

THE HUMAN GOOD IN AQUINAS

Outline

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THE GOOD IN GENERAL

Although our subject matter is the human good in Aquinas, we cannot begin to speak of the good that is specifically human without understanding the concept of the good, that is, 'goodness' in general. Aquinas adopted the Aristotelian definition of the Good as "that which all things tend."¹ This means that the good is that for the sake of which an agent acts. It also means that all things are inclined to the good as an end. He distinguished three goods that man desires²: external goods, goods of the body and goods of the soul. External goods include wealth, power, honour and glory. Goods of the body are health, life, pleasure. Goods of the soul include power, habit or act as well as their objects.

The end every agent tends is appropriate to it, and agrees with it. "But what is appropriate to something is its good."³ The good is tended to because it is seen as

¹ S.G., 3, 11

² S.T., I-II, q. 2, a. 7

³ S.G 3,2

perfecting the agent; because it enables the agent be fully what it is.⁴ The Good then, is pure act whose existence is its essence without any potentiality or else it will not be that which all things tend. The universal good owes its reason of being to itself. Good, says Thomas, is *being*, considered as an object of appetite.⁵ Good is being (what can be) viewed as object of appetite (tendency): not just as desirable, but as fitting, that is, as something which perfects one (or those with whom one is united).⁶ Thus Aquinas states: “the very nature of good is that something flows from it, but not that it flows from something else.”⁷ Because all things tend to the good, the good satisfies all the appetites of the agent tending to it. He writes: “The end is that in which the appetitive inclination of an agent or mover and of the thing moved finds its rest”⁸ This also is “the essential meaning of the good, that it provides a terminus for appetite, since ‘the good is that which all desire.’”⁹ Thus the good is that on which the agent rests. It is, in simple terms, that which satisfies all desire: “The end of anything is that in which its appetite terminates. Now the appetite of anything terminates in a good”¹⁰ “The end is the principle of human operations... therefore it belongs to man to do everything for an end... Therefore all human actions must be for an end.”¹¹

⁴ *S.T.*, I, q. 62, a. 1.

⁵ *De Veritate*, Q. 21, a. 1

⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁷ *S.T.*, q. 1, a. 4, ad. 1. The good talked of here is the First Good, which is infinite. Aquinas would later identify this as the ultimate end of human action.

⁸ *S.G.* 3, 3.

⁹ *S.G.* 3, 3.

¹⁰ *S.G.* 16:2

¹¹ *ST.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1

The good is that end which all things tend. According to Aquinas, “all who rightly define ‘good’ place in its definition something about it being an end.”¹² “End has the meaning [*ratio*] of ‘good’; ‘good’ has the meaning [*ratio*] of end.”¹³ “The good of each thing is its end.”¹⁴ This is true of all things: natural, sentient, rational, celestial etc; all tend to the end in accordance to their nature.

“Consequently it is proper to the rational nature to tend to an end, as directing (*agens*) and leading itself; whereas it is proper to irrational nature to tend to an end as directed or led by another.”¹⁵ Not violently though but naturally having within themselves principles of inclination.¹⁶

As the principle of all things and that towards which all things tend as an end, Aquinas identified God as the good, the universal good, that towards which all things tend. “Accordingly, because God is the last end, He is sought in every end, just as, because He is the first efficient cause, He acts in every agent.”¹⁷

Further, according to him, since all things are ordered to an end that is good, all things are ordered to the highest good, the ultimate end of all things:

If, in fact, nothing tends toward a thing as an end, unless this thing is a good, it is therefore necessary that the good, as good, be the end. Therefore, that which is the highest good is, from the highest point of view, the end of all things. But there is only one highest good, and this is God... So, all things are ordered to one good, as their end, and this is God.¹⁸

¹² *De Ver.* Q. 21, a. 1.

¹³ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2

¹⁴ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 3, ad 2. cf., *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 1

¹⁵ *S.T.*, I- II q. 2, a. 2; *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 4.

¹⁶ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 1

¹⁷ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 2.

¹⁸ *S.G.* 3, 17, 2.

He unpacks the above position in six points all centered on the principle of causality that God is the highest good; therefore, he is the Good all things tend. First, since all things tend to an end which is a good, that which is the highest good is, from the highest point of view, the end of all things. And this is God. Second, the highest good, which is God, is the cause of all goodness in all things. Third, as the first cause in the order of causes, God is more the end of everything than is any proximate end. Fourth, all things are found to be subordinated to one highest good which is the cause of all goodness. Fifth, God is the common good since the good of all things taken together depends on Him. Sixth, God is the supreme agent who orders all other agents to their end. Seventh, God as maker is the ultimate end of all things, since all things are ordered to God as their end. This in fact he says is what tending to God means: "Accordingly, because God is the last end, He is sought in every end, just as, because He is the first efficient cause, He acts in every agent. But this is what tending to God implicitly, means."¹⁹

So Aquinas was saying that God is that end to be attained by all things because God is the highest good, which all things tend. And things attain the end by becoming like the end, God Himself. All things tend to become like God, as God is their ultimate end so that they attain His goodness;²⁰ as effects tend to become like the agent;²¹ as the agent makes a product to his own likeness, all

