

THOMAS AQUINAS: QUESTIONS ON THE PASSIONS

Thomas Aquinas's Questions on the passions form part of the *Summa Theologiae*, his best-known work. This first standalone edition shows, through a translation that is both rigorously accurate and mirrors the rapid tempo of Aquinas's Latin, what Aquinas says in his landmark treatment of the passions. Aquinas sets the parameters and terms of debate for numerous later theorists of the passions, including Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume. Some have alleged that Paul and later Christians have (in Nietzsche's words) "an evil eye for the passions," judging them as "dirty, disfiguring and heartbreaking." Yet the present translation shows that Aquinas regards the passions as part of created nature, and thereby good in their essence. As readers encounter Aquinas's treatment, they will also deepen their knowledge of particular passions – including love, hatred, desire, aversion, pleasure, sorrow, hope, despair, fear, and anger.

ROBERT MINER is Professor of Philosophy at Providence College. He is the author of *Nietzsche's Gay Science* (2022) and *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge, 2009), and translator of *Thomas Aquinas: Questions on Love and Charity* (2017).

THOMAS AQUINAS:
QUESTIONS ON THE
PASSIONS

Summa Theologiae 1a2ae 22–48

ROBERT MINER

Providence College, Rhode Island



Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-45034-8 — Thomas Aquinas: Questions on the Passions
Robert Miner
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009450348

DOI: 10.1017/9781009450379

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-45034-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>page</i> vii
Introduction	viii
THOMAS AQUINAS: QUESTIONS ON THE PASSIONS	I
<i>Summa Theologiae</i> 1a2ae 22–48	
Question 22 The Subject of the Passions	3
Question 23 Difference of the Passions From One Another	10
Question 24 Good and Evil Regarding the Passions	19
Question 25 Ordering of the Passions to One Another	27
Question 26 Love Itself	36
Question 27 The Cause of Love	44
Question 28 Effects of Love	51
Question 29 Hatred	62
Question 30 Desire	72
Question 31 Pleasure in Itself	80
Question 32 Causes of Pleasure	95
Question 33 Effects of Pleasure	109
Question 34 Goodness and Evilness of Pleasures	116
Question 35 Sorrow and Pain	124
Question 36 Causes of Sorrow or Pain	142

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
Question 37	Effects of Pain or Sorrow	149
Question 38	Remedies for Pain or Sorrow	156
Question 39	Goodness and Evilness of Pain or Sorrow	164
Question 40	Hope and Despair	171
Question 41	Fear Itself	184
Question 42	The Object of Fear	192
Question 43	The Cause of Fear	202
Question 44	Effects of Fear	206
Question 45	Daring	213
Question 46	Anger in Itself	220
Question 47	The Cause that Produces Anger, and Its Remedies	235
Question 48	Effects of Anger	243
	<i>Works Cited</i>	251
	<i>Index Locorum</i>	253
	<i>General Index</i>	272

Abbreviations

Buytaert	John Damascene, <i>De Fide Orthodoxa</i> , ed. E.M. Buytaert
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
Chevallier	<i>Dionysiaca</i> , ed. Philippe Chevallier
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i>
q	Question
a	Article
pr	Prologue
sc	argument “sed contra”
co	for body/response of an Article
ad 1	“Reply to the first argument”

Introduction

Though Thomas Aquinas certainly did not have a “system,” he treats the passions systematically – and so does something new in the history of human thinking. It is not that his predecessors are silent about the passions. Because Aristotle wants to teach the art of persuasion, he addresses a range of passions in the *Rhetoric*. In Books 7 and 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we read his discussions of pleasure. But in each case, the treatment is piecemeal. Were one to look to Aristotle for a unified consideration of the passions, one would look in vain. Authors other than Aristotle speak of the passions: Cicero, Seneca, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great, and John of Damascene, along with Jewish and Christian Scriptures. As important as these precedents are for Aquinas, their considerations are scarcely more unified than Aristotle’s. They speak through a bewildering variety of textual genres and diverse vocabularies that seem difficult to reconcile.

The passions, then, present Thomas with an instance of the problem that he poses for himself in the Prologue of the *Summa Theologiae*. Can a teacher who wants to introduce students to previous teachings about the passions gather the fragments into a unity suitable for beginners? How can such a teacher speak of the passions in a way that preserves multiplicity without losing contact with the genuine needs of the learner? Is it possible to attain a comprehensive view, distilling the “high points” that are appropriate to a *Summa*, while avoiding the three maladies that have plagued previous attempts within Christian theology? By uselessly multiplying questions and articles, by flouting the most elementary requirements of the order of learning, by repeating the same things over and over again, such attempts have produced not lovers of wisdom but catechized dunces – victims of a system that fails to inspire or educate. Or so runs the stern judgment on previous theological teaching that we hear in the Prologue.

Aquinas’s Questions on the passions, then, are something new. Among other things, they are the effort of a great teacher to present a synoptic view

Introduction

ix

of the passions. As befitting the author of a *Summa*, Thomas never claims to say everything that might be said about the passions. His central intention is to display the grounding of the passions in the primary passion of love, and so point toward the primacy of charity, which *Summa* 2–2 will make more explicit. Grounded in love (*amor*), all the passions play a vital role in the rational creature's motion toward beatitude – even if they can also occasion some recurring deflections from this course.

Nietzsche alleges that Paul and later Christians have “an evil eye for the passions.”¹ They tend to judge them as “dirty, disfiguring and heartbreaking,” and altogether worthy of annihilation. One may grant that Nietzsche had reasons for arriving at this judgment. More than a few Christians have seen the passions as he says they have. But such a judgment cannot be fairly pinned on Thomas, who regards the passions as part of created nature, and thereby good in their essence.

