

Analytic Outline

Vincent's questions, objections, and comments are set in boldface.

PART ONE

DAY I

Preface

Vincent asks for Anthony's counsel in the face of great suffering. Anthony's first counsel is to seek comfort within, from God.

1. Anthony explains why the help of pagan philosophers is insufficient.
2. Anthony states that all spiritual comfort must be based on the foundation of faith.
3. *The first necessary cause of comfort:* the desire to be comforted by God. Anthony distinguishes who can and cannot be comforted.
4. Suffering is a means to acquire a good frame of mind, i.e., a desire for God, not for worldly follies.
5. The necessary help that a friend (like Anthony) provides: counsel and prayer
6. Comfort requires more than desiring the removal of the suffering; it requires trust that God works all to the best.
7. *The second cause of comfort:* knowledge that all suffering is or can be medicinal or is better than medicinal

8. **Vincent complains that this last counsel is “somewhat brief and short, . . . obscure and dark.”** Anthony elaborates upon these three kinds of tribulation: (1) those that are medicinal for our own faults;
9. (2) those that are medicinal for past sins or for preventing future ones;
10. (3) those that are better than medicinal because they increase merit.
11. *The third cause of comfort:* knowledge that we can earn merit here, but not in purgatory
12. **Vincent questions purgatory.** Anthony responds.
13. *The fourth cause of comfort:* knowledge that the cross is needed for heaven and that continual prosperity is a grave danger
14. **Vincent objects to Anthony’s “awfully harsh” position about prosperity.** Anthony responds.
15. **Vincent raises four more objections to Anthony’s argument about the dangers of prosperity.**
16. Anthony defines tribulation again and answers Vincent’s first and third objections.
17. Anthony answers Vincent’s second objection and explains how suffering draws us to God.
18. Anthony speaks of those who seek “mad medicines” in suffering, instead of God.
19. **Vincent objects: Why give such preeminence to suffering?** Anthony argues that suffering is far better than prosperity.
20. Anthony explains that suffering is a gracious gift from God.

PART TWO

DAY 2, JUST AFTER BREAKFAST

Preface

Anthony apologizes for having talked so much and insists that Vincent talk more. Vincent agrees.

1. **Vincent objects that Anthony’s teaching on suffering seems “rather harsh.”** Anthony explains the need for a right attitude.
2. Anthony claims to be highly selective in his explanations.
3. Anthony distinguishes three kinds of suffering: (1) that freely chosen for the sake of penance or devotion, (2) that willingly endured, and (3) that which one cannot avoid. (*This third kind of suffering* was treated in Part One.) Anthony repeats his first principle: that no comfort is possible without good sense and faith.
4. In the *first kind of suffering*, the person does not need comfort. To show that one can experience two contrary states at the same time (hot and cold, suffering and joy), Anthony tells the tale of a strange fever.
5. **Vincent wonders if this teaching may not lead many to wait until death to repent.** Anthony answers with Scripture and a story.
6. **Vincent questions the need for penance: didn’t Christ do enough penance for us all?** Anthony answers with reference to Scripture and tradition.
7. **Vincent asks about those who cannot feel sorry for their sins.** Anthony answers again from Scripture and tradition.
8. Of the *second kind of suffering*. Anthony distinguishes two kinds: temptation and persecution. (Persecution will be treated in Part Three.)
9. Many as are the different kinds of temptation, Anthony points to one great comfort in them all: “the more we are

tempted, the gladder we have good reason to be." He compares life to a wrestling match.

10. Anthony points out a second comfort in all temptation: God is always ready to give us the necessary strength and wisdom. He introduces Psalm 91 and its comparison of God to a mother hen and of us to her young.
11. Anthony distinguishes *four types of temptation*, on the basis of Psalm 91. He compares God to a body shield.
12. *Fear* ("the terror of the night"), which leads to impatience or negligence, is the *first type of temptation*.
13. Anthony explains the nature and causes of a particular kind of fear: faintheartedness.
14. Anthony gives the scrupulous conscience as an example of faintheartedness, and he shows how it is cured, illustrating his explanation with an amusing story he learned from Mother Maud.
15. Anthony gives his second and "most horrible" example of faintheartedness: the temptation to commit suicide.
16. Anthony distinguishes between counsel and comfort, giving three major examples to show how a proper understanding of the difference helps in curing a person of such a temptation. Then he discusses *pride* ("the arrow that flies by day"), the *second type of temptation* and one greater than fear. He suggests a cure, which **Vincent questions**.
17. Anthony moves on to *worldly "busyness"* ("the pestilence that stalks in the darkness"), the *third type of temptation*. **Vincent shows his own scruple of conscience by questioning if the rich can ever be saved.** Anthony's answer gives rich young Vincent the remedy he needs.

