

A Deeper Unity: Response to Feingold on the Psychological Analogy for the Trinity

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Professor Feingold has provided a much-needed service in retrieving a theme of fundamental significance in Aquinas, namely, the complementarity of intellect and will, and he reinforces Aquinas's position by retrieving yet another theme, the psychological analogy, as a model for interpreting the Trinity. This analogy, which Professor Feingold says has been regrettably marginalized in the theology of the last century, then leads him to a rather novel position regarding man's final beatific condition—novel, that is, among Thomists. While, somewhat notoriously, Aquinas explicitly affirms that man's final end consists essentially of an act of intellect—which is why this end is described as a "beatific vision"—Feingold presents some marvelous, lesser-known texts from Aquinas to make a case that charity ought to be understood as a co-essential part of beatitude. I will admit that he has opened my eyes on this particular point, and I am grateful to him for it. But going distinctly beyond the letter of Aquinas (and it will be worth considering whether and in what sense he goes beyond the spirit of Aquinas), Feingold proposes that the act of intellect, by which man receives a direct intuition of the divine essence, remains in itself unsatisfying, and demands of itself the further act by which man gives himself to God in return (and indeed by doing so gives God back to God in imitation of the procession of the Holy Spirit). This self-giving he identifies as the essential act of will, and the essence of love. While I am sympathetic with Professor Feingold's concern to uphold a deep and ultimately abiding reciprocity between intellect and will, and to incorporate love more deeply than is

usually done into beatitude, I have some concerns about how he understands the reciprocity and how he understands the nature of love, which I hope at least to sketch out in general terms in this brief response.

As Professor Feingold's paper makes clear, the so-called psychological analogy is not "psychological" in the modern sense of the term, meaning more or less "what goes on inside my head." Instead, it is psychological in the classical sense, concerning the logos of the human psyche, or soul, particularly in the operation of its specific powers, intellect and will. These powers do not operate simply "inside my head"; instead, it is by these powers that the soul exceeds its own borders, so to speak, and encounters the reality of things outside of itself. The paradigm of such an encounter with an "other," of course, is the soul's knowing and loving, not just another thing in the world, but another person (God and other human beings). There is thus a natural opening of the "psychological" analogy into the so-called interpersonal analogy, with which the psychological analogy is too often problematically contrasted. I wish to suggest that a reciprocity between these two analogies is essential for a proper understanding of either one, which is to say that our interpretation of each will go astray in significant ways if we simply oppose either one to the other. On this score, it is interesting to note that, although he refers constantly to the psychological analogy, as a matter of fact Professor Feingold spends a good deal of time discussing the interpersonal relation between the lover and the beloved, and in this respect transcending the psychological analogy in just the way I am suggesting is necessary for a proper understanding of it.

Do we find a similar movement beyond the psychological analogy alone in Aquinas? It seems to me that there is a certain ambiguity here, which can become problematic in a modern context in which the nominalistic fragmentation of reality has become the very air we breathe. As Feingold has explained so clearly, the reason Aquinas privileges the psychological analogy is that the soul in its spiritual dimension, that is, in its intellectual and volitional powers, represents the summit of created things.¹ But when Aquinas seeks to characterize what makes it supreme, he highlights a single aspect: the spiritual soul is capable of a kind of action that is unique in creation, namely, perfectly immanent action, which is to say that, even in their relation to an other, the acts of intellect and will remain within the soul, they return to themselves in a perfect reflexivity. It is precisely this dimension that Feingold himself highlights. This immanence is, of

¹ As Aquinas puts it, "person"—the individual substance capable of spiritual acts of knowing and loving—"signifies what is most perfect in all nature," *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 29, a. 3.

course, essential to the analogy since it is what enables us to preserve the simplicity of God as we interpret the Trinitarian persons, and avoid the heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism. But it seems to me that what is truly unique about the spiritual powers is not only the perfect immanence of their operation, but also their perfect transcendence, a transcendence that perfectly coincides with their immanence.² Through our senses, we reach as it were only the surfaces of things; the sensitive power allows us to perceive the essence of a being only in and through its sensible accidents, rather than directly in itself. But in the intellectual operation we are able to know the inner reality of a being (*intus-legere*), to arrive beyond the necessary and good limit of our individual subjectivity, to grasp things as they are in themselves, and in our will we are able to affirm them as such: "It is good that you exist!"³

