# *Josef Pieper's Contemplative Assent to the World*

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I

> We must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit. He who does not do so, understands not the force of reason. There are some who offend against these three rules, either by affirming everything as demonstrative, from want of knowing what demonstration is; or by doubting everything, from want of knowing where to submit; or by submitting in everything, from want of knowing where they must judge.—*Blaise Pascal*[1]

PASCAL'S SUBTLE LIMNING OF BELIEF and doubt and the need to be firm in both would have appealed to Josef Pieper. Pieper approved of Pascal's contributions to the seventeenth-century debate over the validity of tradition because it allowed for a clear distinction between the fact-based truth-claims of empirical science and the tradition-based truth-claims of theology.[2] If one understood the nature of these different truth-claims one would indeed know "where to doubt [and] where to feel certain." The doctrine of falsifiability is integral to the self-understanding of the natural sciences to this day. Tradition, on the other hand, which for Pieper ultimately derives from revelation, proclaims certainties. Pieper's long essay on tradition in the pages of *Modern Age* (Spring 1994) specifically endorses tradition as "a dynamic matter," though, inviting reason to cooperate with faith in one's willing acceptance of that which is handed down, the *traditum*. As American society at large uncritically applauds scientific progress for its own sake while endangering the skepticism which responsible science maintains at its core, Pieper's decidedly untimely meditations on being-in-the-world, his habit of pronouncing the world good ("*gutheißen*") and of affirming the value of the individual deserve reconsideration.

American readers encountering the life and work of Josef Pieper are required to perform the labor of cultural translation. As a German, a Catholic philosopher, a conservative sociologist, a writer of crisp and deliberate prose, a man whose lifetime measured the entire breadth of the twentieth century (1904-1997), Pieper may be no less remote from our world than Ralph Waldo Emerson with whom he shares the gift of clear and distinct expression though none of his other attributes. If all of Pieper's at-

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tributes are potential obstacles to our appreciation of his work, they can at the same time become pathways for us to travel towards him. The adjectives used above to sketch Pieper can turn into key concepts whose clarification will bring us closer to his thought.

Pieper's German roots in Continental philosophy—his admiration for Pascal, for instance—place him in a scholastic philosophical tradition different both from John Locke's empiricism and from Edmund Burke's historical traditionalism. American readers have to make room for this difference. Similarly, Catholicism as a basis of intellectual endeavor has been fraught with its own specific set of obstacles in America until at least the middle of the twentieth century. Finally, a conservative sociologist who grew up in the German empire, lived through two wars, and practiced a lifelong aristocratic ethic is something very different from an American thinker who would earn that designation under the auspices of a continuous democracy.

The almost exclusive popularity in American circles of a single book of Pieper's over the course of many years is a case in point that illustrates the difficulty of resuscitating the genuine Josef Pieper. Until the re-translation and republication in English of his large corpus over just the past few years, Pieper was known in America primarily as the author of *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (1952), to the popularity of which T.S. Eliot's gracious introduction had greatly contributed. Eliot recognized that part of Pieper's genius lay in reclaiming philosophy *as philosophy* instead of employing it as the handmaid of mathematics in a misguided attempt to construct a symbolic ethics. Without mentioning Pascal, Eliot avers that his own youthful inquiries into philosophy perhaps lacked the distinction between knowing "where to doubt [and] where to submit": "At the time when I myself was a student of philosophy...the philosopher was beginning to suffer from a feeling of inferiority to the exact scientist. It was felt that the mathematician was the man best qualified to philosophize."[3] And Eliot uses the concept of submission explicitly when he marks out Pieper's distinctive space: "[H]is mind is submissive to what he believes to be the great, the main tradition of European thought; his originality is subdued and unostentatious."

