

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE (EIGHT ARTICLES)

We must now consider the contemplative life, under which head there are eight points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether the contemplative life pertains to the intellect only, or also to the affections?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether the moral virtues pertain to the contemplative life?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether the contemplative life consists in one action or in several?
 - [\(4\)](#) Whether the consideration of any truth whatever pertains to the contemplative life?
 - [\(5\)](#) Whether the contemplative life of man in this state can arise to the vision of God?
 - [\(6\)](#) Of the movements of contemplation assigned by Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv);
 - [\(7\)](#) Of the pleasure of contemplation;
 - [\(8\)](#) Of the duration of contemplation.
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Whether the contemplative life has nothing to do with the affections, and pertains wholly to the intellect?

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and pertains wholly to the intellect. For the Philosopher says (Metaph. ii, text. 3 [*Ed Did. ia, 1]) that "the end of contemplation is truth." Now truth pertains wholly to the intellect. Therefore it would seem that the contemplative life wholly regards the intellect.

Objection 2: Further, Gregory says (Moral. vi, 37; Hom. xix in Ezech.) that "Rachel, which is interpreted 'vision of the principle' [*Or rather, 'One seeing the principle,' if derived from {rah} and {irzn}; Cf. Jerome, De Nom. Hebr.], signifies the contemplative life." Now the vision of a principle belongs properly to the intellect. Therefore the contemplative life belongs properly to the intellect.

Objection 3: Further, Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that it belongs to the contemplative life, "to rest from external action." Now the affective or appetitive power inclines to external actions. Therefore it would seem that the contemplative life has nothing to do with the appetitive power.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the contemplative life is to cling with our whole mind to the love of God and our neighbor, and to desire nothing beside our Creator." Now desire and love pertain to the affective or appetitive power, as stated above (FS, Question [25], Article [2]; FS, Question [26], Article [2]). Therefore the contemplative life has also something to do with the affective or appetitive power.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[179\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)) theirs is said to be the contemplative who are chiefly intent on the contemplation of truth. Now intention is an act of the will, as stated above ([FS, Question \[12\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), because intention is of the end which is the object of the will. Consequently the contemplative life, as regards the essence of the action, pertains to the intellect, but as regards the motive cause of the exercise of that action it belongs to the will, which moves all the other powers, even the intellect, to their actions, as stated above ([FP, Question \[82\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#); [FS, Question \[9\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)).

Now the appetitive power moves one to observe things either with the senses or with the intellect, sometimes for love of the thing seen because, as it is written ([Mt. 6:21](#)), "where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also," sometimes for love of the very knowledge that one acquires by observation. Wherefore Gregory makes the contemplative life to consist in the "love of God," inasmuch as through loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty. And since everyone delights when he obtains what he loves, it follows that the contemplative life terminates in delight, which is seated in the affective power, the result being that love also becomes more intense.

Reply to Objection 1: From the very fact that truth is the end of contemplation, it has the aspect of an appetible good, both lovable and delightful, and in this respect it pertains to the appetitive power.

Reply to Objection 2: We are urged to the vision of the first principle, namely God, by the love thereof; wherefore Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the contemplative life tramples on all cares and longs to see the face of its Creator."

Reply to Objection 3: The appetitive power moves not only the bodily members to perform external actions, but also the intellect to practice the act of contemplation, as stated above.

Whether the moral virtues pertain to the contemplative life?

Objection 1: It would seem that the moral virtues pertain to the contemplative life. For Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the contemplative life is to cling to the love of God and our neighbor with the whole mind." Now all the moral virtues, since their acts are prescribed by the precepts of the Law, are reducible to the love of God and of our neighbor, for "love... is the fulfilling of the Law" ([Rm. 13:10](#)). Therefore it would seem that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life.

Objection 2: Further, the contemplative life is chiefly directed to the contemplation of God; for Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the mind tramples on all cares and longs to gaze on the face of its Creator." Now no one can accomplish this without cleanness of heart, which is a result of moral virtue [*Cf. Question [8], Article [7]]. For it is written ([Mt. 5:8](#)): "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God": and ([Heb. 12:14](#)): "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see God." Therefore it would seem that the moral virtues pertain to the contemplative life.

