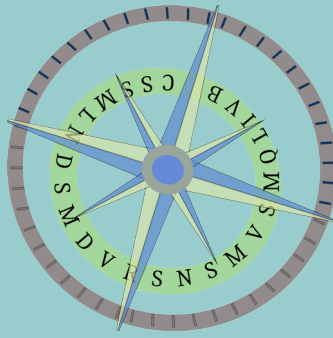


Paul Tassé

Beatituda

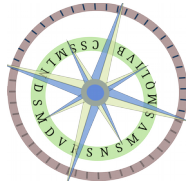


God, happiness & suffering

Occidentalia

PAUL TASSÉ

BEATITUDA



God, happiness & suffering

OCCIDENTALIA

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2 SHORT NOTES

Beatituda: shortened from the Latin *beatitudinem* for *happiness*.

Thanks

Lots of thanks to Daniel Paquette for having allowed me to heavily borrow from his essay *De la mort à l'amour*.

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INTRODUCTION

We are all looking for happiness a bit like we are looking for a good restaurant. Our search for happiness is obviously linked to the conception we have of that happiness. For many people, happiness is the apotheosis of pleasure. But are pleasure and happiness the same thing?

As with many things in life, happiness is both simpler and more complex than what we may think it is.

I want to introduce a different conception of happiness than the one that fills the modern bestsellers. My vision of happiness is foremost spiritual, based on the experience of our finalities and the necessity to live in reality.

PART I

THE ORIGINS OF HAPPINESS

A. THE THREE QUESTS

The structure of happiness is more complex than it appears at first. I will take a somewhat crooked path that will allow me to touch on some questions I deem are essential.

The first of those questions is: is there a link between suffering and happiness? At first glance, this sounds like a no-brainer. Nevertheless, in order to understand precisely if this link exists or not, we must go further.

We must first define a few concepts before we can continue. The first concept that is vital to this chapter concerns the nature of man. In the essay *Primessa* (Paul Tassé, *Primessa*, Éditions Occidentalia), I describe 3 quests that actually exists in each and every human being. These 3 quests are ontological, they belong to the state of being of every person and, therefore, they do not have to be proven, they simply are. If we look into ourselves carefully, we can easily perceive those 3 quests in our heart.

Those 3 quests, as defined in *Primessa*, are:

- the quest for meaning
- the quest for love
- the quest for identity

Those quests all lead to God in the end. But this ultimate goal may take a lifetime and is not always completed. Very often, the quests become blocked at certain points in our lives. They may crystallize and create in each of us temporary or even permanent illusions.

Those false beliefs are not easily eradicated. Without the help of God, it becomes almost impossible, at a certain point, to get rid of them.

Those false beliefs, those illusions, we will be calling them CONVICTIONS in order to communicate the power they hold over the person in addition to the fact that they may be temporary or permanent.

B. THE SACRED

Secondly, we will try and define what is the sacred. All the existing definitions of the sacred are, to me, totally unsatisfactory. It is not easy to approach the sacred. It is hard to define mostly because it touches on very deep aspects of our humanity. The duality sacred-profane is too simple to be of any help. The theory of Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life* making the sacred as to what is set aside and forbidden is, again, not satisfactory.

One thing remains certain, the sacred is very intimately related to the divine. More than that, it is in direct contact with God. This intimate contact with God transforms us in a unique way. Face to face with the sacred, we can dimly see the face of God. We could therefore say that everything that is in the likeness of God is a source of the sacred. But God is not static, He is dynamic, He is life. In the New Testament, Christ defines Himself as the path, the truth and the life (JN 14:6).

But the foremost characteristic of life is movement. And movement exists for a reason and that is change. All

that is moving is going from potential to act as described by Aristotle or saint Thomas Aquinas. This passage from potential to actualization represents a transformation of being. This transformation touches us deeply, it makes new people out of us, it transfigures us.

I will therefore define the sacred as all that possesses this power to deeply and really transform us. As we stated above, this power of deep transformation belongs to God and to everything that carries His likeness. We know from the Bible that human beings were created in the likeness of God and, in the whole universe, human beings, apart from God, possess this transformational ability the most. At the source of the sacred there is obviously God. Without Him, the power of transformation of the sacred would not exist.

