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RIGHT THINKING

PART ONE

CAUSES OF THE DISEASE

Just as the theologian affirms that virtue is the normal condition of the soul, the physician maintains that health is the normal state of the body. Taking the comparison a step further, we might say that, just as virtue is extremely difficult to acquire, health is unknown to most human beings, since many of them are subject to the common bonds of those miseries of the flesh that Labeo, the Roman jurist, called "harmful habits of the body."

Although many diseases undoubtedly originate in excesses due to ignorance or indifference, or in environmental conditions beyond individual control, illness generally arises and takes root in the intemperances and irritabilities of the mind. "Disturbances," writes Philo the Jew, "often outrage the body." In many cases, the philosopher proves to be the only appropriate physician, since pills and purgatives are ineffective against the mental anxieties that so frequently give rise to physical imbalances.

The purpose of this essay is not to discredit the theory and practice of medicine, but rather to underscore the ancient Egyptian adage that knowledge is the best medicine, since the rational person automatically masters most of the ailments that the flesh inherits. Piccolomini asserts that wise people should firmly ground themselves in the moderation of feeling and action.

Remarkable cures have been achieved by applying so-called sacred relics and other religious objects that act by contact to the affected physical area. Those unfamiliar with the subtleties of mental phenomena may attribute an inherent curative power to the relic itself. The psychologist, however, understands that *Its main value lies in the trust that this religious object inspires*. A mythical fragment of the royal cross, for example, produces such profound exaltation in the devotee that it positively breaks the psychological vortices of the illness. By breaking the pathological rhythms of thought, the patient is freed from the mental ailment which, reinforced by daily conviction, attacks (as has already been discovered) the physical tissues, and which, if not counteracted by correcting the mental approach, can undoubtedly prove fatal. Let us ask those who claim that bones and chalices have magical powers to explain the following event that occurred some years ago. A relic that had produced miracles was opened, and, to general dismay, it was discovered that in the confusion inherent in sending the relic to the country in question, its contents had been forgotten!

"Morbid inclinations breed habits if they persist," says Plutarch; and Burton adds, "Habits are, or become, diseases." Many people are unwilling to acknowledge that their temperament oppresses the flesh. But it can easily be shown that passionate excesses consume the body, and that when physical nature is exploited by the autocracy of the mind, it can be reduced to a state of utter exhaustion. We frequently disregard the laws governing material substance when they hinder the achievement of a particular purpose. We apparently count on the body to endure continuous abuse, and we refuse to recognize that the immoderate are inevitably destroyed by their intemperance.

A Chinese proverb states that most diseases can be prevented. Much of an ailment that hasn't been addressed early on can be cured by moderating mental activity. Therefore, our first premise is basic: *Disease is a physical manifestation of a morbid disposition*. What, then, is a morbid disposition? It is a sickness of the soul. Modern criminologists recognize that crime is a disease. We are also convinced that religion quickly tends to become mania, and that excessive love is also a disease, for all of these are afflictions that disrupt spiritual moderation. Through renunciation of his personal attitudes, the

Buddha found liberation from the chain of cause and effect. It was, however, largely a matter of a predetermined destiny that allowed him to achieve his purpose. But most human beings do not yet possess the merit of the degree of perception attained by the Buddha, since, as Lemnius says, "no mortal is free from excesses." Liberation consists in emancipating oneself from all excesses of inclination. The common, uneducated person imagines that Nirvana is a state in which all the impulses and inclinations of temperament find perfect and absolute satisfaction. Consequently, we must attain heaven in order to appreciate it. The happiness of the wise person results from the perfect balance between the individual and the universe of which they are an integral part. From the belief that the individual has diverted Nature from its logical course to serve some absurd idea, only a false happiness can arise.

A morbid disposition is any irritability that causes an individual to deviate from normal tranquility. A perverted temperament arises from mental servitude to some unhealthy attitude, or, as it was formerly called, irrational passion or madness. All these so-called illnesses become their own avengers, since no afflicted mind can enjoy even the slightest measure of happiness. Discontent argues without reason, and when reason is lacking, the body is soon attacked and corroded by the acids produced by jealousy and ambition. Solomon described these feelings as rotting of the bones.

Since no one is perfectly harmonious, we are all potentially ill. However, many factors must be considered before correctly diagnosing symptoms and ailments. What manifests as an abscess in one person may appear as a fever or a digestive disorder in another. The weakest point is attacked first, and this, in turn, affects the rest, until finally the entire body is infected.

A very common maladjustment among so-called wise men is that they do not benefit from their own advice. As Seneca warned, "none of them could alleviate their own ailments." Almost all of these wise men share the same flaws they criticize in others. Medieval soothsayers said that hell is literally infested with theologians, and many physicians fear their own cures even more than the plagues they are supposed to cure. So-called philosophers are, with few exceptions, autocrats, denying others the freedom of thought they claim for themselves. Like reformers who preach moderation of excesses, we find even the best of men afflicted with extremism. Unfortunately, such ills of the mind are pestilent, violently contagious, and insidiously infectious. A single person obsessed with an idea can contaminate a country, dragging multitudes of followers into ruin and disaster.

To diagnose a physical illness, we rely on its symptoms. Pain is man's most merciful benefactor, for it often reveals his critical condition in time for a remedy. However, when reason is afflicted by some abnormal attitude, the affected person is the last to notice the symptoms, and all too often, it is someone else who suffers the pain of the illness. When the mind goes astray, it loses its sense of proportion and becomes incapable of recognizing His own insecurities. Bound like a wheel by flawed calculations, he spins round and round the axis of his idea, blind to the errors in his perspective. Such a disturbed person can see the faults of anyone else, but, regarding his own, enjoys blissful ignorance, even willfully so. When his irrational purposes begin to bear fruit in the form of various illnesses, he blames everyone but himself.

