

ANTHONY T. FLOOD

LOVE OF SELF AS THE CONDITION FOR A GIFT OF SELF IN AQUINAS*

Perhaps the most well-known and provocative element of Wojtyła’s ethical anthropology is that the meaning and purpose of human life is rooted in a complete gift of self. Michael Waldstein has effectively argued that Wojtyła’s account is not novel; rather, Aquinas develops his account of love and friendship in a similar gift-of-self framework.¹ I believe Waldstein is correct both in his argument and in showing the value of Aquinas’s account of love to debates in philosophical personalism. I wish to contribute to this debate by arguing that to understand adequately Aquinas’s account of love in general and the aspect of the gift of self in particular, we must appreciate the importance of his account of appropriate self-love; moreover, self-love and love as a gift of self constitute two foundational poles on which we should base any development of a theory of love within Thomistic personalism. I will proceed by offering brief overviews of Wojtyła’s concept of love as a gift of self and Waldstein’s comparative study of Wojtyła and Aquinas on this issue. I will then examine Aquinas’s notion of self-love, distin-

ANTHONY T. FLOOD — North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, USA
e-mail: Anthony.Flood@ndsu.edu • ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3397-3696>

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¹ Michael Waldstein, “John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity,” *Anthropotes* 18 (2002): 113–138 (first part) and 269–286 (second part).

guishing between the good and bad kinds of self-love and then show how self-love actualized in self-friendship creates the possibility for friendship with others.

Wojtyla

Wojtyla bases his ethical anthropology in large measure on the “personalistic norm.” In *Love and Responsibility*, he defines the norm as such: “a person is an entity of a sort to which the only proper and adequate way to relate is love.”² The negative dimension of this principle demands that persons never be used as mere means, while the positive dimension demands love as the only proper response to a person. Throughout his writings, Wojtyla develops the implications of this principle, including the characterization of the nature of love specifically as a gift of self.

In *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Wojtyla³ characterizes the pre-sin beginnings of human existence first in terms of man’s original solitude and then in terms of man’s fulfillment by means of a complete mutual self-giving in a spousal context. He states the following of the first man:

[H]e, too, after having become completely conscious of his own solitude among all living beings on the earth, awaits a “help similar to himself” (see Gen 2:20). None of these beings (*animalia*), in fact, offers man the basic conditions that *make it possible to exist in a relation of reciprocal gift*.⁴

² Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981), 41.

³ For convenience, in this article “Karol Wojtyla” also stands for “John Paul II.”

⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Translation, Introduction, and Index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), Catechesis 14:1.

The man recognizes in the woman a being like himself with whom he can truly share his life in a “communion of persons.” This recognition is fulfilled in the reciprocal self-giving of love.

One can say that, created by Love, that is, endowed in their being with masculinity and femininity, both are “naked,” because they are *free with the very freedom of the gift*. This freedom lies exactly at the basis of the spousal meaning of the body. The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains “from the beginning” the “spousal” attribute, that is, *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.⁵

Two aspects mark the gift of self: giving and accepting.

This allows us to reach the conclusion that the exchange of the gift, in which their whole humanity, soul and body, femininity and masculinity, participates, is realized *by preserving the inner characteristics (that is, precisely innocence) of self-donation and of the acceptance of the other as a gift*. These two functions of the mutual exchange are deeply connected in the whole process of the “gift of self”: giving and accepting the gift interpenetrate in such a way that the very act of giving becomes acceptance, and acceptance transforms itself into giving.⁶

While all of the above is cast in a spousal context, love as such possesses a self-giving nature, though the spousal instance is a sort of earthly paradigm of it.⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15:1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17:4.

⁷ Elizabeth Salas’s “Person and Gift According to Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II” offers an insightful analysis of how Wojtyła understands a gift of self and, particularly, how the self is not lost, so to speak, in such an act, but rather finds its fulfillment. *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 99–124.

Waldstein

Waldstein argues that the notion of love as a gift of self is not a Wojtylian innovation. Aquinas construes love in much the same way, even using the phrase “gift of self.”⁸ Waldstein notes that Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of love: the love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*) and the love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*). Love of concupiscence is the love of the good itself while love of friendship pertains to whom the love is directed.

Both loves must concur in every love. They are the two sides of one and the same coin. When I love truth, I am attracted to truth as something good and I will it to be mine, or rather, since truth is a common good, I will myself to serve it. Neither aspect can be separated from the other.⁹

Waldstein proceeds to clarify the notion that a person can love himself with a love of friendship by noting that Aquinas insists each person has a friendship with himself. Stronger still, self-friendship¹⁰ is more basic than friendship between people as the former is based on substantial oneness or unity. Waldstein continues on to speak about Aquinas’s predication of ecstasy to the love of friendship for another person, to which I will momentarily turn. However, I wish to interrupt by stressing that it is this notion of self-friendship that needs to be unpacked more fully in order to understand sufficiently Aquinas’s account of love. I will return to this topic in the next section.