¹⁹ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 2

²⁰ *S.G.* 18, 1; *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 2, ad. 2

²¹ *S.G.* 18, 2

things exist in order to attain to the divine likeness, as to their ultimate end.²²

Things tend to become like God by striving for perfection, the full realization of their potentialities.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

As we saw above, all things tend to their end in accordance to their nature. Plants are capable of nourishing themselves and of reproduction. They are moved to their end. Animals are capable of plant activities in addition to sensation. They are moved to their end following their sense appetite. Human beings are capable of plant and animal activities; in addition because they possess the mind, they are able to think and choose freely. Thus they move to their end willingly. As Aquinas remarks:

Nevertheless, it must be observed that a thing tends to an end, by its action or movement, in two ways: first, as a thing, moving itself to the end, - as man; secondly, as a thing moved by another to the end, as an arrow tends to a determinate end through being moved by the archer, who directs his action to the end. Therefore those things that are possessed of reason move themselves to an end; because they have dominion over their actions, through their free will, which is the *faculty of will and reason*. But those things that lack reason tend to an end by natural inclination, as being moved by another and not by themselves; since they do not know the nature of an end as such, and consequently cannot ordain anything to an end, but can be ordained to an end only by another.²³

I think it is appropriate to understand Aquinas as saying here that human act has elements of natural and animal inclinations or qualities as well as rational features that principally distinguishes it from other beings. This means as Jean

²² *S.G.* 18, 4.

²³ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2

Porter rightly remarked that “reason opens downward and upward for Aquinas – downward, drawing on the inclinations and passions which we share with the other animals, and indeed to some extent with all creatures, and upward, toward union with God through the dynamisms of grace and the theological virtues”²⁴ Through their actions human beings tend to their end. Human acts are those acts that the human person freely and knowingly brings about and as such is responsible for. They proceed from deliberate will²⁵; that is, from reason and will. Human acts therefore, are voluntary acts, they stem from the will which is an appetite for the good as discerned through reason. Thus man is the master of his actions. And in fact only that action he is master of is properly called human; else they are called acts of man and as such not proper to man as man. In so far as they proceed from deliberate will, Aquinas says, human act is directed to an end, for “the object of the will is the end and the good.”²⁶

In the prologue to the *Prima Secundae* of his *Summa*, Aquinas quoting Damascene who said that man is said to be made to God’s image, in so far as the image implies *an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement*, lays the foundation of his moral thought. Man by virtue of having free will and control of his actions, is the principle of his actions.²⁷ In this way, Aquinas provides us with tools to analyze human actions in terms of general principles and special

²⁴ Jean Porter, “Right Reason and Love of God”, Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, (ed.), *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 169

²⁵ *S.T.* I-II, q. 1, a. 1

²⁶ *S.T.*, Ia–IIae, q. 1, a. 1

²⁷ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 3.

rules which govern them. The general principles include the internal principles from which actions spring and the external principles making man to act well or badly. “Under the heading of the internal principles, Aquinas includes the will, passions, and virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that perfect the operations of the virtues. Under this heading, he also includes a discussion of vices and sins, which are seen as corruptions of the powers and acts of the agent. The external principles include both Satan, who tempts us to evil, and God, who both instructs us through law, and aids us through grace”²⁸

The Internal Principles of Human Action

(1) The Will

The will as rational appetite is naturally oriented to the universal good. In fact, it necessarily seeks the universal good but not this or that particular good.²⁹ As stated by Aquinas:

The will naturally wills good but not this or that particular good. It is like sight, which naturally sees color but not this or that particular color. For this reason whatever the will wills it wills under aspect of good; yet it does not always have to will this or that good. Whatever it wills, it wills under the aspect of the good.³⁰

And in willing, the will is free. It cannot be compelled to act in its proper act; therefore violence cannot be done to the will. “Not only can no creature by acting upon the will force it (for even God could not do this), but also it cannot even act upon the will directly so to change it with necessity or in any way to incline it

²⁸ Jean Porter, *ibid.*, 171.

²⁹ *De Ver.*, q. 24, a. 7 “Good, taken absolutely, is the object of the will, just as truth, taken absolutely, is the object of the intellect. That is why the will reaches to the universal principle of good itself, to which no other appetite can attain.”

³⁰ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 6, ad. 5

(which God can do).”³¹ The reason for this is that the act of the will is nothing else than an inclination proceeding from an interior knowing principle, just as the natural appetite is an inclination proceeding from an interior principle without knowledge. Each person is responsible for directing his/her choices to the universal good. Since the will is said to be free inasmuch as it is not necessitated, the freedom of the will can be viewed under three aspects: (1) as regards its acts, inasmuch as it can will or not will; (2) as regards its object, inasmuch as it can will this or that, even if one is the opposite of the other; and (3) as regards its ordination to the end, inasmuch as the will can desire what is in truth directed to the appointed end or what is so only in appearance.³²

So an act is morally good when it fulfills three conditions: when the act itself is morally good or indifferent in kind, when it enacts a good intention, and when it is done in a way that is morally appropriate given the circumstances. Thus the criteria in terms of which a human act is to be evaluated are reference to its genus, to its object, its circumstances, and the agent’s aim in acting.

