

Marriage as Friendship: Aquinas's View in Light of His Account of Self-Love

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS'S VIEWS on marriage often elicit strong negative reactions owing to his insistence that wives, because of a lesser possession of reason, are naturally subjected to their husbands and not vice versa.¹ These reactions might lead one to shun and dismiss his account altogether. But we find some contemporary thinkers who, while concerned about the above issue, extol the virtues of his account. For instance, McCluskey criticizes his view of women as inferior to men but praises him "for recognizing even a flawed notion of equality and friendship within marriage. His theory contains resources useful to feminists in addressing the many problems posed by traditional conceptions of marriage."²

¹ Aquinas wishes to maintain a certain kind of equality between husband and wife, yet because of the husband's greater share of reason, the wife is to be subjected to him in various matters. "Subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his own benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection, which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin. For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948), I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 2.

² Colleen McCluskey, "An Unequal Relationship between Equals: Thomas Aquinas on Marriage," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2007): 1-18, 14. Peter Kwas-

Picking up where her conclusion leaves off, I argue that Aquinas's notion that "there seems to be the greatest friendship between husband and wife,"³ particularly when understood in light of his accounts of proper self-love and self-friendship, provides both a relevant account of marriage and a compelling defense of the necessity of its indivisibility. Moreover, Peter Kwasniewski points out that Aquinas is not recognized as a "towering giant" on the subject of marriage, though we can learn from him nonetheless; Kwasniewski contends where there is originality, it lies with the theological dimension of marriage as a sacrament.⁴ I hope my analysis gives justification to an even stronger claim, namely, that Aquinas's marital doctrines when joined with those of proper self-love should be treated as original and provocative. I focus on marriage as a natural union, though my conclusions have the same implications for marriage as a sacrament.

I begin with an overview of Aquinas's account of the general nature and key properties of friendship. The second section analyzes what Aquinas means by proper self-love and what I mean by "self-friendship." The third section addresses the key texts from Aquinas that pertain to his understanding of marriage as friendship. The fourth section examines those texts in light of the considerations from the first two sections, explaining how self-friendship provides the basis for how to relate and give one's self to one's spouse. The final section examines the distinct kind of union present within marriage relative to other forms of friendship and how Aquinas connects this union to indivisibility.

niewski criticizes her analysis as reductionist, arguing that she and other "modern commentators tend to be blinded by a preoccupation with his purported sexism and thereby fail to see the nobility of his conception of spousal love, which is apparent only when one adopts a properly theological hermeneutic." "St. Thomas on the Grandeur and Limitations of Marriage," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 10, no. 2 (2012): 415–36, 422n43. This accusation, at least as directed to McCluskey, is unfair. One, we do find statements by Aquinas, as in the passage above, that clearly indicate a substantive inequality between women and men, regardless of what other claims he makes, and two, McCluskey does see nobility in his account and commends him for the positive elements.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), III, ch. 123, 6.

⁴ Kwasniewski, "St. Thomas on the Grandeur and Limitations of Marriage," 416.

Love and Friendship

The key characteristic of friendship that pertains to marriage is the desirable union between persons that it fosters. Moreover, as friendship is a kind of love, let us begin with an analysis of the kinds of unions present in any love relationship and then turn to how these are manifested in friendship. Christopher Malloy offers a helpful analytical summary of the three kinds of union relevant to Aquinas's notion of love: union of similitude, union of affection, and the union of possession.

Love is the second of these unions—union of affection. Love depends on the first union, and it impels (through desire) towards the last union, in which it rests (by delight). The union of similitude is the fittingness or compatibility of one thing for another, without which love is not possible. . . . So, both union of similitude and cognitive recognition of that similitude are necessary conditions for love. Hence, the union of similitude precedes love.⁵

The union of similitude is the metaphysical foundation for love. There exist good objects that a person apprehends as fitting objects of love. The union of affection is the desire for a given good. Aquinas elaborates on the nature of this union by noting that love involves complacency (*complacentia*) for an apprehended good. The union of affection is the “pleasant affective affinity”⁶ for the perceived object. When the lover possesses the object, he obtains the union of possession, which causes delight and joy.

These three unions apply to any fully developed love relationship. As Aquinas indicates in the following passage, friendship is a particular kind of love, with unique characteristics and, as we will see, a unique realization of the different unions, particularly the union of possession.

