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SELF-LOVE AND FORGIVENESS:
A Holy Alliance?

Patrick McKinley Brennan¹

“Love is a binding force, by which another is
joined to me and cherished as myself.”

-- St. Thomas Aquinas²

I. Introduction: Offense and Forgiveness

Victor and Otto are casual acquaintances. Having recently grown envious of Victor on account of his comparative success, Otto takes advantage of an opportunity to knock Victor off his bicycle. “Take that,” says Otto as he casts down Victor from his bike. The physical harm to Victor is real but not too serious, a few cuts and scrapes that

¹ John F. Scarpa Chair in Catholic Legal Studies and Professor of Law, Villanova University School of Law. An invitation from Darlene Weaver to contribute a paper on “forgiveness and the law” at the conference “Forgiveness,” sponsored by the Theological Institute at Villanova University, provided a welcome opportunity to pursue the topics and themes of this paper. I was able to pursue them further thanks to an invitation to present a public lecture on a topic in law and morality at Texas Lutheran University, as well as a later invitation to offer a faculty seminar at Boston College Law School. The questions of David Baer (Texas Lutheran) and Ray Madoff (Boston College) challenged me in especially useful ways. Though neither of them will, I suspect, find my account of forgiveness sufficiently “other-directed,” sufficiently appreciative of the place of satisfaction or atonement in restorative human relations, the account I develop in this paper owes much to their insightful questioning. Also very beneficial was dialogue with Gaelle Fiasse, of McGill University, whose paper, “Forgiveness and the Refusal of Injustice,” I was privileged to comment on at the annual meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. I also thank Francis Caponi, O.S.A., for sharing with me an early draft of his paper “‘Love Covers All Offenses’: Thomas Aquinas on Forgiveness,” which greatly influenced my research and thinking on forgiveness. Michael Moreland was more than patient in talking the whole thing through with me.

² *Summa theologiae*, I 20.1 ad 3. My quotations from the *Summa theologiae* are from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), though with my own changes here and there. The quotations from other works of Aquinas are my own, though sometimes incorporating words or phrases from various published translations where they are available.

don't amount to much. Insult, though -- Victor feels the sting and shame of insult, and he grows angry. Meanwhile, Otto, the offender, neither feels nor feigns one whit of contrition. Otto remains intransigently unrepentant, and he credibly manifests as much to Victor, his victim.

There's a lot going on even in this constructed mini-universe. If Otto had knocked Victor from his bike on account of his (Otto's) suffering an epileptic seizure, Victor's cuts and scrapes would be the same, but he (Victor) would *feel* differently. Victor's "moral emotions," as they are sometimes called, would be different. Or, more to the point, we can all agree that they *should* be different. A random rock's falling and scraping me, an epileptic's seizing and thereby harming me – these are occurrences.³ Whatever Victor's suffering on account of these occurrences, most people will readily agree, I think, that it would be silly or pathetic (though not, I suppose, unthinkable) for Victor to resent or be angry at the fallen rock or the (formerly) seized epileptic. These are "acts of nature," and there is wide agreement that these do not properly evoke the moral emotions of hatred or resentment.

But can we not also agree that it is appropriate and reasonable for Victor to grow angry under the circumstances I have sketched? I think the answer is yes. Otto has committed (what I shall call) an offense, that is, an injustice, against Victor, and it is right and proper to bridle at injustice, to grow angry at it, perhaps especially when it is perpetrated against oneself. It is not evil but good, according to Thomas Aquinas, to be

³ The classic statement of what is an act "of the person" is Aquinas's in the Prologue to I-II of the *Summa theologiae*. Our criminal law incorporates this moral judgment. See Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Involuntary Acts and Criminal Liability," 51 *Ethics* 332 (1971).

“angry” at injustice.⁴ Otto’s treatment of Victor could be far worse, of course; not all offenses are created equal, and in my example the offense is comparatively slight. But I take such an example in order to highlight that it is a morally significant fact that Victor has suffered an injustice, and it is reasonable for Victor’s passions to be aroused on account of the injustice.

Victor, however, if he is like the rest of us, is angry not just at the offense, but at Otto, the offender. Appreciating -- brooding over the fact -- that the injustice was Otto’s choice, Victor resents not just the injustice but its willful perpetrator. In all likelihood, in fact, it is Otto, not the offense, who becomes the focus of Victor’s passion. What should Victor do now?

Here we may no longer be able to agree. My contention is this: Victor should forgive Otto without precondition, while continuing to hate the injustice. The anger that has been aroused by the offense must yield to a refusal to fold Otto, the offender, into his offense, the injustice he has committed. Victor may – indeed, he should -- hate the injustice, but he may not hate Otto. Unconditional forgiveness no matter what -- this is the thesis I shall defend here.⁵ It refuses to reduce a person to the injustice he has elected, and it liberates the offended to get on with this moral life. As Aquinas says, it is wrong “to be angry against a brother,”⁶ though it is commendable to be angry at his offense.

⁴ Aquinas, *De Malo*, 12.1 ad 1 (“the anger which is directed against sin is good”). As Thomas sees it, our moral emotions or “passions” are not to be suppressed but, rather, conformed to correct judgments of good and evil. See Jean Porter, “The Unity of the Virtues and the Ambiguity of Goodness: A Reappraisal of Aquinas’s Theory of the Virtues,” 21 *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 137, 150-51 (1995).

⁵ This would make me a “pure gracer” in the terms of the debate. See Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 137-38. Jackson canvasses and answers many of the important objections to the “pure gracer” position.

⁶ Aquinas, *De malo*, 12.1 resp.

My informed guess is that this thesis will seem as congenial to a few as it will seem quixotic or dangerous to the great number of others. Many people would counsel Victor to be cautious about forgiving Otto, encouraging Victor to show himself a healthy dose of self-respect by not being too quick to forgive. Others would even advise Victor to require an apology from Otto before forgiving him.

If we start from the account of the human person developed by Aquinas, though, we cannot but conclude, I think, that forgiveness, which I have yet to define, must be given unconditionally. My aim in this paper is to lay out, contextualize, and defend against various challenges, as space allows, the account of interpersonal forgiveness that one can piece together in Aquinas, which starts as a properly philosophical, not a theological, account. The recent revival of interest in Aquinas's thought in contemporary discussions of "natural law" and virtue theory provides a ready context for asking what Aquinas can tell us about human forgiveness, a topic of increasing interest to Anglophone philosophers especially since Aurel Kolnai's 1973 article "Forgiveness."⁷ As far as my answer goes, the bottom line is that for someone holding a teleological understanding of the human person such as Aquinas's, forgiveness is not just about the "moral emotions" that injustice (properly) excites. These are real and important, but not dispositive: There is also the question of virtue and happiness. Victor's anger at Otto is a fact; his virtue and happiness are a possibility.⁸ "For St. Thomas, in the mainstream tradition of Aristotle and the Fathers of the Church, the question of happiness is incontestably the

⁷ 74 *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 91-106 (1973-1974).

