# Philosophical Virtues and Psychological Strengths

## Building the Bridge

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Chapter 8

# Balanced Emotions

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> *The soul's "appetitive and in general desiring element in a sense shares in [reason], in so far as it listens to and obeys it; this is the sense in which we speak of paying heed to one's father or one's friends, not that in which we speak of 'the rational' in mathematics."*
>
> Aristotle[160]

The ancient Greek drama *Oresteia* recounts the story of how the young Orestes, after avenging his father's murder by slaying the killer, Orestes's own mother, must flee from the relentless pursuit of the dreadful Furies. These latter are the older pre-Olympian earth goddesses who avenge the killing of one's kin. Eventually, the Olympian goddess Athena convinces the Furies to suspend momentarily the pursuit of blood vengeance and allow a trial by jury to settle Orestes's fate.

During the trial, the Furies, not without due cause, make their case for just retribution. After a tie vote results in a hung jury, Athena, mindful that blood vengeance leads to unending carnage, intervenes and casts the deciding vote in favor of Orestes, thereby acquitting him.

160 *NE* I.13.1102b30–34.

Pointing out that the tie vote legitimates the Furies' case, Athena follows by offering the Furies a place, albeit a subservient one, among the Olympian gods, where they will serve no longer as goddesses of blood vengeance but as protectors of households. They accept and become transformed into the Eumenides—"the friendly ones"—that is, they take their place as earth goddesses who subordinate their lower instinctive desires for blood vengeance to the wise judgment of the higher gods, such as Athena. Dwelling in the sky on the top of Mount Olympus, these higher gods follow the guidance of reason and enlightened wisdom.

Of the many lessons to be gleaned from this ancient Greek drama written by the famous playwright Aeschylus, chief among them, I think, is the invaluable insight it imparts into the nature of human emotion and its relation to reason. The lower instinctual drives, the emotions, exemplified in the *Oresteia* by the desire for just retribution on the part of the earth goddesses, the Furies, are not bad in themselves and might be quite legitimate. For this reason, they should not be eradicated from human life. Movements of the lower appetites, the emotions play an integral and essential role in our lives, paralleling the way the Furies, once transformed into the kindly Eumenides, go on to play an integral and essential role in the Olympic pantheon as protectors of households. But because the emotions belong to the lower impulsive dimension of the human person, they are by nature subordinate to our higher faculties and ought to be subservient to the commanding role of human reason, of our higher cognitive power, represented in the *Oresteia* by Athena and the other Olympian gods. Reason's role, as Aeschylus understands it, is to integrate harmoniously the lower drives, the emotions, into human life in a balanced way neither by suppressing the emotions outright nor by giving them free reign over our actions.

Aeschylus provides us with a view of human emotion and its relation to our overall good that resonates well, it seems to me,

with modern clinical psychology (and thus with a view, we should add, that helps offset the one-sided interpretation of Greek tragedy offered by Freud). Clinical therapists almost uniformly concur that emotion plays a vital role in the life of psychological health, or, conversely, of psychological imbalance. Our affective dispositions, our emotional reactions to persons and events around us, represent a gateway into the general state of our psyches. Almost all agree that psychological well-being walks hand in hand with, indeed, is consequent upon, the sustained experience of well-regulated or properly balanced emotion. Most clinicians want their patients to integrate their feelings and emotions in a properly balanced way so that they may live happy lives.

At the same time, an imbalance in emotion almost always indicates some type of psychopathology. To diagnose depression, for example, therapists look for extreme mood swings and irritability in a patient, coupled with emotional deprivation, or with feelings of excessive sadness. Extreme mood swings and emotional overreaction (or underreaction) might also indicate the presence of borderline personality disorder. Persons prone to alcohol abuse and addiction invariably suffer from some kind of emotional deficiency, such as emotional withdrawal or instability. Marital problems almost always include the mismanagement of emotions, especially anger. Cognitive therapy, in particular, affirms that the presence of a high degree of emotion or affect indicates that a schema (or underlying maladaptive pattern of behavior) has been triggered.[161] In practically every therapeutic setting, from depression to marital counseling to alcohol abuse and addiction, the therapist, knowing that psychological disorders almost always impact the emotions, seeks to establish a link between the patient's behavior and his emotions.

161 Aaron T. Beck, the founder of cognitive therapy, first lays this out in his seminal work, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976).

With this in mind, the field of clinical psychology would stand to benefit from gaining a fuller, deeper understanding of human emotion. This present study aims at providing the beginnings of one. Written from a predominantly philosophical perspective, yet always with an eye on the clinical setting, this study will note points of pertinence for the therapist wherever appropriate. This will include occasional references to anonymous clinical examples in order to underscore, by way of concrete illustration, such pertinence.[162]

## Fundamental Goods and Human Emotion

The relation of first or fundamental goods to genuine human happiness and to psychological wholeness sets the larger backdrop of this study. Thomas Aquinas, who reflected deeply on the relation of emotional health to overall human happiness and who speaks for the Catholic view on this issue, offers us the key to situating the emotions against this larger backdrop of fundamental goods.[163] With Aquinas, we can say the fundamental good

[162] These examples were kindly provided to the author by Dr. Gladys Sweeney of the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, Arlington, Virginia.

[163] Aquinas gave emotional balance and its relation to our overall well-being more consideration than did any ancient or medieval thinker and more than most modern thinkers. Evidence for this is found in the simple fact that the largest treatise in Aquinas's most important and best-known work, the *Summa Theologica* (*ST*), is the treatise on the passions. Despite this, René Descartes, the seventeenth-century father of modern philosophy, has this to say about his ancient and medieval predecessors' regard for the emotions: "The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions.... [T]he teachings of the ancients about the passions are so meagre and for the most part so implausible (*si peu croyable*) that I cannot hope to approach the truth except by departing from the paths they have followed" (*The Passions of the Soul*, pt. 1,

that concerns emotion is that of sense goods, or the enjoyment of bodily goods (such as pleasures gained through eating and drinking). These are goods in the most immediate and tangible sense of the term and which first come to most people's minds when they think of the word *good*.

Aquinas follows by defining the emotions as instinctive inclinations toward, or aversions to, some physical good or evil cognitively perceived as such by the senses. He calls them *sensory appetitive movements*, that is, movements of the lower, animal-like inclination in the human being (the internal inclination we share in common with the animals). The sensory (or sensitive) appetite accounts for our inclination to, or our internal motion toward, bodily goods or evils perceived by the senses, and to the eventual procurement or evasion of these sense goods or evils. Emotion pertains to the actual internal movement itself of this lower appetite or inclination.

### The Twofold Appetitive Ordering in the Human Person

The first point to underscore here is that we share our internal affective ordering to sense goods, to goods of the body, in common with the animals. Yet human beings are not mere animals. We experience emotion in a unique fashion.[164] The interplay that our

art. 1, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. Robert Stoothoff [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], I:328). Yet Descartes himself gives scanty attention to the morality of the passions in his lengthy *Passions of the Soul*, since he separates the passions from virtuous action. Servais Pinckaers offers a detailed comparison of Descartes's teaching on the passions to Aquinas's in "Reappropriating Aquinas's Account of the Passions," in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 273–287, 279–282.

164 "Considered in themselves the passions are common to both man and animal, but as commanded by reason (*a ratione imperantur*), they are proper to man" (ST I-II, Q. 24, art. 1, ad. 1). For more on this, cf. Stephen Loughlin, "Similarities

lower sensitive inclination (or appetite) enjoys with reason (or our higher cognitive power) and will, our highest faculties, casts an entirely new dynamic on the human experience of emotion. This dynamic encompasses the entire psychological dimension of human life and explains why emotional states are so intimately related to the life of the mind. Take, for instance, the case of a patient diagnosed with severe depressive disorder who had experienced feeling abandoned and unloved by her father when she was a child. Later, after getting married, she often became powerless in the face of crippling fears that her husband would leave her. Here feelings and emotions originating from her childhood resurfaced later and infected a relationship unique to mature, rational human adults; in short, such feelings and emotions cast a pall over her entire psyche.

More specifically, the unique experience of emotion in the human person is explained by the fact that, in addition to our internal affective ordering to created bodily goods, from which arise the emotions, we enjoy a higher appetitive ordering. This higher appetitive ordering concerns the will, the faculty that works with reason (our cognitive power), to equip the human being to choose freely.[165] The will orders us internally to the universal good, to the *summum bonum*.

