

Aquinas on Friendship

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Contents

<i>Abbreviations and Conventions</i>	xv
1. Larger Themes	1
1.1 Friendship and Amicitia	1
1.2 The Importance of Friends	3
1.3 Acts of Friendship	6
2. What Concord Requires	22
2.1 ‘Concord is a Union of Wills, Not of Opinions’	22
2.2 Disagreement and Friendship	31
2.3 Why Conflicting Beliefs Alone Do Not Create Discord: A Look at Heresy	34
2.4 Conclusion	41
3. Friendship and Conformity of Wills	42
3.1 Background	43
3.2 Conformity of Wills and the Friend’s Reasons	46
3.3 Conformity of Wills and Disparity of Circumstances	57
3.4 Ways of Willing the Same	61
3.5 Political Implications of Aquinas’s Position on the Conformity of Wills of Friendship	66
4. What Prevents Us from Joining Other People’s Projects?: Pride as an Impediment to Conformity of Wills	69
4.1 Nilling What Another Wills: Schism, Sedition, and Discord	70
4.2 Vainglory and Unwillingness to Agree with Others	72
4.3 Pride and Unwillingness to Agree with Others	74
4.4 Conformity of Wills Revisited	87
4.5 The Law as a Cure for Pride	88
4.6 Human Institutions and Pride	90
4.7 Summary	92

5. Friendship and Uncertainty: Presumptions and Hope	94
5.1 Present Friendship and the Presumption of Authenticity	95
5.2 Hope and Future Friendship	107
5.3 Conclusion	121
6. Friendship and Recourse to Justice	123
6.1 Justice between Friends	124
6.2 Friendship as a Condition of Just Exchange	133
6.3 Summary	139
7. Justice, Satisfaction, and Restoration of Friendship	142
7.1 Satisfaction and Friendship	143
7.2 Friendship and Quantitative Satisfaction	151
7.3 Summary	160
8. Concluding Remarks	162
Appendix The Duality of the Rational Volition in Christ's Human Nature and Friendship with God	165
<i>Bibliography</i>	167
<i>Index Locorum</i>	175
<i>Index of Subjects</i>	182
<i>Index of Names and Places</i>	187

1

Larger Themes

1.1 FRIENDSHIP AND AMICITIA

Aquinas never wrote a work, or even a section of work, with the title ‘*De Amicitia*’. Insights and discussions about friendship, however, abound throughout his opera. An inventory of the contexts in which Aquinas devotes attention to friendship comprises discussions of the theological virtue of charity; the unity of Church, State, and family; and, of course, Aquinas’s *Commentary* on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. This list is far from exhaustive, however. Isolated remarks, as well as clusters of observations, comments, and reflections about friendship abound in Aquinas’s work, cutting across a wide array of topics.

For Aquinas, friendship is the paradigm ideal for the relationships that rational beings should cultivate. The set of potential friends includes besides fellow human beings, also angels and God. The idea of friendship with God undoubtedly places considerable strain on the conception of friendship that Aquinas inherited from Aristotle. According to Aristotle friendship requires equality of power and status as well as shared activities, choices, and feelings. Yet, arguably, we cannot share time and activities with God, we can talk *to* Him but generally not *with* Him, it is not clear that we can invariably rely on Him (many would say that it is clear that we cannot), and, finally, we have little idea what He is up to. In addition, there is an unbridgeable chasm between God’s knowledge and power and our own.

Although theological discussions do not have human friendship as their main focus, they provide valuable material on the subject. For Aquinas, theological language is essentially analogic: it enables us to grasp otherwise inaccessible divine realities by drawing—at least indirectly, by negations—from world realities. Aquinas’s observations on social life intended for analogical use are at least presumptively representative of his social views. Formally speaking, the use of analogy for pedagogical purposes does not commit one to asserting the reality of

the facts on which the analogy is established. Having said this, there is no reason to doubt that Aquinas was in fact committed to the reality of the observations about human relationships that ground the analogies that he used to clarify theological matters.¹

Are we in fact discussing friendship when we discuss *amicitia*? It is almost customary in treatments of pre-modern ideas of friendship to point out that Aristotelian *philia* and Thomistic *amicitia* significantly differ from what we now understand as friendship.²

One element of *philia-amicitia* that is often considered to be at odds with modern friendship is its wide reach. In the Aristotelian tradition, fellow soldiers, fellow travellers, and fellow citizens are friends, as are those who interact with a view to utility and those whose bond is founded on erotic love. Indeed, it would seem that almost anyone who is not an enemy, and is in some way engaged in a more or less stable and mutually beneficial relationship, is a friend. In contrast, the modern concept seems to apply to a smaller number of people. We tend to call friends those persons (usually not relatives) with whom we have a substantial degree of closeness and intimacy. Persons situated in more distant circles of interaction are regarded as friends only by stretching the reach of the term.

Secondly, the friendships which Aristotle called ‘of utility’ and ‘of pleasure’ (which are neither Aristotle’s nor Aquinas’s central case of friendship), are, in the modern understanding, often not considered friendships at all—the former considered merely a business relationship deprived of the measure of altruism that we expect from friends, the latter perhaps too transitory and one-dimensional.

Thirdly, and more crucially, the sharing of a goal—a central element of friendship within the Aristotelian tradition—seems marginal or even alien to the modern conception of friendship.³ Friendship (save perhaps for marital friendship) is often seen as having no other goal than

¹ See R. M. McNerny, *The Logic of Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 114–22, and my ‘Aquinas on Friendship, Concord and Justice’, D.Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 2002), pp. xix–xx.

² For good discussions on Aristotle’s *philia* and modern friendship see J. M. Cooper, ‘Aristotle on Friendship’, in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays in Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 301–3. For a parallel discussion on Aquinas’s *amicitia* and friendship see J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas d’Aquin, maître spirituel* (Fribourg: Cerf, Éditions universitaires de Fribourg, 1996), ii. 367–9.

³ MacIntyre argues that the relegation of friendship to the private life is explained by the fact that the notion of political community as a common project is alien to ‘this modern individualist world’. ‘“Friendship” has become for the most part the name of a type of emotional state rather than of a type of social relationship.’ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 156.

generating a space of intimacy in which we seek solace from the world (for it is ‘out there, in the world’ that goals are pursued). It is the space for humour, confidence, chat about books and films, food and drink. There is deliberation, of course, but it is not always, or even normally, aimed at deciding upon common actions.

