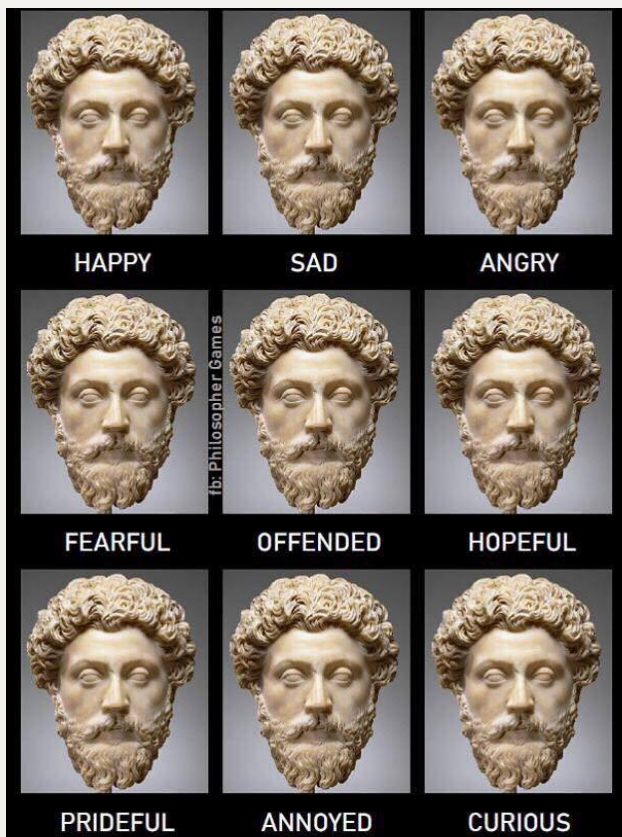


STOICISM AND EMOTION

MASSIMO PIGLIUCCI



Stoicism and Emotion

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Preface

The e-book you are, hopefully, about to enjoy is a collection of essays in practical philosophy originally published at [Figs in Winter](#), my Substack newsletter, or in one of my previous blogs.

I've been writing about philosophy as a way of life for a good number of years now, beginning with my first book on the topic, [Answers for Aristotle](#): How Science and Philosophy Can Lead Us to A More Meaningful Life, continuing with the well received [How to Be a Stoic](#): Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life, and [a number of others](#).

This series of e-booklets (free to download) collects essays that are thematically related and, I think, interesting and useful.

Enjoy, and remember, *Philosophia longa, vita brevis!*

~Massimo Pigliucci

If there is one complex, and often misunderstood, topic in Stoicism is the role played by emotions in the philosophy. You know, stiff upper lip and all that nonsense. That is why I decided to write a series of essays devoted to an extended commentary of Margaret Graver's excellent book, *Stoicism and Emotion*.

Margaret was the keynote speaker at Stoicon 2017 in Toronto, and she is a serious scholar of ancient Stoicism. Her book is accessible, but not aimed at a general public, which is why I am going to do with it something similar to what I did with Larry Becker's must read, *A New Stoicism*. As in the latter case, I have asked the author to take an advance look at my essays and, whenever possible and useful, to comment on the published version during the discussion window. Margaret has graciously agreed to it, which I'm sure will enhance the value of this series. Without further do, then, let us get started!

Stoicism and Emotion is organized in nine chapters, and from the look of it, I will have to devote an essay to each, since Graver's treatment is in-depth and requires some time to unpack. The first chapter is entitled "A science of the mind," and it sets the stage for an understanding of

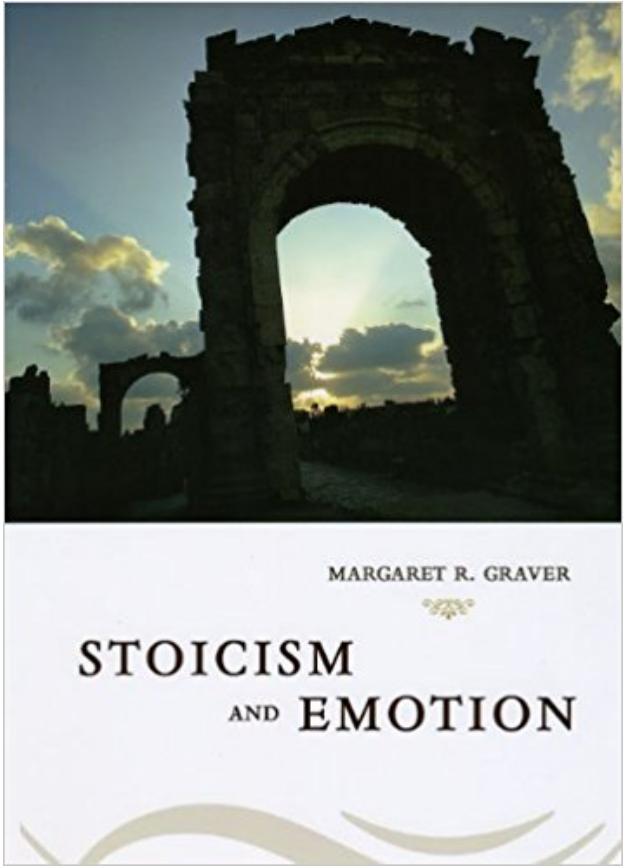
Stoic psychology in general, and their treatment of emotions in particular.

The Stoics, Margaret begins, thought about emotions in what turns out to be a very modern fashion, as at least in part having propositional content. That is, they adopted toward emotions what today's philosophers call an intentional stance: emotional reactions are certainly physiological in nature, but they also contain a judgment, say that something is threatening, or valuable. There is no contradiction between thinking this way about emotions and taking on board what modern neuroscience tells us about the underlying neurophysiology:

“The recognition of a threat [say], is analyzable on two different levels, a physiological level as investigated by the neuroscientist and an intentional level as investigated by the cognitive psychologist.”

Moreover, the Stoic approach is also very much like our own in the sense that the Stoics were materialists, so they thought of mental events in terms of physical changes effected by material substances. These two aspects are important to keep in mind throughout our discussion, because they account for why – despite getting some important details wrong, as we shall see – Stoic psychology is still very much useful today, especially in terms of its practical ethical implications. Indeed, Graver draws a direct analogy between Stoic thought on emotions and William James' circa 1884, as well as with the more recent work by

modern neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio (see, for instance, his *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*).



The Stoic rejection of dualism is based on the same sort of cogent arguments accepted by most contemporary philosophers (even though, amazingly, dualism hasn't completely died out even in 21st century philosophy). First off, the objection that famously stumped Descartes: if

mental phenomena are not physical, then how on earth can we account for the causally efficacious interaction between non-physical and physical aspects of human mentation?

Moreover, the Stoics were familiar with empirical examples of mind-body interactions that, again, clearly point to a physical-to-physical connection. Consider for instance that a cut to your finger (physical) causes pain (mental), or that when you are angry (mental) your face becomes red (physical). It's a two way street, and one does not need to invoke magical or metaphysically suspect non-physical properties to account for it.

Margaret carefully explains the Stoic theory that there is a single substance permeating the universe, the *pneuma* (literally, breath), a mixture of fire and air, two of the classical four primordial elements. That mixture can take different specific forms, which account for the differences between non-living things and living ones, as well as for those among plants, animals, and humans. The *pneuma* can take various forms because of the tension (*tonos*) produced by the balance of the two elements, sort of like the different types of vibrations one gets with a string musical instrument:

"It is variations in tension, and not the properties of air and fire alone, that explain differences in the qualities imparted by *pneuma* to things: hardness to stones, whiteness to silver, and at higher levels the sophisticated properties of plants and animals. Living things differ across the board from the nonliving in that they have much

greater complexity in structure and function, and animals also differ from plants in that their more elaborate body structures and life functions require a higher level of tension to support them. The special characteristics that set humans apart have their physical explanation in yet another level. Indeed the pneuma in a human being at his or her optimal level of functioning is characterized by such a high level of tension that it is capable of maintaining its cohesion [for a time] after the body's death."

Of course, all of this has been superseded by modern science. But the relevant kernel of truth is nonetheless crucial: everything in the universe is made of the same stuff (we call it quarks, strings, or whatever, depending on the fundamental physical theory du jour), and yet this elemental stuff is arranged in different, and varyingly complex patterns, accounting for the variety of non-living and living matter. The implication is that the differences we observe at the macroscopic level, and that seem to be qualitative to us, are in reality the result of an underlying quantitative continuum.

What about the Stoic reference to the soul? The Greek word is *psuché*, and it has none of the non-physical characteristics that Christian theology attaches to the word. *Psuché*, for the Stoics, is material and subject to the same laws of cause and effect as anything else. It can be studied scientifically, just like everything else. And interestingly, Graver points out, does not correspond to the modern concept of mind, but rather to the entire nervous system.

What does correspond to the modern idea of mind is the *hêgemonikon*, the central directive faculty that combines our sensations with our judgments, and which initiates action. As I have argued elsewhere, the *hêgemonikon* is very much akin to the frontal lobes of the human brain.

Chrysippus located the *hêgemonikon* in the chest, and was chastised for that by Galen (Marcus Aurelius' personal physician), who correctly thought that it was located in the brain. Once again, an example of the Stoics being wrong in the details and correct about the general picture. Lucky for us, it is the latter that matters. (Incidentally, as Margaret explains, Chrysippus' choice was not crazy at all, but actually fit very well with Ancient Greek knowledge of human physiology.) Therefore:

"As a theoretical construct ... their account of psychic function did not depend on any particular physiology. Given a more detailed knowledge of the workings of the central nervous system, a Stoic theorist should have had no difficulty in transferring to the brain the role that Chrysippus in fact gave to the heart."

Graver then moves to a detailed explanation of the relations among thought, belief, and action in Stoic psychology, and we need to grasp at least the basics in order to make sense of their treatment of emotions. To begin with, the simplest kind of mental event is an "impression" (*phantasia*). This is an alteration of the *psuchê*

that tells us that something seems to be present or to be the case. Notice that animals too are capable of impressions, but not of a rational kind, since they are unable to conceptualize their phantasia.

Margaret makes the interesting point that the word “rational” (logikos) here does not have a prescriptive meaning, but rather a descriptive one: it just says that human beings are capable of complex thought, not that they get it right from the standpoint of formal logic.