## The Human Person Is Not a Disintegrated Self

That human beings have a twofold appetitive inclination does not mean that their internal ordering lacks integrity. For Aquinas

and Differences between Human and Animal Emotion in Aquinas's Thought," in *The Thomist* 65 (2001): 45–65.

165 For more on the freedom of the human person by means of the will, see the earlier study in this book by Tobias Hoffmann as well David M. Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as a Rational Appetite," in *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 559–584.

in particular, the human person is not a disintegrated self. Our enjoyment of higher goods should not exclude our affective enjoyment of sense goods. Although subordinate to the higher, the lower affective ordering to bodily goods shares actively and integrally in our higher rational ordering to ultimate goodness and happiness. The human person's search for supreme fulfillment builds upon this lower ordering as a necessary first step. Our internal attraction to created bodily goods sets us on a trajectory toward that good which alone is uncreated and unsurpassed. Our passions and desires are like the steeds, to use Plato's legendary metaphor, which, needing to run and while unruly, are the "erotic" drive that propels us on toward the highest Beauty and the highest Good.[166]

To ensure that we remain on this trajectory toward the supreme good, upon which our mental well-being depends, we must maintain strict governance over our internal movements. This means subordinating the lower, affective ordering to the higher,

166 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), 246–256; cf. Plato, *Republic*, bk. 4. Completing the metaphor, Plato says reason is the charioteer by which the steeds are properly harnessed and ordered to the highest of the forms, the Good. This holds even if, as Plato admits, such harnessing "of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to [the charioteer]." Pope Benedict XVI's inaugural encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, which opens with an attempt at reconstructing a renewed and purified understanding of eros and agape, approximates the Platonic understanding of eros when he writes that eros is a form of love the Greeks see as "a kind of intoxication, the overpowering of reason by a 'divine madness' which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness" (no. 4; Vatican translation). At the same time, Plato's position on the moral quality of the passions is ambivalent, due especially, no doubt, to his disdain for the body. For example, in *Phaedo*, 6484, Plato asserts that one must move beyond sensible pleasures in order to attain true spiritual joy.

rational one, which in turn requires a careful balancing of our emotional states. Should the lower, sensitive ordering usurp the higher, rational one, or should reason simply scorn outright our internal attraction to goods of the body, the door swings open to some psychological disorder. Morally and behaviorally speaking, an accomplished human life requires a proper "humanizing" of the passions. It requires the integration of the emotions into the pursuit of the good of reason.

What accounts for Aquinas's integralist view of the twofold appetitive ordering to the universal good and to goods of the body in the human individual is his conviction that fundamentally the human person is a unified being. He rejects the view that would sever the emotions from the higher rational powers. This is the view that isolates the passions in their own lower, animal sphere with little or no interaction with the life of the mind. The Cartesian tendency to internalize only the life of the mind, where the appetites and emotions serve as mere mechanized tools of the mind yields an inadequate disembodied anthropology.

Aquinas's anthropology is one we could term a "participated psychology." In his view the lower, animal-like dimension of the human person participates in the higher, mental or spiritual one. It affirms an intimate synergy and interpenetration between the emotions and reason and will, making the emotions not merely "animal-like" acts but genuine *human* acts. Human reason (our higher cognitive power) and will can incite movements of passion, just as movements of emotion can rouse the will and influence a judgment of reason. Our passions and desires often shape how we think, thereby influencing how we act. For Aquinas, this offers plain evidence of the fact that the lower appetitive ordering to goods of the body truly participates in the higher appetitive ordering to happiness and fulfillment, to goodness itself.

Such a participated psychology, such a view of the human being that is termed hylemorphic or psychosomatic, inasmuch as it

defines the human person as a substantial composite of body and soul, affirms the indispensable role that limited goods, to which the lower, appetitive ordering inclines us, play in an integrated human life. In the human person, a spiritual soul is united to a material body in the way that, as Aquinas explains, form is united to matter.[167] And just as matter is for the sake of form, so the body exists for the sake of the soul. The organic human body exists for the sake of its animating principle, the spiritual and rational soul.

At the same time, however, the soul, as the form of a material body, is so essentially bound to the body that it cannot operate without the body. The life of the body must be sustained if the soul, even in the operation of its rational or spiritual powers, is to act, let alone flourish. That the emotions move us toward those goods which sustain the life of the body evinces just how much the properly human, that is, rational or intellectual, dimension of our lives stands in need of our emotions. We see this particularly in the case of the desire (an emotion) for pleasures associated with eating and drinking, which directly sustain the life of our bodies.

## A Commonality of Outlook

In my judgment, many clinical therapists would find that the participated psychology outlined above aligns closely with their own professional experience. The majority of therapists no doubt work from the conviction that mental well-being hinges directly upon the attainment of limited goods. More specifically, they realize, however intuitively, that attaining bodily goods *in a balanced fashion* is requisite for mental health. Since the emotions represent the internal mechanism by which we target bodily goods, therapy often consists in helping the patient gain a balanced mastery of his emotions.

167 For more on this point, see the earlier study in this book by Matthew Cuddeback.

To this end, therapy frequently takes the form of helping adjust the patient's behavior according to a healthy differentiation of good emotional states from bad ones. We see this in the case of cognitive therapy especially, where the patient is helped to gain an objective, rational (or cognitive) appraisal of his emotions. This in turn is meant, negatively, to keep the patient's emotions from taking control and, positively, to allow the patient to regulate his emotions more optimally. Similarly, Dialectical Behavior Therapy for borderline personality disorder teaches patients to gain a detached, objective appraisal of their emotional reactions in order to help curb their tendency to emotional overreaction.

So whether it means correcting a depressed patient's emotional deprivation (such as excessive feelings of worthlessness and emptiness), or helping a patient to recognize that having certain emotional reactions, such as anger, is not necessarily bad in itself, or helping the patient with aggressive behavior to cope with the onset of intense emotion (say, again, anger), the goal remains the same: to harness the emotions in a properly balanced way so that mental well-being can be attained.

An example here, pulled from the same anonymous case of the depressed patient mentioned above, may help. To help this particular patient overcome paralyzing fears of being abandoned by her husband, traceable ultimately to painful childhood experiences of feeling abandoned and unloved by her father, the therapist (a cognitive therapist) encouraged her to take moments in which she felt such fears to question whether these fears were objectively based or were merely used as a mechanism to support her dysfunctional patterns of behavior. To assist in this rational, cognitive appraisal, and thereby challenge such emotions and the maladaptive patterns associated with them (the task, ultimately, as we shall see, of moral virtue), the therapist pointed to objective data as evidence of her husband's attachment and commitment to her. The evidence included frequent expressions of love, or

expressions of being happy to see and be around her, repeated compliments for her, and the fact that there was no evidence that her husband had ever considered leaving her. The goal for the therapist, among other things, was to help the patient harness her fears in a properly balanced way, to gain mastery over her deep-seated fears of being abandoned by her husband.

Additionally, one could point to the fact that often couples seeking therapy for marital distress will be asked by the therapist to bring to light the various emotions each may be feeling, such as anger and resentment, as well as the emotions associated with feeling unloved and unappreciated or insecure. The goal is to help the spouses develop empathy for each other, as well as to exercise regulated control over their feelings and channel them to serve the good, not the bad, of the marriage.

Given the commonality of outlook between the participated psychology sketched above and clinical therapy, it is my contention that, while Catholic thought can learn much from the insights of modern psychology, clinical psychology can stand to benefit greatly from the more philosophically and theologically grounded view of the way Catholic tradition, following the lead of Aquinas, sees the integration of the emotions into the human person's overall pursuit of moral and spiritual excellence.

What follows is a more detailed, if still cursory, overview of such a view. This study shall conclude with a brief consideration of some important implications this teaching has for clinical therapy.

### A. A Metaphysical Account of Human Emotion

Typically the method clinical psychology observes begins with human behavior itself, or with a patient's actual emotional state, and seeks to determine therefrom a diagnosis. The more philosophically grounded view of Aquinas takes the opposite approach. For him, the study of psychology is first and foremost a

speculative discipline, not a practical one ordered to bettering people's lives.[168] Its proper object of inquiry is the truth of the human being or, more specifically, the nature of the human soul along with its powers or faculties (that is, its various capacities for determinate action) and operations.

