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Thomas Aquinas on the Cognitive Nature of Emotions

Tomasz z Akwinu o poznawczej naturze emocji

ABSTRACT: The article presents the concept of emotions in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In particular, the article focuses on the issue of the cognitive character of emotions and it attempts to answer the question: is the cognitive element constitutive of emotions? For this purpose, the article presents the debate of contemporary researchers of Aquinas' legacy on this topic and the arguments of both sides of the dispute. The first part of the article shows Aquinas' general concept of emotions, as well as his outline of the taxonomy of emotions. The following parts of the article consider the problems of the object of emotions and the intentionality of emotions. In particular, the article deals with the question of the mutual relationship between emotions and cognition. It is also an attempt to answer the question of how Aquinas explains the relationship between emotions and cognition. The second part of the article discusses the problem of the object of emotions as their efficient and formal cause. This part addresses the issue of how the object of emotions is the source of their nature and identity. The third part of the article is a reconstruction of the most important trends in the contemporary debate about the cognitive interpretation of Aquinas' theory of emotions.

KEYWORDS: emotions, cognition, intentionality, Thomas Aquinas, Medieval Philosophy

ABSTRAKT: W artykule przedstawiono koncepcję emocji w filozofii Tomasza z Akwinu. W szczególności skoncentrowano się na zagadnieniu poznawczego charakteru emocji i próbowało odpowiedzieć na pytanie: czy element kognitywny jest konstytutywny dla emocji? W tym celu zrekonstruowano m.in. debatę współczesnych badaczy spuścizny Akwinaty na ten temat i zaprezentowano argumentację obu stron sporu. W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawiono ogólną koncepcję emocji w ujęciu Akwinaty oraz zarys taksonomii emocji. Kolejne części poświęcono problematyce przedmiotu emocji i intencjonalności emocji. W szczególności skupiono się na kwestii wzajemnego stosunku emocji i poznania. Próbowano też odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób Akwinata

wyjaśnia tę relację. Dlatego w drugiej części omówiono problem przedmiotu emocji jako przyczyny sprawczej i formalnej emocji. Skoncentrowano się na zagadnieniu, w jaki sposób przedmiot emocji jest źródłem charakterystyki i tożsamości emocji. W trzeciej części artykułu zrekonstruowano najważniejsze stanowiska współczesnego sporu o kognitywistyczną interpretację teorii emocji u Akwinaty.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: emocje, poznanie, intencjonalność, Tomasz z Akwinu, filozofia średniowieczna

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas presented his concept of emotions (*passiones*) in the part *Prima secundae* of *Summa Theologiae*, an unprecedented work with Aquinas' unique lecture on the theory of emotions against a broad metaphysical, anthropological, ethical and theological background.¹ *Prima secundae* presents the foundations of the theory of emotions and is a philosophical treatise on their nature,² while *Secunda secundae* deals with human affectivity and how virtue and grace bring human affectivity to perfection.

Due to the fact that numerous works have been published to date reconstructing both the general concept of emotions and a more detailed outline of Aquinas' taxonomy of emotions, I will only touch upon these issues in the first part of the article. The following parts of this paper will revolve around the problems of the object and intentionality of emotion. I will mainly focus on the correlation of emotion and cognition. I also intend to address the question of how Aquinas explains the correlation between emotions and cognition. The question is far from being trivial insofar as Thomas firmly separates acts of cognitive power from acts of appetitive power (emotions are, among other things, acts of the latter).³ Thus, in the second part of the article, I discuss the problem of the object of emotions as their efficient and formal cause, concentrating on the issue of how the object of emotions is the source of the nature and identity

¹ One can point to similar works by medieval authors discussing the theory of emotion against a broad psychological, anthropological and theological background, such as: William Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* or Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologiae*. See Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 2.

² It should be mentioned that this article will only deal with *passiones* – the movements of the sensual appetitive power. Although Aquinas also described *affections* (*affectiones*), due to their purely mental nature, they are not the subject matter addressed in this text.

