The declared purpose of St Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises is: ‘To master oneself and order one’s life, without being swayed by an affection which might be disordered’ (Exx 21).¹ The identification of affection as crucial to the ordering of a person’s life highlights its importance in the Ignatian tradition of discernment. But what are disordered affections, and what does it mean to order them?

Modern dictionary definitions treat affection as a synonym for feeling, emotion or attachment. But in the time of Ignatius, emotions did not exist as a psychological category; even today, there is no consensus on the theory of emotions.² To reduce affections to emotions in a contemporary reading of the Spiritual Exercises is thus a gross simplification. Fully to appreciate the sophistication underlying the practicality of the Exercises, it is necessary to consider the medieval discourse on the theology and psychology of appetites, passions, affections and virtues.

At the time of its writing, St Thomas Aquinas’ Treatise on the Passions in the Prima secundae of the Summa theologiae ‘probably constituted the longest sustained discussion of the passions ever written’, synthesizing and eclipsing the ideas of major thinkers preceding him.³ As Ignatius studied theology at the University of Paris under the guidance of the Dominicans at Saint-Jacques,⁴ it is likely that it was there where he encountered the Summa. While there is no evidence as to which pages Ignatius actually

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⁴ Autobiography, n. 93.
read, it was during his stay that the Dominicans started to restructure their curriculum to focus on Aquinas, and Ignatius is believed to have had a Thomist-orientated education. Aquinas’ lasting influence on Ignatius is evident: he would later advise that all scholastics in the Society of Jesus be instructed in the works of Aquinas (Constitutions, IV.4.1 [464]).

Accordingly, I propose to compare Aquinas’ conceptual framework for the affections in the Summa theologiae with Ignatius’ own account in the Spiritual Exercises. I hope to demonstrate the coherence of this antecedent text with the methods that Ignatius employs, in and beyond the Spiritual Exercises, to order the affections towards finding and ultimately resting in God.

The Affections and Passions According to Aquinas

In his book The Logic of Desire, Nicholas Lombardo revisits the Treatise of the Passions and offers an exposition and analysis of Aquinas’ thought on the passions and affections. While Aquinas provides no explicit definition of affection, Lombardo writes: ‘For Aquinas, the category of affection denotes a class of psychological phenomena that includes both movements of the sense appetite and movements of the intellectual appetite, that is, the will’ (75). Passions are a subset of affections and are movements of the ‘sense appetite’ only (20, 76): ‘A passion is a physiological and psychological response to the apprehension of a sensible good or a sensible evil, that is, an object that is known through the senses, and judged to be either good or evil’ (20).6

Defining ‘appetite’, Lombardo translates Aquinas: ‘Appetite is … an inclination toward something … that is both similar and suited to that which desires it’ (26).7 There are three kinds of appetite: the natural appetite, the sense appetite and the intellectual or rational appetite (will). The natural appetite is an inclination towards something ‘only by natural disposition’ (31).8 In the case of the sense appetite, the object or ‘good’ is apprehended by the body; for the intellectual appetite, it is something mentally comprehensible (31).

6 Aquinas also recognises affections of the intellectual appetite alone, referring to them as simple or intellectual affections.
7 Summa theologiae, 1, 2, q. 8, a. 1.
8 Summa theologiae, 1, q. 1, a. 59.
Human beings are particularly special because they possess all three appetites. But the appetites are not mutually exclusive, and their objects are not necessarily the same:

When they are operative, they influence and sometimes compete with each other, as when they incline us toward mutually incompatible goods. It is this conflux of different appetites that makes us complicated. (33)

The inclinations of the sense appetite, however, are subject to the superior intellectual appetite when it comes to choices or actions. And the intellectual appetite is itself subject to reason; hence, the sense appetite is commanded by reason through the influence of the intellectual appetite (94–98). Even so, the appetites respond to reason freely and the passions retain some degree of autonomy: ‘The sense appetite is oriented toward reason’s guidance, but it responds to reason on its own terms’ (95).