This explains why Catholic thought, following Aquinas, typically begins with the metaphysical substructure of the human person before examining the actions that flow from this substructure, such as the emotions, and how such actions become integrated into the moral life. To arrive at a truly satisfactory understanding of human emotion, we must start with a deeper ontology, with a proper metaphysics of human nature, that is, with a fundamental grasp of the objective nature of the human being. As the famous maxim invoked in the era of Aquinas puts it, action follows being (*agere sequitur esse*), or such as a thing is, such is the way it acts.[169] Certainly, Aquinas would affirm that in the order of knowing we come to know of a thing first by its actions, and then proceed back to the being, the nature, of the thing: powers are known by their acts, and natures by their powers. Nevertheless, a proper grasp of human behavior is fully attained only when it rests firmly on a clear-sighted metaphysics of the human person.

## Movements of the Lower Animal-Like Inclination to Bodily Goods

It is with the metaphysical substructure of the human person in mind that Aquinas defines the emotions as internal movements

[168] Christopher Thompson notes this in his essay in this book.

[169] Cf., for example, *ST* I, Q. 89, art. 1; I-II, Q. 55, art. 2, ad. 1; III, Q. 77, art. 3; and III, Q. 19, art. 2, *sed contra*, where Aquinas cites John Damascene's statement (*De fide orthodoxa*, bk. 2, ch. 23 [ed. Buytaert, 142–144]): "operation follows upon nature." Ultimately, this methodology observes the order of Aristotle's *De anima* and was followed throughout the Middle Ages.

of our lower, animal-like inclination (the sensitive appetite) to created bodily goods that are suitable to the sentient dimension of human life (such as pleasures associated with sex or food and drink).[170] Because they are movements that result from an agent being acted upon, specifically the sensitive appetite being acted upon internally by the cognitive sense perception of created bodily goods, the emotions are classified as "passive" phenomena (hence the term *passion*, *passio*). The sensitive appetite marks a certain capacity for action that is actualized by the cognitive perception of a suitable, or desirable, sense good.

From this we can see that passions or emotions do not arise as blind surges of affect or as wild hormonal responses.[171] The emotions mark our internal affective responses to sense objects cognitively grasped as suitable or undesirable. We undergo the emotion of fear, say, when sensing something terrifying, such as when a patient suffering from depression dreads the thought of getting out of bed in the morning to face the day's responsibilities. Or we experience anger when feeling slighted by another, such as when a wife in marital distress gets angry when she feels her husband is berating and negatively criticizing her—although, in his mind, he may merely be attempting to offer counsel.

That cognitive therapy, in particular, recognizes the causal role played by the perception of sense images in the onset of emotion is implied in a number of techniques this mode of therapy employs. Take, for instance, the technique known as the re-experiencing of the origins of dysfunctional patterns of behavior. This technique consists in the calling to mind, the imagining, of sense

170 Cf. *ST* I-II, Q. 22, art. 3, *sed contra* (citation of Damascene, *De fide orth.*, bk. 2, ch. 22 [ed. Buyt., 132]): *Passio est motus appetitivae virtutis sensibilis*. Cf. as well Aristotle, *De anima* III.10.433a17ff.

171 I am indebted to William Mattison for this insight (in personal conversation).

images associated with the initiation of dysfunctional patterns of behavior. The therapist is most interested in the emotions and feelings triggered by such sense images, as they reveal the origins of unhealthy comportment.

Further, it should be clear that in Aquinas's account of the human person, it is perfectly natural to be subject to emotion, to be affected by emotional responses and moods. Whether we like it or not, emotions play an essential role in our lives. To deny this would be tantamount to denying the fact that the bodily, animal-like side of human nature forms an integral part of the essential makeup of the human person: "Man is similar to other animals in his sensitive nature," Aquinas explains in a key passage. "Hence, reactions that follow upon the sensitive nature are present in man naturally, just as they are in other animals. And what is natural cannot be totally suppressed."[172]

This view is implied in many therapeutic settings, such as the clinical technique known as irreverent communication. In encouraging patients to express verbally their anger at themselves and at the therapist—since "it is okay to be angry sometimes"—this technique seeks to underscore that the proper management of emotion, especially anger, means acknowledging the presence of the emotion in the first place. Therapists find this technique helpful when treating patients suffering from borderline personality disorder who struggle with tendencies to harm themselves physically to feel important and cared for because of the attention harming themselves would invite. By using this technique to validate these patients' emotions, that is, to assure these patients that it is perfectly natural to feel unloved and uncared for, to cry, and to feel angry about not being cared for, the therapist ultimately hopes to get the patients to realize that harming themselves is an inappropriate, dysfunctional response to their emotions.

172 *Expositio super Job*, 6:4.

## The Bodily Side of Human Emotion

An emotion always involves a change of disposition in the person who undergoes it, as emotions issue only after the lower, affective appetitive ordering has been acted upon. This change in disposition includes, in every case, some kind of change in the body, such as an increased heart rate, trembling of the hands, flushing of the face, hormonal and biochemical changes (the chemical oxytocin, for example, has been linked to emotional feelings of love). The bodily alteration involved in every emotion explains why biochemical and neurological phenomena are so intimately bound up with the emotions, and why psychopharmacology and neuropsychology can be of therapeutic benefit in many cases. Bodily change caused by an emotion also explains why biochemical predispositions can play a significant role in a person's emotional states. Evidence, for instance, suggests that persons who suffer from borderline personality disorder possess a biological predisposition toward strong and prolonged emotional reactions.

At the same time, we must be careful not to reduce the emotions solely to the biochemical or to the neurological, such as when we reduce love merely to the release of oxytocin, or happy feelings to the chemical serotonin. Aquinas explains how the bodily change, what he terms the *transmutatio corporalis*, is merely one essential component of an emotion. The internal movement of the lower, animal-like appetite is the other, more determining side. The two accompany each other in the way that matter (the bodily change) accompanies form (the internal motion of the lower, sensitive appetite).[173] This explains how the bodily change marks an essential element to every emotion and how we could not even undergo passion if we did not have bodies (and why God

[173] Cf., especially, *ST* I-II, Q. 44, art. 1, but also Q. 17, art. 7; Q. 22, art. 3; Q. 28, art. 5.

is not subject to emotion). It also exposes the error of Descartes, whose radical separation of body from soul leads him to place the emotions in the soul only, and not in the body.[174]

## The Concupiscible and Irascible Emotions

The lower, sensitive appetite inclines us to created bodily goods in a dual fashion. Some of the sense goods that attract us are relatively easy to acquire (such as fine-tasting food placed before us), while others are arduous to attain (such as an athletic victory). For this reason Aquinas divides the one sensitive appetite into the concupiscible (the inclination of simple desire which targets the *bonum simpliciter*, the sense good that is easy to attain) and the irascible (the inclination of struggled desire that targets the *bonum arduum*, the sense good difficult to obtain).[175] Following Aquinas's lead, we can distinguish those passions or emotions of the concupiscible appetite (love or like, desire, joy, hatred or dislike, aversion, sorrow) from those of the irascible appetite (hope, despair, courage, fear, anger).[176] Whereas the first group responds to objects

[174] For an interesting study, cf. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994). Here Damasio shows how practical reasoning and affective states are severely impaired by damage to areas of the brain that are responsible for affectivity.

[175] The principal text affirming this comes in *ST* I, Q. 81, art. 2. For more on this distinction, cf. Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Bonum hominis. Die anthropologischen und theologischen Grundlagen der Tugendethik des Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1987), 183–186; and Letterio Mauro, "Umanità" della passione in S. Tommaso (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1974), 60–86.

[176] Original to Aquinas, this list of eleven specific passions is offered throughout the entirety of his career: *Sent.*, bk. 3, d. 26, Q. 1, art. 3; *DV* Q. 26, art. 4; *ST* I-II, Q. 23, arts. 2, 4; and his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*In Ethic.*), bk. 2, lect. 5. For a detailed discussion of these eleven passions, cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas*

we sense as relatively easy to acquire or avoid, the latter are by definition more complex and more psychologically involved, as it were, since they engage us in a struggle to attain or avoid the sense good in question. This helps explain why psychotherapists routinely face a stiffer challenge in helping their patients overcome those irascible emotions that often lie at the heart of the patient's psychopathology, such as fear or despair, or even anger.

