

*Contemplation does not rest until it  
has found the object which dazzles it.*

KONRAD WEISS

JOSEF PIEPER

*Happiness*

AND

*Contemplation*

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is a well-kept secret when they are operating professionally. It is mystifying why this should be so. It is not so for Josef Pieper.

Not that Pieper confuses a philosophical argument with a theological one. He does not expect a reader without the faith to assent to inferences he makes from revealed truths. But these truths form the ambience within which he fashions philosophical arguments. That is the ambience in which Western culture developed, including until recently philosophy. Far from being an impediment to philosophizing, it is a practical condition of doing it well. Among his many contributions, this may be Josef Pieper's greatest. He has shown how much better philosophy is when pursued within the ambience of the faith.

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I

With what a multitude of meanings do people speak of happiness. They wish it to one another on weddings and birthdays, at partings, on the first day of the year. The entertainment industry purveys to its "consumers," readers, spectators, and listeners, innumerable stories of happiness threatened, crossed, and at last achieved. Popular songs authoritatively inform every girl what it means to make a man happy. The word crops up in the already somewhat old-fashioned formula of the "greatest happiness for the greatest number," and in manifestoes proclaiming everyone's right to happiness.<sup>1</sup> Anyone cognizant of this welter of possibilities may be extremely surprised to come upon the bald statement that man's ultimate happiness consists in contemplation.

This statement precisely is what we are here concerned with.

It contains a whole philosophy of life, a basic conception of the nature of man and the meaning of human existence.

It is of no special importance that the statement

derives from a book by St. Thomas, his *Summa* against the pagans.<sup>2</sup> Of far greater importance is the fact that this idea belongs to a store of traditional wisdom whose root goes deeper than historical time, and perhaps further than the human domain. If in these pages we frequently cite Thomas Aquinas, we do not mean him to speak primarily for himself. He is intended as the witness for that tradition—though, to be sure, a witness of extraordinary rank. Nor is our study in the main concerned with historical aspects. Rather, our concern is with the light that statement casts upon the reality we encounter, and upon the reality which we are ourselves.

We ought not too soon discard our surprise at the proposition that contemplation is man's ultimate happiness—ought not dismiss it, say, by deciding that happiness is meant here in some special sense which has nothing in common with everyday language. For those words were written with a view to all, even the most trivial meanings of happiness. Ambiguity, and even a tendency to banality, are, it would seem, inherent in the subject itself. These equivocations are to be found in all the languages of men.

The Greek tongue, it must be noted, makes a

unique distinction which lends enormous range to the spectrum of meanings of the word "happiness." For there is a Greek word which denotes exclusively the happiness of the gods: only the gods are *mákares*. But the derivative word *makários*, which basically should denote men's share in the untrammelled happiness of the gods, took on such a vulgar meaning in colloquial Greek that the poets Aeschylus and Sophocles scrupulously avoid it. The second Greek word, *eudaimon*, as used in ordinary speech means the man who has money, although originally it referred to the guidance of man's guardian spirit and hence to the supernatural source of happiness. Incidentally, the Greek New Testament does not once use the words *eudaimon*, *eudaimonia*; in the Beatitudes and elsewhere *makários*, *makariótes* alone are employed. Likewise, in the Vulgate the words *felix* and *felicitas* do not occur, only the parallel words *beatus* and *beatitudo*.<sup>3</sup> But as used in colloquial Latin, even these more spiritual epithets may mean anything from the bliss of God to the *beatus ille homo, qui sedet in sua domo, qui sedet post fornacem*. (Blessed the man who sits in his house, who sits by his fireside.) We may think to avoid such ambiguities by opposing "happiness" to "bliss" or "beatitudo." The latter word, it is true, signifies strictly an ultimate

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happiness of knowledge and insight, just as there is happiness in action and 'happiness of the senses.' Certainly it can also be maintained, with good reason, that the happiness of the perceptive mind surpasses all other forms of happiness in depth and value."

All very well. Yet to interpret the sentence in this way, to put so special a construction on it, is to ignore its real meaning. For it says not a word about any special happiness that pertains only to the "philosopher." The dictum speaks of the happiness of man in general, of the whole, physical, earthly, human man. And contemplation is not held up as one among other modes of happiness, even though an especially lofty one. Rather, what it says is this: however the human craving for happiness may time and again be distracted by a thousand small gratifications, it remains directed unwaveringly toward one ultimate satisfaction which is in truth its aim. "Amid a thousand twigs," says Vergil in Dante's universal poem, "one sweet fruit is sought."<sup>6</sup> The finding of this fruit, the ultimate gratification of human nature, the ultimate satiation of man's deepest thirst, takes place in contemplation!