An act is bad if one or more of these aspects of human act are bad. “Hence, an action which is bad with respect to its object cannot be justified by a good aim, and by the same token, an act which is generically good will be corrupted by a bad aim or by inappropriateness in the given circumstances.”³³ Thus Aquinas gives a fourfold appraisal of human action:

Accordingly a fourfold goodness may be considered in a human action. First, that which, as an action, it derives from its genus; because as much as it has of action and being so much has it of goodness... Secondly, it has goodness according to its species; which is derived from its suitable object. Thirdly, it has goodness from its circumstances, in respect, as it were, of its

³¹ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 9

³² *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 6

³³ Jean Porter, *Ibid.*, 173

accidents. Fourthly, it has goodness from its end, to which it is compared as to the cause of its goodness.³⁴

Since we have been talking of the end of human action, a little explanation of the other criteria for evaluation of human action stated by Aquinas above has to be briefly explained. As Ralph McInerny explains, “the object of human action is that which the agent sets out to do, to effect.”³⁵ It is determined by reason, which determines whether what is done is appropriate (as, for example, to use what is one’s own) or inappropriate (to take what is another’s). Human action has absolute goodness because of the object, relative goodness because of the end.

A circumstance is described as something outside the substance of an act and yet touching it. The most important circumstance of an act are those which touches the act on the part of the end, viz. the circumstance ‘*why*’ and that which touches the very substance of the act, viz. the circumstance ‘*what he did*.’³⁶

As the good in general is the object of the will, the will moves the other powers of the soul to their acts. Aquinas distinguishes six stages of willing:

(1) Willing simply considered is conception of a possible end; it is a stage of human action properly so-called. It’s like forming an idea of a possible end in mind. This is possible through the good apprehended by reason, for moral action is composed of acts of knowledge and of the will. At this stage it is cognitive reason that is being turned toward reality. Thus the first prerequisite for effective

³⁴ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 18, a. 4.

³⁵ Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas on Human Action*, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1992), 81

³⁶ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 7, a. 4

willing is the knowledge of the end, or what amounts to the same thing, the good. As Aquinas states: "The awareness of the end must be considered the first thing in the realm of action."³⁷ "Now the order of action is this: First there is the apprehension of the end; then the desire of the end; then the counsel about the means; then the desire of the means."³⁸

- (2) Consent - This is made up of two stages. First, finding means to achieve an end conceived (counsel). Second attractiveness to the means that would most likely help in achieving the end (consent). This is a result of the will's approval of each means deemed conducive to an end. And taking counsel with oneself, finding means to the end, does it. The will consents to the entirety of the appropriate means to the end.
- (3) Intention - commitment to an end in a decisive way once a viable way of attaining the end has been found. Aquinas says: "intention is an act of the will in subordination to reason as it directs to an end the means to it."³⁹
- (4) Choice - Here, the will definitively moves to that one means by which the agent seeks to achieve the end in view. Its proper object is the means to an end.⁴⁰ Thomas says that choice is "the preferring of one thing to another"⁴¹

³⁷ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 15, a. 3

³⁸ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 15, a. 3

³⁹ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 14, ad. 16

⁴⁰ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 15

⁴¹ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 13, a. 2.

“Choice is an act of the will in subordination to reason as it compares among themselves the means to an end.”⁴²

- (5) Use – This regards the application of whatever is within one’s power like one’s intellect, eyes, arms etc. to achieve the end through approved means.⁴³
- (6) Enjoyment – This refers to the agent’s relation to the end insofar as the end is possessed. According to Aquinas enjoyment pertains “to the delight one has in the desired goal.”⁴⁴

In its act of willing, the will tends towards the good presented by reason either absolutely or in subordination to reason.

When reason proposes something to it as a good absolutely, the will is moved to it absolutely. This is willing. When reason proposes something to it under the aspect of a good to which other things are referred as to an end, then the will tends to it with a certain order, which is found in the act of the will, not in accordance with its own nature, but in accordance with the demands of reason. In this way intending is an act of the will in subordination to reason.⁴⁵

As a deliberate act, human act involves the intellect and the will. Nothing is chosen if its goodness is not considered. A thing is tended to because it is considered as good and presented to the will as good. The will then moves the other powers of the soul, the concupiscible and the irascible passions to act towards that apprehended as good. When such is the case the resulting action is seen as morally good.

