

Not Quite Emotions:

Sentiments that Did not Make the Grade

Irasci dicit incitari, inpingi; irasci
quidem non magis sciunt quam ignoscere.
Muta animalia humanis adfectibus
carent, habent autem similes illis
quosdam impulsus (Seneca Dial 3.3.5-6 =
De ira 1?)

The Stoics, as is well known, drew a distinction between emotions proper, which they called pathê, and certain reactions which, though they might seem to resemble pathê, did not in fact qualify as such. Examples of the latter include trembling or growing pale at an impending catastrophe, such as a storm at sea. One of reasons why they wished to deny the status of emotion to such responses is that they recognized that a sage might exhibit these symptoms under appropriate conditions, and yet they maintained that a wise person was not susceptible to emotions in the strict sense of the term. Growing pale, on this view, was an automatic or involuntary reflex, not involving the mind or at least not a deliberate assent to a proposition of the sort: this storm portends an evil for me. Fear, for the Stoics,

would in fact require a double assent: first that such and such an outcome is harmful, and second that it is right to feel fear at it. Neither such assessment is implied in the immediate physical effect of a change of complexion.

Margaret Graver has recently discussed the Stoic conception of "feelings without assent" in a chapter of her excellent book, Stoicism and Emotion, and I do not plan today to review that issue. Rather, I wish to examine some sentiments that are not usually mentioned in this connection, and consider their status not just in Stoic thought but in ancient philosophy generally, or at least in Aristotle, who, along with the Stoics, has bequeathed us the most detailed analysis of emotions surviving from antiquity (some new evidence is available for the Epicureans as well). Aristotle, of course, did not hold the negative view of the pathê that the Stoics did, and so did not share their motive for distinguishing between them and instinctive physiological reflexes; but he too had a highly cognitive understanding of emotions, to the degree that he was inclined to deny that animals could experience them in the full sense of the term. To take an example, anger, according to Aristotle, is provoked by an insult or belittlement; now, this kind of stimulus requires a fairly sophisticated intellectual evaluation, beyond what we usually imagine to be within the capacity of animals. As William Fortenbaugh has written (2002:

94): "Humans have the capacity to think and therefore can believe that an insult has occurred and that some danger threatens. Animals lack this cognitive capacity and therefore cannot experience emotions [in this case, anger and fear] as analyzed by Aristotle." Yet animals certainly exhibit behavior that looks like emotion, and identical, in some instances, to behavior which human beings too display.¹ What kinds of affects are these? Do they constitute a class of their own? And what is their relationship, if any, to true emotions?

There are some indications as to how Aristotle and other ancient thinkers might have answered these questions, but not, I think, a clear or complete account, even in the case of the Stoics. I shall accordingly be supplementing and expanding upon what is to be found in the texts, with a view to spelling out the implications of their analyses. If I have perhaps gone too far in extrapolating from their views, I hope nevertheless to provide some useful insights into the nature of emotions as conceived by the classical Greeks -- and by us.

The first quasi-emotion that I wish to consider is one that has not been explicitly identified as such, so far I know, either by the Greeks themselves or by modern scholarship on their texts: I am referring to maternal love. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defines philia as follows:

They say that one must wish good things for a friend for his sake, and they call those who wish good things in this way well-disposed [eunous], even if the same does not arise on the part of the other; for good will in those who feel it mutually is philia. We must add that it must not escape notice, for many are well-disposed toward people they have not seen, but believe that they are decent and worthy, and one of them might feel the same thing toward him.... It is necessary, then, that they be well-disposed toward one another and wish good things, not escaping [the other's] notice, in regard to some one of the abovementioned kinds [i.e., usefulness, pleasure, or goodness] (EN 8.2, 1155b31-56a5).

Shortly afterwards, Aristotle offers in proof of the proposition that philia resides more in loving than in being loved the following example:

Some [mothers] give out their own children to be raised, and they love [philousi] and know them, but they do not seek to be loved in return [antiphileisthai], if both [loving and being loved] are not possible; but it seems to them to suffice if they see them [i.e., their children] doing well, and they love them even if they, as a result of their ignorance, provide in return none of the things that are due a mother (8.8, 1159a28-33).

The case of maternal love would seem not fit the earlier definition of philia, as Aspasius, the earliest surviving Greek commentator on Aristotle, noticed:

[Aristotle] has assumed not philia, but rather philêsis [the feeling of love]. For philia is in those who love mutually [antiphilein]. But nevertheless the [love] of parents for their children is a trace of philia. I say "a trace," because sometimes sons do not love in return. But it strongly resembles philia, because parents wish good things for their sons for their sakes (179.28-180.5 Heylbut).

