

## The Naturalistic Conception of Happiness according to Saint Thomas Aquinas *from an Essentialist and Finalist Perspective*

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**ABSTRACT:** Happiness is an obsession for every human consciousness. It is a question that plagues human psychology, notwithstanding the varied and divergent answers that are formulated. Happiness is the object of a never-ending quest, and human actions are motivated by the pursuit of this goal. Happiness is, in fact, an aspiration common to all human beings. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, man is a lost being (as a result of original sin), and he must find God in order to be able to heal this wound in his nature, otherwise happiness for him would be a dream in color, in other words, a phantasmagoria. For the author, in fact, man's perfect and eternal happiness, which he calls beatitude, lies in intimate and loving contemplation, that is to say, in the superior and supernatural speculation of truth. From then on, we reproach the Angelic Doctor for not being able to reach the end of his reflection. Between nature and happiness, we argue for the inclusion of a third term, which would be culture, i.e. culture that takes into account the scientific, technical and strategic aspects. In short, if man is to be truly happy, he must integrate all the dimensions of life.

**KEYWORDS:** *contemplation, culture, God, happiness, nature*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a question that has preoccupied thinkers since Antiquity, and continues to be the subject of reflection by researchers today, despite their divergent views. Philosophers at least agree that the actions of human beings are motivated by the pursuit and hope of achieving the good, which should lead to salvation, i.e. happiness. So we can safely say that human beings, by their actions, are continually seeking an end. The end that human beings seek is that which will bring them pleasure and contentment. This end, it should be remembered here, is happiness. It is from this perspective that we can agree with Aristotle when he says that,

All the arts, all the methodical researches of the mind, as well as all our acts and all our thoughtful decisions always seem to have in view some good that we desire to attain; and this is what makes the good perfectly defined when it is said to be the object of all desires.[1]

Following the same logic as Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Saint Thomas Aquinas developed a finalist morality, meaning that all human acts are carried out with a view to an end. And Seneca, in his treatise *On the Happy Life*, with its highly revealing title, reiterated this in the following terms: "To live happily" he said, "is the wish of all"[2]. So, we understand that human actions are not anodyne or arbitrary; on the contrary, they are motivated by the idea of pursuing and achieving the end whose satisfaction will make us happier than ever.

At this point, it is important to clarify the concept in order to better understand and develop what follows. The etymology of the word nature, *natura*, comes from the Latin verb *nascor*, meaning to be born[3](itself derived from the past participle *nasco*). According to André Lalande, it refers to "a principle considered as producing the development of a being, and realizing in it a certain type".[4] Nature is everything that exists within man; the economy of man's material world, which passes independently through his will; it is what exists prior to the human being, that is to say, what exists independently of the intervention of man and the worldly sphere.

Nature also designates a value, a source of norms whose prominence is revived today by natural philosophers who recall the motif of thought in ancient Greek philosophy. In ancient Greece, nature was seen as that which envelops and surrounds us: form and matter. It is everything in nature, including the divinities

themselves: Apollos and Dionysus. Man is the meeting point and even the synthesis of the spiritual world and the corporeal world, in other words the created world. For man to truly attain happiness, Saint Thomas Aquinas invites him to draw closer to his God. Hence the meaning of “the return of the creature to his Creator [...] the Summa Theologica is in reality the return of man to God”. [5] The natural order can be glimpsed in the impressive regularity of phenomena, and consequently expressed in laws, according to a meaning of the term that Aristotle did not know, but which was already familiar to St Thomas. For him, natural law did not yet mean an algebraic equation, but rather, as Montesquieu would say, a necessary relationship that flows from the nature of things.

What is natural to every being is to accomplish the becoming that conforms to its specific form. When it is prevented from doing so, it suffers violence: its movement is constrained. This is why nature is also the principle of what is appropriate for each being so that it is not prevented from fulfilling its proper becoming: deprived of water, the plant dies. [6]

It follows that it is human nature to be happy. Happiness is an aspiration common to us all. In fact, the original meaning of happiness is *bonheur*, derived from the Latin *augurium*, meaning ‘omen’ or ‘luck’. Having said that, and as soon as we try to define it, happiness appears to be a complex notion, the elements of which may even seem contradictory. First of all, if we look at its etymology, we see that happiness is linked to chance. Happiness, like misfortune, is something that happens, that falls into our lap, without us expecting it. But at the same time, it is precarious and beyond any attempt at control. Happiness is often defined, in contrast to pleasure or joy, as a lasting state of satisfaction. [3] André Lalande writes that “happiness means favourable fortune; a state of complete satisfaction that fills the whole consciousness” [4]. In other words, it is, as Michel Nodé-Langlois puts it, “the supreme good that would suffice to fulfil all human expectations”. [6]

However, the question that remains is this: isn't the naturalist optimism of Saint Thomas Aquinas ultimately a rehabilitation of Aristotelian intellectualism? Between nature and happiness, is it not necessary to include culture as a third concept if human happiness is to be complete?