Certainly this exegesis has stripped our dictum of none of its strangeness. Rather the opposite. For

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how can the most intense craving of our nature be entirely satisfied by an act of the intellect? Would it not be more to the point to speak of love, of becoming one with the Infinite, of drowning ourselves in an ocean of joy? These are precisely the questions we must attempt to answer in the following pages.

## II

Man craves by nature happiness and bliss. This statement, which is meant to be taken literally, has a more militant character than may be immediately apparent. It is far from the same as saying that nothing is more natural than that men should want to be happy. No: we want happiness *by nature*. *We* means: all beings endowed with reason. Only a person is capable of being happy—and unhappy—at all. It would be a mis-term to call an animal happy.<sup>1</sup> This, then, must be kept in mind: the directing of the will, through which man strives for his own happiness, has the quality of a natural process.

Thomas Aquinas, it seems, was moved to seek ever-new formulations in which to express this idea. "Man desires happiness naturally and by necessity."<sup>2</sup> "By nature the creature endowed with reason wishes to be happy."<sup>3</sup> "To desire to be happy is not a matter of free choice."<sup>4</sup> "The desire for the ultimate goal is not among the things under our control."<sup>5</sup> This last sentence introduces a new concept: the thought that "happiness" is the name for the ultimate goal of human life.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not

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we desire the ultimate goal, Thomas says, cannot possibly be made the subject of discussion and decision; it has already been decided over our heads. Before any possibility of our own choice arises, we are already irrevocably "on the way." And the destination is called happiness. Happiness can virtually be defined as the epitome of those things which "the will is incapable of not willing."<sup>7</sup>

What, then, is being asserted here? If "by nature" means that there is no possibility of choice; if the naturalness of a process consists in its being held to a single direction and form; if the *determinatio ad unum*<sup>8</sup> is the distinguishing characteristic, then what is being asserted in the most explicit manner is: that man, as a reasoning being, desires his own happiness just as the falling stone "seeks" the depths, as the flower turns to the light and the beast hunts its prey.

But does this not mean that in the center of the mind's domain something altogether irrational is taking place? Is it not a contradiction to speak of man's "by nature willing" something? To will must either be what it has always been thought to be, an act of the mind, and therefore not an aspect of nature; or else it is a natural process, and therefore not an act of the mind.

This difficulty is indeed insoluble so long as we

insist that "nature" and "mind" are mutually exclusive concepts. This, however, the great teachers of the Occident have always contested. They have steadily maintained there is one being which is in a precise sense both mind and nature simultaneously. This being is the created human soul. "By nature" means: by virtue of creation.<sup>9</sup> All being and activity is "by nature" which—from within the central core of things—flows directly out of the primal impulse of the act of creation, by which creatures have become what they are. Part of the definition of the created soul, therefore, is that it has received its essence—and along with that its assignment in life—from elsewhere, *ab alio*, from the shaping and life-giving act of creation. It necessarily follows that in the center of the created soul something happens which is its own act, and therefore an act of mind, but simultaneously a natural process "by virtue of creation."<sup>10</sup> The desire for happiness is of precisely this character; it is "willing by nature," which is to say an act of the mind and a natural process at one and the same time.

As we might expect, here opinions differ. For at this point the question inevitably arises whether man understands himself as a creature or not. Yes or no? Those who answer "no" cannot accept the idea of a desire for happiness inherent in man's com-

position; that idea appears to them a slur upon man's autonomous spirit. Only if we understand man as a created being to the very depths of his spiritual existence can we meaningfully conceive that the will has not the power to not want happiness.

But then what about freedom of the will, if it is in this respect unfree? There are two points to be made. First, the natural desire for happiness springs from the innermost core of man's being<sup>11</sup>; it concerns man's very own will, unrestricted by any external coercion. And therefore it is free. Secondly, this desire points, right through the human heart, back to an ultimate origin which is not human. Man has not by his own resolve set in motion his desire for happiness; it has not been given to him to desire otherwise. And therefore "freedom" is not the right term here. There is no avoiding the troublesome complexity; the subject cannot be reduced to a simple formula. The concept of freedom, too, reveals a new aspect when we think of it in connection with man's createdness. Even St. Thomas, great clarifier as he was, could only state the matter thus: "The will strives in freedom for felicity, although it strives for it by necessity."<sup>12</sup>

In desiring happiness, then, we are obeying a gravitational impulse whose axis is entirely within

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our own hearts. But we have no power over it—because we ourselves are this gravitational impulse. When we desire to be happy, something blind and obscure takes place within the mind, which nevertheless does not cease to be a light and seeing eye. Something happens “behind” which we cannot penetrate, whose reason we do not see, and for which we can name no reason. Why do you want to be happy? We do not ask—because no one knows the answer.

