

Augustine or Madame Bovary?

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Aquinas claims that humans can be happy, and that this happiness is achieved by the satisfaction of desire. Lacan claims that human happiness is impossible, as impossible as the satisfaction of desire. The arguments of each are presented and compared. The argument of Aquinas in a first section, Lacan's argument in the second section; a final section develops a Thomistic response. Along the way, Madame Bovary will be presented as a paradigm of the Lacanian argument, while Augustine makes a paradigm of the Thomistic argument. The dilemma between them can thus be posed as the question, *Can we be happy?*

Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas writes that, *ille qui habet omnia quae vult, ex hoc est beatus, quod habet ea quae vult* (Ia IIae q.3 a.4). His argument for this claim involves his notions of human actions, deliberate will, the ultimate end, natural appetite, and finally happiness. In this first section we will proceed by discussing each in turn. Once each has been elaborated and clarified, we will conclude by presenting this argument in as schematic form as possible. Let us therefore begin with human actions.

Human actions are those, *quae sunt propriae hominis inquantum est homo* (Ia IIae q.1 a.1), and these are the actions of which the agent is master. A human is master of his own actions *per rationem et voluntatem*. Therefore, Aquinas concludes, human actions are those *quae ex voluntate deliberata procedunt* (*ibid*). But all actions, *quae procedunt ab aliqua potentia, causantur ab ea secundum rationem sui obiecti* (*ibid*). Human actions evidently proceed from some power: *ex voluntate deliberata procedunt*. Therefore they are caused by a deliberate will in accordance with the nature of its object. This nature, as Aquinas adds, is an end. After all, unless the object of the will were an end, an agent would be able to move without the intention of an end; but if an agent were be able to move without the intention of an end, *non magis aget hoc quam illud* (Ia IIae q.1 a.2). The object of a deliberate will is thus an end, or good.

Furthermore, though, the object of a deliberate will is the ultimate end, or perfect good. To see this, consider an example of deliberate willing. Let us imagine a man who holds as an end a trip to the mountains. Because this is his end, he will deliberate about the means to achieving it; and insofar as he wills the trip to the mountains, he wills these means. However, a trip to the mountains will likely turn out to be for him a means toward a further end. If we should ask him why he holds a trip to the mountains as an end, he might reply that it would be good for his health. In this way, his trip to the mountains is an instrument for the achievement of another end, namely health.

But if we should ask him next why he holds health as an end, he might reply that it is instrumental for the achievement of another end, such as clear thinking. Obviously we might ask him the same question again -- why do you hold this as an end? -- but we cannot ask him the same question *ad infinitum*. It is necessary that his chain of ends cease, we could say "come to an end," in some ultimate end or perfect good. Otherwise nothing will be an end or good for him.

Like causes, ends are ordered in succession. *In omnibus enim quae per se habent ordinem ad invicem*, Aquinas writes, *oportet quod, remoto primo, removeantur ea quae sunt ad primum* (Ia IIae q. a.4). Avicenna observed that with motions which are ordered

in succession, each depending on its predecessor, it is clear that unless there is a first motion, there will be no subsequent motions. Aquinas adopts the argument elsewhere and applies its logic also here to ends or goods. Unless there is an ultimate end, he observes, a perfect good, there will be no subordinate ends or goods. Indeed, there won't be any ends or goods at all.

Necesse est, he adds, *quod omnia quae homo appetit, appetat propter ultimum finem* (Ia IIae q.1 a.6). The argument draws from elements we have already discussed. First of all, whatever someone desires, he desires under the aspect of a good. That is to say, someone desires something only if he considers it a good. But if he doesn't desire it under the aspect of the perfect good, he at least desires it as something tending toward that perfect good. As Aquinas writes most generally, *semper inchoatio alicuius ordinatur ad consummationem ipsius* (*ibid*); more germane to the goods and the perfect good of the present argument, *omnis inchoatio perfectionis ordinatur in perfectionem consummatam, quae est per ultimum finem* (*ibid*). In sum, then, all desire is ordained to the ultimate end.

Not surprisingly, Aquinas supposes that we have a natural desire for this ultimate end. First of all, *in processu rationalis appetitus, qui est voluntas, oportet esse principium id quod naturaliter desideratur* (Ia IIae q.1 a.6). Additionally, *principium autem in processu rationalis appetitus est ultimus finis* (*ibid*). The apparent problem with this supposition is that different people desire different things, not just in their daily lives, but even when circumstances compel them to clarify the precise nature of their ultimate end. While so far we have not considered other obvious objections to the overall argument, we should pause to consider Aquinas's answer to this one, as it illuminates one of the argument's main premises.