Yet even though *Leisure* was masterfully translated by Alexander Dru, and the title is perhaps even inspired by marketing genius, *Muße und Kult* has a decidedly different ring in German. No one would mistake "*Muße*" for leisurely relaxation; instead, notions of contemplation and gazing inward form part of the associative cluster surrounding the term. "*Kult*" very specifically and anthropologically refers to a series of ritual actions performed in worship and other sacred rites. By contrast, "culture" in English can refer to anything from a supercilious high-brow attitude towards the supposedly uneducated to the sum total of artistic production of an entire society. Pieper's specific concern with ritual festivity and with the living, breathing, vibrant enactment of tradition is not immediately discernible from the English title. Yet these concerns of his ultimately have their roots in German twentieth-century societal phenomena such as the *Wandervogel* youth movement of the twenties—decidedly not proto-Nazi—and in Pieper's religious upbringing in a denomination that emphasized ritual, tradition, and a concept of God as remote and awesome over against a mainline Protestant American understanding that is scriptural, critical, and recognizes a personal concept of God. In other words, terms like *Muße* and *Kult* resonate with Pieper's biography in such a way as to require cultural translation. Most important and potentially misleading, perhaps, is the manner in which the title *Leisure,*

*the Basis of Culture* sets up a logical relationship between leisure as cause and culture as effect. By his characteristic adding of terms in *Muße and Kult* as well as in his later titles such as *Hope and History*, *Happiness and Contemplation* and others, Pieper avails himself of terms which together, as a pair, contain truth. The additive gesture reveals a philosopher steeped in a faith tradition that claims both scripture *and* tradition in lieu of a Protestant, Kierkegaardian either/or.

Pieper's own extensive remarks on his personal, cultural, and religious experiences as a frequent guest on the North American continent can help us to calibrate our responses to what seems alien in his old-world picture. In the end, Pieper's bedrock conviction which appears at first most remote may become the one we apprehend with greatest ease: Scholastic philosophy, coming to its fullest flowering in Thomas Aquinas, not only contains within itself the highest achievement of the occidental mind but also offers twentieth-century man the clearest view of the good. Pieper's precept for the good life is a life lived in contemplative assent to the world.

II

"Assent to the world": at first blush, this seems second nature to Americans, whether for religious or secular reasons. "Contemplation": this is decidedly alien to a people dedicated to action, production, results, measurable achievements. Though Pieper grounds his life rules in scholastic philosophy, he is convinced that anthropological and sociological truths undergird this philosophy. What manner of being-in-the-world most becomes us? Pieper echoes what a Medieval world grounded in faith would have considered commonplace: the deliberate pursuit of leisure, an end in itself, is the necessary corollary of the deliberate pursuit of useful work, a means to an end.[4] Of course, since human beings are created beings, one of their essential tasks in life is to glorify creation—so runs the line of thought from Tertullian to Ockham and beyond. But Pieper speaks these truths to a world in which both the ideological worker state and the bourgeois capitalist state exhibit totalitarian tendencies. Total commitment to work, total quality management, total functionality as the measure of man: across the ideological spectrum, these tenets privilege function over identity and use over dignity.

Pieper's frequent references to Marxism as a foil against which to develop his own ideas illustrate his deep concern for the human individual. He objects to Marxism not primarily as a political structure of organization but as a gross misjudgment of personal dignity. Pieper's objection is anthropological and, by extension, sociological. Marxism instrumentalizes persons by reifying their work. This misconstruction is its cardinal sin. Pieper strenuously defends the dignity of human work but seeks to forestall Marxism's totalizing claim on work. In the absence of deliberate leisure, culture and genuine festivity cannot flourish.

Pieper considers the proper celebration of festivals as an avenue for men and women to regain a sense of their dignity in themselves as parts of creation. By deliberately renouncing admittedly "valuable working time," human beings celebrate "from the root of a comprehensive affirmation—for which no other term can be found than 'love.'"[5] This love signifies assent to the world as it is, and the contemplation required to attain such a "*visio beatifica*" allows us to break through the functional world of the ordinary to the satisfying world of the extraordinary. The power of distinction between what is ordinary and what is extraordinary enables us to make value judgments. Our fossilized language still suggests what we value. "Killing time"

with distracting amusements is the antithesis to access to the self. Having a "good" time really means having access to the good inherent in creation.

