

## TEMPERANCE IN RELATION TO EMOTION

Within Aquinas' account of human psychology, his treatment of emotion and its relation to virtue emerges from the relationship of virtue to the sensitive appetite and details the emotions relevant to each. In this chapter I critically analyze the relationship between these two faculties of the sensitive appetite. I appraise the manner in which temperance and courage are posited as the moral response to the initial movements of emotion that arise from these two faculties. Furthermore, I show how temperance is related to prudence and is essential in the process of moral judgment. Finally, I propose the idea that temperance may be considered analogous to what some modern cognitive emotion theorists call the coping mechanism.

### I

#### *TEMPERANCE, COURAGE, AND THOMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY OF DESIRE*

In the effort to avoid the temptation of understanding the work of temperance in isolation, it helps to recognize its place within the context of the moral virtues. As distinct from intellectual virtues, the moral virtues are particularly focused on human psychology and experience. Temperance and courage are typically considered to pertain to the emotions important to moral life. More specifically, temperance and courage are concerned with the two faculties of the sensitive appetite which Aquinas calls the concupiscible and the irascible faculties.

There must needs be in the sensitive part two appetitive powers—one through which the soul is simply inclined to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called the concupiscible: and another, whereby an animal resists these attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called the irascible (*ST I* 81.2).

Modern interpreters have used a number of terms to portray the concupiscible and irascible faculties in more understandable language. One modern translator of Aquinas, Timothy McDermott, used the terms “affective feelings” for the concupiscible power and “aggressive feelings” for the irascible power.<sup>1</sup> Another, George Klubertanz, similarly adopts “aggressive” for the irascible faculty but unfortunately uses the still somewhat scholastic

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term, “desiderative,” for the concupiscible faculty.<sup>2</sup> In this analysis I too will refer to the irascible power as the “aggressive” faculty. For the concupiscible faculty I will use the term “impulse” appetite as does John Patrick Reid in his commentaries on Thomistic psychology in the appendices of the Blackfriars edition of *Summa Theologica*.<sup>3</sup>

One further note regarding updated terminology is to highlight the purposeful use of “appetite” for the impulse power and “faculty” for the aggressive power. While the impulse power focuses upon and establishes the notion of an intended good to be attained, it is thus morally considered as a worthy appetite. The use of faculty, as opposed to appetite, better portrays the nature of the role of the aggressive power in continuing and supporting the moral appetite already established by the impulse appetite. Thus the terms impulse appetite and aggressive faculty will serve to interpret Aquinas’ outdated concupiscible power and irascible power respectively.

While the object of the impulse appetite is to seek good and avoid evil simply, the object of the aggressive faculty is to follow the effort of the impulse appetite in cases where seeking good and avoiding evil has become arduous. Thus the aggressive faculty overcomes obstacles that stand in the way of the simple satisfaction of the impulse appetite. The aggressive faculty pertains to things “arduous, because its tendency is to overcome and rise above obstacles” (I 81.2).

Temperance is the virtue of the impulse passions, and courage is the virtue of the aggressive passions. Just as these two faculties are closely related, so also are the virtues which act in response. Kenneth Slattery, whose doctoral dissertation examines Thomistic concepts of temperance and emotion, notes the intertwined nature of these two faculties, their corresponding virtues, and the relation between them.

It belongs, then, to temperance and to two of its potential parts, humility and meekness, as well as to fortitude and its subsidiary virtue, magnanimity, directly to superintend the emotions. Moreover, since all the passions are intertwined, the virtues which rule them also fuse....Temperance and fortitude exhibit a correlative relationship.<sup>4</sup>

With this brief introduction to the Thomistic psychology of desire and the role virtue plays in the moral response, I turn to a more detailed look at both faculties and their respective virtues in relationship.

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### *Temperance and the impulse passions*

As temperance is the virtue that is “chiefly concerned with those passions that tend towards sensible goods, viz. desire and pleasure” (*ST* II-II 141.3), it is the virtue most fundamentally involved with the experience of the impulse appetite. Because its realm is the impulse passions and because the impulse passions temporally precede the aggressive passions, temperance “moderates all the other passions, inasmuch as moderation of the passions that precede results in moderation of the passions that follow” (*ST* II-II 141.3 ad 1).<sup>5</sup>

The movements of the impulse appetite are directed at the objects of our desire, both attraction to good and avoidance of evil: good attracts, evil repels (*ST* I-II 23.4). Thus, the impulse appetite is the source of those emotions that regard good or evil “absolutely.” The emotions Aquinas refers to here are “joy, sorrow, love, hatred, and the like” (*ST* I-II 23.1).