We find four words referring in a way, to the same thing: viz,

⁵ Christopher J. Malloy, “Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire,” *The Thomist* 71, no. 1 (2007): 65–87, 68.

⁶ Sherwin's translation of *complacentia*. Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2005), 70.

love (*amor*), dilection (*dilectio*), charity (*caritas*) and friendship (*amicitia*). 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 in 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: and therefore dilection is not in the concupiscible power, but only in the will, and only in the rational nature.—Charity denotes, in addition to love, a certain perfection of love.⁷

Dilection is rational love. The will choosing the good as apprehended by the intellect constitutes an act of love. Concerning the next name for love, friendship (*amicitia*) is a kind of habit that forms from dilections directed to the beloved and vice versa. Aquinas contrasts the love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*) with the love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*).

As the Philosopher says (*Rhet.* ii. 4), *to love is to wish good to someone*. Hence the movement of love has a two-fold tendency: towards the good which a man wishes to someone,—to himself or another, and towards that to which he wishes some good. Accordingly, man has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another, and love of friendship, towards him to whom he wishes good.⁸

The lover wills and seeks the good for the perfection of the beloved. Moreover, as Aquinas indicates, friendship is not reducible to a given act of dilection, but rather it is “kind of habit.” In friendship proper, the lover possesses a stable disposition inclined toward the good of the beloved.

Aquinas develops his account of the love of friendship by characterizing five of its essential properties.

⁷ *Summa theologiae* (ST) I-II, q. 26, a. 3, resp.

⁸ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4, resp.

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.⁹

In a complete friendship,¹⁰ then, we find the following elements: through the union of similitude perceived by his intellect, the lover loves, or has a union of affection with or complacency for the beloved. Through this love, he achieves the union of possession with the beloved, which causes delight and joy. In terms of the particular properties of friendship, the lover wills, first and foremost, an ongoing union of possession with him. The lover also wills the continued existence of and goods for the beloved. The next property proceeds from such willing; it is the desire to actively seek the good for the sake of the beloved. Rounding out the properties, we find an emphasis on the more passive aspects of friendship: The lover enjoys the beloved's presence and mind. All of these relations are reciprocated by the beloved as friendship is mutual.

Proper Self-Love and Self-Friendship

I first developed my basic arguments concerning how we should understand Aquinas's notion of proper self-love in "Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby."¹¹ More recently, in the first chapter of *The Root of Friendship*,¹² I give a revised and much more extensive argumentative analysis concerning the nature of proper self-love, its fully actualized form as self-friendship, and the role it performs in the life of a person. I will present a much briefer version of that latter analysis here. In ba-

⁹ ST II-II, q. 25, a. 7, resp. For an excellent analysis of these five marks in Aquinas, see Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing three kinds of friendship: a friendship of usefulness, a friendship of pleasure, and a virtuous or complete friendship. My comments on friendship pertain to the full form found in complete friendship. See ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4, resp.

¹¹ Anthony T. Flood, "Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2010): 69–83.

¹² Anthony T. Flood, *The Root of Friendship: Self-Love and Self-Governance in Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

sic terms, I contend that Aquinas's account of proper self-love constitutes an account of a person's ongoing self-experience—subjectivity for short—and self-love forms the template for how a person relates (or fails to relates) to others in friendship.

Turning to the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas states:

Love of self is common to all, in one way; in another way it is proper to the good; in a third way, it is proper to the wicked. For it is common to all for each one to love what he thinks himself to be. Now a man is said to be a thing, in two ways: first, in respect of his substance and nature, and, this way all think themselves to be what they are, that is, composed of soul and body. In this way too, all men, both good and wicked, love themselves, in so far as they love their own preservation.¹³

It is common self-love that I contend constitutes the basis for subjectivity. Common self-love that is directed to the true good of the person I call “proper self-love,” with “self-friendship” being the full actualization of proper self-love and so named owing to Aquinas's use of Aristotle's statement that “the defining features of friendship that are found in friendships to one's neighbors would seem to be derived from features of friendship toward oneself”¹⁴ as his departure point. Improper self-love perverts the relation of common self-love away from the true good of the person and leads to both an undesirable self-experience and the inability to establish true friendships with others. In the following passage, Aquinas expands upon the notions of proper self-love and self-friendship:

We must hold that, *properly speaking, a man is not a friend to himself, but something more than a friend*, since friendship implies union, for Dionysius says (*Div Nom.* iv) that “love is a unitive force,” whereas a man is one with himself which is more than being united to another. *Hence, just as unity is the principle*

¹³ ST II-II, q. 25, a. 7, resp.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), IX, ch. 4 (1166a).

of union, so the love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship. For if we have friendship with others it is because we do unto them as we do unto ourselves, hence we read in *Ethic.* ix. 4, 8, that “the origin of friendly relations with others lies in our relations to ourselves.”¹⁵

We find Aquinas positing an essential relationship between self-friendship and friendship, or more generally, between the way in which each person relates to himself and how he relates to others. Love-based self-relations are structurally prior to love-based relations between people, as self-love is the form (*forma*) and root (*radix*) of friendship.

We saw in the previous section Aquinas’s list of the five essential properties of friendship. We will now find Aquinas, first in his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* and then in the *Summa theologiae*, articulating the key connections between those properties of friendship to their source in the more fundamental self-relations of self-friendship. In the *Scriptum super Sententiis*, he states:

For since love in a certain way unites lover to beloved, the lover therefore stands to the beloved as if to himself or to that which concerns his perfection. But to himself and to that which belongs to him, he stands in the following ways. First, he wishes whatever concerns his perfection to be present to him; and therefore love includes *longing* for the beloved, by which the beloved’s presence is desired. Second, in his affections a man turns other things back to himself and seeks for himself whatever goods are expedient for him; and so far as this is done for the beloved, love includes the *benevolence* by which someone desires good things for the beloved. Third, the things a man desires for himself he actually acquires for himself by acting; and insofar as this activity is exercised toward another, love includes *beneficence*. Fourth, to the accomplishment of whatever seems good in his sight, he gives his full consent; and insofar as this attitude comes to be toward a friend, love includes *concord* by which

¹⁵ ST II-II, q. 25, a. 4, resp. The italics are mine, and I have used quotation marks to indicate what was italicized in this translation.

someone consents to things as they seem [good] to his friend.¹⁶

In the *Summa*, he echoes and develops this account, adding the following:

In this way the good love themselves, as to the inward man, because they wish the preservation thereof in its integrity, they desire good things for him, namely spiritual goods, indeed they do their best to obtain them, and they take pleasure in entering into their own hearts, because they find there good thoughts in the present, the memory of past good, and the hope of future good, all of which are sources of pleasure. Likewise they experience no clashing of wills, since their whole soul tends to one thing.¹⁷

The relations a person has to himself are the basis of his friendship with others, or in terms of the principle elucidated by Aquinas earlier, “just as unity is the principle of union, so the love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship.”¹⁸

As I have maintained in my earlier analyses on this subject, the relationship between self-friendship and friendship gives us a second methodological source—in addition to his direct comments—for understanding the nature of self-friendship. The second method uses what I term the *primacy of self-love principle*. The principle states that because friendship derives from self-friendship, anything that is known about friendship can be predicated, *mutatis mutandis*, of self-friendship. We learn from the general application of this principle that Aquinas’s account of the person includes a foundational role for subjectivity. Given that the experience of friendship includes the conscious experience of the beloved, and an intimate experience at that, then self-friendship must involve the conscious experience of oneself. Moreover, the metaphysical bases of the union of similitude and the union of possession

Sen-
tences of *Peter Lombard*,” trans. Peter Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, O.S.B., and Joseph Bolin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), III, d. 27, q. 2, a.1.

¹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 25, a. 7, resp.

¹⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 25, a. 4, resp.

grounding self-love are uniquely strong, relative to other love unions. Aquinas states that “there is a union which causes love; and this is substantial union, as regards the love with which one loves oneself.”¹⁹

Friendship between two people can never be metaphysically inseparable, but such inseparability is foundational to self-friendship. Because there is greater union between oneself versus between oneself and another, then the experience of self-friendship must be more intense and complete than the experience of another in friendship. I contend the experience simply is what contemporary thinkers tend to term “subjectivity”—the ongoing conscious experience of oneself as the subject of thoughts, experiences, and actions that in turn serves as the anchor or subjective pole for one’s experience of anything else.