³ Christopher A. Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 86, no. 2 (2022), 239–40, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2022.0023>.

of emotions. The third (last) part of the article is a reconstruction of the main trends in the contemporary dispute over the cognitive interpretation of Aquinas' theory of emotion. The central question of this dispute is whether the cognitive element (e.g., belief) is constitutive of the nature of emotion. I conclude the article with an attempt to situate Aquinas' views on the correlation between emotions and cognition against the background of a broader medieval debate over the intentional (and cognitive) nature of appetitive acts.

Definition of Emotions and Their Taxonomy

Passio is, according to Thomas Aquinas, an act of the sensitive appetite accompanied by a bodily change (e.g., a physiological reaction). Emotions are triggered by their objects (more accurately, apprehensions of objects), which are the efficient cause of emotions.⁴ Consider a simple example: a wolf encountered during a walk in the woods, apprehended as “evil” (*imaginatio mali*), evokes the emotion of fear, which manifests itself in an accelerated heartbeat (*motus appetitivae virtutis sensibilis*).⁵

Two moments can be distinguished in *passio*. The first, the moment of receptivity, involves stimulation by a sensory object. While *passio* is a sensation, an “act” and “being acted upon,”⁶ it is also, as Peter King points out, “a capacity for being in a given psychological state—rather than something the soul ‘does.’”⁷ In other words, *passio* is a sensation, a passive state in which the subject is motivated by the object to act. Receptivity in *passio*, then, is that moment in which the cognitive powers grasp an object (e.g., a wolf) while apprehending that object in *imaginatione boni vel mali*.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 22 a. 3 s.c.: “Sed contra est quod dicit Damascenus, in II libro, describens animales passiones, *passio* est *motus appetitivae virtutis sensibilis* in *imaginatione boni vel mali*. Et aliter, *passio* est *motus irrationalis animae per suspicionem boni vel mali*.” For the purposes of this text, I translate the term *passio* used by Aquinas as “emotion,” because this term better captures the intentional and cognitive aspect of *passio* in contrast to the term “feeling.”

⁵ However, translating *passio* as “feeling” or “emotion” can be misleading insofar as, on the grounds of Thomistic psychology, it is possible to distinguish such feelings, which are not *passiones*, but *affectiones*.

⁶ Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 35.

⁷ Peter King, “Emotion,” in *The Oxford handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 210–11.

The second moment of *passio* is “movement towards some *telos*.⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas argues that this is the most characteristic aspect of emotion, since even subjects without receptivity or passivity (he refers here to God) possess *appetitus* (acts of will), but do not possess *passio*.⁹ An object that delights or arouses desire will cause the subject experiencing the emotion to make a “motion” aimed at obtaining the object. An object that evokes repulsion or horror will also cause a “motion,” but an opposite one in the form of fleeing, escaping, dodging, etc. At the same time, the “motion” should be interpreted broadly, as both “intentional” and “behavioral.”

Emotions, according to Thomas, fall into two basic categories, belonging to two different sensory appetitive powers:¹⁰ the concupiscent power (*concupisibilis*) and the irascible power (*irascibilis*). This division comes from Aristotle, who wrote in *De anima* that the reactions of the concupiscent power are desires for objects recognized as pleasurable, and the reactions of the irascible power are desires to defeat opponents and repel harmful things.¹¹ Basically, the *concupisibilis* pursues what corresponds to nature and shuns what is harmful to nature. The *irascibilis* encompasses the emotions that follow the repulsion of an attack against something recognized as harmful to nature;¹² this power apprehends the good as the effort a person must make in obtaining good or avoiding evil. St. Thomas explains that the *concupisibilis* includes higher order emotions, and the *irascibilis* power includes lower order emotions, i.e., *irascibilis* emotions already presuppose *concupisibilis* emotions, since “irascible” emotions have their origin in “concupiscent” ones. For example, my fear of the wolf has its origin in the emotion of attachment to my own life and health.¹³

Aquinas distinguishes 11 emotions: love, hatred, concupiscence, disgust, delight and pain (belonging to the concupiscent power); hope, despair, fear, daring and anger (belonging to the irascible power).¹⁴

⁸ Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 34.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia* q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1: “Potentia quae in Deo ponitur nec proprie activa nec passiva est, cum in ipso non sit nec praedicamentum actionis nec passionis, sed sua actio est sua substantia; sed ibi est potentia per modum potentiae activae significata. Nec tamen oportet quod filius sit actus vel factus, sicut nec oportet quod proprie sit ibi actio vel passio.”

