

ST. THOMAS, *EXTASIS*, AND UNION WITH THE BELOVED

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THOMAS AQUINAS devotes question 28 of the *prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* to an examination of “the effects of love.” Having already established in question 27 that the cause of love is similitude with a known good, he then shows in question 28 the ways in which six effects—union, mutual indwelling, ecstasy, zeal or jealousy, vulnerability, and causality of all other actions—belong to the essence of love. The question as a whole is of exceptional interest from many angles, especially regarding the threefold nature of union (a. 1) and the radical dependency of all actions and passions on love, which is “a first cause” (a. 6). Not a small part of the interest lies in the fact that Thomas chooses to include discussions of certain effects that his predecessors, particularly Dionysius the Areopagite, had traditionally ascribed to love, even when at first glance these phenomena seem to bear little resemblance to the doctrine outlined in previous questions of the *Summa*. Three of these effects—mutual indwelling, ecstasy, and “passion that wounds the lover” (*mutua inhaesio, extasis, passio laesiva amantis*)—attract our attention by their very names, which seem to belong more in a treatise on erotic love or mystical prayer than in a *summa* of theology. We will focus on *extasis* in order to show its often overlooked place in Thomas’s doctrine of love and friendship.

## I. EXTASIS IN THE APPREHENSIVE POWER

Among Thomas's infrequent discussions of *extasis*,<sup>1</sup> the most succinct definition of the term appears in *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3. "To suffer *extasis* means to be placed outside oneself [*extra se ponitur*]."<sup>2</sup> Thomas then observes that such a removal from oneself can occur in two ways, either with respect to the apprehensive power (sensation and cognition), or with respect to the appetitive power (the tendency to a good). Regarding the former, Thomas makes a further distinction between elevation and debasement, or good and bad displacement from oneself.

As to the apprehensive power, a man is said to be placed outside himself, when he is placed outside the knowledge proper to him. This may be due to his being raised to a higher knowledge; thus, a man is said to suffer *extasis*, inasmuch as he is placed outside the connatural apprehension of his sense and reason, when he is raised up so as to comprehend things that surpass sense and reason. Or it may be due to his being cast down into a state of debasement; thus a man may be said to suffer *extasis*, when he is overcome by violent passion or madness. (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3)<sup>3</sup>

In the experience characteristic of the first type of *extasis*, a man is "placed outside connatural apprehension"; he is enabled, by whatever agent causes the state, to rise above the knowledge proper to him. It is unclear—perhaps intentionally—whether such super-natural knowledge is only to be attained through divinely inspired *raptus*, as the discussions in the commentary on Second Corinthians and in the *De Veritate* lead us to believe,<sup>4</sup> or whether in fact *all* love, including human friendship at its most sublime,

<sup>1</sup> The only discussions of any length are: III *Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4; *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3; and *De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, lect. 10, nn. 426-37. Thomas talks about *extasis* in connection with *raptus* in three places: *De Verit.*, q. 13, a. 1; *In II Cor.*, c. 12, lect. 1, esp. nn. 447 and 452; *STh* II-II, q. 175, a. 1; and *STh* q. 175, a. 2, ad 1. Lastly, he implicitly refers to *extasis* in *In Gal.*, c. 2, lect. 6.

<sup>2</sup> "extasim pati aliquis dicitur, cum extra se ponitur" (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3 [Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1988]). Unless otherwise noted, translations are the author's. Some published translations quoted herein have been altered in light of the Latin original. Texts of the *Summa theologiae* are taken from the translation of the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> "Secundum quidem vim apprehensivam aliquis dicitur extra se poni, quando ponitur extra cognitionem sibi propriam: vel quia ad superiorem sublimatur, sicut homo, dum elevatur ad comprehendenda aliqua quae sunt supra sensum et rationem, dicitur extasim pati, inquantum ponitur extra connaturalem apprehensionem rationis et sensus; vel quia ad inferiora deprimitur; puta, cum aliquis in furiam vel amentiam cadit, dicitur extasim passus."

<sup>4</sup> *In II Cor.*, c. 12, lect. 1, esp. nn. 447 and 452; *De Verit.*, q. 13, a. 1.

draws the mind and the senses above the lot that falls to them in the ordinary course of nature. Legend has it that St. Albert instantly knew of the death of his beloved pupil, Thomas. Leaving aside the possible miracle involved, one might believe that the psychic union of the two men was of such intensity that it brought about knowledge at a distance.<sup>5</sup> A comparison is apt: just as the framework of modern physics precludes the possibility of action at a distance, positing instead that all corporeal influence must take place through a medium, so too the regular operations of sense and intellect presuppose the world of accessible sense-experience, from which the intellect draws its formal determinations. However, physics can no more disprove the possibility of unmediated causality than psychology can forbid the rare accession of knowledge beyond man's connatural realm. The mediaeval theologians readily assented to exceptional possibilities in the physical and psychic domains *sub specie Dei*; whether their belief admits of a wider human extension is less obvious.