What exactly is a passion? This is not just a conceptual puzzler for “university philosophers,” as Schopenhauer liked to call them.² The question arises from the variegated discourses that Thomas inherits and uses as materials for his own construction. One may start with Aristotle. There are two important qualities shared by an Aristotelian *pathos* and Thomas's *passio*. Each is (1) caused by something external to the thing that experiences it, and (2) can be – but is not necessarily – a “deflection” from a thing's natural course. Yet we should not identify *pathos* and *passio*. If an Aristotelian *pathos* ends up benefitting the subject that experiences it, this is only a happy accident. As Amélie Rorty observes, “both its occurrence and utility are accidental.”³ For Aquinas, by contrast, *passiones* are connected more intimately to the well-being of their possessors. Each of the primary passions, even despair, has some function to perform in the economy of creaturely flourishing.

A passion in Thomas's sense, then, cannot be collapsed into an Aristotelian *pathos*. One might suppose it is closer to a Stoic *perturbatio* – an agitation or commotion that disrupts the one who experiences it. As with Aristotle, one can find some common ground. For Thomas any *passio* is “violent” to the extent that it is an instance of being “acted upon.” Similarly, a Stoic *perturbatio* results from the impact on a person of something external to that person, disturbing her tranquility. Moreover, understanding the causality of both Stoic *perturbationes* and Aquinas's *passiones* demands reference to the way that something in the environment

¹ Nietzsche, *Gay Science* aph.139 (“*The color of the passions*”); Kaufmann, 189.

² Schopenhauer, “On University Philosophy.”

³ Rorty, “Aristotle on the Metaphysical Status of *Pathe*,” 529.

is apprehended or evaluated. But despite these affinities, a *passio* in Aquinas cannot be identified with a Stoic *perturbatio* for at least three reasons: (1) A *passio* is an act or motion of the sensitive appetite, and Thomas considers the Stoics to lack an appropriate distinction between sensitive and rational appetite; (2) A *passio* entails a corresponding “bodily change” (*transmutatio corporalis*) and therefore presupposes embodiment; (3) A Stoic *perturbatio* is by definition hostile to rationality. Apparent exceptions are reclassified as *constantiae* in Cicero’s Latin, whereas for Aquinas the relation between a *passio* and the exercise of reason is considerably more complicated.

What exactly, then, does Thomas consider to be a passion? He says it is an act or motion of the sensitive appetite. But for that description to be intelligible, a prior understanding of the “sensitive appetite” is necessary, which in turn requires clarity about the basic notion of appetite. *Appetitus* in Latin corresponds to *orexis* in Greek: it is a “reaching out” or “stretching toward” something. In the first instance, “appetite” is appetite for what is apprehended as *bonum*, good. In Thomas, “good” must always be read together with completion – a thing’s becoming more fully what it is, according to its nature. In the divine case: God is already pure act, so there is no “becoming” (*Summa* 1.3 on divine simplicity), which entails that God is complete (*Summa* 1.4 on divine perfection) and so culminates in the good (*Summa* 1.5 on divine goodness). For humans and other animals, the same conceptual sequence (actuality → completion → goodness) obtains. Any sentient creature strives for what is suitable to the potentialities of its nature, thereby moving toward the completion of that nature. It will experience this completion as suitable (*conveniens*) – a resonance between “reaching for” (appetite) and what is reached (appetite’s object). The musical metaphor of “resonance” is appropriate: Aquinas himself describes the union of appetite and its object as a *consonantia*. As employed by Thomas, *bonum* is a term that contains each of these notes: the appetitive reaching, the thing reached, its suitability, its consonance, its contribution to the completion or perfection of a nature, so that it more nearly becomes what it is.

If those are the main contours of Thomas’s concept of appetite, what is meant by the *sensitive* appetite? The question is trickier than it may seem. One sign of the trickiness: although Aristotle speaks routinely of *orexis*, he never speaks expressly of a “sensitive *orexis*.” There is no phrase in the Aristotelian corpus that answers to Thomas’s “*appetitus sensitivus*.”⁴

⁴ In his commentaries on both Aristotle’s *De anima* and *De sensu et sensato*, Thomas sometimes reads the “*appetitus sensitivus*” into Aristotle, along with a clear idea of its division into “*vis concupiscibilis*” and “*vis irascibilis*.” Though Aristotle never speaks explicitly of a “sensitive appetite,” he does

“Sensitive appetite” names the capacity for “reaching toward” that is distinctive to beings with “sensitive souls.” In beings without sensation or intellect, there is only what Aquinas calls “natural appetite,” a basic inclination of a being to the completion of its form. Beings with sensation do not lack natural appetite. But they are not limited by natural appetite, since they also have what Thomas calls “animal appetite,” which desires things as they are apprehended. Natures contain more than potencies whose actualizations occur without their awareness. If a pet rock is not fed by its neighbors while its owner leaves town, it will not care – but a dog will, because it contains both natural and animal appetite. It desires food, water, and other things that are both perceptible through its senses and suitable to its nature. When a dog attains these things, it will naturally take pleasure. Should it be deprived of them, it will (no less naturally) experience pain.

The sensitive appetite’s “*per se* object” is a particular thing sensed as pleasant. That is the *bonum* toward which it is drawn. On account of its inclination toward what is pleasant, it also possesses a corresponding (but derivative) aversion from pain. Such pain is the *malum* proper to sensitive appetite, the evil that it shuns by nature. The primary character of the *bonum* and attraction, and the derivative character of the *malum* and repulsion, reflects in Aquinas the ubiquitous presence of the priority of good over evil. A sketch may indicate the first six acts of the sensitive appetite, common to all animals:

Love: basic inclination to <i>bonum</i>	Hatred: basic (but derivative) repulsion from <i>malum</i>
Desire or longing: motion toward <i>bonum</i>	Aversion: flight from <i>malum</i>
Pleasure: attainment of <i>bonum</i>	Pain: contact with <i>malum</i>