Since Pieper's philosophy consistently engages large, foundational questions in finely chiseled statements intended for a general readership, his lifelong associations with universities tended to be reluctant. He arrived at philosophy as an academic discipline only after several semesters of dabbling in theology, law, and sociology, respectively. His reluctance to engage in the laborious, detailed handiwork of a German academic scholarship just short of pedanticism; his preference for writing sweeping, elegant, and plain-spoken books on large concepts; and his conviction about the significance of educating the whole person (*Bildung*) instead of skill-oriented training are all consequences of his image of how persons are constituted and how the truth had best be told. Thus, while Pieper characteristically lent support to his arguments with quotations from the ancients as well as from modern literature so well-chosen that their poignancy raised them to the status of incontrovertible evidence, he typically did not engage in deconstructive commentary on others' work. Instead, sweeping aside the disagreements of the day, he returned directly to Plato, Aristotle, the Church Fathers, and Aquinas in his attempt to point to the supporting beams of that large edifice, the Western tradition. Because he believed that human beings grow to their highest potential in awareness of the totality of human experience, Pieper time and again rejected lucrative but narrow university assignments in favor of continuing his teaching at the teachers' academy in Essen. Indeed, Aquinas had called human virtue *ultimum potentiae*, the ultimate of man's capability. As Pindar did in a pre-Christian universe, so Aquinas stressed that human beings need to "become what they are"; that being on a path is intrinsic to the human condition; and that one's choice is merely between assenting to becoming that *ultimum* or to resist it. Such resistance takes the form of despair, an *acedia* that is not laziness but either carelessness or the ultimately fruitless pursuit of distraction from the self.[6] Pieper remained convinced that educating teachers, not specialists, offered the best opportunity to engage in *Bildung* and to release the *ultimum potentiae*.

Through the mid-1960s, teachers' academies in Northrhine-Westphalia, the North German federal state in which Pieper lived, were confessionally grounded. That is, future teachers for the elementary and some versions of secondary public school service were educated in their disciplines under the assumption that all partners in the educational enterprise shared either the Lutheran or the Catholic faith. While this practice expressly privileged *Weltan-schauung* over the supposedly objective rule of science, Pieper argues that these circumstances never seemed to him "a diminishment of freedom or of 'spiritual breadth'; instead [they] offered a genuine chance to achieve true human *Bildung*." "At any rate," concludes Pieper in 1969, following fundamental progressive changes in the German educational system, it is "a deeply problematical fact that under the banner of the 'scientification of teacher education' the openly declared confessional orientation has been replaced with a far less obvious susceptibility to ideologies of all stripes."[7]

## III

How did Pieper's own *Bildung* guide him towards these convictions? Growing up in a Westphalian village and, from age 7 on, being raised in Westphalia's capital city, Münster, Pieper experienced his adolescence as ordered by the rhythm of the liturgical year. *Sentire cum ecclesia*: not national celebrations but the high

holy days of the Church punctuated the year. Sumptuous liturgy invested feast days with glory and offered respite from hard work. The wholesome necessity of alternating ordinary and extraordinary events would have been self-evident to Pieper in the practice of his life of faith. Small wonder, then, that he felt a calling to theology and the contemplative life—how wrong it would be to speak of a "career choice" in this context! Small wonder, too, that the celebration of liturgy, man's openness to festivity and renewal, the mutual support of theology and philosophy, and assent to the world as a created good would become recurring themes in his life's work.

Yet it is important not to mistake Pieper for a theologian *manqué*. To understand this, we must consider the unique relationship between the state and the churches that has obtained in Germany since the time of Bismarck. Whereas the United States constitutionally separates church and state on the one hand, and whereas countries such as Italy have Catholicism as their state religion on the other hand, the German state has regulated its relationships with the Lutheran and the Catholic churches by contract. The *Reichskonkordat* [treaty] of July 1933 between Germany and the Vatican, with modifications still in force to this day, governs the status of the Catholic church in Germany. The state collects taxes on behalf of the church; hospitals and schools run by the church are under strong administrative guidance from the state and have a mandate to be pluralistic. Religious education is offered in public schools on a voluntary basis, and the churches have a strong, contractually guaranteed voice in public discussions on social policy.

