

Augustine and Aristotle in Aquinas' Doctrine of Happiness¹

Introduction

The ethics of St Thomas Aquinas features two main parts: his famous theory of natural law² and his equally famous doctrine on human happiness. The doctrine on happiness is paradigmatically formulated in the so-called happiness-treatise of *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 1-5 as well as in Aquinas' *Commentary on the Sentences*,³ and in further detail in his *Summa contra gentiles*⁴ and other writings.⁵ Aquinas advocates a eudemonistic ethics and thus situates himself in the classical tradition and its Christian treatment by Augustine. In this paper, I will pursue the role Augustine plays in Aquinas' ethics of happiness.

The reason why this topic requires consideration is that St Thomas Aquinas is often represented as an Aristotelian who abandoned the Platonic and therewith also the Augustinian tradition. According to this reading, Aquinas - while adopting Aristotle's epistemology and his critique of Plato's metaphysics of ideas - also denies the strongly transcendence-oriented thinking of the Platonist Augustine, and develops in its stead a theology rooted in this life - that is, in

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² *Summa theologiae* (*STh*) I-II 90-94.

³ *In quattuor libris sententiarum* (*Sent*) IV d. 49.

⁴ *Summa contra gentiles* (*ScG*) III 2-63.

⁵ Cf. *Compendium theologiae I; In X libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum expositio*.

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concrete sense-mediated experience. A similar argument is made concerning his ethics: Drawing on Aristotle, Aquinas establishes an ethics that does not immediately inquire into the perfect happiness of the hereafter but rather concentrates on human happiness in this life. This line of interpretation, which casts Aquinas' ethics as Aristotelian and therefore as anti-Augustinian, has become so prominent that recent essays on St Thomas Aquinas' treatise on happiness neglect Augustine as a source for Aquinas, and interpret the latter's ethics exclusively in an Aristotelian vein.⁶

I believe that this interpretation is inadequate. I will here attempt to show that Aquinas' doctrine on happiness cannot be understood without the Augustinian heritage.⁷ Undoubtedly, Aquinas is very familiar with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and shortly before composing *Summa theologiae* I-II, he had commented in detail on this work.⁸ And Aquinas does indeed include many of Aristotle's individual theses in his ethics. But he was also intimately acquainted with Augustine's thought. The *Libri sententiarum* of Peter Lombard, which Aquinas commented on during his first stay in Paris, consist primarily of quotations from Augustine. Moreover, Aquinas cites numerous works of Augustine, including *De civitate Dei*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, and the *Confessiones*. Quantitative analysis demonstrates that, after the Bible, Aristotle is the most cited author in St Thomas Aquinas' happiness-treatise, followed by Augustine. But this fact alone does not tell us much about the systematic weight of these authors. Furthermore, in the time around 1270, Aristotle was a relatively newly discovered and still controversial author, whose thought was more in need of explication than Augustine's, who had long been recognized as an ecclesiastical authority.

⁶ For Aquinas's doctrine on happiness cf. Leo Elders, *The Ethics of St Thomas Aquinas: Happiness, Natural Law and the Virtues* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005); Dennis J.M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Rochus Leonhardt, *Glück als Völlendung des Menschseins: Die beatitudo-Lehre des Thomas von Aquin im Horizont des Eudämonismus-Problems* (Berlin: de Gruiter, 1998); Andreas Speer, "Das Glück des Menschen (STh I-II 1-5)," in *Thomas von Aquin: Die Summa theologiae; Werkinterpretationen*, ed. Andreas Speer (Berlin: De Gruiter, 2005), 141-166. While Elders is generally aware of the connections between Aquinas and Augustine, Bradley and Leonhardt give little account of the Bishop of Hippo. Speer leaves Augustine completely unmentioned.

⁷ For Augustine's teaching on happiness cf. Werner Beierwaltes, *Regio beatitudinis: Zu Augustins Begriff des glücklichen Lebens* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1981); Henrique de Noronha Galvao, "Beatitudo," in *Augustinus Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Petrus Mayer et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1996), 1: 623-638; Friedemann Buddensiek, "Augustinus über das Glück," in *Augustinus: Ethik und Politik*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Würzburg: Würzburger Augustinus-Studientag, 2009), 63-85.

⁸ Cf. *In X Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis*.

Principles of Eudemonistic Ethics

Before we consider Aquinas' ethics of happiness and its Augustinian sources, some of the principles should be recognized that were decisive for the eudaimonistic ethical theories in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, as they were also for both Aristotle and Augustine.

