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# The First Movements of the Sensitive Appetite: Aquinas in Context

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## Introduction

What today is often called the '*fomes peccati*' or 'tinder of sin' went by many names in the Middle Ages,[1] including '*languor naturae*', '*lex membrorum*', and, most commonly, '*primi motus*' or 'first movements'.[2] Among the Medieval theologians, the first movements are generally understood to be inordinate movements of the sensitive appetite which people experience because of the effects of original sin. One of the most common discussions about the first movements in the Middle Ages concerned whether or not they were in themselves sinful.[3] Thomas Aquinas, perhaps surprisingly, takes the position that the first movements are indeed sinful. Unfortunately, his treatment of this topic is quite brief, and if read alone, does not provide a sufficient understanding of why the first movements are in themselves sinful. However, if read in the context of the discussions on the first movements that preceded him, Aquinas's account becomes much more intelligible.

This paper will begin with a look at Aquinas's discussions of the first movements in order to show that it is necessary to interpret them

[1] Lombardo and Gondreau both discuss this topic under the heading of "*fomes peccati*"; Mark Johnson discusses it under the heading of "law of sin." See Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotions* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2011), 211-12; Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2009), 342-49; Mark Johnson, "St Thomas and the 'Law of Sin'," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévale* 67 (2000): 90-106.

[2] It seems that the Medieval theologians used these terms interchangeably, but tended to reserve '*fomes peccati*' for their discussions of the sinlessness of Jesus and Mary and '*primi motus*' for their discussions of sins that result from inordinate movements of the sensitive appetite.

[3] In his overview of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century discussions of the first movements, Lottin focuses on two questions: whether the first movements were in themselves sinful and, if so, why. See Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et III^e siècles*, tome II, pt. 1 (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1948), 493-589.

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in light of their historical context. It will then give an overview of the discussions that preceded Aquinas, in order to provide said context. Then, it will argue that Aquinas largely adopts a distinction from William of Auxerre, who drew a line between first first movements, which he considered not to be sinful, and second first movements, which he did consider to be sinful. Finally, in light of the above, it will revisit the Thomstic text and explain what Aquinas's adoption of Auxerre's position means for interpreting his position on whether or not the first movements are themselves sinful.

## The Thomistic Texts

There are five places in the Thomistic corpus where Aquinas explicitly takes up the question of whether or not the first movements of the sensitive appetite are sinful.[4] Among these, there are two – II *Sent.*, d. 24, q. 3, a. 2 and *De malo* q. 7, a. 6 – in which Aquinas clearly makes references to thinkers who preceded him. In both texts, he says that there were some thinkers who distinguished between "first first movements" (*motus primo primi*) and "second first movements" (*motus secundo primi*), but he does not specify of whom he speaks. As the text from the *De malo* is the more mature of the two and contains some more detail than does the text form the *Sentences*, this article will focus on the text from the *De malo*.

In *De malo,* q. 7, a. 6, Aquinas takes up the question of whether there can be venial sin in the human power of sensuality, which he answers in the affirmative and repeats several times in his replies to the objections. More precisely, he says that sin can be in the sensitive appetite when it "is moved in absence of the command of reason and will."[5] Upon hearing such a claim, the question that immediately comes to mind is how a movement of the sensitive appetite that is commanded neither by reason nor will could be sinful. As Aquinas clarified in the beginning of this article, sin pertains only to moral matters, which pertain to things that are "ordained and commanded by reason and will."[6] Sin, therefore, can only be in those parts of a human being that obey reason.

The next question to ask, then, is whether the sensitive appetite obeys reason. Aquinas answers in the affirmative, but says that this

[4] II *Sent*., d. 24, q. 3, a. 1-2; *De veritate*, q. 26, a. 5; *De malo* q. 7, a. 6; *Quodlibit* IV, q. 11, a. 1; ST, I-II, q. 74, a. 3. All Latin quotations will be taken from the Leonine Edition. All translations are my own. NB: Although Aquinas uses the term '*sensualitas*' at the heading of each of these questions, this is simply another term for the sensitive appetite. See *De veritate*, q. 26, a. 1.

[5] Ibid.: "*movetur absque imperio rationis et voluntatis.*"

[6] Ibid.: "*a ratione et voluntate ordinatus et imperatus*."

