

Is it possible and necessary to cultivate love? Education to love according to “Summa Theologiae” of Thomas Aquinas¹

Abstract: The author researches the issue of love in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. He researches the possibility of upbringing for love, and from what point of view this education is needed. The author concludes that the concept of love is quite different in the *Summa Theologiae*. In the context of Aquinian ethics, virtue points out that friendly love, as a unique phenomenon of human beings, is not necessary and therefore not only permits but also requires it to be developed through education.

Keywords: participation, love, friendly love, education

Introduction

In the following text we are going to deal with basic anthropological resources of education to love from a philosophical point of view. We want to answer two sets of basic questions. The first one concerns the “possibility” of education: Is it in any way possible to bring up people to love? Isn’t love, on the contrary, something what comes naturally with individual development? And if it is possible, what are the essential conditions of our human existence which support this possibility? Through the first question, we want to examine what is the possibility of upbringing to love, in other words, the degree of openness of a human being to education to love. The problem

* Marek Wiesenganger doctor in pedagogical sciences, assistant professor at the Department of Educational Studies of the Faculty of Education of the University of Trnava in Slovakia. He deals with the philosophy of education, moral education and pedagogy. He is the co-author of the scientific monograph *On moral education in national education in Slovakia in 1918–1939*, as well as several chapters in scientific monographs on moral education and pedagogy.

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we are facing is to what extent is love in our “power”. If we talk about education to something, every time there is a possibility to become someone, our development is not determined. Is it possible to consider love as some possibility or it is something that happens without the possibility of our choice? This was the first set of questions.

The second set of questions is focused on a different aspect of education to love. It relates to its key position in education. In fact, we ask if it is not only possible to educate to love, but if it is vital. Is this education necessary as something crucial in the development of love as the condition which enables one to develop love or is an upbringing to love only one of many ways in which to acquire love.

These questions form the formal side of this article. As is obvious from the title, our ambition is not to answer the questions generally. The text offers answers drawn from *Summa Theologiae* (*Theological summary*) – the last and unfinished work of medieval theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).

It is necessary to outline the importance of Thomas Aquinas’s thinking for contemporary philosophy, and for the philosophy of education. M. Ascombe’s essay resulted in the aretaic turn in the field of philosophical ethics during the second half of the 20th century. Many authors engaged with this essay. One of them was A. MacIntyre, who was popular and respected but often criticised. His thinking developed and at some stage he engaged with and referenced the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. It is interesting to note that MacIntyre incorporated Thomas into his studies of Aristotle. MacIntyre suggests that Aquinas is more consistent with Aristotelian theory than Aristotle. It is not our task to evaluate the extent to which MacIntyre was successful in revealing Thomas’s theory in its authenticity. More important is the fact that, although MacIntyre was part of the neo-Aristotelian movement, he argued that Thomas Aquinas was the key thinker of the ethics of virtue through an examination of the history of ethical thinking. Similarly, the philosopher and emeritus professor of philosophical ethics G. Abbà at Università Pontificia Salesiana also noted the importance of Thomas Aquinas. Abbà² in his analysis of the evolution of Aquinas’s thinking contends that Thomas Aquinas’s *Theological summary* is the original synthesis in the theory about virtues and human deeds, in respect to other philosophers (e.g. Aristotle, Augustín, Albert Velký). At the same time he points out that Aquinas’s theory didn’t have the final say in the history of ethical thinking. According to Abbà, Aquinas’s synthesis remained uncomprehended by his followers and it was not discovered or appreciated until after the aretaic turn during the second half of the 20th century. Contemporary authors dealing with the ethics of care, the ethics of virtue or the education of personal traits refer to the work of Aquinas rather formally or only historically. We suggest that one of the reasons for the marginalisation of Thomas Aquinas’s thinking is due

² G. Abbà, *Lex et virtus, Studi sull’evoluzione della dottrina morale di san Tommaso d’Aquino*, Roma 1983.

to the scholastic and the neo-scholastic tradition which referred to Thomas Aquinas as a key thinker. According to Abbà, these traditions did not grasp some key ideas in their depth and consequences. This has resulted in a sort of simplified and schematic insight to Aquinas's work, which ignores major shifts in his thinking as well as his openness and dynamism which can provide inspiration for the present. According to us, this context is important to mention especially because of the current review of paradigms as modernism or trans-modernism and also hyper-modernism. All the mentioned traditions did not deal with the original thinking of Thomas Aquinas, but mainly with the scholastic and non-scholastic version. Thus, in this article we try to provide answers to the questions mentioned above about the possibility and necessity of education to love stemming from *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. We maintain that through an examination of the pre-modern concept we can contribute to a more developed view of the studied topic as well as broaden the horizon of the topic of education to love in the present.

