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Thomas Aquinas on Happiness

Summa Theologiae

Part II/1, Question 2. On what constitutes human happiness

Article 7. Whether some good of the soul constitutes man's happiness?

Objection 1: It would seem that some good of the soul constitutes man's happiness. For happiness is some human good. But human goods are divided into the following three kinds: external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul. But happiness does not consist in external goods or in goods of the body, as was shown above (in articles 1–6). Therefore, it consists in goods of the soul.

Objection 2: Further, we love that for which we desire some good more than the good we desire for it: thus we love a friend for whom we desire money more than we love money. But human beings desire *all* sorts of goods for themselves. Therefore, they love themselves more than all other goods. Now happiness is what is loved above all, which is evident from the fact that all else is loved and desired for its sake. Therefore, happiness consists in some good of humans themselves. Not, however, in goods of the body; therefore, in goods of the soul.

Objection 3: Furthermore, perfection is something belonging to that which is perfected. But happiness is a perfection of man. Therefore happiness is something belonging to man. But it is not something belonging to the body, as shown above.¹ Therefore it is something belonging to the soul; and thus it consists in goods of the soul.

On the contrary, As Augustine says, “that which constitutes the life of happiness is to be loved for its own sake.”² But man is not to be loved for man's own sake, but whatever is in man is to be loved for God's sake. Therefore happiness consists in no good of the soul.

1 ST1–2 q. 2, a. 5.

2 *De Doctrina Christiana* I, 22.

I answer that we call something an end in two ways, as it was stated above:³ the thing itself that we desire to attain, and its use, namely, the attainment or possession of that thing. Therefore, speaking about man's ultimate end as about the thing itself we desire as the ultimate end, it is impossible for man's ultimate end to be the soul itself or something belonging to it. Because the soul, considered in itself, is as something existing in potentiality: for it becomes actually knowing from being potentially knowing and actually virtuous from being potentially virtuous. Now since potentiality is for the sake of actuality as for its fulfillment, that which in itself is in potentiality cannot be the ultimate end. Therefore the soul itself cannot be its own ultimate end. Likewise, nothing belonging to the soul can be the ultimate end, whether power, habit, or act. For the good which is the ultimate end is the perfect good that fulfills desire. Now man's desire, that is, the will, is for the universal good. And any good inherent in the soul is a participated good, and consequently a particular good. Therefore none of these can be man's ultimate end.

But if we speak about man's ultimate end as the attainment or possession or any use of the thing desired as the end, then in this way the ultimate end is something of the human soul, since man attains happiness through the soul. Therefore, the thing itself which is desired as the end is that which constitutes happiness, and makes man happy; but the attainment of this thing is called happiness. Consequently, we must say that happiness is something belonging to the soul; but that which constitutes happiness is something outside the soul.

Reply to Objection 1: Inasmuch as that division includes all goods that man can desire, what is said to be a good of the soul is not only a power, a habit, or an act, but also an object of these, which is something external. And in this way nothing prevents us from saying that what constitutes happiness is a good of the soul.

Reply to Objection 2: As far as the proposed objection is concerned, happiness is loved above all, as the good that is desired; whereas a friend is loved as someone for whom some good is desired; and human beings love themselves in this way as well. Consequently, we do not have the same kind of love in both cases. Whether humans love anything more than themselves with the love of friendship, however, we shall have an occasion to inquire when we discuss charity.⁴

Reply to Objection 3: Happiness itself, since it is a perfection of the soul, is an inherent good of the soul; but that which constitutes happiness, namely, what makes man happy, is something outside his soul, as stated above.

Article 8. Whether any created good constitutes man's happiness?

Objection 1: It would seem that some created good constitutes man's happiness. For Dionysius says that Divine wisdom "unites the ends of first things to the beginnings of second things,"⁵ from which we may gather that the summit of a lower nature touches the base of the higher nature. But man's highest good is happiness. Since, therefore, the angel is above man in the order of nature, as stated in the first part,⁶ it seems that man's happiness consists in man somehow reaching the angel.

3 ST1 q. 1, a. 8.

4 ST2-2, qq. 23-7.

5 *De Divinis Nominibus* vii.

6 ST1, q. 111, a. 1.

Objection 2: Further, the ultimate end of each thing consists in that in which it achieves its own perfection; therefore, the part is for the whole, as for its end. But the universe of creatures, which is called the macrocosm, is compared to man, who is called the microcosm,⁷ as perfect to imperfect. Therefore man's happiness consists in the whole universe of creatures.

Objection 3: Further, human beings are made happy by what satisfies their natural desire. But the natural desire of human beings does not reach out to a good surpassing their capacity. Therefore, since man's capacity does not include that good which surpasses the limits of all creation, it seems that man can be made happy by some created good. Consequently, what constitutes man's happiness is some created good.

On the contrary, Augustine says:⁸ "As the soul is the life of the body, so God is man's life of happiness, of whom it is written: 'Happy is the people whose God is the Lord'."⁹

I answer that, It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness. For happiness is that perfect good which entirely satisfies one's desire; otherwise it would not be the ultimate end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's desire, is what is universally good; just as the object of the intellect is what is universally true. Hence it is evident that nothing can satisfy man's will, except what is universally good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone, because every creature has participated goodness. Therefore, God alone can satisfy the will of man, according to the words of the *Psalms* (102:5): "Who satisfies your desire with good things." Therefore, God alone constitutes man's happiness.

Reply to Objection 1: The summit of man does indeed touch the base of the angelic nature, by a kind of likeness; but man does not rest there as in the ultimate end, but reaches out to the universal wellspring of goodness itself, which is the common object of happiness of all the blessed, being the infinite and perfect good.

Reply to Objection 2: If a whole is not the ultimate end, but ordained to a further end, then the ultimate end of a part of the whole is not the whole itself, but something else. Now the universe of creatures, to which man is compared as part to whole, is not the ultimate end, but is ordained to God, as to its ultimate end. Therefore the ultimate end of man is not the good of the universe, but God himself.

Reply to Objection 3: Some created good is not lesser than that good of which man is capable *as of something intrinsic* and inherent to him; but it is lesser than the good of which man is capable *as of an object*, which is infinite, whereas the participated good which is in an angel, or even in the whole universe, is a finite and restricted good.

⁷ *Physics* VIII, 2.

⁸ *De Civitate Dei* xix, 26.

⁹ *Psalms* 143: 15.