

MARTIN PICKAVÉ (UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO)

Affective Intentionality in Medieval Philosophy and the Question of the Intentionality of Our Emotions

The Challenge: Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, c. 1 (transl. CSM I, 328)

“The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions. This topic, about which knowledge has always been keenly sought, does not seem to be one of the more difficult to investigate since everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature. And yet the teachings of the ancients about the passions are so meagre and for the most part so implausible that I cannot hope to approach the truth except by departing from the paths they have followed.”

1. What is the general framework in which medieval philosophers approach affective intentionality?

2. How is it that our emotions are about something and directed at their objects?



The General Framework I: Thomas Aquinas, ST 1-2, q. 22, a. 2

(1) When we have an emotion we are drawn towards the object; the emotions exhibit a specific direction of fit that is more inline with the appetitive powers than the apprehensive powers.

(2) Emotions essentially involve bodily changes

Thomas Aquinas, ST 1-2, q. 22, a. 2 ad 3

“[T]here are two ways in which an organ of the soul can be changed:

(a) by a spiritual change

(b) by a separate natural change in the organ, insofar as the organ is changed with respect to its natural condition—e.g., becoming hot or cold or being changed in some similar way. This sort of change is related per accidens to the act of the sensitive apprehensive power However, a change of this sort is ordered per se toward an act of the sensitive appetite. This is why a natural change in an organ is posited materially in the definition of movements of the appetitive part—as, for instance, when it is said that anger is the heating of the blood around the heart.

Hence, it is clear that the character of a passion is found more in the act of sensory appetitive power than in the act of the sensory sensitive power, even though both are acts of a corporeal organ.”

The General Framework II

Among medieval philosophers there is generally agreement about the fact that our emotions/passions of the soul belong to our appetitive faculties (sensory appetites and/or will), but there's a disagreement about which appetite is involved: the sensitive appetite or the rational appetite (the will)

Aquinas: Emotions (passions of the soul) are movements of the sensitive appetite. There can also be passion-like states in the rational appetite (will), but they are not strictly speaking passions of the soul. Aquinas refers to them as *affectus* or *affectiones*.

Other authors such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham locate emotions (passions of the soul) primarily in the will.

William of Ockham, *Quodlibet II*, q. 17, OTh IX, 186–187; trans. Freddoso/Kelley)

“I state that by ‘passion’ I mean any form that exists in an appetitive power, is naturally apt to be regulated by right reason so as to be well ordered, and requires an actual cognition for its own existence. Or, in short, a passion is a form that (i) is distinct from a cognition, (ii) exists subjectively in an appetitive power, and (iii) requires an actual cognition for its own existence. Condition (i) excludes an actual cognition, since an actual cognition is not a passion; condition (ii) excludes all intellectual habits and vegetative operations; condition (iii) excludes habits in the will, since they can exist in the absence of any actual cognition, as is evident in the case of someone who is sleeping. From this it follows that the passions include acts of the sentient appetite and, in short, all acts of the will as well as the delight and sadness that exists in the will.”

A Contrast: Peter Goldie, *The Emotions*, Oxford Univ. Press 2002, 12-13

“An emotion ... is typically complex, episodic, dynamic, and structured. An emotion is complex in that it will typically involve many different elements: it involves episodes of emotional experience, including perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of various kinds, and bodily changes of various kinds; and it involves dispositions, including dispositions to experience further emotional episodes, to have further thoughts and feelings, and to behave in certain ways. ...”

The Basic Emotions (Aquinas)

Concupiscible Passions:
good evil

Irascible Passions:
good evil

1. Tendency love (*amor*) hate (*odium*)

(passions not exceeding capacities)

hope (*spes*) confidence (*audacia*)

2. Movement desire (*desiderium*) aversion (*fuga*)

despair (*desperatio*) fear (*timor*)

(passions exceeding capacities)

3. Rest joy (*delectatio*) sadness (*tristitia*) [anger (*ira*)]

How is it that our emotions are about something and directed at their objects?