Objection 3: Further, Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the contemplative life gives beauty to the soul," wherefore it is signified by Rachel, of whom it is said ([Gn. 29:17](#)) that she was "of a beautiful countenance." Now the beauty of the soul consists in the moral virtues, especially temperance, as Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 43,45,46). Therefore it seems that the moral virtues pertain to the contemplative life.

On the contrary, The moral virtues are directed to external actions. Now Gregory says (Moral. vi [*Hom. xiv in Ezech.; Cf. [Article \[1\]](#), Objection [3]]) that it belongs to the contemplative life "to rest from external action." Therefore the moral virtues do not pertain to the contemplative life.

I answer that, A thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways, essentially or dispositively. The moral virtues do not belong to the contemplative life essentially, because the end of the contemplative life is the consideration of truth: and as the Philosopher states (Ethic. ii, 4), "knowledge," which pertains to the consideration of truth, "has little influence on the moral virtues": wherefore he declares (Ethic. x, 8) that the moral virtues pertain to active but not to contemplative happiness.

On the other hand, the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life dispositively. For the act of contemplation, wherein the contemplative life essentially consists, is hindered both by the impetuosity of the passions which withdraw the soul's intention from intelligible to sensible things, and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb the impetuosity of the passions, and quell the disturbance of outward occupations. Hence moral virtues belong dispositively to the contemplative life.

Reply to Objection 1: As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), the contemplative life has its motive cause on the part of the affections, and in this respect the love of God and our neighbor is requisite to the contemplative life. Now motive causes do not enter into the essence of a thing, but dispose

Reply to Objection 2: Holiness or cleanness of heart is caused by the virtues that are concerned with the passions which hinder the purity of the reason; and peace is caused by justice which is about operations, according to Is. 32:17, "The work of justice shall be peace": since he who refrains from wronging others lessens the occasions of quarrels and disturbances. Hence the moral virtues dispose one to the contemplative life by causing peace and cleanness of heart.

Reply to Objection 3: Beauty, as stated above ([Question \[145\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)), consists in a certain clarity and due proportion. Now each of these is found radically in the reason; because both the light that makes beauty seen, and the establishing of due proportion among things belong to reason. Hence since the contemplative life consists in an act of the reason, there is beauty in it by its very nature and essence; wherefore it is written (Wis. 8:2) of the contemplation of wisdom: "I became a lover of her beauty."

On the other hand, beauty is in the moral virtues by participation, in so far as they participate in the order of reason; and especially is it in temperance, which restrains the concupiscences which especially darken the light of reason. Hence it is that the virtue of chastity most of all makes man apt for contemplation, since venereal pleasures most of all weigh the mind down to sensible objects, as Augustine says (Soliloq. i, 10).

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Whether there are various actions pertaining to the contemplative life?

Objection 1: It would seem that there are various actions pertaining to the contemplative life. For Richard of St. Victor [**De Grat. Contempl. i, 3,4*] distinguishes between "contemplation," "meditation," and "cogitation." Yet all these apparently pertain to contemplation. Therefore it would seem that there are various actions pertaining to the contemplative life.

Objection 2: Further, the Apostle says ([2 Cor. 3:18](#)): "But we... beholding [speculantes] the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same clarity [**Vulg.: 'into the same image from glory to glory.'*]" Now this belongs to the contemplative life. Therefore in addition to the three aforesaid, vision [speculatio] belongs to the contemplative life.

Objection 3: Further, Bernard says (De Consid. v, 14) that "the first and greatest contemplation is admiration of the Majesty." Now according to Damascene (De Fide Orth. ii, 15) admiration is a kind of fear. Therefore it would seem that several acts are requisite for the contemplative life.

Objection 4: Further, "Prayer," "reading," and "meditation" [**Hugh of St. Victor, Alleg. in N.T. iii, 4*] are said to belong to the contemplative life. Again, "hearing" belongs to the contemplative life: since it is stated that Mary (by whom the contemplative life is signified) "sitting... at the

On the contrary, Life signifies here the operation on which a man is chiefly intent. Wherefore if there are several operations of the contemplative life, there will be, not one, but several contemplative lives.