## 1. Remarks on the Residual Optimism of the Naturalistic Eudemonism of Saint Thomas Aquinas

Since ancient times, philosophers have made happiness the main focus of their thinking. Christianity seems to mark a break with this focus. It is often accused of proposing an ideal of life focused on eternal life, in contradiction with earthly happiness. [7] Aristotle's eudemonism and the Christian faith have developed a concept that is notable and highly influential in the history of ideas, even though they are in contrast. St Thomas Aquinas drew heavily from Aristotle and Christian theology to develop his ideas on happiness. We need to understand that all thought, whatever it may be, has a starting point. Alain Émile Chartier is right when he writes that “there is no other method of thinking than reading thinkers”. [8]

### 1.1. An Aristotelian Legacy

People want to be happy; that's all they want, because in a state of happiness they will surely be free from needs. Happiness is therefore, as Piat repeats, the supreme end of our actions, the end to which everything else relates and which therefore relates to nothing else: it is the supreme good. Philosophers are unanimous, more or less, on this crucial point; so powerful is the emphasis given to it both by the will of nature and the enlightenment of reason. [9] It is in this perspective that Aristotle never ceased to say that the Good is what all things tend towards. He goes on to say: “If, then, there is some end of our activities which we desire for its own sake, and the others only because of it, and if we do not choose one thing indefinitely with a view to another (for this would be done *ad infinitum*, so that desire would be futile and in vain), it is clear that this end can only be the good, the Sovereign Good”. [1] We see that “happiness is something perfect and self-sufficient, and it is the final end of our actions”. [1] According to Aristotle, man therefore has three lives or, more precisely, three levels of life corresponding to his complex tripartite nature. These three levels or degrees of life seem destined, in the concrete individual, to become one. At least, this is the ideal that Aristotle seems to propose. The natural life, which recognises man as a being of nature in the most general sense, is the first. It is made up of appetites, desire and pleasure. It is said to be irrational in the sense of unthinking, although it is not devoid of certain logical processes. It responds to the imperatives of bodily nature and the first stage of psychic life, such as feeding, reproducing, living in a group, striving for pleasure, etc. On the other hand, the rational life, which is the life of the directing soul, master of bodily nature, as Aristotle would say, is the second. It has to do with practical life. It is the place, properly speaking, of ethical virtue, voluntarism, responsibility and deliberation. It is the properly human life. Theoretical life, which is the life that Aristotle calls the divine element in man, is nourished by gratuitous contemplation. Strictly speaking, for the Stagirite, it is the source of human happiness. It is simple and divine, and therefore transcends human life, which it also completes.[10]

Contemplation gives man the best part of his enjoyment. It has something of the nature of the gods; it would be equal to them if we could free ourselves completely from matter, tear ourselves away from the law of becoming and fix ourselves forever in the thought of eternal truths. It is from the contemplative life that our

sweetest joys come, and because it is our highest energy, the one that comes closest to the “Pure Act”. [9] Ancient philosophers linked the pursuit of happiness to morality in a fundamental way. Hence the name eudemonism given to happiness and felicity. In this view, the good life is both a happy life and a morally fulfilled life. [11] The supreme good exists, and that good is happiness, even if its definition varies. What interests Aristotle is a human good, i.e. something that humans can achieve. Happiness is desirable in itself, and there is no higher end. Happiness is definitive, perfect and complete, and justifies all actions. In other words, happiness is autonomous and self-sufficient. [11] Aristotle has a trilogical conception of happiness. This translates into a distinction between three types of life, or three types of good. Each type of life encourages an inclination towards a particular way of pursuing and achieving happiness. These include the life of material enjoyment, the political life and the contemplative and intellectual life, as we have just discussed. To demonstrate the superiority of the contemplative life, Aristotle asks what constitutes the essence of man. To answer this question, we need to know the supreme end of a being, we need to know its specific function. For example, the ultimate purpose of the eye is to see clearly. The proper function of a being is to fulfil its nature excellently. So we need to find out what it is about a human being that makes him special. It is the realisation of this function that will enable us to achieve happiness. [11]

For Aristotle, what distinguishes humans from other living beings “is the active life of the being endowed with reason”. The specific difference between man and other living beings therefore stems from man’s rational soul... Man’s supreme end is therefore rational activity. [...] Completed happiness lies in contemplative activity and in the perfection of the act. [11]