## B. The Ordering of the Emotions to the Moral Good of the Human Person

As already noted, to say the animal-like dimension of the human person finds its satisfaction in the acquisition of those created bodily goods targeted by the passions expresses only a half-truth. The enjoyment of limited bodily goods will be properly "human" only when our internal desires, our emotions, accord with our higher, rational ordering to ultimate goodness and happiness, to the universal good (*summum bonum*).

### Emotion and the Human Quest for the Highest Good

While the passions incline us to the lowest kind of goods, to bodily goods, which cannot bring us, as rational beings, complete fulfillment ,these goods *do* participate in goodness itself—they are, after all, good. Such interim lower goods, then, even if subordinate to the *summum bonum*, remain ordered ultimately to the perfect and sufficient good, to the absolute perfection of God. By being inclined internally to limited bodily goods, we are already on the road, as it were, to the highest good. We are already being ordered to the *summum bonum*, even if only in its initial stages.

Since the soul is essentially bound to the body as form is bound to matter, we could never attain our ultimate end, the end of our

*Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 271–286.

rational souls, if the needs of the body were not satisfied by the procurement of those goods targeted by the emotions. The life of spiritual and moral excellence is not bereft of the enjoyment of earthly and bodily pleasures. On the contrary, the pursuit of holiness and perfection burgeons forth from the enjoyment of earthly and bodily pleasures.

To ignore or outright dismiss the movements of affectivity, the passions, then, would imply, by extension, the renunciation of our very yearning for true flourishing and fulfillment. Our sensitive appetite, our animal-like inclination to lower goods, acts as a kind of germinating seed from which sprouts forth our desire to possess the universal good. In this good our entire appetitive longing, both intellectual and sensitive, both rational and animal, finds its complete rest. The whole of man is made to be moved from within, moved even by his lower sensitive appetite, to the acquisition of happiness, to the proper end of human life. Because the passions set us on a trajectory that finds its completion in the universal good, in the absolute perfection of God, we can appreciate the indispensable role the emotions play in the moral life—and, by consequence, in the life of mental health.

Because Aquinas understands that our rational ordering to ultimate goodness and happiness burgeons forth from our lower, affective ordering to limited bodily goods, he unambiguously distances himself from any kind of Stoic disdain for the emotions. Failing to distinguish emotion, that is, an internal movement of our lower, animal-like inclination to bodily goods, from the movements of our intellectual appetite, the will, and preoccupied with emotion's ability to cloud our judgment and to hamper our duty to live virtuously, the Stoics can manage no better than to revile the passions as "sicknesses of the soul."[177] Neo-Platonism

[177] For references to Stoic texts (principally from Cicero, Seneca, and Virgil) affirming this moral disdain for the passions, cf. my own *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St.*

would carry on this disparaging attitude of emotion.[178] In doing so, the Stoics (and neo-Platonists) revile an essential element of human life. With vivid imagery, the moralist Servais Pinckaers notes the danger in this:

> Some think that [moral excellence] can only be achieved by suppressing our feelings and passions in a kind of self-mutilation. But would we want an animal trainer to use such methods? Wouldn't we mock him if he showed us tigers without fangs or claws? On the moral level such

*Thomas Aquinas* in "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. Neue Folge, 61" [Münster: Aschendorff, 2002], 281, n. 44, and for numerous texts from Aquinas criticizing this view and which span his entire career, cf. *ibid.*, 282, no. 46 (for two examples, in *ST* I-II, Q. 59, art. 3, Thomas denounces the Stoic view as "unreasonable" [*hoc irrationabiliter dicitur*], and in *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, ch. 11, lect. 5 [n° 1535], he calls the Stoic disdain for emotion "excessively inhuman" [*valde inhumanum*]). For an analysis of the influence of Stoicism on Thomas's thought, including the morality of the passions, cf. E. K. Rand, *Cicero in the Courtroom of St. Thomas Aquinas*, "The Aquinas Lecture, 1945" (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1946); Gerard Verbeke, *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 1–19; and Michel Spanneut, "Influences stoïciennes sur la pensée morale de S. Thomas d'Aquin," in *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Proceedings of the Third Symposium on St. Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy*, eds. L. J. Elders and K. Hedwig, "Studi tomistici 25" (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984), 50–79.

178 Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 136, as cited by Michael Dauphinais, "Languages of Ascent: Gregory of Nyssa's and Augustine of Hippo's Exegeses of the Beatitudes," *Nova et Vetera* English edition 1 (2003): 141–163, at 147.

> tactics would be more serious, not to say ridiculous, for movements of sensibility exist and act within us.[179]

Aquinas knows this well. He realizes that emotion, although participating in human rationality, arises from the animal-like dimension of the human person, not the rational. Since only rational actions possess moral worth *per se*, it follows that, considered in themselves, the emotions are morally neutral.[180] What appends moral worth to the emotions is the manner by which reason and will interact with them, in other words, the manner by which the emotions fall under our control.

It is to underscore their essential role in the moral life that Aquinas places his exhaustive study on the passions in the moral part—the second part (*Secunda Pars*)—of his crowning work, the *Summa Theologica*. More particularly, he tactically situates the treatise on the passions amid his analysis of the ultimate end of the human person and of human happiness.[181] This marks a

[179] Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Pursuit of Happiness—God's Way: Living the Beatitudes*, trans. M. T. Noble, O.P. (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1998), 62–63.

[180] Cf. *ST* I-II, Q. 24, arts. 1–2; Q. 59, art. 5, ad. 2; and *In Ethic.*, bk. 2, lect. 3. Thomas's view on the moral neutrality of the passions takes its inspiration primarily from Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, bk. 9, chs. 4–5 (CCSL 47, 251–254), and bk. 14, chs. 5–14 (CCSL 48, 421–438), and from Aristotle, *NE* 2.3–7, and Albert the Great, *In Ethic.*, bk. 3, lect. 1 (ed. Colon., 137). For more on this, cf. Mark Jordan, "Aquinas's Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions," in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986): 71–97.

[181] The treatise on man's end and on happiness is found in *ST* I-II, Q. 1–5, and the treatise on the passions in Q. 22–48. There are 132 articles contained in these twenty-seven questions of the treatise on the passions, making it the largest treatise in the entire *Summa* (for a schematic overview of this treatise, cf. my *Passions of Christ's Soul*, 103–104).

surprising move, since at first sight one would expect Aquinas to have placed his study on the passions earlier in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*, specifically amid the treatise on the human soul (Q. 75–90), whose prologue proposes to study "the essence of the soul, its powers, and its operations" (Q. 75). As movements of the sensitive appetite (a power of the soul), the emotions are certainly to be included among the operations of the soul.

But Aquinas prefers the backdrop of the moral life, not the more metaphysical study of the human soul, against which to locate his study on the emotions. Such a move allows him to drive home the point that the emotions play a necessary first step in our striving for happiness, in our attaining the end of seeing God.

Placing the treatise on the passions in the moral part of the *Summa* marks a surprising move for an additional reason. Christian spiritual writers, betraying the enduring influence of Stoic thought with its disdain for human emotion, traditionally relegated the emotions, or human affectivity in general, to the margins of the spiritual life, usually as inimical obstacles to be shunned.[182] To break ranks with the Stoic-inspired school

[182] Certainly an exception to this general rule would be the great twelfth-century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, who stressed heavily the affective side of the human love for God. One could list as just two examples of spiritual writers who lived shortly before Aquinas and who repeated the Stoic charge that the passions are "sicknesses" of the soul William of St. Thierry (d. 1148), *De natura corporis et animae* (*PL* 180, 714), and Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), *De statu interioris hominis*, I, 9 and 34 (*PL* 196, 1122, and 1141). One could also list Gregory of Nyssa, who, as Michael Dauphinais ("Languages of Ascent," 151–152) tells us, sees passion as signifying unruly, disordered desire as such; cf. his Homily 5, nos. 131–133, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa* (Paderborn, September 14–18, 1998), ed. Hubertus

of thought, then, and to stress that we cannot secure a happy life—the goal of moral action—without the emotions, Aquinas takes the unprecedented step of situating the passions at the heart of his study on human morality.