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is true only of *some* of the acts of the sensitive appetite. He does not clarify *which* of these acts can qualify as sins until his reply to the eighth objection, which for the purposes of this discussion is worth quoting in full:

> To the eighth it must be said that the sensitive appetite is moved by some apprehension, and since it is a power in a bodily organ, its movement can arise in two ways. First, [it can arise] from a bodily disposition. Second, from some apprehension. Now the disposition of the body is not subject to the command of reason, but all apprehension is subject to the command of reason. For reason can prohibit the use of some apprehensive power, especially in the absence of something sensible by touch, which sometimes cannot be removed. Therefore there is sin in sensuality, according as it can obey reason. The first movement of sensuality, which is from the disposition of the body, is not sin, and some call this the first first [movement]. And the second movement, which is excited by some apprehension, is sin. Now reason cannot avoid the first [kind] in any way, but it can avoid the second [kind] with respect to the individual [movements], but not with respect to all [movements]. For when a person turns his thought away from one thing, he may encounter another thing, from which there may arise an illicit movement.[7]

Here, Aquinas draws on the aforementioned distinction between first first movements and second first movements that was common in his time. He says that the first first movements arise from some bodily disposition that is outside of the control of reason. The second first movements arise from an apprehension that is at least somewhat subject to the command of reason. How exactly to understand this distinction is not clear. Consequently, neither is it clear how to determine which movements of the sensitive appetite are sinful and which are not. The other texts where he takes up this question are not of much help for solving this problem. However, when this text is situated within the historical context in which it was written, its meaning becomes much clearer. Thus, this paper will now turn to an overview of the Medieval discussions of the first movements.

[7] *De malo,* q. 7, a. 6, ad 8: "*Ad octavum dicendum, quod quia appetitus sensitivus movetur ab aliqua apprehensione, et tamen est virtus in organo corporali, dupliciter potest motus eius insurgere: uno modo ex corporis dispositione; alio modo ex aliqua apprehensione. Dispositio autem corporalis non subiacet imperio rationis; sed omnis apprehensio imperio rationis subiacet; potest enim ratio prohibere usum cuiuslibet apprehensivae potentiae, maxime in absentia sensibilis secundum tactum, quod quandoque removeri non potest. Quia ergo peccatum est in sensualitate, secundum quod potest obedire rationi; primus motus sensualitatis, qui est ex dispositione corporali, non est peccatum, et hunc appellant aliqui primo primum; secundus autem motus, qui excitatur ex aliqua apprehensione, est peccatum. Primum enim ratio nullo modo vitare potest; secundum autem vitare potest quantum ad singulos, non autem quantum ad omnes: quia dum avertit cogitationem suam ab uno, incurrit in aliud, ex quo potest insurgere motus illicitus*."

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## History of the Controversy over the First Movements

Peter Lombard was not the first Medieval theologian to discuss the first movements, but he was the most influential,[8] since his *Sentences*, with its discussion of whether or not the first movements could be sinful, became a standard textbook for later theologians. In his *Sentences*, Lombard bases his discussion on the sinfulness of the first movement on a passage from Augustine's *De Trinitate*. This section will begin with a brief exposition of the Augustinian text and Lombard's interpretation thereof. Then, it will discuss the developments that followed therefrom.

Amidst his psychological reflections in Book XII of *De Trinitate*, Augustine provides a reflection on the temptations that come from the sensitive appetite.[9] In doing so, he compares this temptation to the first temptation of Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. The man, he says, represents higher reason, and the woman, lower reason. The first has knowledge (*sapientia*) of eternal, unchangeable things. The latter has knowledge (*scientia*) of temporal, changeable things. The sensitive appetite, he says, is very close to lower reason, since the function of lower reason is to reason about corporal things that are sensed by the body and related to action. When it does this well, it does so in order to refer (*referre*) the good that it considers to the ultimate end (*summum bonum*). When it does this badly, it enjoys (*frui*) the good such that it comes to rest (*conquiescere*) in a false happiness.