From this Aristotelian affirmation, we must understand that reason is what constitutes and fundamentally distinguishes man from other living beings. In this same perspective, St Thomas will extend this idea in his own way, by inviting us to invest in this rational part. Considering that man is a being thirsting for knowledge, he must find complete satisfaction by taking an interest in divine things, which alone can enable him to reach his full potential. Thus, the Angelic Doctor “affirms in several places and with remarkable insistence that there is in the human intelligence a natural desire to see in its essence this God whom it knows through the things he has created. His conviction is based on the observation of the dynamism of the intelligence as such, and rests on the following argument: the intellect, when it considers an effect, naturally desires to know its cause. Once it knows the reason for the effect, its desire to know is not yet satisfied, because it still has to know the cause itself. Human intelligence is not satisfied by the discovery of the existence of a first cause of things, but its search then turns to knowledge of the very essence of this cause. This gives rise to astonishment in mankind; astonishment rekindles the desire to know and encourages research. As long as the essence of the cause remains hidden from the intellect, it cannot be said to have reached its proper perfection and completion, because the proper object of the intellect is the essence of things. It cannot therefore be said that the intellect is perfectly happy. [...] Consequently, perfect bliss requires the human intellect to attain the very essence of the First Cause. Perfect bliss consists in the vision of God”. [12]

Every intellectual creature tends by nature to see God. And if human nature is destined for such a concrete object as its ultimate end, it is obvious that it is the same reality that the will unconsciously pursues with its innate natural appetite. For the *raison d’être* of the will is none other than to experience the bliss that results from the completion of an intellectual being. It is therefore, in fact, the vision of God that man pursues, in every voluntary act, through a natural unconscious impulse. [13] Man, according to the Angelic Doctor, is a lost being and he must find God; there is a kind of lack that man experiences within himself, which is that of being reconciled with God (let us remember the myth of original sin) otherwise happiness remains the end of an endless quest. This is the whole project of the Holy Doctor. It is from this perspective that Francisco Viola, in his article entitled: *Félicité, béatitude et désir naturel de voir Dieu*”, with its rich content, points out that:

Wounded by original sin, man is no longer able to attain this felicity, which is itself relative and proportionate to his nature. It is true that he still has the possibility of reaching the First Cause through his intelligence [...] but it has become impossible for him to love God with a love that is natural and effective above all things. [12]

Without the existence of God, the Sovereign Good, the universal amplitude of our will, or its depth that no finite good can fill, would be a radical absurdity, or absolute nonsense. There is an absolute impossibility here that is inscribed in the very nature of our will, whose natural desire tends, not towards the idea of the good, but towards a real good (for the good is not in the mind, but in things) and towards an unrestricted real good that has the same amplitude as the natural desire for him. [14] In the eyes of the Angelic Doctor, man has a totally specific and superior nature, metaphysically and axiologically superior. Saint Thomas is going to establish the separation of good and evil, which can only be pronounced on the basis of the absolute master, i.e. God himself. These two innovations are only possible if Christian philosophy is integrated with pagan thought.

But Revelation lets us know that God has freely called us to an essentially supernatural beatitude, to see him immediately and to love him with a supernatural, perfect and unmissable love. St Thomas makes the essence of supreme beatitude consist in the essentially supernatural act of immediate vision of the divine essence. [14]

It is clear that Christian theology finds in Aristotle's thought a rational foundation that Revelation will confirm. Saint Thomas Aquinas constantly refers to the "Philosopher", i.e. Aristotle, in his long reflection on beatitude (happiness), which he developed in the *Summa Theologica*. Beatitude is the end of man's highest and most perfect activity. The supreme good that reason enables man to contemplate is divine truth. Saint Thomas sets out to demonstrate that other satisfactions do not enable man to attain the peace and permanence that only the contemplation of the absolute [7] provides. Explaining this Thomistic position, Jean-Louis Benoît states:

For Thomas Aquinas, perfect beatitude, which is the contemplation of God, begins in this life. It is fulfilled in the definitive vision of God in eternal life. Only God enjoys absolute beatitude. Souls receive a reflection of this in the light of their holiness. [7]

Moreover, the moral theory of the Angelic Doctor disqualifies happiness as being linked to glory, fame, wealth, carnal pleasure, political power - in short, to external goods, and even less to the whims of fortune, since these are unnatural and amissible, that is, volatile and evanescent. Rather, it resides in the divine covenant and friendship. It is from this perspective that we can agree with him when he points out that,

Man's ultimate felicity is not to be found in these external goods, called "goods of fortune", nor in the goods of the body, nor in those of the soul in its realm of sensibility, nor in the spiritual realm, in the acts of the moral virtues, nor in those of the intellectual virtues which belong to action, art, and prudence, [...] It therefore remains that man's ultimate felicity lies in the contemplation of wisdom relating to the things of God. [5]

