

AQUINAS ON THE EMOTIONS

AQUINAS'S theory of the emotions (*passiones animae*) is cognitivist, somatic, and taxonomical: cognitivist because he holds that cognition is essential to emotion; somatic because he holds that their physiological manifestations are partially constitutive of emotions; taxonomical because he holds that emotions fall into distinct natural kinds which are hierarchically ordered. Aquinas supports these claims with a wealth of argument, presented in his three extended treatments of emotion: *sent.* 3 d. 15 q. 2, d. 26 q. 1 and d. 27 q. 1, dating from ca. 1252–1256; *uer.* qq. 25–26, dating from ca. 1256–1259, and his masterly *sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} qq. 22–48 (the ‘treatise on the emotions’), dating from 1271.¹ His presentation and defense proved so effective that later mediæval thinkers took Aquinas’s theory as their starting-point, whether they agreed with it or not, and it remained a contender in affective psychology up to the end of scholasticism.

Aquinas identifies eleven essentially distinct types of emotion, which he sorts into two kinds, and which for the most part occur in conjugate pairs of contraries: the six concupiscible emotions of love and hate, desire and aversion, delight and distress; the five irascible emotions of hope and despair, confidence and fear, and anger (which has no contrary).² The concupiscible emotions are directed at objects insofar as they appear to be good or evil, whereas the irascible emotions are directed at objects insofar as they present something good or evil that might be hard to achieve or to avoid. But these are not perspicuous or evident claims; we need to begin with more fundamental issues about emotion in general to appreciate Aquinas’s theory.

I’ll begin with Aquinas’s account of the nature of emotion as a psychological phenomenon (§1), as a feature of what he calls ‘sensitive appetite’, after which I’ll turn to how emotion is related to other psychological faculties,

* All translations are my own. Latin texts are cited from their respective editions, with the punctuation as given (not always respected in the translations).

¹ I adopt the dating of these works given in Torrell [2002].

² Respectively *amor* and *odium*, *desiderium* and *fuga*, *gaudium* and *tristitia*; *spes* and *desperatio*, *audacia* and *timor*, and *ira*. Aquinas adopts this list and much of the structure that supports it from Jean de la Rochelle (*Summa de anima*), by way of his mentor Albert the Great: see Knuutila [2004] and King [2010].

namely cognition and volition (§2). After situating the emotions in Aquinas's psychological system, I'll then look at his analysis of their internal structure, which provides a taxonomy of emotional experience (§3). I'll conclude with some brief reflections on Aquinas's theory *vis-à-vis* contemporary theories of emotion.

1. THE NATURE OF EMOTION

Emotion, according to Aquinas, is an objectual non-volitional affective psychological state. Or, in mediæval terms, emotion is an actualization of the sensitive appetite, which is a semi-autonomous faculty of the soul. To see what these definitions mean and why they are equivalent, more than a little unpacking is needed.

Psychology, in the aristotelian tradition, is a subordinate branch of natural philosophy. It studies the activity of living beings *qua* living, and on this score identifies three kinds of clustered activities that living beings exemplify, stemming from three distinct principles, that is, from three types of soul: (*a*) nutrition, growth, and reproduction, typical of plants and trees, whose principle is the vegetative soul; (*b*) self-movement and perception of the world, typical of animals, whose principle is the sensitive soul; (*c*) thought and reasoning, typical of human beings, whose principle is the intellective soul. These kinds of soul are arranged in a hierarchy such that the latter include the former: anything capable of (*b*) is capable of (*a*), anything capable of (*c*) is capable of (*b*) and (*a*). Aquinas famously held that these clusters of principles were not really distinct when combined in the same subject – his controversial stand on the unicity, as opposed to the plurality, of substantial form – but this metaphysical disagreement can be set aside in psychology, since all parties to the dispute agree that human beings, for instance, have intellective and sensitive capacities, whether they stem from a single unique principle or a pair of related principles; horses and cats do not have the same cognitive powers as humans, however these powers be related when found together. One question to ask, then, is whether the emotions are features of the sensitive soul (and so common to all animals) or of the intellective soul (and so particular to human beings).

Yet there is another question that is equally pressing. The cluster of powers associated with the sensitive and the intellective souls are not limited to cognition. Animals and human beings do not merely acquire and process information about the world; they engage the world directly, being drawn to some things and driven away by others. Therefore, side-by-side with cognitive powers to acquire and assimilate information, there are appetitive powers to move the subject. Another question to ask, then, is whether the emotions

are cognitive (and so dealing with information about things) or appetitive (and so dealing with the things themselves).

Aquinas starts his answer to both questions by considering the nature of emotion (*uer.* q. 26 a. 2 and *sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 22 a. 1). For an emotion is a *passio animae*, literally something that the soul “undergoes” or “experiences” – a capacity for being in a given psychological state – rather than something the soul “does” (the way it reasons, for instance). In mediæval philosophical jargon, an emotion is a potency whose principle of actualization is external to its subject; in contemporary terms, an emotion is a *reaction*.

First, if an emotion is a reaction, it is therefore passive as regards whatever brings it about, that is, whatever prompts the reaction. Yet the passivity of an emotion in itself does not entail that the subject is thereby passive with respect to that emotion. Sight is likewise a passive potency – we can see only what is there to be seen – but we can exercise a measure of control over what we see nonetheless: we may close our eyes, avert our gaze, turn our head, and so on. So too we have some degree of control over the emotions. (More will be said about this point in §3.) Moreover, an emotion is a reaction that may well have causal efficacy: fear of the wolf moves the sheep to flee, a perceived insult causes the proud man to lash out in anger, the hope of winning motivates the runner to put on a final burst of speed at the end of the race. Reactions can cause or motivate subjects to act; their doing so depends on how they are related to other elements in the subject’s psychology. That is, *being in a given state* can be the cause of further events, regardless of how the subject comes to be in that state. Hence the intrinsic passivity of emotion is of no real importance.

