“DIVINE DRUNKENNESS”:
THE SECRET LIFE OF THOMISTIC REASON

In the modern age, it appears to be taken for granted, or was until fairly recently, that such a thing as “pure reason” exists, that we are to take it as our guide in developing philosophical positions, evaluating moral issues, framing political constitutions. For medieval thinkers, however, this view is as hypothetical—and as counterfactual—as the larger supposition of which it forms a part, namely “a state of pure nature,” which might have been, but never was. For St. Thomas Aquinas, whom I shall consider in this article, reason, having within itself a seed of transcendence meant to mature by the dew of grace into the fruit of eternal life, can never be “just” reason: man is either living below reason by leading the life of a well-adapted but still earth-bound animal, or beyond reason by aiming at perfect union with the divine good, the mind’s (and the whole man’s) ultimate perfection.  
My purpose in what follows is to articulate the manner in which reason, for Thomas, is a power created to flourish in the hospitable world of revelation and ultimately the beatific vision, in such a way that philosophy and human virtues are not negated, since grace truly builds upon nature, but are decisively subordinated to and fulfilled in a super-rational destiny beyond their grasp. This implies a consequence foreign to much contemporary work on Aquinas, namely, that reason cut off from the supernatural life of grace is operating unnaturally, contrary to its God-given telos, and that this state of affairs may rightly be called mental sickness. The opposite state, mental health, is identified by Thomas as a state of sober drunkenness, in other words, a state of extasis in which reason stands ‘outside itself’. I conclude with reflections on the social-political consequences of this view.

The article’s title is intended to express three points. First, for Aquinas, the power of reason is in no sense autonomous or sufficient unto itself; it was created to drink of the excess of divine wisdom and love, to the point of ‘inebriation’, and this is its true life.  
Second, this transcendent vocation of reason is truly a secret, for it is hidden in the depths of the Creator’s intention and was revealed to us by Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is therefore not within reach of the ‘natural’ man, even the ‘virtuous pagan’ who measures all things by the rule of a reason unilluminated by faith, unformed by charity. The social significance of this difference deserves renewed attention. Finally, Thomistic reason has a “secret life” in a historical sense. In the long history of Thomism, while many commentators have acknowledged the supernatural context in which their master assesses the faculty and functioning of reason, this truth has not established itself as an ele-
mentary and characteristic feature of Thomism, whereas a good case can be made that when we fail to see it so, we are on the road to abandoning what is deepest and most Christian in St. Thomas’s doctrine.

I. LOVE IS FOUNDED UPON KNOWLEDGE

In order to talk about love with any precision, we must get clear what kind of love we are speaking of, towards what object, for what motive. All love is founded upon knowledge, whether sense-perception, intuition, science, opinion, the subtle interpersonal knowledge of friendship, or faith in revealed truth. Such are the different types of soil in which love’s vineyards are planted, giving a distinctive flavor to the wines they produce. Love always bears the signature of the knowledge that furnishes it with its object, and while love can, in this life, reach further than knowledge, it remains dependent on its initial provision of object, and will only attain perfection when the cloud of unknowing is dispersed.

A further conclusion follows. Although love is not determined solely by knowledge, it receives dignity or shame, rectitude or perversity, sacredness or profanity, from the knowledge that feeds it. For example, sensual love is dignified when its source of energy is not mere sense-pleasure but intelligible goodness, as when husband and wife come together not as animals driven by tactile instinct but as persons rejoicing in their nuptial communion with its awesome potentialities for new life. Sensation, of itself, begets a love limited to the sensible domain. But assumed into the domain of reason, sensuality is dignified by its order to reason or made shameful by its rebellion against it. Sensual love is right when the knowledge associated with it is enfolded within the intellectual order, in a total act governed by reason’s discernment of the due good to be achieved by that total act according to its kind. Thus, in my example, while the nuptial act has many dimensions, sensual and spiritual, with a telos woven of two strands, the unitive and the procreative, reason can discern that the total act is generative in kind, and thus, that the due good of offspring is never to be excluded by changing the nature of the act, as when a natural process that may lead to offspring is obstructed. Human sensuality is rendered beautiful when it is rational through and through. What ‘rational’ means here, however, is precisely the inquiry we have to make.

The difference between the nuptial act and its manifold simulacra, and in general, between a good act and a bad one, has much to do with the kind of knowledge active and operative and with the order placed into knowledges involved in a given act. Free activity flowing from well-ordered reason is morally good, delightful, and meritorious. If reason’s apprehension of the good is true (that is, in accordance with eternal law), and if subsequent acts of reason and will take place along a path that seeks this good without deviation or distortion (that is, with a view to the ultimate end acknowledged in its true identity), then all of the energy of love, from the first obscure stirrings of volition to the final execution

sharp as cut crystal, is itself good, praiseworthy, holy, and salvific. If, however, reason apprehends as a fitting good something unsuitable for man—something that, in reality, obstructs the end God, his Creator, has appointed for him—then the whole energy of love unleashed by that false knowledge is off the mark, vitiating, unholy, unavailing for salvation. The immense and, in this life, vague natural desire that drives man necessarily to the universal good such as he knows it can never be vitiating (voluntas ut natura), but the moment this desire is shaped into a distinct and goal-oriented love (voluntas ut ratio), it must be either wholesome or corrupt. The human longing to be complete, fulfilled, divine, is incorruptibly good, yet it is the goodness of promise, not of harvest—the seed, not the fruiting plant. Fulfillment in the flowering of grace, yielding in due season a rich harvest of glory, is the unqualified good for man; this is the concrete, realized goodness of the saint.

Such is the conclusion that follows from the analysis of man’s last end, of human acts and passions, virtues and vices, of law and grace, unfolded in the impressive Secunda pars of the Summa theologiae. What is the root of this view? What implications does it have?

II. FAITH, FOOLISHNESS, AND THE FONT OF LIFE

The root of this view is simple. Revelation alone gives man the knowledge of his ultimate end. Only in the act of faith is this end received, taken into one’s home under cover of darkness; the intellect adheres to this end by an act of will, which moves the intellect to invent what it cannot see. This unseeing faith determines the course of one’s entire life. The resounding affirmations of the Creed, when spoken from the heart, give to human life a new orientation: to God, to Spirit, to heaven, to invisible and divine things, and at the same time, to the poor, the little, the neglected, the oppressed. It gives one an orientation diametrically opposed to the spirit of this world, the pride of the father of lies. If her faith is made living and life-giving by charity, the believer determines all her actions in reference to the end received in faith and held out to hope: eternal happiness with God through entering into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since love is the innermost, ever-abiding source of motion and rest, of action and contemplation, love develops into faithful love or faithless love. Faithless love includes all appetitive acts which terminate in a good not ordained (or worse, not ordainable), here and now, to God. Faithful love is the will’s complacency in the blessed God as my end, the end I myself aspire to attain through His gracious willing of it.

It is at this point that we must size up what the Christian is claiming: that God, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, all-perfect, all-holy, has called man to a

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share in His eternal life, His infinite love and joy—and that He has made Christ the way, His Cross the gate, for entering this life. In the words of Robert Barron: All of Christian life begins with Jesus because in him we see the meeting of two ecstasies, that of God and that of the human being. For Thomas the most impressive and powerful aspect of the Incarnation is its surprise. God's decision to join us human beings in our own flesh, in time and space, in all of the weakness and suffering of our finitude, is something in the presence of which astonishment is the only proper response. God must be a reality stranger, more powerful, more wonderful than we can imagine. Though God needs us not, though God is utterly self-sufficient, God nevertheless goes out of himself, in an unheard-of ecstasy, and becomes one of us. There is, in all of this, says Thomas, an excessive, ever-greater quality.

For all his sobriety of manner, Thomas can hardly contain his astonishment: "This truth, that Christ died for us, is so tremendous that our intellect can scarcely grasp it; indeed, in no way does it fall within reach of our understanding. ... For so great is His favor and love for us, that He has done more for us than we can possibly grasp." No wonder the Apostle exclaimed, when the Gospel was still an infant in swaddling clothes:

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

These verses are invoked more often by St. Thomas than his undeserved reputation for rationalism would lead one to expect. Or rather, the 'rationalism' one might truthfully speak of searches out and rejoices in divine rationes, not human ones, fully expecting to be surprised, even bewildered. "If anyone shall ponder the mystery of the Incarnation diligently and reverently, he shall find such a depth of wisdom as will surpass all human knowledge, according to the saying of the Apostle: 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men.' Hence it is that to those who reverently ponder this mystery, more and more of its marvellous aspects [rationes] are revealed." "Something divine appears to be foolish, not because it falls short of wisdom, but because it superexceeds human wisdom. For people are accustomed to judge something foolish if it exceeds their understanding." The praise of folly reaches its height in the commentary on Dionysius. "The Apostle extols foolishness in God on account of that which appears in the wisdom of God [as] beyond our reason and which seems to us unfitting, as long as we are unable to comprehend God's wisdom; and through this, he raises us to divine truth, which is ineffable to us and exceeds all our reason." Shortly after this last text, Thomas lays out before us the two ultimate possibilities of human life under the reign of grace: relying on what is natural to us and so neglecting union with God, or abandoning ourselves to God and attaining total perfection in this very standing outside of ourselves, conformed to Him by deification.

Our mind stands in two ways to the understanding of intelligible things: first, it has a natural power, i.e., intelligence, through which it can look into intelligible things proportioned to it; second, it has a certain uniting to divine things by grace, which [uniting] exceeds the nature of our mind. By this uniting men are conjoined by faith or any kind of knowledge to those things which are above the natural power of the mind. It is therefore necessary that we understand divine things according to this uniting of grace—not, as it were, by drawing divine things down to those that are at our level, but rather, [by being drawn upwards,] our whole selves standing outside ourselves in God, so that by the aforesaid uniting we may be totally deified. And because someone might say that it would be harmful to us if we abandon ourselves, therefore he excludes this concern, where he says "It is better." And he says that, since God is better than we are, it is better for us that we belong to God by the uniting of grace than that we belong to ourselves, i.e., relying on what is natural to us. For, when we are brought together with God, i.e., when we shall have been united with God, divine gifts will come to us which we are not able to receive, if being negligent of uniting with God, we cling to just ourselves.