We can define self-friendship as the full actualization of a person’s immanent love that is directed toward oneself as subject or person. Drawing on the two texts above, we find that there are at least five essential properties connected to such love. The first is the self-relation of self-preservation of one’s interior life. The second and third properties are the desiring and seeking of goods that contribute to one’s own flourishing, with an emphasis on enriching one’s interior life. The fourth and fifth properties relate to the experiential dimension of self-experience: the delight and pleasure produced by entering into one’s heart and the internal peace and concord that comes from internal unity. When self-love is properly actualized in this manner, a person has the ability to relate to others in friendship, insofar as he will love and relate to the beloved as he loves and relates to himself. While a person cannot attain the unity with another that he has with himself, through the love of friendship, he can achieve a union of mutual possession that can be the source of great joy and delight.

Aquinas on Marriage

We find Aquinas’s most mature writings on marriage in his *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG), as the questions on marriage in part III of the *Summa theologiae* are taken from the *Scriptum super Sententiis*. Kwasniewski notes, however, that Aquinas does not substantially develop his doctrines on marriage over time; hence his texts can readily be cited “side by

¹⁹ ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1, ad 2.

side.”²⁰ In terms of the *Scriptum super Sententiis* and the *Summa contra gentiles*, we find in the former an emphasis on marriage as a sacrament, while in the latter, Aquinas concentrates on the natural dimensions of marriage. As my arguments in the next two sections pertain to the natural dimension, I draw primarily from the *Summa contra gentiles*.

In SCG III, ch. 122, he argues that matrimony is a natural state for human beings. The most basic implication of the status “natural” is that marriage is not sinful. More directly and importantly, such status entails that marriage is a good for human nature and the human individual; it is something that, in principle, contributes to human flourishing. For his primary argument for the goodness of marriage in this context, he draws from the nature of human procreation and care of offspring. Raising children requires significant time and resources and a lasting, healthy relationship between the mother and father promotes such to an end.

The following chapter, 123, contains both desirable and undesirable elements in terms of a suitable contemporary account of marriage. As mentioned at the onset, I focus on the aspects of his account that are most relevant and compelling to current philosophical discussions, namely, marriage as the greatest friendship and the associated notion of indissolubility, and therefore do not attend to those aspects of his account tied to women as inferior to men. Moreover, I do not see any essential connections that his considered views on woman have on the notions of friendship and indivisibility, and therefore we can separate them without injury to the latter. McCluskey notes that if there is an essential connection, it runs the other way; if Aquinas extended his notion of equality to its logical conclusion, he would have revised his view that men are superior to women.²¹

In SCG III, ch. 123, Aquinas states the following:

Furthermore, the greater that friendship is, the more solid and long-lasting will it be. Now, there seems to be the greatest friendship between husband and wife, for they are united not only in the act of fleshly union, which produces gentle associ-

²⁰ Kwasniewski, “St. Thomas on the Grandeur and Limitations of Marriage,” 416.

²¹ “It is a pity that Aquinas himself did not recognize the implications of his own theory, for it would have enabled him to challenge the many inequalities that women of his own time faced.” McCluskey, “An Unequal Relationship,” 14.

ation even among beasts, but also in partnership of the whole range of domestic activity. Consequently, as an indication of this, man must even “leave his father and mother” for the sake of his wife, as is said in Genesis (2:24). Therefore, it is fitting for matrimony to be completely indissoluble (*indissolubile*).²²

Marriage includes not just friendship between the spouses but the greatest of friendships. In the next two sections, I will expand on this notion in light of the considerations in the first two sections. Notice in the passage above, Aquinas uses the notion of marriage as the greatest friendship as the key premise in his argument for the indivisibility of marriage. He adds in paragraph 8 that indivisibility, in turn, provides a framework conducive to good actions on the part of both spouses. The knowledge of the indissoluble commitment contributes to greater faithfulness and greater solicitude between them.

In chapter 124, he employs the notion of friendship as a reason against having multiple spouses. Friendship presupposes equality between the friends. If a man had several wives “it would not be lawful . . . for the friendship of wife for husband would not be free, but somewhat servile.”²³ Moreover, strong, intimate friendships are possible only with a few people. “Therefore, if a wife has but one husband, but the husband has several wives, the friendship will not be equal on both sides. So, the friendship will not be free, but servile in some way.”²⁴ From considerations of both equality and the relative exclusivity of complete friendships, Aquinas concludes the marriage ought to be between two and only two people. In any other arrangement, the nature of friendship is violated and one of the spouses is left disadvantaged.

