

Remarks on the Passions

(1) *The Basic Idea*. Diogenes Laertius: ‘from falsehoods there arises in the mind corruption; this is the source of many passions, and they are responsible for instability’ (*Lives* VII.110).¹ The origin of a passion is a mistake, namely assent to what is false. We commit ourselves to a false proposition (*ἀξιώμα*, *axiōma*, see handout 4), mainly in relation to value: e.g., when we fear *x* we believe that *x* has negative value; but *x* is actually is a ‘dispreferred indifferent’. This distorts or destabilises the soul’s tension (a ‘contraction’, and thus overtension), and hence is an ‘unnatural motion of the soul’ (D.L., *ibid.*). Part of this is an ‘excessive impulse’ (LS65A, *πλεονλάζουσα ὀρμή*, *pleonazousa hormē*), perhaps to avoid *x*. Insofar as they are grounded in evaluative misjudgements, passions are inappropriate. For Zeno passions *result* from mistaken opinions; for Chrysippus passions *are* mistaken opinions or judgements (D.L. *Lives* VII.111: *τὰ πάθη κρίσεις εἶναι*, *ta pathē kriseis einai*). Passions are ‘passive’: we ‘suffer’ them (LS65X), and thus we have a sense of ‘being controlled’ (LS65A) or ‘being pushed’ (LS65J). But passions are not just irrational drives: they have a complex intentional structure, and a cognitive content. (Unlike on the Platonic model, the Stoics do not think the soul has parts, one of which is non-rational and to which the passions could be attributed.)

(2) *Classification*. There are four kinds of passions:

FEAR (<i>φόβος</i> , <i>phobos</i>) is about an apparent future bad we seek to avoid; an ‘irrational shrinking’ (<i>ἄλογος ἔκκλισις</i> , <i>alogos ekklisis</i> ; <i>ekklinō</i> means ‘to avoid’): hesitation, shame, etc.	PAIN (<i>λύπη</i> , <i>lypē</i>) is about an apparent present bad; an ‘irrational contraction’ (<i>ἄλογος συστολή</i> , <i>alogos sustolē</i>): envy, resentment, pity, grief, etc.
DESIRE (<i>ἐπιθυμία</i> , <i>epithumia</i>) is about an apparent future good we seek and not yet have, and think we might be able to get; an ‘irrational stretching’ (<i>ἄλογος ὄρεξις</i> , <i>alogos orexis</i> ; <i>oregō</i> means ‘to stretch out’ and also ‘to desire’): ANGER, sexual desires, love of wealth and reputation, etc.	PLEASURE (<i>ἡδονή</i> , <i>hēdonē</i>) is about an apparent present good that we have and think is good; an ‘irrational swelling’ (<i>ἄλογος ἔπαρσις</i> , <i>alogos eparsis</i> ; related to ‘lifting’ or ‘rising’): satisfaction etc.

D.L. *Lives* VII: [111] “And grief or pain they hold to be an irrational mental contraction. Its species are pity, envy, jealousy, rivalry, heaviness, annoyance, distress, anguish, distraction. Pity is grief felt at undeserved suffering; envy, grief at others’ prosperity; jealousy, grief at the possession by another of that which one desires for oneself; rivalry, pain at the possession by another of what one has oneself. [112] Heaviness or vexation is grief which weighs us down, annoyance that which coops us up and straitens us for want of room, distress a pain brought

¹ ἐκ δὲ τῶν ψευδῶν ἐπιγίνεσθαι τὴν διαστροφὴν ἐπὶ τὴν διάνοιαν, ἀφ’ ἧς πολλὰ πάθη βλαστάνειν καὶ ἀκαταστασίας αἴτια.

on by anxious thought that lasts and increases, anguish painful grief, distraction irrational grief, rasping and hindering us from viewing the situation as a whole.

Fear is an expectation of evil. Under fear are ranged the following emotions: terror, nervous shrinking, shame, consternation, panic, mental agony. Terror is a fear which produces fright; shame is fear of disgrace; nervous shrinking is a fear that one will have to act; consternation is fear due to a presentation of some unusual occurrence; [113] panic is fear with pressure exercised by sound; mental agony is fear felt when some issue is still in suspense.

Desire or craving is irrational appetency, and under it are ranged the following states: want, hatred, contentiousness, anger, love, wrath, resentment. Want, then, is a craving when it is balked and, as it were, cut off from its object, but kept at full stretch and attracted towards it in vain. Hatred is a growing and lasting desire or craving that it should go ill with somebody. Contentiousness is a craving or desire connected with partisanship; anger a craving or desire to punish one who is thought to have done you an undeserved injury. The passion of love is a craving from which good men are free; for it is an effort to win affection due to the visible presence of beauty. [114] Wrath is anger which has long rankled and has become malicious, waiting for its opportunity [...]. Resentment is anger in an early stage.

Pleasure is an irrational elation at the accruing of what seems to be choiceworthy ; and under it are ranged ravishment, malevolent joy, delight, transport. Ravishment is pleasure which charms the ear. Malevolent joy is pleasure at another's ills. Delight is the mind's propulsion to weakness [...]. To be in transports of delight is the melting away of virtue."

(3) *Pro-Passions*. These are passions we suffer *before* a judgement is made (65Y). Seneca calls them 'shadows of passions' (*On Anger* I.16.7). Example: startling noise.

(4) *Good Feelings* (LS65F). The wise are not completely without passion: they have *eupatheiai* (εὐπαθείαι), which are the rational counterparts of the passions: joy, (χαρά, *chara*), caution (εὐλάβεια, *eulabeia*), and wishing (βούλησις, *boulesis*). Suppose I believe my *Paëlla* is fantastic, but my guests do not eat up: I might feel distress and disappointment (a passion). But if everyone is truly delighted I am reasonably proud, I feel *joy*. "The passionless wise man is not someone who never feels. But he remains clear-headed about what he feels, distinguishing what makes a difference to happiness from what does not. By keeping this difference firmly in view, he prevents the transient upsets of life from gaining the momentum which would turn them into passions."²

(5) *Moral progress*. We can move closer to virtue (remember, virtue is not a matter of degree), by developing reason. We can re-adjust our opinions and pre-conceptions (προλήψεις, *prolēpseis*) distorted by sense-experiences. (This resembles Descartes's project in the *Meditations*.) Opinions that need correction are what is pleasurable is good, and pain ought to be avoided. Moral education thus aims to develop *virtue*, which is a stable character (see handout 7): insofar as we are virtuous, we hold true opinions or 'cognitive impressions' that are also mutually coherent or hence overall internally consistent. Passions stand in the way of virtue. But correcting opinions removes the ground for passions, hence leads to *apatheia* (ἀπαθεία) and eventually *ataraxia* (ἀταραξία). The more coherent our opinions about the cosmos, ourselves, and our place in it, the more at ease with ourselves we can be. Without false opinions, there could be no passions.

2 Inwood, B. (1999). Stoic Ethics, in K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 705