While the passionate utterances of a Bernard of Clairvaux or a Hugh of St. Victor on love's folly, haste, blindness, violence, and so on are not typical of Thomas's style, the sentiments that give birth to this mystical clamor are no different from those that find expression in his sermons and verses, flaring up from time to time even in his most formal treatises, consecrated to the wisdom that sinners deem lunacy and saints, inebriation. Consider as an example the way in which the prologue to the Scriptum super libros Sententiarum culminates on a note of drunkenness. At the final branch of his opening divisio textus, Thomas explains that the faithful, planted in the garden of the Church and nourished by streams flowing from the side of Christ, are destined to produce the fruits of sanc-
The Fourth Book treats of the fructus ecclesiae from two angles: the sacraments whereby the saints attain glory and the resurrection whereby this glory is consummated. The prologue concludes:

Now the fruits of this birth [of offspring to the Church] are the saints in glory, of which fruit it is written (Song 5:1): “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees.” These He makes drunk by His most abundant fruition, of which drunkenness it is written (Ps. 35:9): “They shall be made drunk by the riches of your house.” And “drunkenness” is said because [that state] exceeds every measure of reason and of desire, whence Is. 64:4 says: “Eye has not seen, O God, apart from you, what you have prepared for those who await you expectantly.” And this touches on the matter of the Fourth Book, in the first part of which the sacraments are treated, and in the second part, the glory of the resurrection.30

The culmination of Christian theology is mystical drunkenness—a view confirmed by higher authority in that stupefying vision of divine realities Thomas experienced while offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass on December 6, 1273.31 These two themes of Book Four, as of the Tertia Pars in its projected scope, existentially merge in the Eucharist: the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:48) gives life to soul and body, soaking the spirit with divine goodness, sowing the seed of immortality in the flesh. The daily, supersubstantial bread come down from heaven32 is, for Thomas, the agent par excellence of life, transformation, drunkenness, ecstasy. How can he express the total effect the Eucharist is meant to have on the well-disposed communicant? “The fire of that desire which is in us, taking ignition from the burning coal (that is, from this sacrament) will burn up our sins and light up our hearts, so that by participation of the divine fire we may be set on fire and deified.”33 United to Jesus “through faith and love,” the communicant “is transformed into Him and becomes His member: for this food is not changed into the one who eats it, but turns into itself the one who takes it... This is a food capable of making man divine and inebriating him with divinity.”34 “The proper effect of this sacrament is the conversion of man to Christ, that it might be said with the Apostle, ‘I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20).”35 “Charity’s work is transforming the lover into the beloved, for as Dionysius says, charity makes for ecstasy. And since the growth of virtue in this sacrament takes place by the conversion of the one eating into the spiritual food, therefore growth in charity is more [specially] attributed to this sacrament than growth in other virtues.”36 “Through this sacrament’s power the soul gains spiritual nourishment, for the soul is gladdened and, in a way, inebriated with the sweetness of divine goodness, as we read in the Song (5:1): ‘Eat, friends, and drink, and be drunk, my dearly beloved.’”37 On the verse “My cup which inebriates me, how goodly it is!” (Ps. 22:5), Thomas comments: “This cup is the gift of divine love which inebriates, since one who is drunk is not in himself, nor speaks according to himself, but according to the impetus of the wine. In this way, the one who is filled with divine love speaks according to God, for he is made to be in ecstasy, ‘Eat, friends, and be drunk’ (Song 5:1)... Or the cup means the blood of Christ, which ought to make us drunk.”38 And to illustrate the verse “You will make them drink of the torrent of your pleasure” (Ps. 35:9), Thomas makes a comparison: “just as those who keep their mouth on the opening of a bottle of wine get drunk, so those who hold their mouth, that is, desire, to the font of life and sweetness are made drunk.”39 The result?

They who are drunk are not in themselves but outside themselves. So it is with those who are filled with spiritual charisms: their whole intention is borne into God, “our conversation is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). And they are nourished not only by gifts, but also by the love of God: “Then you shall abound in delights in the Almighty, and shall lift up your face to God” (Job 22:26). This is the love of the Holy Spirit, who makes an impetus in the soul like a torrent—“as if a violent river, which the Spirit of the Lord compels on its way” (Is. 59:19).40

III. RECTA RATIO IS REASON SOBERLY DRUNK

These sorts of statements, too frequent to be incidental, give us an unexpected key to Thomas’s understanding of what reason truly is and how it is meant to function.41 There is no such thing as “neutral reason.” Reason is the spiritual being’s astonishing capacity for assimilating and identifying with reality. Hence, when reason conforms to things as they are, it is perfected, it is “right.” One could hardly find a better elucidation of this point than Josef Pieper’s:

Reason includes a reference to reality; indeed, it is itself this reference. “In accord with reason” is in this sense that which is right “in itself,” that which corresponds to reality itself. ... [R]atio is not that reason which arbitrarily restricts itself to the province of purely natural cognition. Ratio here signifies—in its widest sense—man’s power to grasp reality. Now, man grasps reality not only in natural cognition but also—and this reality is a higher object of knowledge and the process of grasping it a higher process—by faith in the revelation of God. If therefore the Summa Theologica states that Christ is the chief Lord (principalis Dominus), the first owner of our bodies, and that one who uses his body in a manner contrary to order, injures Christ the Lord Himself, Thomas is not of the opinion that this proposition exceeds the pattern of “mere” rational order, but rather that for Christian thought to be guided by divine revelation is the very highest form of “accord with reason”—this in spite of the fact that elsewhere Thomas knows how to distinguish

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It is when reason yields itself in faith, surrenders in prayer, touches and embraces divine realities, that it functions most of all secundum naturam—not, to be sure, according to a nature which it might be tempted to claim as its own possession, but according to a wholly gratuitous participation in that higher nature for the sole sake of whom it was created and is given being at every moment. For Thomas, it is in oratio that ratio discovers its pilgrim purpose, performs its most profitable activity, finds its singing voice. Reason is perfected in praise, confession, adoration. Without this work of God, it becomes a house divided against itself, built on shifting sands.

It is significant that Thomas shows no hesitation in accepting the Dionysian portrayal of the life of faith as an excessus or extasis which readily invites the world’s mockery:

He who is united to the truth in faith knows well how well it is for him, by thus adhering to the truth of the faith, even though many reproach him as having suffered ecstasy, that is, as a fool and alienated from himself; for owing to their errors, it is hidden to the ones who make reproaches, that he without doubt suffered, by the true faith, the ecstasy of truth, as if placed outside all sense and conjoined to supernatural truths, since he, as a believer, knows within himself that he is not insane, as they are saying, but he is liberated by the simple truth which always abides in the same way, not tossed about by the unstable and changeable winds of diverse errors.

To the world, the serious Christian appears mad, besotted, out of his wits. Paraphrasing Dionysius, Thomas turns this derogatory judgment on its head: “the divine wisdom is more highly praised as irrational, inasmuch as it exceeds reason; and as mad, inasmuch as it exceeds the mind or intellect; and as foolish, in as much as it exceeds the habit of mind, namely wisdom.” The infinite God exceeds all that finite reason, mind, and wisdom can attain. The life of one who participates in the life of this infinite God cannot fail to exceed the bounds set up by the prudence of the flesh and the wisdom of the world, the bounds taken to characterize ‘sanity’: reasonable self-interest, bourgeois moderation, minding one’s own business. But this kind of ‘sanity’ is, from the vantage of God and those who live in God, the worst sickness, the most abysmal failure. In reality, the ecstasy of Christian life is pure, transcendent sanity. According to St. Thomas, health or sanity of mind, sanitas mentis, is twofold:

- one kind is that by which the mind is cleansed from guilt by the grace of faith, and this health makes one see that inaccessible brilliance [of the divine nature] through a mirror and in riddles. Another kind is that by which it is cleansed of all guilt and punishment and misery, which will happen through [attaining] glory; and this health will make one see God face to face. There is no such thing as non-religious sanity. The man separated from God is sick in his whole being, for flesh and spirit mirror one another.

According to nature’s order, owing to the tying-together of the soul’s powers in one essence and of soul and body in the composite’s one being, the higher and lower powers, even body and soul, let flow from one to the other whatever superabounds in any one of them; this explains why from the soul’s apprehension the body is changed with regard to heat and cold, sometimes to the extent of health and sickness, and even death; for it does happen that a person meets with death from joy or sorrow or love. And hence it is that there occurs in the glorified body an overflowing of the soul’s very glory ... and contrariwise, a change of the body overflows into the soul. For a soul joined to the body imitates its make-up in point of insanity or docility and other such things. Human health is first and foremost the health of the soul healed by grace in this world, made blessed in the world to come. Only secondarily, in strict reference to the soul, is bodily health a human goal as opposed to an animal condition. In this teaching we can see how deep-seated is the opposition between Thomas and modern rationalists, if we may take as their representative the philosopher who saw in the abolition of disease and the prolongation of bodily life mankind’s highest achievements. One recalls, too, Descartes’s comparison of philosophy to a tree whose root is metaphysics, whose trunk is physics, and whose three branches are medicine, mechanics, and morals. “Now just as it is not the roots or the trunk of a tree from which one gathers the fruit, but only the ends of the branches, so the principal benefit of philosophy depends on those parts of it which can only be learnt last of all.”

The fruit of knowledge is, on the bodily side, an abundance of devices for postponing or tranquilizing death and, on the psychic side, the gritty Stoicism to accept life in a universe of indifferent and impersonal forces. A few moments ago we saw Thomas speaking of the ecstatic of truth and liberation from error experienced by the one who welcomes God’s revelation of Himself, regardless of the contempt—and possibly the violence—of unbelievers. Though no mention is made of violence in the Divine Names passage, Thomas’s teaching that the God-given capacity to endure martyrdom represents the pinnacle of fortitude indicates that he is keenly aware of the consequences of proclaiming the true religion.
(about eight years after Thomas had taken the Dominican habit) was waylaid en route to Milan by a Manichean assassin. Peter is said to have given up his spirit with a poignant gesture: the Manichean assassin struck him in the head with an axe but the saint, not yet dead, rose to his knees and, dipping his finger in his own blood, wrote on the ground the words CREDO IN DEUM. After this, the murderer finished off his victim with a blow to the heart. Nearly every Dominican church in Europe today houses a prominent image of Peter standing erect with a blade buried in his head. Seeing the image again and again, one might be led to see it as the bearer of a more universal truth: the Christian mind, reason filled with the Gospel, the anointed head, is destined to suffer assault when it confronts the world of disbelief.