This scenario is unfamiliar to American observers accustomed to a strict church-state separation resulting in vigorous, often acrimonious disagreements on social and public policy. For Pieper, by contrast, the presence of religious discourse in German public life frees a philosopher to be Catholic without professionally associating with the Church. During Pieper's lifetime, then, before Germany deliberately attempted to become multicultural, a certain congruence between value judgments on the political and religious levels could be assumed to exist.[8]

As we learn from the first volume of Pieper's autobiography *Noch wußte es Niemand*[9] and from nearly every page of his published work, Pieper regarded St. Thomas Aquinas as the embodiment of philosophical truth. Several consequences flow immediately from this conviction. 1. Post-schismatic Christianity is essentially engaged in shadow-boxing over doctrinal matters which Aquinas would have perceived as coherent. 2. Post-Renaissance philosophy has become untrue to itself to the extent to which it has abandoned questions of ultimate reality, of the totality of "God and the World,"[10] and has instead deteriorated into a discipline on a par with other self-delimiting sciences. 3. Moral imperatives result directly from one's convictions about how man is constituted; hence, moral teaching is not a question of ideology or even of choice but a consequence of reality. This, in turn, entails seeing reality *as it really is*, and that quest is philosophy's supreme and only appropriate task.

The last assertion is the most difficult for contemporary readers to comprehend, but its application has such far-reaching consequences for the conduct of human life that we need to follow its individual steps. With a single philosophical stroke, Pieper cuts through all warring ideologies of the twentieth century, puts post-Cartesian philosophy to its self-imposed shame, and achieves the generalization that will provide a firm ground for his life and work. Almost incidentally, this insight also provided him with a

dissertation topic. In *Noch wußte es Niemand*, Pieper describes a brief stay in a youth camp in the summer of 1924 that crystallized his thoughts in an epiphanic moment. We have to imagine this youth camp as a sort of voluntary summer school, a heady mixture of hiking and philosophy, a late flowering of the *Wandervogel* movement as yet untainted by Nazi usurpation; a place where conversation, singing, reading, and the best thoughts of the German classical tradition came together. Romano Guardini happened to be speaking to the youngsters on this occasion, the choir gave a recital of some of Goethe's shorter poems, and twenty-year old Josef had recently begun exploring Thomas's *Summa*. And now it happened: "*Alles Sollen gründet im Sein; das Gute ist das Wirklichkeitsgemäße*" [Moral law originates in Being; the Good is that which is according to reality]. This insight would provide the kernel of his dissertation, "*The ontic foundation of morality according to Thomas Aquinas*," and the rest of his philosophy would flow from it.

Pieper spells out what he means. Contemplate, if you will, the result of these words spoken into an American discussion on social policy, school reform, family values, or the abortion debate: "Whoever wants to know and do the good must view objective reality, not his own 'ideology,' not his 'conscience,' not 'values,' not his self-chosen 'ideals' and 'models.' He has to resist examining his own action and instead view reality." For only a brief moment one suspects that Pieper is begging the question of what constitutes objective reality. Does not science give us the answers? No! Only philosophy asks after the totality of existence by asking for the ultimate reason of *why* things are. Pieper's answer is buttressed by faith: the phenomenal world offers evidence of things unseen. Knowledge is a significant step on the path to belief. One wants to know as much as one can, to be sure. But factual knowledge does not answer "why." What is common to all the elements Pieper tells us to reject—ideology, conscience, values, ideals, models—is their privileging of the supposedly autonomous self, that chimera of Enlightenment thinking moderns so revere. For Pieper, Aquinas's natural rights philosophy provides the "*nomos*" we no longer need to impose on ourselves. In the place of a world self-defined by duties, contracts, and obligations, he would put a life lived in tune with creation, a life in contemplative assent to the world.

