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# AQUINAS ON GOD'S JOY, LOVE, AND LIBERALITY

## *1. Passions and attitudes*

IN Book One of *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) Aquinas devotes chapters 44–88 to justifying attributing intellect and will to God, the ultimate explanatory principle. But he does not then go on immediately to consider creating, sustaining, and governing, the acts of intellect and will in terms of which the ultimate explanation has to be developed. In the investigations of creation and providence that make up Books Two and Three, he does, of course, undertake to show in detail how those activities are to be ascribed to God. But first, to fill out Book One's account of God considered in himself, Aquinas adds a few more chapters in which he tries to show, primarily, what reason enables us to say about virtue in God (I.89–96) and about God's existence considered as life (I.97–102).

Broadly speaking, it isn't hard to see why a mode of existence characterized essentially by intellective and volitional activity should be understood as life, even though not in the biological sense. For my purposes in this article, that broadly spoken observation is enough;[1] I won't have more to say now about attributing life to God. The consideration of what can be inferred about God's moral character is more challenging. It also makes a more obviously essential contribution to Aquinas's natural-theological account of God's nature to take up moral character at this point in SCG, after the arguments for divine intellect and will, and before the thorough investigation of those acts of God's intellect and will that bring about and affect beings other than God.

By this stage in the development of SCG I we know that Aquinas's attributions of divine virtues in this natural-theological context will have to be developed as extrapolations from his understanding of their human counterparts. Still, the first move he makes on his way toward considering virtue in God may seem to result from his sticking too close to the human model. For although Aquinas's account of *human* virtues is, naturally, founded on his account of the passions reason controls by means of those virtues,[2] even sympathetic readers are likely to think that he needn't have approached *divine* virtue by way of a full chapter (I.89) devoted to discussing in detail the possibility of passions in God, especially when the explicit outcome of the chapter is entirely negative, as we're sure it would have to be.

The general grounds on which he dismisses the possibility of divine

passions are so obvious that he could have left it as an exercise for the reader to come up with them. There can be no passions of any sort in *God* because, for instance, passions are associated with the *sensory* part of the human soul (89.736), and they involve *bodily changes* (89.737). Of course, any one such consideration settles the matter. Nevertheless, as if the five general grounds he offers might not have been enough, he goes on to examine various *specific* passions because, he observes, "some passions are denied of God *not only* on the basis of the genus of passion *but also* on the basis of their species" (89.742). Grief (*dolor*), for instance, must be denied of God not just generally, because it is a passion, but also specifically, because grief is specified as involving "something bad's having happened to the one who has that passion" (89.742).

This is overkill; but overkill isn't all that his detailed treatment of the passions here achieves. Even though every explicit conclusion is negative and unsurprising, two other features of the chapter make important contributions to the positive portrayal of God.

The first of those two features is only hinted at in Chapter 89, but the hint is developed explicitly in the very next chapter, as we'll see. In making his systematic approach to specifically denying various passions of God, Aquinas claims that the defining character (*ratio*) of any passion gets specified on the basis of (O) its object — some thing, event, or state of affairs the passion's subject considers to be in some respect either good or bad — and (R) (the subject's perception of) the relationship between the passion's subject and its object. So, for instance, the defining character of grief gets spelled out more precisely in terms of (O) some thing, event, or state of affairs the subject takes

[1]Aquinas begins his consideration of the attribute of life by making just that observation: "Now from things that have already been shown we have, necessarily, the result that God is living. For it has been shown that God is intellective and volitional [1.44 & 72], but intellective and volitional activity belongs only to what is living; therefore, God is living" (97.811–812).

[2]See, e.g., the account of the virtues in ST IaIIae.49–70, founded on and immediately preceded by the account of the passions in 22–48.

[3]I'm distinguishing the components of this basis as (O) the object and (R) the perceived relationship because that seems to be what Aquinas intends, although his way of putting it in this chapter isn't quite so clear. In 89.742 he says that "every passion gets its species from its object" and identifies the object of sadness (*tristia*) or of grief as "something bad that is already closely associated" (*malum iam inhaerens*) with the subject, where "something bad" picks out what I'm distinguishing as (O), and "already closely associated" with the subject picks out (R). Then in the next section (743) he introduces (R) expressly, first describing it as an aspect of (O), stipulating that "the defining character of a passion's object (*ratio obiecti alicuius passionis*) is drawn not only from what is good and what is bad, but also from someone's being related in some way toward the one or the other of them." But he goes on almost at once to describe (R) as "the very way in which one is related to *the object*." So it's tempting to think that '*obiecti*' should be deleted from the phrase quoted just above, changing the claim to one that is simply about the defining character of a *passion*.

[4]As he does in 89.742–747, specifically rejecting one of those passions in each of those sections.

[5]The specification is a bit terse: "*Spes autem, quamvis habeat obiectum bonum, non tamen bonum iam obtentum, sed obtinendum.*"

to be in some respect bad and (R) the subject's present possession of, awareness of, or involvement in (O).[3] It isn't hard to anticipate how, on this sort of basis, Aquinas rejects specifically the possibility of divine sadness, desire, fear, remorse, envy, and anger.[4]

But the most interesting development in his consideration of specific passions occurs in connection with his rejecting the possibility of divine hope (*spes*) (743). He specifies hope in terms of (O) some thing, event, or state of affairs the subject takes to be in some respect good and (R) the subject's not having already attained that good but conceiving of its attainment as desirable.[5] For Aquinas's purposes in this chapter the crucial aspect of hope is (R), "which, of course, cannot be suited to God" because the subject's state as stipulated in (R) couldn't be the state of a perfect being. But it's *only* on the basis of (R) that hope can't specifically be attributed to God. There's nothing in (O), the description of hope's object, that's incompatible with God's nature as argued for so far. It's also only on the basis of (R) that hope differs from joy (*gaudium*), as Aquinas remarks (743); for in specifically dismissing the possibility of divine sadness or grief he contrasts them with joy, about which he says that its "object is something good that is present and possessed" (742). In other words, joy is specified in terms of (O) some thing, event, or state of affairs the subject takes to be in some respect good and (R) that good's being present to and possessed by the subject. So in the defining characteristic of the passion of joy there's nothing at all that provides a basis for specifically rejecting its attribution to God. Of all the passions considered in the chapter, only joy is rejected (tacitly) on general grounds alone. And that's the first of the two important features of this chapter I was alluding to.

The second of those features is an explicit claim rather than a hint, but the details of the claim aren't clear at first. It occurs in the opening sentences of Aquinas's rejection of divine passions on general grounds, where we would expect him to be talking simply about passions (*passiones*), but where in fact he seems to be relying on some unexplained classifications: "Now on the basis of things that have already been laid down one can know that in God there are no passions associated with *affectus (passiones affectuum)*. For there is no passion in connection with an *intellective affectio,* but only in connection with a *sensory* one. . . . Now there can be no *affectio* of that *latter* sort in God. . . . Therefore, . . . there is no *affectiva* passion in God" (89.735–736). What interests me most here is the claim that "there is no passion in connection with an intellective *affectio*" and the implication that there may, therefore, be no barrier to attributing an intellective *affectio* to God.

But what are we to make of '*affectio*' and the words related to it in this

passage and, for that matter, in the remainder of the sections on the general rejection of passions?[6] To simplify the issue, I think we can safely assume that the adjective '*affectiva*' is associated equally well with the two nouns '*affectio*' and '*affectus*', and that there is no significant difference here between those nouns (the latter of which occurs only once in the chapter). So we can focus exclusively on '*affectio*'. In *Summa theologiae* (ST) Aquinas lists all these terms and more that are relevant to the topic, drawing the conclusion that "the passions of the soul are the same as *affectiones*. But *affectiones* obviously pertain to the appetitive and not to the cognitive (*apprehensivam*) part of the soul. Therefore, the passions, too, occur in the appetitive rather than the cognitive part" (IaIIae.22.2, s.c.).[7] The SCG passage that concerns me can be illuminated by this ST conclusion if we read the conclusion as claiming only *generic* sameness between passions and *affectiones*, as we can do without obliterating its point. In that case there are *affectiones* belonging to the *sensory* appetite, and they are the passions; but there are also *affectiones* belonging to the *intellective* appetite — i.e., *affectiones* belonging to the will — and they could not be passions.[8]

[6]Only his presentation of the fifth and last general ground (in 740) involves no use of '*affectio*' or related terms. No such terminology occurs at all in the specific rejections (742–748).