⁸ Pursuing a Kierkegaardian account of forgiveness that has remarkably much in common with my own Thomistic understanding of forgiveness, Sarah Roberts-Cady stresses that forgiveness is not simply about changing "emotions." "Justice and Forgiveness," 47 *Philosophy Today* 293, 296-97 (2003).

first consideration in Christian moral theory. It is natural to everyone. . . . It expresses the fundamental human thrust toward the true and the good.”⁹

As I understand Thomas’s account, forgiveness of others should follow from the love of self that a person is by nature inclined to have, a love that works itself out in a life of the natural virtues and happiness. “Well-ordered self-love is right and natural,”¹⁰ according to Aquinas, and forgiveness, I shall argue, is the form natural love takes in one who has been offended, as he returns from anger to temperance. This is a requirement of natural human happiness, as Thomas sees it. But there is more. For someone agreeing with Aquinas that our natural moral life is always already more than meets the eye or the measurements of the physicist, the bottom line also reflects the consequences of (what has been called) an “anthropology of grace:”¹¹ the person’s gratuitous granting of forgiveness is possible because of our graced human participation in the divine life of love, our true happiness. The supernatural virtue of love given by God to man through grace, according to Thomas, gives natural love and all the other natural virtues their form.

II. Situating Forgiveness

Stepping back for a moment, the account of the human person that interests me here is Aquinas’s, but note well a point that seems often to be absent from philosophical and other discussions of forgiveness: Regardless of the account of the human person one adopts (Aristotle’s or Hobbes’s or Aquinas’s – it matters not for my immediate point),

⁹ Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II 77.4 ad 1.

¹¹ Thomas P. O’Meara, O.P., “Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas,” 58 *Theological Studies* 256, 269 (1997).

forgiveness is not a free-floating or foundational concept. A conception of the human person must inform any potentially *promising* theory of forgiveness. Just as it would make no sense to speculate about forgiving without regard to whether it is a person or chimera we have in mind as the potential forgiver, so, too, in giving an account of forgiveness we must have in mind a particular account of the persons who might – or might not -- do the forgiving. “Dogs don’t forgive, because dogs don’t resent. Forgiveness is unique to rational beings, and is a gift of metaphysical freedom. Only the accountable being, able to take responsibility for his own actions and mental states, can forgive or be forgiven”¹² On the account of the human person I have in mind here, Aquinas’s, the human person is called and enabled to be a lover -- of self, of others, and of God, and forgiveness just is, as I have already asserted, the form that human love takes when one has been offended by a fellow human being.

My first introduction to the scholarly treatment of forgiveness many years ago was through the work of my then-colleague Jeffrie G. Murphy, one of the foremost philosophers of punishment of our generation. I note this autobiographical point because, as those familiar with Murphy’s work can appreciate, the man is not profligate with forgiveness. In the preface to one of his more recent books, Murphy reports the following about his earlier book *Forgiveness and Mercy*: “a colleague . . . asked me if the subtitle of the book was going to be ‘An Outsider’s View.’”¹³ Even as he has come around to a wider embrace of forgiveness, Murphy has continued to do us all the service

¹² Roger Scruton, “‘What is forgiveness?’, Review of Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*,” *Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 12 2007 (Timesonline version).

¹³ Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), viii.

of pressing us to think hard about whether we should not be cautious about how we ourselves forgive or recommend that others forgive.

Still, with Murphy's and others' important cautions in mind, I would like to argue here that *forgiveness is to be given as freely as possible* by one who has been offended. This unconditional demand for love in the form of forgiveness in response to offense will come as a subversive message in a culture in which most people are Kantians¹⁴, either by profession (Murphy) or osmosis (most of the rest). Recall that the Kantian fears love itself as a heteronomous influence, a potentially corrupting influence on duty for duty's sake. In a related vein, the demand for unconditional forgiveness will also arouse suspicion in a culture such as ours in which those who are moral relativists in private demand total justice in public.¹⁵ And then there are those many individuals who, not quite sure whether God remains in charge, undertake the divine work of holding themselves and the world together by sheer force of will. Murphy references "the clinch-fisted anger with which I try to sustain my self-respect and hold my world together all alone."¹⁶ Self-creation is hard work,¹⁷ and forgiveness seems an unlikely ally to the task.

The worry that forgiveness will be our undoing is powerful and pervasive. What I shall argue, though, is that, ironically enough, forgiveness is the true way to "hold oneself together," so to speak. This is in part because, as I have already suggested and will argue

¹⁴ "The Kantian view or something closely akin to it seems clearly to be the way many people think about morality even today, particularly those raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Kant often says what they themselves would say about their own moral life, were they to articulate it." Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii. "We are all Kantians now." A.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 2.

¹⁵ "Modern legal culture insists on a single, unified domain of fairness and legality and demands a single standard of justice. To satisfy this demand, every institution has to fall into line." Lawrence Friedman, *Total Justice* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1985) 91.

¹⁶ He does so in the context of observing how "faith" can alleviate this posture. Murphy, 92.

¹⁷ See Patrick McKinley Brennan, *The Place of 'Higher Law' in the Quotidian Practice of Law: Herein of Practical Reason, Natural Law, Natural Rights, and Sex Toys*, __ *Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy* __ (forthcoming 2009).

at length, forgiveness begins in *a self-affirming act*, the self-love that supplants the self-immolation that is involved in nursing an offense. Love of self, properly conceived, is what is most needful on the part of the victim – or so I shall argue; and self-love is the beginning, though by no means the fullness, of forgiveness. Perhaps this will be welcome news to those who regard self-respect and forgiveness as set in essential tension.

But what of the lingering injustice of the offense? The human desire for satisfaction in the name of justice does, and should, run strong. Satisfaction is not, however, on my understanding, a condition of or ingredient in forgiveness, though it may yet be a condition of reconciliation, which is a separate question. Indeed, as I have already suggested, forgiveness just is the way of acknowledging the injustice *while getting on with the moral life – the demands of love -- by not insisting upon justice here and now*. Satisfaction may indeed be the term of a negotiated reconciliation; it may indeed be the work of the state in appropriate cases (as to which, more below); and many believers do indeed anticipate satisfaction in an eschatological rectification. But terrestrial justice, quite apart from the fact that it is not any one individual's to exact, is a contingent and utterly elusive affair, and who can wisely postpone his living, his loving until he shall have received his due?

Before developing my thesis in more detail, a brief aside is in order. One of the areas in which the nature and possibility of forgiveness are much mooted is the law, especially the criminal (as opposed to the civil) law. For reasons that should already begin to be apparent, if forgiveness is the form love takes in the offended, it follows that forgiveness has no place whatsoever in the operation of the criminal law. The denial that

forgiveness has a place in the functioning of a criminal law system follows from the claims, which I am defending, first, that forgiveness is a work of love by one who has been offended and, second, that love, whatever else is true of it, never is, even in the form of forgiveness, an act that someone else can perform on behalf of the one who is called to love. For reasons I shall develop, love is an irreducibly personal act, and in a culture where we are tempted to outsource everything (including procreation), it turns out to be especially important not to lose sight of the intuitively obvious point that only persons can love. Whatever good the state can perform, it is not what we call love.¹⁸ Love is ours to do, not law's.

Related to this first aside is a second. As I mentioned, satisfaction – justice – may be a condition of the offended's and the offender's becoming reconciled to each other, but I need not settle the matter, as I am arguing that forgiveness is distinct from reconciliation and not dependent upon it. Catholic theology, including Aquinas's, teaches that God makes the justice of satisfaction a condition of sacramental forgiveness, but *denies* that humans are empowered to impose that condition on their equals who need to be forgiven.¹⁹ In insisting upon personal forgiveness of offenders, however, I do not suggest – indeed, for reasons I cannot develop here, I deny -- that a robust ethic of loving forgiveness rules out the possibility of just punishment, by the state, of the offender.

¹⁸ “Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbor is indispensable. . . . The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything” Pope Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Deus caritas est*, no. 28b (2005).

