

Commentator's Introduction

THE REASON FOR THIS BOOK

What is happiness? For that matter, what isn't it? Can it be attained, and if so, how? Surely these count among the permanent questions of human life. Yet active interest in pursuing them waxes and wanes over the years, and, in our day, such interest has exploded.¹ What universities call Happiness Studies has become what marketers call a growth field.

The most probable explanation for this current vogue is that despite all our modern advantages, we are not happy – or not very happy – or not as happy as we think we should be. This is not just a personal impression. Recently the share of American adults aged 18–35 who say they are “very happy” in life – never very high – dropped to 25%, the lowest percentage ever recorded in the history of the General Social Survey.² Perhaps the time has come again to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what is probably the greatest book on happiness ever written, Thomas Aquinas's *Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose*, which is part of his massive *Summa Theologiae*.

Encountering the *Treatise* for the first time is less like reading a new book than exploring a new universe. If we do take up the Angelic Doctor's book, we may be forced to readjust our thinking. Years ago, when I had shed yet another skin of unconsidered modern assumptions and prejudices, I realized that I would have to go on molting for a good while longer. I am still molting. I wish all my readers a good molting, too.

¹ This is best illustrated by the fashionable movement that its proponents call positive psychology, represented by such figures as Martin E.P. Seligman and Jonathan Haidt. I engage with these researchers at several points later on.

² See the GSS Data Explorer, available at <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/trends/Gender%20&%20Marriage?measure=happy>.

Most books about happiness approach it from a statistical point of view. They assume that happiness is whatever people think it is. In this age of Self, most people would agree. But the claim is ambiguous, for it may mean any of the three following things.

1. It may mean that human happiness is what it is, independent of our opinions, but that, being humans ourselves, we have inside knowledge of it. Therefore, our opinions have merit.
2. It may mean that human happiness is what it is, independent of our opinions, but even though our opinions about what it is may be wildly wrong, they are no worse than any other guide.
3. It may mean that since human happiness is *our* happiness, our opinions *make* it what it is. It is what people think it is *just because their thinking it makes it true*.

The problem with the first view is that even though we all have inside knowledge, experience is not self-interpreting, and we all draw different conclusions. The second view is arbitrary, for if our opinions are no worse than any other guide, they are no better, and the guides disagree. With the third view, the difficulty is that many people who pursue what they call happiness are bitterly unhappy even by their own lights. They thought that whatever they called happiness would make them happy, and it didn't. Apparently, the notion that the will alone has independent value, that it confers value on the things that it chooses just by choosing them, is false. In the end, we are just lofty enough to admit that we are not lofty enough to pursue ourselves as ends.

St. Thomas takes no account of the second and third views, which are of modern coinage. They are too silly to have been current in his own time. As to the first view, he *agrees* that we have inside knowledge, and he *begins* with common opinion. But in view of the confusions of common opinion, he does not end with it. Instead, he uses common opinion to cross-examine common opinion; he connects the dots of our scattered and fragmentary insights, showing that some of what people say about happiness reveals flaws in their very claims about what it is. It isn't that he doesn't think people know anything about themselves. However, he will not allow psychology to take its stand on shifting sand. With philosophical help, he forces it onto firmer ground.

Here is another thing that takes some getting used to: St. Thomas always wants to know what others before him have thought. Today we are taught so thoroughly to doubt authority that in our vanity, we sometimes behave as though no one worth considering had ever thought about a subject before we did. As a result we are always breathlessly rediscovering banalities, on the order of "Science discovers the benefits of hugging" and "Researchers find that youth are not fully mature." Now St. Thomas is certainly aware that authorities may be mistaken: As he quips in one place, "the proof from authority is the weakest –

according to Boethius.”³ But he would consider it foolish and vainglorious to leap to the opposite conclusion that the authorities of the past have nothing to say to us except when they confirm our prejudices.

It is amazing how devious St. Thomas allows his hypothetical objectors to be in their use of authorities. Sometimes he even allows them to quote selectively, distorting the meanings of the texts they are using. But why shouldn't he? Many real-life objections *are* devious. This was true in his time, and it is true in ours. We do not have the luxury of engaging only with good-faith objections and not with devious ones. We must take them as they come, responding to the former, dissipating the smokescreens of the latter. He had to do this. So do we.