¹⁰ See Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 50.

¹¹ Aristotle, *De anima* I.5, 83; IV.4, 56–57.

¹² Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 50–51.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 25 a. 1; see Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 52.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 22–48; see Artur Andrzejuk, *Uczucia i sprawności: Związek uczuć i sprawności w Summa Theologiae św. Tomasza z Akwinu* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza “NAVO,” 2006), 31–50.

Intentional Concept of Emotion: The Object of Emotion

Although emotions are rooted in objects (e.g., a wolf can be an object of fear), a material object is not, however, what actualizes emotions directly. While one person may feel fear of the wolf, perceiving it as a threat, another person experiences pleasure in the awe of the wolf – a beautiful and wild animal encountered in its natural habitat. Martin Pickavé cites a similar example: an emotional reaction to a spider. On the one hand, the spider may evoke emotions of disgust and fear, but on the other hand, the biologist may react with cognitive fascination or curiosity.¹⁵ In other words, what actualizes the “movement of the sensitive appetite” is the apprehension of an object as good or harmful, i.e. the intentional apprehension of an object in some aspect of it. In *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, Thomas adds that intentions are evaluative judgments that enable one to know the object in its relation to one’s own judgments and preferences.¹⁶

The intention is then contrasted with sensitive appetite (*sensibilis appetitus*), whose response can be twofold: either in the form of a movement tending *toward* the object (if the object is pleasant), or in the form of a movement tending *away from* the object (if it is harmful).¹⁷ In this sense, the object of emotions is their intentional cause. Since the sensitive appetite is an act of bodily power, emotions necessarily involve bodily change. Thomas writes: “Some bodily change therefore always accompanies an act of the sensitive appetite.”¹⁸ For example, when one encounters a wolf in the woods, the emotion of fear may express itself in a physiological bodily response in the form of pupil dilation, increased muscle tension, accelerated heart rate, etc.¹⁹

¹⁵ Martin Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition in Later Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Adam Wodeham,” in *Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4; I-II, q. 22, a. 2, ad. 3; *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, q. 26, a. 4; Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 222.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 26, a. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 21, a. 1.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 20, a. 1, ad. 2.

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that not all medieval philosophers believed that emotions were a bodily phenomenon. Peter Auriol, for example, on the one hand agrees with Aquinas that emotions are acts of sensory appetitive power, but on the other denies that they involve a bodily change. John Duns Scotus, on the other hand, held the position that emotions are instantiated in the will (intellectual power). He thus rejected the notion that human emotions are in any way similar to animal acts of lower appetite. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas therefore essentially reduces emotion to two movements: 1) the intentional and behavioral movement of the appetitive power in relation to the object of emotion, and 2) movement in the form of a bodily change. The first movement is the formal element of the emotion, the second is its material element.²⁰ It is worth mentioning that although Aquinas included both types of movement when characterizing the emotions, there is an ongoing dispute among modern scholars over the question of which “movement” is more characteristic of the emotions themselves. The dispute boils down to the question: what is the correlation between the formal element of emotion and its material (somatic) element? Peter King has argued that physiological change is the *sine qua non* of emotion. All emotions are emotions precisely because they are “felt” in the body.²¹ Accelerated heartbeat is inherent and inalienable in the emotion of fear, as is accelerated breathing and muscle tension (commonly referred to as “butterflies in the stomach”) in the case of the emotion of love or desire. King concludes that fear or desire would not be the same emotions if they were stripped of their bodily element.

