

DESIGNS OF DELIGHT

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T. AUGUSTINE once wrote: "It is no great thing to live long, nor even to live forever, but it is indeed a great thing to live well." By these words, "to live well," the Holy Doctor praises the life of virtue. He lauds the nobility of virtue over one of the deepest human desires, namely, to live forever. And truly, virtue is of greater value than long life. For if there is no virtue in a man's life, there can be neither supernatural merit, nor natural happiness in his activity.

Two cardinal virtues, temperance and fortitude, are ordered to the control of the emotions. They are the clamps on the soul by which natural desires, fears, and love are attuned to their conductor, human reason. But just as a general of the armies cannot designedly win a battle without a clear appreciation of the enemy's strength and weakness, so also an understanding of the emotions, our adversary in the war for virtue, is necessary for eternal victory. For vice is reason tyrannized and defeated by emotion, whereas virtue is intelligent control and use of the same affections. Wholesome temperance and solid virtue assure the victory over emotional uprisings.

A practical approach to knowledge of the affections is a study of the signposts and billboards of one particular emotion. Although all of them are interesting, and have individual characteristics, an insight into one will be sufficient for the recognition of the others. Among the emotions, delight and sorrow, offer particularly appropriate matter, because one or the other is the last step in every emotional experience. For if a person successfully avoids the danger causing some fear, he breathes a sigh of relief; but if the danger overcomes the man, his body and soul suffer depression and sorrow. Both delight and sorrow contain all the elements necessary for our inquiry; but because pleasure and delight so often are used as ends or goals by modern man, we will use delight alone as a stepping stone to the knowledge of our subject.

The emotion, delight, will be considered from two aspects—the psychological and the moral. The former will be treated by an

analysis of the nature, causes, and effects of delight according to the teachings of Aristotle and St. Thomas. The latter will be studied in an analysis and commentary upon the Stoical and Epicurean philosophies of this affection in the light of Christian ethics. By this study we hope to manifest the idea expressed by the English poet and essayist, Joseph Addison: "It is not the business of virtue to extirpate the affections, but to regulate them."

WHAT IS DELIGHT?

Because delight and pleasure are so frequently experienced, to state categorically that delight is an emotion seems superficial. But since it is one of the basic psychological phenomena like hate, fear, and love, it shares characteristics common to all emotions. First, they are psychosomatic—that is, both the body and the soul simultaneously function in their exercise and production. Secondly, they are subject to reason, not as slave to master, but as citizen to governor. Because of their nature, the passions are governed by reason not by despotic but by political control. The word *autonomic* fittingly describes this condition—autonomous without absolute independence. Thirdly, they are present during all the stages of life because they enter the nature of man just as the eyes, memory, or imagination. Fourthly, similar to the other emotions, delight is connected with love, hate, fear, etc., for all the emotions are related. Delight is the emotion experienced after a pleasant action. It stills our desires, alleviates our sorrows, and satisfies our love.

A variety of names are used in the discussion of delight: joy, exultation, felicity, and delight itself. In general, all of these pertain to the pleasure accompanying the possession of a desired good. Their precise connotations, however, clarify the notion of delight and distinguish its types. The word *delight* is attributed principally to the attainment of man's natural needs like food and drink. The pleasure connected with eating a delicious meal is simply termed delightful! *Joy*, on the other hand, is applicable to the enjoyment associated with goods pursued by reason or the higher faculties. Seeing a Shakespearean comedy or winning a game of chess might be examples of actions that give the agent what is termed precisely, joy. *Exultation* pertains to the exterior manifestations of delight. One would say: "Shouts voiced to the Heavens in exultation." *Felicity* connotes the idea of happiness, which is much more permanent a condition than mere emotional experience of which we are speaking. Among these words, then,

the two of greatest consequence to our discussion are *delight* and *joy*. The distinction between them will give us helpful insight to understanding our subject.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF DELIGHT?

Delight of the mind or intellectual joy is a great human possession. By this we share angelic and divine pleasures. St. Denis says: "Holy men in many ways become participants of angelic delectations."¹ He refers to the enjoyments that accompany actions of the higher faculties in men. In speaking of angelic joy the same author says: "Angels are not susceptible to our passible delight, but rejoice together with God with the gladness of incorruption."² By these words he shows that angels do not experience the corporeal delights of men but he would admit that men are able to "delight in the Lord" as the Psalmist suggests. Although this type of joy is truly human, it can be present without any corporeal change, which is required for sensible delight. When the will achieves its end, this pleasure is experienced. The joy of the Beatific Vision is a fine instance, because in Heaven even before the final resurrection man has an inestimable delight as a consequence of the intellectual perception of God. Without the body, he possesses that reward greater than which "neither hath eye seen nor hath ear heard." The intellect in Heaven will see God and the will, which is directed to universal good, will rest in that vision. Another example of intellectual joy would be the discovery of some lost article. One might recall the parables of Our Lord on the Kingdom of Heaven: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field. Which a man having found, hid it: and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." The human soul, then, has pleasure without the body as a participant.