Aquinas answers the objection by pointing out that the ultimate end is spoken of in two ways: *uno modo, secundum rationem ultimi finis; alio modo, secundum id in quo finis ultimi ratio invenitur* (Ia IIae q.1 a.7). Following the first way, everyone actually desires the ultimate end, since *omnes appetunt suam perfectionem adimpleri, quae est ratio ultimi finis* (*ibid*). But following the second way, not everyone does; in fact, few do. For some desire riches as that in which the nature of the ultimate end is found, even though riches are not able to meet the necessary conditions of the ultimate end (Ia IIae q.2 a.1). And others desire honors in this way, even though honors no more than riches meet these conditions (Ia IIae q.2 a.2). Still others esteem still other doomed candidates.

Aquinas compares the ultimate end to sweetness in order to illustrate the distinction. Sweetness is pleasant to every taste, but to some the sweetness of wine is most pleasant, while to others this is the sweetness of honey. And of course to still others, still other sweet things are most pleasant. This presents a problem: among them all,

which is most pleasant *simpliciter*? To solve the problem he adopts Aristotle's solution to it: *Illud tamen dulce oportet esse simpliciter melius delectabile in quo maxime delectatur qui habet optimum gustum* (Ia IIae q.1 a.7).

Next he imports the solution to the similar problem with ultimate ends. Here is the problem: although everyone actually desires the ultimate end *secundum rationem ultimi finis*, not everyone desires it *secundum id in quo finis ultimi ratio invenitur*; as we saw above, some locate it in riches, others in honor, still others in still other things. Which is the ultimate end *simpliciter*? That end is most complete *simpliciter*, he argues, *quod tanquam ultimum finem appetit habens affectum bene dispositum* (*ibid*). Only the person with well-disposed affections -- in short, the virtuous person -- actually desires *id in quo ultimi finis ratio invenitur*.

But desire of this is nonetheless a natural human desire (Ia IIae q.1 a.6); thus, Aquinas would say, everyone desires it *potentially*. Indeed, even a person with badly-disposed affections -- that is to say, the vicious person -- does so. For as we have seen, Aquinas believes that there is a natural order of ends, all of which are ordained to the ultimate end. Therefore, when a vicious person desires as an ultimate end something like riches, which are not *id in quo ratio ultimi finis invenitur*, even this desire is ordained to that ultimate end that only the person with well-disposed affections *actually* desires.

Now we come to happiness. As it turns out, only this virtuous person will be happy when he has what he wants, since only the virtuous person wants what is truly the ultimate end.

To begin with, we should notice that Aquinas seems to contradict himself concerning happiness. In one place he writes that, *beatitudo nominat adeptionem ultimi finis* (Ia IIae q.1 a.8); in another he writes that, *ultimus . . . finis vocatur beatitudo* (Ia IIae q.3 a.1). It would seem at first glance, then, that happiness is both the acquisition of the ultimate end and the ultimate end itself. But there is no contradiction: Aquinas privileges the first meaning by saying happiness *nominat* the ultimate end, while subordinating the second meaning by saying happiness merely *vocatur* the ultimate end. (The active *nominare* signals this privilege, while the passive *vocari* marks the second as subordinate.) As he writes, *Finis dupliciter dicitur scilicet cuius et quo: idest ipsa res in qua ratio boni invenitur, et usus sive adeptio illius rei* (Ia IIae q.1 a.8). Properly speaking, therefore, happiness is not that thing in which the nature of good is found; that is the ultimate end. Happiness is the use or acquisition of that thing. *Beatitudo dicitur ultimus finis*, he concludes, *per modum quo adeptio finis dicitur finis* (Ia IIae q.3 a.1).

Just as everyone desires the ultimate end in one sense, *secundum rationem ultimi finis*, so too therefore does everyone desire happiness, *secundum communem rationem*

beatitudinis (Ia IIae q.5 a.8). After all, the *communis ratio* of happiness is that it is the possession of the perfect good, and as we saw, the perfect good is the object of everyone's will insofar as everyone supposes that it completely satisfies the will (Ia IIae q.5 a.8). In this way, *appetere beatitudinem nihil aliud est quam appetere ut voluntas satiatur* (*ibid*). As Aquinas adds: *Quod quilibet vult*.

But there is another sense in which not everyone actually desires happiness. *Alio modo possumus loqui de beatitudine*, just as we discovered an alternate way of speaking about the ultimate end -- that end of which the possession is happiness, *secundum specialem rationem, quantum ad id in quo beatitudo constitit* (Ia IIae q.5 a.8). The reason not everyone actually desires this, needless to say, is that we make mistakes concerning that which matches the *communis ratio* of happiness. Nonetheless, Aquinas believes, everyone *potentially* desires happiness. Even when we do not know where happiness is found, nevertheless we preserve our natural, albeit potential, desire for it.

