

2

Hope, Hatred, and the Ambiguities of Utopic Longing

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At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks his students to identify the highest good for humans, the content of *eudaimonia* or human flourishing. “Surely,” he says, “knowledge of this good is . . . of great importance for the conduct of our lives, and if, like archers, we have a target [at which to aim], we are more likely to hit the right mark.”¹ What would it be like for a human being to enjoy the realization of his or her full potential? What would it be like for *all* humans to thrive, not only individually, but also in relation to each other, on every level of social organization, from the interpersonal to the (now) global, as mediated by digital technologies? The future comes into being partly through the choices humans make, and we make our best choices, ethically speaking, when we have a working conception of the good in mind.

People often disagree about what makes for a good society, even when they focus on societies of limited scope. For example, many Americans disagree about what a good or ideal American society would look like. Some Americans hope for a social order that, if realized, would tear painfully at what other Americans value greatly. At the same time, other Americans hope for changes that, if brought about, would crush the aspirations of the first group. When people perceive that the ideals and passions of others are opposed to their own, they can feel threatened. They can become defensive

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a23.

and even aggressive. It can seem that, if anything is worth fighting for, it is the way of life that we judge to be best for ourselves, our kin, and future generations. But our opponents are motivated by the same thought.

Idealistic visions can inspire hope and constructive action. They can also ignite hatred and violence. Making use of a Thomistic moral psychology, this chapter explores some of the ambiguities of utopic longing.² First, it presents a conceptual analysis of hope, focusing on the hope that can be aroused by a social ideal. Second, it calls attention to the role that the perception of evil can play in the generation of hope. Third, it presents a conceptual and ethical analysis of hatred, which is commonly evoked by the perception of evil. Hatred and its excesses are an ever-present risk of hope. People who strive to bring about social change, on any scale, do well to recognize this.³

HOPE

If we wish to explore the dynamics of hope, we must begin by defining it. In a Thomistic perspective, hope (*spes*) can refer to several things. It can refer to an emotion. It can refer to a motion of the will. It can and often does refer to a combination of both. Hope can refer to a moral virtue, that is, to a *habit* of emotion and/or volition that is cultivated, over time, through the use of right practical reason. It can refer also to a theological virtue, to a habit or motion of the will that operates in light of faith, where faith is thought to take people beyond the limits of reason.

Consider hope, first, as an emotion. An emotion (*passio*) is a way of being moved by an object (say, a situation) that we apprehend, via our sensory powers, as bearing on our happiness or the happiness of someone who is important to us.⁴ The emotion of hope can be defined as a body-

2. Moral psychology concerns the conceptual and ethical analysis of mental states that are quite common to humans and tend to follow common patterns. Moral psychology analyzes such states especially as they relate to moral agency and the formation of moral character.

3. The following is a constructive account that has its basis in a study of Aquinas's theology, anthropology, ethics, and moral psychology, with a focus on the *Summa Theologiae*, *De veritate* (*Disputed Questions on Truth*), and *De malo* (*Disputed Questions on Evil*). More extensive textual documentation can be found in Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*.

4. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) I-II 23.2, 22.3. From a Thomistic viewpoint, our sensory powers include both external and internal senses. Our internal senses include a "common sense" (by which impressions of various kinds are integrated into unified experiences), imagination, an "estimative sense" (by which humans are able to apprehend simple properties such as usefulness, friendliness, or

resonant or felt mode of tending toward a future possibility that we regard as desirable, but not easily attained or guaranteed. In hope, we are aware of challenges, but are not undone by them. We rise to the occasion. We become high-spirited.⁵

A utopia is usually conceived as a perfect society, and most of us would agree that attaining society-wide perfection, according to any description, is impossible for humans. Limits of knowledge and imagination, partial perspectives, self-interested biases, the consequences of previous, poor choices, and so on, predictably condition our interactions. For those of us who acknowledge such limits, it might seem problematic to refer to hope in relation to utopia, for we hope only in what we regard as possible. Yet one function of a utopic vision can be to orient people toward *some* aspects of an ideal society, toward an *approximation* to the ideal, or simply toward the idea of something *better*. I treat utopic longing as a longing for a society that improves significantly on the social forms that people have encountered to date—a society that allows more people to enjoy satisfying lives, and causes fewer people (and other sentient beings) to suffer unnecessarily. I treat it as a form of hope.