The Stoics thought of impressions, again, as physical events. Zeno, for instance, used the analogy of a wax tablet that is “impressed” with something. Apparently, Cleanthes (the second head of the Stoa) took this quasi literally, so he was corrected by Chrysippus, who said that one should simply think of impressions as some (unspecified) kind of alteration in the psychic material. No need to be committed to a particular theory of human neurophysiology:

“The impression is made, i.e., caused, by some material thing, which, by impinging upon the sense organs, brings about an alteration in the material psyche, and that alteration ‘reveals itself’ together with its object through the psyche’s awareness of its own movements. But impressions may also be of that kind for which the object is more properly described as an actual or hypothetical state of affairs, i.e., a proposition.”

The impression, then, is a linguistically formulable thought. It gets translated into a more complex mental event that the Stoics referred to by a variety of terms, including "assent," "judgment," and "forming an opinion." (See the book for the corresponding Greek terms. I will limit their use here to the essential ones, for ease of exposition.) This is crucial: assent is conceived of in intentional terms: by way of assent one either accepts or rejects the apparent truth of a given impression. It follows that the difference between an ordinary mind and a (Stoically) trained one is that the former has a tendency to accept impressions at face value, while the latter more wisely exercises its faculty of judgment. (As in: "That is a beautiful woman over there, I must sleep with her!" As opposed to: "That is an aesthetically pleasing human being of the female gender. Nothing else follows from such observation.")

Margaret presents the example of the simple act of walking. If we are walking, then we have assented to the impression that, right now, it is good for us to walk (say, because we need to get to the grocery store to buy some foodstuff for dinner). The assent does not need to be conscious, but for the Stoics the fact that we are walking is either the result of a conscious judgment of the *hêgemonikon*, or it implies an unstated judgment of that kind, which can be articulated if need be. If someone stops you in the street and asks you why you are walking, presumably you will be able to tell him that you need to get to the grocery store and why.

What about emotions? From the beginning of the school they have been thought of in a particular way. Zeno defined them as “excessive impulses,” by which he meant a powerful kind of tendency to act. Since the cognitive mature emotions are the result of an assent, they then depend on ratifying (again, subconsciously or consciously) certain propositions about ourselves and how we think of our surroundings. Here is how the commentator Stobaeus puts it:

“Distress is a contraction of psyche which is disobedient to reason, and its cause is a fresh believing that some evil is present toward which it is appropriate to be contracted. Delight is an elevation of psyche which is disobedient to reason, and its cause is a fresh believing that some good is present toward which it is appropriate to be elevated.”

The above, it should be noted, refers to the unhealthy emotions, of which the Stoics produced a detailed taxonomy. In fact, Graver points this out immediately, mentioning that they also recognized “well reasoned” occurrences of “elevation,” “withdrawing,” and “reaching.” Moreover:

“[In] both the Zenonian and the Chrysippian definitions, there is a distinction to be made between the emotions or *pathe* understood as judgments (i.e., strictly for their intentional content, which may be either true or false), and the feeling one gets from a certain emotion. ... Feelings

which are phenomenologically similar will not necessarily represent the same kind of affective response.”

For instance, I may be sexually aroused by the sight of my partner, or by the sight of a stranger. The raw feeling is similar, but if I act on it (following my judgment that it is desirable for me to do so), the first case has a very different import from the second. There are crucial ethical implications of assenting, or withdrawing assent, from the very same emotions.

II—The “pathetic” syllogism

Stoicism is not about suppressing emotions. At least, not exactly. In the previous essay we have seen that Margaret Graver, in her *Stoicism and Emotion*, makes the point that for the Stoics (as in modern cognitive science) there is a fundamental distinction between feelings and emotions. Feelings are raw materials of our subjective awareness, and they can evolve into cognitively informed emotions of different types, depending on the (implicit or explicit) judgment that accompanies them. A rush of adrenaline, for instance, may cause the feeling of fear or dread, but that feeling becomes actual fear (of a specific something) only after I have given it assent: “yes, I really should be afraid, after hearing that noise in my house in the middle of the night, because it is highly likely that someone is after me.” But I can also withhold assent, if I think the feeling is not justified: “no, there is nothing to worry about, it was, once again, the damn cat making noises.”

That is why we need to be careful whenever we talk about a major goal of Stoic training: achieving the state of *apatheia*, literally the lack of *pathē*, which are the disruptive or unhealthy emotions, not to be confused with the

eupatheiai, the positive or healthy emotions. As Graver puts it:

“If the psychic sensations [i.e., the feelings] we experience in emotion are not simply identical with the pathē, then the norm of apatheia does not have to be cashed out as an injunction against every human feeling. One might be impassive in the Stoic sense and still remain subject to other categories of affective experience.”

But aren't emotions natural? And don't the Stoics advise us to “live according to nature”? If so, where does this talk of healthy vs unhealthy come from? It comes from the fact that even though according to the Stoics nature endowed us with feelings for good reasons, it pays to rationally scrutinize what such feelings actually are in any particular circumstance. It is Cicero – quoted by Margaret – that makes the connection clear:

“By nature, all people pursue those things which they think to be good and avoid their opposites. Therefore, as soon as a person receives an impression of some thing which he thinks is good, nature itself urges him to reach out after it.” (Tusculan Disputations, IV.12)

So the inclination to follow our feelings is natural, but how we do that depends on our judgment of whether the feeling refers to a good or a bad situation. Nature yes, but not unaided by reason...

Emotions, for the Stoics, not only come with a (either implicit or explicitly articulated) content, they are associated with a normative aspect. Graver stresses that this is a crucial characteristic of the Stoic approach: the psychological aspect of emotions must be integrated with an ethical judgment as to the appropriateness (or not) of that emotion. The ability to do that, fundamentally, is what distinguishes human beings from other animals. This position is easily traceable back to the early Stoa:

“They [the Stoics] think that the pathē are judgments, as Chrysippus says in his work *On Emotions*. For [he says that] fondness for money is a supposition that money is a fine thing, and similarly with drunkenness, stubbornness, and so forth.” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*, VII.3)

Cicero, in book III of the *Tusculan Disputations*, presents a two-step processes for analyzing emotions, informed by Stoic philosophy (recall that Cicero himself was not a Stoic, though he was clearly sympathetic to the Stoic approach):

“When our belief in the seriousness of our misfortune is combined with the further belief that it is right, and an appropriate and proper thing, to be upset by what has happened, then, and not before, there comes about that deep emotion which is distress.” (III.61)

In other words, distress is what happens when we believe that we should be distressed about whatever it is going on (or we perceive as going on). It is not the event in itself that carries the distress embedded into it, but our cognitive analysis (which, once more, to pre-empt lazy criticism, does not have to be consciously taking place at that specific moment).

Margaret calls this the “pathetic syllogism” (from pathos, nothing to do with the modern word), and she spells out the general form in this fashion:

- P1: Objects of type T are evil
- P2: Object O belongs to type T
- P3: Object O is in prospect
- C: An evil is in prospect

Take the famous example of Agamemnon, the commander in chief of the Achaean expedition against Troy, who felt fear at the idea that he was about to be defeated. The fear comes from his belief that defeat is a bad thing, plus the additional belief that one ought to have certain feelings when a bad thing is in prospect. Of course, just like in any syllogism, if one wishes to deny the conclusion (assuming that the reasoning is valid, which in this case it is), then one needs to find a premise that can be rejected. And that is a major objective of Stoic training, of course.

Another way of looking at the issue, also discussed by Graver, is in terms of externals vs. what she calls “integral”

things. Both Plato and Aristotle referred to things that are determined by us (i.e., they are not externals) as good (or evils) “of the psyche.” The Stoics made this distinction – commonly referred to as the dichotomy of control – central to their philosophy, often the “integrals” as ways of handling externals, or as dispositions to use externals one way or another. Seneca, for instance, talks about an ambassadorship as an external, where the true good lies in handling it with honor. In the case of Agamemnon, the true good (or evil) lies in how the king would handle defeat, if it really did come. As it turns out, the Achaeans were not defeated, though we also know that Agamemnon was pretty bad in general at handling difficult situations, especially for a commander in chief. Graver summarizes the Stoic ethical stance in this way:

“The chief insight of Stoic axiology could very well be expressed this way: that in a rational being, external objects never merit uncompromising evaluation but integral objects always do. ... The claim often appears in the form ‘virtue is the only good, vice the only evil.’”

Because the above mentioned dispositions to use externals are, of course, the virtues. The oft-neglected other side of this famous Stoic coin is that indifferents are not so in the sense that they don’t matter. Indeed, as Margaret says, they may be pursued strenuously, at times, but only on the basis of a restricted evaluation, applicable to local circumstances. The only thing that is always good,

under all circumstances, is virtue, and that is why it is often referred to as the chief good, or the only (intrinsic, unqualified) good. Virtue is the good by means of which one is able to properly handle every external, including ambassadorships and defeats in war.

According to Stoic philosophy, it is possible – though very rare – for a person to align all her beliefs with each other, yielding a full and consistent evaluation of herself and her surrounding. That person would be in harmony with herself and with the cosmos at large, and of course it is referred to in Stoic lore as a Sage. Sagehood, as Seneca says in Letter XLII.1 is as rare as the mythical Ethiopian phoenix, a bird who comes back to life from its ashes (every 500 years, according to legend). Why bother with such a concept then? Graver puts it aptly:

“Alongside the dissatisfaction with our actual moral condition [for the Stoic] goes an extraordinary optimism about what we might achieve. ... Becoming like the Sage would be becoming more human, not less; it would be recognizable as human maturation.”

What about the famous *eupatheiai*, the positive, of healthy emotions? Following Graver’s analysis, we should think of them as normative affect, i.e., as the ethically proper responses of individuals who have been practicing their virtue, and have therefore developed the right dispositions toward externals:

“A wise person who meets with an opportunity to perform some generous or courageous action might feel a kind of yearning toward that action; conversely, she may be expected to experience a horrified aversion from anything shameful or wrong.”

It is commonly assumed that the eupatheiai are somehow less intense than the pathē, leading to the stereotype of Stoics as (nearly) emotionless, or at least characterized by flat emotions. But this is nowhere to be found in the actual literature, and there is no reason, based on Stoic philosophy, to believe that to be the case. Margaret stresses that eupatheiai are “corrected” (by way of ethical training), not diminished, versions of human emotions. She makes the analogy to the seamless movements of a trained athlete: forceful but without strain.

“Preeminent among eupathic responses is the one called chara or joy. Joy is ‘well-reasoned elevation,’ corresponding on a feeling level to the happy excitement the ordinary person experiences on winning a raffle or leaving on vacation. But joy differs from those feelings in being directed at genuine goods: a generous action, for instance, would be an occasion for joy, and the proper object of the feeling would be the generosity itself, as exercised on that occasion.”