Now, I once argued, in my book on classical friendship, that Aspasius' error lay in not recognizing that Aristotle's definition pertained to philia in the sense of "friendship," that is, a mutual relationship between friends or philoî, whereas in the example of maternal philia he was using the term in the broader sense of love per se, withough the requirement of reciprocity. And indeed, the Greek term philia is ambiguous in the respect, and Aspasius was, I think, being too finicky. Yet I now believe that I missed something important here. For Aristotle had earlier affirmed:

[Philia] seems to inhere naturally [phusei] in a parent [tôi gennêsanti] toward a child [to gegennêmenon], not only among human beings but also among birds and most animals,

and also in those of the same species [homoethnesi] toward one another, and this above all in human beings. This is why we praise those who are friendly toward all [philanthrôpous]. One may see when travelling how every human being is related [oikeion] and dear [philon] to every other (8.1, 1155a16-22).

That parental love is natural, and pertains also to animals other than humans, suggests that it is something quite different from the philia that obtains among friends, not so much because it may not be reciprocal -- in fact, here Aristotle indicates that it is felt by both parents and offspring -- but because it is clearly not based on an appraisal of the virtue, the utility, or even the pleasure that derives from the other, as anyone who has had a colicky baby will confirm. Aristotle is speaking here of an innate affection, a sense that phusei often bears, that does not require reason. The case is similar to what Aristotle calls natural (phusikê) virtue versus virtue proper (kuria): all people have something like the several virtuous characters (êthê) from birth, that is, they are just, moderate, brave, the rest, but not in the strict sense (kuriôs); for these natural dispositions (phusikai hexeis) inhere in children and animals as well, and yet these may be harmful since they act mindlessly (1144b1-12). I would like to suggest that the attachment between parents and children, and perhaps too that between

spouses (cf. 1162a17-18: ἄνθρωπος γὰρ τῆ φύσει συνδυαστικὸν μᾶλλον ἢ πολιτικόν), is one of those "not quite emotions" that I am seeking to isolate.²

[Compare Socrates' conversation with his elder son, Lamprocles, who had been lamenting the harshness of his mother Xanthippe, as reported by Xenophon: first the mother carries the child, "weighed down, risking her life, and sharing the nourishment by which she herself is nourished; and after she has borne it with much effort and has given birth, she nourishes and cares for it, without her having experienced any prior good or the infant realizing by whose graces it is flourishing or even being able to indicate what it needs, but she, guessing what is good and pleasant for it, tries to fulfill them. And she nourishes it for a long time, enduring the drudgery day and night, not knowing whether she will ever receive any compensation for it.... How many troubles, with your voice and your actions, do you imagine you caused her from the time when you were a child, giving her aggravation day and night -- how many pains, when you were sick?" (Memorabilia 2.2.5 and 8; cf. the entire passage 1-14). This maternal love is evidently instinctive.]

I would like next to consider a sentiment that is related to love, but still more, as Aristotle treats it, to pity: this

is the feeling that he calls, in the Poetics, to philanthrôpon. The context is a discussion of the best kind of tragic plot. Aristotle states first that when decent people are precipitated into misfortune, it is neither frightening nor pitiable but rather what he calls miarôn, or disgusting. Contrariwise, when wicked people achieve good fortune it is neither philanthrôpon nor pitiable nor frightening. A plot in which a very bad person suffers a great misfortune, in turn, "may involve to philanthrôpon, but neither pity nor fear, for the one concerns a person who is undeservedly unfortunate, while the other concerns a person who is similar [homoios]. Thus what happens is neither pitiable nor frightening" (13.1453a2-6). Aristotle concludes that the middle way is best, in which a person not outstanding for virtue suffers misfortune not out of wickedness but as a result of some error (hamartia). Now, what shall we make of to philanthrôpon here? Is it a third emotion, in addition to pity and fear, evoked just when a vicious person gets his comeuppance? Or is it a more universal sentiment, aroused at the sight of anyone who is suffering greatly, whether or not that person has merited it? And if so, what is its status as an emotion?

