

AQUINAS ON THE EMOTIONS



A

Religious-Ethical

Inquiry



Diana Fritz Cates

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
<i>Religious Ethics</i>	21
Chapter Two	
<i>Religious Ethics and the Study of Emotion</i>	40
Chapter Three	
<i>Approaching Aquinas on the Emotions (I)</i>	62
Chapter Four	
<i>Approaching Aquinas on the Emotions (II)</i>	80
Chapter Five	
<i>Approaching the Human Sensory Appetite from Below (I)</i>	103
Chapter Six	
<i>Approaching the Human Sensory Appetite from Below (II)</i>	129
Chapter Seven	
<i>Approaching the Human Sensory Appetite from Above (I)</i>	164
Chapter Eight	
<i>Approaching the Human Sensory Appetite from Above (II)</i>	191
Chapter Nine	
<i>The Formation of Distinctively Human Emotions</i>	213
Chapter Ten	
<i>The Religious-Ethical Study of Emotion</i>	241
Appendix	
<i>Aquinas on the Powers or Capabilities of a Human Being (Relevant Selections)</i>	267
Bibliography	269
Index	277

Introduction

All of us want to live happily and well. We want this not only for ourselves but also for others who are part of us or closely connected to us. When something happens that appears to bear notably on our own or a loved one's well-being, a situation forms and holds our attention. We receive impressions and make judgments about what is happening and about how it concerns us. More than this, we are *moved* by what we apprehend. We might not be moved outwardly, in the form of physical movement, but we are moved inwardly.

Imagine that the phone rings. You answer and hear the voice of a friend with whom you have not had the chance to talk for months. She sounds happy and you feel elevated. As the conversation unfolds, you have the sense that you are drawing close to her and she is drawing close to you. You resonate with pleasure in the simple goodness of this relationship—in the way that you are poised to unite with her and she with you, in thought, by phone, or in person. When the conversation ends, your friend is drawn away from you into other aspects of her life. You are drawn back into your previous activities. Yet your friend remains vaguely present to you. You rehearse parts of the conversation, smiling.

Imagine that five minutes later the phone rings again, and you answer cheerfully. This time, however, it is a person with whom you have a difficult relationship. At the sound of his voice you experience a kind of dissonance. You recoil inside and your defenses go up. Every time you talk to this person he says something insulting. You replay a set of his past comments as you listen (and fail to listen) to what he is saying now. One part of you tends *away from* the person as you suffer the pain of old and new injuries. Another part of you tends *toward* the person as you fantasize about “knocking him off his high horse.” When you hang up the phone, you go on and on, in your mind, about how awful this person is. You begin to attack *yourself* for not saying something to put him in his place, but you withdraw your attack as you recollect past attempts that have only made matters worse.

Then you hear a knock at the door. Startled, you become aware that you have been lost in a dark reverie for nearly half an hour. “Come in!” The door drifts open and a colleague appears, looking pale. She says, “I’m afraid I have some bad news.” You learn that another, valued colleague has been in a car accident and is undergoing emergency surgery. Instantly, the situation that had preoccupied you since that last phone call is gone from your mind. As

you picture your colleague lying on an operating table, bleeding, surrounded by bustling people in scrubs, connected to beeping monitors, you are initially stunned. You feel pinned, unable to move inside. Then you begin to extend yourself in his direction. By the power of your imagination you encircle him with your concern. You think of his wife and child and draw them into the circle as well. You are buoyed by the thought that your friend has made it thus far, and he is surely in good hands. A few moments later, your imagination drifts back to the gravity of the situation. You stiffen and shudder. The threat of death is creeping in like low-lying fog.

Many of us flow into and out of such states throughout the course of a day. Our responses to similar situations might take different forms. The details of our lives, such as our upbringing, cultural context, education, gender, social location, and the history of our relationships, all make a difference. Yet there are patterns that we can recognize. What are these patterns? What *are* the interior motions that many of us call “emotions”? How ought we to understand them? This book analyzes the writings of medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas in order to elucidate one powerful way of thinking about our emotions. I will explain shortly why I turn to Aquinas. Consider first why it is important to seek greater understanding of our emotions.

THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTION

When we are under the influence of an intense emotion, it is as though we enter a different world. A situation that appears to bear on our own or another’s well-being commands our attention. Other things happen to us and around us, but many of them escape our notice. The things we *do* notice, we tend to construe in a particular way, in terms of the scenario that is playing out before us. Seeing things from this viewpoint, and being moved by what we see, we tend to act in predictable ways.

Imagine once again the first situation above. The emotion you experience when you hear your friend’s voice, and picture her on the other end of the phone, will likely dispose you to treat her kindly. She might tell you that she has realized a difficult goal. At hearing this news, you tend toward her, in your imagination, as though you were rushing up to her and giving her a hug or a high-five. You praise her. When she tells you of a personal loss, you receive some of the weight of her sadness and hold it for a moment. Then you are drawn toward her, as if to her side. You express concern and offer your help. Your friend asks how *you* are doing. Within the context of your drawing near to her—and her tending toward you—many of your problems seem insignificant. Those that are serious feel less weighty than they did before

you picked up the phone. When the conversation ends, you turn to the rest of the day with a positive attitude. You are prone to show kindness to the next person who crosses your path, unless it is someone whom you habitually regard in a negative light.