As an emotion, hope can pull us in different directions. Inasmuch as we have an attractive possibility in view—for example, a society full of kind and cooperative humans—we are drawn toward that possibility emotionally, and we anticipate the pleasure of uniting with it. However, inasmuch as we are confronted by difficulties—for example, opponents who strike us as mean and uncooperative—we also feel disturbed. If our happy goal seems nonetheless possible to attain, albeit with great effort, we might become energized, even excited, depending on how attractive the goal is and how much we enjoy a challenge. If instead we sense that our goal has become impossible, due to the strength of our opposition and to our own relative weakness, or we sense that it is no longer worth the effort, then we are likely to withdraw. We might suffer the loss of hope and let that be the end of it. We might experience renewed hope as we fantasize about other approaches or a somewhat different goal. We might refocus on our opponents and how much they bother us. Hope—like everything else—is subject to change. It can give way to sorrow, despair, hatred, and so on, depending on the aspects of a situation that grip our attention the most.⁶ Generally speaking, hope involves having our attention held primarily by an attractive possibility. In

danger), and memory (ST I 78.4).

5. ST I-II 23.1, 40.1.

6. ST I-II 25.1.

hope, we have the impression that yes, we face challenges, but *yes, we can* overcome them and attain what we desire.

If we imagine overcoming an obstacle and attaining a desired goal, and if having this image in mind causes our heart rate to increase or gives us a spurt of energy, then we experience hope as an emotion.⁷ Ordinarily, when we entertain a sensory image, our higher intellectual powers become engaged as well. That is, we think about the situation, we project possibilities, we formulate a plan, we make choices, and so on. We do such things because we care about the quality of our lives and the lives of our loved-ones. From a Thomistic viewpoint, if we are motivated by thoughts or reasons, and not simply by sensory impressions, then we experience hope also as a motion of the will (*motus voluntatis*).⁸ Hope is usually a mode of passively being moved while, at the same time, deliberately moving ourselves. It is a way of orienting ourselves toward an object that we both sense and judge intellectually to be valuable—not easy to attain, but also **not out** of the question.

Aquinas characterizes hope also as a virtue or habit of character.⁹ He focuses on hope as a *theological* virtue that is **made possible** by the aid of a mysterious higher power, but his account of virtue allows us to think of hope also as a *moral* virtue. The latter is a good habit that is acquired by choosing repeatedly to tend toward (what we correctly regard as) temporal human happiness or its constituents, **despite** the obstacles that stand in our way. As a habit of *emotion*, hope disposes us to be drawn, in appropriate ways, toward future possibilities that we sense will be pleasing or beneficial, but difficult to attain. As a habit of *volition*, hope disposes us to move ourselves toward the realization of possibilities that we judge, by the power of our intellect, to be consistent with happiness and the common good, but not easily secured. The moral virtue of hope makes us prone to experience the right kind and amount of emotion and volition whenever we consider finite possibilities that we regard as appealing and worthwhile, but also uncertain.¹⁰

Aquinas characterizes hope as a *theological* virtue.¹¹ Theological hope is a habit that is acquired, not by making reasonable choices in light of an ideal of temporal human happiness, but by encountering a power of unlimited goodness. Theological hope is gained by opening oneself to this power, consenting to it as the ultimate source of one's being and fulfillment, and

7. ST I-II 22.1.

8. ST I-II 9.1

9. ST II-II 17.1.

10. ST I-II 50.3, 50.5, 58.1, 62.2.

11. ST II-II 17.5. For further discussion of theological hope, presented in a more traditional Thomistic vein, see Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 87–138.

reaching out toward a closer relationship to it, relying on it all the while.¹² In Aquinas's words, the object of theological hope is "eternal happiness as being possible to attain by the assistance of God."¹³ Theological hope lifts the self above the limits of its own resources, but it is something that establishes itself *within* the self. It becomes a virtue *of* the self. As a virtue, theological hope is relatively stable, but it is not necessarily established once and for all. It can be lost. It can also be regained. It can—indeed, it must—be cultivated.

A person who cultivates theological hope is oriented, by her own will and by what she regards as a power greater than herself, toward a perfective engagement *with* this power. She trusts that this engagement will bring her to a "good place" (*eu topos*), even if she will not be able to enter that place fully until she transcends the limits of temporal life. If a person tries to imagine, by means of her interior senses, what this engagement or place will be like (if she pictures, for example, a tropical paradise or a family reunion), then she will experience hope as an emotion.¹⁴ But inasmuch as what moves her is an object of her intellect (for example, the idea of perfect goodness) and the power of her will (for example, the desire to be perfected by goodness), she will experience hope also as a motion of the will.¹⁵ A person who possesses the virtue of theological hope is oriented primarily by gift and by intention, and secondarily by imaginative longing, toward a more intimate union with the fount of all goodness—a union that she judges to be desirable, but unfathomable . . . meaningful, but strictly speaking incomprehensible.

