Passions & Virtue

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1 ❦ Virtue and the Passions

We must first deal with the question of vocabulary. The word "passion" poses difficulties in terms of its current usage, as it is sometimes used pejoratively. One dictionary defines it as an "intense, driving, or overmastering feeling." But according to Descartes, passion is "any affective state or phenomenon." It is in this sense that Saint Thomas Aquinas understood it. Understood like this, the term "passion" corresponds more or less to "sentiment" or "emotion," an enduring affective state. This is how we will use these words.

In fact, hidden behind this question of vocabulary is the more basic question about the meaning of morality. What is the role of the senses, the passions, and feelings in the moral life? How must the moralist treat them? In our day and age, morality is centered on legal obligations, duties, rational imperatives imposed on our free will. Passions, on the other hand, are seen as non-voluntary impulses of the senses against which one has to fight so as not to act contrary to reason and law. Passion is thus characterized by the excess to which it leads, an overmastering feeling, as the dictionary says.

But because passion is opposed to feeling and warns against it, the moral will and its corresponding virtue become dry and without feeling. This can lead to a distrust even of love

and spontaneity. Virtue becomes synonymous with the voluntary observance of the law made more meritorious because it lacks feeling. This is nothing but a modern form of stoicism.

Our aim is to show how feeling, with the passions and the senses, can and must become part of the acquisition of virtue. It seems reasonable to us that a virtue-centered morality consists precisely in the integration of feelings in the virtuous person. This is but an application of hylomorphism to the moral order. Virtue corrects the passions, but it also assumes them and holds them up.

The Example of Saint Thomas

In this area, Saint Thomas Aquinas is a model for us. It is he who created the treatises on the passions. In his commentary on the *Sentences,* he limited himself, like Saint Bonaventure, to explicating Peter Lombard on the question of whether Christ had to assume the infirmities of human nature, notably sadness, anger, and fear, as well as bodily suffering.[1] In *De Veritate,* he makes a connection between the passions and the affective faculties, especially the senses.[2] In the *Summa theologiae,* the study of the passions becomes a veritable treatise comprising twenty-seven questions.[3] After analyzing the passions in general, he looks at the concupiscible passions: love, concupiscence or desire, delight or pleasure, sadness, and pain.[4] Then he examines the irascible passions: hope, fear, boldness,

1. *III Sent.* Dist. 15.
2. *De Veritate,* q. 26.
3. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 22–48.
4. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 22–25, 26–39.

and anger.[5] Scripture, Aristotle, and Augustine are his principle sources here.

It is worth noting that Saint Thomas places this treatise in first position in his explanation of the factors that contribute to moral action, even before the question of *habitus,* the virtues, the gifts, the beatitudes, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which will later be found in the treatises on the virtues in particular. The reason for this, among others, it seems to us, is that our knowledge has its origins in sense perception, so that the terms used for the passions will later be used analogously to designate the movements of the soul such as love, desire, and fear. In his study of the virtues, Thomas will regularly refer back to the corresponding passion. This way of looking at the matter indicates that he considered the passions to be a positive factor in connection with the virtues. Analogy on the level of vocabulary is a reflection of a parallel in acting.

Passions and Moral Progress

The treatise on the passions must be complemented by the exposition on the stages of the moral life that Thomas lays out in his treatise on charity.[6] Indeed, the relationship of the passions to the virtues varies according to one's progress in the order of charity, which gathers together and carries along the whole of the virtues.

Thomas likens the moral life to the stages of human life,

5. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 40–48.
6. ST IIa-IIae, q. 24, a. 9.

of which he distinguishes three: the beginners, those making progress, and the perfect. These stages correspond to childhood, youth, and maturity. Each stage is characterized by a "*studium*," by a major preoccupation, a principle task. The first concern of the beginner is to avoid sin and to resist concupiscence, that is, those desires that are contrary to charity and to the virtues. At this level, the passions are presented as inclinations against whose excesses one must fight, as adversaries to conquer and to bring into submission, as "enemies of our soul," as Saint Bernard would write.[7]

The moral effort of the beginner leads to a change in his or her relationship to the passions. When reason and charity have acquired some mastery over the senses, the principal concern becomes progress in doing the good, in acquiring virtue. During this more positively oriented period, the way one views the passions changes. One is now concerned with the contribution that the senses can make to virtuous action. Now the passions are seen as servants of virtue, obedient to the discipline that virtue teaches them, such as the passion of love to charity, human hope to the infused virtue of hope.

At the end of these stages—that is, at the level of maturity—the moral plan, following Saint Thomas, is that the person has as his or her principal aim to cling to God and to rejoice in him as the proper object of charity and the purpose of all of the virtues. This intentionality involves the whole person and his or her senses and even the body. Taken up by the love of God and transformed by the virtues, the passions then be-

7. *Treatise on the Love of God*, chapter VIII.

come like friends. Charity causes the senses to grow and reach perfection all the more so because one receives the Holy Spirit and his gifts, which Saint Thomas calls a spiritual instinct.[8]

2 ❦ List of Passions

OUR PASSIONS, FEELINGS, AND EMOTIONS are multiple. What are the principal passions? How can we order them among themselves and establish their moral quality?

Our passions are clearly determined by their object. The fear of God is quite different from our fear of an enemy or a storm. Different, too, are the pleasure we experience when eating and the pleasure we enjoy with a family member or a friend. Nonetheless it is the subjective tendency that they have that is the essential characteristic of the passions. Even though they have the same object, there is a difference between love and hate, desire and joy, fear and sadness.[1] It is also important to consider first those passions that command the others. We can then examine the passions in particular, keeping in mind all the while their connection to each other.

Saint Thomas and His Sources

We can follow Saint Thomas's line of thinking on the passions by consulting his sources. As early as his commentary on the *Sentences,* Thomas introduces in his treatment of the in-

1. ST Ia-IIae, q. 24, a. 4.

is the concupiscible appetite, which has to do with the desire for the good that we perceive or flight from evil. The second is the irascible appetite, which reacts to difficulties and obstacles that make it difficult to attain the good, for example, the length of time it often takes to achieve it. In setting itself against such difficulties, the irascible appetite is in the service of the concupiscible appetite.

From all of these elements, Thomas constructs a precise table of the passions. In the concupiscible appetite, we find three groups of opposing passions: love and hate, desire and flight, joy and sadness. In the irascible appetite, we also find three kinds of passions: hope and despair, fear and boldness, and finally anger, which has no opposite. In total, he has eleven passions; they contain—or one can draw from them—all of the others, according to Aquinas.[6]

3 ❦ Love and Hate

We dedicated a chapter to love in our book *Plaidoyer pour la vertu*. In this chapter we will speak of love and hate as a reaction of the senses, as a passion or a feeling, keeping in mind that we experience them in our whole being. Thus we say: I love or I do not love, concerning a taste or a sound or a person. Likewise, hate is normally directed at someone, but it can also be understood in the sense of an aversion: I hate spinach. We will also speak of a taste for or disgust with a thing or a person.

As an integral part of our human experience, love as a feeling is experienced in our relations with other persons. Such a love, maintained by frequent contact, can become a passion in the sense of an attachment without reserve, that is excessive, and that is exclusive. Such a love raises the critical moral question of good and evil, of authentic love, of real happiness.