At least this much can be maintained: the best (and worst) loves are capable of raising natural powers to such a level of energy and fixation, either for good or for ill, that we are justified in viewing the resulting *extasis* as a "going out of" one's limited self and faculties, into a mode of knowing otherwise beyond reach. Thomas acknowledges the truth of such interior transformation when he writes: "The first of these ecstasies [viz. apprehensive] is caused by love dispositively, insofar, namely, as love makes the lover dwell on the beloved, and to dwell intensely on one thing draws the mind from other things" (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3).<sup>6</sup>

The effect of love on the powers of sensation and thought can take two opposite courses, as Thomas notes: the first is to raise

<sup>5</sup> See *Aurora Consurgens: A Document Attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy*, ed. Marie-Louise von Franz, trans. R. F. C. Hull and A. S. B. Glover, Bollingen Series 77 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 415-16.

<sup>6</sup> "Primam quidem extasim facit amor dispositivus, in quantum scilicet facit meditari de amato, ut dictum est: intensa autem meditatio unius abstrahit ab aliis." Throughout this essay we shall refer to the object of love (*amatum*) as "the beloved," although it could just as readily be translated "loved one" or "loved thing." Thomas also uses the phrases *res amata* and *aliquid amatum*, which seem to imply a greater scope than *amatum* by itself; and most of his discussions of *amans* and *amatum* are set in the context of *amor amicitiae*, which merits the English "lover and beloved."

aloft (the phrase *afflatus divinus* used of poets comes to mind), the second is to cast down or diffract (the colloquial “beside himself with anger”). If a person is *extra se ipsum* in the first way, he is led into a higher and better state than he connaturally experiences or is capable of experiencing, because the cause of his “enlargement” removes the limitations of ordinary apprehension and can even be said to remove him from himself, as long as we understand this to mean not that his nature has been renounced or corrupted, but rather that it has been superseded by the help of a higher cause. For “love denotes a certain *coaptatio* of the appetitive power to some good,” and “nothing is hurt by being adapted to that which is suitable to it; rather, if possible, it is perfected and bettered” (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 5).<sup>7</sup> Although the implication that God or the angels are responsible for such *extasis* is uniformly strong whenever Thomas discusses it, nevertheless, one would not think it impossible for such elevation to come about also through the intensity of a union between two magnanimous men, a union of the sort that Laelius and Scipio, or Thomas and Albert, are famed to have enjoyed.

On the other hand, Thomas also points out that *extasis* can take the form of “debasement,” when passion so overcomes reason that a man is said to “go out of himself” in the way that a madman “goes out of his mind.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the assumption that *extasis* implies a loss of reason constitutes the basis of the first objection in article 3. “But love,” the objector says, “does not *always* result in loss of reason, for lovers are masters of themselves at times.”<sup>9</sup> (One suspects that Thomas wrote this sentence more for amusement’s sake than for instruction.) We can gather from Thomas’s response that *extasis* and loss of reason are not only *not* concomitant, but that *extasis*, by lifting a man beyond himself both cognitively and appetitively, is capable of perfecting reason and completing the whole person in a way ordinarily unattainable. The debasement of reason about which

<sup>7</sup> “amor significat coaptationem quandam appetitivae virtutis ad aliquod bonum. Nihil autem quod coaptatur ad aliquid quod est sibi conveniens, ex hoc ipso laeditur: sed magis, si sit possibile, proficit et melioratur.”

<sup>8</sup> See *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 9; *STh* I-II, q. 33, a. 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Sed amor non semper facit alienationem: sunt enim amantes interdum sui compotes.”

Thomas speaks occurs whenever intense love is directed towards a bad object or towards a good object with evil intentions. Although passion can overwhelm and blind reason, this stripping away of wits is a perversion of or impediment to nature, whereas the *afflatus* of the poet and the lover is a higher perfection than nature can attain on its own, and thus is said to be "above nature" rather than beneath it.<sup>10</sup> When Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* groups together "the lunatic, the lover and the poet" (act 5, scene 1) because of the fantastic forms they behold, he names the three kinds of person most susceptible to *extasis*, although in different ways.

In his commentary on Second Corinthians, Thomas draws a distinction between transports caused by a defective power and those caused by divinely bestowed elevation of soul:

Man is made to be outside himself according to the cognitive [power] when he is removed from the natural disposition of cognition, which [removal] happens in order that the intellect, having been drawn away from the use of sense and sensible things, is moved toward seeing certain [other] things. This indeed happens in a twofold way. In one way through a defect of the power, howsoever such a defect happens, such as befalls madmen and those caught in other seizures of the mind; and this drawing out from senses is not an elevation of man, but rather a casting down, since their power is weakened. In another way, through the divine power; and this is properly called elevation, because inasmuch as the agent makes the patient like to himself, the drawing-out which comes to be by the divine power is above man and is something higher than the nature of man. (C. 12, lect. 1, n. 448).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Our discussion is limited to *extasis*, leaving aside the interesting question of *raptus* (see n. 1). The correlation is suitable, for both involve being "carried out of oneself." Nevertheless, it is clear from the texts where Thomas treats of *raptus* that it is a phenomenon "contrary to nature" (as a gloss on Corinthians reads), that is, disproportionate to the natural powers of man and supernaturally inspired, while his treatment of *extasis* places it in the realm of *amor amicitiae* as one of the effects of love. "*Raptus* adds something to *extasis*, for *extasis* means simply a going out of oneself by being placed outside one's proper order, while *raptus* denotes a certain violence in addition" (*STh* II-II, q. 175, a. 2, ad 1).

