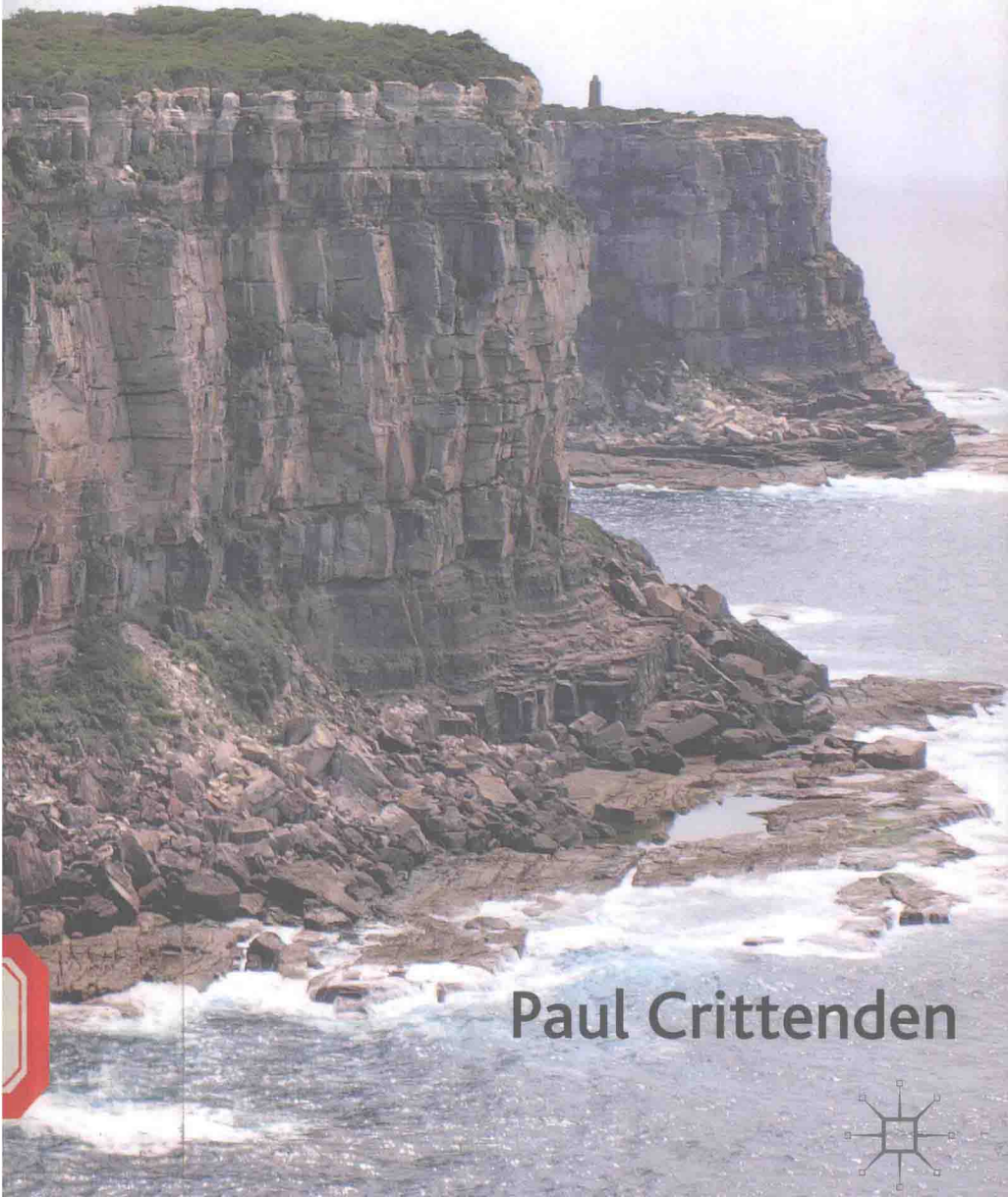
Reason, Will and Emotion

Defending the Greek Tradition against Triune Consciousness



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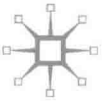

First published 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978–1–137–03096–2

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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Abbreviations