Now recall the second conversation with the person who says insulting things. The emotion that is aroused by *his* voice, by the image of *him* on the other end of the phone, will likely dispose you to act somewhat differently. For example, it might make it difficult for you to do your work. So much of your mental energy is invested in picturing the other's distorted face, rehearsing his words, developing a story line that makes you look like the victim in the situation, fantasizing about payback, and so on, that you cannot concentrate on the material you are to read. Your productivity drops, and this has an impact on the people who rely on you. Behaving like a stormy center of power pushing back on another center of power, you might rush down the hall oblivious to a third person whose eyes are searching yours for recognition.

For good or for ill, an emotion can affect the way we function as moral agents. It can affect our thoughts, perceptions, desires, judgments, deliberations, decisions, actions, and interactions. Particularly if an emotion is intense, arises with great frequency, or lingers for long periods of time, it can affect the quality of our lives and our relationships. It is thus important to understand our emotions and bring ethical reflection to bear on them.

THE MORALITY OF EMOTION

Our emotions can have an effect on our moral lives, but can we, as moral agents, have an effect on our emotions? Are our emotions the sorts of things over which we have any choice? Are they the sorts of things for which we can be held responsible? There are definitely limits to our capacity to influence the ways in which we are moved by the situations we confront. Some of our interior motions and the behaviors to which they give rise are quite automatic. Humans seem to have evolved to respond immediately to certain stimuli before there is time to think. Yet most emotions are more than knee-jerk responses. They are relatively intelligent responses that unfold over time, partly in response to ongoing thinking. There are points in the unfolding of an emotion at which it becomes possible for us to subject our emotions to the power of choice. Inasmuch as an emotion affects our own or another's well-being, and we have some choice in its regard, the emotion is something for which we have a degree of moral responsibility.

First, we are ordinarily responsible for the way we *act* while under the influence of an emotion. I am not referring here to bodily reactions and

behaviors over which we (or some of us) have no control, such as letting out a shriek and jumping on the nearest chair at the sight of a mouse running across the floor. I refer to actions that we commit, which most of us believe we have the freedom not to commit, such as staying up on the chair for a long time or getting down and setting a trap. If we feel impelled to act on an emotion, such as fear or anger, the ideals of virtue require that we be aware of ourselves feeling so impelled and that we judge whether it would be fitting to act as our emotion impels us to act. We are required to make choices we can justify to other reasonable people.

Second, we are responsible, to some extent, for the way we *feel* our emotions. With most emotions—even those that arise under the influence of higher-level thinking about the significance of a situation—we cannot help our initial, interior movement. A situation captures our attention and triggers a response before we know what is happening. However, we can help whether we *consent* to this initial movement. That is, we can exercise some influence, in subsequent moments, over whether we continue to feel the emotion in the way we currently feel it. The very act of observing our emotion and asking the *question* of whether it is appropriate to the situation—or whether we are overreacting—changes the emotion in subtle ways. When we observe and wonder about our emotion, the object of our emotion (namely, the situation of concern, as we perceive or imagine it) is less capable of commanding our attention in a narrow and exclusive way. We put the object in broader perspective, which allows us to view it from more than one angle. Our interior tending with respect to the object is more flexible, less programmed.

We are responsible, in effect, for creating some mental space around our emotion. Moreover, we are responsible for trying to direct the course of our emotion, as needed, so that it reflects the light of reason. In other words, we are responsible for trying to feel our emotion in a way that exhibits good human functioning.¹ It is not a simple matter to determine whether our own or another person's way of experiencing a particular emotion is appropriate to a situation. We humans have different ideas about what is good for us and for other humans. Yet many of us can probably think of cases in which we would say that a person's emotion is fitting, and the way in which the person directs the course of his or her emotion is praiseworthy, while we can think of other cases in which we would say that a person's emotion is unfitting, and the way in which the person indulges that emotion, feeds it, or fails to give it direction is blameworthy.

Consider, for example, a middle-aged man who realizes that he no longer feels the emotion of love he used to feel toward his wife. There are still mo-

ments when he feels it, but these moments occur rather infrequently. When he does feel love, the feeling is not as intense as he would like it to be. The man cannot honestly say that his wife has become less lovable. It is his own attitude that has changed, for reasons he does not fully understand. Motivated to improve the quality of his life and marriage, he sets out to cultivate his love for his wife. In particular, he sets out to feel the *emotion* of love for her more frequently and intensely. Let us say that after much creative effort he begins to feel such love arising more often and ardently, in a way that rejuvenates his life and marriage. I would regard such love (in principle) as morally good, and the man as praiseworthy for feeling it as he does. His emotion is a fitting response to his wife and their marriage, an important moment within the rhythm of a good marital friendship, and he has had a hand in shaping that response.

Consider another example. A woman is consumed with the emotion of ethnic hatred for her new neighbor. Her hatred reflects a lifelong pattern of demonizing a group of people and refusing to consider the possibility that “those people” have any redeeming qualities. Once in a while, as the woman is experiencing this hatred, she has an inkling that there is something unfair about it. She senses that the neighbor could be more than he appears (as the object of her hatred) to be. However, the woman lets this intuition be drowned out by the noise of her hatred, and she fails to return to the intuition in quieter moments. Her interior act of consenting to her hatred when it arises—the act of continuing to feel the way she feels and allowing her hatred to swell, without taking the opportunity to examine whether her emotion is appropriate to the situation—is morally bad and worthy of blame. Assuming that the neighbor is not a serious threat to her way of life, the woman’s hatred is unfitting. It is inconsistent with her own proper functioning and she is corrupted as she indulges it.