These six passions lie at the core of the sensitive appetite. They do not, however, exhaust it. This is because Aquinas considers the “pleasant/painful” axis insufficient to account for everything that sensitive appetite is drawn to or repulsed by. A full account, he judges, will involve another

distinguish ἐπιθυμία from θυμός (like his teacher Plato at *Republic* IV, 439c–440d), attributing both to the nonrational part of the soul (see *De anima* 3.9, 432b6). In the Latin Aristotle, ἐπιθυμία appears as “*concupiscentia*”; both θυμός and ὀργή get translated by *ira*. Thomas might have known something of the Greek terms behind the Latin, e.g. from reading Jerome’s commentary on Matthew. Jerome writes: “We read in Plato, and it is a common dogma of the philosophers, that there are three passions in the human soul: τὸ λογιστικόν, which we can interpret as ‘capable of reason’ (*rationabile*); τὸ θυμικόν, which we say is ‘full of anger’ or ‘irascible’ (*irascibile*); τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, which we call ‘concupiscible’” (*In Matheum* bk.2, on Matthew 13.33 [PL 26:94; CCSL 77:109.899–903]).

duality – the “useful/dangerous” axis (see *Summa* 1.78.4). A sheep is repulsed by a wolf not because it apprehends its sensory qualities as unpleasant, as if it were somehow disgusted by the texture or hue of a lupine coat. (Ovine aesthetics are not that advanced.) Rather, when a wolf comes into its field of vision, something in the sheep apprehends the wolf as “harmful” or “dangerous.” This apprehension arouses a motion of the sensitive appetite that does *not* appear on the list above. The name of this motion is “fear”: the sheep is afraid. From this particular appetitive motion, the sheep will naturally attempt an act of local motion, changing its location by running toward a lupine-free space. In the same way, animals with a sensitive appetite can be drawn toward things not because they are pleasant, but because they are useful. A bird does not gather sticks and straws because she is entranced by their beauty. Rather, she does so because she apprehends them as useful for building a nest (*Summa* 1.78.4 co).

Precisely because Aquinas denies that the “useful/dangerous” axis is collapsible into the “pleasant/painful” dyad, he postulates not one but two “powers” within the sensitive appetite (which itself remains a unity). The first power, which unites the six passions listed above, is what he terms the “*vis concupiscibilis*,” perhaps taking the term from his Franciscan predecessor Jean de La Rochelle (1200–1245).⁵ The second power, embracing the five passions of hope, despair, fear, daring, and anger, he terms (again likely borrowing from Jean) the “*vis irascibilis*.” Both powers are distinguished by their “formal object” – the general description that unites the particulars which fall under the power. “Formal object” is a handy label, though as Peter King notes, Aquinas does not use the term consistently.⁶ The formal object of the *vis concupiscibilis* is “sensible good or evil considered absolutely” – that is, irrespective of other conditions, for example the good’s presence or absence. The formal object of the *vis irascibilis* is “sensible good or evil considered as difficult or arduous” (*Summa* 1.81.2 co).

If the two powers of the sensitive appetite are distinguished by a difference of their formal objects, the same applies no less to individual passions. A formal object makes a passion what it is by specifying what the passion is about and toward what it is directed – its target,

⁵ See Jean de La Rochelle, *Summa de Anima*, ch.106 (“De differentia inter irascibilem et concupiscibilem”) and ch.107 (“De actu et motu irascibilis et concupiscibilis”), 255–62.

⁶ King, “Aquinas on the Passions,” 107n12. In the Question on the passion of *concupiscentia*, Thomas does note the presence of a “formal difference among the passions, according to which passions differ in species” (*Summa* 30.2 co).

Introduction

xiii

one might say.⁷ Hope, for example, is always hope for something; it does not arise unless something is apprehended as a difficult future good that is possible to attain. Similarly, there is no fear without a formal object – namely, an evil apprehended as difficult but possible to avoid. Millions of particular things, real or imagined, can be feared, but each will fall under the description “looming evil, hard to avoid.” Thomas carefully links each of the eleven primary passions to its formal object. Formal objects individuate the passions and supply their intentional content.

To grasp what a passion is for Thomas, no simple definition can suffice. Here is a brief recapitulation of the characteristics sketched above:

1. *Passio* in Thomas’s sense is irreducible to older categories (Aristotelian *pathē* or Stoic *perturbatio*).
2. Passions bear a necessary relationship to embodiment and a “bodily change” (*transmutatio corporalis*).
3. Every passion has a formal object that makes it the type of passion that it is.
4. Passions are acts or motions of the sensitive appetite, which remains a unity even as it is divisible into two powers with distinct formal objects.
5. An appetite is connected necessarily to a thing’s nature and what suits or completes the nature, a completion that constitutes its good (*bonum*). (That modern writers use “appetite” in another sense may be acknowledged – but Thomas is unmodern.)
6. The passions begin with love and are, in the first place, attractions to *bonum*. They are, derivatively, repulsions from *malum*.
7. They are instances of *pati*, “being acted upon.” The sensitive appetite does not move itself, but requires a mover external to itself for its activation.

A summary orientation is no substitute for understanding. But even brief reading suffices to indicate that *passio* in Aquinas is not intelligible apart from its relation to other key terms that are basic to his conceptual network. Detach a *passio* from the larger scheme, and what remains is no longer a passion, as Thomas understands it, but something else.

⁷ As does Peter King, who acknowledges the debt to Wittgenstein. See King, “Aquinas on the Passions,” 109 and Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §476.

