



Passionalist or Rationalist? The emotions in Aquinas' moral theology

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Abstract

Interest in the passions and their contribution to the moral life is enjoying a resurgence in the study of Thomas Aquinas. But much of that interest assumes that Aquinas' position is simply propassion. This is certainly true of Robert Miner's exhaustive study, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*. In this essay, however, I question the adequacy of this assumption on two related grounds. First, I examine the implications for Aquinas' account of the morality of the emotions of his use of the political analogy to account for the structural relation between passion and reason. Second, I suggest that accounts of the passions must consider the experiential differences in the passions of post-lapsarian agents. I conclude that Aquinas' account of the role of emotion in the moral life is decidedly less positive than Miner's presentation suggests.

Keywords

emotions; Aquinas; Robert Miner; control; ethics

Now it is evident that in moral matters the reason holds the place of commander and mover, while the appetitive power is commanded and moved. But the appetite does not receive the direction of reason univocally so to say; because it is rational, not essentially, but by participation.¹

Despite the growing number of articles on the passions in Aquinas' moral theology, Robert Miner's *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* is the first book-length treatment of what has come to be called the "Treatise on the Passions" in the *Summa Theologiae*.² And, as Miner

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Christian Classics, 1948, rpt. 1981), I-II 60, 1.

² Miner remarks his discomfort with referring to QQ. 22–48 of the *prima pars secundae* as a "Treatise": "I am using "treatise" under erasure, since Thomas does not, strictly speaking, write treatises" [*Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1n.1]. Two other recent treatments of the passions in Aquinas suggest the

himself reports, this part of the *Summa* is not only one of “the most neglected” but also “strangely neglected” parts of the work – given, that is, the significance to Aquinas’ moral theology.³ In terms of its comprehensiveness and argumentative rigor Miner’s project will surely receive due accolades. In terms of the significance that Miner accords to the passions, however, I intend to subject his interpretation of Aquinas to critical scrutiny. First, I consider Miner’s remarks on an important analogy that Aquinas derives from Aristotle to speak about the relation between reason and passion. Contrary to what he argues, this analogy doesn’t make the case easier for what I shall call Miner’s propassion position. Second, I shift my focus to consider the contrast between human beings prior to and after the fall from the state of innocence. Aquinas’ remarks on the important differences between human beings in these two conditions shed further light on the control and responsibility that human agents have over and for their emotions. But the light that it sheds again doesn’t suggest the same propassion picture that Miner draws. In both cases, I argue, Aquinas is more cautious with respect to the passions than Miner credits him with being. Of course, seeing in Aquinas a propassion position allows Miner to present Aquinas’ work as convergent with more recent work on the emotions. In fact, Miner speaks pejoratively of those who attribute to Aquinas a “rationalist animus” in his treatment of the passions (33).⁴ Nevertheless, I see myself as defending what Eleonore Stump has called Aquinas’ “reason-centered ethics” against Miner’s attempts to move the passions to the center.⁵ However unfortunate the

timeliness of the topic: Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Georgetown University Press, 2009) and Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire/Aquinas on Emotion* (Catholic University of America Press, 2011), that both of which focus on the “Treatise on the Passions” in the *Summa Theologiae*.

³ As Miner himself points out he is not the first to notice the neglect: “Nothing is more commonplace for readers of Aquinas, and especially of what has come to be known as his “moral theology,” than to pay close attention to the Questions on happiness, virtue, and natural law in the 1a2ae. For many of the same readers, nothing is more habitual than to skim through, or skip entirely, the “Treatise on the Passions.” This neglect has not gone entirely unnoticed. Servais Pinckaers observes that the twenty-seven Questions containing 132 Articles on the passions comprise “une oeuvre unique, classique...et trop negligee” (RSPT 74 (1990): p. 379). Pinckaer’s observation raises a simple question: Why are Questions 22–48 of the 1a2ae so strangely neglected” (5).

⁴ Aquinas is not above concentrating his efforts on the intellectual side of things: “The theologian, however, has only to inquire specifically concerning the intellectual and appetitive powers, in which the virtues reside” (ST I 78, prologue). Aquinas is here, of course, only subordinating the sense powers to the intellectual and appetitive, but insofar as the theologian’s concern is with virtue and virtue involves reason, the extension of such a focus to the subordination of the sensitive appetite to the rational appetite is not without some support.

⁵ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003), p. 22. She elaborates thus: “What makes an action morally bad is its moving the agent not towards, but away from, the agent’s ultimate goal. Such a deviation is patently irrational, and Aquinas’s analysis of the moral badness of human action identifies it fundamentally as irrationality, since irrationality is an

neologism, Miner's passionalist Aquinas is finally far less convincing than the rationalist account of Aquinas' emotion theory that I attempt to reconstruct – that is, I take Aquinas to hold that reason is and must remain the “mover and commander” in the moral life.