Note that Augustine is here using his famous *uti-frui* distinction. Lower reason considers the good badly because it enjoys (*frui*) it – a temporal, changeable good – as if it were the ultimate end, when in fact it should refer this good to the ultimate end, which in *De doctrina christiana* he refers to as using (*uti*).[10] Accordingly, he says that when the sensitive appetite entices lower reason with a good, lower reason is tempted to enjoy the thing for itself, that is, as a private good instead of as a public good. This, he says, is like the serpent tempting Eve. If lower reason consents to this temptation, Augustine says that this is like eating of the forbidden tree. When this happens, lower reason delights (*delectare*) in the thought of the illicit good, but higher reason withholds its consent, restraining

[8] While Lottin begins his discussion of the first movements with Lombard, Knuuttila gives a brief overview of the theologians who preceded him. See Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 178-95.

[9] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ed. W.J. Mountain and Fr. Gloire, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, vol 50 (Turnholt: Brepolis, 1968), XII.12 (371-72). In the Latin, Augustine simply says '*appetitus*', but it is clear that he is not referring to the will, but rather to the lower appetite.

[10] *De doctrina christiana,* Book I, 4.4.

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the members of the body from sinning. If, however, higher reason gives its consent, then the person engages in the sinful action, which Augustine likens to Adam accepting the fruit from Eve and eating with her. At the end of this discussion, Augustine adds the possibility that the mind fails to throw away (*respuere*) the thought of carrying out an illicit action, and instead ponders gladly (*voluens libenter*) over it. When this happens, a person sins, but the sin is not as severe as it would be if he had actually carried out the action.

Peter Lombard's discussion of this text is largely a rehearsal of the Augustinian text, with a few minor changes in terminology and a few clarifying remarks.[11] For example, while Augustine had simply referred to the sensitive appetite as '*appetitus*', Lombard remarks that this appetite is '*sensualitas*', which man has in common with animals. And, while Augustine said that lower reason was close to this appetite, Lombard adds that higher reason is far from it. Such remarks as these follow logically and easily from the Augustinian text, and it would be hard to say that Lombard is reading his own thoughts into it.

However, two of Lombard's remarks seem alien to the original text. For one, while Augustine draws a distinction between the consent of higher reason and that of lower reason, Lombard makes a further distinction regarding the consent of lower reason. For Augustine, the consent of higher reason – according to which the person actually carries out the sinful action – is a severe sin. And if only lower reason consents – such that it delights in the thought of the sin – while higher reason withholds its consent and restrains the members of the body from carrying out the action, then there is a lesser sin. What Lombard adds is a distinction regarding the degree of the severity of this latter sin. He says that if the thought of the sin is quickly repelled, then the person is guilty of venial sin. If, however, the person reflects on the sin for a prolonged period of time, such that the person derives pleasure from thinking about the sin, then there is mortal sin.[12]

Secondly, Lombard adds to the Augustinian text another possibility for sin. He writes, "If the enticement of sin is held only in a sensitive movement, then the sin is venial, and even very light."[13] This claim is more surprising than the previous one, since nowhere in the Augustinian text did Augustine say anything about the movement of the

[11] Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libri distinctae*, 3rd ed., Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 4 (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), book II, d. XXIV, cc. 6-12 (445-60).

[12] *Sententiae*, book II, d. XXIV, c. 8 (445-456).

[13] *Sententiae.* II, d. 24, c. 8: "*Si in motu sensuali tantum peccati illecebra teneatur, veniale ac levissimum est peccatum*." (456).

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sensitive part of the soul being sinful itself.[14] Rather, his discussion focused on the operations of lower and higher reason and the relative severity of their respective operations.

It seems that the medieval scholars in Lombard's day found this claim that the initial movements of the sensitive appetite could be sinful to be no less surprising than we do, for it quickly became a major topic of discussion. How could such a movement of the sensitive part of the soul, one which clearly seems to be outside the control of reason, be sinful? Among those who came after Lombard, some contradicted him without much hesitation.[15] Others vehemently upheld his position, as they thought to do otherwise would be to contradict Augustine.[16] Finally, there were some who tried to pave a road between the two by drawing the aforementioned distinction between first first movements and second first movements. To add to the confusion, this terminological distinction was applied to two different conceptual distinctions. The first of these comes from Simon of Tournai, the second from William of Auxerre.

