

Natural Self-Transcending Love According to Thomas Aquinas

EZRA SULLIVAN, O.P.
Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas
Rome, Italy

HUMANS ARE ANIMALS that can think and love. Human love, inextricably united to rationality, has the potential to embrace all persons, all things it encounters, including God and the human self. The power and extent of love raises meaningful questions: how does self-love relate to the love of others? Is the love of others more altruistic, more detached, more “pure” than love of one’s self? These questions center on what I will call “self-transcending love,” that is, love that is centered on another and not oneself.¹ Modern French thinkers may deserve credit for describing self-transcending love as a “problem,” but they were not the first to notice that it is also a puzzle.² There is a long and venerable

¹ Herbert Schneider posits that one of the most fundamental questions about love is this: “As creatures, are we not too much related to ourselves and to what is of equal footing with us, so that we cannot transcend the way we are made?” *John Duns Scotus and the Question: Can I Love God above All? A Treatise in Four Languages and a Commentary* (Kevlaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1999), 83.

² Pierre Rousselot gave a great impetus to this contemporary discussion with his work *Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au moyen âge*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 6.6 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung, 1908), recently translated by Alan Vincelette as *The Problem of Pure Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution* (Milkwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). The discussion was taken up in Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *L’Amour de Dieu et la Croix de Jésus* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1929). Chapter 2 of that work treated “Le Problème de L’Amour pur.” In translation: *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Herder, 1947). Two years later, a more historical study was made in

conversation about self-love that spans Western thought and reaches a high point in the exposition of St. Thomas Aquinas.³

Many Thomistic scholars have noted that, in his various works, St. Thomas often unites the themes of self-love, love of the common good, and love of God. These scholars typically fall into one of two groups: those who focus on questions about self-love, and those who focus on questions about the common good.

The first strand of thought focuses primarily on the issue of love in the thought of Aquinas. For example, Stephen Pope, David Gallagher, Christopher Malloy, and Thomas Osborne discuss the common good as it is situation within a larger context of St. Thomas's conception of how self-love relates to love of God.⁴ The second strand of Thomistic thought

H.-D. Simonin, "Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l'amour," *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 6 (1931): 174–275.

For Dominican rejections of Rousselot's position, see Louis-B. Geiger, *Le problème de l'amour chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Montreal: Institut d'Etudes Médiévales, 1952); Jean-Hervé Nicolas, "Amour de soi, amour de Dieu, amour des autres," *Revue Thomiste* 56 (1956): 5–42; Avital Wohlmann, "Amour du bien proper et amour de soi dans la doctrine Thomiste de l'amour," *Revue Thomiste* 81 (1981): 204–34. For an excellent discussion of related issues, see Peter A. Kwasniewski, "The Ecstasy of Love in Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2002).

³ For a thorough overview of the philosophical and theological optic within an historical framework, see Alan Roy Vincelette, "The Problem of Love: The Relationship between the Love of Self and the Love of Others, Self-Fulfillment and Self Denial" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1999). See also Jan Österberg, *Self and Others: A Study of Ethical Egoism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1988); Robert Shaver, *Rational Egoism: A Selective and Critical History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ Stephen Pope, "Expressive Individualism and True Self-Love: A Thomistic Perspective," *Journal of Religion* 71, no. 3 (1991): 384–99. David M. Gallagher's work is indispensable here; see his articles "Person and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas," *Acta Philosophica* 4 (1995): 51–71; "Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996): 1–47, esp. 34–39; and "Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis of Love of Others," *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 23–44. Important also is the work of Christopher J. Malloy, "Love of God for His Own Sake and Love of Beatitude: Heavenly Charity According to Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2001), esp. 180–97. See also Dom Gregory Stevens, who insists on the centrality of the part-whole argument. Though he follows Aquinas's thought, Stevens relies heavily on the manuals of his day. See his thorough article: "The Disinterested Love of God According to St. Thomas and Some of His Modern Interpreters," *The Thomist* 16 (1953): 307–33, 497–541. Finally, see Thomas Osborne, *Love of God and Love of Self in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), esp. chap. 3.2, 87–94.

focuses on the common good in the realm of political philosophy and considers love within that realm. In this strand, we find the debate between Charles De Koninck and I. Th. Eschmann, which partly involved Jacques Maritain.⁵ This debate is foundational to the contemporary articulation of a Thomistic understanding of the common good. Those who allude to this debate while recognizing its implications for self-love include such scholars as Michael Novak, Michael Sherwin, David Hollenbach, and Susanne M. DeCrane.⁶

Seeing that scholars who discuss connections among self-love, the common good, and God tend to concentrate either on the self or on the common good, that is, on human-centered reality, the present essay is devoted to addressing the primary subject: God who is the common good. I begin by establishing Thomas's position by examining three similar arguments he proposes in three different sections of the *Summa theologiae*. After this, I provide a synthetic presentation of Thomas's understanding of self-transcending love in light of God and the common good.

⁵ See I. Thomas Eschmann, "A Thomistic Glossary on the Principle of the Preeminence of the Common Good," *Medieval Studies* 5 (1943):123–65. In the same year came a controversial work by Charles De Koninck, *De la primauté du bien commun contre les personalistes; le principe de l'ordre nouveau* (Laval: Editions de l'Université Laval, 1943). In response was I. Thomas Eschmann's "In Defense of Jacques Maritain," *Modern Schoolman* 22, no. 4 (May 1945): 183–208. After this: Charles De Koninck, "In Defense of Saint Thomas: A Reply to Father Eschmann's Attack on the Primacy of the Common Good," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 1, no. 2 (1945): 8–109. All three of these works have been collected and, in the case of De Koninck, translated, in *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerny (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), which is the source I will cite for both Eschmann and De Koninck works, hereafter "De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2." Jacques Maritain's key work in this regard is *La personne et le bien commun* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1947); in English: *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

⁶ See Michael Novak, *Free Persons and the Common Good* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1989), 30–35. Michael Sherwin, "St. Thomas and the Common Good: The Theological Perspective: An Invitation to Dialogue," *Angelicum* 70 (1993): 307–28; the first section of this article (308–14) addresses how self-love relates to love of God and the common good. David Hollenbach, *The Common Good in Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4, 129–36. Susanne M. DeCrane, *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 52–69 *passim*.

The Position of St. Thomas

In the course of reviewing the most significant scholarly literature that treats St. Thomas's understanding of self-love and love of others, Thomas Osborne notes that many scholars have neglected the Common Doctor's understanding of God as the common good.⁷ For a number of French thinkers, this is largely a result of their rejection of the arguments of Pierre Rousselot.⁸ Contrastingly, Osborne shows that Aquinas's understanding of God as the common good is central to his explanation of the natural love of God above self. Osborne provides a thorough and systematic treatment of Thomas's position, a position that employs a part/whole argument to show that man loves God as the common good more than himself. In emphasizing the importance of this argument, Osborne is in good company with Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Charles De Koninck. All three authors note the importance of three texts for establishing Thomas's position in his *Summa theologiae* (ST): I, q. 60, a. 5; I-II, q. 109, a. 3; and II-II, q. 26, a. 3.⁹ We can establish Thomas's basic position by discussing these texts.

Angelic love, because it stems from the freedom of rationality and volition, teaches us about human love. In the *Prima Pars* of his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas asks, "Whether an angel by natural love loves God more than itself?"¹⁰ He begins by noting that some thinkers have maintained that, "absolutely speaking, out of the natural love he [i.e., an angel] loves himself more than he does God, because he naturally loves himself before God, and with greater intensity."¹¹ Though this was the opinion of his teacher, St. Albert the Great, Aquinas

⁷ Osborne, *Love of Self and Love of God*, 98.

⁸ See note 1 above. Osborne summarizes the debate in *Love of Self and Love of God*, 94–98. See Rousselot, *Pour l'histoire*, ch. II.1, "la théorie du tout et de la partie," 23–32. For a historical addendum to Rousselot's position, see L.-B. Gillon, "L'argument du tout et de la partie après Saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Angelicum* 28 (1951): 205–23, 346–62.