In accord with the two possibilities indicated above, two contrary interpretations have been proposed by scholars. Some maintain that to philanthrôpon here refers specifically to the

satisfaction one feels in seeing an evil individual get what he or she deserves (Apicella Ricciardelli 1971-72; Carey 1988: 137-39; Zierl 1994: 24, 28, 138; cf. Poetics 18, 1456a20-24). On the more traditional view, however, the term refers to the residual sympathy one feels at the distress even of a person who deserves it. Thus Gerald Else explains (1967: 95 n. 88 ad 53a1): "The most natural, i.e., the least forced interpretation of this much discussed term is that it denotes a rudimentary grade of pity which is accorded to all human beings (anthrôpoi) regardless of their deserts, whereas pity (eleos) depends on a judgment that the sufferer does not deserve his misfortune." To philanthrôpon, then, differs from pity in that it does not take desert into account.

In the orations of Demosthenes, a contemporary of Aristotle's, philanthrôpia or philanthrôpos is found in combination with epieikeia or "kindness" (36.59) and eleos or "pity" (25.76, 25.81, 21.185, 24.196; cf. Diodorus Siculus 13.19-24, Dover 1974: 201-03; Cavallero 2000-01); the terms are also associated with eusebeia, "piety" (21.12), eunoia, "good will" (18.5), and justice (7.31, 20.109, 36.55, 44.8, Philippics 2.12), as well as with the adjectives praos ("mild" or "gentle": 8.31, 24.51, 24.196, 41.2, Eroticus 13) and hêmeros ("tame": 21.49), and may be contrasted with fearsomeness (phoberos, 13.17), savagery (ômotês, 18.231), and envy (phthonos, 20.165);

philanthrôpia is what restrains a free man from behaving hubristically (21.48). In Aristotle's own writings, philanthrôpia is applied to animals in the literal sense of friendliness toward human beings (History of Animals 617b26, 630a9); when used of humans, it is connected with gentleness (praos) and a disposition to pardon those who err (sungnômikos: Constitution of the Athenians 16.2), and with pity in On Virtues and Vices 5, 1250b32-35, though this work, like the Constitution, is probably not by Aristotle himself but a product of his school. Most interesting of all, Aristotle remarks, in the Rhetoric (1390a18-20), that young men are given to feeling pity (eleêtikoi) on account of philanthrôpia, whereas old men are so disposed because of weakness. None of these passages suggests that philanthrôpia signifies a righteous pleasure in the fall of an evil person from prosperity to a condition of misery.

It seems likely, then, that to philanthrôpon in the Poetics represents a pity-like sensibility in response to another person's distress tout court, without regard for the justice of the case (it is worth noting that Aristotle can speak loosely of pity too as inspired by the sheer impact or pathos of a scene: Poetics 13, 1543b18). It is pity without the moral dimension, as it were. But is such a sentiment, stripped bare of judgment, strictly speaking an emotion? Or is it rather an instinctive

reaction such as even animals might experience upon witnessing a fellow creature in agony? Might to philanthrôpon represent an elementary kind of sympathy that is the basis for the mature human emotion of pity, in the way that affection for offspring is the natural or primitive substratum of the adult emotion of love?³

[Aristotle does not provide a clear answer to these questions. But the same passage of the Poetics may furnish a clue. As we have seen, Aristotle affirms that a reversal in which good men (epieikeis andres) go from good fortune to bad is neither frightening nor pitiable, but rather disgusting (miaaron: 1452b34-36). Since we know that the spectacle of a man of middling virtue suffering a fall on account of an error does induce pity and fear, the feeling of disgust here cannot be a response to a radical change for the worse in just anyone, but must involve an awareness that such a catastrophe is particularly undeserved. In this sense, to miaaron would represent a moral reaction, not an elementary reflex, and so might well qualify as an emotion. And yet, disgust -- if that is the right rendering for to miaaron -- does seem to be a rudimentary affect, as in the aversion to certain odors, which human beings share with other animals. By way of comparison, we may note that Robert Kaster, in his recent book on the Roman emotions, distinguishes two senses of the Latin word fastidium.

It may denote an elementary repugnance, or what Kaster calls a "per se reflex," the automatic avoidance of something repulsive (this may be a conditioned response). But fastidium may also signify what Kaster calls "deliberative ranking," a kind of fastidiousness or aristocratic contempt for what is socially inferior. In many situations, the two senses of the term overlap, and they cannot always be disambiguated. Something of the sort may be at work with to miaron. Elsewhere in the Poetics, Aristotle applies the term to a plot in which a person knowingly prepares to carry out a repugnant act but fails to do so: this situation, he says, has to miaron but is not tragic, since it is apathes (1453b38-39; cf. 1454a3). Recognizing the mischievous intention of a character on stage is certainly a sophisticated cognitive process, but does not produce the intense effect of the accomplished deed. This kind of moral disgust would seem to fall short of being a true emotion or pathos insofar as it is more like a judgment than a strong feeling. If so, then to miaron is not quite an emotion in a different way than maternal love and to philanthrôpon, on the interpretation I have offered above.]