And yet we must not minimize the strength of intellectual pleasure just because it can take place without reactions on the body. Men are frequently wrapped in ecstasy at the sight of a great painting. Great works of art always give pleasure to an appreciative audience. In order to estimate the impact of this joy on the soul, one might reflect upon the stillness in a theatre during the climactic point of a great play. For example, recall the closet scene of Hamlet when the King in utter despair cries out

¹ *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 31, 4 ad 3.

² *Ibid.*, q. 31, 4 ad 2.

the touching verse: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to Heaven go." The differences then between intellectual pleasure and sensible delight are principally in the physical change of the body. Although many more men pursue sensible pleasures because they are more easily recognized and have greater medicinal value, Holy Scripture commends the delight of the higher faculties. One reads in the Psalms frequently: "How sweet thy words are to my jaw, even above honey to my mouth." Intellectual joy is of greater nobility than corporeal pleasure. If a man were asked whether he would rather suffer the loss of an eye or of the total loss of his mind, he would certainly respond affirmatively to the former. The ability to think, to recall past experiences, to plan for the future are valued above any sense faculty. So the pleasure which follows upon this power is of higher dignity than mere sensible delight. Aristotle realized this fact when he wrote: "Delight which is according to the operation of wisdom is the greatest."

WHY IS DELIGHT ATTRACTIVE?

One must wonder, however, why so many men seek corporeal pleasure. There is reason behind the opinion that gives supremacy to the sensible. Because man is a creature composed of soul and body, material reality on the surface has clearer concord with our powers of recognition than spiritual abstract values. Our contact with the world about us is through material faculties: the eye, the ear, the surface of the skin by touch. Recognizing a pound of candy as delightful is much easier to a child than realizing that the virtue of justice has great desirability. *A fortiori* one can apply this to the many enjoyments of modern life. Another solution rests in the medicative power of sensible delight. The transmutation of body in this pleasure is medicine to the sorrows and cares of life. A homely example is the morning cup of coffee which frequently converts a depressing face into an effervescent countenance. Consequently, one must admit that corporeal pleasures have importance in daily life, but that intellectual and spiritual joys far surpass them in nobility and preeminence is equally true.

WHAT CAUSES DELIGHT?

Simplicity is the appeal of science. Man longs to have a few ideas that clarify all the concerns of his mind. He loves unity drawn from multiplicity. But some difficulty arises in an analysis

of the emotional process called delight. There are as many ways to enjoy oneself as there are men on the surface of the earth. One person is gladdened by a night watching the stars. Another relishes frogs' legs. Others rejoice in sunning themselves on the beach. A philosopher, on recognizing these differences, wonders; then, seeks some solution, some comprehensive reason that explains what causes delight. What is the common element in these experiences that urges men to spend time, material resources, and energy in their pursuit?

Particular objects and activities are beyond our scope, but one general factor can be posited. In his present state, man is imperfect and changeable. All of his faculties demand transition before they are effective. In order to see a man must focus his eyes and attention upon some object. Activity then, or placing a potency in operation seems to bring man to perfection. This virtue or attainment of power over deficiency is a cause of delight. But not all activity causes delight. Certainly the action of pulling oneself out of bed in the early morning is far from ecstatically joyful. Certain limitations must be placed upon this general notion of activity. The action must be conatural and unimpeded in order to be delightful. Operations contrary to nature render delight because of aberrations in the individual's character or personality. Of themselves such actions are repugnant. Human potencies love to operate if they are not beset by conflict with other circumstances. The mind takes pleasure in thinking because it was created for that purpose; likewise, the will was made to love and finds satisfaction in the act of love. Aristotle speaks of delectation as "connatural action which is unimpeded."

The natural function of a faculty is the ultimate cause of delight. So an experienced fisherman is amused by this hobby because his well-developed habit renders the actions of baiting the hook, casting the line, and waiting for a bite, natural, easy and entertaining. If this notion is applied to the Divine Essence, one can understand why God is infinitely happy. God is pure act. There is no mixture of imperfection, no weakness, no insufficiency. He is Action without cessation; Eternal Operation without monotony. God delights in contemplating His own goodness. The secret of delight, then, is activity with the absence of interference.