⁹ For their primary usages of these texts, see Osborne, *Love of Self and Love of God*, 77–81; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, 98; De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2, "Principle of the New Order," 132–39, and "In Defense of St. Thomas," 259–62.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 60, a. 5. My translation. All English quotations of the *Summa theologiae* (ST) are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1947), unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ ST I, q. 60, a. 5, c.

frankly says, “The falsity of such an opinion is manifestly apparent if one but consider whither natural movement tends in the natural order of things.”¹² Aquinas’s argument can be summarized in the following syllogism:

1. A part is more principally and strongly inclined to a whole to which it belongs than to itself.
2. God is to the created will as a whole is to a part.
3. Therefore a creature with a rational will inclines to God more than to itself.

To prove the major premise (1), Thomas offers three examples: the hand will sacrifice itself for the sake of the body, the citizen will sacrifice himself for the city, and the individual will sacrifice himself for the preservation of the species.¹³ An implicit assumption holds that whatever will sacrifice itself for the sake of another has a stronger and more principle inclination toward the other than toward itself. St. Thomas More’s willingness to die at the hands of Henry VIII’s headsman shows that More had a stronger inclination to defend the truth than to save his neck.

To prove the minor premise (2), Aquinas states that God is the most universal good. He explains that every created good “is contained” (*continetur*) under the universal or common good, because every creature, including the rational creature with a will, that is, an angel or man, is “of God” (*Dei est*).¹⁴ Regarding this principle, Osborne explains, “Here Thomas is showing that the individual not only belongs to a natural whole like a species, but that its good belongs to the universal good, which is God.”¹⁵ Because God is the source of being, he thereby pre-

¹² Ibid., translation modified. See Albertus Magnus, *In Libros sententiarum*, lib. II, d. III, a. 18.

¹³ See *ST I*, q. 60, a. 5, ad 1, 3: “each part naturally loves the whole more than itself: and each individual naturally loves the good of the species more than its own individual good”; “everything is inclined to preserve not merely its individuality, but likewise its species.”

¹⁴ Aquinas’s reply to objection 3 shows that he equates the universal good with the most common good. See *ST I*, q. 60, a. 5, ad 3: “Nature’s operation is self-centered not merely as to certain particular details, but much more as to what is common; for everything is inclined to preserve not merely its individuality, but likewise its species. And much more has everything a natural inclination towards what is the absolutely universal good.”

¹⁵ Osborne, *Love of Self and Love of God*, 80.

serves and holds all creatures together in himself. According to John Capreolus, chief among Thomas's defenders, this means that "the cause of natural love is not merely union or unity of what is loved with the one loving, but rather the lover's being contained in being and goodness by the thing loved. In this way God contains every creature in being and goodness more than the creature is contained by itself or by its intrinsic principles."¹⁶ Capreolus goes on to note that God is the cause of unity for all creatures, and of their union with each other. A creature is not the primary cause of the union it has with itself. Hence, as source of union, God is closer to the creature than it is to itself.¹⁷ It follows that a creature's union with itself does not result in a lesser love for God. Consequently, the will is related to God as a particular being is related to something that somehow contains it. The relation is one of a part to a whole.

Moving to a consideration of human love in the *Prima Secundae*, Thomas asks, "Whether, by his own natural powers and without grace, man can love God above all things?"¹⁸ In response, he distinguishes between the state of "perfect nature" and that of "corrupt nature." When humans were in a state of perfect, or integral, nature, they were able to love God above all things with God's moving help. But in the current state of corrupt nature, they need "the help of grace to heal his nature" and enable them to perform their natural operation of self-transcending love: "In the state of corrupt nature, man falls short of this in the appetite of his rational will, which, unless it is cured by God's grace, follows its private good, on account of the corruption of nature."¹⁹ Similar to his exposition in the *Prima Pars*, Aquinas's argument here relies on an understanding of the common good. We can formulate it in the following way:

1. Everything naturally loves its own proper good on account of the common good of the whole universe.
2. God is the common good of the whole universe of which man is a part.

¹⁶ Capreolus, *Defensiones Theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, vol. 5, lib. III, d. 27, ed. Paban-Pègues (Turin: Stumpitibus Alfred Cattier, 1905); translated by Romanus Cessario and Kevin White as *On the Virtues* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2001), 196. All quotations of this work are from this translation.

¹⁷ As Augustine said, "interior intimo meo et superior summo meo." *Confessions* III, 6.

¹⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 3.

¹⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 3, c.

3. Therefore man, in a state of uncorrupted nature, naturally loves himself on account of God. This is the same as naturally to love God more than himself.

To prove the major premise (1), Thomas discusses the relation of the whole to the part. He states, "it is manifest that the good of the part is for the good of the whole." He demonstrated this premise in *ST* I, q. 60, a. 5, as we saw above. The implicit assumption here is that to exist for the good of the other is to love the other in some way. Because loving something means willing or tending toward the good of that thing, existing for the good of something is a love-like tendency. A mother loves her family when she wills the good of her family; analogously, a forest of trees have a love-like relation to the rest of the world insofar as the forest tends to assist the good of an ecosystem, even the entire world. In this line of reasoning, Thomas argues that the part naturally loves itself for the sake of the common good of the whole.

Thomas does not explicitly prove the minor premise (2), but we can uncover his implicit reasoning. He states, "everything, by its natural appetite and love, loves its own proper good on account of the common good of the whole universe, which is God. Hence, Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* iv) that 'God converts all things to love of himself.'"²⁰ Here we can note that the Dionysian principle is ambiguous. It could be pantheistic if it means that God "converts" and transmutes or dissolves all things into his very Being. In that case, God would be the common good of the universe because he and the universe would be of the same substance.²¹ But Thomas's theology as a whole makes this an impossible interpretation. The statement in fact means that God "converts" or turns and leads all things to love him. As he said to Israel, "I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love" (Hos 11:4). Just as a farmer can draw an ox to himself with a rope, so God can use our love of creatures as a cord to draw us to himself. As Dante recognized through his love for Beatrice, God can use all lower loves to bring us to the highest love, namely, friendship with God himself.

Finally, the conclusion (3) supposes that to love one thing on ac-

²⁰ Ibid., translation modified.

²¹ Ludwig Feuerbach supposed that this is what Thomas meant. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (The Essence of Christianity) (Leipzig: Wigand, 1849). Charles De Koninck raises this objection and refutes it in *Writings*, vol. 2, 133 ff.

count of another, or for the sake of another, is to love the other thing more than the first. If a person loves to read because it brings wisdom, then the love has an order: reading is subordinate to wisdom. A person loves wisdom more than reading because reading exists for the sake of wisdom, as a means to an end. In a different case, a person may love the face of his beloved primarily because it is *her* face; he loves the face on account of the person: the face is not a means to an end, but it is incorporated within the whole as a part of the person. In a similar way, when a person loves himself for the sake of God, he loves the fact that his life may be a means for giving God glory; when he loves himself on account of God, he loves himself with the same love with which God loves him. In both cases, the person is loving himself less than he loves God.

In the course of discussing the order of charity in the *Secunda Secundae*, St. Thomas continues his inquiry on self-love by asking, "Whether out of charity, man is bound to love God more than himself?"²² Whereas in the *Prima Secundae* he distinguished between integral and corrupt nature, here the Angelic Doctor distinguishes between "the good of nature" and "the good of grace." He makes the astonishing claim that everything loves God more than itself— "every single creature, each in its own way, i.e. either by an intellectual, or by a rational, or by an animal, or at least by a natural love." Here Thomas is speaking of love analogously understood: clearly rocks do not have affections or volition. All things nevertheless have movement toward an end that is connatural to them: for rocks, this is the center of the earth, toward which they move when they fall; for man, the end is to know and love the absolute true and good.²³

Once again Aquinas's principal argument employs his understanding of the common good. Here Thomas explains further how God is the common good of the universe. First he says that natural love is founded on "the fellowship of natural goods bestowed on us by God." As Creator, God is in some way the common good in the natural sphere, for he is the cause of natural goods that man shares with others. Second, Thomas says that "happiness is in God as in the universal and fountain-principle of all who are able to have a share of that happiness." Consequently,

²² *ST* II-II, q. 26, a. 3.

²³ See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 1.

God is the common good in the sphere of grace, the source and goal by which humans have supernatural fellowship with him. God contains the fullness of happiness of which man shares a part through his union with God.

