

The Pursuit of Happiness

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Abstract:

Both academic and popular discussions of the pursuit of happiness tend to downplay its relative importance in the trinity of unalienable rights listed in the Declaration of Independence. Its inclusion is often treated as little more than a curiosity or a rhetorical flourish. Investigation of the personal and public writings of the founders of the United States and their intellectual forebears reveals that the founding generation held as a fundamental assumption that the primary purpose of government and the main criterion for measuring its worth was the extent to which it facilitated the pursuit and promoted the obtainment of happiness among its people. This “Founding Assumption” was a natural outgrowth of the Enlightenment, and was the one idea that united the founding generation even in the midst of passionate disagreement about the proper size, scope and powers of government. The conception of happiness held by the Founders had deep historical roots and included elements of enjoyment, fulfillment and civic virtue.

A Brief History of the Pursuit of Happiness:

The Founding Assumption:

Virtually every American knows the phrase “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”, and would say that these are inalienable rights integral to America’s founding. Many can trace the words to Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. But not many Americans are aware of much beyond that. That is a shame, not only because it is a great story, but because it is important for understanding why the founders put their lives on the line to establish a new government and what they wanted that government to achieve.

Thomas Jefferson’s inclusion of the pursuit of happiness as one of the three specific examples of inalienable rights in the Declaration was not just a rhetorical flourish by a gifted writer who wanted to inspire his readers. Nor was it (as some have suggested) a strategic ploy to make fighting for John Locke’s formulation of “Life, Liberty and Property” more palatable to a vast population without property for which to fight. It wasn’t even unique to American thought, no matter how many people wrongly credit Jefferson with originating the phrase. The idea of the pursuit of happiness as a natural right to be protected by government was well established and widely accepted in the United States and Europe by the time Jefferson included it in the Declaration. Public happiness was, in fact, what the founders assumed was the entire purpose of government. It was a conclusion drawn at a very interesting and particular time

and place, and developed as the synthesis of a rich intellectual history spanning millennia, from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment.

The Origins of the Founding Assumption

The ideas that drove the American revolutionaries did not spring newly formed from their own bewigged heads. They were, in fact, only the flowers of an intellectual growth with very deep roots – perhaps as deep as human history itself. The minds that formulated the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution were fortunate to have been living at the tail end of the Enlightenment, a time in which many hands were digging through the soil of western history’s great philosophers, scientists and theologians. And for whatever reason, what sprung from that soil was a garden of theories about and movements for the pursuit of happiness. The ubiquity of the Founding Assumption – that governments exist to promote the happiness of their citizens - among the American revolutionaries was actually not surprising given the times in which they lived.

The Ancient Philosophers and the Pursuit of Happiness:

The philosophical and political thought of 18th century thinkers rests heavily on the foundation laid by the ancient Greeks and Romans. The letters and other writings of the Founders, particularly those of Jefferson and Adams, are littered with references to them. In the ancients lie the deepest roots of the Founding Assumption. Darrin McMahon notes that one of the central objectives for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was “that of making happiness the goal of all human activity.” These three spilled a lot of ink investigation the causes, nature, attributes and limits of happiness.

And from the beginning, the ordering of society, politics and governance to maximize happiness was part of their thought. Though its main focus was on justice, Plato’s *Republic* was clearly a foray into political theory about the best societal arrangement for human happiness. Socrates summed up the Founding Assumption millennia before the American revolutionaries in saying “What is the point of glittering statues and city walls and warships if those within them are not happy?”

Though Socrates, Plato and Aristotle may be the best known, they were not alone amongst the Greek philosophers in their obsession with happiness. The Epicureans with their philosophy of pleasure and pain, the Stoics with their philosophy of contentment, and other Athenian schools of thought jumped on board with that obsession. As McMahon puts it “By the close of the fourth century BCE, happiness – *eudaimonia* – was the undisputed goal of them all.”¹ And as diverse and sometimes conflicting as those different schools of thought could be, one common thread that united Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean and Stoic was that happiness is obtainable by human effort. This was an ancient revolution in Greek thought: that we are not simply subject to the whims of the gods and dependent on circumstance for our happiness, but can create it ourselves. Human agency could be called upon to improve the human condition.²

¹ Happiness: A History p 51.

² Though McMahon argues that this was new development in ancient thought, there are two main reasons to doubt this. First, though this may have been the first time leading thinkers of the day discussed it in writing, it is hard to imagine that humans were not doing things large and small in their lives to increase their happiness before the leading academics of the time told them they could do so. Secondly, he does note that his focus is on the history of happiness in the west and it is clear that while this may have been the first time western thinkers put such theories into writing, it was not the first time a human had done so. The idea that humans can increase their

Thus when the Enlightenment thinkers were poring over ancient Greek philosophical treatises, they were mired in the west's earliest written investigations of how to develop and expand human happiness and were presented with a variety of theories as to how people can order their lives and communities to maximize their well-being.

The impact was at times direct and powerful. Thomas Jefferson, whose understanding of ancient philosophy was detailed and nuanced, wrote in a letter to William Short, "As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing every thing rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us." But as much as he admired Epicurus, he goes on to say that even his favorite Greek was incomplete as a moralist and prescribed an important addition:

"Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others. The establishment of the innocent and genuine character of this benevolent Moralist [Jesus], and the rescuing it from the imputation of imposture which has resulted from misconstructions of his words by his pretended votaries and artificial systems invented by ultra-Christian sects, unauthorized by a single word ever uttered by Him, is a most desirable object."

By the time Jesus Christ walked the earth, the ideas of the happiness-focused Epicureans, Stoics and other Athenian schools had spread like wildfire and influenced great Roman thinkers of Jesus' era like Seneca and Epictetus, Horace and Virgil. The influence of Jesus and those who claimed to be his followers was also important in the history of the Founding Assumption. Yet because Jesus sparked a very different revolution in happiness, and because his followers took that revolution in so many different directions, the impact is considerably more complex than that of the Greek and Roman philosophers.

Christianity and the Pursuit of Happiness:

The influence of Christ and Christianity on the founding of the United States is a touchy subject these days, with religious conservatives often adamant that America is a Christian nation founded on Christian principles and religious liberals equally adamant that America was founded mainly by Deists and Masons who had rejected religious dogma in favor of Enlightenment science and philosophy. A more nuanced look at the Christian influence specifically on the pursuit of happiness shows that there is some truth to both views, but neither is completely accurate. The truth lies somewhere in between.

In establishing what we now know as the Christian Bible at the Council of Nicaea, the Romans accepted four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) that describe Jesus' life on earth. Most copies of the other gospels used by early Christians were systematically destroyed. In the gospels that remained in the official Bible, Christ's actions show clear concern with some aspects of human well-being, as the vast

happiness by individual effort and by the ordering of their societies is older, and more universal than our friends in togas. Well before the Greeks, the opening words of the Analects of Confucius, the Chinese sage who did so much to shape eastern thought on the proper ordering of society and governance, are about joy and his teachings are full of practical advice and insights on what people can do to live a happy, fulfilled and peaceful life. Around the same time Gautama Buddha, Lao Tzu and Ved Vyasa (the Indian sage to whom the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita are ascribed) were expounding theories or advocating practices to develop human happiness. Something was in the air all over the world in the centuries leading up to the birth of Christ, and that something smelled like the pursuit of happiness.

majority of his recorded miracles involved healing the sick and disabled, freeing those tormented by demons, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead loved ones of the grieving. But remarkably, Jesus mentions earthly happiness not at all in the gospels of Matthew, Mark or Luke, and says in the Gospel of John only that “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” But this is his only mention of joy or happiness, and it’s not even entirely clear that he was referring to joy in this life. His teachings in all four of the gospels are focused on spiritual and ethical living and the path to happiness in the hereafter.

Most of what Jesus prescribes includes ways to live and believe that will result in joy in the next life. And what he says will lead to joy in the next life is manifestly *not* seeking personal happiness in this one. In fact, much of what he prescribes in this life is self-sacrifice in service of God and fellow human, suffering for righteousness, and accepting abuse for one’s faithfulness. In the Gospel of Luke, he sums it up nicely, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”

This was the happiness revolution launched by Jesus of Nazareth – to embrace suffering in this life to ensure happiness in the hereafter. Take for example the famous Beatitudes:

Blessed are you who are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.
Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Jesus actually one-upped the Stoic philosophers, who famously argued that happiness could be achieved regardless of circumstances, and even in quite painful circumstances. Jesus said that happiness in the next life is a *result* of difficult circumstances and pain in this one, and that common happiness in this life leads to pain in the next. The impact on the western world was dramatic.

