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Pseudo-passions: Needless Categorization or Insightful Distinction?

Leonard Ferry

1. Introduction

It will come as no surprise that Aquinas has had both boosters and knockers among philosophers who have undertaken to account for the emotions. Anthony Kenny, in *Action, Emotion, and Will*, refers to Aquinas' positions on the embodied nature and intentionality of the passions as sharply contrasting with the Cartesian picture of the emotions against which he positions himself in that early work.[1] In an overtly critical vein, Robert Solomon charges Aquinas with distinguishing between reason and passion on the basis of "an archaic 'faculty' psychology of the human soul."[2] Solomon continues his characterization of this tradition: "Reason is that part of the soul that is most our own, the only part of the soul that is completely under our control. The passions, however, belong to that part of the soul that is inherited from the animals, an 'inferior' faculty that must be mastered."[3] It may come

[1] Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 16.

[2] Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions/Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 11.

[3] Although Solomon's account is insufficiently sophisticated, which is no doubt a consequence of its polemical purpose, it is certainly true that Aquinas (a) sees the passions as something shared by human and non-human animals and (b) treats reason as something in the human composite that approaches the divine. Aquinas doesn't hold, however, that the passions can be easily dominated insofar as they exercise a limited independence from and resistance to the power of reason. Aquinas makes this point by contrasting the types of control that are possible over the body and over the sensitive appetite by drawing out a political analogy: "For a power is called despotic whereby a man rules his slaves, who have not the right to resist in any way the orders of the one that commands them, since they have nothing of their own. But that power is called politic and royal by which a man rules over free subjects, who, though subject to the government of the ruler, have nevertheless something of their own, by reason of which they can resist the orders of him who commands. And so, the soul is said to rule the body by a despotic power, because the members of the body cannot in any way resist the sway of the soul, but at the soul's command both hand and foot, and whatever member is naturally moved by voluntary movement, are moved at once. But the intellect or reason is said to rule the irascible and concupiscible by a politic power: because the sensitive appetite

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as a surprise, however, to find the following claim made on behalf of Aquinas: "Aquinas' work on the passions constitutes no small part of the background against which both early modern discussions of the passions and recent talk about the emotions must be understood."[4]

I shall not attempt to defend quite so bold a claim. Instead, I shall focus on an innovation in Aquinas' theory of emotion that is too often unremarked. In addition to the passions of the sensitive appetite, Aquinas holds that there are acts of the rational appetite or will that are similar to but distinct from the passions proper. What leads Aquinas to this seeming duplication of appetitive acts? Does the distinction that he draws between passions and pseudo-passions generate genuine insight or a needless multiplication of categories? I begin by articulating the distinction. I then turn to consider two competing readings of the distinction, one positive and one negative. Unfortunately, I fear that both positions manage to obscure Aquinas' philosophical psychology. So I try to indicate where the conversation has gone wrong.

Before I turn to consider the pseudo-passions, let me indicate how Aquinas defines the passions of the sensitive appetite by means of a single example. Like all acts of the sensitive appetite, sorrow requires some apprehension, which, in the case of sorrow, is produced by the interior sense powers (ST I-II 35, 2).[5] Following Aristotle, Aquinas derives the species of a passion from its object: in the case of sorrow the object of the passion is a "present evil"(35, 3). In sum, sorrow is a movement of the sensitive appetite that follows the apprehension of a present evil by the interior sense powers.

2. Pseudo-passions: Are there any? What are they?

In the philosophical psychology of Aquinas, there are, according to Peter King, "analogues to the passions pertaining to the purely intellective part of the soul."[6] King names these analogues of the passions *pseudopassions*, and he describes them thus: "unlike the passions, [pseudo-

has something of its own, by virtue whereof it can resist the commands of reason. For the sensitive appetite is naturally moved, not only by the estimative power in other animals, and in man by the cogitative power which the universal reason guides, but also by the imagination and sense. Whence it is that we experience that the irascible and concupiscible powers do resist reason, inasmuch as we sense or imagine something pleasant, which reason forbids, or unpleasant, which reason commands"(ST I 81, 3*ad*2).

[4] Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

[5] Aquinas reminds us in the first article of this question that "every appetitive movement or inclination consequent to apprehension, belongs to the intellective or sensitive appetite: since the inclination of the natural appetite is not consequent to an apprehension of the subject of that appetite"(ST I-II 35, 1).

[6] Peter King, "Aquinas on the Passions," in *Thomas Aquinas/Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 378, n. 7. The essay was

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passions] do not involve any somatic reactions or indeed any material basis at all. They are located in the intellective appetite as rational acts of will." Examples of pseudo-passions, furnished by King, include such things as the "*amor intellectualis Dei*," "the dispassionate drive to destroy something evil," and "the desire to stop smoking," though the last is, King writes, "typically a pale pseudopassion."

