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Emotion Theory in Ancient Greece and Rome

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Emotion Theory in Ancient Greece and Rome

Introduction

Ancient Greek and Roman writers discussed emotions in various contexts, but only recently have scholars entered into a dialogue with emotion studies in other fields and begun to provide an historical account of emotion theories in the classical world (Kaster 2005; Konstan 2006c, 2016; Cairns 2016; Cairns and Nelis 2017; Cairns 2019a). The aim of this chapter is to review the most prominent philosophical theories of emotions from Plato to the Stoics and explore their relationship to modern analyses.

The study of ancient emotions raises a number of methodological issues that need to be briefly outlined. Since the principal evidence about theories of emotions takes the form of texts in ancient languages, we begin with some remarks on the ancient Greek and Roman emotional vocabulary. The nearest Greek equivalent for “emotion” is *pathos* (pl. *pathê*), from the verb *paskhō*, “to be affected”; the Romans used a variety of terms, including *affectus*, *passio*, and *perturbatio*. All these words suggest that emotions are reactions that people undergo. This idea of emotions as passive occurrences informed the way ancient theories conceptualized them both as bodily manifestations and in thought, putting the emphasis on the bodily alterations and disturbances that emotions entail as well as on how they underpin beliefs and judgments. This framework, as we shall see, led to a variety of ancient insights into the embodied and cognitive nature of emotions that foreshadowed, and in some ways grounded, the current debate on the nature of emotions.

The term “emotion” emerged as a coherent and inclusive category in the English language only during the nineteenth century, having replaced kindred earlier terms such as “passion”, “sentiment,” “appetite,” and “affection” (Dixon 2003). That the definition of emotion is still very much contested renders cross-cultural comparisons all the more complex. What is more, the comparative study of social phenomena differs from that in the natural sciences in that the object under investigation – that is, the domain of the theory – itself may vary from one society to another. Thus, what we translate as “emotion” may not cover the same territory as the native term in languages other than English, and in some cases the idiomatic division of the psychic terrain is such that no concept maps onto the modern idea of emotion. This is the less surprising in that, as noted before, the modern concept itself has undergone change, even in recent history. In order to avoid projecting modern notions onto ancient emotion theories it is thus necessary to situate them in their historical context, which involves referring not only to the philosophical but also to the literary sources that supplied material and inspiration for later, more rigorous conceptualizations. With these prefatory remarks, we turn now to a brief look at the implicit conception of emotions found in archaic Greek literature, in particular Homeric epic, before proceeding to the earliest systematic discussion of emotions, or rather, of the several functions of the *psukhê* (soul), by Plato.

Long before the development of systematic philosophical thinking, which would be dominated by Plato and Aristotle in the classical period, emotions were portrayed and implicitly analysed by poets. Homeric epic is particularly important in this respect; because it was the revered foundation of the Greek cultural tradition, it represents our principal source for popular conceptualizations of emotions and affective experiences. Furthermore, it provided later philosophical theorising with models of mind and examples of emotional attitudes that were discussed, amended, or rejected. For these reasons, a full understanding of ancient Greek theories

of emotions must take into account what has been defined as the “Homeric encyclopedia” (Havelock 1963).

Greek folk psychology, as illustrated in the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and other early Greek literature, makes mention of a great many emotions as well as gestures and other expressions that signify emotions, but they are not all grouped under a single category. In Homer, the word *phrên*, or in the plural, *phrenes*, designates the mind generally and as such may be the seat of emotions as well as thoughts. The term *êtor*, specific to epic and lyric poetry, means something like “heart,” and often signifies life (to die is to have one’s *êtor* destroyed, *Iliad* 5.250, 21.114, etc.); most often *êtor* is associated with pain and desire (*Iliad* 3.31, 9.9, 21.389; *Odyssey* 4.467; Hesiod *Theogony* 163; Theognis 1178-1179), but it may also be the locus of reason or decision, though often characterized emotionally (Pindar *Olympic Ode* 2.79; Theognis 1.122). Particularly strong feelings, such as anger, which is perhaps the dominant emotion in the *Iliad*, are associated with the *thumos*, which has something of the broad sense conveyed by the English “temper,” ranging from “rage” to the neutral “temperament,” but also embracing appetite, will, grief, joy, and courage or high spiritedness, the latter closely related to indignation and ire. In Homer, *thumos* is a psychic force or faculty that includes a wide spectrum of sentiments and is also the source of motivations and desires (Claus 1981; Bremmer 1983; see also Pelliccia 1995; on *thumos* in Homer see Cairns 2019c). It is imagined as a gaseous substance flowing in the breast (*Iliad* 16. 540) or a beast to be tamed (*Iliad* 9. 496, 18. 113), suggesting a physical substratum. In his doctrine of the tripartite soul, Plato introduces *thumos* as a fundamental component of the *psukhê*, developing one strand of the Homeric notion and emphasizing its connection to anger and indignation. Plato explicitly recognizes his debt to Homer: in *Republic* IV, when presenting that part of the soul “which rages without reason,” he quotes a line from the *Odyssey*. The Homeric legacy is crucial to an

understanding of Plato's view of emotions, to which we now turn (for a comparison between *thumos* in Homer and later philosophers, including Plato, see Sharples 1983; on Homeric influences on Plato's theory of the soul see Cairns 2014; on the post-Homeric conception of *thumos* see Cairns 2019b; for a concise overview of scholarship on ancient emotions, see Campeggiani and Konstan 2017).

Plato

There is no passage in which Plato isolates the category of emotion as we understand the term, nor does he offer a full account of emotion in general. Yet there are a number of features in Plato's psychology, especially in respect to his doctrine of the tripartite soul, that reflect an awareness of the complexity of emotional phenomena.