Upon analyzing three texts from different parts of the *Summa theologiae*, we have found that Aquinas retains a consistent vision throughout his work. He argues that humans are able to love God above all things, including themselves, because all individuals have a natural inclination to love the common good more than themselves. In the current order of things, humans can love God above all things only by the healing effects of grace, by which man shares in God's own happiness as a part shares in a greater whole. In sum, we can agree with Osborne that "throughout his writings, Thomas argues for the possibility of a natural love of God over self which is based on a natural inclination of the part for the whole."²⁴

A Thomistic Account of Self-Transcending Love and the Common Good

Having followed Thomas's arguments that man can love God with a self-transcending love, there are two tasks one could perform to develop his thought. The first would be a defensive maneuver: to show the intelligibility, or at least the coherency, of Thomas's position. This would largely be an answer to the objections of Duns Scotus, a work I will not undertake here. The second would be a constructive endeavor: to explain what Thomas means and to show its import. I will try to do that in summary fashion.

As we have seen, Thomas emphasizes that humans love God as part loves a whole. This love is not pantheistic, but entails an ordered relationship between the lover and the beloved such that the good of the greater is identified with the good of the lesser by way of participation: it is a common good that both enjoy in an ordered manner. It is possible to explain self-transcending love without reference to the common good, *pace* Scotus and others, but Thomas emphasizes the part-whole analogy to show

²⁴ Osborne, *Love of Self and Love of God*, 86. Thomas employs in other writings the part-whole argument to explain self-transcending love. See *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3; *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis nominibus expositio*, 4, lects. 9–10; *De Spe*, a. 1, ad 9; *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, 13; *De Caritate*, a. 9; *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) III, ch. 17.6.

that creatures exist in relationship with one and other and with their Creator. To see what this means, I will attempt to uncover the roots of Thomas's thought. First, I will consider Thomas's understanding of *how a part naturally loves a whole* with respect to creatures. After this, I will consider *human love* with respect to the universe, other humans, and God himself.

Love for the Common Good: Terminology

The most basic meaning of "whole," according to Aristotle, is "that from which nothing is wanting."²⁵ Thomas explains that wholeness indicates completeness, "as we speak of a whole man, or a whole box, if they lack nothing which they ought to have."²⁶ The correlative of "whole" is "part." While "whole" fundamentally connotes completeness or perfection, "part" connotes incompleteness and imperfection with respect to the whole. Thomas not only says that a part is *related* to a whole as incomplete is to complete (and as imperfect is to perfect), he specifies the relation: the part is "ordered" (*ordinetur*) to the whole.²⁷ This indicates a "unity of order, whereby some things are ordered to one another," and through that order they share "one end."²⁸ There are three levels of order at work: the order of the individual part to its own intrinsic end; the order of one part to another; and the order of all the parts to the whole. Thomas explains:

Now if we wish to assign an end to any whole, and to the parts of that whole, we shall find, first, that each and every part exists for the sake of its proper act, as the eye for the act of seeing; secondly, that less honorable parts exist for the more honorable, as the senses for the intellect, the lungs for the heart; and, thirdly, that all parts are for the perfection of the whole, as the matter for the form, since the parts are, as it were, the matter of the whole.²⁹

²⁵ *Physics* III, ch. 6 (207a 9–10).

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, trans. Pierre Conway (Columbus, OH: College of St. Mary of the Springs, 1958), III, lec. 11, n. 385.

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

²⁸ *ST* I, q. 47, a. 3, c, and ad 1.

²⁹ *ST* I, q. 65, a. 2, c.

Aristotle points out that the last end, the end of the whole, ensures the proper ordering of the parts: "That for the sake of which other things are, is naturally the best and the end of the other things."³⁰ Commenting on this passage, Thomas relates his famous insight: "Moreover, it must be noted that, even though the end is the last thing to come into being in some cases, it is always prior in causality. Hence it is called the cause of causes, because it is the cause of the causality of all causes."³¹ It follows that the end of whole is the highest end of the parts, and this is supremely good for the part. The end of the eye and its component parts is seeing. When I open my eyelids and look around, I engage muscles surrounding my eyes to perform that task. The engagement of these muscles is not tyranny over them; it lets them participate in the dignified act of seeing, and it can even save the eyes if I move to avoid a projectile flying toward my face. Similarly, the end of the human body is the furtherance of relationships of knowing, loving, and service. If a father sacrifices certain bodily pleasures to provide for his children, or if a mother willingly accepts particular sufferings to protect her children, the man and woman are not lessened by ordering their needs, feelings, and desires to the good of the family. In fact, they are dignified in their persons precisely because they are more greatly promoting their family of which they are integral members and for which they act. "As a being enters into greater communication with the whole," Oliva Blanchette explains, "it does not become less itself, but more so. This is made possible by the total transcendence of the final end in which they communicate."³²

Another way to describe how a part is ordered to a whole is to say that *a part loves the whole more than itself*. Building upon Aristotle's de-

³⁰ *Metaphysics* V, ch. 2 (1013b 25).

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995) V, lec. 3, no. 782. Hereafter *On Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

³² Oliva Blanchette, "The Perfection of the Universe in the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., Laval University, 1965), 402. Blanchette later revised his dissertation, written under the direction of Charles De Koninck, and published it as *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992). Though compatible in their major conclusions, the works are distinct. Henceforth, I will refer to the first as "Blanchette, *Diss.*" and the second as "Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe.*"

scription of the good as “that at which all things aim,”³³ Thomas identifies “end” with “good” insofar as the good is a final cause.³⁴ Because the end of the whole is the end of the part, the good of the whole is the good of each part. Following its inherent drive toward the good, a part seeks the good of the whole so that, one can truly say that the part loves the whole. Thomas Gilby defines love in its broadest sense as “the inborn appetite of every power for its act and perfection, a gravitation to completion and rest. It is the foundation of all activity, the underlying principle of every movement, the striving of something imperfect for completion from without.”³⁵ Each part, in a manner befitting its nature, has this inborn appetite for the good of the whole. Rocks have natural love for the good order of the universe, to which they contribute by their existence and in following the motions of gravity; animals have a sensitive love for their species, manifested in their procreation and care for their young; and humans have rational love, seen especially in their care for the family and city.³⁶ The love that a part extends toward a whole is not self-centered, as if the part loves the whole solely because it derives good from the whole, or as if the whole existed for the sake of the part. Rather, the part seeks its own good for the sake of the good of the whole. Thus “the part does indeed love the good of the whole, as becomes a part, not however so as to refer the good of the whole to itself, but rather itself to the good of the whole.”³⁷ The chorister perfects her craft for the sake of a better choir; the mother reads and rests so that she can be a better caretaker; the soldier improves his agility and intelligence in order to help the military and his country.

For Thomas, to say that the part naturally prefers the good of the whole to its own good is to say that the part naturally is ordered to the common good more than to its own good. “The common good is the end of each individual member of a community,” he says, “just as the good of the whole is the end of each part.”³⁸ The import of this claim

³³ *Nicomachean Ethics* I, ch. 1 (1904a1).

³⁴ *ST* I, q. 5, a. 4, c: “Since goodness is that which all things desire, and since this has the aspect of an end, it is clear that goodness implies the aspect of an end.”

³⁵ Thomas Gilby, *Poetic Experience* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934), 31.

³⁶ See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 1.

³⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 26, a. 3, ad 2.

³⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 9, ad 3.

may be better grasped when one distinguishes between the proper good, the private good, and the common good. A *proper good* is one befitting nature in some respect. Since man is rational by nature, his proper good is the good of reason.³⁹ Proper goods can be private or common. A *private good* is, in Smith's words, "the good of the individual only," that is, what is mine and, as such, cannot be shared with anyone else.⁴⁰ On the animal level, food is a private good insofar as, once eaten, it preserves only the individual's being and not another's. Finally, there is a *common good*, namely, a good that is shared naturally; it is mine and yours simultaneously. De Koninck maintains that a good is common insofar as it is communicable: "communicability is the very reason of its perfection." Consequently, a common good is communicable to individuals as individuals. The good of an orchestra is something shared by each member in the orchestra and by the orchestra as a whole. Because it is naturally shareable, a good considered as "common" cannot be private at the same time and in the same respect. The good of the choir could never be identified with the good solely of the chief mezzo-soprano, which could not be shared with anyone else.