⁴² *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 14, ad. 16

⁴³ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 16, a. 1

⁴⁴ *S.T.* I-II, q. 11, a. 1

⁴⁵ *De Ver.* 22, 13

Hence when the will inclines to act as moved by the apprehension of reason, presenting a proper good to it, the result is a fitting action. But when the will breaks forth into action, at the apprehension of sense cognition, or of reason itself presenting some other good, the result in the action of the will is a moral fault.⁴⁶

Even in such conditions as when the will acts wrongly at quasi-apprehended good, it still acts *sub specie boni*. For the will is moved by necessity of natural inclination to the good. Thus Aquinas explains:

Even those who act contrary to reason are seeking good directly. A man who fornicates, for instance, is interested in something good and pleasurable to sense. That the act is bad from the viewpoint of reason is beyond his intention. Good is accordingly desired directly; evil, indirectly.⁴⁷

Unless the will sees some aspect of the good it is not moved to act by moving the other faculties. Aquinas doubted that anything could be intrinsically evil as to lack any aspect of the good. If so the will will not be inclined to it, since the will is inclined only to the good. "Nothing is so evil that it cannot have some aspect of the good; and it is by reason of that goodness that it can move the appetite."⁴⁸

(2) Emotions

According to Stephen Pope⁴⁹, emotions are natural ways in which one is moved to act by one's surroundings. They are also termed 'passions' because in feeling them agents are moved as a result of having being acted upon by some external agency. Aquinas distinguished between concupiscible passions, which are moved by goods of sense, and irascible passions which are moved by goods of

⁴⁶ SCG. 3, ch. 10, 26; c.f. 25, 10; 26, 21

⁴⁷ *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 1

⁴⁸ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 7, ad. 6

⁴⁹ Stephen Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 33-34

sense which can only be obtained through the overcoming of some kind of resistance. Emotions involve bodily responses to situation. They include love,⁵⁰ hatred⁵¹, concupiscence⁵², delight and pleasure⁵³, sorrow or pain⁵⁴, hope and despair⁵⁵, fear,⁵⁶ daring⁵⁷, anger.⁵⁸

We will not go into details of Aquinas treatment of the passions here. But suffice it to say that emotions are part of our creaturely nature and therefore they are good if we order them properly instead of repressing them. The will guides the emotions in this regard.

3) Virtues

Aquinas following Peter Lombard adopted Augustine's definition of virtue as "a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us."⁵⁹ He saw this definition as "comprising the whole essential notion of virtue"⁶⁰ and explained the clause 'that which God works in us without us' ⁶¹ by distinguishing between the infused virtues [theological virtues of faith, hope and charity] and the acquired

⁵⁰ *S.T.*, I-II, qq. 26- 28

⁵¹ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 29

⁵² *S.T.*, I-II, q. 30,

⁵³ qq. 31-34

⁵⁴ qq. 35-39

⁵⁵ q. 40

⁵⁶ qq. 41-44

⁵⁷ q. 45

⁵⁸ qq. 46-48

⁵⁹ *S.T.* I-II, q. 55, a. 4, obj. 1

⁶⁰ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4

⁶¹ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4, ad. 6

virtues⁶² [the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude]

which can be achieved by us. Thus he identified virtues as habits.

Habits are permanent dispositions to act in characteristic ways. It is a quality in the soul that orders human conduct in a way that contributes to the human development of the person.⁶³ Habits are developed human capabilities. Virtues are habits to the extent that they help in the development or retrogression of the individual and the community in relation to their choice of the good. Virtues are stable dispositions to act in ways that are good. And not only this, virtues equally ensure right use of the dispositions. Thus Thomas Aquinas distinguished two ways by which a thing is called virtue. "Since every virtue is ordained to some good... a habit may be called a virtue for two reasons: first, because besides aptness, it confers the right use of it."⁶⁴

The faculties of intellect, will and the concupiscible and irascible passions are each identified with one of the four cardinal virtues. Jean Porter aptly identified them thus:

Prudence or practical wisdom...enables the agent to choose in accordance with a correct understanding of the human good, as applied to particular situations; justice orients the will toward the good of others or the common good, as discerned by reason; and temperance and fortitude shape the passions in such a way that the agent desires what is truly in accordance with reason, and is prepared to resist obstacles to attaining it.⁶⁵

⁶² *S.T.*, I-II, q. 63, a. 2; q. 92, a. 1, ad. 1

⁶³ q. 49

⁶⁴ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 57, a. 1

⁶⁵ Jean Porter, *Ibid.*, 176

4) Sins and Vices

Just as virtue disposes the agent to its ordered and proper acts, so vices disposes the agent to engage in disordered acts. Sin is found where a person voluntarily engages in a bad human act, that is, in an act that does not conform to its proper measure as determined either by human reason or divine reason. Although the effects of sin are felt in the body, their seat is in the will.⁶⁶

Sin in the formal sense is essentially a corruption or privation of what belongs to a person naturally, the good. The internal causes of sin include ignorance⁶⁷ passion⁶⁸ and malice.⁶⁹ Sin leaves the natural powers of the soul intact; it dulls the natural inclination to virtue, and entirely destroys the gift of original justice.⁷⁰ The inclination to evil constitutes a form of servitude to sin that hinders the person's ability to obtain his or her own good.

The Extrinsic Principles of Action

Thus far, we have drawn attention to the innate tendency all people have to their ultimate end, their capacity for acting intelligently, and their attraction to the good. Now we examine those external principles from outside the human person that assist people to their ultimate end.