Passions and Emotions: Motives for Reading *Summa* 1–2.22–48

Precisely because *passiones* in Thomas's sense are so critically dependent on his larger conceptual network, it is unclear how they are related to "emotions" as later thinkers understand them. Some would take Thomas's *passiones* to be anticipations or precursors, if not direct equivalents, of what we mean by "emotion." One might be so bold as to translate *passio* by "emotion," supposing that what Aquinas means by *passio* and what we mean by emotion are close enough. As a caution against such boldness, there is Thomas Dixon's proposal that "*passio*" is a theological category, and that the term "emotion" does not come into its own until the nineteenth century. It does so, Dixon argues, to meet the demand for a secularized concept that lacks the theological overtones of *passio*. However convincing one judges Dixon's argument (his critics have observed the prominence of *passio* and its cognates in Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume, who seem to have little trouble secularizing the term), there are other compelling reasons not to assimilate Aquinas's *passio* to what we mean by "emotion." For one thing, what "we" mean by "emotion" is hardly clear. As Robert Solomon observes, "emotion" is something of a grab-bag term, one that indicates different and mutually incompatible conceptions.⁸ Another reason is that for contemporary theorists of emotion, the question of whether emotions necessarily have objects or whether there are also (or exclusively) "objectless emotions" is a live issue. For Thomas, however, the idea of a passion without an object borders on the nonsensical. In short, translating *passio* by "emotion" risks anachronistically imposing onto Aquinas assumptions and questions that belong to later models.

Emphasizing the divergences between "passion" in Aquinas and whatever modern thinkers mean by "emotion" raises the question: Can Aquinas be relevant for later inquirers for whom "emotion" is the central category? Given that Aquinas had methodological and theological sensibilities that diverge from those of many philosophers, psychologists, and scientists today, why study his work at all? Can the Questions of *Summa* 1–2.22–48 be of anything more than antiquarian interest?

One answer to this question would simply insist that his texts are of perennial relevance. If we are persuaded that our lives aim for a good that infinitely surpasses the horizon of finite experience, then Aquinas's motive in writing Questions on the passions will be isomorphic with our purpose in reading them. If we are not persuaded by Aquinas's theologically

⁸ Solomon, review of Paul Griffiths' *What Emotions Really Are*, 132.

Introduction

xv

inflected teleology, we may still benefit from “throwing ourselves into the mental position of those who think differently” from us, and thereby know our own view better than we did before, as John Stuart Mill argues in *On Liberty*.⁹ Much of what Aquinas says about the *transmutatio corporalis* involved in a passion will be outdated, since contemporary neuroscience gives us access to data that Aquinas necessarily lacked. But that does not by itself suggest the irrelevance of his work. Aquinas writes about the passions not as a natural scientist, but as a theologian who is not intending to compete with natural-scientific accounts.

This response, one might protest, has missed the point. Since Aquinas composed *Summa* 1–2.22–48, we have made progress not only as natural scientists but also as philosophers. Aquinas’s conception of a *passio*, as my own argument suggests, depends heavily on its relationship to the other elements of his conceptual network. If many thinkers today, including twenty-first century philosophers who share Aquinas’s own confessional affiliation, find these elements implausible or indefensible, then it seems that we return to the position that Aquinas’s writing can be of interest only for those who work in the history of ideas.

To this objection, I can only reply that its plausibility is proportionate to the intensity with which one believes that articles published in today’s philosophical journals represent an overall advance on earlier modes of thinking. Do they? The answer may depend on which inquiry one has in mind. In particular cases, one can find technical advances that can be interpreted as progress. But the necessity of interpretation – and “progress” is an interpretation – cannot be avoided. If skepticism about “progress in philosophy” is tenable, the ground disappears for supposing that later conceptions have necessarily superseded Aquinas’s thinking about the passions. His thought can be of interest to the contemporary philosopher for whom presentism is not an article of faith, and who can accommodate his own habits of rapid reading to the slower rhythms of a *quaestio disputata*.

Part of what is intriguing about Aquinas, on philosophical grounds, is precisely the distance of his thinking from our typical assumptions. As Anthony Kenny writes: “Aquinas was an intellectual giant, and those of us who try to interpret him to a twenty-first century audience are like Lilliputians trying to tie him down with our own conceptual netting.”¹⁰ What needs questioning – and perhaps therapy of a broadly Wittgensteinian sort – is not the lack of fit of Aquinas’s thinking with

⁹ Mill, *On Liberty*, 39. ¹⁰ Kenny, “Stump’s Aquinas,” 462.

present categories, but the psychological need to make it fit. If Kenny is right, we need not be unduly anxious about whether or not Aquinas can be accommodated to twenty-first-century prejudices about what counts as respectable methodology or ontology. We can endeavor to read Thomas on his terms, without trying to “tie him down with our own conceptual netting.”

But, one might rejoin, Kenny’s point applies perfectly to the domain of philosophy. It is, however, inapplicable to passions and emotions. These are empirical entities whose discovery and knowability have nothing to do with philosophy and everything to do with what has become known as “affective science.” Through observation and experiment, using advanced instruments, we are now able to measure exactly what happens at the micro-level of neural transmission in any instance of fear, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness, or joy. From the measurement of these instances, we can reach empirically grounded conclusions about the nature of the basic emotions, as well as other secondary affects that are compounds of “basic emotions.” The thinking of Aquinas, or any other philosopher whose main activity is to theorize rather than measure, is simply irrelevant for anyone who wants to know what emotions really are.

This view of emotions, as plausible as it might sound, is questionable. Natural-kind theorists suppose that ordinary experience gives us a set of distinct emotions, categorized according to familiar names. The job of modern “affective science” is to accept these givens and inquire into their neurological substrate, unearthing their causal mechanisms in the brain. The cluster of symptoms we experience as anger will be explained by an anger mechanism, the cluster we experience as fear by a fear mechanism, and so on. Somewhat embarrassingly for the natural-kind theorists, the major proponents of natural-kind views of emotion have been unable to reach any consensus about just what the natural kinds of emotion are. (Moreover, as Margaret Watkins has trenchantly observed, they do not agree about what a “natural kind” is.¹¹) One theorist (Paul Griffiths) discovers six basic “affect programs”: fear, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness, joy. Another (Jaak Panksepp) finds seven: seeking, rage, joy, distress, care, lust, and play.¹² That natural-kind theorists cannot agree among themselves about the nature of “basic emotions,” their precise number, the criteria for identifying an emotion (basic or otherwise), or the very idea

¹¹ Watkins, “Self-Knowledge and Hume’s Phenomenology of the Passions,” 598.

¹² Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are*, 78; Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, 41–58.