I answer that, We are now speaking of the contemplative life as applicable to man. Now according to Dionysius (Div. Nom. vii) between man and angel there is this difference, that an angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas man arrives at the perception of a simple truth by a process from several premises. Accordingly, then, the contemplative life has one act wherein it is finally completed, namely the contemplation of truth, and from this act it derives its unity. Yet it has many acts whereby it arrives at this final act. Some of these pertain to the reception of principles, from which it proceeds to the contemplation of truth; others are concerned with deducing from the principles, the truth, the knowledge of which is sought; and the last and crowning act is the contemplation itself of the truth.

Reply to Objection 1: According to Richard of St. Victor "cogitation" would seem to regard the consideration of the many things from which a person intends to gather one simple truth. Hence cogitation may comprise not only the perceptions of the senses in taking cognizance of certain effects, but also the imaginations. and again the reason's discussion of the various signs or of anything that conduces to the truth in view: although, according to Augustine (De Trin. xiv, 7), cogitation may signify any actual operation of the intellect. "Meditation" would seem to be the process of reason from certain principles that lead to the contemplation of some truth: and "consideration" has the same meaning, according to Bernard (De Consid. ii, 2), although, according to the Philosopher (De Anima ii, 1), every operation of the intellect may be called "consideration." But "contemplation" regards the simple act of gazing on the truth; wherefore Richard says again (De Grat. Contempl. i, 4) that "contemplation is the soul's clear and free dwelling upon the object of its gaze; meditation is the survey of the mind while occupied in searching for the truth: and cogitation is the mind's glance which is prone to wander."

Reply to Objection 2: According to a gloss [*Cf. De Trin. xv, 8] of Augustine on this passage, "beholding" [speculatio] denotes "seeing in a mirror [speculo], not from a watch-tower [specula]." Now to see a thing in a mirror is to see a cause in its effect wherein its likeness is reflected. Hence "beholding" would seem to be reducible to meditation.

Reply to Objection 3: Admiration is a kind of fear resulting from the apprehension of a thing that surpasses our faculties: hence it results from the contemplation of the sublime truth. For it was stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)) that contemplation terminates in the affections.

Reply to Objection 4: Man reaches the knowledge of truth in two ways. First, by means of things received from another. In this way, as regards the things he receives from God, he needs "prayer," according to Wis. 7:7, "I called upon" God, "and the spirit of wisdom came upon me": while as regards the things he receives from man, he needs "hearing," in so far as he receives from the spoken word, and "reading," in so far as he receives from the tradition of Holy Writ. Secondly, he needs to apply himself by his personal study, and thus he requires "meditation."

Whether the contemplative life consists in the mere contemplation of God, or also in the consideration of any truth whatever?

Objection 1: It would seem that the contemplative life consists not only in the contemplation of God, but also in the consideration of any truth. For it is written ([Ps. 138:14](#)): "Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knoweth right well." Now the knowledge of God's works is effected by any contemplation of the truth. Therefore it would seem that it pertains to the contemplative life to contemplate not only the divine truth, but also any other.

Objection 2: Further, Bernard says (De Consid. v, 14) that "contemplation consists in admiration first of God's majesty, secondly of His judgments, thirdly of His benefits, fourthly of His promises." Now of these four the first alone regards the divine truth, and the other three pertain to His effects. Therefore the contemplative life consists not only in the contemplation of the divine truth, but also in the consideration of truth regarding the divine effects.

Objection 3: Further, Richard of St. Victor [*De Grat. Contempl. i, 6] distinguishes six species of contemplation. The first belongs to "the imagination alone," and consists in thinking of corporeal things. The second is in "the imagination guided by reason," and consists in considering the order and disposition of sensible objects. The third is in "the reason based on the imagination"; when, to wit, from the consideration of the visible we rise to the invisible. The fourth is in "the reason and conducted by the reason," when the mind is intent on things invisible of which the imagination has no cognizance. The fifth is "above the reason," but not contrary to reason, when by divine revelation we become cognizant of things that cannot be comprehended by the human reason. The sixth is "above reason and contrary to reason"; when, to wit, by the divine enlightening we know things that seem contrary to human reason, such as the doctrine of the mystery of the Trinity. Now only the last of these would seem to pertain to the divine truth. Therefore the contemplation of truth regards not only the divine truth, but also that which is considered in creatures.

