

A Mirabilary Of The Passing Parade: Happiness

by Cynicus Americanus (December 2016)



A Mirabilary

Signs And Wonders of The Devolution Of Man And The Decline Of Western Civilization In The Time Of Obama In The Age Of the Gnostics In A Republic of Dunces, A Federation of Twits, An Accommodation Of DumbAsses.

And The Rise Of The Criminally Insane Class

The Passing Parade

As Observed by Cynicus Americanus

Wisdom

“Wisdom does not rely on smarts but on the ability to stay by the obvious truths.” – Józef Tischner

– I am bedrock – Cynicus Americanus

Happiness

or,

The Elusion Of Happiness

The pursuit of happiness appears not to have made the citizens happy.

The nineteenth century's WASP approach to pursuit seems not so efficient in the accumulation of happiness as the stockpiling of wealth. This appears to be the way life had been arranged – no promises of rose gardens, no use complaining. Just keep on going on. Pursue! Well how could it be otherwise in this case, when it is obviously so in all others? A pursuit of daily vittles doesn't guarantee a banquet; unrewarded, the pursuit will lead to greater hunger. A hot pursuit of la belle femme, unsuccessful, makes one... what... warmer... not cooler, Yes? The pursuit of big bucks more often than not, leads to debt. To hell with pursuit!

There are more things in heaven and earth, Dexter, than are dreamt of in your fancies... and will, furthermore, stomp and crush not only your desires but your desire for the pursuit of happiness. Down with pursuit!

Take it where you find it. If all there is, is a smidgen, devour the smidgen. Glean all you can. No opportunity is without recompense if you will only glom onto it. Up with Epicureanism!

Speaking of Greeks bearing gifts: "Call no man happy until he is dead, only lucky" – Solon

Twenty-five hundred years later, yet a thousand more philosophers, a great Enlightenment, probes, MRIs, positron emission tomography, the end of history – what a ride. And where had it got us? "Shit happens and then you die!" That's progress for you.

Who would be non-plussed to discover Solon was a law-maker and one of a sort of democrat? Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose.

Chasing Butterflies?

Say what you will about happiness... ..why should you be left out.

Happiness seems ever a new thing to modern minds. Happiness is always true to the latest fad. It's hard pressed anyone would be, having to devote themselves to the study of social theories, and not finding a promise of happiness at the crux of them. But it's a crooked crux. The diehard Socialist screams "None can be happy 'till all are happy." And the people responded "huzzah... we will not be happy 'till all are happy." Ever notice how unhappy revolutionists are? No... that... what you're thinking... was not happiness – it was bloodthirst. Trust me, Thérèse Defarge was not a happy knitter.

To hell with the revolutionists! I will take the blessing of the gods even if all are not so blessed as I would have them. I am easy when it comes to happiness.

What had the medieval man that the modern man has not? He was not so comfortable as us but he was more content. He had not the freedom we do, not especially the license, yet he was not so encumbered as we are. Happiness was a closer acquaintance to him. If he'd gone a week without the King's agents having taken notice of him he was happy for a good week. We sophisticates have not so great a capacity. From a cursory look one could almost imagine the mods had forged for themselves armor against happiness, and a protective shield.

Christianity, early on, had not much to do but take the old philosopher's word on happiness and make of it something transcendent. There's little choice but to put off happiness when you have an appointment with the lions at the amphitheater. If happiness escapes us in the here and now, then wait until the afterlife (more on the afterlife to come). All's happy that ends happy.

The more a concept escapes us, the more books, treatises, essays, and white papers there are explaining it all. Want to know everything you hadn't known about happiness? There are, of course the ancient Greeks. Though, in the course of half a millennium they managed to traipse over every bit of land mass and soggy swamp there was and made for every human whose beat was to that of a different drummer a different philosophy. Different strokes, as I'm sure the old Greeks would say.

What has the Good Book to say?