I trust you can see just how grating Stoicism can be for some modern sensibilities. I’m thinking of the sort of

people who say things like “who are you to tell me I should / should not feel this way?” The answer is clear, from a Stoic perspective: emotions, as characterized above, come in bad and good varieties, and we should, indeed, work toward feeling in certain ways and avoid to feel in certain other ways. While we cannot avoid raw feelings, we are not at the mercy of our fully formed emotions, pace David Hume.

Graver ends the chapter with a nice discussion of the Stoic classification of positive and negative emotions, first at what she calls the “genus” (i.e., broad categories) level, then at the “species” (i.e., on the basis of more detailed examples) level. The generic classification is nice and neat, while there is no consensus among the available sources about the specific classification. Graver suggests that this isn’t a reflection of disagreement among the Stoics, but rather stems from the fact that the specific examples were meant as illustrative of the generic categories, not as an exhaustive list. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 in this chapter are very useful summaries of both levels of classification. I am reproducing the first two tables here:

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | <i>present</i> | <i>in prospect</i> |
| <i>good</i> | DELIGHT | DESIRE |
| <i>evil</i> | DISTRESS | FEAR |

Figure 2. The genus-emotions.

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| | <i>present</i> | <i>in prospect</i> |
| <i>good</i> | JOY | WISH |
| <i>evil</i> | — | CAUTION |

Figure 3. The genus-eupatheiai.

Notice the lack of a “present evil” category among the eupatheiai. The explanation is along these lines:

“We can see why one would want to claim that the person of perfect understanding has no genus of affective response for present evils. Having perfect understanding entails that one regards as evil only those things that really are evil; that is, integral evils such as personal failings,

errors, and other events or situations whose causes lie within oneself. In order to believe that this sort of evil is present in the relevant sense, one would have to believe that a proposition concerning one's own shortcomings has just become true, something like 'I act unjustly' or 'I am ungenerous.' But the person of perfect understanding is exempt by definition from everything of that kind. The situation simply never arises."

From the third table (not shown here), consider as an illustrative example some of the "species" listed under the "genus" Desire, a pathos: anger (desire to punish someone who is thought to have harmed us unjustly); hatred (anger stored up to age); rancor (anger biting its time for revenge); exasperation (anger that breaks out suddenly). And from the fourth table (not shown), here are some examples of the species listed under the genus Joy, a eupatheia: enjoyment (joy befitting the surrounding advantages); cheerfulness (joy in the sensible person's deeds); and good spirits (joy about the self-sufficiency of the universe).

Let me conclude with one important note. Stoicism is often accused of being a self-centered philosophy, focused only on self-improvement. But as Margaret writes:

"The genus concerned with prospective goods includes some affective responses that are directly concerned with the goods of other people. ... The rich affective life of the wise is being said to include some concern for other

human beings that goes beyond disinterested service to the level of genuine affective involvement.”

III-Vigor and responsibility

There is a sense in which emotions are something that happens to us regardless, or indeed in spite of, our will. As Margaret Graver reminds us in the third chapter of her *Stoicism and Emotion*, this idea of passivity is embedded in the very word the Ancient Greeks used to refer to emotions: *pathos*, the noun form of the verb *paschein*, which means to suffer, or to undergo.

Of course, as we have seen so far in the course of our discussion of Graver's book, the Stoics made quite a big deal of reminding us that full fledged emotions actually include a cognitive component, which means that they are, in a sense, "up to us." That said, we know that even Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoa, was well aware of the fact that people usually have a hard time controlling their feelings:

"Often, through the same blindness, we bite keys, and beat at doors when they do not open quickly, and if we stumble over a stone we take revenge on it by breaking it or throwing it somewhere, and we say very odd things on all such occasions." (Chrysippus, cited in Galen, *PHP* 46.43-45)

Remember that two millennia-old quote the next time you shout at your computer, some things never change... According to Graver, despite the standard Stoic account of emotions which began with Zeno of Citium, Chrysippus was pretty pessimistic about the possibility of controlling them, thinking that once they begin they are for all effective purposes unstoppable. This is an important point to make, because it clearly shows that the Stoics were serious and sophisticated thinkers, and did not espouse the "stiff upper lip" caricature of philosophy that is often nowadays associated with their name.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a serious problem in the contrast between the Zenonian idea that emotions are up to us because they result, in part, from a cognitive judgment, and Chrysippus' realistic appreciation that it ain't quite that easy to overcome unhealthy passions. The resolution of this tension lies in the words "in part": recall that for the Stoics fully formed emotions are the result of an impression, which is not under our control, and a cognitive judgment, which is under our control. These are co-causes of the emotions. The problem is that on the spur of the moment the impression easily overruns the cognitive judgment, as Seneca repeatedly points out in his *On Anger*:

"For once the mind is stirred into motion, it is a slave to that which is driving it. With some things, the beginnings are in our power, but after that they carry us on by their own force, not allowing a return. Bodies allowed to fall

from a height have no control of themselves: they cannot resist or delay their downward course, for the irrevocable fall has cut off all deliberation, all repentance; they cannot help but arrive where they are going, though they could have avoided going there at all." (On Anger, I.7)

Which means, argues Chrysippus, that the answer lies in a sort of cognitive preemptive action: we need to work on our character, our overall collection of judgments, before a specific impression hits us. As in medicine so in practical philosophy: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure after the fact.

"Stoic thought does not consider the impulsory impression to be the principal cause of an action. It is indeed a cause, but the real cause or reason for the assent is to be found in the agent's own mental character, where by 'mental character' is meant simply the structure and content of one's own belief set. ... Whether assent is given on any particular occasion will thus depend on the nature of the existing mental contents and the sort of standard one uses for recognizing logical fit."

Margaret at this point discusses Chrysippus' famous analogy with the combination of internal and external causes that allow a cylinder to roll. I refer the reader to my own summary of that famous Stoic discussion of volition. The bottom line is that two people may be subject to the same impression (say, lust for an attractive potential sexual

partner) and arrive at a different fully formed emotion because their characters differ enough that one is inclined to assent to and the other to withhold assent from the initial impression.



Chrysippus, Trajan Markets in Rome, photo by the Author

Graver then “tests” Stoic, and especially Chrysippian, ideas against several well known examples from Greek mythology. This may seem odd to modern readers, but is,

in fact, not very different from the way in which contemporary moral philosophers confront their intuitions about ethical dilemmas by way of constructing thought experiments, sometimes inspired by fictional characters drawn from modern literature. Here, for instance, is how Chrysippus analyzes the famous instance of Menelaus' reaction to seeing again his wife, Helen, during the final sack of Troy:

“An example is Menelaus as depicted by Euripides. Drawing his sword, he moves toward Helen to slay her, but then, struck by the sight of her beauty, he casts away his sword and is no longer able to control even that. Hence this reproach is spoken to him: ‘You, when you saw her breast, cast down your blade / and took her kiss, fondling the traitor dog.’” (Cited in Galen, PHP 4.6.7-9)

Margaret comments that Menelaus' passivity is the result of a weakness of reason, not an instance of yielding to a passion that is independent of cognitive assent. Menelaus behaves that way because he suffers from a structural weakness in his belief system, i.e., in his character.

I want to emphasize just how important this is for practical purposes, as far as modern followers of Stoicism are concerned. Too often nowadays Stoicism is brandished as a magic wand, as if one decides to “be” a Stoic and this, ipso facto, guarantees immunity from unhealthy emotions. It doesn't, and Chrysippus, Seneca, and Epictetus would be

astounded that anyone would think so. Stoic training is like training for the Olympics (a metaphor often used by Epictetus): you don't just decide to be an athlete, start running, and win the race. You have to train, patiently, for years, improving gradually, and suffering setbacks. We are talking real life here, not wishful thinking.

Medea, of course, is another example of a weak structural belief system, often used by the Stoics, who however tended to see that tragic character with compassion, as in Epictetus. Yet another example, again discussed by Chrysippus, is more positive: it refers to an episode of the *Odyssey* where Odysseus (a standard Stoic role model) has returned home to Ithaca, but has adopted a disguise to study the situation. He is angered by the brazen behavior of the Suitors and the treachery of his own maidservants. But he strikes his own breast and addresses his heart, reminding it to tolerate the offense for now, so not to spoil any realistic chance at justice later on.

Graver devotes a section of chapter 3 of her book to an interesting discussion of how Galen (a known critic of the Stoics, despite being the personal physician of none other than Marcus Aurelius) unfairly characterizes Chrysippus' ideas, even accusing the third head of the Stoa of misunderstanding Plato's treatment of the relationship between emotions and reason. She concludes:

"The charge is implausible. What seems more likely is that Galen and his contemporaries did not stop to reflect that their own interpretation of Plato might not be the only

viable able reading ... [and that] Chrysippus' approach to mental conflict avoids these difficulties [faced by Plato's account] while preserving Plato's central insights about the importance of moral reflection and inner harmony."

Chapter 3 continues with a fascinating section on the so-called Posidonian objections. Posidonius was a major figure in the middle Stoa, but he is quoted approvingly by Galen against Chrysippus. It's easy to see why. Posidonius considers a number of objections to the standard Stoic account of emotions. For instance, tears caused by an emotional response to music, where there clearly is no role played by any belief structure, since no words are involved at all. He also takes up the issue of feelings experienced by animals and young children, again situations in which belief systems seem to play no role (animals) or a very limited one (depending on how young a child is). Or consider grief, which decreases over time, even though, presumably, the belief that co-causes it in the first place, remains intact (it is still a bad thing that my grandfather died, even though it happened decades ago).

Margaret argues that it is implausible that Posidonius meant these objections as insurmountable for the Stoics – as Galen believes – or else he would simply not have been regarded as a major exponent of the Stoic school. Rather, Posidonius considered the objections in questions out of intellectual honesty, as they ought to be confronted by any system that puts cognition and volition at the center of its account of emotions:

“It will help to clarify the import of Chrysippus’ position, then, if we pause to consider how a philosopher of his commitments might reply to the objections raised by Posidonius. This is more than a thought exercise, for on several points there is evidence suggesting that the older philosopher had already advanced at least the beginnings of a position, and on others we know how later admirers of Chrysippus handled similar problems.”

