

Thomas Aquinas' Psychology of Love

Augustine says that all the passions are caused by love: since 'love yearning to possess what it loves is desire; love possessing and enjoying what it loves is joy.' (*Augustinus dicit, in xiv de Civ. Dei, quod omnes passiones ex amore causantur, 'amor enim inhians habere quod amatur, cupiditas est; id autem habens, eoque fruens, laetitia est.'*) *Summa theologiae (ST) I-II 25.2 sed contra*

Good has the aspect of an end. . . . Now it is evident that whatever tends to an end, first has an aptitude or proportion to that end, for nothing tends to a disproportionate end; secondly, it is moved to that end; thirdly, it rests in the end, after having attained it. And this very aptitude or proportion of the appetite to good is love, which is complacency in good (*complacentia boni*); while movement towards good is desire or concupiscence; and rest in good is joy or pleasure. (*Bonum autem habet rationem finis. . . . Manifestum est autem quod omne quod tendit ad finem aliquem, primo quidem habet aptitudinem seu proportionem ad finem, nihil enim tendit in finem non proportionatum; secundo, movetur ad finem; tertio, quiescit in fine post eius consecutionem. Ipsa autem aptitudo sive proportio appetitus ad bonum est amor, qui nihil aliud est quam complacentia boni; motus autem ad bonum est desiderium vel concupiscentia; quies autem in bono est gaudium vel delectatio.*) *ST I-II 25.2*

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (*hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi complacui[t]*) Mt 3.17; Mt 17.5; see also 2Pt 1.17

We find four words referring in a way, to the same thing: viz. love, dilection, charity and friendship. They differ, however, in this, that "friendship," according to the Philosopher (*Ethic. viii, 5*), "is like a habit," whereas "love" and "dilection" are expressed by way of act or passion; and "charity" can be taken either way. Moreover these three express act in different ways. For love has a wider signification than the others, since every dilection or charity is love, but not vice versa. Because dilection implies, in addition to love, a choice [*electionem*] made beforehand, as the very word denotes (*addit enim dilectio supra amorem, electionem praecedentem, ut ipsum nomen sonat*): and therefore dilection is not in the concupiscible power, but only in the will, and only in the rational nature. *ST I-II 26.3*

"To love is to will good to someone." ("*amare est velle alicui bonum.*") *ST I-II 26.4* (but, see also *ST II-II 27.1*)

To love (*φιλεῖν*) signifies to will to another all that you hold to be good, and to do so for the other and not for yourself. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2,4,1380b

Quid autem est amare, e quo nomen ductum amicitiae, nisi velle bonis aliquem affici quam maximis, etiamsi ad se ex iis nihil redundet? *Cicero De finibus* 2,24,78

For in the first place, every friend wishes his friend to be and to live; secondly, he desires good things for him; thirdly, he does good things to him; fourthly, he takes pleasure in his company; fifthly, he is of one mind with him, rejoicing and sorrowing in almost the same things. (*Unusquisque enim amicus primo quidem vult suum amicum esse et vivere; secundo, vult ei bona; tertio, operatur bona ad ipsum; quarto, convivit ei delectabiliter; quinto, concordat cum ipso, quasi in iisdem delectatus et contristatus.*) *ST II-II 25.7*

Love has a twofold tendency: towards the good that a person wishes to someone (to himself or to another) and towards the one to whom he wishes some good. (*sic ergo motus amoris in duo tendit, scilicet in bonum quod quis vult alicui, vel sibi vel alii; et in illud cui vult bonum.*) *ST I-II 26.4*