Many of us have heard the phrase “emotions are not good or bad; they just *are*.” It can make psychological sense to say this under certain circumstances—for example, when a person judges that his or her present emotion is bad and he or she is a terrible person for feeling it, to the point that guilt or shame effectively holds the original emotion in place, not allowing it to dissipate. However, this therapeutic strategy is best considered relative to an ethical perspective that acknowledges (with compassion) that certain emotions, felt in certain ways, are good for us: they are modes of recognition, discernment, or enjoyment that we could not and would not want to do without, whereas other emotions are bad for us: they are ways of misapprehending what is happening and inappropriately being moved. According to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, no emotion is morally neutral inasmuch

as it is subject to reason and choice. An emotion is either suitable to a situation or it is not. When considering what is meant by “suitable,” it is best to imagine a large target that includes a range of responses that are consistent with good human functioning, rather than focusing too intently on the bull’s-eye and seeking one correct response. What is most to be avoided is missing the target completely.

Finally, there are some emotions that incorporate explicit moral judgments into their structure. For example, we might hear on the radio about a government’s violent repression of its own people or its oppression of a geographical neighbor. As we picture acts of brutality, as described by the reporter, we undergo an interior motion of dissonance and recoil. We might also feel the impulse to rise up and defend the victims and punish the offenders. We might judge that what the offenders are doing is morally wrong. We might judge, further, that the offenders are evil. Our emotion thus becomes, in part, a hatred of certain actions and the people who are committing them. This is not simply an emotion that sits alongside a moral judgment; it is a moral emotion. To call an emotion a moral emotion is not to say that it is good. Rather, it is to say that the emotion has as its defining focus an object of perception or imagination (such as a person or a situation) that we judge to be morally good or bad. Moral judgments can be wrong, and the emotions that are informed by them can be misguided. For example, many of us hold that it is morally wrong to assume that a person is evil through and through. We hold that it is thus problematic to indulge an emotion in which we experience only dissonance and recoil, with no accompanying resonance with the basic humanity of the other.

I introduce the morality of emotion not because I am concerned in this book about evaluating the goodness or badness of particular emotional states. I am not. However, an interest in ethical self-cultivation lies in the background of this project. I take it that many of us would like to arrive at a better understanding of the emotions partly because we would like to alter some of our emotional habits. We would like to experience more love or joy, or decrease the frequency with which we experience self-lacerating emotions. Yet if we wish to encourage certain emotional states and discourage others, we must understand the sorts of states with which we are dealing. *How are we to understand our emotions such that it makes sense to say that we can shape them, even as we are shaped by the objects that enter our awareness and cause us a stir?* Until we can answer this question, any attempt to shape our emotions in a particular way, in light of our moral values, will come up short. We might get lucky and find a technique that allows us to have a desired effect on our emotions, but the ideal is to find a technique that makes sense to us so that

we can apply it intelligently. In this book, I seek to answer the question highlighted above by examining Aquinas's understanding of the structure of emotion and by considering, in the process, the relationship between emotions and the powers by which we exercise our moral agency.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTION

Just as our emotions can be of moral significance, they can also be of religious significance. As we will discuss in chapter 1, the religious has to do with what humans regard as “really real”² and of the utmost importance in life. It has to do with what humans regard as the “elements and processes within and beneath ordinary experience.”³ Something is of religious significance if it bears on the way one construes the underlying nature of things, or it bears on what one does to order one's life and community in relation to what one takes to be the deepest or currently most salient source of one's well-being.

Emotions play a notable role in the lives of many people who participate in religion. Ordinary observation indicates that emotions such as fear and love draw many people into the heart of a community's religion. Moreover, a religion functions, in turn, to shape these emotions so that they reflect, as far as possible, what the people believe or intuit to be the sacred order of things. Thus, a religion might enable adherents to experience certain emotions in relation to religious objects. For example, it might enable people to experience an intense love for God (when God is encountered, say, in the words of a rousing sermon) or a fear of ancestral spirits (when the spirits are encountered, say, in a family member's illness). A religion might also enable adherents to alter emotions that concern more ordinary objects, but objects that are viewed in religious perspective. For example, it might enable people to call into question and thus diminish the intensity of a sexual love that they experience for someone else's partner, or it might help people to be more patient when encountering a neighbor's contrary will. By enabling people to redirect the course of certain emotions, especially socially disruptive emotions, religions function to uphold a particular morality.

What is an emotion that it can be directed toward a religious object or toward an ordinary object that appears against a religious horizon? How are we constituted, as humans, that we can be moved by such objects, and we can also have an influence over how we are moved? When we ask these questions in light of the study of religion they appear especially complex, for they suggest the possibility that as humans we are sometimes moved—or think we are moved—by powers or truths that are present to us in some way yet are beyond our intellectual grasp. We might think it is important

to be well moved in relation to the source of all being, the power of life, a manifestation of limitless compassion, or a message from the spirit world. Yet we might also be unsure what to make of such emotions, partly because of the mysterious nature of their objects. In this book I focus primarily on Aquinas's account of ordinary human emotions. I pay attention, however, to some of the implications of his account for understanding the relationship between religion and emotion. Specifically, I examine how objects of perception or imagination that appear to bear on our well-being can also appear to be religious or of religious significance, such that we are moved not simply with emotion but with religious emotion or emotion that has a religious dimension.