Perhaps the biggest shock to our skeptical and secular assumptions is that St. Thomas makes use not only of philosophy, but of theology. However, this does not work the way one might expect. The popular notion of the Middle Ages is that it was a time of unthinking acceptance of dogma. This is far from the truth, for the air was filled with the ring and clash of ideas. The Scholastic thinkers were trained to think of subtle objections to everything – so only those things stood that could not be knocked down. This is not the method of Descartes, who refused to be confident of anything that could be doubted, for anything can be doubted. For the Scholastic thinkers, the question was not whether a proposition can be doubted, but whether it can plausibly defend itself. Even so, this is a rather terrifying intellectual method, because one must inure oneself to standing on precipices. The risk is that one might be shaken in one's grasp of the truth. The gain is that one might attain deeper insight into that truth that cannot be shaken.

As one might guess from this fact, St. Thomas breaks sharply with fideists, who reject reason in favor of faith. In every inquiry, he takes reason just as far as it can go – often much further than rationalists do – before seeking additional help. But he also breaks sharply with rationalists, who reject faith in favor of reason. In his view, although faith without reason is nonsense, true faith makes reason not less reasonable, but more. Not only does it provide reason with additional data, but it ceaselessly pushes it to ask more penetrating questions.

Utter and consummate happiness provides a very good example. As we will see, St. Thomas thinks that reason alone can show that there must be such a thing; yet had it not been for Revelation, the mind might never have pushed itself hard enough to discover the fact. Even so, there are some things about consummate happiness that reason does not have the power to find out without additional help. Revelation provides such help. “Although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest,” he says, “yet the argument from authority based on Divine Revelation is the strongest.”⁴

³ I, Q. 1, Art. 8, Obj. 2: *Locus ab auctoritate est infirmissimus, secundum Boetium*. The phrase “according to Boethius” has somehow disappeared from the Blackfriars translation.

⁴ *Nam licet locus ab auctoritate quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus; locus tamen ab auctoritate quae fundatur super revelatione divina, est efficacissimus*. I, Q. 1, Art. 8, ad 2.

Among other things, this means that by his methods, St. Thomas explores not only the patchy, inadequate, and discontinuous happiness that is attainable in this life, but the complete, unstained, and continuous happiness that is attainable in the next. Some will put the book down for this reason alone. Aren't we beyond all those fairy tales now? To them, the hope of heaven is to be taken no more seriously than the Big Rock Candy Mountains of the Harry McClintock folk song:

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
 You never change your socks
 And the little streams of alcohol
 Come trickling down the rocks
 The brakemen have to tip their hats
 And the railroad bulls are blind
 There's a lake of stew
 And of whiskey, too
 You can paddle all around 'em
 In a big canoe
 In the Big Rock Candy Mountains⁵*

But what if there existed not just wish-fulfilling motives, but actual *reason* to believe in the possibility of union with God? Faith does not mean believing with no reason, and St. Thomas will settle for nothing less than reason. But he thinks there is reason.

The kernel of this reason – although there is much more – is that nothing in the natural order is pointless. Therefore, if we yearn for a satisfaction that nothing in the natural order can provide, then there must be something more than the natural order. Although Divine revelation agrees, this is essentially a philosophical argument. If we are skeptical, the burden of proof lies on us to show where the fallacy lies. If we refuse to do so, then we are betrayers, not followers, of reason. And it is curious, isn't it, that the more contemporary man professes disinterest in the possibility of man's destiny with God, the more he pursues the vision of man becoming God on earth?⁶

ON READING THE TREATISE

For a variety of reasons, then, some first-time readers find St. Thomas exciting, but also disconcerting. When a colleague and I assigned Thomas Aquinas, along with a few other great writers,⁷ in a course on happiness and the meaning of life, one student wrote to us anonymously, "Their questions are not my questions."

⁵ Harry McClintock, "Big Rock Candy Mountain" (1928), No. 6696 in the *Roud Folk Song Index*.

⁶ A cultural motif I discuss in Question 2, Article 8.

⁷ Chiefly Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*), St. Augustine of Hippo (*Confessions*), Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (*The Consolation of Philosophy*), and Dante Alighieri (a portion of the *Comedy*).

I have always wondered what the student's questions would have been. In another course, a student objected that when St. Thomas makes distinctions, he is "splitting hairs just to put the other side in the wrong." But some hairs need to be split, and much of the art of argument is knowing when to split them. Still another student said in class, "Isn't this all just a *religious* argument?" – as though that somehow made the conclusion wrong.

