

## ST. THOMAS ON LOVE OF SELF AND LOVE OF OTHERS

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### 1. Introduction

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, beatitude, or happiness, is the ultimate end of each person's deliberate actions. Different persons, and even the same person at different times, may identify beatitude with different conditions: one person may identify his beatitude or his ultimate end, as wealth, another as power, still another as union with God. But, all agree, say Aristotle and St. Thomas, that each person is acting for the sake of happiness or beatitude, conceived as an ideal condition. This position is at the core of Thomas's ethical theory.

Various critics of Thomas have for a long time argued that this "eudaimonistic position" logically implies that other people are viewed only as mere means in relation to the perfection of one's nature. In other words, Thomas's position that the ultimate end of all one's actions is one's beatitude seems to imply that one cannot act for the sake of someone else's good for their own sake.

The present analysis examines this objection: How does Thomas's theory avoid egoism? Before answering this question, we must first briefly examine Thomas's notion of love as a disposition, and his distinction between love of concupiscence and love of friendship.

### 2. Love as a Disposition

According to Thomas, desire, in the broad sense, is an act of tending toward a good. If such a tendency follows upon a natural form it is a natural appetite. Desires that follow upon sense knowledge are acts of the sense appetites, and desires that follow upon intellectual knowledge, that is, tendencies toward understood goods, are acts of will.

Prior to these acts of loving there is in the sense appetite or will a favorable disposition or proportion toward the sensed or understood good. One senses or understands a good, and this good attracts the sense appetite or will, that is, this known good disposes the appetite toward it. This disposition or modification of the appetite to be

favorably disposed toward a good, produced by the known good, is love. Thus, Aquinas describes love as follows: "the desirable (*appetibile*) moves the appetite, introducing itself, in a way, into its intention, and as a consequence the appetite really tends toward the desirable, as the goal of its motion...Therefore the first change in the appetite produced by the desirable is called love..."<sup>1</sup> So, for example, one smells a hamburger, this sensed good affects one, that is, moves one's sense appetite, disposing it favorably toward itself. Or if one gets to know someone, his goodness may move one's will to be disposed to his good, not for one's own sake but simply as his good—a disposition produced in one's will by the known good, this time an understood good. The disposition toward a known good (on either level) is what Aquinas means by love.

### 3. Love of Concupiscence and Love of Friendship

In speaking of the act of loving, Thomas distinguishes between two types. To love (as an act) is always to will good to someone. So, one can speak of loving that which one wills to a person. For example, one loves wine or health if one wills those to another or to oneself. This, says Thomas, is love of concupiscence. Or one can speak of loving the person to whom one wills good: thus, willing food and health to one's children is to love one's children. And this is love of friendship or love of benevolence. One can love other persons with either type of love. If one loves another because he is good company, or because one can learn from him, then one loves him with a love of concupiscence. On the other hand, to will good to another for his own sake and not just as a means toward some benefit to oneself is to love him with a love of friendship. Some critics of Thomas, in effect, interpret him as saying, or implying, that we love ourselves with a love of friendship, but all others, God included, only with a love of concupiscence.

This, of course, is a misinterpretation. Aquinas clearly teaches that we ought to love God and our neighbor, not just with a love of concupiscence, but with a love of friendship. Charity is a supernatural friendship with God, in which both God and neighbor are loved with a love of friendship, whereas irrational creatures are loved only with a

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<sup>1</sup> ST I-II 26.2.

love of concupiscence.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Thomas teaches that, even on the natural level, that is, even before one brings grace into the picture, we should love God more than ourselves; otherwise our love is deficient. Answering the objection that one's love of God is for the sake of enjoying him, and therefore one's love of God is based ultimately on one's love of self, Thomas says:

That a man wills to enjoy God pertains to that love of God which is love of concupiscence. Now we love God with the love of friendship more than with the love of concupiscence, because the Divine good is greater in itself than our share of good in enjoying Him.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, for Aquinas it is quite clear that God is to be loved for his own sake, not merely for the sake our perfection;<sup>4</sup> indeed God should be loved wholly and without measure (that is, one cannot love God too much).<sup>5</sup>