1. Reason and passion: the political analogy

Miner insists that he does not intend to “romanticize the passions” in Aquinas' account (108), and yet it is clear that, given a choice between treating the passions as threats to rather than supports for moral agency, Miner would opt for the latter alternative. He undertakes to defend, in part, Eileen Sweeney's remarkable claim that “[w]hat Aquinas does not do is express any fundamental distrust of the passions or engage in any heavy-handed appeals to the need for rational control of the passions”.⁶ I shall argue that Aquinas, in fact, does insist on the necessity of rational control over the passions. Miner's preference for a position closer to that of Sweeney comes across clearly in his handling of Aquinas' modeling of the passion-reason relationship in terms of political rather than despotic types of governance, which Miner deploys in his defense of Sweeney against the “entrenched orthodoxy” that would charge her with gross overstatement. Consider Aquinas' modeling of the relation between passion and reason, which he derives from Aristotle:

As the Philosopher says (*Polit.* i. 2): *We observe in an animal a despotic and a politic principle: for the soul dominates the body by a despotic power; but the intellect dominates the appetite by a politic and royal power.* 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

obstacle to the actualization of a human being's specifying potentialities, those that make *rational* the differentia of the human species. In this as in every other respect, Aquinas's ethics is reason-centered” (24).

⁶ Eileen Sweeney, “Restructuring Desire: Aquinas, Hobbes and Descartes on the Passions,” in Stephen F. Brown, ed., *Meeting of the Minds: The Relations between Medieval and Classical Modern European Philosophy*. *Recontres de Philosophie Medievale*, VII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. 222.

sensitive appetite has something of its own, by virtue whereof it can resist the commands of reason. (ST I 81, 3ad2)

Where control means only “subordination” of one thing to another, Miner thinks there is nothing to object to in readings that attribute the claim to Aquinas that the reason must control the passions (107). But he is convinced that it often entails more than subordination, and he uses Aquinas’ model to make his case: “Aquinas endorses the Aristotelian distinction between “despotic rule” and “politic rule,” and explicitly denies any kinship between the reason/passion relation and despotic rule” (107). For Miner Aquinas’ interpreters are guilty of conflating control-as-subordination with control-as-domination: “Perfect subjection of the passions entails their responsibility to reason and will... It does not imply, or even remotely suggest, a ‘life entirely free of the passions’” (108). Yet something is awry in Miner’s presentation of the viable options.⁷ Why is the option suddenly either subordination or extirpation – that is, a life without passion? Aquinas clearly opposes extirpation, but domination is not equivalent to extirpation. The problem, I believe, is that there is really no difference to the distinction between control-as-subordination and control-as-domination: Miner himself speaks of ‘*perfect subjection*’ but wouldn’t such subjection be the same as the type of command-obedience structure that Aquinas attributes to the soul/body? What would be perfect about a type of subjection or subordination in which the subject or subordinate element regularly resisted the commands of the ruler? Either the passions exercise genuine resistance to the command of reason, which would mean that they are not perfectly subject to reason’s control, or there is no difference between the pairs of body/soul and reason/passion. If the former, then there is really no point in trying to distinguish between mere subordination and

⁷ Miner may be inadvertently carried away. He approvingly cites a passage from Elisabeth Uffenheimer-Lippens’ essay where she seeks to qualify the concept of control by introducing this very substitution of extirpation or exclusion for control. This is a peculiar usage of the concept of control. I doubt that most idiomatic uses of the concept in English bear this sense of exclusion. When I want to control my appetite, I don’t mean that I intend to eliminate it. I may also speak of controlling my tongue in certain social circumstances without ever wishing to convey the idea that I intend to eliminate my tongue. If my dog is barking and a neighbour asks me to control him, I don’t respond with outrage at the suggestion because I don’t assume that control means exclude, eliminate, or extirpate. Hence, the leap from control to exclusion requires some justification, though this is not provided by Miner. The passage in Uffenheimer-Lippens’ essay runs as follows: “It is very important, however, to understand what Thomas means by this ‘control’ of reason. We must stress that Thomas speaks always of the ‘mitigation’ of the passions and never of their total exclusion. When he does use the verb ‘to suppress’ in relation to the passions, he refers only to the lack of rational order that must be repelled, not to the passions as such” [“Rationalized Passion and Passionate Rationality: Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Reason and the Passions,” *Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2003):548. Q. by Miner at p. 106n.23.].

domination, since the passions would not even, in that case, be clearly subordinated – and they would certainly not be *perfectly* subject to reason. If the latter, then Miner will have to explain why Aquinas doesn't correct his rather egregious error of distinguishing between the two types of relation (body/soul and reason/passion) in terms of the political categories. But these alternatives are not exhaustive of the possibilities. Miner is guilty of loading the rhetorical dice in his favor through a sleight of hand by substituting extirpation for domination. I want to argue that Miner finds himself in this difficulty because he misinterprets, or better, over-interprets the contrast between body/soul and reason/passion.