Aristotle

De An. *De Anima*
NE *Nicomachean Ethics*

Augustine

CG *The City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*)
Trin. *The Trinity* (*De Trinitate*)

Plato

Rep. *Republic*
Sym. *Symposium*

Thomas Aquinas

SCG *Summa contra Gentiles*
STh *Summa Theologiae*
Ver. *De Veritate* (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*)

Contents

Introduction

My primary concern in this study is to explore and defend the place of affectivity, including the passions and the higher emotions known as affections of the will, in the philosophy of mind and ethics of the Greek tradition. I will be concerned in particular with the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and especially Thomas Aquinas. My aim overall is to throw light on the fundamental importance of affectivity, and indeed to argue for its necessity as a dimension of understanding. As is well known, the Greek tradition in these matters is commonly charged with an extreme intellectualism in which reason is upheld to the exclusion of feeling or affection.

This charge can be found at its most general level in the writings of the early twentieth-century phenomenologist Max Scheler. In Scheler's view, the whole of western philosophy, from ancient Greek thinking onwards, has been caught up in a division between reason and sensibility, in which emotional life is separated from the mind and assigned entirely to the level of the senses. The ethicist Dietrich von Hildebrand also speaks of the exclusion of the whole of affective life from the spiritual domain as a disastrous prejudice bequeathed by Greek intellectualism. For von Hildebrand, love is honoured in this tradition only to the extent that it is stripped of its affective character.

In his account of the mind, Scheler sought to give effect to Pascal's much-quoted remark that 'The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing' (Pascal, 1995, 127). Insisting that the heart has its own logic outside the grasp of understanding, Scheler developed an elaborate theory of ethics based on the perception of value in and through feeling. In his view, love precedes thought or will: 'heart deserves to be called the core of man as a spiritual being much more than knowing and willing do' (Scheler, 1973b, 100). Scheler thus espoused a triune

account of the mind in which reason, will and affection occupy distinct spheres, each with its own particular object and role. In insisting on the place of affectivity in the mind, he did not seek to subordinate reason to feeling in the manner of David Hume, who maintained, in opposition to the Greeks, that 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' (Hume, 1967, 415). But what Scheler rejected in Greek thought (or failed to recognise) was the idea that reason itself could be conceived as incorporating affection as well as knowledge. Holding affectivity in separation from cognition and will, he was drawn to postulate his own version of a hierarchical relationship between them. In Scheler's triune system, affectivity is more basic than reason and will.

I will discuss Scheler's and von Hildebrand's views, especially in their bearing on the Greek tradition, in Chapter 5. But that discussion is part of an extended consideration of a recent argument for triune consciousness proposed by Andrew Tallon, which I take to be representative of triunitarian accounts in modern philosophy as a whole. Tallon appeals to Scheler's phenomenology of love in support of his own thesis that 'affection intends value, parallel to and complementing cognition's intending truth and volition's intending action' (Tallon, 1997, 200). With Scheler, he holds that western philosophy from the time of the Greeks has been marked by a rationalist mindset in which affection is removed from consciousness and located exclusively in the body. On that assumption, he seeks to bring affectivity back into the mind as a distinct kind of consciousness along with cognition and volition. And he too holds that affectivity can be the source of non-conceptual knowledge – called connatural knowledge – especially in ethics.

The argument for triune consciousness rests primarily on an appeal to the notion of intentionality as explored in the writings of twentieth-century phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Scheler, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Ricoeur. Taken generally, intentionality is the characteristic feature of thought and other mental states, including emotions, of being *about* something or *of* something, involving the power of the mind to be directed (or to direct itself) to an object: for instance, to something thought or believed, loved or hated, hoped for or feared. The range of different kinds of intentional mental states or experiences points to different kinds of intentionality or different ways of being directed to an object.