Second, while emotions may be reactions, they are more fundamentally types of *motion*.³ The subject of an emotion is *moved* by it – drawn towards the object, as in the case of desire; or driven from it, as in the case of hatred. This is more than mere metaphor; in the aristotelian tradition, ‘movement’ includes more than just change of place. For in living animals the soul plays two roles: on the one hand, it is the substantial form of the body which vivifies the body and unifies the composite; on the other hand, it exercises its operations through the body which it informs, causing it to change (‘move’) from one state to another. Emotions, Aquinas maintains, are psychophysical phenomena: the apprehension of an insult leads to (a) the desire for revenge, which is the formal aspect of anger, and (b) the boiling of blood around the heart – or as we should say the increase in heart rate, blood circulation, the

³ See King [1998], Miner [2009] Ch. 2.3, and the discussion in §4.

flow of adrenaline, and so on – which is the material aspect of anger.⁴ The desire (*a*) is the formal cause of the physiological changes described in (*b*), set in motion by the soul.⁵ By the same token the physiological changes in (*b*) are what make the associated psychological state an emotion: a desire is only a desire if its motivational force is felt in the proper way, and *mutatis mutandis* for the other emotions.⁶

These considerations about the nature of emotion suggest a single reply to the two questions posed above, namely that the emotions properly belong to the sensitive appetite. Aquinas puts this reply concisely in *uer.* q. 26 a. 3:

Since the body is altered due to an operation of the soul in the case of emotion, it must be the sort of power that is joined to a bodily organ and whose function it is to alter the body. Hence emotion is not in the intellective part [of the soul], which does not pertain to the actualization of some bodily organ. Nor again is it in sensitive apprehension, since from sense-apprehension there follows movement in the body only through the mediation of the appetitive power, which is the immediate moving cause.

Emotions are sensitive rather than intellective because they essentially involve physiological changes, unlike the operations of the intellective faculties of intellect and will (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^e q. 22 a. 3);⁷ they are appetitive rather than cognitive because they ‘move’ the body, that is, because they engender changes in the subject’s bodily states – even the psychological movement involved in emotion is typical of the appetitive rather than the cognitive powers, since the appetitive powers engage the subject directly with things in the world (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^e q. 22 a. 2).⁸ More generally, Aquinas argues that emotions motivate action, as they unquestionably do, only if representations of

⁴ See *sum. theol.* 1^a2^e q. 44 a. 1: “In the case of the emotions, the formal aspect is the motion of the appetitive potency and the material element is a physiological change, where the one is proportionate to the other.”

⁵ Aquinas takes this direction of influence from the soul to the body as a mark of emotion, which he calls by the name of “animal emotion” (*passio animalis*) in *uer.* q. 26 a. 2.

⁶ A corollary of Aquinas’s insistence that physiological changes are essential to emotion is that nonphysical beings, such as angels and God, strictly speaking do not have emotions. See Miner [2009] Ch. 2.2 and the references therein, as well as King [2011].

⁷ Aquinas offers two further arguments for the view that emotions do not belong to the will: the will is a free active power whereas emotions are not, and the will tends to a universal object whereas the emotions tend to a particular object (*uer.* q. 25 a. 1).

⁸ This is Aquinas’s preferred proof when he has to give a brief account of why the

their objects occur in a context in which they move the agent (as in the appetite) rather than one in which such representations are merely assessed for the information they convey (as in cognition). Thus the emotions must belong to the appetitive part of the soul.

Hence there are four distinct types of psychological activity: (i) sensitive cognition *a. k. a.* perception, the domain of the external and internal senses; (ii) sensitive appetite, the domain of the emotions; (iii) intellective cognition, the domain of thought and reasoning; (iv) intellective appetite, the domain of free will. The first pair are common to all animals and their exercise is bound up with the body; the latter pair is specific to human beings and their exercise is carried out independently of the body. In particular, as features of the sensitive soul, the emotions are common to animals and to human beings. Aquinas's account of emotion must therefore be general enough to apply to non-human animals as well as to human beings.

A final point before turning to examine how the emotions are related to the other types of psychological activity listed above (the concern of §2). For Aquinas, emotion has both a formal (psychological) and a material (somatic) component, as we have seen; hence an emotion is primarily a state of the entire unified soul-body composite.⁹ It is the bereft mother who grieves for her lost son, not merely or primarily her soul that grieves, or for that matter her body. Grief is not a mere mental phenomenon, though it of course does involve mental states. As we would put Aquinas's point today, emotions are states of persons.

2. COGNITION, VOLITION, AND EMOTION

The preceding section glossed over the details of how Aquinas takes emotion to be related to other psychological faculties, in particular to cognition (both sensitive and intellective), and volition. With regard to cognition, there are two topics to be considered: whether cognition is an essential part of an emotion, and the extent to which cognition can influence or control emotion.

The issue whether cognition might be essential to emotion arises from reflecting on Aquinas's conclusion that an emotion is a power of the sensitive appetite, and hence categorically distinct from any cognitive act – a consideration that might seem to warrant the inference that Aquinas is a 'feeling-theorist' about the emotions, holding the position that emotions are essentially (pure) feelings which are known entirely through their phenomenological and

emotions are appetitive: see for example *diu. nom.* 2.4 §191 or *in eth.* 2.5 §291.