More than one peaceful and seemingly serene exterior harbors a soul infected by the germs of some kind of madness. Through sheer willpower, the hands and feet submit to an appearance of serenity, while the heart may be filled with destructive restlessness. However, inner states cannot be so easily concealed, and although they may not be expressed through words or tears, they will manifest as chronic illnesses or excruciating pain. The evils hidden within are, to use Chrysostom's words, "a poisonous worm that devours both body and soul." The inner personality cannot be denied expression. The soul imprints its mark on the body, for matter is merely formless clay until the impulses

of the mind mold it. While the body does not diminish in stature because the soul weakens, nor does it increase in size because the soul has adopted a Jupiterian mode, nevertheless, the body's appearance will generally conform to the inner impulse. Thus, if the soul contracts, the body will clearly weaken to harmonize with it, and its withered appearance will reveal the inner shrinking; or, conversely, it will project a nobler appearance as a consequence of an increase in the capacity for inner reasoning. It is a known fact that we wear our souls on our faces, and that every hair testifies to our temperament. Science is only now discovering the extent to which each part represents the whole. Every drop of blood records every peculiarity; a drop of saliva reveals all our weaknesses. Blow on a glass of water, and it will capture the image of the soul so firmly that years later it can be recognized through an examination of the glass.

Paracelsus referred to disease as an organism rooted in the invisible nature of man, which, like a parasitic plant or mammal, sucks the lifeblood of his soul. He asserted that, just as lions and tigers attack human beings and also attack and devour one another, diseases are voracious beasts unleashed from the womb of perverse impulses, and must be treated as such; not as mere aggregates of irrational malignities. An illness is a story or diary, generally a rather compromising document. It exposes what we would not say to any other person, for it is a forced confession. When a person cannot be brought down in any other way, they are humiliated by illness. But even illness can be a blessing in disguise, for through this warning, we are often protected from ourselves. A minor pain prevents us from committing a greater error.

In ancient times, illness was divided into two categories: acute and chronic. Acute illnesses erupt suddenly, run their course over a relatively short period, and upon reaching a sudden crisis, the patient either died or survived. While such illnesses can originate from sudden or extreme mental states, they are, for the most part, physical in origin. They stem from some physical excess, contagion, or some disruption of the system. They are agents of imminent karma and should be faced by the philosopher with the best possible will and endured patiently. Such illnesses teach much, for in most cases their cause is clear or can be discovered with little reflective effort. Of course, an acute illness can result from an accumulation of circumstances, for every person has their weak point. Animals have no choice but to endure it.

On the contrary, man endures and at the same time reflects, and although the reflection comes later, it is better than nothing. Circumstances are so intimately linked that we can anticipate them through an act of reflection and think ahead.

Conversely, chronic illnesses almost invariably originate in temperament, even when they are seemingly contagious, since like attracts like, and an illness only persists and thrives where it is nourished by similarities in mind. Therefore, we can assert that the mind is either the origin of the illness or that it infects the body to the point of making physical nature fertile ground for the disease to take root and flourish. Long-lasting illnesses, which worsen with age and eventually, so to speak, consume the individual to the point that the disease, and not the person, continues to live, almost always affect mentally or emotionally unbalanced individuals. It is said that there was once a great philosopher with such a balanced mind that he could not die, until it was discovered that he had to commit suicide to avoid living eternally.

Let us recall the famous "One-Horse Coach, Built on the Day of the Lisbon Earthquake." This unforgettable coach was made without a single weak point, and because every part was equally strong, the carriage lasted one hundred years and one day, at the end of which the entire structure collapsed. Does this not symbolize the journey of the wise person? Since they possess no uneven weaknesses, they die suddenly and at once, while most people die gradually over the better half of their lives.

To a certain extent, the duration of physical existence depends on one's constitution.

Nor can we disregard hereditary tendencies, which in most cases persist only as tendencies unless some indiscretion betrays nature.

Chronic illnesses generally strike after midlife, as it takes many years for mental corruption to take root. Except in rare cases, young minds are too flexible and recover too easily to be dominated and limited by any perverse idea. Moreover, until midlife, the body's innate vitality allows it to withstand, with relative impunity, the insidious corrosive effects on the soul. But just as rain eventually wears away stone, so too does time weaken all structures. Through repetition, a disintegrating rhythm is established, and the body begins to break down from the monotony.

Many chronic illnesses are a kind of decline. They warn the individual that their inner life has begun to withdraw, displaced from its center by adverse circumstances. Therefore, anyone suffering from an interminable illness should understand that they either used their rational faculties so wrongly or acted so imprudently that they endangered their inner values, and that unless they correct the wrong, they will not reach seventy. The physician may raise many objections to this idea, but the fact remains, and common sense supports this thesis. The mind can control the destiny of the body, just as it is proven that an individual can, by virtue of intellectual tyranny, cause their brain to explode or become damaged, so too must the body, as the mind's most defenseless servant, endure, with the greatest possible tolerance, the excesses of its sovereign power.

There are two general types of temperament: optimistic and pessimistic. The illnesses of the optimistic person generally take on the characteristics of a certain heaviness, liver ailments, or illnesses resulting from their large size. These illnesses are the result of excessive indulgence - too much of this, too much of that - with a general disregard for the consequences, all of which leads to a kind of fatty degeneration.

The excesses of the pessimist are of a negative nature. Overwhelmed by various kinds of deprivation, nature falls victim to lack or deficiency. The pessimist may well appear gaunt and hungry, with a sour disposition and rheumatic joints; abandoned by the tutelary gods of joyful Jupiter, he is attended by the spirits of gloomy Saturn. His affliction is a wasting away, a drying up, a loss of color and aggressiveness, until little more than a ghost remains.

Almost everyone, over the years, gravitates toward one of these two tendencies. They may blame the stars for this inclination, but while the stars can certainly confer certain tendencies, it is always within the individual to determine whether or not to respond to them. Indagine wrote: "The stars influence us so gently that if we were to be guided by reason, the influence of the stars would be null." But if it is necessary for a person to die from some imbalance, it is preferable that they do so as a result of optimism; for although both ends are equally unpleasant, optimism is less harmful to the environment.

"Who," asked the melancholic Burton, "is free from passion, anger, envy, discontent, fear, and sorrow?" Who does not suffer from this affliction? Is illness, then, anything other than (as Gregory of Toulouse defined it) "a dissolution or disturbance of the bodily alliance established by health"? Normality is not merely the harmony of the physical parts; it must be the result of an adjustment between the body and the superphysical nature, whose various parts are united under the common designation of "soul." Illness can arise from an obstruction of the vital current, or from its diversion to some ill-chosen end. As long as normality persists, illness cannot occur. Although the flesh is always burdened with ills, these do not arise while nature is in a sober state. Therefore, the virtue of sobriety should not be underestimated, for it is the standard of all achievement.

