

AQUINAS ON THE PASSIONS



OLLOWING Aristotle, mediæval philosophers generally accepted (*i*) a distinction between the cluster of principles and capacities that account for movement and sensation, known as the sensitive part of the soul, and the cluster of principles and capacities that account for thought and volition, known as the intellectual part of the soul;¹ (*ii*) a distinction between the apparatus of powers whereby information about the world is acquired and assimilated, known as the cognitive or apprehensive potencies, and the apparatus of powers whereby one engages the world, known as the appetitive potencies.

These distinctions cut across each other. The intellectual and sensitive parts of the soul each have cognitive and appetitive faculties; cognition and appetition take place in both the intellectual and sensitive parts. There are thus four fundamental departments into which psychological experience may be divided. The principle of cognition in the intellectual part of the soul is the intellect itself, where thinking and reasoning take place. The principle of appetition in the intellectual part of the soul is the will, responsible for volition and choice; the will is literally ‘intellective appetite.’ The principle of cognition in the sensitive part of the soul is called ‘sensing,’ where sensation and perception occur.

My focus is on Aquinas’s treatment of the fourth department of psychological experience: the principles of appetition in the sensitive part of the soul, namely the eleven kinds of passions of the soul: the six concupiscible passions of love and hate, desire and aversion, and joy and sorrow; the five irascible passions of hope and despair, confidence and fear, and anger.² Aquinas’s account of the nature and structure of the passions as

¹ The sensitive and intellectual parts of the soul sit astride another fundamental cluster of principles accounting for nourishment, growth, and reproduction, known as the vegetative part of the soul. There are psychological experiences founded solely on the vegetative part, for instance hunger, thirst, and sexuality (as mere physical reactivity). But mediæval philosophers, along with modern psychologists, do not classify these together with the passions of the soul or emotions: they are more primitive motivational forces, now called ‘drives’ or ‘urges,’ which I discuss only incidentally in what follows.

² All translations are my own; I use the text given in *S. Thomae Aquinatis: Summa theologiae* (Marietti: Torino-Roma 1950). The term ‘passion’ is cognate to the Latin *passio*, and as such is a term of art with no relation to the ordinary English word “passion”: there need be nothing vehement, forceful, or heartfelt about Aquinas’s passions.

psychological phenomena, developed in his *Summa theologiae* (especially in IaIIae.22–48), is a model of the virtues of mediæval scholasticism. This essay will concentrate on making sense of Aquinas’s theory: §1 explores his analysis of the nature of the passions and §2 takes up the structure of the passions by considering the complex ways in which they are related to one another. At this point we can turn to exploring the ways in which passions are able to be controlled by us (if at all): §3 deals with the extent to which Aquinas’s theory renders us passive with regard to our passions, and §4 examines his account of how reason controls the passions. I hope to show that Aquinas deserves a distinguished place in debates over the passions or emotions.

1. The Nature of the Passions

Aquinas gives the theoretical background to his analysis of the passions in *ST* Ia.77.3. Passions are potencies—something the soul is able to experience, where the modality here is interpreted as roughly akin to the modern notions of an ‘ability’ or ‘capacity.’ Now these modern notions correspond to a fundamental distinction among kinds of potencies: abilities correspond to active potencies, capacities to passive potencies. I have the ability, or the active potency, to climb trees. Water has the capacity, or passive potency, to be heated, say to make tea. Active potencies enable their possessor to ‘do’ something, whereas passive potencies enable their possessor to ‘suffer’ or ‘undergo’ something. This intuitive sense is captured in the idea that the reduction of a potency to act³ requires a cause or explanation: those potencies whose actualization is due to an internal principle are active potencies; those potencies whose actualization is due to an external principle are passive potencies. The grammatical voice of the verb used to express the act in question is often a linguistic test of the kind of potency involved. Thus we can offer as paradigms:

The act of an active potency is φ -ing

The act of a passive potency is being ψ -ed

Acts have objects, and therefore so do the potencies that are individuated by the acts.⁴ An acorn has an active potency for growth, for absorbing nutrients from the surrounding soil and converting them to upward growth

For a critique of the traditional terminology see Eric D’Arcy, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa theologiae* Vol. 19: The Emotions (Blackfriars: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd. 1967), xxiii.

³ Acts are not to be confused with actions—the latter are a special case of the former, namely realizations of potencies where the principle is within the agent.

⁴ Potencies are individuated by their corresponding acts because potencies and acts

(stem, seedling, sapling...). Yet the acorn's potency is not for unlimited growth. Oak trees stop growing when they reach their adult form, which limits their potency. To reach the full adult height is the 'goal' of the acorn, the culmination and terminus of its growth. Biochemical processes are the efficient cause of the acorn's growth, whereas its formal and final cause are its end. This end is the object of the act, and hence the object of the acorn's potency for growth. The point may be summarized as follows:

(OAP) The object of an active potency is the act's end.

Now consider the case of vision, which is a passive potency. (Here the linguistic test offered above is misleading: 'seeing' is in the active voice but is a passive potency.) The act of seeing, which is the exercise of the passive potency of vision, comes about from an external principle or cause and exists so long as the external principle is reducing the potency to act, just as water's capacity to be heated is actualized by a fire so long as it actively heats up the water. The external principle acts as the formal and final cause of the actualization of the passive potency—its end.⁵ As above, the end is the object of the act. Hence the object of seeing is the thing seen; the object of being heated is heat (more exactly being hot), which is imparted by the fire. The point may be summarized as follows:

(OPP) The object of a passive potency is the act's external principle.

Acts are themselves distinguished by their objects, which determine the kind of act in question.

Since the actuality (or realization) of an active potency is an act that is defined by reference to its end, there are as many kinds of potencies as there are distinct ends. These are roughly of two kinds: (*i*) activities, where the goal of the act is the act itself, such as dancing or walking; (*ii*) performances or achievements, where the end or completion of the act is the state that

are not capable of definition: the division potency/act is a transcendental division of being, on a par with the division of being into the ten categories, and hence unable to be captured in a genus-species hierarchy (which is what makes aristotelian definition possible). Yet because act is prior to potency, potencies can be distinguished by their corresponding acts. This doctrine is at the root of the pair of distinctions mentioned at the beginning of this paper: cognitive and appetitive potencies are distinguished by their objects, and the object of appetite is the good whereas the object of cognitive potencies is the real (or the true), as Aquinas argues in *ST* Ia.80.1 *ad* 1; the sensitive and intellectual parts of the soul are themselves distinguished by their objects, which, for Aquinas, differ as particular and universal respectively.

⁵ In the case of vision, the external principle is also the efficient cause of the passive potency's reduction from potency to act. The efficient cause actualizing a passive potency may differ from its formal and final cause, however; see the discussion at the end of §1.

obtains at or after the temporal limit of the act, such as winning the race or being married.⁶ Both activities and achievements are kinds of actions.

Since the actuality (or realization) of a passive potency is an act that is defined by reference to an external principle, according to OPP, such acts must therefore be occurrent states of the subject: the external principle exercises its influence on the subject, causing a change within it in some way, one which persists so long as the external principle continues to exercise its influence. The subject of a passive potency may be put into a state by the exercise of a passive potency that persists after the potency is no longer being exercised, but the state is not properly the exercise of the passive potency; it is instead the result of its exercise. Jones has a passive potency to be beaten with a stick; his passive potency is actualized just as long as Smith is beating him with a stick. Once Smith is done, Jones has been beaten with a stick, and is no longer actualizing his potency to be (actively) beaten—his bruised condition is not the actualization of his potency to be beaten, but rather of his potency to have been beaten, a different matter altogether. Since the passive potency is only actualized by an external principle, the acts of passive potencies are examples of what the subject suffers or undergoes: they are not actions, but passions.

So it is with the passions of the soul: they are passive potencies, the actualization of which is a matter of the soul being put into a certain state: being angered by a remark about one's ancestry, for example. Anger, joy, sorrow, fear, desire—these are all states of the sensitive appetite, conceptually on a par with the pangs of hunger originating in the vegetative part of the soul.⁷ (This fits in well with the common view that the sensitive part

⁶ This distinction, taken from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.5 and 10.4, is reflected in the different kinds of tensed statements that can be made about the acts in question. For a discussion and application of the point to the case of the passions, see Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1963), Ch. 7; Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1987), Ch. 8.