In his study of Husserl's phenomenology, Levinas drew a contrast between treating the world in terms of things to be perceived or thought

about in theoretical terms and relating to it as a world of objects of practical use and value. He suggests that, in wanting to do something or in loving someone, for instance, 'the voluntary and affective elements are special ways of being directed towards an object, special ways of transcending oneself' (Levinas, 1973, 43). On this basis, he was critical of the idea that the intentionality involved in loving someone could be reduced to a theoretical representation of the loved object accompanied by a purely subjective feeling (1973, 44–5). The point is well taken, but Tallon concludes too readily that affective intentionality stands in its own right without reference to cognitive (or representational) intentionality. In the terms of triune consciousness, he must also suppose that volitional intentionality is equally independent of cognition. The basic issue for discussion here is whether it makes sense to suppose that intentionality of an affective or volitional kind could be separated from cognitive intentionality in this way. For instance, my desire to achieve a difficult goal, and my hopes or fears in this regard, rest on my understanding of the goal in question.

As for phenomenological inquiry, closer consideration shows that Levinas agreed with Husserl that 'representation is found necessarily at the basis of intention, even nontheoretical intention' (Levinas, 1998, 60). This is also consistent with Merleau-Ponty's idea of an operative intentionality behind the intentionality of representation, and with Heidegger's reflections on intentionality and mood. Ricoeur's search for a philosophy of the heart in *Fallible Man* (1986) is of considerable interest in the context of the Greek tradition, for he reflects deeply on the theme of disproportion and fragility in the affective sphere in connection with Plato's idea of the role of the spirited element of the soul (*thumos*) in individual and social life. But he too acknowledges Husserl's principle in this work in his analysis of the intentionality of feeling 'in the reciprocal genesis of feeling and knowing'. As a whole, then, I will argue that the major phenomenological thinkers to whom Tallon appeals do not in fact support his claims regarding affective intentionality. Nor do their reflections show that the Greek tradition was wrong about the place of affectivity in the philosophy of mind and ethics.

Greek and medieval philosophers thought of the mind in terms of a distinctive set of capacities commonly known as faculties, chief among them the intellect, as the power of understanding and judgement, and the will, as the affective capacity for intelligent choice. Intellect is linked in turn in a mutual relationship with perceptual powers, and will with emotions, at the level of the senses (along with other powers, including memory and imagination). But, in the wake of Descartes' focus on

consciousness as the defining characteristic of the mind, this approach has had a mixed reception in modern philosophy. Drawing on Bernard Lonergan's work on understanding and insight (Lonergan, 1957), Tallon proposes to drop talk of faculties altogether in favour of analysing the mind directly in terms of conscious operations. Furthermore, Lonergan's account of ascending levels of cognitive and volitional consciousness, each with a related set of operations, provides the matrix to which he adds a parallel line of ascending levels of affectivity.

Against this background, I will be concerned in Chapter 3 with cognition in sense experience and understanding, with particular reference to concepts and their representational nature. I also take note of the idea of a basic level of feeling beneath all knowing and consider the theme of the priority of practical engagement over an assumed theoretical standpoint in knowledge. This leads to a discussion of volition, voluntary and intentional behaviour, and the idea of acts of will, a notion which is especially problematic in a consciousness-based account of volition. Then in Chapter 4, in response to Lonergan's criticisms, I seek to defend a faculty-based account of the mind on lines proposed by Anthony Kenny in particular (Kenny, 1989).

Greek thought about the mind, from Socrates to Aquinas, was focused closely on its manifestation in individual and social life (in keeping with the idea that the mind is a capacity for diverse types of activity, or rather a capacity for acquiring the abilities exercised in the relevant activities). This focus showed itself in a particular concern with motivational factors in human behaviour and related ethical issues, in a framework in which it is agreed that human beings seek the ultimate good of happiness and always choose to do what they think will lead to this end. But people disagree about the good that constitutes happiness, and often act badly. Socrates, according to Plato, held that everything in this regard rests on knowledge or intelligence, and that wrongdoing is always due to ignorance. Plato challenged this in later dialogues, especially the *Republic*, in favour of a more complex account of motivation. In his more developed view, the motivating power of reason can find itself in conflict with spirited feelings such as ambition and anger, or again with the immediate desires associated with the senses. Much of his subsequent ethical, social and political thought, including his reflections on love and creativity in the *Symposium*, is concerned with the different elements of desire in the soul and the idea of finding a balance in which spirited and sense desires find their place in the love of truth and goodness associated with reason.