Let us consider, for example, how, from a geographical perspective, human progress unfolds in temperate zones where, favored by the mildness of the extremes, opposites blend harmoniously. Who can imagine the emergence of a great ethical system at the poles or the equator, where humanity is constantly overwhelmed by the extremes of cold or heat? The Inuit must struggle so exhaustingly with the environment, simply to

survive, that they have little time or energy to strive for the perfection of their spiritual qualities. The indigenous person of tropical climates, on the other hand, succumbs to indolence due to the debilitating influence of the heat and the abundant bounty of Nature, which provides for their most basic needs.

The same is true of temperaments. A frigid predisposition is blocked by deprivation, and a warm nature by excess. Philosophy is the temperate zone of the mind where those cool and pleasant groves abound, in which wise men so enjoy dwelling, gathered in rational fellowship. It is well said that enough is as good as a feast, and those who possess a mind that allows them to be content with moderation are richer than the most opulent dreams of Croesus. A certain Epicurean, one day seeing by chance a stranger wandering in the garden of the wise, said to him these words: "Good sir, a banquet has been prepared; I beg you to join us at this sumptuous meal. We are Epicureans, and our philosophy preaches indulgence. We believe that wisdom consists in dedicating our lives to the attainment of..." "The satisfaction of all our desires; come and feast at our banquet." His appetite whetted by the host's description of the meal, the stranger followed him to the secluded grove where several philosophers sat soaking stale bread in lukewarm skimmed milk, which they shared from an ordinary earthenware bowl. With a grandiloquent gesture, the Epicurean indicated the frugal meal and said with a smile, "Cast aside all moderation and be ashamed of your indulgence." With astonished reference to the pathetic feast, the traveler asked, "You call bread and milk a banquet?" The Epicurean shook his head negatively and said earnestly, "Is not a generous meal enough? Can man eat more than his stomach can bear, and is there any food more tempting than that which, easily digested, frees up energy for the noblest tasks of learning? We Epicureans serve our desires." We truly satisfy our smallest whims and indulge our most insignificant desires, but through knowledge, we have come to desire only what is necessary. Our whims align with our desires, and our cravings are limited by natural prudence. Man is only happy when what he desires is within his reach, for the craving for the impossible breeds the greatest unhappiness. Among all men, we are the only ones who possess all that we desire, simply because we have chosen to forgo that which we cannot have. Rejoice, brother, in our moderation, and when you depart, remember us for the way we satisfied our inner qualities.

By dispelling discontent, we protect the body from physical irritation and restore harmony to its parts. Pliny writes: "Man is born naked and begins to whimper from the start." If we could be Epicurean regarding our appetites, Stoic in our conduct, Platonic in our affections, and Socratic in our purposes, the ripe fruit of self-realization would be our usual reward. We expect only a minimal amount of reasoning from those who pay little attention to the profound questions of life. Such people are protected by a certain inherent instinct, acute in the savage, but obscured in civilized man. Therefore, primitive man often lives better than his more civilized brother. However, this is only apparent, since the savage develops without the free choice of reason, while the philosopher, in whose nature wholeness is complete, is a self-determined agent, master of his purposes, and aware of the circumstances by virtue of which he exists and manifests himself.

It is also noteworthy that civilized peoples, even those merely imitating a state of civilization, are more prone to disease than aboriginal tribes. This phenomenon stems from the fact that while civilization is natural to the mind, it is artificial to the body, providing a striking example of that impulse of Nature which is always sacrificing the inferior to the superior. The congestion resulting from the establishment of communities affects the body, and, by disrupting its natural rhythm, weakens its resistance and exposes it to disease. The need to cover oneself is unnatural to the body except as a means of protection from the rigors of the elements. Yet the age-old custom of clothing has rendered it so delicate that a draft can kill it, and the slightest change in temperature overwhelms it. Thus, the dictates of fashion wreak havoc, and men die many years

before their proper time because they choose to be more "elegant" while they live. It seems that a velvet toga is more desirable than a longer lifespan, and many men would squander their fortunes just to be able, even for a day, to show off some exotic outfit. The savage rejoices in the perfection of the body; however, he suffers from mental sterility and thus falls into the superstitions from which only the wise man is freed.

Therefore, we can affirm that civilization is a producer of plagues and harm, for the congestion it produces breeds all sorts of crimes and damages. Not only is this teeming mass of people hygienically detrimental, but also the close associations provide endless combinations of circumstances that stimulate disease. Thus, people are placed at a desirable distance from each other's possessions, and through the hostile alchemy of temperament, strangers hate each other without apparent motive or cause. In this incessant reciprocal game of human relations, a selective process is set in motion whereby some seem to win and others to lose. Thus arises the clamor of discontent and the protest of injustice, for, as Juvenal said: *Tears* "The truly wealthy mourn their lost money." Enslaved by despair, men live without purpose and die without hope. Is it then surprising that the body suffers the same disorder that afflicts the mind?

A certain friend of mine, a renowned physician, discussing the problem of a peculiar type who is contaminating our social structure, said: "I believe I have discovered the pathological cause of the radical anarchist and the drawing-room anarchist; it is simply a matter of eliminating the poor. Very rarely are these individuals employed in active work; they spend their time sitting around, discrediting the system, and it is natural that when individuals are not working, their functions become dormant. Almost all these people could be cured and redeemed for society by means of vigorous physical fitness and wholesome occupation."

This brings us to another important point: the element of work in the problem of illness. An individual with little to do is more susceptible to chronic diseases than someone permanently engaged in some task of responsibility. "The idle dog will become mangy," says an old proverb, and "A wasteland will become overgrown with weeds." Once afflicted, the idle person has little chance of recovery. One who has time to commiserate over their illnesses very seldom recovers from them. By dwelling on ailments, the mind continually reinforces the afflictions, which increase in direct proportion to the patient's fears, and fears (as Agrippa asserted) are an incitement to illness. It is a well-known fact that many people have died of diseases they never had. We are quite familiar with the type of person who, after reading the symptoms listed on a medicine bottle label, immediately feels every ailment described therein. These pains, naturally, are "cured" by consuming one or two bottles of the elixir; the manufacturer will receive a new pathetic proof of the benefits of his medicine, which in turn will lead to endless cures of sick people who have never suffered the symptoms that the medicine in question promises to eliminate.

