



HAPPINESS FOR NOW

"Thank you, gentlemen; that concludes this board meeting." Luke Edwards scooped up a sheaf of papers from the polished walnut surface. They looked almost printed; shaded type, an electric typewriter, an efficient secretary, that's all that was needed.

"Care to stop for a drink, Luke," one of the board members suavely intoned close to his side.

Luke caught the frown before it could fully form and replaced it with a mechanical smile. "No thank you, Tom, not this evening. I have some things to do at the house," he lied.

The well run house did not need him any more than did the well run business. He was merely useful. After all, a man was needed to play the appropriate role of the moment, host or husband; the business did need someone to call 'Executive Director.' He performed his necessary functions quietly, adequately and impersonally. He had a house, not a home; it was the business, not his business.

He had to admit he was one of those men who deservedly received gifts labeled 'For the Man Who Has Everything.' He had everything that could be bought, demanded or married. Everything, that is, except happiness.

Once or twice, long ago, he had been happy. On a summer afternoon he had stopped momentarily on his way from work to watch a sand lot game. One kid had a tough time with the bat, and Luke showed him a better grip. The kid hit a long one, a homer. He had run up to Luke still panting, smiled at him and said thanks. Luke had felt a kind of warm glow inside for a couple of days.

Then there was another time when he had stepped aside and let a fellow worker get ahead of him because he knew the man badly needed the extra money for his family. Luke had never told him, but he remembered the terrific feeling he got when he saw the man's face light up at the news of his promotion. Luke would have tried to get to know him better, if he had not died in that accident.

Those were his moments of happiness. Brief. Scattered. If only there were some way of holding on to them, to make them last.

Change a few details and names, and this basic experience might be anybody's. A slowly moving gray life with a few purple moments of happiness, sought so avidly, attained so infrequently, lost so regretfully.

It doesn't have to be like this. It could be much different. Men could live happy lives, if they wanted to.

There is no question as to whether every man has a right to the 'pursuit of happiness.' It's a universally attested fact that all men, from the criminals of last night to President Kennedy want to be happy and thus have a natural right to the means to attain it. No man can deny another the right to strive for happiness.

The catch comes in the choice of means, which are in turn governed by what particular individuals think happiness is.

Of course the fact is, the possession of God, the Vision of Truth and Goodness, is the only thing really capable of making man perfectly and totally happy. But God and all things as they are ordered to God is the work of theology. This article abstracts from the theological consideration; it is written in the philosophical mode and deals with man only as he is a rational creature.

Just considered as reasonable beings, men can achieve a type of happiness. Related to the perfect happiness that theology considers, it is im-

perfect, defective, partial. But properly looked at in its own place, it assumes a tremendous value for every man. Its proper place is the world of nature: the family, the city, the state, for these are all natural communities which man forms according to basic patterns instilled in him by the Author of Nature. Its value is that of the key to successful private, domestic, and political life.

This is the happiness that most men want, that most men have sought. It's the goal of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, of naturalists like Sydney Hook, atheistic communists such as Nikita Khrushchev, of unfortunate men such as Oscar Wilde, and of the countless pagans of America and of the world.

Whenever a man acts, he does so because he wants to. Either he wants to because he's afraid of some punishment, or because he knows that some kind of pleasure will come to him. The word pleasure has a black color. 'Delight' is whiter, but 'pleasure' is more familiar. A man is delighted when he finds that he has in his possession something which is very good for him, very fitting to him. It is that agreeable emotion that underlies his desires and is also a basic principle of man's activity.

Men are delighted, although rarely, with any number of things. There are those which are intimately concerned with the body: a good vintage wine properly served, a succulent fowl, a soft fold of velvet against the cheek, the sense of fitness that comes with wearing well-tailored clothes, and of course, most exquisite of all, the delightful satisfaction of sex.

Then there are pleasures which are concerned with the spirit of man: security, self-confidence, understanding and knowledge, the sense of virtue and strength, appreciation of art and skill.

Pleasure can also come from others; some men honor us and we have power over others. Having influence in the social or political sphere redounds to our own glory. Our sense of self esteem will be flattered by those who look to us for protection and help. There are infinite grades of pleasure to be sensed as the oil of love and respect is poured over our heads. From a solid sense of self respect and well being comes a poise expressed in our external acts which enhances the natural dignity of a man.

Each one of these things, however, we want because it will get us something else. We eat to keep well; the pleasure involved is secondary; the point is to stay alive. Self-confidence, virtue, wealth, love—all are used to keep us living well. And enough of all the necessary good things

of life, will enable us to live in a state of security, that is, free from all unreasonable care about the occupations and business of life.

Most of these pleasures men share with animals, some of them with plants and a few with stones. Yet men rise above these things. Man alone is able to enjoy the pleasures of reason. To read the poetry of Brother Antoninus, to design and construct the buildings of New York, to send rockets into outer space, to know the satisfaction of these endeavors is proper to men alone. Because only men possess minds capable of reasoning and abstraction, only they can reach universal conclusions, understand relationships, and make particular applications. One never sees a spider enraptured over the beauty of the morning sunlight sparkling on his dew laden web, nor did the monkeys sent into space find it necessary to comment on their trip; they know only the pressing needs of instinct.