With respect to the temporal world, a person of theological hope will do more than wait for it to end. She will envision a society that reflects, as much as possible, the goodness at the heart of reality.¹⁶ From a Thomistic viewpoint, she will desire a society in which the dignity of persons is honored—a society that promotes, in a balanced and sustainable way, the exercise of the capabilities that are most definitive of persons' full and pleasant functioning. She will know that humans are in need of restraint, but her priority will be to encourage the realization of potential. In striving for a better society, she will keep the idea of the *highest* good (for all) in mind.¹⁷ This good presents itself to her as a distant possibility, in this life and the

12. *ST* I-II 62.3; II-II 17.2.

13. *ST* II-II 18.2.

14. *ST* I 81.2, including *ad* 2.

15. *ST* II-II 18.1, including *ad* 1.

16. For a Thomistic account of "how Christian hope builds up the temporal human good" (119), see Doyle, *Promise of Christian Humanism*.

17. *ST* I-II 92.1, including *ad* 3.

next. She willingly tends toward it, but without knowing, exactly, what “it” is.

The theological virtue of hope could be constructed to fit religious perspectives other than Christian ones. It could function within some agnostic worldviews, where there is an openness to the idea of cosmic purposefulness, an appreciation of the order and beauty of the natural world, or a curiosity about what holds everything together, but where a person does not find it meaningful to relate in a *personal* way to the purported source of order, beauty, or creativity. Constructing religious hope in cross-traditional perspective is not, however, our present task.

A PROBLEM WITH HOPE

Hope in *some* form is essential for human life. If we *have* hope, whether it concerns our earthly existence only, or another mode of existence as well, we will be disinclined to let the difficulties of life defeat us. If we hope in a better society, we will resist becoming bitter and misanthropic when, year after year, many of the changes that we desire elude us, and many situations seem to get worse.

Hope inclines us toward what we *regard* as promising. However, what some of us regard as promising when we look to the future, others regard as menacing. When we hope to bring about positive social change, we attach ourselves to possibilities that at least some of our fellow humans will resist. It is often the anticipation of opposition that evokes hope in the first place. If our goal were *easy*, we would not *have* to hope for it; we could simply reach out for it and effortlessly attain it. The experience of being in the presence of something *high*, distant, or uncertain, or something that otherwise complicates the ease of life, is inherent in hope.¹⁸

One could say that the perception of *evil* is inherent in hope. In a Thomistic framework, evil signifies broadly what is bad, unsuitable, or undesirable. It signifies a relative absence of goodness, a failure of actualization, a cause of diminishment, or an experience of unwanted pain.¹⁹ Evil, like good, is a matter of degree. It is also, to an extent, a matter of perspective. What is good for one person or group can be, in certain respects, evil for another person or group. In addition, what is good for one party, in one respect, can be evil for the same party, in some other respect. By the same token, what is evil for one party can be reconceived, by that party, in a more

18. ST I-II 23.2.

19. See the first question of *The De Malo* of Thomas Aquinas. See also McCabe, *God Matters*, chapter 3.

positive light. For example, people sometimes choose to interpret painful things that happen to them as opportunities for growth.

The *hope* of one person or group can be regarded as evil by others, and vice versa. For example, from a Marxist perspective, a Christian's hope in a happy afterlife is an opiate, and opiates are evil because they keep people from facing the truth and contributing to genuine social progress. From a Christian perspective, a Marxist's hope in the abolition of religion is evil because it motivates social policies that cut people off from an aspect of their humanity, which they must cultivate if they are to thrive.

If we regard the hopes of others as evil because these hopes aim at something that, in our judgment, is incongruent with human well-being—and if other people regard our hopes in the same way—then we are all in a bind. Our interlocking negative judgments and irritations could make it difficult for us to live and work together. The answer to such a difficulty cannot be to stop thinking in terms of good and evil altogether. We cannot stop judging some situations to be pleasant and desirable and others to be painful and undesirable—not without becoming insensible. We cannot stop judging certain things to be better for humans than other things—not without ceasing to care about real humans and their suffering. We can, however, become aware of the way in which the gain of one thing generally implies the loss of something else. We can resist the temptation to think of good and evil as settled opposites. We can practice empathy and generosity of mind as we consider how situations look from other points of view. We can become humbler about our own, usually mixed motives.