The old family doctor of the last century recognized in the bread pill one of his most powerful medicines, because when legitimate drugs failed and bloodletting was not convenient, the harmless crumb pill, administered with all seriousness, touched the psychological point of the disease, producing an almost miraculous cure.

Doctors also know that virtually every patient has a tale of misfortunes to tell. "I beheld a sea so vast of difficulties that swimming across it seemed impossible." (Euripides). This account of calamities encompasses the entire catalog of ills, real or imagined, which, while not considered by the medical profession as the true causes of illness, are certainly recognized as contributing factors. Therefore, the doctor resigns himself to this endless narrative and may prescribe some simple remedy that has a psychological effect. Immediately the patient feels better, not from the spoonful of colored water he takes after each meal, but from the relief or release he experiences. It

means giving expression to the repressed thoughts and emotions that are the true cause of the illness. The doctor may agonize over the ordeal the patient puts him through, but there is no doubt that the patient will improve. The adage that opening up to confession is beneficial for the soul is true, and a chronic liver patient can successfully try this approach.

If we examine a person consumed by an insidiously devouring evil, we will discover that their mind and heart have been corroded by a hidden sorrow, real or imagined: unrequited love, an affront left unavenged. A life spent nurturing grudges, or simply dwelling on them, is a life lost to better causes. There is no heart more blocked than one tortured by remorse or devoted to seeking revenge, and yet, how common it is, even among so-called wise people, to find this lamentable intemperance. Many consider life so fragile that it cannot survive the slightest setback, and frustrated by some detail, they martyr themselves by throwing ashes in their hair and indulging in futile lamentations. Nor should we deceive ourselves into thinking that we have entirely overcome the errors of ordinary people, for it is rare to find a person who does not harbor some inner resentment or who does not allow their memory to wreak havoc on their peace of mind. Woe to him who, in his ascent to the stars, forgets - even for an instant - that he is still a mortal subject to all the imperfections of man; for, as he ascends, a dart shot by some hidden archer will suddenly bring him down, and not even the gods themselves will be able to convince the vanquished that he himself invented the projectile and shot it.

During my long career in public service, I have received and enjoyed the confidences of numerous people, many of whom considered themselves superior in some way. Of course, we are all common to a petty egomania, but we do so few things well that perhaps we have a right to be conceited when we accidentally achieve something commendable. Most were scrupulous, self-sacrificing, and, according to conventional standards, highly commendable, even if they were difficult to live with. They were devoted to their ideals and consistent with their cognitive abilities. Unfortunately, however, their minds played tricks on them, rendering them incapable of making an accurate assessment of their own integrity. Among these valuable people I knew, there was scarcely one who did not have an Achilles' heel. All had some secret sorrow, some savage impulse against which they constantly had to fight, some deep-rooted hatred, denied but painfully evident; and, finally, all had developed in the image of their obsessive idea. Some managed to conceal their secret from most people, but despite their efforts, they were neither well nor happy, and they made no progress toward the goal for which they strove. They weep, saying, "Oh, why do I search in vain?" but in saying this, they blush because, deep down, they have answered their own question. A few, of course, have entrenched themselves so firmly in their ideas that they challenge their own minds to investigate the matter. But when the time comes, even these people are humbled when they finally have to face themselves and know themselves for what they truly are. Surely, the very fear of this inevitable recognition is, in itself, a powerful fuel for illness. Have you not noticed how few individuals enjoy solitude? And have you not wondered why? Almost all of us do not seek solitude because it confronts us with honesty, which, even for those the world considers righteous, is often an unwelcome visitor.

If you are ill, then look for the hidden motives behind every thought and every action. If you are not ill, analyze your personality anyway. Internally, to prevent the appearance of such diseases. Hatred and health cannot coexist within the same organism; normality is irreconcilable with abnormality, and the resulting conflict will incapacitate the physical member from fulfilling its functions. The order of the world is maintained by virtue of harmony with its divine sphere. Through the happiness of the rational plane, the gods sustain the globe, preserving generations and preventing the perpetuation of monstrosities.

What happens in the *Macrocosm*, happens in the *Microcosm* Because the upper and lower are linked as closely as the cranial bones are by their sutures. If the higher nature of man (the soul and the rational faculties) lives in truth and beauty, and cooperates in the service of the supreme good, then the lower nature (the body) will also live in peace, reflecting the wisdom and harmony of the soul. Based on this premise, the ancient philosophers approached the cure of diseases not according to the subtle methods of metaphysics, but with means so simple that they could be used by anyone seeking health and yearning to exchange the anxieties of excess for the comforts of moderation.

PART TWO

THE CURE FOR THE DISEASE

If, as the years go by, you find yourself afflicted by those ailments that drain your natural vigor, and it seems that life lacks its sense of well-being, be cautious of the mind and look within it for the possible root of the imbalance. If the palliatives applied by medical science fail to eradicate the illness/affliction, then there is double reason to think that the cause of it refers to an erroneous and perniciously oriented thought or action.

First, through an analysis of your character, establish, as far as possible, your approach to the world in general and the characteristics of your immediate environment. Are your reflections on everyday incidents edifying? Do you find life good, worth living, or do its risks overwhelm you with sorrows and lamentations to the point that, as David says, the soul ends up dissolving into excessive languor? Do you consider yourself a victim of others, or, having had your efforts to do good rejected, have you hardened your heart, exploiting your fellow human beings and profiting from their credulity? Do you grasp the underlying bonds of connection between all orders of existence, or have hatred and fear isolated you, blocking your feelings of compassion, tenderness, and well-chosen affections? In almost every case, the patient will discover some constitutional fault, some chronic irritation, which, having slowly invaded him in his youth, has been fortified by the inevitable sufferings of life, until it finally obsesses the intellect, forming a cataract over the eye of the soul.