The simultaneity of transcendence and immanence in the spiritual acts may not have been so necessary to emphasize in the Middle Ages, but it seems to me crucial in our contemporary setting, in which we are beset by cultural patterns of pure extroversion and pure introversion, in which the response to the modern predicament of being trapped in our heads is answered only by the postmodern obliteration of subjectivity simply, an obliteration that the modern subject nevertheless continues somehow to survive like one of the living dead. But recognizing the simultaneity of transcendence and immanence is also crucial, I suggest, for a proper understanding of the Trinity.

The necessity for the transcendent aspect of the simultaneity becomes

² On this point, see *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2: "But subsistent forms reach out to other things, *perfecting them and influencing them*—in such a way, however, that they still retain their immanence and self-possession [sed formae in se subsistentes ita ad res alias effunduntur, eas perficiendo, vel eis influendo, quod in seipsis per se manent]" (emphasis mine). Note that we are drawing a distinction between the transcendence of a spiritual operation and "transitive" action, such as Feingold describes, which entails motion and physical alteration. (Aquinas identifies a kind of transition from potency to act that does not entail an alteration of the sort Feingold means. This is the sort of potency Aquinas ascribes to the intellect: *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.) Nevertheless, it is worth considering how the perfection of transcendence, thus conceived, would seem to allow room for the relative imperfections of transitivity: some such thing would seem necessary to affirm God's actions *ad extra*—e.g., creation and redemption (the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection)—which are at least in some respect transitive, without importing some sort of change in God.

³ According to Josef Pieper, this declaration is the essence of love and supreme act of will (*Faith—Hope—Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997], 164).

most directly evident in the procession of the Spirit and the nature of the will, as we will see in a moment, but it is already apparent in the procession of the Son, the Logos or Word, and the corresponding act of intellection. To be sure, Aquinas points again and again to Aristotle's "circle of psychic acts" to show that the act of intellect terminates in the soul. This act is unquestionably the *pre-eminent* immanent act. But it would be improper to think of this act as *merely* immanent for several reasons: First, going beyond Aristotle in an important respect, Aquinas specifies, with Augustine, that the act of intellect terminates not simply in the intellectual power as such, but in the *word that proceeds*. This procession remains in the intellect, at least in one respect, but the very word "procession" suggests a movement outward. This movement stands out especially when we recognize that the word is, as Aquinas frequently says citing Augustine, *notitia cum amore*, explaining that the other-directed movement of love "belongs to the notion of word."⁴ Moreover, as Feingold himself observes, the word, in the human soul, is not itself the object of knowledge, but is instead that in and through which the real thing is known. Knowledge of things as they actually exist occurs properly in the act of judgment, an act that necessarily involves the free act of the will, and by which the intellect transcends in some respect even the *verbum mentis* that remains in it.

But is this need to transcend not precisely what marks the difference between the human soul and the Trinity, since in the latter the Word itself is not a mere sign but the subsistent object of knowledge? Yes and no. It is important to recognize that what distinguishes the Trinitarian procession from human knowing is not that it is an immanent act *rather than* a transcendent one, but that it is a more perfect simultaneity of *both* immanence and transcendence. This point becomes evident in the famous text of *Summa contra gentiles* IV, ch. 11, in which Aquinas makes an argument for the divine procession of the Logos by means of a series of analogies to various processions in the created world, passing from the generative reproduction of plants all the way up to the spiritual act of intellection. Aquinas intends to show here the increasing *immanence* of the acts of procession as we proceed up the chain of being, so to speak. But, as Michael Higgins has pointed out to me, a funny thing happens on the way to his conclusion: When Aquinas reaches the Trinity, he re-introduces biological generation to illuminate the full mystery of the procession of the Word, which is

