

The passions of the good citizen

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The passions are forms in matter.

Aristotle, *De Anima*.

The passions are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments, and which are accompanied by distress and pleasure.

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*.

Temper seems to pay some attention to reason, but to hear it imperfectly -- just as eager servants go darting off before hearing the end of what is said to them.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

1. If Plato was an idealist visionary, Aristotle was the philosopher of reality and commonsense. He developed a theory of the soul as a set of faculties of human beings made out of matter against Plato's conception of it as an immaterial substance trapped in the body, and argued for the good life of the sensible citizen against the ascetic ideal of the philosopher-ruler. He did not reject the ethical prescription of the control of the passions by the rational will, but saw them -- as long as they were kept within reasonable limits -- as acceptable and positive aspects of a fully realized individual, the active member of the political community. Aristotle is indeed one of the few philosophers who were friends of the passions.

His celebrated view of man as a "political animal" was somewhat outdated, to be sure, and even a little hypocritical, when he advanced it. It was then around 340 b.c.e. and Aristotle, after studying at Plato's Academy for twenty years, and after a few more years of independent research especially in biology, had been summoned to the court of Philip, king of the Macedons, to supervise the education of his son, Alexander. By that time the autonomy of the Athenian *polis* was out of the question, and it was to a conquered city that Aristotle returned in 335 b.c.e., under the patronage of Alexander, to found his own school, the Lyceum. The citizens of the *polis* whom Aristotle sought to educate had to combine the virtues of the old city with the necessities of political submission to a foreign power -- which is why he, unlike Plato, refrained from

arguing for a specific form of government. Yet he did not abandon the ideal of a citizen who realizes himself by exercising his moral and intellectual virtues, including the disposition to experience the passions to the right degree, and in the right way. His theory and ethics of the passions competed for several centuries with the Platonic vision and with other rival views; it was studied and kept alive by Islamic thinkers during Europe's "Dark Ages;" and returned to center-stage during the thirteenth century and throughout the Renaissance, mainly thanks to the work of St Thomas Aquinas.

2. Aristotle retains Plato's concept of *pathos* as affection of the soul, but situates it in a new and broader metaphysical framework. All things, he argues, can be either active or passive, and *pathos* in general is precisely the predicament of being acted upon, or "affected." Humans (but also animals) can be affected in such a way as to experience distress or pleasure, and this is what distinguishes the passions from other states of passivity. But in what sense exactly are these affections phenomena of the soul? To find an answer we need to delve a little into the intricacies of Aristotle's bio-psychology.

There were three main theories of the soul (*psuche*) that Aristotle had to confront. The first was that of Plato and of his successors in the Academy, especially Xenocrates; the second was the materialist theory of the atomist Democritus, and of others who identified it with one or more material elements; the third was the "harmony" theory attributed to Philolaus of Tarantum, an unorthodox Pythagorean. Aristotle raises against Plato and the Platonists a number of objections, one of which in particular comes very close to the standard objection to dualism: no explanation is offered of how the soul is actually connected with the body (*De Anima*, 407b). To Democritus and the materialists he replies rather sarcastically that their theory resembles the suggestive image due to the poet Philippus, in which Daedalus makes the wooden statue of Aphrodite move just by pouring molten silver into it (406a). To Philolaus, for whom the soul is not a substance, either material or immaterial, but the *ratio* among the elements of a composite, Aristotle answers with a number of not quite convincing arguments. It is not implausible to suggest that this is because the harmony theory is in fact very close to his own: "Perhaps indeed it would be better not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks, but that *the man* does *in virtue* of the soul" (408b).

Aristotle's theory of the soul is an application of his metaphysics to a field which is broader than what we call psychology, and includes the study of all living things, which we call biology. It is customary to translate two of his key metaphysical terms as "matter" (*hule*) and "form" (*eidos*) but it is perhaps easier to understand the latter as an essence intrinsic to a thing of a certain kind -- Aristotle brought the Platonic Forms down to earth and *into* things. A thing belongs to a kind when the material stuff of which it is made is organized and structured in a certain way, and this organization is precisely its essence, which a thing tends to realize through change. The essence of all living things, the reason why they are alive, is also their principle of organization, and Aristotle calls it soul (*psuche*). Thus for him the soul is not some *thing*, whether material or immaterial, that the body *has*: it is rather the arrangement which allows a chunk of matter to be alive.

