

aversion the repelling of appetite by and from an approaching painful evil. Both the endless successiveness of natural desire and the unlimited complications of desire by rational calculation imply infinity and dissatisfaction (Ia IIae, q. 30, aa. 3–4).

### IRASCIBLE PASSIONS

The generic object of love and hatred, desire and aversion, and delight and pain is sensible good and evil “as such”—the delightful and the painful. But sometimes, Aquinas observes, the soul feels difficulty in acquiring a sensible good or avoiding a sensible evil inasmuch as these actions are above one’s ability to perform them easily. Such cases, he argues, reveal a different generic object of passion, namely sensible good or evil *as* momentous in itself and difficult to approach or avoid. Following Aristotle’s inference from objects to actuations to powers, Aquinas thinks that these two generic objects indicate not merely a distinction between classes of passion, but a division of sense-appetite into a *concupiscible* power that responds to sensible good or evil as such, and an *irascible* power that responds to them as momentous and difficult (Ia, q. 81, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 23, a. 1). There are long-standing objections to the distinction between concupiscible and irascible powers;<sup>19</sup> but suggestive parallels may be seen in Plato’s distinction between “desiring” and “spirited” parts of the soul, in Freud’s distinction between “erotic” and “aggressive” instincts, and, more remotely, in the early modern distinction between “the beautiful” and “the sublime.”<sup>20</sup>

The concupiscible appetite seems to operate as continually as perception, the irascible only in special circumstances. Arousal of the latter signals interruption in the smooth concupiscible flow of love toward the delightful and of hatred away from the painful: suddenly simple desire and aversion are no longer enough to ensure this flow; an obstacle has appeared; the soul responds by tensing for struggle. In meeting its new, elevated object, the soul seems to become more alert and potentially stronger. The irascible appetite is a higher perfection of animal nature than is the concupiscible insofar as, by taking on a present difficulty for the sake of a remote good, it

approximates the foresight of reason; but despite its appearance of superior strength and knowingness, it depends on the concupiscible appetite, which it serves as a defender (Ia, q. 81, a. 1).<sup>21</sup>

The objects of the irascible appetite are complex: they are either good *and* hard to get, or evil *and* hard to avoid or defeat. The range of response in appetite is symmetrically complex: whereas the concupiscible appetite inclines simply toward good and away from evil, the irascible may either approach a promising difficult good *as* good, in hope, or fall away from it *as* unreachable, in despair. Furthermore, it may either shrink from a menacing difficult evil *as* evil, in fear, or attack it *as* a conquerable difficulty, in daring (Ia IIae, q. 23, a. 2). What decides whether it will hope for or despair of a momentous good, and whether it will timorously shrink from or daringly face a momentous evil, is a comparison between one’s own forces and the object’s difficulty (Ia IIae, q. 40, aa. 1–2, 4; Ia IIae, q. 41, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 42, a. 5; Ia IIae, q. 43, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 45, a. 2), a comparison that seems further evidence of the irascible appetite’s canniness. Since daring follows on hope of victory and despair on fear of difficulty (Ia IIae, q. 45, a. 2), hope and fear are the primary irascible passions. The objects of all these passions share the features “future” and “difficult,” and are differentiated by the contrarieties “good-evil,” and “possible-impossible”: a great future good that seems difficult but possible to obtain is hoped for (Ia IIae, q. 40, a. 1); a great future evil that seems not only difficult but nearly impossible to overcome is feared (fear presumes *some* hope of escape [Ia IIae, q. 42, a. 2]); a great future evil that seems difficult but possible to overcome is daringly opposed (Ia IIae, q. 45, aa. 1–2); a great future good that seems not only difficult but impossible to obtain is despaired of (Ia IIae, q. 40, a. 4).

The treatise’s discussion of these passions draws attention to their dependence on and fostering of distinctive, sometimes distorting perspectives on time, particularly on the future. Experience causes hope inasmuch as it allows the time for acquiring skill at doing something easily, or reveals that what seemed impossible is not; but it also causes despair by showing that what seemed possible is impossible (Ia IIae, q. 40, a. 5). On the other hand,