Thomas Aquinas on the Logic of Neighbor-Love

Tucker Sigourney

Abstract. Thomas Aquinas's account of love is sometimes thought to be overly self-focused; and his talk of charity seems to place God in a position of similar exclusivity (though, in that case, it feels less problematic). But I argue that Thomas's account of love is multidimensional in a way which yields a fully satisfying (and rather beautiful) answer to the question "Why love my neighbor?"

I. Introduction

When prompted to give Thomas Aquinas's view of why one should love one's neighbor from charity, Thomists often point out that our neighbor can participate with us in beatitude.[1] And that is entirely fair. That sounds like the answer Thomas himself gives in just the place where one would look for it:

> The reason why our neighbor is to be loved is God, since what we ought to love for our neighbor is that he be in God. Thus it is clear that it is the same species of act in which God is loved and in which our neighbor is loved. And for this reason the habit of charity extends not only to love of God, but also to love of neighbor.[2]

[1] E.g., the straightforward and pretty representative presentation in Gerald Beyer (2003) or Louis Hughes (1975).

[2] ST II-II, q. 25, a. 1. I say "sounds like" because I do not actually think the neighbor's *capacity* for beatitude is quite what Thomas is getting at here, though some translations come across that way. Granted, the first sentence is mildly awkward. The subjunctive "ut … sit" suggests that what you should want for your neighbor in loving him is that he come to be (or remain) in God, but "want" for "diligere" is somewhat unorthodox, whereas what "love" insinuates in English is exactly the "capacity" reading. In any case, it doesn't matter in the bigger picture, because capacity for beatitude certainly *is* something Thomas has in mind in some passages (cf. §V.2).

Here is the Latin: "Ratio autem diligendi proximum Deus est, hoc enim debemus in proximo diligere, ut in Deo sit. Unde manifestum est quod idem specie actus est quo diligitur Deus,

Then, responding to Objection 3:

> ...it would be reprehensible if a man loved his neighbor as his ultimate end, but not if the neighbor were loved because of God, which pertains to charity.[3]

This is an appropriate answer to the question which was asked, given the context and Thomas's goals. Yet this sort of answer has sometimes given Thomists difficulty. And "this sort of answer" shows up both when the question is love of God (as above) and when it is love of self: it is a sort of answer which seems to place the emphasis on God or self to the exclusion of the neighbor. In short, such answers can tend to sound somewhat inattentive to the particular importance of the neighbor himself.

For example, Thomas's answer above may tempt some to speak of "one thought too many", in the oft-echoed words of Bernard Williams.[4] And of course, even apart from that particular way of putting it, the intuition is powerful: people—especially the ones we love—seem to have great value *in themselves*. And love ought to be for the sake of the one you love. Appealing to something beyond the person you love when you act from love is, let's say, at least questionable.

Or, to take the point closer to home, Catholic Personalism emphasizes the same sort of attention to the particular individual. An answer like the one above—if that were all there were to say—would seem to be in some tension with that emphasis.[5] At the very least, it seems incontrovertible that clear tensions with personalism crop up now and again in Thomas's thought. His remarks on killing sinners in ST II-II, q. 64, a. 2, for example, are especially difficult, and at least insinuate that the tension has wide roots. It was for related reasons that Anders Nygren famously rejected Thomas on charity.[6]

Or, to take the point even closer to home, there is also the well-attested "problem of love", the problem of deriving genuine other-love from self-love on Thomas's view.[7] That problem can be extended, I think, because it applies in a parallel way to the derivation of neighbor-love and self-love from love of God. And both versions of the problem get their force in part from the workings of Thomas's metaphysics and anthropology as a

---

et quo diligitur proximus. Et propter hoc habitus caritatis non solum se extendit ad dilectionem Dei, sed etiam ad dilectionem proximi."

[3] "...reprehensibile esset si quis proximum diligeret tanquam principalem finem, non autem si quis proximum diligat propter Deum, quod pertinet ad caritatem."

[4] Williams (1981) p. 17; cf. Charles Fried (1980), p. 227. Williams was talking about saving your wife after a shipwreck, and the urgency of such a situation does lend itself to the intuition: you don't *think* when your wife is drowning! But Williams's point was not really about the urgency of it, nor specifically about saving lives at all. He meant that acts of love—or "acts of partiality", we say when we want to reduce the poignancy of our discussion—are not the sorts of things which seek justifications beyond the person herself.

[5] Cf. projects like those of Jacques Maritain (1947) and Edith Stein (1950), not to mention Karol Wojtyła himself (1969 & 1960), which are (at least partly) attempts to introduce personalist angles to Thomism, suggesting again that there was at least apparent need for it.

[6] Nygren (1953).

[7] The phrase goes back at least to Pierre Rousselot (1908).

whole. Love is an act of appetite (intellectual or otherwise). Appetite is for the good. If you love *your neighbor*—if that's truly the proper way to put it—then *your neighbor* is good. Otherwise, how did he show up as the direct object of an appetitive act? Does his goodness (as far as charity is concerned) consist only (or chiefly) in his *ability* to be happy—a potential he has?[8] That doesn't seem to fit. Plus there is the more general Aristotelian observation that primary being is substance, of which persons are the primary sort.[9] And shouldn't love, which is deeply constitutive of our ability to track goodness in the world, primarily latch on to what is metaphysically primary?

I agree that there is an appearance of incompleteness here, but I do not think the appearance runs deep. Thomas's view has powerful resources for resolving it, not only satisfactorily, but even beautifully.

My intention, then, is to pose the question "Why love one's neighbor?" to Thomas's view, and to catalogue the options he has for answering it. To that end, I will summarize Thomas's account of the rational structure of love: of how love for one thing can also be love for another thing in general; then, more specifically, how self-love extends to others, and how love of God similarly extends to neighbor and self.

The agenda is as follows. Just below, I list seventeen Thomistic principles, the integration of which will amount to a Thomistic account of the logic of love. I go on to explicate each principle in such a way that the resulting account can stand up as a powerful and attractive answer to our framing question.

Principles in the first group will function in this paper as our desiderata for an account of love. They embody presuppositions which it will be necessary to admit if we are to answer our question, "Why love one's neighbor?", but they are also justified insofar as they follow from Thomistic anthropology generally.

1. Love is only properly love for S if it is for S's own sake.
2. Love for S is based on something good about S.

These two guiding principles will operate in the background till the end. The principles in the second group are general axioms of Thomistic metaphysics and anthropology:

3. The object of appetite (including will) is the good.
4. One only wills one's own good.
5. Goodness is convertible with being.
6. One only wills what is possible.
7. Everyone wills beatitude as his final end.
8. Natural laws are first principles of practical reason.
9. An act of will has a twofold end: the object and the appertaining act.

[8] Again (cf. fn. 2), I think what Thomas means in ST II-II, q. 25, a. 1 is not that the neighbor's potential is something good about him, but that what one *wants* for him is participation in union with God. But what I am speaking of here is how he is sometimes interpreted. And note that, if Thomas *is* speaking in that passage of what you should want for your neighbor, then he's not mentioning a feature of your neighbor at all—and the point I'm making here is true in that case too.

[9] E.g., ST I, q. 29, a. 1; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.1, or *Categories* 5.

Principles of the third group are general axioms of a Thomistic theory of love, including charity:

10. Love is an act of appetite.
11. Love is the initial stage of a complete appetitive movement.
12. An act of love is twofold: love of friendship and love of concupiscence.
13. Love for another is founded on love of self.
14. Love for another is founded on a similitude.
15. Love for another is founded on a sharing in something.
16. Charity is first for God, then for oneself and one's neighbor.
17. Charity's formal object is God.

II. Appetite (Including Will)

II.1. The object of the will

It will be good to begin with an understanding of appetite, focusing especially on the will. Our first question is how to understand our third principle.

Principle 3. The object of appetite (including will) is the good.

This is the familiar "*sub ratione* (or *specie*) *boni*" principle.[10] It is a foundational description of what appetite is: an inclination formally specified by its object, a good-tracking faculty by its very nature, just as vision tracks color or intellection tracks truth (or being, if you prefer). There is no such thing, then, as an appetite which seeks something other than the good. It just wouldn't be appetite. We can be mistaken, of course, pursuing things which are not in fact good. But we cannot pursue anything except *as* good.

Now here is a question: is Principle 3 really *exactly* correct, as stated? Is "the good" the precisely correct description of the (*de dicto*) object of appetite? Answering that will require clarifying our next principle:

Principle 4. One only wills one's own good.

At the outset, we must note four brief clarifications of what Principle 4 certainly is not saying. (Consider them stipulative if you like.)

First, "good" does not *just mean* perfection here. Thomas is indeed very clear that everything pursues its own perfection—that is *also* true.[11] We could call that "Principle 4a". But Principle 4 itself is not just about perfection.