Nicholas E. Lombardo interprets the movement that is part of an emotion as a movement of the appetitive power in relation to the object of the emotion. He argues that the moment of an intentional movement toward the object, i.e., the intentional apprehension of the object as an object of appetite or disgust, is most characteristic of emotion, since the moment of desire is common to *passio* and *affectio*. Lombardo is reluctant to agree with King’s interpretation because, as may be assumed, defining emotions through their bodily aspect makes the status of *affectiones* as emotions questionable.²² Particularly noteworthy in this debate, however, is the voice of Christopher A. Bobier, who emphasized that emotions are not directly movements of the sensitive soul that cause bodily change. Rather, they are movements of the sensitive soul mediated by bodily change. He wrote that it is the creature – not the soul of the creature – that is the subject experiencing the emotions.²³

The debate over the nature of emotions in Aquinas’ philosophy opens up a broader perspective on the problem of the relation of cognition to appetite.

described *affectiones* alongside *passiones* – movements of the apprehensive appetitive power, which are quite devoid of a bodily component. See the discussion on this topic in Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition in later Medieval Philosophy,” 49.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 44, a. 1.

²¹ King, “Emotion,” 211.

²² Artur Andrzejuk, “The Problem of *affectiones* in the Texts of Thomas Aquinas,” *Rocznik Tomistyczny* 11 (2022), 181–92, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7539221>.

²³ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 223.

It is important to note that emotions – on the grounds of Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy – are not bodily “sensations,” moods or movements of the soul and body. On the contrary, insofar as their classification is based on the type of object actualizing them, they are intentional. A wolf, cognized through the senses, will evoke fear only if it is recognized as a “predator,” or more broadly as a “threat.” This means that the very first cognitive contact with the object of the emotion – the sensitive perception of the object of the emotion – includes intention and its evaluation. Robert C. Roberts points out that sensitive perception can evoke emotion only if it is a “rationally determined perception,” i.e. when I look at the object evoking the emotion, the “look” already includes judgments, beliefs, and norms.²⁴

On the other hand, however, the following difficulty arises: in what sense – on the grounds of Thomistic anthropology – can evaluative judgment accompany sensitive perception? In other words, does the intentionality of emotions determine that emotions are types of cognition or have a cognitive component?²⁵

These questions will be addressed in the next part of the article.

Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Concepts of Emotions

In the course of the debate over the characterization of emotions in Aquinas’ view, two opposing positions have developed. The supporters of the “non-cognitive” position claim that emotions are caused by cognitive elements, yet remain separate from them.²⁶ Representatives of this position include Shawn D. Floyd and Christopher A. Bobier. The supporters of the “cognitive” position: R. C. Roberts, Thomas Ryan and M. Pickavé insist to the contrary that cognitive

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, describing in *Summa Theologiae* the role of reason in sensitive cognition, emphasized the special importance of *vis aestimativa* and its relation to higher cognitive powers. However, the subject of the correlation between abstract cognition (reason) and sensitive cognition (sensitive perception) is beyond the scope of this text. However, in this context it is worth quoting the works of Daniel De Haan, which can shed considerable light not only on the treatment of this issue in Aquinas’ philosophy, but also in other medieval authors. See Daniel De Haan, “Aquinas on Perceiving, Thinking, Understanding, and Cognizing Individuals,” in *Medieval Perceptual Puzzles* (Brill, 2019), 238–68, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413030_010; Daniel De Haan, “The Interaction of Noetic and Psychosomatic Operations in a Thomist Hylomorphic Anthropology,” *Scientia et Fides* 6, no. 2 (2018), 55–83, <https://doi.org/10.12775/setf.2018.010>.

²⁵ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 223.

²⁶ Bobier, 224.

elements (more precisely, intentional apprehensions of an object) belong to the essence of emotions.

Why Emotions Are Not a Type of Cognition?

In this part of the article, I will reconstruct the arguments for a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic theory of emotions.