Introduction

xvii

of a natural kind, is revealing. It suggests that boundaries between various emotions, along with their naming, are a function of the overarching conceptual scheme in which they are embedded. Here as elsewhere, observation is theory-laden.¹³ It is not a matter of merely opening one's eyes and seeing what is there, evident to any careful observer. Any division of the emotions will be guided by presuppositions, acknowledged or not.

A recent survey of the evidence by the neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett argues that efforts to correlate observable phenomena (reports of emotional experiences, production of distinctive vocal or facial cues, physiological measures of emotions) with discrete emotions and associated causal mechanisms have largely failed. Even recent neuroimaging techniques (fMRI and PET), Barrett contends, have not revealed "a specifiable and separate neural circuit or brain marker that corresponds to each emotion category (in particular, *anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and happiness*)."¹⁴ Despite the optimism of natural-kind theorists, Barrett concludes that "strong correlations among self-report, behavioral, and physiological measures of emotion do not consistently materialize as expected, calling into question the idea that anger, sadness, fear, and so on are homeostatic property clusters that can be identified in observable data."¹⁵ Barrett's negative conclusion is hospitable to my contention that recent natural-kind theories have no tendency to suggest that Aquinas's conception is obsolete. If we have little reason to believe that emotions fall into natural kinds, then Aquinas's scheme of the passions is not superannuated merely because it diverges from the categories of contemporary natural-kind theorists.

But, one might wonder, does not Aquinas take himself to be offering a theory of the passions that falls into natural kinds? And if Aquinas does not track natural kinds any more or less cleanly than a contemporary theorist, then what is the point of studying *Summa* 1–2.22–48? This section will give one answer to this question; the next will suggest a different approach. Even if Aquinas naively imagined his own scheme of the passions to carve nature at its joints, it would not follow that *Summa* 1–2.22–48 is not worth reading. On a broadly constructivist view, the passions experienced by the inhabitants of a particular epoch will be a product of the interaction between a neural substrate (to which our epistemic access is itself theory-laden) and the conceptions available to these inhabitants for interpreting, constructing, and naming their affective experience. *Summa* 1–2.22–48

¹³ This is the point made so memorably by Norwood Hanson in *Patterns of Discovery*.

¹⁴ Barrett, "Are Emotions Natural Kinds?" 35. ¹⁵ Barrett, "Are Emotions Natural Kinds?" 45.

gives us an exceptionally rich and detailed knowledge of what those conceptions once were, at least as seen through the eyes of a medieval *magister*. Such knowledge is particularly valuable for research programs animated by the idea that emotions have a history. It can be a potent means of dislodging the *idée fixe* that emotions have always and everywhere been the same.

The reason for reading *Summa* 1–2.22–48, then, is not that Aquinas hands us *the* truth about the passions, taken as natural kinds that he describes with peerless precision. It is that studying his texts enables us to overcome “the historical innocence of most philosophical analyses of the emotions,” as Amélie Rorty put it in 1984.¹⁶ This justification also entails that one should read any number of later authors who write about the passions, such as Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, or Rousseau. One might, however, privilege *Summa* 1–2.22–48, since a knowledge of Aquinas can help one become a more informed reader of early modern thinkers who consider the passions. The view to which they are responding is frequently Aquinas’s conception or some neo-scholastic modification thereof.¹⁷ Moreover, what Rorty says about Aristotle has equally direct application to Aquinas: “the metaphysics is gone, but since its distinctions defined the phenomena, the questions that stem from those distinctions remain.”¹⁸ Several of the Questions that Rorty names – the causality of passions, the connection of passions to the body, the relationship of the passions to reason, our responsibility or lack of responsibility for our passions – are taken up by Thomas in *Summa* 1–2.22–48. Adopting Aquinas as a means by which one might overcome “historical innocence” about passions and emotion is certainly one valid motive for reading his texts.

Passions and Blessedness

The argument I have just made for reading *Summa* 1–2.22–48 is aimed to dislodge a prejudice that prevents some from encountering Aquinas – namely, that his texts can interest only antiquarians because “we” know so much more than he did. One limitation of this argument, as formulated above, is that it proceeds from a basis external to Aquinas’s texts. In this

¹⁶ Rorty, “Aristotle on the Metaphysical Status of *Pathe*,” 522.

¹⁷ This observation is the starting point of Sweeney, “Restructuring Desire: Aquinas, Hobbes and Descartes on the Passions,” 215.

¹⁸ Rorty, “Aristotle on the Metaphysical Status of *Pathe*,” 522.

Introduction

xix

section, I want to articulate a more internal rationale for studying the Questions on the passions, one that begins where the *Summa* itself begins.

In the very first Article of the *Summa*, Thomas argues that we need instruction beyond what the philosophical disciplines can give, because we are finite creatures with a thirst for the divine, which infinitely exceeds the comprehension of reason. In *Summa* 1–2 qq.1–5, Thomas argues that human desire strives for a goal that exceeds any finite good, no matter how noble. In the absence of wisdom, we gravitate toward two primary strategies for satisfying our desires. One is to immerse ourselves in finite goods. If only we can acquire enough of these, we suppose, our desire will come to rest and we will “be happy.” The second strategy begins by recognizing that the first is an illusion, destined to fail since no finite good (or collection of finite goods) is adequate to satisfy our infinite desire. But it proceeds to condemn or ignore the passions, supposing them irrelevant for attaining the “goal beyond.” Proponents of this strategy tend to reject the passions and other aspects of our animal nature, in the name of “transcending” our humanity in favor of a higher goal.

