



PROJECT MUSE®

Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion

Christopher A. Bobier

The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review, Volume 86, Number 2, April 2022, pp. 219-243 (Article)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2022.0023>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/860276>

THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN COGNITION AND EMOTION

CHRISTOPHER A. BOBIER

*St. Mary's University of Minnesota
Winona, Minnesota*

SCHOLARLY interpretations of Thomas Aquinas on the relation between cognition and emotion are divided along cognitive and noncognitive lines.¹ Some scholars think that Thomistic emotions are noncognitive, purely conative impulses: “Aquinas’s account of emotion,” William Lyons writes, is “in terms of impulses or desires, and the accompanying physiological changes and feelings, rather than in terms of cognitive evaluations.”² While cognitions cause and sustain emotions,

¹ Two clarifications are in order. (1) *Cognitio* is the Latin term referring to both higher-order and lower-order thoughts. It covers everything from beliefs and judgments based on syllogistic reasoning to perception. (2) I translate *passio animae* as “emotion” in large part because this is how many of the scholars I am engaging with choose to translate it (e.g., Peter King, “Emotions,” in *Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012]; Martin Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions (and of Other Appetitive Acts),” *Quaestio* 10 [2010]: 45-63; Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009]; Mark Drost, “Intentionality in Aquinas’s Theory of Emotions,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 31 [1991]: 449-60; William Lyons, *Emotion* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980]). For a defense of this choice of translation, see Craig Steven Titus, “Passions in Christ: Spontaneity, Development, and Virtue,” *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 53-87; and Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 224-29; for a dissenting perspective, see John Dryden, “Passions, Affections, and Emotions: Methodological Difficulties in Reconstructing Aquinas’s Philosophical Psychology,” *Literature Compass* 13 (2016): 343-50; and Stephen Chanderbhan, “The Shifting Prominence of Emotions in the Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas,” *Diametros* 38 (2013): 62-85.

² Lyons, *Emotion*, 36.

they are not constituent parts of emotions. I label any reading of Aquinas that denies cognition a constituent part in Thomistic emotions a *noncognitive* reading. Other scholars, by contrast, argue that Thomistic emotions are, or essentially involve, certain types of cognition. “Since emotions are attitudinal responses of the sensory orexis [i.e., sensory appetite] either to objects intended as simple goods or evils or to objects intended as complex goods or evils,” Mark Drost argues, “the emotions have a cognitive component in them.”³ On this reading, an emotion has three parts: eliciting and sustaining cognition, appetitive movement, and physiological change. I label any reading that affords cognition a constituent role in Thomistic emotions a *cognitive* reading.

Despite the profound difference between these two readings, little has been done to bring them into conversation with one another.⁴ This is surprising because the debate has ramifications

³ Drost, “Intentionality in Aquinas’s Theory of Emotions,” 453.

⁴ The book-length treatments of Aquinas’s account of the emotions by Robert Miner (*Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009]) and Lombardo (*The Logic of Desire*) largely ignore the issue of cognition in Aquinas’s account of emotion. Cates devotes one footnote to the issue in *Aquinas on the Emotions*. Simo Knuuttila (*Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004]), Paul Gondreau (*The Passions of Christ’s Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* [Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2003]), and Susan James (*Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997]) all neglect this issue when discussing Aquinas. Article-length discussions also tend to overlook the issue of cognitive versus noncognitive readings (for example, Stewart Clem, “The Passions of Christ in the Moral Theology of Thomas Aquinas: An Integrative Account,” *New Blackfriars* 99 [2018]: 458-80; Alexander Brungs, “Die passionēs animae,” in *Thomas von Aquin: Die Summa Theologiae*, ed. Andreas Speer [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005]: 198-222; Elisabeth Uffenheimer-Lippens, “Rationalized Passion and Passionate Rationality: Thomas Aquinas on the Relation between Reason and the Passions,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 [2003]: 525-58; Paul Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life: Appreciating the Originality of Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 71 [2007]: 419-50; and Michel Meyer, “Le problème des passions chez saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue internationale de philosophie* 48 [1994]: 363-74). I engage the relatively few explicit discussions of the issue below but it is important to note that they often stand alone: neither Maria Carl (“St. Thomas Aquinas: The Unity of the Person and the Passions,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 86 [2013]: 201-12) nor King (“Emotions”) engages Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions” at length; nor does Dominik Perler

for our understanding of how Thomistic emotions relate to reason, rationality, and morality. Robert C. Roberts, for instance, argues that Aquinas's position is that emotions do not include a cognitive component—they are noncognitive impulses—and that this in turn entails that Aquinas cannot do justice to the rationality of emotions.⁵ Maria Carl, in turn, argues that Thomistic emotions are intrinsically cognitive and that Roberts's criticism is therefore misguided.⁶ The cognitive versus noncognitive debate also has ramifications for our understanding of the applicability of Thomistic emotions to present-day issues. For instance, Giuseppe Butera argues that Aquinas's philosophical psychology can “serve as a theoretical framework” for cognitive therapy.⁷ A problem, Butera notes, is that, “whereas CT makes a sharp distinction between emotions and their eliciting cognitions, APP [Aquinas's philosophical psychology] does not.”⁸ If, however, Aquinas does distinguish cognitions from emotions, then Butera's point about the difference between CT and APP is not apt.

The aim of this article is thus twofold. First, I present the case for endorsing both a cognitive and a noncognitive reading of Aquinas's account of emotion, highlighting the merits of each position. My goal is to bring these competing interpretations into discussion with one another, something that has been largely neglected in recent studies. Second, I argue in favor of a noncognitive reading, according to which Thomistic emotions are caused by but distinct from eliciting cognitions.

