

THE EMOTIONS
ACCORDING TO WILLIAM JAMES
AND SAINT THOMAS

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Mr. James Spexarth
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There is one reason for writing this paper; that is, to show the beauty of St. Thomas' theory on the emotions. In order to accomplish this purpose more effectively I have chosen to consider William James' theory on the same subject. By the contrast I hope to bring out the theory of St. Thomas. When each theory has been presented I will conclude with the two outstanding differences of the two theories.

It must be pointed out that the James Theory is the same as the James-Lange Theory. These two men arrived independently at such similar conclusions that their views have been consolidated into what is generally known as the James-Lange Theory of Emotions.

Let it be stressed that I am not presenting the James theory as anything that might be reasonably upheld. Too many psychologists have seen fit to disagree with the theory to warrant a rash defense of it. As one man has said, "We hold, however, that the theory is illogical....." ¹ Another psychologist states, "Most people are rather impatient with the James-Lange theory, finding it wholly unsatisfactory, though unable to locate the trouble precisely. They know the theory does not ring true to them, that is all." ² Opinions similar in content to these have been expressed by many recent psychologists. The theory has been definitely disproved both philosophically and scientifically.

We begin by presenting James' theory as taken from his Principles of Psychology, II, pp. 449-51:

"Our natural way of thinking about these courser emotions is that the mental perception of some facts excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this later state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My theory, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the changes as they occur is the emotion. Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be imposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the later would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colorless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult, and deem it right to strike, but we should not actually feel afraid or angry..... No reader will be inclined to doubt the fact that objects do excite bodily changes by a preorganized mechanism, or the further fact that the changes are so indefinitely numerous and subtle that the entire organism may be called a sounding board, which every change of consciousness, however slight, may make reverberate.... Every one of the bodily changes, whatever it be, is felt acutely or obscurely, the moment it occurs."

By the "courser emotions" James means the emotions of grief, fear, and anger, as is evident from the emotions he uses as examples in explaining his theory.

James uses three different terms to express what he means by the "perception of the exciting fact." e.g. seeing the bear, losing ones fortune, being insulted by a rival. In one place he uses the term "mental state," in another "perception," and in

the third place "consciousness." It is clear that he means this "perception" to be only on a purely sense level. The activities of the mind, namely, intellectual apprehension, judgment and reasoning do not enter into the picture at all, for he states in his theory, "Without the bodily states following on the perception, the later (the perception) would be purely cognitive in form,....." By "cognitive" he evidently means the intellectual activities of apprehension, judgment and reasoning.

Now this is what James means by his theory. He sees a bear; the sight of it immediately causes him to tremble; the trembling of his body causes him to be frightened, which is the emotion. In his own words he says, "My theory, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes (the trembling) follow directly the perception of the exciting fact (seeing the bear), and that our feeling of the changes as they occur (being frightened) is the emotion." Simply stated, he says that we see a bear, we tremble, and we are frightened. That is all; he says nothing as to what precedes, accompanies or follows the emotion.

Because of this very point we say that James completely ignores the psychical aspect of the emotions. He says nothing about the relation that exists between the activities of the intellect and will and the emotions. He does not seem to realize that, "an emotion is not a momentary, atomic conscious state of pure quality; but a complex form of mental excitement always lasting for some time, and generally constituted of sundry elements both cognitive and appetitive, sensuous and

spiritual." ⁴

Not only does he ignore the psychical aspect of the emotions, but he also implies its absurdity. He says, "Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colorless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we should not actually feel afraid or angry."

From this, then, we see that James considers the emotions only under their physiological aspect. His theory is entirely physiological. "In this theory the emotion is the organic-kinesthetic awareness of the reaction to the original stimulus!" ⁵ Another psychologist affirms that, "According to the theory, the emotion is the way the body feels while executing the various internal and expressive movements that occur on such occasions." ⁶

As we stated before and now stress, James says that an object causes a sense perception; it, in turn, causes a bodily resonance, which is the emotion. The theory is a completely physiological one. This is its greatest weakness.

And yet, in this being its greatest weakness, we also see, from another point of view, that this is its greatest strength. Certainly there are reasons for supporting the theory. These reasons are based on facts. These facts are the strength of the theory, and afford the reasons for a few psychologists intelligently trying to uphold it.