When we hear the term “religious emotion,” we might think of what some Christians call “religious affections.” Jonathan Edwards, who wrote an influential treatise on the religious affections, defines an “affection” as a “lively and vigorous exercise of the inclination” by which “the soul is carried out towards . . . things in view of approving them, being pleased with and inclined to them”—or an inclination by which “the soul opposes the things in view, in disapproving them; and in being displeased with, averse from, and rejecting them.”⁴ Affections are “religious” when they are directed to “God and divine things.”⁵ Thus, one might have a “lively and vigorous” love for God and a similar hatred for sin. Edwards distinguishes, further, between “true” and “counterfeit” religious affections. “Truly gracious” religious affections reveal “the saving influences of the Spirit of God”;⁶ “false and delusive” religious affections do not.⁷

Aquinas does not employ the term “religious affection” as an analytical category. He does refer to affections (*affectus*) or interior motions of the intellectual appetite (the will) or (less frequently) the superior appetite (*appetitus superior*) with the understanding that these appetitive motions can take various objects. He also refers, of course, to love for God, hope in God, and the like, which we might wish to call “religious affections.” Sometimes Aquinas uses the term “affections” to refer to a broad range of inclinations, including inclinations that engage the intellectual appetite and those that engage the lower, sensory appetite.⁸ However, he most often uses the term to refer specifically to motions of the will relative to objects that we apprehend as good or bad by the power of our intellect (which can be extended by a gift of grace). He refers to “simple acts of the will” that occur “without passion or commotion of the soul.”⁹

I am interested in emotions, rather than affections. I analyze *as* emotions what Aquinas calls passions (*passiones*), which are mediated by the body and do involve a “commotion of the soul.”¹⁰ With respect to religion and emo-

tion, I seek to show how an emotion can arise in relation to a sensible object that appears to disclose a religious truth, mediate sacred power, provoke religious questions, or the like. I show, that is, how an emotion can have or acquire a religious dimension. I do not deny the significance of “affections of the will” for Aquinas. I discuss some of these in later chapters. However, I consider these motions as they relate to emotions. I leave the focused study of the will to others.¹¹ In my view, what Aquinas says about the affections that we experience as embodied beings is best understood by starting with the emotions and then considering how the emotions function in relation to motions of the will.¹²

I do not seek to distinguish in this book between true and false religious emotions—between emotions that are true in their religious dimension and those that are false—or between emotions that are caused in a special way by God and those that are not. Making such distinctions in anything but the most formal terms would require articulating and defending a view of the truth of reality, in relation to what I take to be Aquinas’s view of the truth. That would require a work of metaphysics or theology. I am more interested in common religious questions and longings, which tend to accompany religious beliefs and are important in their own right. Asking religious questions in relation to various objects of experience can arouse what I take to be religious emotions or emotions with a religious dimension. By the same token, asking a broader range of religious and other questions *about* such emotions can create some mental space around them, which can put us in a better position to give them direction.

THE STUDY OF AQUINAS ON THE EMOTIONS

The emotions ought to be studied by anyone who has a serious interest in ethical or religious self-understanding and the cultivation of virtue. But why study Aquinas on this topic? What makes his way of thinking about the emotions so special? Let me introduce some notable features of his account.

First, Aquinas holds that emotions are modes of tending in relation to objects of perception or imagination that we assess to be significant for our own or another’s well-being. Emotions are interior motions that are aroused by and oriented with respect to certain objects of “cognition.” Accordingly, Aquinas’s account allows us to attend, as any compelling account of the emotions must, to the cognitive dimension of emotion. Yet he interprets this dimension with flexibility. He includes within its realm not only propositional states, such as states of believing-that and judging-that, but also (and most importantly for the initial formation of many emotions) nonpropositional states,

such as states of having in mind a sensory image or impression that we have not yet put into words—or have only begun to characterize for ourselves through the use of higher-order intellectual powers.

Second, Aquinas attends to the cognitive while also attending to the appetitive dimension of emotion. He holds that emotions are forms of object-oriented appetitive motion. They include forms of being-attracted-to, tending-away-from, rising-up-against, being-crushed-by, being-at-rest-in, being-ill-at-ease-with, and the like. Unfortunately, when many people who study the emotions hear the term “appetite,” they think “hunger” or “sex,” and at that point they stop thinking clearly and creatively about the relationship between appetite and emotion. One of my main goals in presenting Aquinas’s view is to show that it is meaningful and fruitful to think of emotions as forms of appetitive motion.