From the above texts, it is clear that the nature of friendship sets many of the parameters of Aquinas’s account of marriage. Consequently, the better we understand his notion of friendship, the better understanding we are bound to have of his notion of marriage. Let us turn, then, to a consideration of marital friendship in light of his notions of self-friendship and friendship between persons.

²² SCG III, ch. 123, 6.

²³ SCG III, ch. 124, 4.

²⁴ SCG III, ch. 124, 5.

Self-Friendship, Friendship, and Marriage

Friendship is the mutual, habitual love relationship between two persons who desire and seek the good for the sake of the other, enjoy each other's presence, and cooperate in various activities by seeking the same sorts of things. Friendship derives from self-friendship, which is the basic love a person has for himself that constitutes the ongoing conscious experience of himself as a subject/person. If a person loves himself properly—that is, if he wills to and seeks for himself the goods that are perfective of personal being and enjoys his own inner life—then he is in a position to relate to another in a healthy manner and enjoy the beloved's inner life to the extent possible within friendship. Conversely, if self-love becomes corrupted through selfishness²⁵ and pride, then he will lack the ability to form true friendships.

The first significant application of the relation between self-friendship and friendship to marriage consists of the necessity of proper self-love to a healthy and properly actualized state of marriage. An essential feature of marriage is friendship, and, stronger still, it is the greatest friendship possible between human beings. Therefore, if proper self-love is foundational for the possibility of friendship, then a fortiori it is foundational for the marriage relationship. The first set of reasons why

²⁵ Given Aquinas's insistence on the foundational role of self-love, we might be tempted to think that he reduces all love to selfishness; to do so would be a mistake. As Thomas M. Osborne notes, "The love of friendship intends the good of another for itself, and not for the lover. It might be objected that all love of creatures is for the useful (*commodum*) and consequently all friendship must be a form of self-love. Thomas replies that although the object of love of friendship might be useful to the lover, this usefulness is not the intent of the love [In II *Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, ad 3]. In another text, Thomas argues that according to the highest form of friendship, the friend would be loved even if it were possible that such love were not beneficial to the lover . . . Friendship does not twist the love of a friend back to self-love [In III *Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2]." *The Love of Self and the Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 109. Also see Rose Mary (Lemmons) Hayden, "The Paradox of Aquinas's Altruism: From Self-Love to Love of Others," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 63 (1989): 72–83; *Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Aquinas's Personalist Natural Law* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 161; David Gallagher, "The Desire for Beatitude and the Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996): 1–47; "Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others," *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 23–44; and Terrance Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), section 341.

this is the case has to do with the first three properties of self-friendship and friendship.

Through self-friendship, a person desires the continued existence of a pleasant inner or interior life. To accomplish this end, he wills to himself the goods (and the knowledge relevant to determining the status of such goods) and uses his abilities to secure those goods for himself. We have already seen Aquinas's comments that indicate self-love is prior to and guides the love of friendship. Hence we can safely conclude that a spouse loves his beloved properly by using his own antecedent self-relations as a template for how he should relate to the beloved, in terms of the activity of willing and seeking goods.

A second significant role that self-friendship performs in relation to friendship and especially marriage pertains to the "gift of self" dimension of any friendship. I developed this notion in a previous essay²⁶ in terms only of friendship and not marriage, but the idea has a singular relation to marriage as the greatest friendship. The gist of my position revolves around the notion that if friendship involves a gift of one's self to the beloved, then the giver must be a gift worth giving. What I mean by this is that if a person expects the beloved to receive him as a good, then he is rationally committed to thinking he is good. In turn, if he considers himself a good, then he ought to love himself properly, a love that involves that above process of further actualizing his goodness. The question, then, is whether Aquinas contends friendship includes a gift of self.