Although not *all* While illnesses can be attributed to these mental reflexes, it is also undeniably true that such mental predispositions produce certain harmful physical phenomena. The body or mind inevitably breaks down under the pressure of such morbidity. There is only one cure: to restructure understanding on new foundations, uprooting all previous prejudices from nature and establishing a normal flow of thought. Just as stagnant water quickly rots and becomes fertile ground for disease, so too, when the natural flow of thoughts is impeded by the ossification of reasoning, these thoughts breed intellectual bacteria that not only infect the individual but also contaminate everyone who enters their sphere of influence.

When someone falls ill with a contagious disease, we quarantine them and take all sorts of precautions to avoid infecting ourselves. Extensive disinfection is carried out, clothes are changed, and in some cases, masks are even used as a safeguard against virulent germs. And yet, how much more pernicious are those mental illnesses against which the usual methods of disinfection prove ineffective.

We insist: how strange it is that individuals afflicted by certain mental disorders are not isolated, allowing them to infect others with their illness, with absolute state authorization. Violent insane individuals are imprisoned if they exhibit homicidal tendencies, kleptomania, or paranoia. But there are mental illnesses far more dangerous than so-called insanity. They arise in morbidly brilliant, cruelly sane intellects, so damagingly unscathed that neither reason nor law can counteract their influence. Let us briefly analyze the so-called realist school of philosophy. Its adherents are not technically insane, but when taken literally, their position is undoubtedly an intellectual disease. The poison of realism manifests itself as an irresistible impulse to inject into the Furthermore, there is a pessimistic attitude toward every aspect of existence. This morbidity reproduces itself until these people become convinced that the worst is legitimate; that evil, as a natural human instinct, should be deified and accepted as the origin of all impulses. It is harmful enough that people hold such misguided ideas, but the fatal consequences are even worse. No one is content until they have communicated their convictions to everyone within their sphere of influence. Worse still, we feel

positively miserable until our fellow human beings begin to resemble us. Once we have infected a sufficient number of human beings, we consider ourselves prophets.

The following custom of the ancient Egyptians would have filled the soul of a modern legislator with joy. They opened up a boundless field, since they regulated human emotions even when these had not led to actual crimes. For example, self-pity was a capital sin that could harm the soul; excessive suffering was illegal, because one who suffered immoderately could spread miasmas harmful to the spirit of the people. Therefore, wealthy Egyptians were sent off in their tombs to the wailing of hired mourners, who beat their breasts, tore at their hair, wore rented clothes, and shed rivers of feigned tears: as payment for their services.

It is possible that today there are many individuals with the same mindset as those ancient aristocrats, for whom emotional excesses were so foreign that they needed to hire those who could express those emotions in their place.

Americans are a morbidly sentimental people. Oblivious to the true depth of feeling, the average American substitutes genuine emotional intensity with false emotions derived from trivialities and magnified beyond measure by imagination and self-pity. For example, a murder, conveniently detailed in the newspaper, can hold a citizen's interest while they eat their breakfast of bacon and eggs. A well-commented kidnapping will relieve the monotony of washing dishes; and a good suicide provides conversation material over teacups during a bridge meeting. Shall we say that the American is too jaded, or simply bored by their constant reflection on their own stupendous importance? Is it not logical to recognize that we ourselves can become abnormal from contemplating such expressions of crime as emotional stimuli?

Depth of feeling cannot exist independently of depth of knowledge. Only the truly wise are capable of plumbing the depths of emotion or reaching the pinnacle of expression. As knowledge matures, we discover that, while the sensitivity necessary for affective depth is preserved, the accompanying reactions lose their violence and gain in moderation, being transmuted by the wise person into elements of beauty. Recall when Diogenes, upon being insulted on one occasion, debated with himself about the appropriateness of becoming angry. Having decided that it was the right moment to do so, he was perplexed to discover that he had forgotten how to be angry.

Self-pity, so common in our time, seems to stem from flawed environmental conditions. We are obsessed with the conviction that happiness results from a comfortable position, and that a lot of money confers maximum comfort. Only the wealthy man can fully understand the falsity of this premise, a circumstance that moved the satirist Bernard Shaw to write his poignant defense of capitalism, in which he sought to elicit sympathy for the misunderstood and mistreated man of money. Having is not always synonymous with possessing. Self-pity is based on relative judgments, and a man who has less than his neighbor may die prematurely lamenting the cruelty of his fate. I have less than my neighbor; therefore, I am necessarily miserable. In this age when industries producing essential goods have been exploited to the fullest, a large part of the population is consequently engaged in the production of superfluous goods that international propaganda imposes as indispensable. As a result of continually seeing advertisements and posters about new "marvels," an individual who was apparently well-off for many years suddenly falls victim to the psychological workings of propaganda and realizes that during all that long period of his life he has been a poor man because, as a child, he didn't have a baby carriage with ball bearings. To those who are unable to recognize happiness as a state of mind and not a matter of accumulation, we recommend that they reflect on Lawrence Tibbett's well-told story of the happy man who was offered ten thousand dollars for his shirt, but who unfortunately didn't own one.

Some people are born with an indestructible sense of humor; no weight of circumstance can depress them to the point of making them lose sight of the inherent goodness of things. Such people not only gain popularity in their youth but are also

loved and respected by all throughout their lives. If you could be carried by Mercury to a very high place, could you look down and contemplate, like the ancient sages, the cities as if they were countless beehives, each bee with its stinger and occupied only in stinging one another, with some flies exercising dominance over the others, larger than the rest, some like thieving wasps, others acting like drones? Or must you be too personal and therefore very poor?

All these apparent digressions, however, are related to our topic. Dissatisfaction is a disease; sorrow is a mental cancer; hatred, a fever of reason; and every exaggeration of thought is a potential cause of physical illness. Tuberculosis is akin to melancholy, for in both cases the individual is consumed. Anger provokes infections; fear inhibits functional activities; ruminating on unrequited love and harboring feelings of animosity affect the heart in various ways. If a grief or worry can turn the head gray in a single night, how can unhappiness not produce paralysis, stroke, cancer, disorders, and hidden pains? Egotism affects the spleen; ill humor attacks the liver; pride burdens the blood with acids; despair affects the kidneys; sullenness ruins digestion; deeply hidden grievances etch wrinkles on the face; and greed impairs eyesight.

