

## QUESTION 39

### The Goodness and Badness of Sadness or Pain

Next we have to consider the remedies for pain or sadness. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is every instance of sadness bad? (2) Can sadness be an upright good (*bonum honestum*)? (3) Can sadness be a useful good (*bonum utile*)? (4) Is bodily pain the greatest evil?

#### Article 1

##### Is every instance of sadness bad?

It seems that every instance of sadness is bad:

**Objection 1:** Gregory of Nyssa says, “Every instance of sadness is bad by its very nature (*sui ipsius natura*).” But what is bad by its nature is always and everywhere bad. Therefore, every instance of sadness is bad.

**Objection 2:** What all men, including virtuous men, avoid is bad. But all men, including virtuous men, avoid sadness; for as *Ethics 7* says, “Even if a prudent man does not intend to take pleasure, he nonetheless does intend not to be saddened.” Therefore, sadness is bad.

**Objection 3:** Just as a bad corporeal thing is an object and cause of corporeal pain, so a bad spiritual thing is an object and cause of spiritual sadness. But every corporeal pain is bad for the body. Therefore, every instance of spiritual sadness is bad for the soul.

**But contrary to this:** Being sad about what is bad is opposed to taking pleasure in what is bad (*tristitia de malo contrariatur delectationi de malo*). But taking pleasure in what is bad is itself bad; hence, in denouncing certain people Proverbs 2:14 says, “They rejoiced over having done evil.” Therefore, being sad about what is evil is itself good.

**I respond:** There are two ways in which something can be said to be good or bad:

In one way, it can be said to be good or bad absolutely speaking and in its own right (*simpliciter et secundum se*). And in this sense every instance of sadness is something bad. For the very fact that a man’s appetite is troubled by a present evil (*anxiari de malo praesenti*) has the character of badness, since the appetite is thereby prevented from coming to rest in the good.

In the second way, a thing is said to be good or bad given some assumption about something else (*ex suppositione alterius*). For instance, as *Ethics 9* points out, shame is said to be good on the assumption that some disgraceful deed has been committed. So, then, assuming the presence of something sad or painful, it is good (*ad bonitatem pertinet*) that someone should be saddened or pained by this present evil. For one could not fail to be saddened or pained unless either because he is insensitive (*non sentiret*) or because he does not regard the thing in question as repugnant—and each of these is manifestly bad. And so it is good that, given the presence of something bad, sadness or pain should follow. This is a point Augustine makes in *Super Genesim ad Litteram 8*: “It is a good thing for him to be saddened over the good he has lost. For if nothing good had remained in his nature, then there would have been no pain over the good that was lost in his punishment.”

However, since moral discourse is about singular cases, which are what actions (*operationes*) have to do with, what is good on an assumption ought to be judged good, in the same way that, as *Ethics 3* says and as was established above (q. 6, a. 6), what is voluntary on an assumption is judged to be voluntary.

**Reply to objection 1:** Gregory of Nyssa is speaking of sadness from the side of the bad thing that causes sadness (*ex parte mali tristantis*) and not from the side of the one who perceives and repudiates that bad thing. It is likewise true from this perspective that everyone flees from sadness insofar as they flee from what is bad; however, they do not flee from perceiving and repudiating what is bad.

And one should reply in the same way about corporeal pain. For it attests to a good nature that one

should sense and reject what is bad for the body.

**Reply to objection 2 and objection 3:** From this the replies to the second and third objections are clear.

## Article 2

### Does sadness have the character of an upright good?

It seems that sadness does not have the character of an upright good (*non habeat rationem boni honesti*):

**Objection 1:** What leads one to Hell (*ad inferos*) is opposed to what is upright. But as Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, “Jacob seems to have been afraid of being so troubled by his great sadness that he would go to the Hell of sinners and not to the rest of the blessed.” Therefore, sadness does not have the character of an upright good.

**Objection 2:** An upright good has the character of being praiseworthy and meritorious. But sadness lessens praise and merit; for in 2 Corinthians 9:7 the Apostle says, “Each one, as he has determined in his own heart, not out of sadness or necessity .....” Therefore, sadness is not an upright good.

**Objection 3:** As Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 14, “Sadness is has to do with what happens to us against our will.” But not to will what happens at present is to have an act of will that is opposed to the plan of God, whose providence is such that everything which happens is subject to it. Therefore, since, as was explained above (q. 19, a. 9), the human will’s being conformed to God’s will is part of the will’s uprightness (*cum conformitas humanae voluntatis ad divinam pertineat ad rectitudinem voluntatis*), it seems that sadness is contrary to uprightness of will. And so it does not have the character of an upright good.