A pathway may be traced from perception to action in accordance with this analysis (22–25). Perceptions can be gathered by thinking about an abstraction with the intellect, or by using the corporeal senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Their object is appraised by the faculties of common sense, imagination, estimation and memory to form an ‘intention’—a ‘perception colored by cognitive evaluation’ (24). This intention arouses the appetites and, in response, an affection is generated, either of attraction or repulsion towards the object: a good attracts; while evil repulses. The process terminates in action, or the lack thereof, with or without the permission or the influence of reason. All these events are stored as memories, available for retrieval upon a repeat encounter and contributing to apprehension as necessary.
The sense appetite is further analysed into the *concupiscible* and *irascible* powers (54–74). The concupiscible power evaluates objects based on their desirability and hence focuses on the presence or absence of objects. Aquinas identifies *love* and *hatred* as concupiscible passions. Love leads respectively to the *desire* for an object that is absent and *pleasure* in an object that is present. In the same way, hatred leads to *aversion* from an absent object and *sorrow* for a present one. When the concupiscible power is threatened, the irascible power is aroused: the irascible passions ‘are second-order desires and aversions that defend the inclinations of the concupiscible passions’ (51). These apprehend objects according to their usefulness and the difficulty of obtaining them, thereby inspiring movement towards or away from those objects. Hope and despair, fear and daring, and anger constitute the irascible passions. Love and hope are the first of the movements drawn from the concupiscible and irascible powers, respectively, from which all the other passions and affections are derived. The intellectual appetite does not have irascible and concupiscible powers.
Through reason, it is in itself both irascible, in that it repels evil, and concupiscible in that it desires good.\(^9\)

Aquinas differs from his predecessors, both pagans and Christians, in his optimism regarding the passions and affections. ‘Pleasure perfects actions’, according to Aquinas; thus he deems sexual intercourse to have been not only possible but more pleasurable in the Garden of Eden, where man and nature are unblemished (36, 42). This contrasts with the negative view of sexual desires and pleasures held by his Franciscan contemporary St Bonaventure and the earlier theologians St Augustine, St Justin and St Clement of Alexandria.\(^10\)

In medieval medicine, for which the writings of the Greek philosopher and physician Galen hold the ultimate authority, the soul’s passions needed to be diagnosed and cured with reason to render human beings free from them.\(^11\) Galen characterizes grief as ‘an evil of the soul, just as pain is an evil of the body’.\(^12\) But Aquinas argues that passions and affections are not ‘diseases and disturbances of the soul’ (40).\(^13\) Aquinas’ confidence that these are fundamentally good is based on a simple but powerful doctrine: God created them. As such, they are naturally orientated towards what completes and perfects humanity: that human beings may flourish through the development of virtues and realise their purpose (\(\text{telos}\)).\(^14\) The supreme objective of human beings is to be with their Creator; in God, humanity is perfect and complete (17, 37–42). Because God bestowed the appetites on humanity, and with them the capacity to feel, Aquinas is certain that it is through these that God communicates and directs people to God (43). Therefore, even in a world of temporal goods, when confronted with the infinite and absolute goodness of God, human beings will inevitably choose God and will no longer be attracted to lesser goods (29–30).

Original sin does not change the positive nature of passions and affections; the fall of humanity does not automatically condemn it to evil. What the fall effectively does is to isolate human beings from the sanctifying grace through which God dwells in them. Consequently, they