N.B: For Aquinas, the love proper to friendship (*amor amicitiae*) is the act of willing good to the beloved. This willing, however, must also be oriented toward the good we will for our friend, and thus entails as an integral component an *amor concupiscentiae* for the good we will for him. This, in Aquinas' view, is the essence of the love of friendship. When we love a person we are always affirming some good for that person. These are not two separate loves. Rather, human love always has two components, one of which is subordinated to the other.¹ Love of concupiscence is contained within the dynamism of our love of friendship for ourselves or for someone else.² Most fundamentally, the good we will for the beloved is simply the good of existence. "The first thing that one wills for a friend is that he be and live."³ Only subsequently do we then will particular good things for our beloved and direct our actions accordingly.⁴ In relation to God, charity's proper act is to love God for himself, which means to celebrate his existence and goodness.⁵

Aquinas concludes his analysis of love by underlining that love is the principle of all that the agent subsequently does. "Every agent acts for an end, as stated above. Now the end is the good desired and loved by each one. Thus, it is evident that every agent, whatever it be, does every action from some kind of love."⁶

Charity as *Amicitia hominis ad Deum*

St. Thomas begins his analysis of charity by defining charity as a type of friendship with God. "Charity is a certain friendship (*amicitia*) of the human person toward God."⁷ Thomas' definition of charity as an *amicitia* marks the culmination of over a hundred years of scholastic reflection on the nature of charity.⁸ The Scriptures describe the love existing between God and his people in various ways, among which is the theme of friendship. "I no longer call your

¹ ST I-II 26.4: "*haec autem divisio est secundum prius et posterius. nam id quod amatur amore amicitiae, simpliciter et per se amatur, quod autem amatur amore concupiscentiae, non simpliciter et secundum se amatur, sed amatur alteri. 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. et per consequens amor quo amatur aliquid ut ei sit bonum, est amor simpliciter, amor autem quo amatur aliquid ut sit bonum alterius, est amor secundum quid.*" ST II-II 25.3: "*per amicitiam autem amatur uno quidem modo, amicus ad quem amicitia habetur; et alio modo, bona quae amico optantur.*" See also ST II-II 25.2.

² Since friendship is founded on union, not unity, we do not have friendship (*amicitia*) for ourselves, but something more than friendship (ST II-II 25.4). Nevertheless, the love we have for ourselves is the type of love that is proper to friendship (ST I-II 28.1 ad 2).

³ ST II-II 25.7: "*unusquisque enim amicus primo quidem vult suum amicum esse et vivere.*"

⁴ We see this progression described when we read the above cited sentence from ST II-II 25.7 in its larger context: "*unusquisque enim amicus primo quidem vult suum amicum esse et vivere; secundo, vult ei bona; tertio, operatur bona ad ipsum; quarto, convivit ei delectabiliter; quinto, concordat cum ipso, quasi in iisdem delectatus et contristatus.*" See Also ST I 20.2: "*amor noster, quo bonum alicui volumus, non est causa bonitatis ipsius, sed e converso bonitas eius, vel vera vel aestimata, provocat amorem, quo ei volumus et bonum conservari quod habet, et addi quod non habet, et ad hoc operamur.*"

⁵ ST II-II 31.1 ad 1: "*nostrum non est deo benefacere, sed eum honorare, nos ei subiiciendo, eius autem est ex sua dilectione nobis benefacere.*"

⁶ ST I-II 28.6: "*omne agens agit propter finem aliquem, ut supra dictum est. finis autem est bonum desideratum et amatum unicuique. unde manifestum est quod omne agens, quodcumque sit, agit quamcumque actionem ex aliquo amore.*"

⁷ ST II-II 23.1: "*caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad Deum.*"

⁸ See Guy Mansini, "*Similitudo, Communicatio, and the Friendship of Charity in Aquinas.*" In *Thomistica*. Edited by E. Manning. *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale, Supplementa*, volume 1. Leuven: Peters, 1995, 1-26; Bobik, Joseph. "Aquinas on Friendship With God." *New Scholasticism* 60 (1986): 257-271.