In the three centuries after Jesus, Christianity was a revolution of the poor and outcast - many of whom stunned their Roman persecutors by joyfully furnishing themselves up as martyrs to be dressed in animal hides and torn up by dogs, nailed to crosses to be crucified or put to the flame to be burned alive. The martyr Ignatius (a disciple of John the Apostle) who was fed to wild beasts by the Romans in 100 CE, was the first to have been described as going to his vicious death with something approaching ecstasy³. In the next hundred years, the widely popular Montanist sect of Christianity glorified martyrdom and

³ Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, (New Haven: Yale University Press) 2012

encouraged its followers to embrace it happily.⁴ In 203, the North African martyrs Perpetua and her slave Felicitas (whose names translate to “Eternal” and “Happiness”) were recorded by a witness as having gone to their death with a group of Christians fed to wild animals and put to the sword, and having done so with great peace and happiness. Though the spate of martyrdom abated after Rome officially adopted Christianity and stopped widespread attempts to stamp it out, the idea of embracing suffering and rejecting temporal happiness in this life in order to participate in the happiness of Christ simply took different forms.

From the days of the Apostle Paul, who said in his first letter to the Corinthians that “I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should be castaway”, the embrace of suffering has been a part of church history. Self-flagellating Christian monks would routinely whip themselves, with the practice reaching extremes in the 13th century that led the church to officially ban it in the 14th, though the practices survives in some corners even today. Use of a *cilise* (a garment or undergarment made of hair) to cause oneself physical discomfort was likewise common among clerics at various points in Catholic history. Some penitents in the Philippines even today willingly have themselves crucified. More minor mortifications of the flesh, such as fasting and swearing off various pleasures for Lent remain common worldwide among devout parishioners.

The practice of mortification of the flesh was not limited to the Catholic Church. Martin Luther, who sparked the Reformation, said in his Ninety Five Theses that “inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.” John Calvin also promoted self-denial and condemned the pursuit of human desires. His movement opposed pleasures such as dancing, pleasurable sex, card-playing, and singing frivolous songs. He even set to work erecting a theocracy in Geneva to enforce his strict views of morality. Many of the first pilgrims to settle America, and many of the churches that spread here, were followers of his theology.

Another reason for embracing suffering from the Christian viewpoint is its inevitability. The Christian idea that human happiness is not the birthright of humans goes all the way back to the doctrine of original sin - the idea that the sin of the first humans, Adam and Eve, stained us all with collective guilt and we share their punishment. Though earlier articulated by the Catholic Saints Augustine and Aquinas, Martin Luther and John Calvin (along with many protestant leaders to follow) also embraced the doctrine of original sin and the complimentary idea of total depravity – that since the fall, human beings are slaves to sin and unable to satisfy their own desires for earthly happiness. Calvin held the term also to mean that *all* human actions are displeasing to God. In much of Christian thought, this life is a misery brought about by sin, and is only to be escaped for the bliss of Heaven. Some Christians believe the practices of self-punishment and self-denial earn God’s forgiveness, others find solidarity with Christ’s suffering through them, others simply use them to improve self-discipline and still others to prove that they are chosen by God. Yet all these reasons aim toward happiness in the *next* life, not in this one.

Given this aversion to temporal happiness and belief that God Himself made life unhappy, it is understandable that many think the Founding Assumption was a flat rejection of Christian theory. Clearly the idea that we deserve happiness, that it is attainable, and that government exists to help facilitate that attainment seems to fit not at all with original sin, total depravity and mortification of the flesh. In fact, they are diametrically opposed. But the story doesn’t end there.

In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas began to blow the dust off of the works of Aristotle, whose teachings were held in written form at that time only by a precious few, and read by even fewer. Aquinas began the work of integrating Aristotle’s view of the attainment of earthly happiness (which he

⁴ Christopher J. Dawe “Joyful Martyr: A Brief Look at Montanistic Interpolations in Ignatius’ Epistle to the Romans.” *Studia Antiqua*

considered a lower and imperfect form of happiness) with St. Augustine's view that true and perfect happiness was only to be granted to the saved when they entered heaven. As McMahon notes, Aquinas argued that the contemplation of truth, the journey toward God, could lead to earthly happiness in much the same way that Aristotle did. And much like the Greek idea of happiness through the practice of virtue, Aquinas claimed that the application of Christian virtues of charity, hope and faith would allow us to pull ourselves through the trials of this world to the ultimate happiness of salvation. In his teachings, Aquinas allowed for a process of attaining at least an imperfect human happiness – returning some level of felicity in this life to human agency.

Despite his embrace of original sin, total depravity and mortification of the flesh, Martin Luther followed Aquinas' example several centuries later in the 1500s. Though he may have taught that true happiness only followed death, he tempered those teachings with professions of a lower happiness attainable in this life. In a letter to Prince Joachim von Anhalt, he gushed "We now know, thank God, that we can be merry with good conscience, and can use God's gifts with thankfulness, inasmuch as he has made them for us and is pleased to have us enjoy them." The freedom brought by living the Christian life, according to Luther, afforded humans happiness in the here and now.

Unlike John Calvin, who taught that earthly happiness was only a sign that one was chosen by God for salvation (about which humans had no choice), Luther again inserted human agency into the attainment of earthly happiness. Luther's Reformation unleashed a wave of religious debate, conflict, questioning and sectarianism across Europe. Many new sects picked up Luther's assertions about the possibility of happiness in this life and ran with them, sometimes in utterly unexpected directions. Old ways of thinking were being challenged and established ideas undermined. The stage was set for the Enlightenment and a new wave of thought about human happiness.

The Enlightenment and the Pursuit of Happiness:

The religious pluralism unleashed by the Reformation was rampant in England, where a variety of religious groups made radical claims about human freedom, equality, justice, reason and happiness. In this milieu, the phrase "pursuit of happiness" first appeared in Reverend Thomas Coleman's address to the English Parliament in 1643. Then 11 years old, it is unlikely that John Locke heard of Coleman's speech or the turn-of-phrase it contained, but the young Christian would soon become the era's leading philosopher on the subject, particularly as it related to governance.

It may be that Thomas Jefferson first came upon the phrase 'pursuit of happiness' in reading Locke's wildly influential 1689 book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but he probably heard about it from others prior to reading it. Locke and his ideas were internationally famous by that point. He labored to understand the workings of the human mind, and famously argued that we are born a blank slate, a white page, a *tabula rasa*. Though an oversimplification of his expansive writings, Locke ultimately said that what drives our behavior is an aversion to suffering and a desire for happiness. And happiness, he argued, was a gift from God. When we follow true happiness we follow God.

This was the foundation of Locke's views on government and political freedom. We must be free to pursue our happiness, in his view, because it is integral to our relationship with God. In his later political writings, he fleshed out the implications for governance. Government must not put obstacles in the way of this pursuit, nor should it legislate the manner of pursuit. Out of this philosophy came some of the founding ideas of the American Revolution – popular consent, the right to revolt, individual liberty and others.

Locke is commonly credited with inspiring much of American political thought, and some of the most important ideas in the Declaration of Independence can be seen in a quote from the *Two Treatises of Civil Government* in which he says “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...” Here is a clear articulation not only of political equality but of inalienable rights to life, liberty and property - couched in an overall argument for limited, constitutional government accountable to the people.⁵ Liberty was a concept emphasized by Locke again and again. Yet it is rarely noted that liberty was important to Locke only as the surest path to happiness, not as an end in itself.

In Locke’s insistence that liberty was important mainly as protection for the pursuit of happiness, the Founding Assumption started to crystalize. He said in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that “The necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty. As therefore the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our liberty.” For Locke, the pursuit of happiness was what made liberty necessary. His ideas about happiness, liberty and governance were beginning to fan the flames of intellectual revolution.

The following century would see explosive advances in philosophy, science, literature and art as the Enlightenment took full flower and a growing middle class desirous of self-determination questioned traditional power structures. Human happiness was at the epicenter. In Scotland, David Hume wrote essays on happiness. In the Netherlands, Baruch Spinoza philosophized about virtue and happiness. In England, Jeremy Bentham’s principle of utility was also known as “the greatest happiness principle” as his work, as with other Enlightenment thinkers, was aimed at the goal of discovering the path to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. His fellow Englishman Adam Smith, before he wrote his economic magnum opus *The Wealth of Nations*, wrote a treatise on morality in which he argued that the only purpose for humanity that fits with the concept of a benevolent Creator is the pursuit of happiness.⁶ As Robert Darnton noted “The most radical of them, Diderot, Rousseau, Helvetius, d’Holbach, built the concept of happiness into a modernized Epicureanism, with a strong civic consciousness.”⁷ In Geneva, Rousseau churned out philosophical writings, the unifying and constant purpose of which was “a doctrine which, being as sound as it was simple, and without making any concessions to Epicureanism and hypocrisy, was aimed only at the happiness of the human race”.⁸ In France, Chastellux studied the development of happiness over the course of history, and his countryman

⁵ Though the trinity of “Life, Liberty and Property” are often attributed to Locke, it is not a direct quote from any of his writings, and is generally understood to derive from the quote presented here. The actual phrase “Life, liberty and property” does appear in section 1 of the 14th amendment to the US Constitution, which reads “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

⁶ Michael Busch, “Adam Smith and Consumerism’s Role in Happiness”, *Major Themes in Economics 10*(Iowa: University of Northern Iowa) 2008.