Third, partly because of the way he analyzes the concept of appetite, Aquinas allows us to notice significant structural similarities between the object-oriented appetitive motions of humans and the object-oriented appetitive motions of other, nonhuman animals. He allows us to see ourselves in continuity with other animals, even as we suppose that there are differences in experience, which relate to the fact that most humans exercise advanced powers of thought and decision making that are unavailable to other animals. More than this, Aquinas allows us to see ourselves and our emotions in relation to other modes of tending that are evident in the natural world. He allows us to see (and experience) that we are part of a complex, interactive whole that is remarkably well ordered and exquisitely beautiful, even as the world is also (and feels to us) in many respects chaotic, destructive, and painful.

On the matter of reason and emotion, Aquinas allows us to put crude dualisms to rest and move on. Emotions are not simply thoughts or evaluative judgments or other acts of a “rational part,” nor are they simply motions of a “nonrational or animal part.” They are interior motions that have a complex relationship to a set of powers or capabilities by which we receive and process information about ourselves and our world. On the matter of emotions and the body, Aquinas’s view is again complex, and understanding it requires patience on the part of readers who are prone to dismiss talk of the soul. In his perspective, an emotion is a mode of tending on the part of an embodied soul. It is a motion of the soul that is mediated by certain changes in the body. Aquinas avoids reducing an emotion to a purely mental state, a brain state, a bodily state of some other kind, or a bodily feeling. Aspects of his approach will likely appeal to readers who are unsatisfied with intellectualist

accounts that neglect the body, on the one hand, and reductionist scientific-materialist accounts, on the other.

Finally, Aquinas's account of emotion, when placed within the context of his systematic theology, has remarkable metaphysical depth. Entertaining his conception of the nature of reality, as a thought experiment or an act of intellectual creativity, can be awe-inspiring. For me, it has been life-transforming. The world no longer appears quite the same as it did before I began this study, and I no longer feel quite the same in relation to what I see. There are aspects of Aquinas's metaphysics that I do not yet understand, aspects with which I disagree, and aspects about which I am undecided. With respect to his account of emotion, in particular, there are details that I have not yet had the chance to probe, and connections to other parts of his thought that I might never have the chance to explore, given the volume of Aquinas's writings and the way his writings presuppose an engagement with the work of his many peers and predecessors. Moreover, there are parts of Aquinas's account that need to be corrected or supplemented. For example, one would want to reconsider his understanding of the role that "vital spirits" and "humors" play in the arousal of anger. One would want to supplement his account with more accurate information regarding the physiology of emotion. Yet no part of the account is unworthy of serious study and meditation.

INTERPRETING AQUINAS IN LIGHT OF RECENT STUDIES OF EMOTION

Within academia, scholars from many disciplines are engaged in the study of emotion. Of special interest to the present inquiry are normative studies written from the perspectives of religious ethics, Christian ethics, or Catholic moral theology.¹³ Also of interest are studies that are more historical and interpretive in kind, set within the broader context of religious studies.¹⁴ This project has affinities with all such approaches, yet it has perhaps greater affinity to certain analyses in philosophy and, more specifically, philosophical and moral psychology.¹⁵ I do not develop my own, constructive view of the emotions, but I try to present Aquinas's account as I think it must be presented if it is to stand up to other, excellent philosophical accounts.

I have learned much from philosophical studies of emotion. One thing I have learned is that there are significant differences in philosophers' ways of describing or representing emotions. Differences in interpretation probably reflect the ways in which philosophical commitments and other interests are brought to bear on the interpretation of the same or similar experiences. They might also reflect differences in experience. That is, differences in interpretation might concern somewhat different experiences that we have

come to call by the same names, such as “love” and “hatred.” When I read a philosophical account of emotion that does not fit my experience well, or fits some aspects of it but not others, I presume that the author’s concepts illuminate his or her own experience, yet I am not always sure what to make of the fact that those concepts fail to do the same for my own experience.

I do not expect that philosophers will one day agree on a single best account of emotion. I doubt this is a worthwhile goal to seek. More worthwhile is the elucidation of multiple philosophical accounts, each of which has important insights to contribute to our understanding of certain aspects of our interior and relational lives, but none of which can hope to integrate all of the best insights that have been gleaned over the history of human thought. I confine myself mostly to a close reading of Aquinas. I expect that his account will ring true for some readers and not for others—because of limits in the account, limits in my interpretation of it, limits in readers’ abilities to relate Aquinas’s concepts to their own experience, differences in philosophical and religious perspective, and the like, but also because of differences in the way various people experience life.

Also of interest to the present inquiry are recent studies in neuroscience and experimental psychology that seek to demonstrate relationships among various phenomena that have to do with emotions, such as select stimuli, measurable changes in the brain, changes in other parts of the body, observable behaviors (including facial expressions), and the self-reports of experimental subjects. Of particular interest is the way in which some scientists who study the emotions recognize the need to be conscious of the philosophical assumptions they bring to their studies, including assumptions about the nature of consciousness and about the states of consciousness or awareness that it makes sense to call “emotions,” while calling other states by other names, such as “feelings.”¹⁶ Choices must be made, and the more self-consciously they are made, the better. Yet it is difficult to know how to interpret a researcher’s interpretations of his or her experiments when the latter interpretations are filtered through a philosophical framework and a way of dividing up the mental landscape that one does not share. In any case, we cannot go into the study of emotion thinking simply that there are facts about the brain and behavior that any good philosophical account must fit. There are such facts, but all facts must be interpreted, and some facts are open to quite different interpretations. Differences in interpretation can have different implications for understanding human experience.¹⁷

