

Daniel Contreras

Universidad de los Andes, Chile

OMNIA APPETUNT DEUM:
AQUINAS ON THE METAPHYSICS
OF THE HUMAN NATURAL
LOVE OF GOD*

For more than a century, contemporary debate concerning the so-called “problem of love” in the Middle Ages has typically been framed and approached in the terms set out by Pierre Rousselot in 1908. As it is well known, Rousselot identified two major conceptions of love in the writings of medieval authors: a conception he labels “ecstatic”, which requires the lover to entirely forget his own good in the pursuit of the loved object, and a “physical” conception of love that highlights the natural — hence the name — inclination of creatures to seek their own good.¹ As Rousselot himself explained, Aquinas stands out in this medieval landscape as a staunch defender of this second “physical” conception of love, and in his work he tried to show, albeit briefly, the manner in which Aquinas attempted to reconcile the two seemingly opposing claims that (i) disinterested love, correctly understood, is not only possible, but also deeply natural, and that (ii) a purely ecstatic love — i.e., a love that demands from the lover the complete oblivion of self — is in principle metaphysically impossible.²

* Research for this article was made possible by Chile’s National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (Fondecyt), research project nr. 11230648.

¹ See P. ROUSSELOT, *Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au Moyen Âge*, (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, 6/6), Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1908, p. 3–4.

² See P. ROUSSELOT, *Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au Moyen Âge*, p. 14. He references two passages of Aquinas as particularly suggestive: (i) *ST*, I, q. 60, a. 5, ad 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 104–105): “Ad secundum dicendum quod, cum dicitur quod Deus diligitur ab angelo in quantum est ei bonus, si ly *in quantum* dicat finem, sic falsum est: non enim diligit naturaliter Deum propter bonum suum, sed propter ipsum Deum. Si vero dicat rationem amoris ex parte amantis, sic verum est: non enim esset in natura alicuius quod amaret Deum, nisi ex eo quod unumquodque dependet a bono quod est Deus;” and (ii) *ST*, II-II, q. 26, a. 13, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 8,

In the world of Thomistic studies, the various works that have addressed this issue have focused either on the particularities of Aquinas's understanding of love — particularly on the cause of love — or on the more ethical and psychological aspects of a genuinely disinterested love.³ The shared overall goal seems to have been to flesh out in more detail Aquinas's account of the cause of love and to determine how to rightly understand the relationship between the *amor concupiscentia* and the *amor benevolentiae* — which comes as no surprise, for this was, as Rousselot correctly observed, at the center of attention of how medieval thinkers themselves addressed the problem of love in their writings.

In this paper, instead of addressing the more psychological or ethical aspects of this debate, I will focus rather on Aquinas's underlying metaphysics of the natural love of God. If, as Rousselot noticed, Aquinas stands out among his scholastic peers as the main proponent of a physical conception of love, then he must have worked out, to some degree, the corresponding metaphysical framework that allowed him to simultaneously maintain the primacy of the natural love of God in each creature — including, clearly, rational creatures — and the fact that all creatures naturally and inevitably seek their own good. My goal in this paper is, first, to show how Aquinas accounts for the metaphysical conditions required for all creatures to both strive after their own good and yet also naturally love God above all else, and then to lay out his understanding of the uniquely human manner of operating, which allows us to not only strive after the divine resemblance found in the goods to which we are naturally inclined, but also, and more fundamentally, to strive after God Himself and be united to Him in knowledge and love.

p. 223): "Ad tertium dicendum quod unicuique erit Deus tota ratio diligendi eo quod Deus est totum hominis bonum: dato enim, per impossibile, quod Deus non esset hominis bonum, non esset ei ratio diligendi. Et ideo in ordine dilectionis oportet quod post Deum homo maxime diligit seipsum."

³ Among the secondary literature, particularly important contributions to the debate in Aquinas are: V. HÉRIS, "L'amour naturel de Dieu d'après saint Thomas," *Mélanges thomistes*, (Bibliothèque thomiste, 3), Le Saulchoir: Revues des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, 1923, p. 289–310; H.-D. SIMONIN, "Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l'amour," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, vol. 6 (1931), p. 174–276; M.-R. GAGNEBET, "L'amour naturel de Dieu chez saint Thomas et ses contemporains," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 48, no. 1–2 (1948), p. 394–446; vol. 49, no. 1–2 (1949), p. 31–102; L.-B. GEIGER, *Le problème de l'amour chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Montréal – Paris: Institut d'Études Médiévales – Librairie J. Vrin, 1952; G. STEVENS, "The Disinterested Love of God According to St. Thomas and Some of His Modern Interpreters," *The Thomist*, vol. 26, no. 3–4 (1953), p. 307–333, 497–541; J.-H. NICOLAS, "Amour de soi, amour de Dieu, amour des autres," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 56, no. 1 (1956), p. 5–42; and T. OSBORNE, *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, especially p. 69–112. The most recent study is: CH. MALLOY, *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love*, Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2019.

In order to show how Aquinas's metaphysics seamlessly allows for all of these truths, we will first study how Aquinas conceives of natural appetites and what it means for all creatures, living or otherwise, to be endowed with them. The presence in all of creation of natural appetites is ultimately explained, for Aquinas, by the fact that every being exists for the sake of its own operation [*omne ens est propter suam operationem*]. Every creature is naturally constituted so as to act in pursuit of the good that is its perfection, for everything that exists is chiefly ordered to be perfected and actualized by the good to which it is naturally inclined. A closer examination of this doctrine will reveal that, by pursuing their own perfection — i.e., by performing their own operations — all creatures simultaneously and inescapably pursue God too. To seek its own perfection is for any given creature nothing else than to seek the kind and degree of divine similitude that will complete and fully actualize its potencies. No creature could possibly seek its own perfection, by performing its proper operations, if it were not primarily and more radically and fundamentally ordered to the divine good.⁴

Having laid out the groundwork of Aquinas's metaphysics of creaturely movement, we will next focus on the particularities of human operation. Besides primarily and more fundamentally seeking God by pursuing their own perfection, human beings can actively make God the explicit end of their actions. This means that human beings not only love God above all else by a natural love, but that they are also capable of freely choosing to love God in this manner. The root of this possibility lies in their intellectual nature: by being universally open to the knowledge of all being, humans can determine their actions by freely directing themselves to particular goods. An adequate explanation of this last point will require us to study the nature of intellectuality and the distinctive character of the properly rational mode of human happiness or beatitude. This analysis will show that the distinctively human operation for the sake of which human nature exists allows for the possibility of dividing up, though only on a purely psychological level, our natural love of God above all else from the desire of our own good or perfection. In other words, the same intellectual nature that requires us to freely direct our actions to God in order to achieve the distinctive kind of perfection or beatitude proper to rational creatures, allows too for the possibility of freely *not* directing our actions to God — and thus for the possibility of convincing ourselves that we can somehow be exempted from the metaphysical necessity of naturally desiring God as our happiness.

⁴ As Aquinas himself says in *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 24, creatures tend to their own good *precisely because* they seek the divine similitude, and not the other way around [*et non e converso*]; see *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 24, n. 2051 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 31): “Propter hoc igitur tendit [unumquodque] in proprium bonum, quia tendit in divinam similitudinem, et non e converso. Unde patet quod omnia appetunt divinam similitudinem quasi ultimum finem.”

I. APPETITUS

All things, even non-living creatures, pursue their own perfection. All things, in other words, are inclined to the good, specifically to that good which completes and perfects their natures. To desire [*appetere*], says Aquinas, is nothing else than to seek something by tending toward that to which one is ordered.⁵ Appetites can only be defined, then, in reference to the good towards which they are ordered and which they seek.⁶ Creatures, although complete in terms of the degree of actuality that belongs to them on account of the kind of things they are, are all nonetheless permeated with some degree of potentiality, precisely inasmuch as they are creatures, and so they move and act in order to possess the good that completes and perfect their natures. The good they strive after actualizes their potentialities and allows them to achieve that state of completion that is distinctive and suitable to their natures. Now, since this inclination or tendency whereby they pursue their completion and perfection is something that belongs to all things on account of their very natures, we refer to this appetite as a *natural* appetite. All creatures are endowed with natural appetites that incline them to the good that perfects their natures. To speak of a natural appetite, therefore, is nothing but to speak of a creature's inborn inclination or tendency toward the good that perfects it.⁷ Each and every thing has a natural aptitude or proportion [*connaturalitas*] to that which is good for it according to its nature.⁸

⁵ See *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 22/3, p. 613–614, l. 191–198): “Appetere autem nihil aliud est quam aliquid petere, quasi tendere in aliquid ad ipsum ordinatum. Unde cum omnia sint ordinata et directa a Deo in bonum, et hoc modo quod unicuique insit principium per quod ipsummet tendit in bonum quasi petens ipsum bonum, oportet dicere quod omnia naturaliter bonum appetant.”

⁶ See *ST*, I, q. 59, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 92): “Ad cuius evidentiam [i.e., quod necesse est ponere in angelis voluntatem], considerandum est quod, cum omnia procedant ex voluntate divina, omnia suo modo per appetitum inclinantur in bonum, sed diversimode.” This text is particularly revealing of Aquinas's understanding of creaturely tendencies and operations, by highlighting the ultimate cause behind the presence in all things of natural appetites: it is *because* all things proceed from the divine will that they are all inclined by an appetite toward the good, even if each thing pursues it in the manner proper to its nature.

⁷ See *ST*, I, q. 60, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 98): “Est autem hoc commune omni naturae, ut habeat aliquam inclinationem, quae est appetitus naturalis vel amor. Quae tamen inclinatio diversimode invenitur in diversis naturis, in unaquaque secundum modum eius.”

⁸ See *ST*, I-II, q. 26, a. 1, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 188): “Ad tertium dicendum quod amor naturalis non solum est in viribus animae vegetativa, sed in omnibus potentissimis animae, et etiam in omnibus partibus corporis, et universaliter in omnibus rebus: quia, ut Dionysius dicit, iv cap. *De divinis nominibus* : »Omnibus est pulchrum et bonum amabile« cum unaquaque res habeat connaturalitatem ad id quod est sibi conveniens secundum suam naturam.”

Aquinas speaks of this natural appetite in three different, yet connected, ways: (a) in the broadest sense, already seen, he uses it to speak of a thing's inclination to something that proceeds from that thing's very nature; in this sense, he speaks of the natural appetite not only of a thing's nature as a whole, but also of each of its potencies or faculties;⁹ (b) in a more restricted sense, the expression natural appetite is used to designate all appetites that are not rational, i.e., the sensitive appetite of animals and the appetites of plants, minerals and the basic elements;¹⁰ and (c) in the most restricted sense, he speaks of natural appetite to refer exclusively to the inclination proper to things that lack knowledge; this sense of natural appetite excludes both sensitive and rational appetites and is, Aquinas thinks, the best case to examine in order to determine what natural appetites are.¹¹

⁹ See, besides the text quoted in the previous note, *ST*, I, q. 78, a. 1, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 251): "Ad tertium dicendum quod appetitus naturalis est inclinatio cuiuslibet rei in aliquid ex natura sua: unde naturali appetitu quaelibet potentia desiderat sibi conveniens;" and *In Phys.*, I, c. 9, l. 15, n. 10 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, p. 53): "Nihil est igitur aliud appetitus naturalis quam ordinatio aliquorum secundum propriam naturam in suum finem."