⁷ Darnton, Robert. “The Pursuit of Happiness”. *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 19.4 (1995): 42–52. Diderot and D’Holbach were described, in spite of their atheism, as “among the most virtuous of men” in a letter to Thomas Law in 1814

⁸ Peter Critchley, Rousseau and the Quest for Human Happiness, Academia.edu

Voltaire gave his recipe for happiness in his stories. More than just Voltaire's lover, the Marquise du Chatelet wrote her own *Discourse on Happiness*.⁹

Though many major Enlightenment thinkers were disdainful of Christianity, a large and growing number of protestant Christian writers and preachers embraced the possibility of human happiness and theorized about its attainment as well. And despite the persistence of the doctrines of original sin and total depravity, many Catholics jumped on board too. Sermons, books, and speeches on the subject abounded. Joseph Priestley, the theologian, political theorist and scientist, argued that "Happiness is in truth the only object of legislation of intrinsic value."¹⁰ The obsession with happiness was everywhere.

One of the most direct influences on the thinking of American ideas about the pursuit of happiness came from English Philosopher William Wallaston, who developed a theory of "Natural Religion" – a morality independent of formal religion. He wrote a half a century before the Declaration of Independence that "...natural religion is grounded upon this triple and strict alliance or union of truth, happiness and reason' all in the same interest and conspiring by the same methods to advance and perfect human nature and its truest definition is, The pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth."¹¹ The Reverend Doctor Samuel Johnson, an American scholar, expanded on Wallaston's ideas. Not happy with Wallaston's Deism, Johnson adopted Berkeley's idealism and combined it with Wallaston's natural religion and ideas from other thinkers and created a philosophy of the pursuit of happiness which he elucidated over the course of seven editions of philosophy texts, one of which was published and promoted by Benjamin Franklin.¹²

And it was not just the philosophers in the 18th century – mathematicians and scientists of the era attempted to systematize and quantify and even reduce to equations and formulae the mystery of human happiness. McMahon writes of the 1700s that "By midcentury the claim [that humans have a right to happiness] was becoming commonplace, and by century's end it was more common still. Clearly, human beings deserved to be happy. The question was how could felicity on earth best be achieved. Eighteenth-century authors sought to answer this question in unprecedented numbers. No previous age, in fact, wrote so much on the subject or so often."¹³ This was the world in which the American revolutionaries found themselves. It was a world obsessed with the pursuit of happiness.

⁹ Though often left out of the history of the Enlightenment, many women of the era were also involved in the intellectual revolution. Through salons, upper class French women dedicated themselves to their own education and to the propagation of Enlightenment philosophy. In England, women like Moll King ran their own coffee houses and hosted debates and lectures. Not only did some major debating societies allow women, but about the time of the American Revolution, there were four women-only debating societies in England. Some also contributed directly to the discussion with published works. In her book *The Other Enlightenment* Carla Hesse showed that women often published their writings under their husbands' names.

¹⁰ Cited in McMahon, Darrin Happiness a History page 249

¹¹ William Wallaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London: J. and P. Knapton) 1750. The first edition was printed in 1722. See also Clifford Griffeth Thompson, *The Ethics of William Wallaston* (Boston: The Gorham Press) 1922

¹² Herbert Schneider, Carol Schneider and Nicholas Murray Butler, eds., *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College: His Career and Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press) 1929 AND Neil C. Olsen, *Pursuing Happiness: The Organizational Culture of the Continental Congress*, Nonagram Publications, 2013, p.161

¹³ McMahon, Darrin Happiness a History page 200.

The Founding Assumption and the Birth of American Government:

The extent to which the Founding Assumption was the underlying theme of America's political origination is not widely known today. But for those who laid the foundations of this country's political system, it was a constant. More than liberty, more than security, more than prosperity, the founders agreed that governments existed for the happiness of the people they governed, and that their worth was directly tied to their ability to facilitate that happiness.

Liberty was certainly important to them, as the ubiquity of the term in their writings and speeches indicates. Yet it was happiness, not liberty that they constantly cited as the very purpose of government.¹⁴ While they never expressed concern about the dangers of too much felicity, they did so about liberty. Adams noted that the love of liberty may be in the soul of man, but it is also in the soul of a wolf “and I doubt whether it be much more rational, generous or social, in one than in the other, until in man it is enlightened by experience, reflection, education, and civil and political institutions...”¹⁵ Likewise, James Madison wrote that where an excess of power prevails, no man is safe and “Where there is an excess of liberty, the effect is the same, though from an opposite cause.”¹⁶

As Jefferson wrote to the Citizens of Washington County in 1809, “The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government”. This view was far from unique to this one influential founder – in fact, it was virtually universal among the founding generation. Though his colleagues ran roughshod over the original draft of the Declaration of Independence with suggested deletions, additions and rearrangements, none took issue with Jefferson's inclusion of the Pursuit of Happiness as an inalienable right. It remained untouched from first to final draft.

Alexander Hamilton disagreed with Jefferson on nearly everything possible about what America should be, from the need for a standing army and a national debt to prospective allies to the division of power between the national and state governments. The arguments between these two intellectual powerhouses in the first presidential cabinet must have exhausted even the even-keeled and battle-tested President Washington, who wrote to both of them like a frustrated father trying to settle a feud between petulant children. But despite the intensity of their differences Hamilton was clearly in line with Jefferson's view of the purpose of government. In fact, he justified the feud by claiming that Jefferson's faction was “dangerous to the union, peace and happiness of the country.”¹⁷

However much they disagreed on other matters, his words on the purpose of government were directly in line with Jefferson's thinking. In a letter during the revolutionary war, he grounded his support for the establishment of an elected Republic in his belief that the people under such a government were the most likely to be happy.¹⁸ Discussing the Articles of Confederation, he argued that a Constitutional Convention was necessary if the country were to be “happy hereafter”.¹⁹ More than a decade later, he voiced similar sentiments about the importance of maintaining the Union, which he found necessary “to the

¹⁴ I could find only two exceptions to this – Madison once states that the end of government is the protection of property. In another letter, he says it is justice.

¹⁵ John Adams, Letter to Samuel Adams

¹⁶ James Madison, “Property”, *The National Gazette*, March 29th 1792.

¹⁷ Alexander Hamilton, Letter to Edward Carrington,

¹⁸ Alexander Hamilton, Letter to Gouverneur Morris, 1777.

¹⁹ Alexander Hamilton, Letter to James Duane, Sept. 3rd, 1780

respectability and happiness of this country” and noted his own political creed was republican, with equality of political rights and a lack of hereditary aristocracy being “consistent with the order and happiness of society.”²⁰ Hamilton’s letters, speeches and essays are littered with references to his belief that “[U]nder every form of government, rulers are only trustees for the happiness and interest of their nation”.²¹

The Founding Assumption was one of the few things that united Jefferson and Hamilton. And despite Jefferson’s many disagreements with John Adams about the proper scope and use of government power, Adams too was in absolute agreement about its purpose. In *Thoughts on Government*, Adams wrote that “Government is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men; therefore, the people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and infeasible right to institute government; and to reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness require it.” And “the divine science of politics is the science of social happiness, and the blessings of society depend entirely on the constitutions of government...”²² As much and as passionately as their fellow founders fought and argued about the appropriate structure, powers and size of government, they agreed heartily on this one point.

