

Appetite

St. John of the Cross uses in book I of Ascent of Mount Carmel, when talking about the purification, that it applies essentially to the “sensitive appetite”.

What follows is copied from the article “Appetite” of the online Catholic Encyclopedia.

Appetite Etymology

From the latin “*ad*” *to* and “*petere*” *seek*, i.e. “to seek”

Definition: A tendency, an inclination, or direction

Modern use

As it is used by modern writers, the word appetite has a psychological meaning. It denotes "an organic need represented in consciousness by certain sensations . . . The appetites generally recognized are those of hunger, thirst, and sex; yet the need of air, the need of exercise, and the need of sleep come under the definition." The term appetence or appetency applies not only to organic needs, but also in a general manner to "conations which find satisfaction in some positive state or result"; to "conative tendencies of all sorts". (Baldwin, Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, s.v. Appetite, Appetence.)

Scholastic Use (Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas)

For the schoolmen, “appetitus” had a far more general signification. (References are to St. Thomas's works.)

Appetite includes all forms of internal inclination¹.

It is found in all beings, even in those that are unconscious.

The inclination to what is good and suitable, and consequently the aversion to what is evil — for the avoidance of evil is a good — are included in it.

It may be directed towards an **object** that is **absent** or towards one that is actually **present**.

Finally, in conscious beings, it is **not restricted to** organic needs or lower tendencies, but extends to the highest and noblest aspirations.

Two main kinds of appetite are recognized by the scholastics:

1- one unconscious, or *naturalis*;

2- the other conscious, or *elicitus*, subdivided into

- a) **sensitive** and
- b) **rational**.

¹ Summa Theol., I-II, Q. viii, a. 1; Quæst. disputatæ, De veritate, Q. xxii, a. 1.

Natural appetite

From their very nature, all beings have certain tendencies, affinities, and forms of activity. The term **natural appetite** includes all these. It means the inclination of a thing to that which is in accord with its nature, without any knowledge of the reason why such a thing is appetible. This tendency originates immediately in the nature of each being, and remotely in God, the author of that nature².

Rational Appetite

The **appetitus elicited** follows knowledge. Knowledge is the possession by the mind of an object in its ideal form, whereas appetite is the tendency towards the thing thus known, but considered in its objective reality³.

But as knowledge is of **two specifically different kinds**, so also is the appetite⁴.

a) The appetitus sensitivus, also called *animalis*, follows sense-cognition. It is an essentially organic faculty; its functions are not functions of the soul alone, but of the body also. It tends primarily "to a concrete object which is useful or pleasurable", not to "the reason itself of its appetibility".

b) The appetitus rationalis, or will, is a faculty of the spiritual soul, following intellectual knowledge, tending to the good as such and not primarily to concrete objects. It tends to these in so far as they are known to participate in the abstract and perfect goodness conceived by the intellect⁵.

In the natural and the **sensitive appetites** there is no freedom. One is necessitated by the laws of nature itself, the other by the sense-apprehension of a concrete thing as pleasant and useful. **The will**, on the contrary, is not necessitated by any concrete good, because no concrete good fully realizes the concept of **perfect goodness** which alone can necessarily draw the will. In this is to be found the fundamental reason of the freedom of the will⁶.

The **sensitive appetite** is divided into:

- a) **Appetitus Concupiscibilis** its object is apprehended as **good, useful or pleasurable**. There are **six passions** for the **concupiscible appetite**: love and hatred, desire and aversion, joy and sadness.
- b) **Appetitus Irascibilis**, its object is obtainable only **with difficulty** and by the **overcoming of obstacles**⁷. There are **five passions** for the **irascible appetite**: hope and despair, courage, fear, and anger⁸.

All **the manifestations of the sensitive appetite** are called "**passions**". In the scholastic terminology this word has not the limited signification in which it is commonly used today.

² Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxv, art. 1.

³ Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxii, a. 10.

⁴ Summa Theol., I, Q. lxxx, a. 2.

⁵ Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxv, a. 1.

⁶ cf. Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxv, a. 1.

⁷ Summa Theol., I, Q. lxxxii, a. 5; Q. lxxxii, a. 5; I-II, Q. xxiii, a. 1; Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxv, a. 2.