Currently, glands are considered, to some extent, as determinants of character, so that a person's thinking is influenced by their endocrine glands, and their equanimity is determined by their adrenaline secretion. What, however, are these glands if not centers of supraphysical qualities? As certain as Optimists gain weight and pessimists lose weight, and thus their temperamental modalities are noticeable from a distance, as are their voice, gestures, gaze, dragging of feet, tilt of head: all these details reveal the hidden qualities that drive life.

It is said that a man's soul is reflected in his handshake, for it varies as much as faces. Look at your own face, pay attention to your voice, examine your entire physical appearance, and you will discover many things. All things are determined by sympathies and antipathies. Tall men are generally tolerant, just as short men are intolerant, for what they lack in size they compensate for with aggressiveness. Through an analysis of your physical appearance, you can, according to the pragmatic formula, determine its inner nature by the circumstances that derive from it. Once this truth is known, there is only one step to finding the right remedy. But, as Hamlet said, "Ah, therein lies the difficulty."

The same tendencies that have produced the disease and diverted all of nature from normality have, at the same time, so distorted rationality that it will neither perceive error itself nor heed the advice of others. An infallible symptom of irrationality is the instinctive rejection of anything that differs from ourselves. Only the true philosopher can justly judge that which he condemns for himself.

Too often our opinions become the criteria for judging good and evil; we cling to what supports our ideas and reject everything else as invalid and unworthy of consideration. Consequently, the melancholic is blind to their illness and declares that they would very much like to be cheerful if only they could discover reasons to improve their mood. They fail to realize that their own melancholy has blinded them to the spectacle of the eternal good, which only those who prefer not to see it, in favor of base passions, can deny. The one afflicted with self-pity will say, "Why do they tell me to turn away from my sufferings? Why do they point to the example of the happy ones? They know very well that if these people had suffered as I have, they would be in the same state." Yet this same person would not want to exchange their place for that of the happy one; for it is not misfortune that is the source of self-pity, but rather the way in which misfortune is faced. We all suffer more or less the same, some in one way, others in another. Some, rising victoriously above suffering, attain peace of mind, while others are consumed by a wretched hell, where they remain cursing their fate and envying the smiles of others. From a psychological perspective, it is much easier to smile than to sulk, for the latter requires far more muscle activity. However, discontent is our obsessive impulse, and our smile muscles simply atrophy from disuse.

We are all victims of circumstance, but some of us allow circumstance to sacrifice us. It is the old story of the two apples growing side by side: one ripened to a tender, pink, and appetizing appearance; the other withered and soured, until finally it fell from the tree and rotted. Experience is an autumnal impulse by which the fruits of life are harvested. Some ripen in the process while others spoil. There is, however, one exception to this analogy between men and apples: apples rot out of necessity, men, by choice.

There are, then, those punished by adversity who, apparently, were born under the sign of a total eclipse of hope, and who have endured existence only because they lacked the courage to end it. There are those who call themselves stepchildren of fate, considering themselves the predestined victims of every possible form of injustice. If by chance (and chance is more impartial than we generally think) good fortune comes their way, they too consider it another cause of affliction, a harbinger of yet another calamity. Such people can never enjoy good health, since in their constant anticipation of disasters, they create a vortex of misery, and eventually, that which they fear crashes down upon them.

We all live in a whirlwind of imagined problems, and we build or destroy our lives according to our reactions to those accusing fantasies. We can do no better than to remember these famous words from the Bhagavad-Gita: "Only one who is balanced in pain and pleasure is prepared for immortality." Let us remember this: *Pathetic resignation to endless ailments is the most incurable failure.* Is there anything more wretched than being a martyr to one's mistakes?

Reinforced by abundant sighs, appropriate sermons on self-denial, and the elevation of the self as a substitute for Job; all this morbid approach will contaminate the blood, disturb physical functions, and eventually, lead the victim to the door of a hospital.

But who will recognize themselves as such a person? Probably only the occasional, exceptionally sincere individual, for whom the corresponding accusations don't quite fit. Writing books or preaching sermons is dangerous for the scrupulous: they always take credit for what isn't theirs. They are like that sick person who, not knowing how much medicine to take, took it anyway. *all* He died suddenly and with the cure. It is advisable to follow this rule: *If you think something fits you, it probably doesn't; if you're sure it doesn't apply to you, it probably does.*

Therefore, having established, first and foremost, and with all possible honesty, the course and intensity of natural tendencies, each person must take on the task of putting their own house in order: of extracting agreement from discord; of restoring the unnatural to the natural realm. What, then, is the natural state of the individual?

After naming so many abnormalities, how shall we define normality? Aristotle asserted that naturalness was the medium conducive to all qualities: not too much of one, but enough of each. All the aforementioned vices arise from some extreme, and when the exaggerations fade, most of the disturbances disappear with them. The social, political, and religious norms that govern our lives are, for the most part, hopelessly pernicious, and those who conform to them can be sure of accumulating unspeakable evils. The closest approximation to the normal state is that of the child, with this single modification: that, in determining the ideal, philosophy should substitute the spontaneity and optimism of childhood with the single virtue of integrity. A person can be wise and at the same time humble, sincere, spontaneous, understanding, generous, loving, kind, healthy, natural, frank, and simple. They need not make a show of their prowess or try to impress with the noisy thunder of their erudition. His mind doesn't need to rumble like an oxcart. He can be direct in his relationships, free from all the subterfuge and misunderstandings of the sophisticated. He can find pleasure in innocent and insignificant things, and, like a child, build his castles in the air and breathe the breath of reality into them.

We make the sad mistake of growing up; we believe that maturity should be burdened by a sense of dignity and an excess of inconsequential chatter. We become slaves to

fashion and whim, eventually accepting our discomforts as if they were inevitable. We lose the most priceless virtue—supreme naturalness—because we have been raised according to likes and dislikes, trained in antagonisms, instructed according to pernicious ideas, and thrust into life under a code of discontent. We live in accordance with what we have been taught, believing in the inevitability of suffering and death, convinced, all too often, that our suffering will last indefinitely. We are not content with merely populating the earth with evils, but extend their dominion into the realm of space. In the event that the enemy happens to escape his vengeance, through a timely death, the evil individual will console himself with the pious reflection that the universe sustains legions of forked-tailed demons who will unleash upon his former enemy all the fury of his antipathy.

