

**Eros and Agape Revisited:  
Reconciling Classical Eudaemonism with Christian Love?**

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## **1. Introduction**

Anders Nygren (1890-1978), the professor of theology and bishop of Lund, Sweden, was the author of one of the most influential books in 20<sup>th</sup> century theology: *Agape and Eros*, published in 1930-38 in Swedish and eventually in English and seven other languages. Nygren's work contains a trenchant statement of the fundamental incompatibility of the classical eudaemonism of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (the object of Eros) with the new Christian ethic of selfless and 'unmotivated' Agape. According to Nygren, the Eros of the Greek philosophers is primarily selfish (the pursuit of some good for oneself) and dependent on the prior value of its object (one loves the good because it is good). In contrast, Christian Agape is selfless (one loves another for the sake of the good of the other) and utterly unmotivated by any worthiness of its object (God loves the sinner despite the sinner's absolute unworthiness). (Nygren 1953, 75-99) For the Christian, the unconditional love of God and the neighbor is fundamental and independent of any love of self, while for the erotic philosophical tradition, any love for one's friend is grounded in one's love for oneself.

Unsurprisingly, Nygren sees these stark contrasts as absolute barriers to any harmonization of the two traditions. In particular, Nygren asserts emphatically that Thomas Aquinas's synthesis of the two was "doomed to failure." (Nygren 1953, 645)

These questions have grave political implications. If Nygren's absolute dualism were correct, it would, by separating Christian political theology from political philosophy, undermine any possibility of a rationally graspable natural law as the foundation for civic life. Nygrenian theology would entail the non-existence of any rational common ground or *via media* between believers (motivated by God's Agape) and non-believers (still in the grip of Eros).

Nygren's challenge can also be approached from a second angle: interpreting it as a challenge to the coherency and adequacy of the eudaemonistic theory of friendship and politics in the works of Plato and Aristotle on its own terms. The eudaemonists insist both (1) that it is possible to love one's friend for his own sake and not merely as a means to one's own fulfillment (Books 8 and 9 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b32), and (2) that it is rational to sacrifice oneself for the good of one's community (through courageous action in war, for example – see book 1 of the *Ethics*, 1094b8-10, and especially book 9, 1169a20). However, these actions seem possible only on the alternative theory of selfless, Agape love. How can an egoist, however rational and high-minded, avoid treating the good of his friends as merely instrumental to his own happiness? And how can such an egoist justify the sacrifice

of his own life, together with all possible future happiness, for the sake of others, however many and however dear? If these challenges to classical eudaemonism are sound, then it cannot provide a rational basis for the effective social bonds needed for civic life.

## 2. The Thomistic Synthesis and its Apparent Difficulties

Although, as Nygren pointed out, Augustine attempted a synthesis of Platonic Eros and Christian Agape, the most careful and systematic harmonization of the two traditions is to be found in the work Thomas Aquinas. It is by examining the Thomistic synthesis that we can best judge whether any such attempt is (as Nygren put it) “doomed to failure”.

Here are eight relevant Thomistic theses, drawn from David M. Gallagher’s “Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others” (Gallagher 1999):

(1) Each complete substance has only one ultimate end, and two distinct substances must have numerically distinct ultimate ends (ST I-II 1.5).

(2) Each complete substance aims at or seeks its own perfection (the full realization of its natural potentialities) as its sole and unique ultimate end (ST I 60.3, ST I-II 1.6,7).

(3) The ultimate end of any human being is the beatific vision – that is, the enjoyment of the beatific vision by that very human being (ST I-II 3.8).

(4) Self-love is the foundation and principle of all other loves, including one’s love for God. (ST II-II 25.4c, SCG 3.153, In III Sent. 29.3 ad 3; Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 9, 1166a1-2)

(5) One loves one’s friend for his own sake, and not merely as a means to one’s own fulfillment. This is true especially of our love for God. “But St. Thomas’s theory provides for an extension of the self to include the others, such that a person can be willing his own good in willing that good for the other and willing it precisely as being in the other.” (Gallagher 1999, 35) (ST II-II 26.3, In III Sent. 29.3)

(6) The *ordo amoris* (order of charity) requires that one love one’s self more than one’s friends, and one’s friends and families more than the strangers making up the rest of the polis. (ST II-II 25.4c, ST II-II 26.4-12)

(7) The whole is prior to and therefore superior in importance to its parts; consequently, the member of the community rationally loves the community more than himself, and the creature rationally loves God more than himself. (ST II-II 47.10ad2, ST I 60.5)