⁸ Waldstein does not assert that Wojtyla himself thought of this as an innovation. However, many key thinkers deny that Aquinas possessed such an account.

⁹ Waldstein, “John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity,” 128.

¹⁰ Neither Aquinas nor Waldstein use the term “self-friendship.” However, I think it suffices to capture the meaning of “friendship with oneself.”

Continuing on with Waldstein, he cites Aquinas's *Lectures on John* to flesh out this property of ecstasy or going outside of oneself. Aquinas states the following:

Love is twofold, namely, love of friendship and love of concupiscence, but they differ. In the love of concupiscence we draw to ourselves what is outside of us when by that very love we love things other than ourselves inasmuch as they are useful or delightful to us. In the love of friendship, on the other hand, it is the other way around, because we draw ourselves to what is outside. For, to those whom we love in that love we are related as to ourselves, *communicating ourselves to them in some way*.¹¹

The lover gives himself by communicating the being of who he is to the beloved; in other words, he makes himself a gift for his beloved. Waldstein next notes that in mutual self-giving, friends enjoy a communion (*communio*) of one another. One last quote sums up this point and Waldstein's general interpretation of Aquinas on love, friendship, and self-giving:

St. Thomas seems to state a general rule that applies not only to God, but to love in general: "To give oneself is an indication of great love." It must be granted that some kinds of friendship primarily involve cooperation in a common work and sharing in a common good rather than the enjoyment of one another as a concupiscible good. Such enjoyment of one another as a good is clearest in spousal love. Still, a certain self-communication, St. Thomas claims, is an essential aspect of the love of friendship in general. It follows that, when this love is mutually known and accepted, and when a shared life is built up, one can speak of a gift of self in some sense in all friendships. In giving the gift of

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on John*, Chapter 15, Lecture 4, cit. after: Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity," 129.

himself through the love of friendship each friend becomes for the other a good to be enjoyed.¹²

Waldstein demonstrates that Aquinas's account contains a notion quite similar to Wojtyla's gift of self. Moreover, if we wish to continue to develop a view of the person rooted in both the thought of Aquinas and Wojtyla, the overlap of the two thinkers on this point can only make our task easier. However, we need to be attentive to the basis of Aquinas's notion of self-giving, namely its foundation in proper self-love or what I term "self-friendship."

Aquinas on Self-Love and Self-Friendship¹³

Aquinas affirms that each person should love himself, and that such appropriate self-love serves as the basis for the possibility of giving oneself lovingly to another. My point of departure for discussing Aquinas's views on self-friendship is the passage cited by Waldstein referenced above:

We must hold that, *properly speaking, a man is not a friend to himself, but something more than a friend*, since friendship implies union, for Dionysius says (*Div Nom.* iv) that "love is a unitive force," whereas a man is one with himself which is more than being united to another. *Hence, just as unity is the principle of union, so the love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship.* For if we have friendship with others it is because we do unto them as we do unto ourselves, hence we read

¹² Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity," 131. The included citation is from Aquinas's *Lectures on John*, ad 3:16.

¹³ I have argued elsewhere that Aquinas's notion of self-friendship should be understood as an account of subjectivity. My present argument does not depend on such a position. See Anthony T. Flood, "Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 69–83.

in *Ethic.* ix. 4, 8, that “the origin of friendly relations with others lies in our relations to ourselves.”¹⁴

In this passage, I believe we find Aquinas grappling with a lack of terminological resources required to express the reality of a person’s inner-life. Medieval philosophical discourse provides terms to analyze properly the relations between people but seems to lack terms to express adequately the ways in which a person relates to oneself. Aquinas’s solution is to use the term “friendship” analogically. There is greater epistemic access to the nature of friendship between two people than to self-friendship, though, somewhat strikingly, friendship between persons is based on the ontologically prior inner-life of a person. Moreover, a love-based self-relation constitutes self-friendship.