⁷ Aquinas holds that there are analogues to the passions pertaining to the purely intellectual part of the soul—call them 'pseudopassions'. These pseudopassions, unlike the passions, do not involve any somatic reactions or indeed any material basis at all. They are located in the intellectual appetite as rational acts of will. Angels and disembodied human souls experience only these pseudopassions; animals experience only passions; living human beings alone are capable of both. The *amor intellectualis Dei* is a pseudopassion, one that may be deeply held. Likewise, the dispassionate drive to destroy something evil—the reflective judgment that something, for example smallpox, should be eradicated—is a pseudopassion. On a more prosaic level, the desire to stop smoking is typically a pale pseudopassion, quite unlike the passion (the craving) for nicotine. The account given here applies strictly to the passions, not the pseudopassions, which play a major role in Aquinas's theology and merit investigation

of the soul is essentially passive whereas the intellectual part is essentially active.) Three consequences follow from this point. First, for Aquinas, the surface grammar of passion-statements is misleading, just as it is for perception-statements: hating, like seeing, is grammatically active, but describes a state of the subject induced by some external agency. Second, the grammatical formulation of a passion-statement may conceal an ambiguity. A remark such as:

I want a sloop

may be interpreted either as a description of a state experienced by the subject (referring to the presence of the passion of desire in the sensitive appetite), or as a report of a choice or decision (referring to an act elicited by the intellectual appetite, that is, the will). Aquinas regimentes the distinction between these two interpretations, introducing specialized terminology in *ST IaIIae.8–17* for reporting acts of the will so as to avoid such ambiguities (the vocabulary of ‘intention,’ ‘choice’ or ‘election,’ ‘consent,’ and the like). Third, passions are individuated by their objects in line with OPP above, as any passive potency is, so that the formal difference between (say) fear and love is a matter of the distinct objects each has.⁸

In general, then, we can say that the passions of the soul are objectual intentional states of the sensitive appetite. The sense of this claim can be unpacked by considering a structural parallel between the cognitive and appetitive potencies of the sensitive part of the soul, at the core of which is an analogy between experiencing a passion and having a perception: the passions are a kind of ‘appetitive perception.’⁹

What happens when Jones sees a sheep? The act of seeing the sheep is the actualization of Jones’s passive potency of vision. Technically, the sense-organ (Jones’s eye) receives the form of the sheep without the sheep’s matter, and the inherence of the form of the sheep in Jones’s sense-organ simply is the actualization of Jones’s faculty of vision. That is what it is to see a sheep. The inherence of the dematerialized form of the sheep in Jones’s sense-organ actualizes his faculty of vision in a particular way, one distinct from the way in which a dematerialized form of an elephant would. The different ways in which the faculty of vision may be actualized are classified and understood by reference to the external principles that produce them, whereas the form of the sheep, when it inheres in ordinary

in their own right.

⁸ We’ll explore this point in detail in the next section.

⁹ The parallel between emotions and perceptions has been exploited, with some degree of success, by several contemporary philosophers—see, for instance, de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, Ch. 5.

matter (flesh and bone and wool) and makes it into a sheep rather than an elephant, is classified and understood directly through itself. Jones's act of seeing is therefore intentional—it is directed 'toward' something, which, as defined above, is the object of the passive potency, in this case the sheep. It always makes sense to ask what someone is seeing, hearing, touching, and so on.¹⁰ Furthermore, given the underlying aristotelian mechanism, the act of seeing is objectual—Jones receives, and can only receive, forms from particular things.¹¹ What kinds of things can be seen? What is the most general characterization of the object of vision as such, that is, *qua* object of vision? This answer to this question specifies the formal object of vision.¹² The answer can appear trivial—as in the reply “the formal object of vision is the visible”—but often a non-trivial specification of the formal object is available: the formal object of vision, for example, is color (more precisely it is the colored).

Now consider the parallel for sensitive appetite. What happens when Jones loathes a sheep? There are two questions at stake—one about the intentionality of the passion (what is it that is loathed), and the character of the passion (what makes the passion loathing rather than loving). I'll start with the first. The act of loathing the sheep is the actualization of Jones's passive potency of loathing (*odium*). Technically, the actualization of Jones's potency for loathing requires some form's inhering in the sensitive appetite once it has been apprehended and assimilated: the preceding cognition 'supplies' the sensitive appetite with the form towards which the

¹⁰ There is a sense in which someone can 'see' without seeing anything, namely while looking for something. (This is perhaps most plausible for hearing rather than seeing, as in the case of a person listening for something: “Quiet—I thought I heard a burglar upstairs! Listen!”) Now in such cases one is still looking or listening for something, and so the directedness of the act is preserved. Furthermore, they are cases in which a person sees or hears many things, and rejects each in turn as not the object in question—“This noise is just the furnace (not the burglar), that one is the cat meowing (not the burglar), . . .” The sensing is clearly intentional, with an intellectual 'filter' on the input.

¹¹ This is not to be confused with the claim that the received form is itself particular or individual. The point here is that there are no 'forms' of states of affairs, propositional objects, abstract entities, and the like. Forms are received from individuals rather than complexes. This is independent of whether the content of the perception is singular or universal, and also of whether the received form, by means of which perception takes place, is singular or universal.

¹² The terminology was not fixed. Aquinas usually says 'object' rather than 'formal object.' The formal object of a cognitive potency is usually called its '*per se* object' or 'primary object.'

passion is directed.¹³ A physiological account of passion is available, just as it is for perception. The inherence of the form of the sheep in Jones's sensitive appetite has as its material element some somatic condition (ST IaIIae.22.2 *ad* 3).¹⁴ Jones loathes sheep, and whenever he sees one it chills the blood around his heart. Thus passions, like perceptions, are intentional in character: they are directed toward something, which, as defined above, is the object of the passive potency, in this case the sheep. It always makes sense to ask what someone loathes, loves, or hopes for, and so on. Furthermore, since the sensitive appetite depends upon sensitive cognition, the act of loathing is thereby objectual—Jones receives, and can only receive, forms from particular things. He can, in a derivative way, loathe all of sheepdom, but this is a matter of loathing any particular sheep that comes along, not a matter of loathing sheephood or sheepness.¹⁵

The formal object of a potency is the most general characterization

¹³ See ST Ia.81.2: “The sensitive appetite is an inclination that follows upon the sensitive apprehension (just as natural appetite is an inclination that follows upon the natural form).” See also ST Ia.80.2 and elsewhere for this claim. The sensitive appetite receives not only the form from perception but also the associated intentiones (ST IaIIae.22.2), as discussed in §4.

¹⁴ In ST IaIIae.44.1 Aquinas begins his reply by remarking: “In the case of the passions, the formal element is the motion of the appetitive potency and the material element is a bodily change, where one is proportionate to the other; accordingly, the bodily change appropriates the nature of and a resemblance to the appetitive motion.” Aquinas examines the somatic reactions associated with each of the passions in considerable detail. For example, the several articles of ST IaIIae.44 are devoted to the effects of fear. Vital spirits are concentrated in the higher region, deflected from the heart, which is contracted; this chills the rest of the body and may produce trembling, teeth-chattering, and fluttering in the stomach. Depending on the kind of fear blood may rush into the head to produce blushing (if the object is shameful) or away from the head to produce paleness (if the object is terrifying). If the onset of fear is sudden and sharp, control over bodily limbs and functions will be lost. Knocking knees, shuddering, heaving chest, difficulty in breathing, voiding the bowels or bladder—all these accompany a general paralysis.

¹⁵ ST IaIIae.29.6 clarifies this point: “Hatred in the sensitive part [of the soul] can therefore be directed at something universally, namely because something is hostile to an animal due to its common nature and not only in virtue of the fact that it is a particular thing—for instance, the wolf [is hostile] to the sheep. Accordingly, sheep hate the wolf generally.” Sheep do not hate wolfhood but all wolves *qua* having a wolf-nature inimical to sheep, which is to say that the sheep's hatred is directed at any given wolf. This is akin to hatred *de dicto* rather than *de re*, in contemporary terminology, although sheep do not hate (or do anything else) under descriptions. Only particular things are the objects of passions; see QDV 25.1 *resp.* This much said, Aquinas is liberal about what may count as a ‘particular thing’: in ST IaIIae.42.4 he describes the ways in which someone might fear fear itself, for instance.

anything that counts as the object of the potency can fall under; it is the condition any object must satisfy in order to be intelligible as an object of the potency, whether the potency be active or passive.¹⁶ Something must be colored in order to be visible at all; the response to the question “What do you see?” cannot be “A colorless object.” The formal object of the appetitive faculties is the good, as the formal object of the cognitive faculties is the true; the formal object of the sensitive appetite is the sensible good and that of the intellective appetite, the will, is the immaterial good (ST Ia.80.2).¹⁷ In keeping with OPP, the nature of any passion is given as a formal object falling under the sensible good. The differentiae of formal objects define distinct kinds of potencies defined through those formal objects. Thus the concupiscible passions (love and hate, desire and aversion, joy and sorrow) have the common formal object sensible good or evil taken absolutely and the irascible passions (hope and despair, confidence and fear, anger) have the common formal object sensible good or evil taken as difficult or arduous (ST Ia.81.2).

The analogy with perception breaks down at this point. Aquinas argues in several cases that the formal object of a given passion, such as loathing, must also be the cause of loathing (ST IaIIae.26.1). The parallel claim in the case of perception is plausible: the formal object of vision, namely the visible, is also what causes the act of vision to take place. Likewise it may be the case that Jones loathes the very sheep in front of him as a palpable evil. But, strictly speaking, Aquinas admits that the efficient cause of Jones’s loathing is his perception or cognition of the sheep as an evil.¹⁸ This marks a sharp difference between the objects of perception and passion: perception is always of what is present, whereas passions need not be. Smith’s insulting

¹⁶ The mediæval notion of ‘formal object’ has passed directly into the contemporary debates over the emotions, apparently by way of Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* 189: see, for example, de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* 121–123.

¹⁷ When Aquinas says that the formal object of the appetite is the good, for example, he means that any item that counts as an object of appetite must be characterized as good, not that goodness itself (whatever that may be) is the object of appetite. See n. 14 above.

