

“*Delectatio, Gaudium, Fruitio*: Three Kinds of Pleasure for Three Kinds of Knowledge in Thomas Aquinas”

SUMMARY

This paper investigates Thomas Aquinas’s threefold division of pleasure into *delectatio*, *gaudium*, and *fruitio*, and its taxonomical basis in his threefold division of knowledge into tactility, the cogitative power, and the intellect.

KEYWORDS:

Thomas Aquinas, *Delectatio*, *Gaudium*, Passions, Tactility, Cogitative power

Thomas Aquinas distinguishes three ways in which the sensory and intellectual appetites rest in the good. When the will rests in the intellectually apprehended good, this act is called *fruitio*; when the concupiscible appetite rests in a good apprehended by the internal senses this passion is called *gaudium*; and when the concupiscible appetite rests in a good apprehended by the external senses this passion is called *delectatio*. Each of these appetible goods presupposes a different kind of knowledge of a present good, namely, the knowledge of the intellect, internal senses, and external senses, respectively. The difficulty is that it is not entirely perspicuous what the difference is between the goods apprehended by the external senses and those grasped by the internal senses. How does Thomas justify the distinction between *delectatio* and *gaudium*? Can he reasonably maintain that there are three sufficiently different kinds of knowledge that specify three different kinds of pleasure?

In order to address these questions this study investigates Thomas's account of the external and internal senses, and in particular the way in which tactility and the cogitative power supply two kinds of knowledge that specify two kinds of pleasure. Let us begin with a general sketch of the panoply of cognitive and appetitive powers found in Thomas Aquinas's philosophical anthropology; due to the complexity of this doctrine, many of the details of his account will be assumed for the sake of focusing on the problem of how to distinguish *delectatio* from *gaudium*.¹

Thomas holds that sensory and intellectual appetitive powers operate confluently with their cognitive counterparts. This confluence is further clarified by Thomas's identification of final causality with the objects obtained by cognitive powers and efficient causality with the operations of appetitive powers. Whereas the objects of cognitive operations specify the intentional objects of the appetitive powers by final causality, appetitive powers exercise efficient causality by way of attraction or repulsion with respect to the goodness or evil specified by the objects of the cognitive powers. This co-operation of cognitive and appetitive powers is found both within the sensory order, namely, in the cognitive powers of the external and internal senses and the concupiscible and irascible appetitive powers, and within the intellectual order, namely, by the possible intellect and the will.²

Thomas distinguishes within the sensitive and intellectual appetites a threefold matrix of appetitive operations teleologically oriented towards the good, namely,

¹ For a detailed treatment see D. WESTBERG, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994; P. KING, *Aquinas on the Passions*, in *Aquinas's Moral Theory*, ed. S. MacDonald and E. Stump, Cornell University Press 1999, pp. 101–132.

² THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa theologiae* I.80.1–2; I–II.9.1–2; 10.2–3.

inclination, motion, and rest. He uses this matrix and other taxonomical principles to differentiate six phases of volitional operation ordered to the end, as well as six kinds of concupiscible passions, and five kinds of irascible passions.³ The proper end of all the intellectual and sensitive appetites is to rest in the good. Broadly speaking, any appetitive terminal act that rests in the good—either transiently or permanently—can be called “pleasure.” Accordingly, Thomas distinguishes three ways in which the appetites rest in the good, that is, three kinds of pleasure, namely, *delectatio*, *gaudium*, and *fruitio*.⁴ These terms are frequently translated into English as *pleasure*, *joy*, and *fruition*, respectively; however, I shall continue to use the Latin terms in order to keep each kind of pleasure distinct. *Fruitio* identifies the pleasure that results from the will resting in the good. *Delectatio* and *gaudium* are two different kinds of pleasure found in the concupiscible power when it rests in the good. Because Thomas’s account of *fruitio* and the will is relatively straightforward, we can focus our attention on the problem of identifying the specific kinds of sensory knowledge that differentiate *delectatio* and *gaudium*.⁵

The salient taxonomical principle for Thomas is that objects specify operations, which specify powers, but what are the two kinds of sensory knowledge that specify these two kinds of sensory pleasure? In order to account for the distinction between the concupiscible passions of *delectatio* and *gaudium* Thomas introduces the distinction between the external and internal senses. The apprehension of a sensible good as obtained

³ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST* I–II.8–17; I.81.1–3; I–II.23.1–4; ID., *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, 26.3–4.