Before concluding this section, we should remind ourselves of the claim whose defense we are marshalling: *ille qui habet omnia quae vult, ex hoc est beatus, quod habet ea quae vult*. Now we are able to see how Aquinas should consider it true if understood in one way, *simpliciter de omnibus quae vult homo naturali appetitu* (Ia IIae q.5 a.8), but false if understood in another, *de his quae homo vult secundum apprehensionem rationis* (*ibid*). For obviously a person exercising his reason can, and as a matter of fact often will, make mistakes, especially about something so elusive as the ultimate end and the happiness that is the reward of its possession. Many make such mistakes and esteem as the ultimate end riches or honors or other insufficient goods. However, when reason makes no mistakes here, so that someone knows that in which the ultimate end is truly found, such a person will be happy once he has what he desires.

And now, finally, we can collect the notions we have been discussing and summarize the argument.

(1) All human actions are actions caused by a deliberate will according to the reason of an end and good. (2) For there to be such ends and goods, there must be an ultimate end and perfect good to which all deliberate willing is ordained. (3) Either there is such an ultimate end and perfect good, or all human action is pointless (from (2)). (4) Human action is not pointless. (5) So there is such an ultimate end and perfect good (from (3) and (4)). (6) The desire of this ultimate end and perfect good is natural to humans -- not just in the banal sense in which everyone desires *secundum rationem ultimi finis*, but in the substantial sense in which everyone desires, at least potentially, *id in quo ratio ultimi finis invenitur*.

(7) Happiness is the use or possession of this ultimate end and perfect good. (8) The desire of happiness is natural to humans (from (6) and (7)) -- not just in the banal sense in which everyone desires *secundum communem rationem beatitudinis*, but in the substantial sense in which everyone desires, at least potentially, *secundum specialem rationem beatitudinis*. (9) Whoever actualizes this natural desire -- by discovering the ultimate end (*id in quo ratio ultimi finis invenitur*) with reason -- and then gets what he desires, will be happy, precisely because he has what he desires (from 8)

Aquinas leaves no doubt that such happiness is possible: *et eius intellectus apprehendere potest universale et perfectum bonum, et eius voluntas appetere illud* (Ia IIae q.5 a.1).

Lacan

Although Lacan does not address exactly this argument, in some places he addresses its conclusion, while in others he addresses many of its premises. Not surprisingly, his is critical of both. As far as the conclusion is concerned, his theory makes a stark contrast. To counter Aquinas's assertion that, *Ad beatitudinem homo ordinatur per principia interiora* (Ia IIae q.2 a.4), he produces Freud as a witness that *pour ce bonheur . . . il n'y a absolument rien de préparé, ni dans le macrocosme, ni dans le microcosme* (L'Éthique de la Psychanalyse, p.22).

Generally, Lacan says that our experience subverts *l'ensemble d'Aristote*, from which the argument of Aquinas is derived. According to Lacan, this experience renders their moral theories *surprenante, primitive, paradoxale, et, à la vérité, incompréhensible* (L'Éthique, p.14). In particular, it is one feature of this experience, a feature so central to human experience that we may call it our primordial experience: the *Spaltung*, or splitting of each person. We must begin Lacan's critique of Aquinas by introducing it.

This *Spaltung* occurs when the baby sees himself in a mirror. According to Lacan, he compares the image of himself in a mirror -- where he appears to be a unified whole -- with his own experience of fragmentation. This image then becomes his ideal, or as Lacan says, translating Freud's *Ideal-Ich*, his *je-idéal*. But this *je-idéal* is really an other. It therefore introduces a permanent alienation into the person, by situating *l'instance du moi . . . dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu* (Ecrits, p.94). This primordial experience of alienation is pre-social and pre-linguistic, a result of our insufficient bodies: *l'effet chez l'homme . . . d'une insuffisance organique de sa réalité naturelle* (Ecrits, p.96). However, it is quickly exacerbated by social interaction and then the acquisition of language.

For all along the baby's mother has been nursing him and meeting his other bodily needs. Once the mirror-stage occurs, however, and he begins to identify himself with a unitary and fantastic image, his *je-idéal*, he also begins demanding that the mother who meets these needs also recognize and love this ideal. Importantly, the demand is never separate from the needs, for as Lacan writes: *C'est par là que la demande annule (aufhebt) la particularité de tout ce qui peut-être accordé en le transmuant en preuve d'amour* (Ecrits, p.691). The baby ignores particular needs as such and considers them all tests of the mother's love. This demand for love is insatiable, however.

The mother has also been through the Mirror stage, and has therefore also suffered her own *Spaltung*. She too has transmuted her particular desires into demands for love, love of her own *je-idéal*. In this way, she makes the same demand of others, and most likely of him. "Love me," she demands, where her *me* is not herself as she really is but her own imaginary self. This problem is compounded by the fact that she offers this imaginary self as an object of love not to his *je-idéal*, something wholly invisible and unknown to her, but rather to him as he really is. But remember his demand: that she offer herself not to him as he really is but to *his* imaginary self, his own *je-idéal*. Not surprisingly, then, *l'amour, c'est donner ce qu'on n'a pas à quelqu'un qui n'en veut pas*. The mother gives her *je-idéal*, which she doesn't have, to her baby, who doesn't want it. Likewise, he gives his *je-idéal*, something he doesn't have, to her; she doesn't want it either.