## Happiness: An Equivocal Term

At this point, it might be helpful to note a different, if still complementary, use of language between Aquinas the medieval Catholic thinker and contemporary clinical therapists. It centers on the term *happiness*. Aquinas affirms that the emotions are an essential component in the ordering of our psychological lives to the good, or to what he terms the *happy satisfying life*. The emotions initiate this very ordering. Clinical psychology, too, affirms the essential role the emotions play in the ordering of our psychological lives to mental health, to a happy satisfying life.[183]

R. Drobner and Albert Viciano (Boston: Brill, 2000). For a recent theological article arguing that the Christian life should be devoid of the emotion of anger, to single out this emotion, cf. Paul Lauritzen, "Emotions and Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988): 307–324; cf. as well his *Christian Belief and Emotional Transformation* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1992). Also, Dietrich Bonhoeffer carries on the Stoic heritage when he writes (in *The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Touchstone, 1995; originally 1959 by SCM Press], 127): "Jesus will not accept the common distinction between righteous indignation and unjustifiable anger. The disciple must be entirely innocent of anger, because anger is an offence against both God and his neighbour."

183 In this book, Christopher Thompson notes how the January, 2000 special edition of the *American Psychologist*, the leading journal of the American Psychological Association, is dedicated to the special questions of happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning, including Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology: An Introduction."

Yet the clinician typically takes *being happy* to mean the patient's attainment of optimum affective or emotional wellness, a kind of transient state of elation. A patient is happy when he accepts himself and feels good about himself, when his symptoms have been totally or at least significantly reduced, and when he finds he is a well-adjusted individual who makes important contributions to society.

At the same time, clinical therapy seems intuitively aware that mental well-being means something *more* than mere emotional wellness and adjustment. Otherwise, how else could therapists insist that mental health comes only when one gains balanced self-mastery *over* one's emotions? In speaking of what is requisite for the attainment of psychological health, clinical therapy implicitly appeals to something higher than emotion, namely, that which has the duty of regulating and integrating emotion. The positive psychologist and former president of the American Psychological Association Martin Seligman explicitly affirms as much and, in so doing, approximates an Aristotelian doctrine of moral virtue.[184]

That therapists in practice, even if implicitly, recognize that happiness is not necessarily to be equated with an emotional state

184 For instance, in his *Authentic Happiness* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2004), 262–263, Seligman writes: "Happiness, the goal of Positive Psychology, is not just about obtaining momentary subjective states. Happiness also includes the idea ... of deriving gratification and positive emotion from the exercise of one's signature strengths.... [A] *full life* [then] consists in experiencing positive emotions about the past and future, savoring positive feelings from the pleasures, deriving gratification from your signature strengths, and using these strengths in the service of something larger to obtain meaning." Seligman identifies these signature strengths with the virtues and even appeals to Aristotle in doing so. See also the work edited by him and Christopher Peterson, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

is supported, I think, by simple clinical examples. Take the case of a patient seeking treatment for alcohol addiction who has observed, for instance, that his marital satisfaction decreases when he abstains from alcohol and that he becomes "unhappy" when he stops drinking. Any sound therapist will know that such "unhappiness" serves this patient's long-term mental well-being much better than the "happiness" gained through drinking alcohol. The therapist understands that this patient's genuine "happiness" is not to be identified with the affective happiness obtained through indulging in the pleasures of drinking alcohol.

Similarly, the Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) for the treatment of borderline personality disorder encourages patients suffering from this disorder to accept some unhappiness for the sake of greater long-term happiness. In cases where patients frequently allow their excessive affective moods to determine their behavior, therapists using DBT will seek to help their patients realize that behavior leading to genuine happiness is not to be equated with behavior simply reflecting one's emotional moods.

This opens the door to the much fuller and richer meaning Aquinas ascribes to the term *happiness*. While not necessarily excluding emotional balance and wellness, the term *happiness* is employed by Aquinas, and Catholic thought in general after him, to signify the fulfillment of every human yearning, spiritual, moral, *and* emotional. For Aquinas, the pursuit of happiness matches the pursuit of moral and spiritual excellence. The reason abstinence better safeguards the recovering alcoholic's genuine happiness is that it serves his *true good*, not necessarily his immediate affective good (although it would serve his long-term affective good). Abstinence for recovering alcoholics marks the morally proper thing to do.

One could use as another example those cases of marital therapy where one spouse expresses insecurity over the degree of commitment to the marriage by the other—who happens

to be divorced from a previous marriage. Quite possibly this insecurity marks a byproduct of the fact that the divorced spouse (or even both) does not believe marriage is a lifelong commitment. It should come as no surprise, in other words, that in a marriage where one or both of the spouses do not believe in the permanence of marriage there sits a deep-seated insecurity over the other spouse's commitment to the marital relationship. For Aquinas, as for Catholic thought in general, the marital commitment, because it is indissoluble by nature, requires adherence to its permanence. So long as this adherence is wanting, the very meaning of the marital union is undercut, and marital problems can be expected to ensue. The indissoluble nature of marriage upholds the *moral* good of the union, and thus the total good of the spouses, including their genuine affective good. Adherence to the permanence of marriage, in other words, safeguards the very happiness of the spouses, both as married persons and as human individuals. The affective needs of the spouses, if they are to find genuine completion, must serve a higher end, namely, that of lifelong commitment.

Without consigning emotion to a merely peripheral role, Aquinas does not hesitate to insist that happiness is only consequent upon *rightly ordered* or *properly balanced* and *integrated* emotion, that is, emotion ordered to our moral good.

### A Clash of Competing Appetitive Pulls

That the emotions need to be integrated in a healthy, balanced fashion follows upon the ubiquitous existential fact that lower bodily goods of themselves, and the corresponding inclination to them, do not always align with authentic human goods. Clearly they can, but many times they direct us only to apparent goods, illustrated in the previously cited *Oresteia* by the apparent good of blood vengeance desired by the Furies, the pre-Olympian earth goddesses associated with lower, instinctive drives.

Aquinas recognizes that this inclination to apparent interim goods sets off a veritable strife in the human being, a clash between competing appetitive pulls, the one to bodily goods (the lower, sensitive pull) and the other to our highest good, the good of reason (the superior, intellectual pull). Certainly, the highest faculties of the human soul, reason and will, retain a natural "power to command" the lower, animal-like powers (the Latin term used by Aquinas to signify this power to command is *imperium*). This explains why we always remain responsible for our actions, even when we act under the impulse of passion (which might nonetheless lessen our degree of culpability).

Yet this power to command, the *imperium*, enjoyed by the higher powers is not absolute, as the sensitive appetite retains a kind of quasi-autonomy. In short, the power of reason and will to command does not remove or suppress the proper inclination of our internal affective ordering to created bodily goods. Otherwise, there could be no satisfactory way of explaining the state of competing appetitive pulls in the human person, where the lower, sensitive appetite remains ever ready to rebel against the *imperium* of reason and will or, conversely, to consent to it. We know, by contrast, that our bodily limbs own no such quasi-autonomy, as these never, on their own, resist the commands of reason (or our higher cognitive power) and will. The hand, the foot, the arm, and the neck will always observe what the mind commands of them.

There exists, then, a unique relationship between the lower, sensitive appetite and the higher, intellectual powers in the human being. Echoing Aristotle, Aquinas likens this relationship to a political one (the Latin phrase signifying this is *principatus politicus*).[185] More specifically, he likens the lower appetite to free

[185] The classic text from Aquinas is *ST* I, Q. 81, art. 3, ad. 2; and from Aristotle, *Politics*, I.5.1254b2–5.

subjects that participate in limited ways, namely, through their free consent, in the governance of a sovereign, the sovereign in this case being reason and will. Today we would say constitutional monarchy best corresponds to the type of political model Aquinas describes.

Rife with tension, this relationship of *principatus politicus* between our higher intellectual powers and our lower, animal-like powers, implies a kind of face-off between the appetitive inclinations of each. Theologically, we know this competing clash of internal appetitive pulls, which St. Paul poignantly describes in Romans 7:14–24 as a "war among his members" making him "not do the good he wants," represents one of the consequences of Original Sin. Catholic thought has traditionally employed the term *concupiscence* to signify this contest of appetitive pulls in the human person. In Aquinas the term *concupiscence* (not to be confused with *concupiscible appetite*) connotes a state of general disorder in the human condition, wherein the sensitive appetite remains inordinately inclined to lower, mutable goods.[186]

Persons suffering from mental imbalance often know from experience this clash of appetitive pulls all too well. A depressed patient, for instance, may find at times that his ability for objective rational self-possession is completely prevailed upon by his fears of abandonment, that is, the deep-seated (irrational) fear that persons close to him will leave him.