⁴ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST* I–II.11.1–4; 31.1–8.

⁵ Due to the paucity of names, Thomas frequently uses the term *delectatio* to designate a genus and even calls the will’s act of *fruitio* a kind of intellectual *delectatio* or *gaudium*. Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST* I–II.31.4; ID., *DV* 26.4ad5.

by the external senses specifies the concupiscible passion *delectatio*, and when the internal senses apprehend a sensible good as present, this specifies the concupiscible passion *gaudium*.⁶ But is this not a distinction without a difference? What differentiates the sensible goods of the external senses from the sensible goods of the internal senses?

Thomas's account of the external and internal senses takes its point of departure from Aristotle's *De anima* II.6 and the division of sensibles into *per se* sensibles and *per accidens* sensibles. *Per se* or essential sensibles are distinguished into proper and common sensibles. Proper sensibles specify the five formal objects that are uniquely apprehended by the five external senses, and the common sensibles specify essential sensibles such as number, motion, shape, and magnitude, which are apprehended by more than one of the five external senses. Both proper and common sensibles are essential sensibles and any given unified *Gestalt* of essential sensibles specifies the object of the first internal sense power, namely, the *sensus communis* or common sense. As retained, the sensible species that are the formal object of the common sense become imaginables, which Aquinas identifies as the proper object of the imagination.⁷

Given the various combinations of all these essential sensibles there is no difference among them that is sufficient to specify a distinction between the essential sensibles of the external senses and the internal senses. But there is a second problem with this account that should not be overlooked. Desirable goods and undesirable evils specify the sensual passions; however, these are not kinds of essential sensibles, so how can they be

⁶ On some occasions Thomas omits the term *gaudium* and simply distinguishes between exterior and interior *delectatio*, where the external senses specify the former and the internal senses specify the latter form of *delectatio*. Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST I*–II.30.3; 31.3; 35.2; 35.7.

⁷ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST I*.78.3–4.

apprehended by the external senses or these two internal senses that only apprehend *per se* sensibles? In other words, passions, such as *delectatio* and *dolor*, must be cognitively specified by objects such as the pleasurable and the painful, but these are not kinds of essential or *per se* sensibles apprehended by the senses. So there turns out to be two problems with Thomas' division of the concupiscible appetite into the passions of *delectatio* and *gaudium*. First, there is not a sufficient difference between the essential sensibles of the external and internal sensibles to specify the two different passions *delectatio* and *gaudium*. Second, since the pleasurable and the painful are not essential sensibles, it is unclear how either the external or internal senses could apprehend such objects as the pleasurable which could activate the concupiscible passion of *delectatio*, let alone *gaudium*. These are serious philosophical difficulties, yet Thomas Aquinas's account of the aforementioned *per accidens* sensibles and the other internal senses that they specify will provide us with a partial solution to the first problem.

For Aristotle, *per accidens* sensibles are the cognizable objects apprehended simultaneously with *per se* sensibles, but which are not themselves essentially sensible. These objects are *per accidens* sensibles because they are features that are accidental to the essential sensibles. For example, while white is not a *per accidens* sensible, but a *per se* sensible, this white man, the son of Diares, is not essentially sensible, but is a *per accidens* sensible that is incidentally sensed. Thomas follows Avicenna in calling these *per accidens* sensibles *particular intentions*. Particular intentions specify the formal object of the estimative power, which in humans is called the cogitative power (*vis cogitativa*), passive intellect, or particular reason. In contrast to the *per se* universal intentions that specify the formal object of the possible intellect or universal reason, *per se* particular intentions

provide the proper object of the cogitative power. These particular intentions can also be retained under the additional formality of the ‘past,’ and as such, they specify the formal object of the internal sense power called memory. In short, these *per se* particular intentions specify two additional internal senses.⁸ Do the particular intentions of the cogitative power or memory provide Thomas with the formal objects that are needed to differentiate the concupiscible passions of *delectatio* and *gaudium*?