In trying to understand what Aquinas has to say about the emotions it makes better sense to treat domination, subordination, and perfect subjection as largely synonymous terms.⁸ Something or someone can be dominated by, subordinated or perfectly subject to another without being extirpated or eliminated by that other. Just as something or someone can exercise resistance even when doing so is wrong. For Aquinas the potential resistance of the passions to reason is not to their credit but to the discredit of fallen humanity.⁹ I return to this point in the second section of the paper.

What needs to be demonstrated now is that Miner's construal of the political analogy is mistaken. I hope to prove that Aquinas doesn't see the resistance of the emotions to reason as counting in their favor and that the goal of controlling (dominating, subordinating, subjecting) the passions is central to his understanding of the good life. Let me, however, flesh out Miner's position in more detail. Miner draws attention to the political analogy in chapter four in order to contest the usefulness of the "metaphor" of *control*.¹⁰ The "Aristotelian distinction" between types of political rule and its application to types

⁸ Consider in this light the following remarks by Miner: "a primary task in the moral life (perhaps even *the* primary task) is to make the ascent from the condition where the sensitive appetite is an obstacle for the will to overcome, to a better condition where the passions gladly serve reason" (94). That this type of service is not characteristic of despotic rule, as Miner goes on to state, is somewhat confusing. It may simply be that the political metaphors are less helpful than is normally thought. But it does strike me as odd to say that free citizens aim to arrive at a point where they "gladly serve" their leader or leaders. I would agree with Miner, however, that this doesn't sound odd of the reason/passion relation. It is precisely the arrangement that is to be sought, but I'm not sure that it makes sense to speak of that relationship as political. Also, I should point out that this is something that takes time and effort. Along the way, this means that the passions present the wayfarer with obstacles to his or her flourishing. In that sense, the emotions are a negative force.

⁹ Miner does not agree, but he does hold that the passions in fallen humanity are altered by sinfulness: "What exists naturally in animals is deformed in human beings by both fallen nature and bad acquired habits" (76). As I shall argue in the following section of the paper, this is more important than Miner's account of the morality of the passions will allow.

¹⁰ I confess that I do not see why Miner speaks of a control as a metaphor.

of psychosomatic relations “*explicitly denies any kinship between the reason/passion relation and despotic rule*” (107; emphasis added). The denial seems to be complete and positive. Miner argues that “the possibility of a positive contribution” is implicit in the analogy (107n.24). Nothing in the reason/passion relation should be understood in terms of the control that is characteristic of the despotic rule of the soul over the body. Miner wants to draw attention to his own use of the concept because he doesn’t find it altogether satisfactory. He writes: “The passions are “subject” to reason and “obey” reason, but in the same manner as free citizens obey their rulers (not controllers)” (107). The assumption behind these remarks seems to be that resistance is a good thing in the ruled. Surely this is suggested, Miner thinks, by the political analogy itself: free citizens are better off in Aristotle’s political theory than are slaves, whose masters rule them despotically. And Miner sees the passions as “sources of energy” that make a positive contribution to the moral life (94).

The question is whether or not all of the implications of the analogy are intended to be applied to the reason/passion rule. Is Aquinas merely using the analogy to indicate a difference in the responsiveness of the passions to reason from that of the bodily members to the soul? Or is he also expecting that further connections will be made? Miner clearly holds that the analogy should be interpreted in a robust manner: “the analogy to political rule implies not only negative resistance, but also the potential for positive contribution. As free citizens contribute something of their own to the life of the well-governed *polis*, beyond what is already known or prescribed by the rulers, so the passions are able to contribute “something of their own,” as Aquinas says (I.81.3 ad 2m) to the life of the human being” (107).

It is possible to interpret the analogy differently. One might argue that the analogy usefully points to an observable difference between two types of psychosomatic relations. The body does seem to respond immediately and without resistance to the commands of the soul. As I am typing these words my fingers are striking just the keys I want them to (for the most part) in just the order I intend. It makes sense to speak of such relations as captured by an idealized picture of slaves obeying their masters or subjects their despot.¹¹ Similarly, I have had experiences of my passions getting the better of me, of overcoming me, of seemingly moving me in a direction that I would

¹¹ It is probably worth pointing out that even Aristotle must have been aware of the fact that the analogy was intended to touch on ideal relationships: are we to believe that even natural slaves never resisted or that subjects of a despot obeyed without qualm? The limitations of the analogy may, that is, work in both directions, but I am primarily concerned with suggesting that its implications shouldn’t be drawn too broadly with respect to the emotions’ free agency.

not normally be moved in. So, if one is looking for a metaphorical way of capturing this relationship in contrast to that of the soul over the body, there is some truth to its comparison with political rule over free citizens.

