



Happiness: Lessons from a New Science

Richard Layard

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There is a paradox at the heart of our lives. We all want more money, but as societies become richer, they do not become happier. This is not speculation: It's the story told by countless pieces of scientific research. We now have sophisticated ways of measuring how happy people are, and all the evidence shows that on average people have grown no happier in the last fifty years, even as average incomes have more than doubled. The central question the great economist Richard Layard asks in **Happiness** is this: If we really wanted to be happier, what would we do differently? First we'd have to see clearly what conditions generate happiness and then bend all our efforts toward producing them. That is what this book is about—the causes of happiness and the means we have to effect it.

Until recently there was too little evidence to give a good answer to this essential question, but, Layard shows us, thanks to the integrated insights of psychology, sociology, applied economics, and other fields, we can now reach some firm conclusions, conclusions that will surprise you. **Happiness** is an illuminating road map, grounded in hard research, to a better, happier life for us all.

Happiness: Lessons from a New Science Details

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Author : Richard Layard

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Barbara Ab says

Layard è un economista e il libro è un saggio molto down-to-earth sul livello di felicità al giorno d'oggi rispetto al dopoguerra in America e Europa. Malgrado sia stato scritto agli inizi del duemila è sotto molti punti di vista out-of-date. Lettura cmq piacevole in quanto saggio da "intrattenimento" e non accademico.

Nicole says

First half: somewhat faulty science whose flaws were mildly offensive to my sensibilities. Example: a study of nuns showed that 21% of those most cheerful died in the following nine years, compared to 55% of least cheerful nuns. Layard claims this "shows how happiness can increase a person's life." How naively speculative to assume causality between these two variables!! Perhaps the nuns were happy for the very reason that they were healthy. Or maybe an outside variable (having family members visit to care for them) caused both correlations. The whole thing was silly and but one example of the flaws of the first half. Still, vaguely interesting, although not nearly as well-written as Daniel Gilbert's "Stumbling Upon Happiness" on roughly the same topics.

Second half: PAINFUL PREACHY PROPAGANDA on how to be happier. Layard discourages teachers treating religious ideas as "interesting topics for discussion" and advocates presenting them as "established truths." In his disucssion of cocaine, he snarkily refers to nicotine as "more gentle - it kills the body, not the soul." Had I not been reading this for a class, I would have thrown it across the room. UGH. In short: exactly what I feared might happen as I ventured into the self-help section to buy this last week.

Chad says

Interesting summary of the research on happiness with some very strong opinions on how to apply it. I was a bit troubled by his assertion that mobility is bad for happiness, because research shows that when we live in communities with more "others"--those not like ourselves--there is more mental illness and crime. That's the last thing we need to hear in today's world. However, I do like his assertions that we can do more to educate youth on emotional intelligence, empathy, relationships, etc. I also like his assertion (clearly pushing back on the US economy) that increased work and productivity doesn't ultimately make us happier.

David Laing says

underwhelming

Lucy says

i think this is actually the one recommended in the review i read, but it was still pretty interesting. although, i did get kind of depressed at how being miserable changes your brain and weakens your immune system and makes you die sooner (apparently oscar winners live longer than mere nominees). the book is essentially an argument for making happiness the ultimate aim of society, and describes the kind of public policy that would be required. he mainly argues for more family-friendly work places (since if some people work longer hours to get more money, everyone else will need to do the same to keep up, he views income tax as a way of making people pay the cost of decreasing other people's happiness) and the redistribution of wealth to the poor (since their gain in happiness is greater than the loss to the rich). he doesn't like economists much for their lack of concern for people's feelings, but some of his arguments are pretty much the same way (eg abortion should be legal because it reduces the crime rate). i was hoping for more science than economics, so maybe i'll still read the other book, anyway.

Maria Beck says

Denna bok berättar om den underliggande vetenskapen till många av LYCKANS teser, varav en understryker vikten av att sluta jämföra oss med andra. Våra upplevelser ger oss då större glädje. Ett lyckligt samhälle uppnås genom att vi uppbringar sympati för våra medmänniskor samtidigt som vi uppträder objektivt och opartiskt. Om vi aktivt gläder oss åt andras VÄLBEFINNANDE så skall vi allesammans bli LYCKLIGARE. Bokens många infallsvinklar och aspekter gör den intressant och läsvärd.

