

# God, human happiness, and the mystery of it all



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In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas argues that true human fulfillment stems from one's closeness to God. Worldly pursuits, like fame or glory, fall short in comparison to the happiness that comes from arriving at a vision of the divine essence. This beautiful, or perfect happiness, comes from a God who is deeply mysterious. His ways are often unknown, and His nature is difficult to comprehend. What is the destiny of human happiness, and what is the nature of the mystery that encompasses it?

The nature of God's mystery unfolds as humans try to understand Him. In the unassisted human mind, the effects of God are better known than God himself (S. Th. I. Q. 1, A. 2). Human understanding is cloudy and indirect, as they see an incomplete representation of their creator. When humans try to define this creator, there is "no name or word that can express the divine essence" (S. Th. I, Q. 13, A. 1). The capabilities of the human mind are inadequate. God is ever present as the "unmovable mover" that exists "in all things", yet he remains "not comprehended" (S. Th. I, Q. 8, A. 1). This paradox reflects incomplete human knowledge. Thus, God is not mysterious because of his nature; he is mysterious due to limited human intellect. Humanity's confusion is caused by its own shortcomings. These flaws stem from the earthly human condition. Humans have a worldly experience, as they "represent Him imperfectly" and grasp knowledge in a way "that belongs to creatures" (S. Th. I, Q. 12, A. 1). This way of being is inherent in human nature, and it creates distance between humans and God. This innate separation is caused by God, since he is "the cause of existence of all things" (S. Th. I, Q. 8, A. 1). Human happiness, which requires closeness to

God, is hindered (S. Th. II, Q. 3, A. 8). God's mystery is caused by flaws in the human condition, which He himself has created.

Are humans destined for unhappiness? For Aquinas, the answer to this question is no. Although God cannot be known comprehensively by human reason, divine revelation elucidates the “mysteries...of faith” (S. Th. 1, Q. 13, A. 1). Human imperfection is met with divine salvation. God does not abandon the creatures He creates. Even without revelation, Aquinas argues against the notion that humans cannot speak about Him in a reasonable way. Humans can describe God analogically (Discussion, 11/21/2016). God is not entirely unknowable, so humans have the potential to reach happiness. This happiness is made more possible by God empowering the human mind to see his existence “clearly demonstrated” from his effects (S. Th. 1, Q. 2, A. 2). Although God cannot be seen completely, humans know that the source of their happiness exists. Humans can be pointed in the heavenly direction. They are separate from God “in essence”, but they are close in that “he is the author of the power of understanding” used to comprehend him (S. Th. I, Q. 12, A. 2). Humans are at a distance from God, but they are not disconnected from Him because reunion is possible. Aquinas is optimistic about the prospects of human happiness. God's mystery is able to be recognized by human reason and unraveled by divine revelation. With human happiness destined to be fulfilled, what is the purpose of God's mystery that clouded it in the first place? God's mystery and the human imperfections that cause it lead to happiness.

Human knowledge is limited, so God reveals himself fully through “Divine revelation...that is Truth” (S. Th. I, Q. 1, A. 1). By putting humans in a state

of incompleteness, God can serve as the source of completion. Happiness becomes guaranteed. The divine revelation that leads to this happiness “ must be accepted by faith” (S. Th. I, Q. 1, A. 1). Humans are transformed into creatures of trust and devotion. Happiness becomes a matter of belief, which cannot be taken away. This trust is increasingly necessary as “ human knowledge often fails”, while God “ is always true...and stable” (S. Th. II, Q. 2, A. 3). Humans are placed in a state of need, as they flounder in uncovering God’s mystery on their own. Human imperfection, which causes God’s mysterious nature, allows God to be the ultimate provider. Happiness has a never ending source. When humans try to name God, they cannot “ adequately represent what God is”, because they “ represent him imperfectly” (S. Th. I, Q. 13, A. 2). Humans are humbled by His existence, as His mysterious nature relieves them of the responsibilities of total knowledge and perfection. A greater, more perfect happiness awaits them. Human beings can “ know an effect”, which produces “ the desire to know about the cause what it is” (S. Th. II, Q. 3, A. 8). By keeping his nature a mystery, humans are drawn towards him, and subsequently to happiness.

For Aquinas, God’s mystery points the way to happiness, since Aquinas believes that “ Unless he was God, he would not have brought a remedy” (S. Th. II, Q. 3, A. 8). God’s mystery is accounted by human imperfections, and these flaws serve to shape and guarantee the path to happiness. Humanity is drawn in towards God by the redemption of its imperfections, which is the foundation of happiness. Ultimately, Aquinas aims to teach us what it means to live our best lives. God is the ultimate savior, and living a life of faith and piety brings us closer to Him. We, along with Aquinas and the rest of

humanity, can uncover the mystery of God and delight in it every step of the way.