So, people are, after God, the most important carriers of the sacred. This does not take into account the personal, inner qualities of the person or his or her personal development. All people, no matter the qualities or flaws they have, carry the sacred. Atheists, agnostics, unbelievers of all kinds but also saints and sinners, all carry in themselves the sacred because all were created in the likeness of God.

In its own way, nature also carries the likeness of God. Obviously to a lesser degree than human beings and in a more variable way. Whereas human beings all possess this transformational ability to the same degree, in nature it varies a great deal.

Certain human creations (art, architecture, everyday art and many others) can also carry this likeness of God

and therefore this transformational ability. This is what makes, I think, masterpieces. All those obviously are very variable. Ordinary objects can also become carriers of the divine image at a symbolic level obviously and carry, to a much lesser degree than a person, an aspect of the sacred in them.

The transition from potency to act is present in each of us everyday of our lives. Yet, most often, the transformations of everyday life are slow, temporary, difficult, superficial and false whereas the sacred makes the transition faster, easier, deeper, more solid, more permanent and imbued with a profound sense of truth that only God, the actual source of the sacred, can realize.

C. EVIL

We can now try and define what is evil. Obviously, evil does exist, it is not only the absence of good but, rather, a conscious decision to stray from the straight path, to stray from truth and to stray from life. Evil is putting our convictions (see this word above) before the sacred.

All the usual warnings do apply here. Cases of self-defence whether in situations of violence or of war where people must defend their own lives are clearly excluded. Notwithstanding all of that, there should always be an effort to save the sacred.

One of the outcomes of evil is that it automatically creates suffering. It creates suffering for the person that does the evil deed in keeping this person in the status quo and in blocking the transformation potential existing in the

sacred. It creates suffering for the person that is victimized in trampling this person's humanity and degrading him or her at a utilitarian level where he or she serves the convictions of the other person.

Suffering that comes from evil always has a negative impact on happiness. In the New Testament, it is the answer of Peter, violence versus the answer of Christ which is love. The answer of love is sacrifice. Sacrifice literally means *doing the sacred*. Sacrifice is therefore the sacred affirming its utmost importance in the ultimate order of life.

But human beings are unable to act through anything but love. Love creates an expansion of our being that allows for action. Neither hate nor anything else can do that. But if the person can only act out of love, why does evil exist? God has given us free-will and evil is always a free choice that we make. In the next chapter, we will try and answer this.

D. BLOCKAGE

The 3 quests we have discussed were placed in our hearts in order to call us to the life of Christ. In the normal order of things, the sacred and the quests are intimately related. The sacred pushes the quests forward and takes us forward, closer to God. The quests themselves feed on the sacred and need it for their own push forward towards change.

The quests become harmful and bring us to evil whenever they harden and stop. As long as they are

moving forward, the person will never go against the sacred but, on the opposite, will defend it with all his strength. The question is therefore how do the quests harden and stop?

The role of the sacred as we have defined it above is a transformational role. The sacred helps us go from potency to act, it transfigures us. If one of the reasons for the sacred is to help the quests along, can we really be surprised if the blockage of the quests carries with it a hatred for the sacred. When our convictions harden and will not change, the sacred no longer has a reason to exist. Our refusal to go forward automatically brings us to a refusal of the sacred.

The blockage of the quests really has but one source which is itself multifaceted: it is idolatry (see Daniel Paquette, *[De la mort à l'amour](#)*, Éditions Occidentalia). Idolatry is a thousand-headed hydra but finds its origin in an eternal error: not putting God and man in their rightful places. When man believes in his all-mightiness, he wants to rule over all the world and all the people in it. God, on the other hand, is satisfied with begging for our love.

The ultimate sacred of our life is God. Him more than all else has the capacity to transform us. But, in order to effect that transformation in us, God is asking us to let Him in inside our hearts. This *yes* to the demand from God is really the most important event in our lives.

Without this real presence of God in us, our transformation is active but, as we listed above, much more fragile, difficult, superficial and unable to reach its ultimate goal. Human beings were created in order to

possess God inside them but they must first give their approval, they must say *yes*.

