

Thomas Aquinas on the passion of hope

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Thomas Aquinas has argued that the passion of hope is the movement of the sensitive appetite and the first of the irascible passion. The first part of the article aims to explore the cause and the mechanism of the passion of hope, and tries to clarify the relationship between the passion of hope and the perception. In human beings, it is possible that the passion of hope is caused by false judgement of the perception, which will lead to the result of false hope. In Aquinas's argument, the problem of false hope could be solved through the moral virtue and the prudence. In the second part of this article, the aim is to analyse how the virtue of magnanimity, humility and the prudence work impact on the passion of hope and perfect it.

Contribution: This research concentrates on the topic of the passion of hope of Thomas Aquinas, and provides a new perspective on the understanding of the relationship between the passion and the virtue.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas; passion; hope; moral virtue; prudence.

Introduction

Historically, Aristotle was the first philosopher who discussed the topic of hope with concepts of choice and deliberation, and regarded wish as the end of the voluntary action.¹ With the influence of Aristotle and medieval philosophers, Thomas Aquinas's understanding of hope has a twofold meaning, one is the passion in the aspect of the philosophy, another is the theological virtue in the aspect of the theology. The first meaning of hope had a deep influence on 17th and 18th-century philosophers like Descartes and Hume, while Kant who defines hope as a consistence between the virtue and the happiness (Day 1969:89–102) seems under the influence of the second meaning. This article will concentrate on the philosophical aspect of the concept of hope.

Following Avicenna's faculty psychology, Aquinas defines passions (*passiones*) as:

[A]cts of the sensory moving powers caused by external objects by means of the evaluations of the estimative power, and necessarily accompanied by changes in the movements of the heart and the spirits. (Knuuttila 2010:435)

Different from Albert the Great who argues that passions (emotions) are better be regarded as qualities, Aquinas emphasises that passions (emotions) are 'movements of the soul, for the basic classificatory principles of passions can be seen in Aristotle's doctrine of contrary movements in *Physics*' (Knuuttila 2010:435). In Aquinas's discussion of passion in *Summa Theologiae*, the passion of hope is defined as movements of the sensitive appetite and the first of the irascible passion (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 25, a. 3) whose object is possible arduous future good (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 40, a. 1).

The cause of the passion of hope

In the view of Thomas Aquinas, the passion of hope has two characteristics, (1) it is in the sensitive appetite; (2) it is caused by the previous perception. In his *Commentary on Sentences*, Aquinas has defined:

[A] passion is in the activities of the sensitive part's appetite. As Damascene says, a passion is the movement of the appetitive sensible power, which comes from the imagination of a good or an evil. (*Scriptum Super Sententiis* III, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1, resp)

It seems that the previous perception of a passion is the imagination of a good or an evil. However, Aquinas has divided two kinds of sensitive appetites, which are the concupiscible

1. Here I don't make the distinction between wish and hope in Aristotle, the further study can see Mele (1984:139–156), Gravelle (2000:461–477).

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and the irascible (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 81, a. 2, resp). In the explanation of Aquinas, the concupiscible passion is caused by the imagination of a good or an evil, the irascible passion is more than that. Rather than the imagination of a good or an evil, the irascible passion is caused by the estimation of a good or an evil, but the estimation of a good or an evil also comes from the imagination of a good or evil. Then it is clear that both concupiscible and irascible passion come from the imagination of a good or an evil, while the irascible passion is higher than the concupiscible passion, for it requires a further function of estimation.