Aquinas expands on the notions of self-love and self-friendship in *Summa Theologiae* II–II, 25, 7, which asks “Whether sinners love themselves.” While this question is raised within the context of charity (*caritas*), the principles he employs in the response are drawn from natural love (*amor*). He is careful to distinguish different kinds of self-love: a self-love which all possess, a wicked self-love, and an appropriate actualization of common self-love:¹⁵

Love of self is common to all, in one way; in another way it is proper to the good; in a third way, it is proper to the wicked. For it is common to all for each one to love what he thinks himself to be. Now a man is said to be a thing, in two ways: first, in respect of his substance and nature, and, in this way all think themselves to be what they are, that is, composed of soul and body. In this way

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948), II–II, 25, 4 (hereafter cited as *S.Th.*). The italics are mine, and I have placed in quotes what was italicized in this translation.

¹⁵ See also *S.Th.*, I–II, 77, 4, which asks “Whether self-love is the source of every sin.” His answer is that if one is speaking about wicked self-love, then yes, but otherwise no. His reply to the objection 1 summarizes his view: “Well ordered self-love, whereby man desires a fitting good for himself, is right and natural; but it is inordinate self-love, leading to the contempt of God, that Augustine reckons to be the cause of sin.”

too, all men, both good and wicked, love themselves, in so far as they love their own preservation.

Secondly, a man is said to be something in respect of some predominance, as the sovereign of a state is spoken of as being the state, and so, what the sovereign does, the state is said to do. In this way, all do not think themselves to be what they are. For the reasoning mind is the predominant part of man, while the sensitive and corporeal nature takes the second place, the former of which the Apostle calls the *inward man*, and the latter, the *outward man* (2 Cor. iv. 16). Now the good look upon their rational nature or the inward man as being the chief thing in them, wherefore in this way they think themselves to be what they are. On the other hand, the wicked reckon their sensitive and corporeal nature, or the outer man, to hold the first place. Wherefore, since they know not themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright, but love that they think themselves to be. But the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves.¹⁶

Common, natural self-love is the drive for self-preservation found in all substances though raised to a higher level in virtue of man's nature as a rational animal. Both wicked and appropriate self-loves are developments of common self-love, the former as a perversion and the latter as its proper fulfillment. Wicked self-love gravitates to the animal characteristics of human nature. A relation of self-love still characterizes such a person but the love is disordered. A wicked person loves the lower goods of his nature at the expense of the higher goods. Wicked self-love is not the basis of self-friendship.

Good or appropriate self-love is the full actualization of common self-love. This kind of love forms the basis of self-friendship. Through appropriate self-love, each person wills goods through love of concupiscence and wills those goods for himself through a love of friendship. Aquinas turns to his own reflection on the interior life and Aristotle to

¹⁶ *S.Th.*, II-II, 25, 7.

defend the above. In the following, he continues his response to the same question:

The Philosopher proves this from five things that are proper to friendship. For in the first place, every friend wishes his friend to be and to live; secondly, he desires good things for him; thirdly, he does good things to him; fourthly, he takes pleasure in his company; fifthly, he is of one mind with him, rejoicing and sorrowing in almost the same things. In this way the good love themselves, as to the inward man, because they wish the preservation thereof in its integrity, they desire good things for him, namely spiritual goods, indeed they do their best to obtain them, and they take pleasure in entering into their own hearts, because they find there good thoughts in the present, the memory of past good, and the hope of future good, all of which are sources of pleasure. Likewise they experience no clashing of wills, since their whole soul tends to one thing.¹⁷

The self-love of self-friendship is not narcissistic or selfish but the love of the moral and ontological goodness of one's own being.¹⁸ If love is willing the good, then it stands to reason that each person first wills his own preservation, since he apprehends himself as good. Self-friendship is the full actualization of such self-love through the willing of the various goods that pertain to human perfection. Moreover, if one is leading a good life, then he finds his own company pleasant.

Aquinas's view of self-friendship provides the foundation for a meaningful life in two ways. The first way pertains to the quality of a person's inner-life as such. If one is not a friend with himself, then he

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For studies showing the unselfish nature of love of self in Aquinas, see R. Mary Hayden, "The Paradox of Aquinas's Altruism: From Self-Love to Love of Others," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 63 (1989): 72–83; David Gallagher, "The Desire for Beatitude and the Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996): 1–47 (particularly p. 33); Thomas M. Osborne, *The Love of Self and the Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 109.

will be miserable; a misery that will negatively affect all subsequent experiences. The second way concerns friendship with others; self-friendship makes friendship possible. Aquinas's thought seems to be that a person is capable of relating to others only in ways by which he relates to himself. Self-love, then, is a sort of template or guide for how to extend love to others. To see how this template functions, let us first look at the destructive effects of disordered self-love on friendship, and then how self-friendship creates the conditions for relating to others in love.