"Happy [is] the man [that] findeth wisdom, and the man [that] getteth understanding." – Proverbs 3:13-18

Bit will o' the wisp. Finding a wheel does not presuppose making good use of it. Even wisdom may be set aside by human nature to scratch what itches. Understanding! I could tell you horror stories about the curse of discernment. Anything else?

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not through the chastening of the Almighty." – Job 5:17-27

Yeah, in the long run. If not even then, then in the afterlife (more soon).

C S Lewis and Chesterton must have had something to add.

Christianity, whenever it is properly explained, is often times a kill-joy. Just at that moment in history when it (History) had determined that nearly all of what humans pursue was, properly considered, a "right," along comes someone, C. S. Lewis, to put a damper on things. *"You Have No Right To Happiness"* wrote the man. I know of a court, mind you, a SUPREME Court that would beg to make a good quarrel of that, then confuse you with emanations, and tie you up in penumbrae. As I detest the judges, I vote for Lewis. All in all, I would rather forfeit all happiness to the reasoning of Lewis than have a cornucopia of it at the rationalizations of men the majority of who are crazy. When in doubt, make of all your presumptions in favor of sanity, which is to say, stick to reality.

G K Chesterton: "Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable."

I kinda like that. But You have to be happy first... dead end.

From a Christian source, precisely which, does not matter:

*"You read me right. God doesn't want us shivering in the corner, frightened but obedient. **He wants to unleash happiness in our lives, pour it into every aspect of our beings, flood our days with joy** the world can't touch or take away. This is the God of the Bible. Forget what you've heard: he's a joyful God himself, and **he loves nothing more than to make those of us who are chasing worldly happiness truly, deeply joyful.**"*

God doesn't want us...? Which us? Christians, or, all humans (all are his creation; all are his children) If only Christians... look around; think you the great many of them have no reason to be shivering in the corner, frightened? If

all, then not a chance, I'm not buying it. Did the Canaanites draw a short straw? The Jews had obviously done something to tick Him off. Take that! Job. God, I think, is not so much the dispenser or re-distributor of happiness; anymore than he is dispenser of things ranging from predicaments to tragedy. We are the instigators of our troubles by our willful obstinacy in insisting we may play at hubris to our mind's content. God does not "punish" the bloke who'd jumped off the cliff. Reality does, in the name of gravity. God does not directly provision us with happiness. God does not make "happy" the bloke who gets a "yes" when asking the pretty lass to spend some time with him. Reality does, in the name of the nature of things.

And What Of The Zeitgeist? What Has It To Say About Happiness?

Darrin McMahon, a historian – that's a Historian, at Florida State University, gets his points across in the tome *Happiness: A History*.

British economist – that's Economist – Richard Layard, does as much in "Happiness: Lessons from a New Science." Surely no-one still believes Economics is a science. He must be referring to Happiness as the new science what with all neuromancers hanging about brains like witches about a bubbling cauldron.

Let's get a professor in the mix – Jonathan Haidt, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, and his contribution, "The Happiness Hypothesis." Mr. Haidt has been cited by webbers on other matters often; though he may be wrong (he is a psychologist after all), he seems capable of making a worthy point.

Three drunks, a historian, economist, and a psychologist, walk into a bar happy...

You finish the joke.

Hardly anyone can write three hundred pages on whatever without an insight. The historian tells us happiness is a social construct, differing, at times substantially, among societies/cultures. It's worth considering the entire breadth and depth of the matter but had the ordinary layman no notion of this point? Even if he'd never read a page of history, is he entirely unaware that his happiness and... oh say... a Muslim's, or a Thuggee's, or cannibal's have not the same substance behind it?

The economist regales us with poverty as a source of unhappiness. He puts the threshold in the vicinity of 15 grand (US \$). He avers that wealth does not make for happiness, and is as likely to lead to hedonism, which in turn makes Jack unhappy. How long has the man in the street been unaware of that cliché? And where precisely do clichés come from if not the experiences of the men in the streets?