## IV

Duties and obligations have their place, to be sure. In *Grundformen sozialer Spielregeln* ["Patterns of Societal Rules"], a topic that occupied him from the late twenties to the late eighties, Pieper takes paradigmatic sociology to task by rejecting the classic approach of Ferdinand Toennies on both fronts. He simultaneously dismisses Toennies's characterization of the modern organic society based on division of labor as "a pathology"[11] and rejects Toennies's Romantic exaltation of a quasi-tribal mechanical society based on commonality. In place of this duality, Pieper argues that several legitimate forms of association among men exist, and that *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft*, and *Organisation* ["tribe," "society," and "organization," respectively] have each developed rules which rightly balance justice and love according to the sort of association persons engage in with each other. In daily life no form exists in exclusivity, but the family, the business contract, and the military might serve as paradigmatic examples of tribe *(Gemeinschaft)*, society *(Gesellschaft)*, and *Organisation*, respectively.

If I may venture an interpretation into the American context, I suspect Pieper would decry the emotional exhibitionism on daytime talk shows as a classic

example of persons mistaking a *Gesellschaft* ["society"] for a *Gemeinschaft* ["tribe"] and thus confirming the adage that familiarity breeds contempt.[12] Since we have rules that govern the friendly engagement in public life through tact, he would find in such a spectacle confirmation for his belief that the advocacy of radical familiarity or tribal *Gemeinschaft* amounts to an ethic of tactlessness.[13]

Pieper would further characterize the proliferation of lawsuits in private life, guided by the unfounded assumption that every injustice has a legal remedy, as an illegitimate encroachment of contractually-based rules of society in the realm of the tribe. And, in our debates over the second amendment, he would quote with relish an anecdote from Jules Cambon's 1926 memoir, *Le Diplomate*: A Tuareg chieftain was taken around the Paris World's Fair and asked what had impressed him most. The chieftain named neither the Eiffel Tower nor the Ferris wheel, but the fact that one could walk unarmed among so many strangers.[14] Among the greatest achievements of a society is the peaceful coexistence guaranteed by the monopoly of force in the state's organs such as the police.

But Pieper reserves his greatest scorn and his direst warnings for a society which privileges the rules of *Organisation* above all else. To be sure, for certain portions of my life my personal friendship with my superior is held in abeyance in favor of the demands of authority in the workplace, but the hypertrophy of *Organisation* is an illegitimate reduction of human togetherness to contractual and official relationships, a status which severely endangers the *bonum commune*.[15]

## V

"I will be flesh and blood," says Shakespeare's Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing*,[16] as he explains how even stoic philosophy has to face the ultimate test of reality:

> *For there was never yet philosopher*
> *That could endure the toothache patiently,*
> *However they have writ the style of gods,*
> *And made a push at chance and sufferance.*

If quotidian factual knowledge is put to its test *in extremis*, the question "Why" is raised with particular urgency at the point of death. In July 1964, Josef Pieper's oldest son, Thomas, died at age 28, the result of a cerebral hemorrhage he suffered after a day's hiking and camping at the foot of Mt. Rainier in Seattle, Washington. The death of a child is among the most bitter experiences life can dole out to a person, and there is no doubt that this loss devastated Pieper and his wife more profoundly than anything else in their lives, including the long nights in the Münster bomb shelters during the years from 1943 to 1945.

Assent to the world becomes more difficult under such circumstances. The fact that Thomas died while on a fellowship at the University of California at Berkeley to study physics situated the mourning over the lost son in a strange American context. One of Pieper's abiding suspicions of American culture was what he perceived to be its inability to admit a tragic dimension to life.

