Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness
From Doug Powers’ lecture 10/2/14

The Declaration of Independence and John Locke established the rights of the individual in Western political philosophy. Individual freedom alludes to inalienable rights that cannot be taken away, and if they are, must be reclaimed. Life is the right to exist. Liberty is freedom, being able to do what you want to do. We have the liberty and capacity to develop tremendous freedom.

Having less desire, being less needy, being content and complete in ourselves—from a cultivating point of view—we are taking an extreme position to give away power only when we choose. Any time you need anything, you put yourself in a position of powerlessness. The ultimate goal of cultivation is to have no needs—no lack—so there is not any situation of need, vulnerability, and powerlessness. Power in myself means that I do not need anything.

There is a happiness equation for how the post-modern, contemporary mind works. On one side of the equation are the structures of reality through which you analyze your experience (habitus/superego/society’s norms and values). All emotions are habituations of the past, even more powerful than thoughts. The other side of the equation is capital—how much capital you have. Pierre Bourdieu describes four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital.

The Buddhist approach is to lessen need, the habituation of conscious awareness, so that it does not need to engage any of the four capitals for its happiness. Then happiness is no longer dependent. In the happiness equation, happiness is dependent on something else. Happiness and contentment dependent on something outside have that much limitation. The less habituated you are, the clearer you see the karmic conditions.

Less neediness and fear of missing something leads to a joy or bliss that is not conditional, to a mind free from dependency. From that happiness, you have something to share with others that is not an exchange of need. Share happiness, not need.

Happiness is the natural state…you are just messing it up.