¹⁸ It’s not clear whether Aquinas holds that (a) Jones perceives the sheep as an evil, or (b) Jones perceives the sheep and thereafter judges or esteems it as an evil; the neutral word ‘cognition’ covers both alternatives. See the discussion of intentiones in §4. Furthermore, according to Aquinas, Jones’s loathing of the sheep is ultimately due to some form of love: the efficient cause of love is the cognition of something as good (ST IaIIae.27.2), and love, surprisingly, is the ultimate cause of hatred (ST IaIIae.29.2), on the grounds that you can only hate what in some fashion you care about.

letter to Jones causes Jones's anger at Smith, though Smith may be nowhere in the vicinity when his letter is read by Jones. Perception, on the other hand, requires the presence of its object for its actualization. The passions have targets at which they are aimed, and these targets may not be present (or indeed exist at all).¹⁹

To summarize the results of Aquinas's analogy between perception and passion: the passions are physiologically-based potencies of the sensitive appetite, the proximate efficient cause of which is a perception, whose actualities are objectual intentional states: they are targeted at some individual that must fall under a given formal object, which defines their nature.

Aquinas therefore explains the passions of the soul as complex psychophysiological states that, like beliefs, are intentional and objectual.²⁰ The passions involve feelings, which are mental states known primarily through their phenomenological and qualitative properties, but they are not explicable solely in terms of feelings. (If they were, the passions would be analogous to sensations rather than perceptions.) Furthermore, Aquinas's account of the nature of the passions rules out classifying 'objectless' psychological experiences as passions: nonspecific emotions such as angst or dread on the one hand, and moods on the other hand.²¹ By the same token each of the eleven kinds of passions of the soul Aquinas identifies must have a target. For example, joy (*gaudium*) is a matter of rejoicing over something; sorrow (*tristitia*) is also directed at something and in this regard is more similar to grief than sadness; and so on for the rest of the passions.²²

¹⁹ The terminology is derived from Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I §476: see de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* 115–116. The targets of passions need not exist. I can fear the (non-existent) burglar or love the dearly departed, for instance.

²⁰ Aquinas's theory of the passions is therefore cognitivist in much the sense described in Robert Kraut, "Feelings in Context," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), 642–652: "cognitive processes are somehow essential to emotion," where such processes include "complexity, intentional focus, susceptibility to appraisal" and issue in theories that explain emotions in terms of belief and desire (643). Kraut, among others, defends a 'feeling theory' of the emotions, which is strictly incompatible with the account Aquinas provides. The debate is well-known in the modern literature (see de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* Chs. 3–5).

²¹ This doesn't mean that Aquinas denies the existence of such psychological phenomena, but that his account of them doesn't depend on treating them as passions. Anxiety, for example, is a matter of the proper physiological conditions for fear being present (or at least some of them) without the corresponding form in the sensitive appetite. He also uses the theory of the four humors to provide a purely physiological account of moods.

²² This is not to deny that there may be corresponding 'objectless' forms of these passions, as some have argued that anxiety is nonspecific fear, but, as suggested in the

Yet so far all we have is a disorderly heap of passions. What kind of logical structure do the various passions of the soul exemplify?

2. The Structure of the Passions

Aquinas offers a taxonomic account of the passions. That is to say, he separates the passions into kinds that are distinguished by various forms of contrariety. But the taxonomy of the passions is not the strict taxonomic division ideally given in biology: the passions are not divided into pairs of coordinate species that are exclusive and exhaustive, defined by opposite differentiae. Instead, the different passions are specified by a multiplicity of criteria that allow several coordinate kinds at the same level and different types of opposition between different pairs of passions, which are traditionally arranged in pairs (each of which is called a ‘conjugation’) at the same level—except for anger, which has no contrary. All in all, things are fairly messy, and a good deal the more interesting for it.²³

From §1 above we know that the differentiae of formal objects define the distinct kinds of potencies that are defined through those formal objects. The formal object of the appetitive faculties is the good and the formal object of the sensitive appetite, as a subordinate appetitive faculty, is the sensible good (*ST* Ia.80.2). Not too much emphasis should be put on ‘sensible’ here, I think. Aquinas only means that, as the sensitive appetite depends on sensitive apprehension (perception), its object must be capable of being perceived. He certainly does not mean to exclude non-present targets of the passions, and he carefully allows some passions to be directed at things in virtue of the kind of thing they are.²⁴

In *ST* Ia.81.2, and again in *ST* IaIIae.23.1, Aquinas begins his discussion of the passions by dividing them into two broad kinds. The concupiscible passions (love and hate, desire and aversion, joy and sorrow) have the formal object sensible good or evil taken absolutely whereas the irascible passions (hope and despair, confidence and fear, anger) have the formal object sensible good or evil taken as difficult or arduous. In explaining the distinction in his earlier discussion, Aquinas appeals to the claim that natural substances on the one hand pursue what appears good and avoid what appears evil,

preceding note, whatever these phenomena may be they aren’t passions.

²³ Most of the following discussion is drawn from *ST* IaIIae.23.1–4.

²⁴ See n. 14 above for a discussion of this last point. Aquinas’s restriction of the passions to the sensible good, understood as the demand that the target of the passion be perceptible even if not perceived, is connected with his distinction between sensory and intellectual goods (and perhaps the distinction between passions and pseudopassions as well: see n. 7).

and on the other hand resist and overcome contrary forces and obstacles that prevent the attainment of good or the avoidance of evil. Aquinas offers two arguments in support of his distinction (ST Ia.81.2):

These two impulses are not reduced to one principle [for the following reasons]:

[First], because sometimes the soul occupies itself with unpleasant things, against concupiscible impulse, so that it may fight against contrary [forces] in line with the irascible impulse. Accordingly, the irascible passions even seem to be incompatible with the concupiscible passions—the arousal of concupiscence diminishes anger, and the arousal of anger diminishes concupiscence, as in many instances. [Second], this point is also clear in virtue of the fact that the irascible is the champion and defender of the concupiscible, so to speak, when it rises up against whatever gets in the way of suitable things that the concupiscible desires, or it attacks harmful things from which the concupiscible flies. (And for this reason all the irascible passions arise from concupiscible passions and terminate in them: *e. g.* anger is born from sorrow and, taking revenge, terminates in joy.)

I'll return to the details of these two arguments shortly. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about these arguments is that Aquinas gives them at all. Imagine the analogous case for metaphysics: after dividing the genus *animal* by the differentia *rational*, further arguments are given to establish that rational animals really aren't the same as irrational ones! The explanation, presumably, is that the distinction between the formal objects of the concupiscible and irascible appetites is not a strict differentia, as would be, say, *sensible good or evil taken absolutely* and *sensible good or evil taken relatively* (non-absolutely). But then why didn't Aquinas distinguish them in this manner?²⁵ (The problem is not isolated to this case; it holds for the definitions of all of the passions by their formal objects, which are opposed only within a conjugation.) Aquinas does not say, but I think the only plausible answer is that this is how he found the passions—not organized into mutually exclusive and exhaustive classes of phenomena, but clustering around types of formal objects that are not strictly contradictory. The ideal of a strict taxonomy is a Procrustean bed for a scientist who is sensitive to the nuances of the phenomena. For example, the irascible passions have an internal complexity absent from concupiscible passions. Jones's

²⁵ For that matter, why didn't Aquinas distinguish them as *sensible good taken absolutely* and *sensible evil taken absolutely*? He uses the opposition between good and evil as one of the contrarities that give structure to the interrelations among the passions; why not use it from the beginning?

anger at Smith is more than his aversion to Smith (he doesn't simply avoid him); it involves a shift of focus to seeing Smith as an obstacle that none of the concupiscible passions can account for. Likewise, hope is more than future-oriented desire, since it includes the consciousness of its (possible) realization. In addition to such complexity, the passions will also have richly nuanced interrelations—sorrow giving rise to anger, as Aquinas notes.

This reconstruction has the consequence that Aquinas's account of the passions and their structure is not, appearances to the contrary, a matter of definition. Instead, he is engaged in a scientific (or proto-scientific) enterprise, that of arranging his data in the most general classes possible consistent with illuminating analysis. The justification for the definitions Aquinas does offer is not his arbitrary fiat but in the fruitfulness with which they help us understand the passions as psychological phenomena. In other words, the taxonomic structure he articulates has no independent explanatory value: its worth is cashed out in its fidelity to the phenomena it seeks to explain and in the utility of its classification scheme. Aquinas is thus proposing a 'scientific taxonomy' to account for the structure of the passions.

We can appreciate the distinctive character of Aquinas's explanation by contrasting it with two other accounts, one modern and one contemporary, that take fundamentally different approaches. Consider first the compositional theory of the passions proposed by Descartes, who identifies six 'primitive' passions—wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness—that combination of which generates all the passions we experience (*Les passions de l'âme* §69).²⁶ These primitive passions are like chemical elements; they are mixed and blended in different proportions and modes to produce the rich variety of emotional textures we encounter in psychological experience. Aquinas's model is biological rather than chemical. He takes the passions to be essentially different from one another, so that they are related causally rather than by mixture.

