

## NOTHING TOO MUCH

If the Seven Wise Men put *Know thyself* before *Nothing too much*, it would seem to be because one must know oneself before one can know how much is too much. If one did not know oneself, one could not know how much is too much for oneself.<sup>1</sup>

The exhortation *Nothing too much* can be applied first to the exhortation *Know Thyself*. Some have thought that the end of human knowledge was for man to know himself. We find this especially among many modern thinkers.<sup>2</sup> To pursue knowledge of oneself as the end of man's knowledge, and therefore as wisdom, is to seek to know oneself too much. The only knowledge of self that is wisdom is God's knowledge of himself. Man is *not* wise if he is ignorant of himself, but knowing himself does not make him to be wise.

The Seven Wise Men did not urge us to love ourselves. For it is more natural to love oneself than to know oneself. We do not need to be urged to love ourself. But those who do not know themselves may not truly love themselves. Those who think themselves to be more a body than a soul or emotion more than reason, may not truly love themselves. They choose what appears to be good for the body or to satisfy the emotions rather than what perfects the soul or reason. Thomas explains this well:

...quilibet naturaliter seipsum amat; et ideo unusquisque amat hoc quod se esse aestimant.

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<sup>1</sup> But how much is too much (or too little is measured by many things: (1) the end; (2) oneself (know thyself); (3) the circumstances; and (4) by the man of experience & virtue.

Sometimes we know that it is too much; sometimes we guess that it is too much. A little too much may not be noticed or reason takes it as nothing too much.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*. Marx also saw man's goal in making whereby he sees himself in a world that he has made.

Quidam autem aestimant, et vere, se esse id quod secundum intellectum sunt, quia ex hoc homo est homo; et ideo appetunt sibi ea quae sunt bona secundum intellectum et rationem vel directe vel indirecte.

Quidam vero aestimant se esse quod non sunt, et falso, propter naturam sensibilem, quae exterius apparet; et ideo diligunt in se naturam sensibilem appetentes ea quae sunt secundum sensum delectabilia; et quia huiusmodi sunt mala eis et nociva secundum id quod vere sunt, ideo sibiipsis nocent, et se odiunt actu, sed non affectu.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, if the common defect in knowing oneself is to know oneself too little (hence, we must be urged to know ourselves), the common defect in loving oneself is to love oneself too much. This is well put by The Poet:

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye  
And all my soul and all my every part;  
And for this sin there is no remedy,  
It is so grounded inward in my heart.  
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,  
No shape so true, no truth of such account;  
And for myself mine own worth do define,  
As I all other in all worths surmount.  
But when my glass shows me myself indeed,  
Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,  
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;  
Self so self-loving were iniquity.  
    'Tis thee, myself, - that for myself I praise,  
    Painting my age with beauty of thy days.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, for the defect in knowing ourselves, we are urged to know ourselves. And for the common defect in loving ourselves, we are urged *Nothing too much*. But

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<sup>3</sup> *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, Tomus II, Distinctio XLII, Quaest. II. Art II, Ad 2

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, *Sonnet 62*

for the defect of not *truly* loving ourselves, we are urged to know ourselves as well. And this also contributes to not loving ourself too much for we see our defects, as in the above sonnet. Hence, the two exhortations solve the two defects in our self-love.

Why do the Seven Wise Men urge more *Nothing too much* than *Nothing too little*? Since there is the same knowledge of opposites and thus the brevity of wisdom can be satisfied taking just one of these two, why emphasize *Nothing too much*?

Perhaps more harm is done by too much than by too little. Although driving too slowly can cause accidents, more accidents are caused by driving too fast. More harm is done by drinking too much alcohol than too little.

Perhaps we are also inclined more to go towards too much than towards too little. This is clearly seen in the pleasures of eating and drinking and reproducing. But is not the same true as regards anger? And do men love money too much or too little? Men do not seem to be in need of being urged not to love money too little.

And if pride is the queen and root of all the vices, and pride or haughtiness is an excessive love of one's own excellence, *Nothing too much* is an exhortation that we are much more in need of than *Nothing too little*.

Sometimes we are more in need of being reminded that too much is bad than that too little is bad. Thus Shakespeare reminds us:

They are as sick that surfeit with too much,  
as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean  
happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean.<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare's pun on the word *mean* reveals his understanding that virtue, which especially leads to happiness, is a mean between two vices:

.....for the time I study  
Virtue and that part of philosophy  
Will I apply that treats of happiness

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<sup>5</sup> *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Sc. 2

By virtue especially to be achieved.<sup>6</sup>

Men know that too little money is bad, but they think that an abundance of money would bring happiness.

Descartes (and he has many followers) demanded the certitude and precision of mathematics everywhere. Although it is bad to seek more or less certitude and precision than the subject admits, modern thinkers seem to be in need of being reminded more that too much is bad.

Duane H. Berquist

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<sup>6</sup> *The Taming of the Shrew*, Act I, Sc. 1