Perceptions of good and evil *can* be instructive.²⁰ They can make us aware of how much various things matter to us. They can motivate choices that preserve our well-being and the well-being of others. They can provide us with opportunities to think critically about our loves and aspirations. They can challenge us to confront our insecurities. But if we are emotionally or volitionally inflexible, and we are relatively opaque to ourselves, we will be tempted to perceive evils as absolute, located in people other than ourselves, and having nothing important to teach us about ourselves.

HATRED

It is instructive to consider hope in relation to hatred, even though these attitudes are not typically paired by philosophers. Like hope, hatred has several dimensions. Arguably, some of them are less problematic than others, and some are more subject to choice than others, so it is worth teasing them

20. *ST I-II* 24.3, including *ad* 1.

apart, even if they generally occur at the same time, as aspects of a single experience.

Hatred, like hope, can refer to an emotion. According to a Thomistic moral psychology, the emotion of hatred is a painful *dissonance* that we experience when we apprehend something via our sensory powers as being unsuitable for us or for someone who is part of us.²¹ Hatred is the contrary of love, where the emotion of love is a pleasing *resonance* that we experience when we apprehend something as being suitable for us or for someone who is close to us.²² Understood in this way, hatred is always caused, in part, by love: we hate a given object because it seems to be destructive of what we love or regard as lovable.²³ In a Thomistic scheme, *every* emotion is caused partly by love—by our love for ourselves and for those whose good we associate with our own. The objects that move us are those that (we sense) have the potential to affect our happiness, for good or for ill.²⁴

In light of evolutionary science, the emotion of hatred appears to be natural to humans, as it is to other sentient beings. Specifically, if we did not ordinarily feel uncomfortable when we confront objects that are capable of harming us and, in some cases, are *inclined* to harm us, such as extremely cold temperatures or aggressors who seek to invade our territory and consume our limited resources, we would not be here at all. Our species would have gone extinct long ago, or “we” would constitute a different species. Hatred, understood as an object-oriented, internal disturbance, can hold life-saving information. However, we can be wrong about what diminishes us. We can feel disturbed by something that is not, in fact, harmful to us.²⁵ We can also be morally wrong about the sorts of interference with our pleasure that justify us in causing others pain. We can be morally wrong in judging our comfort to be more important than others,’ simply because it is ours.

As soon as we feel uncomfortable in relation to something that strikes us as evil, we have the ability—and the responsibility, as conditions allow—to examine the way we feel.²⁶ Once we bring our intellectual powers to bear on the situation and on our reaction to it, it is possible for us to be motivated, in part, by educated judgments. We can use the power of reason not only to

21. ST I-II 29.1. Readers are asked to set aside, for the moment, their assumptions about what hatred is (what the term refers to), and consider what might be gained by thinking of it in the following way.

22. ST I-II 26.1.

23. ST I-II 29.2.

24. For an analysis of love, which is prerequisite to an adequate analysis of hatred, see Cates, “Love,” 1–30.

25. ST I-II 29.1 *ad* 2.

26. ST I-II 24.1, 30.3, 59.2; I 81.3.

restrain our behavior, if need be, but also to alter how we feel. We can affirm that our hatred is appropriate and consent to it, such that we continue to feel uncomfortable, but our uncomfortableness is qualified somewhat by a pleasing impression that we are emotionally on target. We can judge that our hatred is inappropriate, withhold our consent from it, and direct our attention to a different facet of the object or a different object that we regard as lovable, such that our love increases and our hatred dissipates. We can reject as bad the hatred that we currently feel, but in a way that ironically generates a strong attachment to that hatred, such that it takes *longer* to dissipate. And so on. Reason is not utterly free in relation to emotion, but neither is it simply emotion's slave—at least, not in people who have a measure of virtue.

As noted previously, when we are motivated by thoughts and reasons concerning goodness, our will is engaged. Whereas the emotion of hatred, in a Thomistic perspective, is the experience of being disturbed by a sensory image or impression, the volition of hatred is more intellectual and agent-active. It is the experience of *dissenting* deliberately to an object that we judge to be contrary to human well-being.²⁷ It is an interior act by which we fortify ourselves mentally in relation to something that is poised to diminish us or others whom we love. Hatred, like hope, usually operates as an emotion and a volition at the same time. A sensory object that makes us feel uneasy causes us to think about what is important to us, and our thoughts lead us to reject a particular object as evil: thus, emotion gives rise to volition. Or we judge an object of our intellect to be incompatible with human flourishing and we therefore reject it. We think of this object in terms of related sensory images, and these images cause us to feel uncomfortable: thus volition gives rise to emotion.