Lacan captures this double-jeopardy when he says, *le désir de l'homme est le désir de l'Autre* (Ecrits, p.84). For the genitives here are ambiguous. Are they objective, so that human desire is desire *for* an other? Or are they subjective, so that human desire is desire *by* an other? According to Lacan, both. He exploits this grammatical ambiguity to emphasize the prevalence of so-called alterity in human life.

Most fundamentally, human desire is *by* an other, the *je-idéal*. Speaking of *amour-propre*, Lacan suggests that this passion, *apporte à toute relation avec cette image . . . une signification . . . qui me fait être dans une telle dépendance de cette image, qu'elle vient à lier au désir de l'autre tous les objets de mes désirs, de plus près qu'au désir qu'ils suscitent en moi* (Ecrits p.427). In other words, the primordial fascination with the *je-idéal*, that first other with which one identifies, attracts to itself all the desires of the subject by means of *amour-propre*. The baby's desires, and later the desires of the adult, become quite literally desires *by* that other.

Also, however, human desire is *for* an other, for another's love. It is *toujours désir au second degré, désir de désir* (L'Éthique, p.24). This desire first manifests itself as a desire for the mother. It begins, as we saw, in the complex of need and demand that

structures the relationship of the infant and his mother. As we also saw, though, this demand can never be satisfied; the mother fails to love him as he demands to be loved. Here we find, as a result, the famous Lacanian formula for desire: *C'est ainsi que le désir n'est pas ni l'appétit de la satisfaction, ni la demande d'amour, mais la différence qui résulte de la soustraction du premier à la seconde, le phénomène même de leur refente.* (Ecrits, p.691) Desire outstrips need and compels the subject to seek that object which he thinks will meet his demand. Once the subject recognizes that his mother cannot do this, he goes in search of someone else, even something else, which he hopes can.

This displacement of his original desire for the mother onto other objects, all equally doomed to fail, functions like a language -- specifically, by the linguistic process of metonymy. Lacan defines metonymy as *la combinaison d'un terme à un autre* (Ecrits, p.622). When the mother fails, therefore, the unconscious substitutes another object by a combination of terms. The logic of this combination is different for every individual's unconscious, and perhaps even for every substitution. Proust offers us an amusing example of such combination in this admission: *Car souvent j'ai voulu revoir une personne sans discerner que c'était simplement parce qu'elle me rappelait une haie d'aubépines* (p.233).

Were Lacan to have analysed Proust, he may have found any number of metonymic combinations that linked these later friends to his original desire for his mother. But here the links seem to have been few: he moved from his mother to hawthorn because they often walked together beside hawthorn bushes on Sunday afternoons, and he moved to friends who reminded him of hawthorn, obviously, because they became combined in his unconscious with his mother. Following a crude Lacanian analysis, then, Proust's original demand for his mother's love, and the desire that filled the gap between this demand and his needs, was displaced, first onto hawthorn, then onto these later friends.

But neither the hawthorn nor the friends would have been able to love him as his mother failed to. For hawthorn cannot love at all, and friends are no more able to love a *je-idéal* than a mother. Indeed, no thing, and no one, can love a *je-idéal*, since it exists only in the subject's imagination. Desire may be *la métonymie du discours de la demande*, or simply *la métonymie de notre être* (L'Éthique, p.371), but this metonymic movement takes the subject inevitably from one disappointing object to another.

Accordingly, desire is insatiable. As Lacan writes, *Cet ego . . . est frustration dans son essence* (Ecrits, pp.249-50). This frustration is not the frustration of the subject, properly speaking, it is the frustration of the *je-idéal* with which the subject tries to identify. The more he makes this identification, furthermore, the more he seeks the

satisfaction of this alter-ego, *tant plus s'approfondit pour le sujet l'aliénation de sa jouissance* (Ecrits, p.250). Desire is not just insatiable; the more one seeks to satisfy it, the more distant its satisfaction becomes.

Let us now summarize Lacan's argument so far. (1) There is an irreparable split in the subject brought about by his look in the mirror. (2) This split subject has needs, and he uses these needs as a test of the other, demanding that the other satisfy them, but doing so as a way of demanding recognition and love from the other of his own other, the *je-idéal*. (3) However, the other person is split as thoroughly as himself, and so the other can never meet this demand (from (1) and (2)). (4) Desire is this gap between need and demand. (5) When the subject recognizes that an object of demand cannot meet his demand, however, his desire moves metonymically and settles on another object of demand, another other, so to speak (from (3) and (4)). But (5) brings us back again to (3), and will continue to do so for as long as the subject continues to pursue what he desires. Indeed, the more fervently the subject pursues his desire, the more quickly he will be brought to the disappointment.

