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Aristotle Contemplating the Bust Of Homer
Rembrandt [1653]

FROM THE HAPPINESS OF VIRTUE TO THE VIRTUE OF HAPPINESS: 400 B.C.—A.D. 1780

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It is only right that *Dædalus* should devote an issue to happiness, seeing that its publisher was chartered with the "end and design" of cultivating "every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people."

Its publisher, of course, is the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1780 at a time when Americans—newly independent and free—were demanding that their institutions, like their government, serve a purpose, that they be *useful*. And to many eighteenth-century minds, there was simply no better test of usefulness than 'utility'—the property of promoting happiness. The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham is often credited with first articulating the creed. But when he observed in 1776 in his lawyerly prose that "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question," he was merely giving voice to what was already an eighteenth-century commonplace. To many enlightened souls on both sides of the Atlantic, the need to promote happiness had assumed the status of a self-evident truth.

That this truth, for all its self-evidence, was a relatively recent discovery—the product, give or take a decade, of the preceding one hundred years—is important. For though happiness itself already possessed a long history by the eighteenth century, the idea that institutions should be expected to promote it—and that people should expect to receive it, *in this life*—was a tremendous novelty.

It involved nothing less than a revolution in human expectations, while raising, in turn, a delicate question. Just who, precisely, was worthy of happiness? Was it fit for all? Was happiness a right or a reward? And what, for that matter, did the curious word really mean?

The answers to such questions take us to the heart of an eighteenth-century contradiction that remains with us to the present day.

It may already have been noted that implicit in the few lines from the Academy's charter is another central assumption regarding happiness, though in this case the assumption is far older than the eighteenth century. If we leave aside for now the meaning of "interest, honour, and dignity," we can see most clearly that the Academy is asked not simply to cultivate every art and science that advances happiness, but every art and science that advances the

happiness of a "free, independent, and virtuous people." The people in question are the citizens of the United States. And the implicit assumption is that those living in bondage or sin are not worthy of happiness. In light of the fact that slavery was long considered but a species of sin, and freedom but a product of living well, I want to focus solely on the remaining term—virtue—sketching in what follows a genealogy of its close links to happiness.

The belief in the intimate association of happiness and virtue was widely shared in the eighteenth century. The same man who coupled liberty and the pursuit of happiness so closely in the Declaration of Independence could later state without equivocation that "Happiness is the aim of life, but virtue is the foundation of happiness." Jefferson's collaborator on the draft of the Declaration and an early member of the American Academy, Benjamin Franklin, similarly observed in 1776, that "virtue and happiness are mother and daughter." This assumption had for many the status of a received truth. But the evidence for it was not at all recent.

On the contrary, it had accumulated so steadily, so imperceptibly over the course of centuries as to become less a self-evident truth than a truth unexamined, one that seemingly required no evidence at all.

It was Aristotle, in the fourth century B.C.E., who first put the matter most forcefully. Happiness, he expounded at length in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, is an "activity of the soul that expresses virtue." For Aristotle, all things in the universe have a purpose, a function, an end (*telos*). And that end, he says, is what gives expression to the highest nature and calling of the thing. In the famous example, the noble end of the acorn is to become a thriving oak, and in the same way the function of the harpist is to play the harp (and of the excellent harpist to play it well).

But can we say that there is a function specific to human beings in general? Aristotle believes that we can, and he identifies it as reason. Reason is what distinguishes us from plants, nonhuman animals, and nonliving things, and so our purpose must involve its fruitful cultivation. Living a life according to reason is for Aristotle the human function, and living an excellent life—reasoning well throughout its course and acting accordingly—is for him a virtuous life. Achieving such a life will bring us happiness, which thus represents our highest calling, our ultimate purpose, the final end to which all others are necessarily subordinate.

Happiness for Aristotle is not a fleeting feeling or an ephemeral passion. It is, rather, the product of a life well lived, the summation of a full, flourishing existence, sustained to the end of one's days, "a complete life."