Second, likewise, "one's own good" does not *just mean* beatitude (or "happiness", if you prefer). Again, Thomas is quite clear that we *are* always pursuing beatitude, because that is our built-in all-enfolding last end.[12] We could call that "Principle 4b". But, again, that is not the only good which Principle 4 has in mind.

[10] Cf., e.g., ST I q. 5, I q. 80-82, I-II q. 1, I-II q. 8 a. 1.

[11] E.g., ST I q. 5 a. 1 etc.

[12] E.g., ST I-II q. 1 a. 6.

Third, relatedly, if it had said "always" rather than "only", Principle 4 would have been ambiguous. It might then have been saying that, in every complete act of will, at least one thing willed is our good. That much is entailed by Principle 4b, since beatitude is our own good, and every complete act of will is at least indirectly a willing of beatitude. On the other reading of "always", every complete act of will has as its (direct) object the agent's own good. And that is what Principle 4 says, as stated.

Fourth and finally, I say "complete" act of will because I do not want Principle 4 to take a stand at the outset on whether each *part* of an act of will (or each atomic act of will, if you prefer)—e.g., intention, election, simple volition—is subject to it. Principle 4 is to be read "Complete acts of will are only for one's own good."

II.2. Four modes of one's own good

There is a shallow sense in which what a person pursues is good *to him*: *he* must be the one to see it as good if *he* is the one pursuing it—as in "I do what seems good to me." This is just the difference between the good and the apparent good. But "one's own good" means more than that. What more?

One important focal passage for the idea is in the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, where Thomas distinguishes four senses in which something can be our good: 1) "something is its own good"; 2) "something is united with another through a certain similarity"; 3) "something which belongs to another is its good"; 4) "the whole is the good of the part".[13]

One thing which this distinction makes immediately clear is that *my good* is a broad category. What one might initially have thought of—possessions, perfections, things which benefit me, etc.—are contained within just the third of Thomas's four categories.

A second thing to note is that Thomas's mereological language in (4) is meant to be somewhat figurative. The passage from Dionysius on which he is commenting is about modes of love divided according to station: love for an inferior, a superior, or an equal. Jordan Olver takes this as a cue and interprets the passage in entirely mereological terms: if α and β are parts of $\omicron$, and μ is part of α, then α's good includes 1) α, 2) β, 3) μ, and 4) $\omicron$.[14]

This is a helpful way to think about it. And quite lovely at that, for it makes this relativization of goods to me depend on my place in a whole, foregrounding the importance of community and union. But it cannot be taken too literally. Indeed, Olver himself does not. For example, he speaks of "a sort of part-whole relation" obtaining between image and original (i.e., classifying this as a case of (4), not of (2)).[15] Also, "We relate to someone as whole to part and love that person with love of friendship when we wish that the other might enjoy or participate in some good which first belongs to our self."[16] Thus even the mereological framing is somewhat broader than one might have

---

[13] "... aliquid est bonum suipsius ... aliquid per quamdam similitudinem est quasi unum alicui ... aliquid est bonum alterius quia est aliquid eius ... totum est bonum partis...." *Super De div. nom.*, c. 4, lect. 9, n. 406.

[14] Olver (2017).

[15] Olver (2017), p. 688.

[16] Olver (2017), p. 691.

thought. But, at the same time, it cannot be *too* broad, lest it make *everything* my good.[17] For every thing, on Thomas's view, is a co-part with me in at least one salient whole: the universe, the Church, or (figuratively) God.

It would be helpful, then, to have a somewhat more literal way to frame Thomas's taxonomy. First, what exactly are the boundaries of this category, our good? What sorts of things are included, and what not?

Second, in order to answer the first: how does this limitation of our acts of will to the case of our own good arise in us? That is, what is it about me which explains why I only ever love *my* good?

And, third, in order to answer the second: is MY GOOD (or some such) the very description under which one loves—is it, so to speak, the formal designation of the object of love as such? Or, rather, is it a perfectly good description of the object of love but *not* the very description under which an object is loved?

II.3. Agent-relativization and the formal object of the will

It is often said, and even counted as a central principle of Thomas's anthropology, that the object of the will is the *bonum universale*, the good universally—which is taken sometimes to be, and at least to entail, the good *simpliciter*. This is taken in turn to mean that the *formal* object of the will—the *ratio per quam*, the description internal to the act of willing itself, under which I must will anything—is simply GOOD.[18] Call this the standard reading of Principle 3.[19]

Some disagree with the standard reading.[20] Usually, and most relevantly for our purposes, it is because they take our Principle 4 *also* to be about the *formal* object of the will. As we have noted already, there are plenty of passages in which Thomas limits the object of the will to *our* good, a smaller class than *the* good—and, indeed, the simplest way to incorporate that limitation is just to hold that we will what we will *as our good* (vs. simply as good).

But I think the standard reading is right, and importantly so, and that it still leaves ample room to incorporate Principle 4.

First, the standard reading is drawn at least as easily from the texts as the non-standard reading is. For example, ST I-II, q. 2, a. 8: "For the object of the will, which is the human appetite, is the good universally, just as the object of the intellect is the truth

---

[17] That's a problem here in that it seems not to be the intention behind the language. Though I'll note later (fn. 30) that I do think there is one sense in which everything can indeed be my good.

[18] The idea shows up throughout Thomas's work in different terms: e.g., ST I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad 1 ("...bonum sub ratione boni..."), or ScG I, c. 76 ("...finis comparatur ... sicut ratio formalis..."), or ST II-II, q. 24, a. 1 ("...bonum sub communi ratione boni...").

[19] Cf., e.g., Shields (2017) p. 123.

[20] E.g., Gallagher (1999), esp. p. 25 etc. See also Fr. Ambroise Gardeil (1898) (and other articles in that series); Carlos Cassanova (2018) p. 72; and White (2007), p. 29, who calls the version of the thought he endorses "phenomenological". [maybe Malloy? p. 77 & fn. 21]

universally."[21] Thomas's point here is not so much that the object of the will is simply the good (vs. my good, or the good-for-me) as that the object of the will is the whole, general, fundamental good (vs. the partial, particular, or participated)—but the latter entails the former. A fundamental (vs. participated) good must at least be a good *simpliciter*.[22]

Second, to speak of the ideas themselves, the standard reading is necessary for the job which Thomas sets for it in the passage just quoted: it allows for the parallel between goodness and truth (universally) as the object of intellect. It would be odd if reason attained to the thing itself—the truth, what *is*—in the one case, but did not attain to the thing itself (vs., say, what is good *for me*) in the other. Then some of the good would be inaccessible to the practical side of reason, without the like holding for truth.

Moreover, the breaking of that parallel would have unfortunate consequences elsewhere. For example, the parallel stands or falls with our Principle 5:

Principle 5. Goodness is convertible with being.

In ST I, q. 5, a. 1, Thomas gives an analysis of "good" / GOOD, the word and the idea, along Aristotelian lines, in terms of desire, but is quite clear that the only difference between good and being is in how we understand and speak of them. Merely substantial existence is existence, and minimal goodness is goodness—yet a thing is *called* "existing" *simpliciter* even if substantial existence is all it has, whereas a thing is not *called* "good" *simpliciter* unless it is perfect.[23]

This implies that, though "good" is generally used in a subject-relative sense, so that the good is that which perfects, goodness itself is not strictly *relative* at all. The good is not only that which *perfects*, but also that which *is perfect*, to any extent. (Likewise, the good is not only *perfection*, a property, which is a being relatively, in addition to being good relatively.) We only maintain our ability to make sense of the convertibility of goodness and being if the idea of good which constitutes acts of practical reasoning is grammatically parallel in this way to the idea of being, even if the two ideas do diverge in other ways.[24]

Third, and consequently, a further important job for the *simpliciter* reading is that it preserves a simple and intuitive progression up the chain of appetites—natural, then sentient, then rational. Thomas makes this ranking clear when he defines "will" in the course of attributing it to angels. All things are inclined toward the good, he says, though in different ways:

> Some things are inclined to the good without knowing it themselves, simply through a natural habit.... Some indeed are inclined to the good through a sort of cognition, not insofar as they apprehend the very idea of the good, but as they

[21] "Obiectum autem voluntatis, quae est appetitus humanus, est universale bonum; sicut obiectum intellectus est universale verum." Another telling passage in which Thomas employs the same parallel with truth is ST I-II, q. 19, a. 1.

[22] See also, e.g., ST II-II, q. 25, a. 1 ad 2, right after our passage from the beginning, in which Thomas distinguishes love's object from honor's object on this basis; or ST II–II, q. 26, a. 3, ad 2, on how parts are to love wholes (cf. fn. 35); or the remark on angels in *Super Sent*. II, d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2.

[23] ST I, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1.

[24] Robert Johann (1959), p. 57 – 58, presses (at least one dimension of) this point.

