

CHAPTERS ONE & TWO

**...and The Pursuit
of Happiness**

By **Jonas Cain**

CHAPTER ONE

PURSUING HAPPINESS

THOMAS JEFFERSON

In the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson wrote:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹

Focusing on the last five words: “*and the pursuit of Happiness,*” and assuming that this statement is true, the question becomes: *What exactly is this “happiness” that we have a fundamental right to pursue?* The contemporary understanding of happiness seems to often focus on “pleasant,” “positive” emotions, and having one’s needs met; however in 1776 the common meaning may very well have meant “prosperity,” “thriving,” and “wellbeing.”

THEORIES OF HAPPINESS

To understand the intention behind this word we will begin Chapter One by examining the author himself, which will quickly bring us to a discussion of an ancient Greek philosopher and the roots of *hedonism* — a theory of happiness that favors felt sensations of pleasure. In Chapter Two we will discuss both *quantitative* and *qualitative* hedonism, and in Chapter Three we will outline *attitudinal* hedonism, which favors happiness as a mental or psychological sensation of pleasure.

In Chapter Four will discuss *eudemonism* — a theory that believes happiness is achieved by living a life of virtue to live an excellent human life by fulfilling our full potential.

¹ Jefferson, Thomas. *The Declaration of Independence*. 1776

In Chapter Five will discuss *life satisfactionism* — a theory that believes happiness is achieved when we are overall satisfied with our lives as a whole, based on actually occurring pleasures even if pains find their way into our lives.

Lastly, in Chapter Six we will end our formal discussion of happiness with my own personal prescription for living a happy life with in an essay called *The Structure of Happiness*. This dissertation stands on the shoulders of the philosophies revealed in this book, and is measured by my personal application of them in my own pursuit of happiness. It is my belief that the model discussed in this section is both objective and subjective, in that the structure is sound universally, yet must be applied to one's own life to be effective.

A journey of discovery awaits...let us begin!

CHAPTER TWO

HEDONISM

There is some debate among scholars as to what inspired Thomas Jefferson to include the phrase “...and the pursuit of Happiness” in the Declaration of Independence, however what is known is that Jefferson was a self-proclaimed Epicurean.

EPICURUS

Epicureanism is a school of philosophy founded in 307 BC that is based on the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. This ancient philosopher believed that pleasure was the greatest good.² The emphasis on pleasure makes Epicurus a hedonist, however his understanding of pleasure does not focus on the lower quality pleasures, such as those of the body; rather, it is focused on the

² Pursuit-of-Happiness.org/History-of-Happiness/Epicurus

higher quality pleasures, such as those attained through the acquisition of knowledge, by living modestly, and limiting one's desires. By seeking to derive the greatest amount of higher quality pleasure Epicurus believed this to be the path to tranquility and freedom from fear, which once attained lead to happiness.

It's important to note that according to Epicurus, the acquisition of knowledge was sought only to rid oneself of the fear of Gods and of the fear of death. As such, Epicurus' philosophy did not advocate a belief in God. Since Jefferson was a self-proclaimed Epicurean, it is a safe conclusion that he likewise did not advocate for the belief in God. What supports this inference is that while it is known that he was an avid reader of the Christian Bible, he also created his own version, which he called *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.³ Today this text is often simply referred to as *The Jefferson Bible*. This adaptation removed all mention of Jesus' miracles, and rather only depicts him as a teacher of morals.

What this might suggest, then, is that Jefferson's use of the phrase "*and the pursuit of happiness*" had nothing to do with Epicurus. Notice the reference to a Creator (with a capital "C"):

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..."

With his personal (subjective) deemphasize on God, perhaps Jefferson's intention here was to create a universal (objective) direction for the citizens of the emerging new nation.

³ Jefferson, Thomas. *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. 1895

JOHN LOCKE

A possible answer can be found with John Locke, a seventeenth century English philosopher who coined the phrase “pursuit of happiness” eighty-seven years before the Declaration of Independence was written. The phrase was used in his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and so perhaps an understanding of Locke’s view on happiness will bring us closer to understanding our pursuit.