In order to find the right answers to questions about anthropological conditions allowing education to love and the necessity of education to love, the answer to a basic question is needed: What is love according to *Summa Theologiae*?

In general, love in *Summa Theologiae* is seen as "a specific and unique movement of intellectual creation to God" (STh I, 2, pr.), the essence of which is the participation of human beings in the creation, and especially in relation to the Divine being. Aquinas's anthropological perspective is based on the fundamental premise of "potential perfection", or "initial imperfection" of every human being, who is gifted with the ability of development and changes to their potential into their developed forms. Thomas calls this development by *movement* (lat. *motus*) and indicates the fundamental process concerning the human being in its essence. In other words, and in the terminology of the classic tradition of the ethics of virtues, it is also about the way of acquiring beatitude, let us say the way of virtue, whose goal is "participation" in the highest goods, those which improve us to an unattainable extent and beyond the area of enjoyment and benefit. It is obvious that what Thomas indicates as a *movement*, doesn't relate only to the subjective and individual life of the human individual. On the contrary, the *movement* is basically linked to the principle of *participation*, thus participation in other existence. *Movement* and *participation* are two aspects of the same reality, while participation can be considered as one of the most critical principles of Thomas' philosophy, whereas beatitude as the fulfillment of human life is given by participation in the good, not only by the knowledge of the good, or the desire for the good. The connection of *movement* as the basic process of acquiring the full extent of humanity and *participation* in the surrounding existence points to the thesis of globality and integrity of being. It means that Aquinas is considering each being not only as isolated and absolutely autonomic in regard to other beings, but as ontologically linked and absolutely autonomic taking into account other beings. This

mutual connection has its vertical dimension, thus a hierarchical arrangement, and a horizontal dimension. It means that the acquisition of perfection is dependent on the perfection of the other being, whereby particular beings are able to improve the being at a different hierarchical level in varying levels. In these contexts, it is necessary to point out that Thomas Aquinas considers being in its essence good in a double sense. First, kindness is given by actual existence, in fact, goodness is initial and original. Second, there is potential and perspective goodness, that is, goodness in its excellent and achieved state. This initial and perspective goodness of being is the basis for any being to be the means of the refinement of the other beings.

Considering the questions that we are trying to answer, it is important to point out that the aforesaid ideas find, in relation to a human being, their specific application mainly in the fact that the realisation of human potential happens through love, thus through participation in the good, which has the power to improve our givenness. We can say that the theory about love creates the gravitational centre of the theory about participation. Love as an acquirement forms the humanity of humans. In other words, the way of virtue, according to Thomas, is allowed by the dual-nature of the goodness of human nature as every human is being considered a good so his/her “participation in the Divine goodness, but also by pointing to the good as to your goal”³. In this resolution the basic openness is placed. Human beings rely on goodness which can improve them because it makes real what is possible. The initial participation in goodness, which was given to humans by creation, forms the basis and borders to participation. Choice and goodness are discovered beyond the acting. This type of participation was realised through love. According to Thomas, human participation in God cannot reduce the relationship to a single person and God. According to *Theological summary* it is not possible to know God directly and imminently and as an eternal law inside us, but He is revealed to us only in His impacts (STh I-II, q. 93, a. 2, in corp.⁴) Equally, the way to perfect realisation of our own possibilities to be human leads through participation in God’s impact. This has a decisive impact on all aspects of becoming a unique person. We can say that the way of beatitude, thus the way to realise the potential of being a human being is only via the correct participation in the goodness of the surrounding world. In the necessity of acquiring of one’s own unique humanity every human being finds themselves as being essentially dependent on the world which surrounds them and other beings. The essential anthropological condition to realise one’s own humanity, is openness and reliance of human beings on the good of other created beings. This is connected with the basic situation of love (lat. *amor*) to be the desirous appetitive (lat. *appetitus*) part of the spirit. It means that love “is the movement towards the subject outside the subject”⁵. It is fundamentally

³ A. Blaščíková, *Etika cnosti podľa Tomáša Akvinského*, Nitra 2009, p. 14.

⁴ T. Akvinský, *O lásce a milosrdenství v Teologické sumě*, Praha 2016.

⁵ K. Šprunk, *Tomáš Akvinský o lásce*, [w:] T. Akvinský, *O lásce. Výběr otázek z Teologické sumy*, Praha 2005, p. 10.

different from cognitive processes, which makes the acquaintance between united with the cognised object only in itself.