[7]Here's the beginning of the passage: "But opposed to [the thesis that passion occurs in the cognitive rather than the appetitive part of the soul] is what Augustine says in *De civitate Dei* IX [4], that 'the movements of the soul that the Greeks call *pathe* some of our writers, such as Cicero, call *perturbationes*, while others call them *affectiones* or *affectus*, and still others call them — more precisely (and closer to the Greek) — *passiones*'. On this basis it is clear that. . . ." (What follows immediately is the passage I just quoted in the body of the article.)

[8]When he states this claim in the SCG passage, Aquinas describes it as having been "proved in *Physics* VII." The Marietti editors identify the reference further as 3,247a3–248a9; 247 [*sic*; presumably 248]a23–248b28, which, as they point out, Aquinas discusses in his commentary at L6:921–927. On the basis of a first inspection it seems to me that the topics discussed in those places, whether by Aristotle or by Aquinas, are too broadly relevant to this claim to illuminate it. Things Aquinas says more simply elsewhere are at least as helpful — e.g., "passion properly so-called is found where there is bodily change. Of course, bodily change is found in acts of the sensory appetite — and not just spiritual [bodily change], as there is in connection with sensory apprehension, but even natural. However, no bodily change is required in connection with an act of the intellective appetite, because that sort of appetite is not a power of any organ" (ST IaIIae.22.3c). Even if we set aside Aquinas's Aristotelian doctrine of the organlessness of the rational soul, everyone could agree that the kinds of bodily change associated with emotion — blushing, heavy breathing, tears, and the like — are quite different from any changes in brain states that may be associated with volition.

[9]Given Aquinas's theory of natural appetite, I suppose that by "even the very inclination of a natural thing" (*et ipsam inclinationem rei naturalis*) here he might mean to bring the notion of inclination down to the most primitive, literally interpreted kind of case — e.g., understanding that a stick's inclining against a wall exhibits the stick's natural appetite for a lower location. Cf. ST IaIIae.26.1c: ". . . the very naturalness of a heavy body for the center of the earth (*ad locum medium*) is a consequence of weight (*gravitatem*) and can be called natural love"; also 26.2c: "And weight itself, which is the source of [a body's] movement toward the location that is natural [for it] on account of [its] weight, can, in a certain sense, be called natural love."

But what are *affectiones*? Earlier in SCG, in discussing God's knowledge of human thoughts and volitions, Aquinas draws a relevant distinction: "thought (*cogitatio*) belongs to the soul in virtue of the soul's taking in some sort of form, while an *affectio* is a kind of inclination (*inclinatio*) of the soul toward something; for we call even the very inclination of a natural thing natural appetite" (68.572).[9] Inclinations, then, occur in appetite at every level — natural, sensory, and intellective — and those associated with souls are called *affectiones*, either sensory or intellective. Still, 'inclination', more especially 'inclination *toward* something', is too narrow a translation for '*affectio*' where it must apply to fear as well as to hope, to grief as well as to joy. So I propose interpreting *affectiones* here as *attitudes*. Positive and negative attitudes are, of course, prominent features of our inner life, and we can readily recognize some of them as features of our lower appetite and others as characterizing our higher appetite — liking licorice, and hating hypocrisy.

The translation of the SCG passage in question can then be completed in this way: ". . .in God there are no *passions* associated with attitudes. For there is no passion in connection with an *intellective* attitude, but only in connection with a *sensory* one. . . . Now there can be no attitude of that *latter* sort in God. . . . Therefore, . . . there is no attitudinal *passion* in God." So, if we find in ourselves *intellective* attitudes corresponding to some or all of our passions, we have not been shown any *general* grounds that would prevent us from attributing such attitudes to God. And if there are no *special* grounds of that sort either, as in the case of joy, then we seem to have a *prima facie* case for taking seriously the possibility that there is, for example, joy in God. And if the having of intellective attitudes is simply a corollary of the having of intellect and will, then Aquinas's relational method mandates attributing joy to God.[10]

### 2. *Intellective attitudes*

Before examining that possibility directly, I want to consider very briefly the general notion of intellective attitudes. If we consider just the examples Aquinas uses in Chapter 89, we can in every case usefully and easily distinguish between an attitude of the sensory appetite — e.g., an emotional reaction — and a rational attitude, *each* of which deserves and ordinarily gets the name 'fear', say, or 'anger'. Just imagine the difference between the fear of a housefire you'd feel if you woke up smelling smoke and the fear of a housefire that leads you to install a smoke alarm, or the difference between the anger you'd feel at being slapped in the face and the anger that leads you to vote against the party in power. I think all Aquinas's examples of passions have recognizable rational, unemotional parallels, and I think he thinks so, too: "everything we long for by

nature we can long for also in connection with the pleasure of reason, though not vice versa" (ST IaIIae.31.3c);[11] and "just as a person avoids something bad in the future through the passion of fear, which occurs in the sensory appetite, so the intellective appetite performs the same operation without passion" (90.750). In some such cases, extending the use of the passion's name to the corresponding rational attitude sounds odd, as Aquinas acknowledges.[12] All the same, these extensions do succeed; and the reason they succeed is, I think, that his examples are *attitudinal* passions, the basic analyses of which are developed in terms of (O) an object taken by a subject to be good, or bad, and (R) certain specific perceived relationships between that subject and that object.[13] For such an analysis to be suited particularly to an attitudinal *passion* would require the addition of a third component, describing the associated bodily changes that mark the attitude as an emotional state. As long as we deal with only the first two components, as Aquinas typically does, we're employing an analysis that applies equally to attitudes of the sensory and the intellective appetites. Given Aquinas's general theory of appetite, he's bound to locate both sensory and intellective attitudes in appetitive faculties. Because the object is always described in *evaluative* terms and the subject-object relationship typically involves some *disposition* of the subject in relation to the object, it might be

[10]Within the limits of the natural theology Aquinas is developing in SCG I there are, he observes, only two sorts of bases on which we can justifiably ascribe perfections to God: either "[1] through *negation*, as when we call God eternal [i.e., beginningless, endless, timeless] or infinite, or also [2] through a *relation* he has to other things, as when he is called the first cause, or the highest good. For as regards God we cannot grasp what he is, but rather [1] what he is not, and [2] how other things are disposed relative to him" (30.278). Aquinas uses the first of these two bases for what I call the eliminative method, which he employs through chapter 28 of SCG I. His methodological discussion in I.29–36 uses the second basis for what I call the relational method, with which (in SCG I.37–102) he develops his consideration of what he calls "God's substance."

[11]He's concerned with "the *pleasure* of reason" (*delectatione rationis*) here because the issue in 31.3 is "whether pleasure differs from joy," but the observation regarding rational and sub-rational wants seems quite general.

[12]See, e.g., ST IaIIae 22.3, ad 3, where he quotes Augustine on this sort of extended application of the names of the passions; also QDV 26.7, ad 5.

[13]There are, of course, non-attitudinal passions for which rational parallels are nonexistent or very rare, and for many of them, naturally, we have no good English names — e.g., Weltschmerz, ennui, Angst, malaise.

[14]Aquinas's distinction between '*gaudium*' and '*delectatio*' seems not to be reflected precisely in our ordinary use of the words 'joy' and 'pleasure'; but if we were challenged to distinguish between them, I think we would do so along this same line.