⁴ See *De veritate*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 3: "Love belongs to the notion of word." The precise text from Augustine (*De Trinitate* 10.10) runs thus: "Verbum est igitur quod nunc discernere ac insinuare volumus, cum amore notitia."

indeed also the generation of the Son.⁵ By doing so, he rather ironically returns to what he had initially posited as the most extrinsic form of procession to illuminate what is the perfection of an immanent act. Feingold claims that we cannot use the analogy of biological generation to understand the procession of the Son without falling into heresy. This is true only if we absolutize the “interpersonal” dimension that generation implies in a one-sided way. It is *also* the case that we will fall into heresy if we *fail* to appeal to biological generation and the “otherness” it implies.⁶

Now, let us return to the will and the Holy Spirit, who bears the names “Love” and “Gift.”⁷ Because of the brevity of our time, I will not make a detailed case for the transcendence of the act of the will even in its immanence, which I presume is much more obvious. As I pointed out before, Feingold himself discusses the “immanent effect” of love only in relation to friendship, the interpersonal relationship between the lover and beloved. Aquinas could not be clearer that the will’s operation terminates in what is *other* than itself in a decisive way, that it represents the *outward* movement of the circle of the acts of the soul. In this, he agrees with Aristotle.⁸ It is interesting to note that this self-transcending movement is precisely why Aristotle, who has his own sort of “psychological analogy,” ascribes an *intellect* to God (though, revealingly, without a procession of a word), but does not ascribe a *will* to God in himself. Aristotle, after all, is all about immanent activity. Aquinas, by contrast, affirms a will; he recognizes God as love in himself (and not a mere supreme object of love), and this is because the perfect unity he sees in God is a *tri*-unity.⁹ This makes clear that the immanence of the psychological analogy, taken simply by itself,

⁵ See especially *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, ch. 11, no 18. Michael Higgins has completed a dissertation on Aquinas’s interpretation of the Trinity: “Giving Perfections, Receiving Perfections: The Essential Divine Attributes in Aquinas’s Trinitarian Theology” (PhD diss., The John Paul II Institute, 2017).

⁶ Note that the aspect of biological generation is one of the reasons Aquinas offers to support the claim that man is more properly the *imago dei* than the angels are (even if he indicates man is more *imago dei* than angels only in accidental, not essential, respects: *ST* I, q. 93, a. 3).

⁷ *ST* I, qq. 37 and 38.

⁸ More or less: The extent to which Aristotle would recognize something like a “will” in Aquinas’s sense remains an open question.

⁹ One of the most fascinating texts produced in ancient, non-Christian philosophy is Plotinus’s treatise on will and freedom in God, *Ennead* 6.8, which presents a counter-example to the point I have made. It would be an interesting question how far Plotinus could sustain the perspective he presents outside of Christian revelation (and it has remained a regular question how far he himself may have been influenced by Christianity in his own philosophizing).

is both indispensable and profoundly inadequate as an *analogia trinitatis*. There seems to be an ambiguity in Aquinas on just this point, which an emphasis on the interpersonal analogy helps to clarify. Without it, there will be a tendency to make self-love the “greatest love of all,” as Whitney Houston proclaimed in the self-obsessed eighties. This is a tendency we discover, not only in Aristotle (for whom self-love is the source and model of all love), but also in Aquinas.¹⁰ Second, the decision to remain with the psychological analogy alone will lead one to look for the final perfection of love in its immanent effect, which entails a significant difficulty. In a text cited by Feingold, Aquinas seems to do just this: “The will is made actual, not by any similitude of the object willed within it, but by its having a certain *inclination* to the thing willed.”¹¹ To affirm just this is to terminate the operation in its very movement, which is to subordinate actuality in an ultimate way to potency. This is no doubt quite high on the Thomistic list of sins of the intellect.