Based on the subjective experience of conflict between rational preferences and irrational or objectionable desires (Plato's example is the impulse to view deteriorating corpses), Plato identifies three distinct sources of motivation within the human *psukhê*; each "part" is defined in terms of the set of goals toward which it is oriented and of its specific desires (Ferrari 2007). To each of these parts corresponds a class of citizens and the distinct contribution it makes to the common good: the isomorphism between the constitution of the individual's soul and that of the city underpins Plato's political and ethical thinking, as well as his psychological theory, on which we focus in this paragraph. Reason (*logistikón*), literally the calculating part, has an inherent desire for true knowledge and seeks to rule the soul in its light (*Republic* 441e): in a well-ordered soul (and city), reason performs the crucial task of figuring out what is good on theoretical grounds and exercises governance accordingly. The appetitive part (*epithumêtikon*) is the seat of bodily drives

such as thirst, hunger, and sexual desire, and of all those appetites (including the indulgence in grief that is elicited by poetic representation: *Republic* 605d, 606b) that arise outside the control of reason. Finally, the desire of the *thumos* (or *thumoeides*, the ‘spirited’ part) is directed toward honor (in Greek, *timê*) and to it pertain anger, shame, an offended sense of justice, and the will to self-assertion and desire for others’ approbation, broadly involving an individual’s sense of status and social image (crucial values in classical Greece). Justice and happiness consist in the harmonious relationship of the three elements, which depends on the subject’s capacity to impose rational goals and desires upon the undisciplined sources of motivation coming from the *epithumêtikon*. Resistance to the latter is made possible by the alliance of reason with the *thumos*: because it is the seat of competitiveness and self-esteem, if well-directed by *logistikon*, the spirited part works as a powerful motivating force towards the achievement of those goals that reason defines as worth pursuing. In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato introduces the image of a charioteer and two horses, one obedient and one rebellious, as a figure for the human soul: the docile horse evidently represents the *thumos* and the unruly one the appetites, whereas the charioteer stands for the rational part of the *psukhê*. Rational desires, that is, the desires for what reason judges to be good, should manage those of the spirited part, making it compliant and supportive in the task of taming the lower drives associated with the appetitive part. The metaphor symbolizes the need for an inclusive kind of education, intellectual, affective, and desiderative. It is not that each “part” of the *psukhê* represents the instantiation of a singular function: in fact, all are capable of sophisticated intellectual, affective, and desiderative processes and, as such, they metaphorically represent the different ways a person as a whole interacts with his or her manifold and often contrasting motivations (Cairns 2014). Each psychic part has its own desires and deals with them by evaluation and sentiment. Thus, both the spirited and the appetitive parts are susceptible to arguments and

make use of judgment and reasoning (even if, when left to themselves, they do so not in order to know the truth, but rather to calculate the best ways to pursue their objects of desire). For example, among the various desires of the appetitive part of the soul there is even one for philosophizing: it of course differs from the philosopher's motive in that it is not reason's desire for knowledge but is a superficial pleasure that has nothing to do with the pursuit of the truth (Cooper 1999). The character of a person results from one's overall attitude towards all these motivations, and since this attitude is moulded by social and political influences, Plato was urgently concerned to reform traditional education and institutions.

According to Plato's theory of the soul, what we think of as emotions are dispersed over all its parts; even reason has emotions in the form of a passionate desire (*erôs*) for knowledge, that is, knowledge of objectively existing immaterial forms. There is no single term in Plato that represents "emotion" as such, although he touches upon a wide variety of what we think of as emotions individually, for example pity in the *Republic* (*to eleinon*), shame in the *Gorgias* (*aiskhunê*) and erotic love (*erôs*) in various dialogues, above all the *Symposium*. When, in the context of his critique of poetry in the *Republic*, Socrates condemns the public venting of grief, he says that a good person will, thanks to reason, resist the pain caused by the loss of a child or other misfortune (603e-604a), although *pathos*, that is, the "felt" dimension of the experience, inclines him to such grief (604a 10-11). Poets appeal to the weaker part of the soul (605a 2-4) and can even induce decent people to experience such a sentiment, since they are likely to sympathize (*sumpaskhontes*, 605d 4) with or feel pity for (603b 3) the suffering of the characters on the stage. Poets may likewise arouse laughter, sexual desire, temper or anger, and all things involving desires, pleasures and pains (606d 1-2), all of which are taken (in this context) to be irrational responses. The bottom line is that Plato uses the word *pathos* in connection with a wide variety of

reactions (Konstan 2006b), and for this reason, as we note below, Aristotle may be deemed the first to have theorized the emotions as a class. As noted before, the root verb means basically to experience something, and so bears a passive sense: a *pathos* is what happens to you, as opposed to what you do (e.g., *Sophist* 248d 4-5; *Gorgias* 476c 2-3). By a slight extension, *pathos* may indicate a quality or attribute of something as opposed to its essence (e.g., *Euthyphro* 11A 8; *Sophist* 245A 11; *Republic* 376a 11), but also mental phenomena such as wisdom or remembering, or even stupidity or wonder (e.g. *Phaedo* 73e 2; *Theaetetus* 166b 3; *Republic* 432d 51; *Theaetetus* 155d 3). Plato labels pleasure and pain as *pathê* (*Philebus* 32b 6-7, etc.), and also thirst and hunger (*Phaedo* 94b 7-10). In the *Timaeus* (69c 8-d 4), the *pathê* include, besides pleasure and pain, confidence and fear, temper (*thumos*) and hope (cf. Aspasius 46.7-12 Heylbut, transl. Konstan 2006a: 46).