As a result, it is safe to say that human beings find their salvation in divine knowledge. Etienne Gilson, one of the greatest commentators on Saint Thomas Aquinas, explains in the following terms: "Creatures," he says, "even those devoid of intellect are ordered towards God as towards their final end, and since all things reach their final end insofar as they participate in his likeness [...]. It is therefore immediately evident that the last end of an intelligent creature is to know". [15] It has to be said that the human being was created, and therefore ultimately willed and conceived by his Creator, not to be a thinking substance, for example, or a reasonable animal, but to be in his image. [16] Quoting Saint Thomas, Jean-Pierre Torrell was quick to point this out:

Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, "in delivering his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) [...], has shown us in his person the way of truth by which we can reach, by resurrecting, the beatitude of immortal life. [16]

## 1.2. A Judeo-Christian Reconstruction

Christianity takes a very different view of things and represents a real break with the Greek world, particularly on the question of happiness. Following the logic of the Bible in the book of Genesis, Christianity starts from the original sin (transgression of the divine order) committed by Adam in Eden and God's rejection of Adam and Eve, who were expelled from Paradise. Christianity takes up the idea of God's mercy and the promise of a Saviour who will redeem Adam's sin. Christ would be recognised by Christians (and not by Jews) as this awaited saviour, as Emmanuel, the son of the Promise. [17] He sacrificed his life on the cross to save humanity: resurrection at this price. For all that, he does not bring back with him the lost Paradise, but announces salvation and the return to happiness and joy in the afterlife, in the city of God, in the eschatology after the final judgement where each person will be judged and rewarded according to his or her life. Eternal happiness is therefore a promise obtained as a result of conduct that conforms to the expectations of the Gospel, concern for others and love for God. The temporal world remains the place of trial, suffering (for a long time, life on earth was referred to as a "passage" through the "valley of tears" and sometimes misfortune) and sin. Salvation and hope have replaced ancient eudemonism, and even if Christian theology has evolved over time, the Christian remains a conscience torn apart by the tragic condition of humanity. [17]

Happiness, then, is not of this world, because humanity's sinful condition, of which suffering and death are the consequences, prevents its realisation. The famous passage "you shall earn your bread by the sweat of your brow", "you shall eat wild grass, and the earth shall give you thorns and thistles" and "you shall die", a curse addressed to Adam. And the punishment intended for Eve: "I will multiply the pains of your pregnancies" and "you shall die", all inscribe humanity in a "curse", a word of woe spoken over the cradle of man and woman. Fortunately, this "curse" is quickly accompanied by a promise of salvation and hope. But happiness will not be restored here on earth, and we will have to prove ourselves in some way to benefit from it in the future world. [17] There is no doctrine more certain, or better established in the Church, than that of maintaining that in heaven the chosen will see God face to face, as He is, and that the eternal enjoyment of this vision in love will make them eternally blessed. St Thomas Aquinas obviously starts from this teaching of the Church as a first principle, in order to establish, on the one hand, what beatitude essentially consists of, and on the other hand, what conditions are required so that the intelligence of the chosen, far from being blinded by the unbearable brilliance of the divine light, can see God face to face. [18]

Human happiness is the object of wisdom. But wisdom cannot rest in man as in a spring; God, says the book of Wisdom, reserves the right to grant it to those who ask him. Happiness therefore depends on God. If man, succumbing to delusion, wants to determine Wisdom for himself, by fixing the knowledge of good and evil outside God, he not only falls into sin, but also loses happiness. [19] The Psalter, for its part, makes frequent allusions to this: happiness lies in the fear of God (Ps. 112:1) and the accomplishment of his will (119:1-3); in the forgiveness of faults (32:1-2) and the correction that sometimes accompanies it (94:12). Above all, an oft-repeated affirmation, we must trust in God if we want to be happy (84, 13). Fraternal charity also appears (41, 2). [19] Christ with Beatitudes overthrows the scale of values and proclaims happiness in the belonging to a spiritual kingdom. In order to be happy, it is necessary to have faith in Christ and his teachings. [19] But over time, Christianity, through the Church's Social Doctrine, will evolve by integrating the other dimensions, so that happiness will become truly complete and whole.

## 2. The Earthly Implications of the Christian Faith in Relation to the Idea of Happiness

Every intellectual creature tends by nature to see God. And if human nature is destined for such a concrete object as its ultimate end, it is obvious that it is the same reality that the will unconsciously pursues with its innate natural appetite; for the *raison d'être* of the will is none other than to experience the beatitude that results from the completion of an intellectual being. It is therefore, in fact, the vision of God that man pursues, in every voluntary act, through a natural unconscious impulse. [13] But he cannot avoid the delights of earthly life; he can make the most of them now. Happiness is not exclusively spiritual and supernatural, but it is also temporal and existential, and therefore has earthly implications.

