

QUESTION 33

The Effects of Pleasure

Next we have to consider the effects of pleasure. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Does pleasure widen (*dilatate*) an individual? (2) Is pleasure a cause of a thirst or desire for pleasure? (3) Does pleasure impede the use of reason? (4) Does pleasure bring an operation to perfection?

Article 1

Is being widened an effect of pleasure?

It seems that being widened (*dilatatio*) is not an effect of pleasure:

Objection 1: According to the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 6:11 (“..... our heart is widened (*dilatatum est*)”), being widened seems to have more to do with love. Hence, Psalm 118:96 says of the precept of charity, “Your commandment is exceedingly wide.” But pleasure is a passion distinct from love. Therefore, being widened is not an effect of pleasure.

Objection 2: By the fact that something is widened, it becomes more capacious for receiving things. But receiving has to do with desire, which is directed at a thing that is not yet possessed. Therefore, being widened seems relevant to desire rather than to pleasure.

Objection 3: Squeezing or holding on tightly to something (*constrictio*) is opposed to widening it (*dilatatio*). But it is holding on tightly to something that seems relevant to pleasure. For we hold on tightly to what we strongly want to keep, and this is the sort of appetitive affection that is directed toward something that gives pleasure. Therefore, being widened is irrelevant to pleasure.

But contrary to this: To express joy, Isaiah 60:5 says, “You will see and abound, and your heart will wonder and be widened (*dilatabitur cor tuum*).” Moreover, pleasure itself (*ipsa delectatio*) takes its name from ‘*dilatatio*’ (being widened), in the same way that, as was explained above (q. 31, a. 3), ‘*laetitia*’ (gladness) does.

I respond: Width (*latitudo*) is a dimension of corporeal magnitude, and so in the case of the affections of the soul it is predicated only metaphorically (*non nisi secundum metaphoram dicitur*). Now being widened is, as it were, a movement with respect to width, and it belongs to pleasure with respect to the two things that are required for pleasure:

One of them has to do with the *apprehensive* power, which apprehends the conjoining of some fitting good. Now by this apprehension a man apprehends that he has acquired a certain perfection, i.e., a ‘spiritual’ magnitude, and the man’s mind is accordingly said to be made larger or to be widened by the pleasure (*animus hominis dicitur per delectationem magnificari seu dilatari*).

The other has to do with the *appetitive* power, which assents to the pleasurable thing and comes to rest in it by in some sense surrendering itself to it in order to grasp it interiorly. And so a man’s affections are widened by pleasure in the sense that they give themselves over, as it were, to containing interiorly the thing that gives pleasure.

Reply to objection 1: In the case of things that are predicated metaphorically, nothing prevents the same thing from being attributed to diverse things in accord with diverse likenesses. Accordingly, being widened pertains to *love* by reason of a certain extension, in the sense that the lover’s affections are extended to others, in order that he might care about not just what belongs to him but what belongs to others as well. By contrast, being widened pertains to *pleasure* because something is widened in itself in the sense of being rendered more capacious.

Reply to objection 2: Desire receives some amplification from imagining the desired thing, but much more amplification it received from the presence of a thing that is already giving pleasure. For the mind offers itself to a greater degree to a thing that is already giving pleasure than to a desired thing that is not yet possessed, since pleasure is a goal of desire.

Reply to objection 3: Someone who is taking pleasure does, to be sure, hold on tightly to the thing

that gives pleasure as long as he adheres to it strongly, but his heart grows larger in order that he might enjoy the pleasurable thing completely.

Article 2

Is pleasure a cause of a desire for pleasure itself?

It seems that pleasure is not a cause of a desire for pleasure itself (*non causet desiderium sui ipsius*):

Objection 1: Every movement ceases when it arrives at rest. But as was explained above (q. 25, a. 2), pleasure is a sort of rest associated with the movement of desire (*quasi quaedam quies motus desiderii*). Therefore, the movement of desire ceases when it arrives at pleasure. Therefore, pleasure is not a cause of desire.

Objection 2: An opposite is not a cause of its opposite. But as regards its object, pleasure is in a certain sense opposed to desire, since desire is directed toward a good that is not possessed, whereas pleasure is directed at a good that is already possessed. Therefore, pleasure is not a cause of a desire for pleasure itself.

Objection 3: A distaste for something is opposed to a desire for it. But pleasure is very often a cause of distaste. Therefore, it does not effect a desire for pleasure.

But contrary to this: In John 4:13 our Lord says, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,” where, according to Augustine, ‘water’ signifies corporeal pleasure.

I respond: Pleasure can be thought of in two ways: insofar as it exists *in actuality*, and insofar as it exists *in memory*. Likewise, thirst or desire can be understood in two ways: *properly*, insofar as it implies an appetite for a thing that is not possessed, and *generally*, insofar as it implies [just] the exclusion of anything distasteful (*secundum quod importat exclusionem fastidii*).

