

General Prologue of St. Thomas Aquinas to the *Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose*

TEXT

[1] Since, as Damascene states (*De Fide Orth.* ii, 12), man is said to be made in God's image, in so far as the image implies "an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement": [2] now that we have treated of the exemplar, i.e. God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; [3] it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e. man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions.

PARAPHRASE

St. John of Damascus explains that man is said to be made in God's image in the sense that he is an intellectual being who can choose freely, and whose very nature is endowed with the power of action. Since in the First Part of the *Summa* we have discussed God, the Model from whom the image is taken – along with the things that God's power has brought forth by the exercise of His will – now we may begin to discuss man, who is modeled on God, in that he too is the starting point of his own actions, a being with free will and with power over his acts.

[1] St. Thomas is not quoting precisely from St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, but paraphrasing and interpreting. John had remarked that the Divine image signifies that man is a being with the force of intelligence and free will (*vis intelligendi, arbitriique libertas*). St. Thomas adds *et per se potestativum*, "and in himself a being endowed with power." *Potestativum* is an "agent" noun, a noun that is formed from a word indicating an action and that indicates who performs the action. In this case the underlying word is *potestas*, meaning power, ability, or force, so *potestativum* means something like "exerciser of power." The point is that even though man is but a finite being, dependent upon God, God has made this being lord of his own deeds – a theme to which St. Thomas returns in Question 1, Article 1. In the meantime, he makes the point stronger yet by the addition of the words *per se*, meaning

that man has dominion over his deeds *in himself*. To be sure, all his power comes from God, and he can never be independent of God. Nevertheless, God makes man's power an aspect of man's *nature*; it is a part of his very definition.

It would be a mistake to think that man's power, his status as a *per se potestativum*, absolves him of responsibility before God. In fact, it is the very basis of his responsibility, for man is not a pawn of a blind fate but a being who knows what he is doing. In the remainder of this work we investigate beatitude, or utter happiness. As we see later, this is not attainable by man's natural powers alone. Yet in another sense, God has put the possibility of utter happiness into man's hands, for He has provided him with the means by which to avail himself of the Divine help that he needs. If man fails to attain his end or purpose, the very thing to which he is ultimately directed, he has no one to blame but himself.

[2] To call God the Exemplar is to say that the Divine mind contains the patterns for everything that He has made; all created things resemble these ideas.¹⁴ In the case of man the resemblance is even greater because of the *imago Dei*, the image of God in which man is formed.

[3] With these words, St. Thomas puts us on the alert that everything that follows in the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa*, beginning with the *Treatise on Happiness*, is to be understood from the perspective of his deliberative intelligence, his lordship over himself under God.

DISCUSSION

God and God's Image

We are not God. We are not the same as God, we are not a part of Him, and we are not a "splinter" of Him. Nor will we ever be. He does not depend on anything else, because He is what everything else depends on. He cannot be explained by anything else, because He is what everything else must be explained by. There is no one like Him. He is utterly above us. He is what He is, and there was never a time when He was not.

And yet the same faith that insists upon these things also insists that God made us "in His image, after His likeness"¹ He who is infinite, illimitable, incomparable, and dependent on nothing else has made man a finite and limited portrait of Himself, on whom man depends. What could this mean?

Some over the centuries have held the meaning of being made in God's image is that as God is mind, God has endowed man with mind. Others have held its meaning to be that as God is love, God has made man capable of love. St. Thomas's formulation both includes the former insight and implies the latter. However, it penetrates more deeply.

¹ Genesis 1:26 (RSV-CE).

General Prologue

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For in the first place, God has not made us pure thinkers disengaged from action: As His own thoughts formed the world, so He has made man's own imitative thoughts effective in the world. Within the proper limits of created being, *we can do* those things that arise from our deliberate will. And in the second place, *just because* we are doers, it is possible for us to be lovers. For love is something chosen, but how can I choose if I am but a billiard ball knocked about by the forces of the universe? Love rejoices in the good of the beloved, but how can I carry out even the act of rejoicing if I have no power of action? Love itself is an act of a deliberate will; a person is not capable of love, unless first he is capable.²

² See also I, Q. 93, Art. 6: “[R]ational creatures . . . imitate God, not only in being and life, but also in intelligence. . . . Likewise as the uncreated Trinity is distinguished by the procession of the Word from the Speaker, and of Love from both of these, as we have seen, so we may say that in rational creatures wherein we find a procession of the word in the intellect, and a procession of the love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity.”