It should be remembered that when Aquinas introduces the political analogy in ST I, 81, 3*ad*2, it is in response to an objection that appeals to *Romans* 7:23, where Paul speaks of the appetites as resisting the lawful command of reason. The objection denies that the passions can obey the reason. Aquinas responds in such a way as to endorse Paul's observation and to allow that the passions can still be brought to obey the reason. The point of the analogy in this context is not immediately to present the passions as providing something positive. Its point is to open up conceptual room for seeing in the passions the potential for obeying reason. Since their resistance to the command of reason is something given in experience, Aquinas must suggest a way that something can be obedient and disobedient. That being disobedient is not imbued with positive connotations is a reasonable surmise in the context.

It may help to consider other instances where Aquinas makes the connection between the relation of reason to the passions and political rule. Let's begin with Aquinas' commentary on the passage in the *Politics*:

For we find among the parts of human beings that the soul rules over the body, and this is by a despotic rule in which the slave can in no way resist the master, since the slave as such belongs absolutely to the master... And we perceive that bodily members such as hands and feet immediately execute their functions at the soul's bidding and without any resistance. We also find that the intellect, or reason, rules over the [appetite], although by a political and kingly rule, one over free persons, and so the latter can resist in particular things. And the [appetite] likewise sometimes does not follow reason. And the reason for this difference is that only the soul can move the body, and so the latter is completely subject to the former, but the senses as well as reason can move the [appetite], and so the latter is not totally subject to reason.¹²

There is nothing exceptionable in the passage itself – that is, it could as easily be interpreted to support Miner's interpretation of the analogy as my own. Its context in the commentary, however, is revelatory. Aquinas locates the analogy within a larger argument. In that argument, according to Aquinas, Aristotle intends to demonstrate

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), p. 29. I have throughout the passage quoted replaced Regan's use of will to translate "*appetitus*" because the passage simply does not call for the introduction of the idea of will. In fact, the use of will actually confuses the point of the passage.

both that “there is something ruling and something ruled in everything constituted out of many things so as to make one common thing” and that “this is natural and expedient.” The political analogy furnishes concrete examples of this premise with respect to the human animal. Aquinas dismisses the objection that such rule is not everywhere present in nature by insisting that the argument must focus on “things disposed according to nature and not corrupted things,” because in “diseased human beings and those wrongly disposed, the body very often rules the soul.” In properly disposed human beings, however, Aquinas concludes, “the subjection [of body to soul and passion to reason] is by nature and expedient.” Not only is the subjection natural, but deviations from it are normatively problematic: “it would be harmful for both regimes if the part that should be ruled were to be equal or contrary to the part that should rule. For the body would be destroyed unless it were subject to the soul, and desire would be inordinate unless it were subject to reason.”

This overtly negative conceptualization of resistance is also evident in other uses of the political analogy. In response to an objection that alleges that there is sin only in the will, for example, Aquinas distinguishes the members of the body, which are “organs of action,” from “the internal appetitive powers,” which are “principles” of action. Whereas the former are likened to a slave because they do not move others, the latter are likened to “free agents, because they both act and are acted upon” (ST I–II 74, 2*ad*3). The embodied character of the passions plays a key role in another passage where Aquinas avails himself of the political analogy. There can be no doubt that for Aquinas humans “are masters of their own acts” and that this kind of control over their own activity elevates them above nonhuman animals (ST I 19, 12*ad*4). This is particularly true of their power of command. Command is an act of the reason wherein the reason as “commander orders the one commanded to do something,” though it depends on the prior motion of the will (ST I–II 17, 1). Lacking the power of reason, which is the power to direct by commanding another to do something, nonhuman animals are incapable of command (ST I–II 17, 2). Acts of the sensitive appetite are subject to reason’s command inasmuch as they are “in our power” (ST I–II 17, 7). Unlike the intellectual appetite, however, the sensitive appetite depends on a bodily organ. Its relation to reason’s command must be considered in light of reason’s power to direct the appetite and reason’s control over the body. With respect to the first, the sensitive appetite is subject to reason’s command. But the body is not subject to reason’s command, and so the body may even thwart the command of reason. This happens in one sense when the experience of a passion comes on suddenly and overtakes the agent, though the agent could have prevented it if she or he had seen it coming: “Hence the Philosopher says (*Polit.* i. 2) that the reason governs the irascible and

concupiscible not by a “despotic supremacy,” which is that of a master over his slave; but by a “politic and royal supremacy,” whereby the free are governed, who are not wholly subject to command.” Interestingly, this use of the analogy is again closely associated with the passage from *Romans*. In this instance, Aquinas remarks of the resistance to the command of reason by the appetite that it is caused either by “a disposition of the body, whereby the sensitive appetite is hindered from perfect compliance with the command of reason” or by a “sudden movement” of the passions (ST I–II 17, 7ad1).