⁹ See Cates [2009] Ch. 4.

qualitative properties.¹⁰

Now this inference might be warranted if Aquinas were to hold that the intentional aspect of emotion could be separated (at least by divine power) from the actualization of the sensitive appetite, which would thereby lack any cognitive element. This is not his position, however. Aquinas holds that the sensitive appetite ‘inherits’ its intentional character from cognition, which must therefore figure in the account of emotion. Consider, for example, the case of fear – the emotion consequent upon the perception of some thing as a (sensible) imminent evil that is hard to avoid, which is associated with heightened respiration and heart-rate, the sudden flow of adrenaline, and the like, where fright is the cause of flight. This is not specifically human; a sheep experiences fear when confronted with a wolf, in the well-worn example. Analyzing the stages of the process sketched here will make Aquinas’s position clear.

First, the sheep has a cognitive act, more specifically an act of sensitive cognition: it sees the approaching wolf. This act, properly speaking, is an actualization of the sheep’s passive power of vision. As such, like the actualization of any passive power, it takes place due to an external principle, in this instance the wolf. The wolf, as the external principle of the sheep’s cognitive act, thereby becomes its object; the sheep has a seeing-of-a-*wolf*, after all. The point holds generally: the external principles that reduce passive potencies to acts are their objects.

Sensitive cognition is the paradigm case, but Aquinas does note that the same analysis can be applied when the object is derived not from occurrent sensing but rather from memory via the imagination. The cognitive act alone, however, whether derived from sense or from memory, is not sufficient for an emotion; a camera linked to image-analysis software could just as well register the (sudden) presence of a wolf without feeling a thing. In addition to the simple cognitive act of seeing a wolf, an act of another type takes place, one that links the cognitive to the appetitive faculties. Aquinas describes it as follows (*sum. theol.* 1^a q. 78 a. 4):¹¹

An animal must seek out or avoid some things not merely because they are suitable or unsuitable to the senses, but according to certain other uses and advantages or disadvantages. For example, a sheep seeing an approaching wolf runs away – not due to its unsightly colour or shape, but as if it were a natural enemy. Likewise, a bird collects straw not because

¹⁰ See Floyd [1998], Gorevan [2000], and Ryan [2005].

¹¹ See also *sent.* 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2 §25, where much the same account is given. Miner [2009] Ch. 3.3 discusses the estimative and memorative powers in Aquinas with regard to the emotions.

it is pleasing to sense but because it is useful for building a nest. Thus it is necessary for an animal to perceive *intentiones* of this sort, which the exterior senses do not perceive. There must be some distinct principle. . . the proper sense and the common sense are appointed for the reception of sensible forms, but the estimative power (*uis aestimatiua*) is appointed for apprehending *intentiones*, which are not received through sensing.

The object of the animal's cognitive act, be it the wolf for the sheep or the straw for the bird, is also perceived under some *intentio* or other: the sheep perceives the wolf as a natural enemy, the bird perceives the straw as useful in the construction of a nest.¹² These are not perceptible properties. The wolf's dangerousness is not perceived the way its "unsightly colour" is. Yet the emphasis Aquinas puts on *intentiones* not being perceptible properties – to the extent of postulating a distinct psychological faculty to perceive them at all – is misleading. After all, no dispositional property is strictly speaking perceptible: rationality, ferociousness, fragility, and the like are not apparent to the exterior senses alone. (Neither is the wolfhood of the wolf, or in general the substance of anything.) No wonder that friendliness or hatred are not perceptible (the examples Aquinas mentions in *sent.* 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2 §25). Yet far more important for Aquinas's purposes is his recognition that *intentiones* are what we should call today evaluative response-dependent concepts. The sheep regards the wolf as a threat, and the bird regards straw as useful, because of the kind of thing each is. The sheep does not regard straw as useful, since it does not build nests of straw; the bird does not regard the wolf as a threat (or as much of one), since it can easily fly away. At bottom this is a built-in capacity: "animals perceive these sorts of *intentiones* only through a kind of natural instinct" (*ibid.*),¹³ though it may be modified through conditioning and habituation, as when the family watchdog learns that strangers are the only proper targets of its anger, or, in the case of human beings, through the exercise of higher faculties (as we shall see shortly). For now let us take the point that such evaluative response-dependent concepts occur after acts of simple cognition.

Aquinas offers a few examples of *intentiones*: the sheep perceives the wolf as inimical, the bird perceives the straw as useful, or vaguely "advantages and disadvantages." Now it might be thought that these are a motley collection as

¹² It is unclear whether this cognitive act is distinct from the initial perception of the wolf – perhaps the sheep's 'concept' of a wolf has dangerousness built into it – but it is enough for our purposes that it is logically distinct.

¹³ The 'natural instinct' may be nothing more complicated than the way the animal is wetwired: whenever a wolf-form occurs in sensitive cognition, the adrenal glands begin pumping, heartrate increases, and so on.

varied as the nature of evaluation itself (“evaluation” being the root meaning of *aestimatio*). But there is a general way to describe *intentiones* as such, that is, a way to characterize anything that is to count as an *intentio* at all, much the way that for anything to count as visible it must have colour.¹⁴ It is *sensible good or evil*, where ‘sensible’ refers to the subject’s perception of its object as good or as evil.¹⁵ Hence an *intentio* must present some thing to its subject as a good or as an evil in some fashion. When the sheep perceives the approaching wolf, it may evaluate the wolf as a danger – that is, as an imminent evil – which is hard to avoid.¹⁶ The initial simple cognition of the wolf is augmented with this evaluative response-dependent cognition, each cognition arguably caused by the wolf, or more exactly by the wolf given the natures of the wolf and the sheep.