One should note first that it is not obvious that arguments against the correspondence between *philia* and friendship retain all their force when directed against the correspondence between medieval *amicitia* and friendship. Secondly, we should note that, even if we accept the account of friendship provided above as the idea now prevailing—although there are certainly reasons not to do so—the questions that I have chosen to discuss lose little of their pertinence. Questions about the unknowability of the friends’ present and future wills, about the need to rely on presumptions, on the disrupting effects of pride, on the complex relationship between friendship and justice bear on modern friendship no less than they do on *philia* and *amicitia*. In other words, insofar as almost any concept of friendship will have to assume some level of congeniality or agreement between the friends’ will, questions about this congeniality or agreement bear on friendship however plausibly conceived.

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

According to Aquinas we have the best chance to flourish morally, intellectually, and spiritually in a social life based on virtue: a *consociatio in virtute*. In *Summa Theologiae*, I–II Aquinas asks which, among a list of different goods, warrants being regarded as a constituent of happiness. Friendship is included in a list made up of enjoyment, understanding, a right will, a body, bodily health, external goods, and the fellowship of friends. Each of these has a role that is either preparatory towards, perfecting of, or concomitant with happiness.⁴

The happy person {felix} needs friends in this life.⁵ He does not need them for advantage, nor for enjoyment, as he has perfect enjoyment in his virtuous living and is in no need of material help.⁶ Friends are needed, rather, for good or virtuous activity. Aquinas endorses Aristotle’s view that we need friends in order to have someone to benefit, to delight

⁴ *ST* I–II q. 4 a. 1c.

⁵ *ST* I–II q. 4 a. 8c.

⁶ Perhaps his happiness presupposes his possession of the necessary material needs.

in their so benefiting,⁷ and also to enjoy their own virtuous activity. But, he adds, the happy person needs the help of his friends also for *his own* performance of right works, in both his active and his contemplative life. Since we are less biased towards our friends than towards ourselves, and friends are similar to ourselves, we can, by looking at them, look at ourselves in a less biased fashion.⁸

The happy life demands the permanent availability of the resources which allow virtuous operation. Friendship is said to be one such resource: without friends the continuity of virtuous operation would be impaired; one would be likely to lose enthusiasm for and interest in the activity of virtuous living. The virtuous person will find it difficult to act virtuously continuously unless she experiences enjoyment in such activity.⁹ Friends' virtuous activity is one of the vital sources of enjoyment. The virtuous life is a sort of dialogue or conversation in which the friends act virtuously towards each other, thus mutually feeding the motivation of each to act in this way. Through our friends we expand our capacity to perform virtuous deeds, because friends are united to ourselves in such a way that their actions are, in some ways, also ours.¹⁰

The enjoyment afforded by friendly activity which is not strictly speaking virtuous, such as games and jokes, is also accorded a place, albeit a subordinate one within Aquinas's scheme. This sort of interaction offers the benefits of rest and relaxation which prevent exhaustion and tedium.¹¹

Although, according to Aquinas, the fellowship of friends is not required *de necessitate* for happiness in heaven or *patria*, it befits this status. It is important to keep in mind that solitary *beatitudo* is a limit case; it hypothesizes a scenario which Aquinas himself seemed to consider highly unlikely. Aquinas often depicts the blessed life in heaven as a communal, even political, life taking place in the city of 'celestial Jerusalem', where the pleasures of music and conversation would be cultivated.¹²

⁷ *Nic. Eth.* 1169^b12.

⁸ *Eth.* IX. 10 [1896].

⁹ *Eth.* IX. 10 [1897].

¹⁰ *Eth.* IX. 10 [1896]: 'Since a man's friend is another self, so to speak, the friend's actions will be his own in a sense.'

¹¹ *Eth.* IX. 10 [1893].

¹² See *ST* II-II q. 23 a. 1 ad 1; *Cat. Aur.* VI. 9 [116–18]; *In Heb.* 12. 4 ad v. 22 [706]; *Ps.* 43. 4 [62–4]. Aquinas inherited from doctrinal tradition the notion of '*communio sanctorum*', and often refers to a *societas sanctorum*. He also refers to the 'celestial society' (*ScG* III c. 144 n. 11; *Virt.* q. 2. a. 2c.; *Spir.* q. un. a. 6 sc. 3). Reaching heaven is often

One's beatitude concomitantly includes friendship with those who have been equally awarded the divine vision (if there are any, as it is most likely).¹³ A concomitance between *beatitudo perfecta* and friendship allows Aquinas to claim that while perfect beatitude, under some conditions, inevitably produces friendship, friendship is not an essential component of perfect beatitude.

In addition to the role it plays in human happiness, friendship provides, for Aquinas, the paradigm through which the theological virtue of charity can be best conceptualized. Friendship captures the many disparate elements that different authoritative sources, both biblical and patristic, assign to charity. Charity is a friendship involving love towards God and all rational beings capable of loving Him. Aquinas is not the first theologian to treat charity as a form of friendship, yet it does seem that it is his original contribution to bring charity firmly into the Aristotelian understanding of friendship.¹⁴

Some historians of friendship and some theologians have tended to see friendship as antithetical to charity. It is argued, first, that *caritas* corresponds to the Greek *agapê*, which is conceived of as standing in opposition to *eros*, the drive towards physical or intellectual unity with the beloved that is often associated with an acquisitive or possessive

represented as gaining citizenship in a blissful city: '[just as a] man by divine grace is admitted to the participation in the celestial beatitude which consists in the vision and enjoyment of God, becomes virtually a citizen and partner in that society of the blessed, that is called celestial Jerusalem.' *Virt.* q. 2 a. 2c: 'Man, however, it is not only a citizen of the earthly city, but he is also a participant of the city of celestial Jerusalem, whose ruler is the Lord, the citizens being the Angels and all the Saints.' *Virt.* q. 1 a. 9c. Also, *In Isa.* c. 3. 2 ad v. 15; *Quodl.* X q. 6 a. 1c. In *I Cor.* 13. 4 ad v. 13 [806] Aquinas brings this view directly into contact with friendship-theory. He explains that friendships are diversified by the type of union and that we have two different conjunctions with God, one with regard to participation in 'natural goods', the other with regard to beatitude. This participation makes us citizens of the celestial Jerusalem. For a more thorough treatment of this topic see J. Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 327–31.

¹³ *ST* I–II q. 4 a. 8. ad 3.

