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University of Durham

God, Emotion and Impassibility

Volume one of two

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PhD

2008

## Abstract

The current theological climate presents two extremes in speaking of the emotional life of God: Passibilism, which affirms the fullness of God's emotional life, and impassibilism, which (claiming fidelity to traditional orthodox Christianity) asserts that God cannot experience emotions. Likewise, contemporary philosophy of emotion is characterised by the extremes of cognitive views of emotion on the one hand, and non-cognitive, physiological or 'feelings' views on the other.

In this thesis I argue for a more nuanced account of both impassibility and emotion. I seek to show how a more subtle account of emotion may benefit contemporary philosophy of emotion, and how re-conceiving both impassibility and emotion would provide alternative possibilities within theology for speaking of God's emotional life. I begin by showing how the depiction of early impassibilism and modern passibilism as polar opposite views with few theologians inhabiting a middle ground is an oversimplification that neglects those in both camps who argue that God might *choose* to experience emotions and to suffer, such that God's emotions would not be contrary to God's will or challenge his omnipotence. I then argue that a re-appropriation of the Augustinian and Thomist distinction between *passiones* (emotions that are arational, involuntary, and in Thomas, essentially physiological) and *affectiones* (emotions that are potentially rational, in accordance with the will, and are not essentially bodily) as a distinction within the overarching and less discriminating category of 'emotion' may provide important options for both theologians and philosophers of emotion that have previously been overlooked. I continue by exploring the relationship between emotions and intelligence, will, and the body, and the theological implications of this for divine omniscience, omnipotence and incorporeality. I suggest that applying the distinction between *passiones* and *affectiones* to contemporary theology and philosophy of emotion contributes to creating a more plausible middle ground between passibilism and impassibilism, and between cognitive and feelings accounts of emotion.

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I declare that no part of the material of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in the University of Durham, or any other university.

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## Introduction

This thesis is primarily about how historical and contemporary philosophy of emotion can and should affect the debate on divine impassibility in Christian theology, and secondarily about how ancient and medieval philosophy of emotion may provide a way beyond some of the impasses in contemporary philosophy of emotion. As a working definition of impassibility I shall take the idea of impassibility as incapacity for or insusceptibility to emotional experiences. In defining impassibility in this way, I follow Richard Creel and Marcel Sarot<sup>1</sup> in moving away from the idea of impassibility as being solely about God's incapacity for or invulnerability to suffering, and focus instead on the question of whether God can have emotional experiences more broadly. This definition of impassibility is a *working* definition, however, and part of the purpose of the thesis is to come to a better understanding of whether experiencing emotions is a susceptibility and therefore a weakness, or whether it is a capacity and therefore a strength, what we mean when we speak of experiencing emotions, and what sort of being can experience emotions.

In chapter one I explore how ancient understandings of emotion informed the early church's understanding of divine impassibility. What emerges from this discussion is that while the characterisation of the early church as promoting *ἀπαθία* as a human virtue, and, concomitantly, seeing impassibility as an aspect of divine perfection, is not untrue, it is an over-simplification. I suggest two reasons for why this is the case, the first of which relates to our concept of emotion, and the second of which concerns our concept of impassibility.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House), p. 30, who defines impassibility as 'immutability with regard to one's feelings, or the quality of one's inner life' and R. E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3-9, who defines impassibility as 'imperviousness to causal influence from external factors' with respect to nature, will, knowledge or feelings.

First, the ancient world opted for a diversity of different words for mental experiences rather than the modern monolithic category of ‘emotion’. Translating terms such as *πάθος* and *passiones* as ‘emotion’ can give the impression that the early church had a negative view of all emotions. In some cases (particularly in the cases of eastern Christians who inherited more extreme Stoic thought on emotion) this is justified; in other cases, this portrayal overlooks the fact that other mental phenomena we now class as ‘emotional’ are far more positively viewed.

Second, while impassibility in the early church is often portrayed as unanimous and homogenous, I seek to show the many different ways in which the Fathers of the early church affirmed impassibility and the many different things they meant when they argued for it. In particular, I move away from understanding ancient impassibilism as an affirmation of divine emotionlessness, and draw attention to some interesting ‘impassibilist’ positions proposed by some of the Fathers that seem akin to what would, in modern theology, be termed ‘passibilism’. Building on this, I suggest that some forms of modern passibilism may not be as much of a break from tradition as has generally been perceived, and propose these moderate positions as a way beyond the seemingly insurmountable impasse between impassibilism and passibilism.

In chapter two I seek to provide a partial answer to the question of why impassibilism gave way to a passibilist consensus in the twentieth century and how this relates to altered perceptions of emotion. In the first part of the chapter I develop my response to this question by arguing that the idea that impassibilism was replaced by a passibilist consensus is too broad a generalisation. This is not only because (as chapter one shows) the positions that come under the category of ‘impassibilist’ in the early church are tremendously diverse, but also because most modern formulations of passibilism argue for a more complicated and qualified view of passibilism than appears to be the case in many overviews of the impassibilist debate and, furthermore, there are

also significant exceptions to passibilism in the twentieth century. In discussing the diversity of positions within and without the passibilist camp in the twentieth century, I aim to give a sense both of the key concerns of twentieth century impassibilists and how these relate to their view of emotions, and also a sense of the subtlety and diversity of the positions inhabited by passibilists, and how some of these relate to contemporary philosophy of emotion. The overall impression that emerges is that, rather than shifting from impassibilism to passibilism, Christian theology has shifted in emphasis from stressing the invulnerability and omnipotence of God to focusing on the emotional fullness of God's life and the suffering of God – partly as a result of contextual demands: While the early church needed to emphasise God's otherness in reaction against pagan anthropomorphic conceptions of divinity, modern theology has needed to speak to challenges to faith arising from our increased awareness of the extent of human and animal suffering.

Despite the fact that portrayals of theology that view impassibilism as being overturned in favour of passibilism overlook both significant exceptions to, and subtleties within, both passibilism and impassibilism, it still makes sense to ask why the shift from emphasising God's omnipotence and insusceptibility to emotion, to stressing God's suffering and capacity for emotion, has taken place. In the second part of chapter two, I attempt to provide a partial answer to this question by showing how changes in our understanding and evaluation of emotions have affected whether, and in what ways, we attribute emotions to God. In exploring the impact of modern philosophy of emotion on passibilism, I use as a case study the work of the passibilist philosopher of religion Sarot, and focus on seven aspects of his view of emotion (reflecting the philosophy of emotion of the early nineties when he was writing) that lead to his conclusion that a perfect being such as God would be able to experience emotion. The aspects of emotion Sarot propounds are that emotions are not inherently passive, irrational, negative or

sinful, that emotions are essential to knowledge and intelligence, that emotions require a body, that emotional involvement in others' sufferings (e.g. through empathy and sympathy) are a consolation to sufferers, and that emotional involvement is entailed by perfect love. In discussing the effect these views have on Sarot's passibilism, I seek to show the importance of philosophy of emotion to theological debates on divine impassibility, as well as to prepare the ground for discussions about the relation between emotions and intelligence, emotions and the will, and emotions and corporeality, in later chapters.

In chapter three I develop the idea that, while for most purposes emotions may be regarded as a single category united by family resemblances, treating them as an homogenous kind of experience is problematic for the philosophy of emotion in that it disregards very real differences in terms of the relation of different emotions to our intellects, to our wills, and to our bodies, and so gives rise unnecessarily to polar opposite views within the philosophy of emotion. I suggest an alternative model of emotion based on the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between emotional experiences that are *affectiones* (voluntary, potentially rational, not inherently physiological) and *passiones* (involuntary, arational and, in Thomas, inherently physiological). This, I suggest, reflects more accurately the range of human emotional experiences, provided that we treat the two experiences as the extreme points on a spectrum with many experiences in between, rather than regarding *affectiones* and *passiones* as two entirely distinct kinds of phenomena (departing from Paul E. Griffiths' categorisation of emotions as either 'affect programs' or 'higher cognitive' emotions<sup>2</sup>). Re-appropriating Augustinian and Thomist philosophy of emotion in this way provides a bridge between philosophy of emotion which champions a cognitive and voluntarist view of emotions, and that which sees emotions as inherently physiological and involuntary. Furthermore,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997)

taking as a hint passages in Thomas which seem to attribute *affectiones* to God while holding *passiones* to be proper only to physical beings such as humans. I suggest a way forward for the impassibility debate that provides a means to attribute emotional experiences to God while excluding those emotions that would conflict with God's omnipotence, omniscience, incorporeality and moral perfection. In addition to providing a middle ground between passibilism and impassibilism, such a view also provides a precedent for attributing emotion to God in Aquinas, and so (in opposition to both passibilists and impassibilists who view theology before the twentieth century as espousing the emotionlessness of God) further establishes the orthodox foundations Christians have for affirming the emotional nature of the divine life.

Chapters four, five and six share two aims. Their primary aim is to explore how contemporary philosophy of emotion can (and should) inform our affirmation and understanding of God's emotional life. A secondary aim is to suggest how the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between *passiones* and *affectiones* might provide a way to overcome the deadlock between cognitive and non-cognitive (or 'feelings') philosophies of emotion.

In the first part of chapter four I explore the cognitive theory of emotion, and argue (*pace* the cognitive theory) that some emotions are essentially mental events involving beliefs and perceptions about the world, while others are better regarded as physiological and non-cognitive. Drawing on the work of Martha Nussbaum<sup>3</sup> and Mark Wynn,<sup>4</sup> I agree with Sarot in suggesting that God must have emotions because emotions are essential to our intelligence, arguing that emotions are uniquely revelatory of value and so give us insight into the way the world is that we cannot gain without emotions.

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

As such, I suggest, emotions are an integral part of God's wisdom, understanding and intelligence.

In the second part of chapter four I discuss three emotion types (compassion, anger and jealousy) and explore the ways in which they can be said to be revelatory of value and essential to intelligence, and the ways in which they can be deceptive about the world. In exploring how these emotion types can be intelligent (and the ways in which they can be deceptive) I attempt to come to a better understanding of the sorts of emotional experiences we would want to attribute to God, and the sorts of emotional experiences we would want to exclude from the divine life, and the means by which it is possible to achieve this.

My discussion of compassion has both a critical and a constructive aspect. The critical aspect defends compassion against objections that have been levelled against it, and shows that compassion is not intrinsically deceptive or misleading about the world. Four objections to compassion are addressed. First, I reply to the objection that compassion is misleading because it fails to recognise the dignity of the object of compassion, and that blame or praise are better responses to misfortune than compassion. Second, I respond to the objection that compassion presupposes that contingencies and external goods are important, whereas we ought to root our happiness in non-transient things (such as God) or things over which we have perfect control (such as our own virtue). Third, I address the objection that a non-emotional attitude of benevolence is a better response to others' misfortune than the emotional response of compassion because benevolence is rational and impartial, whereas compassion is discriminatory and imbalanced, thus giving us a false impression about who is valuable and leading us to behave ethically to some people and not to others. Fourth, I respond to the objection that compassion is closely connected to 'negative' emotions such as anger, hatred, revenge and cruelty. The constructive aspect aims to show that compassion is

not only not deceptive and misleading but is actually intelligent and uniquely revelatory of value in the world, and therefore necessary to a wise and intelligent God. I argue that compassion reveals two things about the world that cannot be known except through compassion and related emotional responses: It reveals that people are intrinsically valuable and therefore reveals the reason that we have a moral duty to behave well towards them. This, I suggest, indicates that compassion is an essential aspect of God's wisdom and intelligence.

One of the noteworthy features of twentieth century theology is that, despite the emphasis on God's passibility and the fullness of God's emotional life in liberal theology, the idea of divine anger has been the preserve of conservative theologians, and then primarily on the basis of the prominence of divine anger in the Bible. In my discussion of anger, I respond to three criticisms of anger that would seem to make it an inappropriate emotion for God. First, I answer the objection that anger is counter-productive and leads to destructive behaviour. Second, I reply to the objection that anger makes us irrational because it causes us to act before we have seen all the evidence. Third, I argue against the objection that anger is closely related to hatred, and is therefore at odds with the love of God. Having argued that these objections are not conclusive and do not provide a reason for excluding anger from the divine life, I then provide three reasons for why we should regard anger as an integral part of God's emotional life. Anger, I suggest, recognises both the moral agency of the offender and the seriousness of the offence and, in addition, anger, and the waiving of the right to anger, is essential to the Christian notion of forgiveness. What emerges from the discussion of anger is that far from being irrational, counter-productive and closely allied with hatred, anger recognises the value of the offender and the reality of the offence, and is also an aspect of God's love and personal involvement with creation.

In my discussion of jealousy I argue that, in humans, jealousy is always deceptive because it makes us either mistrustful and paranoid, or else unduly credulous and trusting. Given the deceptive nature of jealousy in humans, I question what jealousy would look like without this deceptive quality, and seek to answer this by exploring what the biblical writers were getting at when they attributed jealousy to God. I suggest that, for the biblical writers, God's jealousy does not entail that God is deceived about the world through mistrust or credulity, and argue that God's jealousy (alongside God's anger) is regarded as an aspect of God's personally engaged love for and passionate involvement with creation. I then consider whether God's love is best understood as the passionate involvement portrayed by the biblical writers that includes both anger and jealousy, or whether it is better understood as an emotionally distanced attitude of benevolence, such that God is viewed not as lover but as philanthropic benefactor, which would not entail jealousy or anger. I suggest that love as personal involvement is more perfect than love as benevolence because the former liberates the beloved whereas the latter is debilitating, and because the former provides a foundation for the Christian belief in the value of each person, while the latter undermines it. I note that one possible objection to conceiving of God's love as personally involved love rather than benevolence is that personally involved love entails vulnerability which seems incompatible with God's omnipotence, and follow Gregory Thaumaturgos and Jürgen Moltmann in suggesting that the choice to be vulnerable may be an aspect of divine omnipotence rather than a negation of it, such that divine omnipotence does not preclude God's personally involved love. I conclude that jealousy might be attributed to God, though divine jealousy is always to be seen as an aspect of God's personally involved love, and never distinct from it and, in addition, divine jealousy would not involve the deceptive qualities characteristic of human jealousy.

Chapter five concerns the relation between emotions and the will, and explores the question of whether the passivity of emotions excludes God from emotional experience. Emotion and personally involved love involve vulnerability to things outside the subject's control and this is, on the face of it, incompatible with God's aseity and omnipotence. While the idea that emotions are passive has age on its side, I turn to some recent philosophy of emotion and follow Robert Solomon<sup>5</sup> in highlighting some of the ways in which our emotions can be chosen and cultivated and so active and within our control. I also suggest that Solomon echoes Thomas in linking emotions that are non-physiological, voluntary and 'morally interesting', as distinct from those that are primarily physiological, automatic and amoral. From this discussion I suggest that the idea that God cannot have emotions because the passivity of emotions render them incompatible with divine omnipotence is inconclusive: Emotions are not inherently passive and can be chosen, cultivated and even controlled. Furthermore, these potentially voluntary emotions are also the ones that are potentially intelligent and 'morally interesting'. This is interesting for the theological debate on whether or not God is passible for it is precisely the intelligent and morally interesting emotions that passibilist theologians are concerned to attribute to God.

One possible objection to the idea that emotions are not essentially passive because they can be chosen and cultivated over time has been put forward in an unpublished thesis by Robin Cook.<sup>6</sup> Cook argues that the determinative factor for the impassibility debate is not whether we have control over our susceptibility to emotion, but about whether the *subjective experience* of an emotion is under the immediate control of our will. Emotions, Cook claims, are essentially passive in the relevant respect because during an emotion we are involuntarily preoccupied with the object of

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<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); *True to our Feelings: What our Emotions are Really Telling Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Robin Cook, 'Divine Impassibility, Divine Love', Cardiff, 2006

the emotion; for this reason, emotions are inappropriate to an omnipotent God. I respond to this objection with a critique of some of Cook's key ideas, and conclude *contra* Cook that this kind of passivity is found in some, but not all, emotions, and is not essential to emotional experience.

Having concluded that emotional experience *in general* does not entail passivity, I go on to discuss an objection to the idea that God experiences the emotions involved in suffering *in particular*. While many passibilists have argued that God chooses to suffer and that God's suffering is always within God's control, some theologians and philosophers have argued that it is integral to suffering that it is something that we do not choose and over which we have no control. This is problematic for the passibilist, for it suggests that if God chooses and controls his suffering, it is not authentic suffering, or at least it is not suffering as humans experience it. In response to this problem I argue that it is the reasons and motivations for which chosen suffering is undertaken that determines whether or not the suffering is authentic, rather than the question of whether or not the suffering is chosen and controlled *per se*. I conclude the chapter by pointing to the ideas of divine suffering and humility as freely undertaken for the sake of humanity and as motivated by God's love for humanity found in Kierkegaard, Moltmann and Paul Fiddes.

In chapter six I discuss the relation between emotional experience and the body, critically engaging with Sarot's thesis that emotions are essentially physiological, so that a passible God must be a corporeal one. Having suggested that Sarot's argument is flawed, I go on to explore three questions about the relation between emotions and the body. First, I discuss whether emotions are simply kinds of bodily experience, and conclude that they are not. Second, I consider whether the body is a prerequisite of emotions, and argue that while a body is a prerequisite for both emotional and non-emotional 'mental' phenomena such as emotions and thoughts in humans, this does not

show that a body is a prerequisite for these experiences in the case of God. Third, I ask whether the physical experiences we have when we have an emotion are intrinsic or extrinsic to the emotion, developing the Thomist distinction between *passiones* that are intrinsically physiological and *affectiones* that are not. I conclude the chapter with a case study of the emotional experiences involved in sexual desire, counter-balancing the emphasis on cognitive emotions and the fullness of God's emotional life in chapters four and five. In so doing, I suggest that some emotional experiences would be excluded from the divine nature, but indicate that analogous experiences (e.g. to divine love conceived as non-sexual *eros* or desire) would mean that God would not be less intelligent, wise or knowledgeable as a result of not having these experiences.

Having outlined what this thesis is about, it is also worth mentioning briefly what it is *not* about. One frequent Christian response to the question of whether God is passible or impassible is to say that God must suffer because Christ suffered. This argument tends to take two forms. The first form is incarnational: Because Christ suffered and Christ is God, God must have suffered. This argument is found not only in non-academic Christian thought, but also, in nuanced and self-conscious forms, in Moltmann, Fiddes and Jung Young Lee<sup>7</sup>. However, this view entails either misunderstanding traditional orthodox Christianity or else rejecting it, since it does not appreciate the way in which Christ's attributes can (and the ways in which they cannot) be predicated to God through the *communicatio idiomatum* (or 'interchange of properties'). According to traditional orthodox Christianity, Jesus suffered in his human nature, but not in his divine nature. Suffering can be attributed to God in the person of Jesus by virtue of the fact that the divine and human natures are joined in one person.

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974), pp 214-5, 240-7; Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp. pp.25-9; Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A systematic Inquiry into the concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), esp. pp. 36-8, 52 - 63

but that does not mean that Jesus in his divine nature suffers any more than it means that Jesus in his divine nature died, or was born of the Virgin Mary, or that Jesus in his human nature created the world. Whether or not one thinks that suffering is appropriate to the divine nature, deducing God's suffering from Christ's suffering in this way fails to maintain the distinction between the two natures and opens the door to obviously ridiculous syllogisms. For example, on the basis of this argument it would be equally possible to deduce that God is bearded, Jewish and male on the basis that Jesus is God and Jesus was bearded, male and Jewish. Of course, it may be possible to deduce the suffering of God from the suffering of Christ if one were to re-conceive the relation between Christ's divine and human natures, but such a re-modelling would require at least a separate Ph.D. thesis and, in addition, would move us away from the question of whether God suffers in Godself, and whether an emotionally full life is appropriate to a divine being. For this reason I do not discuss the relation between God's suffering and the suffering of the incarnate Christ.

The second, independent but potentially complementary, way in which God's suffering is sometimes derived from Christ's suffering is revelatory rather than incarnational. Christ reveals God, and so, it is argued, Christ's suffering reveals God's suffering. Sarot supports this view, arguing that if Christ is the revelation of God and Christ suffers, then it is likely that one of the things he is revealing about God is the fact that God also suffers. J.M. Quinn<sup>8</sup> objects to this argument on the grounds that God is not as Jesus, but Jesus is as God, and to reverse this is fallacious. Jesus reveals God to us in human form, taking on the limitations that human nature involves. But this does not mean that God also shares these human limitations – including passibility. The suffering of Christ does have some revelatory value, however – Christ's suffering and death are symbols of the infinite self-communication of the three persons of the Trinity

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<sup>8</sup> J.M. Quinn, 'Triune Self-Giving: One Key to the Problem of Suffering', *The Thomist* 44 (1980) 173-218

to one another within the centre of divine nature. Sarot dismisses this argument, since, he argues, Jesus' suffering cannot reveal anything about God other than that God is also suffering. From this, Sarot concludes that the revelation of God in Christ implies the divine passibility.

To my mind, Sarot's argument overlooks the possibility that (given that Christians agree that Christ's suffering was undertaken, one way or another, out of love for humanity) what Christ's suffering reveals is not God's suffering, but God's love, for which Christ's suffering is undertaken. According to this view, God shows his love for humanity in the incarnate Jesus, and in the suffering love of the incarnate Jesus, but this does not mean that God's love is also suffering love, for if God is by nature impassible, then his love must be non-suffering love, while Christ, as human, can show his love in suffering as well as in other ways. This suggests to me that Sarot is mistaken in believing that we can derive God's suffering from Christ's suffering, since the argument is inconclusive: Christ's suffering might reveal not God's suffering but God's love. However, it is possible that if we conclude that God suffers, not on the basis that Christ's suffering is revelatory of God's suffering, but on independent grounds, then Christ's suffering may still tell us something about the nature and motivation for God's suffering, and so Christ's suffering is not without revelatory significance for the impassibility debate. In this thesis, therefore, I do not discuss debates concerning whether God's suffering can be derived (on incarnational or revelatory grounds) from Christ's suffering, though I do seek to take seriously the revelation of God in the person of Jesus.

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reach some kind of appreciation of why impassibilism seemed attractive and obvious to early Christian theologians, and (inseparably) what precisely they meant when they affirmed it. There are many stories that could be told here, but the one I will focus on is about how ancient understandings of *emotion* informed the Fathers' inferences about the divine nature. In focusing upon this particular theme, I hope to prepare the ground for the later discussion of the relation between understandings of emotion and impassibility, which will be informed by some of the views of early Christian theologians. I anticipate that the discussion of human *πάθος* and the goal of human *ἀπαθήια* on the one hand, and divine impassibility on the other, will enable us to recognise and evaluate the assumptions with which the Fathers were working, and so discern alternatives to their lines of argument, as well as to highlight our own contemporary presuppositions, and to assess and challenge some of these later in the thesis.

In the second chapter I will complement this chapter with another narrative: A discussion of whether, how, why and in what ways the impassibilist consensus gave way to passibilist theology and an affirmation of the fullness of the divine emotional life. Thus while this chapter engages with the seemingly remarkable question of why impassibilism ever seemed appealing to Christian theologians, the second chapter seeks to elucidate, in the light of the sense we have made of impassibilism during the course of the first chapter, how and why this could have given way to the prevalence of passibilist theology in popular belief and academic theology in the twentieth century.

## Emotion and impassibility in the ancient world

One way to get to the root of why early theologians affirmed impassibilism, and what they meant by it, is to begin with a discussion of early Christian philosophy of emotion. Such a discussion is complicated – and informed - at the outset by the heterogeneity of early concepts of various different psychological experiences, and by the vast range of terms used to describe them. While our term ‘emotion’ encompasses a vast variety of phenomena,<sup>9</sup> the ancient world opted instead for a diversity of descriptions of human psychological experiences. ‘Emotion’ is in many ways an anachronistic term to use in relation to ancient thought, being both conceptually and semantically alien to the early Fathers; conceptually, since, as Thomas Dixon writes, ‘The category of emotions, conceived as a set of morally disengaged, bodily, non-cognitive and involuntary feelings, is a recent invention’<sup>10</sup>; semantically, since the modern sense of emotion was not used until the mid-nineteenth century, when it was developed in association with the rise of secular psychology, and so was defined in opposition to the religious worldview.<sup>11</sup> While the term ‘emotion’ derives from the Latin *motus* (movement), *motus* and its derivatives were relatively minor terms in classical and medieval psychology, and were among a number of terms used to express what we would now term ‘emotions’. Greek terms such as *ἄσθησις*, *πάθος*, *θῶμος*, *ἐπιθυμία*, *ὄρμη/ὄρμημα*, *ἔγερσις*, and Latin terms such as *passiones*, *motus*, *motus animae*, *passiones animae*, *affectus*, *adfectus*, *adfectio*, *affectiones*, *libidines*, *perturbationes*, *permotio*, *sensus*, *concupiscentiae*, *desiderae*, *appetitus*, *commotio*, *concitatio*, *turbatio*, *tumultus*,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert M. Gordon suggests that emotions are best seen as a group of experiences and phenomena related by family resemblances, since the search to define emotions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions has proved fruitless (‘Emotion’, in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 259 – 60).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 4 – 5

*appetentia*, *cupido*, *desiderium*, and *libido* are among the ancient words now often translated and conceptually incorporated into our term ‘emotion’, a translation which generally fails to convey the distinctiveness of the different terms – and the concepts to which they correspond – in earlier thought. This can, I suggest, lead to a misrepresentation of the early Fathers by modern scholars, who risk inadvertently imposing the concept of the emotion upon pre-modern texts.