Simon of Tournai's discussion of the sinfulness of the first movements is found in his *Disputationes*.[17] "The first movement of sin," he says, "is said in two ways: the first movement toward sin, and the first sinful movement."[18] He further breaks down the first movements toward sin into the 'very first movement' and the 'first movement after the very first', which latter is "counted among sins."[19] To exemplify this distinction, he considers the titillation of the flesh. A person can experience titillation in his flesh without taking pleasure in it. This experience is called a sin, but only in the sense that it is a fault in human nature that is a punishment for original sin. A person is not guilty of sin for having experienced such titillation. If,

[14] Regarding this discrepancy, Lottin simply remarks that it is "*étranger à l'exposé d'Augustine*" and says that Lombard nowhere else defends this reading. Knuuttila explains why Lombard's comment about the sinfulness of the movement of the sensitive part is at odds with Augustine: Augustine distinguished between an "unavoidable initial stage of a movement and its continuation." The former is not sinful, the latter is. See Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, 496 and Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-83.

[15] E.g., Hugh of St-Cher thought it clear that the first movements were not voluntary and therefore could not be sinful. Roland of Cremona argued that temptations (which he understands the first movements to be) to which one does not consent are not voluntary and therefore not sinful. See Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, 527-28.

[16] See, e.g., St. Albert the Great, *Summa de Creaturis*, tract. IV, q. 69.

[17] Simon of Tournai, *Disputationes*, ed. Joseph Warichez, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, Études et Documents 12 (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1932), d. XLI, q. 1 (127-28).

[18] Ibid.: "*Motus primus peccati dicitur duplex: primus ad peccatum, vel primus in peccato*."

[19] Ibid,: "*Item, primus ad peccatum duplex: primus primitivus, et primus post primitivum in numero peccatorum.*"

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however, the movement is not restrained, and it proceeds so as to cause pleasure, even without consent to the illicit action, then the person is guilty of venial sin. Mortal sin enters the picture when a person consents to the pleasure.

For Tournai, then, the distinction between first first movements (the "very first movement") and second first movements ("the first movement after the very first") is based on the chronological stages of temptation. First, there is a first first movement that a person simply experiences without prior deliberation. When this happens, the person ought to repress the movement. If he does not, then the movement begins to cause pleasure in the person, at which point the movement becomes a second first movement. The first first movement, that is, the mere experience of a temptation, is not sinful. But if the person fails to repress this movement and allows it to advance to the next stage, he is guilty of venial sin.

The second distinction involving the terms first first movement and second first movement was proffered by William of Auxerre in his *Summa aurea*.[20] He begins with a definition of first movements, in which he makes it clear that they are sinful: "We say that first movement is sin, for the term 'first movement' is used to refer to that movement by which a man is moved voluntarily toward an illicit object before the judgment or deliberation of reason."[21] It seems at first, then, that Auxerre has fully adopted Lombard's position on the first movements: the first movements are sinful, and, oddly, they are all apparently voluntary. But in his reply to an objector who says that first movements are not voluntary, and therefore could not be sinful, Auxerre replies that a distinction must be made between the movements of the animal concupiscible power and the movement of the human concupiscible power. The movements of animal concupiscence, he says, are natural, and therefore involuntary. But the movements of human concupiscence are voluntary and therefore sinful. A movement of this latter kind occurs "when [a person] is moved before the judgment of reason to delight in a sensible thing."[22] He later says that the movements of animal concupiscence are first first movements and the movements of human concupiscence are second first movements.[23]

[20] William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea*, ed. Jean Ribaillier, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, 16-20 (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980-87), II.15.1-5 (vol. ii.2, 525-34).

[21] *Suma aurea* II, tract. XV, c. 1 (526): "*Dicimus quod primus motus est peccatum, quoniam primus motus dicitur ille quo homo movetur voluntarie ad illicitum ante iudicium sive deliberationem rationis*."

[22] *Suma aurea* II, tract. XV, c. 1 (527): "*quando movetur ante iudicium rationis ad delectandum in re sensibili*."

[23] *Summa aurea* II, tract. XV, c. 2, q. 3 (530-31).

