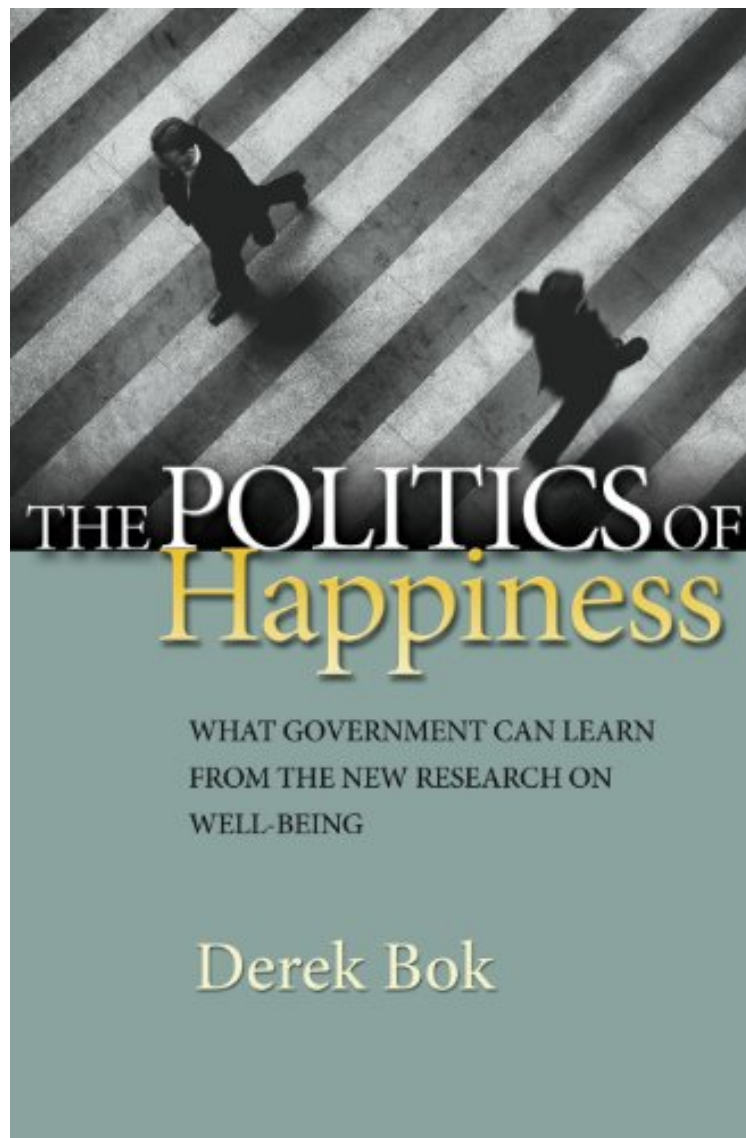


[Download ebook] The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being

The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being

Derek Bok

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Derek Bok : The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being:

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful. A Paragon of the Application of Science to Social Policy By Herbert Gintis Derek Bok, long-time President of and now Research Professor at Harvard University, is among the