Yet Aquinas does not define the passions solely in terms of their causal role in psychological experience, as a functionalist theory does. Instead, he allows for a sharp distinction between the passions and their effects, so that causal connections among the passions are a matter for investigation rather than analytic truth. In his parenthetical remark at the end of the second argument in the passage given above, for example, Aquinas says "anger

²⁶ Descartes rejects Aquinas's taxonomy of the passions in §68, on the grounds that (i) the soul has no parts; (ii) he doesn't see why concupiscence and anger should have any explanatory primacy; (iii) Aquinas's account doesn't give equal recognition to all six primitive passions.

is born from sorrow and, taking revenge, terminates in joy.” One of the merits of Aquinas’s account is that such claims can be made and perhaps falsified. Functionalist theories can also allow for contingent connections between causally-defined items, but, were two passions to have the same causal inputs and outputs, a functionalist account could not distinguish them, whereas Aquinas’s scientific taxonomy could. Aquinas examines the causes and effects of each of the passions carefully, showing how the passions are each embedded in a causal nexus, but he doesn’t reduce them to mere roles in this nexus. Rather, each passion has a definition in terms of its intrinsic features, which partially explains the causal relations in which it can stand.²⁷

How satisfactory is Aquinas’s taxonomy? There is, I think, no obvious way to answer this question, other than considering whether it can in fact account for all our psychological experiences in an illuminating way. Rage, wrath, annoyance, and irritation all seem to be classified under the heading of ‘anger’ (*ira*) by Aquinas; they are presumably distinguished, though not essentially distinguished, by their degree of intensity. Likewise, fright, fear, timidity, and reticence are all forms of ‘fear’ (*timor*). The adequacy of Aquinas’s taxonomic classification depends on how useful such classifications are. They are at least plausible.²⁸ For our purposes here it is enough to have shown that despite the disrepute into which taxonomic theories have fallen outside of biology, there is no *prima facie* reason to rule them completely out of court. Further evaluation will depend on a closer look at the details of his theory. With this in mind, let’s return to consider Aquinas’s arguments for distinguishing the concupiscible passions from the irascible passions.

²⁷ Aquinas’s discussion of the causes, effects, and often the remedies for each passion are wide-ranging, penetrating, and occasionally humorous, as when he considers whether youth and inebriation are causes of hope in *ST IaIIae.40.6* (they are), or whether anger notably interferes with the ability to reason in *ST IaIIae.48.3* (it can). Aquinas investigates serious questions of all sorts, such as whether transport and jealousy (*extasis* and *zelus*) are effects of love (*ST IaIIae.28.3–4*), whether someone can hate himself (*ST IaIIae.29.4*), whether sympathy from friends can help alleviate sorrow (*ST IaIIae.38.3*), whether love is the cause of fear (*ST IaIIae.43.1*), and the like.

²⁸ I don’t know how to prove they are any more than plausible, however. Consider the following remark in John Haugeland, *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1985) 234 about fear and anger (my emphasis): “What I call emotions, on the other hand, are more measured, more discriminating. The point is not that they are less powerful—fear and anger are not fright and rage watered down—but rather they are more intelligent, more responsive to argument and evidence.” Haugeland rejects Aquinas’s classification of rage and anger, or fright and fear, under the same heading. Which theory is right? How do we tell?

Aquinas's distinction between the concupiscible and the irascible passions runs contrary to the trend of affective psychology, stemming from Locke,²⁹ that holds that only concupiscible passions, and indeed perhaps only desires, are needed for adequate psychological explanations. These 'push-pull' theories, typically based on the claim that pleasure and pain alone are the sole motivating psychological factors, are incompatible with Aquinas's analysis. But Aquinas's two arguments for the distinctness of the irascible passions from the concupiscible passions are based on the claims that (a) the two kinds of passion act independently³⁰ and can interfere with each other; (b) they are both required to explain psychological experience since they are directed at different objects. These claims can be made plausible by an example. Suppose that Jones shows Rover a bone and then teases him by almost, but not quite, letting him have it. After a while Rover will no longer pursue the bone, even when available, but direct his energies to attacking Jones and chewing his ear off. According to Aquinas, Rover becomes gripped by the passion of anger as well as by the desire for the bone, and after sufficient provocation Jones becomes the sole and unfortunate focus of Rover's attention. According to Lockean psychology, either Rover should immediately pursue the bone as soon as it becomes available—which, after teasing, does not happen—or the original desire to pursue the bone is replaced by the desire to chew Jones's ears off, and then replaced again by the desire for the bone. Slightly more sophisticated versions of Lockean psychology allow for a new desire to arise in Rover, namely the desire to chew off Jones's ear, that is concurrent with and outweighs Rover's (standing) desire for the bone. But no matter which explanation the Lockean theory adopts, there is a basic question unanswered and indeed unaddressed. What prompts Rover to adopt the desire to attack Jones at all? Jones is not edible, as the bone is. Jones is not a natural target of canine aggression. Why does Rover attack Jones rather than merely circumventing him as quickly as possible? The answer is familiar from experience. Rover attacks Jones because Jones is a present evil, a threat to Rover's pursuit of pleasure, an

²⁹ See Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2.20 for his claim that the passions are simply ideas of pleasure and pain. Jones's hope, for example, is simply mental pleasure generated by the occurrent idea of "a probable future enjoyment of a thing, which is apt to delight him" (2.20.9).

³⁰ This claim is too strong: irascible passions depend on concupiscible passions, since they presuppose some kind of conative attitude towards whatever is regarded as difficult or arduous. That is why Aquinas holds that the irascible passions arise from and terminate in the concupiscible passions. He treats these relations among kinds of passions at length in *ST IaIIae.25*.

obstacle to be overcome. But that is precisely to allow Aquinas's point that obstacles or difficulties themselves can be objects of passions. Furthermore, they are certainly not desires on a par with the simple push-pull model. The burden, therefore, is on the Lockean to explain how desires alone can account for (a) and (b) in ordinary cases.

The rest of Aquinas's discussion in *ST IaIIae.23.2–4* is concerned with differentiating the six kinds of concupiscible passions and the five kinds of irascible passions, that is, with describing the kinds of opposition relating the formal objects that define each of these eleven passions. Aquinas lays out the two kinds of opposition in *ST IaIIae.23.2*:

Passion is a kind of motion, as stated in *Physics* 3.3 [202^a25]. Therefore, one must take the contrariety of passions according to the contrariety of motions or changes. Now there are two kinds of contrariety in motions or changes, as stated in *Physics* 5.5 [229^a20]: (a) according to the [subject's] approach to or withdrawal from the same terminus; this contrariety belongs properly to changes—that is, generation (which is a change to being) and corruption (which is a change from being). The other kind is (b) according to the contrariety of the termini; this contrariety belongs properly to motions. For example, whitening (which is the motion from black to white) is opposed to blackening (which is the motion from white to black).

A subject can be changed by its relation to a single terminus, as in (a); in such cases the subject acquires or loses something, where such acquisition and loss are opposed processes. If we have not a single terminus but two 'poles' of the change, as in (b), we can describe the subject as moving from one terminus to the other, or the other way around; the direction of movement yields different motions.³¹ Aquinas immediately applies these cases to the passions:

Therefore, two kinds of contrariety are found in the passions of the soul:³² (a*) according to the [subject's] approach to or withdrawal from the same terminus; (b*) according to the contrariety of objects,

³¹ Aquinas's distinction between (a) and (b) reflects a real difference in physics. In the case of substantial change, generation and corruption do not involve, in addition to being, a 'real' terminus of non-being. That is to say, there is no readily identifiable substrate persisting through the entire change. However, in accidental change, there are two opposed forms that successively inhere in the persisting substrate. Aquinas argues, as we shall see, that concupiscible passions can only involve something like substantial change, whereas irascible passions have features similar to both substantial and accidental change.

³² Aquinas inverts the order of presentation here, giving (b*) before (a*).

i. e. of good and evil. Only (b^*) is found in the concupiscible passions, namely [contrariety] according to the objects, whereas (a^*) and (b^*) are both found in the irascible passions.

Why shouldn't there be the motion of 'worsening' (from good to evil) and the contrary motion of 'bettering' (from evil to good), parallel to whitening and blackening, for both kinds of passions? Aquinas offers the following explanation:

The reason for [the claim that only (b^*) is found in the concupiscible passions] is that the object of the concupiscible, as stated above [in *ST IaIIae.23.1*], is *sensible good or evil taken absolutely*. Yet good *qua* good cannot be a terminus that change is directed away from but only one that it is directed towards, since nothing evades good *qua* good; rather, all things strive for it. Likewise, nothing strives for evil as such; rather, all things evade it, and for this reason evil does not have the nature of a terminus that change is directed towards but only [the nature] of a terminus that change is directed away from. Therefore, every concupiscible passion in respect of good is [directed] towards it (as in love, desire, and joy); every [concupiscible] passion in respect of evil is [directed] away from it (as in hate, aversion or abhorrence, and sorrow). Therefore, contrariety according to the approach to or withdrawal from the same terminus, [namely (a^*)], cannot exist in the concupiscible passions.