As we have seen above, without the actual presence of God in us, our quests are always at risk of being blocked, stopped. This also means that the ultimate reason for the existence of evil is the absence of the God in us.



PART II

THE COMPONENTS OF HAPPINESS

A. THE FINALITIES

Being happy is above all completing our finality. All and any being who reaches his finality will experience happiness. All existing beings have not one finality but many. But those finalities are not all equal. There are inferior and there are superior finalities. And even among the superior finalities, there are gradations. The more we reach our upper finalities, the more our happiness increases. Happiness is therefore proportional to the finalities that we reach.

Human beings have many finalities. As explained above, those finalities give us happiness according to where they are in the sequence they belong to.

Among all the possible finalities, there is but one that really counts, one on which all other finalities depend. Obviously, this finality cannot depend on us, nor can it depend on anything that can perish. Therefore, it is not love, friendship or intelligence, neither is it anything that belongs to human beings and that disappears when they do. Neither can it depend on human beings as, for example, art, power, money. It cannot be something like beauty, health, truth or goodness because, in our world all those are interrelated and their existence depends on something bigger. Our ultimate finality must be eternal, it must be beyond us as it must be beyond everything that exists in order to answer to the need for infinity that we all carry inside of us.

There exists only one possibility for the ultimate human finality and this is God. If God did not exist, we would have to invent Him because only Him can be our

ultimate finality. No matter what atheists and agnostics say, life cannot be truly lived without Him. Living without God will always be living in a world of illusion where, ultimately, nothing makes sense. Fortunately, God exists.

The possession of God deep in our heart accelerates our transformation. The ultimate sacred is part of us and because of Him, we are always in movement, going from potential to act without stop. God educates us, purifies us and transforms us without pause. Although human beings have this capacity to transform, the transformative powers of God inside of us will always be superior to the ones of people.

But we must not downplay the capacity of human beings to transform others. Because human beings exist in the physical world, there are many cases where their capacity to transform cannot be replaced by anything else. We need to remember that the people are part of our finalities. They are just not our ultimate finality.

B. REALITY

We think we live in reality but we live our lives in a world of illusions and sins. Reality is different from the world we live in. It is not different physically or geographically nor in anything material. The world of reality differs from the world of illusion only on the spiritual level. But this difference is enormous.

In the world of illusion, man is alone. He can express his abilities by himself and for himself. He is the centre of everything. In the world of reality, man is never

alone. God is always present with him in all the actions he does, all the words he says. But man always has his freewill and his freedom. God is only there to help him along.

As long as we do not live in reality, we have not yet begun to live because we are living in a world that is separate from God and that world is false.

Most people have chosen to live their lives in the world of illusion rather than reality. This is often more through ignorance than choice. But once people make the transition, once they pass from the world of illusion to the world of reality, there is no turning back. Everything changes totally.

To live in illusion is to live in facility. And human beings do not do well with facility. They are not content with the illusion they live everyday. This world of illusion is, in my opinion, the source of numerous modern problems such as depression, sadness and anxiety.

It is very difficult, almost impossible, to get away from the world of illusion in which we live everyday. But, at the same time, it is impossible to be truly happy in this world. Only life in reality can bring us happiness. Everything we do in order to be happy is doomed from the start since the first condition to happiness is to live in reality. Otherwise, our happiness is only an illusion.

But between the world of illusion and the world of reality, there are no physical signs. Everything happens inside. We start to live in reality as soon as we accomplish our ultimate finality which is to say *yes* to the actual

presence of God in us.

But taming reality takes time. This is the reason for the existence of the never-ending cycle which gets started following the acceptance by the person of the presence of God. This cycle we call the “cycle of the 3 deaths” does exist in order to help us tame life in the world of reality (see the essay from Daniel Paquette, *De la mort à l’amour* or any other book on Christian mysticism).

C. LOVE

In order to realize our finalities, love was given to us. It is impossible for man to accomplish anything if love is not present. Love is at the root of all actions and speech. It cannot be otherwise. Love is the engine of our becoming (for a more detailed explanation, see Daniel Paquette, [*Amoressa*](#), Éditions Occidentalia).