> apprehend some particular [sort of] good.... Some, though, are inclined to the good by an apprehension in which they know the very idea of the good, and this is proper to the intellect....[25]

The very difference between a sentient and the rational appetite, in other words, is that the formal object of the former is some *specification* of GOOD, whereas that of the latter is simply GOOD.[26]

Fourth and finally, the *simpliciter* reading also preserves the strict distinction *within the will* between love of friendship and love of concupiscence. The former is an absolute love—a love for what is good as such—whereas the latter is a relative love—a love for what is good relative to the subject. If the formal object of the will were MY GOOD, then it would be somewhat unprincipled to insist on that distinction: absolute love would represent a good as good for me, whereas relative love would represent a good as good for what is good for me, which makes it seem as though love is always presupposing something prior to itself with precisely the same internal logic, and tempts one to speak of regresses. But we will say more about this internal logic in §III.

II.4. Agent-relativization and possibility

If the foregoing is right—if MY GOOD is not the very formal object of the will—then how does it happen that I only ever will *my* good?

What I would suggest is that this limitation arises in the same way as the limitation that we only will what is possible. That is, volition invokes the notion MINE in the same way that it invokes the notion POSSIBLE. To understand this, let us briefly discuss our sixth principle:

> **Principle 6**. One only wills what is possible.

(This principle is sometimes taken to entail a "judgment of possibility". Here, I will remain neutral on the extent to which there must be a distinct intellective *judgment* made at any particular point during the lead-up to an action.)

Particulars aside, one part of the reason why this condition arises (for a complete act of will) is clear. Given a certain proposed end, the remainder of a complete act of will is the charting (/ taking) of a path to that end. If charting a path to the end is simply not something one can do, then the act of will can do nothing but cut off short of its completion.[27]

Interestingly, the place at which the act must cut off is between the proposal of something as a good end (in a general sense) and the adoption of the thing as *my* end (in a more personal sense), because there is no sense in which something is *my* end specifically (as opposed to simply *an* end, or a good) if there is no way for me to attain to it. That is,

---

[25] ST I, q. 59, a. 1. "Quaedam enim inclinantur in bonum, per solam naturalem habitudinem, absque cognitione.... Quaedam vero ad bonum inclinantur cum aliqua cognitione; non quidem sic quod cognoscant ipsam rationem boni, sed cognoscunt aliquod bonum particular.... Quaedam vero inclinantur ad bonum cum cognitione qua cognoscunt ipsam boni rationem; quod est proprium intellectus...."

[26] Again, for another passage in which Thomas makes a similar claim, cf. ST I-II, q. 19, a. 3.

[27] This is how Thomas talks about it, e.g., in terms of choice in ST I-II, q. 13, a. 5.

something must be *my* end before I can deliberate about how to achieve it, otherwise whence the supposition that this thing's being an *end* should imply any act of mine? Consequently, this assessment of possibility must enter into the logical sequence from simple volition to complete action quite early: before the will ever actually settles on a path to the end, or even canvasses the options as such.[28] (I speak of the *logic*, not necessarily of the chronology. It could be that you only make the judgment that something is not a possible end after you have looked for a way to get to it and have not found one.) In other words, the most this incomplete act of will could amount to is a simple volition, a wish.[29] Or, to put it differently, the relevant attribution is truly of possibility *to the end*. The judgment that there exists some possible *means* to the end would be a separate thing (and would require presupposing the possibility of the end).

Likewise, I suggest, for the fact that we always will our own good. If the good is not *mine* (at least insofar as some act of mine could count in some way as attaining to it), then there simply is no act of *mine* which can be inferred from it. Its being good cannot support any further step in my practical reasoning.

If the foregoing is accepted, then we have answered the first two questions. MY GOOD is not the very formal object of the will. Rather, it arises as a (logically external) constraint on which goods can move one from initial apprehension to action. "My" good is the good toward which I can act.[30] And this constraint arises relatively early in the logical order: before the consideration of what means to take toward the end.[31]

II.5. What is my good?

All of this suggests in turn an answer to our third question as well, namely, that the boundaries of the category MY GOOD are those which would arise from the very mechanism I have been describing. That is, my good is a good which pertains to me in such a way that I can act toward it.

Now, that boundary is somewhat tighter than it looks initially, because there are considerations which limit what I can act toward aside from the physical possibility that some bodily action of mine would suffice for attaining to it. The "can" at issue here is relative to my *will*. Attainment of this end must be consistent with my rational and human nature. One important constraint is therefore given in our Principle 7:

---

[28] This accords with Thomas's remarks on the differences between wish (*voluntas*) and choice (*electio*) in *Super Nic. eth.*, III, lect. 5, n. 12 etc.

[29] Cf. ST I-II, q. 13, a. 5, ad 1. More strictly, this is true when possibility is taken in the agent-relative sense in which I take it here. But if an end were judged impossible *in itself*, i.e., not possible in any sense, then it could not rationally be wished for either.

[30] On this way of thinking, there is no reason why any *object* couldn't be my good in principle, since anything can be known and appreciated. But there are many *acts* which are not my good, and therefore many *ways in which* many objects are not my good. I cannot possess my neighbor's ox, I cannot live on the Sun, I cannot be sovereign master of my own destiny, etc.

[31] Again, I do *not* say anything further than that about how exactly (or even whether) these ideas, MINE and POSSIBLE, appear in intellect or will in the course of action: e.g., whether we must posit a distinctive act of intellect in which one judges an end possible, or whether the job is done simply *in* the movement from any apprehension of a good to *simplex voluntas*.

Principle 7. Everyone loves beatitude as his final end.

Anything I will must admit of ordering to my last end, just as a matter of psychological necessity. That is how I work: I have a last end, and any other end toward which I reason is either *included* in that last end (as when I discover that having good friends is some of what beatitude consists in) or else *ordered* to that end (as when I discover that baking really good scones is one surefire way to make friends).[32]

Another such constraint arises from the natural law. Recall Principle 8:

Principle 8. Natural laws are first principles of practical reason.

And because they are first principles of practical reason, inferences which would violate natural laws cannot (licitly) be drawn, and thus we get another constraint on possibility.

Here, the possibility is neither physical nor psychological, but normative—a "may", rather than a "can", if you like. But that *is* within bounds for our present subject: we are speaking of POSSIBILITY as a concept constitutive of willing.

Of course the natural law *can* be violated. People *do* commit adultery. But people can also jump off buildings in attempts to fly. The question here is not what people *can* see as falling within their range of options, but what *does* fall within that range. And sin is quite literally not an option. If one does act contrary to the natural law, one is therein and for that very reason *wrong*.

Consequently, those who understand the law, and whose wills are appropriately ordered, do indeed treat it *as a law*, as dictating what can or must be done. This is what underlies Thomas's parallel between sin and error (or construal of sin *as* error).[33] Moral evil is not *just* the pursuit of something bad (not, of course, under that description), but *wrong*, i.e., *incorrect*. Sin is always, in some sense, *irrational*.[34] And that is only a defensible position if, despite the fact that the robbery I am contemplating has a few clear upsides to it (perhaps even enough to outweigh any bad consequences), my decision to commit the robbery is still *incorrect*. The natural law prohibits my validly drawing that conclusion despite the fact that my reasoning is indeed latching onto some genuine goods. In other words, it functions within practical reason in just the same way that other judgments of possibility do.

Here, then, is the picture which has emerged of what it is for something to be my good. My good is a good from which I can validly reason, i.e., with respect to which it is possible for me to perform some appropriate action—e.g., approach, attain, obtain, appreciate, serve. And the 'possible' there is not *just* a matter of the physics and metaphysics which govern me. It is also a matter of the structure of my will, one feature

---

[32] E.g., ST I-II q. 1 a. 6.

[33] Cf., e.g., ST I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

[34] Cf., e.g., ST I-II, q. 71, a. 6 (esp. ad 5), in which Thomas explains sin's contrariety to law both in the form of reason and in the form of the eternal law. There is also, of course, the whole doctrine of privation, in which connection Thomas's discussion of Pseudo-Dionysius on nature, art, and reason (*Super De div. nom.*, c. 4, lect. 22) is especially interesting.

I do think all of this points to the possibility that we can account for a sinful action's being ruled out not (just) because it cannot be seen as good, but because it cannot be seen as *mine*. Right now, that would be a digression, but I figured noting it might be helpful to someone.

of which is that it is (psychologically necessarily) ordered to beatitude as my last end, another feature of which is that it is (normatively) constrained by the natural law.

Things which are *not* my good are things which I cannot (/ may not) pursue in these ways: my dream of flying to the moon on the power of my own two hands, that which I can only and unambiguously see as bad, a spherical cube, murder, my friend's much-better-than-mine-looking sandwich (or his ox, or ass, or anything else belonging to my friend), the conversation which would violate my vow of silence, etc.

II.6. Brief aside

This picture can be assimilated to Thomas's taxonomy above. The first division—I myself am my own good—is trivial.