AVERSION, ANGER, HOSTILITY, MALEVOLENCE, CALLOUSNESS

According to a Thomistic moral psychology, hatred is best understood, not only in relation to love, but also in relation to other interior motions. These other motions are often conflated with hatred and with each other, but it is important not to conflate them.

First, consider aversion.²⁸ Aversion can refer to an emotion, a motion of the will, or both. Construed as an emotion, aversion refers to a mode of

27. ST I-II 29.1. This is implied also by an analysis of love as both an emotion and a motion of the will.

28. ST I-II 23.2. Aquinas needs the concept of aversion (*fuga*), and he needs to keep it distinct from hatred, if he is to have coherent theory of the emotions, as they operate

being repelled by something that is painful or appears, on a sensory level, to be harmful. As a motion of the will, aversion refers to a mode of turning away from something mentally that we judge to be destructive of human well-being. Relative to these forms of aversion, hatred connotes two things: it connotes an emotional *dissonance* that can, but does not necessarily, give rise to a feeling of being repelled by something. It connotes also a volitional *dissent* that can, but does not necessarily, give rise to an intellectually-informed desire to avert a perceived evil for the sake of some good. Hatred is not the same thing as aversion, but it is a common cause of aversion. We often desire to avoid objects that disturb us and that we reject as contrary to genuine happiness.

Some people think of hatred less as a matter of being averse, and more as a matter of being hostile.²⁹ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary reflects both perspectives, defining “hate” as “intense hostility and aversion.”³⁰ By conjoining aversion and hostility, this definition occludes the fact that these interior motions orient us in different directions: aversion is a movement away from, while hostility is typically a movement toward or facing, an apparent evil. Nonetheless, the pairing is suggestive. It hints further at some of the complexity of hatred.

Hostility is best characterized as an emotion, which might or might not be expressed in outward behavior. Like the emotion of aversion, hostility can be thought of as a way of being moved by an object that we perceive, on a sensory level, to be painful or harmful. But unlike aversion, hostility is a way of tending *toward* an object in order to fend it off, disable it, dominate it, or the like. It is helpful to distinguish hostility from malevolence, even though the two are often experienced at the same time. The latter is best characterized as a motion of the will. Like the volition of aversion, malevolence can be thought of as a way of moving ourselves in relation to an object that we think of as contrary to goodness. But unlike aversion, it is a way of tending *toward* the prospect of stopping that object, injuring it, or seeing it do poorly.³¹

Hostility and malevolence sometimes take the more specific form of anger. Anger is best understood as an emotion that is caused by a painful

in relation to the will. See Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, chapter 6.

29. Aquinas does not distinguish carefully enough between hatred as an emotion and hatred as a motion of the will, or between hatred as the contrary of love and hatred as the contrary of desire, but these distinctions are crucial to the development of an ethic of hatred. See *ST I-II* 29.4, 46.2, 46.6.

30. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Hate,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hate?show=0&t=1338228785>.

31. *ST I-II* 78.3.

impression that we have been intentionally or thoughtlessly slighted by someone who ought to respect us.³² (By extension, we can be angry with an inanimate object, such as a missing set of keys, which has failed to be duly amenable to us.) Anger includes a desire to denounce the slight and avenge ourselves. Our hope, in desiring vengeance, is to cause our offender pain, against his will, in order to force him to take us—and what he has done to us—seriously.³³ Our further aim, which is often implicit, is to re-establish an appropriate balance of power and regard between us. (In the case of a mere thing, our hope is to make it subject to our desire.) The more anger goes beyond a basic sense of having been treated unfairly, which is a feeling that can be experienced by many animals, and it incorporates higher-level judgments about human dignity and justice, the more it becomes a motion of the will, as well as an emotion.³⁴

HOPE IN A SOCIAL IDEAL

Having mapped, in outline, some of the conceptual territory of hatred and related states of mind, we can return to the hope in a social ideal. Suppose our desire for social change is opposed by people who want something very different for the world. Suppose we are offended by (what feels like) their refusal to take us seriously. We are frustrated by (what appears to be) their unwillingness to listen to us, their lack of empathy, and their failure to care about things that ought (we believe) to be important to everyone. We want to defeat their opposition in such a way that we get them to change their hearts and minds. Our overarching purpose is to promote the best conditions for widespread human flourishing. We have reason to believe that our efforts will eventually benefit our opponents as well. In that case, we are most likely in the realm of anger.