It follows naturally enough that Aristotle affords at least some place to the role of fortune—chance—in influencing our happiness. For no one would count a man happy, he acknowledges, "who suffered the worst evils and misfortunes." To do so would be to defend a "philosopher's paradox."

In conceding this role to chance as a determinant of happiness, Aristotle, on the one hand, is simply admitting with his characteristic level-headedness the limits on our ability to determine our fate. In a world of uncertainty, anything might happen before the end—a truth, Aristotle affirms, that is well captured in the celebrated phrase of the legislator Solon, "Call no man happy until he is dead." Yet on the other hand, by seeking to circumscribe the role of chance in the first place—to cow it into submission by virtue's superior force—Aristotle was also participating in a much broader philosophical shift, one that directly challenged Solon's ancient wisdom.

In order to fully appreciate this challenge, it is helpful to look for a moment at the principal word in ancient Greek for happiness, *eudaimonia*, one of a constellation of closely related terms that includes *eutychia* (lucky), *olbios* (blessed; favored), and *makarios* (blessed; happy; blissful). [1] In some ways encompassing the meaning of all of these terms, *eudaimon* (happy) literally signifies 'good spirit' or 'good god,' from *eu*=good and *daimon*= demon/spirit. In colloquial terms, to be *eudaimon* was to be lucky, for in a world fraught with constant upheaval, uncertainty, and privation, to have a good spirit working on one's behalf was the ultimate mark of good fortune. Even more it was a mark of divine favor, for the gods, it was believed, worked through the *daimones*, emissaries and conductors of their will. And this, in the pre-Socratic world, was the key to happiness. To fall from divine favor—or to fall under the influence of an evil spirit—was to be *dysdaimon* or *kakodaimon*—'unhappy' (*dys/kako*=bad), or more colorfully, 'in the shit,' a not altogether inappropriate play on the Greek *kakka* (shit/ turds). [2] In a world governed by supernatural forces, human happiness was a plaything of the gods, a spiritual force beyond our control. When viewed through mortal eyes, the world's happenings—and so our happiness—could only appear random, a function of chance.

Central to the outlook of Hesiod and Homer, with strong echoes in many of the lamentations of Greek tragedy, this conception of happiness would prove remarkably stubborn. We need only think of the word itself: in every Indo-European language, the modern words for happiness, as they took shape in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, are all cognate with luck. And so we get 'happiness' from the early Middle English (and Old Norse) *happ*—chance, fortune, what *happens* in the world—and the *Mittelhochdeutsch Glück*, still the modern German word for happiness and luck. There is the Old French *heur* (luck; chance), root of *bonheur* (happiness), and *heureux* (happy); and the Portuguese *felicidade*, the Spanish *felicidad*, and the Italian *felicità*—all derived ultimately from the Latin *felix* for luck (sometimes fate). Happiness, in a word, is what *happens* to us. If we no longer say that we are *kakodaimon* when things don't go our way, we still sometimes acknowledge, rather more prosaically, that "shit happens."

Despite this linguistic tenacity, most people today are probably uncomfortable with the idea that happiness might lie in the roll of the dice. And at least part of the reason for that uneasiness can be traced to Aristotle and his central contention that our behavior is the largest single factor in determining our happiness. Taking his cue from both Socrates and Plato before him, Aristotle avowed faith in human agency, in our ability to control our fortune by controlling our actions and responses to the happenings of the world.

Aristotle's efforts, in this regard, were part of a much broader movement to ensure the inviolability of a flourishing life in the face of external contingency and chance. As Martha Nussbaum has shown, Greek culture of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E., in fact, was obsessed with precisely this dilemma: how to ensure happiness despite what may *happen* to us, despite the unpredictability of luck. [3]

The same question continued to preoccupy the Romans, and indeed it is the response of the Stoic philosophers Cicero and Epictetus that best illustrates the extent of that new faith in human agency. Whereas Aristotle and others had left at least some room for the play of chance in determining happiness, Cicero and Epictetus attempted to rule out its influence altogether. If the man of virtue is the happy man, they argued, then the man of perfect virtue should be happy come what may. Happiness is a function of the will, *not* of external forces. And so, extending this logic to its end point, Cicero is able to conclude that even the most extreme physical suffering should not thwart the happiness of the true Stoic sage.