Objection 4: Further, in the contemplative life the contemplation of truth is sought as being the perfection of man. Now any truth is a perfection of the human intellect. Therefore the contemplative life consists in the contemplation of any truth.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Moral. vi, 37) that "in contemplation we seek the principle which is God."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)), a thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways: principally, and secondarily, or dispositively. That which belongs principally to the contemplative life is the contemplation of the divine truth, because this contemplation is the end of the whole human life. Hence Augustine says (De Trin. i, 8) that "the contemplation of God is promised us as being the goal of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of our joys." This contemplation will be perfect in the life to come, when we shall see God face to face, wherefore it will make us perfectly happy: whereas now the contemplation of the divine truth is competent to us imperfectly, namely "through a glass" and "in a dark manner" ([1 Cor. 13:12](#)). Hence it bestows on us a certain inchoate beatitude, which begins now and will be continued in the life to come; wherefore the Philosopher (Ethic. x, 7) places man's ultimate happiness in the contemplation of the supreme intelligible good.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS180.html](#)ing to Rm. 1:20, "The invisible things of God... are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," it follows that the contemplation of the divine effects also belongs to the contemplative life, inasmuch as man is guided thereby to the knowledge of God. Hence Augustine says (De Vera Relig. xxix) that "in the study of creatures we must not exercise an empty and futile curiosity, but should make them the stepping-stone to things unperishable and everlasting."

Accordingly it is clear from what has been said ([Articles \[1\],2,3](#)) that four things pertain, in a certain order, to the contemplative life; first, the moral virtues; secondly, other acts exclusive of contemplation; thirdly, contemplation of the divine effects; fourthly, the complement of all which is the contemplation of the divine truth itself.

Reply to Objection 1: David sought the knowledge of God's works, so that he might be led by them to God; wherefore he says elsewhere ([Ps. 142:5,6](#)): "I meditated on all Thy works: I meditated upon the works of Thy hands: I stretched forth my hands to Thee."

Reply to Objection 2: By considering the divine judgments man is guided to the consideration of the divine justice; and by considering the divine benefits and promises, man is led to the knowledge of God's mercy or goodness, as by effects already manifested or yet to be vouchsafed.

Reply to Objection 3: These six denote the steps whereby we ascend by means of creatures to the contemplation of God. For the first step consists in the mere consideration of sensible objects; the second step consists in going forward from sensible to intelligible objects; the third step is to judge of sensible objects according to intelligible things; the fourth is the absolute consideration of the intelligible objects to which one has attained by means of sensibles; the fifth is the contemplation of those intelligible objects that are unattainable by means of sensibles, but which the reason is able to grasp; the sixth step is the consideration of such intelligible things as the reason can neither discover nor grasp, which pertain to the sublime contemplation of divine truth, wherein contemplation is ultimately perfected.

Reply to Objection 4: The ultimate perfection of the human intellect is the divine truth: and other truths perfect the intellect in relation to the divine truth.

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Whether in the present state of life the contemplative life can reach to the vision of the Divine essence?

Objection 1: It would seem that in the present state of life the contemplative life can reach to the vision of the Divine essence. For, as stated in Gn. 32:30, Jacob said: "I have seen God face to face, and my soul has been saved." Now the vision of God's face is the vision of the Divine essence. Therefore it would seem that in the present life one may come, by means of contemplation, to see God in His essence.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS180.html](#) themselves in order to explore spiritual things, nor do they ever carry with them the shadows of things corporeal, or if these follow them they prudently drive them away: but being desirous of seeing the incomprehensible light, they suppress all the images of their limited comprehension, and through longing to reach what is above them, they overcome that which they are." Now man is not hindered from seeing the Divine essence, which is the incomprehensible light, save by the necessity of turning to corporeal phantasms. Therefore it would seem that the contemplation of the present life can extend to the vision of the incomprehensible light in its essence.

Objection 3: Further, Gregory says (Dial. ii, 35): "All creatures are small to the soul that sees its Creator: wherefore when the man of God," the blessed Benedict, to wit, "saw a fiery globe in the tower and angels returning to heaven, without doubt he could only see such things by the light of God." Now the blessed Benedict was still in this life. Therefore the contemplation of the present life can extend to the vision of the essence of God.