*The word of Yahweh is straightforward, all he does springs from his constancy.
He loves uprightness and justice; the faithful love of Yahweh fills the earth.
Psalms 33,4-5*

As we have seen in the first chapter, the sacred brings along a transformation of our being which allows our quests to get further and thus transform us. Without love, this would be impossible.

Love that opens us up to the sacred opens us up also to everything that the sacred is. And, because the sacred is the ultimate power of transformation in the universe, it calls us to the impossible. And man’s attraction to the

impossible is infinite.

But if evil does exist, it is first and foremost because the love of self takes over from the love of others or mostly, from the love of God. If this love of self was not present, we would always choose the sacred over our convictions.

The power of transformation of the sacred is infinite and that is the source of the attraction of the sacred for man. The sacred carries all that forever speaks to us because the call of the sacred is also a call for infinity, eternity and immortality. Man, in the deep recesses of his heart, wants to live a life that is beyond him, a life that demands the impossible. And we can never refuse the impossible. This is the nature of the mission that God is asking from all of us. We must realize the impossible because, with His help, everything is possible.

The sacred talks to us everyday, it calls to us without stopping and tells us about the infinite mysteries of life and invites us to this eternal dance. How could we say no?

D. SUFFERING

We have seen that there is a suffering caused by evil. But there is also another type of suffering that does not find its source in evil. This is the suffering associated with change. All change, all passage from potency to act involves a certain type of suffering.

The transformation to which we are called by the sacred, by God Himself is a source of suffering. But this

type of suffering is fertile, it has a reason to exist, it has a goal.

The reason for being of this second form of suffering is obviously that no change is easy and that the personal transformation to which we are called is truly the most difficult endeavour in our whole life. The goal of the suffering is to force us forward. Without the suffering linked to the transformation, our will to go forward would be much lessened. Suffering is therefore a tool that God uses for our greater good.

Modern essays promising happiness without suffering of any kind are blind to reality and take us further away from our true goal. Suffering and happiness go hand in hand. They cannot be separated.

Finally, there is a third and last form of suffering. It is the suffering that comes from causal chains. Those causal chains can be short or long, they can be few or numerous and they can be known or unknown. In all cases, they can be the result of a hazard or not. We are thus left with three options:

1. those chains are from the universe
2. those chains are from man
3. those chains are from hazard

In the first case, the universe, we are including nature and everything that it contains and also all that is part of earth or outside of it but is still able to have an influence on us but we exclude man. There are two aspects to those chains. The first we will be calling active includes all phenomenon from nature or the universe able to cause an infinity of different events which can touch us directly

or indirectly. This includes the suffering issued from illness. The second aspect we will be calling passive recognizes that the passage of time touches everything that is related, either directly or indirectly, to matter. Time leaves nothing untouched, it changes everything, transforms everything, wreaks havoc on everything. We must acknowledge that, again, there is not guilt or responsibility to assign to anyone. Life is thus made.

In the second case, we again have active and passive aspects to the possible suffering. In the active aspect, different actions including decisions, speech, writings, and more by ourselves or other people, close by or far from us, known or unknown, can have predictable or unpredictable impacts on our being. In the passive aspect, even inaction that leads to a situation is considered an action since we or others chose not to act. In the majority of cases. Hazard is excluded since it is issued from many causal chains and not just one. Since those causal chains are from man, evil could, in theory, be involved in one or many of those chains. If evil is involved at any level whatsoever, the final suffering could not have happened without it. We are therefore back to the first case of suffering, the one from evil. If evil is not involved those consequences are the result of the variable nature of life that makes it so that we are unable to totally foresee the results of an action.

Hazard is the meeting of many causal chains that can come from the universe, from man or from a mix of both. If one or many of those causal chains are from evil (and therefore from man), we are back to the same situation as the one described above and we must return to the first case of suffering, the one from evil. If not, in this third case, we must recognize the nature of hazard and the

fact that, ultimately, no guilt or responsibility can be put on anyone. The more life gets complex, the more technology is present, the more people live close together or can interact one with the other, the more the causal chains become real and complex. To reject hazard is to put ourselves in the hands of destiny which is something that Christianity strongly rejects. Because believing in destiny is, in the end, letting go of our free-will and of our freedom. It is also putting the fault on God who is, once again, innocent.