The ‘world’, the amator mundi, refuses to believe the wisdom of a crucified God and so rejects the Gospel as sheer nonsense, but more than that, as socially dangerous nonsense. Indeed, in modern times, its opponents deem it the greatest possible threat to the “liberal” social order marked by a nearly unlimited freedom for practicing vice, an “order” of moral disorder that can only survive through systematic dechristianization. In the Church’s universal missionary impulse, the amator mundi is right to sense a threat to his desires. After stating that Christians are to the world as the soul to the body, the author of The Epistle to Diognetas (ca. AD 120-200) observes: “The flesh hates the soul, and wars against her without any provocation, because she is an obstacle to its own self-indulgence; and the world similarly hates the Christians without provocation, because they are opposed to its pleasures.” This ingenious remark from Christian antiquity shows us why the modern West, for its part, is regressing ever further into the darkness of a cruel, chaotic paganism much like that from which it was long ago delivered by the preaching of the first missionaries. In every age the pagans, whoever they be, have sought to destroy the Church, in proportion to their awareness of what she endeavors to do. It is not for idle reasons that the winding path of Veritatis Splendor passes in the end (§90-§94) through the gates of martyrdom—in the pope’s words, “the exaltation of the inviolable holiness of God’s law,” the eternal law or divine Reason to which St. Thomas attributes the prerogative of being the supreme measure of the created mind and of all free acts.

This being so, the moral implications are potent. Christian and non-Christian do not share the same end of life, or rather, the one embraces his destiny while the other, so long as he seeks for happiness where it cannot be found, sows in vain his seed, which the enemy devours (Lev. 26:16). “Nothing less than everything, than Being itself, than the divine energy will fill up the emptiness of the human heart. Nothing other than a concrete and complete imitation of Christ, the ecstatic lover of God, will bring us to life.” The Christian living from faith and the non-Christian living without faith do not share identical perceptions, attitudes, affections:

The dogma of the Trinity reveals to the Christian what Being is in itself. ... Once a relation with Being itself is elevated and transformed as it is in

Christ, one’s way of existing is elevated and transformed, and at the same time the activities that have to do with being, the activities of knowing and willing, are transformed and elevated. Through faith and vision, the Christian knows otherwise than the rest of men; and through charity, he wills otherwise.

In the abstract, there is room for common ground, but in the concrete, believer and unbeliever stand at odds regarding the meaning and structure of activities as basic and evidently good as natural sexual intercourse and the recreation of offspring. While the Christian’s life may seem from one perspective largely a “private” affair, it takes but a moment’s thought to realize that it is a public, political life on which depends the rise and fall of civilizations, the life and death of societies. The Christian’s virtues of chastity, purity, modesty, restrain subrational chaos; their contrary vices release it. Sacramental marriage endures and bears fruit, sustaining hope and bringing peace in the midst of even the greatest difficulties; profane marriage plummets into divorce and broken families, leading to universal nausea about fidelity and permanence. Contraception corrupts the desire to give and receive generously, without lies. Abortion robs away the deepest foundations of conscience, justice, and law, weakening resistance to proposals such as the cloning of embryos, the fashioning of hermaphrodite zygotes, the staging of in-vitro fertilizations with eggs harvested from the immature ovaries of aborted fetuses, and the transplantation of wombs from women to men. This riot of metaphysical blasphemy fosters an atmosphere of madness in which the bizarre contradiction of same-sex “marriage” and with it, the adoption of a child by two “fathers” or two “mothers,” can be seriously entertained. Given man’s fallen nature, its raw wounds of ignorance, malice, weakness, concupiscence, it follows with almost mathematical rigor that a society of unbelievers, if left to run its course, will degenerate into something more libidinous and more violent than a herd of wild beasts.

Reality is constituted by its causal dependency on God’s knowledge and love, which means that something is and is for what God knows and wants it to be and be for. The soul of an unfallen man, arrayed with preternatural gifts, could mirror without blemish the truth of things derived from their divine origin, his natural intelligence could effortlessly unlock the doors to himself and the world around him. But human life is profoundly affected by the effects of sin, original and personal, and that is why man needs a savior and a savior’s gifts of grace if he would rise above the darkness into which he is born, the blindness in which he walks. In the state of the world as it is, those who accept the revelation of what is above nature again renew access to what is natural and its intended purpose.

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There is no need to call into question man’s capacity to attain some true knowledge without grace or special revelation, and even to acquire some moral virtues, however imperfect and unstable. What is at stake is something far more: the power to live as children of God, the capacity to know the world with a childlike purity and insight, the ability to love with a clean heart, making a gift of oneself to God and to the world. This is not something within the range of fallen nature; it is not even within the range of a (hypothetically) sinless but unelevated nature, however lofty its flights of thought and feeling could be. It is the fruit of grace alone.  

In no way is my presentation of Thomas intended as an assault on natural reason or the relative autonomy of philosophy, much less a claim that the Angelic Doctor could have supported such an assault. It is rather a plea to view reason, in all its God-reflecting dignity, as essentially and principally ordered by its Creator to the loving contemplation of divine truth, a transcendent telos only very imperfectly realized in philosophical speculation, even less in many other human activities, but purely and perfectly in the face-to-face vision of God—that culmination of the divine romance portrayed in the Song of Songs. Yet it is exactly because of the sovereign ordination of reason to beatific contemplation that a Christian must work and be willing to work tirelessly on behalf of his neighbor, for the betterment of this world, for its conversion and transformation in Christ. This heavenly vision is not imparted in proportion to intellectual mastery or maturity but in proportion to ardor of love, the love that longs to see the beloved’s face and lead others, without jealousy, into God’s eternal kingdom. The neighbor, too, is called to that blessed vision, and this world is destined to be re-created, its wounds of war and malice healed, bearing the imprint of each individual effort for peace and justice. There is surely no contemplation without goodness of heart, open-handed sharing, cosmic renewal. But were there no entrance into the courts of the Lord, no blissful contemplation of His changeless beauty, nothing else and nobody else could be worth anything at all, except to the blurry eyes of sentimentality.

Philosophy abides, then, for mortal man on pilgrimage, not for the soul in paradise. As there is neither Eucharist nor Bible in heaven because the Blessed feast upon the Bread of Life and Word of God as He is and appears in glory, without symbolic mediation, so there is neither servile art nor philosophical science: all things are known, all are done, in and through the intuitive vision of the divine essence, God’s mystical theology, the scientia Dei et beatarum. In our condition of exile from the fatherland, however, we need all these things—sacrament and book, food and clothing, physics and metaphysics. If we tried to do without them, we should find ourselves further, not nearer, to our ultimate goal, just as the one who wants to kick away a ladder has to use it first to reach the loft.

IV. EGOISTIC RATIONALISM?

From our all-too-human vantage, divine reason is decidedly irrational. It makes unreasonable demands, replete with unwarranted expectations. The super-excessive eternal Mind beckons human beings to a life of unconditional ecstasy, where the heart is torn open to receive the fullness of the beloved, where selfish desire evaporates and the self becomes sheer gift, gaining its identity in the very act of surrender. This is not what sinful human beings ordinarily want, even when we know it is what God wants. It is in reference to the seeming irrationality of divine reason and the “excessiveness” it imparts to Christian life that I wish to make some critical remarks on an essay by Scott MacDonald, “Egoistic Rationalism: Aquinas’s Basis for Christian Morality.” Since variants of MacDonald’s position are frequently encountered in writings on Thomistic ethics, he may stand as representative of a school or avenue of interpretation. Aquinas holds that acting for one’s own interests as reason apprehends them is the basis for moral action; hence believers and unbelievers can peacefully coexist in a common rational way of life. In two easy steps, Aquinas is launched on a second career as apologist for the liberal democratic order, a “Whig” in Lord Acton’s language, echoed by the indefatigable propagandist Michael Novak.

My principal objection is against the use of the terms “egoist” and “rationalist,” no matter how nuanced their definitions. Thomas’s understanding of self-perfection as the ecstatic gift of self to God and neighbor is as far removed from the Enlightenment’s “enlightened self-interest” as is the God of the quinque viae—who at the same time is open to being a helpless infant, a crucified lover, a glorious judge—from the remote God of the Deists or the socially engineered God of postmodernism. What Thomas underlines in his Christian ethics is the science of the saints, the wisdom of God, which is folly and scandal to the world. Is self-profiting calculation foolish and scandalous? Not in the least; it is eminently respectable. It has nothing to do with the pattern of Jesus Christ, who poured out His blood for the redemption of His enemies, nor is it recognizable in the lives of the saints, consumed with a love that makes the self vanish from the horizon of thought and desire.

There is no need to ignore the legitimate place, in Thomas’s moral theology, of the bonum suum, possession of which constitutes the perfectio hominis. “On this basis a man loves something, that he apprehends it as his own good.” The question is rather, How does Thomas understand this bonum suum and perfectio hominis? The first step, the most crucial, is to arrive at a proper conception of oneself, the self whose good is being spoken of. True love of oneself involves loving God more than oneself; man’s primary bonum suum is none other than God.

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“The perfection of man consists in this: that he cleave totally to God.”82 “Man’s greatest good is that he cleave with his mind to God and to divine things.”83 “The happiness of man is to cleave to God; for each and every thing is perfect when it cleaves to its proper good, and the proper good for man is God.”84 In all these texts—and there are numerous others like them—Thomas spontaneously gravitates towards the language of inhaesio, inhaerere, adhaesio, adhaerere. One thing “inheres” in another when it belongs in it as in a subject, the way accidents “inhere” in a substance. It pertains to an accident “that is has neither absolute being nor unity, but its being and its unity depend upon that in which it inheres.”85 The common meaning of this group of words is poorly conveyed by a transliteration. In typical Latin usage, as can be gathered from the Vulgate, the Roman liturgy, Augustine, Albert, and Thomas, it resounds with immediacy, passion, urgency.87 To “inhere” or “adhere” is to cleave to someone in love, to hold on tightly, hold fast, stick, cling, embrace closely; it expresses an attachment that is intimate and intense. For the Christian, human perfection, human happiness, human virtue, are about this, and only this: adhaerere Deo. Reason is for the sake of this, and only this: adhaerere Deo.