One instance of a Greco-Roman term frequently and misleadingly rendered ‘emotions’ is the Greek term ἐπιθυμία, translated into Latin variously as *concupiscentia*, *appetitus* and *desiderae*.<sup>12</sup> Plato used ἐπιθυμία to refer to instincts, appetites, and passions, though by the time of the New Testament the term often connotes sinfulness or a longing for what is forbidden.<sup>13</sup> However, ἐπιθυμία was still used in a positive sense too: In Luke’s account of the Last Supper, for example, Christ says: ‘With desire I have desired (ἐπιθυμία ἐπιθυμησα) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’<sup>14</sup> One of the defining characteristics of ἐπιθυμία is that the term emphasises the active aspect of emotions: The ‘subject’ of ἐπιθυμία is actively desirous, rather than being the recipient of emotional forces from without.<sup>15</sup> This emphasis upon the active nature of the experience indicates one way in which the modern concept of the emotion does not fully convey the meaning of ἐπιθυμία: In modern English we do not have a word that distinguishes an active experience of an emotion from a passive experience of one.

Another instance of an Hellenistic concept being inappropriately used as synonymous with ‘emotion’ is the concept of πάθος, generally rendered into Latin by *passiones*, or, more specifically, *passiones animae*.<sup>16</sup> The word παθή or *passiones* is

<sup>12</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 39

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Mark 4.19; Rom. 1.24, 6.12, 13.14; Gal. 5. 16 – 24; Titus 2.12, 3.3, where it is translated variously ‘sinful desires’, ‘evil desires’, and ‘passions’ in the Revised Standard Version .

<sup>14</sup> Luke 22.15. The NIV renders it: ‘I have eagerly desired’.

<sup>15</sup> ‘ἐπιθυμία’ and ‘πάθος’, in Joseph H. Thayer (ed.), *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996)

<sup>16</sup> In *City of God* IX.4, Augustine notes several Latin translations of the Greek παθή, including *affectus*, *affectiones*, *passiones*, and Cicero’s *perturbationes animae* (cf. Dixon, *Passions*, p. 40)

often translated ‘emotions’ in a broad sense, and, more specifically, ‘suffering’.<sup>17</sup> However, the literal meaning of *πάθος* is ‘something outside one’s control that befalls one’, thus (in stark contrast to *ἐπιθυμία*<sup>18</sup>) carrying a sense of the vulnerability and passivity of the subject of the emotion. While *παθή* are closely linked to passivity in quite a general sense, they are associated with a feeling experienced by the mind as early as Aristotle: ‘By *pathé* I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure and pain.’<sup>19</sup> In this sense of the term, *παθή* are morally and experientially neutral: The feeling experienced by the mind might be good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. However, in the New Testament, *πάθος* is used by Paul specifically and solely of depraved passions,<sup>20</sup> so that *παθή* came to imply the morally negative by the time of the early Fathers. Just from this very brief glimpse at a couple of Greek terms and the differences between them, we can begin to see that the term ‘emotion’ does not do justice to the distinctions between the many concepts prevalent in the ancient world and, in particular, in the early church.

Correspondingly, the Greek *ἀπαθῆα* and Latin *impassibilitas* are not conveyed by the English translation ‘apathy’, suggesting indifference, or even by the English ‘impassibility’, which has come to connote ‘devoid of emotion’, but are closer to ‘invulnerability’, or ‘incapability of being acted upon by an outside force’.<sup>21</sup> In addition, because of the Platonic association between *πάθος* and mutability on the one hand, and the New Testament connection between *πάθος* and sinfulness on the other, *ἀπαθῆα* and *impassibilitas* are sometimes used by the Fathers to mean faithfulness and moral

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Bauckham, ‘Only the Suffering God can Help: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology’, in *Themelios* 9 (3), 1984, p. 7

<sup>18</sup> ‘ἐπιθυμία’ and ‘πάθος’, in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* II.5, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) *cf.* ‘πάθος’, in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*

<sup>20</sup> e.g. Col. 3.5; Rom. 1.26; 1 Thess. 4

<sup>21</sup> Marcel Sarot, ‘Patricianism, Theopaschitism, and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Considerations’, *Religious Studies* 26, p. 365

fidelity.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the modern understanding of ‘divine impassibility’ is at variance with the definition accorded to it by the early Fathers and their non-Christian contemporaries.

### Passions and divine *απαθήια* in the early church

What were the reasons for the consensus on impassibility in the early church? It is well-recognised that one of the primary factors instrumental in the early church’s assertion of divine impassibility is that by and large Christians inherited and adapted a negative view of the *παθή* or *passiones* (often as distinct from other kinds of emotional phenomena) from the Stoics and Platonists (and other Greco-Roman schools which regarded Socrates’ attitude towards his death [as portrayed by Plato] as exemplary). While it is tempting to suppose that the negative view of the passions was an Hellenistic thought imposed upon a previously emotion-affirming Judaeo-Christian tradition<sup>23</sup>, such a view does not take account of the fact that a negative portrayal of the passions was present in Christianity right from its birth. Paul himself was among the first of the writers (Christian and non-Christian) to use *παθή* in purely negative, and usually sexually negative, terms. In his letter to the Colossians, he advises the community to ‘Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature (lit. ‘your members on earth’): Fornication, uncleanness, passion [*πάθος*], bad desire [*ἐπιθυμιαν κακην*] and the covetousness which is idolatry.<sup>24</sup> Again, in his letter to the Romans, Paul lays the groundwork for Augustine’s belief that sinful sexual passions (in the context of

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<sup>22</sup> G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (Toronto: Heinemann Ltd, 1936), p. 8

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, T.E. Pollard, ‘The Impassibility of God’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8 (1955): 353 – 64; Edward Burnley, ‘The Impassibility of God’, *The Expository Times* 67 (1955 – 56): 90 – 1; Rem B. Edwards, ‘The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God’, *Religious Studies* 14 (1978): 305 – 13; John J. O’Keefe, ‘Impassible Suffering? Divine Suffering and Fifth Century Christology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* p 354 – 365. Some modern passibilist theologians are not sympathetic towards the early Fathers, often viewing them as ‘betraying’ the New Testament revelation of God in Christ in favour of Greek philosophical values. T.E. Pollard, for example, begins his article with a warning that Christian theologians should beware of accepting the gifts of the Greeks (p. 353)

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 3.5; my translation

Romans, homosexuality) are a divine punishment for human sin, writing that ‘God gave them [sinners] up to passions of dishonour [παθή ατιμίας]’.<sup>25</sup> In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul again displays a negative understanding of passions, and a propensity to understand passions as sinful sexual desires, conjoining the terms πάθος and ἐπιθυμία to produce the sense of the ‘passions of lust’ apparently rife among non-Christian Gentiles.<sup>26</sup>

The biblical acceptance of the negative view of the passions was naturally adopted by the Fathers of the Church, and developed in ways that were informed by their own philosophical proclivities. Clement of Alexandria emphasises the Christian’s duty to struggle against the passions when he writes that the true Gnostic ‘is the true athlete, who in the great arena, the beautiful world, is crowned by reason of [i.e. by virtue of] the true victory over all the passions.’<sup>27</sup> For Augustine, *passio* (which he regards as the Latin equivalent of παθή) are movements ‘of the mind contrary to reason’,<sup>28</sup> and thus both irrational and passive (in that the one who experiences them is passive in their experience of them: They are ‘assailed’ by an outside force). The association between passion, passivity and *suffering* also pervades early thought, and is demonstrated in the etymological relation between the classical Latin term *passivus* (‘passivity’) and the later Latin term *passio*, which came to mean both passion and suffering. Further, Dionysius of Alexandria expresses the irrationality and passivity of a subject’s suffering πάθος in listing connected attributes when he emphasises the dissimilarity between God and matter: Those who claim that there are likenesses between God and matter should ‘give the reason why, if both are unoriginate, God is

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 1.26; my translation

<sup>26</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4.6

<sup>27</sup> Clement, *Stromateis* 7.3, cited J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1926), p. 56

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* viii, 17, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972)

impassible, immutable, immoveable, active in work, but matter on the contrary is subject to passion, changeable, unstable, experiencing modification.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the association between *παθή*, passivity and irrationality, passions are also often associated with sin, and susceptibility to passions is seen as a result of the Fall in some of the early Fathers. We have already noted that in the New Testament Paul uses *παθή* to refer only to immoral ‘emotions’. This association between passions and sin is made more explicit in Athanasius, according to whom, while our susceptibility to passions is partly ‘natural’ because it is the result of our createdness and finitude, the extent of our susceptibility to passions is extreme and ‘unnatural’ because we are fallen and sinful. The state of *ἀπαθήα*, which is closely connected with the salvation brought by Christ, not only removes us from sin, but also makes us invulnerable to the susceptibility to passions which results from our finitude and from our fallen nature. Christ’s identification with us in the incarnation (and our responsive identification with him through faith and the sacraments) liberates us from slavery to the passions: ‘And while He Himself [the Second Person of the Trinity] being impassible in nature, remains as He is, not harmed by these affections, but rather obliterating and destroying them, men, their passions as if changed and abolished in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves also impassible and free from them for ever, as John taught, saying “And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin.”’<sup>30</sup> Here, passions have an implicit synonymity with sin. Passions are not only thought to entail passivity and irrationality, but are also consequent upon both our finitude, and our fallen, sinful nature.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the negative view of the passions was not ubiquitous in the early church. Lactantius, for example, provides an interesting counter-example. Lactantius criticises the Stoics for what he regards as their

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<sup>29</sup> Text in *The Letters and other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria*, ed. C.L. Feltoe, p. 184, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 72

<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, *Or. III*, 32 – 34, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 85

rejection of emotion: ‘The Stoics, therefore, are mad; they do not moderate [passions], but cut them off, and in a way want to castrate a human being of things that are implanted by nature.’<sup>31</sup> More specifically, Lactantius criticises the Stoics for what he sees as their rejection of sympathy [*humanitas*], for removing pity [*pietas*] from human beings, for separating themselves from society by the rigour of their inhuman virtue, and so increasing vice rather than curing it.<sup>32</sup> We shall see the correspondence between Lactantius’ view of human emotion, and his understanding of the divine nature, later in the chapter.

### The influence of Stoic passions on the Christian concept of sin

While some of the early Christians were reacting against Stoic psychology, others adopted the Stoic idea of first movements or prepassions, the visceral reaction preceding passions, which (as Richard Sorabji shows) were developed by early Christians first into the ‘bad thoughts’ inciting sinful passions, and later into the temptations preceding the seven cardinal sins.<sup>33</sup> The link between the first movements of an emotion and the temptation to sin, and between passions themselves and the sins to which they are related, indicates a close connection between passion and sin that disinclined the early Fathers to any idea of God experiencing any sort of passion. Sorabji’s argument is of great interest to the impassibility debate, since it demonstrates the degree to which passions and sin were connected by the early Fathers, and the way in which Stoic prepassions were eventually developed into the temptations corresponding to the seven cardinal sins. In discussing his exposition of the early Fathers, I shall tend to follow Sorabji in referring to ‘emotions’ rather than ‘passions’ or ‘παθή’ (and related

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<sup>31</sup> *Div. Inst.* 6.15.2, cited in Juha Sihvola and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 220

<sup>32</sup> *Div. Inst.* 6.10.11, cited Sihvola and Engberg-Pedersen, *Emotions* p. 220

<sup>33</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) What follows is heavily dependent upon Sorabji’s work.

psychological terms). However, I think that ‘emotions’ are best interpreted here as ‘passions’, since, as we shall see, other ‘emotional’ experiences are viewed far more positively by at least some Fathers of the church, and these Fathers might well be antithetical to the idea that positive psychological experiences ought to be identified with sinful passions.

The Stoic Seneca and his Christian successors believed that emotions involve judgements, and that these judgements are, at least in part, voluntary: While it may appear that one is in a bad situation, one can choose whether to assent to or to reject this appearance. First movements and prepassions are not themselves emotions; they are initial and involuntary feelings, rather than rational value judgements. Disregarding this fact can lead us into an undesirable ‘emotional’ state, since we might induce a passion simply by observing an initial reaction and taking it as normative.<sup>34</sup>

The Stoic idea and terminology of prepassions was taken up in Judaeo-Christian thought initially by Philo the Jew, and then – quite variously - by the Alexandrian theologians Origen, Didymus the Blind, Jerome and Clement. Even at this early stage passions are associated with sin, and *ἀπαθῆια*, in the sense of freedom from passion, is viewed as a perfection at which Christians should aim. Stoic ideals are applied to biblical stories and sayings by Christian theologians and exegetes: Christ’s grief is viewed as a prepassion rather than an actual emotion, and Christ’s assessment that someone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery in their own heart<sup>35</sup> is propitiously interpreted to mean that a man is condemned if he looks at a woman deliberately to stir up and satisfy his lustful desires, rather than if he is accidentally aroused by one in passing. Accidental arousal, being an *involuntary* reaction, is a prepassion rather than an emotion, and so is not morally culpable.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, pp. 3, 150, 160, 272

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 5.27 - 28

<sup>36</sup> This latter example occurs in Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew 5.28* § 28 – 29; Augustine, *On the Sermon on the Mount* 1. 34.24, and is cited in Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 344

Origen made a significant transition by connecting first movements or prepassions with bad thoughts.<sup>37</sup> Sorabji suggests that this shift makes most sense if viewed as a change of focus from Seneca's first movement - the initial shock - to its cause, the appearance of the situation. Bad thoughts, the Christian adaptation of Stoic prepassions, provide an incitement to sin, though it is ultimately up to the subject whether to accept them or to resist. Origen optimistically writes that 'It is possible for us, once a malign power has begun to incite us to evil, to repel the wicked suggestions from us and to resist the worse blandishments, and do absolutely nothing culpable.'<sup>38</sup> Despite the sharp distinction made here between bad thoughts/temptation, and the actual sin itself, Origen often blurs the original Stoic distinction between prepassion and emotion, or portrays the distinction as ambiguous. For example, a passage in the *Commentary on Matthew* suggests that Christ suffered a full-blown emotion to a small degree, as opposed to experiencing merely the initial reaction (prepassion) to something sad or fearful while rejecting sadness and fear as an appropriate response upon evaluation: 'So he did indeed begin to be sad and troubled, in accordance with his human nature, which is subject to such emotions [rendered *passiones* by Rufinus], but not in accordance with his divine power, which is far removed from emotion [*passione*] of this kind'.<sup>39</sup> Sorabji suggests that this concession to the idea that Christ has emotions is partly because Origen (or possibly Rufinus) did not want to rule out all emotional experience from Christ, being keen to emphasise Jesus' humanity over and against various Gnostic theories.

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<sup>37</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, pp. 343 - 357

<sup>38</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, 3.2.4, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 347

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 26.36 - 9, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 349. We don't know what word Origen used for the term Sorabji translates 'emotions', but Rufinus translates it into the Latin 'passiones', thus suggesting that the original word used was *παθή* or a term connoting a similarly negatively-overtoned psychological phenomenon.

Didymus the Blind, who is more rigorous than Origen in distinguishing emotion from prepassion (which he regards as the beginning of an emotion<sup>40</sup>), ascribes the former to Christ on the grounds that otherwise Jesus' soul would be of a different substance to ours, and because it would imply that there was no struggle on the cross. However, Christ's soul is thought to have no *irrational* faculty of desire: His response is always a rational one. Christ endures suffering on the cross, is distressed at foreseeing his betrayal, and is tempted to sin. However, this temptation does not detract from Christ's moral perfection: Didymus insists that there is nothing sinful about prepassion.

Following the Stoics, Jerome asserts that the transition from prepassion to emotion is characterised by assent, will, decision, and judgement. Jerome connects prepassions with thoughts, and also adds the idea that some fault attaches to prepassion, while recognising that it cannot be avoided and is not punished by God. That prepassions are not 'sinful' despite the fault attached to them is important in upholding Christ's sinlessness: Like Didymus the Blind, Jerome asserts that Christ's beginning to be sad is a prepassion, but adds that, having assumed humanity, Christ was truly saddened. What seems to be important for Jerome's understanding of emotions and Christ's moral perfection is not whether an emotion is experienced at all, but whether the emotion dominates in the mind, presumably because this would imply that it overcomes reason.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, Clement of Alexandria states that, because of Christ's divine nature, 'He was altogether impassible, into Him no movement of passion could find its way, neither pleasure nor pain',<sup>42</sup> and asserts elsewhere that the Gnostic, who emulates divine *ἀπαθῆια*, overcomes not only 'negative' passions but also 'positive' emotions such as determination, emulation, and cheerfulness. Further, Clement asserts that perfect humans – and so, by extension, God – do without the *εὐπάθεια* which many

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<sup>40</sup> Didymus the Blind, *Psalmen-Kommentar*, Pt. 3 (Ps.s 29 – 24), 222.12 – 14, in Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 352

<sup>41</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew 26*, verse 37, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 352

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 57

contemporary Stoics regarded not as passions but as good psychological phenomena – caution, joy, and *εὐφροσύνη* (joy at the deeds of the temperate).<sup>43</sup> In this way, Clement presents *ἀπαθία* as an ideal that involves not only freedom from negative passions, but also freedom from positive and characteristically virtuous emotions.

Basil of Caesarea offers a positive view of emotion when offering consolation, but a more negative one in his discussion of ideals.<sup>44</sup> In the context of consolation, Basil adopts Anaxagorus' idea that we should remember that our children and loved ones are mortal, but rejects the Stoic conclusion that we should not grieve at their deaths. He expresses the goodness of grief, while also emphasising that grief should be moderated. Importantly, Basil explicitly states that we must not react without emotion or feeling.<sup>45</sup> In his discussion of ideals, however, Basil argues that emotional appetites are the result of the Fall, and idealises freedom from emotion as a way of making us like God. *Ἀπαθία* is not to be achieved by ordinary people; it is reserved for people like St. Paul.<sup>46</sup> Somewhat incongruously, Basil does not attribute *ἀπαθία* to the earthly Christ. It is important for us, he argues, that Christ experienced real emotion.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, emotion is not regarded as sinful in and of itself, but is indicative of fallen nature, and perfection necessitates freedom from it.

Evagrius of Pontus develops a distinctively Stoic view of the Christian life, advising other anchorites on how to combat prepassions, to ward off emotions and to achieve *ἀπαθία*, which he also describes as health. In his *Practical Treatise* Evagrius speaks of eight thoughts which can beset one: Gluttony, lust, avarice, distress, anger, listless depression (*ἀκήδεια*), vanity, and pride. Echoing Stoic thought, Evagrius regards his eight thoughts as the most generic, and as those which encompass all others. (Unlike the Stoics, however, he does not show *how* the others are a species of the eight generic

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<sup>43</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.9 71 – 4, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 387

<sup>44</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 391

<sup>45</sup> Id. On Julitta, PG 31, col.s 215 – 18; Letters 5; 62. cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 391

<sup>46</sup> Basil, *Ascetic Sermons*, 1.1 – 2 (PG 31.869, 872), cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 391

<sup>47</sup> Basil, Id. Letter 261, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 392

ones.<sup>48</sup>) The eight thoughts correspond to emotions – and, importantly, to sins – such as lust, distress and anger, but are not themselves emotions; rather, they are the ‘bad thoughts’ preceding the respective emotions. As in Origen (who influenced Evagrius), these bad thoughts were viewed as first movements. Evagrius sees these bad thoughts as often being initiated by demons, so that the *Practical Treatise* concerns how these demons can be outwitted.

It is not up to us whether bad thoughts assail us, though we can control whether they linger and whether they initiate emotions.<sup>49</sup> The thoughts are only temptations and are not themselves sinful: Sin only enters the equation when assent is given to the pleasure of the thought. The most effective way to dispel bad thoughts is to play them off against one another. In order to perfect this technique, Evagrius studies the causal interrelations among the thoughts. While most thoughts are vanquished by thinking of another, vanity is exceptional: Once the first thoughts have been defeated, vanity remains, and can only be overcome by the remembrance of our frailty achieved through the entertainment of one of the other seven. Through this method of playing off thoughts against one another, one begins to be free of (troublesome) emotion, although profound *ἀπαθμία* is accomplished only when bad thoughts are headed off by humility and chastity.

The idea that listless depression is a bad thought is interesting for three reasons. First, because modern thought does not usually view depression as a moral imperfection, its status as a sin in Evagrius seems rather severe and uncompassionate. The inclusion of listless depression as a bad thought is partly elucidated, however, when one realises that Evagrius associated listless depression with idleness, and indeed in later lists of bad thoughts the name and idea of ‘sloth’ replaced that of listless depression. Two plausible explanations for this transition are offered by Siegfried

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<sup>48</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 358

<sup>49</sup> Evagrius, *Practical Treatise* 6, cited in Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 359

Wenzel. First, in Benedictine monasteries, where life was more communal than for the desert hermits, the monks were given specific tasks to perform and *siestas* in the afternoons. This last is particularly important, since listless depression was recognised as the ‘noonday demon’ (Evagrius), and a *siesta* provided unconsciousness at this time of perturbation. The lack of performing the requisite tasks thus took over as the salient feature since listless depression was diminished. Second, by the ninth century it was found, in confessions for lay people, far more practical to evaluate the non-performance of tasks, rather than an inner spiritual or mental state.<sup>50</sup>

The second reason why listless depression is interesting as a bad thought is that, as Sorabji observes, listless depression is a mood rather than an emotion: It ‘can feed itself by latching on to any situation that comes to mind, rather than being directed to a particular situation’<sup>51</sup>. Listless depression had already been viewed by Origen as one of the *general* temptations of Christ in the desert<sup>52</sup> (as opposed to one of the specific three), and by Basil, who argues, *contra* Evagrius and others, that listless depression might be dispelled by leaving one’s solitary cell and venturing out into the wider community.<sup>53</sup>

A third reason why listless depression might be regarded as interesting is that, while the other bad thoughts correspond to some sort of active emotional experience (such as the active and potentially acute feelings of greed, or lust, or anger), listlessness, depression and listless depression include characteristics that make it more like the *absence* of an emotional experience. For example, listlessness and depression, unlike most ‘emotions’, do not invest value in an object or objects, and are not motivational forces: Those suffering from listlessness and depression tend not to be able to see the value or meaning in any object, and are thus deterred from accomplishing things. In

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<sup>50</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth* (Chapel Hill, 1960), cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 369

<sup>51</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 369

<sup>52</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Luke*, fragment 96, cited by Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 369, who notes that the fragment may not be authentic

<sup>53</sup> Basil, *Constitutiones Monasticae* chapter 7, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 369

contrast, most emotional experiences (virtuous as well as vicious) motivate people to action, since they invest or enable people to perceive value and meaning in a particular object, and motivate people to act accordingly. Even in the case of sadness (which is often spoken of as similar to depression), a value is perceived in the object of the sadness (for example, if the object has been lost), and this motivates the subject to action (to mourn the object, e.g. through tears), while in the case of listlessness and depression no value is invested or perceived in any object. Nor can this dissimilarity be put down merely to the fact that, as we have already observed, listless depression is a mood rather than an emotion because it has no object: Other moods (such as generic cheerfulness) may not be intentional (i.e. not have an object), but they can still tend the cheerfully-mooded person to recognise value in those things that they experience in their life.