On the other hand, another of my students expressed his dismay about what he called his "initial (and, in retrospect, quite impudent) assumptions about the difficulty of criticizing St. Thomas on his own terms." He wrote, "he seemed to meet me at every turn." And he does have this sneaking-up quality.

To speak of only one such turn, St. Thomas avoids both the rock on which hedonists crack up and the hard place on which Kantians come to smash. To the former it may seem foolish ever to accept suffering or make sacrifices; to the latter, it may seem selfish to desire our own happiness. Such is the influence of such thinkers that even Christians have difficulty understanding the Christian paradox that I can find myself only by dying to myself, that I can be utterly fulfilled only by pursuing God rather than fulfillment. They think that it is cheap to hope for heaven, and that they should hope for it less. St. Thomas would think they do not hope for it nearly enough.

Why seek God at all? One can reply in a number of connected ways, for example:

- He is our origin and ultimate purpose.
- In justice, we owe it to Him.⁸
- Our minds seek nothing greater, for nothing greater can be conceived.
- The attainment of Him leaves nothing further to be desired.
- Only in Him can we be in accord with how things really are.

It is not so much that there is a reason to follow Him, or even that there are many reasons to follow Him (though this is true), but that He is the First Reason, in whom alone any reason for anything can finally make sense.

By the way, the God of Thomas Aquinas is more than the "basic good of religion" of which some philosophers speak, or the "transcendence" of which some psychologists speak. By these terms, these philosophers and psychologists mean nothing more than a source of meaning greater than ourselves.⁹ What if one chooses the wrong one? I am reminded of a newspaper article I read some years ago about groups that follow the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, Step Two declares "[We] came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Asked by a reporter what they took the Power greater than themselves to be, some members of these groups naturally replied "God," but others replied differently. One man told the journalist, "For me, it's electricity."

⁸ Even this does not repay the debt, but it is as close to true justice as we can come.

⁹ For more on this topic, see the two Discussions at the end of the commentary on Q. 4, Art. 4.

HOW THE TREATISE UNFOLDS

I would love to let the *Treatise* unfold like a mystery story, so the suspense builds throughout the discussion of what happiness isn't, until finally we learn what happiness is. However, this approach doesn't quite work. Why not? Throughout, St. Thomas is asking what *complete* happiness is. But although he thinks incomplete happiness has a certain integrity of its own, he does not put all his reflections on incomplete happiness together in a single place; instead he sprinkles them throughout the argument on complete happiness. The most important points are these:¹⁰

1. Not even the imperfect happiness of the present life is the same thing as wealth, honor, fame, power, health, beauty, scientific knowledge, or any of the other worldly things into the pursuit of which we hurl ourselves so obsessively.
2. That is not to say that none of these things matter; they have a certain proper place. The important thing is to deal with these things according to virtue.
3. Friends help; they give us persons for whom we may do good, they give us the enjoyment of seeing *them* do good, and they support us in the good we do ourselves.
4. This, in turn, tells us just what the place of all those other things is – wealth, honor, power, and so forth. The primary importance of wealth is that I cannot be generous without something to be generous with. The primary importance of honor is that the virtuous deserve it. The primary importance of power is to do good.
5. Moreover, these created goods point to the Uncreated Good in whom the perfection of happiness really lies.

For these reasons, although he takes seriously the happiness of the present life, the Angelic Doctor spends a good deal more time on the nature of the happiness of those who attain the life to come – a happiness of which in this world we experience flashes and glimpses, but no more.

His argument is not linear, but cumulative. Quite early, St. Thomas introduces his conclusion that although a certain limited happiness is possible in this life, complete happiness lies only in the contemplation of God in the life to come. As he goes along, however, he offers more and more support for the point. For example, in Question 1, Article 8, where he is considering whether other creatures have the same ultimate purpose that we do, he anticipates his later conclusion that our happiness lies in God. However, throughout Question 2 he demolishes a succession of arguments about where happiness lies; at the end of Question 2, he shows that it is impossible for anything in the natural

¹⁰ For further discussion see esp. Q. 5, Art. 5.

order to make us entirely happy; and at the end of Question 3, he shows that it can lie only in the vision of God in his essence.