Taking up Plato's thought in his own way, Aristotle also espoused a complex account of motivation in which affectivity runs across the whole spectrum of mind and senses. Reason, he argues, encompasses the capacity for both theoretical and practical reasoning, the one concerned with truth or falsity in judgement, the other with truth in the sphere of action (bearing on what is good). This yields his conception of rational desire (*boulêsis*) – in essence the idea of the will – as an affective capacity directed towards choice of action to a desired good. And choice in this case is characterised as both cognitive and affective. Along with reason, motivation arises from the emotions of the spirited and sense-based appetites. Again, his ethics (and psychology in important respects) is devoted to characterising these elements and their mutual relationships, and the scope for conflict and harmony between them. This leads to his account of the basic objects of choice and the basic categories of value, and from there to his view of practical wisdom, moral virtue, and the passions in their bearing on happiness (*eudaimonia*).

These ideas concerning mind, motivation, virtue and the passions were taken up and reappraised by the Greek and Latin Stoics in a revival of the Socratic view that virtue is a form of knowledge, that the inner state of virtue alone is truly good, without the need for external goods, and that the passions (as distinct from reason-based affection) involve false value judgements. In considering Greek thought, thinkers in the Christian era were thus faced with the Platonist and Aristotelian standpoint and the sustained challenge to that approach posed by the Stoics.

Augustine, the 'first philosopher of the will', in Hannah Arendt's phrase, is of towering significance in any study of affectivity in this tradition. His thought on this theme can be found especially in *The Trinity*, where he treats of the mind as memory, understanding and will, and portrays the will specifically as the manifestation of love. But he insists that love is related to knowledge, memory or understanding, and 'reason and reasonable appetite [...] are embraced in the one nature of mind' (Augustine, 1996, 323). His treatment of the emotions, to be found especially in *The City of God*, is marred in part by limited sources and some misunderstanding. Nonetheless, in drawing the Aristotelian (Platonist) account into his own world view, Augustine sought to accommodate the Stoic insistence on the involvement of the will in the passions at least to the extent that they move us to action.

Greek thought on these matters comes to a form of resolution and completion, in my argument, in Aquinas' treatment of mind and

affectivity. My aim is to show that his conception of intellectual love is the key to a powerful account of affectivity and values, grounded in reason, open to the importance of the passions and affectivity as a whole, and focused on the goal of individual and common human fulfilment. Love of this kind responds to intelligible good as providing reasons for action that relate to our capacity for achieving fulfilment. The reasons in question are reasons of a general or external kind, which are distinct from a person's (internal) antecedent preferences, and which might reasonably guide the passions in the quest for human well-being.

Aquinas' account of intellectual love and other affections of the will – such as joy in all things that we can desire with 'the pleasure of reason' – emerges in his account of human action, and particularly in his treatment of the passions and their significance for moral virtue and human well-being. I argue that the key distinction in interpreting Aquinas in this matter – and Plato and Aristotle as well – is not the distinction they make between sense-based and reason-based desire. Rather, the passions can be seen as forms of feeling-based and thought-related desire for some specific (and hence limited) perceived good; the (intellective) will, by contrast, is our capacity for affective response to good overall or to good 'all things considered'. Affection at this overall level bears on individual and social good. For intellectual love is expressed importantly in friendship-love, which begins in a proper love of self as the basis for the love of others, and extends to the common good in communities and to a universal concern for the good of all others.

The discussion of affectivity from Socrates to Aquinas, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, extends into the concluding chapter in a consideration of Aquinas' argument for a form of mutual entailment between cognitive and affective powers in human and animal life. This marks a sharp contrast with the triunitarian approach. For, in separating affectivity from reason and the will, triune consciousness cannot give an account of the basic idea of acting for a reason, nor make sense of behaviour as the expression of intelligent choice. Nor can it show how the three kinds of consciousness – affective, cognitive and volitional – are related to one another or how they come together in the mind.