### 2.1. The Individual Quest for Happiness

Do all men have the same final end? They all desire the perfection of their being, and that perfection is their end. But what does perfection consist in? Here begins the divergence of opinions. Some will seek it in riches, others in voluptuousness, and so on. In the same way, the sense of taste, made for everything that is sweet, desires and seeks the sweetness of honey. The truest and best sweetness is obviously that which pleases the healthiest taste. The true end of man is that which the best-disposed soul desires, and which is most capable of perfecting the human being. [20] What about earthly happiness? The question may seem out of place, given the persistence of the idea that religions. Particularly monotheistic ones, are not concerned with happiness here on earth. Yet the sophistication of the answers provided by Judaism, Christianity and Islam to this question proves, if proof were needed, that for them it has been a permanent preoccupation, if not a *raison d'être*. Judaism took many centuries to offer its followers happiness in the Hereafter, Islam developed earthly objectives from the very beginning, and Christianity itself eventually came up with ways of enabling its followers to enjoy a worldly life worthy of the name. [21]

Happiness is a permanent question that governs the whole of human life. According to Thomas Aquinas, the desire for happiness is the driving force behind all intelligent and voluntary activities, the only formally human activities. Bliss is the end of the intelligent subject and of him alone. In contrast to the vulgar Platonism that reserves felicity for the hereafter, for our theologian it is an experiential reality that is inchoate from the present. In its absolute fullness, it is certainly to be hoped for in eschatology, but it can already be, by way of a foretaste, in part, a present experience. This is how Saint Thomas distinguishes between two kinds of beatitude: "The (notion of) beatitude is said in two senses: one designates the imperfect beatitude in our present life; the other the perfect beatitude, which consists in the (intellective) vision of God (as He is)". [22] If every human being aspires to happiness, the whole question is to know whether deep and lasting happiness can exist here on earth. Religions have very different answers to this question. The two most opposed positions seem to be those of Buddhism and Christianity," says Frédéric Lenoir. While the entire doctrine of Buddha is based on the pursuit of a state of perfect serenity in the here and now, that of Christ promises the true happiness in the hereafter. Referring to the life of its founder – Jesus dies in a tragical manner at the age of 36 – but also because of his message: the Kingdom of God that he proclaims is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one, and bliss is yet to come: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:5). [23]

In an ancient world, including Judaism that tended to seek happiness in the here and now, Jesus clearly shifted the focus of happiness to the hereafter. This hope of heavenly paradise was to permeate the history of the Christian West and sometimes lead to extremism: radical asceticism and the desire for martyrdom, mortifications and suffering sought with a view to the heavenly kingdom. But with Voltaire's famous words – "Paradise is where I am" – from the 18th century onwards, Europe witnessed a remarkable reversal of perspective: paradise was no longer to be awaited in the afterlife, but achieved on Earth, thanks to human reason and effort. Belief in the afterlife – and therefore in a heavenly paradise – gradually waned, and the vast majority of our contemporaries began to seek happiness in the here and now. Christian preaching has been completely turned upside down. After insisting so much on the torments of hell and the joys of paradise, Catholic and Protestant preachers now barely mention the afterlife. [23]

The fastest-growing Christian movements – the evangelicals and charismatics – have taken this new situation on board perfectly, and are constantly asserting that faith in Jesus brings the greatest happiness here on earth. The profound truth of Christianity undoubtedly lies between these extremists: the rejection of life and morbid asceticism – rightly denounced by Nietzsche – in the name of eternal life or the fear of hell on the one hand; the sole pursuit of earthly happiness on the other. Deep down, Jesus did not despise the pleasures of this life and did not practise any “mortification”: he loved to drink, eat and share with his friends. We often see him “leaping for joy”. But he clearly affirmed that supreme bliss is not to be expected in this life. He did not reject earthly happiness, but put other values before it: love, justice and truth. He shows that we can sacrifice our happiness here on earth and give our lives for love, to fight injustice or to be faithful to a truth. The contemporary testimonies of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are fine illustrations of this. [23] True happiness is already within our reach, insofar as we awaken to the task of leading our lives in a way that is good and commit ourselves to it. As the sole aim of human action, it is the foundation of all ethics. Thomas shares this Eudemonism with Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and also with Augustine, but he understands it in conjunction with a platonising spiritualism that is not essential to him. In fact, he tried to develop the Aristotelian legacy by vigorously emphasising the intellectual and volitional interiority of happiness and its access. [22]