During a 1948 excursion to Switzerland, Pieper and his wife had struck up a friendship with the painter Richard Seewald. In spite of his appreciation for Seewald's work and faith, Pieper remarks that he missed in Seewald "the grain of 'negative' philosophy and theology without which the world appears as too unrealistically harmonious." A few years later, during a semester's visit to the University of Notre Dame, Pieper approvingly reports Jacques Maritain's complaint about the increasing influence of logical positivism in the United States. Much later, in 1968 in Santa Fe, Pieper takes

umbrage at the injunction "Smile! God Loves You!" painted on the exterior of a church. Only in America, he thinks, could this happen.[17] Pieper had a lifelong suspicion of institutionalized optimism regardless of where he encountered it, but he saw it as endemic in the United States.

Thomas's death in Seattle therefore gains a special poignancy because he died in a place where death is often perceived, at best, as an unsanitary disturbance of life rather than as the participatory act of man in his own new creation. Pieper's numerous writings on hope, whether it be on hope as one of the virtues, or in the context of *Hope and History*, or as the key concept in *The End of Time,*[18] are thrust into high relief when juxtaposed with the experience of losing his son. The popular—or populist?—American concept "hope" has virtually nothing in common with Pieper's definition of hope as a theological virtue.

Americans characteristically have an unbounded confidence in the future, based on their native optimism about overcoming obstacles, their technical expertise, and their enviable record of achievements, especially when called upon to improvise under adverse circumstances. For Pieper, however, and for his interpretation of the Western tradition, two insights are axiomatic: First, man cannot control his destiny and would likely reenact the story of Babel if he tried. Second, while Christians believe that history is ordered towards a salvific goal, salvation is literally beyond this world, and human history may well end in an innerworldly catastrophe—"whether that end be called dying, defeat of the good, martyrdom, or world domination by evil"[19]—without thereby gainsaying God's ultimate plan for a new heaven and a new earth. Wherever and whenever Pieper presented these thoughts to American audiences, he was met with polite applause at best, emphatic disagreement at worst. Invariably, he noticed how such thoughts clashed with the pervasive and unexamined American confidence in the progress of the human race.

A brief summary of Pieper's argument in *Unaustrinkbares Licht*[20] may help clarify these two axioms. For Aquinas, everything is created, and the creator has intended his creation as both good and true. As creatures, we may know things, but we may not formally know their truth. We recognize the imitation but fail to perceive the equivalency between the imitation and the original thought in the mind of God to which we have no access. Readers of Plato will recognize the pattern of this argument from Book X of the *Republic* that makes a similar case with respect to forms. Our terminal insight is simply insufficient to perceive the surplus of light which pervades all created being. Since hope is a "not-yet," a condition closer to "yes" than to "no," we strive constantly towards deeper insight. The highest state of knowledge about God we can reach is to recognize him as the unknowable one: "*tamquam ignotum.*" Boundless optimism and the banishment of suffering to the border of existence are simply not congruent with this world picture. By contrast, suffering is an integral part of man's inability—as yet!—to know the truth of things. Hope under these circumstances is the reaching out towards the eventually unfolding truth. Pieper dedicated his 1967 Salzburg Lectures, *Hope and History*, to the memory of his son. He ended the lectures by recalling that the object hoped for always remains non-specifiable:

> "[T]hose who truly hope...remain open to the possibility of a fulfillment that surpasses every preconceivable human notion.... [This] has nothing to do with timid, petit bourgeois aversion to the radical thrust of great political decisions.... It may well, however, have something to do with mistrust of any delimiting specification of the object of hope.

This is Pieper's version of assent to the world in contemplation under considerable personal duress.

VI

The world which Pieper so strenuously urges us to see clearly is, always and everywhere, our own world. Its truth is spoken in words, communication must be public,—hence Plato's dialogues as Pieper's models—and speaking in the public realm is subject to especially stringent ethical standards. Contemporary literary theory has called into question two assertions that, for Pieper, distinguish the philosopher, the seeker of truth, from the sophist, the merchandiser of words dressed up as wisdom: "First, words convey reality."[21] Second, "the interpersonal character of human speech" is the place for the furtherance of truth and also the point where sophistry can interject itself. For Pieper, language is used genuinely in dialogue that respects the interlocutors' dignity. "Loss of that dignity has insidious political consequences. The degradation of man... through man...has its beginning...at that almost imperceptible moment when the word loses its dignity."

