

Can We Be Happier?

#LSEHappy

Professor Richard Layard

Emeritus Professor of Economics, LSE and Head of the CEP's Wellbeing Research Programme.

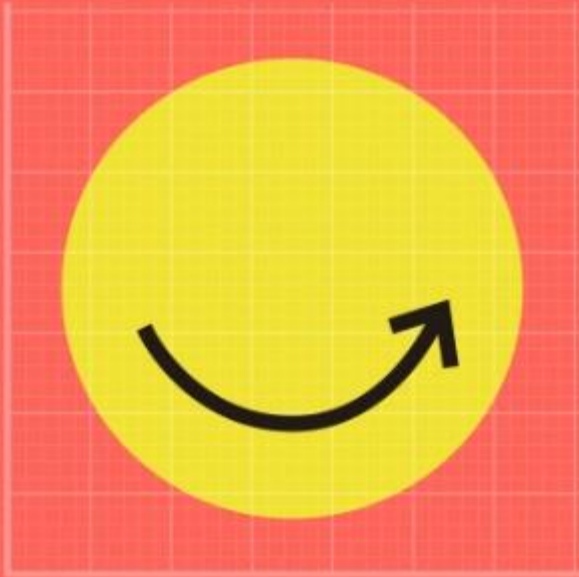
Chair: Minouche Shafik

Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Hosted by Centre for Economic Performance

A PELICAN BOOK

Can We Be Happier?
Evidence and Ethics
Richard Layard



CAN WE BE HAPPIER?

Evidence and ethics

Richard Layard

with George Ward

3 February 2020

THE HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE

The best state of society is when there is the most happiness (especially among those who are least happy)

- **ETHICS** We should produce the most happiness we can in the world...
- **POLITICS** The goal of government should be to produce the greatest happiness...

ETHICS: THE GOAL

- **Not personal success, which is zero-sum for society**
- **But positive-sum, where we get more of our happiness from making others happier**

- **We should aim in our lives to create as much happiness in the world as we can.**
- **Inspiring – default is self-absorption**
- **Needs supporting organisations
(e.g. Action for Happiness)**

SELF-CARE AND CARE OF OTHERS

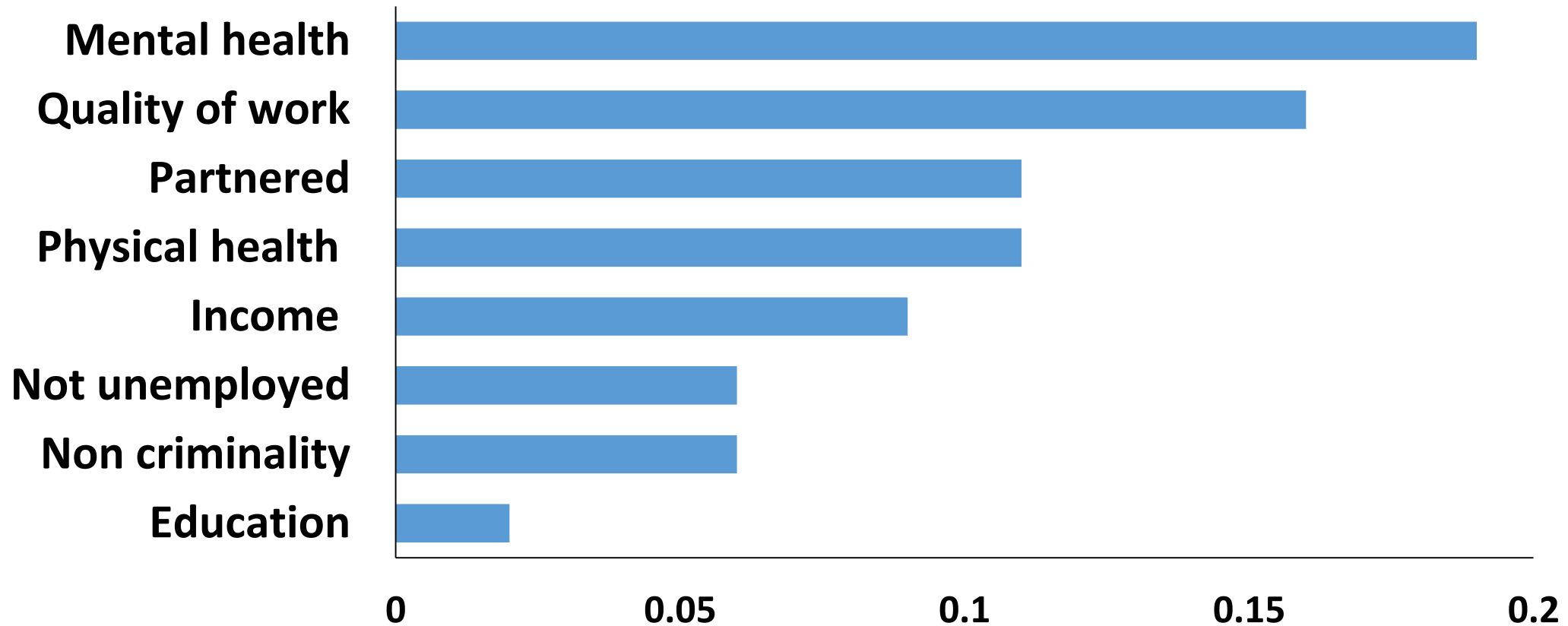
- **Self-care – by changing our thoughts we can change our feelings
e.g. positive psychology, mindfulness.**
- **Care of others: needs evidence**
 - (i) on what matters (naturalistic)**
 - (ii) on what works (experimental)**