## 2.2. The Ecclesiological Challenge of raising People’s Social Status

The salvation offered in Jesus Christ on the initiative of God the Father, realised and spread by the work of the Holy Spirit, is a salvation for all men and of all men: it is a universal and integral salvation. It concerns the human person in each of his or her dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent. It is already beginning to be realised in history, because all that is created is good and willed by God, and because the Son of God has made himself one of us. Its fulfilment, however, lies in the future that God has in store for us, when we will be called with the whole of creation (cf. Rom 8) to share in Christ’s resurrection and eternal communion of life with the Father, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. This perspective shows precisely the error and deception of purely immanentist visions of the meaning of history and of man’s claims to save himself. [24] The salvation that the Lord Jesus bought for us “at a precious price”(cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pet 1:18-19) is realised in the new life that awaits the just after death, but it also embraces this world, in the fields of economy and work, technology and communication, society and politics, the international community and relations between cultures and peoples :Jesus came to bring the salvation that grasps the whole person and all people, opening them up to the marvellous prospect of divine filiation. [24]

To the men and women of our time, her fellow travellers, the Church also offers her social doctrine. In fact, when the Church “fulfils her mission of proclaiming the Gospel, she attests to man, in the name of Christ, his proper dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons; she teaches him the demands of justice and peace, in conformity with divine wisdom” This doctrine has a profound unity that springs from Faith in integral salvation, Hope in full justice and Charity that makes all men truly brothers in Christ: it is an expression of God’s love for the world that he so loved that he “gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). The new law of love embraces the whole of humanity and knows no bounds, for the proclamation of salvation in Christ reaches “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).[24] Happiness, then, means loving our neighbour with charity and solidarity, helping and identifying with the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Christian love, therefore, through the Church’s Social Doctrine, urges us to denounce, to propose and to commit ourselves to cultural and social projects aimed at effective action that encourages all those who sincerely care about the fate of mankind to make their contribution. Humanity understands ever more clearly that it is bound by a single destiny that requires a shared assumption of responsibility, inspired by an integral humanism based on solidarity. [24] Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are the guardians of our brothers and sisters wherever they may be. We form a single human family... Learning to practise the virtue of solidarity means learning to “love our neighbour has global dimensions in an interdependent world. The principle of solidarity leads to choices that will promote and protect the common good. Solidarity calls us to respond not only to personal and individual misfortunes; there are societal problems that are a cry for more just social structures. For this reason, the Church often calls us today not just to engage in charitable works, but also to work for social justice”. [25]

Jesus Christ, confessed in faith as the Son of God, came to share human life so that everyone might receive life and salvation from him. In the eyes of a believer, the encounter with a fellow human being also constitutes the welcoming of a person who benefits from the love of God in his Trinity, whatever his nationality or beliefs. [26] By using the category of “person”, says André Talbot, we are taking into account the relational capacity of the individual human being. What’s more, the path to a happy existence includes the fact that each person comes into their own and grows in humanity through the relationships they have with their fellow human beings. The density of these relationships involving a graduation from final/parental/conjugal love to occasional relationships. “Man, by his very nature, is a social being; without relationships with others, he can neither live nor develop his qualities” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 25). He is first and foremost a being of desire who

seeks his own joy in a respectful encounter with his fellow human beings in a spirit of solidarity. [26] Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* invited Catholics to “come to the aid of men of the lower classes by prompt and effective measures, since most of them are in a situation of immediate misfortune and misery”. [27]

### 3. The Naturalistic Optimism of St Thomas Aquinas as a Resurgence of Aristotelian Intellectualism

Thomism's own way of being a spiritualism is to be a radical theocentrism: everything comes from God and is maintained thanks to God. This is what the outline of the *Summa Theologica* makes clearest of all. Morality has no other meaning than this return movement of the reasonable creature towards God; it is the spiritual movement through which man realises within himself, through the personal acts of his freedom, the image of God that he already is by nature. This philosophical morality will become Christian as soon as the philosopher, concerned with the concrete, realises that historically there is only one way to return to God: Jesus Christ. [28] The crux of Aristotelian anthropology was precisely the theory of the uniqueness of the substantial form, in violent contrast to the traditional position of a body and soul dualism, stemming from Saint Augustine, and in fact very conducive to a certain Christian spiritualism, which is still rife today. Thomas Aquinas, despite all the rehabilitations, never recovered from this setback. [29]