A paradigm of this sort of disappointment is Madame Bovary. She begins with an imaginary concept of herself. So far as Flaubert reports it, however, it is not formed as a baby before a mirror, but rather by her adolescent immersion in romantic novels. She conceives of herself as the princess of her literary imagination, and from each of her lovers she demands not only that they be the knights of romantic literature, but also that they love this *je-idéal*. When she is not married at midnight by candlelight, and after she discovers that her husband is nothing more than a mediocre *officier de santé*, her desire moves metonymically to Rodolphe.

With him she pursues her desire more fervently than ever, but she eventually recognizes him for *sale séducteur* he is -- no knight himself, he does not even love her as the inachievable queen, but rather as one in a series of conquests. Next comes Léon, a renewed demand for imaginary love, and the last in a series of disappointments -- this time bringing her to total despair. *D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie*, she begs, *cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait?* (p.357) The fruit of this despair is of course suicide. Madame Bovary therefore makes a paradigm of Lacan's argument because, although we have no evidence of her encounter with a mirror, we do see her caught in the cycle of desire that brings her from (3) to (4) to (5), and back to (3) again. As for Antigone, whom Lacan presents as another such paradigm, the inevitable result of indulging desire is death.

We are now in a position to match the schema of this argument against the schema of Aquinas's argument in order to make a precise critique of it. Before we do,

however, a proviso is in order. There are many points of contact between our discussions of these two authors so far, most of them points of friction. A full critique would map them all, even those points at which subordinate premises or arguments of Lacan meet subordinate premises or arguments of Aquinas.

For example, Aquinas claimed early on that it is characteristic of humans to be masters of their actions. This was a premise in the subordinate argument defending the first premise in the main argument -- the premise that all human actions are actions caused by the deliberate will according to the reason of an end and good. Lacan has good reasons for rejecting this subordinate premise. After all, according to his theory, it is instead characteristic of humans to be slaves to their desire. A full critique would pursue this and other such disputes further.

This critique will therefore be full incomplete. For brevity's sake, we will restrict ourselves to those points at which main premises and arguments meet -- the ones we have now schematized. Keeping this in mind, let us pinpoint which parts of the main Lacanian argument challenge which parts of the main Thomistic argument. There are two major points of contact.

First of all, Lacan's argument provides grounds upon which to reject (5) of the Thomistic argument: (5) There is an ultimate end and perfect good. According to Lacan, there is no ultimate end or perfect good. As he writes of the psychoanalyst and *le Souverain Bien, il ne l'a pas bien sûr, mais il le sait qu'il n'y en a pas* (L'Éthique, p.347). In his idiom, this Sovereign Good would have to be an other who can meet the demand of the subject. But as we saw, every other suffers the *certaine déhiscence*, the *Spaltung* that makes them all insufficient for the task. And even if there were such an other, one who suffered no *Spaltung* and could therefore meet the subject's demand, this demand would insist on a love for the *je-idéal* from which the subject would remain alienated himself. In short, (2) and (3) of Lacan's argument meet and dismiss (4) and (5) of Aquinas's argument.

In the second half of that argument we find these claims: (7) Happiness is the use or possession of this ultimate end and perfect good. (8) The desire of happiness is natural to humans (from (6) and (7)). (9) Whoever actualizes this natural desire -- by discovering the ultimate end (*id in quo ratio ultimi finis invenitur*) with reason -- and then gets what he desires, will be happy, precisely because he has what he desires (from 8). In a way, Lacan willingly grants that happiness is the use or possession of the Sovereign Good (i.e., (7)). This is why he thinks the demand for happiness presupposes the Last Judgment -- for only there, in the company of an other who might not only meet the demand of love

but even heal the fissure in the loved subject, only there would the satisfaction of desire and thereby happiness be possible.

Lacan also seems to think that the desire of happiness is germane to humans (i.e., (8)). After all, the *Spaltung*, need, and demand that produce this desire are germane to everyone -- everyone born into the natural insufficiency of a human body. What he contests, however, is (9). Actualizing this natural desire will for him mean, as we have seen, giving way to one's desire. But this places the subject firmly within the cycle of desire with which the Lacanian argument concludes. Rather than happiness, the fruit of this cycle is inevitable despair, as we saw with Madame Bovary. It entails believing one after another of others to be capable of meeting one's demand, only to discover each time that they cannot. In short, then, (3) through (5) of Lacan's argument meet and dismiss (7) through (9) of Aquinas's argument.

We concluded the last section with Aquinas's sanguine estimation of the possibility of finding happiness: *et eius intellectus apprehendere potest universale et perfectum bonum, et eius voluntas appetere illud* (Ia IIae q.5 a.1). We do well to conclude this one with Lacan's cynicism: *On perd son temps, on le sait, à rechercher la chemise d'un homme heureux, et ce qu'on appelle une ombre heureuse est à éviter pour les maux qu'elle propose* (*Ecrits*, p.615).