⁶⁶ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 74, a. 2

⁶⁷ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 76, a. 4

⁶⁸ q. 77, a. 8

⁶⁹ q. 78, a. 4

⁷⁰ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 85, a.1

1) Law

Aquinas sees law as “a rule and measure of human acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting.”⁷¹ It is so because it is an ordinance of reason. Since reason is the principle of human action, law belongs to reason. Thus it is defined as “ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community and promulgated.”⁷² Aquinas went ahead to explain this definition. As law must regard human happiness, it is directed to the common good.⁷³ Law can only be made by the community or representatives of a community because it is essentially for the common good.⁷⁴ To be a law it is necessary that it be promulgated, that people be notified of it. In that way it could be binding.⁷⁵ He concluded:

Thus from the four preceding articles, the definition of law may be gathered; and it is nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated.⁷⁶

Thomas distinguishes eternal, natural, human, and divine law. Eternal law is divine reason governing the universe by his divine providence by virtue of the fact that God ruled the world by divine providence. It is the providential government of the universe, and all that is in it, by the Divine Reason.⁷⁷ “And since the Divine Reason’s conception of things is not subject to time but

⁷¹ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 1

⁷² *S.T.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 4

⁷³ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 2

⁷⁴ q. 90, a. 3

⁷⁵ q. 90, a. 4

⁷⁶ q. 90, a. 4

⁷⁷ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 91, a. 1

eternal... therefore it is that this kind of law must be called eternal."⁷⁸ Natural law is the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.⁷⁹ It is the "participation of the intelligent and free human being in the eternal law by living according to "right reason."

Human law is particular determinations of natural law drawn from general principles of practical reason. "These particular determinations, devised by human reason, are called human laws, provided the other essential conditions of law be observed..."⁸⁰ Divine law is necessary besides human positive law for four reasons. First, because man is ordained to an end that is not proportionate to his nature, i.e. an end beyond his nature. He therefore needs law besides the natural law to guide him. Second, because of the uncertainty of human judgments especially on contingent matters, he needs divine law as guide of his actions. Third, man cannot make laws in those matters about interior acts; so divine law is necessary. Fourth, law is necessary in order to ensure that no evil go unpunished.

Grace

Grace is the second of the two divinely given extrinsic principles of human acts. Grace, an effect of the divine love on the soul, is the means by which God leads us back to God.⁸¹ Thomas establishes that grace is absolutely necessary if one is

⁷⁸ q. 91, a. 1

⁷⁹ q. 91, a. 2

⁸⁰ *S. T.*, I-II q. 91, a. 3

⁸¹ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 111, a. 1

to know truth,⁸² to do good,⁸³ to love God above all things,⁸⁴ to fulfill the law, in substance as well as in mode of charity,⁸⁵ to merit everlasting life,⁸⁶ to prepare for grace,⁸⁷ to rise from and avoid sin,⁸⁸ and to persevere.⁸⁹

Grace is the habitual gift, infused by God into the soul that gives one capacity to obtain the supernatural good.⁹⁰ Grace bestows certain supernatural qualities that orient a person to God, the supernatural good.⁹¹ The natural quest for the good⁹² thus finds its true satisfaction discussed on the section on grace.⁹³

Infused Virtues

Whereas the *Prima secundae* examines the essential components that play a dynamic role in the human quest for happiness (the will, emotion, habits, law, grace), the *Secundae secundae* explains how grace brings these elements into a dynamic unity in the infused virtue of charity, the 'form' of all virtues.⁹⁴ Also infused are the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These are the synopsis of the anthropological presuppositions of Aquinas' treatment of the human good.

⁸² q. 109, a. 1

⁸³ q. 109, a. 2

⁸⁴ q. 109, a. 3

⁸⁵ q. 109, a. 4

⁸⁶ q. 109, a. 5

⁸⁷ q. 109, a. 6

⁸⁸ q. 109, aa. 7-9

⁸⁹ q. 109, a. 10

⁹⁰ q. 110, a. 2

⁹¹ q. 110, a. 3

⁹² Discussed in *S.T. I-II*, qq. 1-5

⁹³ qq. 109-114

⁹⁴ q. 23, a. 8

THE HUMAN GOOD

Aquinas notes that “every being is ordered to its end through its action.” Now human beings are ordered to their end through human action. Since the end of human action is the good, every human act is aimed at human good, the end of human action.

The human good is that in which the human appetite terminates. It is that which satisfies the human being by perfecting the human being. It is that which the human agent through reason apprehends as appropriate for it and as its end.

Thus the human good or human perfection is in some way the criterion for what is morally right.

