

Introduction

Subcommittees of the British Medical Association's Medical Ethics Committee sometimes meet in a windowless, heavily panelled, subterranean room in the Association's London headquarters. Surrounding our careful, eminently rational – and of course confidential – ethical debates are the names on each panel of doctors who have been awarded the Association's Gold Medal since the nineteenth century. Many of the doctors honoured have served faithfully on such subcommittees in the past. Some have clearly done much more. The discoverer of penicillin is there, as are several recipients of the highest British civil award, the Order of Merit (limited to twenty-four living recipients and in the direct gift of the monarch). A number have been awarded a Nobel Prize for Medicine or are members of the House of Lords. However, it is the names of two army doctors that have long fascinated me, neither of them, as far as I know, assiduous participants at the Association, Nobel Prize winners, or members of the Order of Merit or of the House of Lords: Captain Arthur Martin-Leake and Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse. They are the only two doctors cited for the period of the First World War and after each of their names 'VC and bar' is added. Only one other person, the New Zealand Second World War soldier Captain Charles Hazlitt Upham, has ever been awarded the Victoria Cross (given for extraordinary bravery within war) twice. Remarkably, two of the three survived into old age.

Arthur Martin-Leake was awarded his first Victoria Cross in the Boer War for his medical action on 8 February 1902 at Vlakfontein, as recorded briefly in *The London Gazette* (13 May 1902):

[He] went up to a wounded man, and attended to him under a heavy fire from about 40 Boers at 100 yards range. He then went to the assistance of a wounded Officer, and, whilst trying to place him in a comfortable position, was shot three times, but would not give in till he rolled over thoroughly exhausted. All the eight men at this point were wounded, and while they were lying on the Veldt, Surgeon-Captain Martin-Leake refused water till every one else had been served.

His second Victoria Cross was awarded early in the First World War. Again briefly (too briefly for some contemporary critics horrified that the Victoria Cross could be awarded to the same person twice), *The London Gazette* (16 February 1916) recorded:

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty throughout the campaign, especially during the period 29th October to 8th November, 1914, near Zonnebeke, in rescuing, whilst exposed to constant fire, a large number of the wounded who were lying close to the enemy's trenches.

Noel Chavasse was awarded both of his Victoria Crosses for his medical services during the First World War. *The London Gazette* (16 October 1916) noted more fully:

During an attack he tended the wounded in the open all day, under heavy fire, frequently in view of the enemy. During the ensuing night he searched for wounded on the ground in front of the enemy's lines for four hours. Next day he took one stretcher-bearer to the advanced trenches, and under heavy shell fire carried an urgent case for 500 yards into safety, being wounded in the side by a shell splinter during the journey. The same night he took up a party of twenty volunteers, rescued three wounded men from a shell hole twenty-five yards from the enemy's trench, buried the bodies of two officers, and collected many identity discs, although fired on by bombs and machine guns. Altogether he saved the lives of some twenty badly wounded men, besides the ordinary cases which passed through his hands. His courage and self-sacrifice, were beyond praise.

The London Gazette (14 September 1917) also recorded at some length (perhaps to counter some of the earlier critics) the actions that led to a second award and his death in August 1917:

Early in the action he was severely wounded in the head while carrying a wounded man to his dressing station. He refused to leave his post and for two days not only continued to attend the cases brought to his first aid post, but repeatedly and under heavy fire went out to the firing line with stretcher parties to search for the wounded and dressed those lying out. During these searches he found a number of badly wounded men in the open and assisted to carry them in over heavy and difficult ground. He was practically without food during this period, worn with fatigue and faint from his wounds. By his extraordinary energy and inspiring example he was instrumental in succouring many men who must otherwise have succumbed under the bad weather conditions. On the morning of August 2nd he was again wounded seriously by a shell and died in hospital on August 4th.

Of course, these are stylised war reports designed to encourage bravery in others. In addition, in a class-conscious era, these reports may well have played down the moral actions of these two officers' subordinates who also risked their lives to rescue the wounded. Both of these features continued

in the two citations recorded in *The London Gazette* (14 October 1941 and 26 September 1945) for Charles Upham's astonishing military courage – mostly for 'single-handedly' destroying enemy positions but on one occasion, in the first citation, for his action 'when his Company withdrew from Maleme he helped to carry a wounded man out under fire, and together with another officer rallied more men together to carry other wounded men out.'