[15]Later, in ST, Aquinas identifies joy as the species of pleasure "that is consequent on reason," explaining that "that is why not 'joy' but only 'pleasure' is applied to nonhuman animals" (IaIIae.31.3c), and identifying joy as "the pleasure associated with the *intellective* appetite" (31.4c). If he were taking that line here, he would not be treating pleasure and joy as divine attributes on a par with each other.

[16]See 89.736, 737, and 738, where each of these three general grounds is presented.

[17]Aquinas of course recognizes that Scripture often uses names of passions in talking about God, and he discusses the metaphorical character of those ascriptions in 91.766–767.

[18]See also SCG I.102.843.

helpful to think of both the sensory and intellective varieties as evaluative, motivational attitudes — or, perhaps, just *motives*, lower and higher. My present concern, however, is only with such intellective attitudes as can or must be attributed to God — person-specifying divine attitudes, the emotionless divine counterparts of emotions.

### *3. God's pleasure and joy*

And, as Chapter 89 hinted, one of those is joy, the attribution of which Aquinas argues for in Chapter 90, where he discusses it along with delight, or pleasure (*delectatio*), drawing this technical distinction between them: "pleasure stems from a good that is really conjoined [with the one who is pleased], while joy does not require that. Instead, just the will's resting (*quietatio*) in the object of its volition is enough for the defining characteristic of joy. That is why pleasure, in the strict sense of the word, has to do only with a good conjoined [with the one who is pleased], while joy has to do [also] with a good detached (*exteriori*) [from the one who is enjoying it]" (90.754). If both joy and pleasure are attributed to God, then, it will be "clear that, strictly speaking, God is pleased by himself but enjoys both himself and other things" (ibid.).[14]

Aquinas introduces joy and pleasure as "passions that are not suited to God insofar as they are *passions*, although the defining character of their *species* entails nothing incompatible with divine perfection" (90.749).[15] I've mentioned some of the general grounds on which we can rule out attributing any passion to God: a passion occurs in the sensory appetite and involves bodily changes, while God must be immutable, incorporeal, and without any aspect corresponding to the human sensory soul.[16] So, as we've seen, the first step in applying Aquinas's relational method to justify the analogical, non-metaphorical use of the name of a passion in talking about God must be to identify in human beings some corresponding attitude in the *intellective* appetite, or will; "for cognized good and bad are an object of the intellective as of the sensory appetite" (90.750).[17]

Well, can we recognize in ourselves a state reasonably described as "the will's resting in the object of its volition," a state that might plausibly be characterized as intellective joy? In connection with what might be called the set of one's will, or static volition, it seems to me that 'joy' is a perfectly appropriate designation for the set of one's will toward something intellectively cognized as good and as present to oneself, whether or not that object is "really conjoined" with oneself. 'Intellective joy' is a good (if unattractive) name for the attitude that is bound to characterize any of us lucky enough to be in those

circumstances.

And, as for identifying that attitude in God, we can begin by observing that God is, of course, "supremely satisfied (*maxime contentatur*) with himself, the principal object of his will [I.74], as having every sort of sufficiency in himself. Therefore, through his will he enjoys and is pleased by himself supremely" (90.751).[18] We can add a little detail to this picture of necessitated divine self-satisfaction by considering the intellectively cognized goods with which a human being is most intimately associated, those that are immediately available as objects of pleasure and joy. Aquinas's paradigms of such goods are the very activities of the sensory and rational parts of the soul, all of which activities are themselves objects of intellective cognition. Some of those activities, he observes, "are actualizings (*actus*) or perfectings of the one whose activities they are: I mean intellecting, sensing, willing, and the like. . . .In that way, then, those actions of the sensory and intellective soul are themselves a good for the one whose activities they are, and they are also cognized through sense [— some of them —] or intellect [— all of them]" (IaIIae.31.5c). And, of course, they are also cognized especially clearly as a good "really conjoined" with oneself. "That is why pleasure arises also from those actions themselves and not only from their objects" (ibid.).[19] "But God has the supremely perfect activity in [his] intellection [I.45]. . . Therefore, if *our* intellection is pleasant because of the perfecting of *it*, the divine intellection will be supremely pleasurable to him" (90.752).[20] We can, then, most reliably reason to and most readily appreciate the nature of God's being pleased with himself if we focus on his supremely perfect intellective activity as the aspect of himself that is the proper object of his intellective pleasure.

But considering only the intellective attitudes corresponding to passions and identifying appropriate objects of those attitudes doesn't yet give us a full warrant for attributing pleasure or joy to God. Some of the general grounds for

[19]Aquinas's description here of one's intellective attitude toward aspects of one's inner life strikes me as providing a good picture of the state of appetitive rest in which we sometimes are. Volition in us isn't always directed toward the acquiring or achieving of something we don't already have. You couldn't exist as a person without the sort of inner life that is essential to personhood. It isn't anything you could acquire or achieve. And yet, the inner life that is essential to you, that isn't even clearly distinguishable from you, is, of course, something you *want*. This static sort of appetite, the wanting of what one already has or is, is what Aquinas identifies as appetitive rest, which is, of course, not to be confused with the cessation of appetite.

[20]See also In EN VII:L14.1533: "to each nature its own proper activity is pleasant, since it is the perfecting of that nature — which is why reason's activity is pleasant for a human being."

[21]Appropriate activating questions would, naturally, sound a bit stupid: e.g., "Do you recognize your activities of perceiving and thinking as good to have?'; 'Are you pleased that you're a rational animal?'.

[22]See also ST IaIIae.22.3, ad 3: "when love and joy and other [passions] of that sort are attributed to God and the angels, or to human beings in connection with intellective appetite, they signify a simple act of will together with a likeness of effect, without passion."

rejecting divine attributes of that sort are circumvented by making those moves, but no such ground is more fundamental than the simple observation that nothing properly describable as *passion* — or even *passive*, as even an intellective attitude might conceivably be described — is compatible with the divine essence that has already been shown to be *actus purus* (I.16). God "is, therefore, *active only* (*agens tantum*), and in *no* way does passion have any place in him" (89.740). If divine pleasure or joy is thinkable, then, it must be identified with not merely an intellective attitude or set of will but with some *act* of will essentially associated with that attitude. Is the name 'joy' properly attached to some human act of will that can serve as the bridgehead from which to extend the use of that name to an *activity* that must be associated with the will of God?

Aquinas certainly thinks so: "in connection with the intellective appetite, which is will, we find activities that are like activities of the sensory appetite as regards the defining character of their species, [but] different [from them] in this, that in connection with the sensory appetite they are passions because they are conjoined with a bodily organ [that passively undergoes change], while in connection with the intellective appetite they are *simple activities*" (90.750). More precisely, "the pleasure associated with the sensory appetite occurs along with a bodily change, while the pleasure associated with the intellective appetite is *nothing other than a simple movement of will*" (ST IaIIae.31.4c). In my view, the only simple act of will that fills the bill Aquinas draws up here for intellective pleasure is what I've been calling static volition — actively willing the continued being and the continued presence of the intellectively cognized good that is now conjoined with the willer. In human willers such static volition is of course often dispositional, but so close to the surface that it takes no more than a question to bring it into consciousness, to make it an occurrent simple act of will.[21] However, in God understood as *actus purus* such static volition would of course have to be eternally *occurrent*.[22]

But can we really identify the simple act of willing the continuing presence of a good — even a superlatively good — state of affairs as *pleasure* or *joy*? What about satiety? What about boredom? In dealing with worries of that sort Aquinas would draw on Aristotle: "for a human being, nothing [that remains] the same is pleasant *always*. And Aristotle says that the reason for this is that our nature is not simple but composite and, insofar as it is subject to corruption, changeable from one thing to another. . . . And he says that if the nature of any thing that takes pleasure were simple and immutable, one and the same activity would be most pleasant for it. For instance, if a human being were intellect *alone*, it *would* take pleasure in contemplation *always*. And it is because God is

simple and immutable that he is characterized by joy (*gaudet*) with a single, simple pleasure *always* — the pleasure he has in contemplating himself. . . . And pleasure that is devoid of movement is greater than pleasure that occurs in connection with movement, for what is in motion is in a state of becoming, while what is at rest is in perfected being. . ." (In EN VII:L14.1534–1535).[23]

On this basis it seems clear how pleasure and joy are to be attributed to God in that "God is pleased by himself" and "enjoys . . . himself" (90.754). The attribution of such reflexive pleasure and joy is, indeed, a corollary of Aquinas's consideration of will in God: the eternal act of static volition that is eternal pleasure and joy in oneself must belong to the appetitive aspect of absolutely perfect being. But the chapter on pleasure and joy concludes by claiming that God "enjoys *both* himself *and* other things" (90.754). In what way and to what extent are *other* things part of the object of God's joy?