James Wilson, signatory to the Declaration of Independence and a major force behind the United States Constitution, said “Nations, as well as men, are taught by the law of nature, gracious in its precepts, to consider their happiness as the great end of their existence.”²³ Gouverneur Morris, Wilson’s collaborator in writing the Constitution, and the man thought responsible for its famous preamble, wrote in a one of his letters about “Politics in the great Sense, or that sublime Science which embraces for its Object the Happiness of Mankind.”²⁴ Similar references to happiness as the very purpose of government or as cause for creating a new government can be found in the writings and speeches of Samuel Adams, Roger Sherman and others²⁵

Even the normally stern and unsmiling George Washington was on board the happiness train, and saw the establishment of an independent America as a chance to apply all the philosophy on human happiness that the Enlightenment had wrought. Upon winning independence and disbanding the army, he sent a circular letter to the governors of all the states – a letter about happiness that gushed with happiness. In it, he rejoiced that,

“[The citizens of America] are, from this period, to be considered as the actors on a most conspicuous theatre, which seems to be peculiarly designated by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity... Heaven has crowned all its other blessings, by giving a fairer

²⁰ Alexander Hamilton, Letter to Edward Carrington, May 26th 1792

²¹ Alexander Hamilton, Pacifics No.IV, July 10 1793. See also in STWSTW letter to Guevernor Morris (108), 114, 164,160

²² John Adams, “To George Wythe: ‘Thoughts on Government’”, 1776. This was the second time that year Adams referred in writing to politics as “the science of human happiness”. The first was in a letter to Mercy Warren, January 8th 1776.

²³ James Wilson, “Of the Law of Nations”, *Lectures on Law*, 1791

²⁴ Morris to Jefferson, November 7, 1791, Sparks, Life of Morris, III, 21

²⁵ See Samuel Adams, Letter to Richard Henry Lee, December 3, 1787 and Roger Sherman, Proposed Committee Report, July 21, 1789.

opportunity for political happiness, than any nation has ever been favored with...at an epocha when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period, the researches of the human mind after social happiness have been carried to a great extent; the treasures of knowledge, acquired by the labors of philosophers, sages, and legislators, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of government...At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a nation; and, if their citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely their own..."²⁶

Washington's speeches and letters are full of concern for American happiness, and it was a constant theme throughout his presidency. He reiterated the Founding Assumption in the concluding paragraph of his inaugural address, noting with pride that Americans had decided upon a form of government that would advance happiness.²⁷ In a 1790 letter to Catharine Macaulay Graham, he noted that while others admired his newly elevated station as President, the only thing in it for him was the "power of promoting human felicity". In a 1792 letter to Thomas Jefferson, he warned that the infighting between Jefferson and his opponents was a threat to the happiness of the United States. In a 1794 letter to Henry Lee, he expressed fear that the insurrection of the times threatened to destroy American happiness. Upon deciding to retire from the Presidency, he wrote to James Madison of his desire to impress upon the people their unity and their resulting potential to be "as prosperous and happy" as any in history. And in his farewell address, he offered them advice "which appear to me all important to the permanency of your felicity as a People".

Though a slave owner, and the head of a government that mainly enfranchised propertied white males, the first president was also of a mind that the felicity protected by the government be extended well beyond that small circle. In his third annual message to Congress, Washington expressed his hopes that "an intimate intercourse may succeed, calculated to advance the happiness of the Indians, and to attach them firmly to the United States." Reflecting the religious pluralism embraced so strongly by Jefferson and others, he also wrote to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island that with wisdom, "we cannot fail under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people...May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."

The opportunity to apply the wisdom of the ages to widespread happiness was also, for the Father of our Country, to be the gift that democratic revolutions gave to the world. In his 1796 address to the Minister Plenipotentiary of the French Republic following the French Revolution, he said "I rejoice that liberty . . . now finds an asylum in the bosom of a regularly organized government; a government, which, being

²⁶ The idea that America was positioned to experiment with theories of happiness was widespread after the revolution. On planning the first new American University in what was then the western portion of the US, Benjamin Rush wrote "Europe in its present state of political torpor affords no scope for the activity of a benevolent mind. Here [in America] everything is in a plastic state. Here the benefactor of mankind may realize all his schemes for promoting human happiness" Benjamin Rush, Letter to Charles Nisbet, December 5, 1783.

²⁷ Adams also expressed in his inaugural address (March 4th, 1797) a delight in the effect of the Constitution on the "peace, order, prosperity and happiness of the nation." Jefferson likewise expressed in first inaugural address (March 4th, 1801) that he was humbled by the responsibility of the office for the "honor, happiness and hopes" of the people. In his second inaugural (March 4th, 1805), he noted again that elected officials "lay the foundations of public happiness in wholesome laws."

formed to secure happiness of the French people, corresponds with the ardent wishes of my heart, while it gratifies the pride of every citizen of the United States, by its resemblance to their own.”²⁸ Likewise, in his farewell address, he expresses his fond wish that “the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete, by so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and the adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.” Washington’s hopes went well beyond the borders of America. This was to be a global happiness revolution.

Political theorist and statesman James Madison enthusiastically agreed with a global happiness revolution. He said of the American people that their glory was in respecting past views and the views of other nations while still not bowing to them over their own good sense, self-knowledge and experience. “To this manly spirit,” he proudly stated, “posterity will be indebted for the possession, and the world for the example of the numerous innovations displayed on the American theatre, in favor of private rights and public happiness.”²⁹ To Madison, America was to be the inspiration for happiness worldwide.

Madison was known as the Father of the Constitution and was the driving force behind the Bill of Rights. Physically tiny though he was, “Little Jemmy” was a giant in American political thought. In arguing for the adoption of the Constitution in Federalist Paper No. 62³⁰, he wrote that “A good government implies two things: first, fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people; secondly, a knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained.” In Federalist Paper No. 43³¹ he further argued that the Articles of Confederation could be superseded without unanimous consent in large part because of “...the transcendent law of nature and of nature’s God, which declares that the safety and happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim.”

In fact, the arguments over whether the newly formulated Constitution should be adopted at all were rife with such examples of statesmen and political thinkers on both sides sharing the assumption that widespread human happiness was what government was for. This shared belief may be what kept the country from tearing itself apart, and is remarkable given the deep conflicts between supporters of the new Constitution (Federalists) and its opponents (Anti-Federalists).

By the time the framers of the Constitution met in Philadelphia, America was at a precarious crossroads and violence was bubbling to the surface. Shays’ Rebellion was an uprising of nearly 4,000 well-armed Massachusetts farmers with complaints ranging from land seizures to corrupt rule by the economic elite and their cronies to widespread bankruptcies to regressive taxes. Though the governor of Massachusetts ultimately put down their rebellion by hiring private militias, the American government’s anemic response caused General Washington to come out of retirement and call for a stronger central government.

²⁸ In his cabinet report to President Washington, Hamilton noted despite his misgivings about the events in France, yet even in this, he showed his support for political change abroad for self-determination in the interest of human happiness. “Every nation has a right to carve out its own happiness in its own way, and it is the height of presumption in another to attempt to fashion its political creed.” Hamilton had written to Lafayette several years earlier about the changes in France, and warned him against “innovations greater than will consist with the real felicity of your nation.”

²⁹ Federalist No. 14 November 30, 1787

³⁰ February 27, 1788

³¹ January 23, 1788

The proposals that came out of the resulting Constitutional Convention in 1787 were controversial enough to tear former allies apart. The intensity of feeling radiates from the first of the Anti-Federalist papers in the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, which roundly rebukes the framers of the Constitution:

“The hideous daemon of Aristocracy has hitherto had so much influence as to bar the channels of investigation, preclude the people from inquiry and extinguish every spark of liberal information of its qualities...Those furious zealots who are for cramming it down the throats of the people...bear the same marks in their features as those who have been long wishing to erect an aristocracy in THIS COMMONWEALTH [Massachusetts]. Their menacing cry is for a RIGID government, it matters little to them of what kind, provided it answers THAT description.”

The anger behind those words almost blossomed into violence yet again before the debate was over. Opposition was so strong in Rhode Island in 1788 that Judge William West and his Country Party led 1,000 armed protesters into Providence.

Federalists and Anti-Federalists argued bitterly over the distribution of power proposed by the new Constitution, the arrangement of government offices, the need for a Bill of Rights, slavery, and countless other issues. Yet one thing still united them – the understanding that whatever form of government was to be adopted, its goal should be the happiness of the people. Edmund Randolph, in his notes on the Virginia ratification debates, references the happiness of the people repeatedly in making his arguments. He declared “To maintain and secure that happiness, the first object of my wishes, I shall brave all storms and political dangers,” and “I have been invariably governed by an invincible attachment to the happiness of the people of America.”³²

Alexander Hamilton’s essays in favor of the Constitution included firm allegiance to the Founding Assumption. In Federalist #1, Hamilton argues that the new system of government was the safest course toward happiness. In Federalist #18 he also calls upon “that fundamental principle of republican government, which admits the right of the people to alter or abolish the established Constitution, whenever they find it inconsistent with their happiness.” Though opposed to Hamilton’s ideas about the form of government, the authors of the Anti-Federalist Papers were united with him about its purpose.