WHAT FACTORS MATTER FOR HAPPINESS?

PERSONAL Mental and physical health
Human relationships
(family, work, community)
Income

SOCIAL Freedom and quality of government
Trust
Social support
Peace

WHAT THINGS BEST EXPLAIN THE SPREAD OF HAPPINESS IN BRITAIN?



Source: Mainly BHPS

Partial correlation coefficients

WHAT WORKS? WHO CAN DO WHAT?

SCHOOL-TEACHERS: measure wellbeing, teach life-skills weekly

MANAGERS: give workers more control, no 'forced-ranking'

COMMUNITY LEADERS: generate social connection. Social infrastructure more important than physical infrastructure.

THERAPISTS: new cost-effective therapies

SCIENTISTS: protect future generations

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Create conditions for greatest happiness (especially among those who are least happy).

Method: choose policies which produce the highest life-satisfaction

Net Increase in happiness

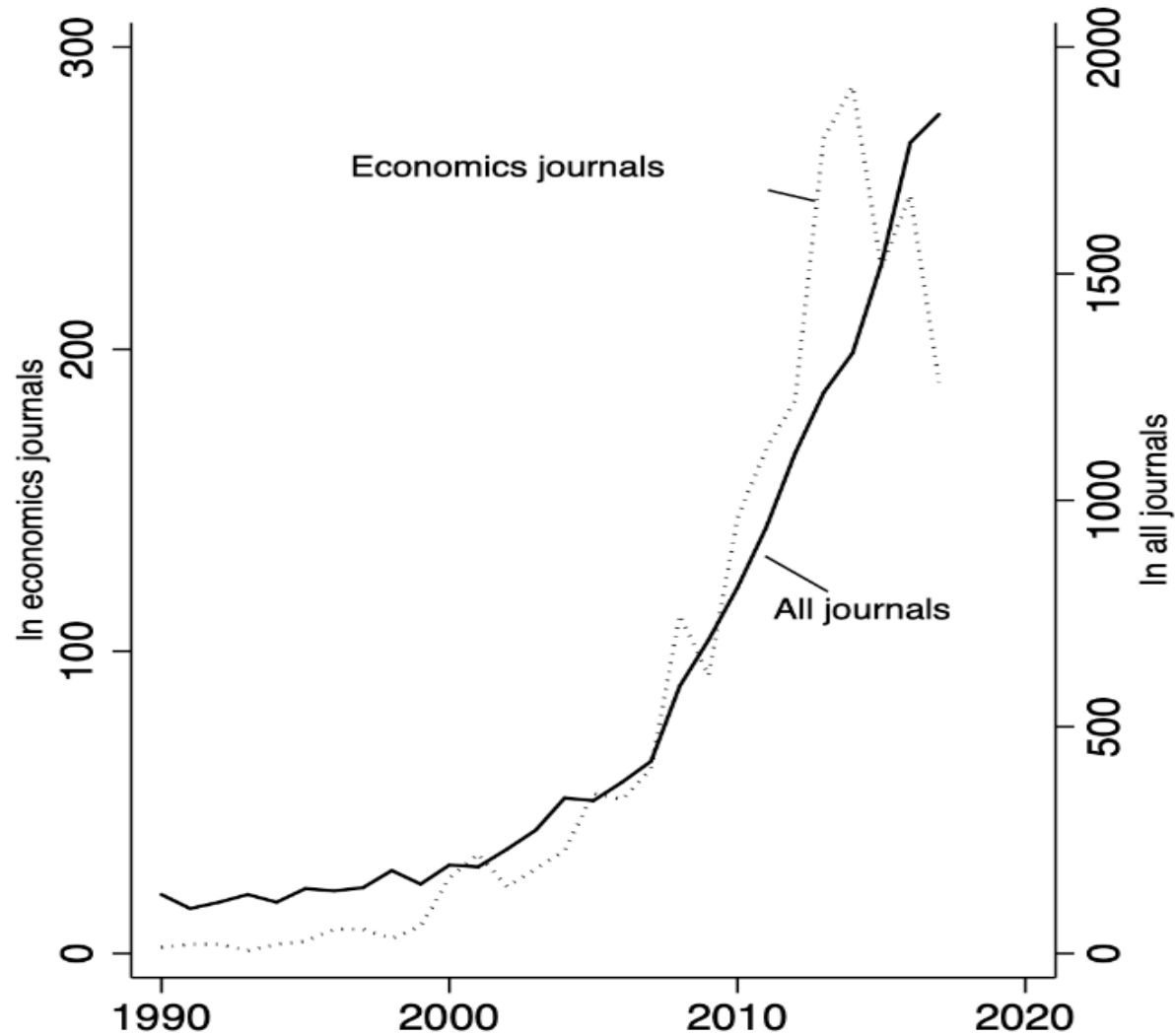
Net public cost

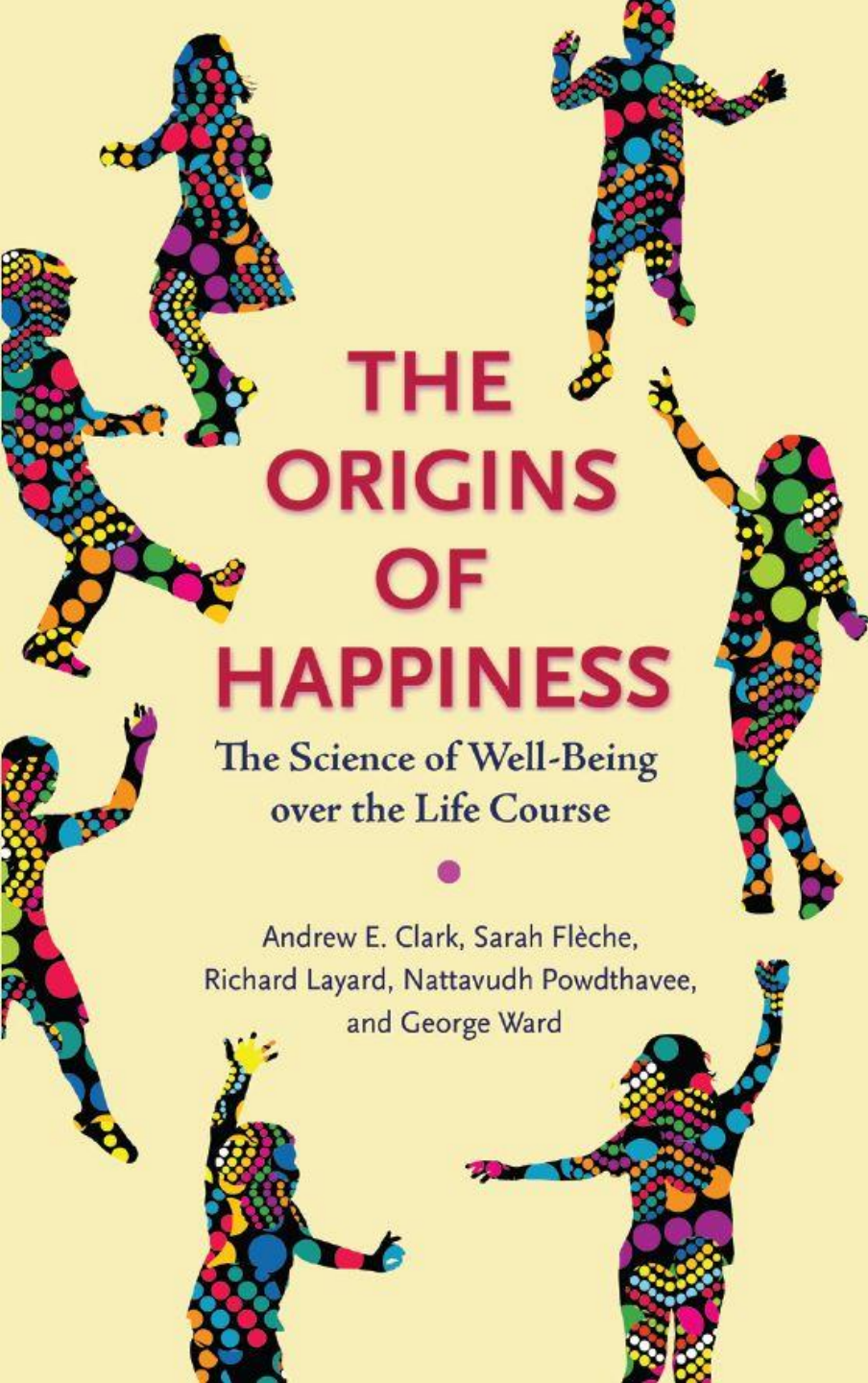
IT'S IN THEIR INTEREST: HAPPINESS DETERMINES ELECTIONS

In European elections since 1970, votes cast for the government are better explained by the happiness of the people than by all economic variables combined.