So much for the cognitive side of things. At this point there is a hand-off to the sensitive appetite: “the lower appetitive power does not naturally tend to anything until after that thing has been presented to it under the aspect of its proper object” (*uer.* q. 25 a. 4 *ad* 4), since in the case of animals “the sensitive appetite is apt to be moved by the estimative power, as when a sheep esteems a wolf as inimical and is then afraid” (*sum. theol.* 1^a q. 81 a. 3). The sensitive appetite, as a passive power, is reduced from potency to act when it ‘inherits’ objectual content from the evaluative response-dependent concept (which is the actualization of the estimative power). That is to say, the sheep has an act of the sensitive appetite directed at the wolf, which is presented to the sensitive appetite as a hard-to-avoid imminent evil. This “proper object” therefore has a double causal role. On the one hand, it reduces the sensitive appetite from potency to act, and is thereby an efficient cause of the resulting act. On the other hand, it makes the resulting act be the kind of act it is, and is thereby its formal cause. For the resulting act of the sensitive appetite is the emotion of *fear* when it is caused by the formal object *the wolf as a hard-to-avoid imminent evil*, with the appropriate associated somatic responses. If an object were presented as a hard-to-attain imminent good, say, the way the sheep might appear to the wolf, the act of the wolf’s sensitive appetite would be *hope*. Emotions are therefore objectual, since the sensitive appetite is the

¹⁴ This is the mediæval notion of the ‘proper object’ or the ‘primary object’ – the terminology was fluid – of a cognitive potency, in this case of the estimative power.

¹⁵ The terminology is not perspicuous, since the *intentio*, which must be a form of sensible good or evil, is, as Aquinas has remarked, not a perceptible feature of the object. The key point to keep in mind is that ‘sensible’ here refers to the particular that is grasped in its presentation as a good or an evil.

¹⁶ As we shall see in more detail in §3, the formal object of the irascible emotions is *sensible good or evil that is difficult*.

passive recipient of the causal and formal agency of the external principle, the wolf in the case of the fearful sheep.

Aquinas is therefore a cognitivist about emotion, since cognitive acts are not only causal preconditions of emotion, but contribute their formal causes as well. The emotion is not the feeling alone: it literally would not be the emotion it is without the formal object it has, and there would be no emotion at all in the absence of a formal object. This is not to say that there cannot be ‘objectless’ states of the sort that are so important to contemporary philosophy, such as angst, dread, or boredom, but that they are not to be understood as emotions: they are rather akin to moods, somatic states that influence psychological states.¹⁷ Despite being a cognitivist, however, Aquinas is also an externalist. For the pair of cognitive acts do not in themselves have motivational force: they act as efficient and final causes of the acts of the sensitive appetite, which do motivate the agent, but even the evaluative judgment implicit in the response-dependent conception of something as a good or an evil does not cause responsive action directly.

The point is important, because the causal link between cognition and appetite is more complicated in the case of human beings. Even in the case of animals such as sheep, the “natural tendency” or “instinct” to respond emotionally in a certain way can be tempered and perhaps even changed by conditioning and habituation. The extent to which this is possible depends on the type of animal, and perhaps even on the particular animal. Kittens and puppies raised together often remain quite friendly with one another as cats and dogs, though they respond in more traditional ways to unknown dogs and cats; sheep, on the other hand, might never learn to be tolerant of wolves, no matter how tame. The strength of the causal linkage in each animal, and its susceptibility to conditioning and to habituation, make all the difference, and these are matters for empirical investigation.

Human beings have higher cognitive faculties, and, in consequence, a more complex and sophisticated emotional life. For one thing, instead of an estimative power humans have a general “cogitative power,” which is sometimes called “particular reason” on the grounds that it combines individual or

¹⁷ Moods were often thought to be completely explained in purely physiological terms, having to do with the relative balance among the four bodily humours. Acts of the vegetative soul in the higher animals, such as sexual arousal or hunger, were also thought to be objectless and hence not emotions – a view in keeping with their contemporary classification as drives or urges. Aquinas points out that male impotence effectively demonstrates the difference between mere bodily arousal and sexual desire, a form of the emotion of desire (*concupiscentia*) and an altogether different thing.

particular *intentiones* (*sum. theol.* 1^a q. 78 a. 4 and q. 81 a. 3). Aquinas says little about human cogitative power, and nothing about what it is to ‘combine’ *intentiones*. Nor do the details really matter. What does matter to Aquinas is that thinking and reasoning affect the evaluative response-dependent concepts that trigger the sensitive appetite, and that human ‘cogitative power’ is involved in the process.

We can now turn to the second of the two questions posed at the start of this section, namely the extent to which cognition can influence and control emotions.¹⁸ We have already seen that some non-human animals are susceptible to conditioning. And, like other animals, humans have some instinctual emotional responses (fear of falling) and some habituated responses (pleasure at the sight of a loved one). But human beings, unlike animals, have an extensive and rich set of conceptual resources that can be deployed even at the level of mere conditioning: the botanist’s instant delight at recognizing an unknown species; the anger that follows upon a perceived slight in a complex but thoroughly assimilated code of honour; and so on.¹⁹ Nor is it merely a matter of human beings having a larger conceptual apparatus; human beings are much less tied to their present circumstances, being better able to imagine things in other places and at other times, and in addition are able to conceptualize the world in a universal, rather than merely a particular, way. They can hope for a happier afterlife, become angry at the memory of a rebuke, love wisdom, hate spiders, be saddened at the loss of the sculptures of Phidias – all beyond the capacity of animals.