Also intriguing to keep in mind, as one approaches the study of Aquinas, are the anthropological accounts of emotion that have been published in recent decades. Some of these accounts seek to show the significant extent to

which emotions are socially constructed. They emphasize differences in the emotions of people who are situated in different cultures.¹⁸ Other accounts challenge radical forms of social constructionism. They proceed on the assumption that, yes, there are differences in experiences of emotion across cultures, but there are also notable similarities; if there were not, we would be unable to understand others' experiences to the extent that we can.¹⁹ Most anthropologists who study people's emotions recognize the need to define what an emotion is before trying to study and report on the emotions of their subjects. Yet it is not easy to specify a working definition of emotion in the face of significant philosophical disagreement. One anthropologist, Catherine Lutz, sets her conception of emotion up against the foil of "Western thinking about the emotions," as if Western thinking were unified.²⁰ Again, it is difficult to know what to make of empirical evidence that is interpreted in light of concepts that are unclear, misleading, or defined in ways that beg important philosophical questions.

There is much to be gained through empirical studies of emotion. There is also much to be gained by pursuing greater conceptual clarity about the objects and the terms of one's study. I hope to contribute to the discussion about how best to define the emotions. Yet I do not attempt to situate Aquinas's account relative to all of the other philosophical contenders. There are too many other, fine accounts that are worth studies of their own. Each of them is marked by subtle distinctions, the discussion of which requires delving into major philosophical issues. I focus on presenting Aquinas's view in light of a couple other options, and I offer his view especially for readers who seek new possibilities for self-understanding, and not simply conceptual clarity and simplicity.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This book is fundamentally a work of religious ethics. Because the defining features of religious ethics are a matter of some debate, I begin with a brief methodological chapter. Chapter 1 develops a working definition of religious ethics. It clarifies what is intended by the term "religious," and what I take to be religious about religious ethics. More specifically, it identifies religion and religious moralities as objects of religious-ethical study, and it indicates how religious-ethical inquiry approaches these objects. Chapter 1 prepares readers to think broadly about the religious as a factor in various emotional states. It encourages readers to reflect on the religious questions and concerns they might profitably bring to the study of emotion—and to their reflection on their own emotions.

Chapter 2 sets the stage for a religious-ethical inquiry into Aquinas by attending to some recent scholarship on ethics and the emotions. The work of James Gustafson provides a way of thinking about the relationship between religious faith and the elements of moral character, including a person's characteristic ways of being moved. What Gustafson says about faith and the affections (including the religious affections) allows us to sharpen the questions we need to bring to our reading of Aquinas. What is an affection? What makes a given affection religious? How does an affection relate to an emotion? What *is* an emotion? Can an emotion also be religious or have a religious dimension? How far can Aquinas's theory of emotion take us in accounting for the many ways in which humans are affected by objects of experience, some of which appear to be ordinary and some of which appear to have religious significance?

The work of Martha Nussbaum provides a way of thinking more specifically about the structure of emotion. In her view, emotions are forms of thought or cognition. Her account differs from that of Aquinas's, for he holds that emotions are forms of interior appetitive motion. Yet Aquinas holds that the appetitive motions that compose emotions are object-oriented. Experiencing an emotion involves having something in mind and making certain sorts of judgments in its regard. Nussbaum's way of characterizing cognition and the role it plays in evoking emotions is probing and subtle. Her analysis prepares us to look for similar subtlety in Aquinas's account of the cognitive dimension of emotion. Her analysis prepares us also to appreciate the central difference between Aquinas's account of emotion and cognitivist accounts that reduce emotions to their cognitive dimension.

Aquinas defines *passio*, or what I refer to as emotion, as an object-oriented motion of the sensory appetite that occurs within a soul-body composite. Chapters 3 and 4 begin to break this definition down into its component parts. These chapters anticipate obstacles to understanding and lay a foundation for subsequent chapters. In particular, chapter 3 distinguishes the power of apprehension (i.e., the power by which sentient beings acquire and process information) from the power of appetite (i.e., the power by which sentient beings are moved interiorly or—in some cases—move themselves, relative to objects of apprehension). Nussbaum appears in chapter 3 as well as in chapter 2. While she argues that emotions are forms of thought (which Aquinas associates with the power of apprehension), Aquinas argues that emotions are best construed as object-oriented acts of the appetitive power. Chapter 3 offers some reasons why one might want to make a distinction between the powers of apprehension and appetite, and why one might want to associate emotions fundamentally with the power of appetite.

Chapter 4 continues to lay a foundation for understanding Aquinas on emotion. A Thomistic emotion is a motion of the soul that is mediated by the body. One can no longer presume that the idea of the soul makes sense to people, that their conception of the soul looks anything like Aquinas's conception, or that people will not misapprehend Aquinas's conception of the soul-body composite in light of Cartesian and other dualisms. Hence, chapter 4 elucidates what the soul is for Aquinas and how the soul relates to the body. This chapter considers some important issues concerning the bodily dimension of emotion. It considers also some implications of Aquinas's view for thinking about emotions in God and other immaterial realities, including the human soul after its separation from the body at death.