- 1) The basis of eudemonistic ethics is a teleology of human action. According to this conception, a central feature of action is that it occurs for the sake of an end and that it is therefore aimed at a goal. The goals of various actions do not exist unrelatly side by side; they are, rather, ordered in a hierarchy. Some goals of action are strived for because they serve as means for reaching higher goals. These goals may, in turn, be strived for in the realization of more encompassing ends. The hierarchy of the goals of action should thus be understood as being structured in the form of a pyramid. At its summit is a single final goal (*finis ultimus*) for the sake of which one aims at all of the other goals. In the end, it is towards this final goal that each and every action is aimed.
- 2) Eudemonistic ethics derives its name because happiness (*eudaimonia*) is established as its highest goal. In everything a human person does, he is ultimately striving to be happy. "Everybody wants to be happy" is a frequently repeated principle of eudemonistic ethics.⁹ It is an ethics of striving, in the sense that it adopts a natural human impulse in order to steer and canalize it. Since humans have always already sought happiness, ethics need not occasion in them an entirely new will as Kant's duty ethics intends. The task of a eudemonistic ethics consists rather in leading the naturally existing striving to its proper goal.
- 3) Eudemonistic ethics includes a doctrine of goods. As the final goal, happiness is simultaneously the highest good. The question quickly arises, however: What makes humans happy? Which goods must one possess in order to share in happiness? Departing from this question, eudemonistic ethics develops an evaluation of goods according to which some goods contribute little to happiness - these are the lower goods - while others contribute more - these are the higher goods. It is at this juncture that the critical concern of eudemonistic ethics comes to the fore: It shows that some goods which many people consider as high-ranking (for example, honour, pleasure, and wealth) are in truth low-

⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I 2, 1095a 18; Cicero, *Hortensius*, ed. Laila Straume-Zimmermann, Ferdinand Broemser and Olof Gigon (Munich: Artemis, 1990), frag. 69I / 70I, S. 68f. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIII 7-9.

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ranking or even illusionary goods to be viewed as ills rather than goods. Humans, in short, tend to search for happiness in the wrong places, often erring in their pursuit of happiness.

- 4) Eudemonistic ethics aims at rendering the human perfect. Accordingly, the individual person has to attain the appropriate constitution of the soul in order to be able to be happy. Happiness does not depend on the possession of external goods but rather on the cultivation of inner attitudes. For this reason, virtue is often represented as a particular disposition of character, as a high good that is indispensable for human happiness. Whoever possesses this good arrives at a condition of mental perfection characterized by inner unity, harmony, and peace.
- 5) Eudemonistic ethics is oriented towards the essence of the human, and therefore has an objective character. When it critically assesses particular goods, individual preferences do not constitute its measure. Instead, the assessment is based on considerations of human nature in general. Subjective wishes are appraised on a basis considered objective - human nature. In this nature reason plays a prominent role because it is through reason that humans distinguish themselves from other beings. The good life, from an eudemonistic perspective, is a life of reason and thus a life corresponding to human nature. Through action a person may more or less cultivate this nature. Happiness is bound to human perfection in the sense of the complete development of human nature and its essence. It can thus be said that the highest goal lies in human self-realization, though this should not be understood as a characteristic of individual particularity, but as the perfected development of the human, which is common to all humans.
- 6) For most forms of eudemonism the human relation to God is important. God is deemed the metaphysical basis of all beings, who as such is transcendent over and above all particular things. With his reason and his will, the human is related not only to individual goods but also to God as the transcendent principle of all of reality. He strives for knowledge and enjoyment of God. Therefore, in eudemonistic ethics, God is thought to be the highest good of humankind, a good that encompasses all other goods. In the enjoyment of God, the human reaches its perfection and becomes completely happy.

Augustinian Elements in Aquinas' Doctrine

I now come to speak about Aquinas' happiness-treatise in *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 1-5. I will explicate its most significant points with reference to Augustine or Aristotle.

The Distinction Between Finis Cuius and Finis Quo (Q. 1)

The first *quaestio* of the happiness-treatise begins with a theory of action. Aquinas demonstrates that every action is aimed at a goal. The goals of action compose, in turn, a hierarchy at the top of which is a final goal (*finis ultimus*).

Aquinas first distinguishes (a.1) "human actions" (*actiones humanae*) from "actions of humans" (*actiones hominis*). In human actions, the individual is master, governing actions by reason and will. In contrast, the "actions of humans" include reflex and habitual actions that are not subject to conscious control. Such actions are not typically human as they also occur among animals. Reason and will, which inform human actions (*actiones humanae*), coalesce in the capacity of free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) through which the human is master of his actions. All kinds of actions are goal-oriented, even those of animals. But the human himself directs his actions towards their goal by means of his capacity for free decision (*liberum arbitrium*), whereas in their actions animals follow their instincts, which God has given them. In the positing of goals, animals do not act, therefore, in the manner of self-determination, as the human does. They are instead determined externally (that is, by God).

The goal of an individual action often proves to be a means to attaining an even higher goal. For example, Aquinas asks (a.4), whether there is a final, highest goal (*finis ultimus*) of human action or whether the hierarchy of goals is infinite so that a *progressus in infinitum* arises. According to him, such a *progressus* is impossible. He insists that every human action has a final goal, a goal therefore that is intended not for the sake of another goal but in and for itself. Aquinas goes on to argue that not only must each individual human action have a final goal but that all of one person's actions must also be directed towards a single final goal (a.6). He even goes so far as to claim that all actions of all humans are ultimately directed towards one and the same final goal (a.7).