Realini says

Happiness- Lessons From A New Science by Richard Layard

Another version of this note and thoughts on other books are available at:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list...> and <http://realini.blogspot.ro/>

This is a Fantastic book.

Really!

It touches so many aspects of happiness that I am in awe.

From Bhutan to the Academy Awards Winners.

From taxation to teaching morals in schools.

The different indicators that make the differences in well being levels between countries are revealed.

They are:

- Levels of trust
- Proportion of people belonging to social entities
- Unemployment figures
- Divorce rates

- Quality of government
- Religious belief

Alas, we have a government that is rightly called "The Red Plague"

And looking around the world to the likes of Trump, Erdogan, Fillon, Putin, Maduro, Duterte, Xi and their buddies it is likely that happiness levels will be affected in those lands.

Status is important for life satisfaction and...life expectancy.

Civil servants tested in the UK have had different levels of cholesterol and other important parameters.

Those in important positions, with higher status lived four or five years longer than the others, who were lower in the hierarchy.

And a strange fact:

Academy Awards nominees have been looked at.

Those who won the Award went on to live longer, four years more than the others who had been nominated but lost.

Bhutan is an interesting, exceptional case.

Their king has decided to look at the Gross Happiness Level and not at the GDP.

Alas, this happened in 1999, but one year later he has decided to allow television and public advertising. After that, levels of aggression and conflict have risen steeply.

This was confirmed in studies made in remote regions of Canada, after the introduction of television.

The author is right in saying that information would be excellent, but ads make people want things they don't need.

And then the rat race is a plague upon our houses.

The example of the Dalai Lama might be revealing

He went into a big department store and said something like:

Wow, so many things that I don't need.

Or the other story of the Mexican fishermen visited by entrepreneurial Gringos...

- Why don't buy another fishing boat?
- What for?
- Well, to expand
- And then...
- You can buy a few more
- So...
- Make money and then retire near the beach and play with kids and grandkids...
- But we are doing that already

Layard is of the opinion that taxes might work.

First of all, one reason for unhappiness is the huge gap between those at the top and the rest.

Then excessive work might need to be taxed, so that people find a better balance...maybe like the Mexican fishermen?

Fabulous, extraordinary masterpiece.

YeJi says

I was looking for a happier read after All Quiet on the Western Front then found this on my shelf. Although it isn't what I expected it to be, I found it enjoyable to read through the economics principles that I have studied at school. Many of the papers were ones that I have already read, so the material wasn't completely new to me. Richard Layard has researched a lot for this book, and it shows. He cites different papers to make a cohesive and well-rounded argument. Some parts of this non-fiction are dry, and I wish there were more case studies incorporated into this book.

Overall, I was happy to find a read that discusses happiness on economic terms, and refresh my memory on a lot of the subjects.

Heather says

I really liked this book. I have read several books on happiness lately and thought this one really made some good points. As an economist, Layard argues that we should be paying more attention to what makes us happy and helping countries and communities work towards that instead of just economic development. After all, it's more than money that makes us happy. If we were to measure happiness instead of income by country we might be able to see better how we are measuring up to the principles espoused in the Declaration of Independence.

Some main factors affecting our happiness include family relationships, financial situation, work, community and friends, health, personal freedom and personal values. So, money doesn't necessarily make us happier. A lot of it is about comparison and having more than someone else. Kind of sad, but that does seem like human nature. We are afraid to lose things more than we are happy about gaining things, generally.

A few quotes and ideas that I liked:

* "Our thoughts do affect our feelings. As we shall see, people are happier if they are compassionate; and they are happier if they are thankful for what they have. When life gets rough, these qualities become ever more important (p. 8)."

* Several times the author made the point that strong families and healthy family relationships were very important in living a happy life and that our societies should focus more on helping to create strong families. I completely agree--as the fundamental unit of society family is so important!