Chapters 5 and 6 approach the center of Aquinas's account of emotion. They focus on what it means to say that an emotion is a motion of the *sensory appetite*. They approach the sensory appetite of humans "from below" with reference to Aquinas's scale of being. Chapter 5 explores structural similarities between motions of the human sensory appetite and appetitive motions that occur in other animals, in other living things, and in inanimate objects. Everything that exists, in Aquinas's view, is characterized by appetitive motion, and it is by virtue of all this motion that the universe holds together as it does. Chapter 5 also examines the formal cause of a sensory-appetitive motion, which is an object of sensory apprehension. It examines various acts of sensory apprehension, appreciating how much human and nonhuman animals have in common on the sensory level, but also anticipating how acts of sensory apprehension in humans (only) are influenced by the intellect and the will.

Chapter 6 examines what is meant by a *motion* of the sensory appetite, focusing on the structure of object-oriented tending. This chapter examines the most basic forms of appetitive tending, which are distinguished with respect to the ways in which their objects are construed, and also with respect to the direction in which one tends relative to these objects. Chapter 6 includes an analysis of the three basic moments in a typical process of appetitive tending. It examines, specifically, the moments of love, desire, and delight, which occur in relation to an object that is apprehended as good or attractive, and the moments of hatred, aversion, and sorrow, which occur in relation to an object that is apprehended as bad or repugnant. It examines also the specific forms of motion that arise when one encounters obstacles in one's tending toward or away from objects that one regards as good or evil. This chapter thus includes an interpretation of all eleven emotions that Aquinas regards as fundamental, with reference to which one can define any other emotion.

Chapters 7 and 8 approach the heart of Aquinas's account of emotion from a different direction, namely, "from above" with reference to his scale of being. Aquinas holds that human emotions are appetitive motions that are, in part, reflective of our animality. Yet humans are more than animals. We are also rational beings. We are rational animals. In Aquinas's view, this means that we have intellectual souls. We can, in principle, exercise intellectual powers, which include the power of intellectual apprehension (intellect) and the power of intellectual appetite (will). Aquinas thinks that we ordinarily exercise these intellectual powers, in some form, as we undergo motions of the sensory appetite or emotions, and that the exercise of our intellectual powers influences our sensory operations. If we wish to understand his account of emotion, we must therefore investigate the ways in which the powers of intellectual apprehension and appetite relate to the powers of sensory apprehension and appetite. Much has been written about the intellect and the will in Aquinas. I do not reproduce that discussion. I treat the intellectual powers and their operations specifically in order to elucidate the influence they can and ordinarily do have on emotions.

Chapter 7 focuses primarily on the intellect. It examines in formal terms the act (the operation of the soul) by which one understands what an object is, and the act by which one judges an object to be good. Understanding what an object is and judging it to be good (relative to one's final end) are acts of intellectual apprehension that stand in an ordered relationship to acts of sensory apprehension by which one forms a sensory image of an object and judges it, on a sensory level, to be attractive. An object that one judges sensorily to be attractive often causes a motion of the sensory appetite or an emotion. Chapter 7 thus shows how certain acts of *intellectual* apprehension are capable of influencing the acts of *sensory* apprehension that provide intentional content for particular emotions. The chapter includes a brief discussion of the way in which Aquinas thinks the power of the human intellect can be extended by a gift of grace, so that certain acts of intellectual apprehension that are "above reason," most notably acts of Christian faith, become possible for humans. Aquinas holds that these extraordinary acts of the intellect can affect the sensory judgments that give rise to emotions.

Chapter 8 focuses on the intellectual appetite or will. It examines the basic forms of appetitive tending that can occur on an intellectual level, as determined by the way in which one apprehends an object's goodness (or badness) intellectually, and the direction in which one tends in relation to what one apprehends. Paralleling the analysis of chapter 6 (up to a point), chapter 8 examines three moments that can be identified in a typical process of intellectual-appetitive tending relative to an object that one judges to be

good. These moments are intellectual love, desire, and joy. In Aquinas's worldview, goodness is ontologically basic. Evil is construed as a privation of good. When he discusses the structure of intellectual-appetitive tending, he therefore focuses primarily on modes of tending toward what one judges to be good. My interpretation follows his lead, but it attends briefly to modes of tending that occur relative to objects that one judges to be bad. Aquinas's account of emotion makes it possible to reproduce on the intellectual level (with necessary modifications) all eleven motions of the sensory appetite presented in chapter 6. I do not explore the *intellectual*-appetitive motions or affections that go by such names as fear, daring, anger, and despair, but I point the way for others who might wish to do so.

Chapter 8 also investigates further the relationship between the intellect and the will, showing how the intellect (so to speak) acts on the will and also how the will, in turn, acts on the intellect. If we wish to understand the influence that the intellect and the will can have on emotions, we need to understand how the intellect and the will function as a pair. This chapter attends also to the way in which Aquinas thinks the power of the intellectual appetite (like the power of intellectual apprehension) can be extended in its operations by a gift of grace, so that a human being becomes capable of extraordinary motions of the intellectual appetite, most notably Christian hope, love, and joy. Aquinas characterizes such motions as affections. Inasmuch as these affections regard a religious object, we might wish, as noted earlier, to characterize them as religious affections. I hope to show, however, that these motions can also profitably be regarded as religious emotions. Taking a religious-ethical approach, we can open the category of religious emotion to include appetitive motions that are directed toward a range of objects that one takes to be of religious import, without having to posit, as a matter of faith, a special supernatural cause of such motions. This allows us to imagine how Aquinas's work could be of use to people outside, as well as inside, Christian circles.