\(^9\) Summa theologiae, 1, q. 82, a. 5.
\(^11\) Galen, On the Passions and Errors of the Soul, translated by Paul Harkins (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1963), 44.
\(^12\) Galen, Passions and Errors, 54.
\(^13\) Summa theologicae, 1, 2, q. 24, a. 2.
\(^14\) Aquinas deviates from Bonaventure on this matter: whereas Bonaventure declares that the virtues reside only in the intellect and the will, Aquinas states that the virtues are in the sense appetite.
lose their inner harmony and are left to deal with nature by themselves. Their intentions are left in disarray; their appetites are more susceptible to conflicts; and their reason is impaired. Like a wounded soldier, a person is weakened and, when confronted with evil manifest through sensible matter, less able to resist temptations (118–124). To be healed, sanctifying grace must be restored, infused into the soul through the sacraments of baptism and penance. Sanctifying grace transforms the appetites, affections and reason towards rehabilitation (125–128). It also grants the gifts of the Holy Spirit which, in cooperation with human agency, foster a habitus or disposition towards holiness (102) and promote the instillation and growth of the virtues (132).

**The Affections According to Ignatius**

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius distinguishes how ‘we use acts of the intellect in reasoning and of the will in eliciting acts of the affections’ (Exx 3). He also writes of ‘that love which moves me and brings me to choose’ something (Exx 184; see Exx 338). These words echo Aquinas’ language of the affections, acts of the will, and the movements that inspire choice.

It is worth noting that Ignatius, like Aquinas, considers the moral status of the affections to be contingent on the intentional objects estimated as either good or evil and, in terms of the irascible powers, with respect to the movements inspired. This can be seen throughout the Spiritual Exercises, which aim to engage the affections in the exercitant’s discernment of God’s will. Two subtle differences must be emphasized, however. First, given an array of legitimate options that one can desire, the actual intentional objects matter less than the affirmation that it is God’s will that these objects be desired (Exx 16).

Second, Ignatius deems motive to contribute significantly to the merit of an affection, which may be seen especially from his letters. He once reprimanded a Jesuit priest for giving rosaries to a group of women who were ‘attached to him’ because the charity was ‘imperfect’ when mixed with ‘human affection’. In another letter, instead of applauding a Jesuit brother for his desire to study, Ignatius reminds him to exercise ‘charity

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and humility’, for not all members of the Society can be learned or be priests.¹⁶ The importance of motives underlying affections is not so clear in Aquinas (109–110).

But what does Ignatius say that ordered affections should be like? With relation to God, affections must be *reverent* (Exx 3). With relation to election, or decision-making, they ‘should descend from above, from the love of God; in such a way that … the love … for the matter being chosen is solely for the sake of our Creator and Lord’ (Exx 184). Affections must be from God, in God and for God.

This is consistent with Ignatius’ statement of humanity’s *telos* in the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23): ‘Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls’. Ignatius expounds how everything else in creation was made to help humanity achieve this purpose; consequently, human beings must be prudent in either utilising or abstaining from these resources. They must not desire anything specific—‘health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor’ (Exx 23)—but only that which elevates them towards this end. Even the motivation for what they desire, Ignatius highlights, must be ‘only the service, honor and glory of the Divine Majesty’ (Exx 16). Therefore, it is imperative that affections must be entirely dedicated to God—ordered from their roots in desire to the acts they inspire—if humanity is to attain the fruition of its *telos*.

Timing is also essential in the ordering of the affections: the pilgrim must act now. The meditation on the Three Kinds of Men states that to find peace and salvation one must be rid of any attachment to a thing that has been wrongly acquired long before the hour of death (Exx 153). In addition, if the sequence of meditations and contemplations in the Spiritual Exercises is to be taken seriously, affections must be ordered before deciding on the matter at stake (Exx 170–174), or at least before making an election.

From Ignatius’ writings, it can be concluded that affections are ordered if, and only if, they are for the glory of God, and they are for the individual’s salvation and his or her union with God. Any affection that does not fit these criteria is disordered and so must be rectified.

**Ordering the Affections**

In the presence of any disordered affection, what does Ignatius suggest? His answer is unequivocal: if someone ‘feels an affection or inclination to something in a disordered way’ (Exx 16), that person should do everything possible to feel and act to the contrary, and earnestly ask God to arrange his or her inclinations so as not to desire anything unless God wishes it.