"The theory, therefore, calls attention in a unique way to two very important facts which have been neglected by the common-sense view of the emotions. In the first place, we must agree that exciting facts and situations (emotional stimuli) do set up instinctive reflexes in the vital organs and in the muscles of the body. The sight of a wild beast causes us to start and tremble before we have had time to image the danger..... The proffered insult immediately closes our fists and sets our teeth..... As James says: 'Emotional objects are certainly the primitive arousers of instinctive reflex movements.' In the second place, we do sense these bodily reverberations as organic and kinaesthetic sensations, sometimes acutely and sometimes obscurely, during the course of the emotion."

Another psychologist had these same two facts in mind when he observed: "Although its chief thesis is erroneous, this theory seems to us to contain grains of truth frequently overlooked by its opponents." ⁸

These few grains of truth have been the strength of the theory; they constitute the contributions made by this theory to Psychology. James has pointed to the role played by the body in the emotions. For this he merits credit. But for his failure to acknowledge the role played by the intellect and will in the emotions he merits only disapproval.

This presentation of the James theory is now considered sufficient for the purpose of this paper. We will dismiss the James theory, and proceed to St. Thomas' theory of the emotions.

We must point out that St. Thomas did not use the word "emotion." "Emotion is not a Thomistic term." ⁹ Rather, he used the word "passio--passion." Practically speaking, there

is no difference of meaning in English when each word is used to express the same thing. But, philosophically speaking, because the word passion comes from the Latin, it is much easier to arrive at the correct idea of "emotion-passion" through the etymology of the word. "In general, passion can mean any reception." ¹⁰ St. Thomas further explains:

"The word 'passive' is employed in its proper sense, when something is received, while something else is taken away: For sometimes that which is lost is unsuitable to the thing:....
.....At other times the contrary occurs:.....and here we have passion in its most proper acceptation. For a thing is said to be passive from its being drawn to the agent: and when a thing recedes from what is suitable to it, then especially does it appear to be drawn to something else." ¹¹

"To be acted upon by some agent and to suffer a change in the process is of the essence of emotion." ¹²

With this introduction, which has tried both to forestall any confusion about the two terms "emotion" and "passion," and to present the meaning of the latter, we continue with one final explanation. Throughout this paper we will use the term "emotion," except when it occurs in a quotation. We hope this will not be a source of confusion to the reader.

One of the outstanding qualities of St. Thomas, which can be appreciated all the more after reading William James, is his ability to arrive at a given point through a perfectly clear and logical process of reasoning. Never is there any doubt as to where he is going in his argument and the means he is using to arrive at the conclusion. Aware of this, we are going to follow

St. Thomas through a list of distinctions and contradistinctions of the appetites--intellectual and sensitive, until we arrive at his theory of the emotions.

To make secure the foundation of his argument St. Thomas first proves that the emotions are in the soul. The soul is the subject of the emotions. "Therefore passions also.....are in the soul." ¹³ And since there are two parts to the soul, he immediately distinguishes that the emotions are in the appetitive rather than the apprehensive part of the soul.

".....the word passion implies that the patient is drawn to that which belongs to the agent. Now the soul is drawn to a thing by the appetitive power rather than by the apprehensive power....
.... Consequently it is evident that the nature of passion is consistent with the appetitive, rather than with the apprehensive part." ¹⁴

Having advanced this far, he shows that the emotions are not located in the natural appetite. Every created being has a natural appetite, which is simply the tendency to act in a determinate way in accord with its nature. A being without knowledge has only a natural appetite. A being with sense knowledge has both a natural appetite and a sensitive appetite. A being with both sense and intellectual knowledge has all three appetites. Thus it is with man. For this reason St. Thomas shows that the emotions are not to be found in the natural appetite. In proof of which, he says:

"Therefore, as forms exist in those things that have knowledge in a higher manner and above the manner of natural forms; so must there be in them an inclination surpassing the natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite. And this

OUTLINE

Introduction

I. James' theory on the emotions

A. Theory

1. Explanation of terms
2. Meaning of theory

B. Emotions considered under their psychical aspect

1. Ignores the psychical role
2. Implies its absurdity

C. Emotions considered under their physiological aspect

1. Theory entirely physiological
 - a. Object causes perception
 - b. Perception causes bodily resonance
 - c. Bodily resonance produces (is) the emotion
2. Reasons to support theory
 - a. Particular perceptions excite instinctive reflexes in body
 - b. Bodily reverberations are sensed before and during the course of the emotion