On the contrary, Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.): "As long as we live in this mortal flesh, no one reaches such a height of contemplation as to fix the eyes of his mind on the ray itself of incomprehensible light."

I answer that, As Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii, 27), "no one seeing God lives this mortal life wherein the bodily senses have their play: and unless in some way he depart this life, whether by going altogether out of his body, or by withdrawing from his carnal senses, he is not caught up into that vision." This has been carefully discussed above ([Question \[175\]](#), [Articles \[4\],5](#)), where we spoke of rapture, and in the FP, [Question \[12\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), where we treated of the vision of God.

Accordingly we must state that one may be in this life in two ways. First, with regard to act, that is to say by actually making use of the bodily senses, and thus contemplation in the present life can nowise attain to the vision of God's essence. Secondly, one may be in this life potentially and not with regard to act, that is to say, when the soul is united to the mortal body as its form, yet so as to make use neither of the bodily senses, nor even of the imagination, as happens in rapture; and in this way the contemplation of the present life can attain to the vision of the Divine essence. Consequently the highest degree of contemplation in the present life is that which Paul had in rapture, whereby he was in a middle state between the present life and the life to come.

Reply to Objection 1: As Dionysius says (Ep. i ad Caium. Monach.), "if anyone seeing God, understood what he saw, he saw not God Himself, but something belonging to God." And Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.): "By no means is God seen now in His glory; but the soul sees something of lower degree, and is thereby refreshed so that afterwards it may attain to the glory of vision." Accordingly the words of Jacob, "I saw God face to face" do not imply that he saw God's essence, but that he saw some shape [*Cf. FP, [Question \[12\]](#), [Article \[11\]](#), ad 1], imaginary of course, wherein God spoke to him. Or, "since we know a man by his face, by the face of God he signified his knowledge of Him," according to a gloss of Gregory on the same passage.

Reply to Objection 2: In the present state of life human contemplation is impossible without phantasms, because it is connatural to man to see the intelligible species in the phantasms, as the Philosopher states (De Anima iii, 7). Yet intellectual knowledge does not consist in the phantasms themselves, but in our contemplating in them the purity of the intelligible truth: and this not only in natural knowledge, but also in that which we obtain by revelation. For

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certain symbolic figures, and by its power we are brought back to the single ray of light," i.e. to the simple knowledge of the intelligible truth. It is in this sense that we must understand the statement of Gregory that "contemplatives do not carry along with them the shadows of things corporeal," since their contemplation is not fixed on them, but on the consideration of the intelligible truth.

Reply to Objection 3: By these words Gregory does not imply that the blessed Benedict, in that vision, saw God in His essence, but he wishes to show that because "all creatures are small to him that sees God," it follows that all things can easily be seen through the enlightenment of the Divine light. Wherefore he adds: "For however little he may see of the Creator's light, all created things become petty to him."

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Whether the operation of contemplation is fittingly divided into a threefold movement, circular, straight and oblique?

Objection 1: It would seem that the operation of contemplation is unfittingly divided into a threefold movement, "circular," "straight," and "oblique" (Div. Nom. iv). For contemplation pertains exclusively to rest, according to Wis. 8:16, "When I go into my house, I shall repose myself with her." Now movement is opposed to rest. Therefore the operations of the contemplative life should not be described as movements.

Objection 2: Further, the action of the contemplative life pertains to the intellect, whereby man is like the angels. Now Dionysius describes these movements as being different in the angels from what they are in the soul. For he says (Div. Nom. iv) that the "circular" movement in the angel is "according to his enlightenment by the beautiful and the good." On the other hand, he assigns the circular movement of the soul to several things: the first of which is the "withdrawal of the soul into itself from externals"; the second is "a certain concentration of its powers, whereby it is rendered free of error and of outward occupation"; and the third is "union with those things that are above it." Again, he describes differently their respective straight movements. For he says that the straight movement of the angel is that by which he proceeds to the care of those things that are beneath him. On the other hand, he describes the straight movement of the soul as being twofold: first, "its progress towards things that are near it"; secondly, "its uplifting from external things to simple contemplation." Further, he assigns a different oblique movement to each. For he assigns the oblique movement of the angels to the fact that "while providing for those who have less they remain unchanged in relation to God": whereas he assigns the oblique movement of the soul to the fact that "the soul is enlightened in Divine knowledge by reasoning and discoursing." Therefore it would seem that the operations of contemplation are unfittingly assigned according to the ways mentioned above.