The second and third divisions—that my good is that which is united to me by a certain similitude, or belongs to me—do most of the lifting. Similitude is a broad and (if I may say so) rather soft category in Aristotelian metaphysics; and "belonging" is similarly broad. Together, these encompass anything which I may have as a good in which to rest, whether as a property or as a possession (even in a minimal sense, e.g., insofar as I 'have' what I know); anything which I may use as an instrument / means; and anything which is *suitable* to me (in yet another capacious Aristotelian sense)—e.g., my family, my favorite stories, my homeland, etc.—or *fitting*, if you prefer.

(Each of these goods, of course, is 'had' in the appropriate way. I do not possess my friends the way I possess a teacup. The actions which my loves for these things yield will differ accordingly: I spend time with my friends, I take walks to soak in the beauty of the place where I live, etc.)

The fourth division—that a whole of which I am a part is also my good—covers the cases in which I can serve something. In a sense, really, *I* am *its* good, but it is called 'my good' insofar as the whole pertains to me, being something which it is my place to serve and to which to belong.[35] In this way, my family, my country, and my God are "mine".

Thus Thomas's categories cover i) what I act toward such that I therein treat myself as the end which it serves (category 3), ii) what I act toward such that *it* is the further end which *I* serve (category 4), and iii) what I act toward such that neither it nor myself is the further end served by the other, or else each is the further end of the other (category 2).

In sum, with a small grain of salt, I do think "my good" means almost exactly what the words mean. The English "mine", the possessive in general, and the corresponding Latin are decent markers for what Thomas means in "my good".

II.7. Intermission

What I have said so far serves as ground-clearing for my thesis. There is nothing in the structure of will itself, on Thomas's view, which would necessitate its being incapable of orientation toward one's neighbor for his own sake.

Before we move on to speak of love specifically, there is one more brief bit of ground-clearing to be done which regards the will generally.

[35] This is just how Thomas explains it in ST II-II 26.3 ad 2.

Principle 9. An act of will has a twofold end: the object and the appertaining act.

Thomas gives this distinction as one between *finis cuius* (the "end of which", we could say), and *finis quo* (the "end by which"), and glosses it as a distinction between a thing itself (*ipsa res*) and the having or using of the thing (*usus rei*) respectively.[36]

The distinction arises from the very metaphysics of action as such. There is a *finis quo* simply because will (like appetite generally) terminates in action. Any act of will must therefore have an end at least in that sense, for otherwise there would be no determinate (pun intended) thing for it to actually *issue in* in response to some perceived good.

Then, since the will must also be determined *by something*, there must also be a *finis cuius*. Here, Thomas's "*usus rei*" gloss must be interpreted with the appropriate generality, for this principle holds even when the *finis cuius is*, in one sense, the very action to be performed. If, for example, I am dancing just because I love to dance, there must still be something to play the logical role of object—the dance, perhaps, or even just a series of atomic bodily movements—which functions as the thing done or achieved in my acting; and *also* the very doing or achieving of that thing—in this case, dancing: in short, the act and the thing enacted.

The principle must therefore always hold within the will itself. If the "having or use" of something consists partly in an act outside the will—one of speculative intellect, say—then there must still be something in the will thus distinguished. For example, Thomas of course holds that the act in which beatitude consists is an act of intellect.[37] That may be true, but it must then *also* be true that the will treats contemplation (as an act of pure intellect) as an object-end, and that there is a corresponding act-end in the will—say, *contemplating*. Which is not at all unrealistic. I can will that I attend, consider, appreciate, etc. Indeed, I must. There is no thinking if I don't.

III. Loves of Friendship and Concupiscence

III.1. To love

Let us now talk about love. It is, for Thomas, a very broad phenomenon. It is in the will and in the lower appetites, even in the appetites (so to speak) of plants or flames, as each rises in its own way. Again, my emphasis here will be on the will, but this broadness must be kept in mind.

Recall Principle 10:

Principle 10. Love is an act of appetite.

As such, love inherits appetite's formal inclination toward the good. In fact, love is the *first* act of appetite, the one which sets the direction for the stages which follow:

---

[36] ST I-II, q. 1, a. 8, or ST I, q. 26, a. 3, ad 2. He is citing Aristotle, *Physics* II & *Metaphysics* V.

[37] E.g., ScG III, c. 26, or ST I-II, q. 3, aa. 4-5. At the end of article 4's corpus, Thomas usefully clarifies in what sense beatitude is not an act of will, and what place the will *does* have in beatitude. Cf. Malloy (2019), p. 72.

Principle 11. Love is the initial stage of a complete appetitive movement.[38]

How exactly to situate love within the total activity of the will (or any other appetite) is somewhat complicated. There are changes in Thomas's thought regarding where love falls in the sequence within a complete act of will, and with respect to whether love is a matter of *being formed*, or else a sort of *complacence*.[39] But in general and in his mature and most relevant work, the story is that a complete movement of will has three stages to it: love, desire, and rest. Love is the initial approval of some good, desire moves to attain it, and rest delights in the attained good.[40]

III.2. Love, absolute and relative

Our twelfth principle is Thomas's distinction between the two intrinsic movements of a single act of love:

> **Principle 12**. An act of love is twofold: love of friendship and love of concupiscence.

The focal passage is ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4. Because to love is to will the good to the other, "the movement of love tends in two directions: toward the good which one wishes to someone, either oneself or another, and him to whom one wills the good. Thus one has *love of concupiscence* for the good which one wills to someone, and one has *love of friendship* for the one to whom one wills the good."[41]

We must make several clarifications. The first will perhaps be tedious for those familiar with these things, but it is important: this is *not* a distinction between friendship (the relationship) and concupiscence (the appetitive power). It is a distinction between *love of friendship* and *love of concupiscence*. Neither one is a power, nor a relationship; both are acts—or dimensions of one act—within the same faculty.[42]

Neither is this a distinction between selfish love and selfless love. As Thomas says, love of friendship can be for oneself. Likewise, love of concupiscence can be for another's sake. Or, at least, that's true of the distinction as given in the passage above. As they appear *across* this and other passages, these terms are somewhat ambiguous. They can mark a rather shallow distinction, between the love one has for a friend (whom one loves for his own sake) and the love one has for wine (which one wants for oneself). In other passages, that is indeed the distinction Thomas has in mind—for he inherited it from those who went before him, and he is not simply talking past his predecessors. E.g., when he speaks of love's union, mutual indwelling, ecstasy, and jealousy, he references the distinction as

---

[38] E.g., ST I-II q. 25 a. 2 and q. 26 a. 2.

[39] Sherwin (2005), Olver (2022), Malloy (2007).

[40] Cf. fn. 38.

[41] "Sic ergo motus amoris in duo tendit, scilicet in bonum quod quis vult alicui, vel sibi vel alii; et in illud cui vult bonum. Ad illud ergo bonum quod quis vult alteri, habetur amor concupiscentiae, ad illud autem cui aliquis vult bonum, habetur amor amicitiae." See also ST I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 3.

[42] Though how exactly you enumerate them is of little substance.

one between the love one has for a friend and the love one has for things which one wants for oneself—here it is quite clearly two different sorts of love.[43]

In any case, Thomas does *also* use the terms to mark a deeper distinction, as we saw in the passage just quoted above. It may be useful, then, to posit new terms to set apart these two distinctions, so that we can speak as clearly as possible.

> **friend-love** vs. **want-love**: the love of a person which is proper to friendship vs. the love (/ desire) of something for oneself;
>
> **absolute love** vs. **relative love**: the love of something for itself (therefore as that for which a relative good is loved) vs. the love of something as good relative to something else.[44]

There are further variants of these distinctions, of course—in logical space as well as in Thomas's writings—but these two will do for our purposes. (Far more detail can be found in Guy Mansini's analysis of the distinction's variations and appearances over Thomas's career.[45])

And now let us note some important and interesting features of the absolute vs. relative love distinction. In so doing, I hope to vindicate the way I have framed it, as an absolute / relative distinction.

There is a certain rather lovely parallel between the absolute vs. relative love distinction and act-end vs. object-end distinction. Each distinction marks an almost inferential link between an absolute good and a relative good: in love, there is the beloved, whose goodness is what grounds that of what is good *for him*; in action, there is the object acted toward and the act itself which is good insofar as it attains to the object. Similarly (and consequently), each distinction is between what determines a movement and what is toward it: the beloved is that the nature of which determines that this good shall be given to him; and the object-end is that the nature of which determines that this act shall be that by which it is attained.

More straightforwardly, the distinction in love's two movements also corresponds to the distinction between absolute and relative being.[46] Just after distinguishing the twofold object of love, Thomas says, "Just as a being *simpliciter* is one which has being, whereas a being *secundum quid* is one which exists in another, likewise, because it is

---

[43] Cf. ST I-II, q. 28, aa. 1-4.