Finally, there is the associated claim in the triunitarian view that affectivity based in virtue gives rise to intuitive, instinctive, non-conceptual ethical judgement that takes the place of understanding and deliberation. Andrew Tallon, drawing on Jacques Maritain and others, attributes this view to Aquinas on the basis of a passage in the *Summa Theologiae* (2–2. 45. 2) in which Aquinas refers to the capacity of the

virtuous person to give right judgements 'by a kind of connaturality'. I argue in response that this passage needs to be interpreted in the light of Aquinas' account of growth in moral virtue, not least the central place he gives to practical wisdom as an intellectual virtue with moral implications. There is no basis for the claim that what is involved is a form of intuitive, instinctive, non-conceptual knowledge.

1
Affection in Triune Consciousness

1 Misidentifying a rationalist tradition regarding affection

In *Head and Heart: Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (1997) Andrew Tallon is concerned to argue against a rationalist focus on reason and will to the exclusion of feeling or affection as a mode of human consciousness.[1] The book, he says, 'defends the right of feeling – meaning the whole realm of passion, emotion, mood, and affection in general – to be admitted to equal partnership with reason and will in human consciousness' (Tallon, 1997, 1–2). Triune (or triadic) consciousness is thus conceived as the union of affection, cognition and volition in an operational synthesis, a union in equal partnership of three distinct, irreducible but inseparable kinds of consciousness. The broad aim of the study is to show 'how affection works, how it operates in synthesis with those two [reason and will]' and to present this concept of triune consciousness as a paradigm for the human spirit (1997, 2).

In gesturing towards the rationalist view of which he is critical, Tallon speaks in passing of 'a tradition (for example, Plato, Scholasticism in general, Descartes) that removed affection from consciousness and located it exclusively in the body considered separate from the soul' (1997, 6). This list of offenders against affection is marked by misunderstanding and error at every point. The issue is not unimportant, for Scholastic thought and its Greek sources constitute a substantial background component in the thesis of triune consciousness.

To begin at the beginning, Plato did not address himself to consciousness directly even if he was familiar with the basic relevant ideas. The same is true of the medieval Scholastics, for the focus on consciousness in the philosophy of mind came only with Descartes. For Plato,

the central notion in this domain was soul (*psuchê*): a complex term embracing life or what brings life; the mental in its different forms as opposed to the physical; our rational and spiritual capacities in particular; and, not least, that element in us that is believed to be immortal. Tallon's claim might seem to find a basis in the *Phaedo*. In that dialogue, concerned so centrally with death and immortality, Plato projects a non-composite view of the soul, identifies it essentially with the power to think, and contrasts it with the body (*sôma*) as marked especially by senses, passions and desires. At the same time he also refers to the soul in the wider sense of animating agent, recognises that soul and body interact with one another, and even allows that the passions and appetites do not necessarily leave the soul after death. In any case, there is no reason to suppose that the senses, passions and desires associated with the body do not involve conscious awareness.

More commonly, Plato proposed an account of the soul as composed of three parts (within an overall unity): the reflective or rational element, the passionate or spirited, and the appetitive or sense-based. Set out most fully in the *Republic*, a tripartite account can also be found in the *Timaeus*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman*. Talk of 'parts' in this context can be best understood in terms of abilities or capacities of the soul manifested in behaviour, broadly the power to think about what to believe and what to do, to strive with passionate feeling, and to desire appetitively. The capacities show up, Plato suggests, in three different types of desire, related in turn to different types of character and ways of life depending on which among the types of desire is dominant in a given individual: a life centred on the pleasures of wisdom, or the pleasures of honour and power, or the pleasures of sensual gratification. His view overall is that each part of the soul has its proper claim to satisfaction, and that each works best when it fits in with the others. In comparative terms, as is well known, Plato looks to a harmonious balance of parts in which spirited striving and appetite have their place subject to the guidance of reason.

This proposal involves an emphasis on reason – especially reason in action – but not at all in a way that removes affection from the soul. In an insightful essay on the *Symposium*, F. M. Cornford observes that Plato's Socrates, 'the man of thought', was also 'the man of passion, constantly calling himself a "lover", not in the vulgar sense – the speech of Alcibiades was to make that perfectly clear – but still a lover'.[2] In keeping with this dual character, the central theme of the dialogue is 'to explain the significance of Eros to the lover of wisdom' (1967, 69). That significance lies in the idea that the three types of desire that shape