Repeatedly, when Aquinas deploys the political analogy, the point he makes refers to the power of the passions to resist the control of reason. It is worth asking, therefore, whether or not this resistance is a good thing. I believe the evidence is overwhelmingly against such an interpretation. In ST I 83, 1ad1, Aquinas refers back to his earlier use of the analogy to make the point that the resistance in question is a resistance to the direction of reason. Given that reason is the rule and measure of human acts, it would be strange to think of any resistance to the guidance of reason as a good thing. This perspective is reinforced by Aquinas’ use of the analogy in *The Disputed Question on the Virtues in General*. In article four, Aquinas introduces the analogy: “reason rules the inferior parts of the soul with a royal and political governance, that is, as kings and princes rule free men who have the right and capacity to resist to some degree the commands of king or prince.”¹³ This sounds very promising for Miner. But Aquinas again uses the analogy to suggest the limitation or constraint that the resistance in question raises for the moral agent. Because the sensitive appetite can resist the commands of reason, it needs some remedy: “if the lower appetite is not perfected by a disposition to follow the command of reason, the operation, which is from the lower appetite as from its proper principle, would not be of perfect goodness. . .” The remedy that Aquinas has in mind is virtue: “when human action must deal with the objects of sense appetite, the good of the operation requires that there be a disposition or perfection in sense appetite by which it easily obeys reason. This is what we call virtue.” Aquinas makes this point as well in the *Summa*, where he argues that because the sensitive appetitive powers “have their own proper movements” which at times act against the command of reason, they will only be “well disposed to act” through the virtues (ST I–II 56, 4ad3). Similarly, this corrective role of virtue is used by Aquinas to defend the division of virtues into intellectual and moral. Moral virtues are necessary in the sensitive appetite in order to restore it to a condition where it is “well disposed” to follow

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue [Quaestio Disputata de Vertutibus In Communi and Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus]*, trans. Ralph McInerney (St. Augustine’s Press, 1999).

reason (ST I–II 58, 2). Again the political analogy is not used in such a way as to suggest the positive value of the passions’ “right of opposition”: it appears that this right, at least potentially, stands in the way of human flourishing.

According to Robert Pasnau, Aquinas’ model “gives the passions a curious in-between status”.¹⁴ Miner charges Pasnau with neglecting the “positive” side of the passions that the model supposedly conveys. The passions are not merely capable of resisting the commands of reason; they are also capable of making a contribution, just like “free citizens contribute something of their own to the life of the well-governed *polis*” (107). From the evidence provided above, and in Pasnau’s defense, Aquinas makes no mention of such a *right* of resistance being a positive thing.¹⁵ If and when the passions exercise such a right *against* the ordination of reason, then the passions would be interfering with and endangering the moral success of the agent.

Aristotle shows that the virtuous man is at peace with his own passions. He keenly feels his own sorrows and joys since the same thing is painful or pleasant to his whole being (i.e., both the sensitive and intellectual part) and not one thing to one part and another to another. The reason is that his sensitive power is subject to reason to such an extent that it obeys reason’s prompting, or at least does not resist {*quia videlicet pars sensitiva in eo a deo rationi subiecta, quod sequitur motum rationis, vel saltem non vehementer renititur*}; for the virtuous man is not led by the passions of the sensitive part so that when passion subsides he must repent of having acted against reason. But he always acts according to reason and does not readily have regrets. Thus he is at peace with himself. (CNE §1809)

The central claim contradicts Miner’s assertion that the resistance of the emotions to reason is some sort of good. On the contrary, Aquinas insists that in characterizing the virtuous individual what is central is the domination of reason over the passions, or, to put it less polemically, the absence of any resistance on the part of the passions to reason’s guidance. I don’t want to leave the impression that the passions are something to be avoided altogether. Aquinas does not, to my knowledge, ever make such a claim. But Miner tends to see the passions as somehow independently contributing to the good life, and this is, I believe, a mistake. The passions contribute to the good life only insofar as they are clearly directed by reason.

¹⁴ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 257. What Pasnau has in mind is the intermediate position of passion when contrasted with both the “body’s limbs” – which obey reason – and the external senses – which do not obey inasmuch as we cannot not see when our eyes are open and there is adequate ambient lighting. The passions have the power to “resist” reason, but can also be made subject to reason. Hence the description of the “in-between status” (257).

¹⁵ See ST I–II 58, 2, where Aquinas writes of the rule of reason over the passions as constrained by the latter’s “right of opposition.”

Otherwise the passions pose a threat to virtuous living. Indeed, the point of the political analogy for Aquinas is to demonstrate how the sensitive appetite can frustrate human agency: “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.” Aquinas distinguishes between the roles played in moving the sensitive appetite – that played by particular reason, as guided by universal reason, and that played by imagination and sense. The resistance of the passions to the control of reason stems from the latter two sources of sensitive apprehension (see more generally ST I 81, 3). And this poses a further challenge to Miner who insists that “while materiality in the fallen state may be part of the problem, what leads to the revolt of the appetites against reason is not essentially materiality.” The direct target of this assertion is again Pasnau, but it is worth noting that insofar as the passions of the sensitive appetite are led astray by imagination and sense they are led astray by material – that is, bodily – powers.