Now, in the movements of the appetitive faculty, good has, as it were, a force of attraction, while evil has a force of repulsion. In the first place, therefore, good causes, in the appetitive power, a certain inclination, aptitude or connaturalness in respect of good: and this belongs to the passion of *love*: the corresponding contrary of which is *hatred* in respect of evil.—Secondly, if the good be not yet possessed, it causes in the appetite a movement towards the attainment of the good beloved: and this belongs to the passion of *desire* or *concupiscence*: and contrary to it, in respect of evil, is the passion of *aversion* or *dislike*.—Thirdly, when the good is obtained, it causes the appetite to rest, as it were, in the good obtained: and this belongs to the passion of *delight* or *joy*: the contrary of which, in respect of evil, is *sorrow* or *sadness* (*ST* I-II 23.4) (emphasis original).

The various experiences of attraction and obtaining, or repulsion and avoidance, cause the pleasures and pains of the specific emotions referred to above, including love, hatred, desire, aversion, delight, and sorrow.<sup>6</sup>

The movements of the impulse appetite are prior to those of the aggressive faculty and their primary cause of movement is the emotion of love.<sup>7</sup> But these impulse movements toward the good are in need of management and here lies the specific relevance of temperance to the impulse appetite. In his account of temperance, Aquinas reminds us that “it belongs properly to moral virtue to moderate those passions which denote a pursuit of the good” (*ST* II-II 141.3). Temperance is the virtue which is “chiefly concerned with those

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passions that tend towards sensible good, viz. desire and pleasure, and consequently with the sorrows that arise from the absence of those pleasures” (*ST* II-II 141.3). Thus at the very base of all emotional experience stemming from the pursuit of sensible good or the avoidance of evil is the virtue charged with managing these movements, namely, temperance. Slattery notes the foundational work of temperance in the experience of emotion:

It is here that temperance compellingly reveals its “transfer value” in emotional life. The rational control of one passion makes another more pliable. In restraining love and desire, the virtue of the concupiscible appetites indirectly moderates pleasure....Reason’s dominance over a single emotion benefits the entire personality.<sup>8</sup>

Because the work of the moral virtues is so closely integrated, and because the sensory appetite is divided into two closely related faculties, a brief examination of the relationship of courage and the aggressive faculty is necessary here.

### *Courage and the aggressive passions*

When the effort to attain good or avoid evil becomes arduous, Aquinas says that it then becomes the concern of the aggressive faculty. The emotions in the aggressive faculty are hope, despair, fear, daring, and anger.

On the other hand, in the irascible passions...in respect of good not yet obtained, we have *hope* and *despair*. In the respect of evil not yet present we have *fear* and *daring*. But in respect of good obtained there is no irascible passion: because it is no longer considered in the light of something arduous,...But evil already present gives rise to the passion of *anger* (*ST* I-II 23.4) (emphasis original).

Aquinas’ placement of emotion in human psychology falls entirely under one or the other of the two sensitive faculties. In his account there are eleven fundamental passions; six in the impulse appetite (love, hatred, desire, aversion, joy, sorrow), and five in the aggressive faculty (hope, despair, fear, daring, anger); “and under these all the passions of the soul are contained” (*ST* I-II 23.4).

Since the impulse appetite concerns the “absolute good” and the aggressive faculty concerns the “difficult good,” the aggressive follows the movement toward the good initiated by the impulse appetite (love begets desire). When

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difficulty in obtaining the good ensues, the emotions of the aggressive faculty occur; thus, they are said to arise from the impulse appetite. When the good sought is finally obtained, difficulty no longer exists, and therefore the aggressive faculty is no longer engaged. The impulse appetite rests in its difficult object only after the work of the aggressive faculty. Thus, the aggressive is said to precede those emotions that connote rest (joy, sorrow).

But if we compare the irascible passions to those concupiscible passions that denote movement, then it is clear that the latter take precedence: because the passions of the irascible faculty add something to those of the concupiscible faculty; just as the object of the irascible adds the aspect of arduousness or difficulty to the object of the concupiscible faculty. Thus hope adds to desire a certain effort, and a certain raising of the spirits to the realization of the arduous good. In like manner fear adds to aversion or detestation a certain lowness of spirits, on account of difficulty in shunning the evil....Accordingly the passions of the irascible faculty stand between those concupiscible passions that denote movement towards good or evil, and those concupiscible passions that denote rest in good or evil. And it is therefore evident that the irascible passions both arise from and terminate in the passions of the concupiscible faculty (*ST* I-II 25.1).

Given the relationship between the impulse appetite and the aggressive faculty which denotes the “precedence” of the impulse appetite, how should one understand the relationship of the corresponding virtues? Should temperance take precedence over courage simply as a result of temporal order, or moral import, or both?

### *Ranking the virtues*

It seems an unavoidable temptation to rank the importance of the various moral virtues. Aristotle succumbed to this temptation in the *Rhetoric* 1366b, 1-6, arguing that as a “faculty of beneficence” the virtues of justice and courage are to be valued highest of all.

Yet there is reason to argue that temperance is more important than courage, particularly in the experience of emotion. Based on Aquinas’ treatment of the psychology of desire and the corresponding virtues, temperance should hold a position of priority both temporally and logically. Admittedly, Thomistic psychology has its problems, some of which I will explore below. But his

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