ST. THOMAS'S RELATION TO AUGUSTINE

St. Thomas was opposed in his day by some who considered themselves humble disciples of the fourth- and fifth-century thinker, St. Augustine of Hippo. Yet he plainly considers himself an Augustinian too. Augustine is quoted in his work far more often than any other Father of the Church, always with the greatest respect. He calls Augustine not "a theologian" but *the* Theologian – as he calls St. Paul not "an apostle" but *the* Apostle, and Aristotle not "a philosopher" but *the* Philosopher – to show that in his view, Augustine is the model for all theologians. Plainly he thinks that Augustine was essentially correct about almost everything.

On the other hand, Augustine does not always write systematically. His favorite literary vehicles are those that allow him to roam and digress, bringing into the discussion a variety of topics that might seem only tangentially related to the one under discussion, as in his famous *Confessions*. So it is that St. Thomas mines Augustine's treatise *On Free Choice of the Will* for insights not just about free will but about virtue and natural law; his treatise *On the Trinity* for insights not just about the Divine Persons but on the interconnectedness of the virtues; his treatise *On True Religion* for insights not just about faith but about judgment according to law; his manual *Rule for the Servants of God* for insights not just about monastic discipline but about avoiding the vice of pride; and his sprawling *City of God Against the Pagans* for insights not just about the relation between the "two cities" but about the nature of commonwealth as such.

What distinguishes the use of Augustine by St. Thomas is that he sets what he takes from Augustine into a systematic framework, for the construction of which he accepts help from a great many other thinkers as well, conspicuously the pagan philosopher Aristotle, of whom many of the Augustinians of St. Thomas's own day were so suspicious. His engagement with Aristotle, however, is so important – and so paradoxical – that it demands a brief discussion of its own.

ST. THOMAS'S RELATION TO ARISTOTLE

One could almost title the Treatise *The Conversion of Aristotle*. Far more frequently than in some other parts of the *Summa*, St. Thomas refers to the pagan sage. It may be thought that he merely dresses up Aristotle in Christian clothing. Yet he succeeds in his endeavor, where Aristotle fell short, just because of his differences from Aristotle.

Though St. Thomas never imagines that Aristotle is a Christian, his book can be read as an idealized conversation between them, a dialogue in which he

explains to Aristotle why he should become a Christian. And yet his most characteristic disagreement with Aristotle is that he thinks Aristotle did not take his own premises far enough. So much of St. Thomas's argument depends on pointing out that Aristotle's arguments are suggestive of much more than Aristotle had realized.

In particular, what Aristotle calls happiness is rather unsatisfactory. St. Thomas does not deny that most of what Aristotle says about it is true, so far as it goes. But if it is true, it cannot be the whole truth. At best, Aristotle is discussing the partial and undeveloped happiness of this life. Although at times one might forget, St. Thomas wants to know what sort of happiness would be consummate and complete. Yes, the various goods of this life are true goods, but they are true goods only in a qualified sense; our nature is so fashioned as to long for something more. Yes, insofar as the happiness of this life is desirable for its own sake, it may be called happiness, but it cannot be the whole story of happiness, for it always leaves something to be desired – something *radically* to be desired – and even on Aristotle's premises, nothing of that incomplete sort can be a complete and final end.

It is no good saying that our complete and final end is unattainable, for in that case it could not be called our end. Arguing against the opinion of Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes, that the ultimate happiness of man lies in understanding all things material and immaterial, St. Thomas writes that in this world it is hardly possible for anyone to understand even all material things:

and thus no one, or very few, could reach to perfect felicity; which is against what the Philosopher says, that happiness is a "kind of common good, communicable to all capable of virtue." Further, it is unreasonable that only the few of any species attain to the end of the species.¹¹

Besides, we naturally desire complete happiness, and Aristotle famously insists that nature makes nothing in vain. If complete happiness is unattainable by our own powers and in this life, then it must be attainable in some other way and in some other life – whether or not Aristotle actually draws this conclusion from his premises!

By the way, St. Thomas certainly thinks some of the goods of this life are better than others. It is a fallacy to think that just because we may pursue more than one of them for its own sake, therefore they cannot be rank-ordered. Why then doesn't St. Thomas take the trouble of telling us how to rank-order them? Because their relations cannot be correctly expressed just by saying, "Pursue the best of them to the utmost degree." Friendship, for example, is better than eating, but we need to eat too, and if we practiced friendship to the exclusion of eating just because friendship is better, we would be sundered from our friends by starvation. Knowing the truth of things is the very highest function of the

¹¹ I, Q. 88, Art. 1. St. Thomas is referring to what Aristotle says in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 9.

mind, yet in this life we need friendship even to arrive at knowledge, and the longing of the mind so terribly exceeds all its powers.