In the last article (a.8) of the first *quaestio*, Aquinas draws a distinction in the concept of goal (*finis*), which is terminologically difficult to grasp, but possesses systematic significance for his entire treatise on happiness. Aquinas differentiates between "goal" in the sense of "wherefore" (*finis cuius*) and "goal" in the sense of "whereby" (*finis quo*). Aquinas maintains that this distinction is to be observed especially when one speaks of the final goal. Whence comes this distinction?

What does it mean? And why does Aquinas believe it is necessary?

Terminologically, the distinction comes from Aristotle. In five passages of his work, Aristotle writes that the goal is two-fold.¹⁰ In *Metaphysics* XII 7 and in *De anima* II 4, he speaks of a *hou heneka tinos* (Latin: *finis cuius*) and of a *hou heneka tini* (Latin: *finis quo*). These passages are very difficult to interpret. I will highlight the passage from *De anima* II 4 (415b2f.) because Aquinas addresses this passage in his *Commentary on De anima*. Aristotle explains his distinction using the example of animals, plants, and all living beings in general. Such beings naturally strive for procreation and reproduction because, as Aristotle points out, through the preservation of their kind, they obtain their share of the eternal.

In Aquinas' interpretation of the example, eternity is the goal towards which animals and plants truly strive. It is the goal in the sense of the *hou heneka tinos* or of the *finis cuius*. In contrast, reproduction is the goal in the sense that living beings reach eternity through reproduction, which is the goal in the sense of "whereby" (*hou heneka tini* or *finis quo*).¹¹ Aquinas himself offers further examples, beyond Aristotle, in order to clarify the doubleness of the goal. A doctor, for instance, acts for the purpose of health; this is his *principale intentum: sanitatis causa agit medicus*. The health of the body is thus the *finis cuius* of the doctor. The doctor also, however, aims at a goal in the sense of the "whereby" (*finis quo*). The goal in this sense is that by which health is reached, namely the warming of the body. Aquinas takes another example from physics. He claims that, when a falling body is moving downwards, the underlying ground is the goal in the sense of the "wherefore" (*finis cuius*); its residing there is, in contrast, the goal in the sense of the "whereby" (*finis quo*). His most descriptive example, however, is drawn from ethics. He asks: Which goal does the miser pursue? According to Aquinas, this goal can be described in two ways. On the one hand, one could say that the goal of every one of the miser's actions is money; this statement specifies the *finis cuius*. Or, on the other hand, one could say that the miser wants the possession or the enjoyment of money; this would be a formulation of the *finis quo*.

The example of the doctor could suggest that the "whereby" is merely a means for attaining the "wherefore": Through warming, the sick person attains health.

¹⁰ *De anima* II 4, 415b 2-3; b 20-21; *Metaphysics* XII 7, 1072b 1-3; *Physics* II 2, 194a 35-36; *Eudemian Ethics* VIII 3, 1249b 13-16. For an interpretation of these passages cf. Konrad Gaiser, "Das zweifache Telos bei Aristoteles," in *Naturphilosophie bei Aristoteles und Theophrast*, ed. Ingemar Düring (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1969), 97-113; Friedo Ricken, "Hou heneka / worumwillen," in *Aristoteles-Lexikon*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2005). Aquinas explicitly refers to *Physics* II and *Metaphysics* V, where Aristotle simply states that the goal is two-fold.

¹¹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia De anima* II, lectio 7 n.8.

The examples of the falling body and of the miser make it clear, however, what the distinction entails. The lower-lying place and the money are both goals in the sense of a concrete external object that is strived for. In contrast, the “residing there” of the body, and the possession and enjoyment of money respectively pertain to inner conditions of the one who is striving. I will illustrate this point once again with the example of the miser: His action may be described from two perspectives. First, one could say that in everything that the miser does he is striving for a particular object, namely money. Why does he do this or do that? He does it for the money. This perspective provides the *finis cuius* (wherefore). Secondly, one could also say that the miser acts in order to possess or enjoy money precisely because he wants to have it. Here it is a matter of the *finis quo* (whereby). The miser strives for a personal condition of possession, but this condition only materializes when he has money as an external object.

Aquinas uses this interpretation of the distinction between *finis cuius* and *finis quo* also and explicitly with reference to the final goal of all humans. The final goal of a human being in the sense of the *finis cuius* is, according to Aquinas, God Himself. The final goal in the sense of the *finis quo* is, however, the possession and enjoyment of God as found in the knowledge and love of God. The name for the condition in which the human finds himself when he possesses God is called “happiness” (*eudaimonia; beatitudo*). For Aquinas, the final goal of humans is double, namely God and happiness. This account does not signify that Aquinas’ pyramid of the goals of action has two summits. Rather, the same summit is considered from two different perspectives. In the first, it is a matter of an inner condition in which the human finds himself when he has reached the goal of all of his striving; and this condition is happiness. In the second, it is a matter of the “object” or the good that he must possess in order to arrive at this condition; and this good is God.¹²