[Ward, G. (2020). American Journal of Political Science]

THE MOST RAPIDLY GROWING SOCIAL SCIENCE





The Origins of Happiness

The Science of Well-Being over the Life Course

**Andrew E. Clark,
Sarah Flèche,
Richard Layard,
Nattavudh Powdthavee
George Ward**

MAP OF RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE



CONCLUSION: THE HAPPINESS REVOLUTION

The evidence

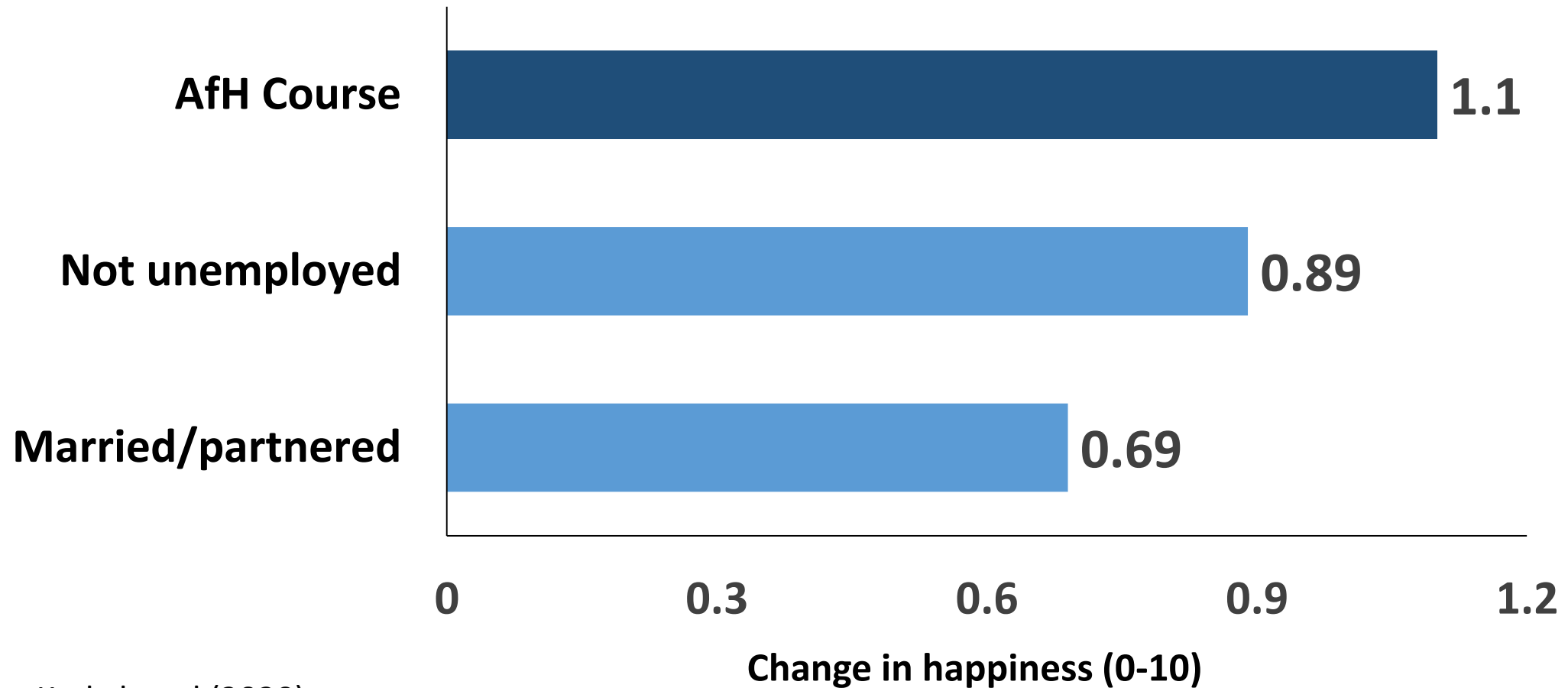
Millions of people

Governments

OECD and European Council

**New Zealand, Scotland, Iceland
(wellbeing budgets)**

Exploring What Matters raises happiness more than finding a job or a partner



Source: Krekel et al (2020).

Can We Be Happier?

#LSEHappy

Professor Richard Layard

Emeritus Professor of Economics, LSE and Head of the CEP's Wellbeing Research Programme.

Chair: Minouche Shafik

Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Hosted by Centre for Economic Performance