I have argued against Miner’s peculiar interpretation of the political analogy – peculiar, that is, insofar as he takes it too literally and expansively, and so ends up seeing in the analogy a positive case to be made for the passions themselves. This reading of the analogy is not required by many of the contexts in which it occurs, especially since in those contexts the connotations are primarily negative. Moreover, this reading seems to be at odds with the experiences of wayfarers who still find many emotional experiences to be threats to their well-being. The goal of all moral agents is to dominate their passions so as to ensure that they are guided by reason, and under reason’s control the passions will prove a complement to human flourishing. This is the goal, but many will not arrive at the goal and others will be somewhere along the way to it. In the next section I consider a unique condition where the normative goal has been achieved, even if only and unfortunately temporarily. I am speaking of the state of innocence.

2. Reason and passion in paradise

Set Miner’s claims in the light of the place that the passions hold in Aquinas’ discussion of paradise. Human beings in the pre-lapsarian state would still be embodied, and so would still have a sensitive appetite. But Aquinas denies to their sensitive appetite all passions having to do with evil. This might sound very promising for Miner: passions such as joy and love would still exist, and would, I gather, play the positive type of role that Miner imagines (ST I 95, 2). Again, however, I am more than willing to allow that the passions have *a* positive role to play in the lives of moral agents. My objection is to

attempts to exaggerate that role, particularly when such exaggeration tends to minimize the threat that the emotions often pose to meritorious action. So the mere fact that there would be positive emotions in the state of innocence is not sufficient to support the claim that Miner is determined to make about the benefits of the opposition of the emotions to reason. In fact, the discussion of the passions in the primitive condition of human beings as described in the *prima pars* suggests that the opposite is the case. First, in Eden the passions would be seriously truncated: since there would be no evil, either present or expected, there would be no sorrow and no fear. If every passion were essential to human flourishing, and yet some passions were excluded from the primitive state, then humans would be incapable of happiness in the state of innocence. This argument is obviously absurd. The best that we can say, therefore, is that only some passions would have been present. *A fortiori*, this means that Miner cannot claim that all of the passions contribute to human flourishing. Moreover, Miner's claims about the resistance of the passions is not specific to a certain passion, which suggests that at least some of the passions that human beings experience in the fallen state resist reason's command in a negative way.

The absence of certain emotions in the pre-lapsarian state raises another possible problem for Miner. If the passions that are most likely to undermine or threaten the control of reason are those passions that are excluded from the pre-fallen condition, then there would be little room for the exercise of the opposition to reason that Miner thinks Aquinas is praising. What needs to be shown, therefore, is that the passions that are most likely to threaten reason's operation are the very ones excluded by hypothesis from this condition. This is suggested by Aquinas' response to the second objection. The objector argues *a fortiori*: the soul is nobler than the body, but the body in the original condition was impassible; so the soul too must have been impassible. To resolve the problem requires a distinction between passion in a general sense and passion construed narrowly. Aquinas provides such a distinction in question ninety-seven, article two:

Passion may be taken in two senses. First, in its proper sense, and thus a thing is said to suffer when changed from its natural disposition. For passion is the effect of action; and in nature contraries are mutually active or passive, according as one thing changes another from its natural disposition. Secondly, *passion* can be taken in a general sense for any kind of change, even if belonging to the perfecting process of nature. Thus understanding and sensation are said to be passions. In this second sense, man was passive in the state of innocence, and was passive both in soul and body. In the first sense, man was impassible, both in soul and body, as he was likewise immortal; for he could curb

his passion, as he could avoid death, so long as he refrained from sin.
(ST I 97, 2)

In his response to the objector in question ninety-five, Aquinas concedes the objector's first premise but denies the total impassibility of the body. The body would only have been impassible with respect to those things that "alter the disposition of nature" not generally impassible. Similarly, the soul would not have been generally impassible, but would have been "impassible as regards the passions which impede the free use of reason" (ST I 95, 2*ad*2).