Michael Waldstein offers a comparative analysis of Aquinas and Wojtyła on this point and, I think, effectively demonstrates that Aquinas does indeed construe friendship in this sort of way.²⁷ He cites Aquinas's *Super Ioannem* to flesh out this property of ecstasy or going outside of oneself. In the *Super Ioannem*, Aquinas states the following:

Love is twofold, namely, love of friendship and love of concupiscence, but they differ. In the love of concupiscence we draw to ourselves what is outside of us when by that very love we love things other than ourselves inasmuch as they are useful or

²⁶ Anthony T. Flood, "Love of Self as the Condition for a Gift of Self in Aquinas," *Journal of Thomistic Personalism* 2 (2011): 1–13.

²⁷ Michael Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity (First and Second Part)," *Anthropotes* 18 (2002): 113–38, 269–86.

delightful to us. In the love of friendship, on the other hand, it is the other way around, because we draw ourselves to what is outside. For, to those whom we love in that love we are related to as ourselves, *communicating ourselves to them in some way*.²⁸

A person gives himself by communicating what he is to the beloved; he makes a gift of himself for the beloved. Waldstein maintains that as this relation is reciprocal or mutual, friends enter into a communion with one another. He notes that this dimension pertains to any complete friendship but has a special realization in spousal love.

St. Thomas seems to state a general rule that applies not only to God, but to love in general: "To give oneself is an indication of great love." It must be granted that some kinds of friendship primarily involve cooperation in a common work and sharing in a common good rather than the enjoyment of one another as a concupiscible good. Such enjoyment of one another as a good is clearest in spousal love. Still, a certain self-communication, St. Thomas claims, is an essential aspect of the love of friendship in general. It follows that, when this love is mutually known and accepted, and when a shared life is built up, one can speak of a gift of self in some sense in all friendships. In giving the gift of himself through the love of friendship each friend becomes for the other a good to be enjoyed.²⁹

If a person does not love himself, it would be odd that he considers himself a good thing to give or communicate to someone else. However, experience reveals few people who simply dislike their own being. Aquinas is well aware of this and has a more sophisticated analysis of deformations relevant to self-giving/communicating.

As we saw in the passage quoted in the second section, Aquinas contends that all people love themselves in some way, but many love themselves improperly or wickedly. He continues on in that text by stating the following:

²⁸ *Super Ioannem*, Chapter 15, Lecture 4, Marietta #2036. Found in and translated by Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity," 129.

²⁹ Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity," 131. The included citation is from *Super Ioan.*, ad 3:16.

Secondly, a man is said to be something in respect of some predominance, as the sovereign of a state is spoken of as being the state, and so, what the sovereign does, the state is said to do. In this way, all do not think themselves to be what they are. For the reasoning mind is the predominant part of man, while the sensitive and corporeal nature takes the second place, the former of which the Apostle calls the *inward man*, and the latter, the *outward man* (2 Cor. iv. 16). Now the good look upon their rational nature or the inward man as being the chief thing in them, wherefore in this way they think themselves to be what they are. On the other hand, the wicked reckon their sensitive and corporeal nature, or the outer man, to hold the first place. Wherefore, since they know not themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright, but love what they think themselves to be. But the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves.³⁰

Because of wicked self-love a person does not relate to his own goodness in an appropriate manner. Aquinas adds in this response that this negative dynamism, in turn, leads to an impoverished and miserable self-experience and interior life. Thus wicked self-love creates a double roadblock to friendship in general and marriage in particular. First, a wicked man does not know how to relate to others in love because he cannot even relate to himself properly. Second, he would not know what to do with a person who gives herself to the wicked man in love. Because of his improper self-love, he would only be able to relate to the other as he does to himself. He could love the corporeal nature of the other in a love of concupiscence, but he could not love the person, particularly that person's interior life, with a love of friendship. Appropriately developed spousal love depends upon both proper self-giving to the beloved and proper receiving of the beloved, and both proper self-giving and proper receiving depend upon proper self-love.

³⁰ ST II-II, q. 25, a. 7, resp.

The Marital Union

In Aquinas's account of marriage as the greatest kind of friendship, the last aspect that I wish to consider is the special kind of union found in marriage. All friendship involves union with another to some degree and that union is structurally dependent on the unity of self-love. Aquinas affirms this is the passage quoted in section two when he states the following:

We must hold that, *properly speaking, a man is not a friend to himself, but something more than a friend*, since friendship implies union, for Dionysius says (*Div Nom.* iv) that "love is a unitive force," whereas a man is one with himself which is more than being united to another. *Hence, just as unity is the principle of union, so the love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship.*³¹

The point is reinforced by a passage that appears earlier in the *Summa theologiae*:

As to be one is better than to be united, so there is more oneness in love which is directed to self than in love which unites one to others. Dionysius used the terms *uniting* and *binding* in order to show the derivation of love from self to things outside self; as uniting is derived from unity.³²

The love of friendship follows the general pattern of all love as a desire for union of possession with the object of that love, which in the case of friendship is the beloved person.