Again, suppose we feel disturbed by our opponents because we perceive that they are keeping us from attaining our ideal. We want to defeat their opposition, but we are not inclined to put much time and effort into changing their attitudes. They have proven themselves (in our opinion) to be beyond reason or lacking in good sense. What we want, in effect, is to force them into submission. We might wish to do away with them altogether, sensing that the world would be a better place if they were not in it. If our opponents remain ignorant of the superiority of our vision, and unwilling to join our ranks, then we have no interest in dealing with them as free and

32. *ST I-II* 46.1, 47.1, 47.2.

33. *ST I-II* 46.6.

34. *ST I-II* 46.4, 46.5.

dignified persons. In that case, we are occupied with forms of hostility and malevolence that are in principle distinguishable from anger.

Many people, in diverse cultures, find it easy to admit that they feel anger, for one can almost always interpret a hurtful situation *as* a situation in which one has been treated unfairly. Many people feel justified in the desire to put an offender in his place—after all, the other needs to know his place and behave himself in that place if he is to be a full member of society. Most people are more reluctant to admit that they feel hostile (except in the defense of the innocent) or malevolent (except perhaps toward unambiguous evils) because these interior motions so often tend toward destructiveness, and this destructiveness does not appear to serve a larger ethical purpose, such as justice. There is a lot of room in situations of conflict for faulty interpretation, and the temptation to self-deception can be strong.

Notice that anger, hostility, and malevolence all typically involve a desire to cause someone pain. An angry person *desires* to cause someone pain because he thinks the pain is deserved. Moreover, the pain will alert the offender to the seriousness of what she has done, which is important to the rebuilding of mutual regard. A hostile person *desires* to cause pain mainly because he thinks this pain will slow his opponent down or cause her to back off—or (in more malicious cases) it will cause his victim to feel weak and dependent. The hostile person might seek the latter reaction because it brings him pleasure or relief from the pain of his own life. A malevolent person *desires* to cause pain mainly because he believes the other person is evil and, for that reason, *ought* to suffer—or (in more malicious cases) the malevolent person *simply* wishes the other evil, without caring to justify himself.

Hatred, by contrast, is *not* a desire to cause pain. It is not a desire at all, in a Thomistic scheme. It is merely a feeling of being uncomfortable with and hardening ourselves in relation to some aspect of a situation that we regard (rightly or wrongly) as unsuitable. Hatred *can* give rise to subsequent desires. It can give rise to anger *if* the evil that we suffer takes the form of a slight, and the respect of others or the acknowledgment of our human dignity really matters to us. Hatred can cause hostility *if* we sense that hurting someone could make us feel better or more in control. It can cause malevolence *if* we judge that someone is evil and undeserving of a good and pleasant life.

Hatred can give rise to any of these desires, but it does not necessarily do so. Often, hatred simply dissipates. Situations change, and we move on to other concerns. In addition, sometimes hatred is experienced more in the mode of coldness and callousness than in the mode of steamy preoccupation. Some people disturb us, and we become cold and distant toward them, but beyond this we do not care enough to give them our attention. We might not care enough to turn toward them mentally and wish them ill. At the same time, we would not be upset if things were to go badly for them.

ETHICS OF HATRED AND UTOPIC LONGING

In a Thomistic ethical perspective, most emotions and related motions of the will can be appropriate to a situation or inappropriate. They can be justifiable in some respects while being unjustifiable in others. Hatred, in particular, can be suitable or unsuitable. It is morally problematic to hate the wrong object (for example, something that is not in fact harmful), for the wrong reason, in the wrong respect, too intensely (or too weakly), for too long (or too briefly), too indiscriminately (without recognition of the object's concomitant goodness), and so forth.³⁵ Often the emotion of hatred arises spontaneously, in response to a sensory stimulus, before we have time to think. The point is not to hold persons accountable for initial emotional reactions over which they have no control. Rather, the point is to hold ourselves accountable for the implicit or explicit choices that we make, in light of ethical ideals, to invest in, to withdraw our energy from, or to redirect our initial interior motions.³⁶

In a Thomistic perspective, it can be permissible to hate a trait, attitude, behavior, or the like, which we judge *correctly* to be contrary to human well-being. That is, it can be permissible to feel uncomfortable with, and to choose to limit our felt vulnerability (for a time) in relation to, something *in the respect* and *to the degree* that it is evil or hurtful to humans and to other beings whose good we include in our own.³⁷ However, it is never permissible to hate a person or group of persons as such. What this means, in part, is that it is not permissible to hate a person's existence, such that we are poised, in a subsequent moment, to wish that the person were dead or had never been born. Existence, especially the existence of a person, is essentially good, whatever the person might have made of his or her life so far. The thought of why this person—or any person, for that matter—exists,

35. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b16–24.