The task of the proponents of this position is to analyze the nature of the correlation between a given emotion and its object. They argue that even if Thomas Aquinas himself wrote that the kind and nature of an emotion comes from its object,²⁷ the correlation between the two is causal, not constitutive.²⁸ Even if my fear of the wolf is derived from the object itself, i.e., the cause of my fear is this particular wolf, and I do not experience general but specific fear of this particular wolf, the intentional apprehension of the wolf is only the cause of my fear, not an element of it. Christopher A. Bobier offers the following analogy: imagine a potter making a pot. Although the potter is the efficient cause of the form of the pot, we would be unlikely to say that the potter is part of this form. Similarly, emotions receive their forms from objects, but this does not mean that objects (i.e., their intentional apprehensions) are part of the form of emotions.²⁹

Another argument of proponents of a non-cognitive interpretation of the concept of emotions refers to the totality of Thomistic anthropology. Firstly, emotions are fundamentally bodily phenomena (Aquinas includes them in the sensitive appetite). No cognitive power is associated with the bodily change, as is the case with emotions.³⁰ Therefore, since emotions involve the bodily change, and cognition is not in close connection with the body, one may conclude that emotions – on the basis of Aquinas' philosophy – are non-cognitive. Secondly, emotions are movements of the sensory appetitive power, separate from the cognitive powers (the powers responsible for cognition, perception or the formulation of beliefs).³¹ Aquinas repeatedly describes emotions as movements flowing from cognition, being its effect: "The movement of the appetitive power

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 46, a. 6.

²⁸ Shawn D. Floyd, "Aquinas on Emotion: A Response to Some Recent Interpretations," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1998), 165.

²⁹ Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," 238.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 22, a. 2.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 22, a. 2

follows (*sequitur*) an act of the apprehensive power.”³² Therefore, as Ch. A. Bobier points out, given the holistic nature of Thomistic psychology, according to which the powers of the soul have various functions, it is not clear in what sense an emotion, which is part of the appetitive power of the soul, can be constituted by the cognitive (cognitive) element.³³

The argumentative strategy taken by proponents of the non-cognitive interpretation of Thomas’s concept of emotion is to distinguish between “emotion” and “emotional experience.” The strategy aims, on the one hand, to preserve Aquinas’s suggestions locating emotion within the appetitive power, and, on the other hand, to preserve basic intuitions about the complex nature of emotion. Bobier’s proposal to distinguish between “emotion” and “emotional experience” boils down to defining “emotion” as a movement of appetitive power devoid of the cognitive element, while defining the scope of “emotional experience” as including both emotion and complex cognitive acts. For example, when I experience fear of the wolf, the emotion of fear is merely a movement of sensory appetitive power, upon which I can either proceed to attack or flee. The belief “this particular wolf is a threat to me” is not part of the emotion itself, but a complex “emotional experience” that consists not only of the emotion itself, but also of beliefs, valuations, somatic changes, behavioral reactions, etc.³⁴

Why Are Emotions a Type of Cognition?

However, a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic concept of emotion is fraught with difficulties as well. First of all, not all emotions – according to Aquinas’ concept – are “movements.” Aquinas notes that in the area of the concupiscent power (*concupiscibilis*) there are both emotions that have an element of movement in them (e.g. desire) and emotions that are devoid of the element of movement (e.g. joy and sadness).³⁵ The difference between emotions as movements and emotions as a rest can also be seen in the difference between desire of *x* and giving love to *x*: love is a kind of affective, but constant and relatively stable resonance between desire and the object of desire. Desire, on

³² Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 46, a. 2; I-II, q. 22, a. 3, sc.

³³ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 230. “Given Aquinas’s psychology, according to which the powers of the soul have distinct functions, it is difficult to know how to make sense of the claim that an emotion, being situated in the noncognitive part of the soul, can be partly constituted by a cognitive element.”

³⁴ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 236.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 25, a. 1.

the other hand, is a movement of the appetite toward an absent object. Desire is a movement, but love is not.

The second difficulty boils down to the fact that adopting a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic concept of emotion undermines, according to their opponents, the hylomorphic theory of human nature. If we were to consider that emotions fall within the scope of the sensory appetitive power and do not have constitutive cognitive elements, we would thereby introduce a boundary between the actions of the appetitive and cognitive power. However, it seems that such a boundary does not correspond with the more general Thomistic concept of man as a hylomorphic whole. Following Aquinas, it can be reiterated that human emotions do not belong exclusively to the rational aspect of human nature nor to its bodily aspect.³⁶