This very inclusivity suggests that Plato is listing the whole range of affections and activities of the soul. Although it does not amount to a systematic treatment of emotions, Plato's psychology lays the groundwork for a more general conception of affectivity, shedding light on the fundamental issues later thinkers will have to deal with. The tripartite theory of the soul provides us with insights into the relationship between emotions, beliefs, knowledge and desires. The vivid descriptions of the phenomenology of mental conflict take account of various cognitive and physiological aspects of emotions: the pleasure and pain they involve, their conative dimension, and the complex interactions between emotions and the objects to which they are directed. Finally, Plato's concern for a philosophical reform of traditional culture and his awareness of the way social institutions influence character and behavior highlight the importance of affective education for individual happiness and social justice. On all these issues Aristotle, the first Greek philosopher to develop a systematic theory of emotions, will have something to say.

Aristotle

Aristotle's exploration of emotions takes place chiefly in the *Rhetoric* and in the *De anima* (*On the Soul*). Whereas in the *Rhetoric* the focus is on the emotions as intentional (object-directed) responses involving some form of appraisal, in the *De anima* Aristotle attends also to their physical dimension and, in accord with his hylomorphic approach to soul-body relations, he affirms that the evaluative component of emotions is neither independent of bodily states nor separable from them (*De anima* 403a 16-403b 1). A full understanding of Aristotle's theory and its relevance to contemporary concerns must take account of both these texts.

The *Rhetoric* begins in a puzzling fashion. In the very first paragraph, Aristotle affirms that pity and anger and similar *pathê* of the soul are not strictly relevant to the science of rhetoric, which should deal exclusively with rational argumentation; appealing to the *pathê* is like using a bent ruler to measure something (1354a 20-32). Yet, in the very next paragraph he indicates that emotion is important to oratory because people judge a case differently when they are distressed or cheerful, or feel hatred or affection. Accordingly, in the second book of the treatise he launches upon the first detailed and rigorous discussion of what we readily identify as emotions, beginning with a brief and rather enigmatic definition: "Let the *pathê* be all those things on account of which people change and differ in regard to their judgments, and upon which attend pain and pleasure, for example anger, pity, fear, and all other such things and their opposites." (1378a 20-23) Two points are worth noting in this connection. First, emotions seem to be defined by their effect upon our judgment, an account that is natural in the context of a treatise on rhetoric but which may seem too narrow as a description of emotions as such. Second, it is worth noting that Aristotle here, and also at the beginning of the first book of the *Rhetoric*, is careful to provide examples of the kinds

of *pathé* he has in mind: it is likely that Aristotle is here indicating a special sense of *pathos*, narrower than the general use of the term that we found, for example, in Plato, precisely in order to identify emotion as a distinct class of affects. He is not only the first seriously to theorize emotions, he is also the first to recognize just the kinds of items that we call emotions as a separate category (Fortenbaugh 2002; Konstan 2006c; *contra* Cooper 1999).

Because Aristotle's primary interest in the *Rhetoric* is in arousing or assuaging emotions by means of speech, he naturally focuses on the stimuli to emotion – the kinds of events or behavior which, when vividly described, will produce the desired effect. This emphasis is in part responsible for the alleged intellectual nature of Aristotle's conception of emotions. Richard Lazarus, one of the founders of modern appraisal theory, has stated that “those who favor a cognitive-mediational approach must also recognize that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* more than two thousand years ago applied this kind of approach to a number of emotions in terms that seem remarkably modern” (Lazarus 2001: 40). Aristotle's definition of anger gives a good idea of his approach: “Let anger, then, be a desire, accompanied by pain, for a perceived revenge, on account of a perceived slight on the part of people who are not fit to slight one or one's own” (*Rhetoric* 1378a 31-33). The description of the emotion emphasizes three components familiar to modern emotion theorists: anger involves an appraisal of its eliciting conditions (it is a response to a perceived slight or belittlement), bodily changes and feelings (it is accompanied by pain), and a conative state (it brings on a desire for revenge). We will consider in more detail each component in turn.

As to the appraisal dimension of anger, it is crucial to emphasize that a slight is a social phenomenon: one has to be able to recognize and evaluate an insult and also to determine whether the person who has put you down was fit – that is, in a social position – to do so. Aristotle's definition places very narrow limits on the causes of anger, and hence its very nature. For example,

the sudden fury that results from stubbing one's toe on a chair would not count as anger on Aristotle's terms; a chair cannot insult a person, although one can of course feel irritated (one might imagine the chair as a wilful agent, but Aristotle does not consider this reaction). What is more, it is dubious whether animals can experience anger on such a description, since they do not normally respond to insults as opposed to maltreatment; nor could we be angry at animals, on Aristotle's view, because animals cannot slight us or belittle us. Anger, as Aristotle conceives of it, requires a high degree of social sophistication (for example, a clear sense of hierarchy) along with the ability to judge or appraise verbal acts and their significance. The higher-order process of appraisal involved in anger is nevertheless entangled with physical processes: not only would the evaluative recognition of an insult not amount to an emotional reaction were it not accompanied by the relevant bodily state (e.g., in the case of anger, the boiling of the blood around the heart), but Aristotle says that bodily feelings themselves can guide our value orientation. Sometimes, when the body is already agitated (for example, when we are hungry or thirsty), we are moved to anger even by insignificant stimuli; analogously, if one is not in the right physical state, one may feel no excitement in spite of strong provocations (*De anima* 403a 19-24; cf. also *Rhetoric* 1379a16-18). It also must be noted that the word "perceived" that Aristotle attaches to "slight" and "revenge" renders the Greek participle *phainomenos*, from the verb *phainesthai* (the root also of *phantasia*), meaning "to appear" or "be apprehended": Aristotle may have meant that a slight must not escape one's notice and that revenge must be perceptible, but some have taken him to mean that a slight could either be real or merely imagined by the victim. Aristotle qualifies as *phainomena* the objects of many different emotions (e.g. fear, pity, indignation, or envy: *Rhetoric* 1382a 21-22, 1385b13, 1387a 9, 1387b 23). We will come back to the role that imagination (*phantasia*) and beliefs (*doxai*) play in the formation of emotions when discussing the *De anima*.