servants, but friends” (Jn 15.15).⁹ St. Thomas appears to choose friendship as his preferred description of charity because of the light Aristotle’s analysis of friendship can shed on our relationship with God when this analysis is applied to charity.¹⁰ In essence, Aquinas seems to intuit that Aristotelian *amicitia* offers a powerful analogy for understanding the unique *complacentia* that is charity. Thomas employs Aristotle’s treatment of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to affirm that friendship has the following characteristics. First, friendship entails mutual benevolence. Friendship is more than merely a solitary expression of the love that exists in friendship. Friendship requires at least two who love each other with this love, whereby they will good to each other.¹¹ Thomas adds that in charity this act also entails a union of affections, for simple well-wishing is not enough for friendship.¹²

Aquinas emphasizes, however, that the foundation of this mutually benevolent affection is a certain communion in the good (*communicatio in bono*). On the natural human level, *communicatio in bono* signifies for Aquinas both an active sharing of goods and a more basic participation in the same qualities, circumstances or origins.¹³ For Aquinas, the first meaning of *communicatio in bono*--the active exchange of goods and services--is rooted in the second more basic meaning. The second meaning refers to some fellowship in goodness. Two people share at least the goodness of their common humanity, but they can also be from the same country or town, have the same profession, belong to the same family, or have developed a similarly virtuous character. Each of these shared goods is a *communicatio vitae* or *communicatio in bono* upon which those who share this good can found a friendship: “all friendship is founded on some fellowship in life (*communicatio vitae*).”¹⁴ Aquinas believes that these characteristics of human friendship are analogously present in charity. The foundation of the analogy rests on Aquinas’ understanding of grace as a type of divine “*communicatio*,” whereby God begins to share (*communicare*) his life with us.

Since there is a *communicatio* between humans and God, inasmuch as God communicates his beatitude to us, some kind of friendship must be based upon this *communicatio*. . . . The love that is based on this *communicatio* is charity. Hence it is clear that charity is the friendship of the human person for God.¹⁵

After establishing this analogy between charity and human friendship, Aquinas employs Aristotle’s analysis of friendship to illuminate the very aspect of charity that Augustine had struggled to explain: the object and order of its love.¹⁶ For our purposes, however, the more interesting feature is how Aquinas uses the analogy of friendship to distinguish charity from the theological virtue of hope.

⁹ ST II-II 23.1 sc: “*ioan. xv dicitur, ‘iam non dicam vos servos, sed amicos meos.’ sed hoc non dicebatur eis nisi ratione caritatis. ergo caritas est amicitia.*”

¹⁰ See A. Stévaux, “La Doctrine de la Charité dans les commentaires des *Sentences* de saint Albert, de saint Bonaventure et de saint Thomas,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 24 (1948): 86-87; Anthony Keaty, “Thomas’s Authority for Identifying Charity as Friendship Aristotle or John 15?” *Thomist* 62 (1998): 594.

¹¹ ST II-II 23.1: “*sed nec benevolentia sufficit ad rationem amicitiae, sed requiritur quaedam mutua amatio, quia amicus est amico amicus.*”

¹² ST II-II 27.2: “*in dilectione, secundum quod est actus caritatis, includitur quidem benevolentia, sed dilectio sive amor addit unionem affectus.*”

¹³ See Joseph Bobik, “Aquinas on *Communicatio*, the Foundation of Friendship and *Caritas*” *Modern Schoolman* 64 (1988): 1-18 and Guy Mansini, “*Similitudo*, *Communicatio*, and the Friendship of Charity in Aquinas,” in *Thomistica*, edited by E. Manning (Leuven: Peters, 1995): 1-26.