(8) The perfected saint loves God above all else and loves himself only for the sake of God. "According to Thomas, as one grows in charity, one adverts less and less to these things [one's own individual good], being more and more consumed by the goodness of God." (Gallagher 1999, 43; ST II-II 19.10a)

There are at least five ways of drawing out what appear to be contradictions from these eight theses:

(i) There is tension between (6) and (7): the priority of the whole vs. the *ordo amoris*. If the whole were always superior to its parts, then one's love for the many who make up the city would take priority over one's love for one's immediate family. However, if there were a strict priority corresponding to the *ordo amoris*, then it would follow that one's love for a single family member ought to outweigh one's love for any number of strangers, even if those strangers make up the majority of one's community.

(ii) Can (5) or (7) be justified, even to the point of complete self-sacrifice, given the priority of self-love, as expressed in (2) and (4)? Thomas Aquinas, along with Aristotle, presumes that it is always rational for a member of the community to sacrifice himself for the whole, even apart from any hope for the individual survival of death. However, such sacrifice cuts off all possibility of future happiness. Even if the shamefulness of cowardice significantly reduces one's prospects for flourishing, it cannot reduce those prospects to zero, much less to a level somehow below zero. It may be rational in some cases to sacrifice the prospects for a long but ignoble life for a short but glorious one, but this would depend on many factors in each particular case, including one's life expectancy and the likelihood that one's cowardice might be forgotten or forgiven. This would not seem to justify a *universal* preference for the good of the whole community over one's individual survival, as required by Thomas's theory.

The apostle Paul provides a vivid version of this tension. Paul was willing to be "accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his kinsmen according to the flesh, that they might be saved." (Rom. 9:3) Paul was willing to exchange the realization of his own ultimate end for the salvation of others. How could such an exchange have been rationally choosable for Paul, given that his unique ultimate end was his own salvation?

(iii) Don't friends become instrumentalized, given (2)-(4), in outright contradiction to (5)? If my own perfection is my sole ultimate end, then mustn't I somehow treat the good of my friends as merely a means to my own happiness?

(iv) Given the connection between ontological diversity and the diversity of ends from principle (1), don't theses (5)-(8) threaten the ontological distinctness of human persons? If we share a numerically identical ultimate end (the common good of the friends or the polis, or the greater glory of God), don't we become merely dependent parts of a single substance?

(v) If we resolve the apparent conflict between (2)-(4) and (5)-(8), by supposing that each human being has more than one ultimate end, doesn't this fragment the individual human being into distinct substances, given principle (1)?

### 3. Metaphysical Constraints on the Solution

The simplest path to resolving the conflicts would be simply to abandon thesis (1): the one-to-one correspondence between ultimate ends and complete substances. In the absence of thesis (1), we could weaken modify thesis (2), asserting only that the perfection of one's nature is one of one's ultimate ends. This immediately resolves tensions (ii) through (iv). The remaining tension, (i), could then be resolved by simply giving priority either to the community as a whole or to the *ordo amoris*.

However, this simple resolution comes at too high a metaphysical cost. The Aristotelian tradition provides compelling grounds for maintaining thesis (1), with its perfect correspondence between complete substances and their ends. Thesis (1) consists of two sub-claims:

(1a) Every complete substance has a single ultimate end.

(1b) Numerically distinct complete substances have numerically distinct ultimate ends.

The combination of the two means that we can count complete substances simply by counting the ultimate ends being pursued. Each ultimate end corresponds to a distinct, complete substance, and no substance has more than one end. Why believe in such a correspondence? There are three reasons:

1. Epistemological. The correspondence thesis (1) provides us with criteria for distinguishing cases in which several things constitute a single complete substances from cases in which they constitute more than one. If (1) were false, we would have no way of distinguishing mere parts from complete wholes, or real unities from mere "heaps".

2. Theological. Unified substantial being is (as Aristotle argued in *The Metaphysics*) the paradigm case of 'being'. All creatures exist by participating in the being of God. God's being is absolutely simple. The only way for a composite, material substance to participate in God's simplicity is by having a single ultimate end. Therefore, every substance must have (by its very essence) a single ultimate end. Since creaturely being consists in having a single end, two creatures can be distinct from one another only by having distinct ends.