Aquinas never uses the expression *pseudopassion*; indeed, as far as I know, he never provides a name for the category of rational appetitive phenomena to which King applies the name, but there can be no doubt that Aquinas intends to distinguish between *passions-properly-speaking* and *passions-metaphorically-speaking* – that is, movements of the sensitive appetite and movements of the rational appetite, respectively – to both of which reference can be made by using the same term analogically. Early in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas introduces a distinction between passions of the sensitive appetite and pseudo-passions in order to account for the apparent attribution of the former to God:

> Some things are said of God in their strict sense {*proprie*}; others by metaphor {*secundum metaphoram*} . . . When certain human passions are predicated of the Godhead metaphorically {*metaphorice*}, this is done because of a likeness in the effect {*secundum similitudinem effectus*}. Hence a thing that is in us a sign of some passion, is signified metaphorically in God under the name of that passion.[7]

Anger is not, therefore, properly predicated of God because "in its primary meaning it includes passion," though we may in a figurative manner refer to the punishments distributed by God as signifying anger. When Aquinas says that anger includes passion, he means to identify its material or embodied character, the character that assigns it to the sensitive appetite. *Passions-metaphorically-speaking*, or pseudo-passions, are not embodied, and as such they are attributable to beings without sensitive appetites, like God and the angels. Aquinas also believes that pseudo-passions are attributable to human beings, specifically to their rational appetite or will:

> Love, concupiscence, and the like can be understood in two ways. Sometimes they are taken as passions {*passiones*} – arising, that is, with a certain commotion of the soul. And thus they are commonly understood, and in this sense they are only in the sensitive appetite. They may, however, be taken in another way, as far as they are simple affections {*simplicem affectum*} without passion or commotion of the soul {*absque*

originally published in *Aquinas' Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Scott Macdonald and Eleonore Stump (Cornell University Press, 1999).

[7] Unless otherwise stated, the translation used is the *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in five volumes (Christian Classics, reprinting in 1981 of the revised edition issued by Benziger Brothers in 1948), ST I 19, 11.

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> *passione vel animi concitatione*}, and thus they are acts of the will. (ST I 82, 5*ad*1).

As it is a necessary condition of the passions of the sensitive appetite that they be accompanied by a somatic response,[8] so it appears to be a necessary condition of the pseudo-passions that they be free of a somatic response. So too, just as the passions-properly-speaking follow a sensitive apprehension of their object – a "present evil" in the case of sorrow, for example – we may infer that the pseudo-passions of the rational appetite will follow a rational apprehension. What is undeniable is that Aquinas treats the two types of passion as distinct from one another: "love consists in a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object, it is evident that love is a passion: properly so called, according as it is in the concupiscible faculty; in a wider and extended sense, according as it is in the will"(ST I-II 26, 2). And chief among the reasons for keeping them separate is the distinctiveness of their motive principles: "The intellectual appetite . . . tends to ['individual things'] as standing under the universal; as when it desires something because it is good. Wherefore the Philosopher says (*Rhetoric* ii. 4) that hatred can regard a universal, as when *we hate every kind of thief*. In the same way by the intellectual appetite we may desire the immaterial good, which is not apprehended by sense, such as knowledge, virtue, and such-like"(ST I 80, 2*ad*2).

Aquinas deals explicitly with these issues in the opening question of his treatment of the passions in the *prima pars secundae*. Question twenty-two is divided into three articles, in each of which Aquinas narrows in on the location of the passions. The first article begins by observing that the passions-properly-speaking cannot be said to be in the soul except in an "accidental" manner, though it is true that there are passive powers in the soul, such as understanding. The second article locates the passions in the appetitive rather than the apprehensive power. The third article locates the passions in the sensitive rather than the rational appetite. Consider the argument that Aquinas constructs against his claim:

(1) Joy is a passion.

(2) Joy is in the intellectual appetite.

(3) Passion is in the intellectual appetite.

The proof of the middle premise is the predication of joy of God and the angels. Since both lack a sensitive appetite, to be able to properly predicate joy and love of God and the angels entails that these passions

[8] See ST I-II 22, 3.