most prominent of contemporary American intellectuals. The scientific enterprise upon which this book is predicated began decades ago with the evidence presented by Richard Easterlin in 1974 that subjective measures of happiness are not much affected by decades of strong economic growth. Since this time several eminent researchers have continued the investigation of the sources of happiness by asking people how happy they are, on a numerical scale of one to seven (or ten, or whatever), or by asking them to pick themselves out of a series of pictures of faces of people varying from the depressed and miserable to the joyously happy. There are four major findings in this area. First, a country can double its per capita income without experiencing a noticeable change in the average level of happiness of its citizens. Second, people seem to be poor predictors of what will make them happy. In particular, people generally think that more money will make them happier, whereas the evidence is that even very large changes in income (e.g., by winning a national lottery) do not affect personal happiness. Third, increasing income inequality does not lower the happiness of the less-well-off. This is surprising because many had thought that it is the fact that happiness is based on relative, not absolute, income that explains the failure of higher average incomes to entail higher average happiness. Finally, there is no correlation between the fraction of gross national income that governments devote to help the poor and other vulnerable groups, and the happiness of the target groups. Despite the failure of the received wisdom on personal happiness, a number of researchers have found several sources of happiness (other than basic temperament) that are strong and systematic across research as samples, as summarized as follows (see, for instance, the work of economist Andrew Oswald): (a) being happily married; (b) being employed; (c) feeling in good health; (d) being religious; (e) helping others; and finally, (f) living in a free country with a democratic form of government. Now, it is worth reading this list over carefully, because if we believe social policy should promote happiness, then very important policy recommendations flow from the above list. The most important is obviously that we should abandon economic growth in the form of every higher GDP in favor of an economic with low growth that promotes human happiness. Bok confronts this recommendation head on, but his analysis is rather weak. An economist would suggest not that we promote "no growth" but rather "growth in what promotes happiness." This calls for redefine GDP to include factors that are important in happiness, such as a low divorce rate, a low unemployment rate, a high level of private charity activity, and a responsive democratic government. Moreover, if there are groups that have been left out of the happiness equation (e.g., minorities in dysfunctional communities), then material resources could be directed to meet their needs, even as the better-off are aided in achieving more self-actualizing goals. The various chapters of Bok's book, following his exposition of the empirical research and an insightful evaluation of its validity and of the various pitfalls in its interpretation, are devoted to the various areas that have been shown to contribute to personal happiness, including poverty, pain and suffering, broken families, dysfunctional education, and the failures of democratic government to capture the approval of citizens. This is only the beginning of policy research in this area, but Derek Bok has placed his valuable imprimatur upon it, and with some luck and courage, it will be an area of increasing research activity in the future. It is an excellent example of the application of scientific research to social policy, avoiding the political bombast of traditional political philosophies (which, in my estimate, are due to be replaced by systems of greater relevance to our contemporary situation).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great - Many Different Types of Happiness and What Government Can Do By Andrew T. Fisher Bok has written an excellent summary of the many true sources of happiness which include: (1) your family and social relationships, (2) freedom to pursue interesting unique hobbies, (3) a wide, broad education including literature, culture, history, art, music, sports and many other topics that are not strictly vocational (3 R's). He cites a number of happiness research projects but points out that many more are needed. Bok points out how government can use this happiness research to improve the general well being of all its citizens. He raises many important questions: (1) How much should government base its policies on happiness? (2) What is the best way to deal with (a) inequality, (b) financial hardship, (c) suffering such as chronic pain, sleep disorders, depression, and others? Most important, Bok questions our high priority on growth. We are constantly being bombarded with advertising telling us to buy a new and bigger car, house, computer, cell phone, and ever so many other goods and services. He points out that numerous happiness research projects have pointed out that increasing your possessions, wealth, and/or power only increases your happiness TEMPORARILY!! Soon you get used to it and want even more. With our finite earth and resources, growth is NOT the answer to more happiness!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It is a great work of scholarship and research By Eugene Ares It is a great work of scholarship and research. The bibliography makes it even more versatile for further inquiries. It's a model for other countries and nations on how to deepen their evaluation of the effectiveness of government leadership and programs. I donated 10 copies to the main library of the Supreme Court of the Philippines. Researchers and scholars of other countries, especially those from developing countries should try to adapt the same approach and format and in the context of their national settings and conditions. The peoples' happiness must be a grand goal of governments.

During the past forty years, thousands of studies have been carried out on the subject of happiness. Some have explored the levels of happiness or dissatisfaction associated with typical daily activities, such as working, seeing friends, or doing household chores. Others have tried to determine the extent to which income, family, religion, and other factors are associated with the satisfaction people feel about their lives. The Gallup organization has begun

conducting global surveys of happiness, and several countries are considering publishing periodic reports on the growth or decline of happiness among their people. One nation, tiny Bhutan, has actually made "Gross National Happiness" the central aim of its domestic policy. How might happiness research affect government policy in the United States--and beyond? In *The Politics of Happiness*, former Harvard president Derek Bok examines how governments could use the rapidly growing research data on what makes people happy--in a variety of policy areas to increase well-being and improve the quality of life for all their citizens. Bok first describes the principal findings of happiness researchers. He considers how reliable the results appear to be and whether they deserve to be taken into account in devising government policies. Recognizing both the strengths and weaknesses of happiness research, Bok looks at the policy implications for economic growth, equality, retirement, unemployment, health care, mental health, family programs, education, and government quality, among other subjects. Timely and incisive, *The Politics of Happiness* sheds new light on what makes people happy and how government policy could foster greater satisfaction for all.