This account of listless depression as being unusual in its tendency to make people oblivious to the value and meaning of various objects (including people), and to deter people from action rather than to motivate people to it, is particularly interesting in the present context. This is because this sort of experience is not typical of an emotional experience on most modern understandings of the emotions, which stress the evaluative nature and motivational tendencies of emotions,<sup>54</sup> but is closer to the modern understanding of apathy as the *absence* of emotion. If I am correct in this account of listless depression and its similarities to the modern understanding of apathy as the absence of emotion, some very interesting suggestions emerge for our account of both the early church's understanding of the psychological phenomena that modern people class as emotions, and the early church's understanding of divine impassibility:

If i) listless depression is (in modern terms) an *absence* of emotion, and shares some characteristics with apathy (in the *modern* sense of the term as absence of

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<sup>54</sup> Modern accounts of emotion stress variously the role of emotions as motivations to action, the nature of emotions as judgements of value in the object, and the non-cognitive 'assessment' that the object of the emotion is valuable, conveyed through 'pure feeling'.

emotions), and ii) listless depression is regarded by the early Fathers as a *bad* thought that precedes sin and corresponds to vicious passions, then it would be astounding if the absence of emotions (of which listless depression is one type) were also regarded as a virtue by the early Fathers, or were predicated by them of God. Yet if we read many of the accounts of the early Fathers on *ἀπαθία* and divine impassibility given by modern theologians this is precisely the impression we get: The early Fathers, it is suggested, believed that God did not experience emotions, that God is emotionless. It is difficult to reconcile the Fathers' portrayal of listless depression as a bad thought with their insistence that God is in a state of *ἀπαθία* or *impassibilitas*, and that this is the sort of state to which the Christian, the wise man, or the true Gnostic should strive. This consideration provides us with an intimation further to the suggestions we have already made that the meaning of *ἀπαθία* is not adequately conveyed by its etymological descendent 'apathy', meaning the absence of emotion, and, similarly, that the Latin equivalent of *ἀπαθία*, *impassibilitas*, is not satisfactorily expressed by the modern understanding of the English term 'impassibility': Neither *ἀπαθία* nor *impassibilitas* ought to be understood in terms of the absence of the modern category of emotion.

All this is not to claim that there is not a strong relation between sin and the passions in early church thought. The link between them was strengthened further when Pope Gregory the Great developed Evagrius' eight bad thoughts into the seven cardinal sins. Gregory removed pride from the list as being the root of all other sins, subsumed listless depression into distress, and added envy.<sup>55</sup> In this way, the connection between passions and sin was made more concrete in Christian theology, and the intellectual context remained far more favourable to impassibilism than to the possibility of a God who experienced passions. Yet – and this is crucial – *παθή* and *passiones* are only one

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<sup>55</sup> Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 370

of many emotion category concepts in early Christian thought.<sup>56</sup> I shall turn to the question of whether and how any other sort of emotion might be regarded as possible for, or appropriate to, God, with a case study of emotion and impassibility in Augustine and Aquinas in chapter three. For the present, however, I shall continue with the discussion of the early church more generally, and shall indicate how the early Christian view of *παθή* and *passiones* relates to the impassibilist consensus.

### Passions and impassibility

First, as will have become apparent in the course of this chapter, one way in which the negative view of passions played a large part in the impassibility discussion in the early church was that passions, as imperfections in humans, are certainly inappropriate to God. This is most apparent on a moral level. John of Damascus writes that ‘God, being good, is the cause of all good, subject neither to envy nor to any passion.’<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen, for many early Fathers, passions are the ‘natural’ result of our createdness and finitude, and overwhelming or involuntary passions are associated with sin, and the propensity for overwhelming or involuntary passions is often thought to be the result of the Fall<sup>58</sup>. It is clear that God, as a perfect, absolutely good and holy being, would be unable to experience them. In addition, because one use of ‘impassibility’ is ‘faithfulness’<sup>59</sup>, God’s *ἀπαθῆια* is designed in part to emphasise that God is not fickle in his righteousness or in his love for creation. It was partially because

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<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the different types of emotion were not clearly systematised: The different emotional ‘types’ were not clearly defined in distinction from one another (in fact at times they were used as synonyms) but there are tendencies to use certain terms (such as *παθή* /*passiones*) in certain ways rather than others.

<sup>57</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition I, I* (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. ix, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 99)

<sup>58</sup> e.g. Athanasius, Evagrius, Basil. For Augustine, the uncontrollability of the passions was a punishment for the Fall.

<sup>59</sup> G.L. Prestige, *God*, p. 8

of God's moral perfection, then, that the early Fathers maintained the divine impassibility.

Related to the insistence upon God's moral perfection is the fact that the early Fathers were keen to emphasise the moral superiority and steadfastness of the Judaeo-Christian God over and against the whimsicalness of the pagan deities. Mozley notes, for example, that for Justin Martyr it was one of the winning distinctions of Christianity that 'in contrast with the earthly and unedifying experiences ascribed to the gods of Greece, it has nothing to say about God which is incompatible with Him being "unbegotten and impassible"'.<sup>60</sup> The Fathers were concerned both to distinguish God from the immorality or capriciousness of the pagan gods, and, by extension, to distance the Christian God from the anthropomorphisms that frequently result in immoral attributions to the divine beings. For example, Athenagoras explicitly denounces the poets', and particularly Homer's, attribution of immoral emotions to the gods, alongside any sexualisations of the divine being/s. He is emphatic that 'Neither anger nor desire nor yearning nor any generative seed is in God.'<sup>61</sup> Thus, while emotions and sexuality are not necessarily deemed immoral in and of themselves, the perception that they are inappropriate to God or the gods, and that attribution of them to God or the gods often results in an immoral portrayal of the divine, means that the early Christians were keen to avoid any ethically dubious anthropomorphisms.

This leads us to a further important consideration in relation to passions and impassibility. For modern theology, impassibility has become a positive statement about God not having emotions, about God being emotionless, defined in contrast to passibilism, interpreted as the idea that God does have emotions. In the early church, however, the emphasis is not upon a positive statement about God, but is the negation of an anthropomorphic attribute – it is about what God is *not* (i.e. subject to passions in a

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<sup>60</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1, 25.2, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 12

<sup>61</sup> Athenagoras, *Legatio* 21, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p 14

weak, human and potentially immoral way) rather than being about what God *is*. Arnobius, for example, attempts to avoid the often monstrous anthropomorphisms of paganism by addressing the Christian God through an appeal to the apophatic nature of our knowledge of God that borders on an extreme doctrine of divine ineffability:

Thou art infinite, unbegotten, immortal, perpetual, the only One whom no bodily form describes, no finitude of qualities limits, transcending every quantitative notion, without place, without motion, without guise, of whom nothing can be said and expressed according to the meaning of human language; we must be silent in order that Thou mayest be understood; and that conjecture may in its wandering be able to trace Thee through the shadows, nothing at all must be uttered.<sup>62</sup>

Arnobius goes on to say that we must not even attribute virtues such as courage, wisdom and intelligence provision to God; these are human merits.<sup>63</sup> When we read about divine impassibility in early Christian theology therefore, we need to bear in mind the tradition of negative theology that arose in reaction against pagan anthropomorphism, and remember that impassibilism is essentially about emphasising God's otherness through an appreciation of what God is not, rather than about saying, in positive terms, something about God's nature.

Second, the early Fathers viewed *ἀπαθῆια* and/or blissfulness as an ideal on a 'metaphysical' as well as on a specifically moral level. Because passions tend to be involuntary and to overcome reason, the experience of passions would disturb God's blessed existence and bliss. Furthermore, because emotion is often conceived of in terms of attraction or desire for something<sup>64</sup>, it suggests a lack: Something further is needed for the subject's fulfilment. A perfect and complete being would not experience passions, since a perfect being needs nothing additional for their fulfilment. Thus Clement of Alexandria writes, '... the divine nature needs nothing and is without passions, wherefore it is not rightly called self-controlled. But our nature admits of

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<sup>62</sup> Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.* I, 31; cf. 111, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p 48

<sup>63</sup> Mozley, *Impassibility*, p 48, fn 1

<sup>64</sup> This is particularly the case where all emotions are seen as types of love. See Catherine Osbourne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

passion and so needs control.’<sup>65</sup> Given that passion is thought to indicate both moral and metaphysical flaws, the early Fathers had a deep-rooted and generally unchallenged predilection towards impassibilism.

A third way in which the consensus that passions are imperfections entered the impassibility debate was through the association between passions and passivity. Because of the connection between passivity and passions, the early Fathers perceived that a God who suffered at the sin and pain of humanity would be a God partially *conditioned* by his creation: What we do would determine to some degree the quality of God’s inner life, either positively or negatively.<sup>66</sup> If this were so, then God’s autonomy and sovereignty would appear to be diminished, and the attribute of omnipotence greatly modified. For this reason, later theologians such as Thomas developed the idea that God is ‘pure act’, and some definitions of impassibility ‘stress the moral freedom of God or his insusceptibility to distraction from resolve’.<sup>67</sup> As Augustine is keen to stress, ‘no one can hurt the nature of God’.<sup>68</sup>

A fourth way in which the ancient assessment of passions entered the impassibility debate is through the early *and* modern conviction that emotions entail change and temporality. For the early church, this rendered God incapable of passions, since he was held to be immutable and eternal in the sense of being outside time. As Bauckham writes: ‘Suffering is connected with time, change and matter, which are features of this material world of becoming. But God is eternal in the sense of atemporal.... He is absolute, fully actualized perfection, and therefore simply is eternally what he is.’<sup>69</sup> Given that timelessness and changelessness would prohibit God from

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<sup>65</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7. 11 – 14, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 57

<sup>66</sup> cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Suffering Love’, In *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. TV Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 196 - 237

<sup>67</sup> Sarot, ‘Patripassianism’, p. 365

<sup>68</sup> *De nat. bon. Cont. Manich.* 1, 40, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 109

<sup>69</sup> Bauckham, ‘Only a Suffering God’, p. 7. In relation to Bauckham’s assertion that emotions were associated with the corporeal/material world, while there is much of this in Aquinas which is drawn upon by Sarot, I have not found much of it in the early Fathers. Indeed, Augustine asserts that the devil is

experiencing passions, one may ask why the early church unanimously predicated of God the twin attributes of eternity and immutability, since it is in modifying these attributes that modern theologians have been able to consider and develop the possibility of divine passibility. The answer to this puzzle lies in the early widespread acceptance of the Platonic contention that change implies imperfection. For the early Fathers it seemed obvious that if something changes, it must change either for the better or the worse. But if God changes for the better, he cannot have been perfect in the first place. But God, it is thought, is a perfect being. Therefore, 'If he change at all he can only change for the worse, for we cannot suppose him to be deficient either in virtue or beauty...'<sup>70</sup> However, if God is vulnerable to deterioration, then he is less perfect than if he is invulnerable to deterioration. Therefore a perfect being would be unchanging, and so the early church believed God to be immutable and eternal, and thus prohibited passions from the divine nature.

A fifth way in which ancient attitudes towards passions affected the early discussion of impassibility is through the idea that, as we have seen Augustine explicitly state, passions are inherently irrational. We have only to recall the status of reason in ancient philosophy – in Aristotle and Plato as well as the Stoics – and the significance of the identification of the Second Person of the Trinity with the divine *Logos*, to realise how unthinkable it would be for most early Fathers to attribute passions to God.<sup>71</sup> For example, Plato's analogy of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* to explain the three-part division of the human psyche shows how the appetites and passions (represented by the ignobly-bred ugly black horse) should be under the control of the charioteer (the rational, intellectual part of the human being [*νοῦς*]). Aristotle also betrays a preference

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incorporeal, and yet that he experiences the passions of jealousy, pride, hatred, and anger, thus implying that passions are not intrinsically corporeal.

<sup>70</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato*, tr. B. Jowett (New York, Random House, 1937), 1, 645

<sup>71</sup> Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 45

for 'the active intellect' (*νοῦς ποιητικός*) as the only divine, immaterial and impassible element of humanity.<sup>72</sup>

One reason for the *development* (rather than initial acceptance) of the theology of divine impassibility in the early church is that the paradox of the Impassible God suffering in the Person of Jesus is seen by the Fathers as a paradigm of the extraordinary fact of the incarnation and of the love God showed the world by becoming human. In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius writes: 'Await Him that is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, the Impassible, who suffered for our sake, who endured in all ways for our sake.'<sup>73</sup> Again, the paradox of the incarnation is emphasised through a series of juxtaposed antitheses in Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians: 'There is only one physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.'<sup>74</sup> Here one might also cite Irenaeus in his development of the theology of deification<sup>75</sup> in the context of his efforts to refute the Gnostic belief that Jesus did not really suffer:

...in every respect, too, He is man, the formation of God; and thus He took up man into Himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in Himself: so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and... He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time.<sup>76</sup>

For Irenaeus as well as for Ignatius, the notion that the Impassible suffered in Jesus is at the root of the incarnation. While passibilism is the default position of Christian theologians today, for the early Fathers the idea that God was 'already' passible, and, in

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<sup>72</sup> cf. Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Frank Thilly (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 128f

<sup>73</sup> Ignatius, 'Epistle to S. Polycarp', 3, trans. by J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1891), p. 87

<sup>74</sup> Ignatius, 'Epistle to the Ephesians', 7, trans. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 65

<sup>75</sup> Compare Gregory of Nazianzus: 'by the sufferings of Him Who could not suffer, we were taken up and saved' (*Theological Oration* IV.5, cited in O'Keefe, 'Impassible Suffering?', p. 359)

<sup>76</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 16.6 (Roberts-Donaldson English translation, available online at <http://www.intratext.com/X/ENG0307.HTM> and <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/irenaeus.html>, accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008)

particular, that God was 'already' susceptible to suffering, would render the incarnation less remarkable, for it would imply to them that God 'sacrificed' less when he became human.

### Different understandings of divine impassibility in the early church

While impassibility was thus in many ways a foregone conclusion in the early church, the way in which it was cashed out by the early Fathers is strikingly diverse, and there is some early theology that both anticipates modern passibilism and may be able to contribute insights to it. For example, Theophilus of Antioch ascribes anger and mercy to God in his relationship with humanity. Interestingly, Theophilus juxtaposes an affirmation of certain emotions of God with an insistence upon God's immutability. Of God's relation to humanity he writes that God 'is angry with the evil-doers, but good and kind and merciful towards them who love and fear Him.'<sup>77</sup> However, immediately afterwards he says that God is 'unchangeable, inasmuch as He is immortal.'<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, as Mozley suggests, Theophilus understands God's immutability as his impunity to forces outside himself, and the essential constancy of his nature.<sup>79</sup>

Origen and Lactantius both suggest divine passibility of a sort. Following his teacher Arnobius, Lactantius emphasises God's impassibility and freedom from external control as an aspect of God's transcendence of human conceptions and human language.<sup>80</sup> However, somewhat at odds with Arnobius' apophatic method, Lactantius also writes a particular treatise on divine anger, in which he argues against those

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<sup>77</sup> Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 1.3.4, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 14

<sup>78</sup> Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 1.3.4, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 14

<sup>79</sup> Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 14

<sup>80</sup> Lactantius, *epitome inst. Divin.* 3, cf. Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 48 - 49

(especially among the Epicureans<sup>81</sup>) who suggest ‘that God is moved by no feeling’<sup>82</sup> and, in particular, those who deny that God does experiences anger. Lactantius suggests that to deny feeling of God is to deny existence, because movement is characteristic of everything that has life. Moreover, God’s blessedness requires feeling, for without it he is in a state of torpor, without either rest or motion, deaf to prayer and blind to those who worship him. Absolute rest, he argues, is in death alone, and so cannot be attributed to God. Some emotions, such as fear and lust and envy, have no ‘material’ (*materia*) for their existence in God, because there is nothing for God to be fearful, or lustful, or envious towards. However, other emotions are appropriate to God: ‘Graciousness and anger and pity have material for their existence in God, and rightly does that supreme and unique Power use them for the preservation of things made.’<sup>83</sup> God experiences pity in observing human afflictions, graciousness in relation to human prayers, offerings and good works, and anger with respect to unrighteousness and neglect of God. When God is angry he is always righteously angry, but that righteous anger is possible is shown by the fact that there are some things it would be wrong for human beings not to be angry about; unlike Arnobius, Lactantius argues by analogy from human emotion to divine. Lactantius is critical of the Stoics, who, he suggests, are erroneous in condemning all anger, failing to distinguish between anger that is just and anger that is not. God’s anger is defined as the ‘movement of the mind as it rises up to check sins’.<sup>84</sup> Notably, Lactantius regards God’s anger as voluntary and according to God’s will: ‘He is not ruled by it, but Himself restrains it just as He pleases’.<sup>85</sup> Thus, although emotions, particularly those describable as passions, have a reputation for being uncontrollable

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<sup>81</sup> Lactantius takes as his antagonist Epicurus, who claims that ‘if in God there is a feeling of happiness issuing in graciousness, and of hate issuing in anger, He must also be the subject of fear, and lust and all the other feelings that belong to human weakness’.

<sup>82</sup> Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 2, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 49

<sup>83</sup> Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 15, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 50

<sup>84</sup> Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 17, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 51

<sup>85</sup> Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 21, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 51

and involuntary, these attributes are not essential to feeling, and it is perfectly possible for God to experience feeling without becoming subject to external forces.

Origen asserts passibilism in two passages, but in the second he qualifies it by saying that when *παθή* are ascribed to God in Scripture, they are to be interpreted allegorically. It seems that Origen is torn between making the relationship between God and humanity ‘personal’, and between his ‘negative’ view of *παθή* and his Platonic metaphysic according to which perfection prohibits change.<sup>86</sup>

While Clement (following Plato) believed that the divine impassibility entailed invulnerability to forces outside *or inside* God’s control,<sup>87</sup> other early theologians hazarded that impassibility might entail *involuntary* susceptibility to passions alone. Alongside modern theologians, some of the Fathers perceived that the understanding of impassibility as an invulnerability to forces outside one’s control might leave open the possibility that God could *choose* to suffer, that God could be vulnerable to forces *within* his control. In particular, Gregory Thaumaturgos was keen to explore this idea. Both Gregory’s conclusions and his line of reasoning are exciting, for they demonstrate one possible reconciliation between passibilist and impassibilist concerns, because Gregory shows the amount that some ancient impassibilism and some modern passibilism share, and because he points out aspects and implications of passibilist theology that are, I suggest, sometimes overlooked by modern passibilists.

Gregory, in common with many modern theologians, takes as his primary concern the question of whether God can suffer. In Gregory’s treatise,<sup>88</sup> the enquirer, Theopompus, poses the problem of excluding voluntary suffering from God: ‘If by nature God is impassible, it follows that He can never suffer, even though He should

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<sup>86</sup> *cf. In Ezech. Hom. vi, 6; In Num. Hom. xxviii; Mozley, Impassibility, p. 61 – 62.*

<sup>87</sup> Sarot, ‘Patipassianism’, pp. 135 – 75

<sup>88</sup> Printed in Cardinal Pitra’s *Sacra Analecta*, iv, pp. 103 – 20, 363 – 76, outlined in Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 63 - 72

will (to suffer), since His nature would then be doing what is contrary to His will.<sup>89</sup>

Thus we have a tension between two types of freedom: Does God's freedom from passions prohibit God's freedom to experience what he wills? Gregory replies that there can be no such subjection of God to necessity

by opposing His nature to His will. For if God does not do what He wills, it certainly follows that very great suffering befalls Him, since we should have to say that the will of God was subjected to His nature... we must understand that God is never prevented by His almighty nature from doing what He wills, since it befits us to say that God is superior to everything, and to nothing is He in subjection... it is impious to take away freedom from almighty God.<sup>90</sup>

Theopompus presses the question further, restating it in terms of whether the nature, or the will, of God is greater. If the will of God is more powerful then God would be able to suffer, despite his impassible nature, while if his nature is greater, he would be prevented from suffering, despite his will to do so. Gregory replies to Theopompus with recourse to the divine simplicity: While humans can experience a conflict between their will and their nature, in the case of God

we do not separate the will of the Godhead from that most blessed essence, which always is as it is, remaining one and the same, in one form, in one being, in one unchangeable will; which learns of itself, gives orders to itself, and itself, of itself and in itself and through itself, is able to do all things, without the will being at any point prevented by the impassible nature from effecting what it wills, since at every time it is as it is.<sup>91</sup>

For Gregory, Theopompus' question is meaningless in the case of God since it misses the point of the divine nature. Theopompus, while agreeing that God is simple and not composite, argues that Gregory's response does not get to the heart of the matter. He patiently rephrases the question again: Could God ever have chosen to undergo human suffering, given that by nature he is impassible?<sup>92</sup> Gregory replies that God can indeed choose to suffer, but, because this suffering is in accordance with God's will and because it is carried out for the good of humanity in overcoming human suffering, it is not experienced as suffering, but as triumph. Thus, 'in His suffering He shows His

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<sup>89</sup> Cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 64

<sup>90</sup> Cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 64

<sup>91</sup> Cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 65

<sup>92</sup> Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 66

impassibility.<sup>93</sup> Of God's own will, he has shared in our sufferings - but he is not subjected to them, nor do they in any way harm him.

Gregory's treatise is important to our discussion both of the ancient impassibilist consensus and of modern passibilism. Gregory anticipates much modern theology in suggesting that God might *choose* to suffer. Furthermore, in contrast to most of the early church, but in common with modern theology, Gregory recognises that voluntary suffering might be a 'contribution' to rather than a diminishment of God's perfection. However, Gregory also perceives that if suffering is *chosen* and is given meaning and purpose, it is in many ways not suffering as most humans experience it, and loses its essential nature. I shall return to this point in chapter five; for the moment it is enough to observe that this essential insight is often not adequately recognised by some modern passibilists who argue that God chooses to suffer, and so Gregory's treatise provides us with an obstacle or potential corrective (depending upon how it is developed) to one very popular formation of the passibilist thesis. In addition, Gregory's treatise is remarkable, for (along with Lactantius, Origen and Theophilus) it demonstrates the degree of variation within the early impassibilist consensus and the subtlety of some of the theses put forward, indicates that some forms of ancient impassibilism and some forms of modern passibilism might have a lot of common ground, and suggests one possible reconciliation between passibilism and impassibilism.

In this chapter I have looked at the early impassibilist consensus through the lens of ancient philosophy of emotion. By approaching the theological question in this way I hope to have highlighted some of the important questions in the philosophy of emotion (ancient and modern) and indicated how these questions about emotions might be significant to the impassibility debate. The method of looking at the impassibility debate in relation to the philosophy of emotion will recur throughout the thesis, in

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<sup>93</sup> Cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 66

which it will be argued that a more subtle view of the emotions than is often posited in relation to the impassibility debate would inform the debate and provide options for emotional experience in God that transcend the passibilist/impassibilist division as traditionally construed. In this chapter I have sought to facilitate some sympathy with the early emphasis upon divine impassibility, for example through an appreciation of the Fathers' attempts to avoid anthropomorphism through an appeal to apophatic theology. I have also aimed to show the variety of different types of impassibilism in early Christian theology, and to highlight certain insights that will allow us to evaluate and critique modern theological thought in later chapters. Perhaps most importantly for the purpose of the thesis, I have indicated that while the impassibilism of the Fathers was concerned primarily with the denial of *passiones* or *παθή* in God, these were not the only category concept of (what we would call) emotional experiences possible, so that in denying passions of God the Fathers were not necessarily arguing that God must be free from all emotion, though this is the position of some of the Fathers. I shall return to the question of what other emotional experiences exist, and whether these might be attributable to God, in chapter three, through a discussion of emotion in the thought of Augustine and Aquinas. In the next chapter, however, I want to turn to the rise of passibilism in modern theology, with a discussion of how passibilist theology has been shaped and informed in part by the modern concept of emotion.