It is one of Aquinas's fundamental principles that all of creation tends toward the good. In the case of creatures that have at least sensitive abilities, he takes this principle to have the consequence that all action is directed to the (apparent) good. Since the passions are part of the affective structure of living creatures, they tend towards something only to the extent that it is seen as a good. Hence there cannot be any passion that tends toward (apparent) evil. In terms of motion, no creature can, in any of its passions, withdraw from the good. Pursuit of the (apparent) good is automatic and innate. Hence (a^*) is impossible.³³ The concupiscible passions are grouped into conjugations as pairs of contrary opposites with regard to good and evil (as Aquinas lists them above), that is, with respect to (b^*): love/hate,

³³ This argument also rules out the motion of 'worsening' (contrary to the motion of 'bettering'). Aquinas is playing fast and loose with (b^*) when it comes to the concupiscible passions: he characterizes them in terms of their motions with regard to each member of a single pair of contradictorily-opposed termini, namely good (motion towards) and evil (motion away from), not in terms of motions between contradictorily-opposed termini. Love, for example, is not a motion from evil to good, but only a motion to good.

desire/aversion, joy/sorrow.

The argument given in the preceding paragraph didn't turn on any special feature of the concupiscible passions. Thus it seems as though (a^*) cannot hold for any of the passions, including the irascible passions. Yet Aquinas says that it does hold for the irascible passions. How is this possible? He continues his explanation in *ST IaIIae.23.2*:

The object of the irascible is sensible good or evil—not taken absolutely but under the aspect of difficulty or arduousness, as stated above [in *ST IaIIae.23.1*]. Now the arduous or difficult good has a nature such that (*i*) something tends to it insofar as it is good (which pertains to the passion hope), and (*ii*) something recedes from it insofar as it is arduous or difficult (which pertains to the passion despair). Likewise, the arduous evil has a nature such that (*i*) it is shunned insofar as it is evil (and this pertains to the passion fear); and (*ii*) it has a nature such that something tends to it as something arduous through which it avoids being subjected to something evil (and confidence tends to it in this fashion). Therefore, in the irascible passions we find both (a^*) [contrariety] according to the approach to or withdrawal from the same terminus, as between confidence and fear, and again (b^*) contrariety according to the contrariety of good and evil, as between hope and fear.³⁴

These four irascible passions are grouped into the conjugations hope/despair and confidence/fear according to (a^*), rather than (b^*) like the concupiscible passions; Aquinas describes (a^*) for each irascible conjugation of (*i*)–(*ii*). The answer to the question raised above, then, is that irascible passions 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 passion that sees its object as a surmountable (attainable) difficult good, so that the difficult good 'approaches' the agent's possession; despair is the passion that sees its object as an insurmountable (unattainable) difficult good, so that the difficult good 'withdraws' from the agent's possession. Likewise, confidence is the passion that sees its object as a surmountable (avoidable) difficult evil and fear the passion that sees its object as an insurmountable (unavoidable) difficult evil.

Irascible passions also include contrariety of type (b^*). Aquinas only mentions and does not explain one of the two pairs, namely hope/fear, but his reasoning is not hard to uncover. Hope and fear regard their (difficult)

³⁴ Aquinas again inverts the order of presentation here, giving (b^*) and then (a^*).

objects as likely to be possessed by the agent—hope directed at the good and fear at the evil. We can invert the reasoning for the other pair, namely confidence/despair: each regards its (difficult) object as likely not to be possessed, confidence doing without the evil and despair doing without the good.

There is an exceptional irascible passion: anger. In *ST IaIIae.23.3* Aquinas argues that it has no contrary of any sort. Anger has for its object a difficult evil already present that it strives to attack and overcome (which is revenge). Since the evil is present, there is no movement of withdrawal, so (a^*) is impossible. Likewise, the opposite of present evil is an obtained good—but, as Aquinas remarks, “this can no longer have the aspect of arduousness or difficulty; nor does any motion remain after the acquisition of a good (except for the repose of the appetite in the acquired good, which pertains to joy, a concupiscible passion). The other four irascible passions are defined by the variety of contrary oppositions they bear to one another, but anger is defined solely in terms of its formal object, without any other kind of passion opposed to it.

The various kinds of contrariety among the irascible passions (including the lack of contrariety for anger) defines each formal object and specifies the essence of each kind of irascible passion. The situation is not so clear-cut in the case of the concupiscible passions, each conjugation of which is characterized by contrariety of the sort described in (b^*). Why are there three distinct conjugations of concupiscible passions rather than just one? Aquinas takes up this question in *ST IaIIae.23.4*, exploiting the technical resources available in the theory of motion:

Every mover in some fashion either draws the patient³⁵ to itself or repels it from itself. In drawing [the patient] to itself [the mover] does three things in it. First, [the mover] imparts to it an inclination or aptitude to tend to [the mover]. For example, an airborne light body imparts lightness to a body generated [by it], through which [the generated body] has an inclination or aptitude to be airborne also. Second, if the generated body is outside its proper place, [the mover] imparts movement towards its place. Third, [the mover] imparts repose in its place to it once it arrives there, since something reposes in its [proper] place by the same cause whereby it is moved to that place. A similar account holds for repulsion.

Now in the motions of the appetitive part, the good has a ‘power of attrac-

³⁵ The ‘patient’ is the item that suffers or undergoes the action of the mover (formed on analogy with ‘agent’).

tion' (so to speak) and evil a 'power of repulsion.' Therefore, first of all the good causes in the appetitive potency a certain inclination or aptitude or affinity toward the good. This pertains to the passion love. The corresponding contrary is hatred in the case of evil. Second, if the good is not yet possessed, it imparts [to the patient] a motion towards attaining this beloved good. This pertains to the passion of desire or cupidity. The opposite in the case of evil is aversion or abhorrence. Third, once the good has been acquired, it imparts to the appetite a certain repose in the acquired good. This pertains to pleasure or joy; the opposite in the case of evil is pain or sorrow.

Each thing has its proper place, to which it moves when possible; even when not moving toward its proper place (*e. g.* when prevented from doing so), it has a natural aptitude towards its proper place. The proper place for a stone is the center of the Earth. When a stone is released in the air, unless a contrary (violent) motion is imparted to it, the stone will tend downwards toward the center of the Earth. Nor does it lose this tendency when not exercising it. The theory of motion he relies on may be quaint, but the point of Aquinas's comparison should be evident: the three conjugations of concupiscible passions differ in representing the simple tendency to move toward the good (love) or away from evil (hate); actual motion towards the good (desire) or away from evil (aversion); and the 'repose' found in the possession of the good (joy) or evil (sorrow). The first conjugation represents the purely evaluative aspect of the passions, the second their motivating features, the last the enjoyment taken in attaining the desired and loved object, or the sorrow in not avoiding the hated object. Aquinas concludes, on the basis of his analogy with movement, that love/hate are the start of all passions and joy/sorrow the end of all, with desire/aversion and all the irascible passions denoting kinds of affective movement (ST IaIIae.25.1–2).

Aquinas's overall taxonomic structure of the sensitive appetite may therefore be represented, in first approximation, 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

These are the most general classifications Aquinas identifies within the sensitive appetite, where each class is singled out by the kinds of contrariety it bears to the other passions and its role in the stages of motion. These, of course, are consequences of the formal object of each passion.

Much more could be said about the elements of this structure; the account given here is not simplified, but certain complexities have been put to one side, and it is certainly incomplete.³⁶ But rather than pursue these issues I want to focus the discussion by considering the sense in which the passions are controllable by us. (This will mean a focus on humans to the exclusion of other animals, as will be clear.) There are two sides to this question. First, since the passions are by definition passive potencies, their passivity might be thought to prevent our exercise of control over them. We are no more than the passive subjects of our passions; their actualization is involuntary—a spasm of desire is on all fours with a sneeze, and loathing is like digestion. Second, modern discussions of the emotions recognize that they are, to at least some extent, ‘cognitively penetrable’: they are affected by shifts in belief and related desires.³⁷ But how can the passions be affected by anything taking place in the higher faculties, posterior to the act of the sensitive appetite? We’ll take up each question in the next two sections.

3. Passions and Passivity

The passions are passive potencies: objectual intentional states of the sensitive appetite elicited by an external principle, defined by their formal objects and structured as described in the preceding section. Non-human animals, who have no higher faculties, are clearly at the mercy of their passions, which determine their actions completely. But since the analysis of the sensitive part of the human soul is continuous with that of the sensitive soul belonging to non-human animals, why should the case be any different for us? The passivity of the passions seems to militate against the possibility of human control.

Aquinas holds that the passivity of the passions only goes so far. He is careful to avoid what Robert Gordon has termed “the two fallacies” that

³⁶ This account does no more than scratch the surface of Aquinas’s account of the passions. A few of the complexities ignored here are as follows. (1) There are kinds of passion subordinate to those listed here. For instance, *amor* (love) is divided into *amor amicitiae* and *amor concupiscentiae*; anger comprises wrath, ill-will, and rancor. (2) Joy is a kind of pleasure and sorrow a kind of pain; more exactly, pleasure and pain are generic terms applying equally to body and soul, whereas joy and sorrow apply strictly to the soul. These passions are nevertheless named after joy and sorrow as the most ‘exalted’ form of the passion. Similar remarks apply to love and ‘dilection,’ desire and cupidity, and elsewhere. (3) The formal object of each passion needs to be spelled out in precise detail.

³⁷ The notion of ‘cognitive penetrability’ used here is taken from Zenon Pylyshyn, *Computation and Cognition* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1984).

attend discussions of “the passivity of the emotions.”³⁸ These fallacies are, first, that passivity of this sort entails that we are ultimately at the mercy of our passions; second, that passivity entails that the passions are not voluntary.³⁹ These seem to be the core intuitions underling the worry that passivity prevents control. We’ll look at each in detail in this section.