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QUESTION I

MAN'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE

(Traditionally, "Of Man's Last End")

ST. THOMAS'S PROLOGUE TO QUESTION I

Man's Ultimate Purpose

TEXT

[1] *In this matter we shall consider first the last end of human life; and secondly, those things by means of which man may advance towards this end, or stray from the path: [2] for the end is the rule of whatever is ordained to the end. [3] And since the last end of human life is stated to be happiness, we must consider*
 (1) *the last end in general;*
 (2) *happiness.*

PARAPHRASE

Let us reflect on the ultimate purpose of human life, then on the means by which man either makes progress toward this purpose or deviates from it. For in everything that pertains to a purpose, the proper guide is the purpose itself.
 We call supreme happiness the final purpose of human life, so it is fitting to consider two things: First (Question 1), the general idea of man's ultimate purpose, and second (Questions 2–5), supreme happiness itself.

[1] This is a “division of the topic,” a traditional way of presenting an outline. Rather than presenting the entire outline at once, it focuses on the very next step, situating it in the context of the whole: For example, “We will discuss I, then II, then III. Under I, we will discuss A, then B, then C. Under A, we will discuss i, then ii, then iii. Under i, we will discuss a, then b, then c. Now let us turn to I.A.i.a.” For the outline of the *Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose* as a whole, see the *Analytical Table of Contents* at the beginning of this book.

[2] This may sound like a tautology – “The end is the rule of whatever the end is the rule of” – but it isn't. St. Thomas is simply pointing out that if an end or purpose is to be attained, then everything must be planned with a view to that end.

[3] The term “happiness,” which is unavoidable in this book, gives but a pale and pallid sense of what St. Thomas is talking about. The word that he uses is *beatitudo*. Expressions such as “blessedness” and “supreme happiness” convey fair impressions of its meaning; the expression “flourishing” would be even better, if only we could keep in mind that the sort of flourishing we are thinking about is neither that of a plant, like a cabbage or artichoke, nor that of an animal, like a cat or a turtle, but that of an *embodied rational being* who has dominion over his own actions. Other Latin words for aspects of happiness are *laetitia*, which is especially suggestive of joy and fruitfulness, and *felicitas*, which is especially suggestive of good fortune.

From a Thomistic point of view, those who say that happiness is not the ultimate purpose, or that happiness is not an end in itself, are usually making at least one of two mistakes. Either they are confusing happiness with pleasure, and saying that *pleasure* is not an end in itself, which is true; why pleasure cannot be our ultimate purpose is explained in Question 2, Article 6. Or else they are failing to distinguish the ultimate purpose in the sense of *the thing itself* that is to be attained (which is God) with the ultimate purpose in the sense of *the attainment or enjoyment* of that thing; this distinction is discussed in Question 1, Article 8, Question 2, Article 7, and Question 3, Article 1.

[1] <i>Under the first head there are eight points of inquiry:</i>	Concerning the general idea of man's ultimate purpose, we must pose eight queries:
[2] (1) <i>Whether it belongs to man to act for an end?</i>	1. Is acting for a purpose a property of man?
[3] (2) <i>Whether this is proper to the rational nature?</i>	2. If so, is acting for a purpose a property of man <i>because of our rational nature</i> ?
[4] (3) <i>Whether a man's actions are specified by their end?</i>	3. Should our acts be <i>classified into species</i> according to their purposes?
[5] (4) <i>Whether there is any last end of human life?</i>	4. Has each human life some <i>ultimate</i> purpose?
[6] (5) <i>Whether one man can have several last ends?</i>	5. Is it possible for a man to have <i>more than one</i> ultimate purpose?
[7] (6) <i>Whether man ordains all to the last end?</i>	6. Does a man direct <i>everything</i> to his ultimate purpose?
[8] (7) <i>Whether all men have the same last end?</i>	7. Do all men have the <i>same</i> ultimate purpose?
[9] (8) <i>Whether all other creatures concur with man in that last end?</i>	8. Do all other created beings have the same ultimate purpose that man has?

[1] The eight queries correspond, respectively, to the eight Articles of this Question.

Man's Ultimate Purpose

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[2] To act for an end is not merely to be pushed along by blind forces, but to act so that a purpose might be achieved. To ask whether it “belongs” to man to act for an end is to ask whether doing so is a thing that pertains to our nature – whether it is a characteristically human thing to do.

[3] Supposing that it is a characteristically human thing to act for an end, we must still ask what *makes* it characteristically human. The suggestion behind the question is that perhaps it is connected with our rationality. Then is it?

[4] To say that an act is *specified* by its end is to say that the purpose of the act tells us the *species* of the act – what kind of act it is. Determining the correct species of an act is not a mere intellectual game divorced from all connection with real life. For example, consider an act of abortion undertaken because the mother is upset about being pregnant. Should we classify the act according to its end or purpose, saying that species of the act is taking a life? Or should we classify it according to its motive, saying that the species of the act is giving the mother peace of mind? The answer affects moral judgment.

[5] Not every end or purpose is a *last* end, an *ultimate* purpose. I may drink a cup of coffee to say awake, stay awake to study, study to pass the examination, pass the examination to pass the course, pass the course to get my degree, and so on. At each of these steps I pursue some good for the sake of some still further good. Does the chain ever reach an end? Is there some good that I pursue not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake?

