

An Analysis of Happiness from the Perspective of St. Thomas Aquinas

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Abstract

The subject of happiness is one of the most important topics in the philosophy of ethics that has attracted the attention of many thinkers and philosophers and has forced them to search for the meaning of happiness. Some theistic philosophers have considered happiness to have different levels and the highest degree of it has been considered as the divine encounter in heaven, among which is Saint Aquinas. But in the meantime, people have become skeptical and have found it very difficult to achieve this kind of happiness, so that many of them have considered this out of reach and think that there is no way to achieve this level of happiness. Therefore, addressing this case and reviewing and analyzing the researches of Thomas Aquinas as a world thinker can help a person to get acquainted with the levels of happiness and find solutions to achieve the highest degree. This article intends to use the descriptive-analytical method to first define happiness from the point of view of Saint Aquinas, and then continues by stating the levels of happiness and offering solutions to achieve true happiness, and ends with a discussion of great happiness. Aquinas emphasizes above all the great happiness that can be achieved in the hereafter and considers that achieving it, in addition to acquiring moral virtues and intellectual knowledge, requires divine grace, which does not include every servant.

Key words; Aquinas; Happiness; True Happiness; Great Happiness; God's Grace

Introduction

The fact that a person's life eventually reaches a good end and has a purpose has always been a subject that has always occupied the human mind (Malik, et al., 2021; Mediani, et al., 2021). Some people very desperately consider human life to be empty and devoid of any meaning, but the God-fearing and divine sages have defended themselves and interpreted human life as full of meaning and beauty (Bashir, et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Aquinas, one of the most influential Christian thinkers, has tried to explain happiness based on Christian culture. He considers happiness as the final goal of human life that a person should be adorned with virtues in the theoretical and practical field in order to achieve this level. He considers happiness to be the attainment of divine pleasure, which since man is from Him, he must use his utmost in this world to become worthy of it again and return to God. He also believes that due to the fact that the world has a limited capacity, people can not achieve true and permanent happiness in this world, so this kind of happiness will be achieved in the hereafter and the highest level of true happiness in the hereafter is the great happiness that meets God.

So far not much has been written about the study of Saint Aquinas 'treatises on happiness, and only one work can be found that deals with the subject of happiness from Aquinas' point of view is a paper with this title " complete and incomplete happiness and its relation to seeing God from the point of view of Thomas Aquinas ", written by Mansoureh Maleki and Hossein Houshangi. However, it does not examine the great happiness in detail and not many solutions have been provided to achieve the hereafter and great happiness, while the present study has placed its main emphasis on true and eternal happiness, especially the great happiness that all people of faith should pay attention to. This article

tries to answer these questions by using reliable sources and necessary analysis;

What is Aquinas' explanation of happiness? What is ultimate happiness from Aquinas' point of view? What is the level of happiness from Aquinas' point of view? What is great happiness from Aquinas' point of view? How can great happiness be achieved?

Definition of Happiness

Thomas Aquinas used Christian propositions in explaining happiness and based on it he explained the subject of happiness. He believes that original sin is an important obstacle to man's attainment of happiness, and despite this obstacle, happiness cannot be achieved, but because divine grace is infinite; by His grace and redemption through Christ, He took away this sin from men so that they might pursue happiness.

Aquinas in the definition of happiness states: "the ultimate goal is called happiness, and if we examine human happiness in its cause or property, it is uncreated; but if we consider it in relation to the nature of happiness, something is a creature. God is inherently blissful; because He is not in the acquisition or assistance of anything else, but inherently happiness. In other words, as Boethius points out, human beings are considered prosperous by enjoyment. Happiness is also referred to as the ultimate and highest good of man because it is the attainment or enjoyment of the highest good" (Aquinas, 1981, 799).

Aquinas explains two types of happiness; negative and positive; what happiness includes and what it does not include. Aquinas believes that happiness is a kind of good that is inherently valuable, and that such happiness can only be achieved through knowledge, reflection, and thinking (Aquinas, 1905, III, 37).