Chapter 9 synthesizes and extends the work of chapters 7 and 8. It traces several ways in which acts of the intellect can affect the formation of particular emotional states. It does the same thing with respect to motions of the will. The chapter considers, finally, some of the ways in which emotions can, in turn, affect certain intellectual acts—including acts that can, in turn, affect the formation and the course of one's emotions (and so on). Chapter 9 seeks to show that the emotions of humans are typically composed (for as long as they last) at the hub of several interactive operations of the embodied soul. With respect to some of these interior operations, it is difficult to apprehend oneself (as) undergoing them; one simply undergoes the changes. With

respect to other of these operations, it is a bit easier to transcend, to some extent, what is happening. By virtue of certain higher-order operations, one can make other of one's interior operations objects for thought, and one can try to alter them.

Chapter 10 synthesizes and extends the book's analysis of Aquinas on the emotions. It explores further the "order" of human emotions in relation to what Aquinas takes to be the order of human nature and the order of nature as such. It also highlights some practical ethical benefits of studying Aquinas's account and studying it with broadly religious questions and concerns in mind. The religious-ethical study of Aquinas on the emotions challenges us to become more aware of and articulate about our questions concerning the nature of reality and concerning what is most important in human life. It challenges us to see how these very questions—and the answers to which we have become attached—can affect the ways in which objects appear to us, the ways in which they cause us to be moved emotionally, and the ways in which we are capable of moving ourselves relative to these and other objects, partly by choosing to cultivate more reflective habits of emotion.

I am in a kind of conversation with Aquinas. I entertain most of his ideas as *living* ideas. Being in conversation with this great thinker requires, for most of us, that we learn a new vocabulary and grammar. As this brief introduction already suggests, it can be challenging to keep relevant definitions and distinctions straight, and to see how various parts fit together into interactive wholes. I invite readers to refer, as helpful, to the appendix for an outline of selected features of Aquinas's conception of the powers or capabilities of a typical human being. One must have a basic understanding of these capabilities if one is to understand Aquinas on the emotions.

NOTES

1. I am pointing to a form of loving self-direction that is exercised within the context of recognized passivity and vulnerability. I am not intimating a form of muscular self-control.

2. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," reprinted in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 112. See chapter 1.

3. John P. Reeder Jr., personal conversation. See the discussion of Reeder's view in chapter 1.

4. Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Avon, U.K.: Bath, 1992), 237.

5. *Ibid.*, 238.

6. *Ibid.*, 245.

7. *Ibid.*, the whole of part III.

8. See, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), hereafter abbreviated *ST*, *ST*I 82.5, and I-II 102.6 *ad* 8. Latin edition: S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, edited by Petri Caramello (Rome: Marietti, 1950). In reading Aquinas, I consult the Latin and often indicate Latin terms, particularly in cases where I expect standard translations of these terms to strike English-speaking readers as odd, but the translations turn out to be rather straightforward, or where certain English terms, such as “love,” have many different dimensions that are signaled by different Latin terms. However, I rely on standard translations of Aquinas’s works unless I think these pose specific problems for interpretation. The work of translating Aquinas, in light of all that Aquinas wrote, and all of the thinkers with whom he was in conversation, is laden with technical difficulties, and I am unwilling to enter into that forest. I focus instead on wrestling with the Aquinas who is largely available to an English-speaking audience. With respect to the *Summa theologiae*, I rely on the Christian Classics translation rather than the Blackfriars because I think the latter begs more philosophical questions when it comes to expressing in English Aquinas’s views concerning human agency.

9. *ST*I 59.4 *ad* 2, 82.5 *ad* 1. However, Aquinas qualifies this view in a way that is important to our analysis, as we will explore in later chapters.

10. Chapter 3 addresses issues concerning the translation of the term *passio*.

11. For an excellent start, see Frederick Crowe, “Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas,” *Theological Studies* 20 (1959); Robert Johann, *The Meaning of Love: An Essay towards the Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist, 1966); and (in a less Thomistic vein) Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

12. G. Simon Harak begins his delightful book with a chapter on the body and ends with a discussion of the passion for justice: *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1993).

13. See the bibliography, which is not exhaustive. Most notable for situating my own work are Richard R. Baker, *The Thomistic Theory of the Passions and Their Influence upon the Will* (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1941); Harak, *Virtuous Passions*; and Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*.

14. See especially John Corrigan, ed., *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and John Corrigan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

15. Most important for my own work are John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); William Lyons, *Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay*

in *Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976); and Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

16. See, for example, Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2003.)

17. For a critique of the biases that affect some of Antonio Damasio's experiments, see Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

18. See, for example, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), and Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

19. See, for example, Charlotte E. Hardman, *Other Worlds: Notions of Self and Emotion among the Lohorong Rai* (Oxford: Berg, 2000). See also John Kloos, "Constructionism and Its Critics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

20. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*. I agree with Robert Roberts that "anthropologists of emotion . . . could profit from greater conceptual (philosophical) clarity about their enterprise." See Robert C. Roberts, "Emotions Research and Religious Experience," in Corrigan, *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, 497.