New Yorker Robert Yates, writing under the pen name *Brutus* in the Antifederalist Papers, made repeated references to this basic assumption, with turns of phrase that echoed his pro-Constitution opponents. In 1787 for example, in a discussion of the conflict between slave and free states over the apportionment of House Members, he noted that “Society instituted government to promote the happiness of the whole, and this is the great end always in view in the delegation of powers.”³³ And again the next year, in objecting to the establishment of a standing army, he wrote “The design of civil government is to protect the rights and promote the happiness of the people. ... For this end, rulers are invested with powers.”³⁴

³² *Journal Notes of the Virginia Ratification Convention Proceedings*, June 9, 1788.

³³ Robert Yates (Brutus), Anti-Federalists No. 54, “Apportionment and Slavery: Northern and Southern Views,” from Brutus III “The Apportionment of Members Among the States,” November 15, 1787

³⁴ Robert Yates (Brutus), Anti-Federalist No. 24, “Objections to a Standing Army (Part I),” New York Journal, January 17, 1788

In fact, in his first *Brutus* essay in 1787, Yates opens his argumentation by introducing the momentous stakes of the decision at hand:

"If the constitution, offered to your acceptance, be a wise one, calculated to preserve the invaluable blessings of liberty, to secure the inestimable rights of mankind, and promote human happiness, then, if you accept it, you will lay a lasting foundation of happiness for millions yet unborn; generations to come will rise up and call you blessed.... But if, on the other hand, this form of government contains principles that will lead to the subversion of liberty -- if it tends to establish a despotism, or, what is worse, a tyrannic aristocracy; then, if you adopt it, this only remaining assylum for liberty will be shut up, and posterity will execrate your memory"³⁵

The remainder of this and all of Yates' subsequent essays against the Constitution can be seen as evidence presented to support his main hypothesis – that the Constitution would lead to the latter rather than the former and therefore ought not to be ratified.

Yates was not alone among the Anti-Federalists in voicing his assumption about the role of government in regards to happiness. Virginian Richard Henry Lee, the man behind the historic motion at the Second Continental Congress for American independence and the 1776 resolution that led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence, was Yates' ally in opposition to the Constitution. Writing as *The Federal Farmer* in Anti-Federalist No. 37, he declared that "The happiness of the people at large must be the great object with every honest statesman, and he will direct every movement to this point." ³⁶

In a speech against the Federal Constitution, the great orator Patrick Henry grounded his opposition in terms of public happiness three separate times in the same speech, at one point saying

"What, sir, is the genius of democracy? Let me read that clause of the bill of rights of Virginia which relates to this: 3d clause... *'Of all the various modes and forms of government, that is best, which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety, and is most effectually secured against the danger of mal-administration; and that whenever any government shall be found inadequate, or contrary to those purposes, a majority of the community hath an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform, alter, or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal'*. This, Sir, is the language of democracy... But how different is the genius of your new Constitution from this? How different from the sentiments of freemen, that a contemptible minority can prevent the good of the majority? If then Gentlemen standing on this ground are come to that point, that they are willing to bind themselves and their posterity to be oppressed, I am amazed and inexpressibly astonished."

Henry's use of the Bill of Rights of Virginia in his argument shows not only that he personally held the founding assumption about public happiness as the purpose of government, but it also illuminates how widely shared that assumption was. It was already written into the Constitution of America's largest state.

In fact, all of the above examples of statements by prominent individual founders are amplified by documents read, signed and published by larger assemblies of those involved in this debate. Declarations

³⁵ Robert Yates (*Brutus*), Anti-Federalist No. 17, "Federalist Power Will Ultimately Subvert State Authority," October 18, 1788

³⁶ Richard Henry Lee (*The Federal Farmer*), Anti-Federalist No. 37, "Factions and the Constitution," essay "The Federal Farmer I," October 8, 1787

of government's role in protecting the natural human right to pursue and obtain happiness also appeared in the original state Constitutions or Bills of Rights of the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, and North Carolina.

Virginia's own Declaration of Rights, which preceded the US Declaration of Independence by about two months, declared "That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural Rights, of which they can not by any Compact, deprive or divest their Posterity; among which are the Enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the Means of acquiring and possessing Property, and pursuing and obtaining Happiness and Safety." Interestingly, intense debate accompanied the statement about all men being born equally free and independent, but no controversy whatsoever came from the statement about the right to pursue and obtain happiness.³⁷

The New York convention to ratify the US Constitution, in explaining its support for the Constitution, stated that the signatories "Do declare and make known... That the enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, are essential rights, which every government ought to respect and preserve. That the powers of government may be reassumed by the people whensoever it shall become necessary to their happiness..." Similar statements were made by public declaration of the ratifying conventions of Rhode Island, Virginia, and North Carolina. The Virginia ratifying convention appended to its statement of ratification a recommendation for amendment, "That there be a Declaration or Bill of Rights asserting and securing from encroachment the essential and unalienable Rights of the People in some such manner as the following; First, That there are certain natural rights... among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety." North Carolina's ratification included a nearly identical statement.

The transcripts of the debates at these ratifying conventions are littered with appeals to the grand goal of human felicity in arguments for and against not only the adoption of the Constitution as a whole, but on a plethora of specific issues from the power to tax to the amendment process to slavery.

At the Massachusetts ratifying convention, one Rev. Mr. Stillman revealed the weight he gave the Founding Assumption when he lamented "But my present situation, sir, is to me extremely affecting. To be called by the voice of my fellow-citizens to give my vote for or against a constitution of government that will involve the happiness or misery of millions of my countrymen, is of so solemn a nature as to have occasioned the most painful anxiety."³⁸ The importance of choosing a system of government that best provided for the happiness of his fellow citizens and their progeny weighed so heavily on the good reverend that it was wearing at his own happiness.

So widespread was the understanding that government existed for the general happiness of the people when the Constitution was ratified that in its early years numerous citizens brought legal suit against the government for impeding their unalienable right to happiness.³⁹

In short, the idea that people had an inalienable right to pursue happiness and that government exists to facilitate that right was so fundamental to the thinking of the founders that its inclusion in the Declaration

³⁷ Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*, New York: Random House, 2010

³⁸ *Debates in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, In Convention, Boston, January 9, 1788.

³⁹ Howard Mumford Jones, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953

of Independence should be no surprise, and was no surprise to anyone at the time. In reflecting on the Declaration almost 50 years later, Jefferson explained “This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of...Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right...” The right to pursue happiness was simply part of the American mind.

Defining Happiness:

The Founding Assumption that happiness is an inalienable right to be protected by government is well and good, but what is happiness ? Though we may all desire happiness, few of us ponder the definition or attempt to detail its causes, beyond the way Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart defined pornography by saying “I know it when I see it.” But try to get more concrete, and a definition becomes slippery and elusive. Like most philosophical questions, the argument over defining happiness will never result in a single “winner”. The debate has raged for millennia without consensus on the answer. But what thousands of years of philosophizing and decades of life experience gave the Founders instead of a single definition is a variety of useful definitions of types or aspects of happiness that almost everyone would agree are worth pursuing.

When looking at the views of the Founders and their intellectual forebears, happiness can be broken down into three broad aspects. The first we can label “Enjoyment”, which is to say the experience of positive emotion, pleasure, feeling good, comfort and ease. The second we will call “Fulfillment”, which includes applying strengths and talents, achieving goals and engaging in virtuous action. The third we can refer to as “Relationship and Civic Virtue”, which involves our interactions with family, friends, neighbors and fellow citizens, but also service to our communities and to our world.

Enjoyment:

Pleasure is an important part of the human experience, and it is hard to describe a life without it as “happy”. Physical enjoyment, positive emotions and mental ease are things that as a general rule, humans seek out naturally. There are dangers to simply equating pleasure with happiness, but the enjoyment of life should not be dismissed as irrelevant and was not dismissed by the founders.

Many major Enlightenment thinkers rejected religion altogether, and contended that the prejudices of organized religion were a major obstacle to happiness and were in fact the source of great suffering. And so despite the fact that early Enlightenment thinkers and their heroes such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates had generally rejected total hedonism, thinkers like La Mettrie, Giacomo Casanova, and the Marquis de Sade promoted the absolute embrace of sensual pleasure. While most Enlightenment thinkers did not go to such hedonic extremes, nearly all did put more emphasis on pleasure than their ancient Greek and Roman forebears. Much of this was couched carefully in language borrowed from ancient Greece and Rome, in which happiness followed virtue and sensual pleasure itself was not the ultimate goal. For example, while John Locke insisted that true happiness was aimed at unity with God, and therefore that not all forms of pleasure are conducive to happiness, others disagreed. Jeremy Bentham’s idea that humans are governed by pleasure and pain is similar to Locke’s but Bentham rejected the Lockean idea of

a divine hierarchy of pleasure and argued that one should be free to pursue whatever procures personal pleasure.