3. Metaphysical. This argument depends on the assumption that reality is ultimately intelligible: that an adequate reason can be given for each fact. In order for reality to be ultimately intelligible, it must be partitioned into a number of minimal units of

complete intelligibility (MUCI's). Every finite thing must be either a MUCI or part of exactly one MUCI, since anything outside of all MUCI's would be ultimately unintelligible, and anything simultaneously belonging to more than one would have a nature that is over-determined in an inexplicable way.<sup>1</sup> We can then identify substances with MUCI's. No substance can be a part of another substance, since either the first would be unintelligible in itself or the second would not be a *minimal* unit of complete intelligibility.

No substance can have two or more metaphysically ultimate ends, since such a binary substance could provide no explanation in and of itself for the conjunction of the two ends. No two substances could share numerically the same ultimate end, since neither substance would be able to supply the grounds for its own distinctness from the other.

As Aquinas puts it, the final cause is the cause (or explanation) of all the other causes (*De Principiis Naturae* 29). Every process (including the persisting existence of a substance) is intelligible only in terms of its ultimate terminus: each process is either a moving toward some definite end, or it is a stable, self-sustaining activity, in which case the activity is its own end. In either case, the ultimate end of a substance's existence provides the grounds for understanding why it has the internal constitution it has and for discerning the boundaries (both spatial and temporal) that distinguish it from all other substances.

#### **4. The Path to Resolution: Two Crucial Distinctions**

The fundamental problem to resolve is this: on ontological grounds, we must posit a single ultimate end for each human being (his own perfection), but on ethical grounds, we must posit a plurality of ultimate ends, including the glory of God and the good of one's friends and neighbors. An 'ultimate' end is one than which no other end is strictly 'more final'. To resolve the contradictions, we must distinguish between two ways in which an end is 'more final' than another: (i) those cases in which the first end is chosen *for the sake of* another, and (ii) those cases in which the first end is choice-worthy *in virtue of* another. Let's call the first relation that of 'practically-rational' or 'p-rational' priority, and the second 'metaphysical' priority.

The idea of metaphysical priority or ontological grounding has been the subject of intensified interest among metaphysicians in recent years: see Fine (2001), Schaffer (2009) and Rosen (2010), for example. One fact p is ontologically grounded in another, more metaphysically fundamental fact q if p is true by virtue of the truth of q, if the fact that p is constituted by the fact that q. For example, the lateral movement of an ocean wave is ontologically grounded in the successive up-and-down movements of various volumes of water near the surface. The existence of a

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, no creature is completely intelligible apart from God. We must take 'complete intelligibility' of a finite substance to mean that it is, together with God and apart from any other creature, fully intelligible.

crowd is ontologically grounded in the presence of various individuals in the same place. The fragility of a vase is ontologically grounded in its molecular structure. Similarly, the value or *choiceworthiness* of some end for some agent can be ontologically grounded in the value of some other, more fundamental end for that same agent.

By way of illustration, consider the case of a non-rational animal. A non-rational animal engages in an “estimative” process that is an analogue of practical rationality. Consider the following ‘desire-perception’ syllogism:

1. E is good (because desired sensually).
  2. Doing A now would (or might well) result in E (given by immediate perception).
- Therefore, do A now.

The notion of ‘result’ employed in premise 2 is not supposed to be understood as necessarily causal in nature. It could be that doing A would simply constitute the realization of E. For example, an animal might desire to engage in an act of sexual congress with a potential mate. A particular act of congress would not cause but would by itself be the thing desired.

There is also a corresponding ‘aversion-perception’ syllogism:

1. E is bad (because feared).
  2. Doing A now would or might result in the avoidance of E (given by immediate perception).
- Therefore, do A now.

These are analogous to the practical syllogism of rational animals:

1. E is good. (A rational judgment of value.)
  2. Doing A now would result in E. (A rational judgment of ground and consequence.)
- Therefore, do A now.

We might take the practical syllogism in this form to be composed of two more fundamental inferences:

1. E is good.
2. Doing A now would (might) result in E.
3. Therefore, A is good to do (now). (From 1, 2)
4. Therefore, do A now. (From 3)

That which moves both us and non-rational animals into action is the perception or judgment that some action is now good to do. This can come about through judging that the action would *cause* some good effect (and that it has no disqualifying defect), or that it would more directly *constitute* some good state of affairs.