¹⁹ Erik Luitjen, *Sacramental Forgiveness as a Gift of God: Thomas Aquinas on the Sacrament of Penance* (Leuven: Peters, 2003), 44.

Forgiveness does not dilute justice. The justice of proportionate retributive punishment may even be, as Simon Weil believed, “a *need* of the soul”²⁰ that has received or even experienced forgiveness, or yet hopes for it.

Related to this is the fact that, further, although loving is not something a legal system can do, a properly designed and implemented system of criminal law can perhaps contribute to identifying when forgiveness might be called for, and, thereby, to reducing the frequency with which love must take the form of forgiveness. It would do this by condemning and promising punishment for, and thus deterring, immoral conduct. It is better not to have to hope for forgiveness; better also to live in a world in which forgiveness is freely offered; and sublime to be the person who overcomes offense with love in the form of forgiveness.

III. Locating Forgiveness: Nature and Supernature

Or is it? Jeffrie Murphy is fond of quoting S.J. Perlelman: “To err is human, to forgive supine.”²¹ That might well be true of the false forgiveness that is a form of condonation of wrongdoing or a manifestation of servile self-loathing by the offended. But, for reasons I have already indicated and to which I am coming in detail, forgiveness that is a true work of love cannot but rise to the level of the divine. If rise it does, though, thanks to grace, it also remains an irreducibly human *and personal* act. I concur in the judgment of Lord Edward Herbert: “Forgiveness is the most necessary and proper work

²⁰ Quoted in Jackson, 139.

²¹ Murphy, 14.

of every man; for, though, when I do not a just thing, or a charitable, or a wise, another man may do it for me, yet no man can forgive my enemy but myself.”²²

That Lord Herbert is right about forgiveness is not self-evident. The trouble besetting Lewis Carroll’s intrepid hunters of the Snark was that all they had to go on was the word-sound “Snark;” it was an existent about which they had no clues. We need not be similarly clueless. Forgiveness is the word-sound currently on the table, and we can approach it by observing the broad agreement that forgiveness is different from forgetting, which is not a moral response at all; excusing, which is “discounting what is bad;”²³ condoning, which is approving of what is bad;²⁴ or pardoning, which is remitting a penalty in some kind of official (not personal) capacity.²⁵

The observation of these differences amounts to considerable progress, but it still leaves many questions unanswered. For example, is forgiveness the overcoming of revenge, as Bishop Butler famously preached? Or is forgiveness “the overcoming of resentment for moral reasons,”²⁶ as Jeffrie Murphy claims, intentionally modifying Bishop Butler’s position? Or is forgiveness, instead, as Joanna North maintains, “a conscious attempt to improve oneself in relation to the wrongdoer?”²⁷ Or is forgiveness,

²² Quoted in J. Harvey, “Forgiving as an Obligation of the Moral Life,” 8 *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies*, 211, 221 (1993). Josef Pieper is in accord: “[W]e can forgive . . . only something that has been done to ourselves.” Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 189.

²³ Pieper, 188. “By ‘excusing’ we mean discounting what is bad. We ‘let it be’ although it is bad; we ignore the evil; we don’t care; we are indifferent to it; we don’t worry about it. Now there is very little that a lover should ‘excuse’ in the above sense – whereas he can forgive the beloved everything.” *Id.* at 189

²⁴ R.S. Downie, “Forgiveness,” 15 *The Philosophical Quarterly* 128, 130 (1965).

²⁵ *Id.* at 131-33

²⁶ Jeffrie G. Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” in Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 14, 23-24. Murphy later expanded his account to understand forgiveness of overcoming other negative moral emotions or feelings (such as “anger, hatred, loathing, contempt, indifference, disappointment, or even sadness”) for moral reasons. Murphy, *Getting Even*, 59.

²⁷ Joanna North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” 62 *Philosophy*, 499 and 506 (1987)

as R.S. Downie argued, a form of *agape* that is equivalent to respect of persons?²⁸ Or is forgiveness, as Charles Griswold has argued at length in his recent book *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (2007), “to understand, to relinquish revenge and resentment, all the while holding the offender responsible,” by (in part) requiring the offender to satisfy certain baseline conditions?²⁹

It seems to me there are important elements of truth in each of these several definitions/descriptions, to some of which I shall return below. Unlike the account of forgiveness I have begun to sketch, however, they all, in their various ways, start from an overall picture of the moral life that is impoverished, above all because they slight the place of love or, as it is sometimes called, charity. “Love” is a term that has become degraded in our culture³⁰, and “charity” conjures images of grudging social work. Caution and care are in order, therefore, when love or charity is at issue, lest we inadvertently cheapen *the central Christian claim*: “God is love.” (I John 4:8).

It is because God *is* love that true human love is, in the Christian profession of faith, nothing less than “a participation in the very life of God and, as such, the foundation of all virtues for those made in the Image of God.”³¹ Having been loved first, we are both called and empowered to love. Having been *forgiven* first, “when we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8), our love must sometimes be of those who injure us, in which case we call it forgiveness. Christ summed this up at the Last Supper: “Love one another

²⁸ R.S. Downie, “Forgiveness,” 15 *The Philosophical Quarterly* 128, 134 (1965): “The principle of respect for persons is the objective correlative of that which as a matter of practical concern emerges as *agape*. It is the fact that respect for persons and *agape* are merely two sides of the same thing that gives forgiveness its high place in Christian as well as in secular morality.”

²⁹ Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Explanation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47.

³⁰ E.g., Barbara Atwell, “The Jurisprudence of Love,” 85 *U. Det. Mercy L. Rev.* 495, 501 (“the most powerful energy we have is love”).

³¹ Jackson, 14. According to Aquinas, “Love is the form, mover, and root of the virtues.” *Disputatio de caritate* 13.

as I have loved you.” (John 13:34-35) To anticipate an objection, here is Aquinas’s answer: “If we compare loving our friends and loving our enemies, then the first is better as regards its object or term; but as regards the principle, which is the will, then there is the more merit where there is the greater effort.”³² This effort will have a beginning in our created nature, but it is completed by God-given grace, which is the principle and root of all the supernatural virtues,³³ including charity.

But is love as I intend it here, then, solely the province of Christians? What is there for non-Christians in my account of love (and therefore forgiveness)? I have distinguished already between the natural and the supernatural, but if we distinguish this way, as Catholic theology does, we do so in order to reunite. Beginning from a phenomenology of the moral life on the natural level, of teleology of the sort familiar since Aristotle, we will be in position to proceed to an account of moral life on the supernatural level, where grace builds on, and does not destroy, nature. “How love is understood follows from how human nature is understood.”³⁴ And the reverse is also true, even without the admixture of the supernatural. How could it be otherwise? My argument here depends, then, upon there being such a thing as human nature and the properties I shall impute to it as I go along. It also depends upon human nature’s being not only created, but also *graced*, that is, raised into a supernatural economy of happiness and participation in the life of God who *is* love. What I shall argue is that human nature, and especially graced human nature, calls for love, including by the offended.³⁵ What I

³² Aquinas, XXX *Commentary on the Sentences* i.3.

³³ *Summa theologiae*, I-II 110.3 ad 3.

³⁴ Pieper, 209.

³⁵ In putting this as I do, I do not suggest that there was ever a time of pure nature (without grace), only that the graced nature that in fact exists is capable of what nature without grace would not have been capable of (if such a counterfactual had obtained).

argue, further, is that grace makes that love possible, even by the offended. “Forgiveness is one of the fundamental acts of love,”³⁶ which itself begins, as I have already said, in the natural love of self, which the Christian believes is perfected through the grace of charity.

