

Does money buy happiness?

Does money buy happiness? Not. Ah, but would a little more money make us a little happier? Many of us smirk¹⁾ and nod. There is, we believe, some connection between fiscal²⁾ fitness and feeling fantastic. Most of us would say that, yes, we would like to be rich. Three in four American collegians now consider it “very important” or “essential” that they become “very well off financially.” Money matters.

Well, are rich people happier? Researchers have found that in poor countries, such as Bangladesh, being relatively well off does make for greater well-being. We need food, rest, shelter and social contact.

But a surprising fact of life is that in countries where nearly everyone can afford life's necessities, increasing affluence matters surprisingly little. The correlation between income and happiness is “surprisingly weak,” observed University of Michigan researcher Ronald Inglehart in one 16-nation study of 170,000 people. Once comfortable, more money provides diminishing returns. The second piece of pie, or the second \$100,000, never tastes as good as the first.

Even lottery³⁾ winners and the Forbes' 100 wealthiest Americans have expressed only slightly greater happiness than the average American. Making it big⁴⁾ brings temporary joy. But in the long run wealth is like health: its utter absence can breed misery, but having it doesn't guarantee happiness. Happiness seems less a matter of getting what we want than of wanting what we have.

Has our happiness floated upward with the rising economic tide? Are we happier today than in 1940, when two out of five homes lacked a shower or tub? When heat often meant feeding wood or coal into a furnace? When 35 percent of homes had no toilet?

Actually, we are not. Since 1957, the number of Americans who say they are “very happy” has declined from 35 to 32 percent. Meanwhile, the divorce rate has doubled, the teen suicide rate has nearly tripled⁵⁾, the violent crime rate has nearly quadrupled⁶⁾ (even after the recent decline), and more people than ever (especially teens and young adults) are depressed.

I call this soaring wealth and shrinking spirit “the American paradox⁷⁾.” More than ever, we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale, secured rights and diminished civility. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life. We celebrate our prosperity but yearn⁸⁾ for purpose. We cherish our freedoms but long for connection. In an age of plenty, we feel spiritual hunger.

by David Myers

金钱能买幸福吗？

金钱能买幸福吗？不！但是多一点儿钱是不是会令我们多一点儿幸福呢？对此，我们中的很多人会嘿嘿一笑并点头同意。我们相信，物质富裕与精神愉悦间存在着某种关联。大多数人会说，是的，我们希望富有。当今3/4的美国大学生认为“经济上很富足”是“十分重要的”或“必要的”。金钱确实重要。

那么富人就更幸福吗？研究人员发现在贫穷国家，如孟加拉国，相对的富有确实能够带来较大的安康。我们需要食品、休息、住房以及社会交往。

但是一个令人惊讶的事实是，在那些几乎人人都丰衣足食的国家中，更加富足并没有什么重要意义。收入与幸福的相互关系是“微乎其微”，密歇根大学研究员罗纳德·英格利哈特在一项对16个国家17万人的调查报告中就是这样说。人们一旦生活舒适，更多的金钱所带来的幸福感便会递减。第二张饼不如第一张香，第二次获得10万美元不如第一次那样兴奋。

即使彩票中奖者以及《福布斯》杂志选出的前100名最富有的美国人都表示，比起一般的美国人，他们只是略感幸福而已。发大财能够带来短暂的快乐，但从长远来讲，财富就如同健康：完全没有，会带来苦难，但是有了却不一定能够保证幸福。幸福似乎并不意味着得到我们想要的东西，而意味着想要我们已有的东西。

我们的幸福是否伴随着经济浪潮上涨了呢？回顾1940年，2/5的家庭没有淋浴或者浴缸，取暖通常意味着向炉子中添加木块或者煤块，35%的家庭没有卫生间。同那时相比，今天的我们是否多了一分幸福？

实际上，我们并没有。自1957年以来，声称自己“非常幸福”的美国人已经从35%降到了32%。同时，离婚率翻了一番，青少年自杀率增长了近2倍，暴力犯罪率上升了近3倍（即便最近有所下降），情绪消沉的人数（尤其是青少年）超过了以往任何时候。

我把这种飞速增长的财富和不断萎靡的精神称之为“美国矛盾”。这种情况现在甚至以往任何时候：我们得到了大房子，但却换来了家庭的破裂；我们得到了高收入，但却降低了道德水准；我们得到了有保障的权利，但却渐渐失去了礼仪。我们善于谋生，但却往往不会营造生活。我们庆祝取得的成功，但却感到缺乏目的。我们珍视个人的自由，但却又渴望着与他人交流。在这个物质财富充裕的时代，我们感到精神上的饥渴。

NOTE 注释：

1. smirk [smə:k] vi. 傻笑，得意的笑
2. fiscal ['fiskəl] adj. (一般) 财务的，金钱的
3. lottery ['lɒtəri] n. 彩票
4. make it big [美俚] 飞黄腾达
5. triple ['tripl] vi. 增至三倍
6. quadruple ['kwɒdrʌpl] vi. 成为四倍
7. paradox ['pærədɒks] n. 有明显矛盾特点的事（人，行为等）
8. yearn [jɜ:n] vi. 渴望，想念，怀念，向往