Mr Haidt's field is far the most fertile. That peculiar study of man (psychiatry) that had sought to make something solid of his misery, now seeks to do as much for his happiness (psycho therapy). It's called "positive psychology" and is, in a great many respects a breath of fresh nonsense. It may, at least, get your mother and father off the hook for your expensive neuroses.

Positive psychology has a formula. Yes, yes, an honest to god formula, on how to be happy – $H=S+C+V$.

H is your level of happiness to be determined by the factors:

S – a set point; natural born mopers have a lower S than those who get up in the AM brighter than the sun.

C – conditions of life, i.e., aggravating/extenuating stresses, e.g., – low if you're having to explain yourself constantly to a wife, or, stress-free – higher for young bachelorhood. A wash for middle age bachelors.

V is for voluntary activities. Extra points for weekends at the soup kitchen; none for chug-a-lug contests on wet T-shirt night.

The S factor alone makes the cynic's follicles stand at attention. It suggests the head-shrinkers have it in mind to make cynicism a disorder on the order of a featured appearance in the DSMMD. Unsunny disposition dragging you down in life's sprint? With just a few \$250 dollar fifty minute sessions, a couple of nostrums, a pharmaceutical miracle, and their end of the kickback, you will see nothing but the sunny side of the street.

Am I being overly cynical? I believe not.

The function V, brings yet another self-evident point up front. Has it not been known for sometime by most all humans that volunteering makes for good internal vibrations. Who had not known it from an early age? Who had not known it even

before the advent of Durkheim and social science. Had Blog the Neanderthal no notion of this?

Whatever the self-help aisle has to offer to making us happy; whatever will come of human excavations in the brain to tap into happiness, none of it bodes well for the human. Has anything so devalued humans as humanism or de-mystified the wonderful mystery? Leave us alone. We don't want, or more to the point, ought not want a brave new world. If you must play doctor, play with yourself.

Pity the happiness of humans when the neuromancers have made it their purpose to stimulate just the right synapses in just the right way to initiate "happiness." From madiana to Soma. That's progress, is it?

Post-modern science is mostly a bust. Genome mapping promised more than the full extent of the territory could sustain. Now the neuromancers vow they will tap the brain and drain the human of hate, envy, racism, sexism, anti-conformity, and so on. They then will vigorously rub the nodes of happiness and voila! Happiness.

Feel Lucky Punk?

Which of the gods had calculated that I would be better off in America? Which others deigned to give me a cheery disposition (I swear to it, I have one). Which had blessed me with wonderful parents and siblings? Which of the three circumstances had led me to the greatest happiness? Might I lose it and be left to circling vultures to peck my dead flesh? Could the loss of love or a loved one prompt me to self-destructive despair?

Who the hell knows. Who on earth would wish to know. Who, at the other end of the spectrum from me, is doomed to unhappiness, forever; for being shortchanged all that is requisite for happiness? Who is destined for unremitting unhappiness? (More on this – minutes away.)

A good deal of modern science is, signally, irrelevant. Not insignificant. It can do much harm. It can make of a human's sojourn on earth a hellish one. Social scientists are particularly expert in this, but hard science daily makes an unvaluable contribution and may be considered a serious abettor.

Go ahead, make my day, make me happy. Convince my three pound three ounces brain

I am handsome, and brave, and honest, devastatingly witty, and a good dancer even though I'm a porker, frightened by my shadow, would cheat young boys of their coins, am as dense as David Brooks, and dance like a three legged hippo. At least I'll "feel" happy.

Cynicus Americanus Explains It All

Happiness endeavored – the pretty girl you'd gotten up the nerve to ask out, says... yes.

Happiness serendipitous – the pretty girl asks you out.

Joy: a happiness of unknown origin, neither sought nor expected, nor in the context of... anything. Joy is happiness ex nihilo.

All life is a tradeoff. This irks Gnostics, materialists, and that particular ilk of scientist, and very nearly every social scientist that ever drew undeserved breath.