In fact, Thomas calls love of concupiscence love only *secundum quid* while love *simpliciter* is love of friendship: "For that which is loved with love of friendship is loved *per se* and *simpliciter*; that which is loved with a love of concupiscence is not loved *simpliciter* and according to itself (*secundum se*) but is love for another (*alteri*)."<sup>6</sup> Love of concupiscence relates to its object as accidental, and what is accidental must be reduced back to what is substantial. Of course, nowhere does Thomas say that the only substance one can love in the manner of a substance is oneself; on the contrary, everywhere he teaches the opposite.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ST II-II 25.3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 26.3 ad 3. See also the previous objection and its answer: "The part [that is, the human person as a member of the community of the whole universe] does indeed love the good of the whole, as becomes a part, not however so as to refer the good of the whole to itself, but rather itself to the good of the whole."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27.3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 27.5.

<sup>6</sup> ST I-II 26.4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Critics could reply, however, that while Thomas in many places affirms that we should love others for their own sake, his position that every deliberate action is for the sake of one's happiness is incompatible with that claim. One might reply that Aquinas's Christianity led him to affirm genuine disinterested love of others and of God, but that his philosophical notion of beatitude is logically inconsistent with that position. To see that this view is mistaken we must explore further Thomas's notions of love of neighbor and love of God.

#### 4. Love of Neighbor and Love of Self

The distinction between love of concupiscence and love of friendship can be misunderstood. The Swiss Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren made famous the distinction between *eros* and *agape*. According to Nygren, *eros* is the acquisitive drive, that is, the drive toward self-perfection. Greek philosophy, said Nygren, held *eros* to be supreme and the fundamental law or pattern of reality and life. But, according to Nygren, the Christian idea of *agape* is radically different. *Agape* is the desire for someone's else's good. It is pure, disinterested love. In *agape*, one transcends *eros* and wills good to another for his own sake, with no concern for oneself.<sup>8</sup> Now, on first reading of Thomas on love, one might be tempted to identify his love of concupiscence with Nygren's *eros*, and Thomas's love of friendship with Nygren's *agape*.

But that would be a mistake. Thomas does not say that love of concupiscence is love of self and love of friendship is love of another. Rather, love of concupiscence is found in every act of love: it is not a distinct act, but an aspect of every act of love. In every act of love, I will a good (that's love of concupiscence) to a person (whether another or myself, and that's love of friendship). So if I will health to another, my love of that health is love of concupiscence. If I will health to myself, my will's relation to the person to whom I will that good—namely, myself—is love of friendship. And so Aquinas does not think love of concupiscence is bad, something we have to set aside, to attain love of friendship. Rather, in every act of love, there is both love of concupiscence and love of friendship.

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<sup>8</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, translated by Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

How is it possible for human beings to love others with a love of friendship? Aquinas's answer is that good is the cause of love, which, of course, means a good that is proportionate to the one who loves. "Now the proper object of love is the good; because, as was said, love denotes a certain connaturality or complacency of the lover toward the one loved. Now to each thing that is a good which is connatural and proportionate to it."<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the good is only my individual perfection—in fact, he has just denied it in the text in question (I-II, q. 27, a. 1). Rather, the sort of object which is "connatural and proportionate" to me moves or attracts my will. If that object is (or would be) instantiated in a distinct subject, then I am inclined toward the good of another.

One might ask: which type of love is Aquinas speaking of here—love of concupiscence or love of friendship? The answer is, both. What is connatural and proportionate to me moves or affects my will, so that I have a favorable disposition toward it. To will the proportionate object as a substance is to love *simpliciter*; to will a proportionate object as an *accident* is to love (something) as directed to someone, that is, to that person whose fulfillment it is. One can will the existence and actions of other substances as means toward one's own perfection—loving them with a love of concupiscence. But one can also will the being and perfection of substances other than oneself, precisely as substances—and that is to love them with a love of friendship.<sup>10</sup> Thus, there is no sharp split between love of concupiscence and love of friendship: one wills the being of oneself and of those connatural and proportionate to one.