¹⁰ See, for example, *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 9): "Si enim agens non esset determinatum ad aliquem effectum, non magis ageret hoc quam illud: ad hoc ergo quod determinatum effectum producat, necesse est quod determinetur ad aliquid certum, quod habet rationem finis. Haec autem determinatio, sicut in rationali natura fit per rationalem appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis;" *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 3, n. 1884 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 5): "Agens per intellectum agit propter finem sicut determinans sibi finem: agens autem per naturam, licet agat propter finem, ut probatum est, non tamen determinat sibi finem, cum non cognoscat rationem finis, sed movetur in finem determinatum sibi ab alio;" and *Super II Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2 (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 2, p. 975): "Ad secundum dicendum, quod naturalia quamvis non habeant voluntatem, tamen intendunt aliquid per appetitum naturalem, secundum quod diriguntur in finem suum ab intellectu divino naturae attribuente inclinationem in finem, quae inclinatio appetitus naturalis dicitur."

¹¹ See, for example, *ST*, I, q. 59, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 92): "Quaedam enim inclinantur in bonum per solam naturalem habitudinem, absque cognitione, sicut plantae et corpora inanimata. Et talis inclinatio ad bonum vocatur *appetitus naturalis*;" *Super II Sent.*, d. 24, q. 3, a. 1, corp. (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 2, p. 617): "Est autem in nobis triplex appetitus, scilicet naturalis, sensitivus et rationalis. Naturalis quidem appetitus, puta cibi, est quem non imaginatio gignit, sed ipsa qualitatum naturalium dispositio, quibus naturales vires suas actiones exercent;" *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 231): "Et haec habitudo ad bonum, in rebus carentibus cognitione vocatur appetitus naturalis;" *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 462): "Ad tertium dicendum quod omnia appetunt Deum ut finem, appetendo quodcumque bonum, sive appetitu intelligibili, sive sensibili, sive naturali, qui est sine cognitione quia nihil habet rationem boni et appetibilis, nisi secundum quod participat Dei similitudinem;" and *Quodlibet I*, q. 4, a. 3 [8], corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 25/2, p. 188, l. 62-66): "Inclinationes enim naturales maxime cognosci possunt in hiis quae naturaliter aguntur absque rationis deliberatione: »sic« enim »agitur unumquodque« in natura »sic aptum natum est« agi [Phys. 199a10]." For a closer examination of natural appetites restrictively understood, see A. PREVOSTI, "El apetito natural y la estructura esencial del ente móvil," *Espíritu*, vol. 65, no. 151 (2016), p. 11-39.

One of Aquinas's clearest accounts of this threefold sense of natural appetite appears in his treatment of angels in the *Summa Theologiae*, particularly in his discussion of whether angels have a will or not:

It is necessary to posit a will in the angels. As evidence of this it must be considered that, since all things proceed from the divine will, all things are in their own way inclined towards the good, but in different ways. Some things are inclined to the good by their natural inclination [*habitudo*], without knowledge, as <is the case with> plants and inanimate bodies. Such inclination to the good is called “a natural appetite”. Other things are inclined to the good with some knowledge, but not because they know the notion of goodness [*ratio boni*], but because they know some particular good — as <it happens with> the senses, which know the sweet, the white, and so on. The inclination which follows this knowledge is called “a sensitive appetite”. Other things are inclined to the good with a knowledge whereby they grasp the <very> notion of goodness; this belongs <solely> to the intellect. These things are most perfectly inclined to the good, since they are not only directed towards the good by another, as <with> those things that lack knowledge, nor <are they inclined> solely to a particular good, as <with> those things that only have sensitive knowledge, but <they act> as if inclined to the universal good itself. This inclination is called “will”. Accordingly, since angels know the very universal notion of goodness, it is manifest that there is a will in them.¹²

Aquinas thinks it is crucial to assert the existence of actual, real appetites in the things themselves and not to view a creature's movements as a merely passive event that just happens in it. If things were so inclined to the good so as to not have in themselves a principle of inclination, then they could be said to be led or guided towards the good, but not to have an *appetite* for the good. To say that something desires or tends to the good is to acknowledge that there is within

¹² See *ST*, I, q. 59, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 92): “Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est ponere in angelis voluntatem. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod, cum omnia procedant ex voluntate divina, omnia suo modo per appetitum inclinantur in bonum, sed diversimode. Quaedam enim inclinantur in bonum per solam naturalem habitudinem, absque cognitione, sicut plantae et corpora inanimata. Et talis inclinatio ad bonum vocatur *appetitus naturalis*. Quae-dam vero ad bonum inclinantur cum aliqua cognitione non quidem sic quod cognoscant ipsam rationem boni, sed cognoscunt aliquid bonum particulare; sicut sensus, qui cognoscit dulce et album et aliquid huiusmodi. Inclinatio autem hanc cognitionem sequens, dicitur *appetitus sensitivus*. Quaedam vero inclinantur ad bonum cum cognitione qua cognoscunt ipsam boni rationem; quod est proprium intellectus. Et haec perfectissime inclinantur in bonum; non quidem quasi ab alio solummodo directa in bonum, sicut ea quae cognitione carent; neque in bonum particulariter tantum, sicut ea in quibus est sola sensitiva cognitio; sed quasi inclinata in ipsum universale bonum. Et haec inclinatio dicitur *voluntas*. Unde, cum angeli per intellectum cognoscant ipsam universalem rationem boni, manifestum est quod in eis sit voluntas.”

the thing itself a principle whereby it tends towards the good.¹³ God desires not only that creatures exist, but also that they operate themselves by means of their own God-given capacities; as Aquinas says, it would diminish the dignity of creation, as intended by God, if they did not really act themselves in their operations, but were merely acted upon by God.¹⁴

Now, all appetites, as mentioned above, are explained with reference to the end towards which they are ordered. That end is, for that appetite, its good. In the case of natural appetites, restrictively understood, the agent does not know the reason of the end's appetibility, but that reason is known by the Author of that agent's nature, who has imprinted on the creature a certain form whereby to seek and tend toward the perfection befitting to it. What is it, then, that things desire in pursuing the ends that are, for them, their good, from natural to rational agents? Aquinas usually gives two different, though related, responses: sometimes he simply says that things seek their perfection and completion, and other times he says that things seek the good that is suited, similar or proportionate to them.¹⁵ This similarity or proportionality between the agent's form or nature and the end to which it naturally tends, is sometimes framed by Aquinas as a certain affinity or connaturality, from which the natural appetite proceeds. This connaturality between the *appetens* and the object he desires or

¹³ See *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 22/3, p. 614, l. 198–207): “Si enim essent omnia inclinata in bonum sine hoc quod haberent in se aliquod inclinationis principium, possent dici ducta in bonum sed non appetentia bonum; sed ratione inditi principii dicuntur omnia appetere bonum quasi sponte tendentia in bonum; propter quod etiam dicitur *Sapient.*, VII, 1, quod divina sapientia »disponit omnia suaviter,« quia unumquodque ex suo motu tendit in id in quod est divinitus ordinatum.”

¹⁴ See *ST*, I, q. 105, a. 5, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 475): “Hoc [i.e., quod nulla virtus creata aliquid operaretur in rebus, sed solus Deus immediate omnia operaretur] autem est impossibile. Primo quidem, quia sic subtraheretur ordo causae et causati a rebus creatis. Quod pertinet ad impotentiam creantis; ex virtute enim agentis est, quod suo effectui det virtutem agendi. Secundo, quia virtutes operativaes quae in rebus inveniuntur, frustra essent rebus attributae, si per eas nihil operarentur. Quinimmo omnes res creatae viderentur quodammodo esse frustra, si propria operatione destituerentur: cum omnis res sit propter suam operationem,” see also *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 69, n. 2445 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 96): “Detrahere ergo perfectioni creaturarum est detrahere perfectioni divinae virtutis. Sed si nulla creatura habet aliquam actionem ad aliquem effectum producendum, multum detrahitur perfectioni creaturae: ex abundantia enim perfectionis est quod perfectionem quam aliquid habet, possit alteri communicare.”

¹⁵ In some passages Aquinas brings both accounts together; see, for example, *ST*, I, q. 6, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 66): “Respondeo dicendum quod bonum esse praecipue Deo convenit. Bonum enim aliquid est, secundum quod est appetibile. Unumquodque autem appetit suam perfectionem. Perfectio autem et forma effectus est quaedam similitudo agentis: cum omne agens agat sibi simile. Unde ipsum agens est appetibile, et habet rationem boni: hoc enim est quod de ipso appetitur, ut eius similitudo participetur. Cum ergo Deus sit prima causa effectiva omnium, manifestum est quod sibi competit ratio boni et appetibilis.”

seeks is what Aquinas understands as natural love [*amor*], from which, again, natural appetites proceed:

It is evident that whatever tends to a certain end, has, in the first place, an aptitude or proportion to that end, for nothing tends to an end that is not proportionate <to itself>; secondly, it is moved to that end; thirdly, it rests in the end, after having attained it. And this very aptitude or proportion of the appetite to the good is love [*amor*], which is nothing but complacency in the good; while movement towards good is desire or concupiscence; and rest in good is joy or pleasure. Thus, according to this order, love precedes desire, and desire precedes pleasure.¹⁶

Since love is the aptitude or proportion to the good suited to a thing's nature, love is also the first motion of the appetitive power, whether it be the will, a sensible appetite or a natural appetite.¹⁷ To speak of a *natural* love, then, is to recognize the existence of a natural correspondence between the good that is loved or desired and the thing that strives after it. This correspondence, when built into the very being of a creature, belongs to it on account of its very nature, and is thus a *natural* love. From this aptitude or proportion there arises in the very nature of the creature an inclination or tendency towards that good, an inclination

¹⁶ *ST*, I-II, q. 25, a.2, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 184–185): “Manifestum est autem quod omne quod tendit ad finem aliquem, primo quidem habet aptitudinem seu proportionem ad finem, nihil enim tendit in finem non proportionatum; secundo, movetur ad finem; tertio, quiescit in fine post eius consecutionem. Ipsa enim aptitudo sive proportio appetitus ad bonum est amor, qui nihil aliud est quam complacentia boni; motus autem ad bonum est desiderium vel concupiscentia; quies autem in bono est gaudium vel delectatio. Et ideo secundum hunc ordinem, amor praecedit desiderium, et desiderium praecedit delectationem.”

¹⁷ In *ST*, I-II, q. 26, a. 1 Aquinas distinguishes between three kinds of love, corresponding to the three kinds of appetite he there (and elsewhere) distinguishes — i.e., natural, sensitive and rational —, and says that “in each of these appetites, love is the principle of the movement that tends to the loved end.” See *ST*, I-II, q. 26, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 188): “Respondeo dicendum quod amor est aliquid ad appetitum pertinens: cum utriusque obiectum sit bonum. Unde secundum differentiam appetitus, est differentia amoris. Est enim quidam appetitus non consequens apprehensionem ipsius appetentis, sed alterius: et huiusmodi dicitur *appetitus naturalis*. Res enim naturales appetunt quod eis convenit secundum suam naturam, non per apprehensionem propriam, sed per apprehensionem institutentis naturam, ut in I libro dictum est [I, q. 6, a. 1]. Alius autem est appetitus consequens apprehensionem ipsius appetentis, sed ex necessitate, non ex iudicio libero. Et talis est *appetitus sensitivus* in brutis: qui tamen in hominibus aliquid libertatis participat, in quantum obedit rationi. Alius autem est appetitus consequens apprehensionem appetentis secundum liberum iudicium. Et talis est appetitus rationalis sive intellectivus, qui dicitur *voluntas*. In unoquoque autem horum appetituum, amor dicitur illud quod est principium motus tendentis in finem amatum. In appetitu autem naturali, principium huiusmodi motus est connaturalitas appetentis ad id in quod tendit, quae dici potest amor naturalis: sicut ipsa connaturalitas corporis gravis ad locum medium est per gravitatem, et potest dici amor naturalis. Et similiter coaptatio appetitus sensitivi, vel voluntatis, ad aliquod bonum, idest ipsa complacentia boni, dicitur amor sensitivus, vel intellectivus seu rationalis.”

that has been placed there by the author of that nature.¹⁸ In other words, both appetite and love have the good as their object, but love, for Aquinas, refers more precisely to the correspondence or proportion between the good something desires and the nature of the thing that desires it, while appetite refers rather to the inclination or tendency that presupposes that proportion.¹⁹ If something has a natural appetite for the good that perfects its nature, it is only because there is already, in its nature, a proportion between that good and the type of thing it is. To speak, then, of a *natural* love of God means affirming that there is an inborn aptitude or proportion between all creatures and God as the good they spontaneously strive after, as their perfection and completion.