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be located in the intellectual appetite.[9] In his response, Aquinas accepts the predication – in fact, he extends the predication of this type of joy, that is, the pseudo-passion joy, to the rational appetite of human beings. What Aquinas does is deny that joy and love, when attributed to the intellectual appetite as "simple acts of the will" {*simplicem actum voluntatis*}, are properly called passions. They have like effects {*similitudine effectus*} but they are not complete insofar as they lack (a) the bodily alteration required of a passion and (b) the dependence on sense apprehension (ST I-II 22, 3*ad*3).[10]

3. A missed opportunity: Miner's minor engagement with Roberts

Several years ago Robert Roberts attacked Aquinas for relegating the emotions to the sensitive appetite. Roberts sought to defend the rationality of the emotions on "broadly Thomistic lines" without the limiting perspective that Aquinas adopts with respect to the placing of the passions.[11] Where Aquinas goes wrong seems to be in displacing rationality in accounts of the passions in order to preserve the symmetry between human and non-human animal experiences of passion-like effects. At a glance, it makes as much sense to say that a dog fears an abusive master as it does to say that a human being fears an aggressive dog. It may be worth asking, however, whether or not a dog truly fears an *abusive* master – that is, to what extent, if any, does it make sense to use the adverb in characterizing the fear of the dog. If non-human animal emotions are restricted to the sensitive appetite and as such dependent on sensitive forms of apprehension, then it may not make sense after all to discuss human and non-human fear in the same way. At least, that appears to be Roberts' objection to Aquinas' project, though his example is not one of adverbial description but the fear of fear itself: "Non-human animals cannot fear complex, concept-dependent objects like fear or the loss of reputation because, as Thomas would express it, they have no intellect. He thinks it follows that, since the passions belong to the sensory appetite, instances of fear that do not take sense-objects are therefore not passions"(291). For Roberts this amounts to putting the cart before the horse: since the passions do take conceptually rich objects, and since non-human animals are, according to Aquinas, incapable of apprehend-

[9] Keep in mind that Aquinas has already, in the preceding article, established that the passions belong to appetite rather than apprehension.

[10] Interestingly, Aquinas refers to the following passage from Augustine's *City of God* (ix.5) in support of his position: "The holy angels feel no anger while they punish . . . , no fellow-feeling with misery while they relieve the unhappy: and yet ordinary human speech is wont to ascribe to them also these passions by name, because, although they have none of our weakness, their acts bear a certain resemblance to ours."

[11] Robert C. Roberts, "Thomas Aquinas on the Morality of Emotions," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, 3 (July 1992): 287.

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ing such objects, it is better to conclude that non-human animals do not experience passions. Aquinas goes awry because he "seems motivated less by the phenomena than by the Aristotelian faculty psychology." Instead, Aquinas should have concluded that at least some passions do not belong to the sensory appetite.[12]

Roberts seems to confuse several issues, most of which I cannot enter into. But let me mention some of them. He conflates sensitive appetite with natural appetite, treating as a model of the former the latter's directionality towards food and sex. This matters because it leads him to claim that Aquinas treats the passions as non-rational. Aquinas can then, according to Roberts, treat the passions as shared with non-human animals, because "animals that cannot reason or have a concept of the purpose of their life do have such appetites"(289). On the one hand, one might retort that Roberts is imposing a very high threshold for rationality insofar as he seems to require it to have a penetratingly future-directed orientation – rationality as requiring life-purposiveness.[13] No non-human animals are likely to meet such a threshold, which is fine if we are willing to sever the connections between human and non-human passion-like experiences. This is precisely Roberts' conclusion: "The implication of what I am saying is that most of the emotions that humans experience are never experienced by animals, and do not, therefore, belong to a non-rational appetite"(292).[14] On the other hand, it is possible that Roberts doesn't give sufficient credit to non-human animals, who, for Aquinas, are capable of forming perceptual judgments via the estimative power about present and future goods and evils. Such judgments won't pass the threshold for rationality that Roberts seems to require. Moreover, Roberts seems to reduce sense apprehension to the apprehension of the exterior senses (289), which neglects the rich interiority of the sense powers of apprehension that Aquinas describes.[15] Take the following as examples: "[a person angry with Ronald Reagan] is mad at him for a reason that cannot be represented to the senses"(290);

[12] I have pointed out that in one sense Aquinas does this in the case of the pseudo-passions, but it is evident that Roberts does not have a limited class of experiences that are similar to the passions in mind. He thinks that passions properly speaking are inadequately accounted for by Aquinas' theory.

[13] "The emotion itself is typically determined by concepts available only via the intellect. The standard emotions of human beings are basically rational, not just derivatively, but intrinsically"(294).