(*Feelings Transformed: Philosophical Theories of the Emotions, 1270-1670*, trans. Tony Crawford [New York: Oxford University Press, 2018]) discuss King, “Emotions.”

⁵ Robert C. Roberts, “Thomas Aquinas on the Morality of Emotions,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9 (1992): 287-305.

⁶ Carl, “Unity of the Person and the Passions.”

⁷ Giuseppe Butera, “Thomas Aquinas and Cognitive Therapy: An Exploration of the Promise of Thomistic Psychology,” *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 17 (2011): 347-66, abstract.

⁸ *Ibid.*, “Thomas Aquinas and Cognitive Therapy,” 355.

I. THE NONCOGNITIVE AND COGNITIVE READINGS

Aquinas identifies emotions as moved-responses of the sensory appetite (*De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 3; *STh* I-II, q. 22).⁹ These responses have both a passive and an active component. Emotions are passive because they need to be actualized: the sensory appetite needs to be presented with a particular good or evil object in order for the emotion to occur. To be clear, that which actualizes an emotion is not a material object. Aquinas recognizes that while Attila experiences fear upon seeing a wolf, Henrietta may experience delight. What actualizes a movement of Attila's and Henrietta's sensory appetite is their sensory cognition of the wolf as good or threatening. Aquinas refers to these evaluative cognitions as "intentions." Intentions are evaluative judgments that enable one to cognize something relative to one's interests (*STh* I, q. 78, a. 4; I-II, q. 22, a. 2, ad 3; *De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 4). A sheep judges that the wolf is dangerous and to be feared, not only on account of the wolf's perceptual qualities (e.g., color), but most essentially on account of the evaluative judgment that the wolf is dangerous to it, which judgment is reached by way of the perceptual qualities (*STh* I, q. 78, a. 4). Once formed, an intention is then presented to the sensory appetite, which responds with a movement either toward or away from the object (*De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 1; *STh* I-II,

⁹ References to Aquinas are in-text. Citations are from *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici. Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII* (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1882-); all translations are my own. For in-depth work on Aquinas's account of human psychology, see Peter King, "The Inner Cathedral: Mental Architecture in High Scholasticism," *Vivarium* 46 (2008): 253-74; and Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For in-depth work on Aquinas's account of the emotions or passions, see Perler, *Feelings Transformed*; Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*; Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*; Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*; Peter King, "Aquinas on the Passions," in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 353-84; Meyer, "Le problème des passions"; and Marcos Manzanedo, "La clasificación de las pasiones o emociones," *Studium* 23 (1983): 357-78. For historical focus, see Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*; Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feelings: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Gondreau, *Passions of Christ's Soul*.

q. 21, a. 1). The sheep's fear of the wolf is a movement of the sensory appetite away from the wolf. While Aquinas believes that nonhuman animals form evaluative judgments by "natural instinct," he posits that humans form evaluative judgments through their "cogitative power," which involves the "coalition" or "collation" of ideas (*STh* I, q. 78, a. 4).

Once an intention is presented to the sensory appetite, the sensory appetite responds by moving either toward the object if it is pleasant or away from the object if it is harmful. Because the sensory appetite is a bodily power, emotion-movements necessarily involve a bodily alteration: "Acts of the sensory appetite," Aquinas claims, "are always accompanied by some bodily change" (*STh* I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 2). As Aquinas describes it, every emotion involves a material change (bodily alteration) and a formal change (movement of soul): "just as movement of the appetitive power is the formal element, so also transmutation of the body is the material element, of which one is proportioned to the other" (*STh* I-II, q. 44, a. 1). Attila's fear of the wolf involves, formally, an alteration of her sensory appetite that inclines it to move away from the wolf. Materially, there is an increase in the flow of blood around her heart, resulting in a higher heart rate, perspiration, and so on. Emotions, accordingly, are not movements of the sensory soul that cause bodily alteration: they are movements of the sensory soul that are *mediated* by bodily alteration. It is the creature—not the creature's soul—that experiences the emotion.

Much more can be said regarding Aquinas's theory. What matters for present purposes is the relation between the intention (cognition) and the appetitive movement. Aquinas is clear that emotions have an intentional structure—they are directed to particular things represented under a certain aspect (*STh* I-II, q. 41, a. 2). Emotions are not nonintentional, mere bodily feelings. They are identified and classified by the type of object that elicits them, and they are actualized so long as the object is presented to the sensory appetite. The question becomes, does the intentionality of the emotions entail that emotions are forms of cognition or have a cognitive element?

Aquinas does not say much about how exactly the emotions are intentional and whether their intentionality entails that they have a cognitive element. Advocates of what I call a non-cognitive reading insist that Thomistic emotions are non-cognitive movements that are caused by but distinct from intentions of an object. Shawn Floyd, for instance, writes that “for Aquinas the relationship between passion and cognition is a causal one. Passion is caused by, but not a constitutive part of, cognition.”¹⁰ More recently, Nicholas Lombardo writes:

A passion is nothing other than the movement of the sense appetite, a passive power, from dormancy to act, in response to the apprehension of an object to which the sense appetite is inclined . . . apprehension of an intention being a necessary preconditions for a passion.¹¹

We may consider the emotion of hope for an example. According to Aquinas, on this reading, hope is the movement of the irascible power of the sensory appetite, which is the power of the sensory appetite that regards arduous goods and evils, that is caused and accompanied by the intention of a future possible good that is arduous to attain (*STh* I-II, q. 40). It is about or directed toward this object in virtue of being a moved-response to that particular intention; however, hope is *not* constituted by the intention nor does it involve the intention as a constituent part. Apart from their causal relation, cognition is separate from the nature of an emotion. Emotions, on this reading, are directed toward or away from objects in virtue of being moved so via intentions.¹²

¹⁰ Shawn Floyd, “Aquinas on Emotion: A Response to Some Recent Interpretations,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15 (1988): 161-75, at 165.