#### 3.1. The Critique of the Anthropological Pessimism of Saint Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas's philosophical reflection on what it means to be human lies at the crossroads of various traditions. His syntheses were to play an important role in the development of the Church's magisterium and in modern developments in philosophical anthropology, with the renewal of the notion of the person. As a commentator on Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas used the notion of the soul, conceived as a form of the body, to account for a certain unity of the human individual. He articulates this approach with the notion of the image as he receives it from the Augustinian tradition of reading Genesis, and envisages, within this framework, a particular place for the human intellect. The horizon of Beatitude conceived as a living relationship with God leads him to reformulate the philosophical notion. Everything in man is subordinated to the activity of the mind: this is a fundamental theme of all Aristotelian ethics. To define the ideal of human life, the Stagirite looks for man's proper function, and it is indeed man and not just the soul that is involved; he will therefore look for an activity that is proper to man, an activity that places him on a higher level than other living beings: it is therefore on the basis of this higher activity that the Stagirite will define the ideal of human perfection. This would be an extreme form of spiritualism and intellectualism that contradicts the fundamental inspiration of Aristotelian ethics. [30] The Angelic Doctor would take up this thesis and develop it further, hence the affirmation of the resurgence of Aristotelian intellectualism in his work.

Thomassian anthropology is both rooted in age-old wisdom and reshaped by the call of the Bible, and contrasts with the anthropology of his contemporaries, which is affected by Platonic dualism (extended by Descartes). It understands man in his unity, which the duality of body and soul fails to grasp, and explains the integration of the bodily dimensions of goods and the desire for them in the pursuit of happiness. It can be summed up briefly in three points: intelligence as the supreme principle; the necessary interiority of the will to happiness; and the intellection of the good, the condition of the free will. [22] In his ephemeral life, fraught with perils and pitfalls, man finds it very difficult to achieve the happiness he covets. Assailed on all sides by the pleasures of the world, carried along in spite of himself in the whirlpool of passions that drags him along, he either fights energetically against all these dangers, and wins; or he lets himself slide without resistance down the fatal slope that, with dizzying speed, precipitates him into the abyss; and then all hope of happiness is gone for good. It is quite certain that this happiness, which man pursues so ardently, is not physical happiness. [31] Human conduct cannot be reasonable if it is not directed towards the goal that is appropriate to human life, and therefore to the satisfaction of the true spiritual and bodily needs of human personal and social life.

Marked by a veritable revolution in man's relationship with nature, [33] humanism today is often characterised by a claim to self-sufficiency: it is a secular humanism. Thrilled by the progress of science and technology, modern man has tended to think that he can be self-sufficient, if not as an individual, then at least as a collective, and that he can achieve his full potential by his own efforts, without recourse to powers outside himself. The prospect of a transcendent destiny fades in such a context, as does that of the help of grace. [34] “There is no longer any question of salvation; it is the most hateful of all evasions”, wrote a contemporary author. [35] In the eyes of many, in fact, the idea of promoting man to a transcendent and supernatural goal can only be alienating: it is an escape into a dream, a renunciation by man of his true fulfilment, which is immanent in earthly life. The idea of grace, for its part, will be seen as essentially demobilising; leading man to rely on illusory help, it prevents him from taking himself in hand and relying on himself as the only authentic factor for fulfilment and salvation. [34] In modernity, man distances himself from the *theos* and the cosmos, and places himself in the *anthropos*. Man is going to prepare his own world on the basis of science, technology, law, morality and economics. The norm is not received, but produced. In contemporary philosophy, it is a question to revising modern philosophy, of refounding it along various lines. Man is thus freed from the precedence of God.

Man is said to be dependent on a set of constraints outside and within him, which overshadow the process of freedom, which can only be defined in terms of liberation. We need to understand that there are three motifs running through the history of philosophical ideas. These include form and matter, the first motif developed during the period of antiquity; nature and grace as the second motif that characterises the medieval period; freedom and determinism are the third motif praised by the philosophers of modernity. Marx, Nietzsche and Freud all called modernity into question once again, saying that we had to get rid of obscurantism and ignorance by relying on freedom.

Values are then affirmed, not by reference to an ideal universe, but within what is given to us *hic et nunc*. The science of moral judgements therefore rejects any appeal to various transcendences (God, etc.). [36]