2. *OMNE ENS EST PROPTER SUAM OPERATIONEM*

All creatures, then, are endowed with natural appetites that incline them to the good that is required for them to achieve the kind and degree of perfection that is proper to their natures. In the case of living beings, this need or drive for completion is more easily recognizable than in non-living things: all living creatures are born in a certain state of deficiency, certainly not with regard to the type of being they are — they can obviously lack nothing of the nature they each are — but rather with regard to what they can become. They are able, through their operations, to achieving the state of being where the potentialities encoded into their very natures are fully and completely actualized; they are capable, in other words, of becoming mature, developed exemplars of their own species. But regardless of whether they are living or not, all things act or operate, and thus manifest a certain basic thrust toward motion. No created thing is merely static or ‘settled’; they all act precisely in virtue of being inclined by natural appetites towards certain goods. What is the reason behind this universal drive for action, behind the need for operating? Why are creatures not already complete from the outset, simply by being created as God intended them to be?

¹⁸ See *ST*, I, q. 20, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 252): “Primus enim motus voluntatis, et cuiuslibet appetitivae virtutis, est amor;” also *ST*, I, q. 60, a. 1, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 98): “Ad tertium dicendum, quod, sicut cognitio naturalis semper est vera, ita dilectio naturalis semper est recta: cum amor naturalis nihil aliud sit quam inclinatio naturae indita ab Auctore naturae.”

¹⁹ As Simonin shows, there is a distinct evolution in Aquinas’s thought regarding the psychological place loves occupies in the actualization of creatures’ potencies. Whereas in the *Sentences* love seems to be either the end term of the motion caused by an appetite — i.e., the union produced by the *formatio* or *informatio* of the lover by the loved object — or is simply confused with desire broadly understood — so that it stands at the beginning of motions alongside desire —, already in the *De veritate* Aquinas clearly identifies love as the primal motor of all appetites, as that which originates the motion of all appetites. See H.-D. SIMONIN, „Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l’amour”, p. 176–198.

Appealing to a much-quoted passage from Aristotle's *De caelo*, Aquinas claims that the underlying fact behind the unyielding drive for action exhibited in creaturely movement is that everything exists for the sake of its operation.²⁰ Everything that exists has the fundamental ontological perfection that belongs to it by reason of its specific nature or essence, but despite having the radical actuality of being [*esse*], its being is, as Aquinas sometimes phrases it, narrowed or limited, precisely because it is created.²¹ Because their very being is received *ab alio*, all creatures are metaphysically constituted in such a way that they are necessarily open to receiving other acts not yet possessed.²² Every single created entity differs from its quiddity or essence by virtue of everything that befalls to it and that does not pertain to its *ratio*, first and foremost its very act of being. This basic metaphysical composition is the ultimate reason behind the fact that all creatures are radically and thoroughly mutable.²³ To be mutable, as

²⁰ Aquinas refers to this principle — *omne ens* or *omnis res* (sometimes *omnis substantia*) *est propter suam operationem* — throughout his entire corpus. In the widely circulated *Auctoritates Aristoteles*, the axiom appears differently, though the same truth is adequately conveyed (*Les Auctoritates Aristotelis. Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique*, ed. J. Hamesse, [Philosophes Médiévaux, 17], Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974, p. 163): “cuiuscumque rei est aliqua operatio, illa est finaliter propter ipsam.” The text behind the scholastic axiom is *De caelo et mundo*, II, a. 9–10 where Aristotle says [ed. W.K.C. Guthrie, (The Loeb Classical Library, 338), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939, p. 148–149] that “everything which has a function exists for the sake of that function [ὅν ἔστιν ἔργον, ἔνεκα τοῦ ἔργου].”

²¹ See, for example, *ST*, I, q. 14, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 166), where Aquinas speaks of the natures of creatures incapable of knowledge as being *more* narrowed and limited than those of creatures who are capable of knowledge, i.e., their being too is narrowed or limited, though less than their nescient counterparts: “Unde manifestum est quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata: natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet maiorem amplitudinem et extensionem.”

²² See *Super I Sent.*, d. 3, div. text. (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 1, p. 88): “Sed omnes creature habent esse ex nihilo: quod manifestatur ex earum imperfectione et potentialitate;” also *Super I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 3, exp. text. (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 1, p. 210): “Item esse creature est causatum [*acquisitum] ab alio, et habet, quantum in se est, potentialitatem et mutabilitatem; sed esse divinum est causa omnis esse, inmutabiliter permanens.” For a detailed exposition of Aquinas's reasoning behind the idea that all creatures, precisely inasmuch as they are creatures, are permeated with potentiality and are thus inescapably mutable, see E. PERRIER, *L'attrait divin. La doctrine de l'opération et le gouvernement des créatures chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Parole et Silence, 2019, p. 162–210.

²³ It is worthwhile mentioning, for the sake of avoiding possible misunderstandings, that to affirm the radical dependence of all creatures on God, and therefore their intrinsic mutability, in no way amounts to saying that creatures are for that reason fragile, unaccomplished or drastically deficient. As a matter of fact, their radical dependence on the power of God is actually the very reason of their consistency and autonomy, since their participated *esse* is something they each possess on their own, as their very own act. For a slightly different view of creaturely being, with perhaps a stronger emphasis on the *vanitas* of created being and on creature's *vertibilitas in nihilo*, see BONAVENTURE, *I Sent.*, proem. (ed. Quaracchi, vol. 1, p. 3): “Profundum creationis est

Perrier has recently rightly emphasized, is nothing else than being in potency with respect to the acts that a thing's entitative composition fundamentally renders possible.²⁴ In other words, since all creatures are not of themselves the very act whereby they exist, to become actualized by their actions or operations is constitutive and distinctive of their very condition as creatures.²⁵

That all creatures are metaphysically constituted in such a way that fundamentally renders possible the reception of additional acts that complete and perfect their being, implies that all creatures are radically capable of becoming, through their own operations, more perfectly actual than what they already are. Everything seeks to become further actualized. This process of increasing actualizations points, in the end, to the fact that all creatures seek to resemble God by becoming as actualized as they possibly can. All things aspire to the good — all things, in other words, strive after the perfection their own operations bring forth — because they, as Aquinas says, participate in God according to a mode of assimilation or resemblance:²⁶ they all seek to resemble God by becoming increasingly more actualized. As Aquinas notes in his *Commentary on the Sentences* when asking whether creatures exist for the sake of God's goodness, there is no problem in saying that, besides existing *propter bonitatem Dei*, they also exist for the sake of their own operation. The apparent problem with this last assertion is its apparent incompatibility with affirming that all things exist for the sake of God's goodness, because the divine goodness is something extrinsic to creatures, since it is found formally in God, but their operations are clearly something of the creatures themselves, intrinsic to them. Thomas sees no problem in considering both claims to be true, because, as he remarks, a thing's operation is the very final perfection in which that thing exists or subsists. A thing's operation, in other words, is the very same act whereby it exists, but fully actualized by its own activities. By performing the operations that are distinctive to its nature, a thing is doing nothing but perfecting and completing its being precisely inasmuch as it is the specific kind of thing it is. Now, what

vanitas esse creati." For further references, see D. CASTILLO, *Trascendencia e inmanencia de Dios en S. Buenaventura*, Salamanca: Naturaleza y Gracia — Imprenta del Monasterio de Benedictinas, 1974, p. 48–65; and V. SALAS, "Bonaventure on the Vanity of Being. Towards a Metaphysic of Ecclesiastes," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 90, n. 4 (2016), p. 635–663. For a recent reappraisal of Bonaventure's thought on these matters, see L. SOLIGNAC, "La nature dans la pensée de saint Bonaventure ou la physique du salut," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 122 (2022), p. 297–325.

²⁴ See E. PERRIER, *L'attrait divin*, p. 183.

²⁵ See E. PERRIER, *L'attrait divin*, p. 86.

²⁶ See *ST*, I, q. 6, a. 4, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 70): "A primo igitur per suam essentiam ente et bono, unumquodque potest dici bonum et ens, inquantum participat ipsum per modum cuiusdam assimilationis, licet remote et deficienter, ut ex superioribus patet. Sic ergo unumquodque dicitur bonum bonitate divina, sicut primo principio exemplari, effectivo et finali totius bonitatis."

a thing is, is that which God intended it to be, not in a merely static fashion, but precisely inasmuch as God endowed it with natural appetites and the required faculties whereby it can achieve the good toward which those appetites naturally incline it. This means, then, that achieving its perfection by means of its operation is for every creature nothing else than approaching as much as it possibly can the perfection of being that makes it not only exist as the kind of thing it is, but also, and just as fundamentally, to intensify its actuality by its own activity. The more actualized a thing is by means of its operation, the more it resembles the divine goodness that it naturally strives to imitate by seeking its own perfection. As Thomas boldly states, it is the very same to say that a thing exists for the sake of its operation as to say it exists for the sake of the divine goodness.²⁷

This means, then, that all creatures are metaphysically equipped to perform the kinds of operations that will bring their being to the highest possible degree of actuality, according in each case to their particular mode of being or essence. If all creatures act because they are metaphysically open to the reception of further acts that complete their being, and thus establish in them a more perfect resemblance of God — who is the unrestricted and unparticipated actuality of being — then the very God who so created them has endowed them not only with their very own act of being, but also with all that is necessary to perform the operations whereby they can achieve that further perfection and completion.²⁸ It should be no surprise, then, that Aquinas considers a creature's operation as its final or definitive perfection, or — said another way — that the good of any creature consists precisely in its operation.²⁹ All creatures are in need of perfection or completion, and so they all have God-given natural appetites whereby they are inclined to act in order to attain the good that is proportionate or suited to their natures. That the act or operation they perform is their good as creatures means, then, that it is in and through their operations that creatures acquire the

²⁷ See *Super II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2 (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 2, p. 48): “Ad secundum dicendum, quod ipsa operatio est ultima perfectio in qua res existit: habitus enim et potentia imperfectionem dicunt: et ideo idem est rei esse propter suam operationem et propter divinam bonitatem, ad quam maxime accedit secundum quod maxime est in actu perfecto.”

²⁸ See *ST*, I, q. 94, a. 3, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 416): “Respondeo dicendum quod naturali ordine perfectum praecedit imperfectum, sicut et actus potentiam: quia ea quae sunt in potentia, non reducuntur ad actum nisi per aliquod ens actu. Et quia res primitus a Deo institutae sunt, non solum ut in seipsis essent, sed etiam ut essent aliorum principia; ideo productae sunt in statu perfecto, in quo possent esse principia aliorum.”

²⁹ See *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 113, n. 2869 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 172): “Omnis enim res propter suam operationem esse videtur: operatio enim est ultima perfectio rei;” and *In Ethic.*, I, l. 10 (ed. Leon., vol. 47/1, p. 35, l. 24–26): “Cuiuslibet rei habentis propriam operationem, bonum suum et hoc quod bene est ei consistit in eius operatione.”

completion they strive after. It is through its operations that a creature is able to resemble God more perfectly.