¹⁴ ST II-II 25.3: “*omnis amicitia fundatur super aliqua communicatione vitae.*” See also, *De Regno* 1.11: “*omnis autem amicitia super aliqua communione firmatur. eos enim qui conveniunt, vel per naturae originem, vel per morum similitudinem, vel per cuiuscumque societatis communionem, videmus amicitia coniungi.*”

¹⁵ ST II-II 23.1: “*cum igitur sit aliqua communicatio hominis ad deum secundum quod nobis suam beatitudinem communicat, super hac communicatione oportet aliquam amicitiam fundari. . . . amor autem super hac communicatione fundatus est caritas. unde manifestum est quod caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad deum.*”

¹⁶ ST II-II 25 and 26. See Stephen J. Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

Charity and Hope

In relation to hope, St. Thomas first employs the analogy of friendship to explain charity's dependence on both faith and hope. Since communion with God in the good is a prerequisite for friendship with him, unless we believe that such a communion is possible and unless we hope for this good as something attainable by us through God's assistance, we could never live the friendship that is charity.¹⁷ Thus, charity depends for its existence on faith in the intellect and hope in the will. Charity, however, is more perfect than hope because charity responds to God as a friend who is present, while hope responds to him as an arduous absent good.

Love and hope differ in this way: love implies a certain union between lover and beloved, while hope implies a certain motion or tending of the appetite toward an arduous good. Union, however, is with something distinct, and therefore love is directly able to consider the other, with whom we are united by love, regarding him as we regard ourselves. Motion, however, is always toward a terminus properly proportioned to the moved object, and thus hope directly considers one's own good, and not that which pertains to another.¹⁸

Aquinas subsequently appeals to the distinction between *amor amicitiae* and *amor concupiscentiae* to explain how charity both animates but differs from hope. "Hope presupposes love of him whom one hopes to attain, which love is a love of concupiscence, by which one more loves oneself, desiring a good, than willing a good to another. Charity, however, entails a love of friendship, toward which hope flows."¹⁹ In charity we say to the beloved, "It's good that you exist."²⁰ As noted above, when we love God, we are merely affirming or celebrating the goodness that is in him. On the other hand, in Aquinas' view, the desire for God as our fulfillment is not properly an act of charity, but of hope. Aquinas recognizes that we can desire this fulfillment from charity, because it is according to God's love for us: God also desires that we be united to him as our fulfillment.²¹ Nevertheless, strictly speaking, the love of desire by which we desire to enjoy God is the love proper to hope. Aquinas further describes this contrast in terms of perfect and imperfect love.

Perfect love is that by which someone is loved for himself, as when one wills him good, the way a man loves his friend. Imperfect love is that by which one loves something not for itself, but because of the good that comes to the lover from it, as when a man loves something he desires. The first love of God

¹⁷ ST I-II 65.5: "*Caritas non solum significat amorem dei, sed etiam amicitiam quandam ad ipsum; quae quidem super amorem addit mutuam redamationem cum quadam mutua communicatione, ut dicitur in VIII ethic. Et quod hoc ad caritatem pertineat, patet per id quod dicitur I Ioan. IV, qui manet in caritate, in deo manet, et deus in eo. Et I ad Cor. I dicitur, fidelis deus, per quem vocati estis in societatem filii eius. Haec autem societas hominis ad deum, quae est quaedam familiaris conversatio cum ipso, inchoatur quidem hic in praesenti per gratiam, perficietur autem in futuro per gloriam, quorum utrumque fide et spe tenetur. Unde sicut aliquis non posset cum aliquo amicitiam habere, si discredere vel desperaret se posse habere aliquam societatem vel familiarem conversationem cum ipso; ita aliquis non potest habere amicitiam ad deum, quae est caritas, nisi fidem habeat, per quam credat huiusmodi societatem et conversationem hominis cum deo, et speret se ad hanc societatem pertinere. Et sic caritas sine fide et spe nullo modo esse potest.*"

¹⁸ ST II-II 17.3: "*Amor et spes in hoc differunt quod amor importat quandam unionem amantis ad amatum; spes autem importat quandam motum sive protensionem appetitus in aliquod bonum arduum. Unio autem est aliquorum distinctorum, et ideo amor directe potest respicere alium, quem sibi aliquis unit per amorem, habens eum sicut seipsum. Motus autem semper est ad proprium terminum proportionatum mobili, et ideo spes directe respicit proprium bonum, non autem id quod ad alium pertinet.*"

¹⁹ ST II-II 66.6 ad 2: *spes praesupponit amorem eius quod quis adipisci se sperat, qui est amor concupiscentiae, quo quidem amore magis se amat qui concupiscit bonum, quam aliquid aliud. Caritas autem importat amorem amicitiae, ad quam pervenitur spe, ut supra dictum est.*"

²⁰ Josef Pieper, *About Love*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), 22.