Every being capable of joy "naturally rejoices in what is *like* it, as in something that is *suited* to it (*quasi in convenienti*) — except *per accidens*, insofar as what is like it may interfere with its own advantage, as 'potters quarrel among themselves' [Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II 10, 1388a16] because one of them interferes with another's making money. But *every* good is a likeness of the divine goodness [I.40]. . . , and God loses nothing for himself as a consequence of *any* good. We are, therefore, left with the conclusion that God rejoices over *every* good" (90.753).[24] The *otherness* of other things, then, contributes nothing at all to their status as objects of God's joy. His enjoyment of creatures is, inevitably, his enjoyment in them of manifold, partial manifestations of the perfect goodness that is the object of his enjoyment of himself. This account of divine joy could disappoint creatures hoping for a God who might enjoy them for themselves, just as they are, but it's only this sort of account that strikes me as having any claim on plausibility. It provides a picture of divine joy over creatures that resembles, I think, the joy the finest concert pianist might take in the beginner's getting something right — joy like a sparking arc of recognition, the joy that is one's seeing in another even just a glimmer of the goodness one

[23]See also 1536. And see esp. ST IaIIae.31.5c, where part of Aquinas's basis for ranking intellective over sensory pleasures is the essential imperfection, or *incompleteness*, of the latter. An element of one's pleasure is one's being conjoined with what one cognizes as good, and in intellective pleasure that conjunction "is more complete, because movement, which is an uncompleted actualization, is a feature of the conjoining of something sense-perceptible with one's senses. That is why sensory pleasures are not entirely present at once (*totae simul*). Instead, in connection with them something passes away and one anticipates something [else] for consummation, as is clear in connection with the pleasure of food and of sex. Intelligible things, on the other hand, are devoid of movement, which is why intelligible pleasures are entirely present at once. . . ."

[24]See also SCG 1.102.849: "God has unsurpassable pleasure in himself and universal joy regarding all goods, without any taint of the contrary."

[25]The Marietti editors supply a reference to 15.124, which is where the odd formulation is introduced in a subconclusion of an argument for God's eternality. But the identification itself is argued for in Chapter 22, esp. 22.205.

knows best in oneself, and willing that that goodness continue to be and that that likeness grow stronger.

### *4. God's love*

Aquinas's project of natural theology succeeds only if its arguments for and investigations of the nature of first being turn up attributes that identify it as God. A crucial component of that identification is a set of attributes that establish personhood. Although I will not argue it here, it seems to me that the attributes of intellect and will are sufficient conditions of personhood. Still, their sufficiency is easier to appreciate when we're shown that certain personifying attitudes, such as pleasure and joy, are corollaries of perfect intellect and will. Personifying relationships would be more illuminating in that way than attitudes are, and so divine love would be more valuable than pleasure and joy for disclosing the personhood entailed by divine intellect and will. In fact, love for other persons is arguably the most significant of the traditional divine attributes from a human point of view, in part because it would most fully disclose God as a person. And we needn't pretend that we have only a theoretical interest in seeking a rational basis for claiming that the ultimate principle of reality is not oblivious or indifferent to us but knows us fully and loves us, even so.

Since there can't be unactualized potentialities or unoccurrent dispositions in absolutely perfect, atemporal God, the divine static volition that has as its proper object perfect goodness, identical with God himself, must manifest itself in God's eternal love of himself and joy in himself. We've just seen Aquinas's derivation of joy as a corollary of God's nature. Earlier in SCG he offers this derivation of love: "All things, insofar as they are, are assimilated to God, who is being, primarily and maximally. But all things, to the extent to which they are, naturally love their own being, each in its own way. Far more, therefore, does God naturally love his being. Now his nature is *per se necesse esse* (as was proved above [I.22]).[25] God, therefore, necessarily wills that he be" (80.680), and, we're now in a position to add, delights in the necessarily perfect fulfilment of that volition.

But it seems to me that the meager, metaphysical self-love derived in that passage does nothing even to enhance our understanding of divine personhood, let alone contributing to the concept of a loving God. In fact, since Aquinas here infers this divine self-love from the utterly universal ontological thesis that "*all* things, to the extent to which they are, naturally love their own being, each in its own way," the only love that's been attributed to God so far isn't even a

personifying attitude, much less an interpersonal relationship of the sort that would illuminate the personhood established by the attribution of intellect and will and that would interest human beings most in connection with attributing personhood to first being. However, that short derivation is by no means all we have to go on. As soon as Aquinas has argued for pleasure and joy in God, he devotes a full chapter to God's love (I.91).

Now of course Aquinas recognizes the occurrence of love as a passion in human beings. Indeed, he argues for love's primacy among all the passions in one important respect.[26] But because his SCG chapter on God's love occurs just after he's developed his account of intellective counterparts of passions, he can and does avoid even mentioning love as a passion here. He begins the chapter by simply declaring that active divine love is a corollary of intellective appetite in God: "in God there must likewise also be love, in accordance with the act of his will" (91.755)[27] — a declaration in which 'likewise also' smoothes the way for the attribution of love by indicating that it's to be patterned on the immediately preceding attribution of pleasure and joy.

[26]See, e.g., ST Ia.20.1: "Love, however, is oriented toward the good in general, whether it is possessed or not possessed, and so love is naturally the first act of will and of appetite [generally]. And for that reason all other appetitive movements presuppose love as their first root. For no one *desires* anything other than a loved good, nor does anyone *rejoice* over anything other than a loved good. *Hate*, too, is directed only toward that which is opposed to a loved good, and it is obvious that *sadness*, likewise, and others of that sort are traced back to love as to their first source. Thus in anything in which there is will or appetite [generally] there must be love; for if the first is removed, the others are removed"; also ST IaIIae.25.2; 27.4; In DDN IV:L9.401; and SCG IV.19.3559.

[27]See also ST Ia.20.1, ad 1: ". . . love, joy, and pleasure are passions insofar as they signify acts of the sensory appetite but not insofar as they signify acts of the intellective appetite. And it is in that way that they are posited in God. . . .[H]e loves without passion."

[28]"Love considered in respect of its object does not entail anything incompatible with God, since [love] is for what is good (*cum sit boni*). Nor [does it entail anything incompatible with God] considered in respect of the way it is related to its object; for the love of any thing when it is possessed is not less but more, since our affinity for any good is enhanced when we possess it (*quia bonum aliquod fit nobis affinius cum habetur*). . . ." On this basis it's hard to see how divine love differs specifically from divine pleasure or joy. (The part of the argument I'm omitting here doesn't help in that respect.)

[29]Accounts of love's double object appear also before 759's oversimplified account — viz., in 756, 757, and 758 — though they are less fully developed than the one in 763. I think it's clear that the double-object analysis of love isn't meant to extend all the way down to the sub-cognitive "natural love" Aquinas sometimes recognizes; see, e.g., n. 9 above.