2.1. *Non propter hoc amat natura, quia suum est, sed quia bonum est*

The notion in Aquinas's metaphysics that picks up both the grounding actuality of being and the added richness or plenitude that is acquired through operation, is the notion of the good.³⁰ Things are good by virtue of being in act. This means that creatures are good, firstly, already as they are — inasmuch as they possess the fundamental actuality of being — but they can also intensify their goodness by means of the operations they perform. These operations complete and perfect their being by further actualizing it. All creatures seek and love their good, but that does not mean that nature's goal or, in Aquinas's language, *intentio*, rests or settles on the fact that it is *their* good, but rather simply on the fact that it is *good*: what moves creatures is not primarily and formally the fact that the good they are seeking is *their* good, but rather the sheer fact that it is *good*. If the thing they pursue is a good that they naturally seek — i.e., a good to which they have a *natural* inclination — then that good necessarily has to be *their* good, a good *to them*, but they strive after it not because it is *their* good, but simply because it is good.³¹

If creatures somehow formally desired their good not because it is *good*, but rather because it is *theirs*, then it would follow that the natural love that God has inscribed in their natures for the good suited to them, and which moves them to operate in the first place, would be ordered to something that, in reality, is incapable of driving them to operate. What sets the entire activity of a creature in motion, and what everything strives after in all of its actions, is simply the good, i.e., the actuality or perfection that is naturally proportionate or commensurate to what each thing is in its own nature, and which, therefore, perfects and completes it. If creatures desired the good they seek under the formality of 'being possessed by them', of being 'their' good, then what they would be desiring is not actually the good, but rather a certain state or condition that is consequent upon the attainment of the good. But if that were the case, if that were what

³⁰ See, for example, *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 263): "In rebus autem invenitur bonum, non solum quantum ad substantiam rerum, sed etiam quantum ad ordinem earum in finem."

³¹ See *Super II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, ad 2 (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 2, p. 127): "Ad secundum dicendum, quod natura in se curva dicitur, quia semper diligit bonum suum. Non tamen oportet quod in hoc quiescat intentio quod suum est, sed in hoc quod bonum est: nisi enim sibi esset bonum aliquo modo, vel secundum veritatem, vel secundum apparentiam, nunquam ipsum amaret. Non tamen propter hoc amat quia suum est, sed quia bonum est: bonum enim est per se obiectum voluntatis."

creatures were actually seeking, then they would not even operate at all, because the only thing that is capable of moving them to act — i.e., the only thing that can truly act as a final cause — is the good or actuality that perfects something else's nature. To desire the good under the formality of 'being possessed by the agent' would be to desire the possession of something *without actually desiring the thing* the possession of which would satisfy the creature's longing. If anything moves at all in any way whatsoever, that can only happen if what sets the thing in motion is the good, i.e., something distinct from the agent itself and which possesses a perfection or actuality that the creature pursues as its completion and perfection.

Besides being entirely ineffective, a natural love that would incline a creature to the good solely under the formality of its possession, would be fundamentally disordered, for it would incline the creature to pursue the good not for its intrinsic actuality and perfection, but rather purely as it relates to them, as it is *their* good. That this would be a disorder is clearly seen if one pays attention to the fact — already mentioned, but explained in more detail below — that, by performing their operations, all creatures are ultimately striving after a more perfect resemblance of God, inasmuch as they are seeking as much actuality as they are capable of attaining. If creatures acted solely for the sake of possessing some good as theirs — i.e., if that were actually the formality under which they operated — then they would be seeking not the likeness of God, but rather their own satisfaction or gratification *on the occasion* of striving after some good, even if that good is, ultimately, the divine good. The entire created universe, then, would not be seeking in its various operations the likeness of God, the communication and participation of the divine goodness in all of creation, but rather their own individual, self-centered, enclosed fulfilment.

In one of the texts that scholars have most often quoted in the contemporary debates concerning the problem of love, Aquinas considers that the view that holds that angels, by a purely natural love, love themselves more than God, is manifestly false, for such a view would imply that angels — and by extension all other creatures — would be endowed with a natural desire that would be, of itself, perverse or disordered:

The falsity of this opinion [i.e., that the angel, with a natural love, loves itself more than God] is clearly manifested if one considers that to which a thing is naturally moved in the natural order of things, for the natural inclination of those things which lack reason reveals the natural inclination in a will of intellectual nature. In natural things, indeed, everything which, according to its nature, belongs to another <precisely> in that which it is, is principally and more strongly inclined to that other to which it belongs, than towards itself. This natural inclination is made plain by those things that are moved according to nature

[*naturaliter aguntur*], for, as <Aristotle> says in *Physics* II, 199a10, “anything that is moved naturally has a natural capacity to be thus moved” [...]. Consequently, since God is the universal good, and under this good both man and angel and all creatures are comprised — because every creature naturally belongs to God in that which each of them is [*secundum id quod est*] — it follows that angel and man alike, with a natural love, love God more than themselves and with a greater love. Otherwise, if either of them naturally loved themselves more than God, it would follow that natural love would be perverse, and that it would not be perfected but destroyed by charity.³²

That angels, as all other creatures, belong to God precisely in that which they are [*alterius sunt secundum naturam quod ipsi sunt*] is just another way of expressing the radically creaturely character of their being. All things belong to God because all things receive their very being from God, and are preserved in being only by the continuous will of God, who desires them to be. If all things that in their very nature belong to another seek primarily and more strongly the good of that to which they belong, and if all creatures belong in the most radical aspect of their reality to God — i.e., in their very being — then all creatures naturally and primarily seek God Himself — i.e., all creatures love God more than themselves — and this by a love that is natural and metaphysically grounded in what they are as creatures.

2.2. *Appetendo proprias perfectiones, appetunt ipsum Deum*

By performing the operations that direct them towards the goods to which they are naturally inclined, creatures are always seeking their own perfection.

³² *ST*, I, q. 60, a. 5, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 104): “Sed falsitas huius opinionis [i.e., quod angelus naturali dilectione plus diligit se quam Deum] manifeste appareret, si quis in rebus naturalibus consideret ad quid res naturaliter moveatur: inclinatio enim naturalis in his quae sunt sine ratione, demonstrat inclinationem naturalem in voluntate intellectualis naturae. Unumquodque autem in rebus naturalibus, quod secundum naturam hoc ipsum quod est, alterius est, principalius et magis inclinatur in id cuius est, quam in seipsum. Et haec inclinatio naturalis demonstratur ex his quae naturaliter aguntur: quia »unumquodque, sicut agitur naturaliter, sic aptum natum est agi,« ut dicitur in II *Physic.* <199a10> [...] Quia igitur bonum universale est ipse Deus, et sub hoc bono continetur etiam angelus et homo et omnis creatura, quia omnis creatura naturaliter, secundum id quod est, Dei est; sequitur quod naturali dilectione etiam angelus et homo plus et principalius diligit Deum quam seipsum. Alioquin, si naturaliter plus seipsum diligenter quam Deum, sequeretur quod naturalis dilectio esset perversa; et quod non perficeretur per caritatem, sed destrueretur.” On the impossibility of natural love being perverse, see *Quodlibet I*, q. 4, a. 3 [8], corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 25/2, p. 188, l. 50–57): “Dilectio enim naturalis est quaedam naturalis inclinatio indita naturae a Deo; <a Deo> nichil autem est perversum; impossibile est ergo quod aliqua naturalis inclinatio vel dilectio sit perversa; perversa autem dilectio est ut aliquis dilectione amicicie diligit plus se quam Deum; non potest ergo talis dilectio esse naturalis.” For a closer examination of the passage from the *Summa*, see T. OSBORNE, *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics*, p. 78–80.

When they so act, they formally seek the good they pursue *as good, because* it is good, and not primarily as being theirs, as if what they fundamentally desired was their own subjective possession of it. As we just mentioned, by performing their operations, creatures are also ultimately striving after a more finalized resemblance of God, because they are seeking as much actuality as they are capable of attaining. This means, as the previous paragraph noted, that all creatures naturally and primarily strive after God Himself. But how could this be? How could it be that creatures primarily and more fundamentally strive after God if what they naturally desire is *their* completion or perfection? Or, put differently, what does it actually mean to strive after God?

In various contexts, all throughout his literary production, Aquinas has no qualms about unambiguously saying that for creatures to seek their own perfection, is also, and more fundamentally, to seek God Himself — each, of course, in the manner proper to its nature.³³ Some creatures, indeed, seek God because they know him and are capable of actively and freely directing their operations towards him; this is what rational creatures do. Others do not know God Himself, but only certain participations of His goodness, and so it is in their pursuit of those participations that they are said to ultimately seek God; this is what non-rational animals do. Other creatures, finally, entirely lack knowledge and so they are said to seek God only because, as Aquinas notes, “they are inclined to their ends by a superior being endowed with knowledge”.³⁴

In the text just quoted above *in extenso* from *S. Th.*, I, q. 60, a. 5, as well as in a passage from *Quodlibet I* cited earlier, Aquinas says that it is easier for us to understand what natural inclinations are in general if we consider first the natural inclinations of those things that entirely lack knowledge. In light of what we have just seen about natural appetites and the underlying metaphysics of creaturely operation, this should by now come as no surprise: creatures that are deprived of knowledge can be directed towards their ends only by a superior

³³ Of the various places where Aquinas expounds this doctrine, see, just as a mere sample, *Super II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, corp. (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 2, p. 48): “Et ideo singulari modo Deus est finis in quem tendit creatura rationalis praeter modum communem quo tendit in ipsum omnis creatura, in quantum scilicet omnis creatura desiderat aliquid bonum, quod est similitudo quaedam divinae bonitatis. Et ex hoc patet quod in omni bono summum bonum desideratur;” and the text quoted above from *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 462).

³⁴ See *ST*, I, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 66): “Ad secundum dicendum quod omnia, appetendo proprias perfectiones, appetunt ipsum Deum, in quantum perfectiones omnium rerum sunt quaedam similitudines divini esse, ut ex dictis patet. Et sic eorum quae Deum appetunt, quaedam cognoscunt ipsum secundum seipsum: quod est proprium creaturae rationalis. Quaedam vero cognoscunt aliquas participationes suae bonitatis, quod etiam extenditur usque ad cognitionem sensibilem. Quaedam vero appetitum naturalem habent absque cognitione, utpote inclinata ad suos fines ab alio superiori cognoscente.” The text from *Quodlibet I*, q. 4, a. 3 [8], resp. [ed. Leon, vol. 25/2, p. 188, ll. 62–66] quoted above says just as much.

being that does in fact have knowledge, i.e., God, because only God can inscribe in their very natures the inclinations whereby they perform their specific operations. Now, directing creatures towards their ends, though more easily recognizable in the case of creatures that lack knowledge, is not a rare exception God brings about within the created order, but is rather a universal law of all of creation: *all* things are directed towards the ends God has set for them as *their* completion or perfection. Everything is directed towards the good God wants it to attain, but always and necessarily in the manner suited to its nature. The crucial truth at play here, however, is that even this very nature that requires from the creature a specific mode of striving after its good, is a nature God Himself has created. This means, then, that the perfections that creatures seek, the good they strive after, is the good God wants them to possess as *their* completion, the good God wants them to acquire in *their very nature*.