Even more important is that although the goods of this life are really good, they are only good because, and to the degree that, they reflect another Good, the Good in which life and all its goods originate. Just now we mentioned the goods of friendship and of knowing the truth of things. But ordinary friendship arouses longings for another Friendship, the possibility of which we may only dimly suspect. Only if we see the friend in the light of the Friend can our friendship come into its own; if we try to see it in any other light, it leaves us in despair, because no temporal friend can be enough. And knowledge of the truths of this life is good, but if pursued for its own sake rather than for the sake of the primal Truth in which all truths have their origin, ultimately it makes of the mind a mere hollow container in which facts that cannot explain themselves rattle around like dried peas in a can.

One might kick against these limitations and deny them. For example, one might protest that the facts we know are *not* unexplained; science explains them. But science does not explain them ultimately. Chiefly it connects facts with other facts, which is a very good thing. Yet why any of them should be true at all it leaves in deepest mystery. Why is there anything, and not rather nothing? And why is what there is *how* it is, and not rather some other way?

What Aristotle did not fully realize, but St. Thomas does, is that nature has a face; it looks up. It does not follow from the fact that we are natural beings that we aspire only to natural things, or that we should restrain the temptation to reach higher. We aspire to that which lies beyond nature, that which lies only in God.

CAN WE BE GOOD AND HAPPY WITHOUT GOD?

Surprisingly, although my students rarely ask whether we can be happy without God, they often ask whether we can be *good* without God. From St. Thomas's point of view, this raises a problem, for if the fragmentary and incomplete happiness of this life depends on the practice of virtue, as he claims it does, then the two questions go together. If we cannot be good, then we cannot be happy.

Can we then be good without God? In one sense, the answer is "Certainly." Just like all other rational beings, the atheist has a conscience, and with fair accuracy, he can work out the foundational principles of morality. But in another sense, the answer is "No." From a Thomistic point of view, the atheist faces at least seven obstacles in understanding and practicing the virtues.

- Since he does not recognize God as the Supreme Good for which all created goods exist and to which they are ordained, it will not make sense to him that although certain acts can be directed to the Supreme Good, others cannot. Consequently, he will find it difficult to understand how any act can be

intrinsically evil. He will be inclined to think that for a good enough result, we may do anything.

- Since he does not recognize Divine providence, the idea that he should do the right thing and let God take care of the consequences is likely to seem senseless to him. It will seem to him that if there is no God, then he must play God himself. He may find it difficult *not* to do evil for the sake of good.
- Since he does not recognize God as the Creator, he must regard conscience as the meaningless and purposeless result of a process that did not have him in mind. Because it will be hard to believe that a ragtag collection of impulses and inhibitions left over from the accidents of natural selection could have anything to teach him, he will be tempted to think that the authority of conscience is an illusion.
- Since he does not have faith, he is likely to view his moral dilemmas as inescapable. For if there is no God, how can he believe the assurance of faith that “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it”?¹²
- Since he does not believe in divine grace, he will be unable to avail himself of its assistance. Certainly he will be able to perform naturally good acts. However, when he meets the wall that each of us meets, when he finds himself doing the wrong he does not want to do and not doing the right that he wants to do, he will be unable to cry out for assistance.
- Since he does not believe in those spiritual virtues that depend on grace for their very existence, he will be unable to practice them at all. For example, though he may love his wife with natural love, he will fail in that supernatural charity that enables him to see that since she is made in God's image, the only true way to love her for her own sake is to love her for His sake.
- Finally, since only a person can forgive, the moral law will seem to him a harsh accuser with a heart of rock. When he has done wrong, as we all do, he will long to drown out the condemning voice of conscience. He will be tempted to tell himself that the law is a fantasy, that there is nothing to be forgiven, that the solution to the problem of guilt is that there is no such thing.

So yes, for all these reasons – some logical and some psychological – we do need God to be good. And therefore we do need God, even to achieve the fragmentary happiness of the present life.

HOW THIS BOOK ORIGINATED

This book is the latest in a series of commentaries that began with St. Thomas's *Treatise on Law* and proceeded to his writings on the virtues. I began where

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:13 (RSV-CE).

I did because of a keen interest in the ethical foundations of social, political, and legal order. A scholarly friend joked to me that I am proceeding in reverse, for what St. Thomas thinks about law presupposes what he thinks about the virtues, and what he thinks about the virtues presupposes what he thinks about happiness.