[30]Aquinas sometimes recognizes a technical distinction between *amor* and *dilectio*, associating the latter specifically with *intellective* love — e.g., "The supreme appetite, however, is the one that occurs together with cognition and free choice (*libera electione*), for that appetite [— the will —] somehow moves itself. And so the love (*amor*) associated with it is also the most perfect and is called *dilectio*, insofar as what is to be loved [with that love] is picked out by free choice" (In DDN IV:L9.402). The etymological connection between '*electio*' and '*dilectio*' Aquinas hints at isn't imaginary, though it's hard to believe it has much influence over the meaning of '*dilectio*', which in this special sense seems close to the meaning of 'esteem'. In my discussion of the divine attribute I will use just the term 'love', as Aquinas uses just '*amor*'. For a fuller discussion of the technical differences among the four terms '*amor*', '*dilectio*', '*amicitia*', and '*caritas*', see ST IaIIae.26.3.

But the argument for divine love that is most like the arguments for pleasure and joy is also the least helpful one in the chapter, because its weak conclusion, that "love is not incompatible with divine perfection as regards the defining characteristic of its species" (91.759), is founded on oversimplified accounts of (R) the relationship between love's object and the one who loves it and, especially, of (O) love's object, identified in this argument simply as what is good.[28] The argument's weak conclusion doesn't really need more support than those oversimplifications provide, but they leave out a formal feature of love that distinguishes it in Aquinas's view from all other attitudes. Later in that same chapter he points out that "it is essential to know that although the soul's other activities are concerned with only one object, love alone is evidently directed (*ferri*) to *two* objects. For we must be related in some way to some object in virtue of intellectively cognizing, or enjoying[, for example]. Love, on the other hand, wills [O1] something *for* [O2] someone. For we are said [strictly speaking] to *love* [O2] that *for* which we will [O1] some good. . . . That is why, speaking simply and strictly, we are said to *desire* (*desiderare*) the things we long for (*concupiscimus*), but to *love* not them but rather ourselves, for whose sake we long for those things. And for that reason those things are said to be loved [by us] *per accidens* and not strictly speaking" (91.763).[29] (Since this analysis of human love is carried out in terms of volitions, and since it's undertaken in connection with attributing love to God, we may suppose that it's intellective love that's being analyzed, whether or not the analysis is intended to apply as well to the love that is a passion.[30])

The two objects of love are (O1) *direct* — the good that is willed — and (O2) *indirect* — the one for whom that good is willed. What is loved strictly speaking, or *per se*, or for its own sake, is love's *indirect* object; its *direct* object is loved only *per accidens*.[31] Furthermore, in any case of loving it's only what might be called the *terminating* indirect object that is loved for its own sake. Someone whose good a person wills is, considered just as such, an indirect object of that person's love, but he or she may not be its *only* indirect object: "Someone whose good a person wills only insofar as it contributes to *another's* good is loved *per accidens* — just as a person who wills that wine be kept safe so that he may drink it, or that a human being be kept safe so that he or she may be of use or pleasure to him, loves the wine or the human being *per accidens* but himself *per se*" (91.757). And so "*true* love requires willing someone's good insofar as it is *that* person's good" (ibid.), in which case that person is the love's terminating indirect object.

As an analysis of intellective love of others this is promising but drastically incomplete. All that's been accomplished so far could stand as a full analysis

only of *benevolence*, and of course benevolence isn't all there is to love, even to intellective love. Aquinas's terminology can occasionally suggest that he might think otherwise, as when he says that the love one has for another person whose good one wills "is called by many the love that belongs to benevolence, or to friendship" (In DDN IV:L9.404). Friendship, however, involves more than benevolence as ordinarily understood, and the more it involves is *uni*volence. Aquinas of course recognizes this: "friendship consists in sharing. . . . But friends share themselves with each other most of all in intimacy (*convictu*), which is why living together seems especially appropriate and pleasurable in friendship" (In EN IX:L14.1946);[32] and "to spend time together with (*simul conversari ad*) one's friend seems to be especially appropriate to friendship" (SCG IV.22.3585).[33] These forms of togetherness that characterize friendship also occur among the *practicable* forms of the all-consuming union passionate love may seem to demand, especially at its kindling, about which Aquinas had learned from the pagans: "For, as the Philosopher remarks in *Politics* II [1, 1262b11–16], 'Aristophanes said that lovers would desire that one thing should be made of the two of them', but 'since that would result in one or both of them being destroyed', they seek a union that is feasible and acceptable (*convenit et decet*) — living together, talking together, and being joined together in other such ways" (ST IaIIae.28.1, ad 2).

[31]Cf ST IaIIae.26.4c: "the love with which a thing is loved so that there may be what is good for it is love unconditionally (*simpliciter*), while the love with which something is loved so that it may be something else's good is love in a certain respect only."

[32]Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX 12, 1171b29–1172a1.

[33]See also 3586–3587.

[34]Aquinas's account of God's love of himself becomes an account of divine interpersonal love in his exploration of the doctrine of the trinity (see, e.g., ST Ia.37.2); but that has no place in this development of *natural* theology in SCG I–III, where only creatures are available as possible objects of God's interpersonal love.

[35]Sometimes Aquinas calls binding and uniting two sorts of uniting. See, e.g., ST IaIIae.25.2, ad 2: "There are two sorts of uniting of what is loved to the one who loves it. One is indeed *real* — I mean the one that involves being conjoined with the thing itself. And it is that sort of uniting that pertains to joy or pleasure, which *follows* desire [and which may or may not be achieved]. But the other is *attitudinal* (*affectiva*) uniting, which occurs in accordance with suitability (*aptitudinem*) or appropriateness (*proportionem*) — I mean that to the extent to which one thing has a suitability for and an inclination toward another, it already shares something of it. And in this way love *implies* uniting — a uniting that indeed *precedes* the movement of desire." Also IaIIae.28.1c: "The uniting of the one who loves to what is loved is of two sorts. One is indeed *in reality* — e.g., when what is loved is now present to the one who loves it. But the other is *attitudinal* (*secundum affectum*), a uniting that must, of course, be considered on the basis of a preceding cognition, since appetitive movement follows cognition. . . . Therefore, love brings about the first [real] uniting in the manner of an *efficient* cause. For it moves [the one who loves] to desire and to seek the presence of what is loved as of that which suits him and pertains to him. But it brings about the second [attitudinal] uniting in the manner of a *formal* cause, since love itself *is* such a uniting or connecting. Thus Augustine says in *De trinitate* VIII [10] that love is, so to speak, 'a kind of life linking, or seeking to link, two together'. His phrase 'linking together' refers to the *attitudinal* union, without which there is no love, but his 'seeking to link together' pertains to *real* union."

So, it's a recognition of love's essential *magnetism* that's still missing from the account of true intellective love as the willing of someone's good insofar as it is that person's good. In terms of intellective love, what's still missing is an account of univolence, of the subject's willing of some sort of *union* with the person who is loved for his or her own sake. No intellective personal relationship that does not entail a volition for being together with a person in some respect can count as love for that person. How does this essential univolence fit into Aquinas's attribution of love to God?