The first line of defense, then, is the realization that Stoic philosophy does not need to deny the existence of feelings in the absence of judgment. In fact, the Stoics recognized that both animals and young children do have affective responses, arguing however that these resemble, but are not the same, as a human adult’s affective response (which is always mediated by cognitive judgment). Indeed, it would actually be problematic to propose too sharp a distinction between young and adult human beings, or between humans and other animals, because then one would not have any account of how character develops over time.

Another way to respond to the Posidonian objections is that phenomena like the tears caused by a particularly moving piece of music are *propatheiai*, not fully formed emotions (“pre-emotions,” as Graver calls them), precisely because they lack a cognitive component. In this case, they lack it because it simply cannot be developed, given that the impression is caused by a stimulus that has no cognitive content.

What about the observation that grief diminishes over time? Recall that grief, like any fully formed passion, is the result of two co-causes: the impression and our assent to it. Margaret points out that we change our assessment of the import of certain events over time, to which one could add that the strength of the impression will also naturally change with time. Since both co-causes of grief are liable to change, then it is no surprise that grief itself does too.

Moreover, the “pathetic syllogism,” which we have discussed last time, should not be taken in the spirit of a modern scientific account of emotions, but rather as describing the ethical aspects of emotional responses, which is what Stoic philosophy is concerned with in the first place. The Stoics are interested in exploring the nature of character and the boundaries of ethical responsibility, in a way similar to a notion proposed by Robert Solomon in his “On the Passivity of the Passions,” quoted by Graver:

“The truth is, we are adults. We must take responsibility for what we do and what we feel. ... Arguing as I have amounts to nothing less than insisting that we think of ourselves as adults instead of children, who are indeed the passive victims of their passions.”

Margaret further comments to the effect that Stoic psychological ethics is even more realistic and nuanced than Solomon’s:

“On the same [i.e., Stoic] school’s realistic understanding of ordinary mental capacities, however, it would be truer to say we are in the process of becoming adults: our intellectual and moral characteristics are always to be compared with that normative conception of human nature which is the endpoint of personal growth and development.”

We are all *prokoptontes* and *prokoptousai*, i.e., we are – hopefully – making progress, but we are not quite there yet.

Which leads me to the final section of chapter 3, on the Stoic meaning of “freedom.” For the Stoics freedom means to be able to do what we want to do, and not to have to do what we don’t want to do – thus distancing their treatment from esoteric, and ultimately sterile, discussions about the metaphysics of “free will,” grounding their approach instead in what Wilfrid Sellars, two millennia later called the “manifest image” of the world. It follows, then, that someone is not free if his affective responses get in the way of what he wants to do, as was the case for Medea and Menelaus, but not Odysseus.

Graver reminds us that even the Stoic Sage is likely to experience strong feelings. The difference between a Sage and the rest of us is that she always experiences the right feelings:

“An awareness of having done the right thing should evoke not just a mild satisfaction but real, deep joy. The

thought of abusing a child should be met with more than unwillingness: aversion should go off like an air-raid siren that arrests one's very being."

In a sense, then, only the Sage is truly free, but, as Margaret puts it at the very end of the chapter, "we are unfree only because we are at variance with ourselves."

IV-Feelings without assent

There is a famous story told by Aulus Gellius, of a Stoic philosopher who finds himself aboard a ship in the midst of a severe storm. While he does not scream or cries, he shows all the outwardly signs of being emotionally disturbed: he is pale, he trembles, and his expression is one of alarm. Once the storm passes, Aulus asks the philosopher how come his Stoicism did not preclude such reactions? Isn't that what his school teaches? Not at all, responds the philosopher, and gets out his copy of Epictetus' Discourses, from which he quotes, in part:

"When some terrifying sound occurs, either from the sky or from the collapse of a building or as the sudden herald of some danger, even the wise person's mind necessarily responds and is contracted and grows pale for a little while, not because he opines that something evil is at hand, but by certain rapid and unplanned movements antecedent to the office of intellect and reason. Shortly, however, the wise person in that situation 'withholds assent' from those terrifying mental impressions; he spurns and rejects them and does not think that there is anything in them which he should fear." (Fragments, IX)

Margaret Graver begins in this way the fourth chapter of her *Stoicism and Emotion*, which I am commenting on in this series of essays. The idea expressed by Epictetus is crucial to understand the Stoic theory of emotions. The initial mental impression (*phantasia*, in Greek) is an inevitable component of human affective responses, and the point of Stoic training is certainly not to try to achieve the impossible. The bit that is morally significant is not whether one experiences the impression, but how one reacts to it, and specifically whether one actually judges that there is an evil at hand. Before that point one has what Graver calls a pre-emotion, a good rendition of the Greek *propathēia*.

A similar treatment of the emotions is actually found in Aristotle, and – among the early Stoics – in Chrysippus:

“People who are weeping stop, and people weep when they do not want to, when the impressions created by underlying facts are similar, and there is either some impediment or no impediment. For it is reasonable that in such cases [i.e., those of involuntary weeping] something happens similar to the way that the cessation of weeping and lamentation come to pass, but rather in the beginnings of the circumstances bringing about the movement.” (cited in Galen, *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* IV.7.16-17)

The point is that the simple fact that people are weeping (or laughing, for that matter) should not be taken

to be evidence of a fully formed emotion, because people may start weeping suddenly, in response to an external stimulus, even though they are not actually grieving, or stop weeping when they are distracted by something else, even though they are, in fact, grieving. Proper distress, for the Stoics, is volitional, because it is dependent on judgment.



Ship in a storm, by Daniel Eskridge

Margaret observes that this view that feelings sometimes occur in the absence of assent is most fully developed, in the Stoic literature, by Seneca, particularly in *On Anger*. According to Seneca, anger is a high-level response, which requires not just the impression that an

injury has been received, but the additional assent to such impression:

“We hold that anger dares nothing on its own; rather, it comes about with the mind giving its approval. For to gain an impression of injury received, and conceive a desire for revenge, and to link together the two ideas that one ought not to have been wronged and that one ought to take revenge—none of this is characteristic of that impulse that is stirred involuntarily.” (On Anger II.1.4)

Why is this? Because anger, fear, and other emotions depend on our believing certain things. For instance, a person isn't really angry unless they believe they have been injured in some way: to be angry is to believe that a particular person knowingly did something bad to you which you didn't deserve. That sort of belief is complicated; it relies on concepts like personhood, intention, and fairness. While some reactions really are involuntary – a rush of adrenalin, as we say, or jumping at a loud noise – it wouldn't be plausible to say that a truly involuntary reaction can include all of that belief-content. So the Stoics need a lesser term for the kind of reaction that might have some of the physiological characteristics of emotion but doesn't include the characteristic beliefs. Their word for the lesser reaction is “pre-emotion.” As Graver points out later on, in the course of her lengthy and careful exegesis of Seneca's *On Anger*, the crucial distinction to the Stoics is between assent, which is the most crucial function of the rational

mind and the ability to receive impressions, which we share with the rest of the animal world. Indeed, Seneca provides a long and at first sight haphazard list of examples of situations that appear to be anger but are not. What the items on the list have in common is that they are all feelings that do not depend on assent, and for which, therefore, the individual experiencing is not morally responsible. But he is human, so he will experience them just the same:

“For natural faults of body or mind are not removed by any amount of wisdom: what is innate and implanted may be mitigated by treatment, but not overcome. ... Some people have lively, energetic blood that rises swiftly to their faces. This is not cast out by any amount of wisdom; if it were, if wisdom could erase all a person’s faults, then wisdom would have nature itself in charge.” (Letters to Lucilius, XI)

Moreover:

“Lest it should seem that what we call virtue strays outside the natural order, the wise person will tremble and feel pain and grow pale, for all these things are feelings of the body.” (Letters to Lucilius, LXXV)

In Letter IC, Seneca even explains that sometimes even the wise person weeps involuntarily, for instance suddenly at a funeral, and at other times voluntarily, when remembering a loved one who passed away. Contra to

common misunderstanding in modern times – not to mention popular caricatures of Stoicism – our philosophy is not a magic bullet that will make you invincible, or impervious to the basic feelings associated with the human condition. It is, rather, an attempt to analyze that human condition and to derive best practices for living it in the best way possible that is actually accessible by members of our species.

Margaret's chapter ends with an interesting discussion of the same concepts as found in the Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria, as well as in the exegetical writings of the Christian Origen. Philo is concerned with the interpretation of Genesis and Exodus in the Old Testament, for instance presenting Abraham as not really mourning Sarah – in the standard sense of the term – but rather behaving a bit like a Stoic sage. His concern, like that of the Stoics, is to explain what Scripture says about Abraham (“he came there to mourn”) in a way that allows Abraham to still be the wisest of all human beings. Similarly, Origen – who was familiar both with Philo and with actual Stoic sources – is concerned with interpreting some apparent emotional reactions displayed by Jesus as *propatheia*, or pre-emotions. In other words, it won't do for these two authors to allow a possible interpretation of either Abraham or Jesus as affected by what the Stoics would characterize as unhealthy emotions, hard to reconcile with the wisdom of a prophet and the character of a god. It seems, then, that the concept of pre-emotion was instrumental in allowing the

Stoic theory of emotions to be taken seriously by many in the ancient world, including their later rival, the Christians.

V-Brutishness and insanity

The Stoic way of understanding emotional experience emphasizes that what we properly call anger, fear, love, or any other emotion actually depends on a judgment by the mind, that this or that has happened or is about to happen, and that it makes sense to react in some feeling-laden way. So what about animals? And what about people who aren't capable of reasoning, either because they are very young children or because their mental faculties are impaired in some way? Should the strong feelings they undoubtedly have be considered emotions? Are they morally responsible for things they do in moments of strong feeling? And what about the fact that none of us is perfectly rational, unless we happen to be a Stoic sage? Is there really a difference between the actions of a typical imperfect adult in a fit of anger and what might be done by someone who is mentally ill? Interestingly, the ancient Stoics had answers to these questions.

Famously, for the Stoics everyone who is not a Sage is a fool, and in a sense "insane," because he lacks knowledge of what is important, and consequently too readily assents to impressions from which he should recoil. This includes people who get angry, which is why Seneca calls anger a

“temporary madness.” This class of individuals can certainly be held morally responsible for their actions, since they are perfectly capable of reason, they just don’t use it well. This is the set up for the fifth chapter of Margaret Graver’s book on Stoicism and Emotion, which I have been commenting upon with her help (she has kindly agreed to check my essays before publication).