Thomas rejects both strategies. He does so, in part, by constructing a lengthy account of the passions which, as Eileen Sweeney notes, exhibits no fundamental distrust of them.¹⁹ The passions are “acts that are common to human beings and other animals” (*Summa* 1–2 pr.6). For Thomas, we are animals with bodies and everything that implies: “real, not pretend, animals,” as Denys Turner remarks.²⁰ In giving so much space to the passions, Aquinas writes this conviction into the heart of *Summa* 1–2. Had *Summa* 1–2 included only the Questions on the acts of the will, skipping the treatment of the passions, it might foster the illusion that we are primarily rational choosers, autonomous beings fully in control of our destinies. Thomas’s decision to place Questions 22–48 just where he does, between acts of the will and later questions on the virtues and vices, is a way of dispelling this illusion. We achieve our perfection as rational animals not by trying to leap over our own humanity, but by entering more deeply into it – by being fully and naturally human. Our being limited finite animal creatures is not something to be dismissed in light of “higher truths.”

If the passions are an intrinsic part of our humanity, then we must know them well in order for our nature to be fulfilled. Accordingly, Thomas spends about a quarter of *Summa* 1–2 on the passions. Many who specialize in what they take to be Thomas’s “ethics” regard the passions as a mere

¹⁹ Sweeney, “Restructuring Desire: Aquinas, Hobbes and Descartes on the Passions,” 222.

²⁰ Turner, “The Human Person,” 170.

digression. Proceeding as if the passions were extraneous to *scientia moralis*, they fix their gaze on happiness, virtues, sins, natural law, or other topics judged to be more urgent. But Thomas himself is convinced that sustained attention to the acts of sensitive appetite is required, if we are to understand what is required for “the motion of the rational creature into God” (*Summa* I, q.2 pr: “*motus rationalis creaturae in Deum*”). In order for this motion to reach its telos, due attention must be given to the flourishing of our bodily nature as finite bodily creatures, located in space and time. No real advance toward beatitude is possible without psychological health, the attainment of which requires knowing and cultivating the passions. This is one reason, at least, for Thomas’s decision to spend the time he does on them in *Summa* 1–2. The treatment is anything but an incidental digression.

But how does Thomas construct a positive account of the passions that affirms embodiment and refuses to reject our “lower nature”? He does so most clearly by drawing upon the texts that he inherits, placing them in any number of mutual relations: “quotation, allusion, annotation, revisionist imitation, eclectic incorporation, tense repression, direct refutation, or silent correction.”²¹ The most frequently cited *auctoritas* in the Questions on the passions is Aristotle. It would be easy to infer that Thomas’s strategy is to use Aristotle to correct the Platonizing tendencies of a theologian like Augustine, in whose writings one can easily find dualistic separations of body and mind. In fact, the matter is not nearly so simple. *Summa* 1–2.22–48 contains a large number of passages from Augustine, particularly in Books 9 and 14 of *City of God*. Anyone who reads these two books will quickly see that Augustine has his own way of making the fundamental point about embodiment. Though the task for him is to live “according to God” (*secundum Deum*) and not “according to man” (*secundum hominem*), this cannot mean hating the body and loving the soul. On the contrary, Augustine declares: “There is no reason to insult the creator by putting the blame on fleshly nature, which is in fact good in its kind and in its order.”²²

The affirmation of embodiment, then, is not a simple reversal of Augustine. Thomas’s use of Augustine is more interesting and complex. He seeks both to appropriate Augustine, in order to underscore a fundamental point about the passions that he takes to shine most clearly in his texts, and to subject Augustine to gentle but firm correction. Let us first consider the correction.

²¹ Jordan, “Thomas’s Alleged Aristotelianism or Aristotle among the Authorities,” 64.

²² Augustine, *City of God* bk.14 chap.5 (PL 41:408; CCSL 48:419–20.1–3).

Introduction

xxi

In the very texts of Augustine that Thomas privileges, the reader can witness two reductions of the passions to something else. Augustine's first reduction holds that all of the passions are nothing but willing. In *CG* 14.6, he begins by asserting that whether a passion is good depends entirely on the moral quality of its possessor's will (*voluntas*), whether it is "good" (*bona*) or "misdirected" (*perversa*). In all the passions, he says, *voluntas* is present. Indeed, "present" is too weak: the passions "are all nothing other than willings (*voluntates*)."²³ As evidence for this startling claim, Augustine asks: "For what are yearning (*cupiditas*) and gladness except the will in its consent to the things that we will? And what are fear and sorrow except the will in its dissent from the things that we will?"²⁴ In the next chapter, Augustine performs a parallel reduction of the passions to love. Here Thomas takes Augustine to require correction.

The first aspect of the correction is structural. Thomas constructs an account that includes eleven primary passions, none of which are reducible to the Ciceronian quartet that Augustine adopts. As acts of sensitive appetite, the passions differ in character from the acts of the will or rational appetite. Second, Thomas acknowledges the interest of Augustine's reduction. He does so by quoting it directly, putting the passage into the mouth of an objector and then giving a succinct reply: "Love is said to be fear, joy, cupidity, and sadness not essentially but causally" (26.1 ad 2). Third, Thomas proceeds to rehabilitate the very distinction that Augustine brusquely sets aside in *CG* 14. *Dilectio* is a kind of *amor*, he argues at 26.3, but it is not just a synonym – he says against Augustine, while leaving him unnamed. *Dilectio* adds something to *amor* – namely, the note of rational choice (*electio*). The passions are neither modes of *dilectio*, nor *affectus* proper to *voluntas*. They are acts that humans have in common with other animals, proper to the sensitive appetite. They are not so many modes of willing or rational loving. (What holds for the passions can also be seen in the virtues. In *Summa* 2–2, Thomas will argue that the multiplicity of virtues defies reduction to the single virtue of charity, even as charity is required for any virtue to be a virtue in the most proper sense of the term.²⁵)

Augustine cannot, then, be taken as a sure guide to the number or nature of the passions. Thomas wants to construct a more finely grained picture of the passions than he finds in Augustine, a picture that preserves their multiplicity and avoids reducing them to volitional acts. But the correction

²³ Augustine, *City of God* bk.14 chap.6 (PL 41:409; CCSL 48:421.4–5).

²⁴ Augustine, *City of God* bk.14 chap.6 (PL 41:409; CCSL 48:421.5–8).