First, given that fear, for instance, is a way (or the product of a way) of being acted upon, it doesn’t follow that we are completely passive with regard to fear—that fear overwhelms us or that we are subject to the vagaries of our affective experience. Now distinguish two questions: (*i*) whether we are entirely passive with respect to experiencing fear; (*ii*) whether we are entirely passive in the face of the fear we happen to be experiencing. Even if we were to grant (*i*) to be the case (discussed more fully below), there are serious complications for (*ii*). It is true that the sensitive appetite is passive with respect to the external principle that puts it into the state it is in, namely fear. Because the sensitive appetite is a part or faculty of the soul as a whole, we can even say that the entire soul is *per accidens* passive with regard to fear. But the qualification ‘*per accidens*’ is important. From the fact that the sensitive appetite is passive with regard to its external principle it does not follow that the soul as a whole is passive with regard to the state of its sensitive appetite—that fear, the state of the sensitive appetite, is an active cause putting the entire soul into some given state. If a soldier is wounded in his hand, the damage inflicted to his hand licenses our asserting that he (as a whole) has been wounded; we pass from a strict assertion about a part to a general claim about the whole, which is very different from saying that the wound in his hand causes damage to the rest of his body. His wounded hand is not a cause of the wound with regard to the rest of the soldier’s body, or to his whole body, which is the fallacy in question. In like manner, the passivity of the passions does not make us passive with respect to our passions.

This argument depends on two assumptions. First, it supposes that the sensitive part of the soul is a proper part of the whole soul, an assumption that holds for humans but fails for animals. (Animals are therefore passive with respect to their passions: they cannot but act on them.)⁴⁰ Second, it

³⁸ Robert M. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press 1987) Ch. 6, especially 117–121.

³⁹ See Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions*, Ch. 6 for a discussion of the extent of these fallacies in contemporary philosophical work on the emotions.

⁴⁰ Aquinas’s story here is more complex than I have made it out to be for reasons he expounds in *ST* Ia.80.1. As a part of his metaphysics he holds: (F) Form is the principle of action. But for animals and humans (F) does not automatically reduce

supposes that the intellectual part of the soul contributes to the condition of the soul as a whole, *i. e.* that motivation is not exhausted by the sensitive appetite; since the will is intellectual appetite and operates in close conjunction with the intellect, this assumption is well-founded.⁴¹ For Aquinas, the will can be and typically is at least a partial co-cause of the state of the soul as a whole. We have to choose something as well as want it to be motivated by it in the relevant way.

Yet even if it is in general fallacious to move from the passivity of the passions to our passivity vis-à-vis the passions, Aquinas recognizes that we often explain actions by referring to the motives of the agent, where a passion is cited as the sole motive for action. For example, when we say that Jones struck Smith out of anger, we explain Jones's action (striking Smith) by referring to the passion he is experiencing (anger). It seems as though passions do completely explain actions, Aquinas's insistence notwithstanding.

Aquinas takes such 'explanations' of action to conflate two very different cases: the rare circumstances in which people are literally overcome by their passions, and the ordinary case in which some degree of cognitive and

to: (F*) The determinate form of a thing is the principle of its action. Now (F) is not equivalent to (F*) because, in the case of creatures that have sensitive or intellectual abilities, in addition to the determinate form that, say, an elephant has—the form that makes it to be the kind of thing it is (namely an elephant)—additional forms are acquired through the cognitive or apprehensive powers. When the elephant sees a mouse its sense organs transmit the mouse-phantasm to its sensitive soul; the behavior of the elephant is fixed by its determinate form and how the acquired form interacts with the determinate form—mouse-phantasm combined with elephant-form produces trumpeting and rearing, a response that likely involves a mixture of physiological structure and conditioned responses ('habits').

⁴¹ To say this does not explain how the higher powers (intellect and will) interact with the passions. The case of intellect is discussed in §4 below. Aquinas has this to say about the will in *ST IaIIae.17.7*: "The sensitive appetite is also subject to the will with respect to execution, which takes place through a motive power. In the case of other animals, motion immediately follows upon the concupiscible and the irascible appetite, *e. g.* a sheep that fears a wolf immediately flees [from it], since there isn't any higher appetite in them to act against it. But man is not immediately moved in accordance with the irascible and concupiscible appetite; instead, he awaits the command of the will, which is a higher appetite. For in all ordered motive potencies, the second mover moves only by the power of the first mover. Accordingly, the lower appetite is not sufficient to move unless the higher appetite consents. And this is what the Philosopher says in *De anima* 3.11 [434^a12–15]: 'The higher appetite moves the lower appetite, as the higher sphere the lower one.'" The will is the source of the activity of the causal power possessed by the sensitive appetite, since it is a higher power to which the lower power is ordered.

volitional control is retained. He describes the difference between these cases in *ST IaIIae.10.3* as follows:

The influence of a passion on a man occurs in two ways. First, such that a man does not have the use of his reason, as happens in the case of those who become crazed or maddened through vehement anger or desire—as with any other bodily disorder, for passions of this sort don’t happen without a bodily change. And the explanation of such cases is the same as for brute animals, which follow the impulse of their passions of necessity: there is no movement of reason within them and consequently none of will. [Second], at times reason is not totally devoured by passion, but preserves the free judgment of reason with regard to something, and in line with this preserves some movement of the will.⁴² Therefore, to the extent that reason remains free and not subject to passion, so too the movement of the will that remains does not of necessity tend towards that to which the passion inclines it.

Thus either (*i*) there is no movement of the will in the man, but rather he is dominated by the passion alone; or (*ii*) if the movement of the will is [in the man], then he doesn’t follow the passion of necessity.

Passions that literally overwhelm reason and will can reduce humans to the level of brute animals, so that they aren’t ‘acting’ at all, strictly speaking, but merely reacting blindly to circumstances.⁴³ This is one interpretation of what is going on when Jones strikes Smith. Jones is so overcome with rage he lashes out blindly, and only later, when he ‘returns to his senses,’ learns what he has done.

More common, however, are cases in which the agent is not overwhelmed by a passion but rather ‘goes along’ with it. Aquinas says that the will gives its consent to a passion (*ad 1*). In this instance “reason is not totally devoured by passion” and, at least in principle, the faculties of the intellectual part of the soul could dictate action contrary to the passion. If not blinded by an overwhelming rage, Jones could refrain from striking Smith. When we explain his striking Smith by citing his (non-overwhelming) anger, we simultaneously describe the state of Jones’s soul and report on a choice Jones has made. The description may pick out something passive, but the report does not. The sense in which Jones’s anger is a passion doesn’t make him passive with respect to it. The explanation of a human action by pas-

⁴² See also *ST IaIIae.17.7 ad 2* for this point.

⁴³ In terms of the famous distinction Aquinas draws in *ST IaIIae.1.1*, such blind reactions are not *actiones humanae* but merely *actiones hominis*.

sion, then, doesn't run contrary to Aquinas's analysis—at least once it is understood in this way.

The second fallacy identified by Gordon is to conclude that passions, in virtue of their passivity, are not voluntary.⁴⁴ There is a clear sense in which the passions are subject to our control. The will's consent to a passion is required, in normal circumstances, for the passion to serve as a basis for action. But there is a related issue here that is less clear. Aquinas recognizes that we seem to excuse actions by referring to the motives of the agent, where a passion is cited as the motive for action. Jones only struck Smith, his lawyer might protest, because Smith made him angry with his insults. Even if a choice is somehow involved, his anger (deliberately incited by Smith) makes his action less culpable. Jones didn't simply walk up to Smith and strike him, after all; he was provoked. Thus Jones's anger is at least one of the background circumstances in which Jones made his choice to strike Smith. Jones's action is therefore not as purely voluntary as his deciding in cold blood to strike Smith would be. Aquinas seems to endorse this line of thought in *ST IaIIae.9.2*:⁴⁵

Accordingly, something seems fitting to a man when he is in a passion that doesn't seem so apart from the passion—for instance, something seems good to an angry man that doesn't seem so when he is calm.

The passions influence our behavior (even if they don't determine it), and so our actions under the influence of the passions are not entirely voluntary. Or so it might be argued.

⁴⁴ Gordon's explanation of the fallacious character of this inference turns on the sense in which we may have control over purely passive responses, so that experiencing the passive response can reasonably be described as voluntary (*The Structure of Emotions* 119–120). He is certainly correct that passivity does not rule out control. My eyes must see whatever is in front of them, but I can open or close them at will, change the direction of my gaze, and so on. I can likewise put myself in frightening situations so as to feel fear—freely walking into a haunted house, say. For that matter, we can exercise similar control over the functions of the vegetative part of the soul: my stomach digests whatever is in it, but I control whether something is in it, as well as what and when. Yet the mere possibility of exercising control over passive responses doesn't mean that we can always exercise such control, and hence that such actions are always voluntary. Whether we can dominate our passions so completely depends on the extent to which they are subject to the higher faculties of the intellectual part of the soul, discussed in §4. Yet this is a less interesting way of taking the question. Surely what matters is not whether we have voluntary control over experiencing the passions, but whether the action that is (at least partially) caused by the passions is voluntary—and that's the question under discussion here.