Objection 3: Further, Richard of St. Victor (De Contempl. i, 5) mentions many other different movements in likeness to the birds of the air. "For some of these rise at one time to a great height, at another swoop down to earth, and they do so repeatedly; others fly now to the right,

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS180.html](#) a circle now more now less extended; and others remain suspended almost immovably in one place." Therefore it would seem that there are only three movements of contemplation.

On the contrary, stands the authority of Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv).

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[119\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 3), the operation of the intellect, wherein contemplation essentially consists, is called a movement, in so far as movement is the act of a perfect thing, according to the Philosopher (De Anima iii, 1). Since, however, it is through sensible objects that we come to the knowledge of intelligible things, and since sensible operations do not take place without movement, the result is that even intelligible operations are described as movements, and are differentiated in likeness to various movements. Now of bodily movements, local movements are the most perfect and come first, as proved in Phys. viii, 7; wherefore the foremost among intelligible operations are described by being likened to them. These movements are of three kinds; for there is the "circular" movement, by which a thing moves uniformly round one point as center, another is the "straight" movement, by which a thing goes from one point to another; the third is "oblique," being composed as it were of both the others. Consequently, in intelligible operations, that which is simply uniform is compared to circular movement; the intelligible operation by which one proceeds from one point to another is compared to the straight movement; while the intelligible operation which unites something of uniformity with progress to various points is compared to the oblique movement.

Reply to Objection 1: External bodily movements are opposed to the quiet of contemplation, which consists in rest from outward occupations: but the movements of intellectual operations belong to the quiet of contemplation.

Reply to Objection 2: Man is like the angels in intellect generically, but the intellective power is much higher in the angel than in man. Consequently these movements must be ascribed to souls and angels in different ways, according as they are differently related to uniformity. For the angelic intellect has uniform knowledge in two respects. First, because it does not acquire intelligible truth from the variety of composite objects; secondly, because it understands the truth of intelligible objects not discursively, but by simple intuition. On the other hand, the intellect of the soul acquires intelligible truth from sensible objects, and understands it by a certain discoursing of the reason.

Wherefore Dionysius assigns the "circular" movement of the angels to the fact that their intuition of God is uniform and unceasing, having neither beginning nor end: even as a circular movement having neither beginning nor end is uniformly around the one same center. But on the part of the soul, ere it arrive at this uniformity, its twofold lack of uniformity needs to be removed. First, that which arises from the variety of external things: this is removed by the soul withdrawing from externals, and so the first thing he mentions regarding the circular movement of the soul is "the soul's withdrawal into itself from external objects." Secondly, another lack of uniformity requires to be removed from the soul, and this is owing to the discoursing of reason. This is done by directing all the soul's operations to the simple contemplation of the intelligible truth, and this is indicated by his saying in the second place that "the soul's intellectual powers must be uniformly concentrated," in other words that discoursing must be laid aside and the soul's gaze fixed on the contemplation of the one simple truth. In this operation of the soul there is no error, even as there is clearly no error in the understanding of first principles which we know by simple intuition. Afterwards these two things being done, he mentions thirdly the uniformity which is like that of the angels, for then all things being laid aside, the soul continues in the contemplation of God alone. This he

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS180.html](#) | on of its powers, it is conducted to the good and the beautiful." The "straight" movement of the angel cannot apply to his proceeding from one thing to another by considering them, but only to the order of his providence, namely to the fact that the higher angel enlightens the lower angels through the angels that are intermediate. He indicates this when he says: "The angel's movement takes a straight line when he proceeds to the care of things subject to him, taking in his course whatever things are direct," i.e. in keeping with the dispositions of the direct order. Whereas he ascribes the "straight" movement in the soul to the soul's proceeding from exterior sensibles to the knowledge of intelligible objects. The "oblique" movement in the angels he describes as being composed of the straight and circular movements, inasmuch as their care for those beneath them is in accordance with their contemplation of God: while the "oblique" movement in the soul he also declares to be partly straight and partly circular, in so far as in reasoning it makes use of the light received from God.