In the *Scriptum super Sententiis*, he makes the following observation concerning the extent of this union desired and achievable in a complete friendship:

For by the fact that love transforms the lover into the beloved, it makes the lover enter into the interior of the beloved and *vice*

³¹ *ST* II-II, q. 25, a. 4, resp.

³² *ST* I, q. 60, a. 3, ad 2.

versa, so that nothing of the beloved remains not united to the lover, just as the form reaches to the innermost recesses of that which it informs and *vice versa*. Thus, the lover in a way penetrates into the beloved, and so love is called “piercing”; for to come into the innermost recesses of a thing by dividing it is characteristic of something piercing.³³

In essence, the love of friendship seeks the greatest union possible between lover and beloved. In a real sense, a person wants the experience of unity or oneness that he has with himself with others in friendship, and an analogous, though inferior, experience is possible, provided the lover and beloved love each other appropriately. Aquinas’s elucidation of these points can be quite abstract, as we would expect in a philosophical account, but the general idea is concrete. In friendship, we enjoy the life of the other person and *vice versa*; we share with one another, to the extent possible, all of those things that make us the individual persons that we are.

Marriage as a kind of friendship possesses all of these characteristics. Because Aquinas construes marriage as the greatest of friendships, however, we should expect some further characteristic or mode of possessing one or more characteristics to be distinct. We find both in marriage, namely, in the fittingness of its indissolubility or indivisibility. Indivisibility is unique to marriage and intensifies the other aspects of friendship. It is the one thing that allows for the union of mutual possession to approximate in the greatest way possible to the substantial unity of self-love and the full actualization of interior self-possession found in self-friendship. Because self-love is based on substantial oneness, there exists a continual conjunction of the union of similitude and the union of possession. The metaphysical inseparability of these two unions allows for the full depths of personal subjectivity. No relationship between two persons can achieve the same unity because of the unnecessary conjunction of the unions of similitude and possession. But indissolubility performs the role in marriage that metaphysical inseparability plays in self-friendship. It creates the framework and foundation for the natural dynamism of proper self-love giving of itself to another, seeking the

³³ *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4. See also *ST I-II*, q. 28, a. 2, resp.

good for the other, enjoying the other, and, ultimately, allowing for a complete co-union or communion with the other. It is because of the unity of proper self-love that we can understand role of and justification for indivisibility.

In nonspousal friendships, the shared lives can be intense and, indeed, through these relationships, persons are mutually bound to each other in a willed manner. In all of these kinds of unions, however, there is the possibility that one or both of the persons can end the friendship, and that possibility creates a natural limit to the extent of the union possible. In marriage, the only limiting characteristic is death. Therefore, when we say “the two become one” in marriage, Aquinas suggests that we are not speaking purely metaphorically. The union of marriage, if fostered by both spouses relating to each other in the appropriate ways discussed in the previous section, comes as close to metaphysical oneness or unity as possible. Marital union, or the union of possession obtained through the greatest and indivisible friendship, encompasses sexual union, the union of cooperation in the raising of children, and, most generally, the union of interior lives unreservedly shared by one another. Aquinas contends that this intense union is something naturally desirable for human beings, and I think most people would find this contention reasonable. Indivisibility, along with proper self-love, is the condition for its obtainment.

In conclusion, while I think it is understandable why many contemporary thinkers have reservations concerning Aquinas’s account of marriage, we should not let those reservations become an impediment to benefiting from what his account has to offer. His notion of marriage as the greatest kind of friendship is original, illuminating, and insightful, particularly when we understand it in light of his general accounts of friendship and proper self-love. In marriage, it is incumbent on both spouses to strive to have proper self-love and self-friendship. By doing so, the respective unity of each person’s inner life becomes the basis of and condition for the greatest union possible between persons—a union whose indivisibility receives its intelligibility from the metaphysical inseparability of self-love, and a union that contributes to the flourishing of both spouses.