But what does being alive involve? For Aristotle, the organizational structure of living things involves having some potentials, or capacities (*dunameis*). Plants are capable of nourishment, growth, and reproduction, and so are animals including man; animals also have the capacity to sense, perceive, and move about; and man, among animals, also has the capacity to entertain concepts abstracted from particular perceptions, and then to reason, and to deliberate. Thus Aristotle opposes to the Pythagorean and Platonic vision of the soul as a "divine" spark trapped in the human body a naturalistic view of man as an ensouled being placed in the hierarchy of all living things. In order to solve the traditional problem of the movement of animals and men, which together with the problem of perception and cognition had prompted the invention of the concept of soul in the first place, Aristotle also introduces a generic faculty, *orexis*, a term which is often translated as "desire" but has in fact a broader sense. It includes the capacity to have drives to satisfy bodily needs for food, drink, and sex, in animals and men; the capacity to have (occurred) desires to act; and also the capacity to deliberate, typical of man.

When all these faculties are exercised -- when these potentials are "actualized," or realized -- we have what we call behavior, and mental events. All living things actually feed themselves, grow, and reproduce; all animals actually sense, perceive, and move about; and all men actually think and perform voluntary actions. Notice that for Aristotle none of these activities (*energeiai*), not even thinking, is possible without the material substratum of the body. The soul, now conceived as a set of bio-psychological faculties, is the first level of

actualization (*entelekhēia*) of a potential that in non-structured matter would remain unrealized; behavior and mental activity correspond in turn to a second level of actualization, that of the potentials or faculties typical of the soul itself. We may note in passing that the claim that organized matter *can* desire and think is a good title for a research programme rather than a conclusive answer, for the question remains: *how* is this actually done? To the problems that this approach is supposed to solve, and leaves instead open, we will return in the following.

Keeping this theoretical framework in mind, we are now in a position to consider Aristotle's approach to the passions. For him, every phenomenon in nature must be simultaneously explained from different points of view. One is that of its material substratum, and in the case of the passions he remarks that "all the affections [of the soul] are of it with body, as anger, mildness [or patience], fear, pity, hope and even joy and loving and hating. For in all these cases the body is affected in some way" (*De Anima*, 403a); hence it must be admitted that "the affections of the soul [...] are inseparable from the natural matter of living things" (403b), and cannot be treated in abstraction from it -- like mathematicians study lines and angles in abstraction from the bodies they belong to.

Now this view of the passions as intrinsically related to the body, and more specifically to its peripheral organs, is not very different from that advanced by Plato in the *Timaeus*. But how is this possible, given the fact that they held different and incompatible theories of the soul? The answer is that the claim that the passions are (perhaps) intrinsically related to *peripheral* somatic phenomena is still compatible with dualism. For the dualist can always claim that the passions are somatic phenomena while the mind is something else -- this is indeed what Descartes, with many others, did. The dualist theory of the mind will be challenged by an account of the emotions only when (1) the latter are understood as phenomena of thought, and (2) thought is conceived as grounded in matter. Aristotle accepted (2), but was not quite sure about (1). The Stoic philosophers were the first to argue explicitly for (1) *and* to hold a materialist ontology of the mind.

Plato had proposed a rudimentary physiology of the emotions to which Aristotle adds nothing, but he had not bothered to define and analyze the passions from three other points of view, those of their cause, their form or structure, and their "end" or motivational import: this is what we call psychology. It is the same difference, Aristotle tells us, as between defining a house as