¹⁴ Charity was identified with *amicitia* at least as early as John Cassian (365?–433?), (e.g. at *Conferences*, XVI). See D. Konstan, 'Problems in the History of Christian Friendship', *Journal of Early Christianity*, 4 (1996), 106 and A. M. Fiske, 'Cassian and Monastic Friendship', *American Benedictine Review*, 12 (1961) on *caritas* and *amicitia*: pp. 202–5. According to Fiske, Cassian's views on charity are partially inspired by the ideas of Evagrius of Pontus, an Egyptian disciple of Macarius the Elder. Friendship was associated with *caritas*, before Cassian, by the Greek Fathers Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. See L. Pizzolato, *L'idea di amicizia nel mondo antico classico e cristiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 375–93, 404, 411 (page references are to the 1996 Spanish translation published by Mario Muchnik in Barcelona in 1996).

desire. Charity therefore would run against all types of friendship in which an erotic element is present. In connection to this claim it should be noted that, as explained below, for Aquinas, charity actually presupposes, rather than excludes, erotic (or, in somewhat dated English, ‘concupiscible’) love.¹⁵

There is, in addition, the view that, since charity is a sort of all-embracing friendship with rational beings, it is more in line with Stoic-minded ideas of a universal brotherhood than with the personal, exclusive attachments that we normally call friendship today. According to Lorraine Smith Pangle, exceptions aside, ‘Christianity’s call to devote one’s heart as completely as possible to God, and to regard all men as brothers, made the existence of private, exclusive, and passionate attachments seem inherently questionable.’¹⁶ Consider, however, that Aquinas devotes a great deal of space to explain how charity joins already existing partial loves by reinforcing them while preserving their differing intensities, rather than by substituting them, or simply by uniformly extending blanket-like over them.¹⁷ Aquinas does not preach the obliteration of existing partialities in favour of a higher, all-encompassing, universal love. Rather, he focuses on how these partialities are transformed (not dissolved) by the advent of charity. Even in *patria*—that is, in our heavenly home—partial attachments would remain in place.

1.3 ACTS OF FRIENDSHIP

The three acts of friendship are ‘[f]irst benevolence, which consists in this that someone wills the other person good and his evil wills not, second, concord that consists in this that friends will and

¹⁵ III *Sent.* d. 27 q. 2 a. 1 ad 1. The thesis that *agapê* is opposed to *eros* became popular with A. Nygren’s *Eros and Agape* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953 c.1930), see esp. 476, 483. But it has been argued that in Greek usage and in the Septuagint, the terms *agapê* and *eros* were sometimes used as synonyms or cognates rather than as antonyms; see W. E. Phipps, ‘The Sensuousness of Agape’, *Theology Today*, 29 (1973), 370–9. For more criticism on Nygren’s thesis see C. Osborne’s *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chs. 2, 3, and app.

¹⁶ L. Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁷ See *ST* II–II q. 26 a. 7 and the whole question devoted to the ‘order of charity’ (*ST* II–II q. 26 a. 1–13). That charity does not extend uniformly to everyone was already held by Cassian who, according to Fiske (‘Cassian’, 203), spoke of *caritas ordinata*.

reject the same things, third, beneficence, which consists in this that someone does good deeds for the person he loves and does not harm him.¹⁸

Aquinas, following Aristotle's lead, defines friendship by these three deeds, acts, or effects.¹⁹ *Concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficentia* can be verified both in interpersonal friendship as in the friendship of a person towards himself. These features of friendship towards oneself propagate to the friend, since the friend is 'another self'. Just as we wish goods for ourselves, so we wish goods for the friend. Just as we act so as to achieve the things we desire, so we act similarly with regard to the friend. Just as we consent (presumably in the sense of giving practical approval) to the realization of perceived goods, so does love as extended to the friend include concord, in that we consent to his own realization of perceived goods.²⁰

Friends must know each other and know of their friendship.²¹ Hence, a controlling criterion in the specification of the acts of friendship is the extent to which these acts could be mutually performed by persons who are unfamiliar or unacquainted with one another. Benevolence taken on its own is thus insufficient for friendship, as one may will good things for people one is not acquainted with, such as a participant in a contest.²² Beneficence is the practical expression of benevolence.²³ Since benevolence can be directed at strangers, we must infer that beneficence too is insufficient proof of friendship. On the same ground concord about scientific matters does not evince friendship since it can happen between people who do not know each other.²⁴

The rest of this chapter is structured around these three acts of friendship. *Concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficentia* present the larger themes within which the more detailed studies that make up the bulk of the book may be located.

¹⁸ *In Rom.* 12. 3 ad v. 15–17 [9–17] [996]; also *ST* II–II q. 80 a. un. ad 2; *Eth.* IX. 4 [1798], [1814], 5 [1820].

¹⁹ Aquinas uses sometimes 'effects' (*Eth.* IX. 1 [1757], 4 [1797]), but more often 'acts' (*ST* II–II q. 31 a. 1 sc., c.; *Eth.* VIII. 3 [1562], 5 [1596–7], [1600], IX. 4 [1797]), and sometimes 'deeds' (*Eth.* VIII. 3 [1583], 5 [1596], 6 [1607], VIII. 4 [1798], IX. 4 [1816], 5 [1820]).

²⁰ *III Sent.* d. 27 q. 2 a. 1c.

²¹ *III Sent.* d. 27 q. 2 a. 1 obj. 9, ad 10; *Eth.* VIII. 2 [1560], 3 [1564]; *In Ioann.* c. 13 lc. 7 [in v. 13:34] [182–5].

²² *Eth.* IX. 5 [1821] [1823]; *ST* II–II q. 27 a. 2c.

²³ *ST* II–II q. 31 a. 1c., a. 4sc.

²⁴ *Eth.* IX. 6 [1830].

1.3.1 Concord and Choice

Concord, for Aquinas, designates the union of wills, equivalent to Aristotle's *homonoia*, which sustains common projects and life.²⁵ The virtuous person is in concord with himself in three different respects: by enjoying his own company, by conversing with himself (recollecting pleasant memories, envisioning anticipated achievements, engaging in theoretical thinking), and by agreeing with his own feelings.

Concord is principally about choices.²⁶ One's choices should concord with those of the friend. Choice is closely related to two central elements of Aquinas's theory of friendship: on the one hand, to the conceptualization of friendship as a habit, and on the other hand, to *dilectio*, the love that characterizes friendship.