To answer this question we must consider what kinds of objects count as *particular intentions*. Clearly the particular intentions of the *past*, which belong to memory, are not sufficient to activate our sensible appetites without some additional appetible specification such as being beneficial or detrimental. Because such evaluative specifications cannot come from memory, it is clear that memory will not provide us with a solution.⁹ But what about the particular intentions apprehended by the cogitative power?

Thomas attributes numerous functions to the cogitative power; for our purposes the most significant of these functions is the cogitative power’s ability to estimate particular intentions that immediately activate passions in the sensitive appetite by way of an ordered impulse. To cogitatively estimate that this meat is *desirable* as edible is sufficient to activate a concupiscible passion of desire. It is this latter cogitative estimation of some object as affectionally good or evil, beneficial or detrimental, and arduously good or evil, that provides a kind of sensory knowledge that clearly specifies an appetible object that is sufficient for moving either the concupiscible or the irascible appetites.¹⁰ Such cogitative

⁸ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *ST* I.78.4.

⁹ Such contentions admit of some nuanced qualifications that I cannot attend to here. Cf. *ST* I–II.32.3; 33.2.

¹⁰ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Sentencia libri de anima* II.13; ID., *ST* I–II.9.1ad2; 17.2; ID., *DV* 25.2.

affectional particular intentions would specify objects as lovable, hateable, desirable, undesirable, enjoyable, and sorrowful. In short, while the other internal sense powers, namely, the *sensus communis*, imagination, and memory, cannot activate concupiscible passions, the affectional particular intentions formed by the cogitative power, such as the *enjoyable*, can activate passions like *gaudium* in the concupiscible appetite.¹¹

In short, the cogitative power supplies a partial solution to the first problem. The affectional intentions of the cogitative power provides a kind of internal sense knowledge that is formally different from the *per se* sensibles known by the external senses, and so can specify the concupiscible passion of *gaudium*. But this partial solution to the first problem does not touch upon the more difficult second problem, that is, how can the *per se* sensibles apprehended by the external senses activate a passion in the concupiscible appetite? St. Thomas's answer to this second problem will also provide us with a complete solution to the first problem inasmuch as it will address how the *per se* sensibles known by the external senses can specify the concupiscible passion of *delectatio*. To this end let us turn our attention to St. Thomas's account of tactility and the distinction between *passio corporalis* and *passio animalis*.

The proper objects of the external senses are *per se* sensibles, which are real qualities in the world such as color, sound, odor, flavor, and the tangibles. Aristotelians classify these sensible qualities under the third species of the category of quality. And as we have seen, these objects of the external senses seem to be able to specify concupiscible passions such as sensible pleasure (*delectatio*) and sensible pain (*dolor*). Due to spatial

¹¹ This controversial interpretation of the cogitative power's primacy in the specification of concupiscible and irascible passions is also defended by M. STOCK, *Sense Consciousness According to St. Thomas*, in *Thomist*, 21 (1958), pp. 415–486.

considerations we will not take up the pleasures and pains of each external sense; instead, we will follow St. Thomas's lead and focus our attention on the particular objects apprehended by tactility.

The crux of the second problem is that the pleasurable and the painful are not *per se* tangible qualities of reality. So what does it mean to say that there are *per se* sensible qualities in the world that are essentially pleasurable or painful to tactility? Thomas's account of tactile apprehensions of bodily pleasure and pain is clarified by his distinction between somatic affections (*passiones corporales*) and psychic affections (*passiones animales*), which presupposes his division of the term *passio*. Generally speaking, the term *passio* signifies any kind of reception. But the term is more properly identified with any reception that also involves a loss, and this can occur in two ways. Either when the object received is more suitable to the subject than the object it displaces, such as when an ill animal becomes well; or when the object received is unsuitable to the subject, in contrast to the fitting object it displaces, such as when a healthy animal becomes ill. The latter case is the most proper sense of *passio*, and it is only found in bodily changes. The powers of the soul are said to have passions in the first sense essentially, but only have passions accidentally in the second and third sense insofar as sensory powers belong to the composite of body and soul, and because the activities of all sensory powers involve a concomitant bodily passion. Among sensory powers, St. Thomas holds that the proper sense of *passio* is most appropriately ascribed to the sensory appetites, because bodily changes are essential concomitants to all sensitive passions.¹²

¹² THOMAS DE AQUINO, *DV* 26.1, 3; *ID.*, *ST* I–II.22.1.