Yet, even when considerable allowance is made for these factors, remarkable evidence remains of extraordinarily selfless altruistic action on the part of both doctors (and on this one occasion, at least, of the third recipient). In the terms of the time their 'courage and self-sacrifice, were beyond praise.' There is also quite a sharp contrast between their actions (and those of their subordinates) and our cautious deliberations as members of a medical ethics subcommittee today.

How do we depict this contrast? Is it a contrast between the passionate and the calculating, between the emotional and the rational, or just between moral action and ethical deliberation? This book struggles with these questions and I am not going to offer a facile resolution, especially at this early stage. However, what I hope to persuade readers is that moral passion and rational ethical deliberation are not enemies. More than that, I hope to persuade readers that *moral passion often lurks behind, and is implicit within, many apparently rational ethical commitments and, conversely, that, while moral passion is a key component of truly selfless moral action, without rational ethical deliberation it can also be extremely dangerous.*

There is a balance here between moral passion and rational ethical deliberation [I use the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' interchangeably, deriving separately as they do from Latin and Greek] that was known to some of the ancient Greek philosophers, to Augustine and some contemporaries and to some medieval theologians, especially Aquinas, but that has been widely overlooked today. A generation ago Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) was a key factor in successfully challenging many of us to take the ancient language of virtue seriously. The time is ripe, I believe, to do the same with rationally constrained moral passion. A book on *Moral Passion and Christian Ethics* is surely long overdue.

Chapter 3 returns to Arthur Martin-Leake and Noel Chavasse. When I first thought of using them as examples of extraordinary altruism I knew nothing about their private ideological or religious commitments. Only subsequently did I discover biographies and letters that offer important clues about these. That will be for later. It is sufficient at this stage to note simply their extraordinary actions. One might readily guess that they were

both motivated by a strong sense of duty. That may have motivated Upham as well, but evidence that he resolutely refused in later life to buy anything made in Germany might suggest that enemy-hatred was also a factor shaping his military actions. It will be seen that Chavasse did in fact use the word ‘duty’ in his final letter to his fiancée just before he died. Yet ‘duty’ as defined in medical ethics today does not remotely depict their actions and perhaps Chavasse was simply being modest when he used it himself. Doctors today do have a duty to inform patients fully of treatment options, to respect their capacious refusals, to be trained properly and keep their knowledge up-to-date, not to be negligent, to respect patient confidentiality and so forth. What they do not have is a duty repeatedly to put their own lives at great risk for the sake of their patients. Even in a context such as the recent Ebola outbreak those brave health care workers who went to affected countries were strongly warned to put their own protection first before making any contact with infected patients. Repeatedly venturing out under heavy enemy fire, and despite being wounded in the process, to rescue others who had been wounded, goes well beyond concepts of medical duty either today or even those of a century ago.

Nor does the concept of moral obligation match the actions of Martin-Leake and Chavasse. Even then, no one obliged either of them to act in this way. On the contrary, they received their Victoria Crosses precisely because they acted well beyond the obligation required of doctors by society at the time (acting ‘beyond praise’), let alone that required of doctors today.

Moral passion, I believe, captures their actions rather better. The word compassion (in Latin) is clearly related to moral passion – terms explored together most recently by Susan Wessel in her important book *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (2016) – with both suggesting a strong emotionally felt response to victimhood. We feel passionately about things and people we care deeply about, especially if they are at risk. Many, thankfully, believe that we have a duty to bring up our children responsibly (as much as any of us can). However, once they have grown up we might then reasonably conclude that our duty is finished. Yet many of us find that we still care passionately if our children then succumb to drug addiction, make a mess of their sexual lives, or get sacked for incompetence at work. Being a good parent for us is not just about duty. It involves much more than that – not least com-*passion* in its literal (Latin) sense of suffering alongside our children.

Wessel shows at length that moral passion and compassion caused a degree of tension within early Christianity, despite their presence in the

gospels. Partly this was because of the lingering suspicion of passion expressed by some of the Greek and Roman philosophers and partly it was because it sat uncomfortably with the ascetic calm sought by early monastics:

Among such early Christians as Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa there was ... a tension between feeling emotions deeply and the Stoic ideal of emotional tranquility. They shared a certain anxiety about our emotional fluctuation and its role in the Christian life. The reasons for the tension lay only partly in the intellectual difficulty involved in combining Judeo-Christian commitments with pagan philosophy. Equanimity held the promise of composure, and even stamina, in the midst of suffering. It spoke to the virtue of steadfastness and to the practicalities at stake in ministering to the afflicted. Emotional engagement lay at the opposite end of the spectrum. Its logical consequence was compassion fatigue, a reality that none of the early Christians dismissed lightly. Even Gregory the Great, who was more sanguine than most about the advantages of a lively emotional life, acknowledged the danger when he said that grief should be measured. Augustine had similarly understood that the ideological commitment to equanimity might stop the wise man from intervening in the face of suffering. Not until the end of his life did he quiet his ambivalence toward affective engagement with suffering. (Wessel 2016, 203–204)

This slow coming-to-terms with passion can be seen clearly in *The City of God* that Augustine wrote towards the end of his life:

The Stoics, to be sure, are in the habit of extending their condemnation to compassion; but how much more honourable would it have been in the Stoic of our anecdote to have been ‘disturbed’ by compassion so as rescue someone, rather than by the fear of being shipwrecked ... What is compassion but a kind of fellow-feeling in our hearts for another’s misery, which compels us to come to his help by every means in our power? Now this emotion is the servant of reason, when compassion is shown without detriment to justice, when it is a matter of giving to the needy or of pardoning the repentant. (*City of God* 9.5, Bettenson 1947 translation)

When considering passionless meta-ethical accounts a sense that ethics or morality ‘involves much more than that’ will be one of the unspoken refrains throughout this book. It reflects my frustration with both secular and religious accounts that pay no attention either to moral passion or, negatively, to moral outrage. Six decades ago the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe was so frustrated with the thin accounts of ethics of her contemporaries (when compared with Aristotle) that she suggested, doubtless using deliberate irony, that: ‘the concepts of obligation and duty – *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say – of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of “ought,” ought to be jettisoned ... because

they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survive, and are harmful without it' (Anscombe 1958, 1). I wouldn't go that far, yet listening to more recent supposedly self-contained rational explanations of morality, I am often puzzled that anyone should find them remotely persuasive for truly selfless moral action. They seem especially inadequate to account for the actions of Martin-Leake and Chavasse.

In seeking to restore 'moral passion' to join the now firmly reinstalled 'virtue' (thanks largely to MacIntyre and, before him, Anscombe) in modern ethical discourse the Dominican Servais Pinckaers's small book *Passions and the Virtue* (2015) is particularly important. It was completed two months before his death in April 2008 and was first published in French and has only now become available in English. As befits a Dominican, he regarded Aquinas's understanding of moral passion as 'a model for us', in contrast to what he saw as the passionless accounts of the Stoics, Descartes and modern psychology – as did the Jesuit theologian Simon Harak in his earlier *Virtuous Passions* (1993) and Robert Miner, who had read Pinckaers's book in French, in his detailed study *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae 1a2ae 22–48* (2009):

In *De Veritate*, [Aquinas] makes a connection between the passions and the affective faculties, especially the senses. In the *Summa theologiae*, the study of passions becomes a veritable treatise comprising twenty-seven questions. After analysing the passions in general, he looks at the concupiscible passions: love, concupiscence or desire, delight or pleasure, sadness, and pain. Then he examines the irascible passions: hope, fear, boldness, and anger ... It is worth noting that Saint Thomas places this treatise in first position of the factors that contribute to moral action, even before the question of *habitus*, the virtues, the gifts, the beatitudes, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which will later be found in the treatises on the virtues in particular. (Pinckaers 2015, 2–3)

As much as I admire Aquinas, I do not claim to be a Thomist, so it is not incumbent on me to follow his subdivisions of concupiscible and irascible passions (or even to adopt the term 'concupiscible'). I do, however, find it helpful to make a distinction between positive and negative passions – as does Oliver O'Donovan (2014) to be explored later – and to see both as crucial to moral action, alongside inculcated moral virtues and prudential rationality. This does seem to be the position taken by both Samuel M. Powell, located in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, and Jean Porter, located in the Thomist-Catholic tradition. Powell argues that the 'impassioned life', as he terms it, involves an abiding tension between 'emotion' and 'rationality' (Powell 2016). Porter argues in her contribution to *New*

Studies in Christian Ethics, namely *Moral Action and Christian Ethics* (1995) to which the next chapter returns, that

The virtues of the appetites are not just desires to do good deeds, which are independently prescribed by prudence. Rather, they find expression in the individual's desires for the good, both in general terms, and in terms of her admiration and desire for the fitting, the noble, the decent, the praiseworthy, as these ideals have been inculcated in her by her upbringing. These desires, in turn, set the orientation of the whole person, her mind as well as her passions and her will. (Porter 1995, 153–154)