For example, it is appropriate to say that the passion of hope is caused by the passion of love (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 40, a. 7, resp). While the object of the passion of love is good, the object of the passion of hope is possible arduous future good. In the explanation of Aquinas, 'when an animal desires those things that appeal to its senses, causing delight, it is according to the sensitive nature, and it pertains to the concupiscible power' (*Scriptum Super Sententiis* III, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2, resp). However, when an animal:

[T]ends toward something good that does not cause delight in the senses, but is rather bound to cause sadness by reason of its difficulty, as when an animal desires to fight with another animal, or to attempt anything else difficult, this is in the sensitive appetite according as the sensitive nature touches the intellectual nature; and this pertains to the irascible power. (*Scriptum Super Sententiis* III, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2, resp)

Aquinas has divided 'four interior powers of the sensitive part, which are the common sense, the imagination, the estimative and memorative powers' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4, resp). The object of the estimative power is intention, which is the cause of the passion of hope. In some way, it is of sufficient reason to say that the basic concept of the passion of hope is intention. For in the view of Aquinas, the estimative power is one of the interior sensitive powers, which can apprehend the intentions without the function of the senses. In this point, Peter King argues, (1) 'the passions of the soul are objectual intentional state of the sensitive appetite' (King 2002:356); (2) the intention functions as an 'evaluative response-dependent concept' (King 2012:214) to generate the object of the future good and make the judgement of the possible. Which means, the estimative power can make judgements about the possible and forms intentions. When it judges that it is possible to obtain a future good, it will form intentions which may cause the passion of hope.

The passion of hope and the particular reason

What should be noticed is that, in dumb animals, the function of the intention depends on the natural instinct planted by the Divine Intellect (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 40, a. 3, ad1). Therefore, the future is foreseen by the natural instinct and the possible is natural in the power without differentiating the true or the false (*Summa Theologiae* I-II,

q. 40, a. 3, ad2) in the object of hope. It is also the reason why the passion of hope can be produced without knowledge, for the intention in dumb animals is caused by the natural judgement of the estimative power.

However, in human beings, the cause of the passion of hope is much more complex. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas divides two kinds of powers to describe the cognitive power (*virtus cognoscitiva*) in human beings, one is the cogitative power (*virtus cogitative*) which is 'the act of a corporeal organ', another is the intellect (*intellectus*), 'which is the act of the soul' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 4, resp). In analogy, the cogitative power in dumb animals is the estimative power (*virtus aestimativa*), whose object is intention.

In his *Commentary on Sentences*, Aquinas has stated:

[W]hen an animal imagines the forms apprehended by its senses, this belongs to the nature of sense apprehension in itself; but when it apprehends those ideas that do not fall under the senses, like friendship, hatred, and the like, this belongs to the sensitive part according as it touches reason. (*Scriptum Super Sententiis* III, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2, resp)

What should be emphasised is the following content: Aquinas then concludes that in humans, this part, which is more perfect because of being united to a rational soul, 'is called particular reason (*ratio particularis*), because it compares particular intentions'.

In the terminological systems of Aquinas, the function of particular reason is in the cogitative power (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4, resp). This essential feature of cogitative power reveals two important aspects. On the one hand, the cogitative power is the activity of a bodily organ in human beings, which means it 'naturally knows things existing in individual matter' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 4, resp) and perceives individual intentions 'by means of coalition of ideas' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4, resp). On the other hand, the particular reason is 'naturally guided and moved according to the universal reason' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 81, a. 3, resp) as 'the application of syllogism drawing particular conclusions from universal principles'. Therefore, the cogitative power naturally has the ability to make right judgements and cause right hope.

The problem of the passion of false hope

Different from the ideal assumption above, Aquinas has listed the possibility of the passion of false hope. In *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas states that the phenomena of false hope are happened in young men, drunkards (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 40, a. 6, resp), the foolish and thoughtless persons (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 40, a. 6, resp). In the interpretation of Miner, those people who have false hope 'falsely judge both their own limitations and the strength of the obstacles (if they are aware of the obstacles to begin with)' (Miner 2009:224).

The causes of false hope can be classified into two kinds. One is the physiological changes,² another is the lack of knowledge. In the first situation, the cogitative power is influenced by the heat and high spirits, and then makes an inappropriate judgement to a particular circumstance. In the second one, the heedlessness of dangers and shortcomings is the main reason. In the ideal status, we say that the passion of hope follows the rational judgement of the cogitative power. However, it is difficult to deny the existence of the false judgement in causing the passion of hope.