Unsurprisingly then, the founders of the United States were no strangers to appreciating and even advocating life's pleasures. In 1787, two days before signing the newly drafted Constitution, the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention had what must have been a pretty rollicking farewell party for George Washington at which they ordered 54 bottles of Madeira, 60 bottles of claret, 8 bottles of whiskey, 22 bottles of porter, 8 bottles of hard cider, 12 bottles of beer and 7 bowls of alcoholic punch. Of course, the musicians imbibed too, but that's still enough alcohol to float a ship. It perhaps should not have come as a surprise, given that alcohol was regularly served at meetings of the Convention itself. The founders apparently were unafraid to let loose now and again.⁴⁰

Washington, though notoriously serious, was clearly not averse to showing people a good time. In his recent book *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, Daniel Okrent writes: "When twenty-four-year-old George Washington first ran for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses, he attributed his defeat to his failure to provide enough alcohol for the voters. When he tried again two years later, Washington floated into office partly on the 144 gallons of rum, punch, hard cider and beer his election agent handed out—roughly half a gallon for every vote he received." At the time of his first presidential election, Washington owned the largest whiskey distillery in America.

Washington's Vice President apparently enjoyed starting the day with a bit of a buzz as well. In *A History of Norfolk County, Massachusetts*, written by one of John Adams's descendants it is noted that "To the end of John Adams' life, a large tankard of hard cider was his morning draught before breakfast," and when he traveled his beloved wife Abigail would arrange in advance to have several barrels waiting for his personal use. It is clear from Adams' statement that "that the form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best," that he believed feeling good was something to which people had a right.

Benjamin Franklin was famous for his fondness of wine, women and song. In the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Franklin published the "Drinkers Dictionary" in 1737, a list of 200 synonyms for getting drunk and said in a letter to the Abbe Morellet, "Behold the rain which descends from heaven upon our vineyards, and which incorporates itself with the grapes to be changed into wine; a constant proof that God loves us, and loves to see us happy!"⁴¹ He wrote drinking songs, which he could play along with on a number of musical instruments including the armonium, an instrument of his own invention. All this was likely helpful in Franklin's lifelong flirtations with women young and old.

⁴⁰ While it is true that alcohol was often preferred to water because water purification was not yet a part of American life and water could make one sick, it is also true that the culture embraced alcohol for a variety of reasons. As the Colonial Williamsburg Journal notes, "Colonial Americans, at least many of them, believed alcohol could cure the sick, strengthen the weak, enliven the aged, and generally make the world a better place. They tipped, toasted, sipped, slurped, quaffed, and guzzled from dawn to dark."

<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/holiday07/drink.cfm>

⁴¹ This quote, translated from Franklin's undated letter written in French, has been misquoted many times over the years as "Beer is the proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy". It is doubtful that Franklin would have minded, as he loved a pint of beer as well.

Franklin's love life has been the stuff of American legend. Aside from his own dalliances, he gave advice on affairs in letters and even published a tabloid newspaper with the first ever sex advice column. Not the only playboy amongst the nation's founders, Alexander Hamilton was heavily drawn to sexual pleasure and had numerous affairs, including with his own sister-in-law, and was the first major American politician to have his career marred by a sex scandal.⁴² Gouverneur Morris was also known as quite the ladies' man, not settling down with one woman until the age of fifty seven. When he lost his leg in an accident, the public rumor (though most likely false) was that he was jumping from a balcony to avoid a lover's furious husband.

The other founders pursued pleasure more than occasionally as well. The Madison White House saw lavish parties, with Dolley Madison and her sisters inviting soldiers to have a good time. John Adams noted that "I dined a large company once or twice a week. Jefferson dined a dozen every day."⁴³ Indeed, Thomas Jefferson was a wine enthusiast and connoisseur, and though as an introvert he probably more enjoyed the solitude of walks through his orchards and terraced gardens, he also spent a small fortune entertaining guests and gushed about the joys of travel in foreign lands. In a letter to John Adams, he wrote "I am not weary of Living. Whatever a peevish Patriarch might say, I have never yet seen the day in which I could say I have had no Pleasure, or that I have had more Pain than Pleasure."⁴⁴

The fact is that Washington, Jefferson, Madison and numerous others among the founders lived lives of luxury and entertained others lavishly in their impressive mansions and pleasure gardens, the day-to-day operations of which were taken care of by slave labor. Relying on unpaid slaves to run their homes certainly allowed them more time than most to pursue whatever they chose to pursue. And the fact that the likes of Jefferson and Madison both condemned slavery but held on to their own slaves shows that their own ease and comfort even overrode some of their stated principles. The fact is that they often chose to pursue their own enjoyment and advocated that others do the same.

There is good reason to embrace pleasure and positive emotion and to count them as important elements of the happy and healthy life. Modern medical and psychological research shows that positive emotions and pleasurable experiences can eliminate psychological and physiological stress, makes us more creative, help us perceive new opportunities, open us to relationships, and develop personal flexibility and open-mindedness. Physical touch and sexual pleasure bring a wide variety of physical and psychological benefits. Moderate red wine intake and even marijuana have been shown to have some health benefits.⁴⁵ In short, feeling good can be good for us, and good for those around us.

⁴² Thomas Fleming, *The Intimate Lives of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Harper Collins) 2009.

⁴³ John Adams, Letter to Benjamin Rush, December 25th, 1811.

⁴⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Adams, February 3rd, 1812.

⁴⁵ Dacher Keltner. "Hands On Research: The Science of Touch." Greater Good. University of California, Berkeley, 29 Sept. 2010; "Benefits of Love and Sex." Benefits of Love, Sex and Relationships. UK National Health Service, 3 June 2014; Kara Mayer Robinson, "10 Surprising Health Benefits of Sex," WebMD, 24 Oct. 2013; CJ Charnetski and FX Brennan ; Sexual frequency and salivary immunoglobulin A (IgA). *Psychology Report*, 2004;94:839-44; S. Brody; Blood pressure reactivity to stress is better for people who recently had penile-vaginal intercourse than for people who had other or no sexual activity, *Biological Psychology*, 2006;71:214-22; Mandy Oaklander, "Here's What Happens When You Drink Red Wine Every Night," Time Magazine, October 12, 2015.

Yet, for the founders, and the philosophers who so deeply influenced their thinking, true happiness was not to be equated with pleasure alone. Indeed, they recognized that pleasure has its pitfalls, and can become the enemy of happiness if not taken in measure. In a letter to Maria Cosway, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

“Advance then with caution, the balance in your hand. Put into one scale the pleasures which any object may offer; but put fairly into the other the pains which are to follow, & see which preponderates... Do not bite at the bait of pleasure till you know there is no hook beneath it. The art of life is the art of avoiding pain: & he is the best pilot who steers clearest of the rocks & shoals with which he is beset. Pleasure is always before us; but misfortune is at our side: while running after that, this arrests us.”⁴⁶

Though clearly capable of over-indulging on occasion, the founders also promoted moderation, balance, and careful consideration of consequences. In a 1789 letter to his nephew, George Washington encourages pleasures in moderation at the proper time, balanced with hard work, frugality and virtue.⁴⁷

The founders agreed with the ancient Greek philosophers and their Enlightenment followers who rejected the hedonist equating of pleasure with happiness. And those views are lent support by the findings of modern science. The “hedonic treadmill” is well documented, and the human trait of adaptation means that a life seeking happiness from pure pleasure seeking is simply not in our DNA. The fact is that humans are physically, mentally and emotionally programmed against continually getting the same rush from repeating a pleasurable experience. This means that sensual pleasure is at best fleeting, when indulged regularly is diminishing in its returns, and at worst can be addictive and damaging to health. Surely the happy life is something more. On this the founders agreed.

Fulfillment:

The Founders of the United States, while certainly fond of their pleasures, saw true happiness as requiring the vigorous application of our strengths and talents and a heaping helping of virtue. Benjamin Franklin, party animal though he may have been, saw a struggle between our passions and our reason – between what we want and what we know is good for us and others. In his 1785 essay *On True Happiness* he said:

“Whilst there is a conflict betwixt the two principles of passion and reason, we must be miserable in proportion to the struggle, and when the victory is gained and reason so far subdued as seldom to trouble us with its remonstrances, the happiness we have then is not the happiness of our rational nature, but the happiness only of the inferior and sensual part of us, and consequently a very low and imperfect happiness to what the other would have afforded us.... There is no happiness then but in a virtuous and self-approving conduct. Unless our actions will bear the test of our sober judgments and reflections upon them, they are not the actions and consequently not the happiness of a rational being.”