At this point, it should be pointed out, particularly for the therapist, that since no one escapes the consequences of Original Sin, not one person is immune to the emotional "imbalance" that

186 Cf. *ST* I-II, Q. 82, art. 3 and art. 4, ad. 1; Q. 91, art. 6; *Compendium theologiae*, ch. 192; *DM* Q. 3–4; and *DV* Q. 25, arts. 6–7. For a detailed analysis of this point, cf. M.-M. Labourdette, "Aux origines du péché de l'homme d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin," in *Revue thomiste* 85 (1985), 357–398, at 371–385, and my *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 294–300.

comes with concupiscence, that is, that comes with the disordered inclination of the lower sensitive appetite. Every person finds himself subject at times to the inordinate pull of emotions that, to varying degrees, oppose our better judgment. Emotional balance and health, in other words, cannot be secured by external conditions alone, such as family upbringing, no matter how "ideal," or no matter the degree of "unconditional positive acceptance" one receives, to use terminology popular among therapists. Servais Pinckaers, again using vivid metaphorical imagery, expresses well the interior disordering that pertains to the experience of every human individual:

> If we look within ourselves and study our conscience and reactions a bit, we can perceive the shadowy figures of all kinds of animals who live there and threaten us.... We find the proud, domineering lion, the bragging rooster, and the vain peacock, the flattering cat and the sly fox.... We discover the brutal rhinoceros and the sluggish elephant, the scared rabbit and the sensual pig, the fierce dog and the gnawing worm.... What power and firmness is needed, what clear-sightedness and skill, if we are going to control all these instincts, bring them to heal, and compel them to obey and serve charity! Complete self-mastery is a long and exacting work.[187]

## The Humanizing Integration of the Emotions through Moral Virtue

Aquinas singles out the cultivation of the virtues, specifically, the moral virtues, along with the assistance of divine grace, as the key to achieving emotional control and balance. The emotions are integrated into the human person's overall good by means of

187 Pinckaers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 62.

the moral virtues. In short, moral virtue marks the concrete way by which reason (our higher, cognitive power) and will exercise their *imperium*, their power to regulate our internal affective ordering to created bodily goods. Moral virtue therefore owns the task of "humanizing" the emotions. Recall how in the *Oresteia* this is exemplified in the way Athena employs wisdom to regulate, and thereby "humanize," the Furies' desire for blood vengeance, inasmuch as she integrates this desire into a higher form of justice informed by reason, namely, trial by jury.

The reason Aquinas assigns the role of humanizing the emotions to the specific type of virtue he calls moral (as distinct from the intellectual virtues) is that, following Aristotle, he insists that our passions and desires constitute the proper "matter" of the moral virtues.[188] In other words, moral virtue is about nothing other than the regulating and disciplining of our emotions, about transforming the internal movements of the lower, animal-like sensitive appetite into actions that conform to and participate in the genuine human good.[189] Moral virtue marks the specific way we act so as to ensure that our inclination to interim bodily goods

188 Cf. *ST* I-II, Q. 59, arts. 4–5; and Q. 60, art. 3; and Aristotle, *NE* 2.6.1106b15–16, where he asserts that "moral virtue ... is concerned with passions and actions." Cf. as well Nemesius of Emesa, *De natura hominis*, ch. 31 (ed. Verbeke-Moncho, 126); and Albert the Great, *De bono*, tr. 1, Q. 5, art. 1, ad. 4 (ed. Coloniensis, 74).

189 In different yet complementary language, Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) stresses the distinctive self-orientation of the appetites and of the emotions that stands in need of integration through "the personalistic norm." The emotions need to be taken up into the fuller context of human perfection, i.e., into the fuller context of human persons who do not admit of being used or treated as objects and who are ordered to self-giving love. Cf. his *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 41; and *The Acting Person*, trans. A. Potocki (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979).

truly does set us on a trajectory toward, rather than divert us away from, goodness itself, toward the absolute perfection of God.

To grasp fully what Aquinas means when he says our passions and desires constitute the proper matter of the moral virtues, we need merely to consider a specific virtue or two. The virtue of temperance regulates the enjoyment of bodily pleasures. Without such pleasures, including the desires for them, there would be no virtue of temperance. Similarly, the virtue of fortitude cannot exist without the emotion of fear. Fortitude consists in the balanced regulation of this emotion, helping us neither to succumb to our fears nor to condemn our fears outright as something inherently bad.[190]

We can see this played out in any number of clinical examples. For instance, there came a moment during treatment (from a cognitive therapist) of a certain patient suffering from depression in which the patient recognized the need to overcome her fears that her husband would take active measures to prevent her from following simple, yet significant, steps toward self-improvement, such as learning how to drive a car. What began as a brute choice of the will to accomplish this over time became easy to do, to the point that the patient was no longer subject to such fears. Fortitude equipped her with this freedom from her fears. And although at the outset this patient's fears were excessive and misplaced, it was important for her therapist to take her fears seriously and not dismiss them as totally baseless.

In the case of another patient receiving therapy for severe depression, fortitude was needed to overcome the fears abetting her dysfunctional patterns of behavior. Concretely, this meant, for instance, expressing to her husband that she had a desire to have a child, a desire that had crippled her for fear it would induce her husband to leave her. Because this patient had used such fears

190 For more on the importance of fortitude in the moral life and its pertinence to clinical psychology, see the study in this book by Daniel McInerny.

to reinforce schemas, or deep-seated maladaptive patterns of behavior, for the better part of a lifetime, here as well the therapist needed to tread gently and firmly to help the patient strike a more balanced way of living with her fears.

Specifically, our emotions are converted into virtuous acts through right reason (our higher cognitive power) reaching a judgment about the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of a given movement of emotion, and the will freely (and habitually) choosing to carry out this judgment. Right reason arrives at this judgment in light of the truth of the human person and of how the sensible good in question is ordered to our highest good, the *summum bonum*. We can see as well how essential the virtue of prudence is to living appropriately with our emotions, as Craig Steven Titus points out in this book: prudence "involves not only doing something well but also expressing appropriate emotions 'at the right time, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right ways' (*NE* 1106b20–22)."[191]

That therapists can use cognitive-based treatment to help children who suffer from aggressive behavior and conduct disorder offers clinical evidence of the necessary causal role cognitive judgment plays in the educing of good behavior. Such cognitive-based treatment, which has enjoyed a good deal of success, includes teaching these children either the skill of reflecting on what might happen as a direct result of acting in a particular way (called the Consequential Thinking skill), or the skill of conceiving different options that might solve problems in interpersonal situations (called the Alternative Solution Thinking skill).

191 C.S. Titus, "Reasonable Acts." For an enlightening study on the role of "right reason" in the moral life, cf. Laurent Sentis, "La lumière dont nous faisons usage. La règle de la raison et la loi divine selon Thomas d'Aquin," in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 79 (1995): 49–69.

Another type of therapy, Parent Management Training, consists in helping the parents of such children acquire a more cognitive-based approach to instilling appropriate behavior both in themselves and in their aggressive children.

Still, since moral virtue plays the key role in the humanizing integration of our emotions and desires, emotional health or balance and, by consequence, mental well-being, cannot be achieved without cultivating the moral virtues. Clinical therapy, as important as it is—even essential in some instances—can never serve as a replacement for moral virtue. Certainly, it can, and in cases of mental illness should, serve as a supplement and aid to moral virtue. Although necessary for emotional health and mental well-being, moral virtue may not always be sufficient for such balance and well-being. At the same time, clinical therapy, at least in practice, can often focus merely on the reduction of symptoms, rather than on removing the ultimate cause of the psychological malady as such. Conversely, the cultivation of moral virtue targets the very underlying, ultimate cause of happiness (or unhappiness) itself.