Aquinas in response to the question of whether pleasure is necessary to achieve happiness or not? He refers to the meaning of "necessity" and considers it unique in four ways;

1. As an introduction and preparation, as education is necessary to acquire knowledge.
2. As a supplement, as the soul is necessary for the life of the body.
3. As an outside helper such as having a sponsor for some responsibilities.
4. As an accompaniment like heat for fire. Pleasure is also necessary for happiness in four ways; because pleasure is obtained in calming the desire of the two good things that have been achieved, and since happiness is nothing but the perception of absolute goodness; its existence is not possible without the accompaniment of pleasure.

In other words, when he achieves absolute good, there is no other good to seek it. Therefore his desire is saturated and calms, and this stillness of desire is accompanied by pleasure; so happiness can not be separated from pleasure (Bani Saeed Langroudi et al, 2020, 103).

Aquinas sees happiness as a practical and perceptual thing, the realization of which is in the light of the realization and attainment of both and with the spread of human knowledge and on the other hand adorned with noble morals, happiness will be achieved.

From Aquinas' point of view, happiness is an action and a virtue; because attaining happiness is a creature and happiness is the absolute perfection of man; everything has perfection and actuality, and perfection is considered against the potential of imperfection and happiness as absolute perfection can not be power and potential; otherwise, it will be a deficiency and not a perfection. Therefore, happiness must include the last act of man, which is the good of man. The ultimate goal of everything is virtue, which is to bring us closer to God (Majidi, 2013, 103).

From Aquinas' point of view, happiness is eternal and unchangeable and there is no way to change it. He believes that lustful and carnal affairs can not be considered happiness and the immediate pleasure arising from them leads to nothing but sin and regret.

Aquinas also does not consider material things such as wealth to be prosperous and states: " Human

happiness does not mean being rich; because wealth also has its value because it is a means to an end. Wealth and conservation can not be the highest good and purpose of life; because the highest good must have intrinsic value. Even valuable acts such as generosity and forgiveness, which are virtues related to wealth and money, are again acquired through money, are not ends "(Aquinas, 1905, III, 30).

Aquinas believes that true happiness can not be achieved in this world because this world with its limitations can not be the full answer to the creation of justice and balance between human beings and on the other hand, the reward of many charities can only be given in another world. As a result, he believes in the realization of true happiness in the hereafter.

Degree of Happiness

Thomas Aquinas also believes that happiness has a hierarchy and it is not correct to consider all the prosperous in one category or all the lovers in one category because as the degrees of faith and purity of individuals are different; their degree of happiness and misery will also vary.

It follows from Aquinas that, firstly, man is inherently a creature in need and therefore in need of divine grace, mercy, and help. Secondly, man's natural will and intellect are inherently imperfect and require divine grace for their perfection. Thirdly, true happiness is supernatural, so a supernatural factor must intervene. Fourth, grace not only completes the intellect and the will and compensates for its inherent imperfection, but also induces virtues; it completes acquired habits and virtues or natural morality. Also, grace has an effective role in forgiving sins and purifying the human soul from the effects of sin (Mirhashemi and Fathi, 2018, 140).

Aquinas attributes one of the levels of happiness to the world, the realization of which will take place, which is a very weak level of happiness that does not deserve attention; because it is immortal and transient. And the other level attributes happiness to the hereafter, the realization of which depends on the existence of human deeds in this world. In other words, according to Aquinas, the worldly level of happiness is the prelude to achieving the ultimate level of happiness in the hereafter.

According to Aristotle, Aquinas explains worldly happiness with philosophical concepts and considers it as a limited manifestation of happiness that can not be the complete answer to happiness according to the human soul and can irrigate him from the source of ultimate happiness.