According to St. Thomas, governments are properly concerned only with the happiness or well-being of people in this life. Since nothing contributes more powerfully to the happiness of this life than good moral character, the laws should encourage justice and the other virtues. As we find in his *Treatise on Law*, where the implications are spelled out, this does not always mean what one might expect, because although human law does shape moral character, its power to do so is limited. For example, in some cases the attempt to suppress a prevalent vice would do more harm than good, or even destroy some good. For this reason, "human laws do not forbid all vices, from which the virtuous abstain, but only the more grievous vices, from which it is possible for the majority to abstain; and chiefly those that are to the hurt of others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained: thus human law prohibits murder, theft and such like."¹³

One might think that what St. Thomas says about the happiness of the life to come would be irrelevant to social and political concerns. Simply put, what he holds is that we are made for two happinesses: Not only for the temporal kind, the achievement of which, with moderate good fortune, lies within our natural powers, but also for the eternal kind, the achievement of which exceeds them. But the twofold nature of happiness is pregnant with political significance, for it shows the greatest reason why the all-embracing State must be rejected. Even Aristotle admitted that a government cannot do the work of such institutions as the family, but there is much more to the matter than that. The State is properly concerned with the happiness of this life, about which it can do something (even if, sometimes, only by doing no harm). The chief constituents of the temporal common good are the support of justice, the upholding of natural law, and the recognition of virtue. But the Church is concerned with the perfect and complete happiness of the next. Precisely because the state is unable to direct us our supernatural good, it must not try. Of course it should be friendly and cooperative toward the Church, but it should keep its mitts off.

For a long time I hesitated about the word "happiness" in the title of this book. In the end, I kept it. However, St. Thomas is not speaking of happy feelings, or of getting what we want for now, or of transient experiences that are here today and gone tomorrow, as when we ask, "Are you happy today?" He was speaking of flourishing, of blessedness, of ultimate fulfillment; of that which is the pinnacle of human good and leaves nothing to be desired. One of the greatest difficulties in asking what happiness means is that the everyday speech

¹³ I-II, Q. 96, Art. 2. This is thoroughly discussed in my *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

of a great many people takes a certain answer to this question for granted, and it is a wrong answer. Among the questions we need to ask is whether happiness is the same thing as pleasure – but we will hardly even grasp what the question means if we are accustomed to using the terms “happiness” and “pleasure” interchangeably. Of course even wrong answers must contain some grain of truth, or they could never seem persuasive. In this case, the grain of truth is that pleasure has something to do with happiness, as a lot of things have something to do with happiness. The question is *what* they have to do with it.

HOW THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN

Curiously, St. Thomas is sometimes criticized just for being a painstakingly careful reasoner. The complaint, that he is a “rationalist,” seems to conflate two very different things. Rationalism, as the critics use the term, lies in thinking that there is no such thing as mystery, and that whatever we cannot understand cannot be real. Although St. Thomas insists on the rigorous use of reason, he is not a rationalist in this objectionable sense. What he does insist is that the rational mind is a precious gift of God, that we should use it to the very limit of its powers, and that we should refuse to embrace logical absurdities. There is very much wrong with the former attitude, but very much right with the latter. I have tried to write this book in such a way as to make the difference clear.

In writing, I have also had to reckon with the difficulties that St. Thomas's terminology and mode of expression pose for contemporary readers. For example,

- Most contemporary English speakers think of a “phantasm” as an illusion or a ghost, but St. Thomas uses the term for the traces left in memory by sense perceptions.
- Today most people think of a “cause” as something that makes something happen, but what makes something happen is only one of several fundamental explanations of why something is what it is, and St. Thomas uses the term for each of them: Besides the “efficient” cause of a thing there are three others.
- In our day the noun “end” and the adjective “final” usually indicate the last stage in a chronological sequence, but St. Thomas uses them for the purposes toward which things are striving.
- For us the statement that God is “pure act” sounds like an assertion that God is always busy, or that He is Something that Something Else is doing, although what St. Thomas really means is that everything that God can be, He always is.
- When a famous twentieth-century group of Thomists writes that “potency and act divide being,” we get the impression that power and activity somehow cause everything in the universe to split up, when in fact they were trying

to say that everything except God has some realized and some unrealized potentialities.