But this does not suggest that, in principle, there exists an inherent tension between moral virtue and clinical therapy. To be sure, clinical therapy can be propaedeutic to the acquisition of moral virtue, if not a ready partner to it. For example, in nearly every case of therapy for alcohol abuse and addiction, the virtue of temperance (although rarely, if ever, by this name) is prescribed, usually in the form of total abstinence. In cases of borderline personality disorder, the clinician will usually try to help his patient overcome his susceptibility to letting his emotions get the better of him. In some instances of this disorder, therapists use the technique termed the dialectical strategy of devil's advocate to make their patients realize that their emotions frequently control their behavior and that deliverance from their disorder would require them to sever the necessary link between their affective moods and their comportment. Ideally, therapists will want to help their

patients to *desire* to sever this link and achieve willful control of their actions.

Cognitive therapy, especially, recognizes the need to take a therapeutic approach that works closely with the affective elements of a patient's underlying schemas (or underlying maladaptive patterns of thought and behavior), an approach the Catholic moralist would see as roughly equivalent to the cultivation of moral virtue. Cognitive therapy uses rational, cognitive appraisal to manage one's emotions better. In one specific case of a female patient suffering from depression, there came a moment in treatment when the therapist sought to correct the patient's proneness to the subjugation schema, or her proclivity to act in excessively nonassertive and emotionally stunted ways. He did this by helping her realize that even nice people, which this patient saw herself as, can and should behave assertively at times, and that this might even warrant getting angry (such as when this patient got angry, which she regretted, after she had blocked her neighbor's car and the neighbor had called the police about it). Cognitive therapy, in other words, operates with the understanding that sometimes a measured expression of anger is healthy and can even serve as an indication of mental fitness.[192]

### C. Consequences: The Emotions Become Rational by Participation

Among the notable consequences of Aquinas's teaching on the humanizing integration of the emotions through the cultivation of moral virtue, two especially, I think, stand out for our

[192] For more on the possible moral goodness of the emotion of anger in particular, cf. William Mattison, "Virtuous Anger? From Questions of *Vindicatio* to the Habituation of Emotion," in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24 (2004): 159–179; and Giles Mihaven, *Good Anger* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

consideration because of the importance they bear on the field of clinical therapy.

### Emotion Should Not Be Shunned as Such

The first marks a fruit of Thomas's metaphysically grounded moral system, wherein the objective nature of the human person sits at the basis of all moral considerations. It concerns Aquinas's conviction that the emotions form part of the essential fabric of our human lives and, because accruing to the animal-like dimension of the human person, are in themselves morally neutral. This means, considered in themselves, our initial emotional reactions to things are neither necessarily good nor bad. In fact, they *could* mark the *proper* reaction (although only a judgment of right reason can determine this). We need not dismiss categorically out of hand an initial reaction simply because it happens to be of an emotional nature.

Still today, this view smacks against popular, if even unspoken, opinion. Many times, we are conditioned to think our initial emotional reactions to things, as such, should be viewed with suspicion. In the case of the same depressed patient seeking cognitive therapy mentioned immediately above, this patient felt misgivings about being angry for the simple reason that she *was* angry. Stoic (and Kantian, as we shall see) in spirit, this approach looks upon the emotions as inherently subversive of our moral well-being (in the depressed patient's case, of her being a "nice person"). The passions are bad and should always be mistrusted.

Yet, again, clinical psychology adopts an approach that is easily akin to Aquinas's. Therapists almost uniformly recognize that it is perfectly natural to feel emotion, even anger, and that emotion should not be shunned as such. The same depressed patient's therapist, for instance, needed to help the patient come to see that feeling angry was not wrong in itself. In a sense, emotions and desires stand on psychologically "neutral" terrain, to adapt

Aquinas's term. If anything, clinicians understand that following the Stoic ideal of dismissing emotion outright opens the door to mental imbalance and pathology. Therapists do agree that it is unhealthy to control one's emotions too much or too little and that therapy should consist in helping patients overcome extreme mood swings or the habitual onset of excessive emotion. But eradicating emotion and desire from patients' lives never marks the goal of sound therapy.

## "Rational by Participation"

This leads to the second, and even more significant, contribution Aquinas makes to the understanding of how the passions become integrated in the pursuit of the human good, and of how his participated psychology can be of service to clinical psychology. According to Aquinas, the lower, animal-like powers of the human soul flow from and participate in the higher, intellectual ones and are ordered back, drawn, to them. At the same time, the animal-like inclination to bodily goods, the sensitive appetite, while inferior, retains the ability to obey (or disobey) reason's *imperium*. From this Aquinas concludes that this lower appetite can act as the *active principle* of virtuous behavior. The lower, sensitive appetite can, by way of participation, become so radically assimilated into the practice of virtue that it becomes a copartner, as it were, with reason (our cognitive power) and will in the shaping of our lives into works of moral excellence. Moral virtue succeeds in converting the very emotions themselves into rationally appropriate acts, into virtue-oriented movements. As a consequence, Aquinas, drawing upon Aristotle, does not hesitate to assert that the lower appetite, our animal-like inclination to bodily goods, has the capability of becoming, in its very act, "*rational by participation.*"[193]

193 Aristotle affirms that the sensitive appetite "participates in reason to some extent" (*NE* 1.13.1102b13–14). This leads Aquinas, in his commentary on the passage (*In Ethic.*, no.

This teaching, while plotting, as we shall see, a middle course, is radical. It seems nonsensical to hold that emotion can *give rise to* virtuous acts, can partake in human rationality. After all, emotion flows from the animal-like side of the human person, and virtue in any case is defined as the will's execution of what is cognitively judged to be rationally appropriate behavior. Human rationality and free choice, not emotion, make an act virtuous as such.

Many prominent philosophers have proposed positions that disagree sharply with Aquinas's on this matter, usually falling to either extreme of his. Before examining in greater depth Aquinas's teaching on the emotions' being rational by participation, then, we shall briefly consider how the history of philosophical thought, particularly after Thomas, has stood at odds with him on this teaching. This will place in relief the unique achievement of Aquinas's doctrine, a doctrine that, again it seems to me, can provide an enormous benefit to the field of clinical psychology. It will place in relief as well the difficulty of affirming the cooperative, consensual role emotion plays in cultivating moral virtue.

242) to call the sensitive appetite "rational by participation." Thomas outlines this position in three principal places: *ST* I-II, Q. 56, art. 4; *Quaestiones disputatae De virtutibus in communi*, art. 4 ("Whether the irascible and concupiscible appetites can be the subject of virtue"), which was written just after the completion of the *Prima Secundae Pars* of the *Summa*; and *Sent.*, bk. 3, d. 33, Q. 2, art. 4, qla. 2. The classic study of this issue is found in M.-D. Chenu, "Les passions vertueuses. L'anthropologie de saint Thomas," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 72 (1974): 11–18; and M.-D. Chenu, "Body and Body Politic in the Creation Spirituality of Thomas Aquinas" in *Listening* 13 (1974): 214–232. See also William Mattison, "Virtuous Anger?," 159–179, and Bonnie Kent, *The Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

## A Reductionist Psychology?

Whereas this essay has stressed points of commonality between the approaches of Aquinas and clinical therapy on the issue of emotional balance and integration, here a caveat must be introduced. One can safely say, I think, that many clinical therapists today hold a reductionist or materialist anthropology in mind. This

nature, covetousness, ambition, pusillanimity, magnanimity, valor, liberality, miserableness, kindness, lust, luxury, jealousy, revengefulness, curiosity, religion, superstition, panic, terror, admiration, glory, vainglory, dejection, sudden glory, laughter, sudden dejection, weeping, shame, blushing, impudence, pity, cruelty, emulation, envy, deliberation.

204 See R.S. Peters, "Thomas Hobbes," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 39.

205 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 10 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), ch. 2, p. 210. Cf. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), I, 1.

leads them to equate psychological well-being simply with good feeling or agreeable emotion. We noted this earlier when remarking how happiness, the goal of therapy, is often understood by the clinician as meaning nothing more than the patient's attainment of optimum affective or emotional wellness; when a patient feels good about himself, when his symptoms are significantly reduced and he feels he is a well-adjusted individual. When this happens, I fear, clinical therapy adopts an anthropology not far removed from that of Hume, Hobbes, and utilitarianism.

In the philosophical anthropology adopted in this essay, mental health means much more than emotional wellness, since the human person is more than a mere mechanized bundle of animal-like feelings and desires. The human person is not reducible to the purely emotional, to the purely biochemical or neurological.