As Aquinas frequently notes, something can be good only to the extent that it participates in a limited manner in God's goodness. This is just another way of saying that things are good to the extent that they *are*. If every creature strives after the good proportionate to its nature because it is good, and if anything that is good is good only to the extent that it participates to some degree in the divine goodness, then this means that what all creatures are naturally pursuing in their operations is the very God whose finite resemblance they find in the creature that is for them the good to which they are naturally inclined.³⁵ The good intended by natural inclinations is a participated likeness of the unique cause of all goodness, so even if creatures are incapable of knowing that resemblance and strive after it only in the manner of animals, plants or inanimate objects, and even if we, humans, who are capable of that knowledge, are unaware of it or simply decide to deliberately ignore it, it nonetheless remains necessary that

³⁵ See *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 462): “Ad tertium dicendum quod omnia appetunt Deum ut finem, appetendo quodcumque bonum, sive appetitu intelligibili, sive sensibili, sive naturali, qui est sine cognitione: quia nihil habet rationem boni et appetibilis, nisi secundum quod participat Dei similitudinem.” To say that something has the *ratio boni et appetibilis* to the extent that it participates in the likeness of God, is no contradiction to what Aquinas says in *ST*, I, q. 5, a. 1, where he explains that the *ratio boni* consists in being desirable [*appetibile*] and that something is *appetibile* only to the extent that it is perfect, i.e., only to the extent that it is in act. That this entails no contradiction at all can be easily seen if one keeps in mind that creatures *are* only to the extent that they are finite resemblances of the divine being. In other words, to the extent that creatures participate in the likeness of God, to that extent they both *are* and are *good*. See *ST*, I, q. 5, a. 1, resp. (ed. Leon, vol. 4, p. 56): “Ratio enim boni in hoc consistit, quod aliquid sit appetibile: unde Philosophus, in I *Ethic.* [1094a3], dicit quod bonum »est quod omnia appetunt.« Manifestum est autem quod unumquodque est appetibile secundum quod est perfectum: nam omnia appetunt suam perfectionem. Intantum est autem perfectum unumquodque, in quantum est actu: unde manifestum est quod intantum est aliquid bonum, in quantum est ens: esse enim est actualitas omnis rei, ut ex superioribus patet.”

the ultimate reason that lies behind any creaturely operation can only be the desire to attain that good *because* it is a likeness of God.

As we have seen already above, Aquinas thinks that it is the very same thing to say that something exists for the sake of its operation and to say it exists for the sake of the divine goodness.³⁶ Now, even if in our understanding of creaturely movement it is truly equivalent to say one or the other, it is nonetheless not irrelevant to recognize which of these two comes first in the order of causality. To say that creatures exist for the sake of their operation is to say that they are perfected and completed through the goods they attain by means of their actions, but this can only be the case if the goods they attain and to which they are naturally inclined are precisely the goods God intends them to have. In other words, it is *because* creatures seek the divine likeness that they tend towards their own good and not the other way around.³⁷ The causal meaning of this ‘because’ is twofold, referring to both the formal and final cause: on the one hand, as we have seen, creatures formally seek the good they strive after simply as being good, because it is good. This is the case because what they are ultimately striving after is the divine likeness found in everything that exists. What ultimately moves all creatures to operate is the divine resemblance that each creature embodies simply on account of participating in the actuality of being, even if the good so pursued is not correspondingly conceptualized, and even if the agent is not even capable in the first place of having that knowledge. On the other hand, creatures tend towards their good and perform all their operations *for the sake* of the divine likeness found in that good. The divine good, in other words, is also the final cause of all creaturely movement. As he sums it up in his discussion of grace, every particular thing loves its own good *because* of the common good of the universe, which is God.³⁸

³⁶ See the text above from *II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2. In the *Summa contra gentiles* he says that it makes no difference [*non est autem differentia sive hoc sive illud dicatur*] whether one says that in acting creatures desire the likeness of God or that they desire their own operation [*Contra gentiles*, III, c. 24, n. 2051 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 31)]: “Planum igitur fit quod ea etiam quae cognitione carent, possunt operari propter finem; et appetere bonum naturali appetitu et appetere divinam similitudinem; et propriam operationem. Non est autem differentia sive hoc sive illud dicatur.”

³⁷ See *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 24, n. 2051 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 31): “Propter hoc igitur tendit [unumquodque] in proprium bonum, quia tendit in divinam similitudinem, et non e converso. Unde patet quod omnia appetunt divinam similitudinem quasi ultimum finem.”

³⁸ See *ST*, I-II, q. 109, a. 3, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 7, p. 295): “Unde etiam naturali appetitu vel amore unaquaeque res particularis amat bonum suum propter bonum commune totius universi, quod est Deus.” Aquinas is fond of saying that the order exhibited in the operations of creatures, whereby some operate in pursuit of the good found in others, is necessarily subordinated to the more fundamental order of the entire universe towards God: God is the *bonum commune totius universi et omnium partium eius*. One can speak, for that reason, of a twofold good of order found in the universe: one corresponds to the order that all the parts of the universe have between them-

Now, besides the fundamental truth that all things attain their perfection, and are thus more thoroughly assimilated to God by means of their distinctive operations, one also finds in Aquinas's writings a rather neglected aspect of his understanding of creaturely activity and divine resemblance. All things perform their operations not only because through them they acquire a more perfected degree of actuality, but also because in and through operating they somehow imitate God's own beatitude, which also consists in operating. While addressing the nature of virtues as operative habits, Aquinas replies to an objection that holds that virtues cannot be ordered toward operations, because, as Augustine said, virtues dispose us towards God Himself and not towards our own operations.³⁹ Aquinas replies that there is, again, no problem in making both claims — i.e., that virtues dispose us towards our own operations and that they also dispose us towards God — because in God Himself his operation is his very substance, so that we are allowed to say that we are all the more assimilated to God the more we act or operate. In other words, we strive after the divine similitude not only because we pursue goods that are themselves resemblances of the divine goodness, but also already by the fact that we operate. It is no surprise that our own happiness consists in an operation, in something we perform, because we are most greatly conformed to God precisely by operating, for God's own happiness is his operation.⁴⁰

selves, and the other one, more fundamental, to the order of the entire universe as it relates to God. But God desires both orders, i.e., God wants the order of all the parts of the universe between themselves, so that, in creating them, He wants the good of each creature as *its* own good. See, among various texts: *Contra gentiles*, I, c. 78, n. 663 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 91): “Secundum Philosophum in IX *Metaph.* [1075a 11–15], duplex bonum ordinis invenitur in universo: unum quidem secundum quod totum universum ordinatur ad id quod est extra universum, sicut exercitus ordinatur ad ducem; aliud secundum quod partes universi ordinantur ad invicem, sicut et partes exercitus. Secundus autem ordo est propter primum. Deus autem, ex hoc quod vult se ut finis est, vult alia quae ordinantur in ipsum ut in finem, sicut probatum est [c. 75]. Vult igitur bonum ordinis totius universi in ipsum, et bonum ordinis universi secundum partes suas ad invicem. Bonum autem ordinis consurgit ex singulis bonis. Vult igitur etiam singula bona;” and *Quodlibet I*, q. 4, a. 3 [8], corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 25/2, p. 188–189, l. 75–82): “Manifestum est autem quod Deus est bonum commune totius universi et omnium partium eius; unde quaelibet creatura suo modo naturaliter plus amat Deum quam se ipsam, insensibilia quidem naturaliter, bruto vero animalia sensitive, creatura vero rationalis per intellectualem amorem, qui dilectio dicitur.”

³⁹ See *ST*, I-II, q. 55, a. 2, arg. 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 351): “Praeterea, Philosophus dicit, in VII *Physic.*, quod »virtus est dispositio perfecti ad optimum.« Optimum autem ad quod hominem oportet disponi per virtutem, est ipse Deus, ut probat Augustinus in libro II *De moribus Ecclesiae*; ad quem disponitur anima per assimilationem ad ipsum. Ergo videtur quod virtus dicatur qualitas quaedam animae in ordine ad Deum, tanquam assimilativa ad ipsum: non autem in ordine ad operationem. Non igitur est habitus operativus.”

⁴⁰ See *ST*, I-II, q. 55, a. 2, ad 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 6, p. 351): “Ad tertium dicendum quod, cum Dei substantia sit eius actio, summa assimilatio hominis ad Deum est secundum aliquam operationem.

*3. BEATITUDO SIGNIFICAT BONUM PERFECTUM
INTELLECTUALIS NATURAE*

All things seek their own perfection by performing the kinds of operations they are suited to execute precisely by reason of being just the type of thing they are. They have all been endowed with natural appetites that incline them to perform those operations, because all things have been created by God so as to attain the kind or degree of divine resemblance that is appropriate to them. In the particular case of intellectual creatures, they do not only seek God by seeking their own perfections, but, precisely because of their intellectuality, are able to strive after God Himself, to possess God and be united to Him. This means that the specifically intellectual operation — i.e., the *operatio propter quam* intellectual creatures are — allows them to actively know God, and as a result of that knowledge, to be able to freely love Him. Intellectual creatures, in other words, can transform their natural love of God into an *elicited* love of God. Their happiness, then, as intellectual creatures — i.e., *our* happiness as rational creatures — lies in correctly performing this specific type of operation only we can execute: the knowledge and free love of God.⁴¹

In order to understand the particularities of human activity and how we are called, through our operations, to make out of our natural love of God one that is elicited — and how this very call opens up the possibility of positing ourselves, and not God, as the end of all of our actions — we will first examine Aquinas's understanding of the nature of intellectuality and the openness of intellectual creatures to the knowledge of all being. By virtue of being open to the knowledge of all being, intellectual creatures are spontaneously moved to seek knowledge of the cause of all things, including, of course, of their very own existence. This inescapable intellectual dynamism leads us humans to attain a certain natural knowledge of God, albeit vague and not theoretically elaborated. From this natural knowledge of God arises in us a certain — as Aquinas calls it — indeterminate love of God, which constitutes the very first step in the specifically human task of developing and nurturing an elicited love of God. Given

Unde, sicut supra dictum est, felicitas sive beatitudo, per quam homo maxime Deo conformatur, quae est finis humanae vitae, in operatione consistit.”

⁴¹ See *ST*, I, q. 26, a. 2, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 302): “Respondeo dicendum quod beatitudo, sicut dictum est, significat bonum perfectum intellectualis naturae. Et inde est quod, sicut unaquaque res appetit suam perfectionem, ita et intellectualis natura naturaliter appetit esse beatam. Id autem quod est perfectissimum in qualibet intellectuali natura, est intellectualis operatio, secundum quam capit quodammodo omnia. Unde cuiuslibet intellectualis naturae creatae beatitudo consistit in intelligendo. In Deo autem non est aliud esse et intelligere secundum rem, sed tantum secundum intelligentiae rationem. Attribuenda ergo est Deo beatitudo secundum intellectum, sicut et aliis beatis, qui per assimilationem ad beatitudinem ipsius, beati dicuntur.”

our rational nature, the perfection of the properly human manner of seeking our good requires, then, that we freely and explicitly direct our actions to God.⁴²

3.1. Ex hoc autem quod substantia aliqua est intellectualis, comprehensiva est totius entis

To be an intellect, or to be endowed with an intellectual nature, is nothing but to be fundamentally open to the knowledge of all things inasmuch as they *are*, since knowledge, as Aquinas says, has of itself a certain infinity that can extend to all things.⁴³ All potencies are by definition ordered to a specific kind of act, the type of act which actualizes them. That act, in turn, is itself specified by the object to which it is naturally ordered, such that the nature of both the act and the potency hinge ultimately on the kind of object they attain. But in this object — and this is the crucial distinction — there are two basic aspects to be considered, a material and a formal one. The distinction between these two aspects points to how the object relates to the corresponding potency (through its acts): materially, or on the side of the realities attained by the potency, many different things, of varied natures, can fall under its scope, but, formally speaking, all those things are related to the potency and are therefore capable of being

⁴² On the need for human happiness to move from a natural love of God to an elicited love of God, see J. MOLINERO, *Elegir a Dios, tarea del hombre. Tránsito del amor natural al amor elícito a Dios según santo Tomás*, Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1979.