The major objection to the non-cognitive interpretation of the concept of emotions is that on its grounds the identity of emotions and their correlation to intentionality is unsettled. Consider an example: even if my fear of the wolf is reduced to somatic symptoms (accelerated heartbeat, adrenaline rush, etc.) and to “the movement of the sensory appetitive power” (a strong desire to flee from the wolf or an attempt to fight it), the emotion I feel is a “fear-before-this-particular-wolf.” In a word, it is impossible to separate the bodily and behavioral response from the intentional content of the emotion. The nature, structure or formal cause of my fear of the wolf depends on the intentional object of the emotion. Moreover, the intentionality of particular emotions is not exhausted by the fact that emotions are “about something,” intentionality is also responsible for the identity of emotions.³⁷ Thus, it can be assumed that cognitive contents are constitutive elements of emotions, since they make emotions what they are, i.e., an individual emotion is always related to its object.³⁸ Such a conclusion was reached, among others, by P. King, who believes that the cognitive element is not only the causal aspect of emotions, but also their formal aspect.³⁹

A broader historical context of the medieval debate over the cognitive nature of emotions should be offered here. This context was theological as it addressed the question of whether love can be a type of cognition and whether emotions can have a cognitive function. Martin Pickavé points out that the debate was not so much about emotions themselves, but about the problem of the intentionality

³⁶ Judith Barad, “Aquinas on the Role of Emotion in Moral Judgment and Activity,” *The Thomist* 55, no. 3 (1991), 402, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1991.0007>.

³⁷ Martin Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions (and of Other Appetitive Acts),” *Quaestio* 10 (January 2010), 46, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.quaestio.1.102325>.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 42, a. 4, ad. 1.

³⁹ King, “Emotion,” 212.

of acts of the appetitive power. For Aquinas, *appetitus* is intrinsically intentional, being – according to the definition – “nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing.”⁴⁰ However, the intentional nature of the appetitive power does not explain why particular emotions relate to particular objects, why my fear is a fear-before-this-particular-wolf.⁴¹ Hence the question: are acts of the appetitive power intrinsically cognitive?

The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas gives a negative answer to the above question. Nevertheless, Pickavé points to several medieval authors who recognized the problem of the tension between appetitive and cognitive aspects in experience.⁴² Walter Chatton (c. 1290–1343) was the first author who explicitly poses the question of whether acts of the appetitive power are themselves a type of cognition. He considers this problem in the question: “Is an angel’s love separate from his cognition?” Chatton formulates a series of arguments over the recognition of the identity of love of object *x* with cognition *x*, although his final conclusion is positive.⁴³ Adam Wodeham (ca. 1298–1358) insisted that love (and other acts of appetitive power) is a kind of cognition.⁴⁴ In the commentary to the *Sentences*, A. Wodeham writes that

every act of desire, hatred or joy is a kind of cognition (*quaedam cognitio*) and a kind of apprehension (*quaedam apprehensio*), since every experience of an object is also a cognition of that object. But every act of appetite is an experience of that object, i.e., an act by means of which that object is experienced.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 8, a. 1. “Omnis autem appetitus non est nisi boni. Cuius ratio est quia appetitus nihil aliud est quam inclinatio appetentis in aliquid. Nihil autem inclinatur nisi in aliquid simile et conveniens.”

⁴¹ Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions,” 49.

⁴² See Pickavé, 45–63.

⁴³ Walter Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias* II, d. 5, q. 1, dub. 3, ed. Joseph C. Wey and Girard J. Etzkorn, vol. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 238–42.

⁴⁴ On Adam Wodeham’s position and his discussion with William Ockham, see Dominik Perler, “Emotions and Cognitions. Fourteenth-Century Discussions on the Passions of the Soul,” *Vivarium* 43, no. 2 (2005), 250–74, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853405774978353>.

⁴⁵ Adamus de Wodeham, *Lectura secunda in primum librum Sententiam* d. 1, q. 5, § 2, ed. Rega Wood and Gedeon Gál (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1990), 278. “Omnis actus appetendi et odiendi, et ita frui, est quaedam cognitio et quaedam apprehensio, quia omnis experientia alicuius obiecti est quaedam cognitio eiusdem. Sed omnis actus appetitivus est quaedam experientia sui obiecti, id est quo experitur tale obiectum, quia omnis actus vitalis est quaedam experientia.”