Aquinas, again

It is tempting to think that Aquinas's belief in God saves him from Lacan's conclusions. For in the second question of the *Prima Secundae*, Aquinas discusses several candidates for *id in quo finis ultimi ratio invenitur*. Not surprisingly, this turns out to be God: *Deus est ultimus finis hominis* (Ia IIae q.1 a.8).

But before he arrives at this conclusion, in the eighth and final article of that question, the arguments of the earlier articles reject the following candidates in turn: wealth, honors, fame or glory, power, some bodily good, pleasure, some good of the soul, and last, any created good. There isn't space here to consider all them, or even one in much detail, but in each case the individual argument leads us to see how someone who took one of these candidates to be his ultimate end would ultimately be disappointed by it. Consider just the last candidate, created good, since it subsumes all the others.

No created good can be the ultimate end, Aquinas argues, because the ultimate end is a perfect good, lacking nothing, and thus leaving the will of one who possesses it completely satisfied. His arguments against each of the preceding candidates have shown that possession of any one of them leaves the will unsatisfied. Wealth, for example,

whether it is natural or artificial, is ordained to the support of human nature, not its happiness. This final article shows that even all of them together -- wealth combined with honors, fame and glory, etc. -- remain insufficient. For they are all created goods, and created goods are ordained to the good of the Creator: *Universitas autem creaturarum . . . non est ultimus finis, sed ordinatur in Deum sicut in ultimum finem* (Ia IIae q.2 a.8).

Should we remove God, the first cause and ultimate end, from this universe, and value only created goods, even all created goods together, there would be no genuine ends -- as we saw from Aquinas's earlier adaptation of Avicenna's argument about causes. True enough, someone might value only created goods for awhile, taking them as ends, and one or more of them as his ultimate end, but their acquisition would eventually reveal their illusory claim to be ultimate. None of them meets the criteria of an ultimate end, and without an ultimate end, there can be no ends at all. Someone who investigated such a universe without illusion would therefore find, as Lacan wrote, *le chiffre de sa destinée mortelle* (Ecrits, p.100). The goal of Lacanian analysis is to emerge able to recognize this *chiffre* without despair.

Before returning to Lacan, however, let us introduce Augustine, who illustrates the Thomistic point, just as Madame Bovary made a paradigm for the Lacanian argument. Augustine's *Confessionum* can be profitably read as an autobiographical rendering of the second question of the *Prima Secundae*. For he narrates his life before conversion to Christianity as a futile search for satisfaction. Sex, learning, Manicheanism, friendship -- each initially promises him this satisfaction, but each in turn disappoints him.

We might say he holds each in turn as an ultimate end, only to discover that none meets the criteria of such end: each left him wanting more. Up to the point of his conversion, then, Augustine's autobiography bears a resemblance to *Madame Bovary*: each of them believes a series of created goods to be ultimate ends, only to possess them in turn and find disappointment. Unlike Madame Bovary, however, whose final disillusionment brings despair, and quickly suicide, Augustine's final disillusionment prepares him to receive the words of St. Paul and accept God as the ultimate end. Rather than be disappointed by this conversion, as just another in a series of seductive illusions, Augustine finds in it the satisfaction he sought: *inquietum est cor nostrum, donec resquiescat in te* (I.1)

Do Augustine and the second question of the *Prima Secundae* therefore offer an escape from the cycle of desire schematized by the Lacanian argument? Properly speaking, does God offer such an escape? At first glance it might seem so. After all, if Lacan were to believe in God, and thus in *le Souverain Bien*, he would at least have to

reformulate the following premise: (3) the other is split as thoroughly as the subject -- its wholeness being as impossible as his -- and so the other can never meet the subject's demand.

Once the subject makes a demand of God -- rather than his mother, or any of the innumerable others that his metonymic movement may lead him to desire -- it seems that this other can meet his demand. For God did not suffer a *Spaltung*, since, as Aquinas argues elsewhere, He is perfect unity: *Est autem maxime indivisum, inquantum neque dividitur actu neque potentia, secundum quemcumque modum divisionis, cum sit omnibus modis simplex* (I q.11 a.4). When God loves the subject, then, He does not present the subject with an imaginary self, a *Je-Idéal* let us say; instead, he presents Himself as He is.

But it does not follow that God can meet the demand of the subject, at least not the God in whom Aquinas believes. For we must remember that the subject demands that the other love his own *je-idéal*. However, the Christian God does not love *je-idéals*, he loves humans as they actually are, regardless of their imperfections. As Aquinas writes: *Deus omnia existentia amat. Nam omnia existentia, inquantum sunt, bona sunt: ipsum enim esse cuiuslibet rei quoddam bonum est, et similiter quaelibet perfectio ipsius* (I q.20 a.2).