¹¹ Lombardo, *Logic of Desire*, 34.

¹² Claudia Eisen Murphy writes, “Aquinas makes sure to differentiate passions explicitly from (1) cognitive states and events, and from (2) movements of the intellectual appetite. The first explicit distinction means that passions are not themselves cognitive states, they are responses to cognitive states” (“Aquinas on Our Responsibility for Our Emotions,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 163-205, at 167). Other proponents include Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions,” 48; Eleonore Stump, “The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas’s Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions,” *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 28 (2011): 29-43; Stephen Loughlin, “Similarities and Differences between

The motivation for endorsing a noncognitive reading is two-fold.¹³ First, Aquinas insists that emotions are movements of the sensory appetite, which is a power distinct from the cognitive powers of the soul that are responsible for knowledge, perception, and belief. The function of the sensory appetite, unlike the cognitive powers, is to move the creature about in the world, whereas the function of the cognitive powers, in which the cogitative and estimative powers responsible for producing intentions are located, is to arrive at true beliefs about the world. Appetite is outward going, while cognition is inward going: the latter assimilates the known or believed in the subject, while the former draws the soul out of itself toward or away from an object (*STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 2). Aquinas approvingly cites Damascene's definition of emotion as "a movement of the sensory appetitive power" (*STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 3, sc), and often describes emotions as movements following upon cognitions: "movement of the appetitive power follows [*sequitur*] an act of the cognitive power" (*STh* I-II, q. 46, a. 2). He explains that "the cognitive power moves [*mouet*] the appetite by representing to the appetite its object" (*STh* I-II, q. 40, a. 2). The relation between cognition and emotion appears to be causal, not constitutive.

Second, and relatedly, the emotions necessarily involve a bodily response, and it is because the emotions involve bodily change that Aquinas posits them as being movements of the sensory appetite. He reasons that no cognitive power is so immediately linked with bodily change, while the sensory appetite does involve the body; therefore, the emotions have to be situated in the sensory appetite (*STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 2). Emotions do not cause a somatic change; rather, they involve a

Human and Animal Emotion in Aquinas's Thought," *The Thomist* 65 (2001): 45-65; Titus, "Passions in Christ," 63; Dryden, "Passions," 40; Patrick Gorevan, "Aquinas and Emotional Theory Today: Mind-Body, Cognitivism and Connaturality," *Acta philosophica* 9 (2000): 141-51; Lyons, *Emotions*; and Roberts, "Thomas Aquinas on the Morality of Emotions."

¹³ See Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 47-48; Gorevan, "Aquinas and Emotional Theory Today"; Roberts, "Thomas Aquinas on the Morality of Emotions," 293-94.

material change (bodily alteration) and a formal change (movement of soul), as noted above (*STh* I-II, q. 44, a. 1). It is for this reason that Aquinas thinks that nonhuman animals experience emotions, even though they do not have the rational, cognitive powers that humans have, and that God and the angels, properly speaking, do not experience emotions since they are incorporeal (e.g., *STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 3, ad 3). Thus, since emotions involve bodily change and cognition is not so immediately related to the body, it would seem to follow that Thomistic emotions are noncognitive.

However, the noncognitive reading is not without textual and conceptual problems. First, as Mark Drost observes, Aquinas claims that some emotions are not movements at all, but rather a kind of appetitive rest.¹⁴ Aquinas explains that in “concupiscible emotions there is found something pertaining to movements (e.g., desire) and something pertaining to repose (e.g., joy and sorrow)” (*STh* I-II, q. 25, a. 1). Consider his description of love’s relation to desire:

Thus, the first appetitive change by the appetible object is called love, which is nothing other than a complacency of the appetite. From this complacency arises a movement toward the appetible object, which is desire. (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 2)

Love is a kind of affective resonance between the appetite and the appetible object, while desire is an appetitive movement toward the object as absent. If all emotions were movements, Aquinas would lose the distinction between love and desire, for instead of love being the springboard for “a person to desire and seek the presence of the loved,” love itself would be an inclination to the loved object (*STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 1). Although, to be sure, showing that some emotions are *not* described as movements does not thereby suggest a cognitive reading, it has been used by some scholars to cast doubt on the plausibility of a noncognitive reading, according to which emotions are movements of the sensory appetite brought about by but distinct from cognitions.

¹⁴ Drost, “Intentionality in Aquinas’s Theory of Emotions,” 455.

A second worry for a noncognitive reading is that separating cognition from emotion undermines Aquinas's hylomorphic theory of human nature. Judith Barad explains that, "For Aquinas, the fact that we are composite beings precludes ascribing emotion either solely to our rational element or solely to our bodies."¹⁵ Human beings are not souls joined to bodies; they are embodied souls, with the body and soul acting as a unified principle of operation. Maria Carl takes the unity of the human being to be evidence of a cognitive position:

Even though an emotion is susceptible of analysis into constituent elements, having an emotion is possible only through a collaboration of various powers. It is, in this sense, a unified experience that depends upon the person as a whole. The unity of the emotion itself is described on the hylomorphic model; each emotion is a unified complex experience.¹⁶

As noted already, Aquinas describes emotions as having matter (physical, material change) and form (alteration of the soul). It is the agent that experiences emotions, and the agent is a unified whole of thought, will, and emotion. Accordingly, distinguishing emotions from eliciting cognitions introduces a division that Aquinas denies.

