

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

By Andrew Sullivan

I believe in life. I believe in treasuring it as a mystery that will never be fully understood, as a sanctity that should never be destroyed, as an invitation to experience now what can only be remembered tomorrow. I believe in its indivisibility, in the intimate connection between the newest bud of spring and the flicker in the eye of a patient near death, between the athlete in his prime and the quadriplegic vet, between the fetus in the womb and the mother who bears another life in her own body.

I believe in liberty. I believe that within every soul lies the capacity to reach for its own good, that within every physical body there endures an unalienable right to be free from coercion. I believe in a system of government that places that liberty at the center of its concerns, that enforces the law solely to protect that freedom, that sides with the individual against the claims of family and tribe and church and nation, that sees innocence before guilt and dignity before stigma. I believe in the right to own property, to maintain it against the benign suffocation of a government that would tax more and more of it away. I believe in freedom of speech and of contract, the right to offend and blaspheme, as well as the right to convert and bear witness. I believe that these freedoms are connected -- the freedom of the fundamentalist and the atheist, the female and the male, the black and the Asian, the gay and the straight.

I believe in the pursuit of happiness. Not its attainment, nor its final definition, but its pursuit. I believe in the journey, not the

arrival; in conversation, not monologues; in multiple questions rather than any single answer. I believe in the struggle to remake ourselves and challenge each other in the spirit of eternal forgiveness, in the awareness that none of us knows for sure what happiness truly is, but each of us knows the imperative to keep searching. I believe in the possibility of surprising joy, of serenity through pain, of homecoming through exile.

And I believe in a country that enshrines each of these three things, a country that promises nothing but the promise of being more fully human, and never guarantees its success. In that constant failure to arrive -- implied at the very beginning -- lies the possibility of a permanently fresh start, an old newness, a way of revitalizing ourselves and our civilization in ways few foresaw and one day many will forget. But the point is now. And the place is America.

Andrew Sullivan was born in England and educated at Oxford and Harvard. At 27, he became editor of *The New Republic*, a position he held for five years. As a writer, commentator and blogger, Sullivan addresses political and social issues, and advocates for gay rights.