These problems can be avoided, I suggest, by integrating the psychological and interpersonal analogies, which allows us to affirm the simultaneity, and indeed the interdependence, of immanence and transcendence, rather than attempting to affirm one aspect precisely by downplaying the significance of the other. Professor Feingold helpfully takes a step in the direction of the interpersonal analogy, as we have pointed out, drawing not only on Aquinas but even more decisively on John of the Cross, *Gaudium*

¹⁰ See, for example, *ST* I, q. 27, a. 3. The most distressing text on this score is no doubt the response to Richard of St. Victor, in which Aquinas affirms that only imperfect beings need to share, or in other words that self-communication does not belong essentially to perfection: “Likewise, when it is said that joyous possession of good requires partnership, this holds in the case of one not having perfect goodness: hence it needs to share some other’s good, in order to have the goodness of complete happiness” (*ST* I, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2). Pieper seeks (*Love*, 233–45) to justify this aspect in Aquinas (as does Pierre Rousselot, who argues that the absolutizing of unity, understood precisely as *spiritual* unity, does not exclude the difference of personal relations; see *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages* [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001]), but it is one thing to say that self-love is an essential component of all love, which no sane person ought to deny (though there are to be sure quite a few in the history of thought, especially post-Reformation and into our day, that cheerfully abandon their reason on this point); it is an altogether different thing to say that self-love is the “source and summit” of love.

¹¹ *ST* I, q. 27, a. 4.

et Spes, and John Paul II.¹² But there are a number of points to be made about the particular way he makes this step. Feingold suggests that Aquinas's argument against love as strictly essential to beatitude is valid with respect to the imperfect love of *eros*, but does not exclude the perfect love of *agape*, which is friendship. Leaving aside for a moment the *eros-agape* distinction drawn here, I wish to affirm in a fundamental way Feingold's observation that friendship is perfect because it entails a real unity of wills. On the other hand, however, it seems to me a more careful argument on this point would be required to justify this reading, one that would take into account the simultaneity of transcendence and immanence I have been insisting on. To see this point, we need only ask a simple question: Where does the principal locus of the unity of lovers lie in the order of the will? One would *have* to say it lies principally *outside* of the soul, following the logic of the will's operation, which is appetitive (to say this is *not* to exclude its immanence). But one *can* say this only if one recognizes the real *transcendence* of the psychic acts. If one fails to see this, one will tend—as Aquinas appears to, and Feingold with him—to reduce this unity to a mere “affective union,” which is deeply inadequate. A coincidence of interior inclinations is, to be sure, the internal *fruit* of unity, but it is not the unity itself, nor can it be the principle of unity. Some more basic unity has to be posited as the actuality that makes the inclination possible. Aquinas's argument against love as part of the essence of happiness would apply equally to what Professor Feingold calls *agape* to the extent that this love reduces to an affective unity. If Feingold wishes to develop Aquinas in the direction of a deeper integration of love into beatitude, he would have to develop an argument for something like the substantial unity, in itself, of a bond, beyond a mere “unity of affections.”¹³

But let us look more directly at Professor Feingold's account of love as pure self-gift. Because Feingold absolutizes the immanence of the intellectual act in his interpretation of Aquinas, it is not a surprise that he finds it unsatisfying with respect to its ultimate instance, and so needs to supplement it with an act of love, which strikes me as equally unsatisfying in

¹² Feingold explicitly follows the line of argument presented by Michael Waldstein, who has been fundamentally critiqued on his interpretation of John Paul II by David L. Schindler in “Being, Gift, Self-Gift: Reply to Waldstein on Relationality and John Paul II's Theology of the Body, Part 1,” *Communio* 42 (Summer 2015): 221–51, and “Being, Gift, Self-Gift, Part 2,” *Communio* 43 (Fall 2016): 409–83.

¹³ More specifically, one would have to deepen the meaning of *esse commune*, and determine the extent to which this presents a kind of actuality that is neither a mere coincidence of two actualities (a moral union) nor a “real” thing in itself (unity of substance).

precisely the opposite way: He describes this love as a purely spontaneous act in the sense that it is a giving rather than a receiving, a transcendence that does not include in itself a receptive immanence.