<sup>11</sup> "Tunc ergo homo efficitur extra se secundum cognitivam, quando removetur ab hac naturali dispositione cognitionis, quae est ut intellectus, ab usu sensuum et sensibilibus rerum abstractus, ad aliqua videnda moveatur. Quod quidem contingit dupliciter, uno modo per defectum virtutis, undecumque talis defectus contingat, sicut accidit in phreneticis et aliis mente captis, et haec quidem abstractio a sensibus non est elevatio hominis, sed potius depressio, quia virtus eorum debilitatur. Alio vero modo per virtutem divinam, et tunc proprie dicitur elevatio, quia cum agens assimilet sibi patiens, abstractio quae fit virtute divina et est supra hominem, [et] est aliquid altius, quam sit hominis natura" (*Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura—Super secundam epistolam ad Corinthos lectura*, ed. Cai [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1953]).

In the body of *STh* II-II, q. 175, a. 2, Thomas discusses the same dichotomy in terms of man's inner psychological orientation, namely, the way in which man may come to be outside himself through the higher appetite of *voluntas* or the lower appetite of *sensualitas*.

## II. EXTASIS IN THE APPETITIVE POWER

After discussing how *extasis* may occur in the apprehensive power, Thomas turns to the appetitive power. "As to the appetitive, a man is said to suffer *extasis*, when that power is borne toward something else, so that it goes forth out from itself, as it were."<sup>12</sup> Occasional phrases—"transports of joy," "caught up in bliss"—testify to our awareness that experiences of desire, love, and joy bestir the soul to pass out from itself into another, chiefly through the longing that accompanies the absence of the beloved. In explaining how love causes the appetitive power to undergo *extasis*, Thomas invokes the all-important distinction between *amor amicitiae* and *amor concupiscentiae*.<sup>13</sup> The former leads to an authentic going forth from self, in which one's own good is placed in or consecrated to the good of another person, while the latter has but the appearance of egress, when in fact it returns wholly to the will of the man desiring and subserves his own appetite.

The second *extasis* [i.e., appetitive] is caused by love directly; by *amor amicitiae*, simply; by *amor concupiscentiae*, not simply but in a restricted sense. Because in *amor concupiscentiae*, the lover is carried out of himself, in a certain sense, insofar, namely, as not being satisfied with enjoying the good that he has, he seeks to enjoy something outside of himself. But since he seeks to have this extrinsic good for himself, he does not go out from himself simply, and this movement remains finally within him. On the other hand, in *amor amicitiae*, a man's affection goes out from itself simply, because he wishes and does good to his friend, by caring and providing for him for his sake. (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Secundum appetitivam vero partem dicitur aliquis extasim pati, quando appetitus alicuius in alterum fertur, exiens quodammodo extra seipsum."

<sup>13</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

<sup>14</sup> "Sed secundam extasim facit amor directe: simpliciter quidem amor amicitiae; amor autem concupiscentiae non simpliciter, sed secundum quid. Nam in amore concupiscentiae, quodammodo fertur amans extra seipsum: in quantum scilicet, non contentus gaudere de bono quod habet, quaerit frui aliquo

Elaborating the same theme in his commentary on the *De Divinis Nominibus* of Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas discusses the difference between concupiscent and amicitial *extasis* with an eye towards the underlying difference of *intentio*, or the reason why the self seeks the *res amata*. The question “what good is that object to me?” may be answered in terms of the degree to which the self leaves behind the good proper to its substance and wills the good for another rational being. Such love of another for his own sake does not turn back upon itself; the end of the action is precisely the good of the other, even if the good state one wishes or seeks for the beloved should happen to perfect the lover as well. Such reflexive perfection is not the *radix amoris* but the *fructus amoris*: it follows upon but does not constitute the essence of love directed to another’s good. Although the simple passion of love as it belongs to some appetitive power is necessarily grounded in the basic love every substance has for its own preservation and betterment, we want to find out what it is about certain more perfect loves that causes an elevation above and beyond this ground, though not displaced from it. In ecstatic love, as Thomas understands it, how does the beloved become the *root* of the lover’s action, so that the good resulting to the lover is more fittingly compared to the *fruit* produced out of that action? How, in short, can “selfless love”—the reality of which cannot be doubted—be explained?