⁴³ See *ST*, I, q. 54, a. 2, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 45): “Secunda autem actio [quae manet in ipso agente] de sui ratione habet infinitatem, vel simpliciter, vel secundum quid. Simpliciter quidem, sicut intelligere, cuius obiectum est verum, et velle, cuius obiectum est bonum, quorum utrumque convertitur cum ente; et ita intelligere et velle, quantum est de se, habent se ad omnia; et utrumque recipit speciem ab obiecto. Secundum quid autem infinitum est sentire, quod se habet ad omnia sensibilia, sicut visus ad omnia visibilia. Esse autem cuiuslibet creaturae est determinatum ad unum secundum genus et speciem: esse autem solius Dei est simpliciter infinitum, in se omnia comprehendens, ut dicit Dionysius, v cap. *De divinis nominibus* [Dionysiana, vol. 1, p. 333–334]. Unde solum esse divinum est suum intelligere et suum velle.” See also *Contra gentiles*, II, c. 98, n. 1836 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 270): “Ex hoc autem quod substantia aliqua est intellectualis, comprehensiva est totius entis.” For Aquinas’s understanding of what it means to be an intellect and every intellect’s natural openness to the knowledge of being, see J. SÁNCHEZ RUIZ, “La conoscenza dell’essere e la infinitezza dell’intelletto umano secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquin,” *Divus Thomas*, vol. 59 (1956), p. 143–169; F. CANALS VIDAL, “El lumen intellectus agentis en la ontología del conocimiento de santo Tomás,” in F. Canals Vidal, *Cuestiones de fundamentación*, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 1981, p. 11–40; F. CANALS VIDAL, “Sobre el punto de partida y el fundamento de la metafísica,” in F. Canals Vidal, *Cuestiones de fundamentación*, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 1981, p. 79–164; Y. FLOUCAT, *L'intime fécondité de l'intelligence. Le verbe mental selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Pierre Téqui, 2001; and T. CORY, “Knowing as Being? A Metaphysical Reading of the Identity of Intellect and Intelligibles in Aquinas,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 91, n. 3 (2017), p. 333–351.

grasped by it, because they all share in one, unique aspect to which that potency is naturally ordered. In the case of the human intellect, the formal object is that which constitutes the very root or cause of any object's intelligibility, that is, that which renders something capable of being intellectually known at all. It is, in other words, that which makes an object able to relate to the intellect in the first place, and it constitutes the perspective or *ratio* under which the intellect conceptualizes everything that it knows. This role is unsurprisingly reserved to being, to which our intellect is naturally and fundamentally ordered, because nothing can be intentionally assimilated and received by the intellect unless it somehow is, or, as Aquinas states it numerous times, unless it is in act.⁴⁴ To be an intellect simply is to be ordered and open to knowing being in just this universal, unrestricted manner. The human intellect, even if the lowest in the *genus intelligibilium*, is fundamentally constituted by this openness to all being, without any restrictions.⁴⁵

The human intellect is naturally open to the knowledge of all being because our agent intellect already possesses in itself the intellectual actuality whereby it can render all other things actually intelligible, since it is, as Aquinas says, nothing but “a certain participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which the eternal reasons are contained”.⁴⁶ In the various places where Aquinas refers to the light of the agent intellect in these terms, he does not usually flesh out in detail what this participation in the eternal reasons is or entails. The relevant picture can be sketched out, however, from other parts of his works. In the uncreated divine light, the ideas or eternal reasons of all things are not only contained in the utter simplicity of God, but are also actually intelligible and

⁴⁴ See, among many references to this fundamental principle, *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 3, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 210): “Unumquodque autem in quantum habet de esse, intantum est cognoscibile. Et propter hoc dicitur in III *De anima* [431b 20–22] quod »anima est quodammodo omnia« secundum sensum et intellectum;” and *ST*, I, q. 87, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 355): “Respondeo dicendum quod unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia, ut dicitur in IX *Metaphysicae* [1051a 29–31]: sic enim aliquid est ens et verum, quod sub cognitione cadit, prout actu est.”

⁴⁵ On Aquinas's understanding of the so-called “genus of intelligibles” and, more broadly, on the idea of a metaphysical genus, see G. DOOLAN, “Aquinas on Substance as a Metaphysical Genus,” *The Science of Being as Being. Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. G. Doolan, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011, p. 99–128; G. DOOLAN, “Aquinas on the Metaphysician's vs. the Logician's Categories,” *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 4, n. 2 (2014), p. 133–155; and B. CARL, “Human Intellectual Potency and the Genus of Intelligibles. A Response to Therese Cory's *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*,” *Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. G. Klima, A. Hall, (Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics, 14), Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, p. 21–32.

⁴⁶ See *ST*, I, q. 84, a. 5, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 322): “Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae.”

actually understood. In the one, simple, undivided act of divine intellect, God both understands Himself as well as all the finite, limited ways in which His divine perfection might be participated by all possible creatures.⁴⁷ At the opposite end of the order or genus of intelligible things, human beings stand in sheer potentiality of becoming actually intelligible and understood. Our potency for intelligibility is actualized only when our possible intellects are informed by an intelligible species that is abstracted by the activity of the agent intellect.⁴⁸ Even if Aquinas regularly compares the human intellect to what prime matter is in the order of being,⁴⁹ the agent intellect remains a fundamentally active power or *virtus* that renders actually intelligible what is only potentially so — i.e., it renders it immaterial.⁵⁰ Aquinas refers to the agent intellect as the very act or actuality of the intelligibles it knows, since it is itself what causes their actual

⁴⁷ See *ST*, I, q. 15, a. 2, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 202): “Ipse [Deus] enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit: unde cognoscit eam secundum omnem modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis. Unaquaeque autem creatura habet propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo modo participat divinae essentiae similitudinem. Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae.”

⁴⁸ See *Contra gentiles*, II, c. 77, n. 1581 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 226): “Habet enim anima intellectiva aliquid in actu ad quod phantasma est in potentia et ad aliquid est in potentia quod in phantasmatisbus actu invenitur. Habet enim substantia animae humanae immaterialitatem, et, sicut ex dictis patet [II, c. 68], ex hoc habet naturam intellectualem: quia omnis substantia immaterialis est huiusmodi. Ex hoc autem nondum habet quod assimiletur huic vel illi rei determinate, quod requiritur ad hoc quod anima nostra hanc vel illam rem determinate cognoscat: omnis enim cognitio fit secundum similitudinem cogniti in cognoscente. Remanet igitur ipsa anima intellectiva in potentia ad determinatas similitudines rerum cognoscibilium a nobis, quae sunt naturae rerum sensibilium.”

⁴⁹ See, for example, *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 22/2, p. 238, l. 143–158): “Sciendum est igitur [quod] nihil prohibet esse aliquid actu unum et in potentia alterum, sicut corpus diaphanum est actu quidem corpus sed potentia coloratum; et similiter possibile est esse aliquid actu ens quod in genere intelligibilium est potentia tantum. Sicut enim est gradus actus et potentiae in entibus, quod aliquid est potentia tantum ut materia prima, aliquid actu tantum ut Deus, aliquid actu et potentia ut omnia intermedia, sic est in genere intelligibilium aliquid ut actu tantum, scilicet essentia divina, aliquid ut potentia tantum, ut intellectus possibilis, quod hoc modo se habet in ordine intelligibilium sicut materia prima in ordine sensibilium, sicut dicit Commentator in III *De anima* [ed. Crawford, p. 387–413];” and also *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 8 (ed. Leon., vol. 22/2, p. 322, l. 261–269): “sicut enim materia prima est in potentia ad omnes formas sensibiles, ita et intellectus possibilis noster ad omnes formas intelligibiles. Unde in ordine intelligibilium <anima nostra> est sicut potentia pura ut materia in ordine sensibilium; et ideo, sicut materia non est sensibilis nisi per formam supervenientem, ita intellectus possibilis non est intelligibilis nisi per speciem superinductam.”

⁵⁰ See *In De anima*, III, 4 (ed. Leon., vol. 45/1, p. 221, l. 155–160): “Comparatur igitur <intellectus agens> ut actus respectu intelligibilium, in quantum est *quaedam virtus immaterialis activa, potens alia similia sibi facere, scilicet immaterialia*. Et per hunc modum, ea quae sunt intelligibilia in potentia, facit intelligibilia in actu” (emphasis added).

intelligibility or immateriality.⁵¹ By saying that the light of the agent intellect is a participation of the uncreated divine light Aquinas is saying, then, that just as in the one, undivided divine light all the eternal reasons of things are actually present in their full intelligibility, so too by the created, finite light of the human agent intellect the substantial and accidental forms of things, which are naturally present in the things themselves, become actually intelligible to us. Since the natural forms of existing material things are modelled on the eternal reasons that are actually intelligible in the divine mind, whenever the agent intellect renders them actually intelligible by immaterializing them, they come to share in the same intelligible character with which they are eternally present to the uncreated divine light.⁵²

3.2. Natura rationalis habet immediatum ordinem ad universale essendi principium

Since humans are radically open to the knowledge of all being, we can come to know God as the source or cause of all that exists. Indelible in every single human being there is an inextinguishable thrust and desire to know the unlimited, unparticipated act of being that is the source and cause of all of creation. Aquinas has no qualms with acknowledging this, and even sees in it a kind of phenomenological proof — not, in any case, a demonstrative one — of the strictly metaphysical necessity of positing the existence of a first principle whose very essence is entirely identical with its boundless act of being, i.e., a pure, all-embracing, unhindered actuality and perfection. Among the various passages where Aquinas speaks of this desire, he says in the *Summa contra Gentiles* that the knowledge of any effect naturally moves reason to desire the knowledge of its cause(s). Our knowledge of *ens universale*, then, naturally moves us to seek the knowledge of the cause of such universal being, which can only be God.⁵³

⁵¹ See, for example, *ST*, I, q. 87, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 5, p. 355–356): “Sed quia connaturale est intellectui nostro, secundum statum praesentis vitae, quod ad materialia et sensibilia respiciat, sicut supra dictum est [I, q. 84, a. 7]; consequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis.”

⁵² For further analysis of this aspect of Aquinas’s doctrine, emphasizing its remote Neoplatonic origins, see W. HANKEY, “*Participatio divini luminis*. Aquinas’s Doctrine of the Agent Intellect. Our Capacity for Contemplation,” *Dionysius*, vol. 22 (2004), p. 1–30.

⁵³ See *Contra Gentiles*, III, c. 25, n. 2066 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 33): “Praeterea. Cuiuslibet effectus cogniti naturaliter homo scire causam desiderat. Intellectus autem humanus cognoscit ens universale. Desiderat igitur naturaliter cognoscere causam eius, quae solum Deus est, ut in secundo [c. 15] probatum est. Non est autem aliquis assecutus finem ultimum quousque naturale desiderium quiescat. Non sufficit igitur ad felicitatem humanam, quae est ultimus finis, qualiscumque intelligibilis cognitio, nisi divina cognitio adsit, quae terminat naturale desiderium sicut ultimus finis. Est igitur ultimus finis hominis ipsa Dei cognitio.”