I turn now to one last candidate for an emotion manquée. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle observes that "people pity their acquaintances, provided that they are not exceedingly close in kinship; for concerning these they are disposed as they are

concerning themselves.... For what is terrible [deinon] is different from what is pitiable, and is expulsive of pity" (1386a18-23). Aristotle cites the example of Amasis, who did not weep when his son was led out to die but did so for a friend: "the latter was pitiable, the former terrible" (cf. Herodotus 3.14). So too, Aristotle says that "people stop pitying [others] when something terrible [deinon] is happening to them." To suffer devastation in one's own right is perhaps more like shock than an emotion proper.

In the Poetics, ta deina seem to be the kinds of events that inspire fear in the audience (1453a2, 1453b14, 1456b3). Fortenbaugh, as we have seen, believes that animals, on Aristotle's view, cannot feel fear in the full sense of the word, because they are not rationally aware of an impending danger. Yet it is clear that animals do perceive and avoid threats in the external world. How does mere perception, deprived of higher cognitive processes, result in such behavior? An answer to this question may be lurking in a curious passage of Lucretius. Lucretius is explaining the odd fact that lions cannot endure the sight of roosters, but instantly take to flight -- a superstition reported also by Pliny, and analogous, I imagine, to the idea, common at least when I was a child, that elephants are afraid of mice. Lucretius writes (4.714-21):

It is no wonder, since in the body of roosters there are certain constituents, which when they are introduced into the eyes of lions, dig into their pupils and produce a sharp pain [dolor], so that, fierce as they are, they cannot withstand it, although these [constituents] cannot harm our eyes, either because they do not penetrate them or because, though they do penetrate, they are given free passage out of our eyes, so that they cannot harm our eyes in any direction by remaining trapped inside.

The lion shuns roosters, then, because the sight of them produces pain; their simulacra are shaped in such a way as to sting their eyes, though they have no such effect on human beings. Lions do not imagine that roosters pose a real threat to them, and so, properly speaking, they do not fear them. A similar analysis will explain the instinctive impulse to flee that deer, for example, experience at the sight of a predator, where the danger of harm is perfectly real.

The Stoics too observed that irrational animals instinctively avoid dangerous predators. Thus, Seneca inquires: "Why is it that a hen does not flee a peacock or a goose, but does flee a falcon, which is so much smaller and not even known to it?" Or again, "Why do chicks fear a cat but not a dog?" (Letters to Lucilius 121.19). Hierocles, a Stoic writer of the second century A.D., remarks in a similar vein that "household

chicks, if a bull circles them and jumps around, continue sleeping and do not go all aflutter, but if it is a weasel or a falcon they screech and duck under the mother's wings as quickly as possible" (col. III, lines 40-42). The Stoics explained such behavior not on atomistic grounds but by ascribing to perception a fairly high-order level of discrimination, by which animals are aware of the offensive and defensive functions of their own parts and those of other creatures, up to and including an ability to recognize the superiority of human reason; as Hierocles puts it, "animals have apprehension (antilêpsis) of the weaknesses and strengths in others, which ones are aggressive toward them, and toward which they enjoy rather a truce and, as it were, an indissoluble pact. When a lion, for example, fights with a bull, it watches its horns, but disdains the other parts of the animal; in battles with the wild ass, however, it is entirely focused on kicks and is keen to avoid the hooves" (ibid., lines 20-26). But such apprehension does not elevate the response to the status of a pathos.

In his treatise On Anger, Seneca remarks: "There is no doubt that the impression of an insult that has been tendered rouses anger; but we are inquiring whether anger follows immediately upon the impression and races forth although the mind does not assent, or whether it is roused only when the mind assents. We believe that it dares nothing on its own but only

when the mind approves" (2.1.3). Seneca explains that, for there to be anger, one must understand that the injury was not deserved and must be avenged, and this is not a simple, spontaneous impulse, but rather a complex or compound response (non est eius impetus qui sine uoluntate nostra concitatur.

ille simplex est, hic compositus et plura continens, 2.1.4).