Not all common goods are shared in the same way. Hence, from within the general notion of the common good, Thomas distinguishes between two ways a thing can be said to be common: in predication (*in praedicando*) and in causation (*in causando*). "First," he says, "it is said to be common through effect or predication; that is, it is found in many things according to one intelligible character. . . . Second, a thing is said to be common after the manner of a cause; that is, it resembles a cause which, while remaining numerically one, extends to many effects."⁴¹ Each meaning of "common" calls for an analysis.

Regarding the first distinction, the *common good in predication*, it is fairly easy to see how something can be held in common only nominally. Three things (e.g., a man, a toy, and a fishing tool) can share the

³⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus*, q. 2, a. 2, c.

⁴⁰ Michael A. Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good in the Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), 87. Thomas says that "the singular, from the fact that it is singular, is divided off from all others. Hence every name imposed to signify any singular thing is incommunicable both in reality and idea" (ST I, q. 13, a. 9, c.). Sometimes a private good is also called a "particular good."

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), q. 7, a. 6, ad 7. Hereafter Aquinas, *On Truth*.

name “Bob” without essentially sharing anything else. Likewise, Thomas notes that genus and species are common by predication.⁴² For instance, the species of humanity can be predicated of individual humans because all have the same human nature. Nevertheless, the essence of man, “humanity,” does not exist apart from distinct individuals; each individual is a separately existing instance of humanity. “We do not share the same human nature as we share a room or a friend,” Froelich explains. “It is not something numerically one of which each of us has a part. Any universality attributed to human nature comes solely from our ability to predicate ‘having a human nature’ or ‘man’ of all men, and not from anything intrinsic to it.”⁴³

Goods common only by predication are, in the strictest sense, private goods. As such, they cannot be shared with another: “if the good aimed at by one person is a private good, it is impossible for it to be the private good of another, for the good in these two cases differs by a numerical distinction.” De Koninck notes: “a private good may indeed be spoken of as common to many persons, but we are then using the term ‘common’ in the sense of ‘common according to predication.’”⁴⁴ Thus, when a mound of food is called the common good of an army, each portion of food is numerically distinct. Two people cannot eat precisely the same portion: if one person eats a potato, another cannot eat the same potato (which is why some hungry people fight during a famine). Similarly, no one else can have my particular instance of human nature. My particular instance of human nature is mine and mine alone, for to “have” *my* human nature is to be me, and someone else cannot be me. In this way, goods common only by predication are not sharable.

⁴² See St. Thomas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* VII, lec. 13, no. 6: “Animal as common or man as common is not some substance among natural things. But this commonality has the form of animal or of man according as it is in the intellect, which accepts one form as common of many, insofar as it abstracts it from all individuals.” Also, *ST* I, q. 39, a. 4, ad 3: “But unity or commonality of human nature is not according to the thing, but solely according to consideration.”

⁴³ Gregory Froelich, “The Equivocal Status of *Bonum Commune*” *New Scholasticism* 63 (Winter 1989): 45.

⁴⁴ In De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2, 255. In this quotation and in my own exposition I substitute Smith’s term “private” for De Koninck’s term “proper.” Smith distinguishes between “private” and “proper”—“private” refers to what is mine alone and cannot be shared; “proper” refers to what befits one’s nature. De Koninck does not employ this helpful distinction.

Goods common by predication “take on a universal character in the intellect”: they are common only insofar as the intellect grasps that many individuals have the same kind of good.⁴⁵ Precisely because the common good in predication is common *only in name*, its goodness is limited: “it is not more noble but more imperfect, as ‘animal’ is, which is more common than ‘man,’” for it does not convey goodness, but only gives a label to it.⁴⁶ Therefore, when Thomas says that the part is directed toward the common good of the whole, he cannot mean that the individual loves the common good in predication more than his own: the individual should not love “humanity” more than the individual human, he should not prefer “society” to his family—this would be to love the lesser above the greater.

There is no analogy between goods common in predication and goods common in causation, De Koninck insists.⁴⁷ In contrast to a good common in predication, a good common *in causation* is necessarily sharable with others. Different common goods can include ideas: the professor and the student can simultaneously ponder the idea of justice without removing that good from the other. In fact, pondering “justice” together could more deeply root the idea in both souls. Political order is also a good common in causation, as are peace and charity: they all depend on the existence of more than one person to share them.⁴⁸ Similarly, the good of a community, such as a choir, is a common good that one can have only if it is shared by many. No matter how good a singer may be, he cannot sing the entire score of Mozart’s *Requiem* by himself. It is a good that can only be enjoyed by the individual when it is shared with other choir members. The sharable good is called a common good “in causation” because it is the formal cause of the good of all who share

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *On Truth*, q. 7, a. 6, ad 7.

⁴⁷ In De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2, 355n124: “The analogical notion of common good could not possibly comprise both *bonum commune in causando* and *bonum commune in praedicando*, since the latter is not formally a good. When used for the one and for the other, the expression ‘common good’ is equivocal, not analogical.”

⁴⁸ Thomas points out that a person cannot have justice only for himself: “justice by its name implies equality, it denotes essentially a relation to another, for a thing is equal, not to itself, but to another. . . . Hence justice properly speaking demands a distinction of suppositis, and consequently is only in one man towards another” (*ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 2).

in it: the *Requiem* causes joy to each singer insofar as he sings well along with the rest of the choir. In this context we can note that another common good is love itself: "True happiness is found in unselfish love," Thomas Merton observed, "a love which increases in proportion as it is shared. . . . Selfless love consents to be loved selflessly for the sake of the beloved. In doing so, it perfects itself."⁴⁹ Insofar as the common good in causation is the cause of goodness for more than an individual, it can be shared with others and therefore is "more noble" and more loveable than the individual good and the common good in predication.⁵⁰

Love for the Common Good and Self-Love

Having established the distinctions among the private good, the proper good, the common good in predication, and the common good in causation, we are equipped to understand how self-love may transcend itself and incline more toward another good than to its own. In the course of discussing the gift of fear, Thomas notes that "self-love may stand in a threefold relationship with charity."⁵¹ David Gallagher helpfully observes that, though Thomas focuses on the relation between fear and an infused virtue, "it seems that what he says there can be applied more broadly to a person's self-love within any community of which he is a part," so that one can speak of three kinds of natural self-love with respect to the common good.⁵² Thus a discussion of these loves will prove quite helpful.

With the first kind of love, "a man places his end in the love of his own good"; this is a wicked sort of love.⁵³ Adam sinned because he unduly loved his personal excellence, which he willed to be his final end; this was pride.⁵⁴ The effect of this sin is that every man without grace pursues his own good to the exclusion of the good of others.⁵⁵ For example, a person

⁴⁹ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island in A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1962), 282.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *On Truth*, q. 7, a. 6, ad 7.

⁵¹ *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 7, c.

⁵² Gallagher, "Self-Love as the Basis of Love for Others," 40. Here I am omitting Gallagher's discussion of the love of God, saving it for the next section of this study.

⁵³ *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 7, c.

⁵⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 163, a. 1, ad 1.

⁵⁵ See *ST I-II*, 109, a. 3, c.

singing with a choir may sing a solo piece so elaborately and with such flamboyant emotion that he ruins the mood of his fellow choristers and makes it impossible for them to sing as a whole. Such an inverted self-love, Gallagher notes, is “opposed to and corruptive of friendship and community. It is a selfish or egotistical self-love, one that seeks for oneself precisely those goods which cannot be shared.”⁵⁶ Gallagher’s assessment confirms our observation above, that those who seek private goods, or goods common only in predication, often enter into competition with each other, for those things that cannot be shared by many at the same time (e.g., food, money) are finite quantities.⁵⁷ This self-seeking love in no way transcends the self: it is clearly contrary to the love of friendship, which wills another’s good for his own sake, and to the love of the common good, which seeks the good in which many can share.

The second kind of self-love is inclined to the good of the individual—but only insofar as it is compatible with the common good. The person seeks his private good with a mind to the good of others, so that it constitutes “the proper self-love of one who is dedicated to a common good.”⁵⁸ With this love, the individual subordinates his good to that of the common good. He does so because, as we have seen, the individual is not in competition with the common good, rather he finds perfection by seeking the good that transcends that of his particular self. In this case, the soloist would love to sing very well, but in such a way as to promote the good singing of the entire choir. “To affirm the primacy of the common good,” Smith points out, “is to say my good which I share with others is more important than my good which I cannot share.”⁵⁹ As Thomas says, “No part separated from the whole has the perfection of nature.”⁶⁰

But subordination is not obliteration. One’s concern for the common

⁵⁶ Gallagher, “Self-Love as the Basis of Love for Others,” 40.