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A bit later on, Auxerre considers the question of whether a first movement toward eating is sinful.[24] If the movement comes from the animal appetite, he says, it is not. But it if comes from the human appetite, it is. To exemplify what he means, he speaks of a satiated glutton "who sorrows because he wants to eat a good morsel [of food]."[25] Such a person clearly has no need for food, but he experiences sorrow anyway. Therefore, concludes Auxerre, such a movement cannot be from the animal appetite, but from the human. While this discussion of the first movements concerning food sheds some light on Auxerre's distinction between the animal and human powers of concupiscence – the former moves naturally and necessarily outside of the will's control and the latter requires some activity on the higher parts of the soul – it is still not clear exactly how to understand how the movements of human concupiscence differ from those of animal concupiscence.

Auxerre's discussion moves on to compare a first movement toward copulation with a first movement toward eating, which sheds light on the present problem. There is a difference, says Auxerre, between these first movements. A person can desire to eat in the absence of any apprehension. Therefore, this desire is in no way subject to the will. But the desire to copulate, he says, is moved by an apprehension and is thus subject to the will. Therefore, it is impossible for reason to refrain from the first movement toward eating, but it can refrain from the first movement toward copulation. However, Auxerre acknowledges that though the will has some control over apprehension, its control is not complete. When some carnal pleasure falls into the apprehensive and estimative powers, he says, animal concupiscence is moved by necessity, regardless of whether or not a person wills it to. Finally, he adds that reason cannot restrain the first movement toward eating because it pertains to the nutritive power and thus to the conservation of the individual, and is thus more natural than the first movement toward copulation, which pertains to the generative power and thus to the conservation of the species.

Now there are two more pieces of information that can be added to the understanding of Auxerre's distinction between human and animal concupiscence. First, animal concupiscence in man moves in the absence of an apprehension and human concupiscence follows an apprehension.[26] Second, animal concupiscence concerns only those

[24] *Summa aurea* II, tract. XV, c. 2, q. 2 (529-30).

[25] Ibid. (530): "*qui dolet quia non potest comedere bonum morsellum*."

[26] It is hard to imagine how a person could feel hungry in the absence of any apprehension, for the experience of hunger seems itself to be an apprehension. It seems, however, that Auxerre has a particular kind of apprehension in mind, since he speaks of estimation alongside apprehension. It seems clear that he is speaking of an apprehension of the internal senses, which is cognitively connected to the estimative power and thus has

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things that are natural to man according to his substance. Human concupiscence concerns a broader array of objects.

To sum up, Auxerre makes sense out of Lombard's claim that all first movements are sinful by drawing a distinction between animal concupiscence and human concupiscence. The former movements do not follow from an apprehension or estimation and are therefore in no way rational. Rather, they move by necessity and, as such, they do not make a person who suffers from them to be guilty of sin. Furthermore, they concern those things that are natural to man according to his substance, such as food. On the other hand, the movements of human concupiscence follow an apprehension and an estimation and are therefore voluntary to some degree. A person, for example, may sometimes be taken by surprise and apprehends something which causes him to experience a first movement. Such a movement, insists Auxerre, is nevertheless voluntary in the sense that it could have been avoided if, for example, he "had been thinking about God and repenting of his sins."[27] Since the first movements are avoidable in general, although not in particular, Auxerre considers this limited degree of voluntariness to suffice for all such first movements to be considered sinful.

As reported in Lottin,[28] those Scholastics who did not outright contradict Lombard or did not absolutely uphold his position, but rather tried to pave a middle ground between them, made use of one of either Tournai's or Auxerre's ways of distinguishing between first first movements and second first movements. To be clear on this distinction, consider a first movement toward eating. If asked whether a first movement toward eating were sinful, Tournai would reply that it depends whether the first movement caused pleasure or not. The first first movement, he would say, by which a person experiences a sudden desire for an illicit object, is not sinful as long as the person derives no pleasure from it. But if the movement is strong such that the person cannot resist it, or if the person allows it to advance such that it begins to cause pleasure, then it is a sinful, second first movement. In response to the same question, Auxerre would reply that the sinfulness of the first movement depends on whether it were caused by animal sensuality, in which case it would be a first first movement, or by human sensuality, in which case it would be a second first movement. The first kind arises from natural causes that are beyond a person's control and are therefore in no way sinful. The

some participation in reason and entails some evaluation of the apprehended object. The animal concupiscible power, then, must respond to some more basic apprehension of the external senses alone.

[27] *Summa aurea*, II, tract. XV, c. 1 (526): "*si cogitasset de Deo et penituisset de peccatis suis*."