Partly for such reasons, partly because the book is long, and partly because, although many readers will read straight through, others will begin in the middle, I freely repeat certain definitions. I also include frequent cross-references, not only to other sections of the *Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose*, but also to other parts of the *Summa Theologiae* as well as to other works of St. Thomas. I try to use language that is both precise and accessible to common sense.

There are other difficulties. Many of St. Thomas's transitions are puzzling. Sometimes his arguments place premises and conclusions in a different order than we would normally place them. Sometimes he even buries a conclusion, implying but not stating it. Besides trying to clarify such obscurities, I try to present my explanations in such a way that the reader is habituated to the way St. Thomas's language and arguments work. I also modernize archaisms, although I retain them occasionally, especially when God is addressed, or when altering the archaisms would cause confusion. Because so much depends on keeping track of his various distinctions, I have also made somewhat greater use of italics than is customary in a book of this kind.

It isn't enough just to paraphrase, because this makes it difficult to relate what one is saying about Thomas Aquinas to what earlier writers have said about him. I have adopted the expedient of a double-column format, in which a traditional translation of the Latin is placed on the left, and my paraphrase of the Latin is placed on the right. I use the celebrated Blackfriars translation, which is in the public domain, and is considered the gold standard.

Even better would have been a three-column format, in which the first column showed the Latin original. Perhaps some future edition can include a Latin column – I hope so – but for the present, that would make the book far too large and expensive. A book is not useful if readers and libraries cannot afford to buy it.

I wish to emphasize that the paraphrase in the right-hand column is not primarily a paraphrase of the Blackfriars translation, because I always consult the original Latin. Usually, because the Blackfriars translation is quite literal, my paraphrase is rather free. Occasionally, though, when the Blackfriars translation itself is somewhat free, as well as in those cases when I think it is misleading, my paraphrase is more literal, just so that none of St. Thomas's nuances are lost. When St. Thomas's prose is awkward and complex, I sometimes even rearrange whole sections of text, but since the reader can always compare my wording with the original, it is always clear what I have done.

I have followed each two-column section of St. Thomas's prose with line-by-line, sometimes even phrase-by-phrase commentary. In the commentary, I both elucidate the arguments and discuss various problems. Another purpose of the

commentary is to place St. Thomas's brief references to his diverse sources in context. This is terribly important, because he does not quote the same way we do. Like other writers of the period, he often gives only the first few words of a passage, expecting his readers to remember the rest of it. In other cases, though he gives more than a few words, he paraphrases rather than quoting directly. A reader who has a capacious memory and who is closely familiar with all the same sources will find this sufficient. We will not, for not only are many of his sources unfamiliar to most readers today, but our memories are not trained like those of the scholars of his day.

Each section of line-by-line commentary is followed by a more-freewheeling section of thematic Discussion. To some Articles, a single Discussion topic is attached, to others more than one, depending on the needs of the case. Some topics simply give greater attention to points that have come up in the line-by-line commentary, for example:

- How seriously should we take teleological explanations?
- How many intellectual powers do we have?
- Is there a *technique* for attaining union with God?

Others address matters that are only indirectly related to St. Thomas's arguments, for example:

- Can we love anything more than ourselves?
- Can we merit anything from God?
- How would St. Thomas respond to utilitarianism?

Sometimes I use a Discussion topic merely to call attention to an unexpected parallel. For example, although many people in our day would scoff at St. Thomas for raising questions about man's relationship with angels, don't even today's materialists take seriously the possibility of intelligent beings superior to ourselves? I title this topic "The Angels of the Materialists." And finally, a few topics are for fun – but I will not say "just" for fun, because they have serious uses, too. For example, although the topic "Do All Dogs Go to Heaven?" will interest people who are sentimental about animals, it also sheds light on what St. Thomas thinks is special about the human soul.

My intended audience is fourfold. Though I am certainly writing for scholars who know a great deal about Thomas Aquinas, I am also writing for scholars who don't – and for interested general readers, of whom there are quite a few – and for students, both undergraduate and graduate. I reject the view that although a book can be either scholarly or accessible to non-scholars, it cannot be both.

Speaking of views I reject, this may be a good place to insert my standard disclaimer. Where pronouns are concerned, I generally follow the traditional English convention – the one everyone followed, before politically motivated linguistic bullying became fashionable – according to which such terms as "he" and "him" are already "inclusive." Unless the context clearly indicates the

masculine, they have always been used to refer to a person of either sex. Readers who choose differently may write differently; I ask only that they extend the same courtesy to me. In the meantime, since my language includes masculine, feminine, neuter, and inclusive pronouns, any rational being who feels excluded has only him-, her-, or itself to blame.