The connection between sensual or non-rational desire and the non-rational animal's *ontologically ultimate end* is a complex one. It is not the case that each animal sensitively desires its own fulfillment *as such*. Instead, its desires (like the 'particular affections' described by Bishop Joseph Butler in his Sermon XI – Butler 1736) have specific and narrow objects, such as food, water, warmth, and sexual congress. What we can expect is this: the animal's desires and aversions, taken as a whole and given the animal's perceptual capacities, lead with some reliability to the fulfillment of the animal's nature. The desires and aversions must at least tend collectively in the right direction and do so better than any other configuration of affections would.

In a similar way, we should expect a human being's rational judgments about what it is good for him to do in each situation to work together collectively in guiding the person toward his own individual fulfillment (*eudaemonia*). Each action judged to be good must be judged to be good either as an end in itself or as a means to some further end (or both). Simplifying somewhat, we can assume that there will be a reliable connection between the realization of the *p-rationally ultimate natural ends* of a human being (that is, those ends that figure in an ultimate way in the practical syllogisms a human being is naturally disposed to employ) and that human being's attaining of *eudaemonia*. However, as in the case of the desires of non-rational animals, we cannot assume that the sole p-rationally ultimate natural end (in this sense) of a human being must be that human being's *eudaemonia as such*.

Of course, there is a critical difference between rational and non-rational animals: the rational animal can (and the non-rational animal cannot) understand itself, including its nature and that nature's perfection. Reflecting on these facts can enable a human person to evaluate his conception of his ultimate ends, to see if that conception is properly calibrated to the successful of his nature. This reflection on human nature is to be found in Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, and the "Treatise on Happiness" in Thomas's *Summa Theologica* (I-II questions 1-48). Such philosophical reflection can reveal the erroneousness of certain conceptions of happiness, including happiness as wealth, power, pleasure, or honor, and it can point to the correct conception of happiness, ultimately in terms of the beatific vision.

Such philosophical reflection does provide human persons with a kind of Archimedean point or God's-eye perspective, from which they can evaluate the appropriateness of their conception of their own ultimate natural ends. However, this reflection does not require that all ultimate natural ends be consolidated into a single end (that of one's own happiness). The right conception of happiness can play a regulative role over one's deliberative practices, but it doesn't play this role by supplanting all ultimate ends with itself. If I can see that my current understanding of what it is good for me to do would not in fact tend toward my own *eudaemonia*, then I have a compelling reason for believing that my current understanding is in error. However, it does not follow that the way to correct this error is to suppose that every action can be good only by being a means to my own happiness.

As I mentioned earlier, we must carefully distinguish between the two ways in which one end can be 'ultimate': p-rationally ultimate and metaphysically ultimate. Scientific and philosophical reflection on human nature reveals that I (and all other human beings) have only one natural end that is metaphysically ultimate: the perfection of my own nature by the beatific vision. However, this reflection does not indicate that I have only one p-rationally ultimate end. That is, it does not indicate that I ought to alter my deliberational practices in order to engage in only those practical syllogisms in which my own perfection figures as the ultimate end. In fact, a fully accurate understanding of human nature reveals quite the opposite: that my nature can be fulfilled only by means of habits of deliberation that include other ultimate ends: especially the good of God, of my community, and of my neighbor (as modified by the *ordo amoris*).

What, then, does it mean to claim that I have only one metaphysically ultimate end? It does not mean that all other ends are chosen *for the sake of* my own perfection, in the sense that they are perceived to be good by virtue of causing my own perfection as their effect. What it does mean is this: the good of my neighbor is a good for me *by virtue of* the fact that pursuing it as a p-rationally ultimate end fulfills and perfects my nature and does so constitutively or intrinsically, not causally. It is not that I realize that pursuing my neighbor's good is a reliable way of producing (as a separate effect) the condition of my perfection. If this were the connection, then I should pursue my neighbor's good only for the sake of my own – only when the corresponding practical syllogism is available for employment. Instead, what I should understand is this: my pursuing of my neighbor's good as such is partly constitutive of the perfection of my nature as a rational creature. It is precisely by being an altruist of a certain kind that my own happiness is realized. Hence, reflection on the self-centeredness of my sole metaphysically ultimate end does not in any way undermine the altruism of many of my p-rationally ultimate ends; in fact, far from undermining this altruism, the metaphysical insight reinforces it.

Here is a scheme for organizing the various kinds of ends.

I. Ends of the will.

A. Artificial (elective) ends.

B. Natural ends

1. Absolutely non-final natural ends, both for the sake of and in virtue of some other end.
2. Ends final in the order of practical reason (FIOPR).
  - (a) Ends final in the order of practical reason alone (FIOPRA).
  - (b) The unique end final in the order of nature (FION).