Since reasoning or thinking is man's most noble act, it would seem that he should get the greatest pleasure from thinking about the most tremendous things. To look at, to think about, to mull over, to contemplate: this is what makes a man a man. And for a man to act like a man is to be in good order. This is to be happy.

To cup your love's face in your hands and just look, enjoying right and possession; to stand above an undulating plain when the wheat is high and ripe, watching the soft summer breeze which has caressed your cheek stroke, stroke and ripple the fields of wheat like the golden fur of a kitten; to be still and hushed before the majesty of a great work of art; to be immersed in the heaving seas of Beethoven's symphonies: these are the intense pleasures of man. But even stronger, more vital and intense than these, are the pleasures of grasping magnificent truths; the intricacies of the marvelous order that the world exhibits—mathematical relationships, laws of physics; to arrive at the full bloom of metaphysical consideration of the most profound truths of being and of life itself: such as these were the pleasures which froze Socrates as he stood 'rapt' in the trenches before Potidaea.

When a man has left behind him the dross and petty humdrum details and exults in the unfathomable sea of wonder which the Author of nature has poured out for man, he has reached a climax of his existence. He is acting as a man and as only a man can fully act.

But our bodies are not as strong as our minds which soar free of the hampering weights of nerves and flesh. They tire and droop with exhaustion; muscles ache and eyes burn. Because of the subtle connection

between the mind and the body, not even the most noble thinking can go on indefinitely. We must return to a more common way of life. These are peaks of endeavor, not skyline highways.

The mind and the body are interwoven and influence each other. A basic proportion exists between the thinking of a man and the functions of his body. The greater the control of the body, the greater the freedom of the mind. And the more license the body is given, the more stringently is the mind restricted. As much as the body is spoiled either by too much or too little, by so much will the mind suffer. Not too much of anything, not too little of anything, but just the right amount is needed—the right amount will satisfy all the right and just needs of the body and pacify the incessant demands of appetites that have a way of their own and will run havoc upon the mind of men if they are given unbridled rein. Then will the mind be allowed the greatest exercise of its freedom.

This is evident even in gross things. When a room is too hot, a man tends to doze and does no work. When a room is too cold, a man is so concerned with keeping warm, he hardly does any work. But if a room is kept at a comfortable warmth, a man will be able to apply himself to his work and get a great deal done, and well done at that.

Along with this achievement of moderate control, there comes a certain breadth of understanding. It is a wisdom that sees a great order to the many small things of life. The normal things a man does, like sleeping, eating, mating, walking, talking, are suddenly seen in a context that gives them a new value. Now they are not seen as ends in themselves, but as means to keep the body of man running as smoothly as possible so that his mind will be unhampered in its best activity.

Happiness should also have a certain security about it. If it were to be easily lost, a man would be very uneasy about it. But this natural happiness is a matter of natural activity. And the usual ways in which a man acts are formed into habits which ingrain themselves in the very fibers of his body. As difficult as those good habits of self-control and mental activity are to remove, so difficult will it be to remove natural happiness from a man who has attained it. And since habits are rubbed in a little each time they are used, the more a man acts with self control and actually meditates or thinks about great truths, the more deeply will his habit of happiness be worked into him.

Happiness is endangered by the crossed currents of fortune and accident, by the jealous and seditious thrusts of enemies and by the slow

progression of nature herself. Just because a man is unable to prudently avoid these evils or perhaps even willingly suffers them, this is no reason for that man to become unhappy. Happiness is a deeply personal thing. The dispositions of body and wealth are not as important as the state of mind which a man has developed. From the vantage point of truth all lower things are seen to have a mutual order. The diseased body, the failing fortune, the burdening responsibilities are all acceptable and compatible with the state of happiness. For out of every one of these evils some good, some positive benefit can be drawn.

Often evils come in great lumps, a flood, a train accident, a war. Yet each of these brings about some good; a flood deposits silt and the land is made more fruitful for many more men; a train accident can be the occasion of many men acting virtuously; a war may benefit the economy of a nation. But a man must have learned to see these goods even in evils, and be skillful enough to draw them out. This is a skill which requires much self-control.

The face of a happy man exhibits the signs of internal peace and calm. He has risen above the small annoyances of life. He has learned to accept the evils that befall him with equanimity. Rancor, unjust hatred, jealousy have no place within him. His emotions are obedient to his reasonable desires. He understands the value of life and will not be deterred from its enjoyment. Even under great stress, his calmness is evident. His interests are much broader than the pet peeves of small men. Life is traversed with steady, almost leisurely pace. His gestures are easy and graceful, without artifice or sham. He is himself. His neighbors might call him wise. He would not live in his memories, searching for happiness in the past. He would not live in his dreams, looking for happiness in fantasy. He would live in the real present world. He would know that he was a man who had happiness now.

—Timothy Myers, O.P., and
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