*"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. 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."*⁴

What’s important to note in Locke’s view of happiness is the distinction between “real” and “imagined” happiness, which suggests an objective view of happiness rather than a subjective one. For example, you may have a strong desire to indulge in rich chocolate cake, and you may believe that indulging in this urge will bring you pleasure, but Locke would argue that this is only imagined pleasure and not really in your best interest — he would try to convince you that rich chocolate cake will not lead to a “true and solid” happiness that is required for satisfaction with life, since such indulgences are only temporary rather than lasting sources of happiness. Put another way: if you place your happiness inside of a sand castle then you will lose your happiness every time the tide comes in. But if you instead place your happiness

⁴ Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 1689 — ch. 21 §51

where neither moth nor rust can destroy⁵ then your happiness will be true and solid.

John Locke's "unalterable pursuit of happiness" advocates for a freedom to make decisions that would result in the best life possible for a human being, however this does not imply that we should be at liberty to choose anything *less* than that which would lead to true and solid happiness. Therefore, if Thomas Jefferson was inspired by Locke then this could insinuate, to use an extreme and absurd example, a ban on the production and sale of rich chocolate cakes, because choosing such base pleasures would not lead to genuine happiness. This is an extreme example, but consider the implication of Locke's theory: we have the right to pursue happiness by being free to choose that which would lead to "true and solid," long-lasting happiness. By including rich chocolate cake in our mix of choices, it is not in keeping with the spirit of Locke's understanding of happiness, because making such a choice would lead only to a fleeting pleasure that lasts only until the next tide comes in.

JEREMY BENTHAM

The eighteenth-century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham would likely disagree with such a proposition, and if you find fault with this interpretation of Locke's happiness, perhaps Bentham's ideas will be more convincing.

Bentham was a quantitative hedonist, believing that happiness is a singular, measurable, felt sensation of pleasure.⁶ Because of his emphasis on measuring *quantity* of pleasure, he took no consideration for the *quality* of pleasure. To be happy by Bentham's theory, then, is simply a matter of experiencing a greater quantity of pleasure over pain or neutral states.

⁵ Matthew 6:20

⁶ Mulnix, Jennifer Wilson; Mulnix, M.J. *Happy Lives, Good Lives: A Philosophical Examination*. Broadview Press, 2015 — p. 62

To support this claim he argued that every felt sensation either offers a measure of pleasure or a measure of pain. Modern philosophers call these measures “hedons” and “dolors,” with a hedon being a measure of pleasure and a dolor being a measure of pain.⁷ Think of a hedon as a positive measure (+) and a dolor as a negative measure (-). In this way, the sum total of one’s hedons and dolors is the measure of one’s happiness.

Bentham suggested seven criteria for quantifying pleasure:

- 1) **Intensity:** *The intensity of the pleasure or pain.*
- 2) **Duration:** *How long the pleasure or pain will last.*
- 3) **Certainty:** *The probability that the event will be pleasurable or painful.*
- 4) **Propinquity/Remoteness:** *How soon will the event occur.*
- 5) **Fecundity:** *The probability of the pleasure leading to further pleasure.*
- 6) **Purity:** *The probability of the pain leading to further pain.*
- 7) **Extant:** *The number of individuals to be effected by the pleasure or pain.*

To understand how to use this criteria, let’s consider the pleasure derived from a hypothetical game of chess to the pleasure derived from a hypothetical game of Russian roulette:

- 1) **Intensity:** It’s safe to infer that Russian roulette will be the far more intense activity versus chess, therefore Russian roulette would be deemed more pleasurable.

⁷ Mulnix, Jennifer Wilson; Mulnix, M.J. *Happy Lives, Good Lives: A Philosophical Examination*. Broadview Press, 2015 — p. 65

2) Duration: Chess can sometimes last for hours and hours, whereas Russian roulette can end almost immediately, making it a rather short-lived endeavor. Therefore, chess is deemed more pleasurable.