⁸ Summa Theol., I-II, Q. xxiii, a. 4.

Concupiscible Appetites: Simple inclination with respect to sensible object	<i>Attraction towards object (object is good)</i>	<i>Repulsion away from object (object is evil)</i>
	Love (good as such)	Hatred (evil as such)
	Joy (present good)	Sadness (present evil)
	Desire (absent good)	Aversion (absent evil)

Irascible appetites: Inclination in virtue of an arduous object	<i>Good that is difficult to attain</i>	<i>Evil difficult to avoid</i>
	(N/A – no present good difficult to attain)	Anger (present evil)
	Hope (absent but attainable good)	Courage (threatening but <i>conquerable</i> evil)
	Despair (absent, unattainable good)	Fear (threatening but unconquerable evil)

In man are found the natural, the sensitive, and the rational appetites. Certain of man's natural tendencies have in view his own personal interest. e.g. conservation of life, health, physical and mental welfare and perfection. Some of them regard the interest of other men, and some relate to God. Such inclinations, however, although springing immediately from human nature, become conscious and deliberate in many of their determinations⁹. The tendency of the various faculties to perform their appropriate functions is also a **natural appetite**, but not a distinct faculty¹⁰.

The sensitive appetite in man is **under the control of the will** and can be strengthened or checked by **the will's determination**. This control, however, is not absolute, for the sensitive appetite depends on organic conditions, which are not regulated by reason. Frequently, also, owing to its suddenness or intensity, the outburst of passion cannot be repressed¹¹.

On the other hand, **the sensitive appetite** exerts a strong influence on the will, both because the passions modify organic conditions and thus influence all cognitive faculties, and because their intensity may prevent the mind from applying itself to the higher operations of intellect and will¹².

The theory of appetite has various applications in theology. It affects the solution of such problems as man's desire for God, the consequences of original sin, and the perfection of Christ's humanity. It is of importance also in questions concerning the natural moral law, responsibility, virtue, and vice, the influence of passion as a determinant of human action. Among the medieval theologians, St. Thomas held that intelligent creatures desire naturally to behold the essence of God. The knowledge which they have of Him through His effects serves only to quicken their desire for immediate vision. Scotus, while admitting this desire as a natural tendency in man, claimed that it could not be realized without the assistance of grace. The discussion of the problem was continued by the commentators of St. Thomas, and it has been revived by modern theologians¹³.

⁹ Summa Theol., I, Q. lx, a. 3, 4, 5.

¹⁰ Summa Theol., I, Q. lxxx, art. 1, ad 3; Q. lxxviii, art. 1, ad 3am

¹¹ Summa Theol., I, Q. lxxxii, a. 3; I-II, Q. xvii, a. 7; Quæst. disp., De veritate, Q. xxv, a. 4.

¹² Summa Theol., I-II, Q. ix, a. 2; Q. x, a. 3; Q. lxxvii, a. 1.

¹³ Cf. Sestili, "De naturali intelligentis animæ appetitu intuendi divinam essentiam" (Rome, 1896).

Saint Thomas Aquinas:

“There is a passion through which the soul is simply inclined to seek what is suitable according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called the concupiscible: and another whereby an animal resists the attacks of any agents that hinder what is suitable and inflict harm; and this is called the irascible, whence we say that its object is something arduous, because its tendency is to overcome and rise above obstacles. Now these two are not to be reduced to one principle: for sometimes the soul busies itself with unpleasant things against the inclination of the concupiscible appetite in order that, following the impulse of the irascible appetite, it may fight against obstacles... This is clear also from the fact that the irascible is, as it were, the champion and defender of the concupiscible, when it rises up against what hinders the acquisition of the suitable things which the concupiscible desires, or against what inflicts harm, from which the concupiscible flies. And for this reason, all the passions of the irascible appetite rise from the passions of the concupiscible appetite and terminate in them; for instance, anger rises from sadness, and having wrought vengeance, terminates in joy. For this reason also the quarrels of animals are about things concupiscible— namely, food and sex, as the Philosopher says (*De animalibus* VIII). (ST I, 81, 2. cf, ad.1.)