[28] 493-589. See also Knuuttila 178-95.

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second kind arises from apprehension and estimation, over which a person does have some rational control, and therefore are sinful. Thus, Tournai's distinction is indexed by whether or not the first movement causes pleasure and Auxerre's distinction is indexed by the underlying psychological mechanism that gave rise to the first movement.

## Revisiting Thomas

Here again is the text from *De malo* in which Aquinas makes reference to some scholars who had distinguished between first and second first movements:

> To the eighth it must be said that the sensitive appetite is moved by some apprehension, and since it is a power in a bodily organ, its movement can arise in two ways. First, [it can arise] from a bodily disposition. Second, from some apprehension. Now the disposition of the body is not subject to the command of reason, but all apprehension is subject to the command of reason. For reason can prohibit the use of some apprehensive power, especially in the absence of something sensible by touch, which sometimes cannot be removed. Therefore there is sin in sensuality, according as it can obey reason. The first movement of sensuality, which is from the disposition of the body, is not sin, and some call this the first first [movement]. And the second movement, which is excited by some apprehension, is sin. Now reason cannot avoid the first [kind] in any way, but it can avoid the second [kind] with respect to the individual [movements], but not with respect to all [movements]. For when a person turns his thought away from one thing, he may encounter another thing, from which there may arise an illicit movement.[29]

When Aquinas here considers the distinction between first first movements and second first movements, he does so in the context of discussing the difference between movements that arise from a bodily disposition and those that arise from an apprehension. The first cannot be avoided at all and therefore are in no way sinful. The second

[29] *De malo* q. 7, a. 6, ad 8: "*Ad octavum dicendum, quod quia appetitus sensitivus movetur ab aliqua apprehensione, et tamen est virtus in organo corporali, dupliciter potest motus eius insurgere: uno modo ex corporis dispositione; alio modo ex aliqua apprehensione. Dispositio autem corporalis non subiacet imperio rationis; sed omnis apprehensio imperio rationis subiacet; potest enim ratio prohibere usum cuiuslibet apprehensivae potentiae, maxime in absentia sensibilis secundum tactum, quod quandoque removeri non potest. Quia ergo peccatum est in sensualitate, secundum quod potest obedire rationi; primus motus sensualitatis, qui est ex dispositione corporali, non est peccatum, et hunc appellant aliqui primo primum; secundus autem motus, qui excitatur ex aliqua apprehensione, est peccatum. Primum enim ratio nullo modo vitare potest; secundum autem vitare potest quantum ad singulos, non autem quantum ad omnes: quia dum avertit cogitationem suam ab uno, incurrit in aliud, ex quo potest insurgere motus illicitus*."

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can be avoided, but only insofar as reason has control over apprehension. And despite the fact that reason does not have full control over apprehension, the fact that it has some control is enough for him to say that all the movements that arise from an apprehension are in some way voluntary.[30] There is no mention of initial movements to or form which one can give or withhold one's consent. Therefore, it is clear that Aquinas's reference to those who distinguish between first and second first movements is to Auxerre's school of thought and not to Tournai's.

But does this mean that Aquinas adopts the rest of Auxerre's view? Namely, does Aquinas also adopt the division of sensuality into two different kinds, one human and one animal? He makes no explicit mention of a twofold sensuality in this text, nor does he in any of the other places where he discusses the sinfulness of the movements of sensuality.[31] In ST, I-II, q. 74, a. 3, he even gives a comparison of sensuality in man and sensuality in animals in the reply to the first objection. There, he says that sensuality is common to both man and to animals, but adds that in man sensuality is subject to reason since man has the cogitative and memorative powers, by which reason can influence the movements of the sensitive appetite. There is no mention of another kind of sensuality that escapes the grasp of reason.

How then can Aquinas's apparent adoption of Auxerre's distinction in the *De malo* be reconciled with his silence elsewhere? Despite his not making a distinction between two different kinds of sensuality in his discussion of the first movements, Aquinas does make a similar distinction in his discussion of concupiscence in ST, I-II, q. 30. Aquinas says in the third article that there are two kinds of concupiscence. The first kind is for a thing that is desirable (*delectabilis*) because it is fitting (*conveniens*) to the nature of the animal. Food and drink are his examples of such things. On the other hand, a thing can be desirable because it is fitting (*conveniens*) to the animal according to an apprehension (*secundum apprehensionem*). When this happens, a person takes pleasure (*delectatur*) in the apprehended good.