Disordered Self-Love and Friendship

Aquinas concludes his response to II-II, 25, 7 with the following sketch of the wicked person's inner-life:

On the other hand, the wicked have no wish to be preserved in the integrity of the inward man, nor do they desire spiritual goods for him, nor do they work for that end, nor do they take pleasure in their own company by entering into their own hearts, because whatever they find there, present, past and future is evil and horrible; nor do they agree with themselves, on account of the gnawings of conscience, according to Ps. xlix. 21: *I will reprove thee and set before thy face.*

In the same manner it may be shown that the wicked love themselves, as regards the corruption of the outward man, whereas the good do not love themselves thus.¹⁹

The wicked person's inability to love himself properly undermines the possibility of friendship with others. I think we can reasonably derive two possibilities for the wicked person and friendship based on levels of wickedness. Aquinas, in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, seems to agree with Aristotle, holding that bad men can form lower-level friendships of utility and pleasure but not perfect friendship, for

¹⁹ *S.Th.*, II-II, 25, 7.

“only good men make friends in that perfect friendship by which men are loved for their own sakes.”²⁰ In the case of a minimally wicked person, he might be capable of willing goods to another person. However, insofar as the other-directedness of his love is conditioned by the direction of his own self-love, he could only will bodily goods for the other. Also, his love of concupiscence or enjoyment of the other could only extend to the beloved’s bodily goods. This is the case because the lover predominately loves his own body and associated goods and not the higher characteristics and associated goods of human nature. If he is blind to those goods in himself, he will be blind to them in others.

In the case of the fully wicked person, the possibility of any kind of friendship becomes more remote. Aquinas again seems to agree with Aristotle that wicked people seek out each other’s company as a sort of distraction from their own inner-turmoil.²¹ However, such friendships are even more fragile than in the cases above in that most of friendship’s properties, such as benevolence, beneficence, and concord, are threatened or undermined by the wicked impulses and instability on the part of both the lover and beloved, since both are wicked.

In the cases of either the minimally or fully wicked person, the self-communication of the love of complete friendship does not take place; in other words, no gift of self occurs. The wicked person lacks the necessary stability of the self to give that self to another (to reify things just a bit). Wojtyla makes a related point concerning self-mastery, which he thinks is an essential precondition to the giving of oneself:

Here we mean freedom above all as *self-mastery* (self-domination). Under this aspect, self-mastery is indispensable *in order*

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), Section 1591. I interpret Aquinas’s remarks in the commentary to reflect his own position.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1816.

*for man to be able to “give himself,” in order for him to become a gift . . .*²²

The negative characterization of Wojtyla’s point is that the lack of self-mastery prevents the possibility of self-gifting. The act of giving oneself in both Aquinas and Wojtyla is conditioned on prior considerations of the person. In the case of Aquinas, such considerations pertain to self-love.²³ If self-love is disordered, then there can be no gifting of oneself. He proposes that proper self-love is the remedy for the above failures in friendship with others.

We ought to shun evil with increased ardor, and make every effort to become virtuous. For in this way a person will have friendship for himself *and be capable of becoming a friend to others*.²⁴

Proper self-love is the key to loving and giving oneself to another in complete friendship.

Self-Friendship and Friendship with Others

Recall that in his response concerning appropriate self-love, Aquinas discusses how the five properties of friendship are rooted in the primordial relation each person has to himself in self-friendship. In other passages, he connects these primordial self-love relations to the possibility of relating to others as a template for the latter. Consider the passage from his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, in which he highlights some of these connections:

For since love in a certain way unites lover to beloved, the lover therefore stands to the beloved as if to himself or to that which

²² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 15:2.

²³ I will expand on some of Wojtyla’s thoughts on such prior considerations of the person in the conclusion.

²⁴ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, 1819, italics mine.

concerns his perfection. But to himself and to that which belongs to him, he stands in the following ways. First, he wishes whatever concerns his perfection to be present to him; and therefore love includes *longing* for the beloved, by which the beloved's presence is desired. Second, in his affections a man turns other things back to himself and seeks for himself whatever goods are expedient for him; and so far as this is done for the beloved, love includes the *benevolence* by which someone desires good things for the beloved. Third, the things a man desires for himself he actually acquires for himself by acting; and insofar as this activity is exercised toward another, love includes *beneficence*. Fourth, to the accomplishment of whatever seems good in his sight, he gives his full consent; and insofar as this attitude comes to be toward a friend, love includes *concord* by which someone consents to things as they seem [good] to his friend . . . over and above what belongs to the four things that have just been described, love adds a special note, namely, the appetite's resting in the beloved; lacking this, none of those four is able to exist.²⁵

Appropriate self-love actualized in self-friendship is a necessary condition for fully loving another; it is a necessary condition for a gift of self.