This third form of suffering really does impact happiness. As opposed to suffering coming from evil, this form of suffering has no one to lay the blame on. There might be potential culprits, especially in the third option, but they very seldom want evil or even suffering. As opposed to suffering coming from personal transformation, there are no positive achievement that can be appreciated. It is often very difficult to accept.

In the absence of a true guilty or responsible person, a vacuum is created that people will try and fill in one way or another. There are many solutions but, ultimately, all are false. This is the price we have to pay for our freewill and our freedom.

E. HAPPINESS

Firstly, it is important to unravel those different states of feeling good in the human being. We speak, often without differentiating them, of pleasure, joy and happiness. But those three terms are not the same, they belong to different states of being.

If we take into consideration the tripartite composition of human beings discussed by early philosophers and theologians, we can discern in man a body, a soul and a spirit.

The body is where pleasure takes place because pleasure is associated with the senses. The soul is associated with joy. Only the spirit is associated with happiness. This is important because although the body and the soul can participate to happiness, they only do so because of the close link that connects all three, that is because body, soul and spirit are closely linked in man.

But there is much more to it. Body and pleasure are closely associated to who I am. The soul and therefore joy are associated to people around me, the links that connect me to people. The spirit and therefore happiness are only connected to God. Therefore, the source of each of those are different: for pleasure, it is the I, the person, for joy, it is the other people, for happiness, it is God.

It is totally impossible to have pleasure if I do not have a close contact with my body. In the same way, it is impossible to know joy if I do not have a close connection to my soul and, indirectly, to other people. But, mostly, happiness is impossible if I am not in an intimate relation with my spirit and therefore with God.

Pleasure, joy and happiness are in direct relation to the reaching of our finalities. The finality of the body is to use the senses and the more we do that, the more the body actualizes itself and the more pleasure we have. The finality of the soul is through relations with others and the

more we entertain those relations, the more our soul actualizes itself and the more joy we feel.

But the ultimate finality of the human being is God. As we discussed above, this is how human beings were made. Man was created to carry God inside. But this will always be a personal choice that we have to make. Without God in us, we are incomplete, unsatisfied.

Happiness is not pleasure or joy. Happiness is closer to peace, to tranquillity, to an absolute certainty (a necessary pleonasm) that we are on the right road and that nothing or nobody can lead us astray and that we will, in the end, accomplish what we need to accomplish no matter what happens to us personally.

The internal peace that results from the presence of God in us is hard to describe because it is not of this world. It rather resembles an internal, never-ending prayer. It puts in us a total certainty that of the existence of God and of His presence in our heart.

The deep sense of unity of our being is the second consequence of the divine presence inside of us. This unity allows us to focus our being and create a place from which everything becomes possible.

Those two elements: the inner peace and the internal unity are part of what we call happiness. But, to those two elements, a third is missing which we discussed in the preceding chapter: suffering.

All of that leads us to a bizarre situation: our greatest happiness is also our greatest suffering. Happiness

and suffering go hand in hand and are inseparable. Even if we were successful in destroying all suffering issuing from evil, or from causal chains, suffering would still be present in our lives.

The three main constituents of happiness are therefore interior peace, internal unity and suffering. It is therefore an illusion to think it is possible to live without suffering. It is only in the world of illusion where we refuse the sacred and live only for our convictions that we can, for a time, live without suffering.



PART III

THE GOALS OF HAPPINESS

A. TWO MOVEMENTS

Human life is pulsed by two opposite movements: the first is internal, the second external. The first movement is to accept God inside of us and to let Him transform, purify, teach and mold me. This first movement is passive. Any action is useless and harmful. The second movement is to put myself in motion in order to participate in the coming of the Realm of God on earth. This second movement is active, I must act and make a difference.

The first movement always comes before the second one. To put myself in action in the world is a pointless illusion. I must, first of all, live in reality before I can act. But, as the first movement knows no end and goes on till our death, I cannot obviously wait for its completion before I get moving.