Moving along, Aquinas dubs the first kind of concupiscence "natural" (*naturalis*), which he says is common to men and to animals, since both encounter things that please them due to their fittingness with their nature, for which reason he also approves of Aristotle's calling them "necessary" (*necessaria*).[32] The second kind of concupiscence is proper to man since man can devise (*excogitare*)

[30] This point is particularly clear in *De veritatie*, q. 26, a. 5, ad 5. There, Aquinas says that the first movements of sensuality are sinful even though they precede the judgment of reason because they can be subject to reason and therefore have the *ratio* of sin.

[31] Again: II *Sent*., d. 24, q. 3, a. 1-2; *De veritate*, q. 26, a. 5; *Quodlibit* IV, q. 11, a. 1; ST, I-II, q. 74, a. 3.

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. III, ch. 11.

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something as good and suitable, outside of nature's requirements. Accordingly, he adds, Aristotle called the first kind 'irrational' and the latter kind 'rational'.

In the reply to the first objection, Aquinas clarifies that a particular thing can be the object of either the natural appetite or the animal appetite, based on how it is apprehended.[33] That is, a thing can be desired with the natural appetite, and then once it is apprehended as good, it can also be desired with the animal appetite. In the reply to the second objection, Aquinas says that the distinction between natural and non-natural concupiscence corresponds to a difference in apprehension. Things desired by natural concupiscence are apprehended as fitting by an "absolute apprehension" (*absoluta apprehensione*), which Aquinas says is also called irrational by Aristotle. On the other hand, something can be apprehended "with deliberation," (*cum deliberatione*) which causes non-natural concupiscence, which Aristotle calls rational.[34]

Now it is clear that Aquinas does indeed make use of the same distinction as Auxerre, but it is also clear that he does not use it in the same way. For Auxerre, the distinction was in sensuality, that is, in the sensitive appetite itself. Aquinas, however, does not make a distinction between different kinds of appetite, but between different movements of the same appetite that correspond to different kinds of apprehension. That is, for both philosophers, a person's basic desire to eat is natural, non-rational, necessary, and will arise whether a person deliberates about it or not. For Auxerre, this is because a person is desiring the thing with his animal appetite. For Aquinas, this is because these kinds of things are apprehended with an "absolute apprehension" instead of being apprehended "with deliberation."

What exactly is the character of this absolute apprehension? It is hard to say, because Aquinas does not go into much detail. The clearest thing that can be derived from the above discussion is that absolute apprehension cannot involve deliberation. It also pertains to

[33] A point of clarification. Infelicitously, Aquinas and Auxerre are using different terms to refer to similar concepts. For Aquinas, there are three kinds of appetite in man: natural, animal, and rational. The first pertains to bodily operations such as growth, digestion, generation, and the like. The second has a cognitive component, as when a person apprehends an apple with his senses, judges it with his particular reason to be good to eat, and desires it with concupiscence. The third pertains to things that are proper to man, such as to know and love God. Since appetite follows apprehension, each kind of appetite corresponds to a different kind of apprehension. The natural appetite follows the absolute apprehension that is discussed in this text. The animal appetite follows the apprehension of the interior senses, which can judge a particular thing to be desirable or not. The rational appetite follows the apprehension of the intellect. What Aquinas and Auxerre have in mind are the first two categories, but Aquinas here calls them 'natural' and 'animal', while Auxerre calls the first kind 'animal' and the second kind 'human'.

[34] For Aristotle's discussion of 'rational' and 'irrational' concupiscences, see *Rhetoric*, bk. 1, pt. 11.

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things that are fitting to man according to his animal nature, such as to eat and to drink. Finally, it is a mode of apprehension that is characteristic of animals.

The few other places where Aquinas uses this term provide some more information. In ST, I-II, q. 16, a. 2, Aquinas speaks of absolute appetition in conjunction with absolute apprehension. Absolute appetition occurs when the appetite moves toward and appetible good simply because the good is good, and not because it is good in relation to something else. While a person can reason to see the goodness of an object in relation to something else (in this case, the object is seen as good because it is useful for achieving some end), a person can also apprehend that an object is simply good, which does not require reasoning. This simple apprehension is what Aquinas calls absolute apprehension.