This twofold approach to ordering affections is fascinating, as it touches on the versatility of what it means to order. To establish order is to put everything in its proper sequence and, as a corollary, to prioritise. Ignatius’ approach is to put God first and hold everything else, including his own desires and affections, as subservient to God. Through this surrender, he reorients his life towards his natural telos and, paradoxically, becomes free to flourish. In addition, to order is also to command, in this case to exert authority over untoward impulses. By action to the contrary (agere contra), Ignatius voluntarily imposes his will on the sense appetite. Agere contra, as a recourse to train the affections and to control the ego, is highlighted at least twice more in the Spiritual Exercises: when exercitants are tempted to shorten the time dedicated to prayer (Exx 13) and when they find themselves averse to desiring poverty (Exx 157).

Aside from strengthening the will in this way, Ignatius has a further strategy to achieve the same end: instructing the flesh through external penance, such as ‘abstain[ing] from what is ordinarily suitable’ in food, sleep and comfort (Exx 83–85), ‘to keep our bodily nature obedient to reason’ (Exx 87). By agere contra and external penance, the lower appetite is actively subjugated by the higher, in accordance with Aquinas’ framework.

The influence of this framework can also be seen in the structure of the Spiritual Exercises. The First Week begins with exercitants reflecting on the history of sin (Exx 45–54) and on their personal sinfulness (Exx 55–61), the fitting conclusion of their reflection being a wish to repent and overwhelming gratitude to the Lord for the opportunity to do so. These preoccupations inspire the affections of sorrow and hope. Sorrow, a concupiscible passion, is provoked by the evil of our unworthiness. As this sorrow moves us to repent not only in words but in deeds (Exx 230–231), it is shown to be derived from genuine love of God (Exx 316). Hope

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arises, in the midst of wretchedness, from remembering the intercession of the angels and the saints, and the life and strength afforded to humanity by nature (Exx 60). It also recognises the possibility of reconciliation with God and the good inherent in that reunion (Exx 61). In Aquinas’ terms, hope is an irascible passion, resulting from the cognition that changing our ways is an arduous task, but is nevertheless possible to achieve with God’s grace. Thus the First Week elicits love and hope—the first movements of the concupiscible and irascible powers, respectively, from which all the other affections spring.

The hope of overcoming sinfulness comes from God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of confession (reconciliation), which Ignatius recommends should best be undertaken after the First Week and at all events weekly (Exx 44, 18). According to Aquinas, God’s sanctifying grace is infused directly into the soul through this sacrament. The acquisition of grace confers the ability, in the midst of temptations, better to order the affections under the rightful rule of reason. Sanctifying grace also instils the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity (125–126). In a letter of 1548, Ignatius echoes these sentiments, writing about how God’s grace will help us choose the path ‘made clearest to us, as the happiest and most blessed in this life, and wholly directed and ordered to the other everlasting life—whereby we are encompassed and made one with these most holy gifts’. Without these gifts, however, ‘our thoughts, words and actions’ are ‘tainted, cold, and, troubled’.18

Ignatius takes great care to manage the external senses in setting the stage for the Exercises, as can be seen in his Additions (Exx 73–82, 229), where he gives his recommendations on prayer space, posture and even lighting.

18 Ignatius of Loyola to Francisco de Borja, 20 September 1548, in Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions, 255.
Of Aquinas’ four methods of cognition (common sense, imagination, estimation and memory), the Exercises make the most use of imagination. The power of the imagination is not to be underestimated; Aquinas states that ‘it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms’ (90).\(^{19}\) Ignatius heightens the imagination by instructing exercitants to use all five bodily senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch in their contemplations (Exx 65–70, 121–125). Through this creativity, both the sense and intellectual appetites are aroused and give rise to affections. The interior knowledge gained through this, with the grace directly requested in colloquy, is to be used so that exercitants can hate the disorder of their actions and so correct themselves (Exx 63).