Plato says precisely this in the *Symposium*,<sup>13</sup> in the dialogue between Diotima and Socrates: “‘If he who loves loves the good, what is it then that he loves?’ ‘The possession of the good,’ I said. ‘And what does he gain who possesses the good?’ ‘Happiness,’ I replied; ‘there is less difficulty in answering that question.’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘the happy are made happy by the acquisition of good things. Nor is there any need to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final.’”

From the vantage point of this insight it appears most odd to say that man is a “needy being” only “in so far as he belongs to the sensual world.”<sup>14</sup> Rather, the thirst of man’s spirit for happiness reveals the inadequacy and neediness of man as creature far more plainly and poignantly than the needs of the body—which by comparison resemble the

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easily met wishes of a child. To be sure, this idea is difficult to reconcile with the doctrine that the dignity of man consists in his refusing to obey any law but one he imposes upon himself<sup>15</sup> and which, quite consistently, sees the desire for happiness as “the direct antithesis of the principle of morality.”<sup>16</sup>

The concept of a nature-dictated desire for happiness has still another implication.

“By felicity,” Thomas wrote as a young man,<sup>17</sup> “everyone understands a state perfect to the highest degree; but in what this state consists is hidden”—*occulta quantum ad substantiam*. Once more we are struck by his closeness to Plato: The soul of the lover craves, as we read in the *Symposium*,<sup>18</sup> “something else” besides pleasure—“which she evidently desires and cannot tell, and of which she has only a dark and doubtful presentiment.”

Because our turning toward happiness is a blind seeking, we are, whenever happiness comes our way, the recipients of something unforeseen, something unforeseeable, and therefore not subject to planning and intention. Happiness is essentially a gift; we are not the forgers of our own felicity. (That is even true of good *fortune*—which certainly does not necessarily involve happiness.) Surely the “attainment of a created good” can fre-

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quently be brought about by purposeful activity. By cleverness, energy, and diligence one can acquire a good many of the goods which are generally considered adjuncts of the happy life: food and drink, house, garden, books, a rich and beautiful wife (perhaps). But we cannot make all these acquisitions, or even a single one of them, quench that thirst so mysterious to ourselves for what we call "happiness," "reflected beatitude." No one can obtain felicity by pursuit. This explains why one of the elements of being happy is the feeling that a debt of gratitude is owed, a debt impossible to pay. Now, we do not owe gratitude to ourselves. To be conscious of gratitude is to acknowledge a gift.

This, too, then seems to reside in the dictum that we desire happiness by nature: that we cannot make ourselves happy.<sup>19</sup>

The contrary attitude of stoic self-sufficiency may still command our respect and admiration. There is "greatness" in the unyielding resolve to desire only what is entirely ours, what we ourselves have acquired. As Seneca has expressed it: "The man is happy, we say, who knows no good that would be greater than that which he can give to himself."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the keener eye will not fail to observe behind all the brave banners and

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heroic symbols the profound nonhumanity, the submerged anxiety, the senile rigidity, the tension of such an attitude. And our admiration becomes tinged with consternation and horror as it becomes apparent to us how closely such self-sufficiency verges on despair. "Suppose he lacks his miserable bread? What does that matter to one who lacks not the knowledge of how to go to his death?" This sentence, too, may be found in Seneca's book on the happy life.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, when it is said that man by nature seeks happiness, the statement obviously implies that by nature he does not already possess it. "In the present life perfect happiness cannot be."<sup>22</sup> Man is not happy by virtue of his being. Rather, his whole existence is determined precisely by the nonpossession of ultimate gratification. That, after all, is the significance of the concept of *status viatoris*. To exist as man means to be "on the way" and therefore to be nonhappy.<sup>23</sup>

Naturally, man does not cease to be man when he reaches the goal of his way. But it remains true that the concept of an Eternal Life, which simultaneously is Eternal Rest, cannot be grasped by our limited minds. Constituted as we are, we are incapable of even conceiving as an embodied reality



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the perfectly happy man, that is to say, one whose thirst has been finally quenched and who nevertheless continues to be a living human being.