Reply to Objection 3: These varieties of movement that are taken from the distinction between above and below, right and left, forwards and backwards, and from varying circles, are all comprised under either straight and oblique movement, because they all denote discursions of reason. For if the reason pass from the genus to the species, or from the part to the whole, it will be, as he explains, from above to below: if from one opposite to another, it will be from right to left; if from the cause to the effect, it will be backwards and forwards; if it be about accidents that surround a thing near at hand or far remote, the movement will be circular. The discoursing of reason from sensible to intelligible objects, if it be according to the order of natural reason, belongs to the straight movement; but if it be according to the Divine enlightenment, it will belong to the oblique movement as explained above (ad 2). That alone which he describes as immobility belongs to the circular movement.

Wherefore it is evident that Dionysius describes the movement of contemplation with much greater fulness and depth.

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Whether there is delight in contemplation?

Objection 1: It would seem that there is no delight in contemplation. For delight belongs to the appetitive power; whereas contemplation resides chiefly in the intellect. Therefore it would seem that there is no delight in contemplation.

Objection 2: Further, all strife and struggle is a hindrance to delight. Now there is strife and struggle in contemplation. For Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "when the soul strives to contemplate God, it is in a state of struggle; at one time it almost overcomes, because by understanding and feeling it tastes something of the incomprehensible light, and at another time it almost succumbs, because even while tasting, it fails." Therefore there is no delight in contemplation.

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the contemplation of wayfarers is imperfect, according to 1 Cor. 13:12, "We see now through a glass in a dark manner." Therefore seemingly there is no delight in the contemplative life.

Objection 4: Further, a lesion of the body is an obstacle to delight. Now contemplation causes a lesion of the body; wherefore it is stated ([Gn. 32](#)) that after Jacob had said ([Gn. 32:30](#)), "'I have seen God face to face'... he halted on his foot ([Gn. 32:31](#))... because he touched the sinew of his thigh and it shrank" ([Gn. 32:32](#)). Therefore seemingly there is no delight in contemplation.

On the contrary, It is written of the contemplation of wisdom (Wis. 8:16): "Her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness": and Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "the contemplative life is sweetness exceedingly lovable."

I answer that, There may be delight in any particular contemplation in two ways. First by reason of the operation itself [*Cf. FS, Question [3], Article [5]], because each individual delights in the operation which befits him according to his own nature or habit. Now contemplation of the truth befits a man according to his nature as a rational animal: the result being that "all men naturally desire to know," so that consequently they delight in the knowledge of truth. And more delightful still does this become to one who has the habit of wisdom and knowledge, the result of which is that he contemplates without difficulty. Secondly, contemplation may be delightful on the part of its object, in so far as one contemplates that which one loves; even as bodily vision gives pleasure, not only because to see is pleasurable in itself, but because one sees a person whom one loves. Since, then, the contemplative life consists chiefly in the contemplation of God, of which charity is the motive, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#), ad 1), it follows that there is delight in the contemplative life, not only by reason of the contemplation itself, but also by reason of the Divine love.

In both respects the delight thereof surpasses all human delight, both because spiritual delight is greater than carnal pleasure, as stated above ([FS, Question \[31\], Article \[5\]](#)), when we were treating of the passions, and because the love whereby God is loved out of charity surpasses all love. Hence it is written ([Ps. 33:9](#)): "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet."

Reply to Objection 1: Although the contemplative life consists chiefly in an act of the intellect, it has its beginning in the appetite, since it is through charity that one is urged to the contemplation of God. And since the end corresponds to the beginning, it follows that the term also and the end of the contemplative life has its being in the appetite, since one delights in seeing the object loved, and the very delight in the object seen arouses a yet greater love. Wherefore Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "when we see one whom we love, we are so aflame as to love him more." And this is the ultimate perfection of the contemplative life, namely that the Divine truth be not only seen but also loved.

Reply to Objection 2: Strife or struggle arising from the opposition of an external thing, hinders delight in that thing. For a man delights not in a thing against which he strives: but in that for which he strives; when he has obtained it, other things being equal, he delights yet more: wherefore Augustine says (Confess. viii, 3) that "the more peril there was in the battle, the greater the joy in the triumph." But there is no strife or struggle in contemplation on the part of the truth which we contemplate, though there is on the part of our defective understanding and our corruptible body which drags us down to lower things, according to Wis. 9:15, "The corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things." Hence it is that when man attains to the contemplation of truth, he loves it yet more, while he hates the more his own deficiency and the weight of his corruptible body, so as to say with the Apostle ([Rm. 7:24](#)): "Unhappy man that

Ezech.): "When God is once known by desire and understanding, He withers all carnal pleasure in us."