Pieper's care for a language of dignity resonates with his distrust of totalitarian abuse of language, of course, but his critique applies as well to the language of advertisement that falsifies reality by cajoling. Pieper would have agreed with George Steiner who, in 1960, warned of the corruption of conscience resulting from an unethical use of words. Steiner meditated on the failure of the German language to keep pace with the economic recovery of postwar Germany. He takes the literary flowering of the 1920, in which Brecht, Mann, Rilke, Kafka, and Musil produced literature in German on a par with Faulkner, Joyce, Eliot, and Proust, as the high benchmark from which Nazism took the language into a rapid deterioration. Hitler, Steiner charges, planted the seed of "moral illiteracy" in the German language:

> Something will happen to the words. Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language. [The language] will no longer perform, quite as well as it used to, its two principal functions: the conveyance of humane order which we call law, and the communication of the quick of the human spirit which we call grace. In an anguished note in his diary for 1940, Klaus Mann observed that he could no longer read new German books: "Can it be that Hitler has polluted the language of Nietzsche and Hölderlin?" *It can* [emphasis added].[22]

Pieper takes this argument back to his own convictions about how human beings are constituted. Flattery, he explains with reference to the *Phaedrus* and the *Politeia*, is so vicious because it demolishes the dignity of the interlocutor: "His dignity is ignored; I concentrate on his weaknesses...to use him for *my* purposes."[23] In other words, once the respect for reality and for the dignity of one's interlocutor has disappeared, the floodgates are opened to admit sophistry.

In the most basic philosophical terms, Pieper's axiomatic assumptions from the Scholastic tradition are at variance with the Enlightenment assumptions governing American thinking. After asserting that "we want happiness *by nature*,"[24] Pieper adds that "[n]o one can obtain felicity by pursuit," as if to repudiate Jefferson's happy phrase in the Declaration of Independence. Pieper's intent is to extend our vision beyond any and all gratification which "instantly reveals its inadequacy" because it will not satisfy and will instead give rise to further desires for happiness. For Pieper, the constitutional primacy of happiness is an indicator of man's status as *viator*, as a traveler within a universe ordered towards a heavenly goal. Not all may share this faith commitment, but those who do not will no doubt admire Pieper's con-

stant reminder that human beings are constituted in goodness, in totality, and are meant to be in agreement with themselves. His consistency on these topics is one of his most admirable traits because we do not need to tiptoe around gaps in his thinking. Careful reading of Pieper's anthropology—and that seems the correct term here—may reveal our own inconsistencies, our tendency to measure things according to changing conveniences. In an early review of *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Allen Tate deplored that Americans tend to "take for granted a long chain of inevitable 'separations'—not only of theology from philosophy, but of church from state, religion from education, work from play, morality from business, art from society, leisure from work, love from sex, the individual from the community."[25] Pieper's insistence on the created good of humanity would transcend these gaps by restoring man's essential, unitary, and complete nature to its rightful primacy as a viable model of anthropology and sociology.

Josef Pieper will use reason to take him as far as it can. But his final trust rests not in the discursive power of *ratio*, but in the *intellectus*, the seeing, the perception, even the intuition that silence gives to men and women. In the opening pages of *Leisure, the Basis of Culture,* Pieper comes close to mocking Kant for reducing philosophy to a form of work.[26] Exclusive reliance on rationality is for Pieper the hallmark of reductive post-Renaissance philosophers. In eradicating unverifiable romantic imprecision, these philosophers have also foreclosed access to insight based on contemplation.