Pinckaers paid much more attention to the passions than Porter, seeing them as not just involved in moral action but actually as precipitating moral action. He also followed Aquinas in seeing the passions as differently appropriate to three stages of the moral life. The proper concern of beginners (childhood), he argued, is to learn to resist those passions, such as concupiscence, that are contrary to charity. The proper concern of those making moral progress (youth) is to see passions such as the passion of love as servants of virtue. And he expressed the proper concern of those approaching moral 'perfection' (maturity) as: 'Taken up by the love of God and transformed by the virtues, the passions then become like friends' (Pinckaers 2015, 4–5). In this final stage, charity has become, through grace, a 'spiritual instinct'. For Pinckaers the saint and the martyr, especially, exemplified this final stage: 'the martyr represents a particularly concrete, clear, and evocative form of the complete [self-]offering to Christ that is the basis of every authentically Christian spirituality' (Pinckaers 2016, 34).

In successive chapters Pinckaers clustered the passions, sometimes in opposite pairs, such as 'love and hate', and sometimes in continuities, such as 'delectation, pleasure, and joy'. However, it is his chapter on 'anger and virtue' that I will find particularly relevant to my concerns in Chapter 5. At the outset Pinckaers recognised the obvious problem with anger for ethicists:

There is something about anger that can make one angry. Indeed, many ethicists, both in philosophy and in theology, consider anger to be a fault, an illness of the soul, and therefore deny its capacity to contribute to virtuous living. Anger is one of the principle passions and shares their condition and is thereby considered to be contrary to reason. Is the ideal to live without anger, as without passion?

And he immediately added:

But what would virtue become if it were robbed of both energy and fire? (Pinckaers 2015, 74)

He then proceeded to look at Aristotle's disciples, who saw a positive moral role for anger; Seneca who did not; and Aquinas who again did, placing anger in the context of virtues controlled by rationality. It is worth quoting Aquinas directly here:

As the Stoics held that every passion of the soul is evil, they consequently held that every passion of the soul lessens the goodness of an act; since the admixture of evil either destroys good altogether, or it makes it to be less good. And this is true indeed, if by passions we understand none but the inordinate movements of the sensitive appetite, then it belongs to the perfection of man's good that his passions be moderated by reason. For since man's good is founded on reason at its root, that good will be all the more perfect, according as it extends to more things pertaining to man. Wherefore no one questions the fact that it belongs to the perfection of moral good, that the action of the outward members be controlled by the law of reason. Hence, since the sensitive appetite can obey reason ... it belongs to the perfection of moral or human good, that the passions themselves also should be controlled by reason. Accordingly just as it is better that man should both will good and do it in his external act; so also does it belong to the perfection of moral good, that man should be moved unto good, not only in respect of his will, but also of his sensitive appetite; according to Psalm 83.3: 'My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God': where by 'heart' we are to understand the intellectual appetite, and by 'flesh' the sensitive appetite. (*Summa Theologicae* I-II, q.24, a.3, Dominican 1920 translation)

The literary critic Terry Eagleton is not a paid-up Thomist any more than I am. However, he too finds Aquinas an important corrective to long-standing philosophical aversions to 'faith' and 'passion'. In his deeply challenging book *Culture and the Death of God* (2015) he writes about 'the spiritual vacuity of late capitalism' and sees a clue in Aquinas:

What rationalism from d'Alembert to Dawkins is loath to acknowledge is that human rationality is a corporeal one. We think as we do roughly because of the kind of bodies we have, as Thomas Aquinas noted. Reason is authentically rational only when it is rooted in what lies beyond itself. It must find its home in what is other than reason, which is not to say that it is inimical to it. Any form of reason that grasps itself purely in terms of ideas, and then fumbles for some less cerebral way in which to connect with the sensory world, is debilitated from the outset. (Eagleton 2015a, 203 and see also Eagleton 2015b, 300)

It will be seen later that Sarah Coakley's *The New Asceticism* (2015) makes a very similar point to Eagleton here. Both might also agree with the Thomist Patrick Clark at this point when he argues that

Aquinas, like Aristotle, assigns the passions their own proper role in the full perfection of the human person. These passions are subordinated to reason, but

they nevertheless emerge from inclinations that are prior to reason and as such direct themselves to goods upon which the operation of reason depends. (Clark 2015, 103)