Finally, a more pressing objection is that the noncognitive reading cannot accommodate the identity and intentionality of the emotions: if emotions are in the sensory appetite, then there is a problem with understanding how they have intentionality. "The species and nature of an emotion," Aquinas writes, "is given by its object" because the sensory appetite is a passive power that is brought to actuality via external causes, so its movements are distinguished, sustained, and directed by eliciting causes (*STh* I-II, q. 46, a. 6). Aquinas writes, "emotions differ in accordance with their activators which, in the case of the emotions, are their objects" (*STh* I-II, q. 23, a. 4). Thus, to know the nature, structure, or (in Aristotelian terminology)

¹⁵ Judith Barad, "Aquinas on the Role of Emotion in Moral Judgment and Activity," *The Thomist* 55 (1991): 397-413, at 402. This is, strictly speaking, problematic because nonhuman animals lack rationality but experience emotions.

¹⁶ Carl, "Unity of the Person and the Passions," 206.

formal cause of a particular emotion is to know its intentional object, which suggests that cognitions make emotions what they are, as Peter King argues: “Aquinas is therefore a cognitivist about emotion, since cognitive acts are not only causal pre-conditions of emotions, but contribute their formal cause as well.”¹⁷ What makes fear an instance of *fear* and not some other emotion is the intention, which is a cognitive element (*STh* I-II, q. 42, a. 4, ad 1). Because the intentionality of the emotions results from a power of the sensitive part of the intellective soul, and because intentionality is a cognitive mental state for Aquinas, it would seem that emotions are partly cognitive: over and above their causal role, intentions figure in the nature of the emotions.

For these reasons, some scholars understand Thomistic emotions to be partly constituted by evaluations of good or bad. Diana Fritz Cates, along similar lines as King and Drost, takes the role of intentions in identifying and defining emotions to be evidence that emotions or passions are partly cognitive:

In my interpretation of Aquinas, *passio* is indeed a motion of the sensory appetite, but it is inherently object-oriented. A situation is apprehended in a certain way; this act of apprehension causes a *passio*; it also enters into the composition of the *passio* because it defines the form of the passion, as long as the *passio* persists.¹⁸

To be clear, Aquinas claims that the formal element of an emotion is its appetitive movement and the material element is its bodily change (*STh* I-II, q. 44, a. 1); he does not directly claim that the intention itself is the form of the emotion. Nevertheless, what Cates and others are claiming is that the emotional movement is formed and sustained by an intention, and thereby the emotions, *qua* movements, are partly composed of a cognitive element. The intention—a cognitive act—makes the emotion what it is, as Drost claims: “Since emotions are attitudinal responses . . . [they] have a cognitive component.”¹⁹

¹⁷ King, “Emotions,” 215.

¹⁸ Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 75 n. 1.

¹⁹ Drost, “Intentionality in Aquinas’s Theory of Emotions,” 453.

A Thomistic emotion, on this view, contains three elements: a conative urge or movement, physiological change, and a cognitive evaluation or intention that directs and sustains said movement. Hope, for example, is the emotion that involves a particular appetitive movement *informed by* an intention of a particular object as a future possible arduous good.²⁰

II. A DEFENSE OF THE NONCOGNITIVE READING

Despite the disagreement, I argue that a noncognitive reading is more faithful to Aquinas's thought. Aquinas is clear that emotions are in the appetitive, noncognitive power of the soul. He entertains the question of whether the emotions are situated in the cognitive power or appetitive power, and argues that they are found in the latter: "the nature of an emotion is more suitably found in the appetitive part of the soul rather than the intellective part," he explains, because it is by the appetite that creatures move about in the world (*STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 2). The cognitive powers are not drawn to things themselves while the appetitive powers are; thus, emotions are situated in the latter power. Similarly, he situates the emotions in the sensory appetite and not in the rational appetite, or will, because emotions involve bodily alteration (*STh* I-II, q. 22, a. 3); nonrational animals experience emotions, while noncorporeal angels do not, strictly speaking. He criticizes the Stoic view that the emotions are false judgments and diseases of the soul by claiming that the Stoics had an incorrect understanding of the

²⁰ Carl writes, "Every passion (and indeed every appetitive act, including the acts of both the sensitive and the rational appetite [the will]) presupposes and is informed by a cognition" ("Unity of the Person and the Passions," 204). Other proponents include Barad, "Aquinas on the Role of Emotion"; Thomas Ryan, "Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 49-68; Carlos Leget, "Martha Nussbaum and Thomas Aquinas on the Emotions," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 558-81; Jorge Arregui, "Descartes and Wittgenstein on Emotions," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1996): 319-34; Stephen Chanderbhan, "*That Your Joy May Be Full: Emotions in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Ph.D. dissertation, Saint Louis University, 2012); King, "Emotions"; Drost, "Intentionality in Aquinas's Theory of Emotions"; Mark Drost, "In the Realm of the Senses: Saint Thomas Aquinas on Sensory Love, Desire, and Delight," *The Thomist* 59 (1995): 47-58.

soul's powers, namely, they failed to locate the emotions in the noncognitive sensory appetite.

There is also a conceptual point to be made here. 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 non-cognitive part of the soul, can be partly constituted by a cognitive element. This point is worth emphasizing. Aquinas posits a strong division of labor among the soul's powers, and insists on a sharp functional division between the cognitive and appetitive powers (see *STh* I, q. 78, a. 1).²¹ Moreover, he regards the soul's different powers as "really distinct," such that they could be separated from each other by an act of God. While one can emphasize the unity of human beings and their experience, this emphasis does not thereby show that cognition figures in the nature of an emotion, *qua* movement of the sensory appetite. At best, it only shows that emotional experiences, not emotions *per se*, involve cognition. To claim that cognition "enters into the composition" (Cates) of an emotion or that emotions are "attitudinal responses" (Drost) does not illuminate how integration is possible, given Aquinas's psychology. How movements of a noncognitive power can have a cognitive part is left unexplained and is in tension with Aquinas's psychology.

III. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

The challenge therefore is to respond to the objections to the noncognitive reading in a way that explains (a) how Thomistic emotions can be intentional but noncognitive, (b) how the unity of the human being does not entail or support cognitivism, and (c) how some emotions can be described as both rest and movement.

²¹ See Peter King, "Late Scholastic Theories of the Passions," in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. Henri Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press, 2002), 229-58; and Daniel De Haan, "Perception and the Vis Cogitativa: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectual Percepts," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2014): 397-437.

A) *Movement*

The first problem for the noncognitive reading is that not every emotion is described as a kind of movement, for some are described as a kind of rest. Delight, sorrow, joy, and love are described as kinds of appetitive rest or consonance, and so are not clearly movements (see *STh* I-II, q. 35, a. 3). Partly for this reason, scholars have been perplexed by Aquinas's claim that emotions are a kind of movement or motion (*quidam motus*). Some of the confusion stems from thinking of emotional movement as being akin to physical movement, something that Aquinas himself says in one passage: "appetitive movement is similar to natural movement" (*STh* I-II, q. 36, a. 2). Eric D'Arcy claims that it is "physical movement, involving local motion in the ordinary sense" that is meant.²² If Aquinas understands appetitive movement as akin to physical movement, then he would be flatly contradicting himself in claiming that delight is physical-like rest and that all emotions are physical-like movements, since rest is the opposite of movement. But if it is not physical movement that is the model for appetitive movement, then what is it?

It is instructive to note that Aquinas refers to Aristotle's account of movement when discussing appetitive movement (*STh* I-II, q. 23). Aristotle defines motion in the *Physics* as the actualization of a power or capacity, "moving" from passivity to act: "the fulfillment of what exists potentially, insofar as it exists potentially" (*Phys.* 3.1.201a10).²³ Motion is grounded in the nature or form of the creature or object. Suzy can raise her arm or become sick because both are compatible with her nature; Suzy cannot, however, fly unaided because this ability is not consonant with her nature. Aristotle further distinguishes three kinds of motion, or ways a power or capacity can be

²² Eric D'Arcy, *Introduction and Notes to Summa Theologiae, Vol. 19, The Emotions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); see also Lyons, *Emotion*, 37; Roberts, "Thomas Aquinas on the Morality of Emotions," 291; James, *Passion and Action*, 62-63; and Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 248-53.

²³ Citations are from Aristotle, *Physics*, in *The Complete Works: Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

actualized (*Phys.* 5.2.226a23-34). First, there is movement of alteration, which occurs when an agent's capacity to receive a quality is actualized, that is, the agent receives one quality or form and loses a contrary one. Water being heated in a kettle is an alteration because the water's capacity for being heated is being actualized. It loses one quality (coldness) and acquires a contrary quality (hotness). Likewise, a person going from health to illness undergoes a movement of alteration because he goes from one quality to its contrary. The second kind of movement is movement of quantity or, as Aristotle claims, "increase or decrease according as one or the other is designated" (*Phys.* 5.2.226a31). This movement occurs when an object goes from an imperfect state to a perfect state (increase), or vice versa (decrease). The movement from being an acorn to being a full-grown oak tree is a movement from an imperfect state to a perfect one. The movement from being a full-grown oak tree to being a shriveled, diseased tree is a movement in the opposite direction, from a perfect state to an imperfect state. The final kind of movement is one of locomotion, or change of place. This movement is the kind of movement with which we are most familiar—for example, the movement of a dog from one location to another.

Although D'Arcy assumes Aquinas has the third understanding of Aristotelian movement in mind, Aquinas claims that the movement of emotions is the movement of alteration. He writes in the *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* that "*passio* in this [proper] sense is found only in the movement of alteration," when one quality or form is removed from a person and its contrary is acquired (*De Verit.*, q. 26, a. 1). He reiterates this understanding in the *Summa theologiae* where he argues that the most proper understanding of *pati* (suffering or undergoing) and *passio* involves the loss of one quality and the reception of a contrary: a person who goes from health to a state of sickness (or vice versa) is said to suffer (*STh* I-II, q. 21). The movement of an emotion, therefore, occurs when the sensory appetite's capacity to be altered from one qualitative state to its contrary state is actualized, for example, from love to its contrary of hate. Important for present purposes, *pace* D'Arcy and others, it

is not physical movement that is relevant to emotional movement. Emotions are movements of alterations, and it is in the sense of alteration that joy, sorrow, delight, and similar emotions, which imply no physical movement, are still movements. Sorrow is the movement of alteration from one state (nonsorrow) to another (sorrow).

Nevertheless, Aquinas does use another notion of movement when describing emotions. In order to see these different uses of the term, note that he himself considers the objection that delight (*delectatio*), which is a rest of the appetite in an attained good, is not an emotion because it is not evidently a movement: "Delight does not consist in being moved, but in having been moved since it is caused by a good already attained. Thus, it is not an emotion" (*STh* I-II, q. 31, a. 1, obj. 2). Since the sensible good is already possessed by the agent, *delectatio* does not appear to involve occurrent movement of any kind. In reply, Aquinas offers the following clarification:

Although *delectatio* is a certain rest of the appetite, considered as the presence of the pleasurable good which satisfies the appetite, nevertheless there remains an immutation of the appetite by the appetible object, by reason of which pleasure is a kind of motion. (*STh* I-II, q. 31, a. 1, ad 2)

Aquinas's point is that *delectatio* is a movement, namely, the movement of alteration by which the soul is altered from a state of nonpleasure to a state of pleasure via an immutation. Thus, when Aquinas describes *delectatio* as a kind of appetitive rest and as a movement, he is using a different notion of "movement."²⁴