something made of bricks, stones and beams, and specifying who made it, its form or structure, and its purpose -- that of offering shelter. This is the meaning of his claim that the passions are "forms in matter:" beside being caused by something, they have a structure and an end (their "essence") which go beyond their material substratum. He offers as an example an explanatory scheme for anger: "Anger is a kind of movement [i.e., change] of a body of a given kind, or of a part or capacity of such a body, because of one thing and for the sake of another." The change in the body is described as "a boiling of the blood and hot stuff about the heart," while "for the sake of another" is specified as the revenge of which anger is the desire (403a). The cause that triggers anger is not described in the *De Anima*, but elsewhere Aristotle will speak of perception and belief (*On Rhetoric*, 1378a). Now it should be noted that these different descriptions of anger belong for us to two different domains, or rather vocabularies, one physiological and the other psychological, and that our unresolved problem (as yet), even if we are not dualists, is to account for just how these vocabularies are related. Aristotle is aware of the difference between modes of description and explanation, but is not bothered at all by the problem of their mutual relation. For example, he nowhere makes clear whether *orexis* (desire in this case, striving in general) is to be regarded as a physical or psychological faculty. This is because Aristotle's psychology is always and simultaneously *bio-psychology*, and psychological issues are (almost) always treated by him from the point of view of the external observer, not of subjective consciousness -- the problem of consciousness was introduced only by St. Augustine seven hundred years later; it was then classically stated by Descartes, and still seems to haunt us. Hence Aristotle's approach may perhaps look attractive, but it is not clear how it can solve a problem which he did not even consider. On the other hand, his idea that psychological faculties are functions of organized matter has more than a casual resemblance with contemporary physicalism and functionalism in the philosophy of mind.

3. For Aristotle, then, the passions are actual events which consist both in physiological changes and in the exercise of some faculties typical of human beings (and animals); these faculties are the essence of man and other animals, and are themselves the realization of potentials intrinsic to non-structured matter. Now one might expect Aristotle to attribute the passions to a special emotional faculty, but he does not do so -- no one was to posit a special emotional or

"feeling" faculty until the eighteenth century. The relevant faculties for the generation of emotional episodes are for Aristotle sensation or perception (he never clearly distinguishes these two), the imagination (the capacity to have images or appearances, not only to "imagine"), the intellect, and motivation. In particular, when perception is "of the pleasant and painful, the soul engages in pursuit or avoidance and these are analogous to assertion and denial" (431a). In modern terms, we might say that for Aristotle the passions are phenomena generated by cognitive states and characterized by pleasure or pain, which generate the motivation to pursue or avoid an object.

We have already noted that the claim about the potentials of matter, whether cerebral or otherwise, cannot be dismissed outright -- it is indeed still part of modern physics: think of energy -- but is more a promise than a solution. Another related question concerns the postulate of potentials or faculties which would be responsible for actual behavior and mental events, including the passions. The Aristotelian Schoolmen of the late Middle Ages ended up multiplying these faculties or powers *ad infinitum*, one for each identified phenomenon of mind, so much so that this whole theoretical strategy was discredited. Indeed, nothing is gained by explaining an episode of anger or fear by reference to the capacity to get angry or frightened. Perhaps the very notion of faculty in the sense of "power to" should be discarded, and replaced at most by a notion of faculty in the sense of category of mental states or events, like sensation, cognition, conation, and maybe "feeling:" this was in fact the "faculty psychology" of Kant and others. Yet it would seem that the concept of potential still has a psychological axe to grind. It is found in the modern notion of dispositional state, which can be defined as a standing state of mind like a desire or a belief to which an individual does not pay attention at a certain point in time. The concept of dispositional desire or concern, in particular, is employed by contemporary theorists of the emotions to account for the insurgence of emotional episodes in the presence of an occurring act of cognition, such as a perception, a memory, or an expectation, which in good Aristotelian fashion are said to "activate" the dispositional desire -- for physical integrity, esteem, or whatever. This notion of dispositional desire, however, has an ancestor not much in the Aristotelian concept of faculty, as in his concept of dispositional "state" (*hexis*), which he employs in his ethical theory to denote a tendency to act, or experience a passion, in an excellent way.

4. Aristotle's most detailed treatment of the passions is found in *On Rhetoric*, a treatise on the art of persuasion devoted to the education of orators. A good orator must know the passions in order to change the mind of the audience. He must know the causes of each passion, the state of mind of which each passion consists, and what the audience is likely to come to desire because of it. A good orator should know that the passions of the audience are related to its judgment of a case, whether it is a matter of judicial procedure or of deliberation concerning the affairs of the state. If the orator is skillful enough to elicit the appropriate emotions in the audience, he will be able to change its final judgment on the topic under consideration. The theme of the discussion, then, is eminently psychological. This is the first systematic analysis of the passions in the history of Western thought.