The artificial or elective ends (IA) are chosen on the basis of other ends by means of a practical syllogism whose availability to the agent is contingent, dependent upon contingent facts and circumstances. All artificial ends are both ends for the sake of some other ends and ends by virtue of those same ends.



Natural ends (IB) are not contingent: they do not depend on contingencies about the agent or the agent's circumstances. A natural end is something that is essentially or naturally an end for every member of the species. Not all natural ends are final, however. Some natural ends are absolutely non-final (IB1) and some are final in the order of practical reason (IB2). An absolutely non-final natural end is one that is chosen for the sake of some further end, but the choice in question is universal and unconditional (for members of the human species). All properly functioning human beings employ the practical syllogism in all circumstances. For example, the acquisition of the natural virtues (like courage or wisdom) is a non-final natural end. All human beings should seek to acquire the virtues, and they should seek to do so for the sake of happiness, by means of a non-optional and invariant practical syllogism, a piece of naturally prescribed practical reasoning.

The natural ends that are final in the order of practical reason (IB2) fall into two kinds: those natural ends that are final only in the order of practical reason (FIOPRA) and that one end that is final in the order of nature (FION). The end FION is also final in the order of practical reason. So, if a natural end is *for the sake of* another end, then it is a natural end *in virtue of* the other end, but the converse relation does not always hold. Some ends are final in the order of practical reason but not in the order of nature. The good of God, of one's community, and of one's neighbor fall into this category. The good of one's community is a natural end in virtue of one's eudaemonia but not for the sake of it.

In order to secure the unique metaphysical priority of that end FION, there must be a nomological, reliable correlation between realizing the end FION and pursuing those ends that are FIOPRA.

There are two sorts of correlation of this kind: success-dependent (indirect) and success-independent (direct). In the case of success-dependent correlation, we have a nearly perfect correlation between the pursuit of a FIOPRA end and the successful attainment of that end, and a nearly perfect correlation between the successful attainment of the end and the greater realization of one's own happiness. In addition, the correlation between the pursuit of the FIOPRA end and one's own happiness is grounded in this pair of nearly-perfect correlations. That is, the correlation between pursuit of the end and one's happiness depends on the correlation between success in that pursuit and one's happiness.

In the case of success-independent correlation, the correlation between the pursuit of the FIOPRA end and one's own happiness is more direct: there is a direct, nearly-perfect correlation between *pursuing* the FIOPRA end and one's own happiness, and either only a very imperfect correlation between pursuit of the end and success, or between success in pursuing that end and one's own happiness. It must be the case, however, that there are still positive if imperfect correlations between pursuit and success, and between success and happiness.

For example, a case of success-dependent or indirect correlation to happiness might be the pursuit of friendship or marriage. One's own happiness is seriously impaired by the absence of friendship, and success in developing friendship is nearly perfectly correlated with some increase in one's own happiness.

A case of success-independent or direct correlation to happiness is the pursuit of excellence in one's profession or craft. Not everyone is capable of actually achieving such excellence, so the correlation is imperfect. However, the mere pursuit of excellence is an important component of one's individual happiness. Pursuing excellence in one's craft contributes greatly to one's happiness even when one doesn't succeed. Of course, there is some positive correlation between attaining excellence and one's own happiness and the happiness of others: otherwise, it couldn't be rational to pursue excellence.

Since human beings are rational animals, every natural end that is final in the order of practical reasoning must be in itself good in some way or to someone. A rational being could not pursue an end not understood as good in some way. However, an end FIOFRA need not be understood as good for oneself, as contributing to one's own natural perfection or eudaemonia. It is enough for it to be good for someone or in itself.

## **5. Conclusion: Resolving the Five Tensions**

A. Tensions (iv) and (v), the threats to the unity and diversity of human beings:

The disparate FIOFRA ends are *nomologically* or *naturally* unified with the single FION end. If it were metaphysically possible to engage in the exchange that St. Paul said he would be willing to make, then Agape and Eros would divide St. Paul into two substances, but the exchange is impossible.

Similarly, there is a metaphysical, in-principle correlation between the common good and the eudaemonia of each citizen. There is, however, a pattern of relations of metaphysical dependency that distinguishes the eudaemonia of each citizen as that citizen's unique metaphysically final end. The common good is good for each citizen in virtue of the fact the pursuit of the common good perfects that citizen's nature, and not vice versa: it is not the case that the fact that the perfection of the citizen's nature (eudaemonia) is good for the citizen is grounded in the fact that the citizen's eudaemonia contributes to the common good.

