good because the action can be consumed by another good, such as being able to be with one’s family for a prolonged period of time. The final condition of the basic good is that the good must be indispensable. Essentially, the action or good, if not obtained, causes genuine harm to a person if the good is not obtained.

The book, although a good thought experiment, is not a quality philosophy of life because it seems to be an outdated defence of a position held by those whom have passed ages ago. The ideological defence of the ancient Greek ideal is interesting, but the fact of the matter is that is not longer applicable to those whom live in todays society. Regardless of the lack of practicality the book is certainly a quality philosophy, and it is work the read if time presents itself.