⁵⁷ See *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 4, ad 2: “Through defect of goodness, it happens that certain small goods cannot, in their entirety, be possessed by many at the same time: and from the love of such things arises the zeal of envy. But it does not arise, properly speaking, in the case of those things which, in their entirety, can be possessed by many: for no one envies another the knowledge of truth, which can be known entirely by many; except perhaps one may envy another his superiority in the knowledge of it.”

⁵⁸ Gallagher, “Self-Love as the Basis of Love for Others,” 41.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good*, 87.

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*, trans. Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1949), a. 2, ad 5.

good does not dissolve or damn one's concern for his private good. Rather, one's love for the private good gains a new character through its incorporation into a movement toward higher goods. Because the individual's good is contained within the common good of causation, "one of the things he will want for himself is precisely his ordination to the common good. . . . What the person wants *for himself* is to be a good part of the whole."⁶¹ He considers himself to be more perfect when properly related to the common good than when ordered to himself alone.

The third kind of self-love can be called "total dedication" to the common good.⁶² In this case, a person identifies his good with that of the common good: "His love of himself is an extension of his love for the whole; because he loves the whole he loves all that belongs to the whole including himself."⁶³ This love is distinct from the second kind, for the object of the second is the good of the self *as related to* the common good, whereas the object of the third kind is *the common good as such*. The distinct loves are compatible, however, for the love of self is subordinated to love of the common good: "To love oneself as ordered to the common good presupposes a prior act by which one determined oneself to be ordered to the common good."⁶⁴ Taking up the singing example again, with this love, the soloist would be practically without an ego: she sings well solely for the good of the whole group. Proper self-love, then, is ordered to love of the common good. If it were not, and one refused the primacy of the common good, one would fall back into the wicked sort of self-love, "a disordered love of singularity [by which] one rejects the common good practically as an alien good and one judges it incompatible with the excellence of our singular condition."⁶⁵ It follows that one loves the common good as such above all other goods but without excluding a love of one's own good.

Love of Created Persons

Given that the common good naturally has primacy in the order of love, some goods are more common than others. Additionally, the more

⁶¹ Gallagher, "Self-Love as the Basis of Love for Others," 41.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2, 86.

common and the more universal a good is, the more it calls for our love. Aristotle laid bare the foundations of this truth in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he states, “Even though the good be the same for one man and for the whole state, it seems much better and more perfect to procure and preserve the good of the whole state. It is admirable, indeed, to preserve the good of an individual but it is better still and more divine to do this for a nation and for cities.”⁶⁶ Developing this insight, Thomas continually insists that the good of the individual is directed to the good of the universe: “the greatest good in created things is the perfection of the universe, consisting in the order of distinct things; for always the perfection of the whole has precedence of the perfection of the individual parts.”⁶⁷ And again: “the good of the order of the universe is more noble than any part of the universe, since the individual parts are ordered, as to an end, to the good of the order that is in the whole.”⁶⁸ This theme winds its way through much of Thomas’s works, but it is no easier to grasp for being so abundantly present.⁶⁹

On the surface, it may seem that, when Thomas asserts that the part is subordinated to the whole, he is claiming that humans are subordinated to a faceless universe, that persons ought to love an abstract, impersonal good more than themselves or other persons. This would seem to pave the way for a pagan exultation of the cosmos above the person, or a totalitarian promotion of the state with little thought for human dignity. De Koninck voices the objection against the primacy of the common good in this way: Does not Thomas say that “intellectual creatures are so controlled by God, as objects of care for their own sakes; while other creatures are subordinated, as it were, to the rational creatures”?⁷⁰ That is, “man is naturally free and exists for his own sake,” while the entire universe was made on account of him? How, then, can the individual be subordinated to the common good?⁷¹

In response, Thomas distinguishes: in one way, the universe as a

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, ch. 2 (1094b 8–14).

⁶⁷ SCG II, ch. 44.2.

⁶⁸ SCG I, ch. 70.4.

⁶⁹ See, among many instances, ST I, q. 15, a. 2; q. 22, a. 4; q. 47, a. 1; SCG III, ch. 64.9–10; Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*, q. 1, a. 8.

⁷⁰ SCG III, ch. 112.1.

⁷¹ ST II-II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3.

whole has primacy over persons; in another way, persons have primacy over impersonal things: "The universe is more perfect in goodness than the intellectual creature as regards *extension* and *diffusion*; but *intensively* and *collectively* the likeness to the Divine goodness is found rather in the intellectual creature, which has a capacity for the highest good."⁷² The part is not in competition with the whole; the proper good is not divided against the common good; only the private good and the common good in predication alone is not sharable as such. Blanchette draws out the implications of this passage: "The universe is more perfect [than the individual human] in that it extends and embraces more than just intellectual creatures, for, besides the intellectual creatures themselves, it also includes the various species of material nature." Furthermore, "each individual intellectual creature itself constitutes only a part of the universe."⁷³ This is the meaning of *extensive* and *diffusive*: extensively and diffusively, the universe is higher than man for it contains more goods than man. But *intensively* and *collectively*: "intellectual creatures are themselves more perfect in that they sum up the perfection of the universe intensively in themselves through their knowing, and draw its multiplicity and diversity into a greater unity," and in that way they transcend "the differences that could otherwise keep the parts of the universe from communication within the whole, and bringing them together into what can most properly be called a universe."⁷⁴

The ability to unite all things together as in an ordered whole comes from the rational creature's capability of reaching God, the highest good, who holds all things together within himself. "The human soul is in some ways all things": reason makes man a "principle part" of the universe, for he is more noble and, as rational animal, contains the principles of the other parts within him.⁷⁵ "Intellectual natures have a closer relationship to a whole than do other natures," Thomas elucidates, "indeed, each intellectual substance is, in a way, all things. For it may comprehend the entirety of being through its intellect; on the other hand, every other substance has only a particular share in being."⁷⁶ With these ideas in mind,

⁷² ST I, q. 93, a. 2, ad 3. Italics added.

⁷³ Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe*, 298.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 299.

⁷⁵ ST I, q. 65, a. 2; SCG III, ch. 112.4.

⁷⁶ SCG III, ch. 112.5.

he argues: “we can say that the universe is in the image of God according to a part of it, that is, its principal or intellectual part, while some parts of it are not in the image of God,” namely, subrational material things.⁷⁷ Therefore the good of the human is in a certain respect *the* natural common good in causation, and thus to be loved above other goods.

All things naturally love the common good more than themselves, as we have seen, according to their capacities. Subrational creatures cannot directly turn themselves toward God, the most common good. They do not know and love him as such; their “love” extends only to his perfections existing in creatures toward which they are directed. Thus, without the rational activity of man, without acts by which man perfects his own human nature, the universe itself would be imperfect. In light of Thomas’s principle that the part is ordered to the whole as material is ordered to form and imperfect to the perfect, Blanchette says, “If we admit a distinction between corruptible and incorruptible parts of the universe, we shall have to say that they are ordered to one another, not *per accidens*, but *per se*.”⁷⁸ Hence man’s body is ordered to his soul, and the material universe is also ordered to man’s soul by being ordered to the good of his body. This order highlights how the parts exist for the sake of the whole in the universe: the soul is in some ways all things, and thus the material things in the universe are parts of it insofar as they are contained in it by knowledge and love. “Among the perfections of things, the greatest is that something is intellectual, because through this it is somehow everything, having within itself the perfection of all things.”⁷⁹ The human soul is, in principle, superior to all material creatures, even the entire material universe.⁸⁰ Blanchette explains: “This superiority is based on something that is particular to intelligence, the ability to encompass, to contain, be in a certain fashion all things. . . . There is nothing above the intelligence, because intelligence can have

⁷⁷ ST I, q. 93, a. 2, ad 3.

⁷⁸ Blanchette, *Diss.*, 405.

⁷⁹ SCG I, ch. 44.6.

⁸⁰ See SCG II, ch. 68.6, 8–12; III, ch. 22.7: “Elements exist for the sake of mixed bodies; these latter exist for the sake of living bodies, among which plants exist for animals, and animals for men. Therefore, man is the end of the whole order of generation.”

in itself the perfection of all things.”⁸¹ Thus the rational creature has a special role to play in the perfection of the universe.