Towards the end of his essay, MacDonald claims: “Both Christians and atheists are rational creatures, and it is natural to suppose that they will largely agree about what actions are in accordance with reason.”88 How do we empty the Cross of its power? We say that all men can agree on the basics and can get along, in practice, without the Cross, even if some might wish to embrace it privately; we say that social order is a spontaneous aggregate of well-intentioned activities aiming at personal benefit. But the wisdom of God is folly to the world, and God has chosen this folly, this weakness, to confound human cleverness and power. A Christian social order will bear within its body the marks of Jesus, the healing wounds that must be dealt to fallen nature. It will embody in its legal and political structures reverence for the Commandments; its cultural life will reflect and promote the beauty of holiness.89 The social end believers aspire to as “doers of the word” is a political and economic order permeated by the new law of the Gospel handed down by the Church— an end that was, to a large extent, really achieved in the ages of faith, when love of God and neighbor held in check the forces perpetually aligned against it. Faith leading to love of God builds the city of God; unbelief, keeping distant from Him, builds the city of man.

The non-believer and the Christian agree about moral activity only to the extent that the non-believer is either disposed to becoming Christian or is a fallen-away Christian, for in either case his heart is already impregnated, to some degree, with the wisdom and strength of the Son of God nailed to the cross. The less the non-believer’s heart is touched or formed by this divine light, the less reasonable he will be, and the less he will “largely agree” with the Christian. In fact, it is much more likely that he will turn against the Christian and ostracize him or put him to death, even as he is already willing to consign unborn children or unwanted pensioners to the memory hole. To a systematic atheist like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, or Peter Singer, there is no such thing as moral good and evil, there is no “natural law,” because there is no such thing as spirit, soul, or nature. Hence, it would be more correct, and rightly provocative, to rewrite MacDonald’s sentence: “Christians, to the extent that they are such, are rational creatures living rationally, and atheists, to the extent that they are such, are rational creatures living irrationally. It is therefore obvious that they cannot agree about meaningful action because they do not act from the same principle.”91

Is this sentence the distillate of a dreary pessimism? No, it is Christian realism—the realism that prompts Thomas to maintain that no virtue is virtue simpliciter if its practitioner lacks the grace of charity. The so-called “natural man,” the pagan, has also a spiritual life, a life ordered by God to a single blessedness, a soul to be saved or lost. Hence Thomas’s remarks are no less applicable to such a person: “The perfection of the spiritual life is to be assessed from charity. The one who lacks charity is spiritually nothing, as is said in 1 Corinthians 13, whereas someone is said to be perfect, simply, according to its perfection; whence it is said in Colossians 3: ‘Above all these things ... have charity, which is the bond of perfection.’”92 A virtue simpliciter is one whose acts merit salvation, which, as we have seen, is definitive human health or ‘sanity’. The only virtue that can produce and rule over such acts is charity, for it unites the believer with Christ, the Lamb that was slain, and conforms her to Him who is worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, blessing (Rev. 5:12). Since man’s ultimate end is concretely the beatific vision—existentially man has no other end than this, no merely “natural” end—he who fails to attain this vision fails as a man simpliciter.93

While St. Thomas willingly allows for a certain development of acquired moral virtues among non-believers, he remains staunchly Augustinian in his insistence that (1) such virtues are not virtues simpliciter, and hence cannot qualify a person as morally good simpliciter, unless they are informed by charity, and (2) a person without charity will, in practice, come up against insuperable obstacles to acquiring and exercising natural moral virtues.94 This point is sharpened by Thomas’s view that not even acquired moral virtues informed by charity suffice for human perfection; this demands the exercise of infused moral virtues different from the acquired ones.95 A non-believer can perform only materially good acts—acts which, taken abstractly and in isolation from life as a whole, are right for their circumstances, but which, concretely and holistically, do not avail for ultimate happiness.96 There is no point in trying to soften the radicalness of this position. It does not mean that non-believers cannot do much towards improving their own moral behavior and the health of a given society. It means that all such activ-

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ity, apart from grace, will be intrinsically defective and inadequate in view not only of the divine economy of salvation but also of the 'human economy' of self-perfection. "Even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from you, he will be regarded as nothing," declares the Book of Wisdom (9:6).

The paradoxicality of Thomas’s position on perfect virtue is summed up in his belief that a person, left to his own resources, can become "reasonably" virtuous, but that this amounts to not being virtuous in the unexpected way God has deemed fitting for man, namely deification in Christ, receiving and exercising a share of the Lord’s virtues. To be only reasonable is not to be simply reasonable, because there is a divine life for man greater than his innate life of reason. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are necessary for salvation and lead man to his highest perfection—to produce the works of the Beatitudes and reap their rewards—have the Spirit, not reason, as their measure. The actions of a Christian in the state of grace are no longer governed by reason alone, but by a reason instructed by divine law, moved by the Spirit’s impulses. Though obviously indispensable (for animals cannot obey a law, strictly speaking, nor receive interior promptings from a higher source), reason is here decisively secondary. The perfection of something that must be moved to its end consists in its very disposition to be so moved by the one who has possession of the end.

A lower principle of movement is chiefly helped and is perfected through being moved by a higher principle of movement, as a body through being moved by a spirit. Now it is evident that the rectitude of human reason is compared to the divine Reason, as a lower motive principle to a higher: for the eternal Reason is the supreme rule of all human rectitude. Consequently prudence, which denotes rectitude of reason, is chiefly perfected and helped through being ruled and moved by the Holy Spirit, and this belongs to the gift of counsel.

In a daring simile, Thomas calls the Holy Spirit the artist, man the instrument by which He accomplishes His work. Divinely heedless of my natural limitations, the Spirit of God draws me beyond my powers, "places me outside myself" in my thoughts, desires, words and works. The extasis of the believer is a being-led-by-another, being at His disposal, to do His will and work, for His sake and because it is His. One is moved by the Other’s will, and what is Other becomes one’s own. Thomas makes the same point in regard to the ruling principle (regula) of charity:

Reason is not the ruling principle of charity, as it is of [the other] human virtues; instead, charity is regulated by God's wisdom and transcends the rule of human reason, according to what is written: "The charity of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). Hence, it is not in the reason—neither as to its subject, as prudence is, nor as to its rule, as justice and temperance are; but solely by a certain affinity of the will to the reason.

God motions the human mind to subordinate itself humbly, obediently, to a higher measure from which the lower measure gains its power to measure human acts rightly.

While acquired and infused moral virtues, under the guidance of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Spirit, are meant to coexist and collaborate in the Christian "spiritual organism," the notable difference between their measures should not be overlooked. It is just this difference which, on the one hand, makes a Christian who lacks acquired virtue experience difficulty in sharing the "heavenly conversation" (Phil. 3:20) and behaving as "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19), and, on the other hand, makes Christian life appear ridiculous or excessive to unbelievers—vows of obedience, poverty, and celibacy, fasting or other bodily penances, rural processes for a good harvest, pilgrimages to Marian shrines, the elaborate ceremonies of a missa solemnis. Unsurprisingly, these traditional Catholic practices weaken and vanish, or fail to spring up at all, in proportion to the dominance of Enlightenment ideology, which rests upon and at the same time fabricates for itself a seductive mythology of many gods (authoritative reason, "free choice," science and technology, "progress," etc.)—an ersatz religion that quickly betrays its true character as idolatry, gross or subtle.

Truth is found in communion: the wedding of nature and grace, the fertile embrace of reason and revelation, the convergence of sanity and sanctity, the simultaneity of possession and being dispossessed, the coincidence of unlehcy and ecstasy. In an incomprehensible gift of love, God willed to join these primordial pairs in Himself. Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis, et vidimus glorio eius. It is man who foolishly tries, in thought or in life, to put asunder what God has joined together. In the eyes of Jacques Maritain, this conjunctio oppositorum is the hallmark of St. Thomas’s life and work, as well as the most urgent lesson that we who are so preoccupied with 'humanism' need to learn from him:

Proclaiming both that grace perfects, without destroying, nature and that the specifically divine life, which graces implants in us, can alone heal the wounds of nature and must take hold of nature absolutely, his peculiar achievement was to bring all the virtues of the mind into the service of Jesus Christ. The whole problem of culture and humanism presented itself in him and his answer was: sanctity. Man becomes perfect only supernaturally: he develops only on the cross. A humanism is possible, but on condition that its ultimate end is union with God through the humanity of the Mediator and that it proportions its means to that essentially supernatural end, a humanism of the Incarnation: on condition that

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it orders itself entirely to love and contemplation; that it entirely subordinates, like the holy soul of Thomas Aquinas itself, mere knowledge to wisdom and theological wisdom to the wisdom of the saints; that it realizes that the form of reason can subject the world only if it is itself subject to the supra-rational and supra-human order of the Holy Ghost and His gifts. Otherwise humanism, even Christian humanism, will inevitably tend to the destruction of man and a universal ruin.109

Perhaps the postmodern revolt against “reason,” in spite of its sound and fury, is, little more than a necessary clearing away of accumulated modern debris—a step that may well assist us in rediscovering the fuller, more nuanced account of reason given by the Angelic Doctor.110 Since tribute is often paid to St. Thomas for exemplifying the integration of faith and reason, we should take pains not to misunderstand what are the gift of faith and the power of reason he sought to integrate, nor the nature of the resulting synthesis, in order to be sure that we are paying tribute to the right thinker, or rather, to the right saint. What should be clear to us and decisive for our discipleship is that Aquinas is no rationalist. For Thomas, reason is capable of infinite exaltation beyond its native power as well as frightful debasement beneath its basic nature; owing to the power of reason, man wanders near the edge of a paradoxical abyss that goes not just downwards but upwards, a depth of self-destruction into which he can plummet, an endless glory into which he can be caught up. And he cannot straddle the fence, for by essence he is dynamic and mobile, restless to go somewhere—he will go up or down, he will enter the narrow gate and follow the hard way, or the wide gate and the broad avenue.110