## Chapter Two: Contemporary Perspectives on Divine Passibility

### Introduction

Contemporary overviews of the impassibilism debate suggest that the impassibilist consensus remained almost entirely unchallenged until the turn of the twentieth century, from which point *passibilism* increasingly became the predominant position.<sup>94</sup> As the Thomist impassibilist Thomas G. Weinandy puts it, 'Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, there has been a growing consensus that the traditional claim, held to be axiomatic since the Fathers of the Church, of God's impassibility is no longer defensible'.<sup>95</sup> The impassibilist Ronald Goetz, reviewing the theological climate of the late twentieth century, writes that 'The age-old dogma that God is impassible and immutable, incapable of suffering, is for many no longer tenable. The ancient theopaschite heresy that God suffers has, in fact, become the new orthodoxy.'<sup>96</sup> The passibilist theologian Moltmann asserts that 'The doctrine of the essential impassibility of the divine nature now seems finally to be disappearing from the Christian concept of God'<sup>97</sup> and the passibilist philosopher of religion Sarot argues that '...during this present century the idea that God is immutable and impassible has slowly but surely given way to the idea that God is sensitive, emotional and passionate.... By now the rejection of the ancient doctrine of divine impassibility has so much become a theological common place, that many theologians do not even feel the need to argue for it.'<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000) p. 1 - 2

<sup>95</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* p. 1

<sup>96</sup> Ronald Goetz, 'The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy', in *Christian Century* April 16, 1986, p. 385 - 392, available at

<http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:ayUJ8UHmFK8J:www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp%3Ftitle%3D1033+Ronald+Goetz+%22The+Suffering+God%22&hl=en&ct=c&cd=1&gl=uk> (accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2008)

<sup>97</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM, 1991), xvi

<sup>98</sup> Marcel Sarot, 'Suffering of Christ, Suffering of God?', *Theology* 95 (1992), p. 113

## Reasons for the rise of the passibilist consensus

Given the apparently sudden and unprecedented nature of the rise of passibilism in the twentieth century, the purpose of this chapter will be to try to ascertain the factors lying behind this shift. Why is passibilism the obvious choice for theologians in the twentieth century, when impassibilism was virtually uncontested among theologians before this time? Ronald Goetz suggests four cultural and intellectual features of the twentieth-century that may have occasioned the rise of passibilism: i) the decline of Christendom ii) the rise of democratic aspirations iii) the problem of suffering and evil iv) the critical reappraisal of the Bible.<sup>99</sup>

The first cultural factor Goetz pinpoints as responsible for the rise of passibilism in the twentieth century is the decline of Christendom. The most extreme form of passibilism (which Goetz, ostensibly in line with his fidelity to the impassibilism of the early church, terms theopaschitism) is Christian atheism: The idea that God has not only suffered, but that 'God has suffered - terminally'.<sup>100</sup> More generally, the demise of Christian triumphalism (from Augustine's theocratic vision that the Church as the earthly City of God would come to rule the world, to the liberal hope that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth through persuasive evangelism) and the perception that the world is getting worse rather than better, has initiated the view that, in Bonhoeffer's words, 'God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross'.<sup>101</sup> Even though most Christians do not subscribe to the view that God is dead, the belief that God is providentially working through history in order to realise the Kingdom is now no longer regarded by most Christians as plausible; as Goetz puts it, 'The actual redemptive presence of God in the world is discerned less in God's taking the sovereign

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<sup>99</sup> Goetz, 'The Suffering God', p. 386

<sup>100</sup> Goetz, 'The Suffering God', p. 386

<sup>101</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, ed. E. Bethge, trans. R. Fuller *et al* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p 360

lead in events and more in God's picking up the pieces after history has misfired'.<sup>102</sup> Goetz does not spell out precisely how this shift in Christian belief might help to bring about passibilism, but we might conjecture that if God is no longer believed to bring about a better world, then the primary role left for him is suffering with the world.

The second factor accounting for the rise of passibilism, according to Goetz, is the rise of democratic aspirations. The rise of democracy in much of the developed world and the hope of democracy in parts of the undeveloped world means that the portrayal of God as immutable and impassible is deemed as tyrannical and irrelevant to liberated human beings, and so is debunked in favour of a more people-friendly deity:

These democratic aspirations have contributed to the problem of belief in an impassible, immutable God. For if God is conceived of as an unmoved mover -- the unaffected source of the world -- he is irrelevant to what free men and women do in the world. And if God's impassibility is interpreted as being emblematic of an imperious rule that is finally indifferent to the effect it has on the opinion of the governed -- as in, for example, the classical doctrine of predestination -- God appears as a tyrant who must be resisted in the name of human freedom.<sup>103</sup>

Perhaps inevitably, then, the popular demand for accessible, democratically-chosen leaders who live in similar situations to the rest of the populous has in turn led to the expectation of a similarly immanent God who is not above the sufferings of his creation.

The third factor accounting for the rise of passibilism is the problem of suffering and evil, which is not only by far the greatest and most widely accepted of the factors is the problem of suffering and evil, but is also frequently used by passibilists as an argument in favour of their position. The Darwinian revelation that pain is built into the biological world through the survival of the fittest and natural selection, and that this pain has taken place over an enormous period of time, made the idea of a God who allows our suffering without experiencing suffering himself unbearable to many Christians. The futility and brutalities of the First World War increased this feeling; as Goetz puts it, 'How could God be love and not lay wounded on the battlefields of

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<sup>102</sup> Goetz, 'The Suffering God', p. 387

<sup>103</sup> Goetz, 'The Suffering God', p. 387

France? Only a God who suffered with the victims of the war could speak to the disillusionments created by the war'.<sup>104</sup> In 1928 Brasnett remarked, 'Men feel, and perhaps will feel increasingly, that a God who is not passible, who is exempt from pain and suffering, is a God of little value to a suffering humanity.'<sup>105</sup> This statement has proved to be prophetic in the light of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, the former of which has acquired almost emblematic status in some passibilist thought.<sup>106</sup>

The fourth factor for the rise of twentieth century passibilism given by Goetz is the scholarly reappraisal of the Bible. The increasing perception of the distinction between biblical, Hebraic thought on the one hand, and philosophical, Hellenistic thought on the other, led to an awareness of the imposition of Hellenistic conceptions of God as characterised by immutability, aseity and impassibility onto the biblical texts. The result of this modern awareness was that biblical scholars felt themselves able to divest themselves of the Hellenistic presuppositions and to recognise the passionate and passible God of the Bible. Furthermore, the move away from the deism of nineteenth century liberalism meant that theologians in the twentieth century were concerned to depict God as personally involved in the world.

In addition to the four factors outlined by Goetz, in a previous article I suggested that the rise of passibilism was also occasioned in part by the diminution of the cult of saints in much western Christian devotion after the Reformation.<sup>107</sup> The cult of the saints and devotion to the sufferings of the earthly Jesus in the early church and middle ages provided religious believers with transcendent figures who understood not only suffering in general but also (as in the case of saints whose lives meant that they were the patrons of those suffering particular misfortunes) the specific sufferings of the

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<sup>104</sup> Goetz, 'The Suffering God', p. 388

<sup>105</sup> B.R. Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (London: SPCK 1928), ix

<sup>106</sup> See especially Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, for whom the horrors of Auschwitz are seen as radical and ground-breaking in terms of the existence of evil.

<sup>107</sup> Anastasia Foyle, 'Human and Divine Suffering,' *Ars Disputandi* [<http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>] 5 (2005), accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008

adorant in question. When the practice of devotions to the saints began to die out, a need was created for a different transcendent 'fellow sufferer who understands'<sup>108</sup>, a need which was gradually fulfilled by the idea of a suffering God. This is supported by the fact that those parts of western Christianity that still practice a high degree of devotion to the saints are less likely to be passibilist, while those, typically Reformed, aspects of western Christianity for whom the saints are no longer an active part of devotional practice have the strongest elements of passibilist theology. This suggestion is fairly speculative, and more controversial than Goetz's four cultural factors, but perhaps the diminution of devotion to the saints and to the particular sufferings of the incarnate Christ may be a further factor accounting for the rise of passibilism in modern theology and religious belief.

#### Is twentieth century theology 'passibilist'?

In addition to recognising the cultural factors behind the rise of passibilism in the twentieth century, it is also worth noting that the portrayal of Christian theology as ubiquitously impassibilist before the twentieth century and unanimously passibilist thereafter is oversimplified and even misleading. This is for several reasons. First and most obviously, there are exceptions to passibilism in the twentieth century and, as we saw in chapter one, there were exceptions to impassibilism (when conceived as the idea that God cannot have emotions) in the early church. Second, many theologians who are typically characterised as passibilist in fact inhabit a middle-ground or argue for a more complicated and qualified view of passibilism than initially appears to be the case. This is even true not only of mainstream Christian theologians such as Moltmann, Fiddes and Barth, but also of less conventional theology such as the Process Theology of

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<sup>108</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929, repr. 1967), p. 532

Hartshorne. It is not possible to do justice to the subtleties of twentieth century passibilism and impassibilism in this chapter, but I shall outline a few of the ways in which the passibilist revolution of the twentieth century is not as clear-cut as first appears to be the case.

To begin with, there are significant twentieth century dissenters to passibilism, including R.E. Creel<sup>109</sup> and Paul Helm<sup>110</sup> and, more recently, Weinandy<sup>111</sup> and Cook.<sup>112</sup> The impassibilist literature encompasses a wide range of different positions, from the Calvinism of Helm to the Thomism of Weinandy, but a few shared concerns may be noted here as common to most kinds of twentieth century impassibilism.

First, impassibilism is either seen as an aspect of immutability or as entailed by immutability. One argument for this, rooted in the idea of divine eternity (the idea that God is outside time rather than within it), is very clearly expounded by Helm. Impassibility is entailed by immutability which is entailed by eternity. From a Thomist perspective, Weinandy deduces divine impassibility from the fact that God is pure *esse* and pure act and thus immutable. God must be perfect, for a thing is perfect to the extent that it is actualised and, being pure being, God is perfection itself. Therefore God must be immutable: 'Because God is pure act it is impossible for him to acquire more perfection through some change which would make him more actual.'<sup>113</sup> In addition, creation requires an immutably pure act, so God's immutability is the *sine qua non* for creating.<sup>114</sup> This immutability is not opposed to God's vitality and dynamism; in fact, the reason that God is immutable is precisely that God is fully in act. God is

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<sup>109</sup> R.E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

<sup>110</sup> Paul Helm, 'On the Impossibility of Divine Passibility', in Cameron NM de (ed.), *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989) Series: Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology

<sup>111</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*

<sup>112</sup> Robin Cook, 'Impassibility'

<sup>113</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 123

<sup>114</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 132 – 134

impassible precisely because (as pure act) God is supremely passionate and loving and cannot change to become any more passionate and loving.<sup>115</sup>

Second, and closely related to the first point, an impassible God is utterly reliable and more able to help sufferers than a non-suffering God. This view is expressed by Weinandy when he writes that 'A God who does not suffer is more loving, compassionate, and merciful than a God who does.'<sup>116</sup> In some situations, Weinandy argues, the human susceptibility to suffering actually hinders the lover's love of the beloved:

In many situations it is precisely sin and the prospect of suffering that hinders the full development and expression of love. A person may desire, on one level, to love someone wholly and entirely, but be incapable of doing so because of the sinfulness which resides within his/her own person causing fear of the sacrifices required of such love. Selfishness, pride, etc. hinder the full growth and expression of love.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore it is not only the case (*contra* some passibilists) that suffering is essential to love (or essential to love where the beloved is suffering or is failing to live up to their full potential through sin); it may also be the case that the prospect of suffering is one that hinders love. An impassible God, therefore, is more free to love than a passible God who may fear the suffering that love would cause him. Helm agrees that the susceptibility to suffering and change are likely to impede God's love and helpfulness, such that only an immutable and impassible God can be known to be completely reliable: 'A God who was subject to change from some external force or agency could not console his people in this unconditioned manner.'<sup>118</sup>

A further argument, or set of arguments, for the way in which a suffering God may be less helpful to sufferers than an impassible God is discussed by Creel. Creel begins by arguing that the comfort that sufferers derive from God is based on the fact

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<sup>115</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 127

<sup>116</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 159

<sup>117</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 160 fn 25

<sup>118</sup> Helm, 'Impossibility', p. 139

that God does not share our pain<sup>119</sup> and that all will be well in the end.<sup>120</sup> For example, if a small child bursts into tears over some insubstantial fright, a mother may be more helpful if she dashes towards him with a big smile on her face in order to reassure him that there is no danger, than if she were also to burst into tears through empathy with him.<sup>121</sup> When we need to be saved from suffering, 'it is help that we want, not fellow-suffering'.<sup>122</sup> In an emergency situation we would feel more admiration for someone who helped the victim without being negatively affected by his suffering than for someone who helped the victim but was emotionally traumatised by his plight: 'I would admire someone all the more for not only being a good samaritan, but also for being able to avoid emotional disturbance in an emergency situation.'<sup>123</sup> All the benefits of divine grace can be enjoyed without necessitating God's suffering.<sup>124</sup> God's bliss in the face of our suffering is not a sign of his aloof indifference, but a sign that ultimately all is well because everything that happens is within the parameters of God's wisdom, power and goodness.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to this line of reasoning, Creel notes a further argument sometimes used by impassibilists, though he himself is critical of it. Some impassibilists, Creel notes, observe that the experienced doctor who is inured to the traumas of the hospital emergency room is more helpful than the new intern who is traumatised by what he sees there and that, similarly, the experienced counsellor is able to get to the root of the patient's feelings and to help them work through them without getting personally involved in them, while the inexperienced counsellor may become too upset by what he hears to be any use to the patient. From this, some impassibilists argue that God would be more able to help sufferers if God, like the experienced doctor and the counsellor,

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<sup>119</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p 119

<sup>120</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 156 – 157

<sup>121</sup> See Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 119

<sup>122</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 155

<sup>123</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 155

<sup>124</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 156

<sup>125</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 156 - 157

were able to remain personally uninvolved in the situation and so avoid being traumatised by it.

Third, passibilism, conceived as the susceptibility to emotions, is often seen to be at variance with God's wisdom and omniscience, because emotions are regarded as frequently if not essentially irrational and deceptive. Helm expresses this view when he writes that God cannot have emotions because emotions are incompatible with God's rationality and wisdom. He continues that 'To act upon emotion or passion is to act when the judgment is in abeyance. Emotion clouds the judgment, or functions in place of the judgment.'<sup>126</sup>

Fourth, it is claimed that God cannot be passible because God is omnipotent and emotions are something that affect us and are outside our control. Passibilism, for Weinandy, is not an option, since 'suffering normally implies that some event outside of God has caused him to suffer.'<sup>127</sup> Cook provides an in-depth account of the ways in which emotions are, and are not, beyond the control of the subject, and makes three core claims: While emotions are not essentially overpowering, certain types of emotion can be overpowering; the actual subjective experience of an emotion is beyond the subject's immediate control; throughout the duration of an emotion, the subject's attention is more or less preoccupied with the emotion's object, and this preoccupation is not entirely something over which the subject has much control. This, claims Cook, means that God cannot have emotions, for emotions – at least as subjectively experienced – are beyond our immediate control, and so experiencing emotions would negate God's omnipotence. Cook discusses the claim of some passibilists that God's emotions are always freely chosen and never beyond God's control, but concludes that this would mean that the experiences God has could not really be emotions, since emotions (at least as humanly experienced) 'cannot be had at will or stopped at will. They are independent

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<sup>126</sup> Helm, 'Impossibility', p. 131

<sup>127</sup> Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 168

of being directly controlled by our will. If emotions are things He brings about Himself, a divine emotion is a very different thing from a human emotion. A fundamental characteristic of human emotion is missing from divine emotion – namely the fact that human emotions always involve passivity in the subject.<sup>128</sup> God cannot have emotions for nothing can happen to God that is outside God's control, and if emotions are within God's control, then they are not emotions as humans experience them.

I shall discuss the latter two of these impassibilist claims through the lens of contemporary philosophy of emotion later on in the thesis; for the present, it is sufficient to note that while twentieth century theology has often been characterised as ubiquitously passibilist, in fact there is a significant and important impassibilist strand in twentieth century theology and philosophy of religion that should not be overlooked.

In addition to these important exceptions to the 'passibilist revolution', it should also be noted that most passibilists in the twentieth century do not posit an unqualified passibilism, but tend to inhabit a middle ground that holds in tension the fullness of the divine emotional life, and, in particular, God's suffering, on the one hand, and the omnipotence and freedom of God on the other. This is true not only of 'mainstream' theologians such as Barth and Moltmann, but also of more controversial theologians such as Whitehead and Hartshorne. In what follows I shall look briefly at the passibilism of Barth, Hartshorne and Moltmann, and shall suggest that there is less of a separation between the impassibilism of some of the early church, and the passibilism of twentieth century theology, than seems to be the case from overviews of twentieth century theology that have posited a passibilist revolution.

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<sup>128</sup> Cook, *Impassibility*, p. 85

## Karl Barth

In some ways, Barth may seem to be an odd person to begin with in a discussion of modern divine possibility from the point of view of philosophical theology, since, on the face of it, Barth exemplifies a more biblical than philosophical approach to the subject, rejecting natural theology and all *a priori* reasoning about God as imposing human standards upon a Being who is radically other. However, because of his emphasis on revelation as the basis of all theological epistemology and God-talk, Barth's biblical theology is also his philosophy of religion. Because God speaks the truth about himself and because he has chosen to be 'for us', we can move from the revelation of God, the economic Trinity or 'God for us', to speaking of the divine essence, the immanent Trinity or 'God in Himself'. The idea of 'God for us', in contrast to God in himself, is not simply about how we experience God (as would be the case with the distinction between God's phenomenon and God's noumenon), but something of God that is nevertheless only to do with his relation to us, and not with his essence as such. Despite seeing a deductive link from one to the other, Barth argues that 'God for us' and 'God in Himself' are not identical: God's essence *corresponds* to his self-revelation, such that there is an 'analogy of relations' between how God makes himself known in the world and how he is in himself. Thus Barth offers a firm epistemological foundation for speaking of and knowing the divine essence, while recognising the limitations of human categories and concepts.

The correspondence between 'God for us' and 'God in the world' is often expressed not simply in terms of 'what can be attributed to God in Christ is also attributable to God in Himself'. Rather, God in Christ redefines the way that we should understand God, and, consequently, divine attributes are often expressed in terms of

paradox. As Paul Fiddes paraphrases Barth, 'the omnipresence of God in himself is exercised by his being able to dwell in one particular place in the world; his eternity, as his own history, enables him to enter our time; his omnipotence is displayed by his triumph within weakness.'<sup>129</sup> The epistemological relation between God in Christ and God in himself leads Barth not to predicate contradictory attributes of God, but to assert that God's omnipresence, eternity and omnipotence are, paradoxically, expressed most perfectly in the weakness, and the spatial and temporal particularity, of Christ.

How does Barth deal with divine impassibility in the light of the passion of Christ? It seems logically impossible to reconcile impassibility and divine suffering, even along paradoxical lines, as with omnipresence, eternity and omnipotence. Impassibility, as the straightforward negation of passibility, cannot be made logically compatible with it, just as one could not simultaneously be a spatula and not a spatula. Barth attempts to resolve this problem by appealing to the non-identity of God for us and God in himself. The suffering of the Trinity in the Christ-event is, he argues, not an analogy of the suffering of God in himself, but rather a reflection of the obedience of the Son to the Father within the impassible immanent Trinity. The suffering of God is confined to the suffering of the Trinity in the Christ-event, and does not affect the divine essence.<sup>130</sup>

The context out of which Barth's denial of the suffering of God in Godself emerges is Barth's concern that God is self-sufficient and is 'the One who loves in freedom'. God could have remained self-sufficient and impassible – it was choice and not necessity that led God to make himself vulnerable in the Person of Christ. God chose the way of the incarnation and the cross, but 'He could have remained satisfied

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<sup>129</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 121; cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936 – 77), esp. IV/I, pp. 187 - 8

<sup>130</sup> See Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 121. M. Steen disagrees with this interpretation of Barth (see M. Steen, 'Moltmann's Critical Reception of Barth's Theopaschitism' in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 67 (4), 1991, 278 – 311 esp. p. 284 - 5)

with Himself and with the impassible glory and blessedness of His own inner life.<sup>131</sup> God could become passible because He is not a prisoner of his own omnipotence.<sup>132</sup> It is precisely because he is omnipotent that God is able to ‘become small’ and to humiliate himself to suffering and judgement. Here again we have paradox, though very differently conceived: ‘He is absolute, infinite, exalted, active, impassible, transcendent, but in all this He is the One who loves in freedom, the One who is free in His love, and therefore not His own prisoner. He is all this as the Lord, and in such a way that He embraces the opposites of these concepts even while He is superior to them.’<sup>133</sup> Because he is free, God takes on attributes wholly inappropriate to the divine being, yet at the same time is able to remain fully God and to ‘rise above’ them. For Barth, divine suffering is always understood in terms of ‘actio’ as well as ‘passio’; God’s self-subjection to suffering is never a surrender of divinity or sovereignty.<sup>134</sup> In contrast to the cases of eternity, omnipotence and omniscience, the Christ-event does not re-define our understanding of impassibility in relation to God: Rather, God is able to suffer in relation to the world, while remaining completely impassible in himself. This view is a subtle variation upon the paradox of Cyril of Alexandria that the Impassible suffers,<sup>135</sup> which relates only to the person of the incarnate Christ, and asserts that God as man suffers while in his divinity Christ remains impassible. For Barth, God takes on suffering and yet remains impassible, and yet this is not simply the suffering of Christ but the suffering of the whole Trinity in relation to the world. In contrast to some early assertions about divine impassibility, the incarnation is not necessary to facilitate divine suffering, since God is free to choose suffering for himself – and yet it is, as in earlier theology, wholly inappropriate to God and excluded from his essential nature.

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<sup>131</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 166; cf. IV/2, p. 345 – 6; IV/1, p. 79

<sup>132</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 214

<sup>133</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 187; cf. II/1, p. 313

<sup>134</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1 p. 202

<sup>135</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation Against Nestorius*, 4

At the end of the day, as Fiddes argues, this means that there is a disparity, a non-correspondence, between God as revealed and God in himself, and so an inconsistency between the way we experience God and the way God really is. In dealing with divine impassibility in the way he does, Barth drives a wedge between God as he is experienced by creation, and God as he actually is, that belittles Christ's revelation of God. What is most interesting about Barth in the context of our current discussion, however, is that Barth asserts God's suffering while attempting to maintain God's self-sufficiency and transcendence over suffering. Barth's passibilism, therefore, is not an unqualified passibilism, but like the impassibilism of Gregory Thaumaturgos and Lactantius and other early theologians, inhabits a middle ground in which divine suffering is held in tension with God's impassibility in the sense of insusceptibility to forces outside God's control. In Barth's case at least, therefore, twentieth century passibilism is not unqualified or clear-cut, but in fact upholds many of the divine attributes defended by theologians in the early church.

#### Process Theology: Charles Hartshorne

Process Theology, as represented by Whitehead and Hartshorne, is often perceived to affirm an unqualified divine passibilism too radical for most mainstream conservative and liberal theologians alike. For Process Theology, at least according to the general perception, God is the absolutely related, the absolutely passive, and the One Who is utterly vulnerable to the world. Goetz, for example, remarks that 'What is unique to the Whiteheadian version of the limited deity is its departure from the classical Western view that God cannot be affected by the pain of an imperfect world. Indeed, as a seal of God's goodness and love, God is, in Whitehead's lovely phrase, "the fellow-sufferer

who understands.”<sup>136</sup> On a closer reading, however, it becomes apparent that this assessment, if taken without qualification, is misleading and inaccurate.

Hartshorne bases his thought about God’s nature on his metaphysic of human nature. Humans, he argues, are dipolar. On the one hand humans have an *independent* pole that remains constant throughout their lives, being ‘unformed’ by their context and ensuring that their identity is maintained throughout. On the other hand, humans also have a *relative* pole that changes with the successive states of their existence, and is affected by the context in which they live. In humans, both these poles have weak forms: in their relative poles they are only imperfectly related to others, while in their independent poles they are only partially independent of contextual changes. As Hartshorne patriotically speculates, ‘extreme changes in weather or scenery might temporarily or permanently rob even Abraham Lincoln of his moral humaneness’.<sup>137</sup>

This view of humans as dipolar is extended to God. In God’s contingent nature, or ‘concrete states’,<sup>138</sup> God is related to the world, involved with the world and suffers with it. In contrast, in God’s independent pole, his ‘abstract essence’,<sup>139</sup> God is remarkably similar to the God of Aquinas and classical theism in general: This nature of God is ‘the uncaused cause, impassible, immutable and all the rest of it.’<sup>140</sup> This abstract nature of God is, for Hartshorne,<sup>141</sup> pure possibility itself. It is the undefined potential for the definite possibilities that emerge in the interaction between the world and God in his concrete states.<sup>142</sup> This possibility – itself the abstract nature of God – is the possibility for God’s perfect relatedness to the world in his concrete state, but is itself totally independent of the world, unrelated to and unaffected by it, and so impassible.

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<sup>136</sup> Goetz, ‘The Suffering God’, p. 386

<sup>137</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958, repr. 1976), p.81

<sup>138</sup> Hartshorne’s phrase. Whitehead refers to this ‘pole’ as God’s ‘consequent nature’.

<sup>139</sup> Hartshorne’s phrase. Whitehead speaks of this as God’s ‘primordial nature’.