[14] See also: "The notion of an emotion (e.g. an episode of anger) "intrinsically considered," which human beings have in common with animals that are incapable of possessing the concepts of justice and desert, and which, because of its independence of reason, does not take moral predicates, is a fiction. It is a fiction because (as Aquinas himself holds) emotions are identified by their objects and the objects of anger (a person who has done me an injustice, a punishment that he deserves) are accessible only through reason"(293).

[15] Indeed, this is his first objection to Aquinas' theory: "My first objection to assimilating emotions to movements of the sensory appetite was that the objects of emotions are not always represented sensorily or in sensory-like images"(293).

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"It seems clear that people can fear loss of their reputation, but surely loss of one's reputation is not an object that can, even in principle, be presented to the senses"(291); and "Since what is agreeable about the object of audacia is not (typically at any rate) something that can be grasped with the senses, it looks as though daring involves a perception that is not merely sense perception, but is determined by reason"(292). It isn't at all clear to me that one would have to be able to represent such a judgment to the senses on Aquinas' account for it to elicit a passion. Aquinas doesn't hold, for example, that the mere sound that one hears is sufficient to cause fear; rather that sound must be interpreted in such a way as to represent a threat (a snarling dog, say). Yet Aquinas does think that such perceptual judgements belong to the sensory apprehensive powers, particularly the cogitative power or particular reason in human beings.

I said "seems" above because Roberts does acknowledge that "particular reason" plays some role in the theory of emotions, and so he cannot mean wholly to reduce matters to mere exterior sense apprehension. He is aware of the fact that Aquinas conceives of the perceptual judgments made by non-human animals as being determined by the *vis estimativa*, a power weaker than the particular reason but similar thereto. But he insists that this is simply not adequate to account for the "logic" that makes Aquinas' theory of emotion worth consideration: "As it stands, it seems quite clear that Aquinas's account does not justify saying that non-rational creatures have hope. For hope is not a pattern of behavioural response to sense-impressions, but an intentional state with a logic . . . "(294).[16]

More recently, Robert Miner has challenged Roberts' reading of Aquinas in part. Like King, Miner sees that Aquinas does have this other category to deal with the passions, and he seems to think that Roberts need only accept that the passions are in the sensitive appetite and the pseudo-passions in the rational appetite (36, n.6). Miner makes the following concession: "Were [Aquinas] to argue that all emotional phenomena are acts of the sensitive appetite, Roberts's critique would hit its target"(36). It is clear that for Miner the division of passions and pseudo-passions provides a sufficient answer to the alleged critique. There are obvious problems with such a retort, however. Roberts is aware of the division, but he finds it fallacious. Furthermore, Roberts' critique is really an effort to elevate all emotional phenomena to the plane of the intellective appetite, if any appetite at all, because all such human phenomena bear the unmistakable marks of intrinsic rationality.

[16] Roberts faults Aquinas for under-estimating the powers of non-human animals: "Perhaps Aquinas's account slights animals' minds; maybe dogs do have some rudimentary concept of the future, which enables them to have genuine expectations and thus perhaps an emotion a bit like human hope. But if they do have this, it is in virtue of having something like human reason"(294).

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So in a significant way Miner's response seems beside the point. Roberts would not be happy to have the two categories, since he believes one of them a mistake. There should, on his tally, be no assimilation of the passions to the sensitive appetite. The point is to do away with any such distinction.

Miner attempts a partial response to Roberts' claim that Aquinas denies that the pseudo-passions are emotions in a footnote. Miner writes: "This is the one thing Aquinas does not do. He clearly holds that while they are not *passions*, they are *affectus*. Roberts's inattention to the *passio/affectio* distinction in Thomas vitiates his entire discussion, to the extent that it claims to understand Aquinas"(36, n. 9). This is a curious argument. What does Miner mean by the *passio/affectio* distinction? On the preceding page, he writes: "Thomas consistently reserves *passiones* for acts of the sensitive appetite. He uses *affectiones* (and, less frequently, *affectus*) for acts that may or may not belong to the sensitive appetite"(35). To begin, I worry that Aquinas is far less fastidious with his terms than this classification suggests. But even if were true that Aquinas only uses *passiones* to refer to acts of the sensitive appetite, that only suggests that there is a real distinction between the two. Yet Miner seems to want to deny such a distinction by grouping both under the umbrella term emotion. The point seems to be to assert that Aquinas carefully distinguishes two things only to subsume them both under one definition, a classic case of a distinction without a difference if ever there were one.

Of the attribution of pseudo-passions to God and the angels, for example, Miner rebuts Roberts' claim that Aquinas treats the pseudo-passions as not properly emotions as "a simple mistake, since Aquinas thinks that while they are not *passiones,* they are *affectiones*"(37). This can only satisfy Roberts as an answer if it were the case that these two things are fundamentally the same, though if they were it would be odd that Aquinas would so carefully use different terms to refer to each.