As he says in the *Summa Theologiae*, while discussing the necessity of faith for salvation, by knowing the universal *ratio entis* men are placed in an immediate relation [*immediatum ordinem*] with the universal cause of being [*universale essendi principium*].⁵⁴ In knowing everything it could ever conceivably know under the perspective of its formal object — i.e., as a participated, composite being that is, for that very reason, caused — human reason almost instinctively recognizes the need for a cause, and explanation, of its object's composition and limitation. Already before engaging in properly scientific metaphysical inquiry — if anything, the very possibility of such inquiry presupposes this dynamism — reason becomes aware of the fact that the beings it knows are radically insufficient to account for themselves, standing, as they are, in need of a cause and explanation. The being that is found in all creatures, Aquinas observes, “cannot be understood except as derived from divine being [*ut deductum ab esse divino*], as no proper effect can be understood except as derived from its proper cause”.⁵⁵

There are a host of instances in which Aquinas speaks in similar fashion, acknowledging a kind of natural, common knowledge of God present in all men: while discussing in the *Summa contra gentiles*, for example, the kind of knowledge that constitutes our final beatitude, Aquinas casually dismisses as a possible candidate the “common and confused knowledge of God” that “is present to almost all men”, and to which we “can arrive immediately by natural reason”.⁵⁶ In the *De veritate* he even explicitly says that in some sense all knowing things —

⁵⁴ See *ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 3, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 8, p. 28): “Respondeo dicendum quod in omnibus naturis ordinatis invenitur quod ad perfectionem naturae inferioris duo concurrunt: unum quidem quod est secundum proprium motum; aliud autem quod est secundum motum superioris naturae [...] Sola autem natura rationalis creata habet immediatum ordinem ad Deum. Quia ceterae creaturae non attingunt ad aliquid universale, sed solum ad aliquid particulare, participantes divinam bonitatem vel in essendo tantum, sicut inanimata, vel etiam in vivendo et cognoscendo singulare, sicut plantae et animalia: *natura autem rationalis, in quantum cognoscit universalem boni et entis rationem, habet immediatum ordinem ad universale essendi principium*. Perfectio ergo rationalis creaturae non solum consistit in eo quod ei competit secundum suam naturam, sed etiam in eo quod ei attribuitur ex quadam supernaturali participatione divinae bonitatis. Unde et supra dictum est [I-II, q. 3, a. 8] quod ultima beatitudo hominis consistit in quadam supernaturali Dei visione” (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ See *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5, ad 1 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 19): “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod licet causa prima, quae Deus est, non intret essentiam rerum creatarum; tamen esse, quod rebus creatis inest, non potest intelligi nisi ut deductum ab esse divino; sicut nec proprius effectus potest intelligi nisi ut deductus a causa propria.” For further examination of this passage, see J. OWENS, “The Intelligibility of Being,” *Gregorianum*, vol. 36 (1955), p. 169–193.

⁵⁶ See *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 38, n. 2161 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 44): “Est enim quaedam communis et confusa Dei cognitio, quae quasi omnibus hominibus adest: sive hoc sit per hoc quod Deum esse sit per se notum, sicut alia demonstrationis principia, sicut quibusdam videtur, ut in primo libro [c. 10] dictum est; sive, quod magis verum videtur, quia naturali ratione statim homo in aliqualem Dei cognitionem pervenire potest.”

and not just men — implicitly know God in the knowledge of everything else, since nothing is knowable “unless by <being> a likeness of the first truth”.⁵⁷ How can Aquinas say that the knowledge of God is implicit in the knowledge of everything else, or that men arrive at some knowledge of God almost immediately [*statim*], if he unequivocally denies that there is anything like an innate knowledge of God, and that, in this life, we can have no quidditative knowledge of Him?

This apparent contradiction vanishes if we pay attention precisely to the fact that the light of the agent intellect is a participation of the divine, uncreated light and that its natural activity consists in rendering material things actually intelligible in a way that, with the corresponding ontological and gnoseological provisions, is similar to the way in which they are eternally intelligible in the divine mind. Since being is the most proper and universal effect of God,⁵⁸ who conceives of all possible creatures as finite, limited participations of the unhindered, infinite actuality He is, whenever we know something, whatever that thing might be, that which we first and fundamentally know of it is precisely that it *is*, i.e., that it is a *being*. To know creatures primarily under that aspect in which they most properly and immediately resemble God — namely, inasmuch as they *are* — means that to exercise our natural, God-given capacity of rendering material things actually intelligible is nothing but to know things under that aspect or *ratio* in which they are more closely related to, and imitate, God. We should not be surprised, then, if we find passages like the ones mentioned where Aquinas says that God is somehow implicitly present in the knowledge of everything else, and that all men immediately arrive, from the knowledge of all other things, at some knowledge of God. This is, of course, a vague and confused kind of knowledge, not one that is in any way explicit or the object of conscious consideration.⁵⁹ Whatever it might be, it is not, in any case, a quidditative knowledge of God or of the eternal reasons as they are present in God’s

⁵⁷ See *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 1 (ed. Leon., vol. 22/3, p. 617, l. 72–77): “Ad primum igitur dicendum quod etiam omnia cognoscentia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quolibet cognito. Sicut enim nihil habet rationem appetibilis nisi per similitudinem primae bonitatis, ita nihil est cognoscibile nisi per similitudinem primae veritatis.”

⁵⁸ See *ST*, I, q. 45, a. 5, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 469): “Oportet enim universaliores effectus in universaliores et priores causas reducere. Inter omnes autem effectus, universalissimum est ipsum esse. Unde oportet quod sit proprius effectus primae et universalissimae causae, quae est Deus.”

⁵⁹ In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas clearly thinks that this immediate knowledge requires some form of discursive reasoning, even if simple and acritical. See *Contra gentiles*, III, c. 38, n. 2161 (ed. Marietti, vol. 3, p. 44), immediately following the passage just quoted: “Videntes enim homines res naturales secundum ordinem certum currere; cum ordinatio absque ordinatore non sit, percipiunt, ut in pluribus, aliquem esse ordinatorem rerum quas videmus. Quis autem, vel qualis, vel si unus tantum est ordinator naturae, nondum statim ex hac communi consideratione habetur.”

intellect. Aquinas is unequivocally emphatic in saying that we do not know in the eternal reasons *themselves*, as they are actually present in their full intelligibility to God Himself. To do so would posit in our minds a kind of knowledge of God's essence that is by definition beyond our — or any creature's — natural possibilities.⁶⁰ This natural knowledge of God should surely not be interpreted as evidence of Aquinas's commitment to the view that God's existence is evident or, in his terminology, *per se notum*. As is well known, he explicitly and decidedly denies this throughout his entire academic career.⁶¹ The natural character of this knowledge points solely to the fact that the human intellect is naturally equipped to know and render actually intelligible all material things, and, in knowing them primarily and fundamentally as beings, to gain some vague and confused knowledge of God, of whom they are finite, limited likenesses.

3.3. Anima semper intelligit se et Deum indeterminate, et consequitur quidam amor indeterminatus

As intellectual creatures, humans are naturally open to the knowledge of all being and are, for that very same reason, spontaneously moved to desire and seek the knowledge of the cause of all being. This intellectual dynamism is present in all of humankind, and it is the ultimate reason behind the vague and confused knowledge of God that, as we have seen Aquinas say, all men possess. From this natural, albeit vague and not properly conceptualized, knowledge arises in us a certain indeterminate love of God, as Aquinas puts it.⁶² This indeterminate

⁶⁰ See *ST*, I, q. 12, a. 4, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 120–121): “Respondeo dicendum quod impossibile est quod aliquis intellectus creatus per sua naturalia essentiam Dei videat. Cognitio enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente. Cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis. Unde cuiuslibet cognoscentis cognitio est secundum modum suae naturae. Si igitur modus essendi alicuius rei cognitae excedat modum naturae cognoscentis, oportet quod cognitio illius rei sit supra naturam illius cognoscentis [...] Relinquitur ergo quod cognoscere ipsum esse subsistens, sit connaturale soli intellectui divino, et quod sit supra facultatem naturalem cuiuslibet intellectus creati: quia nulla creatura est suum esse, sed habet esse participatum. Non igitur potest intellectus creatus Deum per essentiam videre, nisi in quantum Deus per suam gratiam se intellectui creato coniungit, ut intelligibile ab ipso.”

⁶¹ Chronologically ordered, Aquinas addresses this question in *Super I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2 (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 1, p. 93–95); *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 12 (ed. Leon., vol. 22/2, p. 338–343, l. 1–330); *Contra gentiles*, I, c. 10 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 13–14); I, c. 11 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 14–15); *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, arg. 11 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 191); q. 7, a. 2, ad 11 (ed. Marietti, vol. 2, p. 192–193); *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 1 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 27–28). For an overview of all these texts, highlighting their connections and common threads, see A. Di Noto, *L'evidenza di Dio nella filosofia del secolo XIII (Utrum Deum esse sit per se notum)*, (Il pensiero medievale, 7), Padova: Casa Editrice Dott. Antonio Milani, 1958, p. 41–46; and J. ALFARO, “La dimensión trascendental en el conocimiento humano de Dios según S. Tomás,” *Gregorianum*, vol. 55, n. 4 (1974), p. 639–675.

⁶² See *Super I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, a. 5, corp. (ed. Mandonnet, vol. 1, p. 122): “Sed secundum quod intelligere nihil aliud dicit quam intuitum, qui nihil aliud est quam praesentia intelligibilis

love is still far from being the kind of full-fledged explicit love of God that we are capable of and that is required for our complete beatitude, but it is also not strictly identical with the natural love of God that is present in all creatures, since it arises from the knowledge we naturally have of Him. As Thomas says elsewhere, by this kind of indeterminate love, God is sought in a general and confused way [*in quadam generalitate*], inasmuch as we all desire to be and live as well as possible.⁶³

This *amor Dei indeterminatus* constitutes the very first step in the properly human path of developing and fostering an elicited love of God that is grounded in the already present natural love of God. This is a process that is definitely far from completed by the appearance of this vague, indeterminate love of God, but — and this is what is most important for our purposes here — it is a process that, within the entire material universe, only we humans can perform, precisely by virtue of being endowed with an intellectual nature. The specific kind of operation only we can perform — the specific kind of operation for the sake of which we exist — is an operation that allows us to seek not only the goods to which we are naturally inclined to the extent that they are resemblances of the divine goodness, but to strive after, and eventually possess, God Himself.

Now, by being metaphysically constituted so as to be able to elicit a love of God that is deliberate and explicitly aimed at Him as our beatitude, we can also, and by virtue of those very same operations, produce a psychological dissociation between our natural order toward God and what we explicitly strive after in all the actions we perform. Our rational nature allows us to have *dominium* of our actions and to freely choose to perform them and direct them to the particular ends we so desire,⁶⁴ but it also allows us to actively redirect all of our actions, and the ends they each attain, to our own selfish gratification. How

ad intellectum quocumque modo, sic anima semper intelligit se et Deum indeterminate, et consequitur quidam amor indeterminatus."

⁶³ See *Expositio super Boethii De Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4 (ed. Decker, p. 73, l. 18–24): "Ad quartum dicendum quod quamvis Deus sit ultimus finis in consecutione et primus in intentione appetitus naturalis, non tamen oportet quod sit primus in cognitione mentis humanae quae ordinatur in finem, sed in cognitione ordinantis, sicut et in aliis quae naturali appetitu tendunt in finem suum. Cognoscitur tamen a principio et intenditur in quadam generalitate, prout mens appetit se bene esse et bene vivere, quod tunc solum est ei, cum Deum habet."

⁶⁴ Aquinas frequently views this *dominium* over our actions as one of the most clear signs of our ontological condition as persons; see, for example, *ST*, I, q. 29, a. 1, corp. (ed. Leon., vol. 4, p. 327): "Respondeo dicendum quod, licet universale et particulare inveniantur in omnibus generibus, tamen speciali quodam modo individuum invenitur in genere substantiae. Substantia enima individuatur per seipsam, sed accidentia individuantur per subiectum, quod est substantia: dicitur enim haec albedo, in quantum est in hoc subiecto. Unde etiam convenienter individua substantiae habent aliquod speciale nomen praे aliis: dicuntur enim *hypostases* vel *prima substantiae*. Sed adhuc quodam specialiori et perfectiori modo invenitur particulare et individuum in substan-

this psychological process of dissociation or separation between our natural end and our elicited ends takes place, is beyond the scope of this paper. What it is important to emphasize here is that this possibility of separation is metaphysically rooted in the very same nature that allows us, and requires us, to freely love God above all else.

4. CONCLUSION: *NATURA IN SE RECURVA EST*

A staple feature of Aquinas's account of the natural love of God, in comparison with his predecessors and contemporaries, is his rather idiosyncratic interpretation of the often-quoted *dictum* that nature is curved back on itself [*natura in se recurva est*]. Whereas most of his predecessors and contemporaries interpreted this axiom to mean that nature, and particularly human nature, selfishly strives after its own good,⁶⁵ Aquinas had no problem with seeing in it a kind of neat summary of his own understanding of creaturely operation: nature is curved back on itself not because it seeks its own good in a self-centered manner, but

tuis rationalibus, quae habent dominium sui actus, et non solum aguntur, sicut alia, sed per se agunt.”