There is time in the present context just to enumerate what seem to me to be the shortcomings in Feingold's characterization of love, leaving a more detailed explication, qualification, and argument for some other context (perhaps starting with the question period?). First, Feingold's contrast between *eros* and *agape* is deeply problematic, both with respect to Aquinas and with respect to right reason and basic human experience. Desire and goodwill or friendship are not two separate loves, but, as Aquinas makes clear, they are inseparable aspects of every love, and every act of love. Aquinas's main Christian sources on love are Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Dionysius the Areopagite, all of whom quite emphatically deny any significant difference between *eros* and *agape*. (Indeed, the very text that Feingold cites from Aquinas to explicate what he means by *agape* [love as *vis unitiva*] is from Dionysius, who is arguing why *eros* is an even more divine word for love than *agape*.) Aquinas himself does not use the word *caritas*, that is, *agape*, to describe the procession of the Holy Spirit, who is Supreme Love in person, but is content with *amor*, the Latin equivalent (more or less) for *eros*.¹⁴ As for human experience, we all recognize, with a little reflection, how hard it is to separate giving and receiving, generosity and desire. It seems to me that a love without desire is able to give everything *but* itself. (Much, much more could be said on this point, if we had more time.¹⁵) Feingold's separation is more akin to modern altruism than to love in the classical Christian tradition.

This leads to the second point: The isolation of *agape* from *eros* inclines one to reduce love to a deliberate act of will, or in other words to characterize the act of will as fundamentally spontaneous. This conception of will is to be found more obviously in Scotus (and indeed in John Locke) than in Aquinas. Aquinas distinguishes the more spontaneous aspect of the will, the *liberum arbitrium*, which is its *causa sui* aspect, from *voluntas* or will proper, which, as intellectual appetite, is precisely *defined by* desire for the universal good, and embeds the former in the latter. This means that the will is always more fundamentally a receptive being moved by another than it is a moving of itself, which is to say the will is more fundamentally

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the classic book arguing for a radical separation of *eros* and *agape* (Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982]) presents Aquinas as having definitively synthesized the two.

¹⁵ For a more ample presentation of this point, see my article "The Redemption of Eros: On Benedict XVI's First Encyclical," *Communio* 33 (Fall 2006): 374–98.

an attraction than it is a self-giving. Or to put it more adequately: The most basic form of its self-giving is its being attracted by and to the other.

Finally, this characterization as “pure” self-giving neglects a dimension of love that is of decisive importance for Aquinas: Strictly speaking, love is not an act *of the will* in the subjective sense of the genitive.¹⁶ It is better understood as a kind of act *on the will*; it is the introduction *into* the appetite of a form that then *enables* any and every particular act of appetite and therefore of the will in all of its spontaneity.¹⁷ This is what Aquinas means by explaining the *complacentia* that represents the essence of love as a *co-appetatio*, the beloved’s acting *on* the lover’s appetite so as to attune the appetite to itself (and itself to the lover). This prior presence of the disposition, which is an actuality that makes the will’s potency possible, is what allows all the subject’s appetitive acts, including those of the intellectual appetite or will, to conform to the beloved. The particular acts of will by which we give and receive goods, and ultimately the good of our *selves*, to and from the other, are not identical with love, but can be called acts of love insofar as they proceed *from* love (*ex amore*).¹⁸ The will acts *by virtue of* a love that

¹⁶ To be sure, Aquinas states that love is the “first movement of the will” (*ST* I, q. 20, a. 1), but it becomes clear that he means this in the *objective* sense of the genitive, insofar as this movement is love’s *disposing* the will *to* its operation. It bears remarking that Aquinas’s discussion of love occurs, not in his treatment of the will, but in his *treatise on the passions*. Love is characterized as the “first of the passions” (*ST* I-II, q. 26), and it is as such that it represents the principle of every act will. This means that every “spontaneous and self-giving” act of will is founded on, and so borne by, a prior receptivity.

¹⁷ In his classic text on love in Aquinas, “Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l’amour,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 6 (1931): 174–274, H.-D. Simonin points out what he takes to be an evolution in Aquinas’s thought: while Aquinas originally emphasized the reception of the form of the beloved in love, he came to emphasize the *movement* toward the beloved, and so brought out more decisively the “dynamic” aspect of love. While this helps to underscore the essentially self-transcending, and so spontaneous, aspect of the will, and thus clarify its distinction from the receptivity of the intelligence (on this point, see Fr. Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011]), this evolution surrenders what I am proposing is a crucially important dimension of love, namely, its fundamentally receptive character. One can bring out the spontaneity of the will, and yet retain the receptivity of love, I will suggest below, by connecting love principally with *beauty*, rather than with the good that is the proper object of the will. This connection allows love to represent a unity of apprehensive receptivity and appetitive transcendence.