IV. The Analogies of Love

Human persons do not realize the potential of their created nature “automatically,” as it were. Unlike plants and brute beasts, they must freely choose and will it.³⁷ Jacques Maritain captures this central insight of the Thomistic tradition as follows: “According to a commonplace expression, which is a very profound one, man must become what he is. In the moral order, he must win, by himself, his freedom and his personality.”³⁸ This process, of winning oneself by becoming in act what one is in potency, has a temporal beginning for every person who attains the use of rationality. In the context of determining whether before children have the use of reason it can be said that there is in them either venial or mortal sin, Thomas observes that when the child “begins to have the use of reason, he is not entirely excused from the guilt of venial or mortal sin.” Thomas continues immediately to the crucial point: “Now the first thing that occurs to a person to think about at that time, is to deliberate about himself.”³⁹ The

³⁶ Pieper, 189.

³⁷ The rest of creation enjoys only a passive participation in the divine governance of creation. Rational creatures also enjoy an active participation by way of will and intelligence. See Steven Long, “Natural Law or Autonomous Practical Reason: Problems for the New Natural Law Theory,” in John Goyette *et al.*, *Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 165-93.

³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: Bles, 1954), 52.

³⁹ “*Sed primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit, est deliberare de seipso.*”

person thinks first of himself, not of others, not even of God – and, *mirabile auditu*, this is as it ought to be!

This is because what he must do, Thomas explains, is “to direct himself to his due end.”⁴⁰ The human person is not merely the location of a mechanistically determined outcome – he is existentially free to bring himself into ever fuller being and freedom, free, that is, to realize his given purpose or “due end.” Commenting on this important passage, Maritain says the following: This act, “the first act of freedom,” is, “in a moral sense, an absolute beginning.”⁴¹ It is “a moral act par excellence.”⁴² In this “*primal act of freedom*,” he continues, the child

takes himself in hand; he frees or delivers his own self from the deterministic crust under which he had lived until that moment; he ushers himself into the universe of moral life by freely deciding about the direction of his life. At the root of such act there is a reflection upon oneself which takes place in the intellect and answers the question: “What do you live for?”⁴³

“What do you live for?” Stated in the philosophical terms of which the child is not yet capable, the answer is: his good, that is, his last end.

Stated differently, in terms perhaps closer to those of the child’s inchoate understanding, the answer is: happiness, *beatitudo* or *felicitas*. It is Thomas’s view, which seems obviously correct, that we do all that we do for the sake of happiness:

⁴⁰ “*Seipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem.*”

⁴¹ Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), 66.

⁴² Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy: An historical and critical survey of the great systems* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 141.

⁴³ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 66

“Happiness is the greatest human good, the end to which all others are subordinate.”⁴⁴

Make no mistake: We are frequently mistaken about what will make us happy.

Everything we seek, however, we seek under the aspect of the good, that is, because we think it will make us happy.

Why do we, each one of us, inexorably seek our own happiness? The Thomist’s answer is this: “Every natural being . . . possesses a determinate nature, and in accord with this nature a determinate, innate drive or striving for its own perfection.”⁴⁵ Living as we do several centuries into the almost pathological effort to banish teleology from the organic and inorganic world, this can come as a surprise. But not everyone has acceded to the arguments that we can relinquish teleological explanation⁴⁶, and, on the Thomist’s teleological understanding of the universe, each created being possesses appetite, an inner tendency or inclination that moves it toward its proper perfection. “This for Thomas is one of the marvels of creation: that God did not create beings which would be moved only with external causes, but rather endowed beings with their own interior principles of action.”⁴⁷

Amor is Thomas’s name for the inner source of things’ inclinations toward their respective ends. Love is always a transitive affair⁴⁸, and proper love, according to Aquinas, depends upon a proper proportion between the lover and the loved object. Things, both animate and inanimate, are inclined toward their proper ends in virtue of

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, I *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, lect. 14.

⁴⁵ David M. Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas,” 58 *Mediaeval Studies*, 1, 4 (1996). As the subsequent documentation herein will confirm, Gallagher’s work has been very important to my thinking on these topics.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., David Oderberg, “Teleology: Inorganic and Organic,” and Robert Spaemann, “The Unrelinquishability of Teleology,” Ana Marta Gonzalez, ed., *Contemporary Perspectives on Natural Law* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2009), 259-80, 281-296.

⁴⁷ Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 1.

⁴⁸ Pieper, 231.

being created as the kinds of things they are. Anticipating a formulation of Josef Pieper, one can say that all natural kinds are “shot” arrow-like toward their respective ends. *Amor* or love, then, is found analogously throughout creation, in things inanimate, such as rocks replicas, and in things animate, such as apples and antelopes, and even angels and man himself.

In some respects, then, the human person is like the rest of creation. “[O]ne who comprehends man to the depths of his soul as *creatura*,” Josef Pieper explains,

simultaneously knows that in the act of being created we are – without being asked and without even the possibility of being asked – shot toward our destination. Therefore, a kind of gravitational impulse governs our desire for happiness. Nor can we have any power over this impulse because we ourselves *are* it.⁴⁹

Even so, the human person stands apart in creation. While all different kinds of creatures share analogously in the function of being internally directed to their own fulfillment, at the apex of all the levels of appetite there stands the human will. “Thomas posits that the will’s most fundamental inclination, its natural inclination, is toward beatitude, the fulfillment or perfection of the rational being in which it is found.”⁵⁰ The

⁴⁹ Pieper, 235.

⁵⁰ Id.

will of the human person is free but motored by an appetite toward that individual person's fulfillment or *happiness*.⁵¹

All of this has profound consequences for how we understand love. On the one hand, our created, unchosen natural desire for happiness is itself a love of self.

According to Thomas, "Love is an appetitive activity, and, in fact, the most basic of all such activities."⁵² Love *in this sense* is person's intrinsic inclination toward his or her perfection. "It is not surprising, then, to find Thomas saying that the object of love is always one's own good."⁵³ In Thomas's own words: "Angels like men by nature strive for their own good and their own perfection; and this means loving themselves."⁵⁴

On the other hand, Thomas distinguishes terminologically and conceptually between the love all created kinds have for their ends and the *additional* form of love of which only rational creatures, possessed of will (which brute animals do not possess), are capable. He calls the latter *dilectio*, and this is a love over which the rational person has a choice. It falls to her to decide to love or not to love in this way.

To elaborate the point, at the level of sense appetite, a person will be inclined toward goods according as they present delight at the level of sense. At the level of rational appetite, by contrast, the person can pursue these only under the aspect of the good; that is, at the rational level she can pursue them only if she judges them to be good. So, at the sensible level I am attracted to a second ribeye; at the rational level I can pursue the second steak only if I can judge it to be good for me. In sum, *dilectio*

⁵¹ "Man has a natural urge toward complete goodness." Aquinas, xxii *De veritate* 7. "Man has free choice, otherwise counsels, exhortations, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would all be pointless." *Summa theologiae* I 83.1 c.

⁵² Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude," 1.

⁵³ Id.

⁵⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I 60.3.

“consists in a complacency in the known, good object, and it gives rise to the desire [either] to be united to the loved object or to the joy one takes in the object if united to it.”⁵⁵

Finally, Thomas distinguishes two kinds of *dilectio*, and with this we come to the first chamber of the heart of the matter. In his treatment of the passions in the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas raises the question whether love is suitably divided between love of friendship and love of concupiscence, and he replies as follows:

I answer that as the philosopher says in Rhetoric Bk. II, “to love is to will the good for someone.” In this way, then, the motion of love tends toward two things: namely towards some good which someone wills for someone, either for one’s self or for another; and toward that [person] for which one wills that good. Thus one loves the good that one is willing for the other with love of concupiscence, and one loves that [person] for which the good is willed with a love of friendship.⁵⁶

The form of love that is *dilectio*, then, is directed, first, to a person, and this is what Thomas calls love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*), and second, to the good(s) for that person, which Thomas calls love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*).