"Happiness . . . will not tremble, however much it is tortured." The good man can be happy even on the rack.

Like Aristotle, the great majority of the founding fathers of both the American Republic and the American Academy would likely have dismissed such talk as the defense of a philosopher's paradox. Yet in its very exaggeration the example illustrates perfectly the wider— and widely shared—classical view that happiness and pain were by no means mutually exclusive. [4] Happiness itself was not a function of feeling, but a function of virtue. And as such it frequently required denial, sacrifice, even suffering. To anyone in the eighteenth century who had received a classical education—which is to say, the vast majority of educated men and women—this was a powerful set of received assumptions.

And of course Cicero and Epictetus were not the only sources of the assumption that happiness sometimes required suffering, since a very different sort of man had also equated happiness with pain. That man was Jesus Christ, and his instrument of torture, his rack, was the cross.

Admittedly, the image of a mutilated corpse, suspended by nails from planks of wood, and surrounded by weeping women, does not call happiness immediately to mind. One will certainly be forgiven for harboring similar reservations about the religious tradition that grew up around this lugubrious symbol. With reason, it might seem, has Christianity been called the worship of sorrow.

And yet, we need only recall Christ's frequent injunction to "rejoice and be glad" to appreciate that the appeal of this new faith lay in more than simply its invitation to take part in the suffering and sacrifice of its central founder. The promise of redemption *through* suffering—and the promise of a happiness greater than could ever be imagined on Earth—animated the tradition from the outset.

Consider, for example, the nature of Christ's promise in the Gospels, and particularly the ringing good news of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain as recorded, respectively, by Matthew and Luke in the second half of the first century A.D.

Each begins with a series of 'beatitudes,' so named because of the Vulgate translation of the Greek term with which they open. *Beati* in Latin, *makarios* in Greek—the terms are often rendered in English as 'blessed,' although 'happy' would serve equally well, as indeed it does in some English and various other translations, such as in French, where *heureux* from the Old French *heur* is used in

the cannon. What is critical, though, is the original Greek term itself—critical, on the one hand, in that the term is not *eudaimon*, a word that any educated speaker of Greek in the first century would have immediately associated with the tradition of classical philosophy; but critical, on the other, in that *makarios* was itself a term employed frequently by classical authors, including Aristotle and Plato, to signify 'happy' or 'blessed.' More exalted than *eudaimon*, without the same emphasis on chance, *makarios* signified an even loftier state, implying a direct connection to the gods. More importantly, it was the word that had already been chosen by the authors of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament), in their rendering of the classical Hebrew beatitudes, the so-called Ashrel. As Thomas Carlyle was later moved to observe, "There is something higher than happiness, and that is blessedness."

The authors of the New Testament beatitudes would certainly have agreed. Here is Matthew:

> Blessed [beati/*makarios*] are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
>
> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.. . .
>
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
>
> Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
>
> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
>
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
>
> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> (Matthew 5:3—11)

And here is Luke:

> Blessed [beati/*makarios*] are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

> Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
>
> Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
>
> Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.
>
> Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven.
>
> (Luke 6:20—22)

Much, of course, could be said about these curious passages, now nearly two thousand years old. But let it suffice here to emphasize the promise of imminent reward for those living virtuously in the here and now. The merciful, the pure in heart, the meek—all who pursue justice and the way of the Lord—will be given their due, granted mercy, a direct audience with God, intimacy in his family, and the rich legacy of his kingdom. The hungry shall be filled, the mournful shall laugh, their gifts will be great in heaven. And though all are enjoined to rejoice *now* in this expectation—to "leap for joy"—this is essentially a proleptic happiness, a happiness of the future, what Augustine would later call the "happiness of hope."