**But contrary to this:** Whatever merits eternal life has the character of being upright. But sadness is one of these things, as is clear from what Matthew 5:5 says: “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be consoled.” Therefore, sadness is an upright good.

**I respond:** Given the sense in which sadness is a good, it can be an upright good. For as has been explained (a. 1), sadness is a good because of the *recognition* and the *rejection* of what is bad.

In the case of bodily pain, these two things point to the goodness of nature, which is the source of (a) the sensory power’s act of sensing and of (b) the nature’s shrinking back from the hurtful thing that causes the pain.

On the other hand, in the case of interior sadness, the recognition of what is bad is sometimes the result of an upright judgment on the part of reason (*cognitio mali quandoque quidem est per rectum iudicium rationis*), and the rejection of what is bad is the result of a well-disposed will that detests what is bad (*recusatio mali est per voluntatem bene dispositam detestantem malum*). But every upright good proceeds from these two sources, viz., from uprightness on the part of reason and on the part of the will (*ex rectitudine rationis et voluntatis*).

Hence, it is clear that sadness can have the character of an upright good.

**Reply to objection 1:** All the passions of the soul should be regulated by the rule of reason, which is the root of the upright good. Immoderate sadness goes beyond this rule and so recedes from the character of the upright good, and it is this sort of sadness that Augustine is talking about.

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as sadness about what is bad proceeds from an upright will and reason that detests what is bad, so sadness about what is good proceeds from a perverse will and reason that detest the good. And so this latter sort of sadness obstructs the praise or merit that belongs to an upright good, as in the case of someone who gives alms with sadness.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are some things that happen in the present, e.g., sins, that are done not in accord with God's will, but instead with God's permission (*non fiunt Deo volente sed Deo permittente*). Hence, a will that is opposed to sin either within itself or in another is not in disagreement with God's will.

On the other hand, evils of punishment (*mala poenalia*) occur in the present even in accord with God's will. However, as was explained above (q. 19, a. 10), uprightness of will requires not that a man will such things in their own right, but only that he not work against the order of God's justice.

### Article 3

#### Can sadness be a useful good?

It seems that sadness cannot be a useful good:

**Objection 1:** Ecclesiasticus 30:25 says, "Sadness kills many, and there is no usefulness in it."

**Objection 2:** Choice has to do with what is useful for some end. But sadness is not the sort of thing that can be chosen (*tristitia non est eligibilis*); at the very least, as *Topics* 3 points out, "a thing without sadness should be chosen over the same thing with sadness." Therefore, sadness is not a useful good.

**Objection 3:** As *De Coelo* 2 says, "Every entity exists for the sake of its own operation." But as *Ethics* 10 says, "Sadness impedes an operation." Therefore, sadness does not have the character of a useful good.

**But contrary to this:** A wise man seeks only what is useful. But Ecclesiastes 7:5 says, "The heart of wise men is where sadness abides, and the heart of fools is where mirth abides." Therefore, sadness is useful.

**I respond:** There are two appetitive movements that arise in the face of a present evil:

There is one movement by which the appetite is opposed to the present evil. And on this score sadness does not have any usefulness, since what is present is unable not to be present.

The second movement rises up in the appetite to flee from or repel the evil that is causing the sadness. And on this score, sadness has usefulness if it is directed at something that should be fled from. For there are two reasons why something should be fled from:

First, because of its very self (*propter seipsum*), in light of its opposition to the good. Sin is of this sort. And so sadness about sin is useful in order that a man might flee from sin; as the Apostle puts it in 2 Corinthians 7:9: "I rejoice not because you have been saddened, but because you have been saddened unto repentance."

The second reason for which something should be fled from is not that it is bad in its own right (*non quia sit secundum se malum*), but that it is an occasion of something bad when a man adheres to it excessively out of love for it, or also when he thereby falls into something bad. Temporal goods are clearly of this sort. Accordingly, sadness about temporal goods can be useful in the way described in Ecclesiastes 7:3: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for in the former we are reminded of the end of all men."