But Aquinas's explanation of our love of others becomes clearer when he explains that similitude also is a cause of love. A person naturally loves himself, but also those who are similar to himself, because insofar as they are similar they are united to him.

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<sup>9</sup> ST I-II 27.1.

<sup>10</sup> Also, my life, that is, my substantial being, is connatural and proportionate to me, and so I will it to me—here, of course, I am willing my substantial being as though it were an accident in me—life is good to or for me, but really, my life just is me.

Therefore the first kind of similitude [whereby they both have the same form in act, rather than just in potency] causes love of friendship or benevolence. For, from the fact that two things are similar, having as it were one form, they are in a certain way one in that form, just as two human beings are one in the species of humanity...And therefore the affection of one tends toward the other, as it is one with himself, and he wills good to him as to himself.<sup>11</sup>

On Aquinas's view, each agent acts for its own good—that is its nature. But the agent's natural tendency or love does not stop at his own individual perfection. One's love also naturally extends toward those who are united with oneself. Then, one wills good to these others as to oneself. They are, as it were, "other selves." One must recall that for Thomas, "similitude" means a union or unity together with difference.<sup>12</sup> Two things are similar just in case they are one, or have the same form, in one respect, but differ in other respects. Thus, one naturally loves oneself, and those with whom one is in communion. This same point is made earlier in the *Summa Theologiae*, where Thomas is speaking of an angel's love of another:

As was said above, it is true of both angel and man that he naturally loves himself. But, that which is one with a thing, is (in a way) that very thing. Hence everyone loves that which is one with himself...Hence it should be said that one angel loves another with a natural love insofar as the other is one with him in nature.<sup>13</sup>

Aquinas also at times refers to this similarity or union that grounds love of another as a "*communicatio*." There are different types of friendships, and they differ as being based on different connections or unions. Thus, he distinguishes between a friendship of "consanguinity," a friendship between co-citizens, and one between co-workers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., I-II 27.3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., ad 1 and ad 2.

<sup>13</sup> ST I 60.4c.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. DDN, chapter 4.

This union, which is the basis of the extension of one's love of self to others, must be distinguished from the union which love itself establishes. When Aquinas asks whether union is an effect of love, he says that one must distinguish between the ontological union that precedes and grounds love (of friendship) of others and the union in affection, which is an effect of love. As a consequence of love of friendship, the other is related to oneself as another self: one's affections are related to him just as they are to oneself. But preceding this union of affections is the love itself, and preceding the love itself is the ontological union—of one sort or another—that grounds the love.<sup>15</sup>

So, one can say that while Thomas certainly holds that every agent acts for its perfection or fulfillment—the self for whose fulfillment one acts is not an isolated individual, but a being with real ontological connections or unions with others.<sup>16</sup> Every agent acts for his own fulfillment, but not just for his merely individual fulfillment. Rather each person acts—or should act, for there are defections from this, of course—for the fulfillment of himself and of those with whom he is ontologically connected.

### 5. Love of God and Love of Self

The importance of unity in Thomas's explanation of love of others is further clarified when he examines the relationship between love of God and love of self. In several places, Aquinas argues that it is natural for us to love God more than ourselves, and this, of course, with a love of friendship. But he explains how this is so in a way that maintains a fundamental harmony between love of God and love of self.

He argues that now, because of the wounds of original sin, we need grace to enable us to love God more than ourselves. That is, one of the effects of original sin is a disorder in the natural inclination of one's will. Still, it is natural for the creature to love God more than itself. This inclination, he explains, is part of the creature's natural inclination to its own perfection. The following passage sets out the argument in syllogistic form:

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<sup>15</sup> ST I-II 28.1c and ad 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VIII.