This Christian conception was tremendously powerful. For the happiness promised in the beatitudes, and subsequently elaborated in Christian tradition, was at once specific in its suggestions of rich reward and extremely, luxuriantly vague. Here the imagination could be set free to revel in the delights of the kingdom of God, to fantasize the total fulfillment that would justify one's earthly pains. All the milk and honey of Jewish deliverance was joined to a new prospect of ecstatic, erotic communion with God, of gazing lovingly into his eyes, "face to face," as the Apostle Paul had promised. The words themselves—release, rapture, passion, bliss—are revealing. Whether in heaven or the New Jerusalem, the happiness of paradise would be entire and eternal, endless and complete.

Even better, the beatific vision offered a seductive rejoinder to Solon's saying "Call no man happy until he is dead." In the Christian account, happiness was death—a proposition that dealt a powerful blow to the vagaries of earthly fortune, while at the same time transforming the end of human life from a boundary into a gateway. Whereas in the classical account, happiness encompassed

the span of a lifetime, Christian beatitude was infinite. And whereas classical happiness remained a comparatively cerebral affair—cool, deliberative, rational, balanced—Christian happiness was unabashedly sensual in its imagined ecstasies. Feeling, intense feeling, was what flowed forth with Christ's blood, transformed in the miracle of the Eucharist from the fruit of intense pain to the sweet nectar of rapture.

And yet, for all their essential differences, there were important similarities between the classical and Christian conceptions. In each tradition, happiness remained an exalted state, a precious reward for great sacrifice, commitment, and pain. The consummation, the crowning glory of a well-lived life, happiness would be granted only to the worthy, the virtuous, the god-like happy few.

As Christianity was fused ever closer with the intellectual inheritance of the classical pagan authors, these similarities were only strengthened. It is no coincidence that when Augustine put pen to paper shortly after his conversion to Christianity in 386, he entitled his first work *De Beata Vita*, The blessed or happy life. True, he treats there the theme that he would develop with such eloquence in the *Confessions* and *The City of God*— that perfect happiness, in this life, is simply not possible, because of original sin. Nonetheless, the work is a classical dialogue, with a message bearing the deep imprint of Plato and Cicero: that the "search for higher happiness, not merely its actual attainment, is a prize beyond all human wealth or honor or physical pleasure." [5] Augustine's continual assurance that although "we do not enjoy a present happiness" we can "look forward to happiness in the future with steadfast endurance," kept this once classical, now Christian, end directly in the sights of all who wandered as pilgrims on the deserts of life.

One could make similar observations with respect to various other pillars of church doctrine, citing Boethius, say, from his influential sixth-century *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in which he repeatedly insists that the "entire thrust of the human will as directed to various pursuits is to hasten towards happiness." And of course there is Aquinas, who in stitching the rediscovered classics of Aristotle—and particularly the *Nichomachean Ethics*—into the tapestry of the medieval church ensured that Aristotle's highest end would endure, with only minor alterations, as the Christian *telos* for centuries to come. By the end of the Renaissance, in fact, Christianity and classicism had grown so closely intertwined on the subject of happiness that works of Christian Stoicism, Christian

Platonism, Christian Aristotelianism, and even Christian Epicureanism tackled the subject in depth. [6]

The existence particularly of Christian Epicurean tracts on happiness may seem odd, even a contradiction in terms. Yet it is too often forgotten that Epicurus himself was an unimpeachable ascetic who taught that "genuine pleasure" was not "the pleasure of profligates," but rather the simple satisfaction of a mind and body at peace. This was a message that less severe Christians could find amenable. And with the changing attitudes toward pleasure that bubbled up from the twelfth-century 'renaissance' through the *Rinascimento* itself, increasing numbers of them did.

