

A passion of the soul: Aquinas on Love

- **A passion of the soul, in a hylomorphic perspective:**

“Insofar as being acted upon comes with a loss and a change, it is proper to matter and so is found only in things composed of matter and form. But insofar as being acted upon implies just the reception of something, it does not have to belong just to matter, but is instead able to belong to whatever is in potentiality. Now even though the soul is not composed of matter and form, it nonetheless does have some potentiality, and accordingly it is suited for receiving and being acted upon.” (qu.22, a.1)

==> The soul, since it is the form of the body, has appetitive and apprehensive powers – matter in potentiality – and from those powers can undergo passions.

- **Love is a passion:**

“So, too, the desirable thing itself gives to the appetite, first of all, a certain bond with it, which is the appetite’s being pleased with the desirable thing, and from this there follows a movement toward the desirable thing. [...] So, then, since love consists in a certain change in the appetite effected by the desirable thing, it is clear that (a) love is a passion, properly speaking, insofar as it exists in the concupiscible power, and that (b) love is a passion, in a general and extended sense, insofar as it exists in the will.” (qu.26, a.2)

1. A phenomenology of love

Love exists in many different ways, can adopt very varied forms, a lot of different effects can stem from love; yet love is still one single passion and phenomenon.

(1) Nature of love

- **The nature of love is to be found on the different appetites:**

- **Natural appetite** – from that stems *natural love*. Principle of the movement is connaturality between the thing that has the appetite and the thing toward which it tends
- **Appetite by necessity** – an appetite both possessed by animal souls and intellectual souls, but **that can obey will for the latter**. A passion of the concupiscible power. From that stems *sentient love*, which can include love of concupiscence, love of friendship and even charity.
- **Appetite in accord with free choice** – situated in the rational or intellective appetite, or will. From that stems *intellective or rational love*, which includes elective love (*dilectio*) and can include charity (*caritas*).

- **There is a difference between rational love and sentient love**, insofar that the object of the appetite is freely chosen in the first case. But reason and the intellective power can intervene in both, while sentient love remains situated in the concupiscible power.
- **There is a difference between love of friendship and love of concupiscence**. “As the Philosopher says in Rhetoric 2, “To love is to will a good for someone.” Therefore, the movement of love tends toward two things: (a) the good which one wills for someone, either for himself or for another; and (b) the one he wills the good for. Thus, love of concupiscence is had with respect to that good which someone wills for another, and love of friendship is had with respect to the one that someone wills a good for. Hence, this distinction is a distinction between what is prior and what is posterior. For what is loved by a love of friendship is loved absolutely speaking and per se, whereas what is loved

by a love of concupiscence is not loved absolutely speaking and in its own right (secundum se), but is instead loved for the sake of another.” (qu.26, a.4)

(2) Causes of love

- **The good** is the only cause of love. “Love belongs to the appetite power, which is a passive power. Hence, its object is related to it as a cause of its movement or act. Therefore, the object of love must be a cause, properly speaking, of the love. But the proper object of love is the good, since, as has been explained (q.26, aa. 1-2), loves implies the lover’s connaturality with, or his being pleased with, what is loved. But the good for each thing is what is connatural to it and proportionated to it.” (qu. 27, a.1)
- **Cognition** is a cause of love, in the sense that love requires the good in a thing to be apprehended.
- **Likeness** is a cause of love. But there are two types of likeness: (a) two things having the same feature in *actuality*, and (b) one has in *potentiality* and *inclination* what the other has in *actuality* ==> love of friendship vs. love of concupiscence

(3) Effects of love

- **Union** is an effect of love. Two types of union: real union and affective union. Union can also be (a) a cause of love, (b) the love itself and (c) an effect of love.
- **Mutual indwelling** is an effect of love: (a) through the *apprehensive power*, since what is loved exists in the apprehension of the lover that wants to know it intimately; (b) through the *appetitive power*, since the lover wants to possess the loved thing entirely (regarding love of concupiscence) or is so entangled in his love that he suffers and enjoys everything with the loved one (love of friendship); (c) by *reciprocation* in the case of friendship, since friends do good to each other.
- **Ecstasy** (= to be put outside oneself), is also an effect of love: (a) regarding the *apprehensive power*, because one is so absorbed in what he loves that he cannot think about the rest, (b) regarding the *appetitive power*, insofar that he seeks to get goodness from something outside himself, or do some good to someone else.
- **Jealousy**, is an effect of love.

2. Love as a central notion

(1) A passion at the root of all passions

“There is no other passion of the soul that does not presuppose some instance of love. The reason for this is that every passion of the soul involves either a movement toward something or resting in something. But every movement toward something or instance of resting in something proceeds from some sort of connaturality or bond and this belongs to the nature of love. Hence, it is impossible for any other passion of the soul to be a cause in general of every instance of love” (q.27 a. 4)

- **Thomas examines successively different passions that are believed to be the cause of love:**
 - **Pleasure:** for someone to get pleasure from something, he must love this thing beforehand;
 - **Desire:** we only desire what we love, even in a specific way;
 - **Hope:** comes from either pleasure or desire; we always hope for some good that we love.

==> Consequently, certain passions can be the cause of certain instances of love, but no passion is generally a cause of love.

(2) **Love as a natural and universal movement toward the other**

“A passion is an agent’s effect within the patient. But a natural agent brings about two types of effect in the patient. For, first of all, it gives a form and, second, it gives the movement that follow upon that form. For instance, that which generates a body gives the body (a) heaviness (gravitas) and (b) the movement that follows upon heaviness. [...] So, too, the desirable thing itself gives to the appetite, first of all, a certain bond with it, which the appetite’s being pleased with the desirable thing, and from this follows a movement toward the desirable thing.” (qu.26, a.2) ==> Love has its roots in the divine order, it is caused by natural necessity; it is nothing but the universal movement from one thing toward another.

“What is called love is the principle of the movement that tends toward the end that is loved.” (qu.26, a.1) ==> Consequently, there is only one love. All the sorts of love – i.e. natural love, love of concupiscence, love of friendship – are all love, and they all serve a purpose in the world order.

(3) **Love as a passion prior to ethics and moral values**

“Love signifies a certain bond (coaptatio) between the appetitive power and some good. But nothing is bonded with anything fitting for it by the fact that it is harmed; rather, if it is possible, the thing is advantageous to it and make it better. By contrast, it is harmed and made worse by the very fact that it is united to something that is not fitting for it. Therefore, love for a fitting good perfects the lover and makes it better, whereas love for a good that is not fitting for the lover is harmful to the lover and makes him worse.” (qu. 28, a.5)

==> Love, in itself, is not bad since it tends toward the good; it can only be harmful to the lover it is not well-fitted to him. But a particular instance of love, if one chose willingly to love something that is he knew was morally wrong, can be bad:

“The species of an act or a passion can be thought of in two ways: (a) insofar as it belongs to a natural genus, and in this sense moral goodness and badness are irrelevant to the species of an act or a passion; and (b) insofar as it belongs to a moral genus, given that it participates in the voluntary and in the judgment of reason. And in this sense moral goodness and badness can belong to a species of passion to the extent that it takes as its object something that is of itself consonant with reason or at variance with reason [...]. Insofar as the sentient appetite obeys reason, the goodness or badness of reason exists in the passions per se and not per accidens.” (qu.24, a.4)