In the second movement, all that counts is to realize our mission on earth. This mission should be totally clear for us, it must appear to us without any doubt, clear and true (see Paul Tassé, *Primessa*, Éditions Occidentalia). The path we have to take to get there should also be clear even if it does not always please us. Our mission matches the gifts and challenges we received from God.

It is important for this mission to be beyond us, beyond our capacities. As we said when talking about love, it must require the impossible from us. The sacred demands that we go beyond our human capacities. What we cannot accomplish by ourselves becomes possible once God gives us a hand, that He helps us in our efforts.

Have I not told you: Be strong and stand firm? Be fearless and undaunted, for go where you may, Yahweh your God is with you.
JO 1:9

In this mission, we cannot let anyone or anything lead us away from our path. This mission carries in real life, in the physical world, our transformation issued from the sacred. This mission allows us to participate in the realization of the Realm of God on earth and therefore must be first among all the goals we may have.

As we will see in the next section when we will be discussing the priority of the mission, this allows us to understand that although other people participate to the sacred, they must always be secondary to God. In our mission, our first duty is to God and not to the creatures. The finality of our mission is God. We must understand that our mission will always serve people either directly or indirectly, either now or later. But as Jean Daujat mentions in *Y a-t-il une vérité?*, (Daujat, *Y a-t-il une vérité?*, Téqui), the mission requires at the same time a strong assertiveness and a capacity for flexibility that matches the requirements of the mission.

This mission finds its source in the changes that the sacred makes in us. And the mission will also become a source of personal transformation. As our personal internal transformation is a source of suffering, this mission will also be associated with suffering that cannot be separated from it. This suffering will take different forms depending on the obstacles we meet on our path. Those obstacles will, in turn, transform us.

B. CHRIST

The life of Christ is proof of this vision of happiness. The New Testament contains a multitude of examples. I only chose a very few of them:

On the presence of God in him, He said:

The Father and I are one. (JN 10:30) : Christ had God in Him, He was God. The presence of God in ourselves is our ultimate reality. Without it, it is impossible to complete our other finalities.

On the foremost importance of the mission he was given the priority it must have, He said:

‘Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword.’ (MT 10:34) : no family or friendship link, nothing human can come between the person and his God-given mission. What we owe, we owe to God and not to a creature, to another human being.

In all the trips He made, Christ never strayed from His course for anyone or anything. He cures the people He finds on His way but never strays in order to help them.

On the only possible answer to evil, He said:

Vade retro me satana (MK 8:33) The Christ said to Peter when Peter tried to fight away the roman soldiers that came to take Jesus to Pilate: the Christ knows His mission and what He must do in order to realize it. He will not let anyone, not even His close friends, keep Him away

from what He has to do.

On His death on the cross:

the Christ could have tried and negotiate with Pilate, He could have tried to defend Himself. But He knows all of that would have been in vain and that all life that has meaning demands sacrifice, the only possible answer to evil.

The Imitation of Christ underlines the universality of suffering but it describes it as the result of the variable and disappointing nature of the world. But I believe things are more complex than that. As we have seen above, suffering belongs to life. More than that even, it is built into life and cannot be removed. As we discussed in the previous chapter, we cannot avoid suffering any more than we can avoid breathing. Avoiding suffering is also avoiding happiness.

C. ANSWER TO SUFFERING

As we have seen above, the answer to all forms of suffering is the do the sacred. Doing the sacred is to sacrifice oneself.

Face to suffering, whenever it comes from and no matter to which of the 3 types of suffering it corresponds, sacrifice will always be in the form of a gift of self. This gift of self can take many forms but it must always be given in docility and obedience to what is being lived. The real, physical, world is first.

Sacrifice is choosing God rather than choosing oneself. Sacrifice allows for bringing the sacred beyond all human considerations and all human convictions and putting it where it belongs, to God.



CONCLUSION

Happiness creates the link between man and God. Without God, the sacred would not exist and this push outside of ourselves would be without a true goad. Only God can give true happiness.

Happiness is demanding. It is even more than demanding since it asks for the impossible. But the person is made for happiness and this is the reason why we are always looking for it. But happiness does not give of itself easily. It asks for everything in order to give everything in return.

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