<sup>140</sup> Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for our Time* (Illinois: Open Court, 1967, repr. 1973), p. 44, *cf.* p. 27, and Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 134, 524

<sup>141</sup> Here Hartshorne departs from Whitehead, for whom the primordial nature involves God’s perfect and eternal vision of all possible values, which he terms ‘eternal objects’.

<sup>142</sup> *cf.* Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 125

possessing peaceful ‘indifference to relational alternatives’.<sup>143</sup> Reverting to Whitehead’s terms, Hartshorne explains the difference between the two poles by saying that ‘God as primordial is strictly eternal in the sense of being immutable and ungenerated. God as consequent is ‘fluent’, reaches no final completion, contains succession and is ever in ‘process’ of further creation.’<sup>144</sup>

In contrast to the imperfect dipolarity of humans, both God’s concrete states and abstract essence are perfect. In his concrete state God is related to all of reality perfectly, which means that he knows all and so is affected by all, since a knower is changed by the object of their knowledge.<sup>145</sup> In his abstract essence, God is totally independent of the world, and is externally rather than internally related to it: He is known by but does not know the world.<sup>146</sup> By being externally related to the world, God changes the world without being at all affected by it. Fiddes summarises this when he writes that: ‘As Supreme, then, he [God] is related to all; as Absolute he is related to nothing in particular, though since everything relates *to* him he might be said to be “related to the possible as such”, while being indifferent to particular relational alternatives.’<sup>147</sup> In his dipolarity, God is both absolutely related, vulnerable and passible, and impassible, in the broader sense of entirely unaffected by the world.

However, as Fiddes observes, in humans (from whom the analogy is drawn) the dipolarity is not complete, and it is easy to see how the two poles act in relation to one another. There is, in humans, an overlap from the related, affected side to the independent, immutable side such that no aspect of a human person remains uninvolved or unaffected. As with Barth, then, the tension between passibilism and impassibilism in Hartshorne stands or falls depending on how persuasively God’s passibilism and

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<sup>143</sup> Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, p. 81

<sup>144</sup> Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 283, cited Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 125

<sup>145</sup> Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, pp. 6 – 7, 18 - 19

<sup>146</sup> Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, p. 70

<sup>147</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 130

impassibilism can be brought together and related to one another. The bipolarity of Process Theology is interesting, for it gives us another example of the way in which the apparent passibilism of the twentieth century is not as unqualified as first appears, and suggests that the distinction between the impassibilism of the early church and the passibilism of the twentieth century may in fact be superficial in presenting extremes that do not exist in either.

### Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann's model of divine suffering is rooted in his social analogy of the Trinity, which views the Trinity not in terms of the relationships within an individual person (as in Augustine and Aquinas, which Moltmann rejects as too modalist), but as three distinct persons within a community. For Moltmann, the persons of the Trinity are 'individual, unique, non-interchangeable subjects of the one, common divine substance, with consciousness and will. Each of the Persons possesses the divine nature in a non-interchangeable way; each presents it in his own way.'<sup>148</sup> Because human beings exist not in isolation from one another but in a unity of relationships, conceiving of the Trinity as distinct persons does not entail tritheism; in the perichoresis of the Trinity there is truly one God.<sup>149</sup>

Moltmann is critical of attempts to separate the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity, holding to his principle that 'statements about the immanent Trinity must not contradict statements about the economic Trinity. Statements about the economic Trinity must correspond to doxological statements about the immanent Trinity.'<sup>150</sup> In particular, the cross reveals the inner nature of God *without qualification*.

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<sup>148</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 171

<sup>149</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 174 - 8

<sup>150</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 154

In his earlier work *The Crucified God* Moltmann had already begun to speak of the cross as the event in which all human suffering is 'taken up' into God<sup>151</sup> so that Jesus' suffering contains the entire history of humanity's suffering: 'There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God's suffering; no death which has not been God's death in the history on Golgotha'.<sup>152</sup> Thus the crucifixion seems to be both a revelation of God's suffering love and something constitutive of God's suffering love, though the relation between the constitutive and the revelatory remains ambiguous: 'He is love. His very existence is love. He constitutes himself as love. That is what happens on the cross.'<sup>153</sup> Part of the answer to the question of how the cross can be constitutive of divine suffering, despite the fact that God has suffered in love throughout human history, seems to lie in the idea that (because the Trinity is conceived of as distinct persons) the event of the cross brings about a new situation for the Trinity in which Christ's forsakenness creates a unique *breach* in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Despite the strong influence of Barth on Moltmann, Moltmann does not adopt Barth's rejection of the Lutheran idea of *Deus contra Deum*, but rather radicalises Luther's view by positing a real cleft and rupture (*Riß*) within the Trinity. On the cross, the Father and the Son are opposed to one another in *stasis* or revolt. Both suffer, but suffer differently. The Father suffers in experiencing the death of his Son. The Son suffers because he has been forsaken by the Father.<sup>154</sup> The cross therefore goes to the heart of the immanent Trinity itself. By taking human suffering and alienation into himself on Golgotha, God heals the human history of suffering by integrating it into God's dynamism. While the separation between the Father and the Son creates conflict

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<sup>151</sup> Moltmann, *Crucified God*, p. 246

<sup>152</sup> Moltmann, *Crucified God*, p. 246

<sup>153</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 82

<sup>154</sup> For a criticism of Moltmann's view as theological sadism see D. Sölle, *Gott und das Leiden*, in M. Welker (ed), *Diskussion über Jürgen Moltmanns Buch 'Der gekreuzigte Gott'* München, 1979), pp. 111 - 117

and even a rupture within the Trinity, the Holy Spirit unites the Father and the Son in their shared sacrifice for humanity's salvation. Moltmann is critical of Barth because of the gap Barth creates between God in himself and God for us, and because of the monotheistic rather than Trinitarian conception of God, which means that Barth, according to Moltmann, is insufficiently radical in attributing suffering to God.<sup>155</sup> On the face of it, then, Moltmann proposes what seems to be an absolute and radical view of the passibility of God.

In answer to the question of whether God's suffering is free or whether God is a prisoner of his own history, Moltmann argues that God's suffering is free, not in the sense that God can arbitrarily choose whether or not to suffer, but free in the sense that God's suffering comes from God's spontaneous love: The freedom of spontaneous love is a more authentic kind of freedom than the freedom of arbitrary choice, the freedom to choose to suffer or not to suffer, and it is this former type of freedom that is possessed by God. On the other hand, God is not bound by metaphysical necessity such that God, by virtue of his essence, could do nothing but suffer. Rather, God's 'need' for the world is rooted not in imperfection, but in love, and so is different from the suffering of God's creatures: It is an active passion freely taken out of love, not a passive or deficient suffering thrust upon God against his will. This suggests that while Moltmann's passibilism seems on the face of it to be radical and unqualified, because God's omnipotence and freedom are maintained there is at least one sense in which Moltmann's passibilism inhabits a middle ground and follows much earlier thought in maintaining the tension between God's suffering and God's sovereignty.

Behind Moltmann's thought on the suffering of God lies the Jewish mystical image of the redemption of the Shekinah, the dwelling of God among his people.

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<sup>155</sup> cf. Steen, 'Moltmann's Critical Reception', p. 287 - 8

According to this tradition, God not only lives with his people, but also suffers slavery with them. Moltmann quotes Franz Rosenzweig's explanation of this idea:

God himself separates himself from himself, he gives himself away to his people, he shares in their sufferings, sets forth with them into the agony of exile, joins their wanderings... Nothing would be more natural for the 'God of the Fathers' than that he should 'sell' himself for Israel and share its suffering fate. But by doing so, God puts himself in need of redemption.<sup>156</sup>

According to the mystical Shekinah tradition, God withdraws into himself in order to make room for creation. Moltmann adopts this idea, and develops it in terms of not only God's withdrawing and humiliation in creation and history, but in particular in the incarnation and on the cross. God's suffering, then, is 'God's supreme work on God himself'.<sup>157</sup> As Fiddes points out, if we examine the ways in which Moltmann describes God's passion, Moltmann seems to be speaking solely of God's own acts on God's inner passion; God 'is the source of his own suffering'.<sup>158</sup> Fiddes criticises this view, because it suggests that while God humbles himself in creation, incarnation and crucifixion by withdrawing and making room for us, God does not humble himself further by allowing us to contribute to the creative process. God remains unaffected by what we do. Because God's suffering is an action of himself upon himself, there is little humans can do to have an impact God's suffering, either positively or negatively. Consequently, 'God seems less the supreme victim than the supreme self-executioner'.<sup>159</sup>

This suggests that there are two respects in which Moltmann's passibilism adheres to some of the central characteristics of impassibilism as classically conceived. First, God's omnipotence and freedom are never compromised; God remains master of his suffering and is never subject to it. God's suffering is always active, and never

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<sup>156</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.W.Hallo (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971), p.409-410, cited Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 61

<sup>157</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity*, p.99

<sup>158</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 136

<sup>159</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 137

unqualifiedly 'passio'. Second, because God's suffering is a free withdrawal and self-humiliation for the sake of humanity, God can never be affected by what we choose to do: We do not cause God's suffering by choosing to sin, nor can we take away some of God's suffering by choosing to do good. The most we can do in relation to God's suffering is to choose to participate in it and, in so doing, to have our own suffering taken up into God's being and redeemed. Thus Moltmann, like Barth and Hartshorne, seems to offer us a passibilism that has far more in common with some forms of ancient impassibilism that would first appear, perhaps rendering the separation between modern passibilism and impassibilism misleading.

From this broad overview of passibilist and impassibilist theology and philosophy of religion in twentieth century theology we have seen that the idea that there has been a passibilist revolution in the twentieth century is an oversimplification. There are significant exceptions to passibilism from philosophers such as Helm and Creel and theologians such as Weinandy, and those theologians and philosophers who initially seem to stand in the passibilist camp in fact share many of the characteristics of earlier impassibilism. With this in mind, perhaps it is wiser to speak of a shift in emphasis from the invulnerability and omnipotence of God to the suffering of God, despite the fact that both are held in tension in modern passibilism. With this more qualified view of the shift in theology in mind, however, it still makes sense to ask why this shift has taken place. Many answers could be given here, but (in addition to those suggested by Goetz mentioned earlier in the chapter) among them we might pinpoint the fact that 'emotion' has changed its meaning, and that we have developed an alternative evaluation of emotions from that given in ancient thought. In what follows I shall look at one expression of the way in which passibilism is deduced from a consideration of the nature of emotion in the work of Sarot, whose analysis of emotion is broadly representative of modern rather than ancient characterisations of emotion.

## What emotions are: Marcel Sarot

Sarot seeks, through an analysis of what a perfect being would be like, and what emotions are, to establish whether emotions are compatible with perfection. Sarot begins by establishing a working definition of passibilism as mutability with respect to one's feelings or the quality of one's inner life, before moving on to qualify what God's passibilism would be like in the light of divine attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection. In the course of Sarot's book seven crucial questions about emotions can be discerned:

- i) Are emotions essentially passive, in the sense of being something outside our control?
- ii) Are emotions inherently irrational?
- iii) Do emotions entail negativity or sinfulness?
- iv) What is the epistemological status of emotions? That is, do they add to or detract from the subject's knowledge and intelligence?
- v) Are the emotional experiences involved in suffering through sympathy (or empathy) helpful or unhelpful to those sufferers with whom the subject sympathises (or empathises)?
- vi) Does love entail passibility?
- vii) Do emotions require a body?

While isolating these questions from the rest of Sarot's book in some ways fails to convey the overall integrity of his thesis, I shall discuss Sarot's treatment of these seven

questions because his handling of them highlights how our evaluation of the emotions affects whether or not we ascribe emotions to God.

### Passivity and irrationality

Passibility and irrationality are treated together, since, as objections to passibilism, they are closely related. Characteristically, the impassibilist case claims that passibility is inappropriate to a perfect being because emotions are both passive and irrational. These objections to passibilism can be summarised as follows:

- i) We are passive to emotions, in the sense that emotions overtake us against our will. The extent to which passibility and passivity are associated is shown by the fact that the two words are etymologically cognate. Furthermore, because emotions are passive they are, in one sense, evil. Because we are passive to emotions they are, properly speaking, amoral, because they are not subject to our wills. However, in practice our emotions often lead us to immoral actions. Thus we must fight our passions so that they do not make us act immorally.<sup>160</sup>
- ii) The irrationality of the emotions is a corollary of the passivity of the emotions. When we experience a passion the passion is, properly speaking, arational, because it is not guided by our reason. However, in practice passions are often irrational too, since they cause us to experience the object of our emotion in a way that is adverse to our reason. Emotions can also induce us to perform actions we know to be irrational.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 34

<sup>161</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 34 - 5

Sarot seeks to show that passivity and irrationality are not in fact essential to emotion by showing that emotions are sometimes experienced without these characteristics. That passivity and irrationality are not essential to emotion is suggested by two 'everyday' facts: First, we praise or blame people for their emotions, and this would be unreasonable if emotions were always outside people's control. Second, we try to educate the emotional lives of our children, and this suggests that emotions can be guided by reason.<sup>162</sup>

This suggests that emotions are not passive or irrational, and Sarot moves from this to a deeper analysis of counter-examples of passivity and irrationality in emotion. There are three ways in which an emotion may seem to be passive or irrational: i) Emotions may seem to be caused by their objects so that the subject cannot control them; ii) Emotions may seem to dictate action so that the subject cannot act counter to the emotion; iii) Emotions often seem to involve evaluations that are not founded on a thorough consideration of all the relevant evidence. Sarot discusses each of these points in turn in order to show that none of these characteristics is essential to emotion.

- i) Emotions, the impassibilist claims, are passive because they are brought into being by their object. For example, it seems to George that he cannot help being in love with Barbara because Barbara is of unequalled attractiveness. The problem with this view is, as Vincent Brümmer puts it, the 'impressive characteristics are discerned only by those who are impressed'.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, George's attraction to Barbara springs from his preferences, norms and values, in the light of which George evaluates Barbara. Barbara is attractive to George because he prefers extrovert, talkative, blonde, slender

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<sup>162</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 36

<sup>163</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction* (London 1981), p. 119, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 37

women. The fact that our values, preferences and norms lie behind our emotions give us a clue as to how we can make emotions less passive; that is, how we can gain more control over our emotions: 'If we are 'victim' to an emotion we do not want to have, we can try to change our evaluation of the object of the emotion'.<sup>164</sup> We might do this in the following ways: First, by inquiring whether the evaluation of our emotion is factually correct. For example, George might take a critical look at Barbara's hair and note that it is dyed rather than being naturally blonde. Second, by concentrating on aspects of the object of the emotion other than those which evoke the undesirable emotion. For example, George might concentrate on Barbara's 'weak-spots', or else try to see the shadow-side of the characteristics of Barbara that he finds attractive, such as by imagining how exhausting it would be to be married to such a garrulous woman. Third, by trying to change the preferences, norms and values that render the object of the undesirable emotion impressive. For example, George might attempt to talk himself into a preference for buxom rather than slender women.<sup>165</sup> While Sarot concedes that this might be a rather naïve way of dealing with being in love with someone one does not want to be in love with, he suggests that with respect to other emotions it may be a useful technique.<sup>166</sup>

- ii) The impassibilist might also claim that emotions are passive and irrational in that they 'dictate' an action in such a way that it is difficult to act counter to emotion. The psychological components of an emotion are often directed towards a particular course of action. For instance, fear leads to two possible responses: The attempt to escape, or (if one deems escape unlikely) freezing in the hope that one remains unnoticed. However, Sarot argues, unlike

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<sup>164</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 37 - 38

<sup>165</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 37 - 38

<sup>166</sup> see Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 38

animals, humans can act counter to emotions when they think that there is a good reason to do so: 'A woman may overcome her fear in order to save someone else, for instance by rescuing him from a burning house; a man may not show how angry he is with his boss because he realises that he might lose his job; a doctor confronted with the ugly wounds of the victim of a traffic accident may not show his disgust, but try to calm the victim while preparing his treatment'.<sup>167</sup> Sarot concludes from this that, in human beings, emotions often urge us to do this, but that they do not compel us to do them.

- iii) A third argument for the passivity and irrationality of emotion is that emotions involve evaluations that are not founded on a serious consideration of all the evidence. Sarot argues that this is not *necessarily* the case. For instance, one might only become angry after serious reflection on an insult, once one has had the time to consider it fully in the light of the context in which it was given and the way it was meant, and so to appreciate how insulting it really was. Therefore not all emotional evaluations take place without prior deliberation, and so not all emotions can be labelled irrational.<sup>168</sup>

Sarot concludes from this discussion that emotions are not necessarily passive or irrational, though they can be both. This reappraisal of what emotions are, and the move from a negative view of emotions to a more positive one, underlies Sarot's conclusion that God can have emotions, though his view that emotions are sometimes passive and irrational also means that Sarot qualifies his passibilism by saying that God's emotions are never passive nor irrational, and that God always remains master of himself.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 39

<sup>168</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 39

<sup>169</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 40

## Negativity

The third question regarding the nature of emotion that can be discerned in Sarot's thesis is whether the ability to have emotions entails negativity, and whether this negativity is sinful or evil. Sarot characterises the impassibilist position that passibility entails negativity and sinfulness as follows. Negative experiences are unpleasant experiences. The mutability involved in experiencing emotions means that a passibilist being is one who experiences negative emotions: '...when feelings change they change for the better or for the worse. When they change for the better, the feeling preceding the change will be relatively negative; when they change for the worse, the feeling following the change will be relatively negative.'<sup>170</sup> Therefore a passible being is a being who can experience negative feelings. Sarot notes that it is sometimes argued that the experiencing of these negative feelings is evil, and we would deny the evilness of these negative feelings to the detriment of morality, since if we ceased to regard these negative feelings as evil, we would cease to regard causing negative feelings in other people evil.

Following Creel, Sarot argues that the mutuality implied by passibility can be understood in two senses: The subject's feelings may change intensively or extensively.<sup>171</sup> Our feelings change intensively in that they grow more or less pleasant. Our feelings change extensively when they shift from one object to another. In practice, intensive and extensive changes of feeling often go together, but they can nevertheless be distinguished in principle.<sup>172</sup>

Creel responds to the problem of negativity by arguing that God's happiness can be affected extensively but not intensively. But, argues Sarot, this means that God is only passible in a futile sense, since an important part of passibilism is that God not

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<sup>170</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 35

<sup>171</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 145, Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 41

<sup>172</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 41

only experiences positive emotions like joy and bliss, but also negative emotional experiences, such as those involved in suffering. Given this, the view that God's emotional life only changes extensively is not adequate.

Sarot proposes an alternative line of defence, pointing out that it is fallacious to regard the negativity of the experiences involved in passibility as evil. This can be shown when we ask, if negative emotions were evil, what sort of evil would they be? They could not be moral evils, since moral evil refers to intentions and intentional actions, and negative emotions are neither intentions nor intentional actions. The *infliction* of negative emotions may be a moral evil if the intention in inflicting them is evil, but the negative emotions themselves cannot properly be called morally evil. The only other kind of evil that negative emotions could be is a physical or natural evil. However, a physical evil is in itself morally neutral. It can be called a moral evil *in a derived sense* by virtue of being caused by an evil action. By the same token, though, it can also be called a moral good, as for example when it is freely accepted as a means to a good end. Thus negative emotions can be both morally evil and morally good at the same time, though both in a derived sense. Given that we praise humans who accept negative feelings as a means to a good end, why should we not also attribute this kind of experience to God?<sup>173</sup>

In contrast to his discussion of passivity and irrationality, Sarot's discussion of emotion concerns not a negative view of emotions *per se*, but a negative view of negative emotions in particular. In overcoming the view that negative emotions are in some way sinful or morally evil, Sarot suggests that not only can God have emotions generally but, importantly, that God can have the specific emotions that are of concern to passibilist theologians, i.e. the negative emotions such as those involved in suffering. In showing how negative emotions may in fact be a moral good (as when they are freely

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<sup>173</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 43

accepted for the sake of a greater good) Sarot's view of emotions also gives him an additional reason for postulating passibilism in addition to removing a potential objection to the idea of divine suffering: Emotions may not only be contrary to God's moral perfect – they might even add to it. Here we can see again that the shift from a negative view of emotion to the more positive one espoused by Sarot lends itself to an affirmation of passibilism.

### Epistemological status

In discussing arguments in favour of passibilism, Sarot examines the argument from omniscience; i.e. because feelings provide 'a certain kind of knowledge that cannot be obtained in any other way'<sup>174</sup> a being that cannot have feelings cannot be omniscient. In connection with this idea, Hartshorne makes the bold claim that an omniscient God must not only be able to experience feelings, but that he must be able to share *all* our human feelings with us, in the sense of experiencing them himself. As Hartshorne puts it:

To fully sympathize with and to fully know the feelings of others are the same relationship, separable in our human case only because there the 'fully' never applies, and we never know the feelings of others but only have knowledge about them, abstract diagrams of how in rough, more or less general ways they feel. If we saw the individuality and vividness of the feeling we would have the feeling. As Hume said, without perhaps knowing what a contribution to theology he was here making, the vivid idea of a feeling is in principle coincident with its 'impression', that is, with such a feeling as one's own.<sup>175</sup>

If we suffer and God is omniscient, then God must share in our sufferings. However, as Creel points out, this would mean that God would not only have to suffer, but would also feel stupid, horny, and take pleasure in vicious acts, because these are all feelings that humans have.<sup>176</sup> Sarot agrees with Creel that this conclusion is unacceptable for

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<sup>174</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 56

<sup>175</sup> Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1941), p. 163, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 68

<sup>176</sup> Creel, *Impassibility*, p. 129 cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 68

Christian theology, since it is incompatible with God's goodness, justice and unity. Yet, concedes Sarot, perfect knowledge of a feeling does seem to imply that one experiences the feeling as one's own.<sup>177</sup>

As a solution to this problem Sarot suggests that knowing someone's feelings is knowing how that person's feeling feels, rather than necessarily feeling that feeling oneself. He uses the following analogy to demonstrate this point: When one suffers a toothache, one knows exactly how it feels, but after it has gone, it is impossible to remember the exact feeling of having toothache. Furthermore, when we remember the toothache, we do not feel the toothache again. This suggests that having knowledge of past toothache does not suggest we feel it again. Therefore, *contra* Hartshorne, it is not the case that an omniscient God must experience our feelings in order to know how our feeling feels.<sup>178</sup>

However, Sarot's refutation of Hartshorne still leaves a weaker claim open: That it is only possible to know what something feels like if we have felt something. David Brown illustrates this point in making the following implicit distinction between two types of knowledge:

Some children have the misfortune to be born without the ability to experience pain and so unless they are educated in time about the consequences of their actions they end up by doing themselves permanent damage, even accidentally killing themselves. However, if they survive to adulthood, then they will have acquired a good knowledge of the consequences of pain, but even so they will remain without any experiential knowledge of what it feels like to be in pain. Similarly, it seems to me with God. Of course, without the Incarnation he already had perfect knowledge of the consequences of pain, but only the Incarnation could have brought him knowledge of what it feels like to be one of us.<sup>179</sup>

As Sarot points out, here there is an implicit distinction between intellectual knowledge and experiential knowledge. Perhaps most importantly for Sarot, Brown suggests that experiential knowledge adds something to intellectual knowledge, so that someone who

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<sup>177</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 69

<sup>178</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 69 - 70

<sup>179</sup> David Brown, 'The Problem of Pain' in Robert Morgan (ed.), *The Religion of the Incarnation* (Bristol 1989), p. 55-6, quoted Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 70

has intellectual knowledge knows less than someone who also has experiential knowledge.<sup>180</sup> This goes against mainstream Christian theology, for which God is omniscient without having experiential knowledge. For example, in *The God of the Philosophers*, Anthony Kenny argues that everything we know about our sensations is communicable, and that anything that is not communicable is not worthy of the name ‘knowledge’:

‘Only I can know my sensation’ means either that others cannot *know* that I am (e.g.) in pain; or that others cannot *feel* my pain. If it means the former then it is obviously false; someone who sees me falling into flames and screaming as my body burns knows perfectly well that I am in pain. If it means the latter then it is true but trivial, and there is no question of knowledge here.<sup>181</sup>