Somatic affections are passions that are initiated by alterations of the body that terminate in the powers of the soul; psychic affections are passions that are initiated by the powers of the soul and terminate in the body. Thomas connects the tactile experience of somatic affections with the concupiscible passions of *delectatio* and *dolor*, and he connects the intentions known by the cogitative power with the concupiscible passions of *gaudium* and *tristitia*, which are psychic affections. In short, passions like *delectatio* and *gaudium* are the same in one way and they are different in two ways. They are the same inasmuch as both passions result from the concupiscible appetite resting in a particular good. But they differ by way of distinct modes of apprehension, namely, by tactility and the cogitative power, and also by way of different causes.

We have already clarified the way in which they differ by external and internal modes of sense apprehension, but what does it mean to say that they have different causes? The cause of *delectatio* is a good rested in that is a *per se* good to the body, but this good of the body is only a *per aliud* good with respect to the concupiscible appetite. By way of contrast, the cause of *gaudium* or interior *delectatio*, as it is sometimes called, is a good rested in that is a *per se* good to the concupiscible appetite itself. In sum, bodily goods apprehended by tactility are only indirectly goods of the concupiscible appetite, whereas goods apprehended by the cogitative power pertain directly to the concupiscible appetite.¹³ While this distinction goes a long way towards clarifying the differences between *delectatio* and *gaudium*, it still remains unclear what constitutes a *per se* good of the body.

For a somatic affection to be a *per se* good of the body some physical object must be received by the organic body in a way that is especially fitting to the nature of the body.

¹³ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *DV* 26.2–3; 9; *ID.*, *ST* I–II.31.6; 35.2; 35.7; III.15.4–6.

In other words, because the somatic affection caused by the physical object is proportional to the organic body it is a *per se* good for the body. Similarly, if the sensible thing received into the bodily organ is disproportional to the nature of the organ, the somatic affection is a *per se* evil to the body. How are these *per se* goods and evils known?

Thomas's clearest answer to this question is found in his treatment of *dolor*—which is to rest in a bodily evil—and his account of painful somatic affections experienced by tactility. He tells us that there are three elements involved in true sensible pain: First, there is the bodily hurt or injury, which is a present *passio corporalis* that is disproportional and contrary to the nature of the organic body. Second, there is a tactile experience of the present bodily injury, and third, there is the sensible pain itself, which is the concupiscible passion of *dolor*. In short, true sensible pain requires both an injury to the body and a tactile sensation of this injury.¹⁴ Similarly, *delectatio* or true sensible pleasure requires both a bodily passion that is especially proportional to the bodily organ, and a tactile experience of this good somatic affection.

How do these differences between somatic and psychic affections resolve the two problems mentioned above? First and foremost, these distinctions reveal that the cause of *delectatio* and the object experienced by tactility is not a *per se* sensible as such, but a bodily passion caused by some sensible thing. In other words, and contrary to what was proposed before, Thomas does not hold that being pleasurable and painful are *per se* sensible qualities of things like hot-cold and hard-soft; rather, the passions of our bodily organs, which are caused by sensible things, are either fitting or unfitting to the organic body, and such somatic affections are experienced by tactility and specify a concupiscible

¹⁴ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *DV* 26.9; *ID.*, *ST* III.15.5.

passion of *delectatio* or *dolor*. Second, unlike the particular intentions of the cogitative power—which specify psychic affections such as *gaudium* and *tristitia*—somatic affections are not *per se* goods or evils to the concupiscible appetite, but are *per se* goods or evils to the body, and are only *per aliud* goods or evils to the concupiscible appetite. Thus, the twofold difference found in the apprehension and causes of somatic and psychic affections, does seem to provide Thomas with the taxonomical resources needed to distinguish two kinds of sensible knowledge that specify two kinds of sensible pleasure.