As we have noted, Aristotle mentions the hedonic properties of emotions not only in his description of individual emotions but also in the general definition of *pathê*. In the *Rhetoric*, he associates emotions with pain (*lupê*) and pleasure (*hedonê*); some emotions, such as anger, are associated with both pleasure and pain (see below), although he appears sometimes to ignore this affective element (e.g., he affirms that hatred is not accompanied by pain). The hedonic properties of emotions consist in bodily alterations. Pleasure and pain are described in terms of sense perception (*aisthêtikê*: *Eudemian Ethics* 1120b 14): in the *Rhetoric*, pain is often associated with physiological disturbances (1382a 21, 1383b 14, 1386b 23-24) and the word *hedonê* covers a variety of pleasures, ranging from mental states to bodily sensations (Cooper 1999: 416; on the role of perceived affects in Aristotle see Campeggiani forthcoming).

The body is thus not absent from Aristotle's understanding of emotions, as he makes abundantly clear in his treatise on the soul, which is worth citing *in extenso*:

It seems too that all the emotions of the soul come with body: anger, mildness, fear, pity, confidence, and also joy and loving, and hating. For the body experiences something along with these. This is shown by the fact that sometimes, when faced with violent and manifest stimuli one feels no excitement or fear, while at other times weak and dim stimuli arouse these emotions, whenever the body is already aroused and in the condition it is when angry. Here is still a clearer case: even if no external cause of terror is present, sometimes one comes to experience the feelings of a man in terror. If this is so, it is obvious that the emotions are enmattered accounts. Thus, their definitions will be of this sort: "being angry is a kind movement of such and such a body or part or faculty, caused by this or that and for the sake of this or that...." The

natural scientist and the dialectic philosopher would define each of these differently, for instance, what anger is. For the dialectic philosopher would define it as a desire to return pain, or something of the sort, whereas the natural scientist would define it as a boiling of blood and heat around the heart. (*De anima* 403a 16-403b 1)

Formal and physical components of emotions tend to be defined separately: the dialectic philosopher focuses on the evaluative processes and the dispositional states that emotions imply, keeping them conceptually separated from their bodily dimension, with which the natural scientist is concerned. Yet, Aristotle affirms that a proper definition of emotion requires an integrated analysis of both its formal and physical dimension: just as the soul and the body can be distinguished in definition, but are entangled and indivisible in living organisms as hylomorphic compounds (*De anima* 412A-413A), in the same way *pathê* are “enmattered accounts,” that is: they display formal and physical elements, but cannot be identified with either (Aristotle wavered on the parts of the soul itself, sometimes allowing just two, other times three, roughly along the lines of Plato; see Fortenbaugh 1970).

On the enmattered nature of emotions also depends the role that *phantasia* plays in their formation. In the *De anima*, the term *phantasia* often stands for the “impression” that provides the mind with information about sense perceptions. *Phantasia* also may also stand for “imagination” in a post-perceptual sense: it allows us to create images (Frede 1992; Schofield 1992). Aristotle is explicit that emotions may arise either from beliefs (*doxai*) or from *phantasia* (*De anima* 427b 22-25) and we have seen that, in the *Rhetoric*, he qualifies as *phainomenos*, “perceived,” the object of a number of emotions. Affective phenomena can thus be elicited by non-epistemic appearances: it is enough to have a certain impression, deceptive as it may be, or to create an appearance by

imagination, in order to feel an emotion (*contra* Fortenbaugh 2002: 100). It is also worth noting that Aristotle's discussion of the role that *phantasia* plays in emotional processes and its connection with sense perception further underscores the need for an inclusive understanding of emotions as unitary psychophysical experiences, as stated at the beginning of *De anima*.

Finally, Aristotle takes account too of what today are called the action tendencies associated with emotion. Thus, he defines anger as "a desire, accompanied by pain, for a perceived revenge..."; if an insult is, as it were, the input that arouses anger, anger's output is a desire to retaliate for the insult. Aristotle goes so far as to say that if revenge is absolutely impossible, then one cannot really experience anger, since we cannot desire things that we know cannot be realized. The role of *phantasia* is again of paramount importance: if the perceived slight causes us to feel pain, our prospective revenge, which we anticipate in imagination, is a source of pleasure (*Rhetoric* 1378b 8-10).

We have seen that, in his definition of emotions, Aristotle specifies that they are accompanied by pain and pleasure (although these sensations are not always indicated explicitly in the definition, e.g. of hatred and gratitude). It is tempting to treat this as an anticipation of the idea that emotions are positive or negative, and to suppose that when Aristotle speaks of emotions "and their opposites," he is classifying them according to their valence. Anger, then, might be considered a negative *pathos*, since it is said to be painful. In fact, as we have just seen, Aristotle adds that there is also a pleasurable aspect to anger in the savoring of anticipated revenge: thus it is accompanied by both pain and pleasure. What is more, Aristotle describes pity and indignation as opposites, and yet both are painful feelings. He defines pity as "a kind of pain in the case of an apparent destructive or painful harm in one not deserving to encounter it, which one might expect oneself, or one of one's own, to suffer, and this when it seems near" (*Rhetoric* 1385b 13-16).

Indignation, on the other hand, which Aristotle specifies as the opposite of pity, consists in “feeling pain at someone who appears to be succeeding undeservedly” (1387a 8-9). The contrast between pity and indignation resides in the cause of the distress that is associated with each: the former responds to undeserved misfortune, the latter to unmerited good fortune (as Aristotle observes in *Topics* 1.15, there are several ways to construe the opposite of complex propositions).