²⁵ See especially *Summa* 2–2.23.8, in *Questions on Love and Charity: Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae, Questions 23–46*, ed. and trans. Miner with introduction.

is no simple negation. In the very act of correcting Augustine, Thomas is determined to preserve his deeper insight that every passion has its root in love. No matter what the passion is, its cause can be traced back to a primal love for the good.²⁶ All the passions aim at the preservation and flourishing of an embodied being. Even despair has its proper role to play; at times it is appropriate to give up on some finite good. Accordingly, the passions are grounded in love. This is not just an isolated fact or an interesting aside, but a fundamental insight into our nature as human beings. Though Aquinas makes the point in his own name, he chooses to honor Augustine throughout the Questions on the passions by making him the *auctoritas* most conspicuously associated with the grounding of the passions in love.

Though Augustine's importance for *Summa* 1–2.26–48 must be appreciated, it should not be overstated. Regarding specific qualities of the particular passions considered by Thomas, the place of Augustine appears marginal. He appears only once in Question 31 on the nature of pleasure, only three times in Question 40 on hope (all within the opening arguments), only twice in Question 41 on the nature of fear, and twice again in the single Question on daring. It might seem that his relevance increases in the concluding trio of Questions on anger (Questions 44–46), which mention him five times. But in these very Questions, Cicero, Gregory the Great, and John Damascene collectively receive eighteen citations. As for Aristotle, the Questions on anger cite him fifty-five times – more than twice the citations given to all the other authorities combined, including Scripture. As a whole, *Summa* 1–2.22–48 includes over 300 citations of Aristotle.

Though hardly decisive, the above census of authorities is enough to suggest Aristotle's importance for the Questions on the passions. Any adequate grasp of this importance can be discovered only by reading. But here I can briefly mention three aspects of Thomas's use of Aristotle: (1) The fundamental division of the sensitive appetite into two powers depends heavily on Aristotelian materials, even if Aristotle does not himself originate the Platonic distinction between the desiring and the spirited parts of the soul; (2) Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* concludes with arguments for the superiority of the pleasures of contemplation over other pleasures. Thomas develops this theme in both the Questions on pleasure

²⁶ For places where the debt to Augustine is particularly evident, see 27.4 sc, 29.2 sc, 35.6 co, 36.1 arg.1, 40.7 arg.1, 43.1 sc, 46.1 co. For places where the argument can be glimpsed, but without an overt reference to Augustine, see 32.3 ad 3, 32.6 co, 35.3 ad 2, 36.3 co, 41.2 ad 1.

and the Questions on sorrow, particularly in the climax of Question 38 on the remedies for sorrow; (3) Though the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the most cited Aristotelian text (118 citations), the *Rhetoric* is cited almost as much (96 citations). Thomas knew the *Rhetoric* only late in his authorship, since William of Moerbeke produced his translation in 1270, around the time that Aquinas was composing *Summa* 1–2. Thomas cites the *Rhetoric* in all twenty-three Questions on the particular passions (Questions 26–48), without exception. The *Rhetoric* is especially important for Thomas’s understanding of four passions: pleasure, fear, daring, and anger. To give an idea of the relative prominence of the *Rhetoric* over other Aristotelian texts in *Summa* 1–2.22–48, one may consider that Aquinas cites the *Rhetoric* exactly six times as often as he cites the *De anima*. This is perhaps not what one might expect from a treatise in Thomistic philosophical psychology. (But then, Thomas is not writing a treatise. His project in the *Summa* is less doctrinaire, less premeditated, than the overtones of “system” audible in the term “treatise.”)

However important Aristotle may be for Thomas, it is not true that he is merely performing a set of variations on Aristotelian themes. Certain teachings of Aristotle can be incorporated within a picture that Thomas judges helpful for creaturely flourishing. But Aristotle himself can only glimpse the grounding of the passions in love. About the ultimate goal (“complete blessedness”) and our relationship to this goal, he cannot say much. From Thomas’s standpoint, Aristotle knows a good deal about what lies in the middle, but little about the beginning or the end. Therefore, Thomas must place his thinking within a larger frame.

What is this larger frame? Any full answer to this question would amount to an interpretation of the *Summa* itself. Here I can only gesture toward the frame with the aid of two terms: “crucifixion” and “resurrection.” Thomas weaves into the *Summa* a trajectory that begins with the particular passions of *Summa* 1–2 and culminates in the Passion of Christ at *Summa* 3. The Questions translated in this edition point beyond themselves toward the *Summa*’s third (unfinished) part. They do so in several ways. One such way: their insistence that the most acute instance of *pati*, “suffering” or “being acted upon,” is sorrow (see 22.1, 35.1, 41.1). By writing the passions into human anthropology, Thomas prepares us for that to which even Christ was susceptible, the prospect of being acted upon in the most violent of ways. We can escape neither sorrow nor fear – the passion that, just after sorrow, is most evidently an instance of *pati*. The embodied creature cannot escape subjection to the “sad” passions. Nor should she, if

she aspires to what is highest through the imitation of Christ, no matter how excruciating.

To read Aquinas's ethics well, one must remember that "*motus in Deum*" passes through a renunciation that is cruciform. Human flesh cannot escape the realities indicated by "crucifixion." There is no shortcut. But the cross is not the final word. The self-knowledge gained by reflecting on the passions, especially those connected most directly to pain and death, reminds us of their grounding in love. Pain and death seem terrible only because by nature we love our own being, our own preservation and flourishing. Sorrow and mortality themselves suggest that love of the good is the primary fact of our being. Where can such a primal love come from? Can there have been a moment at which my finite ego willed it into existence, as if it were an autonomous self-creator? Any such hypothesis, Thomas would reject as absurd. As beings whose "I" is constituted, at the deepest level, by love of the good, our "I" is nothing other than an expression of that good. Our "I" is a finite image of unlimited conscious being. Apart from infinitely creative consciousness, we have no being at all – just as a ray of light has no being apart from its source. This view receives articulation *very* early in the *Summa* (see *Summa* I 15.2). As constitutive elements of our natures as embodied creatures, the passions are a microcosm of the boundary between spirit and matter.