What are the two notions of "movement"? On the one hand, there is the movement of alteration which occurs when the appetite is moved from one state to another. This is the sense in which *delectatio* is a motion and the primary sense in which all

²⁴ I owe this observation to Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 40-42. A reviewer offered an illuminating observation: Aquinas likens appetitive movement to natural movement (*STh* I-II, q. 23, a. 4). Just as fire has inclination to go up, movement up, and rest when it is up, so do the appetites have inclination (love), movement (desire), and rest (pleasure). This is only an analogy, of course; the word "rest" should not be taken literally to refer to the absence of change.

emotions are movements. On the other hand, Aquinas uses the language of being drawn or inclined: “An appetitive act,” he writes, “is a kind of inclination [*inclinatio*] to the thing itself” (*STh* I-II, q. 15, a. 1). Things that are cognized as good cause “a certain inclination, aptitude, or connaturalness” in the sensory soul (*STh* I-II, q. 23, a. 4). This language of inclination, being drawn, and rest is not to be understood exclusively in terms of the movement of alteration. To understand this notion of orientation or inclination, it is instructive to note that emotions arise in response to intentions of things as good or bad for the agent, and it is a basic tenet of Aquinas’s metaphysics that everything seeks after what appears to be good and avoids what appears to be harmful:

For the nature of a good thing consists in this, that it is something desirable; hence the Philosopher says that good is what all things desire. But it is manifest that everything is desirable inasmuch as it is perfect, for all things desire their own perfection. (*STh* I, q. 5, a. 1; see also *STh* I-II, q. 26, a. 1, ad 3; q. 94, a. 2; *De Verit.*, q. 25, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 19, a. 9)

God has constructed the sensory appetite in such a way that it naturally seeks after what is good and flees what is harmful. When an agent experiences an emotion, and her sensory appetite is presented with a sensible good (or evil) via alteration, she will be inclined to seek the good (or flee the bad). For example, when a person experiences hope for a future good, that person’s sensory appetite is altered from its previous nonhope state—movement of alteration—and, since hope’s object is good, the person’s appetite will naturally incline to the good object—natural movement. Similarly, delight is a movement of alteration that, in virtue of the presence of its object, quiets the appetite. Here, the movement is a movement from a state of inclination to a state of quiescence, or rest.

In sum, all emotions are movements of alteration that, in virtue of their object, incline the appetite to rest, seek, or flee. Therefore, observing that some emotions are akin to rest does not undermine the noncognitive reading of the emotions as all being movements.

B) *The Unity of the Human Being*

The second argument offered against a noncognitivist reading of Thomistic emotions is that it fails to do justice to Aquinas's account of our hylomorphic nature. Barad argues that, despite Aquinas's psychology, Aquinas affirms unity in operations, and thus,

to hold that emotions are only physical sensations is to consider the matter of the phenomenon without the form. And to identify emotions with judgments would be to take the form without the matter. Both views run contrary to Aquinas's hylomorphic theory of human nature.²⁵

However, the unity of the person is not a problem for a noncognitive reading. Aquinas explains that emotions involve a material change (bodily alteration) and a formal change (movement of soul) (*STh* I-II, q. 37, a. 4). It is the soul-body composite, the creature, that experiences emotions. But the important point is that the formal element is the movement of the sensory appetite, not a cognition or judgment. Carl is wrong to claim that "it is the person who is angry or who loves, because Aquinas holds that an emotion is complex" of matter and form involving cognition;²⁶ Aquinas nowhere—to my knowledge—says that the form of an emotion is anything other than a movement of the sensory appetite. There is a conceptual gulf between a movement of the (noncognitive) sensory appetite and cognition of the cognitive powers. According to the noncognitive reading, emotions involve the whole creature, body and soul; they do not involve cognition, however, as a constituent part.²⁷

²⁵ Barad, "Aquinas on the Role of Emotion," 402.

²⁶ Carl, "Unity of the Person and the Passions," 206.

²⁷ To help clarify, consider abstract thought, which according to Aquinas is purely intellectual and nonbodily. Aquinas thinks that such thought cannot occur without phantasms derived from sense experience, but he reserves the label "thought" for the nonsensory portion of this process. Likewise, even if a hylomorphic view of human nature demands that the process involved in emotion includes an interrelation between the various powers of the soul, Aquinas reserves the label "*passio animae*" for the

Although emotions are situated in the sensory appetite, a proponent of a noncognitive reading can agree that *emotional experiences* involve cognitions. In other words, given the hylo-morphic unity of the person, a person experiences emotions with their causally eliciting and sustaining judgments. Cognition elicits emotional responses, and the person experiencing anger, for example, experiences the complex of cognition, bodily change, and movement of the sensory appetite. Noncognitivists can thus separate the emotion from the emotional experience and insist that cognition figures in the latter. Carl seems to suggest something like this interpretation when she writes that, “Even though an emotion is susceptible of analysis into constituent elements, having an emotion is possible only through a collaboration of various powers.”²⁸ Noncognitivists agree with her that cognition figures in the having of an emotion. Some noncognitivist scholars go so far as to distinguish passion (*passio animae*) from emotion, claiming that Thomistic passions, which I have been calling emotions, do not include cognitions but Thomistic emotions, which I have been calling emotional experiences, do. Murphy explains the reasoning behind this view:

because it is a necessary condition for the occurrence of a passion that there be evaluative cognition of an object, it turns out that Aquinas’s passions, taken together with their proximate cognitive cause, make up a complex that could match our understanding of ‘emotions’.²⁹

According to Murphy, *passio animae* does not involve cognition in its nature. If we combine *passio animae* with its eliciting cognition, then we can call this complex state “emotion” if a cognitivist so wishes. Regardless of how a noncognitivist decides to capture the intimate relationship between cognition and emotion, all agree that cognition is integral to emotional experience. Noncognitivists just deny that cognition figures in

noncognitive part of the process. I would like to thank Joseph Dowd for this observation.