As an ingredient in the divine self-love we've considered so far it could seem to be utterly redundant. One might even object to attributing love to God at all simply *because* "Love is a uniting and binding force (*vis unitiva et concretiva*), as Dionysius says in *De divinis nominibus* IV[§15.180]. But that can have no place in God, since he is simple" (ST Ia.20.1, obj. 3). Applied to God's loving himself, that's not really a formidable objection — as Aquinas's rejoinder to it shows: "in loving oneself one wills what is good for oneself and so seeks to unite that good with oneself as far as one can. To that extent love is called a *uniting* force, even in God: but [uniting] in the absence of any compositeness, because the good he wills for himself — he who is good through his essence. . . — is nothing other than himself" (ad 3). In keeping with absolute simplicity, of course, there are in God no real but only conceptual distinctions among all the elements into which love has been analyzed so far: its subject, its two objects, the subject's volition of what is good for the one who is the principal object, and the subject's volition of union with that one. God's volition of union with himself is necessarily, eternally fulfilled in a real union, supremely perfect in its utter seamlessness.[34]

We're looking at Aquinas's rejoinder to an objection that is concerned with an apparent difficulty in the notion of a simple God's loving himself, a difficulty we've seen him deal with handily. But in that same rejoinder he goes on to address the much more interesting and more difficult question of the nature of univolence in God's love for *others*. The human terms in which he begins to develop his answer here depend heavily on his analysis of self-love, which he understandably treats as basic to his account of interpersonal love: "In loving someone *else*, on the other hand, one wills what is good for *that* person. In doing so, one treats that person as oneself, directing good to that person as to oneself To that extent love is called a *binding* force, because one attaches the other person to oneself, relating oneself to that person as to oneself" (ad 3). Having applied the first half of the Dionysian unifying-and-binding formula in showing how the volition of union is compatible with God's simplicity, Aquinas now takes up the second half — binding — in a way intended to deepen our

understanding of what's involved in willing someone else's good when that willing is a component of loving. It can't be left at the level of one's broadly, blandly wishing 'May all be well with you!'. It must be one's *willing*, one's *individuated* willing, that everything be good for that other person *in just the way one wills that for oneself*.

But notice that the *binding* aspect of love, as Aquinas presents it here, is tantamount to and already fully realized in that full-fledged willing of the other person's good, informed by one's understanding and willing of one's own good. The binding is completely achieved as soon as just that volition is in place. By that very volition of yours you have bound to yourself the other person whose good you will in this way, but unilaterally, in a manner that may leave him or her totally unaware of the bond, and even of you. If this "binding" captures any of the associative aspect of love we're looking for, it does so only conceptually or attitudinally. It certainly entails no sort of real uniting of the beloved with the lover. It doesn't even involve on the lover's part a *volition* of real union in addition to the volition of the loved one's good.[35]

Nevertheless, this attitudinal binding is all Aquinas offers here by way of accommodating God's love of others to the Dionysian formula (which he plainly accepts as providing part of the correct analysis of love): "And in that way even divine love is a *binding* force . . . insofar as he wills good things for others" (ad 3). Whatever this consideration may add to our understanding of what God's love for others might come to, it is, after all, obviously *not* identifying, or not *fully* identifying, its *associative* aspect. To the extent to which anything of that sort has shown up so far in the analysis of God's love, it's been confined to self-love's volition of purely reflexive union, which Aquinas handled easily in dealing with the worry about "a unifying and binding force" in the componentless context of divine simplicity.

But Aquinas approaches the associative aspect of God's love more encouragingly in the SCG chapter he devotes to the topic, when he takes as *primary* what appears to be God's volition of union with other things, and then uses that as the *basis* for one of his arguments for the thesis that God loves himself and other things (91.760):

1 As Dionysius says [*De divinis nominibus* IV§15.180], moving toward union is a feature of
2 love (*amoris est ad unionem movere*). For the attitude (*affectus*) of the one who loves is in a way
3 united to what is loved because of a likeness or suitability between the one who loves and what is
4 loved. And so his appetite tends toward the perfecting of the union, so that a union that has
5 already been founded in attitude may be completed in activity. (That is why it is appropriate even
6 for friends that they enjoy each other's presence, and intimacy, and talking together.) But God

[35]The formula as Aquinas read it in the medieval Latin translation of Dionysius (who attributes it to Hierotheus, *"nobilis noster sanctitatis perfector"*), reads this way: *"Amorem, sive divinum sive angelicum sive intellectualem sive animalem sive naturalem dicamus, unitivam quamdam et concretivam intelligimus virtutem. . . ."*

7 moves all other things toward union [with himself]. For insofar as he gives them being and other
8 perfections he unites them to himself in the way in which that is possible. Therefore, God loves
9 both himself and other things.

I'm less interested in assessing this argument as an argument than in using it as a source of insight into Aquinas's understanding of the associative force in God's love for others. It begins with a version of the first half of the Dionysian formula, expressed here in words that bring out the uni*fying* force of love especially graphically: "*moving toward* union is a feature of love" (lines 1–2).[36] Love entails the lover's moving toward union with the beloved because it begins in the lover's recognition of "likeness or suitability" in the beloved. On the basis of the recognition that that relationship is an inchoate, attitudinal union with something good, even if it should be only a one-sided relationship at this stage, the lover's appetite naturally "tends toward the perfecting of the union, so that a union that has already been founded in attitude may be completed in activity" (lines 4–5). So the route of love's movement toward real union is mapped in lines 2–5, and, as we had some reason to expect, love's *unifying* force begins with and develops through the attitude Aquinas identifies as love's *binding* force. The real union of friends, described in standard terms parenthetically in lines 5–6, seems clearly to be offered as an image of the real union God wills that the creatures he loves have with him — and, naturally, as a *faint* image: "it is appropriate *even* for friends. . . ." And when the argument proper resumes with the premiss in lines 6–7, in the setting provided by that image of real union, it seems to be accepting this strong account of the uniting force of love as fully applicable to God's love universally: "God moves all other things toward union [with himself]."

But then in lines 7–9 we're given the terms in which Aquinas evidently thinks the strong account has to be accepted in God's case, and what a falling off is there! How is God supposed to move all creatures toward union with himself? Apparently only "insofar as he gives them being and other perfections" (lines 7–8). *That* is supposed to be God's uniting creatures "to himself in the way in which that is possible" (line 8). But, as depicted here, that way that is possible seems clearly to fall far short of achieving love's real union. We have evidence of its failure. If we consider just human creatures, and if we suppose for the sake of the argument that our being and other perfections are indeed given us by God as goods willed by him for persons he loves, it hardly needs to be pointed out that many or most of us don't see it that way. Aquinas's analysis of loving strikes me as insightful in distinguishing (ideally) (1) an incipient stage of attitudinal binding, (2) a development characterizable as movement toward union, and (3) a culmination in some form of real union. On that analysis, God's binding even

conscious, rational creatures to himself certainly can go unnoticed by the creatures, especially since the binding that is a component of *God's* love seems tantamount to his choosing which possible creatures to actualize. But if God's moving creatures toward *union* with himself in love is of such a sort that those creatures can remain totally oblivious of that process, too, then how does uniting differ from binding in the case of God's love for others? Is divine love's moving toward union, like love's binding generally, simply an attitude of the lover's which the beloved can be and often is ignorant of?

As presented in this argument, moving toward union differs sharply from binding in being not merely a choice or a volitional attitude but the actual giving of actual gifts — the creature's nature and existence — the gifts of creation.[37] When a volition of some creature's good in the form of its being and its specifying perfections is *God's* volition, it is perfectly efficacious. And the chosen recipient, wittingly or unwittingly, and willy-nilly, is thereby indeed *united* to God, *ontologically*. With just a little embroidery at this point we can

[37]Because creation is *ex nihilo,* there is a formal difficulty about considering a creature's being and specifying perfections as gifts given to it: "To that which gets made, the maker gives being. Therefore, if God makes something *ex nihilo,* God gives being to something. Therefore, either there is something receiving being, or nothing. If nothing, then through that action *nothing* is established in being, and in that case it is not true that something gets made. But if there is something receiving being, it will be other than that which is God, since what receives and what is received are not the same. Therefore, God makes [whatever he makes] out of something pre-existent, and so not out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)" (QDP 3.1, obj. 17). Aquinas's rejoinder: "Simultaneously with giving being, God produces that which receives being. And so [in giving being] he need not act on (*ex*) something pre-existent" (ad 17).

[38]Aquinas cites Aristotle as well to this same effect here: "and the Philosopher says, in *Politics* II [1, 1262b10], that union is a *product* (*opus*) of love."