As revealed in the icon of his life, Thomas is a lover of divine Wisdom who places all that God has given mankind at the service of joyful obedience to the new commandment of love—a love that first flowed and ever flows from the ebullient ecstasy of God and leads captivity captive, up to the heavenly Jerusalem, the wedding feast of the Lamb. There, the wine of God’s love flows freely, and all who put their thirsty lips to this blessed draft shall be made drunk by the riches of His house, the eternal embrace of glory.111 Thomas could have made his own the serenely passionate words of Paul: “For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you ... that [your] hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”—a verse on which the friar comments: “Just as if one were to have a book in which the whole of knowledge could be found, he would seek nothing else than to know that book, so, too, there is no need for us to seek anything beyond Christ.”112 Can this be pious exaggeration? Thomas is a man of his word, a man of the Word to whom he consecrated himself in single-hearted virginity, reckless poverty, kenotic obedience. He was “following naked the naked Christ”113—the Word in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were made and thus the meaning hidden at the center of every one of them; the Word made flesh for our salvation, our sanitus mentis, the praise of His glory.114 Evidently, then, in searching out the structure and secrets of nature, in commenting line by line on the Philosopher or the Liber de causis, in finely dissecting metaphysical issues for Trinitarian clarity, in all the strenuous efforts of reasoning to pierce the veil of ultimate truth, Thomas is always seeking one and only one treasure—the face of Jesus, His Beloved. Non nisi te, Domine.115

1 An early version of this paper was delivered at the conference on Thomin/Aquinas and Thomism/Aquiniti Scent Tomás és a Tomizsas, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Pilisszaba, Hungary, on December 13, 2002. I owe special thanks to David Bolin, Vivian Boland, OP, and Lawrence Dewan, OP, for their helpful comments on a later draft. Unless otherwise noted, translations from St. Thomas are my own.

2 Cf. Summa theologica [ST] I-II, q. 70, a. 4: “Spiritus enim Sanctus movet hominum mentem ad id quod est secundum rationem, vel potius ad id quod est supra rationem, appetitus autem carnis, qui est appetitus sensitivus, trahit ad bonam sensibilitae, quae sunt infra hominem. Unde sicut motus sarsum et motus deorsum contrariatur in naturalibus, ita in operibus humanis contrariatur opera carnis fractibus Spiritus.” As Herbert McCabe, OP, puts it: “That is the theology behind the story of the Garden of Eden. There was no human beings could be simply human. They had to be either superhuman or inhuman” (God, Christ, and Us, ed. Brian Davies, op [New York: Continuum, 2003], 65).

3 The simple fact that Thomas’s employment of the term ratio in regard to knowledge is by no means univocal but extends in various analogous directions is already significant, for it indicates a view of rationality richer, more dynamic, and more fluid than the abstract and univocal “emancipated reason” proclaimed by the Enlightenment philosophers. Not infrequently, Thomas appeals to the Augustinian contrast between ratio inferior and ratio superior (e.g., ST I, q. 79, a. 9). Sometimes ratio points to the limitations of human intellect in its discursivity (e.g., ST I, q. 59, a. 1, ad 1). At other times the meaning of ratio includes even divine intellect (e.g., ST I-II, q. 19, a. 4, where the eternal law is called ratio divine; cf. ST I-II, q. 93, a. 1; II-II, q. 130, a. 1). In ST I, q. 15, the rationes of things are said to be in the divine mind.

4 For a schematic discussion of this dependency, see Elisabeth Michel, ‘Nullus potest amare aliquod incognitum’. Ein Beitrag zur Frage des Intellektualismus bei Thomas von Aquin, Studia Friburgensia 57 (Freiburg/CH: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1979).

5 ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2.

6 ST I, q. 12, a. 2, I-II, q. 5, a. 3.

7 See Thomas’s treatment of the goodness and merit of the marital act at Scriptum super libros Sententiarum [Sent.] IV, d. 26, q. 1, a. 4, reproduced in part at ST Suppl., q. 41, a. 4. The general principle is well stated in De malo q. 2, a. 5, obj. 11.

8 ST I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

9 The acts I have in mind are: voluntas, intention, concilia, consensus, iudicium, electio, imperium, usus (ST I-II, qq. 8-17). Such ‘acknowledgment’ does not require explicit consciousness of the final end at the moment of acting, but at least a virtual or habitual ordering to the final end. As Thomas writes at ST I-II, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3: “non oporet ut semper aliquot cogitent de ultimo fine, quandocumque aliquid appetit vel operatur, sed virtus primae intentionis, quae est respectu ultimo finis, manet in quolibet appetitu cuiuscunque rei, etiam si de ultimo fine actu non cogiteret. Sicut non oporet quod qui vadit per viam, in quolibet passu cogit de fine”; cf. De veritate [De ver.] q. 22, a. 5, ad 11. Consider Super ad Phil. 3, lec. 2, §126: “Perfectio quamque hominis consistit in hoc, quod adhaerere Deo per charitatem, quia unumqueque est perfectum secundum modum quo adhaeret suae perfectioni. Anima autem potest adhaerere Deo duplicit perfece. Uno modo, ut totam actionem suam referat in Deum actualiter, et cognoscatur ut cognoscitibi est: et haec est patriae. Sed inhaesio viae eius duplex.”

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Uma de necessitate salutis, ad quam omnes tenentur, scilicet ut in nullo corruo quisque appelleat id quod deo contra Deum, sed habuit aliter referat totam vitam in eum. ... Alia est supererationis, quando quis ultra communem statum inhaeret Deo, quod fit removendo cor a temporalibus, et sic magis appropinquat ad patriam; quia quoantum deficit cupiditas, tanto plus crecit charitas (Marietti ed., 113). Cf. ST III-II, q. 24, a. 8; II-II, q. 44, a. 2, ad 2; II-II, q. 194, a. 2, ad 3, as well as De malo q. 2, a. 5, ad 11 and q. 9, a. 2.

11ST-I, q. 21.

12See de malo, q. 9, a. 2, end of the response.

13On these two types of voluntas, see Sent. III, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, q. 3, ad 1 and ST III, q. 18, aa. 3-5.

14On the human ‘flower’ and ‘fruit’, see ST I-I, q. 70, a. 1, ad 1.

15One may judge how fundamental a point this is from its function in the very first article of the Summa theologica; see also ST-I, q. 62; cf. II-II, q. 1, a. 1 and q. 2, a. 3. In the last, Thomas writes: “Perfecto ergo rationalis creaturae non solum consistit in eo quod ei competet secundum suam constitutionem in Deo, sed in eo quod ei attribuitur ex quaedam supernaturali participa- tione divinae bonitatis.” Before going further I must clearly state that it is no intention of mine to plunge into the debate unleashed by Henry De Lubac concerning the intelligibility of a ‘natural’ beatitude for man. This debate does not impinge upon my argument, which rests exclu- sively on Thomas’s unambiguous position that man has existentially or concretely one and only one ultimate end: heavenly beatitude through incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ. A complementary truth also maintained by Thomas is that human nature, as is the case with any created nature, has an end, a highest activity and object, proportionate to it as created, which end (in its formality) is necessarily distinct from, though a ‘shadow of’, the uncreated divine end that the gift of charity renders proportionate to human nature. Further discussion of these matters is, however, unnecessary, since the views I will advance concern the actual condition of the human race here and now, ordered by its Creator to a single universal end—(sharing in the life of) God himself, uncreated beatitude.

16Cf. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4; q. 2, a. 9; q. 4, a. 1.

17For a poignant discussion of how faith-perception differs from unbelief as regards what is truly valuable in human life, see Denys Turner, “How to Kill People,” in Faith Seeking (London: SCM Press, 2002), 57-63.

18On this contrast, see Thomas’s remarks on “duplex spiritus, huius mundi, et Dei,” in Super II Tim., cap. 1, lec. 3, §14 (Marietti ed., 269).

19The praelim ac actitum of appetitive power is amor: the subject’s connotatia with aptitude for, or proportion to the thing to which it tends. Love is the first of all acts which is from the same thing from which they spring and receive nourishment. Love is not the tendency of the appetitio towards a good not yet possessed (this is desire), but something prior still: “that motion whereby the appetitio is changed by the appetible object, so as to have complacencia in it” (ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2, ad 3). The term complacencia means finding, feeling, or ‘taking’ a good to be suitable, right, worthy of acceptance. See the classic study by Frederick E. Crowe, “Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas,” Theological Studies 20 (1959): 1-39, 198-230, 343-95; cf. David M. Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas,” Mediaevalia Studies 58 (1996): 1-47, cap. 8-20. As I am speaking globally of the shape of a life as a whole, and not in term of a faith or love as a separate, divine love, I use the word ‘faithless’ to refer not to sins specifically against faith, but to a state of soul that lacks a vital bond with saving truth. Since faith precedes hope and charity in the order of generation (ST I-II, q. 64, a. 4), it is possible for a person to have the supernatural gift of faith, a divine illumination of the intellect, without charity (fides informis: II-II, q. 4, a. 4; II-II, q. 6, a. 2). From this, it follows that the love involved in the initial act of faith is not the love of charity by which one loves God for his own sake and oneself as invited to share His bliss (II-II, q. 4, a. 7, ad 5; q. 6, a. 2, ad 3). However, the point of Thomas’s analysis of the generation of theological virtue is to show that faith and hope are impelled by an inner dynamism towards communio in love; they are not complete, they are in fact dead, without that communion. Conversely, directio can only be caritas when it tends towards the divine good adhered to by faith as the first Truth, the divine happiness cherished by hope as one’s future possession. Thus, an act of faith united by charity is a ‘loveless faith’, just as an act of rational love which does not proceed from supernatural faith—let us say, a hetero-then philosopher’s love of a First Cause discovered by a process of demonstration—is a ‘faithless love’. Obviously, it is possible for love-
untes extra nos in Deum, ita ut praedictam unitatem totaliter deficiemur. Et quia possit aliquis dicere quod hoc nobis est noncessarium, si nos ipsos desperamus, ideo hoc tertio excludit, ita: melius... Et dicit quod, cum Deus sit melior nobis, melius est nobis quod sinus Dei per unitatem gratiae quam quod sinus nosri ipserum, ideo nostri naturalibus imitentur. Sic enim, nobis factis cum Deo, iste cum Deo uniti fuerimus divinae notitiae donatae quae quippe non possimus, si Dei unitatem neglegentes, nobis ipsis inhaeremus" (Marietti ed., 263).


