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ENG IV / A
ESSAY # 1

Success

Success, like most everything, is relative. How one defines success most likely has to do with their world view and their goals. Success can therefore be defined as the meeting of one's goals for a certain circumstance.

For example, a radical muslim defines success as getting to heaven and enjoying his 72 virgins; he then sets out to accomplish this by destroying himself along with as many infidels as possible. This does not fit in with the generally accepted guidelines for furthering the human race and can be construed as anti-social. Nevertheless, the young misguided man who blows himself up in a subway has moved towards what he defines as success. (There is no way to test if he is actually enjoying these 72 virgins or not, but it seems doubtful.)

Having defined success, this leads us to analyse whether the Mahabarata's examples are components of the widely accepted definition of a "successful life". Typically I would assume that most Americans would claim others lead a successful life based solely on the size of their income. However, I'm sure a sizable amount of people include a joyful marriage, the discovery or knowledge of meaning, health, and quality friends. As the Mahabarata puts it, "Truth, self control, asceticism, generosity, non-injury, constancy in virtue — these are the means of success, not caste or family." This additionally implies that there is indeed a substitute for affluence (caste or family) which can be achieved through the aforementioned means. Truth, generosity, and (constancy in) virtue are the most dubious examples; for a primarily monetary definition of success (which can bring other sub-definitions with it, such as health, or friends and marriage, depending on what you value in people), these are by no means necessary. Self control, however, plays an elevated role (especially if you forgo truth and generosity) in this definition. Alternatively, a fair amount of more moral (I use the term in the generally accepted definition) citizens will say that most of the examples (perhaps besides asceticism) play a larger part. Success is dependent on joy, which in turn is dependent on truth, generosity, and constancy in virtue. This is typically why people feel "good" when they donate to charity. Most of the examples given are indeed potentially major components; some more than others (asceticism generally being the least, unless you are an artist or interior designer, and non-injury being the most, almost no one enjoys being unhealthy). None seem outright counter-intuitive, though, unlike "drug abuse" or "manic depression". Since the definition and thus the list of components are variable, it is technically impossible to evaluate the Mahabarata's examples on their own. I would argue, however, that it is a valid list to most, and the implication regarding affluence, especially in this egalitarian day and age (at least, comparatively egalitarian), are true.

My own definition (on the lifetime scale) mainly deals with where I'm living, what I'm doing for work, who I'm married to, my health, and what I know. Although, I am more bent towards the introverted and intellectual than most, so my definition naturally deviates some. I assume it's unique in some manner for everyone though, being a relative term.

My definition of success specifically for high school is graduating with enough merit to my name to get into an acceptable college. So far I am doing well, and this last year is shaping up to be along the same path. Typically anything above a 'B' average is acceptable, but this changes from subject to subject. (Subjects I am more skilled in, such as Mathematics or science, tend to demand an A average.) Anything that gets me into college, however, is success in my book. I assume this will not happen without a fair amount of hard work, and a large amount of patience. (Indeed, high school is incredibly boring when you'd rather be taking courses not offered.) A "side goal" in my success is making new friends (since I am new to the school), but I have no systematic means of doing this that I feel comfortable with, so this is entirely optional; thankfully my introverted nature (coupled with already having a few quality friends elsewhere) lessens the importance of this. So primary success in my senior year reduces to graduation with an acceptable GPA, which is likely, with hard work.