Human beings have natural inclination to their ultimate end. As we saw in the introduction of our study, God as the highest good is the ultimate end of human action. Aquinas states that human action has not multiple ends but simple end, the ultimate end. This is nothing else than to understand God in some fashion.”⁹⁵

This also is human happiness:

Now, the ultimate end of man, and of every intellectual substance, is called felicity or happiness, because this is what every intellectual substance desires as an ultimate end, and for its own sake alone. Therefore, the ultimate happiness and felicity of every intellectual substance is to know God.⁹⁶

We leave aside for the moment the problems inherent with Aquinas’ positions above in order to concentrate on the understanding of his thought. In sum, for him, happiness is the ultimate end of man. It is the human good as such. And it

⁹⁵ S.C.G, 3, ch. 25, 7

⁹⁶ S.C.G. 3, ch. 25, 14

is attained in the intellectual knowledge of God. But do all people know this? Are human beings conscious of God as the ultimate end of their life and happiness? Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* thinks that people do not correctly place happiness appropriately in the knowledge of God. Instead, people pursue happiness in different places: in pleasure, in power, in honour, etc. Human happiness does not consist in any of these for the following reasons. First, they are not specific to man, but common to other animals also. Second, evil is possible through them. Third, they are due to external causes and fourth, because man's desire does not rest in possession of them.⁹⁷ No created good, neither goods of the body nor goods of the soul can satisfy man; "For happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite together."⁹⁸ Therefore, neither can constitute man's happiness. God alone constitutes man's happiness.

So, if the ultimate felicity of man does not consist in external things which are called the goods of fortune, nor in the goods of the body, nor in the goods of the soul according to its sensitive part, nor as regards the intellective part according to the activity of the moral virtues, nor according to the intellectual virtues that are concerned with action, that is, art and prudence – we are left with the conclusion that the ultimate felicity of man lies in the contemplation of truth.⁹⁹

Such knowledge is not the type of knowledge of God possessed by all men like knowledge of the self-evident principle that God exists by investigating nature and concluding to the being responsible for order. Nor is it a knowledge acquired by demonstration. It is not knowledge of God's essence or any other

⁹⁷ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 2, a. 4

⁹⁸ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 2, a. 8

⁹⁹ *SCG*, 3 ch. 37, 1

knowledge that can be possible in this life. On the contrary ultimate human felicity is not possible in this life.

If, then, the ultimate felicity does not consist in the knowledge of God, whereby He is known in general by all, or most, men, by a sort of confused appraisal, and again, if it does not consist in the knowledge of God which is known by way of demonstration in the speculative sciences, nor in the cognition of God whereby He is known through faith, as has been shown in the foregoing; and if it is not possible in this life to reach a higher knowledge of God so as to know Him through His essence, or even in such a way that, when the other separate substances are known, God might be known through the knowledge of them, as if from a closer vantage point...; then it is not possible for man's ultimate felicity to come in this life.¹⁰⁰

But is it possible to attain such knowledge of God while on earth? Aquinas knows that every knowledge human beings can have of God is imperfect.

Therefore, perfect human happiness is impossible here on earth. Thus we conclude alongside that Aquinas proposed a twofold human happiness. One imperfect is attainable in this world. Another which is perfect and consists in the eternal vision of God in the afterlife. The attainment of the vision of God satisfies all desires of man in a perfect glorious way because then one possesses goodness itself; therefore one has the fullness of good lacking nothing.¹⁰¹

WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

In the Prima Secundae question 3, Aquinas posed the question "What is happiness?" His answer is related to the end and the attainment of the end:

"Happiness is the attainment of the Perfect Good."¹⁰² His other answer explains

¹⁰⁰ SCG, 3 ch. 48, 1

¹⁰¹ SCG, 3 ch. 63

¹⁰² S.T. I-II, q. 5, a. 1

the end: "Happiness implies two things, to wit, the last end itself, i.e., the Sovereign Good; and the attainment or enjoyment of that same Good."¹⁰³

Generally, he says, "happiness is a perfect and sufficient good; it excludes every evil, and fulfills every desire."¹⁰⁴ However, these answers should not be construed as his definition of happiness. They are rather descriptive. "Since happiness signifies some final perfection; according as various things capable of happiness can attain to various degrees of perfection so must there be various meanings applied to happiness."¹⁰⁵

The various things capable of happiness are those things capable of deliberate will, either as possessing it in themselves through their act or possessing it through the act of another. These include God, angels and man. God is happiness by His Essence.¹⁰⁶ "In the happy angels, the final perfection is in respect of some operation, by which they are united to the Uncreated Good: and this operation of theirs is one only and everlasting."¹⁰⁷ For man, as an operation, happiness is an immanent activity, that is, an act of the agent, that remains in the agent, and that perfects the agent.¹⁰⁸ In the state of perfect happiness, "man's mind will be united to God by one, continual, everlasting operation."¹⁰⁹

But in the present life his happiness is a participation in the divine happiness.

¹⁰³ q. 5, a. 2

¹⁰⁴ q. 5, a. 3

¹⁰⁵ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 3, a.2, ad. 4

¹⁰⁶ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 3, a. 1, ad. 1

¹⁰⁷ q. 3, a. 2, ad. 4

¹⁰⁸ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad. 3

¹⁰⁹ q. 3, a. 2, ad. 4

Aquinas thus talks of two forms of happiness: perfect happiness which is happiness as such, and consists of God's essence. And imperfect happiness, a happiness which man can attain in this life, which is an immanent operation that perfects man and that prepares him for the perfect happiness.