In both modes of love [*amor amicitiae* and *amor concupiscentiae*], the affection of the lover is drawn by some sort of inclination to the loved thing, yet in different ways. In the second mode of love the affection of the lover is drawn to the beloved by an act of the will, but by intention [*per intentionem*] the affection returns to itself; for when I desire justice or wine, my affection inclines toward one of them, but still comes back to itself, since it is drawn to those things in order that through them it might be in a good state. Consequently, this kind of love does not place the lover outside himself [*extra se*] with respect to the end of the intention.

But when something is loved by the first mode of love, the affection is borne toward the loved thing such that it does not come back to itself, since it

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extra se. Sed quia illud extrinsecum bonum quaerit sibi habere, non exit simpliciter extra se, sed talis affectio in fine infra ipsum concluditur. Sed in amore amicitiae, affectus alicuius simpliciter exit extra se: quia vult amico bonum, et operatur, quasi gerens curam et providentiam ipsius, propter ipsum amicum.”

loves the good for the loved thing and not for the reason that from it [the good] something might come to it [the affection]. Thus such a love produces *extasis* because it places the lover outside his very self [*extra seipsum*]. (*De Div. Nom.*, q. 4, a. 10, n. 430)<sup>15</sup>

The crucial point emerging from this text is that the *amor amicitiae* at the basis of a reciprocal friendship of virtue, by moving lover and beloved to cherish and help one another, is the means whereby each individual is enabled to exceed himself, going forth into the will and life of the other so that a common good comes into being at some level, where before only the good of the self stood at the horizon of desire. For man “is made to be outside himself when he does not care for those things which are his own, but [rather, when he cares for those things] which reach toward the good of others, and charity causes this [as is written in] 1 Cor 13:5: ‘Charity does not seek things which are its own’” (*In II Cor.*, c. 12, lect. 1, n. 447).<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, when the individual does *not* go out of himself by placing part (or in the case of God, all) of his good in another, his appetite remains solely self-referential—not merely in the way that love is grounded in self-love, but in the way that *amor concupiscentiae* does not terminate in any other good than one’s own substance. In this manner, the person who does not “go out of himself” by virtue of his love can never exceed the constraints of his individual self. What he takes as his own good will not reach beyond that which is immediately *reducible* to himself, and as a result he may be said to lead a life of solitary confinement. “For through the appetitive power, man is ‘in himself alone’ when he cares only for those things which are his” (*ibid.*).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “In utroque igitur modo amoris, affectus amantis per quamdam inclinationem trahitur ad rem amatam, sed diversimode: nam in secundo modo amoris, affectus amantis trahitur ad rem amatam per actum voluntatis, sed per intentionem, affectus recurrit in seipsum; dum enim appetit iustitiam vel vinum, affectus quidem meus inclinatur in alterum horum, sed tamen recurrit in seipsum, quia sic fertur in rem amatam, quod non recurrit in seipsum, quia ipsi rei amatae vult bonum, non ex ea ratione quia ei exinde aliquid accidat. Sic igitur talis amor extasim facit, quia ponit amantem extra seipsum” (*In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera, O.P. [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1950]). Translations from *De Div. Nom.* are by David Gallagher.

<sup>16</sup> “Efficitur vero extra se ipsum, quando non curat quae sua sunt, sed quae perveniunt ad bona aliorum; et hoc facit charitas (1 Cor., XIII, v. 5): «Charitas non quaerit quae sua sunt.»”

<sup>17</sup> “Per appetitivam enim virtutem homo est solum in se ipso, quando curat quae sunt sua tantum.”



III. THE PLACE OF *EXTASIS* IN THE WHOLE LIFE OF MAN

As we have seen, love causes *extasis* in two ways: indirectly, by disposing the senses and the intellect of the lover to dwell on the beloved, to the point of superseding himself and everything else; directly, by fervently ordaining the lover's will to the good of the beloved for the beloved's sake, so that the lover's affection is truly said to pass out of itself on account of his care and provision for the beloved; or, if the object be superior to him, by moving the lover to entrust himself to be ruled and taught by the higher agent according to the degree of its perfection. Although discussions of love's effects usually presume the love of equals or the love of an inferior for his superior, Thomas's doctrine is meant to be applied to all three possible relationships of agent and patient. Thomas's paraphrase of Pseudo-Dionysius speaks directly to this point:

superiors display the aforesaid effect of love [viz., *extasis*] through the provision that they make concerning inferiors. For in this, in a certain manner, they are placed outside themselves, because they tend into others. *And* similarly, *co-ordinates*, that is, equals, *show [this effect]* through a containing in which they contain each other; namely, as one is helped and cherished by the other. *And inferiors show [this effect]*, in that they are turned towards the more divine, their superiors, as [being] the things in which their good exists. For in all these, it appears that something goes out from itself when it is turned towards the other. (*De Div. Nom.*, q. 4, a. 10, n. 435)<sup>18</sup>

*Extasis* reaches its perfection with regard to both powers, apprehensive and appetitive, when the lover entirely rests in the good of the beloved as in his final end, the source wherein his own good preeminently subsists. This kind of ultimacy in love, where the soul surrenders its own intellect and will unconditionally to another, is merited by God alone.<sup>19</sup> Only in the Cross of Christ, where self-abandonment and self-consummation meet as converging axes, do we see the mystery at

<sup>18</sup> "praedictum effectum amoris, demonstrant *superiora* per providentiam quam faciunt de inferioribus; in hoc enim quodammodo extra se ponuntur, quod aliis intendunt; *et* similiter, *monstrant coordinata*, idest aequalia, per continentiam qua se invicem continent, prout scilicet, unum ab altero iuvatur et fovetur; *et monstrant* etiam inferiora per hoc quod divinius convertuntur in sua superiora, ut in quibus eorum bonum existit. In omnibus enim his apparet quod aliquid extra se exit, dum ad alterum convertitur."