The distinction of these two perspectives on the *finis ultimus* proves to be quite fruitful. In particular, it allows for a differentiated grounding of the thesis that all humans share the same final goal. It is all too apparent that not all humans hold the same goods as worthy of pursuit. While one person strives for fame or renown, another strives for money and wealth, a third for power, a fourth for knowledge and science, and so on. Humans have various life visions and thus pursue different life goals. According to Aquinas, however, all persons are in

¹² Santeler is very critical about Aquinas’ distinction, but he misunderstands it as introducing happiness as a second final goal besides God. Cf. Josef Santeler, “Der Endzweck des Menschen nach Thomas von Aquin: Eine kritisch-weiterführende Studie,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 87 (1965): 1-60.

agreement that they are searching for happiness.¹³ Regardless of whether one desires fame, money, or power, one desires it because one hopes to find happiness in it. Therefore, happiness, as *finis quo*, is the final goal of every human. Differences only arise with respect to the question: In what does an individual seek happiness and by what means does he hope to attain it? - that is, which good in the sense of the *finis cuius* does he deem to be the highest? It is in response to this question that humans choose different objects as their final goal. Admittedly, for Aquinas, not all of the subjectively chosen end goals are equally good. Seen objectively, wealth and power are lesser goods. Whoever is of the opinion that the final goal of happiness, in the sense of the *finis quo*, is to be attained by making these goods the final goal in the sense of the *finis cuius*, will be disappointed. He will find that money is not capable of satisfying the common human desire for happiness. Thus, while every human seeks happiness, not every one is striving for God as the true *finis cuius*, whose possession alone is capable of bringing happiness.

The distinction between *finis cuius* and *finis quo*, which Aquinas delineates in q. 1 a. 8 of the *Summa theologiae* I-II, is of structural significance for the construction of the entire happiness-treatise of the *Summa*. *Quaestio* 2 takes the perspective of the *finis cuius* in discussing the different kinds of goods - external, internal, and transcendental. It ends in q. 2 a. 8 with the conclusion that solely the uncreated God can be the objectively true highest good of humans in the sense of the "wherefore." *Quaestio* 3 subsequently investigates *beatitudo* as inner appropriation and thus as *finis quo*. In q. 3 a.8, Aquinas arrives at the thesis that happiness is to be understood as the appropriation or possession of God through an intellectual vision of the essence of God. *Quaestio* 4 remains true to this perspective in its analysis of the soul's acts and habits, which are connected with the vision of the divine essence and thus belong to happiness. *Quaestio* 5 returns to the distinction between *finis cuius* and *finis quo*. In q. 5 a. 8 Aquinas answers a question which both Augustine and Peter Lombard had posed, namely whether one can say that all humans want to be happy, even those who, due to objectively wrong personal choices regarding goods, are factually proceeding towards misery. The answer to this question lies precisely in the distinction between both *fines*: Indeed all humans want to be happy because all of them strive for happiness as their final goal in the sense of *finis quo*. But only those can arrive at happiness who have taken the objectively right good, in the sense of the *finis cuius*, to be their final goal, namely God.

If the distinction between these two *fines* acquires such significance for Aquinas' doctrine on happiness, and if he terminologically derives this

¹³ On this point, he draws from Augustine's *De Trinitate* XIII 6 in *STh* I-II 5.8.

distinction from the writings of Aristotle, does this not mean that Aristotle, and not Augustine, is the decisive author for Aquinas? In order to evaluate this claim, we will have to turn to Aquinas' early writings on the question of happiness, especially his *Commentary on the Sentences*.

Aquinas' first treatise on happiness is found in his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard (*In quattuor libris sententiarum*) - more precisely, in his explications of Book IV distinctio 49. At the centre of Lombard's text there is a passage that is almost entirely taken from Augustine's *De Trinitate* XIII 7-10.¹⁴ In these analyses, Augustine is primarily dealing with the fact that although all humans want to be happy, they seek happiness in different things, for instance in pleasure or virtue, or in other things. Despite the fact that all humans know what happiness is, not all of them know where to seek it, namely in a life directed towards God. In his interpretation of Augustine's text, Aquinas develops his early version of the doctrine on the two-fold final goal. He distinguishes here between the "interior goal" (*finis interiorius*) and the "exterior goal" (*finis exteriorius*)¹⁵ and explains the distinction through the example of the miser, just as he does later in q. 1 a. 8 of *Summa theologiae* I-II. The miser's external goal is the object he strives for, i.e. money. The interior goal is an act or a condition of the human himself, the possession of money. Applied to the question concerning the final goal (*ultimus finis*) of humans, it follows that the *ultimus finis exteriorius* is God, the *ultimus finis interiorius*, on the contrary, is the act or condition by which the human possesses God. Happiness is the name of that condition.¹⁶

At its core, the doctrine of the two-fold final goal is the same in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and in *Summa theologiae*. However, the *Commentary on the Sentences* shows something more. It demonstrates that the origin of Aquinas' distinction is to be found in Augustine's reflections in *De Trinitate* XIII. Aquinas articulates Augustine's thought at first in the terminology of *finis interiorius* and *finis exteriorius* (or *bonum per se* and *bonum per accidens*), and only later, in the *Summa theologiae*, does he draw upon Aristotle's conceptual vocabulary, speaking of *finis quo* and *finis cuius*. It is apparent, though, that he interprets and clarifies this

¹⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum libri quattuor* IV, d. 49 q. 1 a. 3.