There is only one Being that is happy by His mere existence. "To God alone may perfect beatitude be attributed, by virtue of His nature."<sup>24</sup>

III

The religious sense of our time allows small place, if any, to the thought that perfect happiness is one of the "attributes" of God. We may almost say that this concept is alien to us.

In St. Thomas's *Summa Theologica*,<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, we read that it would be to miss the reality of God not to think of Him as the perfectly happy Being. I must spend a little time over this aspect of Occidental theology's concept of God.

First of all: the meaning of the statement is not solely that God is happy. Rather, the intention and the words are: "He is His happiness."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, "God and happiness are the same."<sup>3</sup> Any human being who is happy shares in a happiness that is not of himself. For God, however, being and being happy are one and the same; God is happy by virtue of His existence.

This idea immediately gives rise to a disturbing implication. If God's happiness does not rest upon anything's happening, it cannot be diminished or intensified by any events whatsoever in the realm of Creation and in the historical world of man.

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they have said that disciplining of the fear of death and of sensual desire (that is, courage and *temperantia*) is not in itself equivalent to "doing good."<sup>1</sup> But what else? The removal of obstacles<sup>2</sup> so that henceforth the really good, that is, the just deed, may be done.

Is, then, justice the purpose of life? Justice is done for the sake of order in the communal life. Is realization of this order fulfilling the purpose of existence? I know that order can never be entirely perfect among men; but here we are not concerned with the succession of things in time, but with their rank and hierarchy. We must recognize that the whole of morality points to something beyond itself; that it makes arrangements for something else; that, in any case, its purpose does not simply lie within itself, and that it therefore cannot constitute the ultimate purpose of life.

But—point *three*—what about active love for our fellow men? What about selfless aid to others? What about works of mercy? Is love not purposeful in itself and therefore the ultimate fulfillment of life? Again, we cannot offer a positive "yes" to this question. One who feeds the hungry primarily wants them to eat their fill. Yet at the same time he must, if he is normal, fervently wish that no one

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need go hungry—wish, therefore, that there were no reason for him to offer such sustenance. In other words, the purpose of acts of charity lies not within themselves, but in the alleviation of suffering. But what about the concern for the fate of one's fellows out of which such acts sprang? What about the inner affirmation of the existence of others which is the essence of love? Are these not meaningful in themselves? Yes and no. No, because love must necessarily aim at something other than itself. But what do I want if I love someone else? I want him to be happy. In charity, Thomas says, we love others "as companions in the sharing of beatitude."<sup>3</sup> And what is beatitude? Contemplation!

The results we have so far achieved can be summed up as follows: All practical activity, from practice of the ethical virtues to gaining the means of livelihood, serves something other than itself. And this other thing is not practical activity. It is having what is sought after, while we rest content in the results of our active efforts. Precisely that is the meaning of the old adage that the *vita activa* is fulfilled in the *vita contemplativa*.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the active life contains a felicity of its own; it lies, says Thomas, principally in the practice of prudence, in the perfect art of the conduct of life.<sup>5</sup> But ultimate

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repose cannot be found in this kind of felicity. *Vita activa est dispositio ad contemplativam*<sup>6</sup>; the ultimate meaning of the active life is to make possible the happiness of contemplation.

In the commentary Thomas wrote on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* there is a sentence which expresses this idea in so challenging a fashion that I hesitate to cite it here. Thomas is speaking of politics, which is the summation of all man's active cares about securing his existence. The sentence sounds almost utopian. But it is based upon a wholly illusion-free estimate of what is commonly called "political life"; it contains the insight that politics must inevitably become empty agitation if it does not aim at something which is not political. "The whole of political life seems to be ordered with a view to attaining the happiness of contemplation. For peace, which is established and preserved by virtue of political activity, places man in a position to devote himself to contemplation of the truth."<sup>7</sup> Such is the magnificent simplicity and keenness of this dictum that we scarcely dare lean on it. Yet it is nothing but an extension of the idea that contemplation is "the goal of man's whole life."<sup>8</sup>

We do not mean by this to scorn or decry practical life. On the contrary, we may well say that here is the clue to the salvation and redemption of

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ordinary life. And here it seems proper to put in a word about the nature of hierarchical thinking. The hierarchical point of view admits no doubt about difference in levels and their location; but it also never despises lower levels in the hierarchy. Thus the inherent dignity of practice (as opposed to *theoria*) is in no way denied. It is taken for granted that practice is not only meaningful but indispensable; that it rightly fills out man's weekday life; that without it a truly human existence is inconceivable. Without it, indeed, the *vita contemplativa* is unthinkable.