[39]This possibility, which seems to be realized often, may seem to make God dependent on beings other than himself. The first thing to notice in this connection is that God's absolute independence could not rule out *logical* dependence. For instance, being omniscient depends on knowing that 2 + 2 = 4, and so God considered as omniscient is logically dependent on knowing that 2 + 2 = 4. But the claim at issue here is that God's nature entails a loving relationship with other persons, and that not even omnipotence can guarantee another person's love for him. This sort of dependence can't be described as merely logical. Still, God's nature entails only his fully loving others, and his loving them couldn't be in any way dependent on their loving him. Even among human beings, $x$'s love for $y$ would be recognized as weak or defective if it depended on $y$'s loving $x$. What does and must depend on other persons' love for God is what might be described as the best outcome of the divine-human loving relationship. The best outcome, real union with God, is not independent of the human being's free choices; but a human being's union with God could not be an aspect of God's nature. God's love for other persons, which must be an aspect of his nature, is in no way dependent on any will but God's.

[40]This identification could be viewed as a mere corollary of Aquinas's thesis that the role of intellective love among acts of will parallels the role of the passion of love among the passions (see n. 26 above): "although evidently several acts pertain to will, . . . love is found to be the single source and common root of them all. . . . And since it was shown in the First Book [of SCG] that God's activity is his very essence [I.45] and that God's essence is his will [I.75], it follows that in God there is no volition as potentiality or as dispositon, but [only] as act. But it has been shown that every act of will is rooted in love. Therefore, there must be love in God" (SCG IV.19.3559 & 3563).

bring out that real ontological union as particularly lively. For, as we've seen, Aquinas's analysis of love includes the lover's willing the beloved's continued being — just what constitutes God's unremitting, eternal activity as universal first sustainer.

Still, ontological union, which even the rational creature can remain utterly ignorant of, is a long way from love's culminating real union, of which both participants must be fully aware, since, as Aquinas often observes, it involves mutuality, sharing, intimacy, and enjoyment. Furthermore, ontological union is achieved by God unilaterally and all at once in creating and sustaining and so could never be thought of as a union *toward* which God *moves* creatures. How, then, can Aquinas settle here for what I'm calling ontological union, where he's out to support the conclusion that "God *loves*. . . other things," and to support it *on the basis of* God's moving other things toward union with himself?

He can settle for it because he has to — *and* because settling for it doesn't mean settling for anything less than true love, as long as it's remembered that true love can be love unfulfilled by real union: "love *is not* that very relationship of union; instead, union is a *consequence* of love. That's why Dionysius says that love is a *uniting force*" rather than an achieved union (ST IaIIae.26.2, ad 2).[38] Divine love, too, can be love unfulfilled. Not even omnipotence can compel the willing participation of the beloved, and without it love's culminating union can't be achieved.[39] That's why it's ontological union alone in which God unites creatures "to himself *in the way in which that is possible*." But the real giving of real gifts that constitutes God's unilateral establishment of ontological union does constitute the first movement toward the sort of real union of creatures with him that could count as the culmination of love's uniting force; and, of course, gifts can be received by their chosen recipients without being acknowledged, without even being recognized as gifts. Since these gifts given to creatures are their being and the perfections that specify them, it's clear that the establishment of ontological union is an absolutely indispensable precondition of achieving love's union with creatures.

In at least one remarkable passage Aquinas clearly identifies God's love itself as the source of the indispensable precondition and of further steps in God's moving others toward loving union with himself:[40] "God, who is 'the cause of all things because of the outpouring of his goodness, loves all things' [quoting Dionysius], and out of love he 'makes' all things, giving them being, and 'perfects' all things, filling out individuals with their proper perfections, and 'contains' all things, sustaining them in being, and 'turns' all things — that is, directs them toward himself as toward their end. . . . This divine love, I say, 'did not permit him to remain in himself, without offspring' — that is, without

the production of creatures. Instead, love 'moved him to activity' in accord with the best possible mode of activity, insofar as he produced all things in being. For the fact that he willed to diffuse and to share his goodness with others as far as that was possible — that is, by way of likeness — and that his goodness did not remain in himself alone but flowed out to other things, was an outgrowth of the love associated with his goodness" (In DDN IV:L9.409).[41]

As detailed in that account, the ontological union prompted by love and effected in the gift-giving that is the creating, sustaining, and directing of creatures includes all that divine love can achieve on its own to begin the process of moving a creature toward real loving union with God.[42] The next move is up to the beloved.

What might the next move be? It seems to me that a rational creature's merely coming to recognize and understand the fact of that ontological union can provide an altogether natural prompting of creaturely love for the creator, in very much the way a child progresses from instinctual attachment to its mother (presumably with no clear conception of a difference between the two of them initially) to a reflective, intellective love of her that begins in the child's dawning recognition of her gifts to him. *Some* sort of union between child and

[41]See also the endorsement of this line of thought in 91.765: "Even some philosophers have claimed that God's love is the source of things [cf. In Met. I:L5.101]. Dionysius's remark agrees with this when he says that the divine love did not permit him to be without offspring"; also SCG IV.20.3570.

[42]The new ingredient here, in addition to creating and sustaining, is divine directing, introduced in Aquinas's claim that God "turns" all things — that is, directs them toward himself as toward their end." Such directing, however it is supposed to be manifested in the lives of creatures, is clearly a crucial further step in moving creatures toward union with God, but I'm leaving it out of account here because it plays no part in Aquinas's presentation of God's love in SCG I.91. Does he omit it because he sees no way of arguing for it within natural theology?

See also In DDN IV:L12.460: Here Dionysius "again gathers together love's two forces, mentioned above, into one first love — viz., the divine, with which God loves: 'a single, simple force', which *per se* moves all the things God loves toward a unifying binding, proceeding from the first good, which is God. And by way of a kind of detour (*derivationis*) it comes 'all the way to' the lowest of the number 'of existing things', and [then] through a kind of turning around (*conversionem*) toward the end, coming back 'again from that' — viz., from the last of existing things — 'next', going up (*ascendens*) 'through all things', it returns to the first good by way of a kind of circular movement, 'turning itself back, and always returning in the same way', by proceeding from that first force and 'through it'. For all the secondary forces derive from the first through a kind of likeness and return to it by the same cause. For the likeness of the first force is found not only through causes but also through effects. And in this way love remains in that force always and, further, always returns to it as to its end."

[43]With different aims in view I discussed love as a relationship between God and human beings earlier in "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?", in S. MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 229–49.

[44]See 92.777, where all four of these are rejected; also ST Ia.21.1, ad 1: "Some moral virtues have to do with passions — e.g., temperance with longings, courage with fear and rash attitudes, mildness with anger. And virtues of that sort cannot be attributed to God except metaphorically. . . ."

[45]Courage (*fortitudo*) is rejected in 92.775 and 778.

mother to *some* degree is essential to the child — the human analogue of what I'm calling ontological union. And normal instances of that union incorporate from the very beginning the mother's love of the child and behavior on the mother's part that will, normally, lead to the child's mature loving of her. But, of course, she can't get that just by willing it or guarantee the development of it by doing all the things that should, normally, prompt the full return of love and the mutuality that goes with it. For all God's surpassing of even mothers in power and ingenuity, divine love, too, must finally leave some of the movement toward the culminating real union up to the beloved.[43]

### *5. God's liberality*

In summarizing the results of his investigations of the personifying divine attributes analogous to human intellective attitudes, Aquinas observes that everything in Chapters 89–91 should show us that "of our attitudes, *none* can be in God strictly speaking *except* joy and love, although [of course] even they are not in him considered as passion, as they are in us" (91.763). So applying the relational method to the vast array of human feelings and their rational counterparts has provided us with just those two additional divine attributes. But those two play special roles among human attitudes, as Aquinas observes, expressing himself in a way that suggests he's at least contemplating such roles for their divine analogues as well: "love and joy, which are in God strictly speaking, are the principles of *all* attitudes — love in the manner of a *moving* principle, obviously, but joy in the manner of an *end*" (91.766).