Aquinas argues with Aristotle that friendship is neither a feeling nor an act, but rather a state or habit:²⁷ 'Friendship is a kind of virtue inasmuch as it is a habit of choice.'²⁸ Therefore, friends continue being so even when they do not perform the acts of friendship, say when they sleep or are temporarily far apart. Note that by 'friendship' Aquinas always means one's friendship towards the friend, that is, a relational property inhering in oneself, rather than a relationship conceived as something, as it were, 'hovering' between the two friends.²⁹

A virtue is a habit or disposition to make a certain type of choice.³⁰ When these choices are perfective of the human being, then the habit is a virtue. When they are detrimental the habit is a vice. Concord is the act of the habit of friendship by which one's choice of action is the same or closely related to that of the friend. Concord allows the friends

²⁵ III *Sent.* d. 28 q. 1 a. 2c., aut. delet. of III *Sent.* d. 27 q. 2 a. 1 in P.-M. Gils, 'Textes inédits de S. Thomas: Les premières Rédactions du *Scriptum super Tertio Sententiarum*,' *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 46 (1962), 611; *In Rom.* 12. 3 ad v. 15 [12–13] [996]; *Eth.* IX. 6 [1831–2].

²⁶ *Eth.* IX. 4 [1800], 6 [1830–1].

²⁷ *Eth.* VIII. 5 [1602–4].

²⁸ *Eth.* VIII. 1 [1538].

²⁹ In the medieval theory of relations a relation is an accident of one of the 'extremes' rather than a separate entity, just as A's 'being taller than B' or 'being B's father' was conceived to be an accident of A. See J. Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations', in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2005 Edition)*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/relations-medieval/>>.

³⁰ The close connection between the habit in which moral virtues consist and *electio* is repeatedly remarked upon by Aquinas partly because of the definition of virtue in *Nic. Eth.* 1106^b35: 'Virtue is a state that decides', 'Virtus est habitus electivus'. Quoted e.g. (in reference to moral virtue) in *ST* I–II q. 58 a. 1 obj. 2, ad 2, a. 2 obj. 4, a. 4c., q. 59 a. 1c., q. 64 a. 1. sc., q. 65 a. 1c.

to participate in the *communicatio*, or shared life, which is the basis of friendship.³¹ This would be impossible if they constantly chose to do different actions.

Friends typically act out of choice, rather than out of passion.³² From the fact that friendship is a source of choices, it follows that friendship can only take place between rational beings: only they are endowed with the ability to choose.³³ It is because the acts of friendship are chosen, and therefore undetermined, that these acts are expressive of the rational dimension of the friend's will; they are expressive of who he is.³⁴

Aquinas insists on referring to the love that binds friends as *dilectio*, defined as a love that involves choice.³⁵ One possible interpretation of this doctrine is that dilection is the love that follows from our determination, through choice, of the object of love, i.e. from the choice of friends. In this view *dilectio* would seem to be unrelated to concord, for concord concerns friends' choices, rather than one's choice of friends.

This interpretation is disputable, however. This becomes clear upon examination of some features of Aquinas's theory of love. Love as a passion is something impressed upon the lover: it is the instilling in the lover of a superadded form or *complacentia appetibilis* which makes the lover tend towards the beloved as a consequence of that form, just as in Aristotelian physics a stone naturally tends downward by virtue of its form.³⁶ In brute animals and in the unregulated sensual soul, this moving towards the beloved is voluntary yet unfree: while the lover is his own principle of action, the means (actions) which mark the progress towards union with the beloved are not freely chosen.³⁷

Yet, according to Aquinas, when the lover's love is intellectual or rational, or even when it is rationally controlled sensual love, the progression towards the beloved is marked by choice.³⁸ We do not

³¹ *ScG* III c. 151 n. 3; *Eth.* IX. 4 [1800], [1816]; *Div.* XI. 1 [885]; *In Ioann.* 13. 7 ad v. 34 [1838].

³² This point is frequently made by Aquinas, e.g. in *ST* II–II q. 26 a. 8 ad 1; *Eth.* VIII. 5 [1603]; *Virt.* q. 1 a. 5 obj. 5.

³³ *Eth.* VIII. 5 [1603]; *ST* I q. 2 a. 2c.; *I Sent.* d. 10 q. 1 a. 5 ex.; *In Ioann.* 21. 3 ad v. 16–17 [2622].

³⁴ *Electio* is the act of the rational appetite: *ST* I–II q. 13 a. 6 sc.; *Mal.* q. 16 a. 7 obj. 18; *Virt.* q. 5 a. 4 ad 13; *Eth.* I. 1 [8], III. 5 [60], 9 [486]. For examples of texts on *electio* and *libero arbitrio* see: *II Sent.* d. 7 q. 1 a. 1 ad 1, d. 15 q. 1 a. 3 ad 3, d. 24 q. 1 a. 2 ad 4, d. 24 q. 1 a. 3 ad 5; *ST* I q. 83 a. 3c.; *ST* III q. 18 a. 4c.

³⁵ *I Sent.* d. 10 q. 1 a. 5 ex., d. 41 q. 1 a. 2 sc. 1.; *III Sent.* d. 32 q. 1 a. 3 sc. 1., q. 1 a. 5 sol. 1 sc. 1.; *ST* I–II q. 26 a. 3c.; *Ver.* q. 6 a. 1c.; *Div.* IV. 9 [402]; *ST* I q. 60 a. 2c.

³⁶ *ST* I–II q. 26 a. 2c.

³⁷ See: *ST* I–II q. 13 a. 2c.

³⁸ *ST* I q. 26 a. 1c., q. 60 a. 2 ad 1; *In Ioann.* 21. 3 ad v. 16–17 [2622].

choose what to love, however we do choose those things that are loved because of their relation to that which we love. The actions which advance the progression towards the beloved are chosen from a number of eligible unnecessitated options.

Therefore *dilectio* concerns all the choices of actions conceived of as related to the object of intellectual love—in our case, the friend. Hence, the choices of the friends stem from *dilectio*. These are precisely the choices which concord unifies.