36. *ST* I-II 24.1.

37. *ST* I-II 29.5.

and what he or she is capable of contributing to the world, under varying conditions, ought to elicit wonder, rather than disdain.

In the same vein, it is never permissible to hate all that a person is or has become. No human being is utterly without redeeming qualities. To the extent that a person has even the *slightest* possibility of realizing *some* potential for goodness, our recognition of this fact must condition the way we experience whatever hatred we might feel. When we fail to admit the possibility of goodness in another, and we choose instead to perceive only what is lacking, we diminish our own moral goodness. We do best as humans, and we are likely to be most satisfied with our complicated lives, if we readily resonate with—and choose to affirm—objects that are, in some respects, poised to please us in ways that are consistent with human well-being.

When Aquinas speaks of hatred as a *habit* of emotion and volition, he usually implies that it is a *bad* habit. It is a vice, rather than a virtue. A disposition to *excessive* hatred, or a disposition to *hate persons* or groups of persons as such, is a common cause of unjustified hostility and malevolence. But hatred is not by definition excessive, nor does it necessarily give rise to unjustified hostility and malevolence. A person *could* be disposed to undergo *appropriate* emotion and volition in response to perceived evils. That is to say, hatred (in our specific sense) *could* name a moral virtue. However, a virtuous response to a hurtful situation would never be one of hatred alone. And it would never be one in which hatred so commands our awareness that we lose the ability *freely* to detach ourselves from our hatred—or at least begin the process—out of a concern for goodness.

Every evil refers implicitly to something good, such as the fact that the object in question exists at all, that it has potential to actualize, that it sustains the life of something else, that it plays some other role in the larger scheme of things, and so on. An evil can be understood and addressed well only in relation to the good that it diminishes, or from which it detracts. In theory, it is *possible* to exercise a virtuous hatred toward particular aspects of others, but only inasmuch as we experience our dissonance and dissent in the context of virtuous love—only inasmuch as we are, at the same time, well-disposed to be pleased by and to affirm what is good in others and ourselves. In the absence of virtuous love, hatred loses its point as a protector of what we value. It is simply an experience of feeling disturbed by and rejecting what strikes us as negative. By itself, hatred cannot put a person in a flourishing state.

If hatred could, in principle, take the form of a moral virtue, in a context of virtuous love, could it also, like hope, take the form of a *theological* virtue? More precisely, could hatred name a habit that orients humans well in relation to other humans, where the good of humans is viewed against

the horizon of the *highest* good?³⁸ Some Christians (among others) hold that God exhibits hatred. The highest power of the universe hates certain people, especially those who unrepentantly do things that are contrary to God's will. Some Christians hold that their love for God and their hope for redemption *require* that they imitate God and thus hate the people whom God hates. What could it mean, however, to say that God hates people? It could mean that perfect goodness as such does not originate, sustain, attract, or unite with people in the specific manner and to the precise extent that they lack goodness. People who have their origin and end in the source of all goodness, but also live in a world of confusion and misdirection, suffer for their own and each other's unloving choices.

Some religious believers imply more than this when they say that God hates certain people. They imply that God is an all-powerful, personal being who, like them, experiences dissonance, dissent, aversion, hostility, malevolence, anger, and the like (where many of the mental states that we have distinguished are blended together). In holding that God undergoes these sorts of painful responses, people imply that God is vulnerable to being injured by humans who do bad things. God responds to threats and harms by becoming unsettled, putting up defenses, or going on the attack. This thesis contradicts the widely-held notion that God is all-powerful. It suggests that God's power *must* continually vie with human power. It also suggests that God is one being among others, albeit a superior being, rather than the power of being itself. Anthropomorphic images of a hate-full and fearsome God are often used to justify the hatred of enemies. However, such views of God and the imitation of God cannot withstand scrutiny.

Unlike God, as traditionally conceived, humans *are* vulnerable to other humans. The *emotion* of hatred can alert us to the fact that we stand in relation to something that is capable of hurting us or other people whom we love. The *volition* of hatred can be a mode of protecting ourselves and others, and refusing to tolerate behaviors that cause unnecessary suffering. In principle, it is appropriate periodically to be disturbed by and to reject such evils as bigotry or rape or child abuse or everyday meanness, which we judge correctly to be contrary to human well-being. But the challenge is to conceive evil always in relation to good—to feel pained and resistant toward hurtful things always in light of the goodness that they oppose and which we love.