[44] My chosen terms here are an attempt to keep as many associations as are helpful (e.g., between friend-love and friends), and to avoid as many as are not (e.g., between want-love and the concupiscible power itself—for that sounds like it presupposes more than it should). "Absolute", unfortunately, feels a little like a term of emphasis; but it is the principled correspondent of "relative".

[45] Mansini (1995). Cf. Olver (2022).

[46] Olver comments on this (2022), p. 599, as does Johann (1959).

convertible with being, a good *simpliciter* is what itself has goodness, whereas what has goodness in another is good *secundum quid*."[47]

Note that the parallel only works if the distinction is truly between what is good absolutely and what is good relatively—*not* between a substance (a being *simpliciter*) which is good and an accident (a being *secundum quid*) which is good. The absolute / relative distinction is between sorts of goodness, not sorts of good beings.[48]

Note also, more subtly, that this is not *analytically* a distinction between the good and the good-for or the good-pertaining-to-me. It is a distinction between that which is good simply (because good itself) and that which is good extrinsically, i.e., because something else is good itself.[49] Again, it is parallel with the sort of being an accident has: just as an accident exists only in a sense, because it is the accident of something which has being itself, likewise a relative good is a good only in that it is the good of something which is good itself. The good-for is a more limited category, and the good-pertaining-to-me touches both sides of the distinction.

Thus, when Daniel Shields rejects L.-B. Geiger's understanding of the distinction—because Geiger interprets it as a distinction between the love of something as an end and the love of something as a means—he is right to do so.[50] But Shields in turn understands the distinction as that between love of subsisting goods and love of inhering goods.[51] And that is not right either: it assimilates the distinction in modes of goodness as a distinction in modes of being, whereas these are meant to be different analogous distinctions. Not that Shields's distinction isn't also perfectly legitimate (as is Geiger's)—but these are *two* (or three) distinctions, and they do different things. We should keep them separate.

---

[47] "Sicut enim ens simpliciter est quod habet esse, ens autem secundum quid quod est in alio; ita bonum, quod convertitur cum ente, simpliciter quidem est quod ipsum habet bonitatem; quod autem est bonum alterius, est bonum secundum quid." Cf. ST I, q. 60, a. 3.

[48] The latter *might* be what Thomas is talking about in *Super De div. nom.*, c. 4, lect. 10, n. 428 etc.: "...in one way, [good] is said of a subsisting thing which has goodness, as a man is said to be good; in another, of that which is in another and makes the other good, as a virtue is said to be a man's good, because by it he is good...." ("...uno modo, dicitur de re subsistente quae habet bonitatem, sicut homo dicitur bonus; alio modo, de eo quod inest alicui, faciens ipsum bonum, sicut virtus dicitur bonum hominis, quia ea homo est bonus....")

But I think the distinction Thomas is employing there is actually one which relies on both of the two we are now discussing: he is speaking of i) the difference between what is good itself and what, by inhering in another, makes the other good—which depends on the difference between ii) absolute and relative good and that between iii) a good substance and a good accident—and that is why his language touches on all three at different points in the passage. The point he is making, after all, is about whether and how love draws one out of oneself.

[49] Though, if we wanted to split some very fine hairs, strictly, a thing could be good extrinsically insofar as it is good relative to itself. E.g., as Thomas says, a man is good simply; but he is also good extrinsically, say, insofar as he is the one who secures food for himself. (No, I do not mean 'instrumentally', though that would *also* be true.)

[50] Shields (2017), fn. 46.

[51] Shields (2017), p. 126.

III.3. A controversy to skip over

We can ask whether love of friendship and love of concupiscence are ever or exclusively for people. *Friend-love* certainly is exclusively for people.[52] Perhaps *want-love* is never for people, formally speaking—that is, if it is for something which is in fact a person, nonetheless it does not in itself represent its object *as* a person.[53] But whether that is right does not concern us at the moment. What matters for us is whether anything similar is true of absolute and relative love.

There is controversy on this point regarding what exactly Thomas thinks. In one place, he argues that love of friendship is always for people, because only people "have their good" in the right way.[54] But Thomas may simply be distinguishing what sort of love he wants to talk about at the moment (for he is certainly doing at least that), not ruling out any sort of absolute love for non-rational creatures.

For our purposes here, we can note that there is nothing about relative love *in itself* which forces this limitation to the notion of *possession*. It is good for a deer to drink clean water, pristine edges are perfective of a cube, it is good for anything that it exists, etc. Even if we swap POSSESSION for the somewhat wider notion BELONGING, that still is not the only mode of relative goodness. This is what we argued in §II. So, at the very least, Thomas acknowledges all the logical space we need to simply distinguish:

relative goodness: goodness relative to something else;

possessed good: a good which is possessed by someone.

Being a possessed good is one way of having relative goodness; the others we outlined above (§II.5). The category *my good* is perhaps coextensive with the category *good relative to me*, but if not, it is narrower. Love of concupiscence, then, can be distinguished likewise:

relative love: love for what is good relatively (as such)

possession-love: love for a possessed good (as such)

And then we can say clearly that possession-love always corresponds to absolute love for a person, whereas relative love may or may not.

III.4. The first mode of love's extension: movement by inference

The foregoing amounts to an account of one way in which love can *extend*, that is, move from one object to another. Loving A, I can therefore love that which is good relative to A. I can, say, "infer" from a love of my wife for her own sake to a love of Olympic figure skating for her sake.

Though I say "infer", I do not mean that one must explicitly think of this as an inference. I am only speaking of the logic of the situation. My "love" for figure skating *follows from*, so to speak, my love for my wife. Or, to speak of the world rather than of my mind, my wife's goodness implies the relative goodness of figure skating (because it is beautiful to her—even if it is *also* good for lots of other reasons). It is in that sense that the

---

[52] E.g., ST I q. 20 a. 2 ad 3.

[53] Cf., e.g., White (2007), p. 14, "Persons may be objects of...".

[54] ST II-II q. 25 a. 3. See also White's (2007) discussion of grammar and translation (esp. p. 17 etc.).

extension of my love for my wife to the sport which she loves is a practical inference. So I will call this **movement by inference**. It is my own term, but the idea is totally unoriginal.

This is the first of the reasons to love my neighbor which Thomas acknowledges, and which I will more neatly catalogue and explain at the end.

IV. From Love of Self to Love of Others

IV.1. Another intermission

There are many ways in which one could speak of reasons having to do with love, and in the following sections, it will be important not to confuse them:

> **reasons-to**: reasons *to love* someone—e.g., my wife's loveliness justifies my loving my wife;
>
> **reasons-from**: reasons *to act lovingly* toward someone grounded in my love for her—e.g., my wife's fondness for flowers justifies my getting her flowers;
>
> **reasons-of**: reasons *from my loving relationship* with someone—e.g., my love for my wife motivates me to get her flowers, or, taking her to dinner for our anniversary is justified by our marriage;
>
> **reasons-for**: reasons *to bring about love* (the disposition, act, or relationship) (for someone)—e.g., that love is an important element of a psychically healthy life justifies joining a club in an attempt to make friends;
>
> **reasons-why**: reasons *explaining* the occurrence of this love (or act of love, or loving relationship)—e.g., that love is a product of natural-selective forces or whatever partly explains why I love, or, my being alive is one of the many conditions enabling me to love, therefore partly explaining how I can love.

My concern is mainly with reasons-to, reasons which ground or warrant love, as carefully distinguished from reasons-for or reasons-why. The latter two have their own important roles to play, of course, but it is reasons-to which our framing question—"Why love my neighbor?"—is after.

IV.2. Views on which all love is at least indirectly self-love

Another Thomistic principle is that love of others is founded upon self-love:

> **Principle 13**. Love for another is founded on love of self.

"Founded" in what sense? Are we to understand that loving others is always, at some level, a way of loving oneself? Or, rather, is self-love merely a sort of natural starting point? In other words, does self-love remain a part of the logical structure of love as it expands to encompass others, or not?

David Gallagher's view is the former.[55] On his view, we do indeed love others for their own sakes—but such love *is also* self-love. It is a single act which is both self-love

[55] Gallagher (1999). Cf. Avital Wohlman (1981). Gallagher's view is addressed at length by (i.a.) Marko Fuchs (2013, p. 208 etc.), who endorses it as a reading of Thomas but argues that it does not yield a

and other-love, in which the self-love element is logically prior, but neither object is loved merely instrumentally.

He therefore offers us two ways to think about the role of self-love in love of God: i) God *is* your good as the whole is the good of the part, and ii) you love yourself best when you love God more.[56] In both cases, in this one act which is loving God and oneself, God is loved more than self, but love of self still has a logical priority. It is, as it were, the premise from which the inference is drawn. Likewise, love for one's neighbor—an equal (more or less)—is founded upon a *similarity* between the neighbor and oneself.[57] In any of these cases, we begin with love of self, we connect self to other in some way, and thereby we love the other.