To be clear, the form of *dilectio* that is love of friendship, i.e., *amor amicitiae*, is not limited to what we commonly refer to in English as “friendship.” Rather, “[t]he term

⁵⁵ Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 13.

⁵⁶ See *Summa theologiae*, I-II 26.4 c. See also Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 14.

denotes simply the love of a person, by which one has complaisance in the other person as good in himself and consequently wills goods for that person for that person's sake."⁵⁷ As Pieper explains, in this sort of love the lover says, "It's good that you exist."⁵⁸ Sometimes the lover says this to other subsistent beings, but, as Pieper muses, "To whom do we refer that expression, instantly *and with sincerity, if not to ourselves?*"⁵⁹ And it is on the basis of this prior loving affirmation that we will then proceed to love with a love of concupiscence what is good for us.

Amor amicitiae is the higher form of love of dilection, because here what is loved is loved *for its own sake*. The complacency of the good of friendship is an affirmation of the good that is found in the self (or, as we will see, in another) as good *in itself*. Again: "It is good that you exist." As one commentator explains, "[t]he love of concupiscence is, so to speak, derivative, and the good found in its objects is loved as the good of the person to whom they are referred."⁶⁰ This rank ordering reflects the fact that, for Thomas, only subsistent beings, not their perfections or accidents, can be loved for their own sake.⁶¹

In sum, we can return to our starting point in the natural desire, which each person has, for happiness. What we can say is that every rational person loves himself with a love of friendship, that is, as a subsistent person. We can also say, derivatively, that every rational person loves with a love of concupiscence the goods necessary or desirable for his own happiness or fulfillment. In every act of willing, including the willing that is

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Pieper, 193.

⁵⁹ Pieper, 235 (emphasis added)

⁶⁰ Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude," 16.

⁶¹ Further, according to Thomas, only rational substances can be the objects of this love of friendship. "All lower beings, irrational animals, plants, and non-living beings are properly loved with a love of concupiscence for the sake of rational beings." Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude," 17.

loving, the individual seeks his or her own perfection, that is, his own good. Happiness, whether considered as general formality (*bonum in communi*) or as a specific instantiation (*bonum suum*), can only be loved with a love of concupiscence, because happiness is the perfection of a subsisting being, not a subsisting being itself.

V. Beginning with Self-Love

Though it may come as a surprise to them, all this has much to teach Victor and Otto. I begin with Victor regarding Victor, not Victor regarding Otto. Before Victor can respond appropriately to Otto, he must take himself in hand. Victor is on a sad slide from virtue into vice on account of Otto's deliberately deciding to take Victor down a peg or two. Before being offended by Otto, Victor was (we will assume) well-disposed toward both himself and the world, a man of virtue. Victor has now become an angry and resentful person. This cannot continue except at the cost of Victor's self-destruction. Victor's natural inclination toward his own happiness and the virtues that make it possible (e.g., temperance, fortitude, courage, and such) must, through Victor's exercise of his own freedom (no one can or will do it for him), manifest itself afresh in the two aspects of *dilectio*. Out of love of friendship *for himself*, Victor is now called to say to himself: "It is good that you exist." Victor is further called to love with a love of concupiscence the perfections that are proper to him. In sum, out of proper love of himself, Victor must seek to return from an incipiently vicious state to a virtuous state.

Many accounts of forgiveness condition the act of forgiving on the apology, repentance, or contrition of the victimizer – and often one can sympathize with the

reasons that coalesce around victims not making doormats of themselves. The account of forgiveness I am developing here *necessarily* excludes the possibility of making forgiveness conditional. Why? Because forgiveness begins in – and unless impeded grows out of -- the act of self-love, and each person's call to love of self is unconditional. We are shot through with an arrow toward our own happiness, and there is no conceivable *reason* not to love oneself, because to love oneself just is to affirm that one is good (*and* in need of the perfections of virtue that constitute natural happiness). None of us is a doormat – *pace* the prevalent theories that are agnostic as to the goodness of being. Each of us is good inasmuch as we *exist* – and each is called to perfection of virtue in charity. *To be sure*, collateral attacks, such as Otto's, sting; *to be sure*, as long as Otto the offender does not apologize, repent, or have contrition, he (Otto) will still be in a bad way. This failure on the part of the offender, however, is no reason for the victim not to begin to do what is necessary for himself, as Herbert McCabe explains:

We can forgive our enemies even though they do not apologize and are not contrite. . . . In such forgiveness *we* are changed, we change from being vengeful to being forgiving, but our enemy does not change. . . . The expression of our forgiveness may just be something we say to ourselves which our enemies do not know about or care about and which does nothing for them. Such forgiveness is good for us; it blesses him that gives, even though not him that takes.⁶²

⁶² Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ, and Us* (London: Continuum, 1996), 122.

Our proper love of self requires that we give up those vicious emotions of hatred and resentment of another person that are *not good* for us. Perhaps even before we think self-consciously of how to change vis-à-vis our injurer, we should be thinking of changing ourselves. Without that change, on which our own happiness depends, none will be possible toward the offender. Before we can will our offender's good, we must will our own – as I go on to explain in what follows.

VI. From Self-Love to Love of Another Self

But enough about Victor's self-love, in which he has begun to overcome hatred of Otto. This is not yet forgiveness. How does this first love which I have been describing finally become forgiveness, that is, the love of an offender such as Otto? Thomas does not teach that we never love others for their own sake; he does not teach that we "love" others only instrumentally to our own goods. On the contrary, Thomas teaches that persons do – and should – love others for the others' sake, that is, with what we often call a "disinterested" love. But how is this possible? How is it possible both that the object of love is always one's own good *and* that we love other persons for their own sake? With this we come to the second chamber of the heart of the matter, and the focus here is on similarity in terms of natural kind and, consequently, of goods.

Thomas teaches the priority of self-love, but he does so without sinking into egoism.⁶³ This is possible because, according to Thomas, *our judgment of our unity with others based on likeness* leads us to love those others with a love of friendship. In his discussion of the causes of love in the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas explains:

The first kind of likeness causes love of friendship or benevolence. For from the fact that two things are alike, having as it were one form, they are in a certain manner one in that form, as two men are one in the species of humanity and two white persons in whiteness. And therefore the affection of the one inclines toward the other as toward what is one with himself: he wills the good for him as he does for himself.⁶⁴

In other words, the unity of affections that constitutes love of friendship follows upon the judgment that there obtains a preexisting unity, the ontological unity of sharing in the same human form.⁶⁵ As a result of this judgment, “a person is moved,” first, “to take the other person at the level of affection as another self and,” second, “so to desire and seek,” with a love of concupiscence, “that person’s good.”⁶⁶ The love of friendship for another, the first act, leads to the second act, love of concupiscence for his or her goods.

As to the first, it should be stressed that, if a person were blind to his own goodness, he would be blind to the goodness of others. If a person found nothing lovable

⁶³ The doctrine is more complex than my account here can explore. For a thorough account, see Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 20-34; see also David M. Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others,” 8 *Acta Philosophica* 23 (1999).

⁶⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II 27.3 c.