The Priority of Love among the Passions

The tradition that springs from Stoicism distinguished four passions: joy, sadness, hope, and fear.[1] But in his treatise on the passions, Aquinas believed that love must hold the first

1. ST Ia-IIae, q. 25, a. 4.

place.[2] He writes that love is indeed the first change *(immutatio)* that is caused in the appetite by what appears to be good. It provokes desire and is brought to completion in the experience of joy. One could describe it as a kind of connivance in what is desirable. It is the source of the other passions. Thus Thomas can state that every act is done under the impulse of love.[3] We can confirm this ourselves: everything that we see provokes in us a spontaneous reaction of attraction or repulsion according to what pleases or displeases us, according to what we like or dislike. Indifference is but the sign that our feelings have not been touched or moved.

At first love is experienced on the level of feeling, as a warming of the heart; then it spreads into the person and moves him or her to action in service of the desire, demanding effort. To be kind-hearted will mean to have the courage to act and endure. It is at this level that love raises the moral question that determines the quality of our acts: what deserves to be loved in a personal way, to become the goal of our acts and the culmination of our life? This question presupposes a rising up from the depths of the human heart of a love superior to that of the feelings, engaging the person's free will. It is in the name of what one loves the most that the will imposes itself on feelings. Thus understood, the question of love covers the entire spectrum of the moral sphere. It is essential and establishes the first criterion of judgment in the moral order, verifying the claim: tell me who you love and I will tell you who you are.

2. ST Ia-IIae, q. 26.
3. ST Ia-IIae, q. 28, a. 3.

The Difficulty of Loving

We spontaneously like love and we experience pleasure in hearing it spoken of. Yet, as soon as we follow love, we perceive that love makes demands that often make us want to withdraw. We may think that love makes all things easy; but experience tells us that there is nothing more difficult and demanding than love.

The central question, it seems to us, can be found in the agreement of the good and of love with the truth. What is the true good? What is true love? Truth is in conformity with the classical definition of free will as a faculty proceeding from the will and the intellect. It joins together the love of truth and the truth of love. Coming from the depth of our soul and heart, such a love clearly goes beyond feelings and submits them to truth's judgment, to its command. From truth come the demands of love that we call spiritual: the acceptance of privations that correct the excesses and the deficiencies to which the passions lead, the effort of submitting oneself to a discipline, ascetical practices that lead to mastery over one's feelings, and their integration within the dynamic of the virtues.

This kind of ascesis, let us note, is inspired by a superior love for the truth, which gives a positive orientation to the very privations that such a love requires. Such a love is the first source of progress in the virtues. The formation of the virtues is not the work of the will pure and simple, but comes from a loving and true will that associates the spiritual momentum to the patience of a daily effort which involves the feelings themselves.

The Love of Christ

The story of Abraham is a prophecy of the mystery of Christ's divine love. It is the mystery of the will of the Father, who loves us to the point of sending his Son on earth so that he might sacrifice himself on the cross for the redemption of all, of each one in particular. Thus he makes well up the spring of a new love, *agapè* (charity, as Christians call it), capable of uniting two extremes: the highest spirituality and the most concrete feelings, the most physical, we might say, and also the most delicate. Such is the work proper to the Holy Spirit.

Let us underscore the deeply mysterious character of this love, which has already been presaged in human love. It is a mystery that goes to the heart of the matter: how can love come from a sacrifice by being stronger and better than before? How can the night of renunciation bring the light of a renewed love? How can one agree to die in order to live with the one we love? Only a successful experience can introduce us into this mystery and bring clarity to it.

At the innermost heart of the question is the personal choice between love of self and love of others, between what looks like love and real love: the love of friendship, as Thomas says. Self-love seeks to embrace everything for itself under the cover of a surface kind of love that is ultimately selfish. True love fights against self-love by mortifying it so that we can learn to welcome God himself in a deep and heartfelt communion. In reality, such a task is beyond us and cannot be realized through the will alone. Rather, it depends on a certain revelation, on the voice of the other who calls us to love according to

the good and the true, of a loving voice that elicits authentic and generous love.

One cannot have love without truth, no more than one can exercise the will without understanding. Love, deprived of the light of truth, strays and becomes corrupted. Without an active love, grasping the truth loses its vigor and fervor, becoming dry and dull. Both of these faculties are rooted in the senses, which provide them with their first perceptions and feelings. Thus the moral virtues need sensible love in order to be formed in us and exercised by us. It is with love that the moral virtues must respond to the essential question: what is the true good?

Hatred

Hatred is the negative face of love. On the level of feelings, it takes the form of aversion, of repugnance, of disgust, of displeasure, of detestation. It has as its object that which seems bad, what causes us harm or pain. It gives rise to sadness and provokes the desire to flee. Like love, aversion is a spontaneous reaction that is subject to the same type of questions of truth. What is true evil? What is truly bad for us? The answer is found in the more global question: what is the fullness of the good, true happiness, the ultimate end of life?

Aversion can be of two types. It is directly concerned with sensible pain; indirectly, it can have a spiritual good as its object, a good that demands the sacrifice of something pleasant. Attachment to sensible goods provokes an aversion to one's being deprived of them, of detachment, of the Law of God. Simi-

larly, concupiscence, the desire for sensible goods, can take on a negative connotation by a refusal of any renunciation or limitation. In fact, aversion will present itself in a more positive and attractive guise, as a desire for tangible goods, for pleasures, for money as a way of getting them. It will hide as much as possible its negative face: the refusal of spiritual values.

Being personal, hatred can so develop as to become the opposite of the love of the good, a kind of love of evil for itself. In order to protect oneself against a love that does harm, self-love gives rise to a certain love of what is evil; it takes pleasure in doing harm and lying. Thus the refusal to obey God's commandments can provoke hatred of God and of religion, as well as any moral teaching, thereby substituting a mystery of darkness for the mystery of light, atheism for the love of God.

It is in this way that love and hatred lead us beyond words, beyond ideas into the depths of the debate which opposes, in our minds and hearts, good and evil.

6 ❧ Delectation, Pleasure, and Joy

First, a word about vocabulary. For Saint Thomas, the term *delectatio* has a general meaning denoting the pleasure that one takes in a good, whatever it happens to be, as opposed to sorrow or sadness. He can, therefore, classify under delectation all forms of pleasure. For us, delectation has a more restricted meaning. To experience delectation means to savor a pleasure, to delight in it. The accent is on the intensity of the feeling. The word "pleasure" can also be used to translate *delectatio* to the extent that it means taking pleasure in a good. It can also mean the possession of this good. We will use delectation and pleasure as equivalent terms which encompass the different kinds of pleasures or joy.

More precisely, delectation is the culmination of a movement that starts with love and the desire for the good and then moves us to acquire it, finally ending in possessing it. Pleasure is like the radiance of the good now possessed in the affectivity of the subject. Understood like this, delectation is fundamentally an affective state which can take on many forms and is expressed in a variety of nuanced ways: pleasure, joy, elation, exultation, jubilation, beatitude. In Latin: *gaudium, laetitia, exultatio, jucunditas, beatitudo.*

Delectation is the direct and specific effect of obtaining, of possessing, the good, just as sadness is the effect of an evil that affects us. Delectation means our subjective reaction with respect to an acquired good. Thus, this question is of the greatest interest to us.