B. Tension (iii), the instrumentalization of friendship:

True friendship involves, as Aristotle had recognized (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8 chapters 3 and 8, 1156b6-10, 1159a27-30, and Book 9 chapters 4 and 8, 1166a3-5, 1168b1-3), valuing the happiness of the friend for its own sake and not merely as a means to one's own end. It is true that one's own happiness serves as a kind of regulative ideal: the life of friendship, in order to be affirmable in rational reflection,

must reliably maximize one's own eudaemonia. However, this does not mean that the good of one's friends ceases to be an ultimate end in the order of practical reasoning. To the contrary: a rational reflection on the value of friendship reinforces the importance of seeking the good of the friend for his own sake.

C. Tension (ii), the possibility of radical self-sacrifice:

The virtuous man loves his own country for its own sake and is certainly willing to sacrifice his own life and future happiness for its welfare, even in the absence of any hope for life after death. Loving one's country in this way is directly connected (in a success-independent way) with one's own happiness or eudaemonia. Most patriots of this sort live long and happy lives: it is only the exceptional patriot who is actually called upon to give up his life. Moreover, as Aristotle argued, most patriots who sacrifice their lives in this way do increase their happiness (or at least, avoid a catastrophic decrease), since they gain the opportunity to perform extremely noble acts and avoid the shame of cowardice. Thus, it is only in the exception of the exception that love for one's own country results in any loss of individual happiness. Therefore, such love is nearly perfectly correlated with an increase in individual happiness, and any rational reflection on the fitness of such love to the needs of human nature must end in validating it. Since the patriot loves the good of his country for its own sake and not merely as a means to his own happiness, his act of self-sacrifice is perfectly rational.

In the case of the apostle Paul's extraordinary willingness to sacrifice his own eternal good for others in Romans 9, it is of critical importance that the exchange Paul considers is a metaphysical impossibility. There is absolutely nothing that Paul (or any one else) could do that would simultaneously increase the prospects of salvation for others while decreasing it for himself. Paul's willingness was a mere wish or velleity, not a potential intention. Such extreme love for one's neighbors' good for its own sake is perfectly correlated with one's own continuation in a state of grace. If it really were possible to sacrifice one's eternal good in this way for the sake of others, such a disposition would have to be counted as a vice and not a virtue, since it would increase the probability that one's nature be destroyed. However, the *de facto* impossibility of such a sacrifice makes all the difference.

D. Tension (i), the conflict between the priority of the polis and the *ordo amoris*:

As we have seen, the virtuous human being is moved by a plurality of distinct loves, each corresponding to some end final in the order of practical reasoning (FIOPR). Human nature demands that these loves be themselves ordered, with love of God given first priority, followed by love of self, of spouse and children, family and friends, compatriots, and other unrelated human beings. This *ordo amoris* corresponds to an allocation of time and resources among a number of inner homunculi of practical reason, collaborating harmoniously in a regime of internal justice.

Insofar as I am motivated by a love of my polis, I must treat the good of myself or my family as outweighed by the greater good of the whole. However, this love of the polis is only one of many co-existing spheres of love in the well-ordered soul. Rational reflection on the needs of human nature provides grounds for regulating the priorities of the different loves without depriving them of their respective spheres of sovereignty. When called upon to act in one's capacity as a public servant, one must act without favoritism or bias, but in one's role as spouse, parent or friend, one rightly puts the needs of one's loved ones above those of others.

#### E. Added Bonus: resolving the tension between perfect and imperfect happiness

There's one more tension within the Thomistic synthesis that I haven't mentioned yet: that between the ends of perfect or eternal happiness (beatitude) and imperfect or earthly happiness (felicity). Both are clearly treated as rational ends of action (ends FIOPR), but only beatitude is the metaphysically final cause of human nature. Once again, the co-existence of multiple final ends in the order of practical reason is perfectly consistent with the existence of a uniquely final end for human beings in the order of nature. Rational reflection reveals that my pursuit of my metaphysically ultimate end is enhanced and not obstructed by loving other goods, including my own felicity and that of my neighbors. Consequently, it is possible for the Christian to be a fully committed and loyal participant in institutions, like the state, that have only felicity as their intrinsic end. Christians must recognize an order here, giving absolute priority of the Church within its appointed sphere, without depriving the state of its own rights and dignity.

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