Now, in natural things, everything which, according to the nature of that which it is, is of another [*secundum naturam hoc ipsum quod est, alterius est*] is more principally and strongly inclined to that of which it is, than toward itself...For we observe that the part naturally exposes itself for the sake of the preservation of the whole, as, for example, the hand is without deliberation exposed to a blow for the sake of the preservation of the whole body...Therefore, since God is the universal good, and under this good are naturally contained both angel and man, and since every creature, according to that which it is, [*secundum id quod est*] is of God [*Dei est*], it follows that by a natural love both angel and man love God more, and more principally, than themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas returns to this explanation frequently, explaining that each creature is, in a way, a part of the whole universe, and on that basis it is natural for the creature to love the good of the whole universe, which is God (for the universe is the expression of God's own goodness) more than one's particular self.<sup>18</sup> Of course, this should not be read in a pantheistic way. Nor does he mean that a person is merely a part of the whole of creation. Each person is a whole in his own right, that is, a substance.<sup>19</sup> Still, a person is a member of the larger community: this belongs to a created person according to what he is. So, his perfection consists in being a constituent or part of the good of the universe.

This argument has, of course, been interpreted in various ways. I believe Aquinas is making two distinct but related points here. First, each creature's good is a participation of--that is, a finite replica of some aspect of--God's universal good. Whatever goodness is in each creature pre-exists in God in a higher manner. Each creature is naturally inclined to its own good. But that good is found in God in a higher manner. Therefore, the creature's natural inclination in some way will be toward God even more strongly than toward its particular good. This is why in the above passage he speaks of the universal good, under which the creature's good is contained. Similarly, when

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<sup>17</sup> ST I 60.5.

<sup>18</sup> See ST I-II 109.3; II-II 26.3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ST I 29.1.

presenting this argument in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, he says, "For that which is superior among beings is compared to the inferior as the whole to the part, insofar as the superior possesses perfectly and totally that which the inferior possesses imperfectly and particularly..."<sup>20</sup> So, the good to which a creature is naturally inclined (its own) is found more perfectly in God, and as a consequence, the creature's natural inclination extends, in some way, to God. What this means exactly for non-rational beings is difficult to understand. It seems that, applied to them, it can only mean that they tend toward what is *in fact* an imitation of some aspect of God's perfection. In rational beings, however, it seems to imply a conditional inclination: *if* one knows that God exists, then one will have a favorable disposition toward him and his plan.<sup>21</sup> In any case, while Thomas holds that the love of self is the root of the love of other created persons, it is *not* the root and cause of love of God. Rather, his position is that an ingredient in one's basic natural inclination is an inclination toward the universal good of which one's proper good is a participation or imitation.

Second—and I think more clearly—it belongs to what a creature is ("*secundum hoc id quod est*," Thomas says) to be a member of the whole universe. So, if the creature inclines toward its fulfillment, then it must incline toward cooperating with other members in its community, and, ultimately, in the largest community of all, the universe. As a good basketball player is not just one who scores baskets, makes rebounds, and so on, but is, by the nature of the case, one who also plays well with his teammates and contributes to the good of the team; likewise, the perfection of any creature includes as an essential component his contribution to, and, if he is a rational being, his caring for, the fulfillment of the good of the whole universe, not just his own individual good.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *DDN*, chapter 4, lecture 9 (#406). *III Sent.* d 29, a 3.

<sup>21</sup> Note also that, since this is a natural inclination, it is toward God as the author of nature, not toward God as personally present, that is, as offering personal communion with him. *ST I* 60. 5 ad 4; *I-II* 109.3 ad 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ST I-II* 109.3: "The reason why [it is natural for man to love God above self] is because it is natural for everything that it desire and love something, according as it is naturally apt to be [*secundum quod aptum natum est esse*], for

This point could also be stated as follows. To love oneself is to will what is really good to oneself. But, caring only about oneself diminishes oneself. Caring only about oneself, acting as if one were the center of reality and everything and everyone else a mere means toward one's own perfection, severely detracts from one's perfection. So, to love only oneself is not to love oneself. The sinner, says Thomas, does not properly, or genuinely, love himself. True, he has a disordered love of self, but he does not will what is genuinely good to himself.<sup>23</sup> To will what is genuinely good to oneself requires that one be a person who cares for others for their good as well as for oneself.