II. St. Thomas' theory on the emotions

A. Subject of the emotions

1. In the soul
2. In the appetitive, not apprehensive part of soul
 - a. Not in the natural appetite
 - b. In the cognitive appetite
 - 1.) Intellectual appetite

OUTLINE (CON'T)

2.) Sensitive appetite

a.) "Passion"

b.) "Emotion"

B. Emotions considered under their psychical aspect

1. Subject to command of reason and will

2. Affect reason and will indirectly

a. By distraction

b. By opposition

c. By fettering

C. Emotions considered under their physiological aspect

1. Formal element

a. Is the movement of the appetitive power

b. Follows apprehension

2. Material element

a. Bodily transmutation

1.) Acts of mind need sensitive powers for execution

a.) Proper act

b.) Execution of the proper act

2.) Sensitive powers hindered when body is disturbed

b. Resembles appetitive movement

c. Is the very nature of appetitive movement

III. Conclusion

A. Cause of the emotions

OUTLINE (CON'D)

1. According to James

2. According to St. Thomas

B. Result of each theory

1. James

- a. Man governed by emotions

- b. No free will

2. St. Thomas

- a. Power of the intellect and will over the emotions

- b. Intellect and will governed by the emotions

superior inclination belongs to the appetitive power of the soul, through which the animal is able to desire what it apprehends, and not only that to which it is inclined by its natural form." 15

Because the emotions are not found in the natural appetite, they must be in the cognitive appetite. That is the only other possibility. But the cognitive appetite is divided into the intellectual and sensitive appetites. The sensitive appetite is proper both to the brute and man, because they can both apprehend an object which appears good or suitable to them. But the intellectual appetite is proper only to man, because he alone possesses an intellect capable of apprehending, judging upon, and reasoning about an object.

We have narrowed the possibility of the emotions being either in the intellectual or in the sensitive appetite. St. Thomas shows that they are in the sensitive appetite.

"As stated above passion is properly to be found where there is corporeal transmutation. This corporeal transmutation is found in the act of the sensitive appetite, and is not only spiritual, as in the sensitive apprehension, but also natural. Now there is no need for corporeal transmutation in the act of the intellectual appetite: because this appetite is not exercised by means of a corporeal organ. It is therefore evident that passion is more properly in the act of the sensitive appetite, than in that of the intellectual appetite." 16

Since the emotions are in the sensitive appetite, and whereas both the brute and man have a sensitive appetite, the question is posed: are the emotions proper both to the brute and to man? St. Thomas states in an objection, "But passions are not proper to man, for he has them in common with the other

animals." ¹⁷ And then he makes this reply, "These passions, considered in themselves, are common to man and other animals: but, as commanded by the reason, they are proper to man." ¹⁸

We, therefore, conclude that the emotions are to be found both in the brute and in man. But they are proper to man because they follow reason, and thus possess a certain liberty. Whereas in the brute the emotions follow only sense knowledge and follow it of necessity, having no freedom in the matter. "An animal's appetites move him automatically to act because they are the ultimate springs of action in him, since his proper perfection is sentiency." ¹⁹

Thus, with the help of St. Thomas, we have arrived at a clear knowledge of the subject of the emotions. They are located in the sensitive appetite of man, and are strickly proper to man, as we distinguished above. All the other possibilities of their location have been logically excluded. St. Thomas considers many more things about the emotions, such as their division into the concupiscible and irascible, explanations of each one of the emotions considered under this division, and numerous other points. All these things we choose not to consider, feeling certain that they are not pertinent to the main theme of this paper.

We prefer to view the emotions according to St. Thomas' theory under their psychical and physiological aspect. This will balance the first part of this paper where we considered the emotions according to the James' theory under the same

aspects. The contrast of the two theories should deepen our appreciation for the correct one.

As regards their psychical aspect, the emotions are subject to the command of the reason and will, and yet they are, in turn, able to affect them. First of all, as they are subject to the command of reason and will, Brother Benignus says:

"Man's sensitive appetite is subordinated to his intellect and will..... This means that when any sensuous good attracts man's sensitive appetite, this good is always, or at least normally, apprehended by intellect as well as by sense, and consequently man is capable of judging about it rationally instead of being compelled to immediate action by his sensitive inclination for it." 20

St. Thomas puts it this way:

"In two ways the irascible and concupiscible powers obey the higher part, in which are the intellect or reason, and the will: first, as to reason, secondly as to the will. They obey the reason in their own acts, because in other animals the sensitive appetite is naturally moved by the estimative power;..... In man the estimative power.....is replaced by the cogitative power,.....

