



HOW TO BE HAPPY

Augustine, Aquinas, and Us

CONFESSIONS

X.29

*Quomodo ergo te quaero,
domine? cum enim te,
deum meum, quaero, vitam
beatam quaero.*

'How then, am I to seek
you, Lord? When I seek you,
my God, I am seeking a
blessed life.' (Hammond)

'How then am I to seek for
you, Lord? When I seek for
you, my God, my quest is for
the happy life.' (Chadwick)

THE ARGUMENT OF THE *CONFESSIONS*

X.29: Surely everyone wants a blessed/happy life – but how can they know *what happiness is* in order to want it in the first place? Were we happy in the past? In Adam? Have we partly forgotten? Have we forgotten completely?

X. 31—32: While people seek happiness in different ways (e.g. joining the Roman Army) they all agree that they are seeking joy, and joy in *truth*. Nobody wants to be happy and deceived.

X. 34—39: Because God is truth, happiness is joy in God.

QUESTIONS

Does everyone desire happiness?

Does desiring happiness rest on knowledge or anything like it?

Is it possible to be happy and deceived?

A CHANGE OF SUBJECTIVITY

Augustine's subjectivity is always
ordered by a total context

Subjective and objective are not
opposed

True joy is *joy in Truth*

Modern subjectivity is often set over
against its context

Subjective and Objective are divided
realms

True joy is self-verifying as experience

**THOMAS
AQUINAS**

**HAPPINESS
AND ETHICS**



HAPPINESS: THE FINAL END

A basic principle: all acts are for an end or purpose

The chain of ends reaches out to a final end: happiness

The final end must give coherence to the whole set of acts, and be appropriate to the agent: it is both an ethical and an ontological goal of human beings as such

(*ST Ia IIae 1.1*)

WHAT HAPPINESS COULDN'T BE

Happiness is not:

Anything desired for the sake of anything else (Wealth)

Anything which follows from a more fundamental good (Honour, Fame)

Anything indifferent between evil and good (Power)

Anything limited to the body (because of the reality of the Soul)

Mere pleasure (which is a *result* of true happiness)

Any good of the soul as such (because these are inherently limited)

Anything created (because even these are inherently limited) (ST Ia IIae 1.2)

WHAT HAPPINESS MUST BE

If happiness cannot be any of these things, it must be what completely fulfils all possible human desiring

Desire: an impulsion towards the Good as such (cf. Augustine)

Happiness has two parts: the thing itself, and our relation to it: God in himself, as the complete reality of the Good in person, and human enjoyment of God

How do we enjoy God? That depends on *what sort of things we are*

Thomas' answer: we 'see' God's own essence with the intellect, the human power for having, as the will is the power for seeking (ST Ia IIae 1.3)

SO WHAT ABOUT 'ETHICS'?

Ethics is the practical discipline of reaching happiness, the final end.

But God is a strange sort of 'final end'!

Aquinas' ethics of virtue and law take up pagan eudaimonism and place them in the framework of relation to an active God whose love precedes human effort, and whose transcendence opens up new categories of behaviour: charity.