Aquinas mentions two ways in which human emotion is ‘cognitively penetrable’, that is, capable of being consciously affected by changes in belief or thought after the quasi-instinctual initial response of the sensitive appetite.²⁰ For although an emotional response “is not completely in our power since it precedes the judgment of reason, it is in our power to some extent” (*uer.* q. 25 a. 5). First, we can imaginatively present one and the same thing in different lights, via the imagination, and thereby trigger different emotional responses (*uer.* q. 25 a. 4). The divorced spouse can think of the former partner with

¹⁸ See Murphy [1999] and Uffenheimer-Lippens [2003].

¹⁹ Aquinas notes that the irascible emotions, in virtue of having a more complex formal object, are thereby “closer to reason” and more susceptible to its influence. He takes this point from Aristotle, *eth. nic.* 7.6 (1149^a25^b3; see for instance *sent.* 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2 §28 and *uer.* q. 25 a. 6).

²⁰ Of course, humans can condition themselves over time through a variety of techniques: training, education, brainwashing, self-hypnosis, repetitive practice, and so on. But here we are concerned with Aquinas’s focus on the ways in which someone can attempt to affect his or her emotional responses directly.

love or hatred, depending on which past situations and events are recalled or imagined. Likewise, the imagination can provoke emotional responses by the force of what it imagines. Aquinas offers the example of a believer who reflects on punishment in the afterlife; “imagining the fire burning and the worm gnawing and the like, there follows the emotion of fear in his sensitive appetite” (*uer. q. 26 a. 3 ad 13*).²¹ Since deliberate imagination of this sort is in the agent’s conscious control, it is clear that some emotions are indirectly subject to the control of reason – though it is a bit like controlling digestion by being able to pick and choose what one eats.

Second, Aquinas notes that the intellect can influence emotion: “anyone can experience for himself that by applying some universal considerations, anger or fear or the like can then be mitigated or even stirred up” (*sum. theol. 1^a q. 81 a. 3*). Reminding oneself of general truths can affect the understanding of a particular situation. Grief over the death of a friend can be mitigated by thinking of the general truth that we all die; confidence can be increased by the thought that only the brave deserve the fair; and so on. Here Aquinas is somewhat hamstrung by his view that the intellect is the realm of the universal whereas sense is the realm of the particular; if we allow him to relax his strict insistence on this dividing principle, then there are all sorts of ways in which intellectual cognition can (attempt to) influence one’s emotions: thinking about the stringent air-safety regulations in place in order to curb one’s fear of flying, for example, or thinking about how even lesser lights have been awarded the Nobel Prize in order to boost one’s hopes. The factor in common in all these cases is that the emotional responses seem to follow (when they follow at all) merely upon having the thoughts.

Such techniques do not always lead to success. For the emotions do not always submit to the dictates of reason or imagination; they are unruly and may resist their commands (*sum. theol. 1^a 2^{ae} q. 17 a. 7*).²² Yet strictly speaking, it is not the role of reason to ‘command’ at all. That is the province not of cognition, but of the intellective appetite, *i. e.* the will.

Aquinas argues that emotion is the province of the sensitive rather than the intellective appetite on the grounds that the latter, like the intellect itself, has a purely nonphysical operation (*uer. q. 26 a. 3* and *sum. theol. 1^a 2^{ae} q. 22 a. 3*). Yet just as in the case of the cognition, the presence of higher intellective faculties allows human beings to influence their emotions in ways that are not open to animals, though not to dictate them; we cannot simply choose not to

²¹ See Galeazzi [2004].

²² See also *sum. theol. 1^a q. 81 a. 3 ad 2*. The allusion is to Aristotle, *pol. 1.2* (1254^b2–5), in which the rational part of the soul is said to control the irrational part “with a political and royal rule” rather than a tyrannical rule.

have an emotional response, though we can have some effect on what that response might be. Aquinas describes three ways in which this can happen.

First, the sensitive appetite is subordinate to the will, and this subordination affects the kinds of emotions that accompany volition (*uer. q. 25 a. 4*):²³

In the case of powers that are connected and ordered to one another, it happens that an intense movement in one of them (and especially in the higher one) overflows into the other. Accordingly, when the movement of the will is directed to something through choice, even the [emotions] follow this movement of the will.

If someone makes a choice that wholeheartedly commits him to a course of action, say, he may thereupon feel delight and hope in its pursuit. Such an ‘overflow’ from the will is an emotion whose inception is in the very choice of the will. In general, the process of habituating emotional responses to choice is part of acquiring practical wisdom, which includes satisfaction with the choices one has made.²⁴

Second, the will is not only the principle of choice; it also governs consent. We may consent to our emotions, or withhold consent from them, thereby strengthening or weakening the emotional response. (The latter is usually described as ‘resisting’ the emotion.) In the ordinary course of events an emotion follows upon sensitive cognition, as described above, and so “precedes the judgment of reason” in such a way that there is no issue of consent, whether explicit or implicit (*uer. q. 25 a. 5 ad 5*). Once the emotional response occurs, the will may then endorse or reject it.