"To the will also is the sensitive appetite subject in execution, which is accomplished by the motive power. For in other animals movement follows at once the concupiscible and irascible appetites:..... On the contrary man is not moved at once;....but he awaits the command of the will, which is the superior appetite. For wherever there is order among a number of motive powers, the second only moves by virtue of the first: wherefore the lower appetite is not sufficient to cause movement, unless the higher appetite consents.....In this way, therefore, the irascible and concupiscible are subject to reason." 21

It is true that the emotions are subject to the command of reason and will. But this does not mean that the emotions

cannot, in turn, affect the reason and the will. St. Thomas has this to say about the subject.

"A passion of the sensitive appetite cannot draw or move the will directly, but it can do so indirectly, and this in two ways. First, by a kind of distraction: because, since all the soul's powers are rooted in the one essence of the soul, it follows of necessity that, when one power is intent in its act, another power becomes remiss, or is even altogether impeded, in its act, both because all energy is weakened through being divided, so that, on the contrary, through being centered on one thing, it is less able to be directed to several; and because, in the operations of the soul, a certain attention is requisite, and if this be closely fixed on one thing, less attention is given to another. In this way, by a kind of distraction, when the movement of the sensitive appetite is enforced in respect of any passion whatever, the proper movement of the rational appetite or will must, of necessity, become remiss or altogether impeded.

"Secondly, this may happen on the part of the will's object, which is good apprehended by reason. Because the judgment and apprehension of reason is impeded on account of a vehement and inordinate apprehension of the imagination and judgment of the estimative power, as appears in those who are out of their mind. Now it is evident that the apprehension of the imagination and the judgment of the estimative power follow the passion of the sensitive appetite, even as the verdict of the taste follows the disposition of the tongue: for which reason we observe that those who are in some kind of passion, do not easily turn their imagination away from the object of their emotion, the result being that the judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, and consequently the will's movement follows it also, since it has a natural inclination always to follow the judgment of the reason." 22

This makes the doctrine of St. Thomas clear as to how the emotions affect reason and will. Many more quotations could be given, but we shall limit these to one more as a further explanation of this important phase of the emotions.

St. Thomas says:

"Sometimes man fails to consider actually what he knows habitually, on account of some hindrance supervening, e.g. some external occupation, or some bodily infirmity; and, in this way, a man who is in a state of passion, fails to consider in particular what he knows in general, in so far as the passions hinder him from considering it. Now it hinders him in three ways. First, by way of distraction, as explained above. Secondly, by way of opposition, because a passion often inclines to something contrary to what man knows in general. Thirdly, by way of bodily transmutation, the result of which is that the reason is somehow fettered so as not to exercise its act freely; even as sleep or drunkenness, on account of some change wrought on the body, fetters the use of reason. That this takes place in the passions is evident from the fact that sometimes, when the passions are very intense, man loses the use of reason altogether: for many have gone out of their minds through excess of love or anger. It is this way that passion draws the reason to judge in particular, against the knowledge which it has in general." 23

This is sufficient for our consideration of the emotions under their physical aspect. We must now consider the emotions under their physiological aspect.

The formal element of the emotions is the movement of the appetitive power, which follows apprehension. The material element of the emotions is the bodily transmutation. This bodily transmutation is what we wish to consider now. St. Thomas says:

"As stated above, in the passion of the soul, the formal element is the movement of the appetitive power, while the bodily transmutation is the material element. Both of these are mutually proportionate; and consequently the bodily transmutation assumes a resemblance to and the very nature of the appetitive movement." 24

From this we see how closely the bodily transmutation and the appetitive movement are united. In fact, St. Thomas says in another place that "Since the soul naturally moves the body, the spiritual movement of the soul is naturally the cause of bodily transmutation." ²⁵ In this quotation St. Thomas assigns the cause of the bodily transmutation of the emotions. And that cause comes from the spiritual movement of the soul--the intellect and will.

Here we wish to point out one of the most intriguing points to be considered in this paper on the emotions. We see that the bodily transmutation has its cause in the intellect and will. And yet after reading St. Thomas that "Although the mind or reason makes no use of a bodily organ in its proper act, yet, since it needs certain sensitive powers for the execution of its acts, the acts of which powers are hindered when the body is disturbed, it follows of necessity that any disturbance in the body hinders even the judgment of reason;" ²⁶ we also observe that the bodily transmutation has of necessity an effect on the intellect and will. Hence, there are two causes and two effects working mutually on each other. This fact has been the source of much of the confusion about the relationship between the intellect and will and the emotions.

