

**Happiness and Unhappiness of the Economic Agent**  
**19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Charles Gide Society**  
University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. 7-9 July 2022

**Call for Papers**

The 19<sup>th</sup> conference of the Charles Gide Society will take place at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2022. This event, organized by PHARE (Philosophie, Histoire et Analyse de la Pensée Économique, University Paris 1), LED (Laboratoire d'Économie Dyonisienne, University Paris 8) and CES (Centre d'Économie de la Sorbonne, University Paris 1) will address the topic “Happiness and Unhappiness of the Economic Agent”.

Emerging during the French and Scottish enlightenments, political economy was developed as a narrative of the origins, which presented history as taking us away from unhappiness and progressing towards a future of happiness. The stages theories of Smith or Turgot illustrate this perspective. During the same period, the philosophy of Rousseau presented an opposite view, fledging society being characterized by happiness from which civilization led us away. These considerations were part of an empiricist philosophy of knowledge inspired by Locke and Condillac, stressing that human beings were more sensible to pain than to pleasure. What has become of these ways of relating happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain, on the one hand, and the progress of wealth and civilization, on the other, during the process of economic development?

Since the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the question of happiness, like that of unhappiness, was a central concern of classical Utilitarianism. This is true of Bentham and his precursors, of course, but it is also true of those, such as J. S Mill or Sidgwick, for instance, who inspired the most important evolution of this philosophical school. These questions were also important in the writings of the so called “Utopian socialists” and in Marx himself, mostly in his early writings.

Contemporary happiness economics could be seen as a re-engagement with these older questions. This field of economics owes part of its success to the elaboration of new measures to quantify happiness and its evolution through time. In a way, happiness economics highlights a legacy of the Enlightenment. As a matter of fact, the disconnection between economic growth and happiness shown by the paradox of Easterlin (1974) transformed happiness into a supreme goal, in a way that is much reminiscent of certain traits of Utilitarianism. Yet, this approach remains mainly positive and far from the historical conjectures on which political economy was built. Contemporary happiness economics puts aside not only the questions of history and progress, that were crucial for 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and economists, but also the original pairing of happiness and unhappiness.

We propose putting into historical perspective contemporary thought surrounding happiness, by studying the place it occupied in the works of past economists and by considering the way it was related to the concept of unhappiness. How have economists considered the happiness and unhappiness of the economic agent from the origins of the discipline to its most recent developments?

This topic may be studied from a variety of perspectives, of which the following list is only a guideline.

- One may question the assumption of a historical progress that underlies classical economic thought, Marxist thought and that is still present in Keynes. Does the economic agent, as he is represented in economics, always aim to escape the initial disaster illustrated by Robinson Crusoe's shipwreck?
- The economist's ways of dealing with unhappiness and happiness as lived, feared or desired may be compared to the approach of other fields like literature. This bears on the limits of economic thought as a science or a philosophy.
- How did economists discuss the place of the rich and the poor, the outsider and women in relation to happiness and unhappiness?
- The history of macroeconomics also involves an often implicit reference to the quest for happiness and the necessity to account for unhappiness. One may consider the difficulty of accounting for "involuntary unemployment" that haunted macroeconomics after Keynes or the uncertain relation between the statistical measures that have structured macroeconomics and the notion of happiness.
- Historicism and institutionalism have also dealt with our topic by analyzing agents' desires as a mimetic phenomenon influenced by social norms. Does the emphasis placed on preferences by microeconomics hide the frustrations or the regrets caused by an institutional environment generating expectations that are impossible to satisfy?
- We welcome contributions on the history of happiness economics. What are its relations with older contributions? What context led to the contributions of Easterlin or Scitovsky? What role did interdisciplinary transfers between economics, psychology and philosophy play in its development?
- Happiness economics and economics of emotions can also be studied from the perspective of economic philosophy by exploring the ethical and methodological problems raised by subjective measures of happiness when they support public policies.

**Please note:**

- Special sessions will be co-organized with the journal *Cahiers d'économie politique* and will lead to the publication of a special issue titled: "Happiness and Unhappiness of the Economic Agent: the Perception of Economics in Literary Narratives". For these sessions we invite communications on the topic of the conference through a dialogue between economics and literature. The call for papers for those sessions can be found on the website of the conference under the rubric "Economics and Literature".
- Like in other Gide conferences, this conference also welcomes communications relating to all history of economic thought and all economic philosophy.
- Propositions from doctoral students are particularly welcome. Sessions on methodology and practical matters (career plans) will be organized.

Please indicate clearly if your proposal:

(i) deals with the specific topic of the conference,

(ii) answers the CFP of *Cahiers d'économie politique*. Participants can choose if they wish to submit their paper for the special issue of CEP. The usual peer review process will apply.

(iii) falls into the general field of history of economic thought and philosophy of economics,

**Important dates:**

Submission of proposal: 1<sup>st</sup> November – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Format: 300 to 400 words.

Decision of the scientific committee: 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2022.

Registration for the conference. Early fees will be 90 euros until 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. Late fees will be 120 euros starting 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Young researchers' fees will be 30 euros. Participation to the conference requires being a member of the Gide Society.

**Keynote speakers**

Opening conference (TBA)

Professor Joseph Vogl (Humboldt University Berlin)

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**Conference website:** <https://gide2022.sciencesconf.org/>