PART THREE

DAY 2, AFTER ANTHONY'S LUNCH AND NAP

Preface

Vincent fears the imminent danger of the Turks' invasion.

1. **Vincent asks if it is a bad idea to think about these dangers before they occur.** Anthony explains the need for the HABIT of spiritual strength, which comes from meditation and from perceiving the true causes of terror.
2. Anthony now takes up the *fourth and worst type of temptation: open persecution* (the attack of the "noontday devil"). **Vincent is anxious to be armed with "substantial advice and good counsel" so he can be a strong support to the others.**
3. Anthony says that persecution can bring a loss of external goods and harm to the body, but no harm at all to the soul unless the soul itself "consents to slide from the faith and thereby harms itself." Anthony repeats that the great need is to strengthen one's faith by frequent meditation so it becomes "a strong, deep-rooted habit" keeping one from being "a rootless tree, barely up on end in a loose heap of light sand."
4. Anthony notes that if the attacks of the noontday devil are weighed well with reason, there is nothing to fear.
5. On the loss of outward goods such as riches, honor, and authority
6. On the lack of security in land ownership
7. Anthony distinguishes two ways of considering external goods: from the perspectives of the present life and of the life to come.
8. The limited value of being rich, even from the perspective of the present life

9. The limited value of fame, when desired only for worldly pleasure
10. On flattery and its relationship to fame
11. The limited value of high positions and authority, when desired only for worldly advantage
12. How these outward goods, when desired only for worldly advantage, not only do little good for the body but also do much harm to the soul
13. How persecution reveals one's motives for desiring external goods
14. **Vincent acknowledges that the threat of losing everything unless one denounces the faith is the "most severe and most dangerous" of all temptations.** Anthony has Vincent play the part of a rich man attacked by this temptation.
15. Anthony says that the wise will lay up their treasure in the safest of places. **Vincent points out that "there always still hangs in a person's heart a loathing to lack belongings."** Anthony reiterates the need for well-rooted attention to the counsel of God.
16. Anthony identifies one remembrance that alone should give sufficient comfort against the loss of worldly goods: Christ's poverty and goodness to us. He then summarizes all that can be done when one is faced with the fear of losing outward goods.
17. **Vincent agrees, but still trembles at the thought of the bodily pain that may be inflicted.** After further counsel from Anthony, Vincent says he is sufficiently comforted; but Anthony knows better.
18. Anthony now raises harder issues and begins to "examine the weight and the substance" of the bodily pains that Vincent fears. Anthony defines enslavement and explains its nature.

19. Anthony turns to the nature of imprisonment. **Vincent objects strongly to this explanation, criticizing Anthony for resorting to "sophistic fabrications."** Anthony convinces Vincent that everyone in the world is in a prison of one kind or another.
20. **Vincent objects: the *kind* of prison makes a great deal of difference!** Anthony responds.
21. **Vincent objects again: the terror of a shameful and painful death is so great that it "instantly makes us oblivious to everything that should give us comfort."** Anthony reminds him that everything depends on "the affections that are previously fixed and rooted in the mind."
22. Anthony now turns to consider the nature of death in and of itself.
23. Anthony shows how one deals with the shame that may accompany deadly persecution for the faith.
24. **Vincent points out that "the real pinch is in the pain."** Anthony explains the role of reason, especially reason grounded in faith. **Vincent tells the story of the faint-hearted deer.** Anthony explains self-rule. **Vincent makes five more points.** Anthony responds to each.
25. Anthony compares the pains of earth with the pains of hell.
26. Anthony counsels Vincent to cultivate a "right imagination" of "spiritual, heavenly joys." Only in this way will Vincent become "he who conquers."
27. Anthony concludes, emphasizing the importance of conceiving "a right imagination and remembrance" of Christ's bitter, painful Passion, of hell, and of heaven.