WHAT DOES DELIGHT EFFECT?

Just as the block of marble from which Michelangelo carved his "Pieta" seemed valueless until the last chips had been carved

from it, so also a knowledge of delight is shallow until all its effects are known. Bodily relaxation and uplifting of spirit accompanying the emotion are known by common experience. A person usually feels very "comfortable" after a good meal. A few other psychological effects, however, deserve some inspection. One of these is a desire or thirst for the delightful. A common maxim illustrates this idea. "More flies are caught by a drop of honey than by a gallon of vinegar." If a person was not attracted by the sweetness of the honey, he would not desire to possess it. The flies would never be led into the trap if delight had not drawn their attention. The success of an entertainer, of a comedian, depends upon the delight he gives to the audience. If he pleases, his popularity rises; if not, he fails. The reason behind this is simply that delight causes desire.

Having seen desire as an effect of delight, a question that remains to be investigated is the relationship of delight to reason. Since man's actions are guided by reason and he is judged by the same norm—the question naturally arises, does delight impede human judgment? An English writer answered the question in striking terms: "Affection is still a briber of the judgment." Reason is often impaired and even overruled by strong emotion. Sensible pleasure frequently interferes with determined decision because it distracts the mind from an objective study of the problem. Insufficient attention obstructs the mind in the effort necessary for right thinking by offering the escapes of relaxation and comfort. But this is the case when the enjoyments are immoderate and unregulated. If a proper mastery of delectation is accomplished, these same emotions are helpful to activity. Since man is a living macrocosm, all parts in his nature are useful. In writing on the Mystical Body, Saint Paul used an illustration that pertains to the mutual assistance among the human faculties.

"For the body also is not one member, but many. If the foot should say: because I am not the hand, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say: because I am not the eye, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body? . . . and the eye cannot say to the hand: I need not thy help. Nor again the head to the feet: I have no need of you . . . that there be no schism in the body; but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it."³

³ St. Paul, I Cor. 12, 14-26.

Of course this applies to the physical parts of man, but if it is true in the physical members, should it not pertain *a foritori* to the psychological portions? Well ordered emotions, then, are advantageous to virtuous living. In regard to delight in particular, Saint Thomas teaches:

"Pleasure perfects operation . . . as agent; not indeed directly for the Philosopher says that *pleasure perfects operation not as a physician makes a man healthy, but as health does*: but it does so indirectly; inasmuch as the agent through taking pleasure in his actions, is more eagerly intent on it and carries it out with greater care."⁴

St. Thomas thus points out why delight is an asset, if reason moderates its use. A man puts vitality in his work when it is a delight to him. For the sake of clarification, we might mention the difficulty of action when all delight is absent. A pointed instance is the period of aridity in prayer. This is characterized by almost fruitless attempts to praise and love God. The absence of delight makes contact with God almost impossible. Of course this is a natural and psychological explanation for dryness of soul; moral solutions to the problem would be different. Still, if an action is greatly impeded when delight is absent, then certainly its presence must be an important factor to fruitful action. The conclusion, then, in simple terms, is that excessive corporeal pleasure is an impediment to the functions of the higher faculties, but well-tempered application of delight makes activity more efficacious.

DELIGHT AND MORALITY

To study an emotional reaction according to its psychological makeup is very fruitful and interesting. A much more important aspect, however, is the moral. Every human act either brings us closer to or further from Heaven. Since enjoyment or delight is connected with every human act, it is a means of judging the morality of the human action. Many errors have arisen concerning pleasure during the ages, and to study all of them would give much insight and a greater appreciation of the truth. Since the two extreme positions embrace the others, at least radically, a clear consideration of them seems profitable and sufficient for our purposes. The two poles of this question are held by the Stoics and the Epicureans with the Aristotelian-Thomistic position claiming a stalwart middle.

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 33, 4 corp..

ONE EXTREME—STOICISM

The name "Stoic" originated from the name of the place where the school was founded. Zeno, the first Stoic, opened his school in a portico called the *Stoa Poecile*, or the painted porch. The modern signification of the word suggests unflinching fortitude, a virtue highly praised among the Stoics, springing from one of the major doctrines of the system. The Stoical school had great influence around the time of Our Lord and in the early days of the Church. It included among its adherents in Rome such famous names as Seneca, Epictetus, and the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius Antonius. Although Stoicism established theories in the field of physics and logic, the doctrines commonly remembered are in the science of ethics. Their position is simply summarized:

"The Stoic ethics were the ethics of apathy. The soul, or the Divine Principle in man, should not allow itself to be carried away by the passions . . . the passions are due to false judgements and mental disturbances. . . . Man is not, indeed, master of his fate, but he can be master of himself."⁵

The conclusion drawn from this position was that all passions, and therefore all delights are morally evil.