Third, the will can directly affect what Aquinas calls the “motive” or “executive” power, so as to prevent or facilitate the emotion from being causally efficacious (*uer. q. 25 a. 4*). When a human being perceives the sudden approach of a wolf, he experiences fear as a natural reaction, but unlike the sheep he may exercise his free will and choose to stand his ground in the face of his fear, blocking his natural impulse to flee. He would have no success in the face of his more immediate somatic responses, however: he may tremble, grow pale, break into a sweat; his teeth may chatter, his knees knock, his heart race (the physiological expressions of fear which Aquinas catalogues in *sum. theol. 1^a 2^{ae} q. 44*).

3. THE TAXONOMY OF EMOTION

Aquinas adopts the traditional distinction of emotions into two fundamental types, namely concupiscible and irascible, and sets out to establish

²³ See also *sum. theol. 1^a 2^{ae} q. 24 a. 4 ad 1*.

²⁴ Aquinas takes this point from Aristotle, *eth. nic. 2.5* (1105^b25–29).

the distinction on a firm philosophical basis.²⁵ He sketches three arguments that the concupiscible emotions and the irascible emotions genuinely differ and “are not reducible to a single principle”:

- *The Interference Argument.* The two types of emotions must be different in kind because they are able to interfere with one another: stirring up anger can lessen desire, and conversely stirring up desire can lessen anger.
- *The Submission Argument.* Sometimes the soul ‘submits’ to distress, against the inclination of desire, so that it may fight against things opposed to it.
- *The Champion Argument.* The irascible emotions arise from the concupiscible emotions, to help them succeed, whereupon they terminate in them. Anger, for example, may be born from distress and, in taking revenge, thereby relieve the distress and end in delight.

A few comments about each are in order.

The Interference Argument, which is ultimately derived from Plato’s *Republic*, turns on the fact that the distinct kinds of emotions can be directed at one and the same real thing while nevertheless differing in their formal (intentional) objects. One and the same person can be simultaneously alluring and annoying, for example; these contrary characterizations of the same person conflict with one another. Hence the emotions must be different in kind, not merely in degree. For while it is true that we speak of the relative strength of the concupiscible and the irascible emotions, as when we say that anger finally won out over desire, this is not to be understood literally. It is quite different, Aquinas maintains, from the case in which two emotions of the same sort compete with one another – when I am presented with a choice between chocolate ice cream and vanilla ice cream, for instance, where I have only to consult the relative strength of each desire to make the choice. But when the emotions are of different kinds, their strength does not accurately predict the agent’s behaviour. Even a tempting bone will not deflect a dog, once angered, from attacking someone.

The Submission Argument takes a different tack. Sometimes the sensible good that is hard to attain is such that the difficulty is an intrinsic feature of the good in question: we want to win the race, become fluent in Icelandic, learn quantum physics. But sometimes the difficulty is in the surrounding circumstances, not inherent in the object itself. It is no challenge to make tea, unless one is stranded on a desert island with tea but no kettle. In cases such as the latter, Aquinas declares, the end can be unproblematically desired, independent of the difficulties associated with it; drinking tea is not an

²⁵ The following discussion is derived from *sent.* 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2; *uer.* q. 25 a. 2; and *sum. theol.* 1^a q. 81 a. 2.

intrinsically difficult or challenging enterprise, even if it is so in certain circumstances. In such cases, though, where the difficulties are not intrinsic to the good sought, one must ‘submit’ to them to reach the desired goal. The implications of the Submission Argument should be clear. Aquinas holds that we cannot understand all behaviour in terms of simple ‘push/pull’ desires, in particular instances of submission to present pain, which involve not merely weighing the relative strength of the desires but at least rudimentary means-ends calculation.

The Champion Argument turns on the fact that the concupiscible emotions are comprehensible in their own terms, whereas the irascible emotions make sense only against the background of the concupiscible emotions. Aquinas presents this as partly a logical claim and partly a causal claim. Overcoming the difficulties means attaining the sensible good, which prompts the emotional response of delight; so much is simple logic. But other connections among the emotions, such as distress, anger, and revenge, are causal rather than logical in nature. Aquinas’s point is that in such causal connections, the irascible emotions “come to the aid” of the concupiscible emotions, the former being “champions” of the latter. They can do so in virtue of being a different kind of emotion, for otherwise they would be a constitutive part of the initial (concupiscible) emotional response to the object, not something further.

Having established by these three arguments that there are two basic kinds of emotions, Aquinas then turns to isolating and specifying the distinct varieties of each. Before we turn to the details of his account, however, it is worth remarking on his method. Although Aquinas will be offering a taxonomic theory of emotion, identifying distinct kinds of emotions and their interrelations, his procedure is quite unlike the standard sorts of taxonomies found in ordinary genus/species accounts, or even the less rigid taxonomies found in botany and biology. The fundamental divide between the concupiscible and the irascible emotions is not due to a differentiating feature, but to a distinction of their formal objects: *sensible good/evil taken absolutely* and *sensible good/evil that is difficult*. (If anything, the latter looks like a candidate for a species of the former.) Once we accept this distinction, however, we might think that we could identify the subordinate kinds of each type by proper differentiae – presumably differentiating the formal objects of each, the irascible emotions distinguished by different kinds of difficulty, for instance. But this is not how Aquinas proceeds. Instead, he uses some technical apparatus from Aristotle’s natural philosophy to generate a set of principles so as to arrange the six concupiscible and the five irascible emotions into rational groups of

coordinate pairs,²⁶ on the grounds that emotions are, literally, ‘motions’ of the sensitive appetite.