⁶⁵ Albert the Great, for example, interprets the *dictum* to mean that without the help of divinely infused charity, men naturally love themselves more than God. See ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *II Sent.*, d. 3, a. 18, resp. (ed. Borgnet., vol. 27, p. 98): “Ad hoc [i.e., dictum Bernardii, quod *natura in se curva est*] dicendum, quod ratio naturalis consideratur dupliciter, scilicet ut *natura*, et sic *curva est* et ad modum suum: et ut *deliberativa* et *inquisitiva* honesti et boni, et sic potest aliquid diligere plusquam se, sicut multi fecerunt qui *charitatem* nunquam *habuerunt*,” and *Summa theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei*, p. II, tract. IV, q. 14, memb. 4, a. 2, sol. (ed. Borgnet., vol. 32, p. 200): “Ad hoc dixerunt antiqui, *Praepositinus* scilicet, et *Gulielmus Altisiodorensis*, quod duplex est amor sive *dilectio voluntatis*, scilicet *dilectio amicitiae*, et *dilectio concupiscentiae*. *Dilectio amicitiae* est, quae tendit in alterum: et de hac dicit *Gregorius* quod »minus quam inter duos esse non potest.« *Dilectio concupiscentiae* est *naturae*, quae semper *curva est* in *seipsa*: et quidquid diligit, ad *seipsam* *retorquet*, hoc est, ad *bonum proprium* et *privatum*: et nisi per *gratiam* *gratum* facientem *elevetur* super *se*, omne quod diligit ad *bonum proprium* *retorquet*, et diligit propter *seipsam*, quod *privatum* *commodum* *quaerit* in *illo*: tamen *perversa* in *hoc* non est, quia *ulterius* non potest nisi per *gratiam* *adiuvetur*. *Naturale* est enim in *omnibus* quae sunt, quod ament sive *diligent convenientia* sibi *secundum* *naturam*, ut dicunt *Plato*, et *Boetius*. Et *haec solutio* mihi placet: quia *bona est*.” Bonaventure is of the same opinion; see BONAVENTURA, *II Sent.*, d. 3, p. 2, a. 3, q. 1, ad 1 (ed. Quaracchi, vol. 2, p. 126): “Ad illud quod *obiicitur*, quod *motus naturae curvus est*; dicendum, quod aut *Bernardus* intelligit de *natura*, qua *communicamus* cum *brutis*; aut si de *rationali*, intelligit prout *lapsa est*; aut hoc vocat »*curvitatem*«, quod *appetit* sibi. Sed esto, quod *Deum* *appetat* sibi, non tamen aliquid magis diligit sibi quam *Deum*, et ita *nihilominus* propter *se* et *super omnia*.” For overviews of how other scholastic authors interpreted this axiom, see L.-B. GILLON, “Primacía del apetito universal de Dios según santo Tomás,” *Ciencia Tomista*, vol. 62, n. 194 (1942), p. 329–341; and M.-R. GAGNEBET, “L'amour naturel de Dieu chez saint Thomas et ses contemporains,” p. 397–412.

rather because it is impossible for any creature to operate without seeking the good that perfects its nature.⁶⁶ To operate in pursuit of what is good for the nature of the agent is, for Aquinas, nothing more than seeking the divine likeness. There is nothing like an inescapable incompatibility between striving after one's good and simultaneously loving God above all else.

Human beings find themselves in the unique situation among material creatures of being able, by virtue of their intellectual nature, of loving God above all else not only by a natural love, but also by an explicit rational love. Precisely because we are fundamentally open to the knowledge of universal being, we are capable of freely determining for ourselves the ends towards which we direct our actions. The conditions required for free rational behavior are, however, the very same conditions that enable us to dissociate or separate our natural love of God above else — common to all creatures — from the pursuit of our own perfection and completion. This separation, however, takes place only on a purely psychological level: we can convince ourselves that we can somehow be excused from the deeply metaphysical necessity of naturally desiring God as our happiness. But even in that most infelicitous of cases, humans remain primarily and more fundamentally striving after God rather than after their own good, though in an acutely mistaken manner, one that removes them or alienates them not only from God, but even, and for that same reason, from their own perfection and happiness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Commentarium in Sententiarum.*, ed. A. Borgnet, (Opera Omnia, 27–30), Paris: Luis Vivès, 1893.

ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Summa theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei*, ed. A. Borgnet, (Opera Omnia, 32), Paris: Luis Vivès, 1894.

BONAVENTURA, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventura, 1882.

ARISTOTLE, *De caelo et mundo*, ed. W.K.C. Guthrie, (The Loeb Classical Library, 338), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939.

⁶⁶ As Gillon noted, Aquinas was the first among his contemporaries to extend the primacy of natural love of God above self beyond the realm of intellectual beings to absolutely *all* creatures; see L.-B. GILLON, “Primacía del apetito universal de Dios según santo Tomás,” p. 329–330.

Les Auctoritates Aristotelis. Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique, ed. J. Hamesse, (Philosophes Médiévaux, 17), Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate*, ed. B. Decker, (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 4), Leiden: Brill, 1965.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. M.-R. Cathala, R. Spiazzi, Torino – Roma: Marietti, 1950.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu "Summa contra Gentiles"*, ed. C. Pera, P. Marc, Torino – Roma: Marietti, 1961.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, Roma: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888–.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Epis copi Parisiensis*, ed. P. Mandonnet, Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929.

THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Scriptum super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, ed. M.F. Moos, Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1933/1947.

S. THOMAE AQUINATIS, *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2: *De potentia. De anima. De spiritualibus creaturis. De unione Verbi incarnati. De malo. De virtutibus in communi. De caritate. De correctione fraterna. De spe. De virtutibus cardinalibus*, ed. P. Bazzi, M. Calcaterra, T.S. Centi, E. Odetto, P.M. Pession, Taurini – Romae: Marietti, 1965.

Secondary Literature

ALFARO, J., “La dimensión trascendental en el conocimiento humano de Dios según S. Tomás,” *Gregorianum*, vol. 55, n. 4 (1974), p. 639–675.

CANALS VIDAL, F., “El *lumen intellectus agentis* en la ontología del conocimiento de santo Tomás,” in F. Canals Vidal, *Cuestiones de fundamentación*, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 1981, p. 11–40.

CANALS VIDAL, F., “Sobre el punto de partida y el fundamento de la metafísica,” in F. Canals Vidal, *Cuestiones de fundamentación*, Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 1981, p. 79–164.

CARL, B., “Human Intellectual Potency and the Genus of Intelligibles. A Response to Therese Cory’s *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*,” *Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. G. Klima, A. Hall, (Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics, 14), Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, p. 21–32.

CASTILLO, D., *Trascendencia e inmanencia de Dios en S. Buenaventura*, Salamanca: Naturaleza y Gracia — Imprenta del Monasterio de Benedictinas, 1974.

CORY, T., “Knowing as Being? A Metaphysical Reading of the Identity of Intellect and Intelligibles in Aquinas,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 91, n. 3 (2017), p. 333–351.

DI NOTO, A., *L'evidenza di Dio nella filosofia del secolo XIII (Utrum Deum esse sit per se notum)*, (Il pensiero medievale, 7), Padova: Casa Editrice Dott. Antonio Milani, 1958.

DOOLAN, G., "Aquinas on Substance as a Metaphysical Genus," *The Science of Being as Being. Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. G. Doolan, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011, p. 99–128.

DOOLAN, G., "Aquinas on the Metaphysician's vs. the Logician's Categories," *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 4, n. 2 (2014), p. 133–155.

FLOUCAT, Y., *L'intime fécondité de l'intelligence. Le verbe mental selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Pierre Téqui, 2001.

GAGNEBET, M.-R., "L'amour naturel de Dieu chez saint Thomas et ses contemporains," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 48, no. 1–2 (1948), p. 394–446; vol. 49, no. 1–2 (1949), p. 31–102.

GEIGER, L.-B., *Le problème de l'amour chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Montréal–Paris: Institut d'Études Médiévales–Librairie J. Vrin, 1952.

GILLON, L.-B., "Primacía del apetito universal de Dios según santo Tomás," *Ciencia Tomista*, vol. 62, n. 194 (1942), p. 329–341.

HANKEY, W., "Participatio divini luminis. Aquinas's Doctrine of the Agent Intellect. Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius*, vol. 22 (2004), p. 1–30.

HÉRIS, V., "L'amour naturel de Dieu d'après saint Thomas," *Mélanges thomistes*, (Bibliothèque thomiste, 3), Le Saulchoir: Revues des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, 1923, p. 289–310.

MALLOY, CH., *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love*, Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2019.

MOLINERO, J., *Elegir a Dios, tarea del hombre. Tránsito del amor natural al amor elícito a Dios según santo Tomás*, Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1979.

NICOLAS, J.-H., "Amour de soi, amour de Dieu, amour des autres," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 56, no. 1 (1956), p. 5–42.

OSBORNE, T., *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

OWENS, J., "The Intelligibility of Being," *Gregorianum*, vol. 36 (1955), p. 169–193.

PERRIER, E., *L'attrait divin. La doctrine de l'opération et le gouvernement des créatures chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Parole et Silence, 2019.

PREVOSTI, A., "El apetito natural y la estructura esencial del ente móvil," *Espiritu*, vol. 65, no. 151 (2016), p. 11–39.

ROUSSELOT, P., *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Âge*, (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, 6/6), Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1908.

SALAS, V., "Bonaventure on the Vanity of Being. Towards a Metaphysic of Ecclesiastes," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 90, n. 4 (2016), p. 635–663.

SÁNCHEZ RUIZ, J., “La conoscenza dell’essere e la infinitezza dell’intelletto umano secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino,” *Divus Thomas*, vol. 59 (1956), p. 143–169.

SIMONIN, H.-D., “Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l’amour,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, vol. 6 (1931), p. 174–276.

SOLIGNAC, L., “La nature dans la pensée de saint Bonaventure ou la physique du salut,” *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 122 (2022), p. 297–325.

STEVENS, G., “The Disinterested Love of God According to St. Thomas and Some of His Modern Interpreters,” *The Thomist*, vol. 26, no. 3–4 (1953), p. 307–333, 497–541.

OMNIA APPETUNT DEUM:
AQUINAS ON THE METAPHYSICS
OF THE HUMAN NATURAL LOVE OF GOD

SUMMARY

The contemporary debate concerning the so-called “problem of love” in the Middle Ages has typically been framed in the terms set out by Pierre Rousselot in 1908. In the world of Thomistic studies, the various works that have addressed this issue have focused either on the particularities of Aquinas’s understanding of love — particularly on the cause of love — or on the more ethical and psychological aspects of a genuinely disinterested love. In this paper, instead of addressing the more psychological or ethical aspects of this debate, I will focus rather on Aquinas’s underlying metaphysics of the natural love of God. If, as Rousselot noted, Aquinas stands out among his scholastic peers as the main proponent of a physical conception of love, then he must have worked out, to some degree, the corresponding metaphysical framework that allowed him to simultaneously maintain the primacy of the natural love of God in each creature — including, clearly, rational creatures — and the fact that all creatures naturally and inevitably seek their own good. I first show how Aquinas accounts for the metaphysical conditions required for all creatures to both strive after their own good and yet also naturally love God above all else, and then lay out his understanding of the uniquely human manner of operating, which allows us to not only strive after the divine resemblance found in the goods to which we are naturally inclined, but also, and more fundamentally, to strive after God Himself and be united to Him in knowledge and love.

KEYWORDS: Aquinas, Natural Love of God, Rousselot, Appetite, Inclination, Divine Resemblance, Intellect, Elicit Love

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Akwinata, naturalna miłość Boga, Rousselot, dążność, skłonność, Boże podobieństwo, intelekt, miłowanie przez wybór