The fact is important, for it highlights a tension that had existed in the Christian conception of happiness from the start. On the one hand an earthly existence that demanded denial and renunciation, the embrace of suffering as *imitatio Christi* and the just deserts for original sin. And on the other, the promise of a reward that was often pleasurable—sensual—in the extreme. Heaven may always have seemed a paradise, but beginning in the thirteenth century, its luxuries achieved new levels in the Christian imagination. "In that final happiness every human desire will be fulfilled," Aquinas observes in the *Summa against the Gentiles*, and men and women will know "perfect pleasure," the "perfect delight of the senses," to say nothing of those of the mind. No pleasure, no pleasure at all, would be lacking—even, Aquinas specified (to the later delight of Nietzsche) the pleasure of enjoying others' pain. *Beati in regno coelesti videbunt poenas damnatorum, ut beatitude illis magis compleaceat.* The saved would feast on the sight of the sufferings of the damned.

Creative speculation on the Christian meaning of happiness multiplied during the High Renaissance. In works like Lorenzo Valla's *On Pleasure* (1431) and the monk Celso Maffei's *Pleasing Explanation of the Sensuous Pleasures of Paradise* (1504), to name only two, little was left to the imagination, with accounts brimming over with the delights that awaited the faithful in the world to come. 7 Classical descriptions of Elysium, the Blessed Isles, and the pagan Golden Age were freely adapted to give spice to the afterlife, as were Christians' own accounts of the Paradise before the Fall, where, as Augustine had stressed, "true joy [had] flowed perpetually from God." The Renaissance imagination thus ranged freely forward to the joys that would come, and backward to those that had been. But the impulse to do so in such graphic detail clearly came from the present. The imagined pleasures beyond, that is,

were a reflection of the greater acceptance of pleasure in the here and now.

The reasons for such a broad shift are of course complex. But in terms of ideas, an important place must be given to Aquinas and his fellow Christian Aristotelians. For by de-emphasizing the total, vitiating effects of original sin, and emphasizing the place of virtue as man's *telos*, they carved out a space for cultivating and improving earthly life. To be sure, perfect happiness (*beatitudo perfecto*) would still come only with death by grace. But in the meantime, one could prepare for it by cultivating imperfect happiness (*felicitas* or *beatitudo imperfecto*) along the ladder that led to human perfection. It was by climbing— pulling oneself upward—on the heights of just such a liberal theology that Christian humanists like Erasmus and Thomas More were able to conceive of an earthly existence that was rather more than a vale of tears.

In some respects, it is true, the Protestant Reformation—with its recovery of a dour, Augustinian theology of sin—tended to put a damper on this open indulgence of pleasure. And certainly the terrible violence of the ensuing Religious Wars did little to minimize pain. Yet it should also be stressed that for all their emphasis on human depravity, Calvin and Luther were by no means ill disposed to pleasure. The damned might well be "vessels of wrath," in Calvin's words, but for those in whom the workings of grace could be detected, the joys of the new Adam were at hand. As Luther felt moved to observe in his preface to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith.

Calvin, for his part, observed in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that God's grace was the alchemy that could transform human misery—including poverty, wretchedness, exile, ignominy, imprisonment, and contempt—into gold. "When the favor of God breathes upon us, there is none of these things which may not turn out to our happiness." [8] The trick of course was to be certain of God's grace and forgiveness, a certainty that in theory at least could never be had. But as Max Weber famously observed, one could always be on the lookout for signs. Did it not make sense to see earthly happiness as an indication that one might be headed in the direction of everlasting content? Not only fortune was evidence of good fortune. The ability to take pleasure in the wonders of God's creation was also an encouraging sign.

In this respect, it is fair to say that just as Epicurus was hardly epicurean, Protestants and Puritans were much less puritanical than is often supposed. The sanctioning of sexual pleasure within marriage, the "affirmation of ordinary life" entailed in the enjoinder to seek God in all things, and the constant reminder that the Creator's perfect creation appeared ugly only to those who saw it through sinful eyes—all this went some way toward establishing the proposition that pleasure might be taken as a sign of grace, that happiness might be a direct reflection of the virtuous Christian soul. 9