²⁸ Carl, “Unity of the Person and the Passions,” 206.

²⁹ Murphy, “Aquinas on Our Responsibility for Our Emotions,” 168.

the nature of emotions as Aquinas uses the term “*passio animae*.”

C) *Intentions and Identifying Emotions*

There are two challenges for a noncognitive reading of Thomistic emotions, arising from their intentionality. The first challenge is that emotions are identified and distinguished by their formal object, which is provided by the intention (“the species and nature of an emotion is given by its object” [*STh* I-II, q. 46, a. 6]) and this observation seems to suggest that emotions are partly cognitive because intentions figure in their identity. As Carl writes, a noncognitive reading “ignores the intentionality of emotions” because every emotion “is articulated in terms both of cognition and physiology.”³⁰ One cannot know what hope is, say, without knowing the intentional object of hope—a future possible good that is arduous to attain—and the intentional object is a cognitive state.

This point about intentionality is not a damning problem for a noncognitive reading, however. To see why, it is important to recognize how passive powers are identified and actualized. According to Aquinas, we recognize and distinguish among passive powers by what actualizes them, that is, brings them from a passive state to an active state: “the sensory appetite,” he explains, is distinguished “by the different particular goods to which it responds” (*STh* I, q. 82, a. 5). Emotions are actualized by an intention being presented to the sensory appetite, and they remain present so long as that intention—the object to which the emotion is directed—is present. Nevertheless, that we distinguish passive powers via their eliciting objects does not entail that passive powers are identical to or constituted by those objects. The ensuing appetitive movement is different from the eliciting cause, even if the cause is the means by which we identify the movement, and this is true even granting that the object makes the ensuing movement the kind of movement it is. In other words, just because the cognition supplies the

³⁰ Carl, “Unity of the Person and the Passions,” 205.

form by which the movement arises, it does not thereby follow that the ensuing movement is cognitive. Consider a potter making a pot. The potter is the efficient cause from which the pot receives its form, but this fact does not mean that the potter himself is part of the pot's form. Likewise, the emotions receive their form from their objects, but this fact does not mean that the objects are part of the emotions' form. Thus, although intentions account for the differences among the emotions, this is not clear evidence that intentions figure in the nature of the emotions.

D) *Emotional Intentionality*

Still, it might be objected that it is the fact that emotions are intentional, that is, directed at objects, that is problematic. The challenge here is that intentionality, being directed at or onto the world, seems to be cognitive, since only cognitive states are directed at or are about the world.³¹ Bodily reflexes are nonintentional, but my belief that today's weather is fine is intentional. It makes sense to ask people *what* or *whom* they are mad at, while it does not make sense to ask who people are sneezing at. This intentionality is grounded in the fact that emotions are actualized by the inherence of an intention in the sensory appetite, as King explains: "the actualization of Jones's potency for loathing requires some form's inhering in the sensitive appetite."³² Because intentions, which are cognitive acts, contribute the formal cause to emotions, King concludes in

³¹ It is precisely this claim—that only cognitive states are intentional—that leads Perler to claim that William Ockham endorses a cognitive account of the passions or emotions: "In his [i.e., Ockham's] explanation of various sensory passions, he makes it clear that most of them are *about* something, and therefore have a cognitive content" (Dominik Perler, "Emotions and Cognitions: Fourteenth-Century Discussions on the Passions of the Soul," *Vivarium* 43 [2005]: 250-74, at 260). Perler assumes that intentionality is cognitive, and so if the emotions are intentional, they are cognitive. This is in stark contrast, however, to his account of Thomistic emotions, as will be seen clearly later on.

³² King, "Aquinas on the Passions," 359.

another article that “Aquinas is therefore a cognitivist about emotion.”³³

It is instructive, in reply, to ask whether it is anachronistic of scholars to draw this inference. Aquinas himself draws a sharp distinction between cognition and appetite, and nowhere to my knowledge does he entertain the question, whether the intentionality of the emotions entails that they are cognitive. Marc Neuberg has argued that Descartes was the first clearly to distinguish and to discuss the relation between cognition and physiological change, and it was he who set the stage for later debates regarding the relation between cognition and emotion.³⁴ More recently, Martin Pickavé has argued that Walter Chatton, writing in the fourteenth century, was among the first to ask whether appetitive acts are themselves cognitions when addressing the question, “Whether the love of an angel is distinct from the Angel’s cognition?”³⁵ While Chatton answers negatively, Pickavé focuses on the claim of Adam Wodeham, Chatton’s contemporary, that love and other appetitive acts are forms of cognition. Wodeham writes:

I say—not by way of expressing an assertion, but by way of expressing an opinion—that every act of desiring and hating, and so enjoyment, is some sort of cognition and some sort of apprehension, because every experience of some object is also a cognition of the same object.³⁶

Wodeham offers a series of arguments for this position, a position he recognizes is nontraditional. The traditional view, he notes, is that appetitive acts are noncognitive.³⁷ The important point for our present purposes is that the question of the

³³ King, “Emotions,” 215.

³⁴ Marc Neuberg, “Le traité des passions de l’âme de Descartes et les théories modernes de l’émotion,” *Archives de philosophie* 53 (1990): 479-508.

³⁵ Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions”; 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*, ed. Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁶ Adam Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, d. 1, q. 5, sect. 4; cited in Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition,” 99.