Thus, insofar as it exists *in actuality*, pleasure is not, speaking *per se*, a cause of a thirst or desire for pleasure itself. Instead, it is only *per accidens* a cause of a thirst or desire for pleasure, as long as ‘thirst’ or ‘desire’ is being predicated of an appetite for a thing that is not possessed. For pleasure is an appetitive affection with respect to a thing that is present.

However, it is possible for a thing that is present not to be possessed perfectly. This can happen either on the side of *the thing that is possessed* or on the side of *the one who possesses it*:

On the side of *the thing that is possessed*, because the thing that is possessed does not exist all at once and so is received successively, and because while someone takes pleasure in what he does possess, he desires to enjoy what still remains. For instance, as Augustine says in *Confessiones* 4, someone who hears the first part of a verse and takes pleasure in it desires to hear the other part of the verse. And in this sense almost all corporeal pleasures are a cause of a thirst for themselves, up to the point of their being consummated. For pleasures of this sort follow a certain movement, as is clear in the case of the pleasures of food.

On the side of *the one who possesses it*, as when one possesses a thing that exists as a whole within him (*habet aliquam rem in se perfectam existentem*), but does not at once possess it completely and instead acquires it little by little. For instance, in this world we take pleasure when we perceive imperfectly something of the knowledge of God, and the pleasure itself excites a thirst or desire for perfect knowledge—this according to a possible interpretation of Ecclesiasticus 24:29 (“They who drink of me will still thirst”).

By contrast, if by ‘thirst’ or ‘desire’ one means just an intense affection without distaste, then it is spiritual pleasures that especially effect a thirst or desire for pleasure itself. For since increased, or even prolonged, corporeal pleasures overwhelm the natural condition (*faciunt superexcrementiam naturalis habitudinis*), they become distasteful (*efficiuntur fastidiosae*), as is clear in the case of the pleasures of

food. Because of this, when someone has already reached a completeness in corporeal pleasures, he finds them distasteful and sometimes desires other pleasures instead. By contrast, spiritual pleasures do not produce an overload in the natural condition, but instead perfect nature. Hence, when consummation is reached in the case of these pleasures, then they are more pleasurable—except perhaps *per accidens*, insofar as the contemplative operation has adjoined to it certain operations of the corporeal powers, which are wearied by persistent operation. And it is in this way that one can understand Ecclesiasticus 24:29 (“They who drink of me will still thirst.”) For even of the angels, who know God perfectly and take pleasure in Him, 1 Peter 1:12 says, “They desire to look at Him.”

On the other hand, if pleasure is thought of insofar as it exists *in memory* and not in actuality, then it is *per se* apt to be a cause of a thirst and desire for pleasure itself, viz., when the man returns to the disposition in which what has now passed was pleasurable to him. However, if he has departed from that disposition, then the memory of pleasure is a cause of aversion in him and not of pleasure, as in the case of the memory of food for one who is now full.

Reply to objection 1: When the pleasure is complete (*perfecta*), it then has rest in the full sense (*habet omnimodam quietem*), and the movement of desire toward what is not possessed ceases. But when pleasure is had incompletely (*imperfecte*), then the movement of desire toward what is not possessed does not cease altogether.

Reply to objection 2: What is had incompletely is had in one respect and not had in another respect. And so both desire and pleasure can exist simultaneously with respect to it.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, pleasures are a cause of aversion (*fastidium*) in one way and of desire in another way.

Article 3

Does pleasure impede the use of reason?

It seems that pleasure does not impede the use of reason:

Objection 1: Rest confers what is especially needed for the use of reason; hence, *Physics* 7 says, “When we sit and rest, the soul becomes knowledgeable and prudent,” and *Wisdom* 8:16 says, “Going into my house, I will repose with her,” i.e. with wisdom. But pleasure is a kind of rest. Therefore, it does not impede the use of reason, but instead assists it.

Objection 2: Things that do not exist in the same thing do not impede one another, even if they are contraries. But pleasure exists in the appetitive part of the soul, whereas the use of reason exists in the apprehensive part. Therefore, pleasure does not impede the use of reason.

Objection 3: What is impeded by another seems to be changed by it in some way. But the use of the apprehensive power affects pleasure instead of being affected by it, since it is a cause of pleasure. Therefore, pleasure does not impede the use of reason.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 7 the Philosopher says, “Pleasure corrupts the judgment of prudence.”

I respond: As *Ethics* 10 says, “Proper pleasures add to operations, whereas extraneous pleasures impede them.” Thus, there is a certain pleasure which is had by the act of reason, as when someone takes pleasure in contemplating or in reasoning. This sort of pleasure does not impede the use of reason but instead assists it; for we do more attentively that which we take pleasure in, and attention aids an operation.