<sup>19</sup> See *De Div. Nom.*, q. 4, a. 10, n. 433.

the heart of reality: “he who loses his life for my sake will gain it” (Matt 10:39). Commenting on Galatians 2:20, “And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me,” Thomas writes:

A man is said to live according to that in which he chiefly puts his affection and in which he is mainly delighted. Hence men who take their greatest pleasure in study or in hunting say that this is their life. However, each man has his own private interest by which he seeks that which is his own. Therefore, when someone lives seeking only what is his own, he lives only unto himself; but when he seeks the good of others, he is said to live for them.

Accordingly, because the Apostle had set aside his love of self through the cross of Christ, he said that he was dead so far as love of self was concerned, declaring that *with Christ I am nailed to the cross* (2:19), i.e., through the cross of Christ my own private love has been removed from me. Hence he says *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (6:14). “If one died for all, then all were dead. And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them” (2 Cor. 5:14). *And I live, now not I*, i.e., I no longer live as though having any interest in my own good, *but Christ liveth in me*, i.e., I have Christ alone in my affection and Christ himself is my life: “To me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).<sup>20</sup>

As the above passage makes clear, the most potent effect of love is the transformation of the lover into the beloved, which results from his being carried out of himself. In his paraphrase of Dionysius, Thomas again develops the same theme of Pauline *extasis*:

[It is] *because of* this—that love does not allow the lover to be of himself, but of the beloved—that *the great Paul*, having been placed in the divine love as in a certain containing power of the divine love, *making* him go completely out of himself, as though speaking by the divine voice, says: “I live, yet not I, but

<sup>20</sup> *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P. (Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1966), c. 2, lect. 6, n. 107. “homo quantum ad illud dicitur vivere, in quo principaliter firmat suum affectum, et in quo maxime delectatur. Unde et homines qui in studio seu in venationibus maxime delectantur, dicunt hoc eorum vitam esse. Quilibet autem homo habet quemdam privatum affectum, quo quaerit quod suum est; dum ergo aliquis vivit quaerens tantum quod suum est, soli sibi vivit, cum vero quaerit bona aliorum, dicitur etiam illis vivere. Quia ergo Apostolus proprium affectum deposuerat per crucem Christi, dicebat se mortuum proprio affectu, dicens *Christo confixus sum cruci*, id est, per crucem Christi remotus est a me proprius affectus sive privatus. Unde dicebat infra ult. [vi, 14]: *Mihi absit gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri*, etc., II Cor. v, 15 s.: *Si unus pro omnibus mortuus est, ergo omnes mortui sunt. Et pro omnibus mortuus est Christus, ut et qui vivunt iam non sibi vivant, sed ei*, etc.—*Vivi autem*, id est, *iam non vivo ego*, quasi in affectu habens proprium bonum, *sed vivit in me Christus*, id est tantum Christum habeo in affectu, et ipse Christus est vita mea. Phil. i, 21: *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum*” (*Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura—Super epistolam ad Galatas lectura*, ed. Cai [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1953]).

Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), because, namely, the whole self going out from itself stretches out into God, not seeking what is its own, but what is God's, *as the true lover having suffered extasis by the living God, and not living the life of himself, but the life of Christ as [that] of the beloved*, which life was *intensely* lovable to him. (*De Div. Nom.*, q. 4, a. 10, n. 436)<sup>21</sup>

An important text in the *Sentences* commentary takes up and extends the same line of thought. After arguing that any passive power is completed when it is informed by the term of its action, as occurs when the intellect ceases to inquire once it grasps the intelligible form to which the intellect "is affixed" and "firmly adheres," Thomas writes: "Likewise, when the affection or tendency is wholly imbued by the form of the good that is its object, it takes delight in it and adheres to it as though fixed on it. . . . Whence love is nothing but a certain transformation of affection into the beloved thing" (III *Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1).<sup>22</sup> Pursuing this argument to its conclusion, Thomas declares:

And because all that is effected [*efficitur*] by the form of anything is made [*efficitur*] one with it, so through love the one loving becomes one with the beloved because the latter is made [*est factum*] the form of the one loving. Thus the Philosopher says in *Ethics* IX that 'a friend is *alter ipse*,' and in 1 Cor. 6:17 it is said, 'whoever adheres to God is one spirit [with Him].'<sup>23</sup>

Not only is the lover disposed in his affections toward the good of the other, but he begins actually to live *by* and *within* the life of the beloved, whose will becomes in a certain manner a principle of his *own* acts, as though the inclination of the other were engrafted onto his own inclination.