God's grace and mercy, as an external factor for happiness, play a decisive and fundamental role. Aquinas believes that divine agents are the helper of human natural forces to complete their shortcomings. Thus there is a reciprocal correlation between nature and grace, between acquired natural virtues and induced divine virtues or moral virtues and theological virtues. According to Aquinas, God moves everything in its own way; as we see in natural objects, what is heavy and what is light move differently according to their different natures. Therefore, he makes man justice according to the state of his human nature. But the special nature of man is to have free will and also to use reason (Ibid139).

Aquinas believes that the attainment of any level of happiness, in addition to the human intellectual effort to acquire knowledge, as well as his spiritual effort to acquire moral virtues; it depends on the divine grace and grace that deems him worthy of achieving happiness and bringing him to happiness.

Great Bliss

Aquinas considers the highest level of happiness in spiritual knowledge and meeting God in heaven that none of the aspects and examples of happiness can be compared with this example, and achieving this example of happiness depends on acquiring knowledge and virtue, and the fulfillment of this is the hereafter.

Aquinas believes that none of the worldly forces can express the issue of true happiness. Man's happiness is outside the lust, and other things like wealth, and these things can not be considered the

criterion of true happiness. On the other hand, man himself is not the subject of happiness, and the actions of moral virtues are not considered true happiness and ultimate good for man.

According to Aquinas, the true understanding of happiness in this world is not possible and people are not able to understand the true happiness in this world and that ultimate happiness can not be achieved except in the hereafter and gaining the worthiness of man who is next to God.

Aquinas believes that the capacity of this world is such that it does not have the necessary preparation for the absolute happiness of man, and man can attain only some partial instances of happiness. On the other hand, he believes that man's free will and following God's commands and avoiding sins is something that increases man's worthiness in the hereafter to achieve true happiness.

Happiness includes theoretical intellect and practical intellect because, firstly, if happiness involves an action, it must require the highest human action. The highest human action means the action in which the highest human force moves towards the highest goal; theoretical intellect is the highest human force and the highest human goal is divine good; so happiness with pleasures is such an action. Aquinas goes even further and does not consider the mere actuality of reason to be sufficient for the purpose of happiness. Secondly, it is obvious that reflection and thought are desirable in themselves, but the act of practical intellect is not for the intellect itself; it is desirable for another purpose. As a result, the ultimate goal cannot be practical life, which is related to practical reason. In addition, since rational knowledge is dependent on the senses and the theoretical and natural sciences begin with the senses, the theoretical sciences are also limited and confined to sensory power and ability, which is not compatible with the perfection of human happiness. Therefore, theoretical sciences can not be faithful to the purpose of human happiness (Aquinas,1905,36). Even knowledge of differences like angels can not be the ultimate happiness and goal of man (Ibid 37). And it is only the vision of the divine essence that can be the ultimate and complete happiness (Majidi,2013,105).

Aquinas believes that physical vitality can not be the criterion of human happiness and physical happiness can not be considered the end of happiness; because it lacks durability and validity, and physical pleasures can not be compared with spiritual pleasures. Aquinas believes that happiness means reaching the ultimate goal - which is God - so the things that are necessary to achieve happiness; they must come together, and these include matters of intellect and will, which one must use effectively for one's own perfection.

Aquinas believes that the most important thing and goal in human life is to obtain divine satisfaction and goodness, which is absolute goodness and nothing but goodness is issued from Him. He believes that true happiness is the happiness that is achieved in the hereafter and the greatness is the degree of happiness of divine vision and proximity to Him, which can not be achieved except in the acquisition of intellectual virtues and perfections, and on the other hand, divine grace. Aquinas believes that rational perfection alone can not lead to true happiness, and that happiness will not be achieved unless there is divine grace and God deems man worthy of being with him. Aquinas believes that even moral virtues alone can not lead to ultimate happiness, and in addition to human virtues, one must also acquire the knowledge that is necessary to achieve happiness and it is the comprehensiveness of these two things and their overlap with each other that can ultimately lead a person to happiness.

