

**Objection 1.** It would seem that there cannot be a virtue about games. For Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 23): “Our Lord said: ‘Woe to you who laugh, for you shall weep.’ Wherefore I consider that all, and not only excessive, games should be avoided.” Now that which can be done virtuously is not to be avoided altogether. Therefore there cannot be a virtue about games.

**Objection 2.** Further, “Virtue is that which God forms in us, without us,” as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 55, a. 4). Now Chrysostom says\*: “It is not God, but the devil, that is the author of fun. Listen to what happened to those who played: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.’” Therefore there can be no virtue about games.

**Objection 3.** Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. x, 6) that “playful actions are not directed to something else.” But it is a requisite of virtue that the agent in choosing should “direct his action to something else,” as the Philosopher states (Ethic. ii, 4). Therefore there can be no virtue about games.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says (Music. ii, 15): “I pray thee, spare thyself at times: for it becomes a wise man sometimes to relax the high pressure of his attention to work.” Now this relaxation of the mind from work consists in playful words or deeds. Therefore it becomes a wise and virtuous man to have recourse to such things at times. Moreover the Philosopher† assigns to games the virtue of *eutrapelia*, which we may call “pleasantness.”

**I answer that,** Just as man needs bodily rest for the body’s refreshment, because he cannot always be at work, since his power is finite and equal to a certain fixed amount of labor, so too is it with his soul, whose power is also finite and equal to a fixed amount of work. Consequently when he goes beyond his measure in a certain work, he is oppressed and becomes weary, and all the more since when the soul works, the body is at work likewise, in so far as the intellectual soul employs forces that operate through bodily organs. Now sensible goods are connatural to man, and therefore, when the soul arises above sensibles, through being intent on the operations of reason, there results in consequence a certain weariness of soul, whether the operations with which it is occupied be those of the practical or of the speculative reason. Yet this weariness is greater if the soul be occupied with the work of contemplation, since thereby it is raised higher above sensible things; although perhaps certain outward works of the practical reason entail a greater bodily labor. In either case, however, one man is more soul-wearied than another, according as he is more intensely occupied with works of reason. Now just as weariness of the body is dispelled by resting the body, so weariness of the soul must needs be remedied by resting the soul: and the

soul’s rest is pleasure, as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 25, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 31, a. 1, ad 2). Consequently, the remedy for weariness of soul must needs consist in the application of some pleasure, by slackening the tension of the reason’s study. Thus in the Conferences of the Fathers xxiv, 21, it is related of Blessed John the Evangelist, that when some people were scandalized on finding him playing together with his disciples, he is said to have told one of them who carried a bow to shoot an arrow. And when the latter had done this several times, he asked him whether he could do it indefinitely, and the man answered that if he continued doing it, the bow would break. Whence the Blessed John drew the inference that in like manner man’s mind would break if its tension were never relaxed.

Now such like words or deeds wherein nothing further is sought than the soul’s delight, are called playful or humorous. Hence it is necessary at times to make use of them, in order to give rest, as it were, to the soul. This is in agreement with the statement of the Philosopher (Ethic. iv, 8) that “in the intercourse of this life there is a kind of rest that is associated with games”: and consequently it is sometimes necessary to make use of such things.

Nevertheless it would seem that in this matter there are three points which require especial caution. The first and chief is that the pleasure in question should not be sought in indecent or injurious deeds or words. Wherefore Tully says (De Offic. i, 29) that “one kind of joke is discourteous, insolent, scandalous, obscene.” Another thing to be observed is that one lose not the balance of one’s mind altogether. Hence Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 20): “We should beware lest, when we seek relaxation of mind, we destroy all that harmony which is the concord of good works”: and Tully says (De Offic. i, 29), that, “just as we do not allow children to enjoy absolute freedom in their games, but only that which is consistent with good behavior, so our very fun should reflect something of an upright mind.” Thirdly, we must be careful, as in all other human actions, to conform ourselves to persons, time, and place, and take due account of other circumstances, so that our fun “befit the hour and the man,” as Tully says (De Offic. i, 29).

Now these things are directed according to the rule of reason: and a habit that operates according to reason is virtue. Therefore there can be a virtue about games. The Philosopher gives it the name of wittiness (*eutrapelia*), and a man is said to be pleasant through having a happy turn‡ of mind, whereby he gives his words and deeds a cheerful turn: and inasmuch as this virtue restrains a man from immoderate fun, it is comprised under modesty. .

**Reply to Objection 1.** As stated above, fun should fit with business and persons; wherefore Tully says (De

\* Hom. vi in Matth. † Ethic. ii, 7; iv, 8 ‡ *Eutrapelia* is derived from *trepein* = ‘to turn’

Invent. Rhet. i, 17) that “when the audience is weary, it will be useful for the speaker to try something novel or amusing, provided that joking be not incompatible with the gravity of the subject.” Now the sacred doctrine is concerned with things of the greatest moment, according to Prov. 8:6, “Hear, for I will speak of great things.” Wherefore Ambrose does not altogether exclude fun from human speech, but from the sacred doctrine; hence he begins by saying: “Although jokes are at times fitting and pleasant, nevertheless they are incompatible with the ecclesiastical rule; since how can we have recourse to things which are not to be found in Holy Writ?”

**Reply to Objection 2.** This saying of Chrysostom refers to the inordinate use of fun, especially by those who make the pleasure of games their end; of whom

it is written (Wis. 15:12): “They have accounted our life a pastime.” Against these Tully says (De Offic. i, 29): “We are so begotten by nature that we appear to be made not for play and fun, but rather for hardships, and for occupations of greater gravity and moment.”

**Reply to Objection 3.** Playful actions themselves considered in their species are not directed to an end: but the pleasure derived from such actions is directed to the recreation and rest of the soul, and accordingly if this be done with moderation, it is lawful to make use of fun. Hence Tully says (De Offic. i, 29): “It is indeed lawful to make use of play and fun, but in the same way as we have recourse to sleep and other kinds of rest, then only when we have done our duty by grave and serious matters.”