³⁷ Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition,” 99.

relation between cognition, intentionality, and the emotions seems to be a nonissue for Aquinas. He appears content to claim that the emotions have intentional objects and that they are caused-movements of the noncognitive sensory appetite. Our interests do not map on to Aquinas's interests.

We still might ask how Aquinas *would* respond if he were pressed with this issue. But the question is not whether the emotions are intrinsically cognitive according to Aquinas. They are not. Instead, the question is how Aquinas understands the relation between cognition and emotions, one that preserves the sharp distinction between the cognitive and appetitive powers but still allows for the intentionality of the emotions. This is the process of charitable historical reconstruction.³⁸ Dialectically, then, all that is needed is for there to be a plausible story, one that fits Aquinas's theory, of how the emotions can be intentional, noncognitive movements. If scholars in the twenty-first century cannot offer a plausible account, this inability does not provide reason for thinking Aquinas is therefore a cognitivist about the emotions. Instead, it provides reason for thinking that our concerns and interests were not those of Aquinas.

The goal is to offer an account of how to understand the intentionality of the emotions while preserving the distinction between intellect and sensory appetite. An account that has drawn favor from some noncognitivist scholars, a view that I endorse but make no claim to have originated, is the *derivative intentionality model*, according to which the emotions are intentional in virtue of their eliciting cognitions. Pickavé explains the model succinctly:

It is also clear that on this account the intentionality of the emotion piggybacks on the act of cognition, which provides the sensitive appetite with its object. And since we tend to take sensory experience as intentional experience we may want to say that emotions derive their intentionality from the intentionality of the sensory cognitions immediately causing them.³⁹

³⁸ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 48.

³⁹ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 50.

On this view, intentions are the cause of emotional experiences that direct emotional experiences in virtue of their intentionality. Emotions are movements directed *at* particular objects in virtue of the preceding cognition that actualizes and, thereby, moves or inclines the sensory appetite a certain way. What makes fear an instance of fear and not hope is that the intention acting upon the sensory appetite is one that is directed at a future arduous evil; what makes my fear about this snake, as opposed to anything else, is that the eliciting intention is about *this* snake. Fear, in itself, *qua* movement of the sensory appetite, is just that—a movement with accompanying physiological change. It is a directed movement away from some particular object, however, because it was caused and sustained by a particular intention regarding said object. Consider a person throwing a dart at a target. In itself, the dart contains no mental representation of the target. The person does, however, and the dart is directed at the target, not just in the sense that it is moving toward the target but also in the sense that the target is the goal in virtue of the dart's being directed to it by the person. Likewise, a Thomistic emotion, in itself, contains no cognition of its object, but it is directed at its object because the accompanying cognitive intention has directed it that way. Thus, cognition is integral to experiencing an emotion, but it is not constitutive of the emotion itself.

To clarify the derivative intentionality model, it is instructive to compare it to King's cognitivist reading. King seems to endorse something like the derivative intentionality model when he writes,

So much for the cognitive side of things. At this point there is a hand-off to the sensitive appetite. . . . The sensitive appetite, as a passive power, is reduced from potency to act when it 'inherits' objectual content from the evaluative response-dependent concept.⁴⁰

He defends his cognitivist reading by pointing out that, since intentions make emotions what they are, intentions are their formal cause; and since formal causes are part of the caused

⁴⁰ King, "Emotions," 214.

object or event, intentions figure in the emotion. There are a couple of problems with King's inference. First, emotions are situated in the sensory appetite and the sensory appetite is not a cognitive power of the soul. Aquinas describes their relation in terms of mover and moved: "movement of the appetitive power follows [*sequitur*] an act of the cognitive power" (*STh* I-II, q. 46, a. 2). How a movement of the noncognitive appetite can be cognitive remains unanswered and in tension with Aquinas's psychology. Second, and more importantly, we do not need to posit that emotions are intrinsically cognitive because the derivative intentionality model can explain how intentions direct, sustain, and make emotions what they are while maintaining the integrity of Aquinas's psychology. Emotions are movements of the noncognitive appetite with accompanying physiological alterations, and so are not intrinsic cognitive states. However, emotions are not mere feelings, either. Lyons's description of Thomistic emotions as "impulses or desires" plus "accompanying physiological changes" is misleading insofar as it suggests that emotions lack intentionality, for Thomistic emotions are moved-responses toward a good object or away from a bad object with accompanying physiological changes. In this way, a proponent of a noncognitive reading can agree with King⁴¹ who claims that Aquinas's theory of emotions is cognitivist in the sense that, following Robert Kraut, "cognitive processes are somehow essential to emotion."⁴² Cognitive acts are essential to bring about, direct, and sustain emotions, but they are not constituent parts of emotions proper. On the model defended here, cognitive acts figure in our emotional experience without figuring in the emotion itself.

CONCLUSION

There is good textual evidence for reading Aquinas as a noncognitivist about the emotions. Even though cognition is

⁴¹ King, "Aquinas on the Passions," 341 n. 20.

⁴² Robert Kraut, "Feelings in Context," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 642-52, at 643.

essential to emotional experience, the emotions do not have a cognitive element as a constituent part, and the reasons offered to the contrary are not as convincing as the textual evidence that posits emotions in the noncognitive part of the soul. The derivative intentionality model explains the intentionality of emotions without violating Aquinas's psychology, and this is the strongest reason why we should adopt it. This interpretation is contentious, to be sure, and so I close with a challenge for defender of a cognitivist reading, namely, to offer an account that explains how appetitive movements can be intentional in a way that is consonant with Aquinas's sharp division between appetite and cognition.⁴³

⁴³ I would like to thank Joseph Dowd, participants at the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy Inaugural Conference at Notre Dame, and reviewers of *The Thomist* for helpful suggestions and corrections.