

## SOME NOTES ON HUMAN WILL AND DIVINE GOODNESS

or

### HOW WE DO AND HOW WE DON'T LOVE GOD

Neoplatonism clearly supposes that human fulfillment is in ceasing to be human, or going beyond being merely human, and reuniting with the superhuman. Thus, thinking in a neoplatonic framework, Augustine supposed that the human heart is naturally oriented toward divine goodness and can rest in nothing less. But even St. Thomas, though trying to avoid neoplatonism, accepted a very similar view, as is shown by his claim that there is a natural desire for the Beatific Vision.

Actually, the assimilation of man to the divine is not peculiar to neoplatonism, but is only stronger and clearer there. Aristotle really has essentially the same view. For him, the first mover moves by being a final cause. Thus, the first moved which loves the first mover is trying to fulfill itself by striving to be (if it could) more than itself. And man becomes fully himself only in passing moments of godlike contemplative activity.

These notions arose from attempts to find order among realities in the absence of the key notion of creative efficient causality, and also (certainly in Aristotle's case) in the absence of a proper understanding of the supersubstantiality of God. In other words, Aristotle thought he knew what God is: substantial and perfectly actual thought thinking itself. Lacking the idea of creation and thinking he knew what God is, Aristotle could only relate other realities to God by his notion of final causality and emulation by

lower realities of the perfection of things above them. (A reflection of Athenian social order, perhaps?)

St. Thomas develops this thinking in such a way that he seems to suppose that the human will really has divine goodness as its proper object. Oriented to intelligible goodness, it is only fulfilled adequately by the absolute good, Goodness Itself, divine goodness. He seems to suppose that the human will's openness to anything good together with its natural dynamism as appetite somehow amount to a natural tendency toward divine goodness--as it were, an habitual disposition underlying its simple volition of the various basic human goods. On that supposition, one could naturally will everything else for the sake of divine goodness, which alone, being infinite, could exhaust the capacity of the will.

However, this argument is fallacious. For: (1) Nothing is received except according to the capacity of what receives it. But the capacity for the full actualization of anything is its nature. Therefore, nothing receives its full actualization from goodness which does not fulfill its own nature. Divine goodness is the actuality of divine nature. Therefore, it cannot be the actualization of human persons unless they either cease to be human or become simultaneously divine. Naturally they cannot be both human and divine. Therefore, naturally they cannot be actualized by divine goodness without ceasing to be human. But: (2) Will is human appetite. Every appetite tends toward the actualization of that of which it is an appetite. (As we explained above, this does not imply egoism, because human persons can share in a common life and fulfillment proper to their nature.) Therefore, human will tends to

human actualization. Nothing is actualized by ceasing to be. But whatever ceases to be what it is, ceases to be. Therefore, nothing is actualized by ceasing to be what it is. Therefore, human persons cannot be actualized by ceasing to be human. Therefore: (3) Since human persons cannot naturally be actualized by divine goodness without ceasing to be human (from 1), and since they cannot be actualized by ceasing to be human (from 2), human persons cannot naturally be actualized by divine goodness.

And so the human will can have no natural, underlying disposition to perfect fulfillment in divine goodness. There can be no natural desire for the Beatific Vision, if that is understood as the mature life of those who are "God's children now," not by nature, but by water and the Spirit (or by adoption). The human heart is made not for God but for human fulfillment. If human persons do not rest in human fulfillment, that is partly because they wrongly try to rest in mutilated fragments of it and partly because the human will (unlike the neoplatonic eros) is not made for rest.

It seems to me that a correct understanding of appetite, beginning from what we observe in ourselves and in animals, would contrast it with cognition as follows: Knowledge is primarily of what is, and only secondarily and indirectly of what can be; appetite is primarily of what is to be, and only secondarily and indirectly of what is. In the natural world, knowledge is the power to anticipate change before it happens, and appetite the power to make it happen favorably.

Appetite belongs to what is not yet all that it can be, and

moves it to what it is still to be. Appetite is for the fulfillment of that whose appetite it is. This fact does not imply self-seeking in an egoistic sense. Animals don't have selves, and the fulfillment of individuals is in organic continuity with one another--sex, reproduction, sharing food, etc.

St. Thomas had an essentially sound view about knowledge of God, though he cheated a bit here and there--for example, by trying to deduce from the ratio of ipsum esse subsistens. He knew (basically) that we don't know what God is, but what he is not, and how other things are related to him. So there is no natural, direct understanding of God, as neoplatonists suppose. We come to know God not by the first act of the intellect nor even by a direct second act of the intellect, but only by reasoning--a third act reflecting on direct propositional knowledge. He should have held to the same pattern in his account of the human will and divine goodness, but did not. We can carry out the parallelism as he should have.

The "first" act of the will (what in will corresponds best to simple apprehension in intellect, although it is specified by a proposition--a principle of practical reasoning--not by a simple insight) is simple volition of basic human goods. In simple volition, the goods are loved absolutely; there is a general interest in them which does not (of itself) get anything realized.

The "second" act of the will (what corresponds most closely to propositional knowledge) is choice of a possible course of action. What is willed here is the precise realization to be accomplished through action. But in this case, this "second" act presupposes a more complex act, which orders the realization to what it fulfills.

The "third" act of the will (third as more complex, but prior in the will's dynamism) is intention of a benefit--projection of the interesting good as fulfillment to be realized.

Whereas choice bears on what is in one's power, intending goes beyond that, for it bears on the benefit, which is only partly brought about by action. Action may succeed or not; the benefit sought is anticipated but not foreknown and expected. So in intending benefits, one wills not only to do what one can, but also wills that everything go well so that the outcome will really be beneficial. One wills the action and fulfillment of other agents on whom the beneficial outcome depends.

Here is the basic, natural love of God, inevitable for the human will. It is a love of the unseen source of meaning and value whose action (considered from our point of view as fulfillment for it) is necessary if our own action is to attain its real purpose--to succeed in benefitting us (the "us" includes humans with whom we cooperate, for fulfillment is in common).

But the situation is different for the morally good and bad. The morally bad will, in limiting its own fulfillment, subordinates the fulfillment of others (including God) to itself. The morally good will does not restrict benefits, and so can accept the fulfillment of others even when its own purposes are not realized. In such cases, the morally good will clearly wills the good of others for them. So the natural love of God which is morally significant and not inevitable is tied to moral goodness. It involves an attitude of mutuality and submission to God's unknown ways.

In the fallen human condition, this moral love of God is always limited and mixed. Man's heart is divided.

The incarnation brings God into human fellowship. It makes possible a human love of a divine person--but only the willing to him of human goods. However, this human love (volitionally, the act of faith) is possible without thorough moral goodness. Thus, it can be justifying--a principle which overcomes immorality--and can be a relatively permanent stronghold for sanctification, despite some falls into sin and persistent dispositions to sin. (Faith, thus, is really a humanly appropriate fundamental option. The fundamental option of Rahner and company is based on a neoplatonic notion of will, which supposes that divine goodness can be loved directly.)

Adoption or second birth raises human persons into divine fellowship. Sharing divine nature, human persons can will divine goodness, insofar as it is a fulfillment common to themselves and the divine persons. Insofar as human persons in this life are not yet fulfilled in divine goodness (God's children now, but still to be more), their love is a desire. The heart is restless, not as made, but as remade by grace.