This fact can be explained by making the proper distinctions as St. Thomas certainly does. The intellect and will, in so far as they properly comprise the soul--the form of the body, can be said to be the cause of the bodily transmutation. And

radically the soul is the cause of the bodily transmutation, which occurs with the emotions. Likewise, the bodily transmutation has an effect on the intellect and will. And in this way..... Since the intellect and will depend upon the organs of the body for their improper act, namely, the carrying out of the commands coming as a result of their proper acts, they are naturally limited by, or at the mercy of, so to speak, these body organs. Thus, if the body organ is injured, the mind is unable to have its command carried out. In the case of drunkenness or sleep, the intellect and will are at a loss to get anything done simply because there is no body organ to carry out their wishes. It is in this way that a bodily transmutation can be said to have an effect on the intellect and will. From this we can see how the intellect and will affect the emotions, and how, in turn, the emotions affect the intellect and will.

With this we come to the end of our discussion of St. Thomas' theory of the emotions. As a conclusion we would like to refer back to James' theory, keeping in mind St. Thomas' theory, in order to discuss two ideas which force themselves upon us as a result of the consideration of these two theories.

First of all, we want to show what each man considers the cause of the emotionsⁿ. That is the ultimate point of their disagreement. James says that the cause of the emotions is the bodily transmutation. "Really we feel sorry because we cry; we feel angry because we strike, we are frightened because we

run away." The "feeling sorry", the feeling angry", and the "being frightened", are the emotions, which are directly caused by the bodily transmutations of "crying", "striking", and "Running away."

Our own experiences in life are enough to tell us that James tries to produce an effect without a cause. Crying does not produce sorrow. We have seen people crying because of intense joy. Furthermore, we have observed that countless people catch sight of a bear in the zoo, walk away, and never are frightened in the least. What is the trouble? Why isn't the emotion produced? --simply because there is no cause for it. James assigns a cause to the emotions where there is no cause at all.

St. Thomas, on the other hand, says that the cause of the emotions is to be found in the soul--the intellect and will. The intellect causes the emotion when it judges that the bear is at large and capable of satisfying its hunger on our precious flesh and bones. The will produces the emotion when it desires the bear to be agreeable or does not desire it to be disagreeable. Hence, the intellect and will work together to cause the emotions. Then, because of the emotions the bodily transmutation takes place. Therefore, the intellect and will are said to cause the bodily transmutation also, as stated above.

Having ascertained the cause of the emotions according to each theory, there remains only to consider the second

idea, namely, the result of each theory. If James' theory were followed, the result would be a man governed by his emotions. Man would be only an animal, incapable of controlling his emotions. Naturally, man would have no free will, and he would be justified in giving vent to all his emotions, simply because he could not act otherwise.

St. Thomas, however, as a result of his theory, produces a man who has control over his emotions, whose intellect and will govern the man with a "politic and royal" power. Yet, he gives the emotions the credit they deserve in so far as they are capable of affecting the intellect and will, as explained above. In his theory, St. Thomas gives us a complete, whole man, perfectly integrated in his twofold nature, intellectual and sensitive. And that is the beauty of the theory of the emotions according to St. Thomas.