Delectation according to Saint Thomas

In his commentary on the *Sentences,* Saint Thomas introduced a question on delectation found at the very end of Peter Lombard's work, where he discusses final beatitude. Judged useful for defining beatitude, Lombard's study is already lengthy. It has four questions: 1) the nature of delectation as a passion and on the spiritual plane (q. 31); 2) its causes, which are the movement or the presence of the good, the actions of others, works of charity, and admiration (q. 32); 3) the effects of delectation such as interior dilatation, contemplation, and action (q. 33); finally, 4) its moral quality (q. 34). This is a first sketch of this treatise.[1]

Incidentally, in the *De Veritate,* Thomas makes a distinction between delectation and joy.[2] Delectation has its beginning in the real union with a good and is completed in apprehension—that is, in becoming aware of it—while joy has its origin in becoming aware of the good and ends in affectivity. Thus delectation is sometimes the cause of joy, just as pain is the cause of sadness. We can rejoice in enjoying.

The *Summa theologiae* offers us a veritable treatise on delectation. It is made up of four questions and twenty-four articles; this is followed by five questions on pain and sadness.[3] This treatise is a veritable creation of the angelic doctor, indicating the importance that he gives it in his conception of a morality dominated by the question of human happiness. One senses that Thomas must have experienced a certain delectation in writing this treatise. In it, he discreetly reveals, almost by accident, his own experience.

1. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 31–34.
2. *De Veritate,* 26.4 ad 5.

To summarize: Thomas first explains that delectation is a passion of the soul and then distinguishes it from joy. There is a sensible delectation that affects the body and a spiritual delectation that concerns the will and intelligence. Spiritual delectation is greater than sensible delectation, but it is more sober and measured. Among the senses, touch causes the greatest pleasure. There also exist non-natural delectations, such as those brought about by sickness or by bad habits; these can be contrary to each other.[4]

The causes of delectation are actions, movement, hope, memory, sadness, the actions of others, works of charity, resemblance to others, and admiration.[5] Thomas's exposition leads to the summit, which is admirative contemplation. This brings about the greatest joy.

The effects of delectation are the expansion of the heart and mind, thirst and desire. Spiritual delectation favors the use of reason to which bodily pleasures are an obstacle. Finally, delectation perfects human action and makes it more intense.[6]

As for the moral quality of the various kinds of delectation,

3. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 31–34, qq. 35–39.
4. ST Ia-IIae, q. 31, aa. 1–8.
5. ST Ia-IIae, q. 32, aa. 1–8.
6. ST Ia-IIae, q. 33, aa. 1–4.

Thomas rejects the opinion of the Stoics, who held that all delectation was bad, as well as the opinion of the Epicureans, who believed that they were all good. For Thomas, certain kinds of delectation are good and others bad, according to whether or not they conform to our nature. One must even say that our ultimate end consists in delectation, that which is caused by the joy of God. Delectation can thus become the criterion of our moral quality: it is good for those who find joy in the practice of the virtues, and bad for those who find pleasure in doing evil.[7]

Pleasure and Joy

The distinction between pleasure and joy is an important one, we believe, in that it puts order among the many enjoyments that are offered to us. These are the two terms that we use most frequently when speaking about what touches us in a way that is agreeable.

A first difference that comes to mind is that pleasure has its cause in an exterior good, while joy is caused by an interior one. We experience pleasure when touching an object, in eating dessert, in seeing a play, in listening to a speech or to a song. As for joy, it comes directly from an action that we have done, from a task that we have accomplished. We experience joy when we have pleased someone, have been generous, perspicacious, or brave. Pleasure depends on what pleases us, just as pain or sorrow comes from what displeases us or causes us harm. In addition, pleasure can also have as its object an action that we have done. We can take pleasure in running, in swimming, in playing, or in thinking about a person whom we love. But these actions remain oriented toward the exterior. Quite another thing is joy. It proceeds from a personal act, a choice that we make, a decision that we have reached, an action undertaken that conforms to our sense of truth and of the good and to which we give consent in spite of the effort or the needed sacrifice. We experience joy when we deprive ourselves of some good because someone else has need of it. Joy can be experienced when we struggle, over a long period of time, to complete a work of value, or at having accepted sacrifices for the sake of a cause that deserves it. We would not say that we take pleasure in depriving ourselves, in sacrificing ourselves, but we do experience joy if we do these things willingly. The source of joy is found in the deepest part of the human person, in our reasoning and free personality from which spring our actions. Understood in this way, we can consider joy to be the criterion of a person's moral quality whether he or she finds his joy in good or in evil.

But can we really find joy in evil? We can certainly find pleasure in it, but will we derive true joy from it? We can say that we are joyful in vanquishing an enemy, in amassing a fortune, or in winning the lottery. But if the cost is an injustice or fraud, this joy will be eroded interiorly by the feeling of having acted badly, by the barbs of a bad conscience which seeks to hide its outward exuberance. Does this not indicate that true joy is found in the feeling of having acted well, with a right intention and a pure heart? We can certainly speak of an evil joy; but this cannot be real joy, since it is vitiated at its root because it contradicts our profound sense of truth and goodness, the source of morality. Thus understood, joy can serve as a criteri-

7. ST Ia-IIae, q. 34, aa. 1–4.

on in the moral life, allowing us to distinguish true virtue and to show us the way to happiness, the path that leads to God.

Joy as a Criterion for the Moral Life

We have to admit that today we have some difficulty and scruples about the experience of delectation, joy, and especially pleasure, which are the criteria for moral value. We even think the contrary. Does it not seem to us that the renunciation of what pleases us, sacrifices, and voluntary privations are a surer, even necessary, sign of the quality of our actions? Are we not tempted to think that the highest ideal, the purest way, consists in acting only out of duty, by obedience to the moral law, to the will of God, without any consideration of pleasure or joy or, finally, of our happiness? And even if we do not go to these extremes, do we not see in pleasure and joy no more than a simple aid to our weakness, a support for our imperfections? The virtuous, so it seems, think of nothing but doing their duty; they are suspicious of what brings them pleasure and even shun joy. It is significant that the study of happiness, which is the fulfillment of joy, no longer has a place in a modern ethics of duty. We are dealing with a predominant mentality of our day and age which has moved the center of gravity in morality from the consideration of happiness to the concern of duty, from respect for obligations to legal imperatives. We need a veritable intellectual conversion in order to give to delectation and happiness the role that they had in a virtue ethics of which Saint Thomas is the most systematic interpreter.

Let us begin with pleasure. Against the Stoics, who thought

that all of our delectations were evil, Saint Thomas observes that no one can live without sensible and corporeal delectation, without any pleasure. This is what not only experience teaches us, but the example of the Stoics themselves as well, whom we see accept certain pleasures in spite of their teaching.[8] Indeed, pleasure is natural to us and we experience it even before thinking or speaking about it. All that we feel, all that we do, is marked by this first reaction: it pleases us, attracts us, or, it displeases us or repulses us. On the intellectual level as well we look spontaneously with favor, with acceptance, on what seems to us to be true and beautiful, and we rebuff what to us seems false and ugly, such as a lie. We experience a primitive joy in pursuing truth, as in approving the good. This reaction, this pleasure or joy, is the work of the good in us, its direct and revealing effect. The good does us good; we perceive it at the level of the mind as well as of the senses. In this sense, delectation and the good are inseparable, as the proper effect and its cause. For Saint Thomas, *bonum* goes together with *delectabile;* the good is what causes delectation; all delectation reveals a certain good.