To avoid being considered excessively exaggerated in declaring that bodily afflictions have their origin in a supraphysical nature, we can do no better than to base our ideas on Plato, the immortal initiate, who in his *Carmides* He says, "everyone" "The ills of the body proceed from the soul." Democritus and Plutarch also declare that the soul could easily be blamed for disturbing and, in many ways, harming the body, which is its instrument. Burton wrote, to mention this author again, "The mind truly acts upon the body, producing, with its passions and disturbances, surprising alterations, such as melancholy, despair, a merciless illness, and sometimes even death itself... All philosophers attribute the ills of the body to the soul, which should guide it better through reason and not harm it." Philostratus writes: "The body is corrupted only by the soul." The predispositions of the soul and the study of its phenomena constitute the proper field of psychology. As one of the main disciplines derived from philosophy, psychology is defined as the branch of knowledge that deals particularly with the facts and qualities attributable to a mental origin. Currently, however, the soul has lost its identity, being irremediably confused with intellectual substances.

Having practically exhausted the possibilities of the world of forms, science now turns to the realm of the mind in its quest to extend the limits of knowledge. Since the higher controls the lower, the mind (or soul) is superior to the body, and the impulses of the intellect subordinate physical nature, which is unaware of how pernicious those impulses can be. Curing a disease without correcting its supraphysical causes inevitably ends in disaster; for although the disease may disappear from one place, it is certain to reappear somewhere else, and will continue to appear until the internal source of its causes is eradicated or redirected.

Just as pain is a symptom of disease, so too is disease a symptom of irrationality. Disease is Nature's rebellion against an intolerable evil. It is a parasitic entity maintained at the expense of the one to which it attaches itself. For centuries, the constitution and origin of germs have been a subject of discussion in philosophical circles, and a considerable number of illustrious metaphysicians have affirmed that bacteria represent the concrete precipitation in matter of the evil impulses that the human mind continually engenders. Being offspring of irrational thought, they thrive in an analogous environment, like mosquitoes in a rainwater tank. Remove the unhealthy environment in which they reproduce, and they will disappear for lack of sustenance. Even if an individual claims that their illness has a purely physical origin, due to one circumstance or another, the philosophical truth involved remains pertinent. Suppose someone falls down the stairs. We can hardly relate this circumstance to jealousy or some other abstract mental attitude. In reality, from a materialist perspective, the prevailing evidence is against us, since its sense of justice does not extend to the realm of Providence. Nevertheless, the philosophical approach must be considered valuable, as one's mental attitude will profoundly affect the speed or slowness of the patient's recovery.

It is a well-known fact that some people die from relatively minor illnesses simply because they lack the will to live, while others, through a Herculean effort of will, survive the most deadly plagues. Optimism is a powerful factor in bone healing, wound

repair, and blood purification; joy accelerates all healing processes, reduces suffering, and raises men from their graves. Pessimism can cause a simple bruise to develop into an infection that leads to a long and painful illness. Harvard University is currently conducting successful experiments in this area at its so-called School of Social Medicine.

The Stoics preached the folly of emotional excesses. It is evident that once a harmful rhythm is established, it becomes a vicious cycle in which every consequence transforms into a new cause, and every cause into a new result or consequence. The unbalanced or irrational mind inevitably affects the body; the affected body expresses its resistance in the form of aches and pains. These, in turn, torment the mind, since the tranquility necessary to commune with the Muses is impossible while the physical body is tormented by pain. "Obstructed by past excesses, the body also drags the mind down." (Horace). Mind and body, dragging each other down, ultimately intertwine in common ruin. This vicious cycle operates, to varying degrees, in all individuals, since no one is perfect.

The ancient prophets said that no mortal was without some exaggeration or excess, since moderation was natural only to the gods. Humans, therefore, draw closer to the divine by increasing their temperance, for we are closer to that which we most resemble. Like attracts like. Consequently, those with animalistic tendencies are drawn to beasts, while those with divine qualities are elevated, by virtue of those qualities, to the very heights of the gods. Recall that Diogenes said the gods were gods because they needed nothing, while humans are humans because they always lack something. The gods are self-sufficient; humans must sustain one another and be sustained by the gods.

Giving a practical example of his theory, Diogenes maintained that the fewer men's needs, and the less dependent they were on one another, the more they would resemble the immortals. For this reason, he rejected a house and lived in a barrel with rats as his bedfellows and dogs as guests at his table. One day, while drinking, he began to reflect on his drinking vessel. He suddenly realized that the gods had no need for such vessels, and that this cup was an obstacle between him and the celestial state. He immediately smashed the vessel to pieces, declaring that any man's hands would serve as a drinking bowl, and that anything else was a sordid luxury that inclined the mind toward vanity and worldliness.

For years, science has asserted that the average lifespan should be five hundred years. In reality, it is economically unsound that it should cost humankind so much to equip itself for life if the period of professional activity is going to be so short. At the very moment when one reaches the point where one begins to grasp part of the mystery of life, one is pulled away from that point to confront the unfathomable mystery of death.

Comparatively, few men reach the milestone of seventy, for they answer death's call before the golden years of reason have even begun. Why is life so difficult and death so easy? Why must we struggle with so many obstacles to exist, and be brought down if we let our guard down for even a moment? It would seem as if both the answer and the remedy belong to the future. We live in an environment of excess, we are constantly tempted to abandon our state of moderation, and we are incited to greed, passion, or despair in the face of everyday circumstances.

In the enthusiasm of youth, we set out to forge a noble destiny, correct a legion of errors, and protect ourselves from the evident absurdities of our cultural system. However, it is almost impossible for anyone to counteract the power of a civilization's concentrated ideas. Not a single person in a thousand can resist the insidious corrosion of example and opportunity. Each of us, in turn, falls. We tread the same well-worn path, accepting with patient resignation what seems inevitable. We have developed the habit of dying young, and this concept is too deeply ingrained in the essence of our unconscious thought. We continue down the old familiar path, and disregarding

moderation, which alone would ensure our survival, we become entangled in excesses that have only one inevitable end. We desire to die, and therefore, we die.