As is known, 'all ancient and medieval theories associated some kind of evaluation with an emotion'. The Stoics argued that:

[E]motions are essentially self-regarding judgments – false value judgments, by which people mistakenly evaluate things from their subjective perspectives, thus deviating from the rational view of reality codified in Stoic philosophy. (Knuuttila 2010:429)

Compared with the possibility of the existence of the phenomena of false hope analysed above, it contains some similarities. Firstly, they acknowledge the false value judgement of human beings' emotion. Secondly, they attribute the cause of false judgement to the subjective perspectives.

Nevertheless, the basic distinction between the false judgement of passion of hope of Aquinas and the false judgement of emotions of the Stoics is how they overcome such phenomena. The solution the Stoics find is 'the philosophical therapy of emotions (*therapeia*)' (Knuuttila 2010:430), which is aimed at the state of *apatheia*. While Aquinas chooses to argue instead for 'the moderation of emotions (*metriopatheia*)' (Knuuttila 2010:430). In the argument of Knuuttila, the first solution takes its tradition from Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, Plotinus, and has deep influence on the Alexandrian theologians Clemens, Origen and even Western monasticism; the second solution has its origin from Plato, Aristotle, and is inherited by the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine (Knuuttila 2010:430).

Obviously, Aquinas belongs to the second group, and because of the deep influence of Aristotelian natural philosophy, he argues that 'the intellectual soul should keep emotions under strict control' (Knuuttila 2010:437). It is also the reason why Lombardo writes that, 'Aquinas emphatically rejects negative evaluations of the passions' (Lombardo 2011:40). To Aquinas, the phenomena of the passion of false hope must be solved through the moderation of emotions. The method Aquinas adopts is the perfection of the passion of hope through the moral virtue and prudence.

The perfection of the passion of hope

Different from the Stoics who hold that all passions are evil, Aquinas follows the opinion of the Peripatetics who maintain

²Such as the movements of the heart, the spirits, and the humours. See Knuuttila (2010:437).

that moderate passions are good (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 24, a. 2, resp). Aquinas notes, (1) in the opinion of the Peripatetics, passions are thought to be good when being guided by reason; (2) if passions are not guided by reason, they may be called 'diseases or disturbances of the soul' [*morbi vel perturbationes animae*]. As what Lombardo argues, 'the passions require the guidance of reason in order to become virtuous, and thus fully conducive to human flourishing, but virtue also requires the passions' (Lombardo 2011:41).

It is known that the subject of the passion of hope is irascible power, while the moral virtue fortitude is assigned to the irascible power (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 56, a. 4, c). Aquinas argues that the irascible power can be considered in two ways: (1) in itself which is sensitive appetite; (2) participating in the reason. If the irascible power is considered in the first way, it may not be sufficient to be the subject of virtue. Only when the irascible power is considered in the second way, we say that it has 'a natural aptitude to obey reason', and is the subject of the moral virtue fortitude. In the definition of Aquinas, 'the virtue which is in the irascible and concupiscible powers is nothing else but a certain habitual conformity of these powers to reason' (*Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 56, a. 4, resp).

The virtue of magnanimity and the virtue of humility can work on the passion of hope and perfect it. Compared magnanimity with humility, there are two characteristics: (1) 'the virtue of magnanimity and the virtue of humility are both regarding to the difficult good, while magnanimity belongs to the virtue of fortitude, humility belongs to the virtue of temperance' (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 161, a. 4, ad3); (2) magnanimity and humility are both related to 'right reason, while magnanimity urges the mind to great things in accord with right reason, humility restrains the appetite from aiming at great things against right reason' (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 161, a. 1, ad3).