<sup>21</sup> "*propter hoc quod amor non permittit amatorem esse sui ipsius, sed amati, magnus Paulus constitutus in divino amore sicut in quodam continente et virtute divini amoris faciente ipsum totaliter extra se exire, quasi divino ore loquens dicit, Galat. 2 [20]: Vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit autem in me Christus, scilicet quia a se exiens totum se in Deum proiecerat, non quaerens quod sui est, sed quod Dei, sicut verus amator et passus extasim, Deo vivens et non vivens vita sui ipsius, sed vita Christi ut amati, quae vita erat sibi valde diligibilis.*"

<sup>22</sup> "Similiter quando affectus vel appetitus omnino imbuitur forma boni quod est sibi objectum, complacet sibi in illo et adhaeret ei quasi fixum in ipso. . . . Unde amor nihil aliud est quam quaedam transformatio affectus in rem amatam" (*Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi*, v. 3, ed. R. P. Maria Fabianus Moos, O.P. [Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1933]).

<sup>23</sup> "Et quia omne quod efficitur forma alicujus, efficitur unum cum illo; ideo per amorem amans fit unum cum amato, quod est factum forma amantis. Et ideo dicit Philosophus in IX Eth., quod *amicus est alter ipse*; et I Cor., vi, 17: *Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est.*"

To act according to [the inclination of love] is to do whatsoever is befitting the beloved. For since the lover takes up [*assumpserit*] the beloved as one with himself, it follows that the lover wears the mask [*personam*], as it were, of the beloved in all things relating to the beloved, and thus in a manner the lover serves the beloved insofar as he is guided by the aims of the beloved. (Ibid.)<sup>24</sup>

Thomas's discussion of *mutua inhaesio* (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 2) takes on a deeper meaning in view of these radiant passages from the *Sentences* commentary. In order for the mutual indwelling of friendship to take place, the lover and the beloved each must pass out of himself and come to dwell in the other, in this way "sharing" each other's good, willing it in common. As we have seen, such dwelling and commingling is made possible when the affections of the heart become harmoniously proportioned to another person, and one's free will becomes unreservedly attached to another's good. We can understand why John Donne speaks of the "interanimation" of lovers, as though two individual principles of life had begun to work conjointly, each infusing the other—a state exemplified in the words of Christ: "In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Even the Almighty is borne out of Himself towards His creatures in a transcendent *extasis* of emanation:

this aforesaid operation of love is even found in God. . . *that He Himself*, who is *the cause of all things* through his own beautiful and good love by which He loves all things, according to the abundance of His goodness with which He loves them, *comes to be outside of His very self*, insofar as, through His goodness and love or dilection, He provides for all existing things, and in a certain manner *is drawn and displaced* from His excellence, according to which He exists above *all things and is separated from all things*, toward this, *that He be in all things*, through the effect of His goodness, according to a certain *extasis*—which, nevertheless, He makes to be in all inferiors in such a way that His supersubstantial power does not go forth from Him. For He fills all things such that He Himself is in no way emptied of His power. Because indeed, he adds, that through this He was said to be *displaced*, a lessening not being

<sup>24</sup> "operari autem secundum eam est operari ea quae amato competunt. Cum enim amans amatum assumpserit quasi idem sibi, oportet ut quasi personam amati amans gerat in omnibus quae ad amatum spectant; et sic quodammodo amans amato inservit, in quantum amati terminis regulatur." The expression *gerit* . . . *personam* can also mean "to perform the role of x." Thus understood, Thomas would be saying that the lover, by identifying himself with the beloved, performs the beloved's role, that is, he loves the beloved as the beloved loves himself in all the things he does or wishes to do.

understood, but only this, that He betakes Himself into inferiors on account of [their] participation of His goodness. (*De Div. Nom.*, q. 4, a. 10, n. 437)<sup>25</sup>

No earthly love can equal the divine largesse, which proceeds from the supreme being subsisting through itself, in whose being (and, as a result, in whose goodness) all things participate in their diverse degrees. The procession of the Son from the Father, the Holy Spirit from Father and Son, the emanation of the world from God, and the mission of the Word made flesh, each typifies *extasis* in so exalted a mode that all earthly manifestations of self-giving and self-emptying are but imperfect similitudes of these divine *extases*.