In order to keep confusion at bay, I will follow Margaret’s qualification of the two types of “insanity”: paradoxical insanity (where “paradoxical” in ancient Greek just meant contra to common opinion) is the way in which we are all fools because we are not Sages (we are, literally, unsound, as one translates the Latin word *insanus*). The other type is “melancholic” insanity, from the Greek term literally referring to “black bile disease,” but which broadly speaking indicates a condition close to our modern conception of mental illness. Again: moral responsibility requires functional agency, so the paradoxically insane is ethically responsible for the use of his impressions, while the melancholically insane is not.

A classic example of melancholic insanity is that of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, who at one point hallucinates that his sister is a Fury, pursuing him for his (just, arguably) matricide. According to the ancients, this condition may be the result of what we would today call extreme psychological stress, or may even be caused by drugs, including alcohol. Graver points out, for instance, the existence of a fragment in which Stobaeus refers to drunkenness as a “little insanity.” Interestingly, one of the

disagreements between Cleanthes (the second head of the Stoa) and Chrysippus (the third head) is that the former thought that once acquired virtue cannot be lost, while Chrysippus points out that even the Sage may suffer the effects of melancholia or drunkenness (though she shouldn't get drunk of her own volition in the first place!), and thus at least temporarily lose virtue. The difference between the two philosophers is not actually very big, according to Margaret, but it is indicative of the fact that the Stoics modified their positions in response to external criticism, in this case from Academic Skeptics.

Again, though – and contra popular mischaracterization – there is a clear distinction between actual insanity and the Stoic “paradoxical” insanity, as Graver forcefully reminds us:

“No bona fide Stoic text ever asserts that the mental state of every human is just the same as that of an Orestes or Alcmaeon, and none ever refers to melancholia or any other medicalized notion of insanity when speaking of the madness of humans in general. ... ‘All fools are mad’ is a paradox, one of the counterintuitive teachings for which the school was renowned. Like others of its kind – ‘only the wise person is rich,’ ‘all fools are slaves’ – it runs contrary to popular opinion (para doxan) but becomes plausible when restated in other terms. It is a conversation opener, a deliberately provocative formulation meant to arouse the curiosity of the audience, later to be cashed out in a way that renders it acceptable.” (p. 117)



Orestes pursued by the Furies

This isn't quite as strange as one might at first think. Chrysippus points out that even lay language refers to people in the throng of strong emotions (anger, love, etc.) as "besides themselves," i.e., mad, if temporarily. When those people wish to do whatever is on their mind to do "no matter what," this is a clear indication that they are not in full possession of their rational faculties. The Stoics just pushed the point a little further: for them, anyone who sets their heart on external things – as almost all of us do – is primed for emotional turmoil at any moment. We might be fine now, but any chance event can throw us into a tailspin. Cicero too uses a similar approach, when in the third

Tusculan Disputation he uses the Latin word “insania,” meaning without health, i.e., a mental condition that falls short of full health, or sanity.

Graver brings up the intriguing question of whether it is compatible with Stoic psychology to consider the possibility of a strictly emotional cause of derangement, given the Stoic emphasis on rational assent. She reminds us that the Stoics were strict materialists, for whom anything happening in our mind is the result of one sort or another of physical change in the pneuma, the substance that pervades everything. So yes, it is perfectly conceivable, within Stoicism, that either physical substances (drugs, alcohol) or repeated, strong emotional experiences will cause some permanent alteration of our psychic condition, mediated by physical changes. Nowadays, we don’t believe in pneuma, but we think – like the Stoics – that there is no separation between the mental and the physical, so the general idea still applies.

The last two sections of the chapter are devoted to Seneca’s treatment of anger, and especially of a particularly dangerous form of insanity that Seneca calls “brutishness.” They make for fascinating and insightful reading. Brutishness in the Senecan sense is no longer anger, but it has its roots in the latter condition, and it should serve as a warning for the dire, ultimate consequences of indulging in anger. The difference between anger and brutishness is that the first is motivated by a (mistaken, in Stoic philosophy) belief that one has been hurt. The sort of behavior Seneca calls brutishness, by contrast, is cruel and

results in inflicting pain for fun, without even a plausible reason for it. Indeed, Margaret points out that although the term brutishness refers to animal-like behavior, this is misleading, since animals don't attack out of cruelty, but in response to natural urges like hunger, self-defense, or defense of their offspring. Animals are not morally responsible for their actions, human beings in possess of their rational faculty are.

Seneca explains the difference between anger and cruelty also in his *On Clemency*, where he says that the cruel tyrant has a tendency to punish beyond what is actually required by the situation, indulging his own lust for blood and the infliction of pain. And in his *Letter CXXXIII* to Lucilius he describes the excesses of Mark Anthony, an example of the cruelty developed by the far gone alcoholic. We call this anti-social personality disorder, or psychopathy. This loss of rationality affects us profoundly, of course, because for the Stoics rationality is the best and most characteristic of human attributes.

The last bit of this chapter is an in-depth discussion of Seneca's so-called three movements in *On Anger*, and again is well worth a detailed look. Consider first the following extended quote from Seneca:

"Let me tell you how the emotions begin, or grow, or get carried away. The first movement is non-volitional, a kind of preparation for emotion, a warning, as it were. The second is volitional but not contumacious, like this, 'It is appropriate for me to take revenge, since I have been

injured,' or 'It is appropriate for this person to be punished, since he has committed a crime.' The third movement is already beyond control. It wants to take revenge not if it is appropriate, but no matter what; it has overthrown reason. That first impact on the mind is one we cannot escape by reason, just as we cannot escape those things which I said happen to the body, such as being stimulated by another person's yawn, or blinking when fingers are thrust suddenly toward one's eyes. That second movement, the one that comes about through judgment, is also eliminated by judgment. And we must still inquire concerning those people who rage about at random and delight in human blood, whether they are angry when they kill people from whom they have not received any injury and do not believe that they have – people like Apollodorus or Phalaris. This is not anger but brutishness. For it does not do harm because it has received an injury; rather, it is willing even to receive an injury so long as it may do harm. It goes after whippings and lacerations not for punishment but for pleasure. What then? The origin of this evil is from anger, which, once it has been exercised and satiated so often that it has forgotten about clemency and has cast out every human contract from the mind, passes in the end into cruelty." (On Anger II.4-5)

The standard scholarly interpretation of this is that Seneca brakes with the bit that begins "and we must still inquire," where he starts talking about brutishness. According to some interpreters, anger is not present until

the third movement, and brutishness is a separate topic entirely. If this is true, then – observes Graver – Seneca is committed to say that there is a half-way point at which one assents to the full content of anger as a judgment but still doesn't get carried away. So the sequence of three movements would be: pre-emotion > anger not at odds with reason > full-fledged anger. But this is contrary not only to the entire corpus of Stoic doctrine (sounding suspiciously Aristotelian), but also to everything Seneca himself has been saying in *On Anger* up to that point.

Margaret's interpretation, by contrast, seems to me (admittedly, as a simple Stoic practitioner, not a scholar of ancient philosophy) to make much more sense. She takes Seneca's sequence to present anger in the middle, flanked by a pre-emotion that precedes it, and by a runaway brutishness that follows it (if one indulges one's anger). Neither the first nor the third movement are rational. The first one because it takes place without assent, the third one because it happens to an individual who is no longer rationally competent. Only the second movement is actual anger, because it is caused by a mistaken assent given by reason to the impression of injury. Remember that in Stoicism assent to an impulsive impression does not take place before the impulse; rather, it is the impulse, analyzed at the intentional level. That analysis, of course, may be on target (the agent withholds assent and anger winds down) or off (the agent mistakenly gives assent and full anger results).

I find this analysis – and Seneca’s presentation of the issue – beautiful and clarifying. In Stoic psychology, anger is a cognitive emotion, which is why it is under our control. But neither the pre-emotion nor the descent into brutishness is under our control. The first because it is naturally inevitable, since it comes before reason kicks in. The latter because we have lost control of things and are overpowered, thus losing competence to arrive at rational judgment. This is a terrifying prospect, which has enormous practical consequences, and that’s precisely why Seneca makes a big deal of it, using appropriately horrific language to describe it. As Graver concludes at the end of the chapter:

“One thus has a powerful motive to learn ways of eliminating or at least decreasing the frequency of anger by the methods Seneca goes on to suggest, like examining one’s conscience, correcting one’s values, asking friends for help. For these are the means of preserving one’s humanity.” (p. 132)

VI-Traits of character

The scene is Mount Olympus. Zeus and the other gods are contemplating the ongoing Trojan war, and the father of the gods remarks to Hera, his wife, and Athena, his daughter: "Perhaps it's time to give up: make peace for real, and let Troy stand." This does not go down well with either wife or daughter, who have been supporting the Achaeans against Troy, with Aphrodite on the other side. (This disputes among the goddesses, as is well known, stems from Paris being asked to make the impossible judgment of which of the three was the most beautiful one.)

Margaret Graver, in the sixth chapter of her *Stoicism and Emotion*, uses the story as a way to introduce her discussion of character. Hera and Athena react very differently to Zeus' comment. Athena – allegedly the goddess of wisdom, let us not forget – just murmurs to herself and glares at her father. Hera, by contrast, goes into one of her usual, and often barely provoked, rages. A major explanation (though, admittedly, not the only one possible, given their different relationship to Zeus) for the contrasting reactions to the same provocation is character. Athena is able to control her anger, while Hera very clearly

is not. Hera is in fact best described as irascible, i.e., prone to anger. Which, needless to say, is a major character flaw as far as the Stoics are concerned.



The judgment of Paris, by Henryk Siemiradzki, 1892

As Graver points out, character is central to Stoicism because it bears the full import of moral responsibility, as explained for instance by Chrysippus in his famous metaphor of the rolling cylinder. Now, at the coarsest level the Stoics only recognized two types of character: the just one and the unjust one. The Sage is just, everyone else isn't. But at a finer grained level they were interested in individual differences in character, and that's the major focus of this chapter of the book:

“Just as one may observe variations in the sea floor without disregarding the fact that all of it is equally underwater, so it is possible in this system to differentiate one personality from another even where all concerned have the same overall moral standing.” (p. 134)

In other words, the fact that all of us ordinary people are equally non-wise doesn't mean we don't have individual personality traits. In order to show that the Stoics' philosophically rigorous analysis of character can allow for that sort of variety, Graver goes into the distinction between two kinds of conditions. Some conditions can vary in degree, others can't: you can be more tall or less tall, for instance, but you can't be more or less pregnant. Conditions that can scale up or down are called scalar conditions; those that can't are non-scalar.