The wicked are, ultimately, frustrated in their attempts for non-trivial friendship. Nevertheless they seek out the company of others in order to escape dwelling with themselves.

Evil men cannot converse with themselves by turning to their soul but they seek to associate with others by speaking and cooperation with them in external words and works. They act in this way because when thinking alone about themselves they remember many distressing evils they committed in the past and they are convinced they will do the same in the future—this is

²⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, III, 27, 2, 1, cit. after: *Id.*, *On Love and Charity: Readings from the "Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard,"* trans. Peter Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, O.S.B., and Joseph Bolin (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

painful to them. But when they are in company they forget their wrongdoings in the distraction of external activities.²⁶

The wicked person's motivation for friendship throws the contrary dynamic of the self-friend into clear relief. The person who is a friend with himself is not trying to avoid being with himself.

Aquinas maintains that the inner-life of the self-friend is quite pleasant. A friend is not an escape from turmoil; rather, complete friendship gives the lover an opportunity to share his life with the beloved, and vice versa. It is only because the lover loves himself that he sees that he is gift worth giving, for who would give a gift one thought was an evil thing? Moreover, the lover, on account of his relations to himself, knows how to will the good and respond to the beloved. Aquinas uses vivid language to describe the depths of this self-gift and resulting communion with the other:

For by the fact that love transforms the lover into the beloved, it makes the lover enter into the interior of the beloved and *vice versa*, so that nothing of the beloved remains not united to the lover, just as the form reaches to the innermost recesses of that which it informs and *vice versa*. Thus, the lover in a way penetrates into the beloved, and so love is called "piercing"; for to come into the innermost recesses of a thing by dividing it is characteristic of something piercing.²⁷

Only in loving oneself through self-friendship does a person wish to give himself completely and to receive the beloved completely.

²⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, 1816. Cf. *S.Th.*, II-II, 25, 7.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, III, 27, 1, 1, reply 4. See also *S.Th.*, I-II, 28, 2.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that, for Aquinas, a gift of self is something consequent to an appropriate self-love. Moreover, I think we find a deep symmetry, and not disagreement, between the accounts of Aquinas and Wojtyla. A fairly convincing case could be made that what Wojtyla refers to as “original solitude” in *Man and Woman He Created Them* is relevantly similar to Aquinas’s self-friendship.²⁸ For instance, Wojtyla states, “The concept of original solitude includes both self-consciousness and self-determination.”²⁹ It is the condition of Adam before the creation of Eve, and this condition, in turn, becomes the precondition to the giving of himself that occurs with the creation of the woman. The self-gift is not an attempt to distract Adam from his inner-turmoil, but rather, it is the fulfillment of his inner-life.³⁰ If the above is the case, then this dimension of Wojtyla’s personalism is quite similar to Aquinas’s view of self-love and self-giving. Obviously much more work would need to be done to make this case, but I think the above suffices to neutralize any preliminary antagonism between the two thinkers on this issue. Thus, I am not criticizing Wojtyla but insisting

²⁸ I make this case in some respect in my “Aquinas on Subjectivity: A Response to Crosby” in arguing that Aquinas’s notion of self-friendship is an account of subjectivity, though my focus is John Crosby’s version and not Wojtyla’s. However, Crosby explicitly ties his account to Wojtyla’s work. See John Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1996), Chapter 3.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 6:1.

³⁰ Salas states, “Wojtyla argues, then, that the gift of self, arising in immanence, transcends itself, reaching the core of the other’s dignity by establishing a union of love, in common pursuit of the good, between giver and givee, a union that at the same time confirms the giver’s own dignity” (“Person and Gift According to Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II,” 124).

on the proper place of Aquinas's thought as an authentic foundation for Christian personalism.³¹



LOVE OF SELF AS THE CONDITION FOR A GIFT OF SELF IN AQUINAS

SUMMARY

The author attempts to contribute to the debate about the value of Aquinas's account of love to philosophical personalism. He argues that to understand adequately Aquinas's account of love in general and the aspect of the gift of self in particular, we must appreciate the importance of his account of appropriate self-love; moreover, self-love and love as a gift of self constitute two foundational poles on which we should base any development of a theory of love within Thomistic personalism. First, the author offers brief overviews of Wojtyła's concept of love as a gift of self and Waldstein's comparative study of Wojtyła and Aquinas on this issue. Second, he examines Aquinas's notion of self-love, distinguishing between the good and bad kinds of self-love. Finally, he shows how self-love actualized in self-friendship creates the possibility for friendship with others.

KEYWORDS

Aquinas, Wojtyła, Waldstein, Thomistic personalism, philosophical personalism, love, self-gift, self-love, self-friendship, friendship.

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