In brief, his account is as follows. Physics teaches us that there are two types of motion: (*a*) movement either towards or away from a given terminus, in which case it is the ‘direction’ of the movements that are contrarily opposed; (*b*) movement between two contrary opposed termini. Concupiscible emotions are directed at their object solely as (sensible) good or evil. If the terminus in question is the good, then, Aquinas maintains that the sensitive appetite cannot fail to move towards it; if evil, it cannot fail to move away from it. Hence (*a*) does not apply. The concupiscible emotions are therefore properly understood as types of movement between contrary termini, that is, of type (*b*), between the contrary opposites of good and evil: love, desire, and delight towards the good; hatred, aversion, and distress towards evil. The grouping of concupiscible emotions into three conjugate pairs has to do with the flavor of the movement each exemplifies: love and hate are simple tendencies of the sensitive appetite with respect to their objects; they are ‘emotional attitudes’ toward the object, pure and simple – an affective stance to it. The second conjugate pair, desire and aversion, involve moving towards or away from their objects, being drawn to or driven from it. The third conjugate pair, delight and distress, has to do with the affective stance one is in when attaining the object.

Irascible emotions, on the other hand, are directed at (sensible) good and evil not in themselves but *qua* difficult, and so are capable of both directions of movement implicit in (*a*) as well as movement between contrary termini as in (*b*). They are properly categorized according to (*a*), however. Aquinas insists that the irascible emotions do not characterize approach and withdrawal in terms of good or evil but in terms of the surmountability or insurmountability of the difficulties associated with the (good or evil) object. Hope is the irascible emotion that sees its object as a surmountable (attainable) difficult good, so that the difficult good ‘approaches’ the agent’s possession; despair, with which hope is paired, sees its object as an insurmountable (unattainable) difficult good, so that the difficult good ‘withdraws’ from the agent’s possession. Likewise, confidence is the irascible emotion that regards its object as a surmountable (avoidable) difficult evil, and fear, with which confidence is paired, regards its object as an insurmountable (unavoidable) difficult evil. Fi-

²⁶ There seems to have been some development in Aquinas’s conception of how the emotions are structured and organized. The account given here mostly follows the mature analysis given in *sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 23 a. 2–4). This is Aquinas’s major advance over Jean de la Rochelle, who had organized emotions into their conjugate pairs, but who did not offer any principles underlying their organization.

nally, there is the irascible emotion *par excellence*, anger, which is unique in not having a contrary; here the sensitive appetite has achieved the evil that was difficult to avoid and ‘rests’ in it, taking in the full measure of its difficulty. Each conjugate pair represents a flavour of motion, as with the corresponding concupiscible emotion: the simple tendency with respect to the object, surmountable obstacle to something good (hope) or insurmountable escape from something evil (despair); movement with respect to the possession of the object, either towards an attainable good (confidence) or away from an unavoidable evil (fear); and finally anger, which dwells on a present evil in its possession that is hard to overcome, and so is a form of ‘rest’.

As noted, irascible emotions also involve movement of type (*b*), namely between contrary opposites, although in a more complicated way than the concupiscible emotions. Moreover, the irascible emotions are grouped somewhat differently in respect of (*b*). Hope and fear are paired together in that they each regard their (difficult) objects as likely to be possessed by the agent, hope directed at something good and fear directed at something evil. The same reasoning presumably applies to confidence and despair, each regarding its (difficult) object as likely to not be possessed by the agent, confidence at the prospect of being without something evil and despair at the prospect of being without something good. Anger, as before, obeys a slightly different logic, since it has for its object a present evil that is already possessed and difficult to overcome; there is no contrary irascible emotion of overcoming directed at the possession of a present good; indeed the only proper response to the possession of a present good is delight, a concupiscible emotion.²⁷

Aquinas thus takes the overall taxonomic structure of the eleven kinds of emotion to be as follows:

<i>Concupiscible Passions</i>			<i>Irascible Passions</i>	
Love	– Hate	[simple tendency]	Hope	– Despair
Desire	– Aversion	[movement]	Confidence	– Fear
Joy	– Sorrow	[repose]		Anger

Given the complexity of the underlying division (not all of which is represented here), it is not clear how to extend the taxonomy to bring into its scope further species of each kind of emotion. In the event, Aquinas does not do this, preferring instead to discuss each emotion one-by-one and to describe the subtypes and varieties of each, as required.

²⁷ This last point illustrates a logical and causal truth for Aquinas, namely that the irascible emotions begin from and finally terminate in the concupiscible emotions (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^a q. 25 a. 1–2).

Two examples will give the flavor of Aquinas's discussion of the sub-species of emotions, each the paradigm of its type: love for the concupiscible emotions, anger for the irascible emotions.

In *sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 26 a. 4, Aquinas puts forward his basic division of love into friendly (*amor amicitiae*) and covetous (*amor concupiscentiae*). This division follows upon his observation that love, strictly speaking, has two targets: the item, seen as a good thing, and the subject who receives the item. Covetous love is love that gives precedence to the good thing, which is typically wanted for oneself; friendly love is love that gives precedence to the recipient, typically someone other than oneself, for whom the good thing is wanted. The two kinds of love are not entirely on a par. The object of friendly love is loved simply and *per se*, whereas the object of covetous love is not loved for itself but for something else. Friendly love is also known as "benevolence" (in q. 27 a. 3) because of this concern for the other for its own sake, which gives it priority over covetous love. Friendly love is even found among animals, the best instance being the friendly love a mother has for her offspring. The two kinds of love, then, seem quite close to being species of the genus *love* in the traditional sense.