Fr. Michael Mary Wright defends a similar view: "Love of friendship for another person causes that person to be viewed as one's own from the unity of their friendship. One rejoices in his own good, likewise rejoicing in a friend because the friend is seen as one's own good."[58] This can happen in two ways: i) the friend is a part of me, or ii) the friend is like me. As for the upward-oriented form of other-love, "The self-love of the human person is still the basis for this love of God. When he sees that he is part of the whole, he takes the whole as another self, similar to an individual friend. This enables a person to see the good of the whole, God, as his own good. … This is still a type of wanting what is best for one's self, since the good of the whole fulfills one's own partial good."[59]

IV.3. Unity

It seems to me, though, that none of these mechanisms validly draws a reason to love my neighbor from my love for myself. They therefore do not suffice to maintain self-love as part of the logic of other-love (as opposed to earning it, say, a merely efficient-causal priority over other-love, or a justifying role for certain *acts* of love).

The unity mechanism cannot be taken perfectly literally. I am not you. And I might act for the sake of a "we" rather than strictly for myself, but this must be acknowledged as a "we", which is a grouping of individuals, who therein remain individuals. The formation of a loving relationship is not the forming of a totally undifferentiated hive-mind. "As one"—yes, always "as", not simply "one".

Furthermore, if 'unity' is taken to mean an interpersonal relationship—a friendship—then it is not a reason *to love*, but a reason *from love*. It is a reason to act in

---

way for self-love to ground genuine other-love. I agree with that much, but, as I'll argue, there are possible links between one's own good and genuine other-love which Fuchs does not note (p. 210 & fn. 17). It is true that I do not love you for your own sake in, say, wanting you to be happy just because it makes my home life easier. But there is a *certain* "for-your-own-sake-ness" there if your happiness simply delights me (cf. the last paragraph of §V.1); and it need not come down (logically) to self-love *at all* that your happiness is "my good" in the sense of §II.4 above. Cf. fn. 80.

[56] Gallagher (1999), p. 38 & 39.

[57] Gallagher (1999), p. 32 & 33.

[58] Wright (2020), p. 502.

[59] Wright (2020), p. 505.

certain ways, to value certain things, etc., based on the union between me and another effected or constituted by our love.

Thus understood, unity cannot validly ground a reason to love you in my love for myself. This is why Thomas always (as far as I know) speaks of this sort of unity as a consideration within an already-founded friendship, and one relevant to treating one's friend a certain way within that friendship. For example, in the place in which he quite tellingly classifies union as an effect of love, Thomas says,

> So, when one loves something in the manner of desiring it, he apprehends it as pertaining to his own wellbeing. Likewise, when one loves someone with a love of friendship, he wills good to him just as he wills good to himself, wherein he sees him as another 'himself', to the extent that he wills good to him just as he wills it to himself. And it is from this that a friend is called another self.... Therefore, a first sort of union love *effects*, since it moves one so that the beloved is desired and his presence sought as something suitable to himself, and as pertaining to himself. A second sort of union love *forms*, since love is itself such a union or bond.[60]

"Union *or* bond" presumably because love the interpersonal relationship is a union, and love the mutual movement of souls is a bond. He is speaking here of both as relations between people. His emphasis is on the ways unity *arises from* love, and on the fact that that unity in turn constitutes reason to treat one's friend lovingly, as another self.[61]

If we should like to speak of love for a "we" in a way precisely analogous to the way in which we naturally love ourselves, we certainly can. But that's a distinct thing from self-love, therefore perhaps deserving its own term: "us-love", say. This is best understood, I'd suggest, along the lines of Thomas's talk of wholes (cf. §II.2 & 6).

Or, if we did want to speak of a union other than friendship, one which truly (logically) *precedes* love—say, the unity of family, kinship, Church, which are in some sense reasons for my love for my fellows—then we move into the territory of the second and third mechanisms I will consider.[62] So let us turn there.

IV.4. Similarity

Another of our principles from the beginning was:

---

[60] ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1. Some of my translation choices are perhaps a little overly literal in a way that emphasizes my point, but I think they are legitimate. "Cum enim aliquis amat aliquid quasi concupiscens illud, apprehendit illud quasi pertinens ad suum bene esse. Similiter cum aliquis amat aliquem amore amicitiae, vult ei bonum sicut et sibi vult bonum, unde apprehendit eum ut alterum se, inquantum scilicet vult ei bonum sicut et sibi ipsi. Et inde est quod amicus dicitur esse alter ipse.... Primam ergo unionem amor facit effective, quia movet ad desiderandum et quaerendum praesentiam amati, quasi sibi convenientis et ad se pertinentis. Secundam autem unionem facit formaliter, quia ipse amor est talis unio vel nexus."

[61] See also ST I-II, q. 32, a. 6; q. 28 a. 2; q. 38 a. 3 ad 3; or *Super Nic. eth.*, IX, lect. 4, n. 15 & lect. 8 n. 5.

[62] As seems to be Thomas's point in, e.g., ST I, q. 60, a. 4, or II-II, q. 26, a. 5, ad 2, or the third motive he mentions in *Super Decem praecep.*, a. 2, or *De perf.*, c. 13.

Principle 14. Love for another is founded on a similitude.

Now, I cannot love you on the grounds that you are similar to me as such, properly speaking, full stop. My reason to love you must somehow come down to your being good. Love is an act of appetite, and appetite is for the good. So, if I do love you on grounds of your similarity to me, it must be insofar as I see your being similar to me as *good*.

But the very fact that you are similar to me is not a good thing just as such. Not every similarity is good; nor, even when it *is* good, is it good because of the similarity itself, but because that in which the similarity consists is good: our virtues, our good habits, our charming personality quirks, etc. Our similarity is rather a *pointer* to the good. If what grounds my love for you is that you and I are "of the same form", then I love that form in me because it is good, and likewise do I love it in you—and the priority of self-love lies in this: that I was able to see it in you because I saw it first in myself.[63]

This does not mean self-love must ever *cease* to be the basis of other-love in this weaker sense. I might continue to see good things in you, which I understand because I see those same things in me, even long after I know you well. All it means is that self-love is not, as Gallagher suggests, the cotemporaneous practical-logical basis for other-love. Seeing you as like me does not amount to my love for you being ordered, logically, to my self-love.

IV.5. A mode of love's extension: movement by similitude

Before moving on to the mechanisms connecting self-love with love of God, note that the foregoing has given us another way in which love can extend. In the case of the extension of self-love to other-love, the inference is not one of practical reason, but of speculative reason. For if self-love led to other-love *within* practical reason *per se*, it would then be a premise from which other-love is drawn, which is just to say it *would* be the logical basis of other-love after all. Instead, my love for myself extends to another when, because he is similar to me, I see that he is good.

Let us call this **movement by similitude**. And let us note that, combining the results of this section and the last, though we introduced it here within a discussion of self-love—because that is the central and simplest case—there is no reason why it *can only* be a phenomenon of self-love specifically. The inferential structure at issue is the same when, seeing that my friend is good, I see that his son is good.[64]

IV.6. Parthood and sharing

Some of what it means to say that I am part of God we discussed in §II: really, I am God's good—good relatively to God—but this suffices for God, considered as a good, to pertain to me in the way which the "mine-ness" which conditions my will requires. But that, as we've seen, does not mean love of God as the whole to which I belong is logically founded on self-love.

---

[63] Now, perhaps one could hold that we naturally see similarity (*itself*) as a good, as a sort of instinctual first principle. But this would have to disappear in a mature and wise love if what I have said is true. And it would be strange if there were a universal instinctual first principle in us which were not true and which were meant to fall away like training wheels.

[64] Cf. fn. 77 and context.

Is there some other sense in which this thought *does* require grounding in self-love? It is certainly true that, in God, I live and move and have my being (which is rather comprehensive). In that sense, he *is* good *for me*. Without him, where or what would I be? So I certainly *can* love God in a way which is referred to self-love. Must I? More aptly, is the *proper* or *best* sort of love for God founded in self-love?

I think we should say 'no' for a couple of reasons.

First, there is a different virtue the primary object of which is eternal beatitude as (practically-conceptually speaking) a relative good—*my* happiness—namely, hope.[65] Charity is distinguished from hope by its object (as always), and it would seem that the only way to deliver on that distinction is to maintain that the primary object of charity is simply God—not the enjoyment of him itself.[66] And, if charity is the form of the virtues, then its object is not referred to anything external to itself.[67] In charity, God is loved simply as such, not relatively for the sake of anything else.

Second, Thomas's argument for why one ought to love God more than oneself from charity relies on the thought that "every part naturally loves the common good more than its own particular good," and "beatitude is in God, the common and fontal principle of all who can participate in beatitude."[68] His example is of a citizen sacrificing his own good for the city's. The spirit of this argument, let alone the conclusion, does not seem to be preserved if Thomas has it in mind to allow the possibility that love of God may be founded upon love of self in the logical sense.