This citation would surely have called to mind the verse immediately following: "I have drunk my wine with my milk: Eat, O friends, and drink, and be drunk, my dearly beloved." Thomas quotes this striking invitation of the Bridegroom many times: cf. ST III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2; Super Isaiaem 25, 28, and 66; Super Ps. 22 and Super Ps. 35; Super Matthaeum 26, lec. 4; Super Isaiaem 2, lec. 1 and 21, lec. 2; Super I Cor. 11, lec. 4; Super II Cor. 5, lec. 3.


On this event and its significance, see my article “Golden Straw: St. Thomas and the Ecstatic Practice of Theology,” Nova et Vetera, Eng. ed., 2 (2004): 61-89. Needless to say, in this life of exile, much of the work of sacred doctrine, as of the philosophical disciplines, will be humble and hardly rapturous (cf. ST I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3 on two kinds of divine wisdom, the one a gift of the Spirit, the other acquired by diligent study).

St. Thomas quoting St. John Damascene in the sed contra of ST III, q. 79, a. 8: “Ignis eius quem in nobis est desiderii, assumens eam quae ex caritate, id est, eae quae omnes ignitio, combet nostrat peccata, et illuminat nosstram corda, ut participazione divini ignis igniamur et deficiemur”.

Super Joannem 6, lec. 7, 6969. Thomas here cites a beautiful statement from Augustine’s Confessiones: “Sic ergo spiritualitatem maneat et carmen et bibit sanguinem per comparationem ad Christum contentum et signatum, qui conun- gittur ei per fidem et caritatem, quod transformatum in ipsum, et efficitur eius membra: non enim cibus iste convertatur in eum qui sumit, sed manducantem convertit in se, secundum Augustinum, cum dicit: ‘cibis sum granidum: crese, et manducabis me; nec tu me mutabies in te’, et ideo est cibus hominem divinium facere valens, et diviniret inevitabiliter.” Cf. ST III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2; Sent. IV, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, q. 1.

Sent. IV, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, q. 1: “Unde pro- prius effectus hujus sacramenti est conversio hominum in Christum, ut dicat cum Apostolo, Galat. II: Vivo ego, jam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus.”

St. Thomas commenting on the sacrament of Eucharist, in loc. cit: “Caritatis proprium est transformare amantium in amantium, quia ipsa est quae excitam facit, ut Dionysius dicit. Et quia augmentum virtutum in hoc sacramenti fit per conversionem manducan- tit in spiritualium cibum, ideo magis attributur huius sacramenti caritatis augmentum quam aliorum virtutum.”

ST III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2: “Et inde quod ex virtute hujus sacramenti anima spiritualiter reficitur, per hoc quod anima delectatur, et quod- dammodo inebrietur dulcedine bonitatis divinae, secundum illud Cant. V, comedite, amici, et bibite, et inebriamini, carissimi.”

Super Ps. 22, §2 (BUSA 6:796): The whole passage reads: “Hic calix est donum divini amoris qui inebriat: quia ebrus non est in se, nec secundum se locutur, sed secundum ipsum virtum; sic icle qui est plenus divino amore, loquitur secundum Deum: est enim in extasiis factus. Cant. 5: comedite amici, et inebriamini. Isa. 55: quomodo descendit imber et nix de caelo, et inebriat terram, et germinare eam facit; sic erit verbum quod egridetur de ore meo. Eccl. 5: et inebriabatur Deus ebrus, et quasi homo madidus vino a facie Domini. Vel calix dicitur sanctus Christi, quia debet inebriare et hic quam praeclarus est, id est maxime clarus.”

Citations from the Postilla super Psalms are taken from the Opera Omnia cum hypertextibus in CD-ROM, ed. Roberto Busa, s.i. (Milan: Editoria Elettronica Editel, 1992), with reference to the printed edition. The Postilla super Psalms is a precious transmitter of Aquinas’s mature views on important topics, as Thomas F. Ryan demonstrates in Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

Super Ps. 35, §4 (BUSA 6:998): “sicut qui tenentem os suum ad fontem vini, inebriarentur; sic qui tenet suum os, iste desiderium, ad fontem vitae et dulcedinis, inebriantur.” I take a small liberty in the translation, for it does not seem idiomatic to say "the font of wine.”

Super Ps. 35, §4 (BUSA 6:994): “Et qui sunt ebris, non in se sunt, sed extra se. Sic qui repleti sunt spiritualibus charismatibus, tota eorum intentio fortur in Deum: Phil. III: nostra conversatio in caelis est. Et non solum donis reficen-

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at us per veritatem simplicem et semper eodem modo se habentem, ne circumferatur per instabiles et variabiles ventos diversorum errorum" (Marietti ed., 278).

55By "world" here is meant, of course, the fallen world, under the power of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19), not the world as created by God and redeemed by Christ: see Super Ioanneum 1, lec. 5, §128. On mundus as signifying amantes mundi, see ST II-II, q. 72, a. 3, obj. 3; I-II, q. 106, a. 1, ad 1.

56In De div. nom. 7, lec. 2, §708: "Recolligitis ergo primo excessum diviniae sapientiae dicens quod divina sapientia laudator eximientior sicut irrationabilis, inquam excidit rationem; et sicut amnes, inquam excedit meminerat sine intellectum; et sicut stulta, inquam excidit habitum mentis, scilicet sapientiam" (Marietti ed., 265).

57On "prudence of the flesh," see ST I-II, q. 93, a. 6, ad 2; ST II-II, q. 47, a. 13, ad 3 and q. 55, a. 1. On "worldly wisdom," see ST I-II, q. 45, a. 1, ad 1 and q. 46. According to St. Thomas, sinners cannot have the virtue of prudence, but they can have its deceptive likeness: cleverness and cunning (cf. ST I-II, q. 47, a. 13). The passage Thomas speaks of is the shortcoming at the level of the acquired virtue of prudence, as Aristotle recognized them. The situation becomes more complex when we remember that for Thomas, acquired moral virtue—even if it were perfect on its own terms—is not virtuous simpliciter, and hence we have a new critique: in so far as it falls short of the right command of means to eternal life, acquired prudence too is a sort of "simulation" of infused prudence, a deceptive likeness. I will return to this contrast below.


59De ver. q. 10, a. 11, ad 9: "Duplex est sanitas mentis: una quae sanatul a culpa gratiarum fidei, et haec sanitas facti videre illum inaccessiblem biliamatem per speculum et in aemnagia; alia est ab omni culpa et poena et mineria, quae per gloriari, et haec sanitas faciei videri Deum facie ad faciem." 51

56De ver. q. 26, a. 10: "Secundum naturae ordinem, propter colligabant virum animae in una essentia et animae et corporis in uno esse compositi, vires superiores et inferiores, et etiam corpus et anima invicem in se effluunt quod in aliquo eorum superabundat; et inde est quod ex apprehensione animae transmutat corpus secundum calorem et frigus, et quamdoque etiam usque ad sanitatem et aegritudinem et usque ad mortem; continent enim aliquem ex gaudio vel tristitia vel amorem mortem incurrere. Et inde est quod ex ipsa gloria animas fit redundantiae in vitam gloriam... et similiter est et converso, quod transmutatio corporis in animam redunat. Anima enim coniuncta corpori eius complexiones imitatur secundum aeternum vel docet sanctitatem et sanctitatorem."

59A famous passage in the Discourse on Method still has power to shock when read against the backdrop of the Christian wisdom it repudiates: "In place of that speculative philosophy taught in the schools, it is possible to find a practical philosophy," by means of which we could "render ourselves as masters and possessors of nature. This is desirable not only for the invention of the infinite machine... but also for the entire man, enabled one to enjoy trouble-free the fruits of the earth and all the goods found therein, but also principally for the maintenance of health, which unquestionably is the first good and the foundation of all the other goods of this life... If it is possible to find a good man... render men generally more wise and more adroit than they have been up until now, I believe that one should look for it in medicine. [...] One could rid oneself of an infinity of maladies, as much of the body as of the mind, and even perhaps also the frailty of old age, if one had a sufficient knowledge of their causes and of all the remedies that nature has provided us" (Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th ed. [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998], 35). See Richard Kennington, "Descartes and the Mastery of Nature," in Organism, Medicine, and Metaphysics, ed. F. S. Spicker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), 201-23.

57See Principles of Philosophy, Preface to the French edition of 1647, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:186. For Descartes's notion of "morals"—described in this work as "the high-

verse amor sui, which is the hallmark of the amator haucus mundi.

58As one sees occurring on all sides in contemporary Europe, where the union of Christendom envisioned by Adenauer, Schuman, and Gaucks and the European Community under the EU and EEC, which has been undermined by an obstinate secularism that cannot hide its derivation from the anticlericalism of the nineteenth century, itself derived from the liberalism of the Enlightenment. Particularly striking is the way in which the question of modern political philosophy is: How do we react to the Church—how do we gain power over it, neutralize it, and if possible, destroy it? Many are the methods proposed, ranging from wholesale slaughter to the legislative cold shoulder. See his An Intellectual History of Liberalism, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

59Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers, trans. Maxwell Stanford, rev. Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 145. The author of this Epistle seems to take for granted the world's (irrational) opposition to the Gospel, while holding out hope that some, such as the epistle's recipient, will choose a wiser path. It is infinite does not mean that Christians are people who obey all just laws and keep all honest customs, giving no cause for scandal or disapproval on that account.

60CF. ST I-II, q. 4, a. 5; q. 5, aa. 7 and 8.

61Barrow, Spiritual Master, 172; cf. Torrell, Spiritual Master, 101-24.