¹⁵ *Sent.* lib. 4, d.49 q1 a.1 qc. 2.

¹⁶ In *Sent.* lib.4 d.49 q.1 a.3 qc.1 Aquinas makes a similar distinction between the *bonum/finis per se* and the *bonum/finis per accidens*. The *bonum per se* is the object of human will par excellence: it is happiness. The *bonum per accidens* is a concrete good whose possession brings happiness. This terminology, however, is poorly chosen because its logic renders God, the highest good whose possession makes humans happy, a *bonum per accidens*, even though God is good in Himself, not just accidentally. In later writings, Aquinas designates God precisely as the good itself (*bonum per se*). Probably in order to avoid such confusion, Aquinas abandoned the terminology of *bonum per se* and *bonum per accidens* after his *Commentary on the Sentences*.

conceptuality, the meaning of which is difficult to pin down in Aristotle, in an Augustinian vein. He uses the expressions of Aristotle in order to explicate a thought of Augustine. It would thus be false to conclude that Aquinas turns from Augustine and becomes an Aristotelian. The example of the doctrine of the two-fold final goal demonstrates, on the contrary, that he puts his Aristotelianism in the service of Augustine.

Let us look briefly at the happiness-treatise of the *Summa contra gentiles*, which is temporally situated between Aquinas' *Commentary on the Sentences* and his *Summa theologiae*. In this work, too, we find the distinction between the two final goals. In *Summa contra gentiles* III 25, in particular, Aquinas distinguishes between the vision of God as an inner act on the part of the human and God Himself as the external object of the vision. But Aquinas no longer utilizes the terminology of the *Commentary on the Sentences* in order to express this distinction. He does not secure it terminologically at all.¹⁷ Obviously, Thomas uses the doctrine of the two-fold goal throughout his works. Only in his late works does he apply Aristotle's terminology to Augustine's distinction.

God is the Highest, Perfect, and Universal Good (Q. 2)

In *quaestio 2* of the happiness-treatise of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas asks which good must a person possess in order to be happy. His question is consequently directed at the final goal in the sense of the *finis cuius*. He thus treats sequentially the external goods (wealth, honour, fame, power), the bodily goods (health, strength), and the soul's goods (pleasure, virtue). Aquinas offers four reasons as to why the external goods do not come into question as potential final goals. First, these types of goods may be found among good and bad people alike. Wealth is something which both the wise man and the wicked man can both have. The highest good, however, should exhibit an inner connection to morality - that is, it has to be constituted such that only good people can possess it. Secondly, the highest good in the sense of the *ultimus finis cuius* should completely fulfill the person such that no wishes remain open. External goods like wealth, honour, fame, and power do not achieve this kind of satisfaction but leave much to be desired. Thirdly, Aquinas emphasizes that every one of these external goods, but especially wealth and fame, can ruin one's character and lead to bad things. The true highest good, in contrast, makes the person better, even

¹⁷ Francesco Silvestri of Ferrara, whose commentary on the Leonina edition of the *Summa contra gentiles* is offered as an official explication, points out this gap. To fill it, he refers back in his explanation of *ScG* III 25 to Aquinas' *Commentary on the Sentences*, precisely to the terminology of *finis interior* and *finis exterior*.

unto perfection. And fourthly, the external goods are subject to the vicissitudes of luck (*fortuna*). The true highest good is not subject to vicissitudes, however, because the human is naturally directed toward it.

The goods of the body do not come into question as the highest *finis cuius* either, because the human body is subordinated to his soul. Even the goods of the soul point beyond themselves. Aquinas brings his distinction between *finis cuius* and *finis quo* to bear on this point. Happiness as *finis quo* is indeed a condition of the soul, and therefore represents an inherent good of the soul. The object, however, whose possession makes humans happy, namely God as the *finis cuius*, resides outside of the soul.

At the end of q. 2 (a. 8), Aquinas arrives at the following thesis: That good whose possession makes humans utterly happy must be “uncreated.” He clearly means God. While Aristotle does not make the distinction between created and uncreated, for Augustine this distinction constitutes the centre of his thinking. What becomes clearly recognizable is that Aquinas draws on the Augustinian and, beyond it, the Platonic tradition. This reference is particularly visible in his invocation of the notion of participation: God created and maintains the world by having things participate in Himself; the created exists by taking part in God. If one proceeds through the text of q.2 a.8, one finds further characterizations of God as the highest good. Aquinas writes, for instance, that God is the perfect and infinite good (*bonum perfectum et infinitum*). Only the uncreated God could so fulfill humans that nothing remains to be desired. The created goods, in contrast, are always finite and limited. They cannot make humans utterly happy.