### 3.2. Culture, an Essential Component of Integral Human Happiness

Between nature and happiness, we argue for the inclusion of a third term, which would be culture, but culture in the full sense of the term, i.e. culture considered as a set of human productions. We will look at man's own responsibility in the quest for happiness. Culture is man's own universe, taking into account the scientific, technical and strategic aspects. It should be noted that there are many definitions of the concept of culture: in 1952, the American anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn counted more than 150... UNESCO gives the following definition: "In its broadest sense, culture may today be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group. In addition to the arts and letters, it encompasses lifestyles, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs". [37] In fact, what Jacques Chatau  calls "laborious consciousness" [38] in the order of the "philosophy of reticularity" [38] must be inscribed in human psychology, i.e. in the common imagination. Because "Africa", he says, "cannot dream of emergence by thinking of an industrial society to which we would have access without the intermediary of an industrial society, supposedly open to the systemic valorisation of manual labour". [38] We understand the need to bring manual labour back to the heart of philosophical concerns, and indeed to the centre of politics, since it is a question of moving from a society of assistance to a society not of consumption, but of production, so that the export of a *Cogito* of labour takes on meaning and consistency, in place of the *Cogito* of representation. Africa may eventually, through exogenous emergence, become a consumer society; but endogenous emergence means that it must first aim to become a production society. [38]

If human happiness is to be complete and integral, it needs to be placed in a slightly broader context that is, taking into account man's existential and fundamental needs. In addition to the loving contemplation of God, man must respond to the demands of the body and the spirit, while placing it in a perspective of wholeness. There is no fundamental antagonism between matter and form, or the natural and the supernatural: the thesis that consists in showing the existence of a type of happiness that would be perfect on the one hand, and an imperfect happiness on the other, is not admissible. Happiness is unique; it is not divisible or separable, let alone hierarchical. At the risk of getting bogged down in an irremediable duality by separating earthly happiness from heavenly and supernatural happiness, we need to understand that man has a dual nature that is neither contradictory nor opposable. If we are to realise our full potential and hope to achieve happiness, we must place ourselves on two equal levels by satisfying our natural needs in a disciplined and rational way, but also and above all by drawing closer to our Creator by loving and contemplating Him.

But once these advantages have been given, nothing is done yet, and everything can turn to our greatest misfortune. Happiness comes from within; "it dwells in the temple of the soul". It springs from the depths of our intellectual activity. And physical goods only contribute to it insofar as this activity itself regulates the time and limit of their use. [9] Happiness, according to Aristotle, requires, in addition to virtue, a retinue of external goods, such as health, and goods of wealth, not only wealth, but family satisfactions, friends, rank in society, and even ornaments, such as beauty. [39] He adds

There are other things, the deprivation of which alters the happiness of men who lack them: nobility, a happy family, beauty. A man cannot be said to be happy if he is repulsively deformed, if he is of bad birth, if he is isolated and childless; still less can a man be said to be happy if he has children or friends who are completely perverse, or if death has robbed him of the virtuous friends and children he once possessed. So, we repeat, it seems that happiness still needs these useful accessories; and this is why fortune is often confused with happiness, just as others confuse it with virtue. [1]

Man, being constituted by a spiritual and corporeal nature, occupying, as it were, the boundaries of the one and the other, it seems that what is accomplished for the salvation of man concerns the whole of creation. Indeed, the lower corporeal creatures are seen to serve man, and are in a certain way subject to him. [40] Not only must we not place man in a supernatural and transcendental sphere by muzzling his corporeality at the risk of sinking into an exaggerated theocentric reductionism, but we must also not cut him off from his divine closeness and intimacy by glorifying self-sufficiency and being proud of self-referring to his own capacities, because there is danger in that.



#### IV. CONCLUSION

All human action properly so called is directed towards an end that is external to the act, like the house that the architect builds or the health that the doctor causes; sometimes, on the contrary, it is self-sufficient and is not directed towards anything else. But all these acts, whether self-sufficient or directed towards an external object, must be ordered in relation to each other and, all together, towards a single end. This is not just a question of convenience. It is the very existence of these acts that is at stake. We will therefore not understand the meaning of Thomistic morality if we do not see the rigorous parallelism of the argument by which we are going to establish that all human actions are ordered with a view to a single final end, with those which, in Thomistic metaphysics, establish the existence of God. [41] In fact, the existence of a transcendent end in relation to which man must situate himself raises him above all the partial ends that mankind sets for itself. [42] Man participates in happiness; he is dependent on the natural and spiritual world. Thus, with the Angelic Doctor, we see two theologies: natural theology and revealed theology. The morality of Thomas Aquinas is finalist, because it has a supreme end in view, and naturalist, because it is based on a precise and realistic anthropology of human nature. Man must fit into the order of the Universe willed by God, in other words, do what he was created to do: know and love God. Because morality is concerned with the human being as a being composed of soul and body, it must integrate all sensitive inclinations, all passions, all loves, so that man can reach his end in all its integrity: this end is happiness in the natural order, and Beatitude in the supernatural order. And, in a complementary approach, we maintain that Saint Thomas Aquinas's philosophy of happiness must include a third concept, which would be culture, understood in its broadest sense, if man's happiness is to be truly complete.

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