Pieper strenuously defends contemplative seeing—we need to remember that the Latin *contemplatio* corresponds to the Greek *theoria*[27]—as having already reached what the critical thinker is still trying to reach. Pieper's literary prooftexts for these epiphanic moments tend to come from Goethe's late letters, but Anglophone readers will recognize the same gesture in an English contemporary of the late Goethe. When John Keats, in "Ode to a Nightingale," rejects opiates and intoxicants in favor of poetry, he performs a similar operation as Pieper would have us perform with the act of intellectual perception. Access to the object of beauty is as immediate, and unmediated, for the poet as access to truth is for the philosopher:

> *Though the dull brain perplexes and retards*
> *Already with thee!*[28]

Thus, with Aquinas, Pieper would exhort us to maintain our human dignity, to enjoy our humanity as such, by reserving a space free from utility. He would point to education, grounded in the "gentlemanly" arts of leisure, and considered use of language as tools to a genuinely human development. Far from existentialism in any of its forms, Pieper would more properly be called an essentialist, a firm believer in reality and in our capacity for its intentional apprehension. In the end, "[t]he essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect."[29]

**1.** *Pensées* (London, 1948), 77. **2.** "Tradition: The Concept and Its Claims Upon Us," *Modern Age,* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Spring 1994), 218. **3.** "Introduction" to *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York, 1963), 12. **4.** "Leisure, the Basis of Culture" and "The Philosophical Act," *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend, 1998), 24, 32-33. **5.** *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity* (South Bend, 1999), 20-21. **6.** *Menschliches Richtigsein, Josef Pieper Lesebuch* (München, 1990), 15-16. See also *Leisure*, trans. Malsbary, 28-30. **7.** *Noch nicht aller Tage Abend, Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen 1945-1964* (München, 1979), 141. [Literally: "Not Yet the End of Days," Vol. 2 of Pieper's autobiography, not currently available in English.] I have translated all quotations from German texts unless otherwise noted. English titles are quoted as printed. **8.** The

12 years of Nazi rule are the obvious exception. Yet, the failure of so many Germans to resist totalitarianism more vigorously may also find one of its roots in this customary, traditional attribution of decency to political leaders. The political cynicism of our time is a fruit of different political experience. **9.** *Noch wußte es Niemand. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen 1904-1945* (München, 1976). [Literally "No One Knew As Yet"] This first volume of Pieper's autobiography appeared in English translation as *No One Could Have Known: An Autobiography: The Early Years, 1904-1945* (*San Francisco*, 1987). **10.** "The Philosophical Act," in *Leisure*, trans. Malsbary, 97. **11.** München, 1987, 34. **12.** Pieper quotes the adage in English on p. 31 of *Grundformen*. **13.** See *Grundformen*, 51. **14.** See *Grundformen*, 54. **15.** See *Grundformen*, 69-70. **16.** *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974), V, I, 34-38. **17.** *Eine Geschichte wie ein Strahl. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen seit 1964* (München, 1988), 120. [Literally: "A Story Like a Beam," Vol. 3 of Pieper's autobiography, not currently available in English]. **18.** *The End of Time: A Meditation on the Philosophy of History* (San Francisco, 1999). **19.** *Hope and History: Five Salzburg Lectures* (San Francisco, 1994), 107. **20.** *Unaustrinkbares Licht: Das negative Element in der Weltansicht des Thomas von Aquin* (München, 1953). [Literally "the light one cannot drink to the bottom": *q.v.*, a source of light which will not run dry. Subtitled "The negative element in the world view of Thomas Aquinas."] **21.** *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power* (San Francisco, 1992), 15. **22.** "The Hollow Miracle: Notes on the German Language," *The Reporter*, February 18, 1960, 37, 38. **23.** *Abuse of Language*, 23. **24.** *Happiness and Contemplation* (South Bend, 1998), 20, emphasis in original. **25.** "In Search of the 'Wisdom Possessed by God,'" *New York Times Book Review*, February 24, 1952, 12. Reprinted in *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Dru, 147. **26.** Trans. Malsbary, 10. **27.** See *Happiness and Contemplation*, 73. **28.** *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, in *The Oxford Authors* (Oxford and New York, 1990), 286. **29.** *Happiness and Contemplation*, 58.

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