The biblical precept that sets the limit of human life at seventy years has undeniably destroyed millions of human beings who either fulfill their predetermined path or compromise the accuracy of the Holy Scriptures. We don't mean to say that people deliberately kill themselves, but rather that they have been undermined by the infection of fatalism. They have placed limits on their lives, and these limitations have ruined them. This is one of the accusations leveled against the practice of prophecy, for undoubtedly the average person becomes an active agent in the consummation of the predicted event.

It is said that a famous medieval astrologer predicted the moment of his death. When the fatal hour arrived and the man found himself in good health, he committed suicide to prevent the accuracy of his science from being questioned. If the dietician can prove the truth of his assertion that men dig their graves with their teeth, the psychologist could also add that human beings fill their graves with their thoughts. The thread of life is fragile, and the mind can break it, often with comparatively little effort. To place limitations on one's own life, or to impede, in any way, the free course of destiny, is a grave mistake.

Particularly in North America, we have thwarted the goals of a long life by intensifying our habits and rhythms to such an extent that the soul, unable to endure them for long, is forced to retreat to a more harmonious and less uncomfortable realm. The Greeks imagined that the soul descended into matter to investigate the experience of physical life. However, the environment in which the average person is born is so frustrating from the perspective of the soul's experience that the inner nature of humankind finds little satisfaction in its physical abode.

We will say it in the words of an old master who had the misfortune of living through a period of civil wars, and who said to one of his disciples: "I have endured this dreadful state of interruption for almost long enough." For one who has rationalized his entire nature and engaged in useful physical labor, death appears as a clear interruption, just as Archimedes also considered it. Yet for most people it is the only escape from the excesses we have engendered in the name of civilization.

Just as the body is, to a certain extent, the objectification of the mind, so too is the political state the crystallization of a form of thought: a solidification of national impulses, attitudes, and (all too often) irritations. Just as the body suffers from mental illness, so too is the country consumed by the diseases of excess, war, tyranny, and unjust legislation. Like the individual, the state can also become ill; indeed, the whole world can suffer the consequences of a disruption in its intellectual image. Civilization itself is mortally ill. All its structures are afflicted by intemperance and intellectualism. The person born into it is like

Anyone forced to live in a plague-ridden house is almost certain to become infected if they remain there long enough. The reformer, the educator, even the great philosopher, are all Father Damians, who will very likely end up dying from the same disease they sought to cure. However, before succumbing, each of them will have accomplished something for the common good, and therefore consequently, in due time, whether through the growing integrity of humankind or through great natural upheavals, the evils from which we suffer will be overcome, and we will enter the Golden Age envisioned by the sages. Meanwhile, if we wish to survive, given the constant tendency toward excess, we must realize the necessity of maintaining rational moderation, neither inclining toward hatred on the one hand nor toward frustrating attachments on the other. By living moderately, thinking moderately, and feeling moderately, we minimize the friction of our inner nature that sustains the body and ultimately reduces it to a state of senility.

We can summarize the philosophy of illness thus: even excluding so-called "accidents" of Nature, the effects of physical disorders are not the same as their underlying causes.

These causes may lie in ignorance and immoderation, for an individual who understands all its components can enjoy the gift of perfect health. Wisdom is the most perfect state, and those who wish to acquire it must sacrifice everything else; above all, they must sacrifice indulgence. The attainment of wisdom is impossible in a body trained for the disorders that are our common destiny. Wisdom is the normality of reason. The balance of the mind and its liberation from the irritations and struggles of physical disorders allow it to contemplate, with uninterrupted tranquility, the luminous essence of the real universe, which, for most of us, is nothing more than a dream.

Philosophy affirms that an individual can be healthy if they strive for health with sufficient strength. If they have the will to sacrifice excesses, they can enjoy spiritual happiness. If, in the act of eating, they serve their physical organs, and not their appetites, they can enjoy good digestion. And if, in their sentimental and rational aspects, they protect the higher interests of the mental and emotional planes, these, in turn, will become their unconditional servants. We have no better motto than this: *"If you put yourself at the service of the parts of your being, your entire being will put itself at your service."*

Service If one sacrifices the paltry gratification derived from envy and hatred, or the solace from self-pity, it is possible to attain constant peace of mind, tranquility of emotions, and healthy bodily function. He who lives in a hospice for an extended period will himself go mad, and the soul that must inhabit a body tormented by ailments and pains, and convulsed by excesses, will necessarily lose its composure and appear as demented as the institution in which it lives.

The pharmacist can prepare an infinite variety of combinations that may counteract or temporarily neutralize the impulses that cause illness. You can buy a concoction that neutralizes, for a while, the effects of anger. These palliatives are like dyspepsia pills that satisfy the glutton, allowing him to indulge his gluttony without immediately suffering the consequences of his indulgence. All these so-called remedies fail to approach the root of the disorder. There is no pill for the soul, no potion to soothe the mind, nor can the state of reason be sold off. It is the individual who, ultimately, must understand that health, like happiness, must be earned or deserved; for happiness is the harmony of the soul, just as health is the harmony of the physical body.

We can only be truly satisfied when we live in perfect harmony with the laws that created and sustain us. Any deviation from these laws leads to our destruction. Absolute accord with the purposes of Nature is the secret of happiness and longevity. Illness is a deviation from Nature; health is a return to it. Understanding this is to reach... To possess the secret of life, to apply this understanding, is to live. Nature is just, and the unjust must perish through their intemperance; Nature is impersonal, and all that is personal must die. Nature envies nothing, is jealous of nothing, and is indifferent to ambition. Those driven by impulses less universal than those of life itself will be destroyed by the inadequacy of their own ideals. Those who are limited perish for lack of air; those who are superficial die for lack of depth. Only those who are moderate in all things, consistent in all things, and natural in all things survive, and they will continue to live because they partake of the qualities of continuation. Sharing the qualities of the gods (who have neither beginning nor end), humankind unfolds, one by one, all the divine potentialities, until its divine destiny finally reaches its absolute fulfillment. Sickness, decay, and death are absorbed by the splendor of the enlightened soul. And man, turning away from the limitations of the flesh, inclines towards immortality, to finally unite with the immutable and infinite Good.