But practice does become meaningless the moment it sees itself as an end in itself. For this means converting what is by nature a servant into a master—with the inevitable result that it no longer serves any useful purpose. The absurdity and the profound dangers of this procedure cannot, in the long run, remain hidden. André Gide writes in his *Journals*: "The truth is that as soon as we are no longer obliged to earn our living, we no longer know what to do with our life and recklessly squander it."<sup>9</sup> Here, with his usual acuteness, Gide has described the deadly emptiness and the endless ennui which bounds the realm of the exclusively practical like a belt of lunar landscape. This is the desert which results from destruction of the *vita contemplativa*. In

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the light of such a recognition we suddenly see new and forceful validity in the old principle: "It is requisite for the good of the human community that there should be persons who devote themselves to the life of contemplation."<sup>10</sup> For it is contemplation which preserves in the midst of human society the truth which is at one and the same time useless and the yardstick of every possible use; so it is also contemplation which keeps the true end in sight, gives meaning to every practical act of life.

One exception (point *four*) would seem to be the activity of the artist, which, having nothing to do with either morality or livelihood, is nevertheless a pursuit which triumphantly achieves meaning through perfection of the work of art. Disregarding momentarily the fact that this activity, too, can also and incidentally bring its practitioner his means of livelihood, and that it is always ethical (or antiethical) activity—still the work of art to be perfected cannot be something ultimate. Certainly a work of art has no utilitarian end, and certainly it is not a means to accomplish something else. But may we not ascribe its power to the fact that the process which takes place in the artist takes place also in his audience—who in seeing, hearing, absorbing the work are kindled to contemplation of Creation?

The poet Gottfried Benn, in a significant speech

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on growing old, has made a penetrating remark on works of art and their meaning. It contains a statement, and a question which he does not answer. This unanswered question is the chief point. Benn says: "One thing is clear: when something is finished, it must be perfect—but what then?"<sup>11</sup> This is not the tone of someone who thinks a work of art meaningful in itself. To be sure, the question "What then?" is flung into a world that promptly falls mute. "Then" we ought to be able to celebrate, festively commemorate affirmation of the meaning of the world—in the happiness of contemplating something that is not the work of art, but that is brought into view by that work. Perhaps also—in a rare, special case—it should be possible "then" to offer up the completed work as a consecrated gift and sacrifice in the precise meaning of the word. Phidias, when he completed the Athene Promachos, knew the answer to the question "What then?" Bach knew it too, and Bruckner. And probably there is no better answer.

Are we, then, saying that love of God, and all that is done in that name, is the only remaining "activity" which is in itself meaningful? This is—let us recall that we have now reached point *five*—a final element in the counterproposition we are still con-

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sidering, one which questions whether contemplation is the ultimate human goal. It seems purely rhetorical, for who would withhold the affirmative answer, or venture to contend that it is infinitely more meaningful to love God than to know Him? Thomas would not allow himself to be enmeshed by such verbal snares. If by knowing God the *visio beatifica* is meant, then what is more meaningful: to love God or to see Him? If love consists of two fundamental acts, desiring and joy in possession,<sup>12</sup> and if knowing is the "noblest form of possession,"<sup>13</sup> can we say that wanting to possess is more than possession, or that joy is more important than the reason for joy? In this historical existence, it is true, in *statu viatoris*—the sages agree on this doctrine—for man here on earth, there is nothing more meaningful than the love of God, the persistent striving for "the whole good." But this is so because it may be possible for us to desire God with our whole beings, but not (not yet!) to possess Him wholly. Nevertheless, desiring aims at possession. And possession is had in contemplation.

One of the great Greeks before Socrates, Anaxagoras—of whom Aristotle said that he behaved among his companions like a sober man in a company of drunks<sup>14</sup>—was asked: To what end are you

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in the world? This is the same question with which Christian catechisms begin. Anaxagoras' reply was: *Eis theorian*—in order to behold sun, moon, and sky.<sup>15</sup> This phrase was scarcely intended to refer to the physical heavens. Anaxagoras meant rather the whole of the universe, the whole of being. Thus the cosmological wisdom of the early Greeks and the doctrine of the New Testament, thus Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Thomas, agree that we partake of the perfection for whose sake we live by *seeing*.

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may be observable to his eye by virtue of love, the activity of the eye is still seeing and not loving.