What is of particular interest metaphysically is Aquinas' definition of God as a universal good (*universale bonum*),¹⁸ a universal source of good (*universalis fons boni*),¹⁹ and the subsisting essence of goodness itself (*ipsa essentia bonitatis*).²⁰ Aquinas draws here on Augustine's doctrine on God, and Augustine himself acquired it from Plato's theory of ideas and from the Platonists. Similar to Plato's idea of the good, God is the universal good that endows all individual goods with goodness. God is the universal source of goodness because He created all individual goods and endowed them with goodness. Finally, God, as *bonum universale*, is not to be conceived as a nominalistic *universale post rem*; He rather subsists as the essence of goodness and is thus *ante rem*.

In his explanation of God as the highest good, Aquinas relies heavily on Augustine and his adaptation of Platonism. In the *sed contra* of q. 2 a.8, Aquinas refers to Augustine's *De civitate dei* XIX 26, where it is written: “God is the

¹⁸ *STh* I-II 1.8; 2.8; 2.7; 5.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2.8.

²⁰ *STh* I 103.3.

happy life of humans,” and (with *Psalm* 114:15) “Happy is the people whose lord is God.” Aquinas’ designation of God as *ipsa essentia bonitatis* is very similar to Augustine’s reflections in *De Trinitate* VIII 3. According to Augustine, God is the *ipsum bonum* through which the many individual goods are good because they participate in him. This *ipsum bonum* is, for Augustine, the source of all good and the highest good (*summum bonum*), which cannot be augmented or diminished because it is not good through participation but by its essence.

One may be initially surprised that Aquinas draws so heavily from the Platonic-Augustinian metaphysics. Was not Aquinas, in matters of metaphysics, an Aristotelian? And did not Aristotle dismiss Plato’s theory of ideas and its doctrine of participation? Aristotle sharply repudiates Plato’s notion of a good that is universal, a *bonum universale*, claiming that “participation does not mean anything.”²¹ A glance at the happiness-treatise in the *Summa theologiae* demonstrates that although Aquinas rejects Plato’s theory of ideas, he definitely adopts the notion of participation. In Aquinas’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, it is evident how he weakens Aristotle’s negative judgment of the participation doctrine.²² Aquinas even alters Aristotle’s critique of the ideas such that it merely aims at undermining the conception of the universal good as a generic notion. According to Aquinas, the good appears in every category, and the connection of the categories to it is not to be interpreted as a genus-species relation but as analogy. Just as Aquinas conceives the relation of God, the *ipsum esse*, to the being of creatures in terms of an *analogia entis*, so does he determine the relation of the *universalis fons boni* to the individual goods as *analogia boni*. Whereas Aristotle rejects the understanding of “good” as something “universal and common,” Aquinas makes the concept of a *universale bonum*, in which all of the particular goods participate, into one of the most important concepts of his doctrine on happiness. Aquinas, therefore, does not reject Augustine and adopt Aristotle in his determination of the final goal in the sense of the *ultimus finis cuius*. Instead, the contrary is true: He holds fast to Augustine against Aristotle.

Critique of the Possibilities of Happiness in Earthly Life (Q. 5)

Characteristic of Aquinas’ doctrine on happiness is the distinction between the imperfect happiness (*beatitudo imperfecta*) that is attainable in earthly life, and the perfect happiness (*beatitudo perfecta*) of transcendent life. Some historians of philosophy suggest that Aquinas’ reflections on the possibilities of

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 9, 991a 21-23; 992a 29.

²² Cf. *In I Metaph.* lectio 10 n. 153-156. For this topic cf. Leo Elders, *Die Metaphysik des Thomas von Aquin in historischer Perspektive* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1985), 1:178-185.

happiness in earthly life are particularly dependent on Aristotle, for Augustine concentrates, from the beginning, on eternity. One should observe, however, that Augustine had already distinguished between a *vita beata* of earthly life and a *vita beatissima* in the hereafter.²³

Since Aristotle knows nothing of the life hereafter, he is compelled to establish the highest human happiness as taking place in earthly life. Hellenistic philosophers, namely the Epicureans, the Stoics, and Cicero, agree with him on this point. Augustine, however, sharply criticizes the doctrine of earthly happiness.²⁴ He emphasizes that human life is necessarily afflicted with ills, and consequently, there can be no perfectly happy life on earth. Earthly goods are impermanent: bodily and mental sickness can befall a person; the suffering of pains is inevitable; in collective life, there is wickedness, injustice, and war, and at the end, representing everything that militates against natural human striving, there is death.

In q.5 a.3 of his happiness-treatise, Aquinas draws upon Augustine's *De civitate dei* XIX in order to point out, like the Bishop of Hippo, the magnitude of earthly life's ills. Ignorance, susceptibility to affects, sicknesses of body and mind, and, in particular, mortality, all diminish the degree of happiness attainable here. Moreover, Aquinas stresses the transience of earthly goods, especially the good of life itself, which all humans naturally desire. According to him, true happiness is impossible in earthly life because ills, suffering, and death are unavoidable. Following Augustine,²⁵ Aquinas is of the opinion that earthly happiness consists mostly in the hope for the perfect happiness of the afterlife. Both of them thus echo the Apostle Paul, who writes in *Romans* 8:24: "For we are saved by hope." Aquinas, along with Augustine thus attenuates the Aristotelian optimism regarding the possibility of earthly happiness, developing in its stead, with recourse to *De civitate dei* XIX, a realistic view of earthly life and its numerous ills.