Modern subjectivism, contained in germ in Descartes's phrase "I think, therefore I am," broke the bond between the human subject and the object, between delectation and the good. The good has hardened into an imperious and resistant object. Delectation has become soft, merely a subjective and changing impression. We absolutely need to reestablish the natural relation between the good and delectation. This is especially the work of the virtues and the experience that they bring us.

8. ST Ia-IIae, q. 34, a. 1.

The Experience of Virtue

A difficulty is the fact that the experience of virtue is not immediately perceived, as in the case of the senses. Rather, it is acquired slowly in the very practice of virtue itself. Frequently, the first impression we have when we embark on the practice of the virtues is of the difficulties that we confront, the pain that we must cause ourselves, the sacrifices to which we consent in order to become brave, temperate, chaste, or just. In order to discover virtue, one must accept a certain amount of suffering and a rather long period of effort, like an artisan who learns his trade by repeated attempts, failures, and starting over again. Virtue is even more difficult and exigent than art, for it has as its object our personal transformation. As in trying to reach any summit, we cannot acquire virtue without struggle and sweat as we ascend interiorly.

Success at acquiring the virtues truly allows us to discover a new world that we can characterize precisely as the union of the good and delectation under the form of joy. We learn that the good, diversified according to the virtues, rouses the most sure and long-lasting joy. Here, experience itself is our teacher and it teaches us from the inside.

Moreover, we will discover that virtue heightens even our sense of pleasure by teaching it a measure that brings out its quality and brings it into line with spiritual values. Thus, by its savor virtue gives a new taste to feelings, such as a finer and purer touch of things and their value. Abstemious persons appreciate food more than the overeater, even if they take less of it; and, in a certain sense, they make it the servant of their

spiritual hunger. Temperance demands fast and abstinence not in order to destroy, but to bring to perfection our taste for bread and wine, thus preparing us for receiving the Eucharist and finding our joy and even our pleasure in it. Why would not attraction to such a sacrament, as spiritual as it is, extend even to our feelings? Similarly, is it not the experience of joy in acting justly, even to our own detriment, in serving the common good with all of its demands, which is the sign that we possess this virtue, that we are even possessed by it? Likewise, the brave person experiences joy that belongs to him or her when confronting dangers that make others tremble.

We can use each virtue as an example. It is clear from the experience of those who practice virtue that it naturally gives rise to joy and, with it, a certain pleasure, a surfeit in the order of feelings. One is able to understand that the delectation of which Saint Thomas speaks is the proper effect of a true good, that it can even reveal moral goodness.

Because of the experience associated with virtue, we can restore to the treatise on beatitude, which concerns the greatest joy, pride of place in Christian ethics. The question of our happiness is not simply a subjective one, changeable according to persons and times; virtue reveals its objectivity and shows us that our happiness depends on the choices we make, as of its cause. It is this that fills us with joy. Even the pleasure we experience in acting virtuously becomes a sign for us. Virtue, in effect, engages and perfects our feelings. Tell me what suits you and I will tell you who you are.

7 Suffering, Pain, and Sadness

SAINT THOMAS adds to his study of delectation five questions on pain and sadness, which are delectation's contraries and which demand a remedy.[1] To our desire for happiness he opposes the feeling of sadness. In doing so, he addresses the problem of suffering, which includes all the forms of evil that we suffer.

The question of suffering is crucial for all people. No one can avoid or escape it, and it is decisive for the meaning that we give to our lives as well as to our actions. Suffering has given rise to numerous and characteristic answers in philosophy and literature. Suffering can be found with the Cross of Christ, which is at the heart of the Christian message. Suffering goes beyond our descriptions, our ideas, and our words. Nonetheless, its presence and importance in all human experience obliges us to reflect on and speak about it in order to find our way through life and to overcome the evils that we encounter. The reality of suffering raises the question of happiness in all of its acuteness and breadth; it calls into question our very existence: are living and being worth it if it is only to suffer?

1. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 35–39.

Saint Augustine and the Stoics

Formerly, the Stoics extolled insensibility, *apatheia,* not only with respect to sadness but with all the passions as well. Occupied with the contemplation of ideas, the Stoic escapes from the power of feeling, especially from the fear of pain and sadness. By the practice of virtue, the Stoic overcomes suffering and holds him or herself impassible in the face of it.

Saint Augustine criticizes this wisdom that exalts humankind and is, at the same time, inhuman. He opposes it with gospel wisdom which gives due place to feeling. "The citizens of the City of God, living according to God," he writes, "fear and desire, become sad and rejoice, and because their love is upright, so too are their affections." Christians "suffer because of their sins and rejoice because of their good works." Actually, Saint Paul experienced great pain and sadness concerning the Israelites: "For, in their unawareness of the righteousness that comes from God and their attempt to establish their own [righteousness] they did not submit to the righteousness of God" (Rom 10:3). Jesus, too, shed tears before the remains of Lazarus, and his soul was saddened at the approach of his Passion. According to Saint Augustine, one cannot speak of insensibility in this life. "If it consisted in not experiencing feeling, who does not see that this stupor is worse than all the vices?"[2] By substituting the primacy of love and charity for the philosophical ideal of *apatheia,* the bishop of Hippo restores their value and their role to feelings according to their confor-

2. *City of God,* 14.

mity to this love. The Christian is not insensible, as the Stoics pretended to be—without, by the way, really achieving it; but feeling is inspired by Christ's love.

Saint Thomas and Suffering

Saint Thomas places the study of suffering within the framework of his treatise on the passions after delectation as its opposite. He examines the question according to his usual order: the definition of pain and sadness as well as their species, their causes, their effects, their remedies, and, finally, their morality.[3] He draws his inspiration mostly from Saint Augustine and Saint John Damascene, who is himself dependent on Nemesius of Ephesus.[4] Saint John distinguishes four types of sadness: grief *(achos)*, which renders one silent; worry *(achthos)*, which oppresses us; envy *(phthonos)*, or sadness caused by the good of another; mercy *(eleos)*, which is provoked by the evil that affects others.[5]

Thomas defines suffering by the apprehension of evil of which it is the object, first at the level of the senses where sadness is properly the passion, and then on the spiritual level.[6] He makes a distinction between pain, which directly affects the bodily senses, and sadness, which is properly a passion at the level of the soul. Sadness is therefore a species of pain.[7] In and of itself, pain is opposed to delectation as its contrary. But it

3. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 35–39.
4. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* I, II, c. XIV; Nemesius, *De natura hominis*, c. XIX.
5. *De fide orthodoxa*, art. 8.
6. ST Ia-IIae, q. 35, a. 1.
7. ST Ia-IIae, q. 35, a. 2.

can happen that pain also causes pleasure, such as the enjoyment of spectators at a tragic play.

