
The papers gathered in this volume are a welcome continuation of the excellent work started in Portraits du bonheur au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance, which presents twelve models and conceptions of happiness. By focusing on Erasmus, the present collection not only deepens the analysis of a key notion in Western thought but also enlightens our readings of the famous humanist. For happiness, which is both a secular and a religious concept, encompasses our modern sense of self-fulfillment as well as a more ancient (and sometimes forgotten) sense of divine felicity. The title chosen by Brenda Dunn-Lardeau thus presents an hypothesis—that happiness is an effective category with which to read Renaissance texts—and the studies gathered convince the reader that her stance is legitimate. Moreover, this category proves to be an efficient and relevant way to emphasize some aspects of the Erasmian corpus that thematic or disciplinary studies on theology, rhetoric, spirituality, and history could only survey. If only for this reason, this special issue of Renaissance and Reformation immediately finds its place as an important contribution to recent Erasmian bibliography. A bilingual volume, it attests to the high quality and vitality of present Canadian research on Erasmus, allying different approaches and fields for an enriched understanding of a complex corpus.

The four papers collected and introduced by Dunn-Lardeau do not claim to give an exhaustive account of the topic; rather they focus on reading specific texts with an array of methodologies and points of view. This format proves to be both conceptually valid and pleasurable to read, amply illustrating the scope of Erasmus’ treatment of the topic. Bringing into perspective the Praise of Folly, the Colloquies and the Adages, the volume never sacrifices either detailed analysis or argumentative reach.

Dunn-Lardeau opens the volume with a study of the ever-presence of happiness in Erasmus’ works. Whether writing about literary, pedagogical or biblical matters, Erasmus elaborates a picture of happiness that reconciles within the pious life the traditional dichotomy between celestial felicity and...
terrestrial pleasures. Always affirming the consubstantial unity of happiness and virtue, he finds in faith and prayer a way for man to know a brief taste of eternal felicity in his earthly life.

In the general preface, in other words, Dunn-Lardeau offers not merely a justification for gathering together the papers included but a short essay on happiness and felicity. In five dense and vivid pages, she demonstrates the broad implications of the topic and highlights the prudence of Erasmus’ nuanced and precise exploration of it. Happiness is an Erasmian topic not only because it is mentioned so frequently but also because of the central status of the notion, which finds itself at the crossroads of ethics, spirituality and scholarship. This intersection is an essential aspect of Erasmus’ thought and writing, and although the integration of ethics, knowledge, and faith initially seems problematic, Erasmus manages to demonstrate its strength. Dunn-Lardeau’s careful and fully documented presentation of the topic readies the reader for the variety of approaches that serves the volume’s ambitious scope.

Olga Ann Duhl examines “Le Plaisir des sens comme source de bonheur dans les Stultiferae Naves de Josse Bade” and demonstrates that the classical notion of voluptas, based on the five senses, is at the basis of Bade’s denunciation of folly. An often overlooked source for the Praise of Folly, Bade’s provocative depiction of vices and delusions attributes human folly, here emblematically associated with women, to original sin. The comparison of Erasmus’ paradoxical praise with one of its sources exposes the former’s departure from Augustinian and pre-Lutheran condemnations of worldly happiness. Without the help of morals and the guidance of piety, the power of voluptas poses a danger for virtue because the senses provide only a secondary and unreliable happiness. Offering a detailed analysis of both sources and texts, Duhl also offers an illuminating study of Erasmus’ theological inventiveness.

In “Felicitas (eudaimonia), ou les promenades d’Érasme dans le jardin d’Épicure,” Peter Bietenholz addresses Erasmus’ considerations of the Epicurean conception of felicitas. Erasmus first evokes this school in the Praise of Folly in his criticism of Stoicism. Toward the end of his life, however, he rejects Epicureanism altogether. Elegantly presented as a perambulation through various gardens—those that Erasmus visited, those he created in the Colloquies and those he found in ancient literature and philosophy—this paper is a fundamental piece of scholarship for all Erasmians. Starting with Italian gardens, Bietenholz demonstrates the major influence of Valla’s De voluptate on Erasmus. Such a focus sheds new light on the Praise of Folly, where the Epicurean status of happiness as a motivation for human life is both affirmed and denied. Although Epicureanism and Christianity are intrinsically