In his *Summa contra gentiles* (III 48), Aquinas argues even more explicitly than in his *Summa theologiae* against the possibility of true happiness on earth. Here, too, he emphasizes the transience of earthly goods and the unavoidable ills of this life. Even Aristotle, he explains, concedes that virtue, though the highest good, does not bring happiness per se but only a reduced happiness since it makes us, as Aristotle claims, "merely happy as humans."²⁶ In his *Commentary on*

²³ Cf. *De Civitate Dei* XIX 20.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, XIX 4-10.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, XIX 20.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I 11, 1101a 20. About Aquinas' reinterpretation of Aristotle's "merely happy as humans" as *beatitudo imperfecta* cf. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*, 395-404.

the Sentences, Aquinas explains that for Aristotle it is a matter of the lastingness of goods, which he sees in the constancy of virtue.²⁷ But Aristotle himself knows that this is merely a relative lastingness. For this reason, Aquinas concludes, Aristotle only addresses the imperfect happiness of humans on earth. Aquinas thus criticizes the ethics of Aristotle because it only treats worldly life, making no reference to the coming eternal life.

Perfect Happiness in Transcendent Life

Since Aristotle does not know transcendent life and therefore perfect happiness, Aquinas relies completely on Augustine for his own treatment of this subject. I will only mention the most significant points of Aquinas' doctrine of transcendent happiness. From a systematic perspective, it offers a description of the *finis quo*. More precisely, it treats the question of what belongs to the act of the soul that may be designated as happiness. Among other questions, Aquinas inquires into the significance of human corporeality for perfect happiness. In his reflections, two motifs cross: one more Platonic and one Christian (cf. q. 4 a. 5). According to the Platonic motif, it is only after its separation from the body that human reason attains to the knowledge of the essence of God so crucial for happiness. According to the Christian motif, there is a resurrection of the body. The happiness of being with God is not reserved for the life of the soul alone. It involves rather a life of the soul reunited with the body. The Christian theme of a bodily existence in the *eschaton* is a theme that Augustine accentuated. In *De civitate dei*, Augustine argues against the Neoplatonist Porphyry that the happy life is not a life without the body but precisely a life in the body - though not in an earthly but in a transfigured body.²⁸ Aquinas follows Augustine in q.4 a.6, explaining not only that the bodiless soul finds its completion and happiness in the intellectual vision of God but also that the soul is designed to possess a body and govern it. Since it is natural for a soul to have a body, it is incomplete without it. The possession of the body is then, for Aquinas, a requisite for happiness because it makes it perfect (*perficiens*). This perfection does not consist in the fact that the possession of the body belongs to the essence of happiness. Having a body instead makes human happiness perfect by contributing to the human's being good (*bene esse*). The happy life, for Aquinas, is ultimately a life in the body. Aquinas expressly supports his claim with statements from Augustine's *De civitate dei* XXII 11-12 and 26-27 and *De Genesi ad litteram* XII 68.²⁹ Augustine

²⁷ Cf. *Sent.* lib.4 d.49 q.1 a.1 qc4.

²⁸ Cf. *De Civitate Dei* X 29; XXII 11-22; 26-27.

²⁹ Cf. *STh* I-II 4.6.

explains in those passages that the blessed will be equal to angels in their vision of God but only when they will have received their resurrected bodies. As long as they are in a bodiless state, the souls, Augustine claims, will be held back in a way that prevents them from having the vision of God in full clarity. For both Augustine and Aquinas, this body will be a perfect one, which no longer causes pains, does not age, and no longer has any needs that could prevent the soul from moving on to the vision of God.

Furthermore, Aquinas asks (q. 5 a. 8) about the role social goods, in particular friends, play in perfect happiness in the hereafter. Is the happy life solitary or communal? At this point, a Christian motif can be distinguished from an Aristotelian one. Aristotle's ethics links happiness with autarky and thus arrives at the thesis that the happy life consists primarily in a life of solitary contemplation of the divine, and secondarily in a social life of political activity. The biblical motif of a people of God is, in contrast, a life in the community of all those humans who find their highest good in God and see him. Augustine, in particular, attributed a social character to the transcendental vision of God.³⁰ With reference to Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* VIII, Aquinas explains that in their vision of God the blessed also see each other and God in each other (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 4 a. 8). They therefore rejoice over their community in God. Neighbourly love is indeed subordinate to the love of God, for Aquinas. As a result, the transcendent individual would also be happy in the perfect love of God, even if there were no other humans. Since there are other humans, however, according to Aquinas, the love for them flows from the love for God. Aquinas, like Augustine, thus believes that the community of persons belongs to the perfect happiness of the beyond. In conclusion, it should be clear that Aquinas' decisive motifs for his doctrine on the *beatitudo perfecta* are adopted from Augustine.

Is Knowledge or Love the Basic Human Tendency?