In the Second to Fourth Weeks, exercitants effectively participate in the life of Christ. The virtues of humility (Exx 116) and obedience (Exx 134), for example, are contemplated not merely by watching the scenes unfold but by sharing the experiences of Christ. This is made clear in a prelude that provides instruction on what the exercitant must ask of God:

> What I ask for should be in accordance with the subject matter. For example, in a contemplation on the Resurrection, I will ask for joy with Christ in joy; in a contemplation on the Passion, I will ask for pain, tears, and suffering with Christ suffering. (Exx 48)

Aquinas regards the affections as not only beneficial but necessary for the development of virtues. In light of the beatific knowledge intrinsic to Christ’s divinity and because he is without sin, Aquinas considers that his affections are perfectly ordered: “Christ has absolutely no disordered desires”, not because he was less human but because he was more human’ (212).\(^{20}\) Thus, by partaking in the affections manifest in the life of Christ, through the use of senses and the imagination, the Exercises order affections by following the example of the epitome of humanity and virtue: the Son of God himself.

Habituation and confirmation of the decision to order the affections and to follow God are accomplished in the Exercises through repetition of either the Compositions of Place or their respective themes. The call to

\(^{19}\) *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 84, a. 7.  
\(^{20}\) *Summa theologiae*, 3, q. 7, a. 2.
dwell on moments of former consolation and desolation (Exx 62) or once again to contemplate God’s love at the conclusion of the Exercises (Exx 230) applies the cognitive faculty of memory to observe what happens to the intentional objects conceived. The expectation is that, regardless of the possibly altered perspectives or the fresh insights gleaned, the ordered affections remain, are tuned more finely, or perhaps are even reinforced. With repetition, the role of cognition also diminishes, so that there is a transition ‘more from head to heart’ as ordered affections become more instinctive.\(^2\) The benefits of repetition confirm Aquinas’ thesis that the joy following from the use of reason and the exercise of will strengthens its future use: ‘Virtue generates joy because the will attains goods that it desires through virtue, and when the will attains some desired good, the volitional affection of joy necessarily results (hence the proverb: virtue is its own reward)’ (107).

Indirect strategies to support the ordering of affections can be found elsewhere in Ignatius’ writings. In one of his letters, Ignatius offers his advice to the Jesuit fathers and brothers after learning of their ‘holy follies’ and ‘indiscreet fervor’.\(^2\) While commending them for their enthusiasm, Ignatius also warns of its dangers and urges them to focus their energy on study and acquiring knowledge. In the scheme of Aquinas, affections, when guided by reason, develop into what is good and naturally fitting (\textit{connaturalitas}) for humanity.\(^2\) Learning is practical as it empowers the intellect and helps support reason over the appetites—particularly the sense appetite, which the young Jesuits had been inciting through self-mortification.

The methods that Ignatius proposes to order the affections can be summarised into two categories: human agency, through \textit{agere contra}, penance and prayer; and God’s love, through sanctifying grace, the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Aquinas’ terms, God’s tremendous grace overflows into the reason and the will, enabling mastery of the appetites (136). When a human being cooperates with God to train the senses and educate the intellect, their synergistic efforts drive


\(^{22}\) Ignatius of Loyola to the fathers and scholastics at Coimbra, 7 May 1547, in \textit{Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions}, 172.

him or her towards the realisation and growth of the virtues. Thus, perfectly to order the affections means not only to prioritise and command, but also to harmonize. The integration of human faculties, united with God’s will, is what leads to inner peace (250–251)—an indicator of consolation, according to Ignatius’ rule on the discernment of spirits (Exx 316).

Reading Ignatius through the lens of Aquinas’ theory of affections illuminates the link between scholastic and mystical piety. The *Treatise on the Passions* provides the anatomy and physiology of the affections, for which the *Spiritual Exercises* offers a prescription of healing. Bridging theory and practice, and utilising the affections as signposts, the Exercises guide exercitants through an ordered life on a journey to the grandest of destinations, their *telos*: an eternal home with God.

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