Just because some of my readers may be encountering St. Thomas for the first time, it may be helpful to explain the method by which I refer to other sections of the *Summa Theologiae*. The *Summa* is divided into the *Prima*, or First Part, the *Prima Secundae*, or First Part of the Second Part, the *Secunda Secundae*, or Second Part of the Second Part, the *Tertia*, or Third Part, and the *Supplementum*, or Supplement. These main parts are abbreviated "I," "I-II," "II-II," "III," and "Supp." A Question, abbreviated "Q." in the singular and "QQ." in the plural, followed by a numeral, is not one query but a set of related queries; each of the individual queries is addressed in an Article, abbreviated "Art." with a numeral. Usually, though not always, an Article phrases the query in such a form that the traditional answer is "Yes." Possible Objections to giving a "Yes" answer are enumerated as "Obj. 1," "Obj. 2," and so forth; St. Thomas's Replies are enumerated as "ad 1," "ad 2," and so forth. The *sed contra*, or "On the other hand," is always a brief restatement of the traditional view to which the Objectors are objecting. Sometimes it merely cites a representative authority, but sometimes it goes a little further by presenting a brief argument. However, the *respondeo*, or "Here is my response," is St. Thomas's own argument, and is always more complete.

Using these conventions, we may say that the *Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose* is made up of I-II, QQ. 1–5. Sometimes Q. 1 is called the *Treatise on the Last End*, and sometimes QQ. 2–5 are called the *Treatise on Happiness*, but they plainly make up parts of a single continuous argument, and so I treat them as such. Since these titles and divisions into "treatises" were devised by later scholars, not by St. Thomas himself, I have felt complete liberty to change them.

Since I am writing not only for scholars but for others as well, for the convenience of the latter, in quoting from works other than the *Summa Theologiae*, such as the writings of Aristotle, I try to use reliable editions that are in the public domain and are available on the Internet. Sometimes this is impossible or inconvenient. The specialists, of course, will have their own favorite translations. When I provide quotations from the Bible, I most often use either the Douay-Rheims American version (DRA), which is an American English translation of the Latin Vulgate that St. Thomas used,¹⁴ or the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSV-CE), which is sometimes more clear and often more beautiful. Which translation I am using is always indicated in

¹⁴ The Blackfriars translation of the *Summa* employs the British English version of the same Bible translation.

footnotes. When the chapter and verse divisions of the Douay-Rheims differ from those of more recent translations, I indicate this fact in the notes as well.

LAST WORD

In closing, let me say a word about the lovely picture that graces the cover of this book. Many readers will find the choice self-explanatory. Others may find it a little puzzling. What does Joseph DeCamp's *The Blue Cup* – a painting of a housewife, face and eyes glowing, admiring a cherished piece of crockery that we can hardly make out – have to do with happiness?

My original thought had been to use a quite different image, some suitable illustration of the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price: “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”¹⁵ All I can say is that the available paintings of the Pearl of Great Price all seemed to leave something to be desired. Of course, I may have overlooked or misjudged some great work of art. But for me, the homely *Blue Cup* evokes the Pearl of Great Price with truer pitch than any image that is known to me of the parable itself.

I find the writing of acknowledgments exquisite torture, not because I have nothing to acknowledge, but because I have too much. I am certainly grateful to my editor, Robert Dreesen; my copy editor, Leslie Bachman; my project manager, Samantha Town; and my content manager, Laura Blake. When I was younger, I used to name everyone who had in any way been helpful to me in the long process that culminated in a book – even, say, one of my early teachers. This sort of list tends to be very long, because I have long reasons for gratitude. At the same time, it tends to be tedious.

Those who have done me the greatest good during the actual writing of this book are my friends, though the good they have done me is usually indirect – it results not from the fact that we talked about the book itself, but from the fact that we talked about matters of shared interest and concern. Would my friends wish to be listed, then, simply as friends? This would merely embarrass them, but I hope that they know how I esteem them. If you must have names, read some of the acknowledgments in my previous books. They haven't changed.

Perhaps my wife, Sandra, will also be embarrassed to be listed. But the greatest part of happiness and ultimate purpose that I have enjoyed in this life is due to her – or to God's grace through her – and if she doesn't know it, she should.

¹⁵ Matthew 13:45-46 (RSV-CE).