⁶⁵ As well as that form’s being graced by a call to beatitude. See *infra* text at <>.

⁶⁶ Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love,” 33-34

in himself, he would not be able to love others.⁶⁷ Love of another self depends upon love of self. “The love that a man has for others arises in man,” Thomas explains,

from the love that he has for himself, for a man stands in relation to a friend as he does to himself. But a person loves himself inasmuch as he wishes the good for himself, just as he loves another person by wishing him good. So, by the fact that one is interested in his own good he is led to develop an interest in another person’s good.⁶⁸

The extension of self-love to include another occurs when we see that other person *as another self*, loved for who she is.⁶⁹ To quote *and then extend* what we first said of ourselves: “It is good that you exist! You are not the same person that I am but you are good, and it is good (for me) that you exist!”⁷⁰ In the love of friendship for another, “I take the other person as somehow good in himself or herself, and *for this reason* as a good for me. The affective extension of self can only be that, an extension, if the goodness of the other is not reduced to my goodness, as occurs in [love of desire], but rather is a good other than the good I have in my own individual subsisting self.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ See Pieper, 159. On the other hand, self-love can be excessive. See *Summa theologiae*, I-II 77.4 ad 1.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, III *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 153, which is discussed in Romanus Cessario, O.P.. “The Theological Virtue of Hope (IIa IIae, qq. 17-22),” in Stephen J. Pope (ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 232, 237-38.

⁶⁹ See Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love,” 33-34.

⁷⁰ In Thomas’s terms: “Love goes out to another in two ways: one to a substantial good, as when we love a man for himself; the other to an accidental good or quality, as when we love virtue, not as an end in itself, but as making us good. The former movement of love includes the love of friendship, the latter the love of concupiscence.” IV *Expositio in librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis nominibus* lect. 10 par. 428 (Turin: Marietti, 1950).

⁷¹ Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 26-27.

The priority of self-love that I am reporting from Thomas is not a not-so-covert assertion of the ontological superiority or priority of the self.⁷² Quite the opposite. The extension of self-love into love of the other follows upon the judgment of similarity and unity in form. Unless we fail to reach that judgment, we will take the victimizer as another self and will with a love of concupiscence what is good for him. The self that loves itself with a love of friendship and humans as other selves will be moved to love those others with a love of friendship, and following upon that a love of concupiscence for those others' true goods.⁷³ The love of self "find[s] its fulfillment precisely in the love of others."⁷⁴

In sum, where conventional analyses would raise the question of whether, and if so under what conditions (if any), Victor should forgive Otto, the stage has been set for me to say that Victor should posthaste – and necessarily first – love himself, and then allow that self-love to extend itself into a love for Otto, first a love of friendship and then, derivative of it, a love of concupiscence. This latter love will be the desire for Otto to give up his vicious envy (of Victor) and return to a state of virtue. Though it starts in self-regard, forgiveness is indeed "other-directed,"⁷⁵ and it extends not only to the person but also to what is good for him. The virtuous do not stand in need of human

⁷² "For Thomas, the primacy of self-love over love of neighbor on this level is not a statement of normative ethics. He simply describes the natural weight of the human will, which is inscribed in it as an ontologically fundamental direction. In a specific way, the human will also stands under the fundamental law of all creaturely being according to which *being-one* is prior to *becoming-one* (*unitas est potior unione*). The natural assertion of one's own good precedes the free love that is supposed to reach the neighbor, just as it already includes the self of the one loving. At any rate, Thomas does not always clearly distinguish between the natural assertion of one's own good and the free self-love of virtuous human beings who follow the ethical order of love. Hence, he has lent plausibility to the misunderstandings of many modern interpreters who acknowledge in human love only the 'physical' tendency to one's own good and overlook the analogical levels in which the natural weight of being is realized on the level of human beings by their free will." Schockenhoff, 253

⁷³ For some complications to this analysis, see *infra* text at note <>.

⁷⁴ Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love," 23.

⁷⁵ See Harvey, 213: "[W]hatever else we may say about forgiveness, it is 'other-directed.'"

forgiveness. “Forgiving others is always incarnating Goodness and the best one can hope for in doing well by them.”⁷⁶

VI. Interpersonal Forgiveness within the Anthropology of Grace

Some of the distinguishing features of the Thomistic account of forgiveness will come into clearer focus by resolving several contrasts. Roger Scruton has written that Charles Griswold is right to condition forgiveness on contrition, lest “you have shown no recognition of the fault.”⁷⁷ But this is a *non sequitur*, since the *voluntary* injustice is the very reason for the forgiveness; again, we don’t need to forgive fallen rocks or seized epileptics, no matter how much they damage us. The very condition of the possibility of true forgiveness is the experience of an offense, a willed denial of justice. It is Otto’s *fault* that he willed (and perpetrated) an injustice.⁷⁸ Absent such an offense, there is no room for forgiveness, no person to be forgiven, and I have already explained why forgiveness cannot properly be conditional, *pace* Howard McGary⁷⁹: Our call to self-love is not conditional, and self-love extends itself into love of another *provided* the other is seen *as he in fact is*, that is, as another self.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Jackson, 155.

⁷⁷ Scruton, 2.

⁷⁸ A potentially different case would be presented if Otto were *innocently* unaware that what he was willing was in fact unjust, but I bracket that problem for present purposes. Christ prayed to the Father on behalf of his crucifiers: “Forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). On this, see Calum Carmichael (ed.), *The Deed and the Doer in the Bible, David Daube’s Gifford Lectures* (Templeton Press, 2008), 86-91.

⁷⁹ Howard McGary, “Forgiveness,” 26 *American Philosophical Quarterly* 343, 350 (1989) (arguing that if we “make” forgiveness a moral duty, as opposed to an act of supererogation, forgiveness will have to be “see[n] as a substantive virtue”).

⁸⁰ The intriguing account of interpersonal forgiveness developed by Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, “In Defense of Unconditional Forgiveness,” 104 *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 39 (2003), notes theories for which “a major reason for forgiveness is that it is good for the forgiver – it lifts the burden of hatred and resentment off her shoulders and allows her to move on in her life.” Garrard and McNaughton

But this is *by no means* to suggest that forgiveness will necessarily be easy. The literature on forgiveness makes much of the question of the difficulty of forgiving, and given what we know of the capacity of humans to offend and violate one another, the issue is gravely serious. Someone might appropriately object that Victor and Otto, shoves and bicycles distort the matter by trivializing it. Perhaps, but I borrow the example (with some alteration) from as serious a moralist as Herbert McCabe.⁸¹ Still, there can be no doubt but that the question about whether forgiveness is required – *and therefore possible* -- must ultimately be confronted in the face of torturers and rapists, gulags and concentration camps, perpetrators of apartheid and traffickers of oneself as a child – offenses that cannot but arouse the fear “[v]ery deep in us . . . that our existence as a subject is precarious, and contingent, and perhaps an illusion.”⁸² Those who do us injustice become, to a greater or lesser extent, enemies of our existence.⁸³ Is it possible that the victims of some offenses can be incapable of forgiving their offenders?