For Franklin and the other Founders, happiness consisted as much or more in *being* and *doing* good as did in *feeling* good. In other words, the happy life is one in which a person strives with diligence for excellence, for meaning, and for greatness of character.

⁴⁶ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Maria Cosway, October 12th, 1786

⁴⁷ George Washington, Letter to George Steptoe Washington, March 23rd, 1789

The Application of Strengths and Talents:

Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided an early description of what psychologists now refer to as “flow” when he said

“If there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul.”

This form of happiness – being fully engaged in a task that challenges and inspires – was important to the Founders of the United States. As Thomas Jefferson said “It is neither wealth nor splendor; but tranquility and occupation which give you happiness.”⁴⁸ Alexander Hamilton likewise argued for the diversification of the American economy so that “each individual can find his proper element, and can call into activity the whole vigor of his nature.”⁴⁹

Overwhelmed by the pressures of what life as an elected official might mean, John Adams wrote in his journal the night before votes were cast in 1773 that if he lost, he might enjoy his own private pursuits “But I was not sent into this world to spend my days in sports, diversions and pleasures; I was born for business, for both activity and study. I have little appetite or relish for anything else.”⁵⁰ Franklin agreed that happiness comes not only from ease and pleasure, saying “It is the working man who is the happy man. Man was made to be active, and he is never so happy as when he is so. It is the idle man who is the miserable man.”

The happiness at the core of the Founding Assumption, then, includes more than comfort and ease. The opportunity and energy to engage fully in fulfilling pursuits was clearly an aspect of happiness important to the founders.

The Practice of Virtue:

In his 1789 Inaugural Address, George Washington said “...there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness” Other founders repeatedly echoed this sentiment. In a letter to Amos J. Cook in 1816, Jefferson said that “Without virtue, happiness cannot be.” For them, happiness consisted not only of enjoying life and engaging in fulfilling work, but in being a virtuous person.

John Adams wrote in a letter to Mercy Warren that “human Happiness is clearly best promoted by virtue...”⁵¹ He elaborated more fully in *Thoughts on Government* that same year when he wrote “All sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity, consists in virtue. Confucius, Zo-roaster, Socrates, Mahomet, not to mention

⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Anna Jefferson Marks, July 12th, 1788.

⁴⁹ Report on Manufactures, 1791

⁵⁰ John Adams, Diary Entry, May 24th 1773.

⁵¹ John Adams, Letter to Mercy Warren, January 8th 1776.

authorities really sacred, have agreed in this. If there is a form of government, then, whose principle and foundation is virtue, will not every sober man acknowledge it better calculated to promote the general happiness than any other form?" This linking of happiness and virtue was not a matter of public posturing for Adams, it was personal.

In his own journal as a young man he wrote: "Oh! that I could wear out of my mind every mean and base affectation; conquer my natural pride and self-conceit; expect no more deference from my fellows than I deserve; acquire that meekness and humility which are the sure mark and characters of a great and generous soul; subdue every unworthy passion, and treat all men as I wish to be treated by all. How happy should I then be in the favor and good will of all honest men and the sure prospect of a happy immortality!"⁵² The sentiment was shared by the other founders.

James Madison said at the Virginia Ratifying Convention "Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks-no form of government can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea, if there be sufficient virtue and intelligence in the community, it will be exercised in the selection of these men. So that we do not depend on their virtue, or put confidence in our rulers, but in the people who are to choose them."⁵³ For Madison, a virtuous society was a happy society.

Mary Wollstonecraft, even in her withering attack on the patriarchal oppressions of the era's political thinkers, agreed with this basic attribute of social happiness, writing "A truly benevolent legislator always endeavours to make it the interest of each individual to be virtuous; and thus private virtue becoming the cement of public happiness, an orderly whole is consolidated by the tendency of all the parts towards a common centre."⁵⁴ In the Founding Assumption then, there is as Alexander Hamilton said in 1790, "an intimate connection between virtue and happiness".⁵⁵

The idea goes back at least to the Nicomachean Ethics, in which Aristotle wrote, "the happy man lives well and does well; for we have practically defined happiness as a sort of good life and good action." Virtue and happiness were closely intertwined in much Greek philosophy. This line of thinking was also a natural extension of Lockean thought and Enlightenment ideas about happiness more generally. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke stated,

The stronger ties we have to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general, which is our greatest good, and which, as such, our desires always follow, the more are we free from any necessary determination of our will to any particular action, and from a necessary compliance with our desire, set upon any particular, and then appearing preferable good, till we have duly examined whether it has a tendency to, or be inconsistent with, our real happiness: and therefore, till we are as much informed upon this inquiry as the weight of the matter, and the nature of the case demands, we are, by the necessity of preferring and pursuing true happiness as our greatest good, obliged to suspend the satisfaction of our desires in particular cases. "

⁵² John Adams, Diary Entry, January 16th 1756.

⁵³ James Madison, Speech at Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 20 1788

⁵⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chap. IX. Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society. 1792

⁵⁵ Alexander Hamilton, *Treasury Department Report on Public Credit: Communicated to the House of Representatives*, January 9, 1790

Locke heavily emphasized the importance of “true” or “real” happiness as distinct from the satisfaction of every personal desire. Well-considered, virtuous action in line with our higher good was the goal, not immediate gratification.

Numerous Enlightenment philosophers continued this line of thought. Busch wrote of Adam Smith that “Among all the moral rules developed by societies, Smith identifies three basic virtues that underlie happiness. The three major virtues, in Smith’s view, are justice, beneficence, and prudence.”⁵⁶ Smith was a hero of Jefferson’s and the latter made numerous similar statements.” Jefferson’s view of virtue was similar to that of Smith. In an 1819 letter to William Short, Jefferson included a summary that he had made ‘some twenty years ago’ of Epicurus’s most important ideas – ideas that he noted would ensure happiness: Under the heading “Moral”, he wrote a bullet point list, which included these four points among others:

- ❖ Happiness is the aim of life.
- ❖ Virtue is the foundation of happiness.
- ❖ Utility is the test of virtue.
- ❖ Virtue consists in
 - prudence
 - temperance
 - fortitude
 - justice

The utilitarian view of virtue he elucidated in several other letters, including one to Thomas Law which said “Nature has constituted utility to man the standard and test of virtue. Men living in different countries, under different circumstances, different habits and regimens, may have different utilities; the same act, therefore, may be useful and consequently virtuous in one country which is injurious and vicious in another differently circumstanced.” These ideas of moral utility were shared by numerous enlightenment thinkers, like William Wollaston, the philosopher of Natural Religion who argued that virtue is not to be found in specific action actions but the conformity of actions with reason and truth.⁵⁷

At nearly 80 years of age, looking back on a long and remarkable life, Benjamin Franklin wrote an essay *On True Happiness*. It was essentially an argument that true happiness lies in reason and virtue, and not in passions or pleasures. Paeans to virtue were also common in his writings in Poor Richard’s Almanack. In 1746 he included a quote in its pages that “Virtue and Happiness are mother and daughter.” In a letter to John Alleyne in August of 1768 he wrote “Be in general virtuous, and you will be happy.” Virtue was a lifelong pursuit of Franklin’s and to him it was essential to happiness. At the tender age of 22, he had embarked on a project to attain “moral perfection”. He made a list of 13 virtues, and after failing to master them all at once, he focused on one a week. The list was as follows:

Temperance. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

Silence. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

Order. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

Resolution. Resolve to perform what you ought; to perform without fail what you resolve.

⁵⁶ Michael Busch, “Adam Smith and Consumerism’s Role in Happiness”, *Major Themes in Economics 10*(Iowa: University of Northern Iowa) 2008. This also hearkens back to the ancient Greek civic virtues like courage, moderation and justice.

⁵⁷ Clifford Griffeth Thompson, *The Ethics of William Wollaston*

Frugality. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
Industry. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
Sincerity. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
Justice. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
Moderation. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
Cleanliness. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.
Tranquillity. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
Chastity. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
Humility. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.⁵⁸

Though this was the work of a young Franklin who would throughout his life learn more and refine his understanding of philosophy, morality and virtue, the list is nonetheless demonstrative of the views of the Founding generation on virtue. While grounded in Christian tradition and the virtues of the ancient Greeks, these are not high-flying ideals but practical and attainable human strengths.

Relationships and Civic Virtue:

Personal pleasure is certainly wonderful and much to be desired (in balance, of course). Expending energy in activities that challenge and inspire gives life meaning. And the application of virtue allows one to be happy with one's own character. But none of this could quite be considered happiness if experienced in total isolation. The Founders of the United States also included intimate relationships and friendships and a broader relationship with our community, country and world in their conception of happiness.