A partly erroneous position is more deteriorating than a completely erroneous one, because what is only half erroneous is half true, and thus gives its adherents "ground to stand upon" as is commonly said. The Stoics recognized the dignity of man as rational; they respected his nature as higher than mere brute animality. They sought virtue as a goal of life, but they failed to distinguish the intellectual life in man from the sensible life, according to proper formalities. Their psychology in regard to the emotions was not precisely true because intellect and sense are not opposed necessarily as they held, but are complementary. Just as the eye has a relation to the interior powers of knowing, so the emotions have a relation to the higher motions of the will. Without moderation, however, there can be no virtue. But if the emotions are subject to reason and exercised within the bounds which reason postulates, they are good.

The teaching of the Stoics in regard to delight coincides with their general position that all emotion is evil. Therefore, to discuss and to show vulnerability in their general position is equivalent to an argument against the one point, that delight in particu-

⁵ *New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. XXI, 1916, Dodd Mead and Co., p. 547.

lar is evil. Looking upon *feeling* and *affection*, Cicero is said to have called them "sicknesses of the soul." This view, however, fails to recognize the total nature of man. The Creator placed the emotions within the human soul because the preservation of physical and psychological well-being demanded them. If a man could not fear, how could he take arms against a sea of troubles; if a man could not hate, how could he flee the onslaughts of injustice; if a man could not love, how would he appreciate the generosity of God hanging on a cross.

The Stoical war with emotions came as a reaction against a life dominated by emotion. Emotion must be subject to reason's mastery. Saint Augustine has expressed an idea which displays his opposition to icy Stoicism. "All these emotions are right in those whose love is rightly placed . . . for they fear to sin, they desire to persevere; they grieve for sin, they rejoice in good works."⁶ The Stoics failed to recognize the harmony in human nature whereby the head and the heart cooperate to form the full man. Reason, the head, convinces the man of what is right; the heart, the affections, should urge him to do what is right. Knowledge without affection results in impassivity; emotion without reason is dissipation.

Since actions speak louder than words, the Stoical position that all delight is evil would have only superficial influence over man. If men hear speakers disparaging delight in all their sayings and writings, and see the very same men taking part in the actions that they academically condemn, such teachers would be termed dissimulators. It is evident, however, that some delight must be experienced during the course of life. Enjoyment is a natural medicine for sorrow, so men will pursue some pleasure to remove the sorrows and cares of life in this vale of tears. A doctrine, therefore, that condemns all enjoyment as evil will lose face at many turns. This is true historically. In Rome where Stoicism gained some following, the men who professed it were in the minority of the upper-class dillantantes. The common people were not converted to these doctrines in great numbers. The Stoics are unable to live in the practical order according to their own opinion. Finally, for the practicing Christian, there is always the example of the life of Our Lord with His joys and sorrows to show the falsity of a life without emotional delights. And there are also his words:

⁶ *City of God*, XIV, 9.

"Amen, amen, I say to you that you shall lament and weep but the world shall rejoice: and you shall be made sorrowful, *but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. A woman when she is in labor hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but when she hath brought forth the child, remembereth no more anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So also you now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice. *And your joy no man shall take from you.*"⁷

THE OTHER EXTREME—EPICUREANISM

Six or seven years after the death of Plato, the philosopher Epicurus was born on the island of Samos near Greece. From this popular thinker of ancient Athens, the school of philosophy called Epicureanism received its name and the first seeds of its doctrine. Very successful as a teacher, great numbers from all parts of Greece and Asia Minor flocked to his school. His teachings, in modified form, have been taught and followed by men of all ages—from Horace and Pliny the younger in ancient Rome, to Moliere, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Santayana in modern times. Epicurus was a voluminous writer. One author says that he left 300 volumes. Although many of his theories and his works concerned natural philosophy and psychology, two of his ethical principles stand out as distinctive notions among his doctrines: namely, a denial of life after death, and the placing of the highest good of man in pleasure.