A created thing can be perfect in two ways, according to Thomas. In one way, something is perfect according to its species, its particular nature, its proper being. This is true perfection with respect to the individual, but it is imperfect with respect to the universe that contains an aggregate of many species, whose perfections are distinct from each other. In a second way, a thing is perfect “according to which the perfection proper to one thing is found in another thing. And this is the perfection of one who knows inasmuch as he knows, because something is known inasmuch as the known itself is somehow in the knower.”⁸² Among material creatures, only humans have this sort of perfection. Only human nature constitutes the horizon of being: only humans are simultaneously corporeal and spiritual. This natural, hylomorphic unity entails that humans retain, in their very ontological structure, communion with all things: “there is contained, as a principle, in the good of the universe, the rational nature which is capable of beatitude, and to which all other creatures are ordered.”⁸³ This is a “sort of remedy or compensation for the imperfection of the first mode,” Blanchette notes, for the created universe would not have a proper cohesion of its parts without a created knower grasping their natures and holding them together in his mind.⁸⁴ Because of this special place in the order of the cosmos, the human being “has an irreplaceable part to play toward the perfection of the universe; if all lower, infrarational beings are ordered to it, it is also through it, as well as in it, that they attain their perfection as parts of the universe.”⁸⁵ Nature, therefore, calls for man to exercise his rationality.

By perfecting himself as human, the human person thereby perfects not only the highest part of the universe, but also the entire or-

⁸¹ Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe*, 269.

⁸² Aquinas, *On Truth*, q. 2, a. 2, c.

⁸³ Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity*, trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), q. un., a. 7, ad 5. This partly explains why it was more fitting for God, in saving creatures, to take the nature of a man than of an angel. See SCG IV, ch. 55.4: “Man, since he is the term of creatures, presupposing, so to say, all other creatures in the order of generation, is suitably united to the first principle of things to finish a kind of cycle in the perfection of things.”

⁸⁴ Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe*, 271.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

der of creation insofar as the human soul is in some way all things. It follows that the perfection of the love of the common good of the universe is the love of persons, for, "In loving the good of the universe, we shall be loving the persons with whom this good has become identified."⁸⁶ The perfection of the universe toward which man is directed is not some external utopia, some perfect arrangement of natural things, like well-ordered gardens in nineteenth-century France. Nor is it some external arrangement of peoples, such as a political order per se—the "perfect society." Rather, it is the perfect order of his soul, in his acts of knowing and loving persons. In other words, the perfection of the universe, the active love the common good, consists in human friendship and the contemplation of truth.

Higher than natural and sensitive love (*amor*), humans have a love proper to their rationality: Thomas calls it "chosen love" (*dilectio electiva*), which is a movement of the will. He argues that "since nature is first in everything, what belongs to nature must be a principle in everything," so that "natural love is the principle of their love of choice."⁸⁷ David Gallagher explains: "Whether or not a person takes complaisance in an object, can result from a free choice"; that is, through habitually chosen action a person chooses to shape himself to be pleased by an object and to experience it as good. At the same time, "one chooses to take the object as one's good to be pursued, or one chooses to pursue the good of one person and not another."⁸⁸ Precisely because he is rational, man can choose a spiritual object as the focus of his love. Hence naturally elicited love, which arises from the senses, does not comprise the whole of human love.

In Thomas's view, there are two kinds of rationally elicited or chosen love: the "love of concupiscence" and the "love of friendship."⁸⁹ Love of concupiscence is ordered to the love of friendship: "Now the members of this division are related as primary and secondary: since that which is loved with the love of friendship is loved simply and for itself; whereas that which is loved with the love of concupiscence, is loved, not sim-

⁸⁶ Blanchette, *Diss.*, 409.

⁸⁷ *ST I*, q. 60, a. 2, c.

⁸⁸ Gallagher, "Person and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas," 56.

⁸⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4, c.

ply and for itself, but for something else.”⁹⁰ Love of friendship is only for other persons, for “we have no friendship with wine and suchlike things,” even though we desire wine as good.⁹¹ In the love of friendship, the object is the person who is the seat of the goodness. There may be lesser reasons that moved us to love a person in himself, certain qualities that attracted us and moved us to love him with friendship: he is courteous, a good conversationalist, humble; he loves us; he has done good for us, etc. Clearly, when we love a person, our love is primarily directed to him, even if our love arose because of his looks or personality. We love the substance primarily, the accidents and what relates to the substance secondarily. Consequently, our love of impersonal things is naturally ordered to our love of persons. Gallagher is firm on this point: “when a person loves what is not a person with a love of concupiscence, he must have a corresponding love of friendship, either for himself or for another person; if I love wine, I love it for someone.”⁹² The miser loves gold not for itself, but for himself, as George Eliot poignantly illustrated in *Silas Marner*. Even if a miser sits on piles of gold, when he no longer loves himself, he is tempted to commit suicide: there is nothing else to live for. Thomas’s conception of love, therefore, is personal in two senses: only persons can have this nobler love, and it is directed only toward persons.

The primacy of the person-centered love of friendship, the only sort of love that loves another for his own sake, clarifies man’s love of the common good. When a person loves the common good of the universe considered as an abstract, impersonal order, he loves with the *love of concupiscence*. He loves it for the sake of one or more persons. The love of concupiscence is ordered to the love of persons, and so the love of the common good in this case would be “based on a love of friendship for the persons who make up the community.”⁹³ The common good would not be loved for its own sake, but for the sake of those who share in it. But when the universe is considered as residing in its principal part, in a rational soul, one’s love for the common good terminates in persons toward whom one is inclined with the *love of friendship*.

Given that the created universe contains all created persons, this

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., *sed contra*.

⁹² Gallagher, “Person and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas,” 57.

⁹³ Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 35n94.

means that, naturally speaking, one's love is perfected when one loves all peoples with the love of friendship. That is not to say that one is friends with everyone. Gallagher explicates this important distinction: "for Thomas, *amor amicitiae* and *amicitia* are related but not identical. The love of friendship, as the love of the person for himself, is found wherever a person is loved for his own sake," and consequently one wills goods toward him with benevolence, "while *amicitia* or friendship requires reciprocal and mutually recognized loves of friendship on the part of the two persons for one another."⁹⁴ The love of friendship toward another means, fundamentally, to know another's intrinsic goodness and to will him good for his own sake. Such an act of knowing and loving perfects not only other persons but even the one who wills it, the lover.

The cosmological import of the love of friendship provides the key to grasping Thomas's explanation of self-transcending love. Taking a cosmological perspective, Blanchette rightly observes: "Without the human being's knowing activity, nature remains essentially incomplete. But the intellectual creature's own perfection is not actualized merely in the use and exploitation of nature, but rather in the love shown to other intellectual creatures."⁹⁵ It follows that to love another person with the love of friendship, to love another for the other's sake, is a perfective natural human act. This is the case for many reasons.

First, the love of friendship engages the lover's highest faculties, his intellect and his will, in performing the greatest operation the will can perform: loving another person. Second, it is directed toward the greatest created object, that is, the common good insofar as it exists in the souls of persons, which are in principle able to encompass all beings. Because his love is directed toward the common good of which the lover is a part, he is simultaneously willing good toward himself

⁹⁴ Gallagher, "Person and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas," 61. See *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 1, c: "Not every love has the character of friendship, but that love which is together with benevolence, when, to wit, we love someone so as to wish good to him. If, however, we do not wish good to what we love, but wish its good for ourselves (thus we are said to love wine, or a horse, or the like), it is love not of friendship, but of a kind of concupiscence. For it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse. Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication."