In II-II, q. 57, a. 3, Aquinas uses the term absolute to describe a kind of commensurateness (*commensuratum*) in a discussion of natural rights. A male, for example, has the *ratio* of being commensurate with a female so as to beget offspring with her. But a thing can be commensurate with another according to something that is consequent from it, such as private property. There is nothing, explains Aquinas, about a piece of land that makes it fitting for ownership, except that it can be used to grow crops. Aquinas then speaks of absolute apprehension as being common to both man and animals, which means that natural rights pertain to both of them. Man, however, can reason about things and see that they are good not in themselves, but because something can come from them. Thus, it is by absolute apprehension that a person perceives that a thing is good for him because it is commensurate with his nature, and not because he can make some use of it, which would require reason. Both animals and man, then, perceive those things that are commensurate with their nature as good by absolute apprehension.

So then, in addition to being natural, necessary, non-rational, and independent of deliberation, it can be added that the objects of absolute apprehension are also seen as good in themselves because they are commensurate with the a person's nature, not because they are good due to their suitability for some other purpose.

To sum up, the first first movements of the sensitive appetite arise due to absolute apprehension, which has as its objects things that are good in themselves because they are commensurate with a person's nature. The second first movements arise from a rational kind of apprehension, which has as its objects things that are judged to be good because of their fittingness for some other purpose. From this, it is clear why the first first movements are not sinful; reason has no control over them. But reason does have some control over the second first movements, since they are in some way rational. What exactly is it that makes them rational?

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Aquinas provides an answer to this question in his final discussion on whether the movements of the sensitive appetite are sinful in ST, I-II, q. 77. In article 5, he draws on the above-described distinction between natural and animal concupiscence. The objects of animal concupiscence are desired not because a person needs them for sustenance, but because of "an apprehension of the imagination or of some similar apprehension,"[35] such as money or ornate clothing. This sort of apprehension thus depends on the operation of the interior senses. Aquinas clarifies in ST, I-II, q. 17, a. 7 that the interior senses can move the sensitive appetite and, since these senses are somewhat under the command of reason,[36] reason has some control over the sensitive appetite through them. Sometimes, he says, the sensitive appetite moves suddenly because of an apprehension of the imagination. If this movement is toward an illicit object, then it would be a second first movement. Reason, says Aquinas, cannot always prevent such movements, but it can prevent them when it foresees them. Thus, this sort of apprehension is called rational inasmuch as it can be influenced by reason and, for this same reason, a person can be responsible for it.

## Conclusion

Finally, what does all of this mean for Aquinas's position on the first movements? In the *De malo* text, Aquinas had said that all first movements were sinful, but he specified that by this he meant to exclude those movements that follow a bodily disposition, which some had called first first movements. It was shown above that he is here referring to the school of thought that originated with William of Auxerre, who distinguished between animal and human concupiscible powers in man. By the former, a person desires without deliberation things that are natural to him. By the latter, he desires things that he apprehends and judges to be good. It was then shown that Aquinas adopts the distinction, but does not divide the sensitive appetite into two parts; rather, he distinguishes between two different kinds of apprehension by which the sensitive appetite can be moved. The first, called natural, is common to man and animals. By it, a person desires things that are natural to him, fitting to his nature as such. This kind of desire occurs in man by necessity, that is, without deliberation, meaning that he has no volitional control over it, for which reason this kind of apprehension is called irrational. On the other hand, rational apprehension is proper to man. By this apprehension, a man

[35] ST, I-II, q. 77, a. 5: "*apprehensionem imaginationis, aut alicuius huiusmodi acceptionis.*"

[36] For more detail, see ST, I, q. 78, a. 4.

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can desire something not as suitable in itself, but as suitable for some further purpose. Further, since it is dependent on the kind of apprehension that has some degree of rationality, it is to some degree volitional and thus the movements that it causes can be sinful. In his comment in the *De malo* text that the first first movements were not sinful, Aquinas meant to exclude movements that arise from the irrational kind of apprehension. Those movements that arise from the rational kind of apprehension, however, can be sinful.

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