At this point the outlines of the concept of "contemplation" come into view somewhat more distinctly. Actually, contemplation is not simply one possible form among others of the act of knowing. Its special character does not flow from its being a particular aspect of the process of knowing. What distinguishes—in both senses of that word—contemplation is rather this: it is a knowing which is inspired by love. "Without love there would be no contemplation."<sup>10</sup>

Contemplation is a loving attainment of awareness. It is intuition of the beloved object.

IX

The Latin words *contemplatio*, *contemplari*, correspond to the Greek words *theoria*, *theorein*.<sup>1</sup> Cicero, Seneca, and undoubtedly many other less famous writers established the Latin words as coordinate with the earlier coined Greek words in the course of those comprehensive labors of translation which characterized the early history of the Latin West.

*Theoria* has to do with the purely receptive approach to reality, one altogether independent of all practical aims in active life. We may call this approach "disinterested," in that it is altogether divorced from utilitarian ends. In all other respects, however, *theoria* emphatically involves interest, participation, attention, purposiveness. *Theoria* and *contemplatio* devote their full energy to revealing, clarifying, and making manifest the reality which has been sighted; they aim at truth and nothing else. This is the first element of the concept of contemplation: silent perception of reality.

A second is the following: Contemplation is a form of knowing arrived at not by thinking but by

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all beings. G. K. Chesterton, considering his life in retrospect, said that he had always had the almost mystical conviction of the miracle in all that exists, and of the rapture dwelling essentially within all experience.<sup>21</sup> Within this statement lie three separate assertions: that everything holds and conceals at bottom a mark of its divine origin; that one who catches a glimpse of it "sees" that this and all things are "good" beyond all comprehension; and that, seeing this, he is happy. Here in sum is the whole doctrine of the contemplation of earthly creation.

XI

It would be astonishing if a host of protests and objections had not been aroused by what has been said so far, levelled not only against this or that point, but against the whole conception. Fairness demands that these criticisms be heard. We shall attempt to meet them squarely.

Exception might be taken in the following terms: Man is above all a creature of action, destined to keep himself alive by his own activities, to make the earth and its natural forces serve him, to establish order in the world by political activity in its widest sense, so that the natural communities of family, nation, and state may be able to live in peace. There are also the labors of peace to be considered: building, construction, achievement of justice by rule and service, mutual aid, active love toward others. What would ethical life be if it were not active fulfillment of duties, discipline of animal vitality, struggle against evil, creation of values? Art, too, after all, is nothing but the production of *poiemata*, of formed structures and works. Even the love of God is not convincing if it fails to be practical. In

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short, human life means stirring, putting shoulder to the wheel, accomplishing something, laboring, making, working, acting. And in all these things man's happiness also lies; it makes him happy to live in this way.

All this sounds highly plausible; indeed, it gives the impression of being beyond cavil—whereas the statement that man's true happiness and the whole meaning of his life is to be found in contemplation sounds, on the other hand, extremely feeble. At best it may appear an oversophisticated proposition, scarcely meant to be taken literally; an inadmissible generalization, an exaggeration.

What, then, can we say in reply? We must perforce agree. Everything said about man's active nature is, viewed as a whole, incontestably true. It is not only incontestable; it is not contested. Nevertheless, the notion that this stands in contradiction to our doctrine is a delusion. But now the many strands of this argument must be unwoven, and taken up in due order.

*Point one:* Active concern for the preservation of life does demand a large portion of that same life. No one will gainsay this. And obviously, this is not only the fact of the matter; this is how it should be. The human activity which serves this end, and

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which comprises those phenomena—by now so vast that no one can grasp them all—which we call the economy, production, transportation, technology, and so on—all this cannot simply be dismissed by assignment to the realm of “material things.” Rather, the preservation of life is a truly human task which concerns the whole man, which means that it also is subject to the human, which is to say the ethical, norm of life. Very well, what else? Now the disputed point is appearing around the corner. Two questions must be posed: Once the means for living have been obtained, in what will this now-secure life consist? Furthermore, is it not patently absurd to say that the meaning of life consists in securing the means of livelihood? Elementary logic disposes of this last question. But the first question remains open.

*Point two:* At any rate, does not the meaning of life consist in man's being good? But here we must clarify our terms. Do we mean to say that one who does not live justly, courageously, or moderately has missed the meaning of life? If that is the purport, everyone will agree. But what if we are saying that man is here on earth in order to practice these virtues? The ancients insisted on a hierarchy of rank among the virtues; and amazingly enough,