Miner accuses Roberts of having "grabbed the stick at the wrong end" because "Aquinas does not think that we first know what passions are, and then proceed to determine whether they are located in the sensitive or the rational appetite"(37). According to Miner, for Aquinas "the passions *just are* the acts of the sensitive appetite." In Roberts' defence it should be pointed out that (a) we no doubt do know passions – at least we will have had experiences of them – long before we know how to classify them and (b) Aquinas *does* begin his treatment of the emotions precisely by trying to locate the passions in three steps: soul, appetite, sensitive appetite. Miner's approach seems very different from Aquinas' own. Besides, Miner seems to confuse Roberts' argument: Roberts does not argue that the existence of the pseudo-passions is sufficient reason to reject the location of the passions in the sensitive appetite. Again, Roberts treats the pseudo-passions as an unnecessary category, unnecessary because we can only do justice to the "logic" of an emotion

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on Aquinas' own terms, according to Roberts, by acknowledging that the passions should not be assimilated to the sensory appetite given their intrinsic rationality.

It is very difficult to see just what Miner has in mind in trying to downplay the distinctions between passions and pseudo-passions, and he is not always consistent. He will, for instance, in speaking of sorrow in contrast with joy describe the former as a "genuine passion"(63). If the pseudo-passions are not genuine, why shouldn't we treat them as fundamentally different and so not emotions? If I say the five dollars that I am sending you to the store with is not genuine, you may well ask me for another five dollar bill or refuse to go. Later on, Miner will attempt to establish a dependency of the pseudo-passion, *dilectio*, on the genuine passion of love. It is possible for the one to be prior simply in the sense of being a necessary condition for the other, but Miner seems to want to elevate love as a passion above love as a pseudo-passion. This is even more peculiar since Aquinas says that in the will love and *dilectio* are identical (ST I-II 26, 3*ad*3).

Speaking of the rationality of the passions is difficult. In a restricted way, the passions are not properly rational at all, and so are not "in themselves" subject to moral evaluation (ST I-II 24, 1). Properly speaking the passions of the sensitive appetite "participate" in reason, but do not have it essentially. Aquinas will argue, however, that insofar as they are commanded by reason they do have some rationality (ST I-II 24, 1*ad*2). Of course, whenever what is at issue is a pseudo-passion rather than a passion-properly-speaking, then rationality is wholly attributable to the phenomenon.

4. More and less

I want to be careful not to confuse issues, however. Aquinas not only distinguishes passions from pseudo-passions, he also distinguishes degrees of passivity within the passions properly speaking. Unless care is taken, it is likely that the two types of distinction will be conflated. So I should indicate what Aquinas says about degrees of passivity, and why that cannot be mapped on to the altogether different distinction between passions and pseudo-passions. Anger has less of the character of passions properly speaking to the extent that it participates to a greater degree in the operations of reason.

The thing to keep in mind, therefore, is that within the passions properly speaking – that is, with respect to those that Aquinas locates in the sensitive appetite – there is to be understood a spectrum along which the various passions are to be located. At one end of the spectrum are to be placed those passions that most fully satisfy the conditions of passion properly understood. In contrast, passions like anger, that will be located at the opposite end of the spectrum, still share in some sense

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key aspects of what Aquinas sees as central to the passions, but they are closer to the pseudo-passions. Nevertheless, anger can still be treated as an act of the sensitive appetite and as an act of the rational appetite.

Conclusion

The great interest in the emotions that is everywhere evident today in academic studies, is only matched by the great diversity of understandings of the passions that are on offer. I've done little to lighten the load. Quite the contrary, I've suggested that there is a real need to complicate matters with respect to Aquinas' account of the emotions. But it does seem worth asking, by way of conclusion, if there are any benefits to the multiplication of distinctions that I have argued Aquinas engages in. I see at least two. On the one hand, while Aquinas' account of the emotions enables us to see them as intentional, even passions properly so-called, it leaves more room for comparisons of human and non-human animal experiences insofar as it insists on important symmetries between the sensitive faculties of both. Strong cognitivist accounts of the emotions generally fall afoul on this ground. On the other hand, Aquinas' distinction between passions and pseudo-passions may well enrich our understanding of the morality of the emotions in new ways. Not only do the pseudo-passions "overflow" – giving direction to the lower appetitive movements – but they may also help us to account for emotion-like experiences that are totally under our control from those that are only partly so.

Leonard Ferry
Niagara College and University of Toronto

lferry@niagaracollege.ca or l.ferry@utoronto.ca

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