3) Certainty: With chess, assuming you are playing against an opponent of similar skill, there is approximately a 50% chance of winning and/or losing, whereas with Russian roulette there is only approximately a 16.67% chance of losing and an 83.33% chance of winning. Under such considerations we can safely surmise that because Russian roulette has better odds of winning versus chess that Russian roulette will be more certainly pleasurable, and the other to be more certainly painful. Yet there's more to consider: when playing any game, winning is not the only source of pleasure; indeed, often the mere thrill of the game and the ensuing camaraderie with your fellow players is enough to make the notion of winning or losing to be but a side note. Add to this the fact of Russian roulette's possibility of ending in death, this "side note" becomes imbued with far more meaning and repercussions. As such, I argue that this tips the scale in favor of chess being more certain to be pleasurable and Russian roulette being more certain to be painful. However, by combining the former Certainty consideration with the latter, we arrive at a Certainty stalemate. Therefore we need not consider the games' Certainty in our hedonic calculus.

4) Propinquity: The nearness of the pleasure for both games will differ depending on the circumstance, so in this category we can consider it a tie between both games.

5) Fecundity: The probability of further pleasure is in favor of chess, for it is not likely that continued play of Russian roulette will lead to further

pleasure, but rather instead death. Therefore by this criteria chess will lead to greater pleasure.

6) Purity: The probability of further pain is in favor of Russian roulette, as outlined in the discussion on fecundity. Therefore by this measure chess will lead to greater pleasure.

7) Extant: Whereas chess is a game between only two individuals, Russian roulette can theoretically be played by any number of individuals, making Russian roulette the favorable choice when seeking pleasure as per this criterion.

By keeping score simply, giving 1 hedon to either chess or Russian roulette for every measure outlined, we find that chess has 3 hedons, while Russian roulette has 2 hedons. Therefore, by using Bentham's criteria we have discovered that playing chess is more likely to lead to happiness rather than playing Russian roulette.

To be charitable to Bentham's theory it must be added that we can further complicate the calculus by factoring in the dolors won by each measure, and yet still further add to the equation a spectrum of hedons and dolors — say on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest amount of pleasure or pain and 1 being the lowest. But this poses a problem: Holding pleasure to be a singular sensation along a spectrum leaves us wondering what constitutes the base hedonic value. Won't this value vary depending on the individual?

JOHN STUART MILL

The nineteenth century British philosopher John Stuart Mill solves this problem with his emphasis on a spectrum of felt sensations that vary in quality.

According to Mill, pleasures of low quality (such as eating a cookie or taking a nap) do not have as much an affect on us as higher quality pleasures (such as reading poetry or studying philosophy). The philosopher defined these higher quality pleasures as whatever involves the human capacity for reason and appreciation of aesthetic beauty. This explains his famous saying: “*It is far better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.*”⁸ Meaning, if given the choice, people will always choose the higher qualities of human rationality even if otherwise unsatisfied, rather than the life of a pig, whose only capable of low quality pleasures even if completely satisfied. Humans are rational creatures, authors of their own existence, and this rationality should be celebrated for it leads to high quality human happiness. In this way Mill is like Epicurus, in that he advocates for high quality pleasures, however Mill’s pleasures don’t quite reach Epicurus’ standards.

This theory has its own problem, however. Consider prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps. They may have had the gift of human reason, yet despite the presence of such a high quality pleasure they lacked even the base pleasures of adequate food and shelter. It cannot be asserted that these individuals were happy, but according to Mill’s theory it can be argued that should be regarded as happy.

To unpack a better defense for hedonism, let’s turn to Chapter Three.

⁸Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*.1863

ABOUT JONAS CAIN

Jonas Cain is an author, corporate magician, and facilitator of fascination working to Engage, Empower, and Encourage corporations and individuals to become positivity leaders that Excel at work, home, and beyond. Through magical keynote presentations, interactive workshops, and one-on-one consulting, Jonas equally performs, informs, and transforms!

For more information or to schedule a free consultation contact:

800-969-9778 • jonas@positivitiymagic.com
30 Newbury St. 3rd Floor Boston, MA 02116
www.PositivitiyMagic.com