Wodeham further argues that it is not possible for the object of love to be unknown to the will. Since the act of love is an act of the will alone (acts of the intellect or acts of sensitive cognition are not involved), the will must know its object. In other words, according to Wodeham, the act of will is also a cognition.⁴⁶

Summary

Thomas Aquinas *explicitely* expresses the belief that emotions (*passiones animae*) are dependent on the species of their objects. This emotion of fear has its particular object in the form of a wolf.⁴⁷ The dependence of the emotion on the object, more precisely, on the intentional apprehension of the object in some aspect of it, allows us to classify the Thomistic theory of emotions as an intentionalist theory. However, a question should be posed whether the mere fact that emotions are intentional allows the conclusion that they are a certain kind of cognition.⁴⁸

On the basis of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, this question must be answered in the negative. The whole of Thomistic psychology draws a distinction between the cognitive and appetitive powers.⁴⁹ Aquinas' description of emotions suggests that emotions are acts of the appetitive power, not the cognitive one. Even if we refer, as Bobier writes, to Aquinas' postulated psychophysical unity of man, we cannot draw the conclusion that cognition lies in the nature of emotions.⁵⁰

Therefore, on the one hand, Thomas claimed that emotions are a movement of sensitive appetite, but on the other hand, he wrote about their intentionality. Yet, even if the object of emotion is a particular sensitive object, emotions refer to it *secundum aliquam intentionem universalem*.⁵¹ They are already a certain apprehension of the object, they grasp the object in a certain aspect. Moreover,

⁴⁶ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 57; Simo Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 227.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 41, a. 2. "Passiones animae recipiunt speciem ex obiectis. Unde specialis passio est quae habet speciale obiectum. Timor autem habet speciale obiectum, sicut et spes."

⁴⁸ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 49.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 1.

⁵⁰ See Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," 230.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 25, a. 1, ad. 3. "Nam sensus percipiunt sua obiecta particulariter, ratio vero inferior habet actum circa sensibilia secundum aliquam intentionem universalem. Sensualitas vero hoc modo tendit in obiecta sensuum sicut et ipsi sensus, scilicet particulariter."

Thomas, in describing even animal emotions, wrote about the “prudence” (*prudentia*) of animals, because the emotional reference to object *x* is an intentional and evaluative reference to object *x*.⁵² Subsequently, intentional and evaluative reference to an object presupposes the prior possession of beliefs, judgments, norms, in a word, cognitive apprehensions that are beyond the competence of appetitive power.

Thomas Aquinas presents the concept of *ratio particularis* and *vis aestimativa* as a type of intellectual cognition that would apply to particular and sensitive objects. One proposal for resolving the dispute over the nature of emotion in Thomas’s philosophy suggested that the term *passio*, used by Aquinas, has a narrower meaning than the modern term “emotion.” While the term “emotion” refers to a cognitive state, the term *passio* refers to a conative state.⁵³ Hence, S. D. Floyd argued that what we call emotion today consists of two separate acts: *passio* and the act of cognition.⁵⁴

However, Pickavé insists that Floyd’s suggestion is not only anachronistic, since it starts from a certain contemporary idea of what emotion should be, but also erroneous. He points out that we assign certain functions and roles to emotions: emotions enhance perceptions, accompany the formation of dispositions, to name but a few. These roles are performed by what Aquinas calls *passiones animae*.⁵⁵

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⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 25, a. 2, which states: “Sicut vis imaginativa competit animae sensibili secundum propriam rationem, quia in ea reservantur formae per sensum acceptae; sed vis aestimativa, per quam animal apprehendit intentiones non acceptas per sensum, ut amicitiam vel inimicitiam, inest animae sensitivae secundum quod participat aliquid rationis: unde ratione huius aestimationis dicuntur animalia quamdam prudentiam habere.”

⁵³ See Thomas Ryan, “Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (February 2005), 53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390506600103>.

⁵⁴ Floyd, “Aquinas on Emotion,” 160.

⁵⁵ Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions,” 47.

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