So concord is one of the acts of the habit of friendship: the friend chooses so that his choice may stand in a particular relation to his friend's. Further, because it is not merely passive, the love of friendship involves practical deliberation about the best way to realize the friendship. Practical conclusions do not follow by necessity but only through undetermined choice. Just as there are different ways of fulfilling the acts of courage or temperance (i.e. of determining what courage, or temperance, require in such and such contingences), there must be different ways of determining what acts eventuate friendship in such and such circumstances. Hence concord, as an act of friendship, does not eliminate the need to conduct practical deliberation in choosing the way towards realizing friendship. Chapters 2 and 3 develop this topic by asking what we must agree about with our friends, and what to do if we do not grasp the reasons behind our friends' wills.

1.3.2 Aptitudes for Concord

The sharing of goals is a fragile state of affairs that can be positively or negatively affected by various factors, such as the personal dispositions of the friends.

Aristotle believed that people lacking in virtue ('the base') are unequipped for friendship, even towards themselves.³⁹ Perhaps central among a number of reasons for this is that base people are unable to sustain concord over time. Their character lacks the stability and firmness necessary to achieve it.⁴⁰ This volatility is a result of a disordered soul: the base lack internal concord. Instead, they are the location of internal conflict between opposing forces. Their sensitive and rational appetites push in opposite directions, thus causing the same disharmony in the soul that is present in the incontinent or weak-willed.⁴¹

³⁹ *Nic. Eth.* 1166^b23–4. ⁴⁰ *Nic. Eth.* 1159^b7–10; *Eth.* VIII. 8 [1651].

⁴¹ *Nic. Eth.* 1166^b17–23; *Eth.* IX. 4 [1817].

Paradoxically, the base also have a great need for the company of other people. This permits them to distract themselves from what must be necessarily an irritating self-contemplation (the base cannot avoid awareness of their base past deeds and probable future ones).⁴²

The impact of vice and virtue on concord receives a more fine-grained treatment by Aquinas when he discusses the roots of factionalism and the destruction of concord. Discord is often a result of our unwillingness to admit the fallibility of our views: ‘Among the proud there are always contentions.’⁴³ For Aquinas, pride and associated vices are often behind reprehensible forms of discord, conflict, and the breaking away of friendship.

Pride presents some philosophically interesting questions. Reprehensible pride involves an element of falsity: the belief that one is better—in some respect—than one really is. But if pride is a form of intellectual error then it is not clear what is reprehensible about it. Pride cannot be, on the other hand, a self-conscious lie—we can easily distinguish liars from proud people. Pride presents therefore the same paradox associated with self-deceit—namely whether self-deceit is genuinely possible in a unified self. Chapter 4 examines in detail the impact of pride on concord and shows how the power to introduce dissension can be used to promote one’s self-image.

1.3.3 Benevolence and Beneficence: Selflessness or Self-Love?

As indicated above, two of the three central components, or ‘acts’, of friendship are the willing good things to your friends (*benevolentia*) and the performance of acts, such as granting gifts, that contribute to their obtaining these good things (*beneficentia*). The granting of benefits raises two important questions: (i) what is the appropriate relation between a person and his possessions that enables him to be a friend? and (ii) what resources are needed to fulfil this granting and returning of benefits?

What are the personal dispositions and affections behind beneficence? On the one hand it could be argued that the readiness to share, or even to give away, one’s belongings is an expression of altruism, or, taken to an extreme, of selflessness. On the other hand it could be argued that this generosity, which concerns mostly external goods such as money, reflects not selflessness, but rather a healthy detachment from worldly goods.

⁴² *Eth.* IX. 4 [1816].

⁴³ Prov. 13: 10.

The first approach is often in evidence among the Apostles, particularly St Paul. He sometimes suggests that Christian charity involves a readiness to undergo loss and the patient forbearance of wrongs.⁴⁴

Aristotle supports the second approach—namely, that the best friendship involves a lack of undue attachment to external goods. Aristotle does not consider this lack of attachment to express selflessness, but to express virtuous self-love. Self-lovers, Aristotle says, are criticized not so much for loving themselves as for procuring for themselves money, honour, and bodily pleasures.⁴⁵ According to Aristotle no one would criticize a self-lover who procures for himself wisdom and virtue.⁴⁶ The self-lover with an appropriate conception of the good will seek to benefit his rational part rather than his sensual part, and hence will not go after worldly goods for their own sake. Rather, the virtuous self-lover will subordinate the acquisition and use of worldly goods to the pursuit of virtue.

It is not because the virtuous person disregards the value of external goods that he gives them to his friends. Rather, he does so because helping your friend is a virtuous and honourable act, and this is what the virtuous person aims for.⁴⁷ If external goods were deprived of all value, then granting them to your friends could hardly be regarded as a virtuous act. Aristotle goes on to argue that, in fact, giving your life for the sake of your friend is a perfect expression of virtuous self-love.⁴⁸

Someone who accepts Aristotle's view will have to interpret the texts of the Apostles on charity mentioned above, as recommending not selflessness, but an appropriate understanding of what goods are really important (and, correspondingly, what in oneself is worthy of love). This is precisely Aquinas's line. He characterizes *cupiditas*, the vice that constitutes one of the main enemies of charity,⁴⁹ not as an unspecific 'love of having', but rather as love of moneys, love of transient things, love of honours, and love of worldly things.⁵⁰ The person who

⁴⁴ E.g. Cor. 6: 6, 6: 7, 13:15; Luke 6: 30; Matt. 5: 40.

⁴⁵ *Nic. Eth.* 1168^b16–17.

⁴⁶ *Nic. Eth.* 1168^b25–8.

⁴⁷ *Nic. Eth.* 1169^a18–35.

⁴⁸ *Nic. Eth.* 1169^a25–6.

⁴⁹ Following Augustine's dictum that 'cupidity is the poison of charity' in *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, I. 36 (*PL* 40. 25), and alluded to in *ST* I–II q. 99 a. 6 ad 1; *ST* II–II q. 118 a. 5 obj. 2 ad 2, q. 184 a. 2c.; *ST* III q. 79 a. 6 ad 3; *Mal.* q. 13 a. 2 obj. 2, ad 2; *Quodl.* III q. 6 a. 3c.; *Perf.* c. 6 [569].