For an answer, I must return to the distinction I made at the outset. I distinguished between two types of love, natural love and supernatural love, and I did so, as I said, in order, in the end, to reunite them. From the Catholic Christian perspective, we – *all of us humans* – first come to the tasks that are ours by nature (including the primordial one of self-love) *always already graced*, always already caught up in a

object that “this is an attitude-focused reason for forgiving and we are seeking an object-focused on. Attitude-focused reasons for action are reasons for getting oneself into a particular psychological state, in this case the state of having a forgiving attitude. To adopt a forgiving attitude in order to make oneself feel better is to act on an attitude-focused reason. Object-focused reasons reveal the way in which the relationship actually holds between the victim and the offender makes a forgiving response appropriate. Attitude-focused reasons do not . . .” *Id.* at 51-52. The objection depends upon a false dilemma. Forgiving another as a function of loving oneself (and then another self) is not dissolvable into “attitude;” it remains at the level of virtue, not of “objects” but of persons. Garrard and McNaughton have dark theological reasons for forcing a choice between attitude and object. *See id.* at 59.

⁸¹ McCabe, 119.

⁸² *Id.* at 120.

⁸³ “The problem with people who insult us is that they become enemies of our existence.” Herbert McCabe, 120.

supernatural economy in which grace builds on and helps nature -- unless and to the extent we opt out of sanctifying grace by personal sin. Instructively, one way to “opt out” would be deliberately to refuse, in a grave matter, to refuse to love one another as we have been loved. The Thomist’s “anthropology of grace” nowhere provides a reason for not loving one another as we have been loved by God.

From an opposing perspective that lacks the element of grace altogether but affirms a purely natural version of the teleological view that I have developed here, one faces the problem that Bernard Williams called, in a deliberate oxymoron, “moral luck,” the possibility that by bad luck we will ineluctably end up being morally bad individuals.⁸⁴ This, roughly, was Aristotle’s view, that some people’s worldly lot could be such that they would necessarily be morally bad people. Deploring this feature of Greek ethics, Jacques Maritain noted an historical alternative: “The great novelty introduced by Christianity is this appeal to all, to free men and slaves, to the ignorant and the cultivated, adolescents and old men, a call to perfection which no effort of nature can obtain but which is given by grace and consists in love, and from which therefore no one is excluded except by his own refusal. The same is true regarding final Beatitude . . . It is promised to all, if only they really wish it.”⁸⁵ Christians do not believe that everyone will flourish in terms of worldly success (which too often for the Greeks was equated with or identical to happiness), nor, on the other hand, do Christians believe they are the only ones God calls to the true happiness that is the love revealed in the New Testament, and made possible by grace.

⁸⁴ Bernard Williams, “Postscript,” Daniel Statman (ed.), *Moral Luck* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 251.

⁸⁵ Maritain, *Moral Philosophy*, 85. Or, as Maritain says elsewhere: “The wounds of Original Sin have less efficacy to impair our nature than the wounds of Christ to elevate us by grace to friendship with the God who pardons.” Jacques Maritain, *Notebooks* (Albany: Magi, 1984), 270.

In the context under consideration here, where a person's happiness has been disrupted by an offense that has dislodged him from the habitual practice of virtue, which is the happiness that is possible in this life, the believing Christian can say that it is God through Christ who makes both possible and exigent the victim's love of himself and his consequent forgiveness of his offender. The "anthropology of grace" teaches that love is possible, and with it – and only with – the complete practice of all of the other virtues. The Thomist says that love is the form of all of the other virtues, and by this he or she means that charity orders all the other virtues to the happiness that is possible in this life and to their ultimate end, the person's happiness with God.⁸⁶ We do not have to exaggerate or falsify the level of our control over our moral emotions, which can be quite tenuous and elusive, in order to say forthrightly that every rational person, thanks to grace, is capable of doing what God requires, as Herbert McCabe explains:

All that God asks of us is that we put aside the barriers, the illusions and the timidity that stand in the way of accepting his love. All that he asks is that we relax and let ourselves be filled with his love, which eliminates our sins and makes us channels and bearers of his love and forgiveness to everyone.⁸⁷

This occurs by charity's working in and through the virtues, including those Victor surrendered, at least in part, when he became angry and resentful at Otto in the wake of Otto's offense.

⁸⁶ Schockenhoff, 251.

⁸⁷ McCabe, 123.

Without pretending that forgiving will always or even often be easy, the Thomist teaches that we should recognize that we are called to love ourselves in a way that allows God's love to work through us and thus to reach others. Sometimes we will be able to resume relations with our enemies, sometimes not.⁸⁸ Regardless, forgiveness – the love of one who has offended us – will be complete when we have sincerely willed his or her good as much as it is in us to will it.⁸⁹ It is these acts – of love of friendship and of concupiscence, first of oneself and then of one's injurer – that constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions of forgiveness.⁹⁰ If reconciliation requires atonement for injustice, human forgiveness refuses to be held hostage by justice and the contingency of its satisfaction.

This is reinforced in the fine work of Gaelle Fiasse, which has helpfully clarified that forgiveness *per se* is an *interior* act on the part of the victim,⁹¹ a denunciation of the offense and an affirmation of the offender (but not *qua* offender).⁹² The essential interiority of forgiveness does not rule out its sometimes or even frequently being accompanied by exterior manifestations, including declarations (which are not themselves performative – declarations are sometimes false).⁹³ But whereas love of

⁸⁸ This question involves a determination of the virtue of prudence. See *Summa theologiae*, II-II 47.7.

⁸⁹ Cf. Pieper, 196-98.

⁹⁰ On such affirming/willing, see Pieper, 164-65.

⁹¹ "Forgiveness and the Refusal of Injustice," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, October 31, 2008. I should add that Fiasse distinguishes "integral forgiveness" which does involve an external exchange between offender and victim, "freely offered and received."

⁹² See also North, 500: "[F]ar from removing the fact of wrongdoing, forgiveness actually relies upon the recognition of this fact for its very possibility." Unfortunately, North then proceeds to conflate forgiveness and reconciliation. See *id.* at 505-06. John Wilson takes North to task for not requiring repentance as a part of this forgiveness-cum-reconciliation. John Wilson, "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," 63 *Philosophy* 534 (1988).

⁹³ "We can forgive our enemies even though they do not apologize and are not contrite. But such forgiveness, as I have said, does not help them, does not re-create them. In such forgiveness *we* are changed, we change from being vengeful to being forgiving, but our enemy does not change. . . . The expression of our forgiveness may just be something we say to ourselves which our enemies do not know

concupiscence desires to bring about the good of another, the prior love of friendship seeks a true union between the lover and the loved, which is interior.⁹⁴ Such a union is not a spontaneous or secure achievement, even on a good day. If the forgiven continues to offend the victim, this does not diminish – indeed, it may magnify -- the victim’s need to love himself and, by extension, his offender. The more (apparently!) wicked the offender, the greater potential difficulty for the victim to see him or her as another self. Still, our injurers, however wicked, share with us not only our human nature, as I have mentioned repeatedly, but also the call of all humans to supernatural happiness⁹⁵ -- and this is the complete ontological basis for the elongation of self-love into forgiveness.

It is worth belaboring that the movement from self-love to love of another is fraught with risk of failure! Such is the working of the human mind and heart that *our own* sinfulness can preempt the recognition of unity on which love of our enemies depends. The history of human speculation about equality and inequality is replete with evidence that the judgment of unity in human kind is far from assured.⁹⁶ Especially dangerous are our own imaginings that we know the names of those who will not be saved. There is no theological contradiction lurking here. Catholics do indeed profess that God calls all to salvation, but they also profess that God’s antecedent will that all be saved does not preclude God’s consequent will to damn those who sin and do not

about or care about and which does nothing for them. Such forgiveness is good for us; it blesses him that gives, even though not him that takes.” McCabe, 122.

⁹⁴ “But the love, which is in the intellectual appetite, also differs from goodwill, because it denotes a certain union of affections between the lover and the beloved as somewhat united to him, or belonging to him, and so tends toward him.” *Summa theologiae*, II-II 27.3 c. See also *id.* at I-II 28.2.