So, granting that a love of God *can* be referred to a love of self, it need not be, and it is not so in charity. This still leaves beatitude plenty of non-primary roles to play in charity. It is, after all, good for me, who myself am good for God. It is also that which binds the community of the Church so that she may be united as one to God. And, even more straightforwardly, beatitude is the *finis quo* to the *finis cuius* which is God.[69] I.e., beatitude is still charity's end in a sense—just not its (primary) object.

Finally, briefly, Gallagher's second suggestion: that loving God is good for me, thus a way of loving myself. Again, that is certainly true as far as it goes—but it does not give us a reason of the sort I am looking for at the moment. At most, it justifies for my attempting to *bring it about that I love God more than myself*. As we saw above (cf. Principles 10 and 11), love is an elemental value response: I can *nurture in myself a love for A* because loving him would be good, but that cannot be my reason *to love A*. I can only *love A*, properly speaking, because I see *A* as good.[70]

---

[65] ST II-II, q. 17, a. 2.

[66] This is how Thomas explains it in ST II-II, q. 17, a. 8 & q. 26, a. 3, ad 3.

[67] ST II-II, q. 23, a. 8.

[68] The context, from ST II-II, q. 26, a. 3: "...quia unaquaeque pars naturaliter plus amat commune bonum totius quam particulare bonum proprium. ... Et ideo ex caritate magis debet homo diligere Deum, qui est bonum commune omnium, quam seipsum, quia beatitudo est in Deo sicut in communi et fontali omnium principio qui beatitudinem participare possunt."

[69] Cf. ST II-II, q. 26, a. 3, esp. ad 3; and see De Letter (1950).

[70] In these things, I agree with Christopher Malloy. His discussion of Gallagher's view is deeper and better: see [cite].

As for sharing, it came up in another of our principles from the beginning:

Principle 15. Love for another is founded on a sharing in something.

In light of the Aristotelian-Thomistic action theory we outlined above (and Thomas's texts), the straightforward role for sharing to play is that it *constitutes* loving relationship, and thereby provides a basis for loving action.[71] The unity between us, after all, consists at least partly in the overlap of our lives—that is, the practical overlap, the things we do together. And having thus been drawn together, my friend and I become good for each other in that we are parts of each other's lives, and we get to know each other, and we find and form similarities between us. In other words, our shared life enables all the other movements of love which we saw above.

IV.7. A mode of love's integration: integration by sharing

We can understand Principle 15, then, as giving us a mode of love's **integration**—not a movement by which love extends from one object to another, but a movement by which *two* loves are woven together. This sharing of the pursuit of an end unites the loves of two different subjects as one common love for that end. This is not a straightforward matter of inference (as I called it), as with the two modes of extension I noted earlier. It is a matter of A and B living parts of their lives together—doing something which unites them.

Our primary example has been the integration by which members of the Church are united in their shared love for God. But, as before, the structure of the phenomenon is general: A loves E; B loves E; by coming together in their love for E, A's and B's love for E becomes common. That could happen just as well for Aristotelian natural happiness, or within smaller domains, like gardening.[72] It can even hold for two loves within the same agent when their objects are referred to the same further end.

V. Reasons to Love One's Neighbor

V.1. From love of self to love of others

Here, then, is the picture we have arrived at of the reasons to love my neighbor which begin with self-love (i.e., which follow in some way from absolute love for self).

First, I can love my neighbor in a way which begins from self-love insofar as, because I know and love myself first, and because I see that my neighbor is somehow like me, I see that he is good in himself just as I take myself to be. My love generalizes to him, for it applies straightforwardly to him in the same way that it applied straightforwardly and naturally to me. This goodness in my neighbor which I now see is a *reason to* love him (in §IV.1's taxonomy). The similarity between us, by which I first saw him as good, is a

[71] E.g., Thomas on sharing as grounding the mutuality of love (e.g., ST II-II q. 23 a. 1); on the *relationship* as what sharing establishes (e.g., ST II-II q. 25 a. 3; *Super Nic. eth.*, VIII, lect. 9); and on distinguishing kinds of relationship on this basis (e.g., ST II-II q. 23 a. 5). Cf. also fn. 72.

[72] E.g., *Super Nic. eth.*, IX, lect. 14, n. 4 etc.; see also VIII lect. 5 & 9, or *Super Ioan.*, cap. 15 lect. 3, on the sharing of knowledge.

reason why this love arose in me. And the mechanism for this is what we called *movement by similitude*.

Second, I can love my neighbor because of some activity which we share. Suppose, for example, he and I each love birdwatching, and come to love doing it together. In this paper's terms, this is an *integration by sharing* of his love for birdwatching and mine, forming a mutual love between us. His love for birdwatching is *reason-for* or a *reason-why* explaining my pursuit of a relationship with him. A love founded in this way can be as deep as any, for this applies just as well to beatitude as to birdwatching.

In both of the above cases, love of self functions efficient-causally. It *generates* a love for my neighbor; it is not a part or a ground of that love. But there is a way to love one's neighbor in which self-love does play that more justificatory role. Third, I can simply love my neighbor with want-love. Shallow as that sounds, it is not always bad, especially if it is just one of the many interwoven tendencies of love which I have toward my neighbor. It is even rather central sometimes (e.g., in marriage). This is a *reason-to*, extending love of self to the other via *movement by inference*.

V.2. From love of God to love of self and neighbor

We can say things about love of God similar to what we said about love of self. As with self-love, it is a Thomistic principle not that *all* love is founded upon love of God, but that the love of charity—the highest of all loves and that which orders all others—is.

Principle 16. Charity is first for God, then for oneself and one's neighbor.

It is a parallel question, then, whether and in what ways love of self and of neighbor can be founded upon love of God. And now it becomes relevant that our observations in §§II-IV have been observations about the very logic of love, not dependent on the specifics of what is loved. That is, the three movements we noted apply in charity as well.

Here, then, is the picture we have arrived at of the reasons to love my neighbor proper to charity (i.e., which follow in some way from absolute love for God).

First, my neighbor can be loved from charity—i.e., is the sort of thing which can be loved from charity—because, unlike lower things, he can share with me in my participation in the last end. In this paper's terms, the love of charity extends to my neighbor via *integration by sharing*, the shared action in question being beatitude itself. In our taxonomy, this is a *reason-why*, and perhaps a *reason-for*, for dispositional love of one's neighbor from charity.

Second, my neighbor can be loved from charity because he is someone God loves, and is therefore a good of God's. This is a want-love for my neighbor for God's sake, i.e., a *movement by inference* of charity to my neighbor. In our reasons taxonomy, it is a *reason-to*. Nor must it be my neighbor: I can also love myself in this way. Note also that it does not change anything about the practical logic if we think of the neighbor (or the self) as good for God insofar as he is a "part" of God, or as belonging to God—both of which, as we've seen, are ways of speaking which Thomas endorses.

This second movement treats one's neighbor as an object in a certain sense. But that is not necessarily a problem. Even in Kant, the rule is not "Never treat anyone as an object," but "Never treat anyone *only* as an object." And the third movement of charity will fill that gap: I can love my neighbor for his own sake, in the strongest sense any Kantian or

personalist could ask for, and also love him for God's sake in two distinct ways, all at the same time, all in one selfsame act of charity.

The third movement of charity gives us a reason to love one's neighbor in the fullest sense, founded upon one's love of God, via the third principle from our list at the beginning:

Principle 17. The formal object of charity is God.

That is, the object of charity is God, both in that charity's *de dicto* object is God and in that its primary *de re* object is God. But charity's *de dicto* object being God is what makes it possible to love something which is not God "under the aspect of God", as Thomas says.[73]

Thus, third, my neighbor can be loved from charity because he is, in some way, like God. In other words, I can infer from God to my neighbor (if you prefer, from love of God to love of neighbor), just as I can infer from self (self-love) to neighbor (neighbor-love), via the "similitude" which unites the two. This is what we called a *movement by similitude*, now of charity. It yields a *reason-to* justifying love of charity for one's neighbor. (And this, too, applies as well to myself as to my neighbor.)[74]

Admittedly, this is not an idea which Thomas leans on as heavily as he does on some of the other movements of love I have listed. But I hope to have shown by now that his system has a place for it—and he does sometimes appeal to it. For example, in ST II-II q. 44 a. 7, he says we love our neighbor because he is near to us "according to the natural image of God and according to his capacity for glory."[75] Likewise, in answering the first objection in ST II-II q. 25 a. 1, immediately after our opening passage, he speaks of loving one's neighbor "because of what there is of God in him".[76]

He says more in *De carit*. a. 4, where he speaks of how love can have one "formal" object which corresponds to many "material" objects. He gives the example of loving a man for his own sake, and then, for that reason and with the very same love, loving the man's relatives and anyone else connected to him. Then he says:

---

[73] This is one way we could have translated ST II-II, q. 25, a. 1, our passage from the beginning. It is especially explicit in Thomas's talk of form and matter in *De carit*. a. 4, esp. ad 1, as well as a. 8 (see just below). It also comes up, e.g., in ST II-II q. 26 a. 4 & a. 6 (arg. & ad 2), and his talk in a. 5 of "more fully having the *ratio*" is especially suggestive.