Thus, the Reverend Thomas Coleman, preaching before the English Parliament on August 30, 1643, likened his countrymen's struggle against Charles I to the ancient Israelites' "long pursuit of happinesse," arguing that they might be confident in attaining their end. [10] It was a felicitous phrase, and in the coming years Englishmen of a variety of persuasions employed it regularly, echoing the conviction of the author of the 1641 tract *The Way to Happiness on Earth* that this was where our journey began. [11] "The being in a state of Grace will yield . . . both a Heaven here, and Heaven hereafter," rendering "a man's condition happy, safe, and sure," emphasized the Puritan millenarian Thomas Brooks. [12] By the time of the Restoration, even High Church authors were penning popular tracts on the art of contentment, as if to give credence to an earlier author's claim that "happinesse is the language of all." "We must look through all things upon happinesse," this author observed, "and through happinesse upon all things." [13]

The claims of these seventeenth-century British divines bring us very close to the truly momentous proposition that pleasure and happiness might be considered good in and of themselves. And it should not surprise us that one of the first authors to entertain this bold suggestion—John Locke—evolved directly out of this same religious milieu.

The son of a Puritan who had fought for Cromwell in the English Civil War, Locke himself, to be sure, was no orthodox Calvinist. And whatever insight he may have gleaned from Christian sources regarding happiness was no doubt amply supplemented by his immersion in Newtonian science and his understanding of Epicurus (as interpreted by the French priest Pierre Gassendi, whose writings Locke studied on happiness closely). Quite rightly, as a consequence, historians have long emphasized the latter influences in shaping Locke's work, particularly the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), in which he presents his celebrated conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, born without innate ideas

or the corruptions of original sin, animated by sensations of pleasure and pain.

In the famous chapter "Power" in book 2 of that work, Locke uses the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" no fewer than four times. And he indeed employs a variety of Newtonian metaphors —stones that fall, tennis balls hit by racquets, and billiard balls struck by cues—to describe the ways in which human beings are propelled, and propel themselves, through the space of their lives. The force that moves them, we learn, the power that draws them near, is the desire for happiness, which acts through the gravitational push and pull of pleasure and pain. We are drawn by the one and repulsed by the other, and it is right that this is so. For in Locke's divinely orchestrated universe, pleasure is providential; it is a foretaste of the goodness of a God who desires the happiness of his creatures. "Pleasure in us," it follows, "is that we call good, and what is apt to produce pain in us, we call evil." And happiness in its full extent is simply "the utmost pleasure we are capable of."

Here, then, was the monumental formulation. Redeeming pleasure, it unabashedly coupled good feeling with the good.

Its influence on the eighteenth century was profound. There was virtue in pleasure, Locke's readers came to believe, and pleasure in virtue. Being good meant feeling good. Arguably, there was no more widespread Enlightenment assumption. Moral sense theorists like Frances Hutcheson and Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui shared it, as did the Unitarian Joseph Priestly and the psychologist David Hartley. David Hume maintained as much, right alongside the French philosophers Helvétius and Condillac and the Italian legal theorist Cesare Beccaria. And of course there was Bentham with his felicific calculus of pleasure and pain, to say nothing of Jefferson and Franklin.

All of these men, as it happens, were deeply indebted to Locke's *Essay*. But by the second half of the eighteenth century, even many who were not tended to share its key assumptions. [14] The anonymous author of *True Pleasure, Chearfulness, and Happiness, The Immediate Consequence of Religion*, published in Philadelphia in 1767, gave no evidence of having read the wise Mr. Locke. But he undoubtedly believed with him that God delighted to see his creatures happy, and that pleasure itself was a very good thing. Christ, he argued, was a 'Happy Christ,' who had revealingly performed his first miracle at a wedding, where not coincidentally there was feasting, dancing, and ample wine. The heavenly Father, surely, did not frown on mirth; he smiled fondly upon it.