And, expressed in still another way: if you love yourself, then you will want to be morally good and have friendships, real friendships. Someone might object that this makes caring for another a means in relation to one's individual perfection. But the point is that only if one genuinely—that is, not as a mere means—cares for others for their own sakes, is one an upright, good person. One cannot, coherently, want to be morally good merely as a means toward an end, and one cannot will to have a friendship in the full sense of the term, unless one is morally good for its own sake and unless one cares for one's friend for his own sake, and not as mere means toward one's own perfection.<sup>24</sup> Caring about even one's own individual perfection logically entails caring about other people's perfection for their own sakes.

We can now return to the question whether Thomas's position on beatitude is compatible with his position that we ought to love God and neighbor for their own sakes. The fundamental answer to this objection is as follows: true, every act is for the sake of one's own good—otherwise, the action does not flow from within, but is imposed from outside. However, this does not mean that every act is for the sake only

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'each thing acts according as it is naturally apt to be,' as is said in the Second book of the Physics. Now it is clear that the good of the part is for the sake of the good of the whole. Therefore also by a natural appetite or love, each particular thing loves its own proper good for the sake of the common good of the whole universe, which is God."

<sup>23</sup> *ST II-II 25.4.*

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas says that so-called friendships of utility and friendships of pleasure are not friendships in the full sense of the term: *ST I-II 26.4 ad 3.*

of my own individual good. Rather, as we have seen, Thomas is quick to point out that I am inclined toward my perfection according to the sort of thing I am. And I am not just an individual. First of all, I am in communion with other people in various ways: family members, co-citizens, co-students, co-employees, and all other human beings. These different ontological unions ground different types of affective unions. Second, as a creature, my good is a reflection—vague and inadequate, but real—of the universal and infinite goodness which is God. Thus, my natural inclination is toward my good, but not as if it were the center, or the only good, in the universe. It is toward my good as a part of, or a constituent of, the good of the universe as reflecting the universal good, the fulfillment of God's plan. And so beatitude, for Thomas, cannot consist in my own individual fulfillment in isolation. It is essentially social.

Thomas takes over Boethius's definition of beatitude: "the state perfected by the possession of all goods."<sup>25</sup> Aquinas holds, of course, that the essence of true beatitude is vision of the divine essence as it is in itself. This is a *supernatural* condition, that is, one which is more than the actualization of our natural capacities. In addition, however, beatitude will include the fulfillment of all of our natural capacities, since in creating us God directs us to our natural fulfillment. God is the author of our nature, that is, the natural inclinations in us as directing us toward our fulfillment are from God. The fulfillment of our natural capacities—which in the early questions of the *Prima Secundae* Thomas says will come about by an "overflow" (*redundantia*) from the beatific vision itself, is our natural fulfillment. So, there will be supernatural fulfillment (union with God) and natural fulfillment (actualization of natural capacities) as components of complete beatitude.<sup>26</sup> Neither of these components, however, should be conceived individualistically. Communion with God is by the nature of the case social, a communion with the three divine persons, but also a supernatural communing with all the other saints, all the other friends of God.<sup>27</sup> Natural fulfillment also will include friendship, the fulfillment of our social nature. So, our

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<sup>25</sup> See ST I-II 2.1.