The angelic doctor is interested especially in the contemplative life because of his Dominican vocation. Certainly contemplation can cause sadness if it has evil for its object, such as looking at our sins or considering our faults. But the very practice of contemplation procures of itself a satisfaction devoid of sadness, as in the case of grasping a truth about evil or good. Thus we can say that the contemplation of the mind contains neither bitterness nor boredom. Still, we can speak of suffering as a side effect, an accident, due to the fatigue of the sensible organs that we use in contemplation. By itself the desire of delectation is stronger than passing sadness, even though privation makes us experience our desire and love more than enjoyment, which is more peaceful. Finally, interior pain that comes from reason or the imagination normally gets the better of exterior pain in the order of the senses because it is deeper and more universal. Thus we accept physical pain in order to avoid moral pain, as in the case of remorse.[8]

Next, Thomas tackles the causes of sadness. He looks at four at some length: the presence of an evil more than the privation of a good; concupiscence and the desire for union, which are thwarted by each other; the inability to resist a stronger power.[9]

As for the effects of suffering, they relate to the soul and the body. In the first place, Thomas notes that suffering diminishes the faculty of learning and can even take it away

8. ST Ia-IIae, q. 35, aa. 5–7.
9. ST Ia-IIae, q. 36.

entirely when it is intense. It can keep us from thinking, reflecting, and studying. He concedes, however, that a certain moderate sadness can contribute to learning a discipline. On the other hand, bodily pain is a greater obstacle to contemplation than interior pain because contemplation in particular requires calm and rest. Pain and sadness are a weight on the soul and can sometimes paralyze one's members, making the person seem stupid. In filling the soul, these feelings also diminish one's capacity to act; we do not act as well when we are sad as when we are joyful. Still, from another point of view, sadness can provoke us to act in order to avoid what causes sadness, such as in the case of an illness. Finally, Thomas is of the opinion that, among the passions, sadness is the most harmful to the body because it runs counter to the vital movement that comes from the heart.[10]

Following this, our doctor discusses the remedies for sadness previously pointed out by Aristotle and Saint Augustine. Just as sleep eases fatigue, so all delectation, all that is pleasurable contributes to chasing away sadness. Tears and groaning also alleviate interior pain by manifesting it outwardly through gestures and words that express what one is feeling. The compassion of friends is another consolation against sadness because it makes us think that they share the weight that burdens us, and especially because it shows us the love that they have toward us. Nevertheless, the most powerful remedy against sadness is in contemplating truth, love of wisdom, to the point where one can rejoice in one's trials and even find

10. ST Ia-IIae, q. 37, aa. 1–4.

one's joy , like the martyrs, in being tortured. Thus the joy that spiritual contemplation brings can have repercussions for one's feelings. Finally, sleep and baths fight sadness by restoring our state of health, according to Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine.[11]

Saint Thomas ends his treatise with an assessment of sadness and pain. Because its object is a certain kind of evil, sadness has a negative and disquieting side. But it is because of the presence of evil that it is good to be sad and to regret the evil. We cannot therefore say that all sadness is bad. Because sadness can be good, we must ask ourselves if it is a true good or simply a useful good. Sadness can be virtuous if it comes from a right judgment of reason followed by a repudiation of evil by the will. In this sense, we recall the beatitude of the afflicted to whom Christ promises divine consolation. Sadness is useful to the extent that it moves us to flee evil, sin, first of all, by avoiding it or by opposing it with penance, and then the occasions of sin, as for example the abundance of temporal goods. Sadness increases the inclination to flee evil just as delectation increases the desire for the good. As unpleasant as it is, sadness, no more than pain, cannot be the worst of evils. If we are dealing with what is truly evil, it would be worse not to consider it to be such or not to flee from it. If we are dealing with an apparent evil, sadness is less than being deprived of a true good. As great as it can be, sadness is not what leads to the greatest sadness.[12]

Saint Thomas's study of pain and sadness is significant for

11. ST Ia-IIae, q. 38, aa. 1–5.
12. Ibid., q. 39, aa. 1–4.

its care and importance. For him, sadness is not simply a subjective feeling, but is rather the sign in us of the evil of which it is the effect, just as delectation is a sign of the good. Thus the entire moral life is involved as in the case of evil. Ethicists following Aquinas have not been attentive to sadness any more than they have to joy, by the way. Seen as mere feelings, sadness and joy only serve as accessories in their treatment of morality.

Reflection

Aquinas's careful study is an invitation to reflect on suffering. We do not like to think about it, but it makes its presence felt in every human life. Suffering is as present as, and more felt than, pleasure or joy. Is this a weakness or a failure in the work of Divine Providence that directs the universe? Would the world not be better and more beautiful without suffering? But could it not be that suffering is a means used by God to guide us and make us better? We could say quite willingly that pleasure and suffering are the two hands that God uses to lead us to himself. If there were only pleasures in our life, we would be content to enjoy them and remain there. If we only knew suffering, we would keep our heads down with fear or flee. But the alternation of pleasure and suffering forces us to forge ahead in order to escape the one and make progress in the other. Thus we can discover by experience what can be the usefulness of suffering. In what way can suffering serve us? Because we do not like it, we want to answer that it serves no purpose. And yet . . .

Everyone can see that pleasure is sweet and that suffering is

hard. According to Saint Thomas, this is why we feel the loss of some good more deeply than its possession.[13] The former hurts and troubles us; the latter seems normal and calms us. Is not the hardness of suffering a sign that reveals to us the hardness of what is: a strong dose of reality? In wounding us, suffering obliges us to go beyond first impressions in order to penetrate further, more deeply into the being of things, beyond simple appearances. Suffering is hard also because it makes us question what is most personal: will we agree to accept suffering even though it means fighting the causes of it, or will we refuse? Will we let ourselves be shaped by suffering or will we rebel against it?

Suffering leads us to the being that resists; at the same time, it makes us experience that it is changeable, that it passes from being to non-being and, from our perspective, from possession to privation, from pleasure to pain. It can also lead us to pessimism, to a conception of the world as evil, to being as bad. It is here that the other hand of Providence intervenes. To those who accept the path of suffering, it shows that there exist goods superior to those of which one is deprived, interior goods, qualities that are gained by our free acceptance. These are the virtues, the natural fruits of our acts that conform to reality. Through suffering we will discover that a deeper life can be born in us, a little like the woman who must suffer the pangs of childbirth in order to know the joy of giving birth to new life.

The acceptance of suffering, the personal engagement in

13. Ibid., q. 35, a. 1.

the road that opens before us, lets us perceive the new being in our depth, our spiritual being. This being is not given to us from the outside, as in the case of our parents, but it is we who form it, we who bring it to be from the inside. The surprising thing is that this process is very personal, like our acceptance, our consent; at the same time, it is a stranger to us in that it runs counter to us.

The experience of our spiritual being shows us that it is being formed according to the progress we make in the virtues, that it consists in a growth comparable to that of plants, always ascending as in a hike toward the summit. At the same time it is a descent through the humility required when facing reality, and a diminishment because of the struggle against selfishness. Thus joy and suffering are united biologically so to speak in the spiritual life. But suffering is at the service of joy. Suffering contributes to joy by purifying it and especially by raising it above exterior pleasures in what we can call our "cordial" being, a being that is able to resist the agitations of the senses, the assault of vices and mirages.

Paved with virtues, strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the path of the spiritual life is solid and assured. The path is also long and enriching and, in the end, surprising. Indeed, becoming conscious of our being, we can say of our moral creation that we are led on occasion to seize, in a moment of illumination which lightens the end of our existence, that we did not create ourselves. We have been created and this creation continues far beyond ourselves. In our deepest recesses is found the unique Creator who alone is uncreated being and who can proclaim: "I am who I am."

It is at this height that joy and suffering come together: the joy of discovering the One who gave us being and the suffering that is caused by our sense of nothingness as we stand before him. Here is the meeting of being and non-being, of life and death as well, since we cannot experience it unless we have died to self.