Emotions and their (formal) objects

(1) “Emotions (*passiones animae*) are determined in type (*species*) by their objects. A specific emotion thus has a specific object. Fear has such a specific object, just as hope does.” (ST 1-2, q. 41, a. 2)

(2) “The species and the nature of an emotion is taken from the object.” (ST 1-2, q. 46, a. 6)

One proposal: S.D. Floyd, "Aquinas on Emotions",
History of Philosophy Quarterly 15 (1998): 161-162

"I will suggest that what we call emotion consists, for Aquinas, in two separate acts: an act of cognition *and* a passion. On the view I am suggesting, passion is not identical to human emotion but is nevertheless a constitutive part of it."

Aquinas on the interaction of apprehension/cognition and emotions I

“[I]n order to understand how the act of the sensitive appetite is subject to the command of reason one has to consider how it is in our power [...]. An act of the sensitive appetite does not only depend on the appetitive power, but also on the disposition of the body. Now that which is on the side of the power of the soul follows apprehension. And the apprehension of the imagination, which is a particular apprehension, is regulated by the apprehension of reason, which is universal; just as a particular active power is regulated by a universal active power. From this side the act of the sensitive appetite is therefore subject to the command of reason.”

Aquinas on the interaction of apprehension/cognition and emotions II

“But the condition or disposition of the body is not subject to the command of reason: and consequently from that other side, the movement of the sensitive appetite is hindered from being wholly subject to the command of reason. Moreover it happens sometimes that the movement of the sensitive appetite is aroused suddenly in consequence of an apprehension of the imagination or sense (*apprehensio imaginationis vel sensus*). And then such movement occurs without the command of reason, although it could have been impeded by reason, had reason foreseen it.”

“Inherited Intentionality” and another Thomas: Thomas of Bailly, *Quodlibet* IV, q. 3 (ed. Glorieux, 250)

“Moreover, even if God could make immediately whatever can be made by means of a particular agent, because God contains in itself the total active power, nevertheless God could not make a thing except in the way in which it can exist; and this means that it exists together with those things which from its nature happen to be in its existence. And because a volition also requires that an object that it has as an endpoint (*terminus*) coexist with it, and not just as an object that brings the volition about efficiently, God cannot bring about a volition unless an object coexists under that aspect under which the volition requires it and is directed to it as to an endpoint (*terminus*). But this cannot happen unless the object exists under an apprehension in the intellect.”

Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, dist. 1, q. 5, n. 4
(ed. Wood/Gal, 278)

“Second, I say – not by way of expressing an assertion, but by way of expressing an opinion – that every act of desiring (*actus appetendi*) and hating (*odiendi*), and so enjoyment (*frui*), is a cognition of some sort (*quaedam cognitio*) and an apprehension of some sort (*quaedam apprehensio*), because every experience of some object is also a cognition (*cognitio*) of that same object. But every appetitive act (*actus appetitivus*) is an experience of some sort of its object; i.e., it is that by which such an object is experienced, because every vital act is some sort of experience.”

Why believe it?

“Again, then the will would be blind since it is distinct from the intellect . . . Again, it is impossible that something simply unknown [simpliciter incognitum] pleases the will. But when the act of loving alone is posited and everything else is set aside, the object of love pleases the will.” (ibid. 274)

An objection

“If every act of loving is a cognition of some sort (*cognitio quaedam*), then we experience in the heart an act of understanding (*intellectio*) where we would experience the act of loving. But this is not true, since we experience no act of understanding except in the head.” (*Lectura secunda*, dist. 1, q. 5, para. 3, ed. Wood/Gál, 277; see Walter Chatton, *Reportatio* II, dist. 5, q. 1, dub. 3, ed. Wey/ Etzkorn, 240–241)

Some concluding thoughts

- Emotions belong primarily to the appetitive psychological capacities
- By debating on the 'place' of the emotions (will vs. sensitive appetite) medieval philosophers clash over what it means to be a human being
- The idea of 'shared' or 'inherited' intentionality
- ...