In this connection, we may observe that both these contrasting emotions, pity and indignation, involve a moral judgment: pity is not simply a gut response to another’s suffering, irrespective of the cause, nor is indignation reducible to mere resentment about another person’s prosperity. Aristotle does recognize such an emotion, which he identifies as envy and defines as “a kind of pain, in respect to one’s equals, for their apparent success in things called good, not so as to have the thing oneself but [solely] on their account,” that is, because they have something that we do not have, irrespective whether we have a need for it. But although others, Aristotle reports, have regarded pity and envy as opposites, the one consisting in pain at another’s misfortune, the other in pain at another’s good fortune, Aristotle himself flatly denies this, precisely because envy lacks an appraisal of desert.

Aristotle does not, in the *Rhetoric*, include in his inventory of emotions pain caused by the mere perception of someone who is suffering harm, irrespective of desert, which would appear to be the proper opposite of envy. Pity, in fact, presupposes a certain distance. As he observes, “people pity their acquaintances, provided that they are not exceedingly close in kinship; for concerning these they are disposed as they are concerning themselves.... For what is terrible is different from what is pitiable, and is expulsive of pity” (1386a 18-23). Aristotle cites the remark of a certain Amasis, who did not weep when his son was led out to die but did so in the case of a friend: “the latter was pitiable, the former terrible,” Aristotle comments (Herodotus 3.14 reports

the story slightly differently). To understand Aristotle's point, we may recall that, in his definition of pity, Aristotle states that we feel pity at undeserved afflictions of the kind that "one might expect oneself, or one of one's own, to suffer." The sufferings of dear ones, whether close family or friends, are felt as though they were our own, and, as Aristotle says, "people stop pitying when something terrible is happening to them." The reason is presumably that we feel pity when we are vulnerable to adversity rather than when we are actually experiencing it. People who have always been well off tend to feel immune to misfortune and so are not given to feeling pity, according to Aristotle. What is more, Aristotle states that those who have lost everything are also incapable of pity, just because they do not believe that they can suffer anything worse. Pity, then, requires some similarity with the sufferer, so that we recognize our own vulnerability to such harm. The emotion of pity (*eleos*) also plays a prominent role in the *Poetics*, where, together with fear (*phobos*), it is the source of the "proper pleasure" of tragedy. Pity is elicited by the recognition that the pitied's misfortune is undeserved and, in this respect, is distinct from what Aristotle calls *to philanthrôpon*, a sympathetic or philanthropic feeling devoid of moral content that is elicited by human sorrow as such (*Poetics* 1453a 1-7), and so more like a unreflective or instinctive response (as Aristotle observes, we do not pity someone who is justly condemned to punishment). On the other hand, "fear pertains to a person who is similar to ourselves" (*Poetics* 1453a 5-6), since we perceive that we are vulnerable to a comparable misfortune. This common vulnerability (which in the *Rhetoric* was one of the grounds for pity) constitutes an emotional bond, at least among members of the same group who can identify with one another's condition.

Aristotle has several terms for sympathy, or rather, for sharing another person's pleasure or pain. In English, "condolence" (like sympathy) refers to sharing in someone else's pain, but there is not a corresponding term that denotes sharing in someone else's pleasure. Aristotle states

that we feel what we may call positive and negative sympathy for those who are “our own,” that is, very dear to us, but this joint pain or pleasure is not strictly speaking an emotion (Konstan 2001). Aristotle perhaps draws another distinction between a full emotion and an instinctive affect in his account of love or *philia* (Konstan 1997). The love between friends and dear ones is predicated, according to Aristotle, on attractive qualities in the other, which include congeniality, usefulness, and a good character, the last being the most significant. But many creatures experience affection for their young, and clearly for none of these three motives. It is reasonable to conclude that animals may not experience the emotions in the full sense of the term. As William Fortenbaugh observes: “Humans have the capacity to think and therefore can believe that an insult has occurred and that some danger threatens. Animals lack this cognitive capacity and therefore cannot experience emotions as analyzed by Aristotle. Of course, animals can be said to experience *pathê*, for this word has multiple meanings and can be used inclusively to cover both the emotional responses of human beings and the reactions of animals” (2002: 94). It is a consequence of Aristotle’s multidimensional approach to emotions as psychophysical experiences involving perception and bodily alterations, but also cognitive appraisal and goal-oriented behaviours, that animals cannot have emotions in the strict sense.

We conclude by noting the importance of emotions for the virtuous life in Aristotle’s ethical treatises: emotions, he says, “may be felt both too much or too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b 20-23; later commentators sometimes referred to this equilibrium as *metropatheia* or “moderate emotion,” but the term does not appear in Aristotle’s own works). Virtues are correct dispositions towards emotions: morally virtuous

people correctly appraise the object of their emotions and orient their behavior accordingly. Courage, for example, is a correct disposition towards fear, and mildness (*praotês*) towards anger; virtuous people rightly appraise and evaluate and their emotional responses and behavior are as they ought to be: they are neither rash nor cowardly, neither irascible nor apathetic (1125b 25 - 1126b 10). How are we to achieve correct dispositions and become virtuous? Aristotle's multidimensional approach to emotions once again indicates the way: emotions are bound up with cognitive and evaluative processes but they also involve feelings of pleasure and pain. Although these components are sometimes isolated for purposes of philosophical analysis, they are indissociable in the emotional experience: this is why emotions cannot be controlled by reason alone and require a long period of ethical training and practice (1179b-1180a). Education, achieved through laws, customs and family discipline, moulds a person's moral character and dispositions in part by the dispensation of pleasure and pain in the form of rewards and punishments. The education of the emotions thus represents, for Aristotle, an essential part of human life and the high road to moral virtue. Yet Hellenistic philosophers, to whom we now turn, were inclined to see emotions as a threat to psychological stability and the virtuous life.