The passions are responses to what is apprehended by the senses. As such, their typical function is to promote our creaturely preservation. Yet Aquinas does not overlook the possibility of a deep connection between the passions and the ultimate goal, union with the divine. In one of the few instances in which he replies not only to the opening appearances but also the argument *sed contra*, Thomas writes:

Some lay it down that even in the will itself, the name *amor* is more divine than the name *dilectio*, because *amor* denotes a certain passion chiefly according as it is in the sensitive appetite, whereas *dilectio* presupposes a rational judgment. The human being can better tend into God (*in Deum tendere*) by *amor*, drawn passively in a certain way by God himself, than he is able to lead himself to this by his own reason, which belongs to the character of *dilectio*, as said above. And on account of this, *amor* is more divine than *dilectio*. (I-2.26.3 ad 4)

The "motion into God" is a motion that culminates in union with the divine. Does such union imply *theosis* – that is, humans *becoming* divine? (In Latinate terminology, "deification.") Thomas knows the possibility in several ways – not just as an Athanasian commonplace, or as inference

Introduction

xxv

drawn by Boethius (*Consolation of Philosophy* 3.10, 4.3), but also from the very Augustinian texts that he reads in considering the passions. The last sentence of *CG* 14.4 asserts: “You are living according to man, not according to God, for if you were living according to God, you would yourselves be gods.”²⁷ There may be a deep connection between the full actualization of our potentialities (total participation in the good) and deification. But as usual, Aquinas is more careful than Augustine. Though his liturgical texts speak expressly of deification, the *Summa* hesitates to commend the possibility of becoming God in this life.²⁸ Thomas may have feared that promulgating any such teaching in the *Summa* would encourage its intended audience (*incipientes*, “beginners”) to suppose they can overleap their humanity. It might lead them to try losing themselves in mystical possessions and ecstasies – the very thing that Montaigne finds himself unable to stomach in the life of Socrates – or otherwise disparage the goodness proper to the embodied creature.²⁹ This is the goodness of participating in the world of experience, the world as extended in space and time. It is the goodness capable of loving the taste of a single-malt Scotch, or savoring the taste of a beautiful English strawberry.

Strawberry: the very word leads the mind to “straw,” the humble reality to which Thomas compared his own writings. What prompted the comparison was a vision. We know little about this vision, except its most dramatic effect: Aquinas did not finish the *Summa*.³⁰ But for those of us who continue to write, and to grow strawberries in our gardens, the task is to be as naturally and deeply human as we can. One aspect of this task is to grow in self-knowledge by knowing our passions, setting them in order so as to develop a healthy initial sense of our finite being, akin to what Nietzsche means by being “healthy at bottom.” Such health is a necessary prologue to the growth in love that culminates in blessedness, an expanded experience of self (spiritual growth) in which one may know oneself as “not-other” than God.³¹

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God* bk.14 chap.4 (PL 41:408; CCSL 48:419.64–65).

²⁸ The *Summa* contains few explicit references to blessedness-as-deification; his liturgical texts are more explicit.

²⁹ Montaigne, *Essais* III.13 (“Of Experience”); Frame, 1044.

³⁰ For commentary on what Thomas’s experience means for reading the *Summa* well (and especially for what it implies regarding the possibility of “isms” or “system” in Aquinas), the brief remarks of Josef Pieper remain an excellent starting point. See his *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 158–59.

³¹ I owe these formulations to Christian Moevs, to whom I am grateful for searching comments on an earlier draft of this section. For Nietzsche’s idea of being “healthy at bottom,” see *Ecce Homo*, sec.2; Kaufmann and Hollingdale, 224.

Our passions are neither everything nor nothing. As guides or promptings to an individual's flourishing in the world of space and time, the passions must be known. Merely reading the *Summa* cannot substitute for our individual performance of this task. We need not only to know the passions in general – love, hatred, desire, hope, anger – but also *our* idiosyncratic passions: *our* love, *our* hatred, *our* desire, *our* hope, *our* anger. That we have no access to the “divine microscope” that Nietzsche sought for such a task (*GS* 8) seems plain enough. But we do have some old texts that can help us, if we can slow down and try to read them well, savoring their pleasures. Among them is *Summa* 1–2.22–48.

Reading the *Summa*: Note on the Text and Translation

The passions are both mundane realities, experienced by embodied creatures, and hylomorphic signs that point beyond themselves toward union with the divine. That is one frame into which Thomas's treatment of the passions can fit. As helpful as a frame might be, the greatest benefits for any reader of Thomas will come through multiple acts of slow and careful reading. Any attempt to “fly” through *Summa* 1–2.22–48 is unlikely to bear fruit. Nietzsche is not the only writer to “booby-trap” his texts (as Bernard Williams put it) in a way that will frustrate readers who are in a hurry and cannot bear to slow down. As Ignatius Eschmann reminds us: “the *Summa* was meant to be a textbook in school. The Articles are meant to be read slowly. The medieval professor had to read his text slowly: lighting conditions were poor, parchment expensive, ink not easily carried around, pens needed frequent sharpening.”³²

To read an Article slowly, it is helpful to bear in mind the structure of an Article from *Summa* 1–2.22–48. Any Article in the *Summa* is an abbreviated version of a medieval *quaestio disputata*, an event where students would present arguments on the first day for one side of a question, and on the second day for another side. On the third day, the *magister* would make a *determinatio*. Every Article contains these five sections:

1. The opening “query,” usually beginning with “whether” (*utrum*). Neither completely open-ended nor entirely obvious, the query can be resolved in a limited number of ways.
2. The opening set of “appearances,” beginning with “IT SEEMS that” (*videtur quod*). These are not so much objections to be vanquished as

³² Eschmann, *The Ethics of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 7.