Aquinas believes that achieving great happiness alone is beyond the reach of moral virtues and rational knowledge and its full realization is in the light of divine grace and bounty, even if one is adorned with moral virtues or even if one has acquired rational knowledge. But in the end, his attainment of great happiness depends on divine grace, which deems him worthy of this, and by his infinite forgiveness gives him the reward of happiness, otherwise, without divine grace and forgiveness, no happiness will be achieved.

Conclusion

People have always sought to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter in their lives, and many of them have paid more attention to and emphasized the ultimate happiness in their actions than any other aspect. Therefore, due to the attention of the human race to happiness in doing things, various thinkers and philosophers have studied the issue of happiness and have offered various definitions in this regard and happiness has been considered in different types and levels, but this issue has been different in the works of different thinkers. Saint Aquinas is one of the philosophers who has studied this issue and believes that true and ultimate happiness can be achieved not in the material world but in the hereafter.

He considers happiness to be the ultimate goal and absolute perfection of man, and regarding the creation of happiness, he believes that if we consider human happiness in relation to God, who is the essence of happiness, something is a creature; because divine happiness does not depend on anything else and originates from His eternal existence. He also considers the way to achieve happiness in the development of human knowledge and adornment with noble morals that all these things are pleasing to the Almighty and have been considered by Him. Therefore, according to this strategy of achieving happiness, it can be stated that he considers happiness in recognizing the divine attributes, which is a good deed and virtue, as well as reaching the Supreme Being. Aquinas believes that true happiness is eternal and unchangeable and there is no change in it, so what is eternal cannot be achieved in this world and will be permanently achieved in the hereafter, he considers true happiness. Regarding pleasure and happiness, which many consider to be true happiness, he says that they are transient and unstable; because the times are different and worldly pleasures are not lasting, and happiness that is not eternal can never be considered true happiness. Of course, the fact that he does not consider worldly pleasures and joys as true happiness does not mean that he does not value these pleasures as happiness, but, he considers happiness to have worldly and otherworldly levels and believes that one of the levels of happiness that is very weak and is not worthy of attention due to its transience is worldly happiness and once again he attributes happiness to the hereafter, the realization of which depends on the existence of good deeds of man in this world. In fact, it can be said that from the point of view of Thomas Aquinas, the worldly level of happiness is the prelude to achieving the ultimate level of happiness in the hereafter. Also, due to the fact that human beings are created, Aquinas believes that achieving any level of happiness, in addition to requiring human intellectual effort to acquire knowledge and his spiritual and spiritual effort to acquire moral virtues; it depends on divine grace.

In addition to the worldly and otherworldly levels that Thomas Aquinas considers for happiness, he has also considered levels for the hereafter happiness which he considers to be true happiness, the highest of which is the great happiness that is in knowing the spiritual and meeting God in heaven. He considered this type of happiness incomparable with other levels of happiness and considered its achievement dependent on acquiring knowledge and virtue. He believes that mere intellectual perfections or moral virtues can not achieve true happiness for man, and unless there is divine grace and God does not consider man worthy of neighborliness, happiness will not be achieved. In addition to moral virtues, one must also acquire the knowledge that is necessary to achieve happiness, and it is the comprehensiveness of these two things and their overlap with each other that can ultimately lead a person to happiness. But in the case of the grace of grace, in addition to the existence of these two things, there must also be divine grace; because this time is the highest level of happiness that brings man to absolute perfection and brings with it divine pleasure and meeting him in heaven. Therefore, achieving this level of happiness, which is very valuable, must be different from other levels. Therefore, even if a person is adorned with moral virtues or has acquired intellectual knowledge, in the end, his attainment of great happiness depends on divine grace, which deems him worthy of it, and

by his infinite forgiveness gives him the reward of happiness. Finally, it is necessary to mention that Thomas Aquinas considered the highest degree of happiness to be achieved in the Hereafter, and the reason for this is the lack of capacity of this world to make man absolutely happy and free, and to follow the divine commands and avoid sins in this world, it increases one's worthiness in the hereafter to attain true happiness.

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