Want to be happy? Choose! And then live with the choice. And don't complain. Even though you're not happy you can make others happy by shutting the hell up. More on that very soon.

A small part of a Scenario:

gods: *You want to be happy? How happy?*

Dexter: *I want the happiness what comes of having a beautiful woman as a wife.*

gods: *You sure?*

Dexter: *Of course I'm sure. Why? Is there a problem?*

gods: *You realize of course you will be miserable.*

Dexter: *How so?*

gods: *Every moment will be given over to suspicion and the maintenance of your jealousy. Your only happy moments will be those devoted to imagining either her demise or your own.*

Dexter: *Is there no alternative?*

gods: *Of course.*

Dexter: *What?*

gods: *If you want to be happy for the rest of your life, make an ugly women your wife.*

Dexter: *That's not fair!*

gods (mockingly): *That's not fair, that's not fair. Boo-hoo! Whiney little sniveler.*

Dexter: *Well it's not. And...*

gods: *That's it, you ungrateful poor excuse of a hominid sod. From here on you will find yourself a woman trapped in a man's body.*

Dexter: *Will I be happy?*

gods: *You will be frisson personified.*

Dexter: *Is that good?*

gods: *It's the best.*

Dexter: *I'll take it.*

Aside:

gods: *Damned stupid idea... humans. Whose idea were they?*

chorus: *Zeus*

The End

Every moment is its own discreet entity. Our moments are not etched in stone. Every moment has, forever, impetus. Every moment evinces, forever, an influence. All our moments in time never, ever, never-ever, constitute finality. Life is not a timetable where every moment that's passed is drenched in amber, hardens, and preserves a fossil. Life is not so ruthlessly finite, nor so recklessly inefficient. It has not a script, it has not acts, there is no "The End."

"There are no second acts in American lives," said F Scott Fitzgerald. He was not being literal; he was being literary. It's damned difficult to knock that out of a fine writer. It's best to accept it as what it is and not what it purports to be – profound. Everything past remains as much of our future. It would astonish nearly all just how true, how immutable, that is. The past has more purpose than to linger in our memories and manufacture, by assembly line, cheap regrets.

No part of our lives is not at the beck and call of another part. All parts are reciprocally associative. What percentage of the cells that make us as we are today, have not the inherent ability to replicate and make us tomorrow what we were not yesterday? The parts of our lives are more complex than the parts of our biology.

I'd venture a gambler's dime that, measured by whatever scale in whichever unit, the past more makes us than the future will – or could. We have not even a guarantee of a future, but are well supplied with a past and it is more precious than anyone might imagine.

"The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history." – George Orwell

If ever anyone would wonder why the know-it-alls want so desperately to eliminate the past the answer is there: we are our past; it is our identity, our selves, our very *being*, it is what makes us *I*. Whether the brights have it in mind to get rid of the past so they can appoint a new people who can be depended on to "vote" for the status quo or "work" in their cubicles for their allotment of daily breads and circuses, or merely conform, in the full extent of their existence, with alacrity, doesn't much matter. The past must go.

Whom the Gnostics desire to remake, they first destroy all that he is – his past.

Lucky for us, I'd say; happiness has to it that same quality as light – the power to overwhelm. There is not darkness enough in the entire multiverse to subsume one small candle with a flickering flame. There is not despair enough to kill off one small happiness.

The Happy Moment (finally!)

I had never been so happy as that time when I had been happy over some moments that had not been particularly happy at the time of their occurrence. It is NOT a mere memory. Years, even decades after that time in the long ago, it remains as a miracle of transubstantiation; having the appearance of a happy memory but the substance of pure elation.

Art imitates life and does so in the production of *After Life* (1998), a Japanese movie directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. It is, in its original Japanese title, called *Wandafuru raifu*. Roll that about in your mouth giving it voice each time round. It comes out a transliterative voice, complete with the Nipponic “L/R” speech difficulty, charmingly, and perhaps – who knows – with an oriental bow to Frank Capra... “Wonderful Life.”