⁹⁵ Blanchette, *Perfection of the Universe*, 300.

along with the entire community of persons within the universe. Additionally, because the act of friendship-love is perfective of the principal part of the universe, we can rightly say that the good of friendship is a common good—not only for the lover and the one for whom he wills good, but also for the created universe as a whole. When one's love extends to others who themselves are friends with each other and when one wills that they have friendship for each other, one thereby proffers the love of friendship toward them: one wills a good for their sakes. And because the highest friendship is concerned, not only with the good for individuals, but for the common good, this friendship turns outward and extends itself to others for whom they will good. Authentic friendship inclines friends to extend the love of friendship toward others. Hence the friendship of two can be the source of the love of friendship for all, and thus a perfection of the universe both formally and extensively. A community of friends, then, would be *the* common good of the created universe.⁹⁶

Love of God as the Supreme Common Good

Lofty as the created common good of the universe is, it does not constitute the greatest good that exists. Thomas, commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, says that *bonum*, understood as "the end or the goal of a thing," is twofold, either as intrinsic good or extrinsic good: "For an end is extrinsic to the thing ordained to it, as when we say that a place is the end of something that is moved locally. Or it is intrinsic, as a form is the end of the process of generation or alteration; and a form already acquired is a kind of intrinsic good of the thing whose form it is."⁹⁷ To explain the difference between these two goods, Thomas discusses Aristotle's classic example of the good of an army as a good common in causation.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Blanchette hints at the centrality of common friendship for the perfection of the universe when he says, "For him [Thomas], the universe is ultimately a community of intellectual beings, each intelligent and free, all capable of the highest good, moving toward completion through an activity in which this community expresses and perfects itself. . . . Thus, for Saint Thomas, the universe opens up to ethical community" (*Perfection of the Universe*, 300).

⁹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics* XII, lec. 12, no. 2627.

⁹⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, ch. 10 (1075a 11-1076a 4).

The good of an army is a good for each warrior in it, but it is a good greater than the individual particular good, for it involves a coordination of goods that contribute to a larger whole: the good of the archers indirectly aids the good of the foot soldiers, which aids the good of the horsemen, and so on. Aristotle and Thomas distinguish between the intrinsic and the extrinsic good of the whole and its parts.⁹⁹ The *intrinsic* good of an army is its formal character, the internal order and arrangement among the various parts: the way a foot soldier relates to a sergeant and a sergeant to a captain, and a captain to a general, for example. The *extrinsic* good of an army is its end—that to which it is directed. Thomas says, “Now the order of an army exists for the purpose of achieving the good of its commander, namely, his will to attain victory.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the good of the army depends on the commander’s intellect, which is the source of the plan of victory and which arranges the army suitably to his plan, and on his will, which causes the plan to be put into action.

Though a warrior may not grasp how his particular victory is related to the overall victory, his fighting would be ultimately senseless if it were not directed by the higher end that is known to the commander. Without the commander’s wisdom, which sees and directs particular ends to a single higher end, individuals would fight battles, but they would not contribute to an overarching strategic war. The commander is the primary cause of the overall good and the formal cause of that good, namely, the strategy. Because the strategy exists in the commander’s mind, the extrinsic good of victory is truly *his* good, but it is good for the army as a whole as well as for each member of the army.¹⁰¹ Victory won by strategy is not a private good, nor it is a proper good; it is a good common by causation. In contrast, the immediate victory, the proximate final end of a warrior or detachment, is directed toward the overall victory of the army. Indeed, the overall victory could not come about except by the particular, but the

⁹⁹ See Aquinas, *On Aristotle’s Metaphysics* XII, lec. 12, nos. 2627 ff.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2630.

¹⁰¹ It is his because, as the scholastic principle says, *omne agens agit sibi simile*: every agent makes its effect like itself. According to Thomas, “The agent is said to be the end of the effect inasmuch as the effect tends toward a similitude of the agent: hence the form of the thing generating is the end of the process of generation” (SCG III, ch. 19). The commander, who had the form of victory in his mind, extend that form to the concrete reality of his army and thus makes it like himself.

overall victory is something greater than the sum of the particular victories precisely because it can be shared in by all, whereas the particulars cannot. The overall victory is good for each and all.¹⁰² This good is commonly shared: it is caused by the general primarily and caused secondarily by the soldiers who fight with him and under his guidance; therefore it is called the common good in *causation*.

The example of intrinsic and extrinsic goods of an army leads to a more precise consideration of the First Mover. Thomas draws together the notions of the good in causation and the good in being, demonstrating that the first mover is God, the only good in being (*in essendo*). Thomas compares the order of the army with the order of the universe. Just as the intrinsic good of the army exists for the sake of the commander, to whom belongs victory as the army's final cause and as the army's good in causation, so too the universe exists for God, the First Mover: "the whole order of the universe exists for the sake of the first mover inasmuch as the things contained in the mind and will of the first mover are realized in the ordered universe. Hence the whole order of the universe must depend on the first mover."¹⁰³ With the biblical narrative of creation in mind, Thomas explains that, in this analogy, the intrinsic good of the army corresponds to the common good of the created universe, whereas the extrinsic good of the army corresponds to the supreme common good, God himself:

For it is clear that good has the nature of an end; wherefore, a particular end of anything consists in some particular good; while the universal end of all things is the Universal Good, Which is good of Itself by virtue of Its very Essence, Which is the very essence of goodness; whereas a particular good is good by participation. Now it is manifest that in the whole created universe there is not a good which is not such by participation. Wherefore that good which is the end of the whole universe must be a good outside of the universe.¹⁰⁴

Smith summarizes the argument: "God, as our highest good, is our

¹⁰² See the discussion in Froelich, "Equivocal Status of *Bonum Commune*," 48–49.

¹⁰³ Aquinas, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics* XII, lec. 12, no. 2631.

¹⁰⁴ *ST* I, q. 103, a. 2, c.

uncreated common good, but our highest *created* common good is the order of the universe.”¹⁰⁵ This distinction is founded on distinction between Goodness itself and participated goodness.

A consideration of God’s substantial goodness, his absolute perfection, leads us back to the part-whole analogy. While the notion of wholeness applies to individual created substances, Thomas says, even more does this notion hold “in regard to what is truly and perfectly whole, namely, that outside of which there is absolutely nothing.”¹⁰⁶ The supreme analogue of wholeness is God himself, the supreme substance, whose unity and completeness are perfect. As a result, God can analogously be called a “whole.” Strictly speaking, God is not an organic or natural whole, for he is completely simple and without composition or parts.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, he is truly a *virtual* whole, a whole in which “a form is the principle of [the] operation” of its parts.¹⁰⁸ The primary meaning of “form” is “that which is in act,” so God, as complete actuality and Being itself, is “therefore of His essence a form.”¹⁰⁹ In his very Being, God is the principle of the operation of the parts of the universe, which stand in relation to him as imperfect to perfect. Stevens explains: “God himself is the ‘whole’—the plenitude of goodness, the ‘universal good.’ God thus ‘contains’ the limited good of each creature . . . and ‘part’ refers to participated being.”¹¹⁰ Consequently, both the creature as a whole and the creature’s good, whether private or proper, “is then a participation of the Supreme Good. . . . The creature is not identified with God, nor wholly separate and disparate, but is rather a participation in God.”¹¹¹ As we saw Capreolus argue, the part-whole and the hand-body analogies

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *Human Dignity and the Common Good*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* III, lec. 11, n. 385. In this vein, Thomas develops Aristotle’s observation, “Whole and complete are either quite identical or closely akin,” saying, “‘whole’ is not found in simple things which have no parts; in which things, nevertheless, we use the word ‘perfect.’ This shows that the perfect is ‘that which has nothing outside of it.’”

¹⁰⁷ See *ST I*, q. 3, aa. 1–8. Also, *ST I*, q. 10, a. 1, ad 3: “Eternity is called ‘whole,’ not because it has parts, but because it is wanting in nothing”; that is, it is complete and perfect.

¹⁰⁸ *ST I*, q. 76, a. 8, c. Above we discussed virtual wholes, such as communities and armies, but God also is a virtual whole, although in an infinitely more eminent way.

¹⁰⁹ *ST I*, q. 3, a. 2, c.