Is not this union of joy and suffering a characteristic of love? It is not a question of loving and seeking out suffering any more than evil; that would be a perversion. But we can only suffer if we love and for that which we love, or for the one whom we love. Love seems to need suffering in order to provoke us and to teach us to appreciate it, to lift us to the level of real love, which calls us into being, and to grow in mind and heart.

Do we not thus encounter God's very thought which, by the most surprising mystery, chose for his Son here on earth the greatest suffering: that of the Cross standing before us as the unquestionable sign of his love?

10 ❦ Anger and Virtue

THERE IS SOMETHING about anger that can make one angry. Indeed, many ethicists, both in philosophy and in theology, consider anger to be a fault, an illness of the soul, and therefore deny its capacity to contribute to virtuous living. Anger is one of the principal passions and shares their condition and is thereby considered to be contrary to reason. Is the ideal to live without anger, as without passion? But what would a virtue become if it were robbed of both energy and fire?

Anger is a part of our everyday lives. A small contradiction, an object that strikes us, or a person who bothers us is enough to anger us, to make us want to kick what has hurt us, as well as to reply with an invective to an unpleasant word. Swearing is a spontaneous expression of anger. It is true that our anger is often repressed, but this does not mean that it does not exist in our heart. Why? Because anger is a hard-hearted feeling.

Anger is everyone's companion in this life. It is worthwhile to reflect on its nature, its motives, and its forms in order to discern its moral quality. Is it always good to repress anger or can it sometimes be good? If so, under what conditions? As in the case of the passions in general, scholars are divided on the question of anger. Aristotle and his followers consider anger to be a positive dimension of the moral life on condition that it is governed by reason and avoids excess. On the other hand,

the Stoics promote the idea of *ataraxia*, the clearing away of all passions. This would require the repression of anger as being contrary to virtue and a sickness of the soul.

We should also point out that modern ethicists have barely dealt with anger. In a recent work, Christian Derouesné wrote: "It is striking to observe how much general discussions on the nature of the emotions obscure the study of each individual emotion. The literature devoted to anger in particular is almost non-existent."

For his part, however, Saint Thomas studied anger at length in his treatise on the passions; and later, in relation to the virtue of kindness.[1] But later ethicists were content to summarize what Thomas had written, stressing the sinfulness of anger, or, in many cases, omitting it all together.

As for us, we would like to show that anger can, under certain conditions, make a positive contribution to the life of virtue, just as it can be a fault which we should avoid. In addition, to what extent can we attribute anger to God and the angels? We will examine the classical authors on this subject: first Aristotle, then Seneca, who responds to Aristotle. Next we will consult the sacred Scriptures and Saint Thomas and his sources. Finally, we will glance at some modern writings before offering our own reflections on what has been said.

Aristotle and Seneca

Let us begin with vocabulary. The word "anger" has its roots in the Greek word *cholè*, which means "bile." This indi-

1. ST Ia-IIae, qq. 46–48; ST IIa-IIae, q. 158.

red in face
bitterness
spit

cates the physiological dimension of this feeling. Indeed, we say "to get one's bile up" to indicate "to get angry." As for the Latin *ira,* this gives us the adjective *irascible.*

In the *Tuscalan Questions,* Cicero gives us (while at the same time criticizing) the opinion of Aristotle's disciples, which affirmed that nature gave us the passions for our good and even praised anger, saying that it was the whetstone for courage. An angry man has much more ardor to attack an enemy. Also, there is no strong authority without a little harshness that anger brings with it, nor a good orator without a punch line. In short, a man would not be a man without anger.[2]

Seneca, Nero's tutor, wrote a work entitled *De ira,* in which he describes the harm of anger in thinking about the crimes of Caligula. He stands in opposition to the favorable view of Aristotle. According to Seneca, anger is the most frightening and furious of the passions, like a kind of temporary madness. It is a plague contrary to human nature. Anger has no use even in combat or in war because it makes one rash. No one becomes stronger when he is angry if he is not already strong. While reason judges what is just, anger pretends that what is just is what is judged to be so. It rises up against truth itself when truth runs counter to it. Virtue alone is great, and no one is great unless he is peaceful. Posidinius defined anger as the desire to punish the person whom we think has committed an injustice against us. So it is not entirely instinctual, but is an assent of reason to revenge oneself for an offense. It takes pleasure in causing pain and leads to savagery.

In contrast to Aristotle, Seneca does not approve of using

2. *Tusc.* L. IV, XIX, 43.

anger against shameful behaviors because, in this instance, the wise person would be agitated and unhappy. In people there are as many vices to deplore as there are individuals. Rather, the wise person must forgive those who sin or are mistaken and correct them calmly as does a doctor with his patients. As difficult as this seems, one can forswear all anger by assiduous meditation and regular discipline. The practice of the virtues is easy and leads to happiness while enslavement to vice demands much effort. Anger, which gives strength to the barbarians (the Germanic peoples and the Scythians), is still in its savage state; it dominates them more than they dominate it. Their condition is still imperfect. One cannot go straight unless one is guided by reason.

Seneca treats at length the remedies against anger, starting with education in one's youth while the soul is still easy to fashion. Anger depends on the temperament of each and is reinforced by habit. Time is needed to fight against anger and to learn to defer its satisfaction in order to make a better judgment. We must not become irritated with those who do not have the will to offend us, that is, against objects, animals, and children, against natural phenomena, or against the gods or the magistrates whose role is to render justice. The best remedy against anger is to know how to wait. Moderate work and games can contribute to this. But riches or seeking a prominent position can, on the contrary, give rise to anger.

We are so made that we easily believe what is against us and easily interpret badly. It is necessary therefore to keep one's anger in check, even to plead against oneself the cause of the person who spoke against us. We must distrust our credu-

lity and not get all excited about trifles. We have to take into account that no one is without faults, that human nature produces all sorts of vicious souls; but we are members of society, of a country, as members of a body, and we should spare each other. What is more glorious than to transform anger into friendship? Thus it is that Romans have no more faithful allies than those who were their worst enemies. It is the mark of a great soul to despise insults, even from the elite.

Seneca describes in detail the ugliness of the choleric when they look at themselves in the mirror or examine themselves inwardly. According to him, anger is its own punishment. It is distinguished from the other vices by its haste and violence. It is a chasm for the soul. It spares no age, nor does it exempt any race and can even take possession of a whole people. To guard oneself against anger, one needs to look at the harm it does. It delights in the sorrow of others and seeks to do them evil; it provokes disputes and causes war. On the other hand, those who master their anger live in peace and modesty. To obtain this tranquility, Democritus recommends that we not exert ourselves either in private or in public in multiple pursuits or in those that are beyond our strength, that we seek out peaceful people. We should avoid curiosity and take with humor malicious speech or, like Socrates at his trial, keep silent when irritated. The Emperor Augustus was an example of moderation toward those who insulted him. Let us be tolerant toward those who insult us, for what we find blameworthy in others we find in ourselves. It is better to heal an offense by pardoning it than to avenge oneself. No one likes what he has if he looks at what others have. Let us be grateful for what we have received.

It is the whole question of money that angers us and leads to fighting between individuals and cities. Before retiring for the evening, it is good to examine our behavior during the day to see ourselves clearly and to chase away anger. Finally, we need to calm the anger of others with kindness by taking time and by adapting ourselves to their condition, as a doctor does with the sick.