<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas speaks of the "*bene esse* of beatitude." See ST I-II 4.5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.8.

friendships will have both natural and supernatural components or levels. Therefore, acting for the sake of beatitude is not aiming merely at one's individualistic perfection, but is aiming at a condition that is communal. My beatitude includes more than my individual fulfillment. Thus, one could express Thomas's thought by saying that one's ultimate end in life should be the glory of God, understood as the fulfillment of God's plan for creation, and one's own good as a constituent—not a mere means, nor the end to which everything else is a mere means.<sup>28</sup>

## 6. Objections

Let us now consider just one objection regarding Thomas's position. Although not mentioning Thomas Aquinas by name, Dietrich von Hildebrand criticizes his position that solidarity, or union, is a basis of genuine love of another. While von Hildebrand concedes that we often do have solidarity with others, and that this can ground a type of caring about them, this type of caring should not be confused with love. Wherever solidarity is the basis for interest, according to von Hildebrand, one views the other as a part of oneself, or as one's possession. For example, solidarity may ground the interest of a husband in his wife so that he may resent people insulting her or mistreating her, even though he himself frequently abuses her, or a master resents someone mistreating his servants, despite the fact that he mistreats and abuses them.<sup>29</sup> In the same way, John Crosby speaks of solidarity that grounds taking an interest in others, but only "on the basis of absorbing others into ourselves, or considering others as extensions of ourselves. But, surely there is no self-transcendence in attaining to the other by abolishing him or her as other!"<sup>30</sup>

On the contrary, there are three points to make in reply. First, Aquinas's claim is that the *love of friendship* for oneself is extended to

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Volume 1: Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), ch. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Role of Human Love*, translated by Jan Van Jeurck (Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), pp. 9-11

<sup>30</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 180.

another on the basis of that other's ontological union (same nature, same city, same family etc.), not a mere love of concupiscence. Why assume, as do von Hildebrand and Crosby, that, in effect, such an extension is impossible, that instead, the solidarity allows one only to view the other as a possession or a part? No argument has been given for this assumption.

Second, while there certainly are possessive husbands and abusive masters who view other persons as one with themselves, these are not the types of unions causing the love that Thomas refers to as love of friendship. He explicitly distinguishes this sort of case from a case where an ontological union causes an extension of love of friendship. In his commentary on Dionysius's *On the Divine Names*, he explicitly distinguishes between loving another as *a part of oneself*—the kind of love based on the union that is evidently referred to by von Hildebrand and Crosby—from loving another as *for his own sake*.<sup>31</sup> In other words, Aquinas explicitly recognizes that in some cases an ontological union (solidarity) grounds only a love of concupiscence. But he also claims that in other cases an ontological union grounds a genuine love of friendship of another.

A third point in reply to the claim of von Hildebrand and Crosby is that they evidently did not look hard for possible counterexamples. Certainly the love of a mother for her child (or of a father for his child) in some way grows out of the maternal (or paternal) relationship itself. This love is as it is, not *only* because of the intrinsic degree of goodness in the child—although that of course is also present, as Thomas insists. Rather, it is clear that this love for one's child is based, in part, on his nearness to, or unity with, oneself. A mother loves her child very intensely, not simply or only because he is very good—there likely are other children better than he—but because he is her child. And yet most instances of maternal love are not cases of viewing the child as a part of oneself or as a possession. So, Thomas roots one phenomenon (genuine love of another) in another (natural inclination toward one's fulfillment). This is quite different from saying that one is just a disguised form of the other.

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<sup>31</sup> DDN, chapter 4, lect. 9.

### 7. The Significance of Thomas's Answer

We might ask ourselves why Thomas takes such pains to root love of neighbor in love of self, and why he insists that the inclination to love God is an ingredient in our natural inclination. Also, we might ask, is this insistence necessary? Why not simply say that when we perceive someone who merits our love, then we love him? Why not simply say that when we love another for his own sake we are transcending our natural inclination toward self-perfection? Why, in other words, does Aquinas resolutely align himself with what Pierre Rousselot called "the physical conception of love," and why should we do so?<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the position that the will is able to act outside the direction of its natural inclination was strongly championed by Duns Scotus. Scotus argued that, while there is in the will a natural inclination toward the perfection of the agent, an inclination he calls an "*affectio commodi*" (affection for the advantageous), the will also has the ability to transcend its natural inclination and render to the object what is due it. This ability he calls the "*affectio iustitiae*" (affection for justice). According to Scotus, then, in order to act morally one must transcend one's inclination toward self-perfection, and thus will to the object what is fitting to it, irrespective of its relation to oneself.<sup>33</sup> On this view, "acting according to nature" is not yet acting in a morally significant way. The morally significant acts occur when the will is able to set aside its natural appetite, and act according to *its affectio iustitiae*.<sup>34</sup> Something like this position is proposed by von Hildebrand and many of his followers.