Personal Love, Family and Friendship:

Personal love was for the founders, as for all of us, a vital component of happiness. A youthful George Washington wrote to Sally Cary Fairfax of his love for Martha Custis "'Tis true, I profess myself a votary to love. I acknowledge that a lady is in the case...I feel the force of her amiable beauties in the recollection of a thousand tender passages..."⁵⁹ And when the widow Custis later became his wife, he wrote tenderly to her on the prospect of having to lead the American army, lamenting "I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity, and that I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay was to be seven times seven years."⁶⁰

Over the course of almost 40 years, John and Abigail Adams wrote over 1,100 letters to one another. Despite his sometimes prickly nature, he wrote to her during their courtship that "Love sweetens Life"⁶¹ Shortly before their marriage in 1764, he wrote her "But you who have always softened and warmed my Heart, shall restore my Benevolence as well as my Health and Tranquility of mind. You shall polish and refine my sentiments of Life and Manners, banish all the unsocial and ill natured Particles in my Composition, and form me to that happy Temper, that can reconcile a quick Discernment with a perfect

⁵⁸ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. 2003 pp89-91.

Franklin's original list actually included only the first twelve. A Quaker friend reminded him of his pride and insolence, prompting Franklin to add the 13th.

⁵⁹ George Washington, Letter to Sally Cary Fairfax, September 12th, 1758

⁶⁰ George Washington, Letter to Martha Washington, June 18th 1775

⁶¹ John Adams, Letter to Abigail Smith, April 20, 1763

Candour.” Their partnership was a source of strength, self-improvement and happiness to both of them. And so it was with the founding generations as it is with all generations. Whether or not each of them found a loving, happy marriage, they recognized that kind of partnership as essential to happiness.

Beyond partnership, the founders also acknowledged the importance of family and friends for a happy life. As Jefferson wrote, “the happiest moments of my life have been the few which I have past at home in the bosom of my family.”⁶² He wrote to his daughter that “these reveries ... leave me always impressed with the desire of being at home once more, and of exchanging labour, envy, and malice, for ease, domestic occupation, & domestic love & society, where I may once more be happy with you, with Mr. Randolph, & dear little Anne,...”⁶³ He later wrote to Madison that after a lifetime of public service, “age, experience and reflection” led him “to seek for happiness in the lap and love of my family, in the society of my neighbors and my books, in the wholesome occupation of my farm and my affairs...”⁶⁴ Some three decades later, in one of the last letters of his life, he wrote again to Madison to say “The friendship which has subsisted between us, now half a century, and the harmony of our political principles and pursuits, have been sources of constant happiness to me through that long period.”⁶⁵ In short, happiness requires personal social bonds.

Service to community, nation and humanity:

The founders noted not only the importance of personal relationships for happiness, but also emphasized the importance of one’s relationship with their community, state, and country. Civic virtue was amongst the highest virtues for the founders, and essential to happiness.

It is an idea that again goes back to ancient Athens. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend notes “For the Greeks, excellence could be manifest only in a city or a community. Since human beings were political animals, the best way to exercise virtue and justice was within the institutions of a great city (the polis). Only beasts and gods could live alone. A solitary person was not fully human. In fact, the Greek word “idiot” means a private person, someone who is not engaged in public life. It was only in a fair and just society that can men and women could be fully human--and happy.”⁶⁶ Happiness requires being of use to the people around you. As John Adams wrote to a friend in 1790 “As it has been the great aim of my life to be useful, if I had any reason to think I was so, as you seem to suppose, it would make me happy.”⁶⁷

The link between civic virtue and social happiness was a common theme in Enlightenment political thought. D’Holbach, admired by Jefferson for his virtue, was a case in point. Spier notes that “Like other Enlightenment philosophers, D’Holbach’s concept of pursuing happiness was far removed from selfish egocentrism, but was instead embedded in what we may now call an empathetic way of dealing with other people, but which was then called virtuous behavior... As he saw it, if people behaved virtuously while pursuing happiness, a harmonious society would automatically come as a result. No religion was needed anymore to proclaim moral rules, because the virtuous pursuit of happiness would be sufficient to ensure

⁶² Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Francis Willis, April 18, 1790

⁶³ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Martha Jefferson Randolph, January 15th, 1792

⁶⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, June 9th, 1793. April 20th, 1763

⁶⁵ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, February 17th, 1826

⁶⁶ Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, “The Pursuit of Happiness: What the Founders Meant – and Didn’t”, The Atlantic, June 20, 2011.

⁶⁷ John Adams, Letter to Richard Price, April 19 1790

moral societies.”⁶⁸ Despite being somewhat on the fringe at the time because of his atheism, the public-spiritedness of his ideas was common to his fellow philosophers.

Frances Hutcheson, known as the founder of the Scottish Enlightenment and George Turnbull, another Scottish Enlightenment thinker, envisioned an education system in which students would learn that individual and societal happiness depends on a personal duty to act with benevolence toward others. This idea was picked up by Benjamin Franklin, who wrote in his own treatise on education that “Doing Good to Men is the only Service of God in our Power; and to imitate his Beneficence is to glorify him.”⁶⁹ In starting the academy that would later become the University of Pennsylvania, Franklin sought an education system that would instill the inclination and ability to serve humanity, country, friends and family. This was a constant theme in Franklin’s thinking about government, citizenship, religion and morality.⁷⁰

Though Franklin was the creator of numerous inventions⁷¹, he refused to patent any of them, because he wanted to enrich society, not himself. Regarding his invention of the Franklin Stove, he wrote in his autobiography that “...Govr. Thomas was so pleas’d with the Construction of this Stove, as describ’d in it that he offer’d to give me a Patent for the sole Vending of them for a Term of Years; but I declin’d it from a Principle which has ever weigh’d with me on such Occasions, viz. That as we enjoy great Advantages from the Inventions of others, we should be glad of an Opportunity to serve others by any Invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously.” Service to others, for Franklin, was not a sacrifice but an opportunity for gladness. Various historians have noted that the guiding principle of Franklin’s life, the fundamental tenet of his morality, and the sum of his religious beliefs was that “The most acceptable service to God is doing good to man.”⁷²

Jefferson agreed with Franklin on this point, saying in an 1816 letter to John Adams “If [an act] is to effect the happiness of him to whom it is directed, It is virtuous... The essence of virtue is doing good to others, while what is good may be one thing in one society and its contrary in another.” This doing of good to others was, to Jefferson part of nature’s design of humans as social animals – a built-in reward system to bring happiness to those who bring happiness to others. To Thomas Law, Jefferson wrote

“It has been said that we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bind up the wounds of the man beaten by thieves, pour oil and wine into them, set him on our own beast and bring him to the inn, because we receive ourselves pleasure from these acts... These good acts give us pleasure, but how happens it that they give us pleasure? Because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses... The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist had he intended man for a social animal without planting in him social dispositions.”⁷³

Franklin spent his life in innumerable acts of public service, from service as a militiaman, postmaster and diplomat to launching libraries, fire brigades, night watchman corps, a hospital, a militia, and a

⁶⁸ Fred Spier, “Pursuing the Pursuit of Happiness: Social Evolution in History, Volume 12, No. 2, September 2013

⁶⁹ Scott A Cook and William Earle Klay, “George Washington and Enlightenment Ideas on Educating Future Citizens and Public Servants”, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 20 (1) 45-55.

⁷⁰ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 2003, 142

⁷¹ http://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/l3_inquiring_little.html

⁷² Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 91

⁷³ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Thomas Law, 1814

government. The same can be said of most of the other founders as well. They again and again put public service above more pleasurable pursuits. Throughout his life, the letters of Thomas Jefferson ached again and again to leave public life for retirement to Monticello, to the point of driving some friends to exasperation. Washington likewise agonized over service as a general and as a President when he wished to withdraw from public life; but serve he did and refused financial compensation for it. Happiness, in the view of the founders, requires a certain amount of care for and service to others.

Conclusion

The inclusion of the Pursuit of Happiness as one of three specific unalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence was no fluke. The founding generation shared near universally the assumption that governments exist to facilitate that pursuit and should be judged on their performance in doing so. This idea was the result of immersion in the philosophies of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the great theologians and the varied great minds of the Enlightenment. The happiness they envisioned included the enjoyment of life, but also full engagement in purposeful activities, the practice of virtue and meaningful relationships with and service to others. In assessing how well the government of the United States fulfills the intent of the framers, then, Americans would do well to look to the extent to which it facilitates the widespread happiness of its people.