[74] All of this, by the way—movements of self-love and of love for God—is possible even when the self or God is not loved as a final end. Though, of course, in natural self-love one *does* love oneself as a final end, and in charity one *does* love God as a final end.

[75] The full sentence: "Ratio quidem diligendi tangitur ex eo quod proximus nominatur, propter hoc enim ex caritate debemus alios diligere, quia sunt nobis proximi et secundum naturalem Dei imaginem et secundum capacitatem gloriae."

[76] The full sentence: "Alio modo timetur homo et amatur propter id quod est Dei in ipso, sicut cum saecularis potestas timetur propter ministerium divinum quod habet ad vindictam malefactorum, et amatur propter iustitiam. Et talis timor hominis non distinguitur a timore Dei, sicut nec amor."

Cf. also *Super Sent.* I, d. 17, q. 1, a. 5; and ST II-II q. 25, a. 3, where he considers an objection and offers a reply which both explicitly presuppose that the neighbor (as opposed to irrational creatures) has God's image. In short, Thomas does seem to have the idea he emphasizes in *De carit*. a. 4 at least partly in mind in II-II q. 25 as well.

> Thus it should be said that charity loves God by reason of himself, and, by reason of God, loves all others insofar as they are ordered to God. So, in a way, God is loved in all neighbors, for the neighbor is loved in charity because God is in him or God may be in him.[77]

This echoes the idea Thomas appealed to in our passage from the beginning, "that he may be in God", except this time it is God who may be in the neighbor ("*ut in eo sit Deus*"), and now he also adds a disjunct: that God *is* (already) in the neighbor ("*in eo est Deus*"). Here, what's at issue is that the neighbor has something of God in him. The notion of the *Imago Dei*, of course, is the obvious mode of divine indwelling which is common and essential to all of us. One could also speak of the sort of oneness and mutual indwelling which arise from mutual love—in this case, between God and man—which seems to be what Thomas has primarily in mind here.[78] But either way, such a similarity enables love's movement from God to neighbor by similitude.[79]

V.3. Conclusion

I have not made the case that these are *all* the movements of love which Thomas's view acknowledges. But they are principled, and together they amount to a good Thomistic answer to our framing question. If I ask "Why love my neighbor?", Thomas can answer that he is a good thing in himself (just as I am), who shares a life with me (or could); that, moreover, his goodness is the very image of God, and the life in which he can share is the beatific union of the Church in God; and that, on top of it all, he matters to God, and may even turn out to be good for me.[80] I think the multidimensionality of this answer lends it credibility. Moreover, it also satisfies our two criteria:

> **Principle 1**. Love is only properly love for S if it is for S's own sake.
>
> **Principle 2**. Love for S is based on something good about S.

Neighbor-love (from both directions!) can genuinely be for the neighbor's own sake, and on the basis of what is truly good about him, without compromising its proper interplay with love of self or God. Even better, charity can bind all three together as one. There is more that could be said, of course, but as an outline, that seems promising.

---

[77] "Sic igitur dicendum, quod caritas diligit Deum ratione sui ipsius; et ratione eius diligit omnes alios in quantum ordinantur ad Deum: unde quodammodo Deum diligit in omnibus proximis; sic enim proximus caritate diligitur, quia in eo est Deus, vel ut in eo sit Deus."

[78] Cf. ST I-II q. 28 aa. 1 & 2.

[79] Cf. also Diana Cates (2012) on Thomas on spiritual love, esp. p. 21 etc. There is also reason to think the idea of the image of God operates deeply in the background *throughout* Thomas's anthropology (not just here)—cf. Craig Boyd (2007).

[80] I hope herein to have at least partly addressed Fuchs's (2013) charge that Thomas's account of charitable neighbor-love cannot preserve an Aristotelian focus on the friend for her own sake.

References

Aquinas, Thomas. *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*. In *Opuscula theologica*, ed. Raimondo M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1954).

———. *In duo praecepta caritatis et in decem legis praecepta*. In *Opuscula theologica*, ed. Raimondo M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1954).

———. *In librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus*. Cura et studio Fr. Ceslai Pera, O.P. (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

———. *Quaestio disputata De caritate*. In *Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. Pio Bazzi and Raimondo Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1965).

———. *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*. Ed. Pierre Mandonnet and Maria Fabianus Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1947).

———. *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. *Opera Omnia* iussu edita Leonis XIII P. M., vol. 49 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1969).

———. *Summa contra Gentiles*. *Opera Omnia* iussu edita Leonis XIII P. M., vols. 13 – 15 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1918 – 1930).

———. *Summa theologiae*. *Opera Omnia* iussu edita Leonis XIII P. M., vols. 4 – 12 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1888 – 1906).

———. *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*. Cura P. Raphaelis Cai, O.P. (Rome: Marietti, 1952).

Aristotle. *Categories*. Trans. J. L. Ackrill. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

———. *Metaphysics*. Trans. W. D. Ross. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

———. *Physics*. Trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Beyer, Gerald J. "The Love of God and Neighbour according to Aquinas: An Interpretation". *New Blackfriars* vol. 84 no. 985 (2003): 116 – 132.

Boyd, Craig A. "Participation Metaphysics, The 'Imago Dei', and the Natural Law in Aquinas' Ethics". *New Blackfriars* vol. 88 no. 1015 (2007): 274 – 287.

Casanova, Carlos A. "Humanae Vitae and Veritatis Splendor as Expositions of 'Natural Law' Contrasted with Their Irrational Rejection". *Aemaet* vol. 7 no. 1 (2018): 56 – 101.

Cates, Diana Fritz. "Love: A Thomistic Analysis". *Journal of Moral Theology* vol. 1 no. 2 (2012): 1 – 30.

De Letter, Prudentius. "Hope and Charity in St. Thomas". *The Thomist* vol. 13 no. 2 (1950): 204 – 248.

Fried, Charles. *An Anatomy of Values*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Fuchs, Marko. "*Philia* and *Caritas*: Some aspects of Aquinas's reception of Aristotle's theory of friendship". In *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 203 – 219.

Gallagher, David M. "Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others". *Acta Philosophica* vol. 8 no. 1 (1999): 23 – 44.

Gardeil, Ambroise. "Les exigences objectives de 'l'action'". *Revue Thomiste* vol. 6 (1898): 125 – 138, 269 – 294.

Geiger, Louis-Bertrand. *Le problème de l'amour chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*. Montréal: Institut d'études médiévales; Paris: Vrin, 1952.

Hughes, Louis M. "Charity as Friendship in the Theology of Saint Thomas". *Angelicum* vol. 52 no. 2 (1975): 164 – 178.

Johann, Robert O. *The Meaning of Love: An Essay towards a Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959.

Malloy, Christopher J. "Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire: A Development of Doctrine". *The Thomist* vol. 71 no. 1 (2007): 65 – 87.

———. *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019.

Mansini, Guy. "Duplex Amor and the Structure of Love in Aquinas". In *Thomistica*, ed. Edward Manning (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 127 – 196.

Maritain, Jacques. *The Person and the Common Good*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.

Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love*. Trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

Olver, Jordan. "Bonum Nostrum: Thomas Aquinas and Love of Others for Their Own Sake". *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 70 no. 4 (2017): 663 – 694.

———. "Love of Friendship and Love of Concupiscence". *The Thomist* vol. 86 no. 4 (2022): 573 – 628.

Rousselot, Pierre. *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au moyen âge*. Münster: Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung, 1908.

Sherwin, Michael S. *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005.

Shields, Daniel. "Aquinas on Will, Happiness, and God". *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 91 no. 1 (2017): 113 – 142.

———. "On Ultimate Ends: Aquinas's Thesis that Loving God is Better than Knowing Him". *The Thomist* vol. 78 no. 4 (2014): 581 – 607.

Stein, Edith. *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*. Trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt. In *The Collected Works of Edith Stein* vol. 9, ed. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2002 [1950]).

White, Kevin. "Wanting Something for Someone". *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 61 no. 1 (2007): 3 – 30.

Wohlman, Avital. "Amour du bien propre et amour de soi dans la doctrine thomiste de l'amour". *Revue Thomiste* vol. 81 (1981): 204 – 234.

Williams, Bernard. "Persons, Character, and Morality". In *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1 – 19.

Wojtyła, Karol. *The Acting Person*. Trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979 [1969]).

———. *Love and Responsibility*. Trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981 [1960]).

Wright, Michael Mary. "The Transcendence of Love According to St. Thomas Aquinas". *Studia Ełckie* vol. 22 no. 4 (2020): 499 – 509.