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The American Way

Sigi Oh, Ph.D.

America. You gotta love it. That's what my broker says. He loves the American ethic: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. My broker is in hot pursuit of happiness. He believes that the road to happiness is paved with consumer items, that things will make him happy. I think that this idea is both simple and profound, because it lets you measure happiness. Anyone can tell how happy you are and whether you are more happy than they are. My personal trainer, Kiki, says that happiness is a quest. For young people like Kiki, the world is full of things like quests, heros and miracles. Unfortunately, personal trainers don't make much money, and happiness can be a long quest for them. Kiki has a short-cut, my broker. He's her hero because he has so much happiness. I think that it would be a miracle if she gets him to share it with her, especially because she's a Democrat. My broker, who is a Republican, believes that happiness should be yours for the taking. Democrats, on the other hand, think that happiness should be distributed equitably to everyone, especially if it comes from Republicans. I don't think that there is much future in this relationship.

At the heart of the American system is the happy consumer. To acquire things, you must work for money. Money lets you buy things made by others. The more of these things that you buy, the happier you are. The hard-working American consumer is on the fast track to happiness. Furthermore, your work makes more things for others to buy. So your work not only makes you happy, it provides happiness for others. Happiness is infectious. However, you can never have enough things, so you are always a little un-

happy. But you never want to be less happy than your neighbor, so you should always work a little harder to buy more things. It's a race for happiness. If you really work hard, and you exceed the happiness of all your neighbors, you should move into a more expensive neighborhood, where some of your neighbors are obviously happier than you are. Failure to pursue happiness in this manner would be un-American.

I agree with my broker that the American system is amazing. For example, it pays a guy like me to do science. Science makes me happy. And what does the system get in return? More data. What can it do with more data? Fill journals. And what does it do with filled journals? Justify more research grants. And what do we do with more research grants? More science. The market creates the product, and the product recreates the market. What a great system! And what fuels this incredible, self-perpetuating data machine? Tax money. Taxes are the price consumers pay for happiness. Taxes permit the system to invest in things like science. In turn, this allows scientists to make a living and to pursue their own happiness. However, scientists also pay taxes on their income, which was tax money to start with. How many times can you tax the same money? It's like xeroxing a mirror. Given this system, it would appear that most scientists working from federal grants are self-employed, albeit through intermediaries. Taxes even pay for the intermediaries. Awesome! Where does all this tax money come from? Consumers in search of happiness. Happiness makes science, and science makes happiness! America. You gotta love it.

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