And now that these very few, very significant divine attitudes have been identified and examined, in an investigation that parallels the investigation of the passions in human beings, Aquinas is ready to proceed with the theological parallel to a treatise on the virtues, the regular sequel to a treatise on the passions. It seemed obvious that the concept of a passion couldn't be applied to God, and the concept of a virtue may seem almost as obviously inapplicable. To begin with what's most obvious, at least some of the human virtues that Aquinas recognizes consist in reason's control of *passions* — e.g., the virtues of sobriety and chastity in particular, of continence or temperance more generally.[44] No such virtues could characterize God. Again, there are no conceivable circumstances in which an omnipotent, omniscient being could appropriately be called courageous.[45]

But we don't have to consider the virtues one by one in order to see that they can't be converted into divine attributes. A virtue is, by definition, a *habitus*, a disposition to act in a certain way in certain circumstances, and a *habitus*, as

Aquinas points out near the beginning of the first of his five chapters on divine virtues, "is an unperfected activity, midway between a potentiality and its actualization, one might say. . . . In God, however, there is [only] supremely perfect activity. In him, therefore, there is no activity having the status of a *habitus* — for instance, [no *habitus*] such as *knowledge* — but, rather, [only its actualization], such as *considering*, which is the final, complete activity" with which that *habitus*, knowledge, is associated (92.770). Aquinas offers plenty of other grounds, general and particular, on which to reject the attribution of virtues to God, but this sampling is enough, I think, to show what any attempt to make such an attribution is up against.

And yet, the principle at the heart of the relational method itself is enough to show that despite all such obstacles, there must be some respect in which virtues can, after all, be attributed to God. "For just as God's being is universally perfect, in some way or other containing within itself the perfections of all beings [I.28], so also must his goodness in some way or other contain within itself the goodnesses of all things. Now a virtue is a goodness belonging to a virtuous person, for 'it is in accordance with it that one is called good, and what one does is called good' [Aristotle, *Ethics* II 6, 1106a22–241]. Therefore, *in its own way* the divine goodness must contain all virtues" (92.768).[46] And it isn't hard to anticipate how absolute simplicity will shape the unique way in which they must be contained. "For *being* good is not suited to God through something else added to him but rather [only] through his essence, since he is altogether simple. Moreover, God does not *act* through anything added to his essence, since his acting *is* his essence (as has been shown [I.45 & 73]). Therefore, his virtue is not some *habitus*, but rather his own essence" (92.769).

These considerations remove some obstacles to attributing virtues to God, but only the general obstacles, those that seemed to crop up in the theoretical account of the nature of virtues and in the natural-theological account of God's nature as developed so far. However, a specific virtue's essential association with human passions constitutes an irremovable obstacle, as least as regards

[46]See also an earlier sketch of this account in 37.304.

[47]Temperance and courage (775); sobriety, chastity, temperance, and continence (777); courage, magnanimity, mildness, "and other virtues of that sort" (778).

[48]See also ST Ia.21.1, ad 1: ". . .However, other moral virtues have to do with activities, such as giving and spending — e.g., justice, liberality, and magnificence — which are also not in the sensory part but in the will. And so nothing prevents our positing attributes of that sort in God. . . ."

[49]And at least once, albeit in an objection, liberality is picked out as the virtue through which "a human being is most of all assimilated to God, 'who gives to all abundantly and does not reproach', as is said in James 1[:5]" (ST IIaIIae.117.6, obj. 1). Aquinas's rejoinder (excerpted below) doesn't really dispute this claim.

[50]On the connection of liberality with love, see also SCG III.128.3007.

[51]See also ST Ia.44.4, ad 1: God "alone is characterized by liberality in the highest degree, since he does not [ever] act for some advantage (*utilitatem*) of his own, but only for his own goodness."

non-metaphorical, direct attribution to God, and in Chapter 92 Aquinas explicitly blocks the attribution of seven different virtues on that basis, indicating that those are only samples of human virtues unattributable to God.[47] Virtues such as those, he concludes, are in God not as characterizing his nature but only as divine ideas — "as is the case regarding other corporeal things" besides the passions with which those virtues are linked (93.790).

But since the general obstacles in the way of non-metaphorically attributing virtues to God have now been removed, some such attributions can (and must) be made if there are any human virtues that don't present the specific obstacle of being essentially associated with passions. The "contemplative" virtues, such as knowledge and wisdom, are clearly free of any such association, and Aquinas devotes a chapter (I.94) to establishing them as divine attributes. But it's moral virtues we're interested in, and, Aquinas observes, "there are some virtues directing the active life of a human being that have to do not with passions but with actions — e.g., truthfulness, justice, liberality, magnificence, prudence, and art" (93.779).[48] "Virtues of this sort," he says, "are perfectings of will and of intellect, which are the sources of activities devoid of passion. But in God there is will and intellect lacking no perfection. Therefore, [virtues of this sort] cannot be absent from God" (93.781). Aquinas argues briefly for each of these as a divine attribute (except magnificence), but for present purposes I'm interested only in liberality, the one to which he gives the most attention here.

Liberality is the virtue most pertinent to the rest of the subject matter of this article because, of all the virtues under consideration here, liberality's the one most closely tied to love.[49] All intellective, volitional loving, but especially divine loving, motivates freely giving of one's own what is not owed, and liberality is the virtue that gets expressed in the act of freely giving of one's own what is not owed.[50] God "wills to share his goodness with something not because he might thereby gain some advantage for himself but because sharing himself is suited to him as the spring of goodness; and to give, not for any benefit expected from the giving, but for goodness itself and for the appropriateness of giving (*convenientism dationis*) is the act of liberality. . . . God, therefore, is characterized by liberality in the highest degree" (93.785).[51] And, viewed against the background of our discussion of love, these descriptions show that to give in that way is also one of the acts of love, an act that is a component of "moving toward union," especially when, as in this case, the giving of one's own is a giving of oneself. On at least one occasion Aquinas argues that, for just such reasons, the virtue expressed by God's giving might be identified less precisely as liberality than as "charity, which is the greatest of the virtues," because "divine giving stems from the fact that he loves human

beings" (ST IIaIIae.117.6, ad 1). But liberality is the virtue standardly associated with God's giving, with God as "the distributor of the totality of all goods" (93.790), and especially with what I called earlier the gifts of creation: "God. . . brought things into being out of no indebtedness, but out of sheer liberality" (SCG II.44.1217).

Elsewhere I have argued that Aquinas seems unwittingly and unwillingly committed to a necessitarian explanation of the creation of some world or other, because of the Dionysian Principle, which Aquinas accepts: Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and (thereby) of being.[52] Is that explanation compatible with this attribution of liberality? I think so, because, as I argued in that earlier article, God's will is necessitated as regards *whether* to create but fully free as regards *what* to create. The creatures that do actually exist are, then, the freely chosen recipients of divine liberality, of the freely given, unowed, manifestations of goodness that constitute the precondition of love's real union and the first move toward it. As we've seen Aquinas putting it when the Dionysian spirit is on him, "out of love God 'makes' all things, giving them being, and 'perfects' all things, filling out individuals with their proper perfections, and 'contains' all things, sustaining them in being, and 'turns' all things — that is, directs them toward himself as toward their end" (In DDN IV:L9.409).

Anyone who knows the whole story can't help being disappointed at the pale thinness of natural theology's best account of God's loving and giving. Still, this account is not to be disdained. On the contrary, it is part of what should be reason's masterwork. The fulness of God's loving and giving emblazoned in John 3:16 is out of natural theology's reach, though it needn't be out of the natural theologian's mind.[53]

[52]See "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything At All?" in S. MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp.

[53]I'm grateful to William Alston, Scott MacDonald, William Rowe, and Eleonore Stump for helpful written comments on an earlier draft.