According to Kenny, therefore, experiential knowledge cannot be a type of knowledge distinct from intellectual knowledge (since then it would not be knowledge), and since all knowledge is communicable we can get all knowledge through means other than experience; as Sarot puts it, ‘If I am in pain, I can tell others that I am in pain and they can learn from my words that I am in pain’.<sup>182</sup> The only difference between getting knowledge through experience and getting knowledge through someone else’s expression of it is that in the case of the former there is also the experience of pleasure and pain: According to Kenny, a sense is ‘essentially a faculty for acquiring information in a modality which admits of pleasure and pain’.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, an impassible God can know everything we know and more, but without the pleasure and/or pain we experience with it.<sup>184</sup>

Sarot responds that what Kenny succeeds in showing is that it would be nonsensical to hold that it is impossible for someone who is in pain to communicate this to others. However, there is a difference Kenny has overlooked between knowing that someone is in pain and knowing how that pain feels. In addition to the statement ‘only I

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<sup>180</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 70-71

<sup>181</sup> Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 31, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 71

<sup>182</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 72

<sup>183</sup> Kenny, *God of the Philosophers*, p. 32, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 72

<sup>184</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 72

can know my sensation' having the two possible meanings Kenny proposes, it can also have a third meaning: 'Only I can know *how my sensation feels*'.<sup>185</sup> While we can explain to our friends how our pain feels by describing how it differs from other pains, in the case of people who are congenitally immune to pain (such as the children in Brown's example) we cannot explain to them either how pain feels in general or how specific pains feel in particular. This means that not everyone can understand the feeling of pain. And this is not only true of the concept of feeling pain, but also of any other concept.<sup>186</sup>

Therefore, some knowledge cannot be acquired except by experience. Like the people with an immunity to pain, an impassible God would be able to know all true propositions about pain, but not be able to know how pain feels. As Keith Ward points out, this would be a major qualification of divine omniscience:

To rule out knowledge by acquaintance from omniscience is to rule out the most important and personal knowledge completely... It seems to me an extraordinarily attenuated notion of knowledge which it views as the accurate tabulation of true propositions, registered passionlessly, as if on some cosmic computer. The whole idea that omniscience could consist in simply knowing more true propositions than any other being strikes me as grotesque.<sup>187</sup>

As Brown and Ward suggest, if God has no experiential knowledge, his omniscience is seriously restricted. In the light of this conclusion, Sarot asks which experiences a being would have to undergo in order to be omniscient. While the experience of pain is the only one discussed so far, suffering, feeling stupid, feeling horny, taking pleasure in vicious acts, and other human experiences must also be considered.<sup>188</sup>

Sarot points out that we can often form a new concept by combining elements of other concepts one already understands. This one might understand the concept of pleasure in vicious acts by combining one's conception of pleasure and vicious acts. This suggests that we can separate the feeling of experiences from the circumstances

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<sup>185</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 72

<sup>186</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 73

<sup>187</sup> Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 132, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 73 - 4

<sup>188</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 74

under which the experience is had. Therefore, when the occasion is such that God could not have the experience in such circumstances because that would be incompatible with one of God's attributes, God could have the same feeling-experience in another context, so that he could understand the concept in question.<sup>189</sup>

Having shown how God might experience those feelings necessary for his omniscience without compromising his other attributes (such as goodness and justice), Sarot goes on to discuss Brown's idea that it is only through the incarnation that God has certain sorts of knowledge. Sarot finds Brown's thesis unsatisfactory, since it means that God's omniscience, and thus his perfection, are dependent upon the incarnation, and also because it makes human nature more perfect than divine nature. Furthermore, if (as Brown and Sarot both hold) God is in time rather than outside time, then it means that God would not have been omniscient for some of his existence. Finally, Brown's thesis also gives God a non-selfless reason for becoming incarnate: Part of God's motivation for the incarnation may have been the perfection of his own omniscience. Therefore it is important to hold that not only through the incarnation, but also as part of the divine nature itself, God is capable of having certain feeling-experiences.<sup>190</sup>

In addition to arguing that a being who cannot have certain experiences would be lacking in experiential knowledge, Sarot argues that experience is also required for purely intellectual knowledge, so that a being who lacked experience would also lack some intellectual knowledge. One example of the way in which this might be the case is shown in R.A. Sharpe's argument that someone who is congenitally immune to pain could not judge whether new descriptions of painful experiences are accurate. The person suffering from an immunity to pain would also be unable to propose new descriptions.<sup>191</sup> As the knowledge of whether descriptions are accurate or not is a type

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<sup>189</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 75

<sup>190</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 76

<sup>191</sup> R.A. Sharpe, 'How Having the Concept of Pain Depends on Experiencing it', *Philosophical Investigations* 6 (1983) 142-4; cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 76

of intellectual knowledge, people who are immune to pain are limited in terms of intellectual knowledge as well as experiential knowledge. This means that even if we *did* formulate omniscience purely in terms of knowledge of all true propositions (which Ward has already persuasively argued to be an impoverished conception of omniscience) God could not be omniscient if he did not experience certain feelings because this would entail that God lacked some propositional or intellectual knowledge. For Sarot, therefore, certain emotional experiences are required for divine omniscience both in terms of God's experiential knowledge and in terms of God's intellectual knowledge.

Underlying Sarot's argument for passibilism is the understanding of emotions as not only not inherently unintelligent- or irrational-making, but as actually necessary to intelligence. This shift is part of a wider shift towards seeing passibilism not as something that makes us primarily vulnerable or susceptible, but as an ability or capacity. In other words, emotions are a necessary part of perfection, and not a set of experiences that would detract from it.

#### Are sympathy and empathy helpful or unhelpful to sufferers?

Those concerned with divine impassibility in the light of the problem of evil are divided upon whether 'only a suffering God can help' (Bonhoeffer), or whether God is better able to help and console if he is himself removed from the suffering. Some theologians, such as Kenneth Woollcombe<sup>192</sup> and Richard Creel, tend toward the view that a God who does not suffer is better able to console, in that his blissfulness in the face of suffering reminds us that all will be well in the end, and that the suffering we now experience is within the boundaries God himself sets, determined by his wisdom,

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<sup>192</sup> Kenneth J. Woollcombe, 'Pain of God', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967) 129 – 48, cited Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 78

power, and goodness. Woollcombe bases his analogy on an upset child and a consoling parent: it is more reassuring for the child to be consoled by a calm parent, who does not share, for instance, their fear of a nightmare, or their pain and shock in relation to a cut or bruise. In response to this Sarot points out that, while in the case of *minor* suffering it is often more consoling to be consoled by an undisturbed parent, this clearly will not do in the case of more serious suffering. Would the equanimity and emotional indifference of another in the face of child abuse, rape, or the discovery of a painful terminal illness serve to reassure the victim that in fact all was well, or merely intensify the loneliness and confusion the victim was undergoing? Creel discusses (and criticises) a further argument for an impassible God: Someone who does not suffer is better able to help in a crisis, since they are not traumatised by it. Sarot concedes that it is often the case that human sympathy impedes aid, but follows Creel in pointing out that the same cannot apply to God, since, because God is omniscient, nothing (including sympathy) can be an obstacle to God's judgement and action: 'Although it is true that *our* sympathy can interfere with *our* ability to help, the same consideration cannot apply to God.'<sup>193</sup> From this discussion Sarot concludes that God would not be able to give perfect consolation were he not a fellow-sufferer, and that this fact points to a doctrine of divine passibility.

As we shall see in chapter four, the question of whether experiences of fellow suffering such as compassion, empathy and sympathy are helpful, or whether they prevent the subject from helping the sufferer or from viewing them fairly, is a bone of contention. From this brief overview of Sarot's discussion, we can see that Sarot ascribes a positive status not only to positive (pleasant-feeling) emotions, but also to negative (painful-feeling) emotions such as suffering. Furthermore, Sarot also argues implicitly that emotions can be empowering – that is, that there are some things (such as consolation) that a being can do better with emotions than without them.

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<sup>193</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 80

## Love

Sarot then turns to the relation between love and emotions, in order to enquire whether divine passibility is entailed by divine love. In contemporary theology, there are two distinct conceptions of divine love, only one of which entails passibility. Both conceptions of love are based upon analogy from human life, the impassibilist upon the love of the good Samaritan (*amor benevolentiae*), and the passibilist upon human relations of mutual love, exemplified in that of lovers.<sup>194</sup> The primary difference between benevolence love (love b) and the love of lovers (love l) lies in the fact that love b aims for the well-being of the beloved, while love l aims for the happiness of both persons. There are four further differences arising from this primary difference, as follows:

- i) In love l, both persons are active and passive, give and receive, while in love b, A is active and B passive, A gives and B receives
- ii) In love l, A and B are attracted to one another because they perceive an inherent value in the other that they do not find in other people. In love b, A perceives no value in B, but simply a need to be fulfilled. Love b is therefore disinterested, while love l is interested.
- iii) In love l, A gives his/her complete being to B, and *vice versa*, i.e. A and B live for one another. In love b, the giving and 'amount' of love is adapted to the need of the beloved. A does not need to give B his/her entire self.

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<sup>194</sup> It is interesting that Sarot avoids the terms *agape* and *eros*, perhaps moving away from the very specific overtones these terms have picked up in Christian discussions of love such as those of Kierkegaard and Nygren.

- iv) In love I, both A and B are irreplaceable and unique. In love b, the beloved is not loved for any inherent value or uniqueness, so that A could have the same relationship with C or D as with B.

The significant (and controversial) aspect of divine love conceived as love I is that God's offer of love renders God *vulnerable*, 'vulnerable not only to rejection by the beloved, but also to whatever negative factors may be afflicting the beloved'.<sup>195</sup> In order to be real, vulnerability must involve God's feelings, and thus necessitates divine passibility.

Which view of love is to be preferred as an analogy for God's love of creation? Love b is often considered superior because it stresses the selfless nature of love, and the non-manipulability of the lover. However, Sarot argues, these important aspects are not essentially or inherently incompatible with love I. Concerning non-manipulability, Sarot has already demonstrated that God need not be unconditioned, and so can be emotionally involved, without being manipulable. Therefore, love I and non-manipulability are compatible. Regarding selflessness, Sarot argues that perceiving God's love as love I involving vulnerability would not be selfish, if God *chose* to love in this way, to make himself vulnerable, because humanity needs this kind of reciprocal relationship with God, and needs to be needed as well as to receive what it needs. This suggests that love I is not fundamentally selfish, and may in fact be an act of self-sacrifice if the lover chooses to make himself vulnerable for the sake of the beloved: 'It will be clear, then, that it is misleading to say that God wants to enter into relations of mutual fellowship because that makes him happier. It is just the other way round: God wants to enter into such relations because this is a condition for our complete happiness.'<sup>196</sup> This makes love I preferable to love b as an analogy for the divine love.

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<sup>195</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 85

<sup>196</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 88

since, while neither need involve manipulability or selfishness, love l alone involves (when applied to God) the self-giving act of relinquishing perfect blissfulness in order to become vulnerable and to suffer with and for the object of love.

Sarot concludes by preferring love l to love b as an analogy for the divine love. Love l is a fuller, more self-giving kind of love than love b, since ‘A loving l God would be able to satisfy our need for mutuality in a way a loving b could not’<sup>197</sup> and such love could only be brought about by a renunciation of blissfulness on God’s part. Such love is more perfect, and therefore must, according to the principles of perfect being theology, be preferred as a model of the divine love.

I shall return to the distinction between love as benevolence and love as intense passion in chapter four in discussing whether God can experience jealousy. For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that one of the primary distinctions between love b and love l is that love l involves strong and intense emotions (and involves vulnerability), while love b either doesn’t involve any emotions, or only involves weak and calm ones. In coming down on the side of love l, then, Sarot is saying, *contra* the main thrust of Christian theology, that emotional love is superior to the kind of love which requires only a small amount of emotional involvement, and thus *that the ability to have strong emotions is an aspect of perfection rather than a weakness.*

## Body

A large part of Sarot’s book is taken up with a discussion of whether and in what way passibility implies corporeality. Sarot’s discussion will be evaluated in chapter six, but can be briefly summarised as follows. Sarot argues that certain bodily sensations are necessarily located, thus demanding corporeality. An incorporeal God could only

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<sup>197</sup> Sarot, *Passibility*, p. 90. *cf.* p. 90–1 for a further argument for love l, based upon the practice of evangelisation.

experience ‘weak and calm emotions’, and not the ‘strong and intense’ emotions demanded by passibilist theology. Therefore, we must either reject the idea that God suffers intensively with and for us, or else we must develop a doctrine of divine embodiment. Sarot then discusses the concepts of the world as God’s body that have been suggested by Charles Hartshorne, Grace Jantzen, and Luco van den Brom, favouring Jantzen’s theory as a starting-point for a doctrine of divine corporeality in line with passibilism.

Sarot’s treatment of passibilism and corporeality differs from his treatment of the other characteristics of emotion (e.g. activity, epistemological status, importance to love I, etc.) in that the other discussions focus on discerning whether emotions are required by, or instead prohibit, divine perfection. By the time Sarot discusses emotions and bodiliness, in contrast, he has already concluded that emotions are required for the divine perfection, and turns his attention to the question of what other divine attributes emotions, and the ability to have emotions, require. Sarot does not evaluate the attribute of corporeality, and therefore his discussion of emotions and corporeality tells us nothing further about the value he attributes to emotions. However, Sarot’s discussion of the other characteristics of emotion give an indication of the way in which both the understanding and the evaluation of what emotions are has changed. In the first place, emotions are treated as one concept-category rather than several, while in the early church there was greater discrimination between different category concepts of emotional and mental phenomena. When compared to passions or *παθή*, we can also see that the modern evaluation of emotion differs in according to emotional experiences a far more positive role in human life. For example, emotions differ from passions in that they are not essentially passive. In contrast with some, particularly eastern, ancient Christian thinkers, emotions also differ from passions in that they are not inherently sinful, negative or irrational. In fact, the modern assessment of emotions suggests that

emotions may even be a necessary aspect of wisdom and knowledge. The modern concern with theodicy has given rise to a new consideration regarding the comfort that God gives to sufferers, and this consideration in and of itself gives the emotional experiences involved in 'suffering with' people a moral importance that has suggested to some that divine emotions are essential to, rather than a diminishment of, God's moral perfection.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to answer the question of why, given that impassibilism seemed obvious to the Fathers of the early church, there seems to have been a passibilist revolution in the last one hundred and twenty years. Part of my answer to this question is that the apparent shift from impassibilism to passibilism is not as extreme as first appears, in that in addition to the fact that some of the early Fathers attributed to God emotional experiences in a way that made them very much like modern passibilists, most modern passibilists inhabit some sort of middle ground or qualify their passibilism by maintaining divine omnipotence and freedom in a way that means they have more in common with ancient impassibilism than initial appearances would suggest. I have also pointed to several exceptions to the modern passibilist consensus which should not be overlooked in surveys of modern theological thought. In so doing, I have proposed that we should be cautious of attributing a passibilist revolution to the twentieth century, and instead speak in terms of a shift of emphasis from talk of God's omnipotence and invulnerability to talk of the fullness of God's emotional life as an aspect, rather than a diminishment, of God's omnipotence and freedom.

In so far as we can speak of a shift, I have suggested that one factor that is responsible for this is that there has been a change in the concept of emotion, such that

emotion now refers to one set of experiences rather than many, and such that these experiences are seen to be potentially active, positive, rational, and even essential to wisdom and intelligence. I shall return to a consideration of whether emotions are active, positive, rational and intelligent in chapters four and five. In the next chapter, I shall focus on the idea of emotions as distinct and diverse sets of mental and physical phenomena rather than as one set of experiences that we can analyse as a distinct group, through a discussion of *passiones* and *affectiones* in Augustine and Aquinas. In doing this, I hope to persuade the reader of the diversity of different emotional phenomena, and to suggest a way forward for the current impasse between twentieth century passibilists and impassibilists.

## Introduction

In the previous two chapters I looked at the way in which the idea of impassibility and passibility was developed in the early church and in modern theology in the light of their respective views on emotion, and indicated some of the ways in which a middle ground between passibilism and impassibilism has been suggested. In this chapter I want to return to earlier theology to explore in more depth one of the means by which ancient and medieval philosophy of emotion might both help modern philosophy of emotion and suggest a way of surmounting at least some of the deadlocks between modern passibilists and impassibilists. Re-appropriating elements of Augustinian ‘philosophy of emotion’, and, more briefly, developments of Augustine’s thought by Thomas, I shall suggest that the distinction between *passiones* and *affectiones* is more helpful than the broader category of the ‘emotion’, both when analysing human emotion and in relation to the impassibility debate. This distinction, I shall argue, leads to a clarification of the definition of the divine passibility that goes some way towards finding a solution to the concerns of both passibilist and impassibilist theologians.

## Emotion-words in the ancient world

The modern category of the emotion encompasses a vast variety of phenomena, to the extent that contemporary philosophers and psychologists have been unable to provide a single definition of the term. W. Reddy observes that the recent surge of experiments and studies on emotions has ‘done little to clear up the vexed question of what, exactly,

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<sup>198</sup> Some of the material for this chapter was published in a shorter article in the *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 7.2, April 2005 (169-177), under the title ‘Emotion in Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas: A Way Forward for the Im/passibility Debate?’

emotions are. Disagreements persist, uncertainties abound'.<sup>199</sup> A.S. Reber writes of emotion that 'Historically this term has proven utterly refractory to definitional efforts; probably no other term in psychology shares its nondefinability with its frequency of use',<sup>200</sup> while R. Corsini asserts that 'its exact nature has been elusive and difficult to specify'.<sup>201</sup> Robert M. Gordon concludes that emotions are best seen as a group of experiences and phenomena related by family resemblances, since the search to define emotions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions has proved fruitless.<sup>202</sup> Likewise, Aaron Ben Ze'ev comes close to speaking of emotions in terms of family resemblances when he argues that 'There is no essence which is a necessary and sufficient condition for all emotions or even of one type of emotion... Emotions constitute a prototypical category, namely a category the membership in which is determined by the degree of similarity to the best example. Hence, emotions have no clear and definite borders.'<sup>203</sup> Amélie Rorty argues that current conceptual analysis of emotion suffers badly because we take the concept of emotion at face value, as though it were a single coherent concept, without taking into account the differing historical ideas and agenda that went into producing the concept we use today:

The history of discussion of the passions does not form a smooth continuous history, which expands or narrows the class of *pathe* by following a single line of thought. Sometimes the transformations (say from the Aristotelian *pathe* to Stoic *passiones*) arise from moral preoccupations concerning voluntary control; sometimes the transformations (say from the Renaissance *amor* to Hobbesian passions and desires) are impelled by metaphysical and scientific preoccupations, sometimes the transformations (say from Hobbesian passions and desires to Humean and Rousseauian sentiments) have a political direction. If nothing else, this should show that *pathe*, *passions*, affects, emotions and sentiments do not form a natural class. Additions to that class were made on quite distinctive grounds. Before we can evaluate the competing claims of current polemical debates, before we can understand the force of their various claims, we must first trace the philosophic preoccupations in which they originated.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>199</sup> W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), ix

<sup>200</sup> A.S. Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 234

<sup>201</sup> R. Corsini, *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 1994 [2<sup>nd</sup> edition]), p. 478

<sup>202</sup> Robert M. Gordon, 'Emotion', in *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 259 – 60

<sup>203</sup> Aaron Ben Ze'ev, 'The Nature of Emotions', *Philosophical Studies* 52 (1987), p. 393

<sup>204</sup> Amélie Rorty, 'Aristotle on the Metaphysical Status of *Pathe*', *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1984), p. 545

In fact, the concept of the emotion is exclusive to the modern era. The term did not crop up in English until the mid-sixteenth century, when it was used to denote a public disturbance, and was not given its current meaning until the early nineteenth century. While the term is etymologically derived from the Latin *motus*, *motus* denotes ‘movement’ and is only indirectly related to the current meaning of emotion. Furthermore, no exact translation or equivalent is found in Latin or any of the ancient languages. As we saw in chapter one, in contrast to the preference of the modern world for a single over-arching category, the ancient and medieval worlds had a diversity of descriptions of human experiences, and imposing our category of ‘emotion’ on these different concepts can overlook the original implications of each term.

#### Augustine on emotion-terms

In *City of God* IX.4, Augustine mentions several possible Latin translations of the Greek *παθή*, implying that *passiones* is the most accurate general term for what we would call emotions: ‘Two opinions are found among the philosophers concerning those agitations of the soul (*animi motibus*), which the Greeks call *pathe*, while some of our Latin authors, Cicero for example, describe them as disturbances (*perturbationes*), others as affections or affects (*affectiones uel affectus*), or again as passions (*passiones*)....’<sup>205</sup>

This may well be because *passiones* is etymologically descended from *παθή*, while *perturbationes*, *affectiones* and *affectus* are not. Earlier on in *City of God*, speaking of Apuleius’ assertion that the demons are disturbed by the passions, Augustine tells us that ‘disturbance [*perturbationes*] represents the Greek *pathos* (passion)... [and] the word “passion” [*passio*] (*pathos* in Greek) signifies an irrational movement of the soul [*motus animi contra rationem*]’.<sup>206</sup> Here the point seems to be that Apuleius translates

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<sup>205</sup> *City of God* IX. 4, trans. Bettenson, p. 345

<sup>206</sup> *City of God* VIII.17, trans. Bettenson, pp 322 - 324

the Greek *παθή* as *perturbationes*, rather than that '*perturbationes*' is Augustine's preferred translation. Elsewhere, Augustine sometimes uses the terms *motus animae* (movements of the soul), *affectus* and *passiones animae* to speak of emotional phenomena in their broadest sense.<sup>207</sup>

However, despite this general and morally-neutral use of terms such as *passiones*, *affectus* and *motus animae*, Thomas Dixon has shown that there is also a tendency in Augustine's work to use *passiones* (and related words such as *perturbationes*, *libido* and *morbos*) in a pejorative sense, and to contrast these with virtuous *affectus*, *motus* and *affectiones*. For Augustine, the terms *affectus* and *affectiones*, 'referred to acts of will... and are to be contrasted with *passiones*, which for both writers were not active movements of the will but passive movements of the lower, sensory appetite.'<sup>208</sup> According to this use of *passiones*, the passion is a movement of the lower animal soul<sup>209</sup>, which is involuntary in the sense of not in accordance with the will.

### Passiones

One instance of Augustine's use of *passiones* in the sense of an involuntary movement of the lower animal soul is to be found in *City of God* VIII.17. In his discussion of Apuleius, Augustine explains that the souls of the demons and of men in this life are disturbed by the storms and tempests of the passions (*passionum turbelis et*

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<sup>207</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 40

<sup>208</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 48

<sup>209</sup> Augustine employs two (logically incompatible) uses of the term 'soul': The Platonic and the Aristotelian. On the Platonic model, the soul is the inner self, i.e. the rational and moral part of a human, which distinguishes humans from other animals. On the Aristotelian model, the soul comprises not only the 'intellective soul' (roughly analogous to the soul on the Platonic view), but also the animal/sensitive soul, and the vegetative/nutritive soul, the former of which involves both sense perception and animal appetites. The sense in which the passions affect the 'lower, animal soul' is in the Aristotelian sense: in Platonic terms, they would not be thought to affect the soul at all (cf. *De Trinitate* XII; *Confessiones* XIII; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987], p. 13f.)

*tempestatibus*), while the angels and the blessed in heaven, able to attain perfect wisdom, are free from them.<sup>210</sup> In men these disturbances are possible as a result either of stupidity or wretchedness. The angels are free from such passions because ‘they are not only immortal but also happy [*beata*]’.<sup>211</sup> Animals are also free from passions, since a passion is involuntary, and can never occur in animals, by virtue of the fact that animals do not possess reason and so do not have the ability to make informed choices (though they may have instincts apparently similar to passions). Without will, animals do not have a choice about whether or not to do something moral (i.e. and therefore their action is neither voluntary nor involuntary), since their ‘decision-making faculties’ are not informed by reason. The demons are liable to passions because, although they are immortal, they are not blessed, but wretched, thus having involuntary passions forced upon them.