⁴⁵ See also *ST IaIIae.17.7 ad 2*.

Aquinas attacks this question with his analysis of the voluntary, the non-voluntary, and the involuntary. He sets forth two requirements for voluntary action in *ST IaIIae.6.1* and.2:

- (1) The principle of action is within the agent
- (2) The end of the action is known as the end

Aquinas points out in *ST IaIIae.6.1 ad 1* that the internal principle of an action need not be the first principle of the action; there may be an external principle that occasions the action of the internal principle (as passions are prompted by circumstances), or the operation of the internal principle in itself requires the prior action of other principles (as the passions ordinarily need the will to operate). Now the action generated by the internal principle must have an end, as noted in §1 above, which must be known as the end for the action to be voluntary—it must be seen as some kind of good, be it in fact real or merely apparent.⁴⁶ Failure to meet either (1) or (2) prevents an action from being voluntary: it renders it non-voluntary. Yet these two requirements are ordinarily satisfied when someone acts on the basis of a passion. The influence of the passion doesn't prevent an action from being voluntary.

Aquinas recognizes that an action considered in itself, apart from the circumstances in which it is performed, might be opposed to the will; he calls such an action involuntary (see *ST IaIIae.6.6*). He discusses Aristotle's case of an action done out of fear, when the ship's captain jettisons the cargo during a storm (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1 1110^a9–11). Technically, such an action is voluntary, for it satisfies (1)–(2). Throwing the cargo overboard, an action performed to avoid the greater evil of the ship foundering (*i. e.* done out of fear), is voluntary. Whether the cargo is thrown overboard depends solely on the captain; it is his command that determines the fate of the cargo. Yet the captain's action is involuntary. In other circumstances, or independent of these particular circumstances, the captain would not throw the cargo overboard—far from it; he is entrusted with its protection. Therefore, although his action is voluntary, it is involuntary in a respect

⁴⁶ To be known as the end of an action—to fall under the *ratio finis*—is to be seen as some sort of good. Animals may know their ends but humans know their ends as ends. It's one matter to be hungry, and so tear apart the wrapping and eat the food within, and quite another to recognize one's tearing apart the wrapping as an action which has the food within as an end, as Aquinas notes in *ST IaIIae.6.2* (Aquinas adopts Aristotle's practice of referring to the thing that is the end as itself 'the end.'). The ability to recognize an end as an end is in turn dependent on something more fundamental, namely the capacity for self-reflection: one has to conceptualize oneself as an agent engaged in an action to recognize an end as an end, and that, in its turn, depends on having a conception of oneself.

(*secundum quid*). In such cases, the agent wills what he does not want to will. The correct moral, it seems, is that we are responsible for what is done out of fear, since the actions are voluntary, but the circumstances may be extenuating. So too with Jones's anger. Striking Smith doesn't seem like a good idea in other circumstances; were it not for Smith's provocation, Jones would not strike Smith at all. Jones is responsible for striking Smith but, perhaps, should be excused for doing so.⁴⁷

The cases of anger and fear contrast sharply with concupiscence (*concupiscentia*), which Aquinas takes up in ST IaIIae.6.7. He argues that concupiscence is simply voluntary. There is nothing of the involuntary in it, for the agent wills to have what he would will to have in other circumstances. The desired object would be chosen in other circumstances as well. Hence there cannot be any extenuating circumstances for concupiscence.⁴⁸ Therefore, action on the basis of a passion is voluntary, but may include an involuntary component. But even if it does, whether the involuntary component should free the agent from blame is a separate issue.

4. Reason and the Passions

Aquinas holds, contra Hume, that reason is and ought to be the ruler of the passions: since the passions can be controlled by reason they should be controlled by reason (ST IaIIae.24.3). But this bit of moralizing depends on reason being able to control the passions in a more robust way than described in §3, where the cases under discussion do no more than somehow affect what seems good to the agent. Aquinas recognizes several external

⁴⁷ Whether Jones should in fact be excused for striking Smith is another question, one that pertains to moral theory rather than an account of the passions. (Aquinas will say that there isn't a general principle that defines exculpating circumstances.) For our purposes it's enough to note that Aquinas preserves the force of both intuitions that Jones was in control of his actions when he struck Smith (he acted voluntarily) and that Jones was provoked (his action was involuntary in a respect). Gordon's second fallacy is thereby avoided and the reason why people are tempted by the fallacious inference is explained.

⁴⁸ Why the asymmetry? Aquinas thinks there is a moral distinction to be drawn between Jones's being provoked by Smith and Brown's being enticed by Green. I suspect he hasn't distinguished three cases: (i) Brown would choose Green apart from the enticing circumstances; (ii) Brown would desire Green but not choose Green apart from the enticing circumstances; (iii) Brown would neither choose nor desire Green apart from the enticing circumstances. Aquinas's argument depends on understanding the baseline as in (i), but the parallel to the case of Jones and Smith is (ii) or (iii). Surely circumstances can make something seem desirable just as much as they can make something seem provocative.

factors that can affect the content of the apparent good: bodily dispositions (ST IaIIae.17.7 *ad* 2); the physiological states of the organs involved in the somatic reaction associated with the passion (ST IaIIae.10.3); the condition of the recipient in the attendant circumstances as well as the condition of the object itself (ST IaIIae.9.2); and so on. Yet none of these ways in which the content of the apparent good can be affected is under the control of reason, except indirectly. Digestion is just as ‘controllable’ by reason, since it too is a process that proceeds largely autonomously but can be influenced by bodily disposition, the state of the stomach, what is eaten and the circumstances in which it is eaten, and so on. Aquinas needs to explain the way in which passions can be controlled in a robust sense: how beliefs and reasons can influence the passions themselves (if they can), as opposed to merely influencing action based on the passions. In short, Aquinas needs to explain how the passions are cognitively penetrable.

The mere presence of the higher faculties in humans is not enough to explain the cognitive penetrability of the passions. For the passions might be caused by their external principles regardless of our beliefs, as the sense of taste responds to hot peppers no matter what our cognitive state may be. Instead, there must be some means by which the cognitive and the appetitive faculties can interact.⁴⁹ The intellect must be connected to the sensitive appetite, in some fashion yet to be determined, so that belief can directly affect desire.

Aquinas describes the connection between perception and passion in the case of non-human animals in *ST* Ia.78.4:

If an animal were moved only according to what is pleasant and unpleasant to sense, it would only be necessary to postulate in the animal the apprehension of forms that sensing perceives, in which [the animal] takes pleasure or shudders at. But an animal must search out or avoid some things not only because they are suitable or unsuitable to the senses, but also according to some other uses and advantages or disadvantages. For example, a sheep seeing an approaching wolf runs away—not due to its unsightly color or shape, but as if it were a natural enemy. Likewise, a bird collects straw not because it pleases sense but because it is useful for building a

⁴⁹ The particular case of the interaction between the cognition and appetite in the intellectual part of the soul—that is, between intellect and will—has been exhaustively studied in Aquinas. The connection between perception (sensitive cognition) and passion (sensitive appetite) has been granted to be largely a one-way connection, the latter depending on the former. It is the link between intellectual cognition and sensitive appetite that remains obscure.

nest. Thus it is necessary for an animal to perceive intentions (*intentiones*) of this sort, which the exterior senses do not perceive. There must be some distinct principle for the perception of this, since the perception of sensible forms takes place in virtue of a sensible transmutation, but not the perception of the aforementioned intentions. Therefore, the proper sense and the common sense are appointed for the reception of sensible forms... but the estimative power is appointed for apprehending intentions, which are not received through sensing.

Animals do not respond solely to the perceptible properties of the objects they encounter. They also respond to such objects as useful or useless, as harmful or harmless, which are not perceptible properties of these objects. Sheep run when they see wolves; birds gather straw for nests. The non-perceptible properties of an object are the *intentiones* associated with it.⁵⁰ The behavior of sheep and birds, Aquinas maintains, cannot be explained solely in terms of the perceptible properties of wolves or straw. The intentions associated with wolves and straw, however, provide the beginnings of an explanation. We need to postulate a faculty for the reception of these non-perceptible properties—the estimative power.⁵¹ While Aquinas does not here spell out the connection to the passions, the link should be obvious: when a sheep receives the intention of enmity from the wolf in the estimative power, it has the passion avoidance (or perhaps fear), which is the proximate cause of and explanation for the sheep's flight. Animals subsume perceived objects under the formal objects of the passions by the estimative power.

Aquinas doesn't explain the mechanics of the connection between the estimative power and the sensitive appetite, but the details are of no interest for our purposes; sheep necessarily respond to certain intentions with certain passions, whether this is in the end due to their physiology, conditioning, or a mixture. Matters are more complicated in the case of humans (who are themselves more complicated), as Aquinas immediately points out (*ibid.*):

It should be noted that there is no difference as regards sensible

⁵⁰ These *intentiones* are problematic. Does a wolf 'give off' an intention of harmfulness? Does an elephant therefore find the wolf dangerous? Are such *intentiones* located in the object, the subject, or relationally between both? See Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1988) for an account of mediæval philosophical attempts to grapple with *intentiones*.