Thus, compared to cognitive processes, love is the principle (beginning) of the movement towards the beloved goal, from which desire arises as the movement to goodness and joy as a real connection to goodness. We can notice that love is the way of updating one's own potential, which Thomas termed *adequatio*. This term is often translated as "accordance", but from this is not adequate. *Adequatio* is a complex process, where Thomas indicates in the case of love three consecutive effects of good on appetite. The first one is a passive adaptation (lat. *coaptatio*) of appetite to goodness. Present goodness has the strength to activate inactive appetite. This activation means its initial change and contains some basic homogeneity (lat. *connaturalis*) with goodness and its adaptation (lat. *coaptatio*) to the form of goodness. The second following impact is the interiorisation of goodness, because an impression of goodness arises in the will (Lat. *impressio*) where in appetite rises the movement to goodness, comes tendency to a wanted thing (STh I, q. 27, a. 4⁶), which Thomas called falling in love (Lat. *complacentia*). The third and last impact of present goodness on appetite is unity between loving and loved. It is concerned about so-called affective unity (Lat. *nexus*), which Thomas differentiated from real unity. This unity means the transformation of diligence, which becomes homogenous in proportion to the present and desired good. Although in such love there is still no real unity with the subject of love, Thomas claims that affective unity is similar to a substantial one. Love in general (Lat. *amor*) is so called simply love, which creates the basis, the principle of every other love (STh I-II, q. 26, a. 3, in corp.⁷) In this context, we can clarify the causes of love: good, similarity and causality⁸. Good as the reason means that we can love only something that is appropriate, similar to our nature and that we have in the performance of what we have in potency (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 1⁹). Second, everything loves that which is in unity with it. This creates some colligation on the basis of similarity (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 3¹⁰). The third reason of love is knowledge. Although Thomas recognises the necessity of knowing good (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 5¹¹), he defines that goodness comes first and that something could be loved more than it is known because it might be perfectly loved although it is not perfectly known (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 5, ad. 2¹²).

In connection with these three causes of love, it is clearly shown that Thomas's theory about love unfolds from the original, universal good of the world, in which every human specifically participates and has their own specific mission. Through

⁶ T. Akvinský, *O lásce a milosrdenství v Teologické sumě*, Praha 2016.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ K. Šprunk, *op.cit.*

⁹ T. Akvinský, 2016, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

love, people find the world homogenous with themselves, perceive the adequacy of the world which surrounds them, towards themselves. Love is the only cause of the movement of humans to goodness. Human beings, with their appetitive abilities, have the essential position to realise in the world. This reality is clearly shown in Thomas's distinction between demanding love (lat. *amor concupiscentiae*) and friendship (Lat. *amor amicitiae*) (STh I-II, q. 26, a. 4, in corp.¹³). According to J. McEvoy¹⁴, Thomas placed the discussion of friendship (Lat. *amicitia*) in relation to the discussion of general love (Lat. *amor*) and to the highest form of love (Lat. *charitas*) in order to understand the form of friendship. Thomas defines friendly love as the form of love to another person, where goodwill (Lat. *benevolentia*) prevails on those forms of needs and desires which characterise passionate love. To love somebody else because of themselves means to respect and develop their unique nature as an independent reality and at the same time as a reality where we discover our "second self" (STh I-II, q. 28, a. 1, in corp.¹⁵).

Thomas highlights the distinction between demanding love and friendly love in an analysis of the effects of love (lat. *effectus*), distinguishing between the following effects: union, mutual indwelling, ecstasy, zeal and wound. In the most basic effect, union (lat. *unio*), Thomas reaffirms the original harmony and similarity of individual human beings, because on the basis that the two are similar, as if they are in one form, they are in this form somewhat unaltered. Therefore, the affection of one points to the other as to the one with which he is one, and wants him as good as himself (STh I-II, q. 27, a. 3, in corp.¹⁶). For that, "each of these arises from a kind of apprehension of the oneness of the thing loved with the lover. For when we love a thing, by desiring it, we apprehend it as belonging to our well-being. In like manner when a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself: wherefore he apprehends him as his other self, in so far, to wit, as he wills good to him as to himself. Hence a friend is called a man's "other self" (STh I-II, q. 28, a. 1, in corp.¹⁷). This is directly related to the second effect of love, mutual residence (Lat. *mutua inhaesio*) between loving and loved. In friendly love comes specific mutual in-dwelling, where "the lover is in the beloved, inasmuch as he reckons what is good or evil to his friend, as being so to himself; and his friend's will as his own, so that it seems as though he felt the good or suffered the evil in the person of his friend. Hence it is proper to friends "to desire the same things, and to grieve and rejoice at the same"

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ J. McEvoy, *K recepcii Aristotelovského pojmu priateľstva v scholastike*, „Filozofia“ 2004, nr 5, p. 370.