This author was probably more upbeat than most. But he was not alone in proclaiming earthly happiness to be a direct consequence of religion. By the latter part of the late eighteenth century, in fact, Christian writers on both sides of the Atlantic—Protestant and Catholic alike—were churning out works that made precisely this claim, arguing that Christianity was an excellent means to a much coveted earthly end. In this way, religion itself took part in the great Utilitarian current that swept the century, sweeping up all things in its midst. And if happiness and pleasure—good feeling and amusement—were now expected even of religion in this life, they could be required of most anything. Increasingly they were, making unprecedented demands on places, professions, laws, relationships, governments, scientific academies—even essays on happiness, of which there were more written in the eighteenth century than in any previous age.

It bears repeating how radical this transformation was. For henceforth religion would be asked not only to serve salvation, but to serve what in a secularizing culture was treated ever more like an end in itself: earthly happiness. Already in the early nineteenth century Tocqueville could point out that when listening to American preachers it was difficult to be sure "whether the main object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the next world or prosperity in this." He would have much more difficulty today.

It has long been a truism of modern historiography that this shift from the happiness of heaven to the happiness of Earth was a product of the Enlightenment, the consequence of its assault on revealed religion and its own validation of secular pleasure. I would not dispute the main lines of this interpretation, but as I have tried to suggest here, it is also the case that the shift toward happiness on Earth occurred *within* the Christian tradition as well as without.

And this fact is important, for it helps to account for the ways in which eighteenth-century men and women were able to shield themselves for so long from an uncomfortable truth. Namely, as Immanuel Kant would point out with such force at the end of the century, that "making a man happy [was] quite different from making him good." Kant, writing in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), used the term 'happy' in its eighteenth-century sense, as pleasure or good feeling—and clearly he was right. For if the proposition that doing good (living virtuously) meant feeling good (being happy) was always debatable, it was far more dubious still that feeling good meant being good. Virtue,

Kant reaffirmed, with an air of common sense, was sometimes painful. And those who were happy, who felt good, were sometimes bad.

He might easily have added that by the logic of the pleasure/pain calculus, not only was it good to feel good, but it was bad to feel bad. Sadness, by this measure, would be a sin, and those who experienced it would justly feel guilty for doing so. It may be that in our own day we are close to this point. But in the eighteenth century, the proposition would still have shocked. The question is why—why did not more people think through the implications and the logic of one of the century's most dominant ethical impulses?

One answer is that they did not want to—all ages, after all, have their willful blind spots, our own day no less than the 1760s—and certainly it was nice to believe that feeling good and being good were mostly one and the same. But most men and women in the eighteenth century were simply *not able* to think through the implications of their increasingly contradictory assumptions about happiness—not able, that is, to see with the piercing vision of a Kant the contradictions that lay at the heart of the century's newly self-evident truths.

Admittedly, there were radicals who pushed the logic of the pleasure/pain calculus to its ultimate extreme. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, for one, or the Marquis de Sade, for another, argued that if pleasure was good, and pain was bad, then the most intense forms of pleasure—sexual or even criminal— should be embraced with virtuous gusto. "Renounce the idea of another world; there is none," Sade observes in his "Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man" (1782). "But do not renounce the pleasure of being happy and of making for happiness in this." If the world, in short, could offer nothing better than pleasure, then should not pleasure be pursued to the hilt? And what was more pleasurable, Sade wanted to know, than a good fuck?

Such exceptions, however, prove the rule. For Sade and La Mettrie were written off as pariahs, decried as scandalous, condemned as immoral, accused of lacking virtue. Their pleasure was not happiness, contemporaries charged, but egotism, immorality, indulgence, and vice. But the assumption that many fell back on to level this charge was not the century's newly self-evident conception of happiness as utilitarian pleasure. They fell back instead on the teachings about happiness that had accumulated slowly over the centuries, amassed by Hebrews and Hellenes, classicists and Christians: that happiness and virtue, happiness and right action,

happiness and godliness did indeed walk in step, but that the journey was often difficult, demanding sacrifice, commitment, even pain. That happiness, if it came at all, was not a right of being human, but a reward, the product of a life well lived.

In the eighteenth century there were still enough Stoics and close readers of the Bible—men and women steeped in classical teachings on happiness and rich in the legacy of Christian virtue—so as not to efface completely the line that separated being good from feeling good. The eighteenth century still lived on this inheritance—but we might say that it lived on borrowed time.