⁵¹ The name for this faculty, the *vis aestimativa*, is linked to 'evaluating' (*aestimatio*) and to 'esteem' (*aestimare*). This nicely captures the non-judgmental assessment of objects as useful or useless, harmful or harmless, and so on.

forms between man and the other animals, for they are similarly transmuted by the exterior senses. But there is a difference as regards the aforementioned intentions, for other animals perceive intentions of this sort only by a kind of natural instinct, whereas man does so through a kind of combination. And so [the power] that is called the natural estimative in other animals is called the cogitative in man, which discloses intentions of this sort through a kind of combination. Accordingly, it is also called particular reason. Physicians assign a determinate organ for this [faculty], namely the middle part of the head, for it combines individual intentions just as intellective reason [combines] universal intentions.

The natural estimative power, common to all animals, is replaced in humans by the cogitative power: particular reason. Aquinas is unhelpful as to its nature. Localized in the middle part of the head, particular reason is said to ‘combine’ intentions—more exactly, it combines individual intentions, as reason (in the intellective faculty) combines universal intentions. This faculty is the mediating link between cognition and the passions. We can make some headway on understanding particular reason by looking at what Aquinas says in *ST Ia.81.3*:

[The irascible and the concupiscible appetite] obey reason with respect to their own acts. For in other animals the sensitive appetite is apt to be moved by the estimative power, *e. g.* a sheep that esteems a wolf as inimical is afraid. But the cogitative power takes the place of the estimative power in man, as stated above [in *ST Ia.78.4*]. Some call it ‘particular reason’ because it combines individual intentions. Accordingly, the sensitive appetite in man is apt to be moved by it. Yet particular reason itself is apt to be moved and guided in accordance with universal reason. Singular conclusions are thus drawn from universal propositions in logic. And so it’s clear that universal reason commands the sensitive appetite (which is divided into the concupiscible and the irascible) and that the [sensitive] appetite obeys [reason]. Now because deducing singular conclusions from universal principles is not the work of the simple intellect but of reason, the irascible and the concupiscible are said to obey reason rather than to obey the intellect. Also, anyone can experience this in himself: by applying some universal considerations, anger or fear or the like can be mitigated—or even stirred up!

Particular reason is a faculty that stands apart from all the other cognitive faculties and receives their input. It deals with singular propositions. Now it is a fundamental thesis of Aquinas’s philosophy of mind that sense deals

with particulars and intellect with universals; reason joins universal concepts together in propositional judgments.⁵² But singular propositions can follow from universal ones, and particular reason is the faculty that draws such inferences. Furthermore, particular reason may supply singular propositions that are combined with other propositions, singular or universal, to draw conclusions. As he says, “particular reason is moved and guided by universal reason.”⁵³

Aquinas’s remark at the end of this passage confirms this interpretation. From the singular proposition “This is a lion” (provided by sensible apprehension) and the universal proposition “All lions eat human beings” (known to the intellect), the particular reason draws the conclusion “This lion eats human beings”—a singular proposition that should trigger a response of fear. Other universal considerations, such as “All lions prefer eating humans to anything else,” should in the appropriate way increase my fear. Alternatively, the intellect can be left out of account, and I can lessen my fear by combining “This is a lion” with the singular proposition “This is Chicago, the well-known vegetarian lion.”⁵⁴ In either case, particular reason is the place where the logical ‘combinations’ take place.

In replying to an objection, Aquinas lists the psychological faculties that are directly linked to the sensitive appetite the way particular reason is (*ad 2*):⁵⁵

⁵² See Peter King, “Scholasticism and the Philosophy of Mind: The Failure of Aristotelian Psychology,” in *Scientific Failure*, eds. Tamara Horowitz and Allen I. Janis (Rowman & Littlefield 1994), 109–138 for a discussion of Aquinas’s philosophy of mind. My identification of ‘particular reason’ in this passage with the faculty of drawing singular conclusions is based on Aquinas’s connection between particular and universal reason in the latter part of the passage; his initial description of particular reason as the faculty that “combines individual intentions” certainly seems unlike any inferential ability. Scott MacDonald has proposed that universal reason may draw singular conclusions which then affect the intention-combining faculty, in part on the grounds that the combination of intentions is a much lower-level function than syllogistic inference.

⁵³ Nothing in the passage cited above forces us to identify the particular reason Aquinas is discussing here with the faculty of drawing singular conclusions.

⁵⁴ More exactly, the individual intention “This lion is dangerous” is combined with “This lion, namely Chicago, is not dangerous.” Here ‘combination’ seems to mean ‘is replaced by.’ Aquinas owes us an account of the forms of combination.

⁵⁵ A parallel listing is given in *ST IaIIae.17.7*: “Whatever is due to the power of the soul follows upon an apprehension. Now the apprehension of the imagination, although it is particular, is governed by the apprehension of reason, which is universal, just as a particular active power [is governed] by a universal active power. On this score the act of the sensitive appetite is subject to the command of reason. . . . Sometimes it also happens that a movement of the sensitive appetite is suddenly aroused upon

Now intellect or reason is said to rule the concupiscible and irascible “with a politic rule” ([*Politics* 1.2 1254^b2]), because the sensitive appetite has something belonging to it that can resist reason’s command. For the sensitive appetite is apt to be moved not only by the estimative power in other animals and by the cogitative power in man, but also by the imaginative power and by sensing. Accordingly, we experience that the irascible and the concupiscible struggle against reason, in that we sense or imagine something pleasurable that reason forbids, or [something] unpleasant that reason enjoins.

Yet the fact that the irascible and the concupiscible struggle against reason in some instance doesn’t stop them from obeying it.

Reasons and beliefs, then, can directly affect the sensitive appetite through imagination and particular reason. These cognitive faculties are naturally linked to sensitive appetite, and, just as sensitive apprehension does, they provide content for the passions. The cognitive penetrability of the passions depends on the mediating activity of the imagination and of particular reason.

The truth of this general claim is compatible with the passions being more or less open to reasoning and persuasion on any given occasion. People may persist in the fear of flying even while mumbling the air-safety statistics to themselves; weakness of the will is possible; other factors (such as organic dysfunction) may intervene. The passions are recalcitrant; they are not slaves to reason’s commands, but free citizens (mostly) following the ruler’s advice. Yet the difficulties in the way of making the passions completely rational are minor compared to the importance of his basic claim that reasons and beliefs can affect the passions. The passions are not, after all, similar to our reaction to hot peppers. They can be affected by reasons and beliefs. Their cognitive penetrability will turn out to be fundamental to Aquinas’s moral and theological psychology, since this allows people to perfect themselves through the virtues.

How sensitive apprehension, imagination, and particular reason actually interact with sensitive appetite, though, is left obscure. All Aquinas says is that “the sensitive appetite in man is apt to be moved by [particular

the apprehension of the imagination or of sensing. In this case, the movement is outside the command of reason, although it could have been prevented if reason had foreseen it. Accordingly, the Philosopher says that reason controls the irascible and the concupiscible not ‘with a tyrannical rule,’ which is that of a master over his slave, but ‘with a politic or regal rule’ ([*Politics* 1.2 1254^b2–5]), which is over free men who are not completely subject to command.” Sensitive apprehension, imagination, and particular reason directly affect the sensitive appetite; presumably the first two also provide input to the particular reason.

reason]” and “the sensitive appetite is apt to be moved not only by... the cogitative power in man, but also by the imaginative power and by sensing.” All well and good, but how do they do it?

Aquinas has no real answer to this question, and, I think, that is one of the virtues of his account. He describes psychological activity at a high level of abstraction, where the relation among psychological faculties is characterized functionally: sensitive apprehension, imagination, and particular reason are treated as so many inputs to sensitive appetite. This is the level of abstraction common in contemporary cognitive science. Aquinas does suggest where the answer may be found—in the realization of the functional system he mentions the physiological basis, namely the middle part of the head, where he vaguely suggests the interface among the faculties might be. But he does not pursue the matter, leaving it to future neurophysiologists if any should be interested, preferring to concentrate instead on the substantive claims made in his functional psychology. In this regard, Aquinas (and scholastic philosophy of mind generally) is far superior to its successors. Descartes’s account of the passions and their somatic bases, for instance, is shot through with his attempts to identify the underlying neurophysiological mechanism, in terms of brain-pores and animal spirits. Neurophysiology is not psychology, though, and all the latter demands are functional mechanisms, which may be physiologically instantiated in one way or another. Aquinas shouldn’t be blamed for not giving an account of how the interaction among the various psychological departments takes place; he was, rightly, more concerned with the logic of such interaction than with the nuts-and-bolts of how it worked.

Conclusion

Aquinas’s account of the nature and structure of the passions as psychological phenomena is as fine a piece of philosophical analysis as the Middle Ages had to offer. And, apart from its historical merits, I have tried to argue that his theory is attractive in its own right. His emphasis on a faculty psychology and scientific taxonomy is a more sophisticated philosophical approach to psychological inquiry than that found in the early modern period, bearing remarkable similarities to contemporary questions and accounts being developed in cognitive science. The subtlety and penetration of Aquinas’s analysis of the passions is unparalleled, and the questions he addresses are still philosophically pressing and acute. His discussion deserves to be taken seriously by anyone concerned with the issues he discusses, not just by those with primarily historical or systematic interests. That is his genuine philosophical legacy to us, and it is a rich legacy indeed.