It is noteworthy that, for Augustine, corporeality does not seem to be necessary either to *affectiones* or to *passiones*: Augustine attributes various *passiones* to the demons, including desire, fear and anger<sup>212</sup> and writes that ‘...it is not only from the influence of the flesh that the soul experiences desire and fear, joy and distress; it can also be disturbed by those emotions from a source within itself.’<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, while the ‘emotions’ are understood as movements of the appetitive soul that affect the body, in another sense they are also understood as things that affect the rational soul, forcing the rational soul to react against the sensory appetite in order to regain control. Thus, in the subjection of the demons to *passiones*

It is their mind [*mens*] that is affected, the superior part of the soul [*animi superior*], the faculty that makes them rational beings, the place where virtue and wisdom, if they have any, exercises mastery over the turbulent passions [*passionibus turbulentis*] of the lower parts of the soul by directing and controlling them. It is their mind [*mens*] which... are tossed about on the waves of the passions [*passiones*].<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> *City of God* VIII. 17

<sup>211</sup> *City of God* VIII.17, trans. Bettenson, p. 323

<sup>212</sup> *City of God* IX. 6

<sup>213</sup> *City of God* XIV.5, trans. Bettenson, p. 555

<sup>214</sup> *City of God* IX.6, trans. Bettenson, p. 350

In yet another sense *passiones* affect the soul, in that external sensory objects act upon it, pulling the appetitive soul to and fro. In the case of some emotions the soul may act in response to something in the body:

When the flesh is said to desire or to suffer pain, it is in fact the man himself who has this experience... or else some part of the soul which is affected by the experience of the flesh, whether a harsh experience producing pain, or a gentle experience, producing pleasure. Bodily pain is really nothing but a distress of the soul arising from the body, and a kind of disagreement with what happens to the body, in the same way as mental pain, which is called grief, is a disagreement with what has happened to us against our will.<sup>215</sup>

Because of the way in which *passiones* affect and are moved by different elements of the human and the world, they are variously described as *passiones* of the body (i.e. because they affect the body, and it is passive to them), *passiones* of the appetitive soul and even *passiones* of the intellectualive soul.<sup>216</sup>

### Affectus and Affectiones

In Latin contemporary to Augustine, the term *affectus* denotes a range of human behaviour.<sup>217</sup> It is often accompanied by *mentis* or *animi*, though it can also be used on its own. It can reflect either (or both) a mental or an emotional state, or simply a long lasting disposition. It is also used to mean diligent attention, eager desire, and enthusiasm.<sup>218</sup> In Augustine's use of the term, *affectus* contrasts with *passiones*: The *affectus* is a movement of the higher, intellectualive soul, which is voluntary, in that it is in accordance with the will. Of virtuous affects, Augustine writes that 'If these movements

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<sup>215</sup> *City of God*. XIV.15, trans. Bettenson, p. 576

<sup>216</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 58 – 9

<sup>217</sup> Gerald O'Daly and Adolar Zumkeller, 'Affectus, passio, perturbatio', *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer *et al*, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG 1986 – 1994), 166 - 180

<sup>218</sup> George Lawless, 'infirmior sexus... fortior affectus': Augustine's *Jo. Ev. Tr.* 121, 1 – 3: Mary Magdalene', in *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003), 111

(*motus*) and affects (*affectus*), that spring from love of the good and from holy charity, are to be called faults, then let us allow that real faults should be called virtues. But since these affections (*affectiones*) are the consequence of right reason when they are directed towards their proper objects, who would then venture to call them diseases (*morbos*) or disordered passions (*passiones*)?’<sup>219</sup> Despite being movements of the intellectual soul, there is no lack of feeling in these affects: in contrast to modern views of emotion, Augustine does not contrast those emotions he knew as *affectus* and *affectiones* with reason. As Dixon observes:

The ‘affections’ and ‘moral sentiments’... could be understood both as rational and voluntary movements of the soul while still being subjectively warm and lively states.... Augustine and Aquinas do indeed recommend that the passions be subjected to the rule of reason. However, that is not the same as saying...that the Christian tradition recommended the subjection of all ‘emotions’ to reason. The rational mind had its own ‘emotions’, namely those movements or acts of will that were known as affects or affections. In other words, the reason-passion dichotomy was decidedly not a reason-emotion dichotomy. The higher part of the soul was properly moved in its voluntary acts – in its expression of its love. Its position above animal passion (sensory appetite) in the hierarchy did not exclude it from all the aspects of life that we would call ‘emotions’, only from the wild, violent, unrestrained and unconsidered compulsions of passions that it would still seem reasonable advice to seek to avoid.<sup>220</sup>

It does not follow from this that affections are necessarily virtuous, nor that passions are necessarily sinful. Rather, what makes an affection an affection rather than a passion lies in the fact that it is a movement of the will, which is a part of the higher, inner, intellectual self, while the passion is an act of the appetite, an aspect of the lower, outer, sensual self. What makes an emotion a passion or an affection is not its moral status, but whether it relates to the sensitive or intellectual self. However, *in practice* it is often the case that passions are sinful,<sup>221</sup> because (as a consequence of the Fall) the lower sensitive self is in rebellion against the higher intellectual self, which should be its master and guiding principle.

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<sup>219</sup> City of God XIV.9: Hi *motus*, hi *affectus* de amore boni et de sancta caritate uenientes si uitia uocanda sunt, sinamus, ut ea, quae uere uitia sunt, uirtutes uocentur. Sed cum rectam rationem sequantur istae *affectiones*, quando ubi oportet adhibentur, quis eas tunc *morbos* seu uitiosas *passiones* audeat dicere?

<sup>220</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p.3, 54 - 5

<sup>221</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 48

Whether a particular passion or affection is virtuous or vicious is dependent upon two factors: First, the agreement of the emotion with reason, and, second, the object of the emotion, which is closely related both to the direction of the will and to the orientation of the subject's love. As we shall see, these two conditions which determine the moral status of an 'emotion' also incline passions to be sinful, and allow affections to be virtuous.

First, the extent to which an 'emotion' is good is partly dependent upon whether the emotion is in accordance with reason. Augustine writes that 'This is a blessed and peaceful life of man when all its emotions [*motus*] agree with reason and truth; then they are called joys and holy affections, pure and good. But if they do not agree, they tear the soul apart and make life most wretched, and are called perturbations and lusts and evil desires.'<sup>222</sup> Since the affects or affections are movements of the will, the *voluntas*, which is an aspect of the intellectual self and potentially informed by reason, it follows that affects are often in agreement with reason: They are, as Dixon implies, 'the emotions of the rational mind'.<sup>223</sup> Indeed, one cannot have a will without having reason to inform it (as Augustine's treatment of the 'non-passions' of the beasts indicates), and thus all affects have the potential either to be reasonable or unreasonable (there is no 'third option' available). In contrast, the passions are acts of the *appetitive* soul that affect the physical body, and the question of whether they are 'in agreement' with reason really becomes a question about whether they are *in subjection* to reason. As involuntary movements, they can never be 'reasonable' in and of themselves, since it is meaningless to say that there could be reason without a will, i.e. when something is involuntary. Thus passions are necessarily and inherently *arational*, and can never be informed by reason. While, as I have already noted, it is not necessarily the case that all

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<sup>222</sup> Augustine, *De Gen. Cont. Manich.* 1, 20, cited Mozley, *Impassibility*, p. 104

<sup>223</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 54 – 5

affects are virtuous and all passions sinful, there is therefore a *prima facie* reason for why affects are often virtuous and postlapsarian passions never so.

Second, the question of whether an 'emotion' is good or not also concerns the object of the emotion. This is expressed both in terms of the direction of the subject's will, and the orientation of their love. A right will (*voluntas recta*) or a good love (*bonus amor*) results in appropriate affects while a wrong will (*voluntas perversa*) or a bad love (*malus amor*) produces sinful passions.<sup>224</sup> In relation to the direction of the will, Augustine writes, 'The important factor in those emotions [*motus*] is the character of a man's will. If the will is wrongly directed, the emotions will be wrong; if the will is right, the emotions will be not only blameless, but praiseworthy. The will is engaged in all of them; in fact, they are essentially acts of the will'.<sup>225</sup>

The same idea is expressed not in terms of the direction of the will, but the orientation of love: '...a rightly directed will is love in a good sense and a perverted will is love in a bad sense... feelings are bad, if the love is bad, and good, if the love is good.'<sup>226</sup> In relation to the orientation of the subject's love, Augustine stresses that all forms of emotion (good or bad, *affectus* or *passiones*) are ultimately expressions of love. All love is seen as attraction, in the sense of the desire to become united with the beloved. The crucial issue is whether this love is *caritas*, love directed toward goodness, wisdom and ultimately God, or whether the love is *cupiditas*, directed toward mundane objects, and therefore essentially idolatrous.<sup>227</sup> All virtues and virtuous affections spring from *caritas*, and *caritas* reorients the life of the one who loves God so that the subject loves all other things because of their love for God, in God and for God's sake, and not absolutely as the source of their fulfilment. All sinful emotions arise from *cupiditas*, from a love of the world that seeks to find ultimate happiness in the world itself. Again,

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<sup>224</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p.40

<sup>225</sup> *City of God*. XIV.6, trans. Bettenson, p. 555

<sup>226</sup> *City of God* XIV.7, trans. Bettenson, p. 557

<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, Augustine uses *voluntas* and *caritas* interchangeably in the context of his trinitarian theology, opposing both to *cupiditas*.

given the fact that passions are movements of the lower, appetitive self, most postlapsarian passions are involuntarily orientated towards the mundane, and thus involve *cupiditas*, while the fact that affections are a part of the higher, intellective self and are voluntary gives them the potential to be *caritas*, to be directed towards God and to created beings secondarily, according to their proper place and in correct proportion to their being.<sup>228</sup>

To love created beings according to their proper place and in correct proportion to their being requires not that one should cease to love them but that one should love them as a part of loving God, partly because one can use them as God's creatures to come to know God, and partly because, in the case of humans, by virtue of being created in God's image they can be enjoyed in their own right. As Martha Nussbaum writes: 'Not all Christian love is love of God: there may be human loves that are distinctively Christian. But these other loves are suffused by the love of God, and... their real object always is, in a way, God.'<sup>229</sup> Other creatures are never to be loved absolutely, as though they are infinite and immortal beings, and as though ultimate happiness can be found in them. They are always to be loved as mortal creatures. To fail to love humans in this way not only results in idolatry, but also inevitably in deep grief. Augustine testifies to this, providing a moving account of his reaction to the death of his close friend from Tagaste, which occurred while Augustine was a young man, still a Manichaean and prior to his conversion to the Christian faith:

'Grief darkened my heart' (Lam. 5:17). Everything on which I set my gaze was death. My home town became a torture to me; my Father's house a strange world of unhappiness; all that I had shared with him was without him transformed into a cruel torment. My eyes looked for him everywhere, and he was not there. I hated everything because they did not have him, nor could they now tell me 'look, he is on the way', as used to be the case when he was alive and absent from me.... Only tears were sweet to me, and in my 'soul's delights' (Ps. 138:11) weeping had replaced my friend.... I found no calmness, no capacity for deliberation. I carried my lacerated and bloody soul when it was unwilling to be carried by me. I found no place where I could put it down. There was no rest in pleasant groves, nor in games or songs, nor in sweet-scented places,

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<sup>228</sup> William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought through the Confessions Story* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 42

<sup>229</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, p. 528, fn 1

nor in exquisite feasts, nor in the pleasures of the bedroom and bed, nor, finally, in books and poetry. Everything was an object of horror, even light itself; all that was not he made me feel sick and was repulsive – except for groaning and tears.<sup>230</sup>

As Nicholas Wolterstorff observes,<sup>231</sup> it is when reading passages such as these that the modern reader empathises most with Augustine, and finds him most appealing. It comes as something of a shock, therefore, to learn that it is precisely these aspects of Augustine's life that Augustine himself finds most repugnant and culpable. In retrospect, Augustine sees his love of his friend as excessive, being directed toward a finite and mortal object who will, by virtue of his createdness, die, and distress all who love him. Augustine writes, 'I was in misery, and misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost.... The reason why that grief had penetrated me so easily and deeply was that I had poured out my soul on the sand by loving a person sure to die as if he would never die.'<sup>232</sup> As Augustine discovered, if one loves a finite and mortal creature as though they will live for ever one will be inconsolable at their death. Therefore, 'What madness not to understand how to love human beings with awareness of the human condition! How stupid man is to be unable to restrain feelings in suffering the human lot!'<sup>233</sup> The love Augustine accorded to his friend was in fact appropriate only to the immortal God, and even in his relationship with his mother he was 'guilty of too much worldly affection'.<sup>234</sup> Augustine writes, 'Blessed are those who love You, O God.... No one can lose you...unless he forsakes You.'<sup>235</sup> The lover should reorient his absolute love to God, who alone is the source of human happiness, for loving a creature as absolute can result only in acute and excessive bereavement. Thus, as Gerald W. Schlabach puts it:

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<sup>230</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* IV.iv.9; IV.vii.12, translated Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 57 – 58; p. 59

<sup>231</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Suffering Love', p. 196

<sup>232</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.vi.11–IV.viii.13, trans. Chadwick, p. 58, 60

<sup>233</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.vii.12, trans. Chadwick, p. 59

<sup>234</sup> Cited by Wolterstorff, 'Suffering Love', p. 197

<sup>235</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* IV, 9, cited Wolterstorff, 'Suffering Love', p. 199

To love other creatures rightly, then, a human being must relativize that love — devaluing its object in one way, yet rediscovering its true and stable value in another way. When we love friends or neighbors rightly, the value they lose is their value as a tool of our own egocentric self-interest; the value we then recognize in them is their value insofar as God, the source of all things, creates and secures them. To love one's neighbor rightly, in other words, Augustine's abiding conviction was that we must first love God, and then 'refer' all other loves to God.<sup>236</sup>

The *caritas* Augustine propounds is sourced in the divine love, as is shown by the fact that Augustine radically equates God and love,<sup>237</sup> and writes that in order that we may love God, we must allow God to live in us, and so 'let him love himself through us, that is, let him move us, enkindle us, and arouse us to love him.'<sup>238</sup> All human *caritas* is in fact God present in humans, the participation of the Christian in the life and love of God, and not a human phenomenon that is possible independently of God. Through the love of God by which God enables us to experience for himself and for creation, God draws human beings into his own inter-trinitarian self-love, thus allowing us to share in the enjoyment of himself. At the eschaton there 'will be one Christ, loving Himself; for the love of the members for one another is the love of the Body for itself.'<sup>239</sup> In this life, human love of fellow humans is in fact love of God, and is good (*caritas*) only when it is rooted in God: 'The good which you love [in other humans] is from him. But it is only as it is related to him that it is good and sweet.'<sup>240</sup>

Crucial to the relation between love of God and love of creation is the distinction between love as use (*uti*) and love as enjoyment (*frui*). By analogy to the Kantian

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<sup>236</sup> Gerald W. Schlabach, 'Continenence, Consumption and Other Abuses: Or Why an Augustinian Ethic is Worth the Bother', a paper given at the *Society of Christian Ethics* (8 January 2000, Washington D.C.), available at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html> (accessed on 21st January 2008)

<sup>237</sup> In his homilies on the First Epistle of John, Augustine comments: 'For God is love' [Love is God]. What more could be said, brethren? If nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of this epistle, if nothing whatever throughout the other pages of the Scriptures, and this one only thing were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, 'For Love is God;' nothing more ought we to require.' See also Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John', in *Nothing Greater Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 86

<sup>238</sup> S. 128.2.4, cited in Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, John C. Cavadini *et al* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 1999), p. 115

<sup>239</sup> *Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis* 10.3

<sup>240</sup> *Confessions* IV.xii.18, trans. Chadwick, p. 63 - 64

categories of ‘means’ and ‘ends’, the distinction can be imperfectly and somewhat anachronistically introduced as follows. ‘Use’ is our correct love for creation, which is a means by which we can come into fellowship with God. ‘Enjoyment’ is our correct love for God, Who is ‘an end in Himself’, and the source of our *εὐδαιμονία*, although (as we have seen) there is a sense in which we can love other humans in this sense also, because of their creation in the divine image. In this context Augustine discusses which category God’s love for creation falls into, whether it should be regarded as use or enjoyment. God’s love cannot be enjoyment, since his happiness is rooted not in creation but in himself, the source of all happiness. On the other hand, God’s love cannot be use in the sense that our love for creation is use, since God does not need us to find his own fulfilment, which is himself. Rather, God’s love for us is use, not for his own selfish end (for what end could that be?), but for the realisation of our own happiness – enjoyment in the beatific vision:

There is still an element of uncertainty here. I am saying that we enjoy a thing which we love for itself, and that we should enjoy only a thing by which we are made happy, but use everything else. God loves us (and the divine scripture often commends his love towards us) [cf. Rom. 5:8], but in what way does he love us – so as to use us or to enjoy us? If he enjoys us, he stands in need of our goodness, which only a madman could assert; for all our goodness either comes from him or actually consists of him. Is it not quite clear and beyond all doubt that light does not stand in need of the brightness of the things which it illuminates? The prophet says very clearly, “I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord, since you do not stand in need of my goodness’” [Ps 15:2 (16:2)]. So God does not enjoy us, but uses us. (If he neither enjoys nor uses us, then I fail to see how he can love us at all.)

But he does not use us in the way that we use things; for we relate the things which we use to the aim of enjoying God’s goodness, whereas God relates his use of us to his own goodness. We exist because he is good, and we are good to the extent that we exist. Moreover, because he is also just, we are not evil with impunity; if we are evil, to that extent we exist less. God exists in the supreme sense, and the original sense, of the word. He is altogether unchangeable, and it is he who could say with full authority “I am who I am”, and ‘You will say to them, “I have been sent by the one who is” [Exod. 3:14]; so it is true of other things which exist that they could not exist except by him, and that they are good to the extent that they have received their existence from him. So the kind of use attributed to God, that by which he uses is, is related not to his own advantage, but solely to his goodness. If we pity someone or take thought for someone, we do so for that person’s advantage, and we concentrate on that; but somehow there also results an advantage to us, since God does not let the compassion we show to the needy go unrewarded. This reward is the supreme reward – that we may thoroughly enjoy him and that all of us who enjoy him may enjoy one another in him.

For if we enjoy one another in ourselves, we remain as it were on the road and put our hopes of happiness on a human being or an angel. This is something that arrogant people and arrogant angels pride themselves on; they rejoice when the hopes of others are placed on them. But a holy person or a holy angel restores us when we are weary and when we desire to rest in them and stay with them, using either the resources which they have received for our sakes or those which they have received for their own sakes (but in either case they have certainly received them); and then they impel us, thus restored, to go to the one by enjoying whom we likewise are made happy....

When you enjoy a human being in God, you are enjoying God rather than that human being. For you enjoy the one by whom you are made happy, and you will one day rejoice that you have attained the one in whom you now set your hope of attaining him.... For when the object of love is present, it inevitably brings with it pleasure as well. If you go beyond this pleasure and relate it to your permanent goal, you are using it, and are said to enjoy it not in the literal sense but in a transferred sense. But if you hold fast and go no further, making it the goal of your joy, then you should be described as enjoying it in the true and literal sense of the word. This is to be done only in the case of the Trinity, the supreme and unchangeable good.<sup>241</sup>

Thus our love for creation can be real, but if it is to be real it must always be secondary to our love of God, and all created things must be loved in God. Augustine sometimes speaks of love of God as being concomitant with contempt of the self, implying to some that Augustine advocates self-hatred.<sup>242</sup> However, the point seems to be rather that self-denial is a part of self-love, because through self-denial the Christian moves from egocentricity to theocentricity and so finds salvation and ultimate happiness; this is why Augustine advises us to 'learn to love yourself by not loving yourself.'<sup>243</sup> In rooting our love of creation in God we love with *caritas*, and our affections become rightly oriented and so virtuous. Whether or not one buys into Augustine's idea of rooting all our love in our love of God, I suggest that the distinction between *caritas* and *cupiditas*, and between *affectus* and *passiones*, leads to a more nuanced and discriminating account of emotion than that suggested by modern philosophers of emotion. Furthermore, I shall suggest that, in contrast to the modern category of the emotions, the categories of *passiones* and *affectiones* may offer to the impassibility debate some distinctions and possibilities previously overlooked.

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<sup>241</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* I.XXXII.35 – I.XXXIII.37, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 24 - 26

<sup>242</sup> See *City of God* XIV. 28: 'We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self'.

<sup>243</sup> S. 96.2.2, cited in Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p. 512

## Augustine on the ethics of human emotion

While many ancient eastern Christian theologians adopt whole-heartedly the Stoic condemnation of emotion, opposition to the ideal of *απαθία* in the present life is found particularly among Latin-speaking Christians.<sup>244</sup>

As Peter Brown<sup>245</sup> and Martha Nussbaum<sup>246</sup> show, Augustine's thought regarding the emotions altered during his life as a Christian. In works such as *De Quantitate Animae* (388) and *De Genesi contra Manichees* (389), written in the period following his conversion, Augustine, greatly influenced by Neoplatonic renderings of the *Symposium's* 'ladder of love', endorses an essentially Platonic contrast between earthly and perfected love, holding up the goal of contemplative self-sufficiency as the goal for the Christian, not only in the afterlife, but also in the here and now.<sup>247</sup> According to this view, the good Christian is increasingly emptied of desire, longing and tension. In later works, such as the *Confessiones* (c.401), and the slightly earlier work the *Ad Simplicianum de diversis quaestionibus* (396), the apathetic goal is replaced by the idea of an ascent in which the subject becomes progressively receptive to God and to love, becoming not self-sufficient, but more and more aware of their dependence upon God.<sup>248</sup> As Nussbaum explains, the *Confessions* advances 'a picture of ascent (or ascent combined with descent) that gives a more substantial and more positive role to certain ingredients of ordinary human love.'<sup>249</sup> At this point, the Platonist goal of self-sufficiency is seen by Augustine as deeply impious, because it is rooted in pride, in the same proud deviation from God that caused Adam and Eve to disobey the divine command and fall from their state of grace. By the time of *De*

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<sup>244</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Emotion*, p. 397.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967)

<sup>246</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, pp. 527-557

<sup>247</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals* pp. 527-557

<sup>248</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals* pp. 537 - 557

<sup>249</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, p. 531

*Civitate Dei* (413 – 415), Augustine goes further, condemning the classical philosophical project of finding happiness and virtue for oneself as essentially pride-ridden:

For we do not yet see our good, and hence we have to seek it by believing; and it is not in our power to live rightly, unless while we believe and pray we receive help from him who has given us the faith to believe that we must be helped by him. Whereas those who have supposed that the Ultimate Good and the Ultimate Evil are to be found in this life... all these philosophers have wished, with amazing folly, to be happy here on earth and to achieve bliss by their own efforts.<sup>250</sup>

Happiness is not to be found in self-sufficiency and *απαθία*, as the Platonists and Stoics asserted, but in fellowship with God, which requires openness to certain emotional experiences. As Nussbaum shows, Augustine's journey to God is not characterised by a neat intellectual progression towards contemplative purity, but by a sense of longing, incompleteness and passivity.<sup>251</sup>

For humans and in *this* life, Augustine advocates experience of emotion if rightly directed and sanctioned by reason and the will (i.e. virtuous affects), departing from the Stoic belief that emotions are always and without exception pernicious.<sup>252</sup> On this view, every type of what we would call emotion (for example, love, desire, fear, joy, sorrow) can be *either* virtuous or vicious, depending upon its object, its relation to reason and the will, and so on. Thus the phenomenon itself (e.g. joy) is morally neutral, but how it is instantiated in the human being makes it good or bad. Three exceptions to

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<sup>250</sup> *City of God* XIX. 4, trans. Bettenson, p. 852

<sup>251</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, pp. 527 - 557

<sup>252</sup> cf. *City of God* 14.9. Ironically, Augustine supports his view that emotions are good in moderation by drawing on an account of the Stoic Epictetus misleadingly-paraphrased by Aulus Gellius. In Epictetus' story, a Stoic who grows pale during a sea storm eventually responds to enquirers with recourse to the idea of first movements or prepassions. As Richard Sorabji points out, Gellius alters Epictetus' '*pallescere*' (to grow pale) to '*pavescere*' (to grow jittery). That Augustine misunderstands Epictetus' meaning, interpreting the 'jitters' as indicating some degree of emotion, becomes clear when Augustine further paraphrases Gellius' version of Epictetus, resolving the ambiguity in the wrong direction by adding 'with fear' after 'grows jittery', by asserting that the wise person may shrink with sadness, and by describing the Stoic's reaction as a 'passion' (i.e. an emotion) on three occasions. From Epictetus' misleadingly-paraphrased account, Augustine wrongly concludes that the Stoics actually allow emotions, misconstruing the idea of prepassions and first movements, and writing that the Stoics' disagreements with other philosophical schools is purely the semantic issue of how emotions are defined (Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch* 1.30, cited Sorabji, *Emotion*, ch. 24).

the idea that these psychological phenomena are (in and of themselves) neutral are pride, lust and anger. Pride is never acceptable, since it is the root of all sin, because it is the elevation of the self over and against God, and the grounding of the self in the self as the basis of all absolute values, rather than in God. Thus Augustine writes:

And what is pride except a longing for a perverse kind of exaltation? For it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed, and to become, as it were, based on oneself, and so remain. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself: and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless God in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction.<sup>253</sup>

Unlike pride, lust can be harnessed and put to a good purpose (i.e. that of procreation), though it is never good in itself. This is because lust itself, and the bodily movements which precede or accompany lust, are not under the control of the will.<sup>254</sup> Anger is also never to be 'enjoyed' (*frui*) for itself, since like lust it is a disturbed and undisciplined emotion, 'leading to acts which wisdom forbids, and ... [which therefore needs] the control of intelligence and reason.'<sup>255</sup> However, like lust, anger can be properly channelled and so put to a good purpose. In practice, Augustine suggests, anger can be used (*uti*) in the prevention of public disorder.<sup>256</sup>

Augustine asserts that *other* emotions are not only permissible in this life if experienced in moderation and when controlled by the will, but also that virtuous affects – both pleasant and unpleasant – are both necessary and desirable to Christians in the current life. Compassion is particularly admired:

To be indignant with the sinner with a view to his correction, to feel sorrow for the afflicted with a view to his release from suffering, to be afraid for one in danger so as to prevent his death – those are emotions which, as far as I can see, no sane judgement could reprove. The Stoics, to be sure, are in the habit of extending their condemnation to compassion (*miseriordiam*), but how much more honourable would it have been in the Stoic of our anecdote<sup>257</sup> to have been

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<sup>253</sup> *City of God* XIV. 13, trans. Bettenson, p. 571 - 572

<sup>254</sup> *cf. City of God* XIV.16

<sup>255</sup> *City of God* XIV.19, trans. Bettenson, p. 580

<sup>256</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 51

<sup>257</sup> i.e. that of Aulus Gellius, whose Stoic philosopher upon a stormy ship felt, and justified feeling, tremors, which Augustine took to be a 'tolerance' of certain emotional reactions.



