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Success – An Attainable Goal?

On September 21st, 2012, amidst photographs and fanfare, the iPhone 5 was released. Advertised as “the greatest innovation since the iPhone”, Apple’s latest product clearly captured the success of its CEO – Steve Jobs. He had met and exceeded many times the expectations of his clients and competition. Winning the adoration of millions, Steve Jobs remains sealed in history as a business success – or was he? Walter Isaacson's biography explains that Jobs was rarely satisfied with his accomplishments. The demanding expectations he sought may have simply been an expression of his internal dissatisfaction at what little he could accomplish, so before his own conscience, was Steve Jobs successful?

What makes a person successful? Is it a personal trait, perhaps a drive to perform well? Or is success determined by the flip of a coin? Why do people sometimes succeed or fail for reasons having nothing to do with their personal talents and virtues or lack thereof?

What is success? Is there any objective standard of it? From the point of the view of the U.S. Constitution, the loftiest goal to which a person may aspire is having and sharing “justice ... domestic tranquility ... common defense ... general welfare ... and ... the blessings of liberty.” Who would deny the intrinsic riches of these values? Over the years – really, the generations – Americans have tried to create a government where such blessings shower every citizen, but have they succeeded? Really, if the government right now were granting ‘success’ to all its

citizens, there would be no debate over partisanship. Instead, senators, citizens, presidents, and politicians continue to be divided as to how achieve Constitutional aims. In a government that cannot even agree upon, much less meet, its own criteria for success, how can it guarantee any more for its citizens?

However, even if the United States could create a world where every man and woman enjoyed lasting justice, welfare, and liberty, would that mean lasting success? No matter how much “more perfect” this “Union” becomes, will it ever be able to solve the greatest problems threatening mankind? Will any unanimous vote cast off the terror of death that consumes tens of thousands daily? Human history testifies contrary! Unquestionably, the quest for success is entirely beyond the realm of politics.

Where, then, does it lie? In science, religion, or public education? The advancement of health science has enabled millions to live longer, healthier lives, yet is this capability being fully realized? According to the World Health Organization, ten million children died preventable deaths last year. Hardly, “general welfare”! Health science does not promise success.

Neither does religion in general promote success. Far from contributing towards “domestic tranquility”, religious extremists from the tribal gods of antiquity to the Catholic church to ISIS have incited or instigated many of the world’s bloodiest conflicts.

Will educating people – citizens and rulers alike – solve these kinds of problems? While raising awareness can direct progress now, history has demonstrated a deeper underlying problem. Millennia of education have failed to uproot deep seated prejudices, check environmental degradation, and end global conflicts. For example, it was not because the Nazi

S.S. were unaware of the suffering they were supporting that many complied working in the concentration camps; it was because they lacked the strength to resist.

That same callousness towards others plagues the world today. The economic system behind much human advancement is driven by selfish forces – self-propagating values that have proven genuinely unconcerned for the success of others. While having the power to do so, can anyone foresee Walmart, Apple, or ExxonMobil directing their billions in revenue toward the sick? Why do millions die preventable deaths every year? Why is news of shootings so frequent? And why are there so many unconcerned by all these reports? It is because people do not care enough about others.

This paper cannot exhaust the ways humans have failed to solve their own problems. The government cannot reach let alone agree upon its own standard of success. It is, therefore, no surprise that it cannot guarantee the same for its citizens. Scientific advancement and religion in general also fail to ensure a successful life, and while education ideally can help coordinate people to be successful, in reality, it only identifies the human quality behind many world problems: a lack of care for others. Without a doubt, unless the spirit of this world changes, people will continue to succeed or fail for reasons having nothing to do with their personal talents and virtues or lack thereof.