Epicureanism and Stoicism

Both Epicureanism and Stoicism originated in Athens at the end of the fourth century BC and represented two major strands in Hellenistic philosophy for centuries thereafter.

Epicurus, an Athenian raised in Samos, set up a school in Athens toward the end of the fourth century. Although no surviving treatise of his is devoted specifically to emotions, we know that he applied the term *pathê* to the sensations of pleasure (*hêdonê*) and pain (*algêdôn*), which he

regarded as basic criteria for the evaluation of experience as to be pursued or avoided (Diogenes Laertius 10.34; other such criteria were the information provided by the senses, which he deemed always to be true – if we see something as red, there is no way to falsify the sensation – and certain types of especially clear concepts acquired through the senses, such as “warm,” “sweet,” “human being”). For Epicurus the *pathê* reside in the non-rational part of the soul (he seems to have adopted a bipartite model of the soul, with rational and irrational parts) and are instinctive; as such, they are distinct from reactions that require the participation of the rational soul, such as joy and fear (*khara* and *phobos*: Diogenes Laertius 10.66; cf. Lucretius *De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*] 3.136-76, Konstan 2008: 3-25; these emotions might also be referred to as *pathê* in a more latitudinarian usage). The latter, although they involve sensations of pleasure or pain, are subject to reasoning and argument: they may be mistaken, dependent on empty, that is, irrational, beliefs (as in the case of the fear of death: *Letter to Menoceus* 124), and are thus liable to philosophical therapy, i.e reasoning as a challenge to empty beliefs and the disturbing desires they underlie (*Letter to Menoceus* 132; on Epicurean philosophy as therapy see Nussbaum 1994: ch. 4).

The major treatise on the emotions to survive from the Epicurean school is *On Anger* by the 1st-century BC Epicurean philosopher Philodemus, whose library, buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, has been partially recovered (the scrolls are scorched and require expert restoration and interpretation). Philodemus identified two types of anger, one of which he called *orgê*, the same term employed by Aristotle, and which he, like Aristotle, regarded as a legitimate response to unwarranted offenses (this kind of anger is moderate in intensity and of short duration); the other type of anger Philodemus labeled *thumos*, or “empty *orgê*,” that is, anger based on false opinion and hence the kind of uncontrolled rage to which the sage was not vulnerable (Indelli

2004). It is debated whether this distinction goes back to Epicurus himself or is a later development.

The goal in life for Epicurus was what he called *ataraxia* or the absence of perturbation, a state of mind that, when combined with absence of corporeal pain, constituted the highest state of pleasure. The chief cause of mental disturbance was taken to be fear, or more precisely, irrational or empty fear, that is, fear based on a misapprehension of the potential threat. The Epicureans held that the most fundamental fear was that of death and of punishment in the afterlife; they thus argued that the soul disintegrates entirely upon the dissolution of the body, and that, consequently, “death is nothing to us” (Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus* 124; Lucretius 3.830), since when we are dead we no longer exist and when we are alive death is absent. The unacknowledged fear of death and extinction was in turn the cause of irrational desires, such as limitless ambition and greed, which were imagined as somehow holding death at bay. So powerful were the effects of anxiety that, Lucretius affirmed, that some people actually commit suicide to escape it, “forgetting that the source of their sorrows is this very fear” (Lucretius 3.82). This suggestion of unconscious anxiety anticipates modern notions of repression and displacement, and renders Epicureanism the most psychological (in the modern sense) of the ancient theories of emotion. To sum up, Epicurus regarded pleasure as naturally attractive, as evidenced by the behavior of animals and infants (sometimes referred to as “the cradle argument”). The highest pleasure consisted in the well-being and proper functioning of the mind and body: it was the positive experience of the absence of pain and perturbation. If people failed to pursue such natural pleasure, it was because empty emotions, that is, emotions and above all fear excited by imaginary dangers (death and posthumous suffering), blinded them to the natural and easily obtainable sources of pleasure and instilled insatiable desires, whether for wealth or power, that seemed to promise an impossible security.

Epicurus, like Aristotle and the Stoics (as we shall see), thus recognized an irreducible element of appraisal in his conception of the emotions (as distinct from the instinctive character of pleasure and pain, which he also referred to more narrowly as *pathê*).

The Stoic school was formed in Athens around 300 BC by Zeno of Citium: his immediate successors were Cleanthes and Chrysippus (a prolific writer sometimes called the ‘second founder’ of Stoicism); later important figures are Posidonius and, in Roman imperial times, Seneca, Epictetus and the emperor Marcus Aurelius. In respect to the emotions, the Stoics are best known for their condemnation of the *pathê* and their endorsement of a state of *apatheia*, that is, the absence of emotion. But their view is in fact more nuanced, and in their radically cognitive interpretation of the emotions, involving voluntary assent to impressions, along with a new conception of pre-rational impulses, they developed Aristotle’s conception of the emotions (and indeed that of Epicurus) in new and creative ways.

The writings of the founders of Stoicism survive only in fragments, although they were abundant, and there are inevitably difficulties in reconstructing their views. Our most detailed information comes from the works of Seneca, who lived in the first century AD in Rome and was tutor to the emperor Nero, before Nero turned against him and ordered him to commit suicide. Seneca wrote a treatise on anger (*De ira*), and another, shorter and incomplete, on clemency or mercy (*De clementia*); his essay on benefactions (*De beneficiis*) has much to tell us about gratitude (treated as an emotion by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* 2.7, though the emotion in most translations is misidentified as kindness: see Konstan 2006: 156-68), and scattered throughout his other writings (above all the collection of *Moral Epistles* addressed to Lucilius) are insights into the nature of emotions of many sorts, including fear, shame, grief, and love. Seneca also wrote several tragedies, in which he illustrated the passions in action. In this section, we outline the Stoic account of

emotions with reference mainly to Seneca's writings, highlighting where possible continuities and the differences between the Roman version of Stoicism and its Greek predecessors.