¹¹⁰ Stevens, “Disinterested Love of God,” 527. Footnotes omitted.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

are meant to illustrate the fact that creatures, including humans, exist in a natural, ordered relationship with their Creator. God is the supreme common good because he is the Good in itself, which is eminently participatable. Hence God is not just a common good in *predication*; he is the common good in *causation*, as the exemplary and final cause of good in the subjects that incline toward him. This is what prompted Cajetan to assert that, while a creature loves the universe more than itself, it loves God even more, as “the universal good, the good of all.”¹¹²

In continuity with Stevens, De Koninck explains the part-whole relationship with respect to human beings and shows its implications for love:

Because the human person is in his very being of [or from] another, he is radically dependent, he is radically, *primo et per se*, a part. Consequently, he is principally and more inclined toward that from which he participates his very being. It is this principle, observed first of all in nature and in political virtues imitating nature, which serves as a basis for the conclusion that we love God according to natural love more than ourselves.¹¹³

Accordingly, Thomas asserts with Augustinian overtones: “nothing is able to satisfy the will of man except the universal good, which is not found in anything created, but solely in God, because all creatures have goodness by participation.”¹¹⁴ In other words, *man naturally loves God as the common good more than himself*. This can only be the case because, as we have seen Capreolus point out, “the good of a creature is more powerfully preserved in God than in the creature itself. . . . Nor can one be opposed to the other, any more than the good of a species can be opposed to the good of one of its individuals, or vice-versa.”¹¹⁵ To love God more than oneself is to love the One in whom all good is contained, including our own.

Just as the part loves the whole more than itself, so man naturally

¹¹² See note 67.

¹¹³ De Koninck, *Writings*, vol. 2, 99.

¹¹⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 8.

¹¹⁵ Capreolus, *On the Virtues*, 194.

loves the created common good above himself—and even more does he naturally love God, the uncreated common good, above himself. Furthermore, just as the love of common good above the self entails friendship with others, so love of the supreme common good entails friendship with God. In an early text, Thomas writes: “The good of the lover himself, however, is more to be found where it exists more perfectly. . . . Since, then, our good is perfect in God as in the first, universal, and perfect cause of goods, so it is naturally more pleasing that the good exist in him than it exist in us. Consequently, God is naturally loved by men more than self even with the love of friendship.”¹¹⁶ Later on, Thomas confirms this doctrine in his commentary on St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Noting that “love is a unitive force and all love consists in some union,” Thomas argues that “we have a twofold union with God: one refers to the goods of nature, which we partake of here from Him; the other refers to beatitude.”¹¹⁷ With regard to the first union, based on nature, Thomas says: “According to the first communication with God there is a natural friendship, according to which each one, inasmuch as he is, seeks and desires as his end God as first cause and supreme being.”¹¹⁸ Here we find Thomas’s doctrine of self-transcending love in its full flowering: *man is naturally a friend of God*.

When a man recognizes his place in the universe, his intrinsic being as a rational animal and a principle part of the universe, coming from God and going to God, his love is able both to transcend the self and to include the self. The love of God unifies within the lover an ordered series of desires contained in a single act: (1) to love God for his own sake with the love of friendship; (2) to perform the act of loving God with the love of friendship, which man knows will perfect himself; (3) to perfect a principle part of the universe in perfecting oneself by loving God more than oneself. God is good for the individual, but not in the way that one person’s good health is good for the self alone. Rather, God is good for each precisely because he is good for all others. Only supreme goodness can be the complete good of distinct creatures. His intrinsic goodness,

¹¹⁶ *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3, c. Quoted and translated in Gallagher, “Self-Love as the Basis of Love for Others,” 37.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher (unpublished), ch. 13, lect 4, no. 806.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

because it is essential goodness, is desirable by all, and thus the end of all, and thus the good shareable by all: the common good.

Because man is made in the image of God, he is able to be ordered by knowledge and love to the highest Good in himself. Because man is not passive with respect to his highest faculties, he is therefore “the principle of order in nature, inasmuch as all inferior bodies are ordered to him; and he can, by his own initiative, introduce a new dimension of order.”¹¹⁹ By virtue of his will, man, aside from the ravaging effects of sin, naturally is able to order himself to God by love. Stevens describes the structure of this act of love: “in the integral state of nature [it] would be a free moral act produced without grace or any supernatural aid, and directed to God the author of nature. The act would be natural both from the point of view of efficient causality and from that of formal causality. Furthermore, it would be natural as being based on a natural likeness or similitude of God, and not in the participation of the life of the Trinity granted in sanctifying grace.”¹²⁰ With such a capacity, man should love God, not only with the love of concupiscence, so that he may receive goods from the Creator, but with a love of friendship, so that he desires that all things turn to God as their final end and ultimate, common good.

God is, absolutely speaking, the principle of order, but God orders nature from *outside* of nature, insofar as God is not a part of nature, whereas man orders nature from within nature as a part of it. At the same time, God orders nature from *within* insofar as God conserves all things within his own being and insofar as he moves nature to its end, which is himself. God does no violence when he creates things such that they are moved to love him, for he is the greatest good and the perfection of all. In his love, God moves humans to follow their natural inclinations and become friends with him. Thus a fully aware, loving man knows that when he loves God for God’s sake, his love paradoxically transcends himself without leaving himself behind. Self-love perfects itself in giving itself away to the one most worthy of love. By loving God more than himself, man perfects himself and the whole universe—his friendship with God is a common good that he wills for God and for

¹¹⁹ Blanchette, *Diss.*, 396.

¹²⁰ Stevens, “The Disinterested Love of God,” 534.

God's creatures, including himself, each and all of whom God loves with an infinite love.

Summary and Conclusion

When Aristotle discusses self-love, his perspective is not limited to the love of individuals for each other. Instead, he sees that self-love is directly related to the love of a society of persons and the common good. Love of self and love of the common good are not intrinsically competitive, the Greek philosopher insists: "if *all* were to strive towards what is noble . . . everything would be as it should be for the common good, and every one would secure for himself the goods that are greatest."¹²¹ In discussing whether an individual naturally loves himself above all things, Thomas takes the same perspective, seeing self-love in light of the common good. He frequently argues that, just as a part loves a whole more than itself, so man naturally loves the common good more than himself, and, in the state of uncorrupted nature, he loves God more than himself. For Thomas, this shows that the human being's love naturally extends above and beyond itself: natural, created love is self-transcending.

To grasp the significance of Thomas's part-whole analogy, to see why he employed that argument when he could have argued on other grounds, one must see how, for him, the individual is related to the cosmological and the transcendental. The part is related to the whole as imperfect is to perfect, and the imperfect loves the more perfect to which it is related. Rocks, trees, animals, and human beings all love a good greater than themselves, a good in which they share: the common good. This is the good common in *causation*, that is, the good that formally perfects those who share in it. When the individual loves the common good, he orders his self-love to it; he does not forsake his own good, though it does not have primacy of place as his final end. For the human, as a rational creature, his love of the common good is a free choice. As rational, he is the principal part of the created universe. The perfection of a human soul, and the perfection of other rational souls, constitutes the common good in a special way. Because the perfection of the rational soul consists especially in acts of knowledge and love of persons for persons, friendship is the principal common good of the

¹²¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, ch. 8 (1169a 8–11). Emphasis added.

created universe and thus the goal of self-transcending love. As substantial goodness, and as the exemplar of all rationality, God in himself is the supreme common good of all things. Hence human love especially transcends itself and finds its ultimate perfection when man loves God with the love of friendship. By loving God with the love of friendship, man fulfills himself as the image of God, not least because God first extended such a love toward him.

Given Thomas Aquinas's well-known emphasis on nature and his love for unity of thought and exposition, it should be no surprise that his part-whole analogy was not chosen at random from among Aristotle's metaphysical works. Although Thomas could have demonstrated on other grounds that the human person naturally loves God more than himself, he consistently employed the part-whole analogy in a variety of contexts. By doing so, by showing that the object of self-transcending love is God as the common good, the Common Doctor accomplished many tasks at the same time. He showed that humans and all creatures love God more than themselves, that this self-transcending love is natural, that it is a "cosmological" love insofar as it has a direct impact on the perfection of the universe, that human love perfects the individual and the whole, and that our love consists especially in friendship between persons. With the part-whole analogy, Thomas manifests his concern to show the metaphysical and moral possibility of man to fulfill the commandment to love God more than oneself. Furthermore, he demonstrates the deep truth of the principle that grace perfects nature, and that nature is in no way in competition with itself or with God: he defines charity as man's *supernatural* friendship for God. Therefore, in showing what integral nature is capable of aside from the effects of sin, Thomas gives us a glimpse into the greatness of human love once nature is purified and elevated by divine grace. St. Francis de Sales ably sums up the Thomistic doctrine: "Man is the perfection of the universe; the spirit is the perfection of man; love, that of the spirit; and charity, that of love. Wherefore the love of God is the end, the perfection, and the excellence of the universe."¹²²

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¹²² Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. Henry Benedict Mackey (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1949), X, ch. 1, 410.