For the Stoics, wisdom is a non-scalar condition, since wisdom consists in coherence among all a person's beliefs and judgments – a set of beliefs is either coherent or it's not, just as a math problem is either correct or incorrect. And virtue is wisdom, since it consists in knowledge of how to live. So either you have wisdom, or you don't. But it doesn't follow that everyone who is not wise is completely alike. There are other kinds of personality traits that are scalar conditions: we can have them or not have them, and we can have them in greater or lesser degree.

Graver explains that in the ancient texts, the word for non-scalar traits is *diatheseis*, and the word for scalar traits is *hexeis*. One rather technical, but highly informative

paragraph from Stobaeus' summary of Stoic ethics gives examples of both good and bad mental characteristics that count as either diatheseis or hexeis.

"Some of the goods having to do with the mind are diatheseis, some are hexeis, and some are neither. All the virtues are diatheseis, but the habitudes, like prophecy and so forth, are hexeis, while activities in accordance with virtue, like a prudent action, an exercise of self-control, and so on, are neither. Likewise, some of the bad things having to do with the mind are diatheseis, some are hexeis, and some are neither. All the vices are diatheseis, but proclivities, like enviousness, tendency to grief, and so on, are hexeis, as also are the sicknesses and infirmities. Activities in accordance with fault, like an imprudent action, an unjust action, and so on, are neither." (Stobaeus, Ecl. 2.7.5f; 70-71W; cf. D.L. 7.98)

Notice that tendencies toward certain emotions (envy, grief) figure among the bad hexeis. These kinds of traits are especially important for Stoic living, because they quantify levels of negativity of which we need to be aware. Left unchecked they can easily generate powerful emotions capable of ruining our chances at eudaimonia.

Margaret takes a close look at the items in Stobaeus' list and organizes them in a couple of useful diagrams (a classification of good and bad traits of character, if you will). Consider, for instance, what Stobaeus says about the bad traits called "sicknesses":

“A ‘sickness,’ they say, is a desirous opinion which has hardened into a condition and become entrenched, according to which people suppose that things which are not choice-worthy are extremely choice-worthy; for instance, fondness for women, fondness for wine, fondness for money. And there are conditions opposite to these which come about through aversion; for instance, hatred of women, hatred of wine, hatred of humanity.” (Stobaeus, Ecl. 2.7.10e (93W); similarly Seneca, Moral Epistles 75.10-12)

Graver points out that in Stoic philosophy to say that an indifferent is not choice-worthy does not mean that it should not be pursued, as even Sages have preferences (and dis-preferences). For instance, most of us would probably agree that it is preferred to have some money as opposed to being poor. But that preference slides into a sickness when one becomes fond of money for its own sake, and even worse if one attempts to get more money by unjust means. And the word “sickness” here is particularly appropriate, given that the Stoics thought of philosophers as doctors of the mind, often drawing direct analogies with the medicine of the body.

Next is an analysis of “proclivities,” which Chrysippus explains are tendencies toward specific emotions, or towards action contrary to nature (in the specific Stoic sense of the term). What, precisely, is the difference between sickness and proclivity? Margaret explains:

“A person with a ‘sickness’ is especially concerned about some one object type and experiences a range of emotions concerned with that object. Someone with a proclivity, by contrast, experiences one emotion more than all others and must therefore experience it in connection with a wide range of objects.” (p. 142)

In one case, someone is fixated on a certain object, money for instance, and becomes upset when they can’t get it, thrilled when they do get it, fearful of losing it, and so on. In the second case, someone has a tendency toward a certain reaction, anger for instance, and becomes angry about all sorts of things. This account gives the Stoics a neat cognitivist theory of the non-wise conditions.

The last bit of the chapter is about the personality traits of virtuous people. Still working with the summary in Stobaeus, Graver shows that while all wise people are alike in being wise, they can also have individual characteristics. These are called “habitudes” (epitēdeumata) and are classified as scalar hexeis.

“Fondness for music (philomousia), fondness for literature (philogrammatia), fondness for horses (philippia), fondness for hunting with dogs (philokunēgia), and, in general, the things that are said to be encyclical skills are called by Stoics ‘habitudes’ but are not said to be forms of knowledge; rather, they are classed among the worthwhile conditions.” (Stobaeus Ecl. 2.7.5b11; 67W)

A habitude doesn't engage the emotions in the same way that the sicknesses and proclivities do. It seems to be just a behavior pattern, a tendency to spend time in one way rather than another. Two people can both be wise without knowing exactly the same things; after all, they might live in different surroundings. At one point, a habitude is called "a road that leads toward what is in accordance with virtue." Interestingly, the same Greek word, *hodos*, means both road and method. Also interestingly, the Stoics did not claim that all wise persons would cultivate the same habitudes: the road to virtue is made of many paths.

"One wise person may be fond of music but not of dogs, while another, equally wise, devotes herself to horses, or to a variety of pursuits. Such preferences are not what it is to be wise; rather, they are personality traits of the wise, products of their varied experience." (p. 147)

One final word to clear up possible misunderstanding: the wise person understands that music, or dogs, or whatever, are not good in and of themselves (only virtue is). Which means that she can be fond of music, dogs, etc., without for that reason coming to think that not being able to pursue those interests is an evil. By avoiding mistakes about the value of externals, the wise have freed themselves of the emotional disturbances that such mistakes inevitably produce.

VII-The development of character

The phrase “bad faith” is usually associated with Existentialist philosophy, and particularly with Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and their famous example of the waiter who tries a bit too hard and artificially to be a waiter. When someone is in bad faith, existentially speaking, he is responding to pressure from social forces, adopting false values, and thereby disowning his innate freedom, which results in him acting inauthentically.

Interestingly (though Existentialism and Stoicism actually share a number of commonalities), the phrase “bad faith” features at the very beginning of chapter 7 of Margaret Graver’s *Stoicism and Emotion*, on which I have been commenting for a while now. Specifically, what the author is suggesting is that the Stoics wished to pre-empt the bad-faith excuse that our behavior is (entirely) caused by forces outside our control, a point related to the Stoic rebuttal of the (in)famous “lazy argument.” As we have already discussed, the Stoics were indeed determinists, but distinguished a number of causes at work in the universe, and when it comes to human behavior they made the point that some of these causes are external (and hence truly outside of our control), but some are internal, constituting

our character (and at least in part under our control). Chrysippus used the famous analogy of a cylinder that rolls when pushed because of a combination of two causes: one is the external push, but another is its internal nature of being a cylinder. If it were a cube, say, it wouldn't roll, even in response to the very same external push. As Margaret puts it:

"One might say that the causal history supplied for emotional responses addresses the question 'why does the cylinder roll?' and answers it, in brief, by pointing out that the cylinder is round. By contrast, the causal history of character addresses the question 'why is the cylinder round?'" (p. 149)

And it is to that second causal history that we now turn. To begin with, remember that Stoic philosophy maintains that the human mind is geared toward doing good, that is, toward acting virtuously. (They thought this was the result of a providential universe in the form of a pantheistic god, we today might say that human beings are pro-socially inclined as a result of evolution by natural selection.) But if that is the case, then why is it that virtuous behavior is so infrequent? Plato blamed the influence of the Sophists and the shifting opinion of popular assemblies; Epicurus said it was the fault of bad cultural influences, particularly poetry and drama. But the Stoics knew that these answers are insufficient and set out to do better.



The first step is the Stoic developmental account of human character, famously presented by Cato the Younger in book III of Cicero's *De Finibus*. Even young children, says Cato/Cicero, do not seek pleasure for its own sake (take that, Epicurus!), but rather whatever aids them in the goals of self-preservation and self-improvement. For instance, they keep trying to learn to walk, all the while experiencing pain and frustration when they repeatedly fall down. Our native endowment also includes a tendency to learn, make

connections, and react positively to people who are truthful to us and negatively to those who try to trick us.

“Natural preferences for self-preservation, for understanding, and for order and control thus work together to establish in one’s life the stable and coherent systems of belief and action which constitute the human good. ... While this account of intellectual maturation employs a broadly empiricist model of knowledge acquisition, it also makes use of innatist elements, preferences and tendencies which are simply part of human nature.” (p. 152)

Graver also points out that Cicero makes the link between normal human character development and the virtues very explicit in his *On Duties*: prudence (practical wisdom) develops from an innate preference we have for understanding; justice is the result of an innate tendency toward sociability; courage from a propensity toward mastering situations; and temperance from a preference for order. What, then, keeps going so predictably wrong for so many people?

A summary of a two-cause explanation is given by Diogenes Laertius:

“The rational animal is corrupted sometimes by the persuasiveness of things from without, sometimes through the teaching of our associates. For the starting points which

nature provides are uncorrupted.” (Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers VII.89)

A later commentator on the Stoics, Calcidius (circa 400 CE) agrees, and presents the Stoic two-cause account of human failure to behave virtuously again in terms of the attraction of “things themselves” (e.g., the lust generated by a potential sexual partner) and “the transmission of rumors” (i.e., popular opinion, even and especially by our parents and other caretakers).

In a sense, we go wrong because early on we commit a natural logical fallacy: Calcidius says that we learn to associate nice with good and troublesome with bad, and eventually come to believe that those general correlations actually signal causal connections. We come to love things like glory, since we are told that it is good, and since it brings about good things, instead of its close but virtuous kin, honor (which we are also, typically, taught is good, but is more troublesome to achieve). And we mistakenly assume that praise is a good thing in itself, rather than thinking about what a knowledgeable observer would praise us for.

“Since the happy person necessarily enjoys life, [people] think that those who live pleasantly will be happy. Such, I think, is the error which arises ‘from things’ to possess the human mind. But the one which arises ‘from transmission’ is a whispering added to the aforementioned error through the prayers of our mothers and nurses for

wealth and glory and other things falsely supposed to be good.” (On the Timaeus of Plato 165-66; SVF 3.229)

We find yet another rendition of the two-cause argument in Cicero’s *On Laws*. Cicero’s Stoic-informed view is minimalist about human nature: we have a tendency, which we possess even without being taught, to favor the development of justice. However, things can easily go wrong, mostly through a perversion that results from “customs and false opinions.”

Specifically, Cicero lists six objects that people commonly mistake for goods and evils: pleasure and pain, death and life, honor and disrepute. These are closely associated with an object for which we have a natural affinity: health, preservation of our natural state, and moral excellence (positives), and bodily harm, the dissolution of our nature, and moral turpitude (negatives). Our problem is that too often we confuse things from the first group with things from the second group, without realizing that we should care about the latter, not the former.