Involuntary reflexes are such things as goosepimples, an aversion to touching certain things, the rising of one's hair upon hearing bad news, blushing at foul language, and the vertigo produced by heights. Seneca notes that we respond to things we see on stage or in paintings, or read about in books, as well as to certain kinds of music or the sad sight of even a thoroughly just punishment. None of these involuntary responses is anger, however, any more than it is real sadness we feel when seeing a shipwreck on stage or real fear when we read of past wars; rather than emotions, they are preliminary starting-points for emotions (nec adfectus sed principia proludentia adfectibus, 2.2.6).⁴

Margaret Graver observes that "Seneca's list is dazzling, but it is also baffling. In itself, it defeats analysis" (p. 96). She goes on to explain that what all the items have in common is that they "occur without one's having made any commitment to the truth of the occurrent impression" (p. 97). This is basically correct, I think. Certainly, some of these

incipient emotions are not ascribable to animals, for example the reaction to obscenity (might this be a kind of proto-shame?) or to artistic imitation: if a dog barks at the scene of a battle on stage, presumably it takes the event for real. Human beings are capable of more sophisticated responses than animals are even prior to giving assent. But one can also see why anger-like behavior in animals does not qualify as an emotion, any more than apparent sadness or fear would. This does not mean, however, that Seneca regards such responses as figments or meaningless sets of gestures. He seems rather to acknowledge that proto-anger is distinct from proto-fear or proto-sadness, as it will also be -- I may add -- from proto-love, by which I mean the natural and instinctive love that human beings and animals alike have for their offspring, and from proto-pity, which is the feeling we experience when we see, in Seneca's example, a person being justly punished -- and which I would identify with what Aristotle called to philanthrôpon in the Poetics.

Although no ancient thinker explicitly stated, to the best of my knowledge, that each of the major emotions has associated with it a primitive or pre-cognitive sentiment that falls short of being a true pathos or adfectus, it would seem that such a view may well have obtained implicitly among several of the philosophical schools. But perhaps they were wise not to

pronounce too systematically on the matter: even if one allows that there are several distinct affects or proto-emotions, which form as it were a substrate of emotions in the strict sense of the term, it does not follow that there is necessarily a one-to-one relation between the two sets. Nevertheless, the idea of proto-emotions represents, I believe, a promising line of investigation even today, among other reasons because it might contribute to bridging the gap between those psychologists who maintain that emotions are universal and innate, and those who hold that they are culturally constructed and vary from one society to another. Certain elementary sentiments, such as infant attachment, the avoidance of rapidly approaching objects, hiding when exposed to violent stimuli, and the startle reaction (or Moro reflex), may well be common to humans everywhere, and shared by certain animals as well. The mistake lies, however, in applying to these primitive affects the name of "emotion." Emotions proper are, as Seneca says, more complex things, involving cognitive operations and moral awareness; as such, they can and do differ in different cultures. But if correlations, however intricate, can be established between instinctive responses and higher-order emotions, we would have a most useful tool for engaging in historical and cross-cultural analysis. We may well wish to pay closer attention to those sentiments that did not make the grade.

¹ Cf. Excerpt 4B "From the Discourse of Hermes to Tat": "But now you tell me that it is because the irrational animals are deprived of the rational part of the soul, that they are irrational..., and it is clear that it follows of necessity from this that they irrational animals have no portion of knowledge or skill.... How is it then, father, that we see some of the irrational animals using knowledge and skill...? Hermes: It is not by knowledge or skill, my son, that they do those things, but by natural instinct." The proof is that with skill or knowledge, some people master it and others not, whereas all creatures are endowed with instinct: hence, all ants store up their food, and not just some. From the Corpus Hermeticum extract 4 in Stobaeus = Scott p. 407. There is a possible Egyptian analogue in the so-called Book of Thoth (cf. R. Jasnow and K.-T. Zauzich, The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica (Wiesbaden, 2005) 70.

² See Cicero On Ends 3.62, where he affirms that, according to the Stoics, children are naturally loved by their parents, and compares this instinctive to response to the natural avoidance of pain; cf. Margaret Graver, Stoicism and Emotion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 36.

³ See also Seneca, Moral Epistles 99, for the idea that tears at a funeral may flow involuntarily as a result of a certain "natural necessity," and are a sign of humanitas; cf. Graver (above, n. 2) 101.

⁴ *Consider Philodemus On Anger here: is thumos a possible name for primitive irascibility? I rather think it is kenê orgê, that is, anger based on a false judgment, but it's curious that it should be given a different name.