His thesis on death is succinctly expressed, "when we are, death is not; and when death is, we are not." The school without a doubt holds that with the dissolution of the body the soul ceases to exist. For Christians, a doctrine of this nature needs little discussion. Our Lord promised eternal life in categorical fashion to all that would follow Him. In the discourse with Nicodemus in Saint John we read:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but *may have life everlasting*. For God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son: that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but *may have life everlasting.*"⁸

Resurrection from the dead is essential to Christian thinking. There can be no compromise on this most consoling doctrine. In the days of Saint Paul, however, men tried to change the doc-

⁷ St. John 16, 20-22.

⁸ St. John 3, 14-16.

trine. The answer which the Apostle to the Gentiles makes to these false teachers in 1st Corinthians seems to be a cogent response to the Epicurean first principle:

Nof if Christ be preached, that He arose again from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

"But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen again."

And if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain: and your faith is also vain. . . ."

"Now Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep: for by a man came death: and by a man the resurrection of the dead."⁹

Coupled with their doctrine against life after death, and probably a natural consequence of it, the Epicureans taught that pleasure is man's highest good. The word *epicurean* as it is commonly used today has been derived from this doctrine and suggests sensuous delight in the pleasure of eating and drinking. If the delight of which they speak referred to the enjoyments derived from exercising man's highest faculties, their position might be considered tenable. But they speak of corporeal delights.

Their misunderstanding of the truth follows from a failure to distinguish absolute good from convenient good. To love God and to find one's complete happiness in Him is good without distinction. At no time or under no circumstance would it be morally evil to delight in God. He is man's ultimate joy. All beings owe Him a debt that can never be paid. On the other hand certain pleasures of man are good after a fashion, depending on his state at one time or another. For a sick man to spend a month in complete physical inertia is morally good. The circumstance of ill-health demands this medicine. But the same antidote for a man in a perfect state of body might bring legitimate qualms of conscience.

Simple good abstracts from circumstances. It is the objective consideration divorced from concrete situations. Law, for example, deals with simple goods like the rights of man or the common good. Jefferson wrote: "Man is endowed by his Creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In denying absolute right and wrong, the Epicureans have overlooked these general prerequisites to peace

⁹ St. Paul, I Cor. 15, 12-14; 15, 20-21.

and harmony. Their purpose is the alleviation of the sorrows and fears of the individual. But if every man were to judge right and wrong by a justice of personal convenience, society would approach chaos.

The absolute good sustains and guarantees harmony, justice, and charity among men. To destroy this notion is to open the way to injustice and discord because rejection of the absolute replaces duty and responsibility with the whims of the human will. An instance of a man recognizing the absolute good even to his own destruction is related in the stoning of Saint Stephen. He preached his doctrine, although the priests accused him, saying: "This man ceaseth not to speak words against the Holy Place and the Law." But St. Stephen, respecting a higher law than that seen by men, spoke his own defense. He was not stopped by the good which his body might have desired, for he certainly knew that the priests would seek revenge which they executed in having him stoned. He submitted his own physical good to the higher absolute goal of eternal charity when he cried with a loud voice: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

In Sacred Scripture one can find many appropriate arguments against the ideas of the Epicureans. This philosophy makes this world our abiding home, an idea directly opposed to Christianity which places its strongest faith in life after death. For this reason our Lord could advise us against the attraction of Epicureanism when he said:

"No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other: or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat, and the body more than the raiment?"¹⁰

The allurements of Epicureanism is that it offers flight from the realities of life which a true Christian overcomes with vigor by faith, hope, and charity, and the all-transcending grace of God.

CONCLUSION

In *résumé*, then, we have discussed the psychological and moral aspects of the emotion of delight. We have attempted to express the causes, effects, and nature of this common psychological phenomenon. We have seen that delight results from the

¹⁰ Matt., 6, 24-25.

attainment of a desired end. It is caused by natural unimpeded operation; and it effects a strengthened desire for the object loved. While some delights hinder the operations of man, others make them perfect and more fruitful. From a short study of the Stoical and Epicurean philosophy, we hoped to show that both extremes in regard to the emotions are erroneous and contrary to Christian virtue. One should understand that the emotions are a necessity in human living and that a proper knowledge of their operations, as well as their purpose is an aid toward perfection and peace of mind.

If a person avoids the errors of the Stoics and Epicureans, he will be led to follow the middle way of virtue. Virtue stands in the golden mean within reason and the Divine Law. It is of value to know that some virtues have the sole purpose of moderating and controlling emotional life, that is, temperance and fortitude—the former to restrain the urges which would overrule reason, the latter, to encourage the passions which hesitate to follow reason. From the exercise of these virtues by the grace of God, we can look forward with firm faith and constant hope to the vision of God when for all eternity we will “delight in the Lord and He will give us the requests of our heart.”