But Cicero’s most elaborate presentation of this material, according to Graver, is found in the third book of the *Tusculan Disputations*. He argues that we are born with the seeds of virtue, but that we go off the rails because of the bad counsel of a number of people who are influential on us from early on, including parents, teachers, and even books of poetry. Interestingly, though, Cicero also maintains that the most dangerous influence of all is that of the cheering crowd, and the most susceptible to it are

talented individuals who go into politics, who wind up ruining both themselves and their country. Sounds familiar? It seems like things have not changed that much in the last couple of millennia after all.

In the end, the picture that emerges is that the Stoics, like Plato before them, regard moral error as the result of lack of guidance, or exposure to bad guidance, coupled with natural mistakes of reasoning, not as the predictable outcome of an intrinsically evil nature. I have pointed out that this view is not very dissimilar from the one espoused many centuries later by David Hume, who interestingly wrote a favorable essay about the Stoics, even though he personally preferred the Skeptics among the ancient philosophers.

But the Stoic account of character development is more sophisticated than just claiming that people make mistakes because they confuse similar yet distinct things, or that they are influenced by the bad opinion of others. The twofold cause gets us into the realm of error, but the formation of specific tendencies toward poor reactions and downright bad behavior owes a lot to our own lack of mental discipline. We find this point both in Cicero (in *Tusculan Disputations* IV) and very explicitly in Epictetus:

“When once you have desired money, if there is an application of reason, which will lead you to recognize the evil, the desire stops and our directive faculty (*hēgemonikon*) governs as at the start, but if you do not apply anything in the way of therapy, it no longer returns to

the same [condition], but when it is again stimulated by the corresponding impression it is kindled into desire more quickly than before. And if this keeps happening, it thereafter becomes callused, and the infirmity gives stability to greed." (Discourses II.18.8-10)

The analogy with a callus is important: our character is molded continuously, by repeated decisions of our ruling faculty. Every time we judge correctly, we channel our character toward virtue; every time we judge incorrectly, we channel it away from virtue. And it is in this sense of a continuously sustaining internal cause that we are morally responsible for what we do or don't do. Just as a callus, once formed, alters our sensitivity to continued touch experiences, so our character, once altered in a given direction, makes it more likely for us to keep moving in that direction. We, however, as rational agents, are capable to reverse the trend, so to speak, and actively decide to steer our character back onto a virtuous path.

"Each of us can take charge of the formation of a healthful character for ourselves. Conversely, if we fail to take charge in this way, we contribute by omission to the vice-ridden character we end up with. For however it was that we first fell into error, it is only through subsequent laxity that the error becomes entrenched." (p. 167)

Crassus, Margaret reminds us, was a notorious example of unvirtuous Roman, because he was greedy. The cause of

his greediness was to be found in a combination of earlier circumstances and his persistent and repeated (and erroneous) judgment that money is good for its own sake. That string of judgments had gradually formed a “callus” in his character, which made him greedy as a matter of moral disposition. Even so, Crassus was also a human being capable of reason, and so he was continually responsible for his judgments and the ongoing shaping of his character. That, in a nutshell, is the difference between the antecedent and the sustaining causes of our character.

Metaphysically, this is a brilliant move, because as Graver puts it:

“The Stoics’ distinction between antecedent and sustaining causes gives them a way to respond to the concerns [of ultimate reductionists]. They can allow that a person’s character is the product of a variety of formative influences; indeed as determinists they should insist on this. ... Each of us is shaped at least in part by genetic factors, as well as by the physical environment, by the way we are treated within the family, and by our education, role models, and so forth. Rarely do we have any control over these matters which, collectively, supply the makings of our adult selves. One could consider them a form of luck. On the Stoic scheme, however, all these influences which are outside our control come under the category of antecedent causes, not sustaining causes. ... The direct cause is always the sustaining cause, which maintains the state over time, and that cause consists in one’s own

psyche. ... To say that we are rational creatures is to say that we are capable of reviewing and correcting our own beliefs, whether or not we do so in fact." (pp. 169-170)

We may be, ultimately, the product of Zeus or the Big Bang, in the sense of antecedent causes. But who we continue to be is the result of an ongoing dynamic process, which is sustained by every single decision we make. Make good decisions, then, and you will be a better human being.

VIII-City of friends and lovers

“Some things are transformed by growth. After many additions which merely increase them in size, the final addition works at last a change: it imparts to them a new state of being, different from before. It is a single stone that makes an arch – the keystone, which is slotted in between the sloping sides and by its coming binds them together. Why does the final addition accomplish so much, though small in itself? Because it is not only an addition but a completion.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, CXVIII.15-16)

This beautiful metaphor by Seneca sets the tone for the beginning of Margaret Graver’s treatment of friendship and love in her book on Stoicism and Emotion, which we have been discussing so far. The last stone in the arch represents human maturation: when our character is well formed we get to realize a number of potentialities that had been there from the beginning, but could not be actuated. Our opinions are brought into harmony with each other and with the world, we no longer assent to false notions, and we acquire inner stability and beauty. It is important to note that the mature human being – that is, the wise person – is still a human being: the finished arch is made of the same

materials as the unfinished one. And yet the final state is quite different from the previous ones. The same holds true for mature relationships, including relationships with friends and lovers.



The Stoics thought that things like marriage and political action are in accordance with human nature. We are rational, communal, and gregarious animals, which means that we want relationships with others. Remember also that we have a natural tendency toward ethical and intellectual development, because of innate tendencies and preferences that are the starting point of virtue, and because of a natural orientation (*oikeiôsis*) toward others. Moreover, this sense of kinship with others is extended by

way of reason to the entire membership in the human polis, the basis of the Stoic concept of cosmopolitanism. There is a problem, though:

“Until wisdom is actually attained ... the usual epistemic limitations remain in force. The natural sense of attachment is subject to perversion, as are all the starting points, and for this reason the imperfect person’s sense of what is appropriate in dealing with others is quite unreliable.” (p. 177)

One consequence of this is that we can’t live a good life just by going with the strong emotions that come out of our personal relationships. As Epictetus told the sick child’s father, reacting emotionally to the situation sometimes gets in the way of the more truly human response, which is to think about what the other person actually needs. But it doesn’t follow that wise relationships have to be devoid of feeling. Some of the texts Graver looks at suggest that there is an affective dimension even in the ideal form of Stoic friendship. The point isn’t to suppress emotions, it is to develop the proper emotions:

“The ideal form of human relationship is conceived not only as a mutual disposition to act in one another’s best interests but also as a disposition to respond affectively to one another. We are to imagine the wise interacting with one another in daily life and, in the context of those

interactions, experiencing feelings of warmth and affection." (p. 179)

An important point made by Margaret is that for the Stoics friendship was an intrinsic good, that is, something that is good in and of itself, not just because it allows us to exercise our virtue (like other, instrumental goods do, such as wealth, education, and so forth). Stobaeus says that a friend is "choice-worthy for his own sake" (Ecl. II.7.11c; 94-95W), while Cicero states that among the wise each person "values his friend's reason equally with his own" (On Ends II.70). When Zeno was asked "what is a friend?" he replied "another I" (Diogenes Laertius, VII.23). Indeed, in Zeno's Republic the wise persons are all, naturally, friends, and each wishes good things for the others, for their own sake:

"The notion of a community of the wise was important in Stoic political thought at all periods, whether that community was conceived as in Zeno's Republic, as an idealized version of existing Greek cities, or in a broader sense as comprising all wise persons wherever they happen to live." (p. 182)

One radical claim made by the Stoics is that there is no trade-off between friendship and the self-sufficiency of the individual. Seneca makes two distinct arguments in this regard, one a bit more convincing than the other. They are both found in the ninth letter to Lucilius, on friendship.

The first argument is that the wise person can rise above the loss of a friend due to the knowledge, which the wise person possesses, of what is truly good. Seneca elaborates by way of a fascinating analogy:

“Here is what it means to say the wise person is self-contained: there are times when he is content with just part of himself. If infection or battle took off his hand; if an accident cost him an eye, or even both eyes, the remaining parts of himself would be sufficient for him; he would be as happy with his body diminished as he was with it whole. Still, although he does not feel the want of the missing limbs, he would prefer that they not be missing.” (Letters, IX.4)

A friend, here, is akin to a part of ourselves, obviously signifying a very intimate relationship indeed. And yet, though we do not prefer it, we can live a good life even without an eye or a limb. And so it has to be with the death or the departure of a friend. As Stoics, we accept what happens with equanimity, without foolishly wishing for things that cannot be had.

The second argument is that it is not a particular friend that is good, but friendship itself. Which means that friends can be replaced by new ones. Again, Seneca deploys an analogy, this time less successfully:

“But in truth he will never be without a friend, for it rests with him how quickly he gets a replacement. Just as

Phidias, if he should lose one of his statues, would immediately make another, so this artist at friend making will substitute another in place of the one who is lost.” (Letters, IX.5)

Phidias was a famous Greek sculptor, whose statue of Zeus at Olympia was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The problem with the analogy, as Graver points out, is that statues are objects, for which one does not have the sort of affection that can compare to friendship (unlike, again, the regard we have for parts of our own body). Following the analogy, friends are passive recipients of our practice of virtue, and not therefore valuable in themselves.

What does work, however, is the general argument to which the analogy with Phidias’ statues does not render justice. It is true even for us non-wise people that there is a value in friendship that transcends the individual friend, just like there is a value in love that transcends the individual lover. Several people can be our friends, or our lovers, and yet that does not diminish their importance to us, both intrinsically, for who they are, and in terms of the general relationship (friendship, love) that we have with them.

Speaking of love, the last part of Margaret’s chapter is devoted to that topic, and there too we find a number of notions that would surprise the naive outsider, like the fact that a number of the early Stoics, including Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, wrote treatises on erotic love.

Just like friendship, love is obviously a matter of affective response, but it has to be of the right, that is, virtuous, kind:

“There are two senses in which one may speak of the ‘erotic person’; one in reference to virtue, as one quality of the righteous person, and one in reference to vice, as if blaming someone for love-madness.” (Stobaeus, Ecl. II.7.5b9; 65W)

The vice aspect of eros manifests itself whenever someone is uncontrollably drawn to someone else. While this notion has been romanticized ever since Sappho, it is of course an emotion akin to strong hunger, and it is not what the Stoics are after.