FOOTNOTES

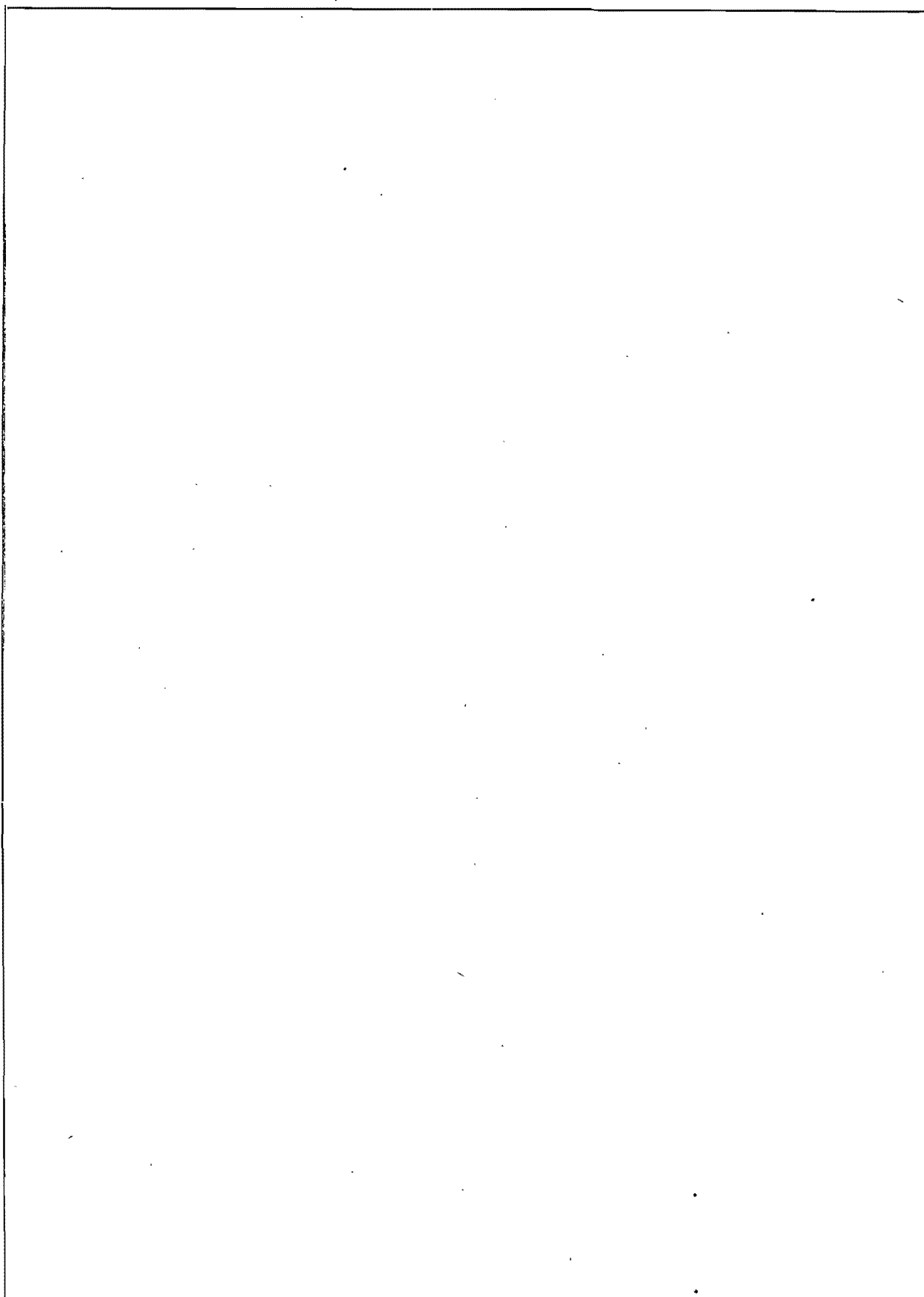
1. Burtis Burr Breaze, Psychology. p. 372.
2. Robert S. Woodworth, Psychology. p. 130.
3. Burtis Burr Breaze, op. cit., pp. 377-78.
4. Michael Maher, S.J., Psychology. p. 444.
5. Douglas Fryer and Edwin R. Henry, An Outline of General Psychology. p. 125.
6. Robert S. Woodworth, op. cit., p. 129.
7. Burtis Burr Breaze, op. cit., pp. 378-79.
8. Michael Maher, S.J., loc. cit.
9. Edmond Darvil Benard, M.A., S.T.D., "The Thomistic Theory of Emotion," The Appeal to the Emotions in Preaching. p. 1.
10. id., p. 1.
11. Summa Theol., 1,11, q. 22, a.1.
12. Edmond Darvil Benard, M.A., S.T.D., loc. cit.
13. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.22, a.1.
14. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.22, a.2.
15. Summa Theol., 1, q.80, a.1.
16. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.22, a.3.
17. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.24, a.1.
18. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.24, a.1.
19. Brother Benignus, F.S.C., Ph. D., Nature Knowledge And God. p. 241.
20. id., p. 241.
21. Summa Theol., 1, q.81, a.3.
22. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.77, a.1.
23. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.77, a.7.

FOOTNOTES (CON'D)

- 24. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.44, a.1.
- 25. Summa Theol., 1,11, q.37, a.4.
- 26. Summa Theol., 1,11, a.48, a.3.

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