With respect to people in our communities who hope for a future society that we regard as morally problematic, it can be appropriate to hate the

38. Aquinas refers to these virtues more specifically as "infused" moral virtues. See *ST I-II* 63.3.

prospect of that society, just as it can be appropriate to hate the resistance that people pose to our efforts to improve the human condition. The key is to experience such hatred in light of a general ideal of “a good society that is enjoyed by all,” which evokes our consent and our sensory resonance, but which we remain reluctant to define in too much detail.

With respect to our opponents, it is important to presume that they, like everyone else, possess notable goodness. Virtue requires that we consistently look for this goodness, take pleasure in it, and affirm it mentally, even as we feel whatever else we feel—if not at the same moment, then in a workable oscillation. If other people pose a danger to us or to the people whom we love, it is appropriate to register this danger and steel ourselves against it. But our next task is to move ourselves, as soon as feasible, to a more subtle and flexible response, reminding ourselves that persons and situations have many facets, and moral agents have the power to examine one facet, then another, and then another, in an effort to attain a reasonably balanced view of what is happening.

Some people are prone to react to the initial stirrings of hatred by being consumed by their hatred. They become obsessed with a perceived evil, and they lose the ability to advance themselves to other considerations. Inasmuch as hatred is a natural response, in a person with a healthy brain, we probably cannot avoid feeling disturbed in some way by the presence of something that strikes us as hurtful. Moreover, in a Thomistic perspective, hatred is a necessary cost of love, within the temporal realm, and a life without love is not worthy of a human being, nor does it lead to flourishing communities. However, Aquinas would have us strive to become more capable of experiencing dissonance and dissent in relation to a particular feature of a situation, without losing touch with other features of the situation, and other situations that warrant openness and affirmation. If we are to thrive in each other's company, we must presume that it is generally possible for us and for others to register the presence of a hurtful object, while remaining capable of evoking alternative perspectives and motives, as needed, to keep ourselves from becoming overly-preoccupied by what appears to be negative.

Ought we to indulge in utopic longing, individually or as members of a group, when other people in our extended communities regard our social ideal as anything but ideal—when these other people are disposed to hate that for which we hope, and even to hate our hope, and we, in turn, are prone to hate the fact that they hate the things that are dear to us? The question is: are we and others emotionally and volitionally capable of managing our response to a perceived evil, such that we keep our initial hatred from becoming excessive and yielding malicious forms of hostility, malevolence,

and anger? If we love goodness, we will appropriately hate what is contrary to goodness. Yet we will realize, all along, that the people or groups who oppose us are not defined simply by their opposition to us. They do not exist only for or against us, but in their own right. Both they—and we—are capable of much goodness. Moreover, we are all capable of changing in surprising ways. Indeed, each of us is continually changing. Developing our full human potential requires cultivating habits that reflect an awareness of this fact. It is possible to bring ourselves to love the presumed goodness and potential for goodness of even our strongest opponents, in a manner that reliably qualifies our hatred, as our hatred rises and falls.

It is good to think of the ideal society as a situation in which humans (among other beings) thrive individually, interpersonally, and communally, within the constraints of finitude. Beyond this, it is wise to regard the more specific content of the ideal as somewhat of an open question. (The question ought not to be regarded as *completely* open; there is a range of reasonable views concerning what is good for humans, but it is not the case that anything and everything is consistent with human well-being.) Our opponents are persons who have reasons for embracing the conception of the good that they currently embrace—reasons that they could probably articulate to us, if we were to ask well-formed questions. Close listening can inspire us to reformulate our ideal in ways that are experienced by others as more congenial to their way of thinking.

A utopic ideal can function as a reminder to consider and care about the good for humans, in a way that self-consciously orients us toward an end that we love, but cannot fully comprehend. It can, in principle, expose the limits of any settled view of things. It can continually bring people back to simple moral practices that hold the worst forms of cruelty and callousness at bay. Utopic longing poses moral risks inasmuch as we lack the mental wherewithal to project our ideal while also, at the same time, recognizing that our perspectives and judgments—like those of others—are limited. Yet we have little choice but to cultivate the kind of character that allows us—and hopefully encourages others—to both take and minimize this risk. Doing well as humans requires that we be ever hopeful of the possibility of goodness, especially of the reduction of pointless suffering, while learning to deal with ineliminable features of our animal nature, including our tendency to find certain things in our environment disturbing.

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