⁵⁰ *ST* II–II q. 19 a. 3c. (*cupiditas* as love of moneys, worldly love); *ST* II–II q. 129 a. 2c. (as love of wealth and honours); *ST* I–II q. 30 a. 2 obj. 2. (as love of transient things, after Augustine), *Dec.* (proem.) (as love of holding to temporal goods, after Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus*).

on account of *cupiditas* cannot act in the spirit of charity has an incorrect appreciation of what goods are worth pursuing and retaining and, correspondingly, an incorrect understanding of what in himself is worthy of love. When discussing whether one should, out of charity, love oneself over other persons, Aquinas replies in a very Aristotelian fashion that ‘A man ought to bear bodily injury for his friend’s sake, and precisely in so doing he loves himself more [than the friend] as regards his spiritual mind, because it pertains to the perfection of virtue, which is a good of the mind.’⁵¹

So, in Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s view, *benevolentia* and *beneficentia* do not demand selflessness, but rather a correct appreciation of what is really valuable. Such appreciation engenders the sort of generosity that is peculiar to friendship. This generosity should not be confused with mere liberality. Liberality is the sort of largesse that one displays towards strangers rather than friends, as it need not reflect an informed concern for the well-being of the recipients.⁵²

For some Christian theologians and polemicists, property claims (i.e. demands to retain or to regain a thing) are closely connected to *cupiditas*. If property demands originate from *cupiditas*, and *cupiditas* is incompatible with charity—it is argued—then property demands are inconsistent with charity. For Aquinas, however, rights-based claims can arise from motives other than cupidity. They may even originate in a willingness to better the friend. Insofar as justice is a virtue, and acquiring virtues is good for a person, justice-based demands help the wrongdoer make progress towards virtue. Therefore, as Aquinas says, people making justice-based demands may be moved by the spirit of brotherly correction, rather than *cupiditas*, vengeance, or anger. Hence charity, and friendship, do allow for the defence of one’s rights, and may even require it.

Charity requires that we be ready to undergo loss if such loss is necessary to avoid scandal or in situations of dire need by the unlawful possessor of one’s belongings.⁵³ Not all scandals, however, give reason to forfeit one’s legitimate claims, only scandals which involve public

⁵¹ *ST* II–II q. 26 a. 4 ad 2; III *Sent.* d. 29 q. un. a. 5 ad 3: ‘To die for the sake of the friend is a most perfect act of virtue; because this act is preferred by the virtuous to his own bodily life. Yet when someone gives away his own bodily life for the sake of the friend, it does not follow that he loves his friend more than himself; but rather that he loves in himself the good of virtue more than the good of the body.’

⁵² *ST* II–II q. 117 a. 5 ad 3. To see this, contrast liberality with mercy and piety.

⁵³ *ST* II–II q. 43 a. 8c.; IV *Sent.* d. 38 q. 2 a. 4 sol. 3c.

shock damaging to the spiritual health of the community. In this regard Aquinas often gives the example of Thomas Becket's epic defence of the Church's rights. His actions were meritorious and compatible with charity even though they scandalized both king and public.⁵⁴ This topic is developed further in Chapter 6 where I examine Aquinas's views on the presumed incompatibility of friendship and right-based claims.

1.3.4 Hoped-for Goods and Friendship with the Benefactor

Hope receives little attention in Aristotle's account of human willing and action and almost none in his analysis of friendship. By contrast, hope is central to Aquinas's treatments of friendship. One of the reasons for this is hope's status as one of the theological virtues, causally prior to charity/friendship.

Faith, hope, and charity, the three theological virtues, are conceived of by Aquinas as stages in a process reaching its fulfilment in friendship with God. The genesis of this friendship is the appreciation, possible through faith, of the spiritual goods that human beings stand to gain (*beatitudo*). Human beings, however, must make themselves worthy of these goods in the eyes of God. For Aquinas, the process leading to friendship with God begins with the pursuit of these spiritual goods. God is first loved as a benefactor, and only at a later stage is loved irrespective of the benefits He confers.⁵⁵ If a human being disbelieves in his capacity to be worthy of these benefits, and so despairs, he will be unable to conceive of God as his own personal benefactor. He will fail to experience the interested love which ultimately, according to Aquinas, becomes friendship. It is hope therefore that makes friendship possible.

The thesis behind the role played by hope as a theological virtue is, then, that true friendship starts from interested love. Hope is not, strictly speaking, a specific component of friendship. It is rather a personal disposition associated with all of those enterprises which comprise future, challenging, but feasible goods.⁵⁶ Insofar as friendship is engendered by the common pursuit of a good, or by the reception of a good from a benefactor, then hope comes to bear on friendship, or, at least, on some friendships (those which present a challenge).

⁵⁴ IV *Sent.* d. 38 q. 2. a. 4 sol. 3 sc. 1, ad 5; *ST* II–II q. 43 a. 8 sc.; *Impugn.* IV. c. 3 ad 8 [463].

⁵⁵ *ST* I–II q. 40 a. 7c.

⁵⁶ See Section 5.2.1.2.

This view may seem difficult to reconcile with some common interpretations of Aristotle's theory of friendship. Aristotle contemplates three types of friendship: utility-, pleasure-, and virtue-based. One way of understanding this distinction, is to say that in the first two kinds, the friend is loved only as a source of utility and pleasure (rather than for his own sake). In virtue-based friendship alone the friend is loved *propter se*. If this reading of Aristotle is correct, then the friendship that hope makes possible (whether with God or with another benefactor) cannot be virtue-based friendship.

On a more refined understanding such as the one proposed by John Cooper, however, Aristotle does not mean that the friend is loved for his own sake only in virtue-based friendship.⁵⁷ Rather, Aristotle argues that the friend in virtuous friendship is loved in recognition of non-transitory features—that is, features that are not accidental to what he truly is (whether this love is dependent on the reception of benefits or not). In the other sorts of friendship, by contrast, the friend is loved in recognition of relatively ephemeral characteristics that are not essential to what he is. Notwithstanding this, these friendships do present love of the friend *propter se*, which is sustained so long as the general context of profitable exchange is preserved. If this reading is correct, then the presence of the interested love (typical but not restricted to non virtue-based friendship) does not exclude the love of the friend 'for his own sake'.

The fact that hope leads us to love someone on account of the benefit that we expect from him, does not mean that hope is necessarily associated with utility or pleasure. One can love both virtuously and interestedly when one of the reasons behind the love of the friend is to benefit the best part of one's own soul. The difference between the virtuous and the non-virtuous friend is not that the love of the former is interested while that of the latter is not, but rather that the virtuous friend has a correct appreciation of what goods constitute true benefits. The virtuous friend has, as Aristotle would put it, a self-love based on a correct understanding of his self, and therefore of what goods are truly beneficial to himself. He also has a correct understanding of the friends' self and so, of the goods that truly benefit him.