To his immense credit, John Locke understood this dilemma, saw with a perspicacity and foresight that rivaled Kant's own the problems raised by the novel pursuits he set in motion. In the very chapter "Power" of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke acknowledged, with more than a nod to his Calvinist past, that what prevented his system from devolving into a simple relativism of feeling was the prospect that one would judge the virtue of present pleasures and present pains—abstaining and acting accordingly—on the basis of future pleasures to come. This was "the reasonableness of Christianity." As he emphasized again, with reasonableness, in a later work of that name:

Open [men's] eyes upon the endless unspeakable joys of another life and their hearts will find something solid and powerful to move them. The view of heaven and hell will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains of this present state, and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason and interest, and the care of ourselves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm. [15]

By contrast, Locke conceded in the chapter "Power" of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Were all the Concerns of Man terminated in this Life, then why one followed Study and Knowledge, and another Hawking and Hunting; why one chose Luxury and Debauchery, and another Sobriety and Riches," would simply be "because their *Happiness* was placed in different things." "For if there be no Prospect beyond the Grave, the inference is certainly right, *Let us eat and drink*, let us enjoy what we delight in, *for tomorrow we shall die*."

In such a world, why men and women should read the publications of the American Academy if it did not feel good to do so—or perform any number of other virtuous tasks—was not immediately apparent. 🕮

Endnotes

1. On this subject, see Cornelius de Heer, *Makar, Eudaimon, Olbios, Eutychia: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*(Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969).

2. The *kak-* root (bad) in Greek bears no direct linguistic relationship to the *kakk-* root (caca; turds). Yet the classical Greeks used *kak-* words as generic forms of cursing to signify 'damn,' or perhaps even more strongly, 'oh shit,' thus rendering the pun plausible if not immediately apparent in formal terms. I am grateful to Jeffrey Henderson of Boston University for sharing his expertise on this matter. On the Greek penchant for such punning in general, see Henderson's wonderful *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

3. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

4. This, I would argue, is true even of Epicureanism, although the case is certainly complicated. For more on Epicurus, see below.

5. This is a phrase from Cicero's lost manuscript, *Hortensius*, which Augustine knew well. See Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, Past Masters series (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 24.

6. See Charles Trinkhaus, *Adversity's Noblemen: The Italian Humanists on Happiness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

7. See the concise account in Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 5, "The Pleasures of Renaissance Paradise."

8. On the subject of happiness in Calvin's thought, see Heiko A. Oberman, "The Pursuit of Happiness: Calvin between Humanism and Reformation," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1993).

9. The phrase "affirmation of ordinary life" is that of Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

10. Thomas Coleman, *The Christian's Course and Complaint, Both in the Pursuit of Happinesse Desired, and for Advantages Slipped in that Pursuit: A Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons on the Monthly Fast Day, August 30, 1643* (London: Christopher Meredith, 1643).

11. Robert Crofts, *The Way to Happinesse on Earth Concerning Riches, Honour, Conjugall Love, Eating, Drinking* (London: Printed for G. H., 1641).

12. Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth, or, A Serious Discourse Touching a Well-Grounded Assurance of Men's Everlasting Happiness and Blessedness*(London: Printed for John Hancock, Senior and Junior, 1657), preface.

13. Richard Holdsworth, *The Peoples Happinesse. A Sermon Preached in St. Maries in Cambridge, Upon Sunday the 27 of March, Being the Day of His Majesties Happy Inauguration* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1642), 2, 5—6. Holdsworth was master of Emanuel College and vice chancellor of the university. Richard Allestree's *The Art of Contentment* (Oxford: At the Theater, 1675) went through over twenty editions and was still in print in the nineteenth century. Allestree, a leading royalist divine, was the provost of Eaton.

14. On the importance of Locke and the primacy of pleasure in the eighteenth century, see Roy Porter, "Enlightenment Pleasure," in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

15. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), 70.

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