Thus, if all humans suffer from a *Spaltung*, an irreparable split, and all humans demand that the external other love their internal other, the *je-ideal*, then not even God can satisfy human demand. In other words, even if Madame Bovary had turned to God after Léon, and conceived Him, finally, as *un être fort et beau, une nature valeureuse, pleine à la fois d'exaltation et de raffinements* (p.357), she would eventually have been disappointed with Him as well. For a good priest would eventually have informed her that God does not love her as Guinevere, Isolde, or even Lamartine's Madame Charles, but rather as the adultress, the liar, and the idolater that she is. So long as she continued to demand love for her imaginary perfection, therefore, her disappointment in God would have been as great, or greater, than her disappointment in her husband, Rodolphe, and Léon. So long as she refused to see herself as she was, in other words, she could never have accepted God's love.

Does this mean that Lacan is right? Only if *all* humans do indeed suffer from an irreparable split, a false concept of themselves as perfect, and an inexorable demand that an other love them for this imaginary perfection. A Thomistic rejoinder will thus have to argue that not all humans suffer from these conditions. To argue that *no* human has suffered from them would be foolish, for as Flaubert said, and truly: *il y a un millier de Madame Bovarys qui pleurent à chaque jours dans les provinces*. The plausible

Thomistic rejoinder must therefore argue that *some*, but not *all*, humans have suffered these conditions. In short, the Thomistic rejoinder must argue that Lacan describes a pathology, not human nature as such.

Aquinas himself offers no such argument; however, we can build an argument out of several of the elements of his thought -- some of which we have already discussed. Furthermore, just as Augustine served as a paradigm for our earlier Thomistic arguments, so too several passages from the *Confessionum* will confirm this Thomistic rejoinder.

The ultimate end, according to Aquinas, is God; conceiving our ultimate end as anything short of God will leave us disappointed, as we have seen. If Lacan is right, moreover, and we all demand love from the objects of our desire, we will demand that our ultimate end love us. Therefore, when we conceive a created good as an ultimate end, we will demand love from it, from him or her. So too, when we conceive the Uncreated Good as our ultimate end, we will likewise demand love from Him.

Now, Aquinas argues that there is an important difference in the way humans love and the way God loves. As we have seen, God loves everything insofar as it exists (I q.20 a.2); indeed, his love brings everything into existence and goodness: *Sed amor Dei est infudens et creans bonitatem in rebus (ibid)*. This is why He does not love us for our perfections; rather, His love brings our perfections about. Humans, by contrast, must love things that already exist, and not because they exist, but rather because we think they are good: *bonitas eius, vel vera vel aestimata, provocat amorem quo ei volumus et bonum conservari quod habet, et addi quod non habet; et ad hoc operamur (ibid)*. Thus, when we think of something as imperfect, or lacking in goodness, we do not love it.

This difference between divine love and human love will cause an important difference to the psychology of one who holds God as his ultimate end, as opposed to someone who holds any created good, especially a human being, as his ultimate end. For when someone holds a human being as his ultimate end, he will, as we have seen, demand this person's love. However, because humans love something in virtue of the perfection they perceive in it, someone conscious of his imperfection can expect his demand for human love to be met only if he can deceive the person whose love he demands into believing that he is perfect.

The obvious way to do this will be for him to project an imaginary, perfect self, the *je-idéal*, and demand that the other love this. But, as we saw, the lover has no knowledge of this imaginary self, precisely because it exists in the subject's own imagination. All that the other sees is the subject as he really is. And yet, even if the subject can successfully project an image of perfection, as sports heroes or movie stars do

nowadays, should an other love this imaginary self the subject will remain unsatisfied, alienated from the object of the other's love.

All humans begin by holding another human as their ultimate end: the mother. She is the first object of desire, the first other whose love we demand. Because she is human, though, we recognize that we must exhibit goodness in order to expect her love. Mothers may love unconditionally, but the baby certainly feels this love more when he is good than when he is bad. In any case, most children learn that the mother cannot meet this demand, for the reasons we discussed earlier. Thus, as we have seen, he adopts other others whose love he demands. The metonymic movement of his desire has therefore begun, and for every created good upon which it settles, the subject will recognize that insofar as this object can love, he can only expect it to meet his demand if he projects an imaginary self.

Contrast this charade with someone who holds God as his ultimate end. If Lacan is right, as Aquinas would surely agree, the believer will demand that God love him. So long as he is conscious of God's nature, however, he will know that God loves all existent things, regardless of their goodness. Thus, he will not need to construct an imaginary self in order to secure the love he demands. By the very act of holding God as his ultimate end, he secures the love he demands. In fact, he had that love all along; only by holding God as his ultimate end, now, does he demand it. This is not to say he will not have an *je-idéal*.