63I do not choose this example at random, for I agree with John Paul II that the conflict between procreative and contraceptive mentalities discloses fundamentally opposed anthropological positions resting on incompatible visions of reality. See Familiaris Consortio §32, last paragraph; Letter to Families §12-13.

64All these research projects were either announced or proposed at the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, held in Madrid from June 29 to July 2, 2003. See the Zenit report ZE03071201, available at www.zenit.org. More recently, some researchers have proposed patenting and marketing human embryos with

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manufactured genetic profiles as ‘models’ for studying diseases with genetic roots. See the Zenit report ZENIT112123.

6See ST II-II, q. 85, a. 3, and Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, ed. James Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, Ill.: TAN, 1974), 115. The Council of Orange (529) taught that due to the sin of Adam, the whole man, both in body and in soul, was changed for the worse (cf. DS 371).

7Thomas accepts and even develops further Aristotle’s claim that wicked men are worse than wild beasts; “peior enim est malus homo bestia, et plus nocet” (ST II-II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3).

8The most complete discussion is in the commentary on the Ethics (Sent. 7. Ethic. lec. 1, Leoni ed., 47:380-82); cf. De Regro Regio I.3 (Leoni ed., 42:453). According to Jean Porter, Thomas’s view that even sinners can acquire the virtue of justice by dint of repeated just acts in accordance with right reason “seems to imply that a non-Christian society cannot nonetheless be a just society, which the Christian can recognize as such”; “justice provides a framework for human life that does not owe its validity to Christian revelation” (“The Virtue of Justice,” in The Ethics of Aquinas, ed. Stephen J. Pope [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002], 284). These claims are highly questionable, if “Christian revelation” means not only a special message but also the healing and elevating grace that accompanies it. In abstractus, that is, prescinding from the structures of sin erected and consolidated by personal sins and the effects of original sin, a non-Christian society could attain widespread justice, but in concreto, such a goal would be unimaginably difficult, and can be realized only with the healing and elevating effects of grace. That even the manifestly religious Plato and his disciple Aristotle defend abortion in some instances—a crime John Paul II considers in some respects the most heinous, the most at variance with natural law—is a sober reminder of the limits of unregenerate human thought and action. On pagan attitudes towards the child, see John Saward, Cradle of Redeeming Love: The Theology of the Incarnation (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 308-14; on Plato and Aristotle, 311. See infra, note 94.

6See e.g., ST I, q. 14, a. 8 and q. 15; q. 16, a. 6; q. 19, a. 4; q. 20, a. 2-3; q. 44.

7Cf. De ver. q. 18, aa. 2, 4, and 6; ST I, q. 94, aa. 2-4.

8On this point, see infra, note 94.

9Hence I agree with Lawrence Dewan’s critique of the idealist and fideist bent of John Milbank’s and Catherine Pickstock’s response to secular rationalism (“On Milbank and Pickstock’s Truth in Aquinas,” Nova et Vetera, Eng. ed., 1 (2003), 199-212). All the same, one looks around at the world of high-powered intellectual circles and sees the barely educated masses bewitched by Darwinism in rejecting something as obvious as nature’s acting for the sake of an end, and one cannot help asking oneself: How is it possible for the human mind, that spark of divine light, to fall so far down into darkness? Without help, left on his own resources, man is prone to become a creature of ignorance, error, and vice. It is for this reason that Thomas, when discussing why the Word became flesh, never fails to emphasize his mission to deliver men from their sins.

10Cf. SCG III, 160, §3316; “quibus de facili homo provocatur ad peccandum, nisi retrobatur per firmam inhaesionem ad ultimum finem, quam gratia facit” (Marietti ed., 3:238); Compendium theologiae I.213: “Perfecta autem inhesio voluntatis ad Deum per amorem est per gratiam, per quam hominem perfectus idem illi doctrinale gratia illius: ex hoc enim homin iustus est quod Deo per amorem inheret” (Leoni ed., 42:166).

11I hold, with Veritatis Splendor and Fides et Ratio, that reason and philosophy stand to faith and theology as human conscience to divine lawgiver: “participated theonomy.” For a defense of the relative autonomy of reason, see Wayne Hankey, “Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas,” The Heythrop Journal 42.3 (2001): 329-48; “Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Ian MacRitchie and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas,” Laval theologie et philosophie 59.2 (2003): 193-224. My position depends entirely on accepting that reason, or more generally intellect, is truly a power of grasping (though not of comprehending) reality directly and successfully; this is the precondition of its ecstatic openness to God’s revelation of Himself, its welcoming of the Word which penetrates and secures the most essential and most potent promises.

12On the unperturbable happiness of God as the ultimate foundation of reality, see Josef Pieper, Happiness and Contemplation, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), esp. 29-31; on the


13See, e.g., ST III, q. 63, a. 5, obj. 3; q. 61, a. 4, ad 1; q. 64, a. 4, ad 1.

14For a magnificent description of this process, see Sent. III, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1 corp., and among the responses, particularly the response to the fourth objection.


16It was nothing less than the total perversion of Thomas’s political theology by Novak’s philosophical precursors—men like Ignatius Eschmann, or, Walter Farrell, or, and Mortimer Adler—that prompted Charles De Koninck to demonstrate once and for all the impossibility of pressing the Angelic Doctor, or, more importantly, the social doctrine of the Church, into the service of modern liberalism (i.e., “personalism,” in its rather narrow sense of the term). See On the Prioricity of the Common Good: Against the Personalists, translated by Sean Collins and published, with companion essays by Eschmann and De Koninck, in The Aquinas Review 4 (1997). For a recent discussion of this debate see Mary Martha Keys, “Personal Dignity and the Common Good: A Twentieth Century Thomistic Dialogue,” in Catholicism, Liberalism, and Communitarianism, ed. K. Grasso, G. Bradley, and R. Hunt (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 173-95. On a sample of Novak’s tendentious reading of tradition, see Kenneth R. Cragg, Jr., “Was Aquinas a Whig? St. Thomas on Regime,” available at www.evin.com/library/business/994042.htm.

17ST II-II, q. 62, a. 4; “et hoc homo aliquo aliquando, quod apprehendit illud ut bonum suum.”

18See ST II-II, q. 25, a. 7, where Thomas analyzes the lyes in terms of spirit and flesh. Am I, is my “self”, most of all my body; is my identity constituted by the stream of data that comes through its powers of sensation; is my good through the life of sensual delight, the force or fame or fortune available here? Or am I, is my “self”, most of all a spiritual soul open to, yearning for, the infinite good, so that my weal and woe are bound up primarily with my interior life, to which my body—creature of God that it is, and vital part of who I am—should minister? Another approach is to consider different activities or objects to which a man gives himself. Cf. De cartasi a 2, corp.: “Proprium autem bonum hominis opus est secundum se accipiendo, secundum quod homo diversimode accipit. Nam proprium bonum hominis in quantum homo, est bonum rationis, eo quod homini esse est ratione esse. Bonum autem hominis secundum quod est artexus, est bonum artis; et sic etiam secundum quod est politicus, est bonum eius bonum commune civitatis.” Thomas goes on to apply this insight to man’s participation through grace in the blessed life of God, the ultimate and infinite common good. Though infinitely beyond his nature, yet by God’s merciful gift of Himself, this good paradoxically becomes the proprium bonum hominis beyond compare.

19See ST I, q. 60, a. 5. The coming citations will highlight this connection, but for a complete exposition the reader is referred to David M. Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas: Self-Realization as the Basis for Love and Others,” Acta Philosophica 8 (1999): 23-44; idem, “Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship,” 34-39.

20ST II-II, q. 186, a. 1: “In hoc autem perfectio hominis consistit quod totaenier Deo inhaerat.”

21SCG 3, ch. 130, §320: “vero optimum hominis ut stente deo adhaeret et rebus divinis” (Marietti ed., 3:192). Cf. ST II-II, q. 81, a. 7: “Deo reverentiam et homonem exhibenmus non propter ipsum, qui in se ipsio est gloria plenis, cui nihil a creatura adici potest, sed propter nos, quia videnti per hoc quod Deum reverentiam et honoramus, mens nostra ei subiiciunt; et in hoc eius perfectio consistit; quaelibet enim res perfectior per hoc quod subditur su superiori, sicut corpus per hoc quod vitalificatur ab anima, et aer per hoc quod illuminatur a sole.”

22Super Ps. 32, 611: “beatiudinom hominis est inhaerere Deo. Unumquodque enim perfectum est, si inhaeret proprio bono. Proprium autem bonum hominis est Deus” (Basa 6:93a). This passage of Super Ps. 32 is of great interest. Thomas first reviews the different opinions of the philosophical sects on what constitutes hap-

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piness: the Epicureans, who say bodily goods; the Stoics, who say the virtues of the active life; the Peripatetics, who say contemplation of the truth. But all these short man of man's true happiness, union with God Himself; anything short of this is vana. Cf. the contrast in Sent. III, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 1 between the philosopher's and the saint's contemplation; also Erb, "Pati Divina," 80-81. 19b Thomas is also able to speak of the perfectis hominis as beatitudo (e.g., ST I-II, q. 4, a. 5, obj. 3; II-II, q. 186, a. 3, obj. 4), contemplation of truth (ST-II-II, q. 180, a. 4, obj. 4, virtue (De virtutibus, q. 1, a. 9, ad 20), as consisting in imitatione divina (De malo, q. 12, a. 1, obj. 5), in imitationem de Deum (In Bohetii De Trinitate q. 2, a. 1, response), in dilectio Dei et proximi (De duobus praeceptis, De quarto praecepto), etc.

19c Sent. I, d. 9, q. 1, a. 2: "Hanc est difference inter adjectiva et substantiva: quia substantiva significant per modum substantiace; et ideo significat rem suam absolutum; ... adventum autem significat per modum accidentis, quod non habet esse absolutum, nec uniam: sed esse suum et uniam suae dependet ex eo cui inhaeret...."