One of Fiscal Times Best Books for 2010"Compelling."--David Brooks, *New York Times*"With his clear analysis and outside-the-box ideas, Bok encourages thoughtful consideration of what we should want for ourselves and expect from our government."--Sarah Halzack, *Washington Post*"Careful and cogent. . . . Bok believes . . . that the American government, which is in no danger of tranquilizing its citizens, can and should design policies to enhance their happiness."--Glenn C. Altschuler, *Boston Globe*"Delving into the burgeoning field of happiness research, former president of Harvard University Bok (*The State of the Nation*) sifts through scientific studies on how societal well-being indications can and should be used to shape social and political policy. . . . Bok's arguments on how good government, access to education, and adequate child care make for a pleasanter society are incontrovertible, and he initiates an important, jargon-free discussion of American public policy, especially when its aims contradict or diminish the public weal."--*Publisher's Weekly*"Bok addresses how happiness research could inform US policy. The first three chapters unpack the claims of happiness psychologists, evaluate reliability and discuss policy application. The remainder address happiness in relation to economic growth, inequality, financial hardship (retirement, healthcare and job loss), suffering (chronic pain, sleep disorder and depression), marriages and families, education and the quality of government. The debate on happiness, Bok concludes, 'will be an accomplishment of enduring importance to humankind'."--Paul Stenner, *Times Higher Education*"Mr. Bok's rich, challenging, remarkable new book is remarkably solid. For it is based not on the empty aphorisms so beloved by lazy and second-rate pseudo-philosophers. There is a surprisingly massive quantity of serious statistical and sociological research that has been done on the subject of happiness in both prosperous and developing societies, and Mr. Bok draws liberally and impressively upon it. His conclusions are remarkable and well worth heeding. . . . This is a remarkable, original, provocative and brilliant book. Anyone who wants to be happy, or to share their happiness with others, should snap it up at once."--Martin Sieff, *Washington Times*"Bok reviews a wide range of surveys that consistently associate levels of happiness or satisfaction with several demographic and social variables. . . . Bok concludes that the scientific evidence on well-being is now robust enough for politicians to start taking action."--Felicia Huppert, *Nature*"[Bok asks] whether governments should really try to make their citizens happier. Answer: yes, not through promoting economic growth, but through environmental policies, healthcare, and strengthening marriage and the family."--Glenda Cooper, *Prospect Magazine*"Provides insights into the mysteries of happiness."--Phillip Longman, *Washington Monthly*"Bok, former president of Harvard, outlines the work of 'happiness scholars' and suggests that their findings would be an 'eminently defensible way' of informing public policy, at least as valuable as opinion polls or economic indexes. Among the most significant findings he cites is that an increase in wealth does not correlate with an increase in happiness and that rising inequality has not caused a decrease. From these and other points, Bok argues for many general and specific policy measures that, he believes, would add to the sum of happiness in the United States. . . . Readers will find him in turn provocative and quixotic."--Bob Nardini, *Library Journal*"[A] sweeping study of behavioural research and public policy. . . . This is a book that leaders of developing nations obsessed with economic growth will find puzzling and troubling, but not as much as market economists will."--Stephen Matchett, *Australian*"Okay, I hear your protests, your gut telling you that Bok is a naïve professor with his head in the clouds. Skeptical myself, I found his book full of surprises. Example: The growing inequality of incomes in the United States has not made Americans more dissatisfied than in previous times. Only one group is upset by this growing disparity--wealthy Americans! See what I mean? Counterintuitive conclusions, like this one, abound."--Mandy Twaddell, *Providence Journal*"Relatively light and accessible. . . . Although Bok is partisan, his is a good introduction to the subject. He accurately outlines the findings of the research while questioning its shortcomings."--Daniel Ben-Ami, *Spiked of Books*"[This] is a careful, helpful book. It brings together the key findings in the area of happiness research--a relatively new discipline of the social sciences that uses surveys and polls to measure well-being. . . . *The Politics of Happiness* is not a complete answer. . . . It does however, add the methodology and reasoning of modern social science to the profound insights of ancient moral and political philosophy."--Nitin Pai, *Pragati, Indian National Interest* "Bok explores a number of new studies related to the concept of happiness and then painstakingly asks whether and how government can do much to increase

human happiness. . . . The Politics of Happiness raises a number of challenges to our assumptions."--Debbie Bruno, Roll Call
"This book is clear and nicely written and provides a fascinating overview of what does--and doesn't--contribute to the wellbeing of people in the Western world."--Miriam Cosic, Australian
"Bok's summary of the available research is skillful and to the point."--Tevi Troy, Claremont of Books
"A book policymakers and people in governance should read. So that there can be more happiness all around."--Vaidehi Nathan, Organiser
"This book offers a fresh look at the surprisingly not-so-elusive quality of happiness and why economic policy can make a difference where it counts. Bok has a smooth and convincing narrative style, and he weighs his arguments carefully."--Maureen Mackey, Fiscal Times
From the Back Cover
"Bok provides a lucid analysis of scientific research on human happiness, and shows how it can and should be used to shape social policy. The breadth of his knowledge is matched only by the depth of his insight. There is not a word in this book to be missed."--Daniel Gilbert, author of Stumbling on Happiness
"Derek Bok asks the right question, 'What policies would produce the greatest happiness?' and he gives great and often startling answers, combining his deep knowledge of politics with the new findings of happiness research."--Richard Layard, author of Happiness: Lessons from a New Science
"Consistently fair-minded, pragmatic, and insightful, this is the single best book on its subject to date. Derek Bok confronts the findings of happiness research head-on and does not shy away from pursuing its implications."--Darrin M. McMahon, author of Happiness: A History
"This strong and timely book should have a major impact on how policymakers think."--Barry Schwartz, author of The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less
"Happiness research has principally focused on the factors affecting happiness, while policy implications remain an afterthought. There needs to be a more thoughtful and thorough consideration of these policy implications, and this excellent book is a significant contribution to the subject."--Richard Easterlin, University of Southern California
About the Author
Derek Bok is the 300th Anniversary Research Professor at Harvard University. From 1971 to 1991, he served as Harvard's twenty-fifth president, and he served again as interim president from 2006 to 2007. He is the author of The State of the Nation and The Trouble with Government, and coauthor of The Shape of the River (Princeton).