But even with these clarifications the second problem still remains, and if it cannot be solved, then we cannot count the answer given to the first problem as complete. The principal difficulty concerns Thomas's account of tactile experience of somatic affections, whether they are *per se* goods or evils to the body. What should we make of this peculiar account of tactility? Most Aristotelians contend that tactility and the other external senses apprehend sensible qualities in the world, but Thomas seems to be ascribing to tactility the ability to apprehend a somatic affection or bodily passion that is either a *per se* good or evil to our organic body. Consequently, whether tactility apprehends the bodily injury or the evil of the injury, neither of these are *per se* tangible qualities, but unsuitable ways in which an animal's organic body interacts with sensible things in reality. Is there any precedent for attributing to tactility such a *sui generis* object? In order to illuminate this question we must turn to the details of Thomas's doctrine of tactility.

Even for Aristotle, tactility is a peculiar external sense. First, tactility is regarded as the most fundamental external sense in all sentient animals. Second, it does not seem to fit nicely into the model of being a specific external sense power with only one proper

sensible as its formal object; rather, tactility seems to be specified by a variety of formally different proper sensibles such as hot-cold, dry-moist, heavy-light, hard-soft, viscous-brittle, rough-smooth, sharp-dull, course-fine. This is why St. Thomas contends that tactility is a generic sense power and that there are many specific powers of tactility specified by many formally different tangibles.¹⁵

Given the peculiar character of tactility as a generic sense power, it seems that it might be able to accommodate another object, namely, the fitting or unfitting somatic affections caused by the reception of sensible things into the sense organs. Such an answer would stretch the notion of a *per se* sensible to include a *sui generis* kind of tangible; it would be *sui generis* inasmuch as it is not a sensible quality of the world, but a “tangible” somatic quality, which is a good or evil somatic affection in the bodily organ that is caused by sensible qualities in the world. While attributing the experience of bodily pleasure and pain to tactility might not be an entirely satisfying account for more recent philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein, there nevertheless remain many contemporary philosophical accounts of pain sensation that are quite similar to this doctrine of Thomas.¹⁶

To conclude, let us recapitulate St. Thomas’s answer to the aforementioned problems. His answer to the second problem addressed the way in which the *per se* sensibles known by the external senses, especially tactility, could specify the concupiscible passions of *delectatio* and *dolor*. This answer required a series of nuanced

¹⁵ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *In DA* II. 22–23; ID., *ST* I.78.3ad3.

¹⁶ For a survey of contemporary positions, see P. HACKER, *The Conceptual Framework for the Investigation of the Emotions*, in *International Review of Psychiatry*, 16 (2004), pp. 199–208.

distinctions. First, *per se* sensibles can cause a somatic passion that is either a fitting or unfitting quality with respect to the nature of the organic body, and such qualities are either pleasurable or painful tangibles, respectively. Next, these pleasurable and painful tangibles are known by some *sui generis* species of tactility that experiences fitting or unfitting bodily passions. Finally, these tactile experiences specify the concupiscible passions of *delectatio* and *dolor*.

This answer to the second problem brings us to his complete answer to the first problem, which is: what kinds of sensory knowledge differentiate *delectatio* from *gaudium*? First, the concupiscible passion of *delectatio* is specified by some pleasurable tangible quality of a somatic affection that is experienced by a species of tactility. Second, the concupiscible passion of *gaudium* is specified by the affectional particular intention known by the cogitative power. These two sense powers and their operations provide formally different objects that sufficiently differentiate *delectatio* from *gaudium*.

Many more details would need to be addressed in order to provide a complete picture of how all the senses are involved in the various concupiscible and irascible passions. This study, however, has elucidated a variety of nuanced and significant taxonomical distinctions found within Thomas's philosophical anthropology. By focusing on these taxonomical principles we have shown that St. Thomas Aquinas does have good philosophical reasons for differentiating three kinds of pleasure on the basis of three different kinds of knowledge.

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