Second, the model for Aquinas in paradise is clearly not mere subordination but domination: "in the state of innocence the inferior appetite was wholly subject to reason: *so that in that state the passions of the soul existed only as consequent upon the judgment of reason*" (ST I 95, 2; emphasis added). This note of reason's complete control over the passions is suggested by the response to the first objection. The objector claims that there were no passions whatsoever in the first condition because passion leads to the opposition of the flesh to the spirit. But there was no such opposition in the operations of the human powers in the pre-fallen condition. Aquinas' response is brief but forceful: "The flesh lusts against the spirit by the rebellion of the passions against the reason; which could not occur in the state of innocence" (ST I 95, 2*ad*1). Miner may wish to retort to this observation that the despotic rule of reason over the passions to which he is opposed (and to which, he argues, Aquinas is equally opposed) should be contrasted with the resistance of the passions to, *not their rebellion against*, reason. But this is not what Aquinas claims in the body of the article. Contrasting the condition of fallen human beings with that of those in the state of innocence, Aquinas emphasizes the loss for the former of the domination of reason over the passions: "For our sensual appetite [as opposed to those in the state of innocence], wherein the passions reside, is not entirely subject to reason {*non totaliter subest rationi*}; hence at times our passions forestall and hinder reason's judgment; at other times they follow after reason's judgment, accordingly as the sensual appetite obeys reason to some extent {*sensualis appetitus aliquantulum rationi obedit*}. But in the state of innocence the inferior appetite was wholly subject to reason {*erat rationi totaliter subiectus*}" (ST I 95, 2).

This latter aspect is emphasized in the previous article of question ninety-five. In this article Aquinas argues that human beings *were* created in grace. What matters for my present purposes is how Aquinas, in defending his thesis, articulates the relations between soul and body as well as reason and the passions:

But the very rectitude of the primitive state, wherewith man was endowed by God, seems to require that, as others say, he was created in grace, according to Eccles. Vii. 30, *God made man right*. For this

rectitude consisted in his reason being subject to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul: and the first subjection was the cause of both the second and the third; since while reason was subject to God, the lower powers remained subject to reason, as Augustine says. Now it is clear that such a subjection of the body to the soul and of the lower powers to reason, was not from nature; otherwise it would have remained after sin. . . (ST I 95, 1)

I am not here interested in the conclusion that Aquinas wishes to reach – that is, that the first human beings were created in a state of grace. Instead, what interests me is twofold. On the one hand, Aquinas clearly states that what was *rightly ordered* about the first human beings was that their passions were subordinated to their reason. No mention is made of the passions having “something of their own” or of the goodness of their opposition to reason. No opposition to reason is entertained, because such opposition would limit reason’s control where such control was, we are to understand, unlimited and perfect. Indeed, the passions are now assimilated to the soul-body relation rather than differentiated from it in such a way as to suggest the total control over the passions that reason was capable of in the primitive condition, a type of control that in the fallen state only appears in the relation between soul and body.

Aquinas returns to this specific passage in his later consideration of the fact that it was impossible for the first human beings to commit a venial sin prior to committing a mortal sin. He rejects the interpretation of this fact that locates the impossibility in the dignity of the state of innocence: the dignity would aggravate a sin but it could not, Aquinas holds, alter the species of sin. Instead, Aquinas argues that venial sin was impossible because the two conditions of venial sin did not obtain: “venial sin occurs in us, either through the imperfection of the act, as in the case of sudden movements. . . or through some inordinateness in respect of things referred to the end” (ST I–II 89, 3). Both conditions result from “some defect of order, by reason of the lower powers not being checked by the higher.” There could be no venial sin in the state of innocence prior to the loss of integrity with respect to the first condition because of the domination of reason over the passions, which is no longer the case for us: “the sudden rising of a movement of the sensuality in us is due to the sensuality not being perfectly subject to reason. . .” But in the primitive condition the domination of reason over the passions was perfect: “there was an unerring stability of order, so that the lower powers were always subjected to the higher *{simper inferius contineretur sub superiori}*, so long as man remained subject to God. . .”

The complete domination of reason over the lower powers also explains why the passions in the state of innocence were only consequent: passions that precede the judgment of reason are not only

potential threats to that judgment but threaten rational judgment to the extent that they are not subject to its control. For Aquinas the distinction between antecedent and consequent passions is useful in differentiating degrees of human sinfulness:

If concupiscence be understood to include the movement of the will, then, where there is greater concupiscence, there is a greater sin. But if by concupiscence we understand a passion *{passio}*, which is a movement of the concupiscible power, then a greater concupiscence, forestalling the judgment of reason and the movement of the will, diminishes the sin, because the man who sins, being stimulated by a greater concupiscence, falls through a more grievous temptation, wherefore he is less to be blamed. On the other hand, if concupiscence taken in this sense follows the judgment of reason, and the movement of the will, then the greater the concupiscence, the graver the sin: because sometimes the movement of concupiscence is redoubled by the will tending unrestrainedly to its object. (ST I–II 73, 6ad2)