Hence Aquinas's view that hope is conducive to the best sort of friendship—i.e. friendship with God—ceases to produce a paradox if one accepts Cooper's interpretation of Aristotle's classification of

⁵⁷ Cooper, 'Aristotle on Friendship', 308–15.

friendship. Friendship with God can be based on the pursuit of benefits and, at the same time, be virtuous, given that the benefits involved are spiritual goods.

According to Aquinas, when we hope for benefits from a specific person, he becomes 'our good'.⁵⁸ This is supposed to explain how hope leads to the love of friendship that is typical of charity. It is difficult, however, to see how the benefactor's being 'our good' leads to the best friendship if 'being our good' is understood as 'being good for us'. There is, nevertheless, an alternative understanding of 'being our good'. Suppose our well-being is closely connected with the well-being of someone else. In such a state of affairs one's good and the good of the other person become virtually indistinguishable from each other. This may be a rather unlikely thing to happen, but it would explain how one can ascend from purely-interested to a non-purely-interested love without the latter becoming a love to the exclusion of oneself.

A more detailed account of the role of hope in sustaining friendship and in allowing us to overcome the doubts generated by the uncertainty surrounding future friends' wills is provided in Chapter 5.

1.3.5 Beneficence and Indebtedness

Friendship involves promoting the friend's well-being. Benefiting your friends generates in the recipient what we may term a debt of gratitude.⁵⁹ Aquinas calls this the 'debt of friendship' and 'debt of honesty' belonging to the broader category of 'moral debt'.

Aquinas posits two kinds of duty: legal and moral,⁶⁰ corresponding to the two kinds of justice postulated by Aristotle.⁶¹ A legal debt is a debt the payment and amount of which is dictated by codified law.⁶² Natural justice is the master directive guiding our best legislative efforts. Yet it cannot as such be codified since right reason may demand different things in different situations.⁶³ These contingencies cannot be brought

⁵⁸ *ST* I–II q. 62 a. 4c.

⁵⁹ *ST* II–II q. 106 a. 1 ad 3: 'Since true friendship is based on virtue, whatever there is contrary to virtue in a friend is an obstacle to friendship, and whatever in him is virtuous is an incentive to friendship. In this way friendship is preserved by repayment of favours, although repayment of favours belongs specially to the virtue of gratitude.'

⁶⁰ *ST* II–II q. 23 a. 3 ad 1; *ST* II–II q. 106 a. 5c.

⁶¹ *ST* II–II q. 80 a. un. c. quoting *Nic. Eth.* 1162^b20–1: 'There are two ways of being just, one unwritten, and one governed by rules of law.'

⁶² *ST* II–II q. 114 a. 2c. ⁶³ *Eth.* V. 16 [1086].

under the universal directives which are typical of positive law.⁶⁴ Thus the need to posit a moral duty defined as ‘that which one owes by reason of the rectitude of virtue’. Some moral duties are so important that without meeting them ‘moral rectitude cannot be preserved’.⁶⁵ Aquinas considers truth-telling, gratitude {*gratia*}, and *vindicatio* as moral duties of this kind.

In the context of friendship Aquinas identifies legal debt not as a debt required by law, but rather as a debt originating from an express pact. Since between friends there are no such pacts, friends’ debts are moral rather than legal.⁶⁶ Again the emphasis is on the difference between tacit understandings of what justice and decency require, and explicit, codified injunctions. Thus, the difference between moral and legal debts is not that one is required by justice and the other is not.⁶⁷

If natural justice demands that one return one’s friend’s favours, how is this exchange of gifts different from a normal commercial transaction in which one pays for what one has received? Although Aristotle gives some useful clues, he fails to give sufficient distinctiveness to friendly as opposed to commercial exchanges. Seneca, on the other hand, wrote an entire book on benefits, and if only for this reason, has a much more nuanced and detailed understanding of *beneficentia* and gratitude than Aristotle. Aquinas, understandably, takes Seneca and not Aristotle as the main authority on gratitude.

According to Seneca, the granting of benefits and their repayment differ from the repayment of a debt in a number of important respects. ‘The grandeur of the act is ruined if we make our benefits commercial transactions.’⁶⁸ A service is a benefit if it goes beyond the duties of one’s station or office.⁶⁹ For something to count as a benefit, rather than as a loan, it must be accompanied by an appropriate will and friendship on the part of the giver. A benefit ‘is the art of doing a kindness which both bestows pleasure and gains it by bestowing it, and which does its office by natural and spontaneous impulse. It is not, therefore, the thing

⁶⁴ *Eth.* V. 16 [1084–5]. ⁶⁵ *ST* II–II q. 80 a. un.c. (my trans.).

⁶⁶ On absence of explicit pacts between friends see: *ST* II–II q. 78 a. 2 ad 2, q. 106 a. 1 ad 2; *Impugn.* II. c. 6 ad 27 [344]; *Mal.* q. 13 a. 4 ad 5.

⁶⁷ Moral debt comes under natural justice: *ST* I–II q. 99 a. 5c.; *ST* II–II q. 80 a. un. c., ‘duplex est iustitia’: *Eth.* VIII. 13 [1733] citing *Eth.* V. 16 [1081] in which it is claimed that the equitable is contained in the natural just, not in the legal just. The legal just has its origin in the inalterable natural just: *Eth.* V. 12 [1023].

⁶⁸ *Benef.* III. 14 § 4. ⁶⁹ *Benef.* III. 22 § 1.

which is done or given, but the spirit in which it is done or given, that must be considered.⁷⁰

The benefit is not the material good granted, but rather the will which accompanies it. It is to this will that we respond when we return the favour. Things are instruments to express this friendly will. In commercial exchange, on the contrary, our return corresponds to the value of the thing as such, irrespective of the intention or will that accompanies its granting.