Martha Nussbaum's celebrated study *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (2004) also makes considerable reference to Aristotle – albeit none at all to Aquinas (see Miner 2009, 4–5 and 97). She too sees the moral, and especially legal, importance of, as well as danger of, emotions such as anger, indignation, fear, grief and compassion – but, emphatically, not of shame or disgust:

I have frequently suggested that anger and indignation will be ... core sentiments because they react to harm or damage. A salient fact about the human being, from the point of view of liberalism, is its vulnerability to significant damage at the hands of others. Once again: not all instances of anger are reliable, based on correct views about what constitutes a significant damage, or whether such a damage has occurred. But it is a sentiment of the right *sort* on which to rely, once one evaluates critically all the concrete judgments contained within it. A liberal society, focused on the dignity, the self-development, and the freedom of action of the individual needs to inhibit harm; to the extent that anger tracks harm, it will be a reliable guide to lawmaking. (Nussbaum 2004, 345)

Similarly, 'compassion involves the thought that another person has suffered a significant hardship or loss, and it plays a prominent role in prompting helping behaviour that addresses these losses ... Yet compassion, like anger, can go wrong' (Nussbaum 2004, 346). In both instances, strong passions are important moral and legal stimulants to action that need to be evaluated critically and carefully. In contrast, she can see only a very limited private role for disgust and shame, regarding their social role in, say, punitive systems as 'deeply problematic'.

Eagleton is less impressed with basing such claims on 'a liberal society' than Nussbaum and adds, instead, a decidedly theological turn – asserting that postmodern thought is atheistic because it is suspicious of faith whether it is religious or not: 'It makes the mistake of supposing that all passionate conviction is incipiently dogmatic. Begin with a robust belief in goblins and you end up with the Gulag' (Eagleton 2015a, 192). He finds evidence for such a position in Nietzsche and – using irony himself – in late capitalism:

Conviction suggests a consistency of self which does not sit easily with the volatile, adaptive subject of advanced capitalism. Besides, too much doctrine is bad for consumption ... Given its pragmatic, utilitarian bent, capitalism, especially in its postindustrial incarnation, is an intrinsically faithless social order. Too much belief is neither necessary nor desirable for its operations. Beliefs are potentially

contentious affairs, which is good neither for business nor for political stability. They are also commercially superfluous. (Eagleton 2015a, 194–195)

As a result, he believes that postmodern society has a ‘spiritual vacuity’ that gives rise, paradoxically, to both secularism *and* to religious fundamentalism. He agrees with John Milbank that ‘agnosticism designed to ward off fanaticism appears now to foment it both directly and indirectly’ (Eagleton 2015a, 198).

You do not need to be a proponent of either Eagleton’s version of (increasingly theological) Marxism or Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy to see the difficulty involved in the marginalisation of faith and moral passion today. Samuel Fleischacker, for example, is an observant Jewish philosopher who is a proponent of neither Marxism nor Radical Orthodoxy. Using a version of Kant’s moral argument for theism he maintains that ‘We turn to religion because we seek a vision of the highest good that we can love’ (Fleischacker 2015, 91). He argues that assuming there is a God is no more arbitrary than assuming that there is no God. Like Kant, he does not believe that logical ‘proofs’ for the existence of God work, but in practice belief in God and divine revelation does make a difference, especially when we take a stance on what makes life worth living. He contends that

We inevitably take such a stance in the way we organize our lives, whatever we may think we are doing. Even the person who says “nothing really matters; one can do whatever one likes with one’s life,” thereby takes up a view of ultimate worth ... we use metaphysical claims of one sort or another to underwrite beliefs that life is made worthwhile by eros, art, politics, and the like.’ (Fleischacker 2015, 86)

Even if we conclude that it is science that makes life worth living we make, so Fleischacker argues, a metaphysical (and not a scientific) claim ... that is a *faith* claim. In the pages that follow I note quite a number of implicit faith claims made by secularists who explicitly eschew them. For once, here, John Milbank and I are at one. I also note the tentative faith claims made recently by Roger Scruton – which Terry Eagleton characteristically ridicules but which, in part at least, I rather admire.

Moral passion has not received the sort of attention in recent years, even within Christian ethics, that it deserves. Moral passion might be thought to be an essential feature of genuinely moral behaviour. After all, if some people lack moral passion, it might seem obvious that they will be less inclined than others to believe that some actions are deeply wrong and therefore should be opposed actively by them, especially if such opposition involves a serious cost to themselves. It might also seem obvious