¹⁸ Aquinas says that “Every agent, whatever it be, does every action from love of some kind [*ex aliquo amore*]” (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 6).

precedes its active operation in every single case. This is why Aquinas presents love in the *Summa*, not in his discussion of the will and its acts, but in his discussion of the *passions of the soul*. Love is not most essentially an act of the will, but a *passio*, a reception of the form of the beloved.

To gather all of the foregoing up: Professor Feingold seeks to present a complementarity between intellect and will in light of the Trinity (and vice versa). But I want to raise a respectful question whether he manages to do justice to the *circumincession* of the persons. It seems to me he tends to reduce the Trinitarian *taxis* to a mere sequential order of discrete moments, and thus does the same with respect to the relation between the soul's powers: *first* the Father alone, *then* the Son, *and then* the Spirit. Similarly, *first* the intellect alone, *then* the will, the intellect achieving itself in pure immanence and the will representing a purely transcendent supplement. Without in the least compromising the basic order in each case, I wish to suggest nevertheless that a genuine complementarity requires not just an addition of one movement to another, or simply an insistence on both; instead, there must be a mutual indwelling, a reciprocal inherence, a recognition that each movement includes the movement of the other *in* itself, so that it does not complete its own operation without also undergoing analogously the movement of the other: The intellect does not terminate in the soul without transcending itself in the procession of the word and in its actual knowledge of the real thing in judgment; the will does not move appetitively, and self-givingly, to the other except inside of its desirous reception of the other. Real complementarity means each analogously contains the other according to its own specificity.

If I may make a final observation, which perhaps will open up a whole new array of questions: I am increasingly convinced—and reflecting on Professor Feingold's essay the past month has reinforced this conviction—that one of the most fruitful ways forward on all of the issues Feingold has recalled to our attention lies in a recovery of the significance of beauty—specifically, in a retrieval of the ancient view of beauty as the proper correlate of love, more basically than the good, which is the proper object of the will.¹⁹ Many commentators on Aquinas have noted the role beauty could play precisely in *sealing*, as it were, the complementarity of intellect and will. It seems to me that an affirmation of beauty as a transcendent property with its own integrity, its perfection in itself in distinction from the perfections of truth and goodness, and an association of beauty with

¹⁹ For a more detailed argument on this point, see my article, "Love and Beauty, the 'Forgotten Transcendental,' in Thomas Aquinas," *Communio* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 334–56.

love would allow us to liberate the deliberate self-transcending activity that belongs specifically to the will without falling into modern altruism, or in other words while not in the least compromising the essentially *receptive* character of love, and at the same time to enrich in profound ways our understanding of understanding.

What would the introduction of beauty imply for our conception of beatitude? Would it permit us to reconceive our knowing of the divine essence as a contemplation that includes the self-transcending openness of wonder as *part* of its perfection,²⁰ and the act of will as both desirous reception of God and gift of self (and of God) back to God (and indeed both ultimately as one and the same)? Would it perhaps also open a way to integrate the gazing on the human face of Christ, the grateful and astonished touching of the wounds that remain in his resurrected body, with all of the sensibility and corporeality this implies, a dimension that is notoriously absent from Aquinas's conception of *visio beatifica* as immediate intuition of the divine essence? And—to conclude with a huge question—what would the introduction of beauty imply for our understanding of the Trinitarian processions? Rather than trying to give any facile responses to these questions, I want to end by leaving them open, offering them perhaps as little “doggie bags” to bring home from the extravagant intellectual feast we have all had the privilege to enjoy at this colloquium. N.V.

²⁰ As Aquinas puts it in *SCG* III, ch. 62, “the divine substance is always viewed with wonder by any created intellect, since no created intellect comprehends it.”