Aquinas considers a position that in some ways is similar to Scotus's when he considers the teaching of William of Auxerre. William taught that our nature inclines us to love ourselves more intensely than God, and that only with the supernatural gift of charity do we love God more

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<sup>32</sup> Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, translated by Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), first published in French in 1908 in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, VI, 6 (Muenster: Ashendorff, 1908), and then in book form again in 1933.

<sup>33</sup> On Scotus's ethics, see: *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, translated by Allan B. Wolter (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniensis*, Book II, distinction 6, question 2.

intensely than ourselves. Thomas's answer is significant: "[I]f it were natural to love oneself more than God, it would follow that natural love would be perverse, and it would not be perfected by charity, but destroyed by it."<sup>35</sup> The *affectio iustitiae* of Scotus is not supernatural, and so Scotus's position differs from William's. Still, like William, he holds that the will's natural appetite or inclination is simply toward one's own individual perfection. Indeed, according to Scotus, to love any other person for his own sake involves acting outside or beyond the natural tendency in one's will. So, like the position of William of Auxerre criticized by Thomas, this position implies that one's natural inclination is self-centered or egoistical. Genuine love of others requires setting aside one's natural tendency. To act morally one must ignore one's natural inclinations and act instead on the basis of the merits of the object itself.<sup>36</sup> In turn, this position implies that the goodness of the self is in tension with the goodness of God. On this view, then, something of human nature, indeed something quite central—the basic natural inclination to fulfillment—must be set aside or suppressed to make room for love of God.

However, this position has profound difficulties. It is a fundamental metaphysical truth that each agent acts for its own perfection; this is simply a manifestation of its distinctness, of its being a distinct agent or distinct being. If there were an inclination in the will which is outside its natural appetite, then it would have to be either preternatural, if it were not against or contrary to the will's natural appetite, or violent, if it were against the will's natural appetite. Such an inclination would have to be something coming to it solely from an *extrinsic* agent, and, to that extent, not natural.

To this, one might object that it is just the nature of the will to tend toward good as such, not toward the agent's good. However, the good is fulfillment, so the object of a tendency must be *someone's* or *something's*

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<sup>35</sup> ST I-II 60.5.

<sup>36</sup> This in turn produces a dualism between one's natural self, or the natural side of oneself, and one's moral self, similar to the dualism in Kant between the phenomenal self and the noumenal, or moral, self. On this point, see Jean Rohmer, *La Finalité chez les Théologiens de Saint Augustin à Duns Scot* (Paris: Vrin, 1939).

fulfillment. What this objection would be saying, in effect, is that the will's nature, or natural appetite would be, not toward its own good (that is, the good of the agent, this human being) but toward the good of the whole, or perhaps, the good-of-every-person-known. But that cannot be the whole story. For in that case the will would be by nature *only* a part; it would have no more tendency toward its own good than toward anyone else's. It would not have a specific or individual nature. Suppose you have a whole, W, composed of x, y, and z. Now suppose x tends toward W's good, and that x's relation to its own good is just the same as its relation to y's good and z's good. And suppose this is true, analogously, of y and z also. Well, that is incoherent. For in that case x, y, and z, could not be different beings. For the actions of a thing follow its being, and if the tendencies of x, y, and z, are no different at all, then x, y, and z are not different. That is, for any x and y, their inherent tendencies cannot be exactly the same (or: have the same logical ordering); for, since action follows being, x and y would not be distinct beings.

