

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND JOHN ADAMS BELIEVED:  
THE ONLY PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT IS TO MAXIMIZE  
THE TOTAL HAPPINESS OF THE GOVERNED

In their words:

*“The only orthodox object of the institution of government is to secure the greatest degree of happiness possible to the general mass of those associated under it.”* Thomas Jefferson

*“The End of all Government is the happiness of the People ...the greatest happiness of the greatest Number is the point to be obtained.”* John Adams

**Policymakers who truly desired to serve the most important ideals of our Enlightenment philosopher Founders would want to create public policies based on these facts:**

Two Princeton University researchers studied the question of whether money buys happiness. Their analysis of more than 450,000 responses to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index revealed that people’s emotional well-being or happiness does not increase above a household income of about \$75,000 per year. Emotional well-being was measured based on people’s frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger, fascination, anxiety, and affection the day prior to the poll.

However, the researchers also found that “life evaluation” or the thoughts that people have about their life does increase as income rises above \$75,000 at least to an amount well over \$120,000, although measures of happiness do not. They also found that poverty strongly exacerbates the negative effect of adverse circumstances such as divorce, health problems and loneliness, on happiness.

Their data only refer to differences between people with somewhat stable incomes, they do not imply that people will not be happy with a raise from \$100,000 to \$150,000, or that they will be indifferent to an equivalent drop in income. But, policy should focus on maximizing stable conditions of happiness not transient ones. The researchers also reported a possible association between high income and a reduced ability to savor small pleasures, an indication that happiness may decrease above some maximum income.

Below \$75,000, additional dollars have increasing value the lower the household’s income, and above \$75,000, no stable value on happiness. As *The New Enlightenment* details, an economic system dominated by worker-owned and self-directed businesses will greatly reduce the creation of extreme incomes both at the high and low end. It will raise the incomes of tens of millions of people at the low end, where additional dollars substantially increase happiness without significantly or at all reducing happiness at the high end, so will greatly increase total happiness. How we can establish worker-owned and self-directed businesses extensively through government-private financing partnerships and education is thoroughly detailed in *The New Enlightenment*.

Also, redirecting a portion of exorbitant incomes created by our currently poorly functioning economic system dominated by unjust economic enterprises to those of low income where relatively small changes in income are especially significant to happiness will serve the ideal of “*the greatest happiness of the greatest Number.*” Reasonable, moderate “redistributive” systems, well within historic and international norms, are also detailed in *The New Enlightenment*.

“*Redistribution*” is not the best term to use for a system that uses highly progressive taxation to reduce inequalities, since the tax system is just returning an appropriate portion of large economic gains to the source of its creation, society, for it to use in the best interests of society. “*Just compensation*” more accurately describes the process. When people pay for services, we do not use the term “*redistribution.*”