In *sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 46 a. 8, Aquinas turns to the types of anger (given traditional expression by John of Damascus): wrath, ill-will, and rancor. He proposes that each increases anger: wrath, which might better be termed irascibility (as Aquinas remarks in *ad 2*), denotes the facility of the movement to anger; ill-will the rehearsal of what caused the anger; and rancor the vindictiveness or unquenchable impulse for revenge. But none of these is in any clear sense a 'division' of the formal object of anger, namely the desire to overcome a difficult present evil that poses an obstacle. Aquinas seems to recognize the justice of this point, since in his answer to the first objection, which charged that Damascene's enumeration was an accidental division, he declares that "those things that help to complete anger in some fashion are not altogether accidental to it; as a result, nothing prevents them from providing it with a specific differentia" (*ad 1*). Perhaps not, but that is hardly the same as saying that they do provide specific differentiae, which Aquinas carefully does not say. Nor is there any discussion of what we might think of as better candidates for species of anger: annoyance, irritation, rage, and the like. Aquinas seems interested only in finding some way to accommodate tradition, rather than exploring the question in its own right. Later commentators such as Cajetan took note of Aquinas's understated conclusion; in his commentary *ad loc.*, Cajetan concluded that wrath, ill-will, and rancor are not genuine species of anger for Aquinas.

The upshot is that Aquinas leaves us with a careful taxonomy of the

emotions at the generic level, along with a variety of observations about some of their species, with no attempt to systematize them. His work on this score remains incomplete. Yet there is good reason to think that this is not what he meant to do. In the remainder of his “treatise on the emotions” (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} qq. 26–48), Aquinas takes up each of the eleven kinds of emotions in detail. His analysis of each conforms to a rough pattern: he discusses the causes of the emotion, its nature and formal object, and its effects. Sometimes issues specific to a given emotion are taken up, *e. g.* whether it is possible to hate oneself, given the nature of hatred (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 29 a. 4); sometimes causal connections are explored, *e. g.* whether sympathy from friends can help to alleviate distress (*sum. theol.* 1^a2^{ae} q. 38 a. 3). Identifying distinct species of emotion does not seem to be one of his main concerns. In many ways, that is just as well, since taxonomic theories have lost the lustre they once possessed, but Aquinas’s particular discussions of individual emotions are still psychologically acute and philosophically rewarding.²⁸

CONCLUSION

The last section might well lead one to wonder about Aquinas’s theoretical aims, if he is neither giving us quite an empirical theory founded on observation nor a taxonomic genera-species classificatory scheme. There is much to say about the sense in which Aquinas offers us a theory of emotion, but perhaps the best way to approach the issue is to see how his theory is related to contemporary theories of emotion.

We have already seen in §2 that Aquinas is a cognitivist (of sorts) about emotion, a finding that puts him with the majority of philosophical treatments of emotion in the last fifty years. But the discussion in §1 gives us an even closer comparison. Given the role played in the psychological economy by sensitive cognition on the one side and by sensitive appetite on the other side, it is clear that Aquinas’s account of the emotions is in many ways like contemporary “perception theories” of emotion, *e. g.* in Roberts [2003]. Such perception-theories diverge from standard cognitivist accounts in taking the evaluative element crucial to emotion to be not a judgment, with all the cognitive apparatus judgments draw in their train, but rather a perception, or something very like a perception. From the safety of the sidewalk I might perceive the onrushing traffic as a threat even though I know that I am quite

²⁸ There have recently been several studies of Aquinas’s views about particular emotions: Manzanedo [1987], Manzanedo [1988], Manzanedo [1991], Manzanedo [1994], Drost [1995], Loughlin [2005], Green [2007]; the need for such careful studies of particular emotions is the central theme of Miner [2009].

safe where I am; if the evaluative judgment that I am in danger were a requisite part of the emotion of fear, then it seems hard to explain my fear in the face of my knowledge of my safety. Perceptions, however, need not be reasoned, though perhaps permeable to reason; they can be had by non-intellectual subjects, such as babies and dogs, who we want to say experience genuine if primitive emotions; and they can deploy concepts without requiring their articulation – the sheep may regard the wolf as dangerous without having the concept of danger at all.

Aquinas's account of the emotions is in many ways close to such perception theories. Indeed, Aquinas exploits the structural parallel between perception and emotion frequently, and, as with perceptions, he holds that the most fundamental way to understand emotions is to see them as modes of engagement with the world. Again, Aquinas holds that the cognitive penetrability of emotion derives from the susceptibility of perception to being affected by changes in beliefs and thoughts. The rich array of psychological faculties that Aquinas sketches, with the complex interplay among cognitive and affective components, offers a congenial background for the contemporary cognitive scientist accustomed to working with mental modules and their transference of information via representations. If Aquinas draws a sharper line between perceptual and intellectual cognition than most theorists are comfortable with today, that is a small drawback for being centuries ahead of his time. The taxonomic structure he proposes might then be taken as a first attempt to isolate the natural kinds of emotion as an affective phenomenon. In short, we could preserve his insights and his general approach to the emotions, and perhaps even the general taxonomy, but leave behind some of its more mediæval features, such as the appeal to the aristotelian theory of motion, or the necessarily immaterial character of intellectual functions. But a remarkable amount of Aquinas's analysis bears worthwhile comparison to contemporary theories, as well as being a stunning intellectual accomplishment in its own right.

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