'disturbed' by compassion so as to rescue someone, rather than by the fear of being shipwrecked! Far more creditable, more humane, and more in harmony with the feelings of true religion was the sentiment expressed in Cicero's praise of Caesar, 'Of all your virtues, none was more admirable, none more attractive, than your compassion'.<sup>258</sup> What is compassion but a kind of fellow-feeling in our heart's for another's misery, which compels us to come to his help by every means in our power? Now this emotion (*motus*) is the servant of reason, when compassion is shown without detriment to justice, when it is a matter of giving to the needy or of pardoning the repentant.<sup>259</sup>

To attempt to achieve *ἀπαθῆια* in the sense of absence of emotion is morally repulsive: If 'some, with a vanity monstrous in proportion to its rarity, have become enamoured of themselves because they are not stimulated or excited by any emotions [*ut nullo prorsus erigantur et excitentur*], not moved or bent by any feelings [*affectu*], such persons rather lose all humanity than obtain true tranquillity'.<sup>260</sup> Emotions such as love and gladness are not to be despised either in this life or the next, while unpleasant emotions such as grief and fear are the proper response to the sin and suffering of the present life. Augustine criticises the Stoics for asserting that while the ordinary, weak man experiences desire, joy, fear and grief, the wise man experiences no grief at all and replaces desire, joy and fear with will, gladness and caution. Rather, he argues, will, caution, gladness, desire, fear and joy are all 'emotions' common to both good and bad. But, he writes,

The good feel them in a good way, while the bad feel them in a bad way, just as an act of will may be rightly or wrongly directed. Even 'grief' – and the Stoics imagined nothing could be found in the mind of a wise man to correspond to this emotion – even 'grief' is discovered used in a good sense, especially in our Christian authors. The Apostle, for example, praises the Corinthians for having felt a grief 'in God's way'.<sup>261</sup>

Thus Augustine turns away from the negative view of the emotions championed by the Stoics and Neoplatonists. Nussbaum writes of Augustine that 'This is not language that the Stoic ...wise man would use, extirpating the passions.... In some manner Christian

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<sup>258</sup> Cicero, *Pro Lig.* 13, 37

<sup>259</sup> *City of God* IX.5, trans. Bettenson. p. 349

<sup>260</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. XIV, 9, cited Wolterstorff, 'Suffering Love', p. 205

<sup>261</sup> *City of God* XIV.8, trans. Bettenson, p. 560 - 561

love has reopened the space within which fear, and anxiety, and grief, and intense delight, and even anger, all have their full force. And correct love promises no departure from these other emotions – if anything, it requires their intensification.<sup>262</sup>

Augustine not only advocates affections in *this* life; he also provides a radically alternative interpretation of ἀπαθήια as the *eschatological goal* to that of the Stoics. If ἀπαθήια involves freedom from all emotion, it is not to be sought-after, either in this life or the next. He writes that ‘...if *apatheia* is the name of the state in which the mind cannot be touched by any emotion (*affectus*) whatsoever, who would not judge this insensitivity to be the worst of all moral defects? There is nothing absurd in the assertion that the complete final happiness will be exempt from the spasms of fear and any kind of grief; but only a man utterly cut off from truth would say that love and gladness have no place there.’<sup>263</sup> Concomitantly, the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall was one of absolute bliss, devoid of sin, death and sickness: ‘the pair lived in a partnership of unalloyed felicity; their love for God and for each other was undisturbed. This love was the source of immense gladness, since the beloved was always at hand for their enjoyment.’<sup>264</sup>

### Theological perspectives on emotion in Augustine

As the above quotations suggest, the prelapsarian state and the state of the blessed in heaven is not that of apathy in the sense of absence of emotion: While there will be no suffering and fear, it is the case that real love and gladness are central. But what about God? Does God, in Augustine’s view, share these affections with the blessed in heaven? Augustine never describes the ‘emotional life’ of God in great depth, presumably on epistemological grounds. He does, however, as I have suggested, indicate both that

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<sup>262</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, p. 530

<sup>263</sup> *City of God* XIV.9, trans. Henry Bettenson, p 564 - 565

<sup>264</sup> *City of God* XIV.10, trans. Bettenson, p. 567

human and angelic love and gladness are sourced in the divine love and gladness. He also indicates that the emotional life of the Christian should be modelled on God. The Christian life should, like God's, be devoid of passions, disturbances, agitations of the mind, and all emotion contrary to reason and stemming from *cupiditas*. However, love of all creation is essential both to Christians and, by virtue of the fact that God is love and the source of all *caritas*, to God. Thus, he writes, it is folly to worship or venerate demons since the demons are prompted by anger, while:

We, on the contrary, are bidden by the true religion not to allow ourselves to be prompted by anger, but rather to resist it. The demons are influenced by gifts; but we are bidden by true religion not to show favour to anyone in consideration of gifts received. The demons are mollified by honours, but we are bidden by true religion not to be influenced in any way by such things. The demons hate some men and love others – not as a result of a calmly considered decision, but because their soul, in the phrase of Apuleius, is 'subject to passions'; as for us, we have the instruction of the true religion that we should love even our enemies. Lastly, the true religion bids us abjure all those movements [*motum*] of the heart, all those agitations of the mind, all those storms and tempests of the soul [*turbelas et tempestates animi*] which in demons make a raging sea of passion. It is nothing but folly, nothing but pitiable aberration, to humble yourself before a being whom you would hate to resemble in the conduct of your life and to worship one whom you would refuse to imitate. For surely the supremely important thing in religion is to model oneself on the object of one's worship.<sup>265</sup>

Despite Augustine's endorsement of certain kinds of emotion as against the Stoics and Neoplatonists, his assertion that all Christian love and gladness is rooted in the divine love and gladness, and his identification of God with love, many modern theologians have tended to take a dim view of Augustine on the emotions of God. While all recognise that, on the face of it, Augustine asserts the divine love and blessedness (or gladness), many assert that God's love was viewed by Augustine not as an emotion, but as an attitude of benevolence toward the beloved. For instance, Paul Fiddes writes that 'Traditional theology has ... [regarded] love as an attitude and action of *goodwill* towards another person. True love, it has been argued, is to will and achieve the good of another, and has nothing to do with feelings. Augustine, for example, distinguished

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<sup>265</sup> *City of God* VIII. 17, trans. Bettenson, p. 323 - 324

between emotions and moral actions as far as the perfect love of God is concerned....<sup>266</sup>

This seems unjustified in the light of the love and bliss which Augustine attributes to God: While excluding negative 'emotions' from the divine life, there is no evidence to suggest that the positive affections such as love and gladness that are attributed to God are merely intellectual attitudes rather than warm and lively feelings or (*mutatis mutandis*) 'subjective states'.

However, it is clear from what Augustine says that emotions such as mercy that involve suffering in humans can only ever be attributed to God analogously, because God cannot suffer. Augustine believes that God cannot suffer for two reasons. First, suffering is closely linked to sin in Augustine's thought. Second, Augustine believes that God is eternal and immutable, and while it is logically possible to posit eternal suffering to God, the theological implications would be disastrous. As Nicholas Wolterstorff observes, if God experiences emotions such as suffering, grief, and anger etc. in *eternity*, then he must experience them 'at all times', unchangingly. The logical conclusion of this idea is that God would experience suffering and so on even in the *eschaton*, despite the triumph over sin and suffering in the world. Such a conclusion is theologically unattractive, but the implications go deeper still. If God experiences negative emotions eternally, then the *ευδαιμονία* of the blessed, which comprises sharing in the divine bliss and joy, cannot be achieved, since God would not experience perfect happiness, but a combination of different emotions, some unpleasant.<sup>267</sup> It is not clear, therefore, in what our salvation would lie. Thus, Augustine is forced to conclude that emotions such as mercy and pity can only be experienced by God without the suffering that is an aspect of them in humans: 'With regard to pity, if you take away the compassion which involved a sharing of misery with him whom you pity, so that there

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<sup>266</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, p. 17. Fiddes bases this on the fact that Augustine attributes love of God but excludes suffering, which he takes to be an assertion that there is no feeling in God's love, but simply good will and the intention to act benevolently. While suffering is indeed excluded by Augustine from God, not all feeling is: God, in Augustine's view, still feels benevolence, mercy, love, joy etc.

<sup>267</sup> cf. Wolterstorff, 'Suffering Love', p. 211

remains the peaceful goodness of helping and freeing from misery, some kind of knowledge of the divine pity is suggested.<sup>268</sup> However, while Joseph M. Hallman concludes from this statement that ‘the divine mercy is reduced to God’s giving of being to those who are saved’, and that ‘in the final analysis it is emotion-less’<sup>269</sup>, I do not think that the evidence leads to this conclusion. Rather, while God cannot feel the suffering that we feel in compassion, in the case of mercy he does seem to be capable of feeling ‘the peaceful goodness of helping and freeing from misery’.<sup>270</sup> While Hallman eventually concludes that God ‘feels nothing,’<sup>271</sup> this conclusion does not seem justified. Augustine rejects literal interpretations of the divine repentance, anger, jealousy and mercy, both because they are inappropriate to a morally perfect being and because they either imply or, in the case of repentance, entail, temporality and mutability. In the case of love however, Augustine adopts a very literal interpretation, asserting that love is God and that God is the source of all human love. Apart from being more perfect, the only way in which divine love seems to differ from human love is in being atemporal, but this does not seem to be a reason to conclude that the divine love is devoid of feeling. To this we might also add the ‘emotion’ of blessedness or happiness. The happiness of the blessed in heaven and of the angels depends upon participation in the divine happiness: ‘God imparts to them their happiness by granting them a share in his own being’, and ‘they are blessed, not by themselves, but through adhering to him who made them.’<sup>272</sup> Thus, Augustine attributes love and gladness to God in very literal, uncompromising (though atemporal) terms, while also finding himself unable to attribute certain emotions of God because of associations between, for

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<sup>268</sup> *De div. Quaest. Ad Simpl.* II.2.3, cited Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 17

<sup>269</sup> Hallman, *Descent*, p. 18

<sup>270</sup> *De div. Quaest. Ad Simpl.* II.2.3, cited Hallman, *Descent*, p. 17

<sup>271</sup> Hallman, *Descent*, p. 19

<sup>272</sup> *City of God* IX.23, trans. Bettenson, p. 368

instance, sin and suffering, and between immutability and perfection – associations which modern theologians have found themselves at liberty to contest.

### Synopsis: Augustine, impassibility and emotion

In conclusion, the following elements of Augustine's 'philosophy of emotion' and 'impassibilism' are highlighted. First, Augustine distinguishes between good and bad emotion, but, excepting the cases of lust, anger and pride, the moral status of an emotion does not depend upon the type of the emotion but upon the direction of the will of the subject, or the orientation of the love from which it springs, and upon the agreement of the emotion with reason. Second, within the modern category of the emotions, Augustine distinguishes between *passiones* and *affectiones*, the former of which relate to the appetitive soul, and are involuntary, while the latter are movements of the higher, intellectual and rational self and are voluntary. These *affectiones*, when properly directed, are essential to the virtuous Christian life, and are elements both of the prelapsarian state and of the life of the angels and the blessed in heaven.

### The Augustinian distinction between passions and affections in Thomas

Thomas follows Augustine's distinction between passions and affections,<sup>273</sup> but the content of the passions and affections, their moral status and what they are passions and affects of differs because Thomas adopts a far more Aristotelian understanding of the soul. Like Augustine, Thomas adopts the distinction between the vegetative, animal and intellectual parts of the soul, viewing the intellectual, rational elements of humans as

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<sup>273</sup> Though unconsciously, since Thomas, focusing on *City of God IX*, on the passage in which Augustine concludes that *passiones* is the best rendering of *παθή*, believes that Augustine uses the term *passiones* generally, and that the word is synonymous with *affectus*, *affectiones*, etc. However, as Dixon demonstrates, Augustine elsewhere distinguishes sharply between passions and affects, and the idea that the two are synonymous is not consistent with a broader reading of Augustine's work.

superior to the irrational lower appetites, although in Thomas the distinction between (in Augustinian terms) the intellective soul and the irrational appetite is expressed in terms of the higher appetite ('the intellective soul') and the lower appetite ('the appetitive soul'). Furthermore, in Thomas the Augustinian concern with the relation between changelessness and perfection becomes a preoccupation with the superiority of rest over motion. Both the higher appetite and the lower appetite are divided within themselves into rest and motion. Within the higher appetite, understanding, resembling rest (since it is fulfilled when the object is apprehended) is superior to will, which signifies motion (because the will is fulfilled when the lover is drawn by the beloved).<sup>274</sup> In the lower appetite, rest and motion correspond to concupiscible and irascible passions respectively. The irascible passions (hope, desire, fear, courage and anger) resemble motion since they are 'movements of the lower appetite towards a sense-good (a desirable object of sense) that was hard to attain or away from a sense-evil (an undesirable object of sense) that was hard to avoid'.<sup>275</sup> Concupiscible passions, such as love, hate, desire, aversion, pleasure and sadness, are 'states of potential movement, or of affinity, towards sense goods or away from sense evils'.<sup>276</sup> Such passions are best seen as tendencies towards certain sense-objects, and, while potentially in movement, signify rest.

Thomas is also more concerned with the Aristotelian distinction between passivity and activity than Augustine. On a scale depicting activity to passivity, God is viewed as pure act, and formless 'prime matter' (a hypothetical category: Thomas did not believe that matter existed without form) as purely passive. Thus, while rest is more perfect than motion, activity (which would appear on the face of it to involve motion) is more perfect than passivity. This is because the activity of God does not involve motion, but is eternal. Human beings fall in the middle of the activity-passivity scale. Generally

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<sup>274</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, 1a.81.1; Dixon, *Passions*, p. 35 - 6

<sup>275</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 36

<sup>276</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 36; cf. *ST* 1a.2ae.23

speaking, the higher appetite (which involves intellect and will and is closely related to reason) is active, while the lower appetite is passive. In a different sense, however, the higher appetite is also passive in that its potential for understanding often remains unrealised. Ultimately, the final end of the blessed is to rest in 'the eternal unmoved divine activity.'<sup>277</sup>

Thomas' preference for act over passivity influences his view of the passions as greatly inferior: Within his treatment of the 'emotions' he often treats passions as a specific instance of the way in which humans are acted upon, closely connecting passions to passivity.<sup>278</sup> Thus, passions are inherently linked to imperfection:

Now passion or passivity implies by its very nature some sort of deficiency; a thing is passive in so far as it is in potentiality to being actualised and thus improved. Those creatures that come nearest to God, the first and completely perfect being, have little of potentiality and passivity in them; others, of course, have more. Accordingly one will find less of passivity, and so less of passion and the passions (*passiones*), in the cognitive faculties, since they are the more primary powers of the soul.<sup>279</sup>

Thomas also differs from Augustine in his application of the categories of matter and form to the relation between the human body and soul. Matter refers to basic material 'stuff', while form determines what sort of object the matter will instantiate, what it will become. In other words, the form is the set of properties of the matter (e.g. dimensions, weight, etc.). In humans, the body is the basic matter and the soul the form. Clearly, this view is potentially materialistic (the soul is reduced to a set of properties of the material body) and would not immediately suggest that the soul is immortal, or could survive without the body. In order to make his Aristotelian ideas more consistent with the Christian concept of the person and belief in the immortality of the soul, therefore, Thomas emphasises that the human soul is unlike other forms. The human soul, he

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<sup>277</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 36

<sup>278</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 41

<sup>279</sup> Thomas, *ST* 1a.2ae,22, 2, cited Dixon, *Passions*, p. 42. Here I have substituted the translation of *passiones* as 'emotion' to 'passions', since rendering it 'emotions' does not take into account the difference between passions and modern-day emotions, and does not help to make sense of the association Aquinas makes between passion and passivity.

argues, is 'subsistent' – it exists in and of itself rather than merely as a set of properties of a material object. This is shown by the fact that the soul has its own activity, and that understanding can take place without the involvement of any physical organ. Furthermore, the human soul is also immortal – not by nature but by virtue of the grace of God.<sup>280</sup>

Like Augustine, Thomas criticises the Stoics for their rejection of all 'emotion', and for their failure to make distinctions between different kinds of emotion. However, this is cashed out in more strongly Aristotelian terms:

The Stoics made no distinction between sense and intellect, and hence between the sensitive appetite (*appetitus sensitivus*) and the intellectual appetite (*appetitus intellectivus*). Accordingly they made no distinction between the passions (*passiones animae*) and movements of the will (*motus voluntates*), since the passions (*passiones animae*) belong to the sensitive appetite (*appetitus sensitivus*), and movements of the will (*motus voluntates*) to the intellectual appetite (*appetitus intellectivus*).<sup>281</sup>

All forms of emotion are forms of love, which is interpreted by Thomas as movement towards or away from an object – love is a tendency to move towards and be united with the beloved. The lower appetite, also known as the sensory love, has a natural tendency to move towards sense-goods and away from sense-evils, while the higher appetite, or rational love, has a tendency to move towards intellectual goods and away from intellectual evils.<sup>282</sup> Sensory love (*amor sensitivus*) is contrasted with intellectual love (*amor intellectivus seu rationalis*), the former relating to objects of sense (food, drink, sex), the latter to an intellectual good (wisdom, truth, God). This distinction between different types of love is, as in Augustine, related to the movements of the will. For Thomas the question is whether the emotion is a movement of the will or not – and this determines both whether an emotion is virtuous or vicious and whether it is a passion or an affect. Thus Thomas makes explicit the Augustinian association

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<sup>280</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 38

<sup>281</sup> *ST* 1a. 2ae. 24, 2

<sup>282</sup> Dixon, *Passions*, p. 43 – 5, cf. *ST* 1a.2ae.26.1.

between what is voluntary and what is potentially reasonable and virtuous. Passions are viewed as involuntary, in the sense of not authorised by the will, while affects are both voluntary and active. Thomas also accords importance to the question of whether emotions are under the control of reason, 'for the passions (*passiones*) are not 'diseases' (*morbos*) or disturbances (*perturbationes*) of the soul, except precisely when they are not under rational control... Passion (*passiones animae*) leads one towards sin in so far as it is uncontrolled by reason; but in so far as it is rationally controlled, it is part of the virtuous life.'<sup>283</sup>

Thomas suggests a further distinction between passions and affections, not present in Augustine, that may further provide insight in our discussion of divine impassibility. In *Summa Theologiae* 1a.2ae.24,2, Thomas observes that passions always cause an increase or decrease in the rate of the heartbeat. As Sarot observes, Thomas anticipates modern psychology in recognising the physical components of – or accompaniments to – emotion. However, the statement that Thomas sees emotions as entailing corporeality needs qualification. Examining the phrase 'a passion for the things of God', Thomas questions whether this suggests that love of God is a movement of the lower animal appetite. He concludes that it is not: 'The phrase 'a passion (*passio*) for the things of God' means here affection (*affectio*) for the things of God, and union with them through love; but this involves no physiological modification.'<sup>284</sup> It seems that, while Thomas predicates physiological modification in *passions*, affects and affections are not necessarily related to the physical.<sup>285</sup> The theological implications of this distinction for the impassibility debate become apparent in the following passage:

The words 'love', 'desire', and so on are used in two senses. Sometimes they mean passions with some arousal in the soul. This is what the words are generally taken to mean, and such passions exist solely at the level of sense appetite. But they can be used to denote simple

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<sup>283</sup> *ST* 1a. 2ae. 24, 2, cited Dixon, *Passions*, p. 52

<sup>284</sup> *ST* 1a.2ae.22,3

<sup>285</sup> *cf.* also *ST* 1a.2ae.22,1; 1a.2ae.22, 1 - 3

attraction, without passion or perturbation of the soul, and such acts are acts of will. And in this sense the words apply to angels and to God.<sup>286</sup>

Thomas does perceive physiological modification in the passions, and this (along with their inherent passivity, mutability and moral dubiousness) makes them improper to God. However, the category of emotions known as affects does not entail corporeality, and these kinds of emotions – argues Thomas – can be attributed not only to the angels but even to God.<sup>287</sup> If the Augustinian-Thomist view is correct in this distinction between passions that entail corporeality, and are in other respects inherently unworthy of the virtuous life, of the blessed and of God, and affects that may be free of physiological change, and experienced virtuously by Christians, by angels and the blessed in heaven and even by God, then a new possibility emerges for the impassibility debate that meets many concerns of both passibilist and impassibilist theologians and helps to unite the position of the two.

#### Conclusion: Augustine and Thomas and the modern impassibility debate

I suggest that re-appropriating the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between passions as extreme and overpowering feelings, and affects as feelings that are in accordance with reason and/or the will, might elucidate the argument more aptly than recourse to the category of ‘emotion’. In speaking of God being able to experience ‘affects’, the concerns of the passibilist would be in some ways compatible with the impassibilist who, in Sarot’s words, seeks to ‘stress the moral freedom of God or His insusceptibility

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<sup>286</sup> *ST* 1a.82,5 ad 1, cited Dixon, *Passions*, p.26

<sup>287</sup> A related point is made by Helm in his discussion of *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.90 that Aquinas ‘does not object to some of what are affections in human beings being a part of God’s character, he only objects to those affections which, if they are had by anything, require that individual to be passive and to be in time’ (Helm, ‘Impossibility’, p. 126)

to distraction from resolve'.<sup>288</sup> Real emotional feeling and personal involvement with creation is attributed to God, and yet this is never contrary to God's reason and will, and never results in fickleness or infidelity to the world. Of course, partly because of the modern rejection of the association between perfection and immutability, the modern theologian might include suffering among the affects which God might experience, just as types of suffering are included by Augustine as affects experienced by humans in the present life.

Furthermore, if we adopt Thomas' view of passions as entailing corporeality, and affects as potentially independent of the body, applying the latter rather than the former to God, a further possibility arises. Recent passibilists, such as Sarot, have been led by the link between emotion and corporeality in modern psychology to the conclusion that if God has emotions, God must, in some sense, also have a body. This becomes a further stumbling block for impassibilists, who, hoping to retain the idea of God as spirit, are forced further away from positing any 'feeling' in God. But if Thomas' distinction between passions as corporeal and affects as independent of corporeality is tenable, then a model of 'divine emotion' emerges that may meet the concerns of both 'conservative' and 'liberal' theologians.

But is this view plausible in the modern world, given that we have a very different view of emotion and of what constitutes the human person than that of Augustine or Thomas? In what follows, I seek to show that the distinction between passions and affects as characterised by Augustine and Thomas is not only plausible in the context of contemporary philosophy of emotion, but that it may actually contribute valuable insights to modern philosophy of emotion and psychology.

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<sup>288</sup> Marcel Sarot, 'Patipassianism', p. 365