Antecedent passions *clearly* pose a risk to the proper functioning of the will, so much so, in fact, that they mitigate the culpability of those acts that humans perform under the sway of such passions. Where the passions violate the proper functioning of the will – in the body of the article Aquinas observes that the will’s “natural inclination is to be moved freely of itself in accord with the judgment of reason” – by hindering either its voluntariness or its rational directedness, they act as “extrinsic and remote” causes of sin. And, while it is true that such passions reduce the gravity of sinfulness, the central point is that the passions themselves are *causes* of sinfulness. To ignore or to minimize the voluntary-reducing power of the passions can only cause confusion in the understanding of and passing judgment on human action in Aquinas’ moral theology and philosophy. In contrast, Aquinas stresses the power of passion to undermine the human good.¹⁶ Equally important, however, is the fact that the consequent emotions can actually aggravate the culpability of human sinfulness. The claim is that the passions can be enlisted by the will toward the achievement of an evil end whereby the whole person is more committed to such an end than might otherwise be the case. Such passions increase the gravity of the sin because they cooperate with the will itself, which is, according to Aquinas, “the direct and proper cause” of sinful acts.

¹⁶ In ST I–II 73, 5 he observes that “carnal sins” are less grievous than spiritual ones because the former exercise a greater power over human agents: “A third reason [for thinking carnal sins less grievous] may be taken from the motive, since the stronger the impulse to sin, the less grievous the sin. . . Now carnal sins have a stronger impulse, viz. our innate concupiscence of the flesh. Therefore spiritual sins, as such, are of greater guilt.”

Consider also the corruption that results from original sin in the disorganization of the parts of the soul. Aquinas treats this topic explicitly in a comparison of the infection and corruption of the concupiscible and irascible powers in *De Veritate*. Article six of question twenty-five asks precisely this comparative question. Aquinas holds that the concupiscible is not only more “infected” as a result of the fall but also more corrupt. Why? The two terms, infection and corruption, refer respectively to the guilt and penalty that follow the loss of innocence through sin. Only corruption speaks directly to my present purpose. Corruption in the soul is to be modeled on corruption in the body: “when the principle which holds the individual contrary parts together is removed, they tend to whatever agrees with them individually according to their own natures,” which results in the corruption of the body.¹⁷ In the state of innocence, original justice enabled reason to hold “the lower powers altogether subject to itself. . .” Aquinas follows Aristotle in comparing the sensitive appetitive powers after the fall to “palsied members of the body.” What these powers now lack is the “unifying control exercised by reason and [so they] go out in all directions. . .” The absence of reason’s control, a control that was perfect in the original condition, allows us to differentiate degrees of corruption in the sensitive appetitive powers: the more desiccated the lower power – that is, the further it is from reason’s dominating command – the more corrupt it is. Aquinas finds the concupiscible more corrupt because it is further from reason “as participating” than the irascible.

Finally, Aquinas identifies the source of rectitude in human operations in the primitive state with a supernatural gift as opposed to a natural one: “the primitive subjection by virtue of which reason was subject to God, was not merely a natural gift, but a supernatural endowment of grace.” In fact, according to Aquinas, in the condition of “original justice” the body would have been “wholly under the control of the soul so long as the soul remained subject to God; so that neither death nor suffering nor any other defect would affect a human being unless the soul were first separated from God.”¹⁸ That the defects of the body that humans would have been freed from include the passions is made explicit by Aquinas:

The struggle which goes on in a human being among contrary desires results too from the exigencies of nature. Thus, if a human being was to have senses, it was necessary that he then sense objects which cause delight and that a desire for these delightful objects arise in him, and such a desire is very often opposed to reason. But in the state of

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Truth [De Veritate]*, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1954, rpt. 1994), 25.6.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Questions on the Soul [Quaestiones de Anima]*, trans. James H. Robb (Marquette University Press, 1984), Question 8.

innocence, a human being was granted a remedy against concupiscence through grace, namely, that his lower powers would not be moved in any way that was opposed to reason. However, human beings lost this remedy because of sin.¹⁹

Aquinas appears to argue that some of the passions *naturally* stand in opposition to the proper order of human operations – that is, that some of the passions interfere with the control of reason over the appetites. The point seems to be that this is a matter of the material in which humans are embodied. In the original condition, this would have been corrected, as it were, by grace. After the initial disobedience, however, this power of opposition would have returned to its natural state. Miner, so far as I know, doesn't acknowledge this argument, and he really couldn't because he doesn't favor the domination of reason over the passions. Are we correct to think of domination as the goal of the relationship between reason and the passions for fallen humanity? I think we are.

Conclusion

It is clear that Miner hopes to *rescue* the passions. The danger is that we conceive of such an effort as presenting us with a choice between seeing the passions as forces for good or as forces for evil. Miner is aware of the fact that the passions can frustrate the moral trajectory of a human life, but he emphasizes their contribution to such lives. The emphasis is timely and true, and yet, and this is where I differ from Miner, the passions *are* disruptive and threatening. They can contribute to human good, but they can also endanger it by undermining the resources that rationality can bring to bear in our practical decision-making. It is for this reason, I believe, that Aquinas devotes so much attention to the passions.

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Q. 8ad7.