¹⁵ T. Akvinský, 2016, *op.cit*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

(STh I-II, q. 28, a. 2, in corp.¹⁸). The third cause or a sign of true friendly love is so called ecstasy (Lat. *extasis*). Love causes ecstasy by two means: dispositively and directly. Dispositively in the case when it encourages knowledge beyond the cognitive; directly in passionate love where: “loving is entrained outside of themselves, joy from good is not enough for them they have and therefore they try to use some good outside of themselves. [...] Such a feeling ends in themselves or “in friendly love rises apart of them because they want and act well to their friend the way he cares and shows him the care because of themselves” (STh I-II, q. 28, a. 3, in corp.¹⁹).

It is evident from these three causes of friendly love that in the context of various forms of love friendly love is a unique movement of the soul for Thomas. Participation in good means that friendly love is a unique realisation of the abilities of our souls through virtues. The essential principles of friendly love include the fact that one human being who realizes their uniqueness can be good in a manner in which another person finds the way of their realisation. It is related to the ability of a human being who can recognise and realise good for another person. It means that humans are a unique creation who can develop the world which surrounds them at different levels and impact it in accordance with their own realisation. Love for another person can't be replaced by any other sort of good, where the person participates.

As we have shown, according to Thomas, passionate love as well as friendly love creates the essential movement of human beings who can achieve fundamental perfection. At the same time, it is love in which man tastes his own fundamental referral to the good, which is out of him. Because love is the unique reaction of human nature through which we are participants of good. Through love a given good improves, so actualising our own dispositions, potential.

Let us try to answer the first set of questions which asked if it is possible to bring people up to love or is love a movement rising out of our nature. It seems that the answer is ambivalent. It is clear that Thomas endows “love” with some natural movement, which is caused by the presence of good: spontaneous movement which doesn't require the choice of good or its recognition. In this case, it would seem that it is necessary to exclude the possibility of upbringing to love. All the aspects of love that Thomas develops through the theory about virtue are about the way to improve one's own nature, in other words, the change of one's own substance. On the one hand, we can accept that some type of love is a natural reaction to some aspect of the good of another being. On the other hand, it is necessary to take account of the fact that the presence of other beings doesn't have to be a coincidence and it is a possible targeted submission of selected human beings. In this case, we can talk about an intentional act

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

in which one human focuses love at another human being – at the level of natural love. A person, who by intentionally choosing others, is able to change. This is the root of a unique type of good, which is not given to us by the only existence of being. Friendly love, which we are given by someone, is good, which is in its essence coincidental and accidental. But this doesn't mean anything other than that its existence has its own inception in a free act of another human. Accidentality means, that the act of friendly love is not necessary and determined. On the contrary, it is a true gift, because it arises from "nothing". For a better understanding, it is appropriate to point out the fact that, according to Thomas, beatitude is the fruit of virtue, which is nothing other than accident, including the essence of human being. But it mainly means that being virtuous is not necessary. It is just an option, which can remain unused. Therefore the act of friendly love, which can "wake up" our love, is that exact good, which is under our control. We can bless someone by it or retrieve them a specific good. Sure, the very love as an echo of spirit is not in this case of our power, but if it could be allowed to initiate the potential to be loved by friendly love, it is just possible to do it in the way through good created by friendly love. In this case, Thomas's thinking is inspiring as it always points out that love is always the answer to good and at the same time, the quality of love (demanding, friendly) is influenced by the quality of good.

The next area where we find roots for the possibility of upbringing in love is in the differentiation Thomas makes between various types of love. It seems to us that his understanding of acquirement of virtue is quite beneficial. If we ask what a virtue is, one of the answers is that it relates to an accidental form of substance. This means that it is quite stable (habitual) and at the same time an unnecessary (but accidental) change of our substance. The fact to which we want to draw attention is that this change is caused by a frequency and intensity of the presence of good which allows humans to recognise the given good and love in various situations. Thomas describes this process as "habitation". As G. Abbà always repeats, virtue is not a habit, but the ability to choose some good in the different contexts and conditions of outside and inside a character. So virtue is an ability to choose the better good, despite the presence of minor goods, which activate interest and love. This ability is not only necessary, but directly supposes conscious effort.

The second set of questions which we hoped to answer concerned the necessity of upbringing to love. Is upbringing necessary in the development of love as a condition, which basically allows love to be developed, or is upbringing in love one of many possibilities of earning love? Here too we can point to some ambivalence. There is a variety of love from the side of the loving, as well as from the side which is loved. We want to highlight the necessity of upbringing to friendly love. The necessity comes out of the problem of so-called random passions (Lat. *passiones*). It is obvious that love comes with various emotional states which are not bound only to a loved subject and the affects are rational or sensual. The variety of origin of these affective reactions is the

source of variety in their spontaneity and intensity. For example, physically-sensitive affects are more direct, spontaneous than rational affects. This can cause a problem with the choice of good and it opens the demand for the development of such affective reactions which will be in harmony with the way of virtue. Upbringing to love would develop the ability to prefer that type of good which is in harmony with a good life despite its lower affective attraction.

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