In light of the foregoing, we can understand more deeply one of the great paradoxes of love: its enduring internal contrariety. The lover goes out of himself to dwell in the beloved, but by so doing, the beloved comes to dwell in *him*; and the dialectical process of giving and receiving can never be completed, inasmuch as no love is perfected on earth. Even when the object of love is possessed, it cannot be appropriated; even when the lover is removed from himself, he yet remains within the sphere of his own good. At this point, it is possible to see more lucidly a connection between *mutua inhaesio* and *extasis*: the ardent desire felt by the lover for an ever-greater union with the beloved. "The lover is said to be in the beloved," writes Thomas, "inasmuch as

<sup>25</sup> "praedicta operatio amoris etiam in Deo invenitur . . . quod *ipse* qui est *omnium causa* per suum pulchrum et bonum amorem quo omnia amat, secundum abundantiam suae bonitatis qua amat res, *fit extra seipsum*, in quantum providet omnibus existentibus per suam bonitatem et amorem vel dilectionem et quodammodo *trahitur et deponitur* quodammodo a sua excellentia, secundum quod supra *omnia* existit *et ab omnibus segregatur*, ad hoc quod sit *in omnibus*, per effectus suae bonitatis, secundum quamdam extasim, quae tamen sic ipsum facit in omnibus inferioribus esse, ut supersubstantialis eius virtus non egrediatur ab ipso. Sic enim implet omnia quod ipse in nullo evacuetur sua virtute. Quod quidem addit, ut per hoc quod dixerat: *deponitur*, non intelligatur aliqua minoratio, sed hoc solum quod se inferioribus ingerit propter suae bonitatis participationem." In *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2, obj. 1, an objection is raised precisely on the grounds of Dionysius's statement that love places the lover outside himself and causes him to pass into the beloved object—a thing seemingly inadmissible for God: "Quia, secundum Dionysium, 4 cap. *de Div. Nom.*, amor amantem extra se ponit, et eum quodammodo in amatum transfert. Inconveniens autem est dicere quod Deus, extra se positus, in alia transferatur. Ergo inconveniens est dicere quod Deus alia a se amet." The response makes use of the text quoted above from Thomas's paraphrase of Dionysius: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod amans sic fit extra se in amatum translatus, in quantum vult amato bonum, et operatur per suam providentiam, sicut et sibi. Unde et Dionysius dicit, 4 cap. *de Div. Nom.*: *Audendum est autem et hoc pro veritate dicere, quod et ipse omnium causa, per abundantiam amativae bonitatis, extra seipsum fit ad omnia existentia providentiis.*"

the lover is not satisfied with a superficial apprehension of the beloved, but strives to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to him, so as to penetrate into his very soul" (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 2).<sup>26</sup> *Extasis* both precedes and succeeds the affective and real union of lovers. *Amor amicitiae* demands a constant willing of the other's good and a steady purging of self-will. Because of its forestalled fulfillment and steady solicitude, such a discipline must be painful, and will wound the lover (cf. *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 5); but it is only from the wounded heart that blood and water can freely flow. By being carried out of oneself, a certain suffering is undergone whereby the lover is wounded in his self-love by its expansion and outflowing into another. (Psychologically, the correlation of indwelling, transport, and wounding is indeed richly suggestive.) Therefore, *extasis* and mutual indwelling, along with the other effects of love detailed in *STh* I-II, q. 28, are seen to follow necessarily from the desire for, and the reality of, communion between lover and beloved. Love is best described, then, as a *vis unitiva*, a force that overcomes the separateness and solitude of the individual, leading multiplicity back into a unity of common purpose and goodness.<sup>27</sup>

Answering the objection that love ought not to be called a *vis unitiva* because it is said to pierce, burn, melt, and carry one away—all of which bespeak division rather than union—Thomas in the *Sentences* passage upholds the fittingness of these figurative expressions.

For from the fact that love transforms the lover into the beloved, it makes the lover enter into the interior of the beloved, and conversely, in order that nothing of the beloved remain not united to the lover; just as the form comes into the innermost of the thing formed, and conversely. And so the one loving in a way passes into the beloved, and according to this, love is called piercing; for to come into the innermost of a thing by slicing it apart is what is characteristic of something piercing. And likewise the beloved penetrates the lover, coming to his interior; and because of this it is said that love wounds,

<sup>26</sup> "Amans vero dicitur esse in amato secundum apprehensionem in quantum amans non est contentus superficiali apprehensione amati, sed nititur singula quae ad amatum pertinent intrinsecus disquirere, et sic ad interiora eius ingreditur."

<sup>27</sup> See *STh* I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 3; *STh* I-II, q. 26, a. 2, ad 2.

and that it transfixes the lover's passions [lit., *iecur*, liver or seat of the passions]. (III *Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4)<sup>28</sup>

Earlier we made note of the way in which the affection or tendency of a man is "wholly imbued by the form of the good that is its object," even up to the point of a certain formal union or dissolution of self-identity. The more a love is focused on the object, the more it is capable of transforming the lover into the image of his beloved. Indeed, so ample is its power, that the vehemence of the desire to seek one's good in another magnifies the delight and inherence of the conjunction of wills. Continuing his response in the *Sentences*, Thomas shows how the language of Scripture and mysticism accurately reflects the exchange of forms involved in *amor amicitiae*.