As mentioned, everyone begins by demanding the love of a parent, and thus projecting an imaginary self whom they expect the parent to love. Even someone who begins to hold God as his ultimate end from a very young age will bear traces of this *Spaltung*. But habituation can reduce it. The adult convert will also preserve his imaginary self, and inasmuch as he spent his life before conversion demanding that others love it, he will have to work much harder to reduce it. In both cases, then, an imaginary self will likely remain; the extent to which it attracts the objects of desire -- in the way discussed earlier, through the dynamics of *amour-propre* -- will depend on the firmness with which the subject holds God as his ultimate end -- in short, the depth of his faith, and the weakness of his pride.

By contrast, someone who holds a created good as his end, but especially another human or group of humans, will develop a firmer and firmer *je-idéal*. Madame Bovary remains the paradigm of this pathology. In order to attract the love of each man, she tries harder each time to project an image of romantic perfection; thus, the more vehemently she demands their love, the more dependent she becomes upon her imaginary self. Not surprisingly, she pays no heed to her financial troubles: they play no role in her *je-idéal*.

But the movie star makes another, more contemporary example: in order to attract the love of his fans, he literally projects an image of Hollywood perfection, and the more vehemently he demands the love of his fans, the more dependent he will become upon this imaginary self. Again, in such a case the *Spaltung*, and the self-deception it requires, has become a pathology.

This Thomistic rejoinder finds confirmation in the *Confessionum*. According to the argument we have developed, we should expect Augustine before his conversion, when he held a series of created goods as his ultimate ends, to have a *je-idéal*, along with the self-deception it requires, whereas we should expect him after his conversion, when he held the Uncreated Good as his ultimate end, to have a much weaker *je-idéal*, to be almost, or perhaps even entirely, free of self-deception. And this is exactly what we find.

Recounting the day during which he made his final decision to convert, he says of himself before conversion: *tu autem, domine, inter verba eius retorquebas me ad me ipsum, auferens me a dorso meo, ubi me posueram, dum nollem me adtendere* (VIII.7). Before his conversion, then, Augustine had deceived himself, pretended that he was someone other than he really was. This pretence was therefore not only the image of himself that he presented to himself, his *je-idéal*, but also the image he presented to a series of others whose love he had demanded: his parents, his teachers, his girlfriend, his friends, etc.

Reflecting upon his conversion, he describes it as a confession of misery, of his sin and imperfection, but also as trust in God's mercy: *affectum ergo nostrum patefacimus in te confitendo tibi miseras nostras et misericordias tuas super nos, ut liberes nos omnino* (XI.1; cf. X.3). The result of this confession and trust, he reports, is, *ut desinamus esse miseri in nobis et beatificemur in te* (*ibid*).

For happiness to be possible, according to the Lacanian argument, Augustine must receive the love he demands. If the *Spaltung* is a congenital human condition, then this love must be love of his *je-idéal*. But of course the Christian God does not love *je-idéals*, He loves real people with all their imperfections. If Augustine is right, then, despite the *je-idéal* that he brought to God in his conversion, he accepts His love of himself, as he really is, trusting in God's mercy. When he personifies *continentia*, the voice that urges him to convert, she says, *proice te in eum, moli metuere; non te subtrahet, ut cadas: proice te securus, ecipiet et sanabit te* (VIII.11). After he follows *continentia*, moreover, he claims that by her power he has overcome his internal division: *per continentiam quippe colligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus* (X.29)

Next he reads St. Paul, and believes -- that is to say, he holds God as his ultimate end. After this conversion, as we know, he exhibits a remarkable frankness and self-knowledge. Needless to say, this self-knowledge has been present throughout the *Confessionum*, but his description of himself after conversion shows how he acquired it. Trusting in the God who is now his ultimate end, he asks: *quis ego et qualis ego? quid non mali aut facta mea aut, si non facta, dicta mea aut, si non dicta, voluntas mea fuit? tu autem, domine, bonus et misericors* (IX.1; cf. X.3). By believing that his demand for love will be met even with his imperfections, Augustine no longer needs to deceive himself about himself, as he did before his conversion, when he needed to promote an image of perfection to secure the love of others; now, confident in the love of the one he loves, regardless of his imperfection, he is free to see himself as he is.

The result, if he is to be believed, is not only self-knowledge, but also *beatitudo*. This is what we should expect, however, according to the Thomistic argument. For so long as someone has actualized his natural desire -- a desire for *id in quo finis ultimi ratio invenitur*, that is, God -- then *ille qui habet omnia quae vult, ex hoc est beatus, quod ea quae vult*. Augustine's conversion presents us with the case of someone who exemplified the Lacanian argument before, but the Thomistic argument after. Insofar as we believe him, then, the Thomistic argument survives the Lacanian challenge, and the *Spaltung* upon which it draws, by demoting it from the congenital condition it claims to be, to a widespread pathology that every human should hope to overcome.

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