Yet, as was noted earlier, clinical therapy seems intuitively aware of this, for therapists almost universally recognize that mental health comes only when one gains balanced self-mastery over one's emotions. In short, clinical therapy, in speaking of what is requisite for the attainment of psychological well-being, implicitly appeals to something higher than emotion, namely, that which has the duty of regulating and humanizing the emotions. There is the need, then, both for correction and for appreciation of commonality of outlook.

## Aquinas Stands Apart

From the foregoing brief survey of philosophical thought, we can see that Aquinas's position on good moral action flowing from our emotions—indebted to Aristotle's remark at the end of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the lower, sensitive or animal-like part of the human soul possesses the ability to participate in reason "to some extent"—stands very much apart in the annals of western learning. Writing in the fifteenth century, the Thomist John Capreolus does not hesitate to place Aquinas in a

class of his own on account of his insistence that our lower, animal-like inclination to bodily goods, our sensitive appetite, can act as the principle, the source, of a genuine *human* act, and, thus, of a virtuous deed.[206] Not rational per se, the passions become rational by participation, that is, by active collaboration with those faculties—reason (our cognitive power) and will—unique to the human person.

Aquinas would agree with Bonaventure, Scotus, and Kant that virtue consists first and foremost in an act of the will: "[T]he principal act of moral virtue," Thomas affirms, "is choice [election], and choice [election] is an act of the rational power."[207] He would be quick to add, however, that it need not consist exclusively in an act of the will. In no case will he agree with Kant that our passions and desires have, or at least should have, little or nothing to do with our moral obligations, that we should do what we ought regardless of our passions and desires. Aquinas insists that what we ought to do should include our passions and desires. After all, our emotions significantly impact the way we think and choose.

### Good Moral Action Should Flow from Our Emotions

We turn, then, to a more in-depth consideration of Aquinas's position that the emotions become rational by participation, that

206 Cf. Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De virtutibus in communi*, art. 4; *ST* I-II, Q. 56, art. 4; and John Capreolus, *Defensiones Theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, bk. 3, d. 33, art.1, end of concl. 1 (the English translation of this is found in *John Capreolus, On the Virtues*, trans. K. White and R. Cessario [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001], 246–260, at p. 250). Here Capreolus defends Thomas's position on the sensitive appetite's being the subject of virtue against the objections of Scotus and Peter of Auriol.

207 *ST* I-II, Q. 56, art. 4, arg. 4; *Quaestiones disputatae De virtutibus in communi*, art. 4, arg. 2. The first part of this phrase is a citation of Aristotle, *NE* 2.6.1106a36 and VI.2.1139a22–23.

good moral action should flow from our internal desires and emotions. To begin, we need to recall that, unlike such actions as digestion or bodily growth, over which the human person enjoys no real self-mastery, the movements of our lower, animal-like appetite, because of their rebellious nature (as owing to the quasi-autonomy, as it were, of the sense appetite), demand that we gain mastery over them. And self-mastery makes an act properly human, since it involves the engagement of reason and will, or reflective judgment and execution.[208] Insofar, then, as an emotion leads us to gain mastery over it, it is brought up into, it becomes one with, the work of our higher intellectual faculties. It becomes a properly human act, a rational act.

Put another way, the lower, animal-like appetite in the human person gives rise to the emotions, which, unlike, say, digestion and growth, are interior movements that always remain able to resist the commands of reason. This means they stand in need of perfection. Since virtue perfects human acts, it follows that the sensitive appetite acts as a goad to virtue. That is, the sensitive appetite gives rise to acts of virtue as from a principle or source.[209] The human sense appetite, our animal-like ordering to created bodily goods, relates to virtuous conduct in the way that cause relates to effect.

208 "Man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human of which man is the master. Now man is the master of his actions through his reason and will" (*ST* I-II, Q. 1, art. 1).

209 As Capreolus succinctly puts it: "Every power that is able to be a principle of a human act, and is not of its nature determined ... to obeying reason, can be the subject of a virtue" (*Defensiones Theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*). Aquinas does affirm in *ST* I-II, Q. 77, art. 6, ad. 2 that emotion can lessen the freedom of an action when it acts as a cause of virtue. But this is not the same as what is at issue here, which Capreolus well explains.

Because Aquinas recognizes an active, synergistic participation of the animal-like powers of the soul in the rational ones, he concludes that any power of the soul that operates as a principle of a genuine human act must participate in human rationality.[210] In short, since the sense appetite can become rational by participation, and since it belongs to virtue to perfect human acts by aligning them with reason, "it follows," Aquinas concludes, "that there [be a kind of] human virtue ... [which] is placed in what is rational by participation, that is, in the appetitive part of the soul."[211]

We see here just how far a participated psychology can be pushed. The rational powers, through their ability to penetrate the lower, animal-like part of the soul, empower the lower sense appetite of the human being to accomplish what properly belongs to reason and will. Rather than simply being forced to submit to reason and will, as Bonaventure, Scotus, and Kant would have it, the animal-like sensitive appetite, because of its transformation, is treated as a kind of equal; it is conscripted into service in the acquisition of the moral virtues. As Aquinas affirms in a key passage:

> It is not the function of moral virtue to make the sensitive appetite altogether idle, since virtue does not deprive the powers subordinate to reason of their proper activities, but instead makes them execute [*exequantur*] the commands of reason *through the exercise of their proper acts*. Virtue therefore ... orders the sensitive appetite to its proper regulated movements.[212]

### The Lower Sense Appetite as a Virtuous Habit

Virtuous conduct consists in habitual choice (*habitus* is the Latin term denoting this), whereby our repeated good acts incline

[210] *ST* I-II, Q. 56, art. 4.
[211] Aquinas, *In Ethic.*, bk. 1, lect. 13 (no. 243).
[212] *ST* I-II, Q. 59, art. 5; emphasis mine.

us to acting rightly, or endow us with a stable, character-shaping disposition or skill at acting well. As a result, Aquinas sees little problem in attributing the notion of *habitus*, habit, to our lower, animal-like inclination to bodily goods, to our sensitive appetite.[213]

Some moralists, pointing to a text by Aristotle for support, continue to debate whether virtuous habits, because they incline us to a certain type of comportment, actually lessen our freedom.[214] We must recall, however, that the faculty of choosing, the will, has as its object the universal good, the good of reason. Because virtuous habits incline us to the rational good, they order the will to its proper object. In so doing they ensure a proper functioning, and thus the proper fulfillment or flourishing, of the will. Aquinas does not look upon free will as a radically open-ended, undetermined power, indifferent to whatever stands before it, whether good or evil. Rather, freedom is determined and perfected by, because inscribed in, the human person's natural inclination to the good.[215] While it may hold, then, that vicious habits (the type of habit, in fact, mentioned by Aristotle) lessen our freedom, just the reverse is the case for virtuous habits.

To attribute the notion of habit to the sensitive appetite means that this lower appetite, our internal affective ordering to bodily goods, can be shaped into a power that is disposed to working side by side, as an active consensual partner, with reason (our cognitive power) and will in the practice of virtue. Through

213 *Sent.*, bk. 3, d. 33, Q. 2, art. 4 and Q. 1, art. 2; and *Quaestiones disputatae De virtutibus in communi*, art. 4.

214 The key passage from Aristotle comes in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he asserts that those who have cultivated the vicious habit of intemperance or injustice lack the ability, the freedom, to be anything but intemperate or unjust (*NE* 3.5.1114a3–22).

215 "The will does not desire of necessity whatsoever it desires ... [since] the appetible good is the object of the will" (*ST* I, Q. 82, arts. 2 and 3; cf. Q. 83, art. 3).

growth in moral virtue, the lower, sense appetite advances from a power that contests, no matter how vigorously, reason and will's power to command to one that cooperates with it more and more, through its own impulses. In fact, the very proof that moral virtue, such as temperance, has been attained lies in the fact that one is no longer foiled by one's passions (in the case of temperance, one no longer struggles with disordered desires for bodily pleasures).

If this did not happen, our attempts to act virtuously would meet often with resistance from our animal-like inclination to sense goods. This would severely limit the extent to which virtuous behavior perfects our character, for our emotions would never take on a perfectly human character, would never be genuinely "humanized." To attain the state of perfect virtue, the very inclination of the sense appetite, likened to a subject that must give its free consent to the governance of a sovereign, must itself become virtuous. To attain the state of perfect virtue, we need to become good in our emotions and desires and in the choices of our will.