Now the reason why sadness about all the things that should be fled from is useful in that one's reasons for fleeing are doubled. For (a) the bad thing itself should be fled from in its own right, whereas (b) everyone flees from sadness itself in its own right—just as, similarly, everyone (a) desires the good and (b) desires to take pleasure in the good. Therefore, just as taking pleasure in the good makes one seek the good more eagerly, so, too, being sad about what is bad makes one flee from what is bad more resolutely (*vehementius*).

**Reply to objection 1:** This passage is talking about immoderate sadness, which absorbs the mind.

For as was explained above (q. 37, a. 2), sadness of this sort immobilizes the mind and makes it difficult for one to avoid what is bad.

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as everything that can be chosen becomes less choiceworthy because of sadness, so everything that should be fled from becomes, because of sadness, even more such that it should be fled from. And it is in this respect that sadness is useful.

**Reply to objection 3:** Sadness about an action impedes the action, but sadness about the cessation of an action makes one operate more eagerly.

#### Article 4

##### Is sadness the greatest evil?

It seems that sadness is the greatest evil:

**Objection 1:** As *Ethics* 8 says, “The worst is opposed to the best.” But there is an instance of pleasure that is the best, viz., that which belongs to happiness (*felicitas*). Therefore, some instance of sadness is the greatest evil.

**Objection 2:** Beatitude is man’s highest good, since it is man’s ultimate end. But as was explained above, beatitude consists in (a) a man’s having whatever he wills and in (b) his willing nothing bad. Therefore, man’s greatest good is the fulfillment of his will. But as is clear from Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 14, sadness consists in something’s happening against one’s will. Therefore, sadness is man’s greatest evil.

**Objection 3:** Augustine argues as follows in *Soliloquia*: “We are composed of two parts, viz., a soul and a body, and the body is the lower part (*pars deterior*). Now the highest good is the best thing that belongs to the better part (*melioris partis optimum*), whereas the greatest evil is the worst thing that belongs to the lower part (*pessimum deterioris*). But the best thing in the mind is wisdom, and the worst thing in the body is pain. Therefore man’s greatest good is to be wise, whereas his greatest evil is to suffer pain.”

**But contrary to this:** As was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 48, a. 6), sin (*culpa*) is a greater evil than is punishment (*poena*). But sadness or pain has to do with the punishment for sin, in the same way that the enjoyment of mutable things is a sinful evil. For in *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, “What is the pain that is attributed to the soul, other than the soul’s being deprived of the mutable things that it used to enjoy or had hoped it would be able to enjoy? And this is the totality of all that is called evil, i.e., sin and the punishment for sin.” Therefore, it is not sadness or pain that is man’s greatest evil.

**I respond:** It is impossible that any instance of sadness or pain should be man’s greatest evil. For every instance of sadness or pain is directed either (a) toward something that is truly bad or (b) toward something that is apparently bad but truly good.

Now pain or sadness that is directed at something that is truly bad cannot be the greatest evil, since there is something worse than it, viz., either not to judge as bad what truly is bad, or not to reject it.

On the other hand, sadness or pain that is directed toward something apparently bad but truly good cannot be the greatest evil, since it would be worse to be altogether separated off from the true good (*peius esset omnino alienari a vero bono*).

Hence, it is impossible for any instance of sadness or pain to be man’s greatest evil.

**Reply to objection 1:** There are two goods common to both pleasure and sadness, viz., (a) true judgment about what is good and bad and (b) an proper ordering on the part of the will by which it approves of what is good and rejects what is bad (*ordo debitus voluntatis approbantis bonum et recusantis malum*). And so it is clear that there is some good in an instance of pain or sadness which is such that if it is removed, then the pain or sadness can be made worse. But it is not the case that in every

pleasure there is some evil which is such that if it were removed, the pleasure would be made better. Hence, it is possible for some instance of pleasure to be man's highest good, in the way explained above (q. 34, a. 3), but it is impossible for an instance of sadness to be man's greatest evil.

**Reply to objection 2:** The very fact that the will opposes what is bad is a certain good. Because of this, sadness or pain cannot be the greatest evil, since it has some good mixed in with it.

**Reply to objection 3:** What harms the better part is worse than what harms the worse part. Now as Augustine explains in *Enchiridion*, something is called 'bad' because it is harmful. Hence, what is bad for the soul is a greater evil than what is bad for the body. Hence, the argument that Augustine adduces here—not in his own voice but in that of someone else (*non ex suo sensu sed ex sensu alterius*)—is not efficacious.