20b "... in sursum et matrem et adhierit utori suae et erunt duo in carne unia" (Gen. 2:24); "Sychem fili mei adhesi anima filiae vestrae, date eam illi uxorem" (Gen. 34:8); "adhesit pavimento anima mea: vivifica me secundum verbum tuum" (Ps. 118:25). From the Latin biurgy (both Roman and Dominican rites), a prayer after communion: "Fac me tuis semper inhaerere mandatis et a te runquam separar permittas." Augustine's City of God is replete with it: "ita illud, quod omnes homines appetunt, id est vitam beatam, quomuque isti assecuratum negant, qui non illi uni optimo, quod est incommensurabilis Deus, puritate casti amoris adhaeserit" (Lib. 10, c. 1, In De civitate Dei libri XXII, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphonso Kalb, 2 vols. [Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1933, 1-401]); "Verum sacrificium est omne opus, quo agitur, ut sancta societate inhaereramus Deo" (Lib. 10, c. 6, Dombart-Kalb 1:410.9-10); "Bonum enim nostrum, de cuius fines inter philosophos magna contentio est, nullum est alium quam illi cohaerere, cuius unius anima intellectualis incorporato, sicut potest, amplius in veris impletur fecundatuerque virtutibus. ... Hic autem finis est adhaerere Deo" (Lib. 10, c. 3, Dombart-Kalb 1:408). We find Albert, too, saying: "Visio ... dict conversionem super praesentiam tantum: comprehensio autem quaee succedit spei, dicit adhaerentiam: sed amor co quod est vitta stringens et acutum mobile, penetras amas, ut dicit Dionysius, dicit: inhaerentiam" (Sent. I, I.B.12 ad 1, ed. Borget, 35:29-30).

21b "Egoistic Rationalism," 348.


24c "I do not wish to overlook the elements of truth in MacDonald's position. No atheist has ever acted on the basis of his atheism; in addition, most non-believers are not atheists simply speaking. Consequently, it does turn out to be the case that men in general, whether Christian or not, agree that murder, theft, and the like should be judged as morally wrong, even though they may not recognize what constitutes a moral wrong in the supernatural end; it is possible to believe that those who fail to attain it account on original sin alone, such as unbaptized children, may attain some lesser end which, from the vantage of true beatitude, is a punishment, but which nevertheless participates in a shadowy way in this beatitude. I am speaking, of course, of the limbus puerorum, the existence which was supported at the Council of Florence. See Christopher Beiting, "The Idea of Limbo in Thomas Aquinas," The Thomist 62 (1998), 217-44. While I do not discount Thomas's view, I have suggested a different possibility at least for the victims of abortion: see my "King Herod and the Martyr-Children," in Abortion and Martyrdom: The Papers of the Solemnitas Conference on Abortion in the Catholic Church, ed. Aidan Nichols, op. (Hereforshire: Gracewing, 2002), 32-50.

25c Cf. Thomas Osborne, "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theory," The Thomist 67 (2003): 279-305; Brian Stanley ("Aquinas on Pagan Virtue," The Thomist 63 [1999]: 533-77) is right to remind us of Thomas's view that some kind of genuine political virtue existed among the pagans. Yet Stanley admits that acquired virtues are virtues secundum quid since they do not order man to his ultimate end (to say they could so order him would be sheer Pelagianism), and more importantly, hints at a connection, in the order of divine providence, between any authentic virtue and the gift of grace (576). Indeed, this seems evident: if a pagan does transcend the egoism of fallen human nature, he must be moving under the influence of grace. Self-transcendence is natural to man insofar as he is copax Dei (ST I, q. 93, a. 4), but after the fall, this inclination has to be moved by grace, beyond that of the conservation of being (ST I-II, q. 109, a. 3). If there is a virtuous pagan, he is already moving in and towards Christ, though he may not yet be an actual member of His body (cf. ST III, q. 8, a. 3; Charles Journet, The Church of the Word Incarnate, vol. 1: The Apostolic Hierarchies, trans. A. H. C. Downes [London: Shoe & Ward, 1955], csp. 1-15, 28-45; Jacques Maritain, The Church of the Christ, trans. Joseph W. Evans [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973], 93-134).

26c ST-I-II, q. 63, a. 2: "Solae virtues infusa sunt perfecte, et simpliciter dicendae virtutes." There is considerable discussion in the Thomist tradition about how to understand infused moral virtues, but we need not enter into details, for the salient point to me is just Aquinas's insistence on the magnitude and multitude of divine gifts necessary for attaining man's single true end, owing to its loftiness. It is a point nicely made in De Trinitate q. 6, a. 4, ad 5: "Quamvis enim homo naturaliter inclinetur in finem ulteriori, non tamen potest naturaliter illius consequi, sed solum per gratiam, et hoc est propter eneminentiam illius finis."

27c ST-I, q. 113, a. 4, obj. 3: "Infeles etiam, eti interdum bona opera faciant, non tamen bene faciant, quia non recta intentione faciunt, sed errantium intentione eti interdum uti quidam virtutem est; et nihil est bonum sine summo bono.ubi deest cogitatio veritatis, falsa est virtus etiam in optimis moribus") is not rejected, but placed alongside the lesser truth defended in the corpus: virtues directed to the good as defined by reason can be acquired by a man's own effort, yet these do not avail for his total perfection or salvation, since they are not virtues directed to man's unqualified good, namely the good as defined by the divine law. Cf. ST-I-II, q. 109, a. 2: "Quia tamen natura humana per pecatum non est totaliter corrupta, ut sacrilicet toto bono naturae pravitet; potest quidem etiam in statu naturae corruptae, per virtutem suae naturae aliquid bonum particularum aegere, sicut aedificare domos, plane vineas, et alia huiusmodi, non tamen totum bonum sibi connaturale, lia quod in nullo deficit." Cf. Sent. II, d. 40, q. 1, a. 5, obj. 2

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and reply. The reason a non-believer does not sin of necessity is that he does not always think explicitly of, much less will, an end contrary to God. When he performs an act generically good, such as giving alms, or good by reason of the circumstances, such as eating soup when hungry, his action is ordered habitually to his last end but not in its distinctness, and therefore not inserted as an end in contrary to God. His action can be good simply speaking, although it is imperfect and he merits nothing by it.3

3See the concurrent opinion of Torrell, Spiritual Master, 268-75.

ST II-II, q. 68, a. 2; q. 69, a. 1; ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1: “virtutes humanae perfectionis, secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus movetur. Et tiae perfectiones vocantur domina, non solum quia infunditur a Deo; sed quia secundum ea homo disponitur et efficitur movebatur mobilibs ad inspiratione divina.” On the Thomistic doctrine of the gifts, see M.-Michel Labourdette, “Dons du Saint-Esprit—Saint Thomas et la théologie thomiste.” Dictionnaire de spiritualité 3:1610-35; Garrigou-Lagrange, Three Ages.

4Of course, for Thomas God’s motion is never violently opposed to rationality: see, e.g., ST II-II, q. 52, a. 1; II-II, q. 68, a. 3, ad 2; q. 68, a. 4, ad 1. The gifts take precedence over the moral and intellectual virtues, but the theological virtues take precedence over the gifts, since it is through faith, hope, and charity that the mind is united to God so as to be moved by His promptings: I-II, q. 68, a. 4, ad 3, and a. 8.

ST II-II, q. 68, a. 1: “Manifestum est autem quod omne quod movetur, necesse est proportionalium esse motui, et haec est perfectio mobilis inquantum est mobilis, dispositio quid disponitur ad hoc quod bene movetur a suo motore.” This general principle is then immediately applied to the virtues and gifts. Cf. q. 68, a. 2: “Sed in ordine ad finem ultimum supernaturaem, ad quem ratio movet secundum quod est aliquiliter et imperflicta per virtutes theologicae; non sufficit ipsa motio rationis, nisi desinat in actu coniecturis ad modo Spiritus Sancti ... quia scilicet in haereditatem illius terrae beate orum nullus potest pervenire, nisi moveretur et deducatur a Spiritu Sancto.”

ST II-II, q. 52, a. 2: “principium motuum inferius praecipue adivitur et perficitur per hoc movetur a superiori motivi principio, sicut corpus in hoc quod movetur a spiritu. Manifestum est autem quodque accidens rationis humanae comparatur ad rationem divinam sicut principium motuum inferius ad superius, ratio enim aeterna est suprema regula omnis humanae rectitudinis. Et ideo prudenter, quae importat rectitudinem rationis, maxime perficitur et iuvat secundum quod regulatur et movetur a Spiritu Sancto. Quod pertinet ad dominum constil.”

ST II-II, q. 68, a. 4, ad 1: “quantum ad infusionem donorum, ars pertinent ad Spiritum Sanctum, qui est principaliter movens; non autem ad homines, qui sunt quaedam organa eius diuum ab eo moventur.”

This has its earthly analogue in noble friendship: I am moved by the other’s will, the other’s needs; I act for his sake, for his benefit. Since it is good to help another, this action indirectly redounds to my benefit as well, just as the being-moved by the Holy Spirit is for my salvation (ST I-II, q. 68, a. 8). The key point, however, could be put colloquially: What is moving me, what is motivating me? Is it the Spirit of God or my own will, as distinct from Him? But if my will—is in the sense of liberum arbitrium—that which he means to be on the way—he cannot be in any other form; man is intrinsically a pilgrim, ‘not yet arrived’, regardless of whether he is aware of this or not, whether he accepts it or not. The object of this dynamism, the destination of this journey, the aim, therefore, of this becoming and the moving force underlying it all, is the good” (Only the Lover Sings, trans. Lothar Krauth [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990], 42-43).

Recall the prologue to Sent. 1, the remarks from Super Ps. 22 and Super Ps. 25, and similar texts, discussed above.

Super ad Colsosenses 2, lec. 1, §82: “sicut qui haberent librum ubi esset tota scientia, non quaererent nisi ut scierr illum librum, sic et nos non oportet amplius quaerere nisi Christum” (Marietti ed., 142). The text is Col. 2:1-3. Thomas cites this phrase from Jerome on three occasions, in each instance to sum up the essence of the evangelical life or sequela Christi: Contra reticenses ch. 15, Contra impugnantes ch. 6 (in the numbering of the Leonine ed.), and ST II-II, q. 186, a. 3, ad 3.

Cf. Jn. I.3; Col. I.16; Eph. 1:12.


“Divine Drunkenness”: The Secret Life of Thomistic Reason

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