In conclusion, let us seek peace for our souls by regular meditation and the desire for the good without bothering with our good or bad reputation. Do not temper anger, but get rid of it altogether.

Saint Thomas Aquinas

Apparently, Saint Thomas did not know Seneca's *De ira*. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, he makes only one allusion to anger. As for hope, he distinguishes between the concupiscible and irascible passions; he shows how anger is different from the other passions and has no contrary passion.[3] Traditional scholastic teaching did not yet contain a study of anger. It is on his own initiative that the angelic doctor develops a treatise on this subject. He is brought there by his organization of morality based on the virtues and by the notion that the passions contribute to the life of virtue.

In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas refers to Cicero's *Tuscalan Questions*, which records the opinion of Aristotle, thus providing him with a strong philosophical base. He also relies on the tradition of the Fathers, notably John Damascene in

3. *III Sent.* dist. 26, q. 1, a. 3.

his *De fide orthodoxa,* in which he briefly examines the different passions. John defines anger as "a boiling of blood around the heart that comes from an exhalation or a mixture of bile from whence its name (in Greek) *chole,* bile, and *cholos.* Anger is then the desire to avenge oneself. Indeed, when we endure an injustice or believe ourselves to be the victim of one, we are distressed and this feeling becomes, from that moment, a mixture of desire and anger." John then distinguishes three kinds of anger. In its first movement, it is called *chole,* bile. We call it *mènis,* from the verb "to remain," when it lasts or when it focuses on the memory of the injustice. We call it *kotos* (from *keinai,* to be at rest) when anger finds the opportunity to avenge itself. Anger is thus a satellite of reason and the justification of desire.

Thomas also takes into consideration the generation of the seven principal vices according to Gregory the Great, for whom from pride comes envy, then anger, which gives rise to brawling, the agitation of the soul, insults, cries, indignation, and blasphemy.[4]

Thomas's study of anger consists of two parts. In the *Prima Secundae,* it can be found in the treatise on the passions and exposes the nature of anger. In the *Secunda Secundae,* anger is analyzed as to its moral quality, in its capacity to be virtuous or vicious, in its connection to kindness. Saint Thomas's perspective is clearly a moral one in the larger sense of how he understands it.

Here, then, is a brief summary of Aquinas's study. Anger is a special passion even though it is caused with the help several passions. Anger has a twofold object: vengeance considered as

4. ST IIa-IIae, q. 158, a. 7.

a good and the person who has harmed us. Anger is an act of feeling, an irascible appetite to which it gives its name. But it is also an act of reason, not a command, but the denunciation of an injustice that provokes the will to avenge ourselves. Anger is less natural than concupiscence, such as the desire for food and sex, but in one sense, it is more natural to humans because of its participation in reason. Anger varies according to the temperament of each. Anger stirs us more than the other passions and can be compared to fire. It comes down to us like an inheritance. Hatred is much worse than anger for it desires evil for evil's sake rather than in the name of justice, as does anger. Properly speaking, we cannot be angry at inanimate objects or against the dead who can no longer suffer from our vengeance, unless it is the effect of our imagination. Anger is inscribed in the framework of justice toward others. Hence it is only in a metaphorical sense that we can speak of being angry at the self. Finally, following John Damascene, Aquinas distinguishes among three kinds of anger.[5]

Thomas then discusses the causes of anger and announces that he will study its remedies, but apparently will forget to do so. The essential motive of anger can be found in an injustice committed against the one who experiences it. Anger revolts against the ill will and lack of esteem of the person who commits the injustice; it is rooted in the excellence of the person who endures it as undeserved, or stems from his infirmities, as the weakest are more easily aggrieved.[6]

The effects of anger vary. Anger brings with it a certain

5. ST Ia-IIae, q. 46, aa. 1–8.
6. ST Ia-IIae, q. 47, aa. 1–3.

pleasure contrary to the sadness that provokes it. This pleasure, caused by the hope of vengeance, ceases once vengeance has been achieved. Anger is kept alive by turning over in one's mind the offense. Anger is the most tempestuous passion and moves the heart to the service of love from which it desires to remove all obstacles. Because of the movements that it provokes in the feelings and even in the body, anger impedes the use of reason more than any other passion; it makes speech difficult and can even make one fall into silence.[7]

Thomas discusses the moral quality of anger in the *Secunda Secundae* with respect to the virtue of gentleness. Gentleness holds anger in check by acting as an obstacle to our judgment on the truth because of the agitation that anger causes. He mentions the opinions of the Stoics, who considered all passions bad, but he sides with the Peripatetics and Saint Augustine, who see them as good or bad according to the measure of reason. He supports the idea that anger can be licit and praiseworthy if it is in conformity with right reason. He distinguishes antecedent anger, which precedes reason and turns it away from rectitude and is, therefore, bad, from consequent anger that is aimed at the vices and is good, meritorious, praiseworthy. Anger is a venial sin if it is antecedent or imperfect, but it can be a mortal sin if it seeks revenge contrary to justice and charity, because of its interior and exterior violence. Anger is less serious than hatred, but differs from it by its vehemence and impetuosity.[8]

Thomas returns to and explains Aristotle's distinction among the three kinds of anger. It is sharp in its origins, bitter in its duration, difficult or heavy in its search for revenge. Thomas also mentions the division of pseudo-Saint Gregory of Nyssa, that is, that of Nemesius, into bitter anger that is out of control and frenetic. Anger is a capital sin, being the mother of many vices. Indeed, according to Saint Gregory the Great, anger gives rise in the heart to indignation and wrath, clamor in the mouth, blasphemies against God and neighbor, insulting behavior, and quarrels. Finally, following Saint John Chrysostom, Thomas recognizes that the lack of anger can be a vice, the lack of will to punish for a just cause and by the absence of the movement that corresponds to the feeling.[9]

The *Summa theologiae* again treats of anger with respect to Christ, who chased the sellers from the temple of Jerusalem (Jn 2:13–17). Having established that Christ experienced sadness, as Saint Matthew writes (Mt 26:38), Thomas deduces that he could have experienced anger, which adds the desire for vengeance. But we must distinguish between the vice of anger, which is contrary to reason, from what is called righteous anger, which is in conformity with the order of justice, as in Christ's case as an expression of his zeal for divine worship.[10] He adds that this anger did not upset Christ's joy of contemplation as it does for us.

Saint Francis de Sales

We cannot speak of anger without looking at Saint Francis de Sales, the apostle of gentleness. In the *Introduction to the De-*

7. ST IIa-IIae, q. 48, aa. 1–4.
8. ST IIa-IIae, q. 158, a. 1, ad 1; aa. 1–4.
9. ST IIa-IIae, q. 158, aa. 5–8.
10. ST IIIa, q. 15, a. 9.

vout Life, Saint Francis treats of gentleness toward one's neighbor and also gentleness toward oneself.[11] Our author speaks of gentleness more as a spiritual experience than as a theologian. He bases his teaching on the word of Jesus, who calls himself meek and humble of heart. First of all, he warns that gentleness and humility must be in our heart and not only in our words, as is the case with certain people. He recommends that we do not become angry at all, if that is possible, under any pretext. Without doubt we must suppress vices in ourselves and in others, but gently and peacefully. As Saint Augustine said, it is better to deny entry to just and equitable anger than to receive it, for, even though it may be a small matter, by the fact that it has been received it is difficult to get rid of, because it enters like a sucker and in no time gets bigger and becomes a beam.