As stated above (A. 2 ad. 4), man's happiness is twofold, one perfect, the other imperfect. And by perfect happiness we are to understand that which pertains to the true notion of happiness; and by imperfect happiness that which does not attain thereto, but partakes of some particular likeness to happiness.¹¹⁰

Perfect happiness does not consist of the goods of the body and the goods of the soul. It consists in the contemplation of God. It is not proportionate to human nature. Perfect happiness is not an act of the will because it is not an operation. It is not attained by man's deliberate will and choice. It is a gift of God. Since human action cannot but be an act of deliberate will, perfect happiness is not attainable in this life. Human happiness attainable in this life, the imperfect happiness, is only a participation in the perfect happiness. Aquinas writes: "perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation. But imperfect happiness, such as can be had here, consists first and principally in contemplation..."¹¹¹ The difference in both contemplations is that while the former is perfect, the latter consists in an operation, a participation in the perfect contemplation.

¹¹⁰ q. 3, a. 6; He specifies this twofold happiness clearer later: "Happiness is twofold; the one is imperfect and is had in this life; the other is perfect, consisting in the vision of God." Q. 4, a. 5

¹¹¹ q. 3, a. 5

Since his treatment of the human good is in relation to the end, Aquinas said that “happiness consists in gaining the last end.”¹¹² Imperfect happiness does not lead to the last end; man can only use the things of his present life to attain perfect happiness. Imperfect happiness does not satisfy human longings, human desires. On the contrary, “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”¹¹³

To attain happiness, rectitude of the will is necessary; if not one will not be able to attain perfect happiness.¹¹⁴ Happiness in this life is either in the hope of happiness in the life to come or a participation in them¹¹⁵ or some likeness to true happiness.¹¹⁶ It is impossible to have a true happiness in this life because it is completely excluded in this life; and also because the vision of the Divine Essence cannot be had in this life. The reason for this is that happiness in this life is not excluded from evil. It can be lost. For instance, one can also lose active happiness when one falls to vice from the virtue, in whose act happiness consists.¹¹⁷ Man may lose contemplative happiness either through sickness or by forgetfulness. Perfect happiness cannot be had in this life “for the present life is subject to many avoidable evils; to ignorance on the part of the intellect; to inordinate affection on the part of the appetite, and to many penalties on the

¹¹² q. 4, a. 3

¹¹³ q. 3, a. 8

¹¹⁴ q. 4, a. 4

¹¹⁵ q. 5, a. 3, ad. 1

¹¹⁶ q. 5, a. 3, ad 3

¹¹⁷ q. 5, a. 4

part of the body.”¹¹⁸ But perfect happiness cannot be lost once acquired because “happiness is consummate happiness, which excludes every defect from the happy.”¹¹⁹ In short happiness, for Aquinas, is nothing but the perfect happiness in the life to come.

However, it does appear that Aquinas anthropological presuppositions above are an indirect treatment of imperfect happiness. The reason for this supposition is drawn from his statement that imperfect happiness consists in an act of virtue,¹²⁰ and that man attains happiness in this world by his natural powers, the intellect and will, which naturally is the principle of human action.

SOURCE OF HUMAN GOOD

Thus far, what has been taken for granted is Aquinas definition of the good as that which all things tend. But we have not asked where and how the human mind conceives the good. Is it conceived from external objects, if so how does the mind know that what is good is good? How does the mind form an idea of the good?

Aquinas constantly and frequently expressed conviction that the mind does not start off with any stock of innate ideas or innate knowledge. He affirms Aristotle’s statement that the mind is initially like a wax upon which nothing is written. “This is clear from the fact that in the beginning we understand only

¹¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹¹⁹ q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1

¹²⁰ q. 5, a. 5

potentially, though afterwards we understand actually"¹²¹ In other words, though the mind is naturally a capacity for knowing things, we cannot have actual experience of the world except through sense-experience of the world, i.e., contact with material things through the senses. "The first thing which is known by us in the state of our present life is the nature of material thing, which is the object of the intellect, as has been said above many times."¹²²

Aquinas however, did admit self-evident propositions which in some sense give information about reality. He called these propositions "*principia per se nota*" (self-evident principles). There are self-evident propositions in the speculative reason and in the practical reason. In the speculative reason, Aquinas distinguished two types of self-evident principles. The first type consists of those propositions in which the predicate "falls under the definition of the subject", that is, those in which the predicate gives the whole or part of the connotation of the subject or is contained in the intention of the subject. Definitions are of this type, and purely formal propositions like "A is A" or "The whole are greater than any one of its parts;" "Man is a rational being" etc. The second type consists of those propositions in which the predicate is an attribute or property that belongs necessarily to the subject.¹²³ The first indemonstrable principle of

¹²¹ S.T., 1a, 79, 2.