⁹⁵ *Summa theologiae*, II-II 25.6 c.

⁹⁶ See John E. Coons and Patrick M. Brennan, *By Nature Equal: The Anatomy of a Western Insight* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

repent.⁹⁷ But who are the condemned? *As far as we know*, all our fellow humans share our nature and the same vocation to beatitude.

None of this is to deny that we love more and more easily those who are *more* similar to us. The facts that are *knowable by us* are not overlooked, as Aquinas makes clear: “[J]ust as fire acts with greater force on what is near than on what is distant, so too, charity loves with greater fervor those who are united to us than those who are far removed; and in this respect the love of friends, considered in itself, is more ardent and better than love of one’s enemy.”⁹⁸ Even this, though, cannot become a resting place, according to Aquinas, for faith leads to hope, and hope leads to charity. We must hope that our enemy will come to his senses, love himself, and, in turn, love us and, above all, God.⁹⁹

VII. Conclusion

The account of interpersonal forgiveness that I have sketched here has the advantage, I submit, that, without slighting the other-directed character of forgiveness, it

⁹⁷ For a compendious treatment of the issue, in the context of a refutation of Jean Porter’s argument (“The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the *Summa theologiae*,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 22 (1992)) that all receive grace “equally,” see Patrick McKinley Brennan, “Arguing for Human Equality,” *28 Journal of Law and Religion* 99, 139-41 (2002).

⁹⁸ *Summa theologiae*, II-II 27.7c. See Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” 30-32. On the “order of charity” according to Aquinas, see also Stephen J. Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 58-67. God himself loves some objects more than others. *Summa theologiae*, I 20.3.

⁹⁹ “[B]ecause a person hopes for good from some person, a way develops for him to love that other person in himself, from whom he hopes to obtain the good.” Aquinas, III *Summa Contra Gentiles* 153. Both victim and victimizer are at stake: “A grave sin committed with respect to a fellow human person not only breaks the relationship of the sinner with God, but can also have the ‘side effect’ of causing anger or hate, or desperation, or the loss of faith or of trust on the part of the victim, all of which have immediate consequences for the relationship of the victim with God. . . . Anger, hate etc., can be so intense that it causes the loss of grace in the victim. Turning our attention to the victim has the great advantage of opening our eyes to the fact that any sin not only has consequences for the sinner’s relationship of grace with God, but also for the victim’s relationship with God.” Luitjen, 46-47.

returns attention to the offended and the moral imperative of her returning from vice to virtue. Such a virtue-theoretic account of natural forgiveness would have its own value even if what I have said about grace were not true, because the admitted appropriateness of the “moral emotions,” with which we began, settles neither the question of the kind of people we *capable* of being nor the question of the kind of people we *should* be. As to the second, to suggest that an enemy’s collateral attack *should* render me an angry person, full stop, is to deny that we have a natural inclination to a happiness that is fitting for our kind, an end that we *should* achieve. Such denials of natural teleology are, as I noted, common. But they leave open the former question, of what kind of people we are *capable* of being. Are the offended, even the grievously offended, capable of self-love and love of others? What appears to be an empirical question calls for an empirical answer.

For the Christian, the empirical is not exhaustive. For the Christian, the dyadic relationship between offender and offended is always already in fact part of a triadic relation that includes God and the possibility that offense against our fellow man involves *sin*, first on the part of the offender, but also on the part of the offended *if* he refuses to love himself and then his offender. Every sin – every culpable injustice -- is an offense against God, which only He can forgive, whether it be Otto’s or Victor’s. This is exactly why Victor’s hating Otto’s offense was morally commendable: “That person who is angry at his brother’s sin does not seek his own vengeance but God’s, for sin is nothing else but an offense against God, and therefore he who is justly angry does not usurp what belongs to God.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *De Malo*, 12. ad 14.

It would be a usurpation, however, to refuse to forgive our offenders, because forgiveness is not, strictly speaking, our own, but God's. As Timothy Jackson explains, "[w]e do not forgive others in order subsequently to be forgiven, but rather because we have already been forgiven, most basically by God. . . . Once we comprehend forgiveness as Eternity's work of love, as a good gift given first from above,"¹⁰¹ we are free to get on with this life's work, which Henri Nouwen described in this way: "We need to forgive and be forgiven, every day, every hour – unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family."¹⁰² Such work does not condone the offense; it responds to persons with love exactly because we have been loved first through a gracious participation in the divine life. Again, love in the form of forgiveness does not overlook (indeed, it depends upon) the offense, but it rejects the views of those who maintain either that we sometimes do well to try to hold ourselves and our dignity together through a protective grudge-bearing toward our offender¹⁰³ or that we should calculate and tabulate the reasons to forgive.¹⁰⁴ If we have reason to forgive, it is the "reason" that is grace.¹⁰⁵ It is we who freely love our enemies, but it is not we who make it possible. "Divine generosity meets the creature's efforts [to forgive as completely as God forgives] with miraculous aid, enabling the victim to forgive. And

¹⁰¹ Jackson, 139. "The literal truth is that when God forgives us he doesn't change his mind about us. Out of his unconditional, unchanging, eternal love for us he changes our minds about him. It is God's loving gift that we begin to think of repenting for our sin and of asking for his mercy. And that repentance does not *earn* his forgiveness. It *is* his forgiveness under another name. The gift, the grace, of contrition just is God's forgiveness." McCabe, 61.

¹⁰² Quoted in Garrard and McNaughton, 100.

¹⁰³ Though speaking from an exclusively philosophical context, John Wilson observes: "The test of love in relation to forgiveness is to be able to love in such a way, or to such a degree, that one's own dignity matters less to one than the restoration of good relationships. This is immensely hard, because underlying the fear of losing one's dignity is the fear of losing one's existence . . ." John Wilson, "Is Forgiveness Possible," *The Philosopher* 14, 21 (1985). Cf. Herbert McCabe, *supra* text at note <>.

¹⁰⁴ "Asking why we ought to forgive is like asking why be moral, even as asking how to forgive is as odd as asking how to breathe." Jackson, 146

¹⁰⁵ See Herbert Morris, "Murphy on Forgiveness," 7 *Criminal Justice Ethics* 15, 19 (1988)

so, at bottom, forgiveness is . . . a gift bestowed on victim and offender alike, a beautiful aspect of human life, a sign of a benign universe – Christians would say, an advertisement of its gracious maker.”¹⁰⁶

Is this too much to believe? If we doubt the gracious character of all interpersonal forgiveness, it would be paradoxical or even perverse if we were to entertain no doubt about whether we are entitled to be angry or resentful at an apparent offense. Not being able to read others’ hearts, are we *sure* they offended us?¹⁰⁷ An offense depends upon a culpable violation of justice, not just my perhaps eccentric or precious sensibility that I have been mistreated. Are we ourselves sure we are not too sensitive, sure that we are not too quick to find fault (*culpa*) where there is none?¹⁰⁸ God only knows.

¹⁰⁶ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Forgiveness, A Christian Model,” 8 *Faith and Philosophy* 277, 300 (1991).

¹⁰⁷ See P.J.M. Van Tongeren, *Tibi Soli Peccavi: Thomas Aquinas on Guilt and Forgiveness* (Leuven: Peters, 1996), 70-73.

¹⁰⁸ “[T]here is something morally offensive about undue sensitivity to injury, even although forgiveness follows from consciousness of injury.” Downie, 134.