But since nothing can be transformed into another except according as it recedes in a way from its own form, since of one thing there is one form, therefore *another* division precedes this division of penetration, insofar as the lover is separated from himself in tending into the beloved. And according to this, love is said to make [one in] ecstasy, and to burn, since that which burns rises [*ebullit*, "boils over"] outside itself and exhales. Since, however, nothing recedes from itself unless freed from what was containing it within itself, just as a natural thing does not lose [its] form unless freed from the dispositions whose form was retaining it in matter; therefore, it is necessary that that limit, which used to contain it only among its own limits, be removed from the lover. And because of this, love is said to melt [*liquefacere*] the heart, since a liquid is not contained by its own limits; and the contrary disposition is called hardness of heart.<sup>29</sup>

Just as the lung's act of breathing involves inhalation and exhalation, and the heart's act of circulation consists of

<sup>28</sup> "Ex hoc enim quod amor transformat amantem in amatum, facit amantem intrare ad interiora amati et e converso, ut nihil amati amanti remaneat non unitum; sicut forma pervenit ad intima formati et e converso. Et ideo amans quodammodo penetrat in amatum, et secundum hoc amor dicitur acutus. Acuti enim est dividendo ad intima rei devenire. Et similiter amatum penetrat amantem ad interiora ejus perveniens. Et propter hoc dicitur quod amor vulnerat, et quod transfigit jecur."

<sup>29</sup> "Quia vero nihil potest in alterum transformari nisi secundum quod a sua forma quodammodo recedit, quia unius una est forma, ideo hanc divisionem penetrationis praecedit alia divisio qua amans a seipso separatur in amatum tendens. Et secundum hoc dicitur amor extasim facere et fervere, quia quod fervet extra se ebullit et exhalat. Quia vero nihil a se recedit nisi soluto eo quod intra se ipsum continebatur, sicut res naturalis non amittit formam nisi solutis dispositionibus quibus forma in materia retinebatur, ideo oportet quod ab amante terminatio illa qua infra terminos suos tantum continebatur, amoveatur. Et propter hoc amor dicitur liquefacere cor, quia liquidum suis terminis non continetur; et contraria dispositio dicitur cordis duritia."

contraction and dilation, so every act of love involves the indwelling of the beloved and the sending-forth of the lover, with the full array of vivifying effects brought about by the communion of souls or spirits. Ortega y Gasset eloquently describes this bivalency of love:

When the other person reciprocates, a period of transfusive union follows, in which each one transfers the roots of his being to the other, and lives—thinks, desires, acts—not from himself but from the other. Here the beloved is no longer an object to be thought about, for the simple reason that you have him within you.<sup>30</sup>

We must observe, however, that Thomas is always careful to append *quodammodo* or a similar qualifier to the phrase *exiens extra se ipsum* (cf. *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 3). The qualification is important, inasmuch as man cannot strictly speaking “leave himself behind,” which would be a description of physical death, not of love. The legend of Tristan and Iseult, especially as retold by Wagner—culminating in the famous *Liebestod* of his opera—explicitly identifies the sublimity of erotic love with the finality of death. As Denis de Rougemont convincingly argues,<sup>31</sup> such a presentation of ecstasy is a perversion of its true character, and leads in the end to the death of love itself. For love is perfective and bettering, not corruptive (cf. *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 5); and if to pass outside of oneself means to *lose* one’s reason or to be severed from the body, it is no better than insanity or dismemberment.

Attending to Thomas’s words, we learn that the appetite of the ecstatic lover is borne, especially by the desire for affective and real union, towards the beloved and his intrinsic good. Thus understood, *extasis* expresses with added emphasis the central truth Thomas iterates in his discussions of *amor amicitiae*, namely, that the human being is perfected by and through the loving of other persons for their own sake. “Every passion of the soul implies either movement towards something, or rest in something” (*STh* I-II, q. 27, a. 4),<sup>32</sup> and of these passions, love is

<sup>30</sup> *On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme*, trans. Toby Talbot (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 65.

<sup>31</sup> *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> “omnis alia passio animae vel importat motum ad aliquid, vel quietem in aliquo.”



the absolute origin and goal (cf. *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 6). “Just as fire cannot be restrained from the motion that befits it according to the exigency of its form, save through violence, so neither can the lover do anything apart from love” (III *Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1).<sup>33</sup> If the beloved is good in itself or the Good Itself, then in some sense it will always remain beyond a man’s own limitations and will be worthy of his indwelling. The person who keenly desires perfection must reach towards and work to assimilate the good, so far as may be done; for there will never be an end to this ecstatic discovery of the beloved. In order to make the beloved “one with himself,” he must go forth from his naturally delimited self, enlarging the good he will inhabit. As is clear from Thomas’s teaching on *extasis*, the Christian’s final rest in the beatifying vision of the divine essence will be the supreme example of going forth from oneself, a mere creature, to the Beloved who is all in all, the God who is the principle of one’s being, life, and bliss.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> “Et sicut ignis non potest retineri a motu qui competit sibi secundum exigentiam suae formae, nisi per violentiam; ita nec amans quin agat secundum amorem.”

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to Timothy B. Noone for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.