Seneca affirms in his essay on anger that the Stoic definition of this emotion is roughly the same as that of Aristotle: as he puts it, "Aristotle's definition is not far different from ours; for he says that anger is the desire that pain be paid back." Chrysippus had described anger as "the desire to take vengeance against one who is believed to have committed a wrong contrary to one's deserts" (*SVF* 3.395). "It is objected to both definitions," Seneca continues, "that wild animals grow angry but they are not stirred up by an offense or for the sake of punishment or pain to another; for even if they accomplish this, it is not what they intend." To this, Seneca replies: "We must affirm that wild animals, and all creatures apart from human beings, are without anger; for since anger is contrary to reason, it does not arise except where reason has a place. Animals have violence, rabidity, ferocity, aggression, but do not have anger any more than they have licentiousness.... Dumb animals lack human emotions, but they do have certain impulses that are similar to emotions." Seneca goes on to observe that animals can utter sounds, but they do not have language; their perceptions, moreover, are muddy and confused: "thus, their attacks and outbreaks are violent, but they do not have fears and worries, sadness and anger, but rather things that are similar to these" (*De ira* 1.3.4-8); so too, in the *Consolation to Marcia* (5.1), Seneca states that animals do not experience sadness and fear any more than stones do.

When it comes to authentic human emotions, Seneca explains: "there is no doubt but that what arouses anger is the impression that is presented of an injury" (*De ira* 2.1.3). Both Chrysippus's and Seneca's descriptions bear on the judgment that an injustice or insult (*iniuria*) has occurred. Likewise, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle's definition of anger implied, as we have seen, an evaluative perception of a slight. Aristotle had also insisted on the enmattered nature of

emotions and the Stoics too provided a physical account of emotions: for example, Zeno described them as “a fluttering of the soul” (*SVF* 1.206) and Chrysippus noted that emotions were accompanied by swellings or contractions of the soul that we feel in the heart (*LS* 65 K 1).

Nonetheless, even if they recognized the physiological substratum of emotions, the Stoics concentrated principally on their cognitive aspect and conceived of emotions as necessarily involving reason and thus inaccessible to animals or human children up to the age of 14. In his more precise definition in the second book of *On anger*, Seneca states that anger is aroused by the presentation or appearance of an offense, but he immediately adds that the emotion does not follow automatically upon the presentation itself, but only when the mind gives its assent (“anger ventures nothing on its own, save when the mind approves [*animo adprobante*],” *De ira* 2.1.4). Thus, for anger to arise, one must receive the impression (*species* = Greek *phantasia*) of having endured an offense and must desire passionately (*concupiscere*) to avenge it, and must further join two judgments together, namely that one ought not to have been harmed or offended and that one ought to seek revenge, and all this is not a function of that impulse (*impetus*) that is stimulated independently of our will (*sine voluntate nostra*); in a similar vein, Chrysippus had defined emotions as consisting of two judgments: that something is beneficial or harmful and that it is appropriate to react. The immediate impulse, Seneca explains, is a simple thing, whereas a true emotion is compound and contains several elements: one has recognized something (that is, received an impression), considered it improper or injurious (*indignari*), condemned it, and is in the act of avenging it, and all this cannot occur unless the mind has given its assent to what has struck it. And this animals cannot do, and hence do not in fact get angry in the proper sense.

If human emotions differ from those of animals, according to the Stoics, in respect to their evaluative nature, human beings too have precognitive affective responses to impressions, defined

as impulses (*impetus*). Consistent with earlier Stoic views (cf. Posidonius' idea of "emotional movements" and the notion of "pre-emotions" or *propatheiai* mentioned by Philo and by Clement of Alexandria: Sorabji 2000; Graver 2007), Seneca labels such responses "the initial preliminaries to emotions," (*principia prohudentia adfectibus*: 2.2.5) and he provides a detailed list of such reactions to a wide variety of stimuli. These include shivering with cold, squeamishness at certain kinds of touch, hair standing on end in response to bad news, blushing, dizziness caused by heights, and the sentiments (which resemble emotions but do not count as such) that we experience when seeing plays, reading books, hearing music or seeing horrible paintings, or watching people being severely punished even if they deserve it (otherwise a judgment of desert would yield the *pathos* or emotion of pity). What all these reactions have in common is precisely that they are involuntary and do not depend on judgment or assent. When you are watching a tragedy, you may shudder instinctively at the action on stage but you know perfectly well that there is no real danger, and hence what you are experiencing is not fear, and your response is not in principle different from trembling because of a chill. In this same context, Seneca states that "the ears of a soldier prick up at the sound of a trumpet, even when peace reigns and he is wearing the toga" (*De ira* 2.2.6); this is not the confidence that Aristotle regarded as the opposite of fear, based on a sound judgment of one's superiority in battle, but mere excitement; indeed, Seneca says that war horses react similarly to the clash of arms.

The Stoics' insistence that full-scale emotions are not only elicited by an impression (in Greek, *phantasia*; in Latin, *species*) but require the rational and voluntary assent to this impression is crucial to their belief that the sage is free of such responses. They recognized that even a wise person will shiver when cold, and held that growing pale or trembling at the prospect of a storm at sea was likewise instinctive and not subject to reason; hence the sage too would be subject to them,

but not to emotions as strictly defined. Seneca's description of emotions as *concentrationes animi voluntate* ("willed stirrings of the mind") and their definition in terms of their propositional content reveal both their voluntary nature and the ethical responsibility they imply: rational human beings are accountable for their emotions, insofar as they are accountable for what they believe and hence for assenting to an impression. This also explains the place attributed to emotions in the Stoic ethical system: their elimination is prescribed because they are grounded on incorrect value judgments (for example, that insults or even death constitute an evil, whereas the only true evil is vice), and no one should believe what is false. *Apatheia* (that is, impassivity, freedom from passion) thus becomes the norm to which the Stoics are committed. The sage's affective experience will be rational and good: *apatheia* does not exclude affective responses arising from true judgments of the value of things (again, only virtue counted as an unqualified good for the Stoics, and vice as an evil); such responses were labeled *eupatheiai*, literally "good *pathê*" (see further below).