The repayment of a benefit differs from the repayment of a commercial debt in both timing and quantity: ‘The man who is always eager to repay under all circumstances, has not the feeling of a grateful man, but of a debtor [...] [H]e who is too eager to repay, is unwilling to be in his friend’s debt; he who is unwilling, and yet is in his friend’s debt, is ungrateful.’⁷¹ One should not return the exact amount of what one has received, but if possible even more, thus extending the obligation and, therefore, the friendship, in what resembles a ball game:⁷² ‘I ought to be more careful in the choice of my creditor for a benefit than a creditor for a loan; for I have only to pay the latter as much as I received of him, and when I have paid it I am free from all obligation; but to the other [the benefactor] I must both repay more, and even when I have repaid his kindness we remain connected, for when I have paid my debt I ought again to renew it, while our friendship endures unbroken.’⁷³

For Seneca, benefits are closely, perhaps even necessarily, linked with friendship, for benefit giving and return makes sense only within an ongoing relationship animated by mutual and acknowledged good willing. A benefit is a means both of initiating a friendship and of preserving it. It may fail to achieve this purpose if the receiver is uninterested in friendship: he will treat the benefit as a mere loan.⁷⁴

Aquinas endorses most of what Seneca has to say about gratitude, ingratitude, and benefits. However, there seems to be some ambiguity in his consideration of the debts of friendship. For while, as stated

⁷⁰ *Benef.* I. 6 § 1.

⁷¹ *Benef.* IV. 40 § 5, VI. 35 § 3, 41 § 1–2; see also *ST* II–II q. 106 a. 5c., ad 1.

⁷² Seneca uses Chrysippus’ simile of benefit giving and receiving as a sports game in which the players skilfully pass the ball to each other. *Benef.* II. 17 § 3–4.

⁷³ *Benef.* II. 18 § 5 (with some modifications over Stewart’s trans.). See also *ST* II–II q. 106 a. 6c.

⁷⁴ *Benef.* II. 21 § 2.

earlier, benefits generate debts the repayment of which is required by natural justice, Aquinas sometimes distinguishes between the 'equality of justice' and the 'equality of friendship'.⁷⁵ The first equality is said to be upset by a legal debt and the second equality is the one disrupted by a moral debt. Does this mean that, for Aquinas, repayment of moral debt is not in fact required by justice?

A solution is provided by Seneca's view that the true benefit is the good will of the giver, rather than the object given. Aquinas agrees.⁷⁶ The difference between legal and moral debt is not that one falls under justice while the other does not. Rather, the difference is that one concerns the return of things and the other the reciprocity of feeling. When Aquinas wonders whether returning for a benefit more than one has received upsets the equality of justice, he does not reply that justice does not govern friendly exchanges. Rather, his answer is precisely that gratitude (which is a part of justice) concerns the equality of wills: 'For while on the one hand the benefactor of his own free will gave something he was not bound to give, so on the other hand the beneficiary repays something over and above what he has received.'⁷⁷ The idea is that the will 'to give more than one has received in material goods' must match the friend's similar will. Hence, in the case of friendship and gratitude, the relevant currency of justice is not things but wills.⁷⁸

Friendship therefore requires moral resources, that is, it requires the capacity to perform acts that are worthy enough to put the friend in debt. Sometimes, however, a prospective friend lacks the resources to perform such acts, and hence cannot benefit/indebt the other friend so as to set the friendship in motion. This is discussed by Aquinas in the context of his theology of merit. There Aquinas explains how, by making part of the resources of one friend common to the other, friendship may help create the required conditions of beneficence. This view is discussed in Chapter 6.

Sometimes friends' acts not only upset the justice that is particular to friends, but also the general justice, i.e. they infringe upon the

⁷⁵ *IV Sent.* d. 14 q. 2 a. 1 sol. 2c., d. 15 q. 1 a. 1 sol. 2 ad 1.

⁷⁶ *Eth.* VIII. 13 [1743], *Eth.* IX. 1 [1767].

⁷⁷ *ST* II-II q. 106 a. 6 obj. 3, ad 3.

⁷⁸ *ST* II-II q. 106 a. 5c.: 'In the friendship based on virtue repayment should be made with regard for the choice or motives [the feelings that move the will] of the giver since this is the chief requisite of virtue, as stated in *Nic. Eth.* VIII' 'In amicitia autem honesti debet in recompensatione haberi respectus ad electionem, sive ad affectum dantis, quia hoc praecipue requiritur ad virtutem, ut dicitur in *Nic. Eth.* VIII.' See *Nic. Eth.* 1163^a21-3.

right that the friend has qua person rather than qua friend. Are the responses to such infringements dealt with differently when they take place in the context of friendship than when they take place between strangers? What happens when the offender-friend lacks the resources to make appropriate restoration for the wrong inflicted? Aquinas raises this problem within his penitential theology. Again, Aquinas explains how the presence of friendship creates circumstances in which the less endowed friend can make an acceptable compensation and so restore the friendship. I discuss this topic in Chapter 7.

1.3.6 Friendly Acts and the Uncertainty of the Heart

Friends' acts are responses to the acts of the other friends. These acts are valuable insofar as they express valuable feelings, intentions, and choices.⁷⁹

Sometimes an act is not backed by the intention that it is supposed to express, and so it deceives. Given that the connection between acts and wills is not fixed we cannot know with certainty whether friendship actually exists. Augustine asks of Terence's 'evils of love',⁸⁰ 'Do they not often occur even in honourable friendships? On all hands we experience these slights, suspicions, quarrels, war, all of which are undoubted evils; while, on the other hand, peace is a doubtful good, because we do not know the heart of our friend, and though we did know it today, we should be as ignorant of what it might be tomorrow.'⁸¹

Aquinas believes that we should presume that other people's acts and words are authentic, i.e. that they reflect what they will or think.⁸² He argues that to assume the opposite without conclusive evidence would often entail doing an injustice. If presumptions are rules that instruct us in what to believe, it follows that, for Aquinas, holding what could be false beliefs is preferable to risking unjustly misjudging a person. In other words, our beliefs are not to be judged only in terms of their correctness or falsity, but also as bearers of a moral value which might not necessarily coincide with their truth value.

⁷⁹ *Eth.* VIII. 13 [1743], IX. 1[1767]; *ST* II-II q. 106 a. 5c.

⁸⁰ See Parmeno's discourse in *Eunuchus*, I. i. 14–18: 'In love there are all these evils; wrongs, suspicions, enmities reconcilements, war, then peace; if you expect to render these things, naturally uncertain, certain by dint of reason, you wouldn't effect it a bit the more than if you were to use your endeavors to be mad with reason.' In *The Comedies of Terence*, trans. Henry Thomas Riley (New York: Harper, 1874).

⁸¹ *CD* XIX, 5.

⁸² See Section 5.1.1.

Aquinas's discussion of presumptions belongs to his detailed treatment of procedural justice, but also touches upon non-judicial cases; indeed, Aquinas provides examples which are relevant to friendship. These examples and the 'presumption of authenticity' are analysed in Chapter 5.