²¹ See ST II-II 25.4.

pertains to charity, by which we cling to God for himself, while hope pertains to the second love, because one who hopes intends to obtain something for himself.²²

The love by which we desire God as our perfection, therefore, properly belongs to hope. Although charity both animates this desire and enables it to attain the desired end, properly speaking charity loves God for himself, willing and celebrating God's goodness.

These quotations from Aquinas place Augustine's texts in a new light. They suggest that Augustine's theology of love is primarily a theology of hope. This might seem paradoxical since Augustine himself says relatively little about hope and what he does say often merely paraphrases the Scriptures.²³ Nevertheless, when Augustine in the *On Christian doctrine* defines charity as a *motion toward* enjoying God instead of as simply the enjoyment of God, he underlines an aspect of charity that exists only in this life. He is defining charity in terms of the imperfect and temporal act of loving God as an absent good. In other words, from the perspective of Aquinas, Augustine's theology of love emphasizes the component of temporal charity that properly belongs to hope.²⁴ This is understandable in light of Augustine's concern to show that perfect happiness (and thus also the perfect enjoyment of God) is possible only in heaven. As a consequence, however, Augustine underemphasizes Charity's other aspects, especially its proper act of benevolent well-wishing. However this may be, one implication of Aquinas' psychology of love is that Augustine's confrontation with classical culture can be fruitfully reinterpreted from within a theology of hope. The deepest desires of the human heart and of human societies are not necessarily in vain. When healed and elevated in the grace of conversion they can attain their goal. Nevertheless, even when these desires are well-directed, they are lived in hope.²⁵ The desires of the human heart find perfect fulfillment only in heaven in the eternal kingdom. In this life, therefore, an aspect of charity's love will always be lived in hope.

Conclusion

Early in the twelfth century, scholastic authors at both Laon and Paris began to question the Biblical and Patristic heritage they had received. They began especially to question the Augustinian account of charity. Although the extent to which Thomas Aquinas was aware of this questioning remains uncertain, he was clearly aware of the difficulties posed by the Augustinian heritage. Employing tools drawn from Aristotle and his reading of the Scriptures, Aquinas developed a psychology of love and a definition of charity that enabled him both to preserve Augustine's deepest insights and to remain more faithful to the biblical witness. In this way, Aquinas was able to save Augustine from the extreme views of some twelfth century Augustinians.

²² *ST II-II 17.8: Perfectus quidem amor est quo aliquis secundum se amatur, ut puta cui aliquis vult bonum, sicut homo amat amicum. Imperfectus amor est quo quis amat aliquid non secundum ipsum, sed ut illud bonum sibi ipsi proveniat, sicut homo amat rem quam concupiscit. Primus autem amor dei pertinet ad caritatem, quae inhaeret deo secundum seipsum, sed spes pertinet ad secundum amorem, quia ille qui sperat aliquid sibi obtinere intendit.*"

²³ For a brief presentation of Augustine's theology of hope, which notes the influence of Augustine's conception of charity on his theology of hope, see Francesco Russo, "Espérance" in *Encyclopédie saint Augustin*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2005), 538-541.

²⁴ See *ST II-II 28.1 ad 3*.

²⁵ *De civitate dei 19.20: "Quam tamen quicumque sic habet, ut eius usum referat ad illius finem, quam diligit ardentissime ac fidelissime sperat, non absurde dici etiam nunc beatus potest, spe illa potius quam re ista."* See also *De civitate dei 19.4*.