The Stoics classified all emotions under four general headings: pleasure, pain, appetite or desire, and fear. The first two were responses to present stimuli, perceived either as good or as evil; the latter two to anticipated positive or negative presentations, for example the expectation of pain. Under each of these classes, they listed a large number of emotions, minutely distinguished from one another. For example, anger was defined as a wish for revenge inspired by the impression of an injury (one must judge voluntarily that it is an injury), and so falls under the rubric of desire. Under pain, the Stoics grouped such *pathê* as envy, jealousy, pity, grief, and an assortment of other feelings for which it is difficult to find suitable English equivalents. Pity, to take one of these subtypes, is defined as "pain for someone who has suffered undeservedly" (Diogenes Laertius 7.111; cf. Stobaeus *Eclogae* 2.92.7; Andronicus *Peri pathôn* 2, p. 12 Kreuttner). In these classifications,

elaborate as they are, the general term, e.g., *lupê* (pain or distress), is not repeated among the species of emotion. Similarly, fear as a general class may be taken to mean “avoidance,” thus including a wide spectrum of emotions, ranging from trepidation (*agōnia*) to shame (*aiskhunē*) and reluctance (*oknos*), since each of them represents a painful response to something perceived as evil (e.g. somebody else’s goods in the case of envy, or somebody’s unjust suffering in the case of pity). Pleasure includes satisfaction and, perhaps surprisingly, spite. It is probably best to understand the general categories as elements that are associated with the several emotions they cover; thus, pain and pleasure are not complete emotions in themselves (although the Stoics use the term *pathos* for these), but components of the relevant emotions.

The Stoics also held that the good emotions of the sage fall under only three headings: joy corresponding to pleasure, caution to fear (one takes care to avoid undesirable states affairs but without regarding them as vicious and hence frightening), and wishing to desire or appetite. These emotions (as they appear to be) also embrace subclasses; wishing includes goodwill (*eunoia*) and cherishing (*agapêsis*), among others, caution includes respect (*aidôs*) and reverence (*hagneia*), whereas joy (*khara*) embraces gladness and cheerfulness (see Gill 2016). The genera to which *eupatheiai* belong all have virtue as their object: we feel joy at being virtuous, we wish to be virtuous, and we take caution against misdeeds or vice. There is no category of *eupatheiai* corresponding to pain, since the wise are secure in their virtue and regard nothing else as bad or harmful. This is where the Stoics connect their emotion theory with their theory of value: virtue is the only thing that is genuinely good, and it is under our control. Likewise, only vice is bad. All the rest (such as health, wealth, beauty and their contraries) should be regarded as morally indifferent, although the Stoics allowed that such things might be preferred to illness or poverty; but preference does not confer value on its object – value inheres in virtue and virtue alone. It is

usually rational to pursue health and avoid disease, but actually obtaining health is irrelevant for our happiness. In ordinary emotions undue importance is attached to these “indifferents,” by regarding them as being good or bad for us: precisely because ordinary emotions are grounded on such incorrect evaluations, freedom from them is a moral ideal. If emotions are false judgments concerning what is good and what is bad, they are cured by reasoning rather than by suppression: the judgment that something is good or bad, and hence deserving of anger, for example, or pity, can be cognitively addressed by showing that the objects of our emotion are in fact indifferent and not a matter of virtue or vice. The Stoics also recommended techniques to counter the incipient judgment that might generate an emotion; for example, observing ourselves in a mirror and seeing how hideous we appear with our features distorted by rage serves as negative reinforcement and will incline us to think twice about how we judge offenses (*De ira* 2.36.1). It is worth remarking that *apatheia* is not inconsistent with the sage’s good emotions: the Stoics endeavoured not to eliminate affectivity from human life but rather to set the mind free from false beliefs and shape it according to virtue. For the Stoics good emotions, which are based on genuine knowledge, were a fundamental part of the virtuous life.

Conclusion

Our survey of ancient Greek theories of emotions has necessarily been brief but we hope we have shown that they anticipate modern views in a variety of ways. Each of the philosophical conceptions we have reviewed is distinct, but all take account of the phenomenology of emotions, their intentionality as reactions to objects or events, and their epistemological and moral dimensions. All the classical schools conceived of emotions as psychophysical experiences, though the fullest account of emotions as embodied phenomena goes back to Aristotle, whose

conception of the *pathê* as *logoi enhuloi*, “enattered accounts,” in the *De anima* did not preclude the analysis of their intentional and evaluative dimension in the *Rhetoric*. The Greek and Roman thinkers in general did not attempt comparative analyses of emotions in different cultures, although Latin writers were conscious of differences in vocabulary; but the overall cognitive orientation of ancient theories, along with their practical emphasis on the education of the emotions and their relation to social institutions, opened up a space for something like today’s social constructivist approaches to emotion by acknowledging changes in the nature of emotions over time and dependency of appraisals on contemporary values. This is especially clear in connection with Aristotle’s exploration of the role played by *doxai* and *phantasiai* (beliefs and impressions) in emotions, and the crucial function of moral evaluation. It is fair to say that, in theorizing about emotions, it is appropriate to treat the classical Greek and Roman thinkers not as primitive precursors to modern approaches but as full colleagues in a common project of investigation.

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