It is better to try to live without anger than to wish to use it moderately and wisely. We must not suppress anger with impetuosity, which does nothing but stir up the heart. To fight against anger, it is better first to invoke God's help. If we have been angry, we must repair the fault by a contrary act of gentleness. We must stock up on gentleness and kindness by speaking and acting, in little manners as in great ones, in the gentlest way possible.

Finally, we must avoid getting angry at ourselves, even by becoming angry at having been angry. We must control ourselves with gentle words.

11. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, cc. 8–9.

[redacted] We are dealing with a spiritual anger, a spontaneous reaction of an upright heart and the spirit of a just person to injustice and falsehood in all of its forms. We are thus led to admit of an anger tied to virtue as a manifestation of a spiritual sensibility that is proper to God. This kind of spiritual sensibility can also be spread to us even to the level of the sensible emotions. This kind of anger will have the force of a virtue, but will not cause disorder as with the passion.

We can thus say that all virtue has its anger. The just cannot tolerate injustice, nor the chaste impurity, nor the honest lies, nor the courageous cowardice. It belongs to this kind of anger to be deeply reasonable, in conformity with a reason that projects light onto our feelings and acts. It pushes us to condemn vices and sins, without at the same time judging persons, but seeks rather to better them. Moreover, like the love that is its servant, spiritual anger goes beyond the limits of the individual and can acquire a social dimension. Thus it can support the cause of a people who struggle for its safety or its independence, for its material and moral progress, as well as for the good of the Church. Understood in this way, we can attribute anger directly to God. Proceeding from justice, spiritual anger is, like justice, fully expressed in God, all the while being in harmony with his mercy. The virtue of justice gives us the power to participate in it.

The relations between anger and virtue are therefore diverse. The feeling of anger must be ruled by virtue; from virtue anger gets its measure, an adjustment while, at the same time, it gives virtue a certain heat. Spiritual anger goes together with virtue and proceeds from feelings for its proper object. It manifests the energy of virtue and its clearheadedness.

A final question remains: to know whether we can make a place for anger by moderating it or should banish it completely; whether anger can be associated with virtue or whether it is evil in itself. Saint Thomas allows for a praiseworthy and regulated anger. Saint Francis de Sales believes it best to try to live without anger rather than to desire to use it moderately.

This question concerns most directly sensible anger, which bursts forth before the intervention of reason and is realized with its approval. This primal impulse contains, in germ, a condemnation and a punitive reaction. It therefore demands an effort of mastery and correction by taking the time to think, adopting a kindly attitude in correcting a spontaneous ill-conceived remark, taking things with a grain of salt so as not unduly to blow things out of proportion, attempting as best one can to be clearheaded. Such is the work of the virtue of kindness, which presupposes great self-control, capable of calming one's feelings. Given all of this, the elimination of all anger that disturbs one's judgment will seem like an ideal.

As for spiritual anger, it comes from virtue itself and is energized by it. It helps us in combating vice and sin; it actively serves the truth and the good; it presides over the mind and strengthens the will. Thus there exists what we can call a spiritual condemnation. The Last Judgment will be the full expression of this. There is no question of ridding ourselves of this kind of anger; rather, we ought to cultivate it as a work of peace and a servant of truth in conjunction with the virtues and with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a manifestation of spiritual strength.

15 ❦ Psychology and the Virtues

PSYCHOLOGY presents itself to us today as the scientific study of human psychic facts, feelings, ideas, and behaviors with regard to oneself and others. Consequently, we can ask ourselves what will be the relationship between that science and the virtues. Must science deal with them and, if so, how?

We have clearly noticed the problem with the reading of Pierre Daco's book *Les prodigieuses victoires de la psychologie moderne.*[1] The book is very good. It defines psychology as a science—and an art—of human behavior in all of its forms, both normal and abnormal, in relation with the other human sciences. The aim of psychology is the fulfillment of mental and psychic equilibrium useful for human perfection. The author insists on the primordial role of education. He then looks at fatigue and depression, timidity, then what he calls the speleology of the mental with the subconscious and the unconscious, the sexual instinct, and complexes according to reputable psychologists, neuroses and psychoses, illness and psychosomatic medicine, character and temperament according to diverse

1. *The Amazing Victories of Modern Psychology* (Paris: Marabout Press, 1960).

classifications. One chapter each is devoted to education, to adolescence, to sexuality, and, finally, to the will before concluding with the art of living.

One of the qualities of this work is the care in getting to the human experience with concrete examples that help the reader to refer to his or her own lived experience. The author should also be praised for the breadth and the balance of his positions, which come from an informed and well-thought-out reflection. He offers a good general view of psychology; it is well laid out and is both scientific and practical.

The Omission of the Virtues in Psychology

In closing the book and thinking about it, I was struck by an absence in the author's description of human psychology: he never speaks about the virtues. The word virtue cannot be found in the dictionary, or in the index at the end of the book. There is also no mention of particular virtues like prudence or temperance, not even justice, simply a few lines on courage in the dictionary. The question is obvious: can one write a book on the whole of human psychology without speaking about the virtues? Apparently, Pierre Daco did not even think about it. How does one explain this omission?

We can put forward first of all a methodological reason. Psychology is positive and starts from the observation of psychic facts, while morality, in which the virtues can be found, tells humans what they are to do. Psychology and morality belong to two different orders: the order of facts, and the order of what we must do, imperatives. Psychology, not being

concerned with morality, does not have reason to treat of the virtues.

We must make note of this difference; but it is not absolute, especially when dealing with humans. Indeed, among human phenomena, moral behaviors appear to be proper to humans, unlike animals. The power of free self-determination produces a succession of facts which make up, day by day, a human biography. To make abstraction of such moral facts, as well of the virtues and vices that contribute to them, leads to a misunderstanding of what is the most characteristic and interesting thing about human life. On penalty of impoverishment and deformation, psychology must take into consideration, in one way or another, moral facts and, therefore, the virtues.

In addition, the absence of virtue in modern psychology can also be explained by the predominant conception of morality today, a morality of imperatives, of obligations, and of prohibitions, which reduce virtue to the obeying of legal prescriptions. In this light, psychology and morality are set in opposition to each other as the positive exposition of facts to the statement of what we must do. Moreover, we can describe the different systems of morality as historical facts by taking care, in the interest of objectivity, not to discuss their value. Nevertheless, psychology cannot easily gloss over in its descriptions of human behaviors certain value-based criteria, as Pierre Daco does when he distinguishes normal from abnormal, healthy from sick behaviors.

Whatever be the scientific considerations, the existence of virtues and vices is a recognized part of our common experience and of major importance to each person. We are all aware

of the faults that trouble us and that are the opposite of the qualities that we appreciate, the virtues of which we approve. How many times do we say: that is unjust, he was imprudent, she was cowardly, he lacked temperance, she was impatient or fickle, timid or a talker? In fact, we continually encounter in everyday language all of the names of the virtues and the vices which have become rare in the writings of moralists. This is a sign of a general experience; it militates in favor of a renewal of a virtue ethics. When it comes to humans, psychology and morality cannot be entirely separate; virtues and vices stand out as human facts.