¹²² S.T., 1a, 88, 3

¹²³ S.T., I-II, q. 94, a. 2

speculative reason is the principle of non-contradiction that “the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time.”¹²⁴

Just as the first indemonstrable principle of speculative reason is founded on being, so the first principle in the practical reason is founded on the notion of good, viz., that good is that which all things seek after. Hence the first indemonstrable principle of practical reason identified by Aquinas as “the first precept of law”¹²⁵ is that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil to be avoided.”¹²⁶ This proposition is, according to Thomas, *per se nota* (known through itself) because the predicate, ‘to be done and pursued,’ is immediately (without proof, without a middle term) understood to be included in the subject ‘good.’¹²⁷ “All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man’s good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.”¹²⁸ The ability to grasp the first principle of practical reason is made possible by what Aquinas called “*synderesis*.”¹²⁹ It is the intellectual habit whereby every moral agent has an immediate knowledge of the first practical

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Patrick Lee, “Is Thomas’s Natural Law Theory Naturalist?”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. LXXI, (1998) 4

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*

¹²⁹ *S.T.*, Ia, q. 47, a. 6, ad 1

principles. They are therefore natural to man as rational being; they are “in a certain way innate to our mind.”¹³⁰

Later, Aquinas identified the two great commandments mentioned in the Scripture: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour,” as the first and general principles of natural law. And as such they do not need to be promulgated in the divinely revealed Decalogue because they are the *per se nota* precepts that specify the ultimate ends of practical reason. However, these self-evident principles of the speculative and the practical reason in no way were construed by Aquinas in the modern Cartesian sense of innate ideas independent of sense experience. We must first perceptually grasp a sensible instance of being and goodness. “We only first actually cognize the *per se nota* practical principles by first knowing and willing the determinate goods that correspond to our natural inclinations.”¹³¹

In effect although the basic human inclination is to the good, it is not to the good in the abstract but to the good apprehended by reason in the concrete. For according to Thomas Aquinas, “the good apprehended by universal reason moves the will only through the mediation of a particular apprehension... since acts are performed in individual cases.”¹³² This is the good that must be done and its contrary evil that must be avoided. Thus the good is that which all things tend. Naturally all things tend to the good as an end. This good is imbedded in

¹³⁰ II Sent., d. 24, q. 2, a. 3 cited from Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*, (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 292; Cf. *De Ver.* q. 22, a. 7

¹³¹ Denis Bradley, *Ibid.*, 301-302

¹³² *De Ver.*, q. 22, a. 9, ad. 6

human nature as such. Based on this, Aquinas talks of natural inclination to the good, because every human action as an act of deliberate will tends to the good as an end. By implication, one naturally tends to the good spontaneously because every rational being knows that it (the good) ought to be done and its contrary (evil) ought to be avoided. In a certain sense, one could say that it is embedded in human nature to do the good and avoid evil. This first principle of moral goodness is the criteria of moral action and that also in which moral action tends. So the source of the human good is the will of the human person, because the will naturally tends towards the good as an end. The will strives for human perfection, for the realization of human potentialities. As Aquinas states:

Accordingly what the will necessarily wills, determined to it by a natural inclination, is the last end, happiness, and whatever is included in it: to be, knowledge of truth, and the like. But it is determined to other things, not by a natural inclination, but by so disposing itself without any necessity."¹³³

In willing the human being seeks to realize to the full his nature which he shares with other substances, with other animals and that nature which is specific to him as a rational being. This is the human good, human perfection: preservation of life as a being just like any other substance; generation of life through sexual intercourse; education of offspring, a specific nature he shares with other animals; and a natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society, which is unique to him as a rational animal. These constitute human good

¹³³ *De Ver.*, q. 22, a.5

Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature...Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals...Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has an inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society...¹³⁴

One only desires an end because it seems good; an agent cannot aim at a morally bad end because it is bad. In choosing to act one chooses in accordance with "right reason."

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

Aquinas remarks about the last end of human life; his equation of this end with God; and his view that all things act for an end raises a number of questions that is problematic for his moral thought. Thus we ask, is it really the case that there is a single end of human action? Do human beings not act for multiple ends? By basing his moral thought on God as the end of human action, was Thomas Aquinas laying out attaining perfection in God as the ultimate criterion of moral action? Is God to be considered the end of human action as such? In acting, do human beings think of God? What does Aquinas aim at achieving by proposing God as the end of human action? In a pluralistic society today can one argue with Aquinas that God is the end of human action?

Equally problematic is his twofold human good: imperfect and perfect happiness. If man cannot attain perfect happiness, how does he have natural

¹³⁴ *S.T.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2

inclinations to attain it? In other words how can the beatific vision both fulfill human nature and be utterly gratuitous? If happiness properly so-called is not attainable what is human life supposed to mean, a mere waiting of the after life, a prolonged preparation for it? What is the meeting point of happiness in this life and happiness in the beatific vision? If the good is that which all things tend, how does the human mind form the notion of the good? Do human beings have a natural inclination to the good? If so how come some people choose evil *sub specie boni*? Could Aquinas moral thought be considered as derived from natural law?

One also notices some inconsistency in the thought of Aquinas. Why would he knowing that it is impossible for reason to concentrate on contemplation such that whatever we do is because of God, still insist that perfect happiness is the contemplation of God; and why would he insist that the ultimate end of all things is God, the highest good? For he had acknowledged to have the judgment of reason unobstructable surpasses the state of this present life; because “primarily and principally ... it is impossible for reason in this life here below to be always in the act of correct contemplation so that the reason for everything we do is God.”¹³⁵ Yet he held the view that “ultimate happiness consists in contemplation of God”

¹³⁵ *De Ver.*, q. 24, a. 9