It is not incoherent to say that x has a tendency toward W's good (the good of the whole, or more precisely, the universal good, of which x and y are participations) as an integral part of its tendency toward its own good, because it is by nature a part (as a member of a community) of W—that is Thomas's position. You could even say that it tends toward the good of W more than its own good. Still, its relation to y's good and z's good must be different than its relation to its own good. Specifically, the logical order of its natural interests must differ; x's tendency to y's good and z's good must be based and patterned on its more original tendency to its own (x's) good.

Also, x's tendency toward y's good or z's good must be a specification of its basic natural tendency toward its own good (which can include its tendency toward W's good, since x is a participant of or image of W); otherwise, the tendency toward y's good or z's good is preternatural or violent (to be preternatural rather than violent there would have to be first a union of y's or z's nature with x's). So, x can tend toward y's good or z's good, but only if z's good or y's good first comes under the umbrella or formality (*ratio*) of x's good. What is at stake in this issue is the metaphysical distinctness and distinct goodness of each creature, as opposed to its absorption in the being and goodness of the Absolute. The creature's good or fulfillment cannot

consist only in being for another. It must possess an inherent being and tendency; additional tendencies, unless they are preternatural or violent, must be in some way specifications of, within the rubric of, those inherent, natural tendencies.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship of love of God and neighbor to love of self is *analogous* to the relationship of grace to nature, or, even more generally, of God to creatures. Just as there is no dichotomy between grace and nature, so one must be careful not to create, in one's theory, a dichotomy between the divine good and the human good, or between love of God and love of self.

Part of who you are is the fact that your love follows an order, so that you love more those who are nearer to you, nearer to your self, than those more distant. You love your father more than other men not because he is objectively better than they, but because he is your father. For Aquinas, this is entirely right, proper, and morally good. In Aquinas, there is no bifurcation between an ethical, universalistic standpoint, and a natural, particularistic one. The universal standpoint is achieved, but one arrives at it by extension, by extending one's interests, not by setting aside those which are, after all, bound up with one's deepest personal identity.<sup>38</sup> So, one could rightly call Thomas's distinctive position on love *personalistic*, since it safeguards against reducing or absorbing the identity of the person.

Thomas avoids egoism, but he also avoids viewing genuine love of self as an alternative to, and so in fundamental tension with, love of God and love of neighbor. According to Thomas, we are called to love God and dedicate ourselves to doing our part in the fulfillment of God's plan. This is indeed the grand vision of the *Summa Theologiae*. Every agent acts for its own good. But its own good is a likeness of God's infinite goodness, willed by God, conserved in being by God, and moved

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<sup>37</sup> This applies also to supernatural tendencies. While they dispose the creature to fulfillment, which transcends its own nature, still, the natural tendencies of such a being must be open to such addition. The will's orientation to understood good makes that possible.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Christine Sommers, "Philosophers Against the Family," reprinted in *Analyzing Moral Issues with Reasoning, Reading, Writing, and Debating in Ethics*, edited by Judith Boss (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005).

toward attainment of its proper end by God, an end that is at the same time a component in the implementation of God's Providence, God's eternal Plan. So, working for the attainment of one's own good, or the good proportioned to one's nature, and working for God's glory—these are not antithetical. Rather, there is a genuine harmony between one's own fulfillment and the love of God or the fulfillment of his plan. One must not make oneself the center, reducing all else to a mere means toward one's own good, since one's own good is only a part of the whole, the whole being the common good of the whole universe. On the other hand, one's genuine good—which means one's real fulfillment, including first-order goods such as knowledge, health, and artistic development—is neither a competing (perhaps distracting) alternative, nor an extrinsic means in relation to the fulfillment of God's plan. Rather one's genuine fulfillment is an intrinsic constituent of the good that God plans. So, one ought to love oneself, that is, will to oneself what is genuinely good for oneself, but as part of the fulfillment of God's plan.