By contrast, there are three reasons why corporeal pleasures impede the use of reason:

First, because of *distraction*. For as has already been explained, we pay close attention to what we take pleasure in, and when attention is strongly fixed on a given thing, it is weakened with respect to other things or totally withdrawn from them. Accordingly, if a corporeal pleasure is great, then either it

will totally impede the use of reason by attracting the soul's attention to itself, or else it will impede it to a great degree.

Second, because of *opposition*. For certain pleasures, especially excessive ones, are contrary to the order of reason. And on this score the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 6 that “corporeal pleasures corrupt the judgment of prudence, though not speculative judgments, e.g., that a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles.” (However, pleasure impedes both sorts of judgment in the first way mentioned above.)

Third, because of a sort of *shackling* (*secundum quandam ligationem*), viz., insofar as what follows upon pleasure is a certain corporeal change—even greater than in the case of the other passions, since the appetite is affixed more strongly to a present thing than to an absent thing. Corporeal disturbances of this sort impede the use of reason, as is clear in the case of drunkards, whose use of reason is shackled or impeded (*ligatum vel impeditum*).

Reply to objection 1: Corporeal pleasure does, to be sure, involve the appetite's coming to rest in the pleasurable thing, and this rest is sometimes contrary to reason. And on the part of the body, pleasure always involves a change. In both of these respects, pleasure impedes the use of reason.

Reply to objection 2: The appetitive and apprehensive parts of the soul are, to be sure, diverse parts, but they are parts of a single soul. And so when the soul's attention is strongly applied to the act of one of these parts, a contrary act by the other part is impeded.

Reply to objection 3: The use of reason requires the appropriate use of the imagination and other sentient powers, which employ a corporeal organ. And so the use of reason is impeded by a corporeal change when the acts of the imaginative power and of the other sentient powers are impeded.

Article 4

Does pleasure perfect an operation?

It seems that pleasure does not perfect an action or operation (*non perficiat operationem*):

Objection 1: Every human operation depends on the use of reason. But as has been explained (a. 3), pleasure impedes the use of reason. Therefore, pleasure weakens and does not perfect a human operation.

Objection 2: Nothing perfects either itself or its own cause. But as *Ethics* 7 and 10 explain, pleasure is an operation, and this has to be understood either with respect to its essence or with respect to its cause. Therefore, pleasure does not perfect an operation.

Objection 3: If pleasure perfects an operation, then it perfects it either as an end or as a form or as an agent. But not as an end, since operations are not sought for the sake of pleasure; instead, as was explained above (q. 4, a. 2), it is just the opposite. Nor, again, in the manner of an efficient cause, since it is instead the operation that is an efficient cause of the pleasure. Nor, again, as a form, since, according to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 10, pleasure does not perfect an operation as a sort of habit. Therefore, pleasure does not perfect an operation.

But contrary to this: *Ethics* 10 says that pleasure perfects an operation.

I respond: There are two ways in which pleasure perfects an operation.

In the first way, in the manner of an *end*—not, to be sure, in the sense in which an end is *that for the sake of which* something exists, but rather in the sense in which every good that is *added by way of completion* can be called an end (*omne bonum completive superveniens potest dici finis*). Accordingly, in *Ethics* 10 the Philosopher says, “Pleasure perfects an operation as a sort of supervening end,” viz., in the sense that over and beyond the good which is the operation itself, there supervenes another good which is the pleasure and which involves the appetite's coming to rest in the previously mentioned good (*quae importat quietationem appetitus in bono praesupposito*).

In the second way, on the side of the *agent cause*—not *directly*, to be sure, since in *Ethics* 10 the

Philosopher says that “pleasure perfects an operation not in the way that a physician perfects a healthy man, but in the way that health perfects him,” but instead *indirectly*, viz., insofar as an agent who takes pleasure in his action pays closer attention to that action and carries it out more diligently. Accordingly, *Ethics* 10 says, “Pleasures augment their own operations and impede extraneous operations.”

Reply to objection 1: It is not all pleasures that impede the act of reason, but rather corporeal pleasures, which do not follow upon an act of reason, but instead follow upon an act of the concupiscible part that is augmented by pleasure. By contrast, pleasure that follows upon an act of reason strengthens the use of reason.

Reply to objection 2: As *Physics* 2 says, it is possible for two things to cause one another in such a way that the first is an efficient cause of the second and the second is a final cause of the first. And in this way, as has been explained, an operation is a cause of pleasure as an efficient cause, whereas the pleasure perfects the operation in the manner of an end.

Reply to objection 3: The reply to the third objection is clear from what has been said.