At one point in the happiness-treatise, namely in *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 3, the Aristotelian heritage of Aquinas appears to come prominently to the fore. The question is which capacity of the human soul is particularly active in perfect happiness. For Aquinas, perfect human happiness consists in the vision of the essence of God through the *intellectus speculativus*. The decisive capacity of the human soul is, in this respect, not sensibility or the will but speculative reason. Aquinas places the natural human desire for knowledge at the centre. On this point, he follows Aristotle's first book of the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle explains

³⁰ Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram* VIII 47; *De Civitate Dei* XXII 29.

that “all humans naturally strive for knowledge.”³¹ According to Aristotle, there are several different kinds of knowledge, from mere sensory perception to experiential knowledge, science and art, and finally wisdom as insight into the first causes and principles. It is, moreover, striking that Aristotle distinguishes between a knowledge “that” and a knowledge “why.” The knowledge “that” something acts in such and such a way belongs to mere experience. But whoever knows “why” something acts that way possesses greater insight into the principles and causes.

For Aquinas, the natural desire of human reason is especially directed at the knowledge of the cause of a given effect. However, the desire for the knowledge of the cause is not fulfilled in merely finding an existing cause, but in the ascertainment of the “what” or the essence of the cause. In line with Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes between a knowledge “that,” i.e. that something exists (namely a cause) (*an est*) and the deeper knowledge of “what” the cause is (*quid est*).³² Reason ultimately strives for the knowledge of the essence of a cause, in fact the highest cause of everything.

Aquinas applies this thought to the question concerning the knowledge of God.³³ An investigation of being with respect to certain features like that of movement or order leads to the insight that there must be a cause of being in general, namely God. This line of thinking constitutes the foundational framework for all of Aquinas’ proofs of God.³⁴ But the knowledge that God exists is insufficient to fulfill reason’s striving for knowledge of the cause. For such fulfillment it is necessary to apprehend the *quid est* or the essence of God. Consequently, the human will only be completely happy when he sees the *essentia* of God, who is the first cause of all things. In this vision, reason reaches its goal and its perfection.

According to Aquinas, however, knowledge of the essence of God is not possible in earthly life because human reason is bound to sensory perception from which it must proceed in order to recognize the essentialities of things. There cannot be any sensory perception of God, though, since God is a transcendent being. The limitation of the human cognitive faculties to sensible objects will only be removed in transcendental perfection.³⁵ It is only at that time that humans will be capable of the contemplative vision of God’s essence.

Although Aristotle does not know anything about a vision of God in the hereafter, Aquinas nevertheless formulates his thesis on the *visio beatifica*, as the

³¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 1, 980a 21.

³² Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 1, 981a 28f.; *Analytica posteriora* I 8.

³³ Cf. *STh* I-II 3.8.

³⁴ Cf. *STh* I 2. 3; *ScG* I 13.

³⁵ Cf. *STh* I 12.4; 12.11; *ScG* III 52; *Sent.* lib.4 d.49 q.2 a.6.

fulfillment of the natural human desire for knowledge, by means of Aristotle's metaphysics and theory of science. Nothing in Aquinas' argument is foreign to Augustine, however. The idea that perfect happiness consists in an intellectual vision of God in the afterlife is something which Aquinas also read in Augustine.³⁶ Aquinas also repeatedly refers to Augustine's description of the highest happiness as "joy in the truth."³⁷ He interprets this statement in the sense that "truth" designates the vision of the essence of God through speculative reason, while "joy" refers to the fulfillment of striving and the repose of the will.³⁸ But the thesis of a natural human striving for the knowledge of God also plays an integral role for Augustine. He writes, for example, that God is naturally known by every human under the name of truth, which all humans love.³⁹ Consequently, when Aquinas adopts the Aristotelian conception of a natural striving for knowledge, he in no way contradicts the view of Augustine.

Nevertheless, a certain shift in accent may be said to exist between Aquinas and Augustine. This accentual difference emerges in the details of their respective descriptions of the "natural striving" of humans toward God. Under the influence of Aristotle, Aquinas interprets this striving primarily as a desire for knowledge. His understanding of the highest happiness as a perfect knowledge thus has an intellectualistic hue. It is by no means self-evident that the goal of life should reside in knowledge. Augustine's conception of happiness, on the contrary, is less intellectualistic. He characterizes natural human striving more in terms of the longing for peace and the heart's rest and as the fulfillment of love. "Restless is our heart until it rests in you."⁴⁰ It is not without reason that while Augustine is often portrayed as the man with the burning heart, St Thomas Aquinas is typically depicted as a professor with a book in his hands or conducting a *disputatio*.

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³⁶ Cf. *De Civitate Dei* (XXII 29), *De Genesi ad litteram* (XII 54-69), and *De Trinitate* I 7. Aquinas quotes from *De Trinitate* I 7 in q.3 a.5 (sed contra) and q.4 a.1.

³⁷ *Gaudium in veritate* (*Confessiones* X 33).

³⁸ Cf. *STh* I-II 3.4; 4.1.

³⁹ Cf. *Confessiones* X 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I 1.