The Plot Thickens

Their lives are over. They’ve been directed, as all such cases are, to a large building/bureaucracy where they will be... what... decommissioned from active service to a just eternal reward. Each of the dearly departed is interviewed over a span of seven days by a facilitator trained in bureaucratic rigmarole. The denouement of the premise is for the recently deceased to reveal to the facilitator a happy moment – the happiest moment of their lives. The moment is then recreated with c-movie production values, a tape is made and presented to the newly departed for an eternity of viewing pleasure. It sounds tacky, but can the pursuit of true happiness be tacky? It’s much nearer beautifully, humanly, quaint.

As things are, the facilitators happen to also to be the dead among the dead. When, in the moment of truth they could not tender a happy memory worthy of a production, they had not been processed and moved along, but became facilitators of the process for others after them. Each may yet have redemption should they recall a happy moment worthy of memorialization – on appeal.

A seventy-year old widower is having a difficult time transitioning; he can recall few, if any details of his life that had been more significant than quotidian habits. His facilitator is a dour young man who had died decades earlier. As a young man of about twenty years he’d had his youth stolen from him by an Empire and his life snuffed out by war – that war.

The young man though is dutiful, as is the wont of, if not youth, the Japanese;

he makes available to the old man the records of his life and within it old man's arranged marriage, and his near cruel indifference to his long suffering wife. The old man sees, perhaps for the first time, the stupefying life that could not possibly have granted him a notable memory, let alone a happy one. That empty space reserved for happiness, subsequent to the review of his life, had, of a sudden, been inundated with remorse. And in that bleak remorse he remembered a happiness – not his own but his wife's. He recalled the evening he had taken her to, of all places the movies. Thereafter they walked together to the park and there sat on a bench. The man's wife's happiness inspired him as few things other than happiness can. He promised her there would more such evenings for her. But as he seems not to have remembered them during his processing, it may be there were no such memories for there having been no such evenings. Still, there was one happiness, not his, but one that he had shared in.

During the gathering of the old man's records, his Facilitator discovers, to his astonishment, that the old man's wife was his own lovely betrothed when she was a young woman. He finds her records and discovers the young woman's happiest moment. It was the moments of their promise of engagement, on the very same bench in the very same park that had provided the old man his happiness. Just as with the old man, it was another's happiness that now provided the facilitator with his own long sought after moment of happiness.

After Life ends with the production of the recreation of the young facilitator's – Takashi's – happiest moment. He sits alone on a park bench. I wonder who will stand in in the role of his young woman. Perhaps it will be the young woman, an assistant facilitator in training, who has had an abiding womanish crush on Takashi. But that's another subplot.

The stories of the recently deceased are all wonderfully subtle. Moments, clearly not great in scope, become so big that the few of them of one poor soul's existence become greater even than an epic. If you can be moved by a man sitting alone on a bench in a moment of sublime happiness you have all it takes to happily love this mortal coil and call yourself human.

He was not happy and considered himself a failure until he had learned he had once made someone very happy.

"I searched desperately for a happy memory, until I realized I was part of someone else's happiness. What a wonderful discovery!" – Facilitator Takashi –
After Life

There's someone to pity, who had not that experience in his life, who had not brought happiness into someone's life. The poor soul had never experienced the greatest happiness; not the pursuit of it but the presentation of it to another.

* * *

In the spirit of "Happiness" and the season, I wish all the staff at New English Review and the Iconoclast, and all its readers a very Happy Christmas.

Cynicus Americanus was born, had as marvelous and happy a childhood as could be imagined, went to school, got a job, and several more, retired, was torn between wiling away the time writing or exposing rubbish, gibberish, claptrap, balderdash, hogwash, baloney, rot, garbage, jive, tripe, drivel, bilge, bull, guff, bunk, piffle, poppycock, phooey, hooey, malarkey, hokum, twaddle, gobbledygook, codswallop, flapdoodle, hot air; bunkum, tommyrot, bullshit, and crap. He decided to merge the projects.

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