Despite the moral virtue working on the irascible power, the prudence in reason should also be considered in the perfection of the passion of hope. Aquinas notes, according to natural reason, the proper end of moral virtue is appointed (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 47, a. 7, resp), which is from a special natural habit *synderesis*. That is to say, *synderesis* is 'the first practical principles bestowed on human beings by nature' (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, a. 12, resp). Following *synderesis*, the function of prudence could be concluded as two points, (1) to decide 'in what manner and by what means man shall obtain the mean of reason in his deeds' (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 47, a. 7, resp); (2) to 'apply universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters' (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 47, a. 6, resp).

What should be noticed is that, though *synderesis* is bestowed by nature, prudence is not. Aquinas (1947) argues: (1) 'prudence includes knowledge both of universals, and of the singular matters of action to which prudence applies the universal principles' (*Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 47, a. 15, resp);

(2) referring to the knowledge of universals, though 'the primary universal principles are known by nature, the secondary universal principles are not inherited from nature, but are acquired by discovery through experience, or through teaching'; (3) referring to the knowledge of particulars, though the right ends and right judgements are bestowed by nature in moral virtues, 'the means to the end in human concerns are not'.

As a conclusion, virtues which can help the perfection of the passion of hope could be divided into two types: one type is the intellectual virtue prudence in the practical reason of cogitative power,³ another is the moral virtue magnanimity and humility in the irascible power.

Conclusion

In the contemporary philosophy, the attention on the problem of emotion begins from the article 'What is an emotion?' written by William James, where he identifies the emotion with bodily feeling (Lombardo 2011:10). On the one hand, many philosophers and scientists such as Jesse Prinz, Antonio Damasio, Robert Zajonc choose to follow and modify the way James thinks to investigate the phenomena of emotion, partly because it 'was convenient to both behaviorism and logical positivism, then at the height of their influence' (Lombardo 2011:10), their theory is called 'either a noncognitive or a "feeling" theory of emotion' (Lombardo 2011:12).

Other than the feeling theory of emotion, another group of philosophers and psychologists, such as Errol Bedford, Anthony Kenny, George Pitcher, Magda Arnold, Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum (Lombardo 2011:11) think highly of the role intention, and rational judgement played in the phenomena of emotion; their theory is called a cognitive theory of emotion.

In Aquinas's theory of the passion of hope, intention and the right judgement in the estimative and/or cogitative power are two essential elements in the causation of the passion of hope, which in somehow provide the ancient resources for the contemporary debate between non-cognitive and cognitive theory of emotion. Obviously, the position Aquinas holds is a strong support for the cognitive theory of emotion.

The concept of intention [*intentio*] plays an important role in the Aquinas's theory of the passion of hope. Firstly, internal sensory intention is the object of the estimative and/or cogitative power. Secondly, internal sensory intention forces the movement of the irascible power. Thirdly, internal sensory intention is in a higher level than imagination. Fourthly, while internal sensory intention in some way indicates the non-physical aspect as an activity of the soul, 'the use of *intentio* to refer to cognition has significant echoes in the discussions of intentionality in Husserl, Heidegger, and many other Continental thinkers' (Barker 2012:213).

3.The relationship between prudence and practical reason is also discussed with *synderesis* (universal conscience) and natural law, see Irwin (2007:571–587).

Right judgement is also an essential element in Aquinas's theory of passion. As an irascible passion, hope in dumb animals follows the natural judgement caused by the natural instinct in the estimative power; hope in human beings follows the right judgement caused by the particular reason in the cogitative power. However, the cogitative power in human beings has the possibility to make a false judgement, which results from either the influence of the bodily state or the ignorance in the reason. Therefore, Thomas Aquinas emphasises the prudence in the cogitative power and the moral virtue in the sensitive appetite to avoid the situation of false hope.

This conclusion also opens the possibility of the discussion on the relationship between the passion of hope and the moral responsibility. In Aquinas's (1947) theory, the freedom of human beings just depends on the moderation and the control of the passion.⁴ Meanwhile, the emphasising of the positive effects of the passion of hope also indicates the natural teleology (Barnes 2014:349) of Aquinas.

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4.The further study can see Ryan (2001:55–70).

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