Reply to Objection 3: The contemplation of God in this life is imperfect in comparison with the contemplation in heaven; and in like manner the delight of the wayfarer's contemplation is imperfect as compared with the delight of contemplation in heaven, of which it is written ([Ps. 35:9](#)): "Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure." Yet, though the contemplation of Divine things which is to be had by wayfarers is imperfect, it is more delightful than all other contemplation however perfect, on account of the excellence of that which is contemplated. Hence the Philosopher says (De Part. Animal. i, 5): "We may happen to have our own little theories about those sublime beings and godlike substances, and though we grasp them but feebly, nevertheless so elevating is the knowledge that they give us more delight than any of those things that are round about us": and Gregory says in the same sense (Hom. xiv in Ezech.): "The contemplative life is sweetness exceedingly lovable; for it carries the soul away above itself, it opens heaven and discovers the spiritual world to the eyes of the mind."

Reply to Objection 4: After contemplation Jacob halted with one foot, "because we need to grow weak in the love of the world ere we wax strong in the love of God," as Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.). "Thus when we have known the sweetness of God, we have one foot sound while the other halts; since every one who halts on one foot leans only on that foot which is sound."

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Whether the contemplative life is continuous?

Objection 1: It would seem that the contemplative life is not continuous. For the contemplative life consists essentially in things pertaining to the intellect. Now all the intellectual perfections of this life will be made void, according to 1 Cor. 13:8, "Whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed." Therefore the contemplative life is made void.

Objection 2: Further, a man tastes the sweetness of contemplation by snatches and for a short time only: wherefore Augustine says (Confess. x, 40), "Thou admittest me to a most unwonted affection in my inmost soul, to a strange sweetness... yet through my grievous weight I sink down again." Again, Gregory commenting on the words of Job 4:15, "When a spirit passed before me," says (Moral. v, 33): "The mind does not remain long at rest in the sweetness of inward contemplation, for it is recalled to itself and beaten back by the very immensity of the light." Therefore the contemplative life is not continuous.

Objection 3: Further, that which is not connatural to man cannot be continuous. Now the contemplative life, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. x, 7), "is better than the life which is according to man." Therefore seemingly the contemplative life is not continuous.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS180.html](#) be taken away from her," since as Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.), "the contemplative life begins here so that it may be perfected in our heavenly home."

I answer that, A thing may be described as continuous in two ways: first, in regard to its nature; secondly, in regard to us. It is evident that in regard to itself contemplative life is continuous for two reasons: first, because it is about incorruptible and unchangeable things; secondly, because it has no contrary, for there is nothing contrary to the pleasure of contemplation, as stated in Topic. i, 13. But even in our regard contemplative life is continuous--both because it is competent to us in respect of the incorruptible part of the soul, namely the intellect, wherefore it can endure after this life--and because in the works of the contemplative life we work not with our bodies, so that we are the more able to persevere in the works thereof, as the Philosopher observes (Ethic. x, 7).

Reply to Objection 1: The manner of contemplation is not the same here as in heaven: yet the contemplative life is said to remain by reason of charity, wherein it has both its beginning and its end. Gregory speaks in this sense (Hom. xiv in Ezech.): "The contemplative life begins here, so as to be perfected in our heavenly home, because the fire of love which begins to burn here is aflame with a yet greater love when we see Him Whom we love."

Reply to Objection 2: No action can last long at its highest pitch. Now the highest point of contemplation is to reach the uniformity of Divine contemplation, according to Dionysius [*Cf. Coel. Hier. iii], and as we have stated above ([Article \[6\]](#), ad 2). Hence although contemplation cannot last long in this respect, it can be of long duration as regards the other contemplative acts.

Reply to Objection 3: The Philosopher declares the contemplative life to be above man, because it befits us "so far as there is in us something divine" (Ethic. x, 7), namely the intellect, which is incorruptible and impassible in itself, wherefore its act can endure longer.