But there is a normative type of eros, which is a kind of resolve, a future-directed impulse, the object of which is not intercourse per se, but rather friendship of a special kind:

“It is [the Stoics’] doctrine that the wise person behaves not only in the manner of a thoughtful and philosophical person but also in the manner of a convivial and erotic one. ... The wise person is also an erotic person and will fall in love with those worthy of love.” (Stobaeus, Ecl. II.7.5b9; 65-66W and 2.7.11s; 115W)

Graver goes into some detail in explaining why such love is often directed at a young person, who will be guided by the wise one toward the acquisition of virtue.

And no, in context it doesn't sound at all like what you may be thinking here.

The important point is that the object of virtuous erotic love is the forming of a friendship, which the wise person recognizes as a good to be realized in the future. Such love is not just something that is selected because it exercises our virtue; it is a genuine affective response, one of the *eupatheiai* or positive emotions:

"If love is indeed eupathic then there is no reason to deny that it, like other eupathic responses, involves feelings similar in kind and intensity to the feelings ordinary people experience in emotion. In general what distinguishes the *eupatheiai* from the *pathē* [i.e., the unhealthy emotions] is not the kind of the psychophysical change they produce but their correctness as judgments: pleasure is irrational uplift, joy a rational uplift. As a judgment, eupathic love is very different from desire, for it is directed at an object that really is a prospective good according to the Stoic theory of value. ... Eros does not require justification; it is a good thing in its own right, as are all the *eupatheiai*. The wise fall in love for no other reason than that it is their nature to want to be intimate with those whom they see as beautiful." (p. 188-89)

What about the rest of us, non-wise people? Margaret concludes the chapter by remarking that what is proper for every human being is not just concern for others, but affectively engaged concern. That's a fundamental

component of human nature. The problem arises because the non-wise may make mistakes about the object of their affective responses, which is why at times we may be able to do more good by setting aside our feelings. But having strong feelings is not, per se, an indication of error of judgment.

*IX-The tears of Alcibiades,
or of Stoicism and remorse*

Alcibiades, the ward of the famous Athenian statesman Pericles, was nineteen years old when Socrates made him cry. Alcibiades (on whom I'm seriously thinking of writing a book) was handsome and smart, and one of the most promising of Socrates' pupils. On that occasion, however, Socrates shows him clearly just how short of virtue he is, in response to which Alcibiades weeps and begs his mentor to help him live a virtuous life. (We know from subsequent history that it didn't work out too well.) This is the setting for the last chapter of Margaret Graver's *Stoicism and Emotion*, and therefore also for the last of this series of essays on her book.

Alcibiades' reaction presents an interesting structural problem for the Stoic account of emotions. Normally, Stoic theory treats emotional reactions like weeping and begging as inappropriate, because one is reacting to an object outside one's control as if it were a genuine good. Here, though, Alcibiades' affective response is triggered by something that is under his control (his character) and that is, in fact, the chief good (virtue, or in his case, lack thereof). So what Alcibiades is experiencing seems to come from a

correct assessment of the situation, just like the eupatheiai (the positive, healthy emotions) of the wise person. And yet his response is not that of a wise person. What gives?



Socrates teaches Alcibiades, by François-André Vincent (1776, the angel-like figure on Socrates' shoulder is, presumably, his daimon)

To get the problem, it's helpful to think about why the wise person of Stoic theory does not ever feel remorse (for which the Greek word is *metameleia*):

“Remorse is distress over acts performed, that they were done in error by oneself. This is an unhappy emotion and

productive of conflict. For the extent to which the remorseful person is concerned about what has happened is also the extent to which he is annoyed at himself for having caused it. ... [The Stoics] hold that the person of perfect understanding does not repent, since repentance is considered to belong to false assent, as if one had misjudged before." (Stobaeus, Ecl. 2.7.11i; 102-3W and Ecl. 2.7.11m;113W)

Remorse, then, is an affective response ("an unhappy condition"), and one that is not compatible with wisdom, because it comes from the belief that what you did was a mistake. But the non-wise (i.e., pretty much all of us) frequently do experience remorse, because we are prone to give assent to false propositions.

One can think of remorse as the judgment that "Because I acted badly, it is now appropriate for me to feel mental pain." Is this judgment true or false? If the Stoics hold that it is necessarily false, then they need to explain what is wrong with it, since an ordinary person like Alcibiades obviously does act badly at times, and the Stoics' own theory holds that acting badly is bad for us. Then again, if the judgment may sometimes be true, then it looks as if some forms of emotional response must actually be appropriate for non-wise people.

Provisionally, one could posit that just as the wise person has eupatheiai or good affective responses for present goods (e.g., a virtuous activity in the present) and also for prospective goods and evils, so also the ordinary

person might have correct – but still not wise – emotional responses to present evils (her own faults) and again for prospective goods and evils, as follows:

| EUPATHIC GENERA | | | ANALOGOUS GENERA IN THE NONWISE | | |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| | <i>present</i> | <i>in prospect</i> | | <i>present</i> | <i>in prospect</i> |
| <i>good</i> | JOY | WISH | <i>good</i> | | DESIRE for improvement |
| <i>evil</i> | | CAUTION | <i>evil</i> | REMORSE | FEAR of future error |

Margaret begins the analysis by examining what she terms strategies of consolation. Consolation in times of grief was a standard philosophical practice, famously engaged in by Seneca in three letters to his friends Marcia and Polybius, and to his mother Helvia. Cicero, in his third Tusculan Disputation (at 77), contrasts two approaches to consolation by the early Stoics, Cleanthes and Chrysippus.

Cleanthes, following basic Stoic philosophy, thought that grief is the result of a mistaken judgment (that the object of grief is a true evil, rather than a dispreferred indifferent). It follows that the way to console the grieving person is to attempt to persuade him that he has made an error of evaluation. This, however, will not do, because the distressed person is unlikely to listen to that sort of

argument, at least not while he is experiencing the distress. Here Chrysippus sounds eminently pragmatic:

“During the critical period of the inflammation one should not waste one’s efforts over the belief that preoccupies the person stirred by emotion, lest we ruin the cure which is opportune by lingering at the wrong moment over the refutation of the beliefs which preoccupy the mind.” (Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.51 (SVF 3.474), from Chrysippus, *On Emotions*, book 4).

Instead, Chrysippus suggests an approach to consolation that skirts the question of whether the bereavement was really an evil and concentrates on convincing the grieving person that mental pain is not, in fact, an appropriate response to evil. This looks at first like a good solution: after all, true grief has both components, a belief about value and a belief about the appropriate response, so removing either belief should work for consolation. The aim is strictly pragmatic, to get the person to calm down for now, in hopes that there may be an opportunity later on to explain why death isn’t really a bad thing.

The strategy runs into trouble, however, when it’s applied to something like remorse. Unlike the person who is weeping because someone has died, the remorseful person has a correct evaluation of the situation. Since the Stoic philosopher now agrees that something bad is

present, it's less clear why she should even be trying to eliminate the feeling of distress.

This focuses our attention squarely on the question of affective response itself. Are the Stoics only saying that the ordinary emotions are wrong because they are based on false judgments of value, or do they also mean to say that the feelings involved in emotion are just inherently wrong?

In the latter part of the chapter, Margaret isolates the specific belief-components that give rise to the feeling-laden response to a situation. These can be presented in two versions, one that applies to all forms of affective response and then a more specific version for mental pain.

[A] (general): If something which is either good or evil is either present or in prospect, it is appropriate for me to undergo some sensed psychophysical movement.

[B] (distress-specific): If an evil is present, it is appropriate for me to undergo a contraction; i.e., to experience mental pain.

Margaret's position is that the Stoics should not categorically rule out either version, on penalty of running into inconsistencies in their philosophy. To begin with, an across-the-board denial of [A] would mean that normal affective responses are never appropriate in human beings. They would have to say that there is no right way for us to use a capacity that is inherent to human nature, a design feature of the species or (as we might say nowadays) a part

of our evolutionary endowment. It really would turn Stoics into the sort of inhuman robotic caricature that they are so often (unjustly) accused of aspiring to.

What about [B], the distress-specific case? Could it be that other categories of feeling have a good use, but mental pain does not? After all, the *eupatheiai* or “good emotions” of the Stoic sage include forms of feeling that correspond to delight, fear, and desire, but none that corresponds to distress. Does this mean that the feeling of distress is inherently wrong?

Here I find Graver’s analysis both very clever and convincingly rooted in Stoic literature. She argues that the Stoic view is based on a counterfactual statement. The wise person would agree that IF an evil were to be present, THEN it would be appropriate to undergo a “contraction,” i.e., feeling mental pain. But of course the wise person, by definition, is never in the presence of true evil (since the only true evil is lack of virtue), and so the situation remains, for them, a hypothetical. Still, they retain the capacity for mental pain, even if they never have occasion to feel it. The ordinary person does have those occasions, both when we think we are in the presence of evil but really aren’t, and when we are in the presence of a true evil; that is, a moral evil. In the latter case, the feeling of distress is indeed appropriate.

This means that Socrates was entirely right in rebuking Alcibiades, causing in him the “biting” of shame. Indeed, the best known example of a Stoic teacher who uses Socrates’ approach is Epictetus, who often berates his

students, presumably with the aim of making them ashamed of their patent lack of wisdom. The goal, of course, is not shame for its own sake, but nudging students to redouble their efforts to improve. What is being deployed here, however, is a prospective, not reactive, form of affect:

“Crucially, moral shame is a eupathic response, a species of caution rather than of fear. ... Epictetus clearly holds that ordinary imperfect people have the capacity to be mortified at the prospect of justified censure for their actions in prospect. That capacity may be underdeveloped or willfully ignored, but in many, perhaps most cases it remains available to us and can assist us in choosing appropriate actions.” (p. 208)

What about *apatheia*, then? Remember that the *pathē* that Stoics wished to eliminate do correspond to some of what we today call emotions, but that not every emotion is considered a *pathos*, and therefore not all of them are subject to elimination. The best human condition, that of wisdom, would still have room for many strong feelings, including joy, eagerness for what is good, love, and friendship. Moreover:

“We should remember that the attainment of *apatheia* is not in itself the goal of personal development. For the founding Stoics the end point of progress was simply that one should come to understand the world correctly. The

disappearance of the pathē comes with that changed intellectual condition: one who is in a state of knowledge does not assent to anything false, and the evaluations upon which the pathē depend really are false. ... The central and indispensable point of the Stoics' contribution in ethics and psychology [is] that no rational being wants to believe what is false." (p. 210)



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