* One key thing that was mentioned, but I don't think received enough attention in the book was faith in God

(and His Plan of Happiness), but I do think there were some interesting points made about "educating our spirits:"

"First, our increasing tendency to do the best for ourselves is doing us no good. We spend too much time living in the future rather than the present. Some planning is essential, but too many people are mainly focused on tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, they will be planning for the day after....Cultivate the sense of awe and wonder; savor the things of today; and look about you with the same interest as if you were watching a movie or taking a photo. Engage with the world and with the people around you. In one sense, as Leo Tolstoy said, 'the most important person in the world is the one in front of you now.'

"Second, we have to control our tendency to compare ourselves with others. We should try to make the happiness of others our goal, and to enjoy the success of others. We should also have confidence in our own judgments rather than the judgments of others. In the end the only person's opinion of you that matters is your own.

"There is ultimately one common strand in what can make us happy: it is love (p. 199)."

While I don't see this book as all inclusive on the ideas of what happiness is and how to find it I think it makes some interesting points.

Brian says

This book was pretty interesting. Layard is an economist and he talks about how it would seem better for nations to use a measure of happiness as a marker of progress rather than gross national product. He does a good job of evaluating the science of happiness (enough to satisfy my rather critical eye) and concludes that we can now measure happiness well enough in a meaningful way. The book ranges from the science of happiness, to the economics of producing happiness, and to the spiritual aspects of happiness (getting into meditation, etc.). A pretty well rounded review! I found some of its most thought provoking points to be how "relative" happiness is, and how that needs to be considered in public policy and in personal decisions. In the most basic example, raising the income of a poor person creates much more happiness than raising the income of a wealthy person by the same amount. If raising average income is our goal, then either option is viewed the same. In a somewhat related vein, we personally habituate ourselves to current lifestyles and comfort of living, making it so that we are continually seeking improvements and constantly comparing ourselves to others to assess our standing. Often we seek improvements through material things, which unfortunately are the things that we habituate to most quickly. Other things like friendship we seem to not habituate to, and thus may be more productive investments for happiness! The book also touches on the unfortunate phenomenon of the rat race at work and how frustrating this can be to everyone's happiness. The author proposes some solutions which I found interesting if not exactly likely in today's society. More than a blueprint for public policy, I found this book valuable for making me more cognizant of what makes me happy and highlighting some concepts to consider as I go about my life.

Alex Burgess says

Part 1 of this book is great, for the most part. It contains some various interesting statistics and thoughts on various societal and genetic changes and their effects on happiness.

Part 2, and Part 3, are a whole different story. The ideas are severely underdeveloped and mostly lazy, to the point where it feels like someone submitting a general proposal for writing a paper rather than a paper itself. Too many opinions are presented as justified and 'self-evident'. This does not strike me as having taken much mental effort to write. Little-to-none of the argumentation is convincing.

Ian Vollbracht says

An instant classic. There is a great deal of wisdom in these pages.

Beckie says

i think this is actually the one recommended in the review i read, but it was still pretty interesting. although, i did get kind of depressed at how being miserable changes your brain and weakens your immune system and makes you die sooner (apparently oscar winners live longer than mere nominees). the book is essentially an argument for making happiness the ultimate aim of society, and describes the kind of public policy that would be required. he mainly argues for more family-friendly work places (since if some people work longer hours to get more money, everyone else will need to do the same to keep up, he views income tax as a way of making people pay the cost of decreasing other people's happiness) and the redistribution of wealth to the poor (since their gain in happiness is greater than the loss to the rich). he doesn't like economists much for their lack of concern for people's feelings, but some of his arguments are pretty much the same way (eg abortion should be legal because it reduces the crime rate). i was hoping for more science than economics, so maybe i'll still read the other book, anyway.

Gawaind says

A book on the economics of happiness, that is mistakenly placed under psychology. Plainly - economists tend to be clumsy when counting happiness, and Layard gives us some tools to count correctly. In sum, love brings happiness. Money does, but not much past a middle class amount. We tend to compare ourselves to our neighbors.

Lots of neat little psychological truths about how we make economic decisions. For people who want to learn about economics but don't want the math.

Holly says

so far I really like this! Yes, part of my grad program - this week's topic: Taking Happiness Seriously.

I should send this book to my ex-husband. he thinks fun and happiness are utterly unimportant.

* * * * *

Interesting - don't agree with everything, but written by an economist - so - what can I expect? However, he's moving in a good direction I think.