[6] Supposing that there is such a final and ultimate good, is there only *one* such thing? Or could it be that some acts are aimed at one final end, but others are aimed at another?

[7] Supposing that there is only one such good, is *everything that we do* undertaken for its sake? Or could it be that some acts are undertaken for its sake, and others are not?

[8] Could it be that for some people, one thing is the ultimate good, but that for others, something else is? Some people even think that one can *choose* what one's ultimate good is to be. Are they right?

[9] Whatever man's ultimate aim may be, do other creatures such as dogs, cats, and centipedes have the same ultimate aim? Do they have different ultimate aims? Or do they have no ultimate aim at all?

DISCUSSION

So Many Questions

St. Thomas might have abbreviated his inquiry. Some philosophers do, even good ones. Aristotle, for example, moved very quickly in his *Nicomachean*

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Ethics from the question of whether everything we do, we do for the sake of some good (which most people immediately answer “yes”) to the question of what that good is (which most people immediately answer “happiness”). Only then did he slow down, when he asked what happiness might be. St. Thomas’s discussion is much more ambitious than Aristotle’s, but a part of his task is to cover at a walk the ground that Aristotle covered at a run, digging up the soil with a spoon to make sure nothing has been too quickly assumed and nothing has been missed.

QUESTION I, ARTICLE I

Whether it belongs to man to act for an end?

TEXT

Whether it belongs to man to act for an end?

PARAPHRASE

Is acting for some end or aim a property of man?

In either of two ways, one might deny that it is characteristically human to act for an end or aim. The more moderate way to deny the proposition is to suggest that man does not *always* act for an end. This is the approach taken in Objections 2 and 3. The more radical way is to suggest that man *never* acts for an end, but only seems to. This is the approach taken in Objection 1.

Objection 1: [1] *It would seem that it does not belong to man to act for an end. For a cause is naturally first. [2] But an end, in its very name, implies something that is last. Therefore an end is not a cause. [3] But that for which a man acts, is the cause of his action; since this preposition “for” indicates a relation of causality. Therefore it does not belong to man to act for an end.*

Objection 1. Apparently acting for some end or aim is not a human characteristic. In the phrase “for an end,” the preposition “for” implies causality – “this, because of this.” But the *cause* of an action is the *first* thing in a sequence. By contrast, an “end” is attained *last* in a sequence. It follows that an end cannot be the cause of human action.

[1] The efficient cause is first in the sense that the cause explains the effect, rather than the effect the cause. It is not necessarily first *in time*; for example, if an eternal foot lay within an eternal footprint, no one would

deny that the foot was the cause of the footprint, even though neither came earlier than the other.¹

[2] The word we are translating is the Latin word *finis*, which refers to an end of any sort – any sort of boundary, demarcation, limit, or point of termination. The Objector reasons that since an end comes last but an efficient cause comes first, an end cannot be an efficient cause.

[3] But the Objector suggests that when we speak of a man acting “for” an end, or “because of” an end (*propter finem*), we are suggesting that the end is an efficient cause – which he has just argued cannot be. So nobody really does act for an end.

Objection 2. [1] *Further, that which is itself the last end is not for an end.* [2] *But in some cases the last end is an action, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. i, 1). Therefore man does not do everything for an end.*

Objection 2. Moreover, an ultimate end is that *for the sake of which* activity is performed – not something that is performed for the sake of something else. But as Aristotle points out, sometimes an activity is performed for its own sake. Such an activity is not performed for the sake of an end beyond it. From this we see that at least *not every* activity that man performs is performed for the sake of an end that lies beyond it.

[1] Suppose there is a hierarchy of ends: Say, a man flosses his teeth for the sake of removing food particles, removes food particles for the sake of preventing plaque, and prevents plaque for the sake of health – and suppose health is the last end. If it is, then it is pursued for its own sake; it terminates the series. This is what it means to call it the “last” end.

[2] Health is not an action, but something attained by action. However, the Objector points out that sometimes the thing that has no aim beyond itself is *itself* an action, for example, playing a game of chess. Here then we have an activity quite different than flossing our teeth. We floss for the sake of something else, but we do not play chess for the sake of something else; playing is an end in itself. Apparently, then, not every activity is performed for the sake of something beyond it.

The Objector credits the distinction to Aristotle, who writes as follows in his *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, Book 1:

All arts and all teaching, and similarly every act and every choice seem to have the attainment of some good as their object. For this reason it has correctly been proclaimed

¹ St. Thomas discusses this possibility in I, Q. 46, Art. 2, ad 1, explaining why although the hypothesis of the eternity of the world is rejected by faith, it cannot be disproven on grounds that the world was created by God. His own source is St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Book 10, Chapter 31, where Augustine discusses the views of the Platonists.