Aristotle begins with a definition which, not surprisingly given the context, focuses on *effects*: "The passions are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments, and which are accompanied by distress and pleasure" (*On Rhetoric*, 1378a). Attention is drawn here to cognitive and evaluational changes, only "accompanied" by bodily events and experiences of distress or pleasure. From the point of view of the orator, indeed, the passions are what originates changes of opinion and evaluation. In his discussion of particular passions, however, Aristotle also considers their *causes*. Fear, for example, is defined as "a sort of stress or agitation *derived from the image* of a future destructive or painful evil" which must have the potential for great pain or destruction, and these must appear near (1382a; my emphasis). Anger is "desire, accompanied by distress, for conspicuous retaliation *because of a conspicuous slight* that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near one" (1378a; emphasis added). These definitions are important because Aristotle here identifies the causes of emotional episodes in *beliefs* and *expectations*, which are cognitive states of mind. To be more precise, it is not quite a matter of a full-fledged belief, which would be an occurring actualization of the faculty of intellect, but rather of an image (*phantasia*), or provisional impression short of asserted belief, which is an actualization of the faculty of imagination. Notice that this image may be more or less accurate, and when it is a full-fledged belief it may be true or false.

Some modern commentators have pointed out that Aristotle's view is an ancestor of some contemporary cognitive theories of the emotions, according to which cognitive states are *constitutive* of emotional episodes. This claim however

seems exaggerated, because one thing is to argue that the emotions are constituted by cognitive states, another is to suggest, as Aristotle does most of the time, that these cognitive states are the *cause* of "distress" or "agitation," phenomena which seem to be for him of a physiological kind. Yet in some cases Aristotle does formulate his definition of an emotion-type by pointing at something which is very close to an intentional content in the modern sense. For example, he defines shame as "a sort of pain and agitation *concerning* the class of evils, whether present or past or future, that seems to bring a person into disrespect" (1383b; emphasis added), and pity as "a certain pain or distress *at* an apparently destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer" (1385b; emphasis added). Again: in the case of fear Aristotle tells us that there is a characteristic "state," which is the expectation of some destructive misfortune; and that this expectation is *about* the actions of some objects, or targets, namely former accomplices, rivals, aggressive people, etc. (1382b). All in all, he is not quite consistent in his definitions of emotion-types, because in some cases he speaks of a state of distress caused by, or causing, cognitive states, in others he speaks of cognitive states "accompanied" by distress; it must be noted nevertheless that he does bring to the fore a cognitive aspect of emotion which had only been considered in passing by Plato, and which at least in some cases does not reduce to a cause or an effect of a non-intentional state.

Aristotle's recurring references to pain or distress should not be underestimated, however -- nor should be the fact that pain and pleasure, unlike beliefs and desires, represent nothing. Aristotle is very attentive to what is called the *hedonic* aspect of emotional states -- it is in this connection, in fact, that even ancient psychology takes into account the subjective experiences of a person. It is not quite clear if this pain or distress is to be understood as a physical sensation or as a psychological event unrelated to the soma, since *pathos* actually has both meanings. From Aristotle's general remarks on the necessarily multiple explanation of the passions that we have found above, however, it must be inferred that he intends never to lose sight of the body, and that "agitation" means *at least* "bodily upset." All the passions for him include it, except for hatred or enmity; for while one who is angry is upset and wants somebody to suffer, one who hates simply wants the other not to exist (1382a).

5. The multiple account of the passions that Aristotle advocates requires to specify their end, or purpose. This requirement is clearly met in the case of anger, which in one definition that was mentioned above is even *identified* with the desire for conspicuous retaliation. Hatred is also a desire (with no pain), and friendliness is "wanting for someone what one thinks are good things for him" (1380a). The requirement is not met for all the passions considered, however. It should also be noted that one thing is to *define* a passion as a desire, another thing is to consider the *motivational import* of it: fear and shame, for example, carry with them the motivation to do something -- to flee, to hide -- but can be defined without mentioning that motivation, which is in fact what Aristotle does.

Motivation, quite obviously, is instead at the core of desires for sensual and non-sensual pleasures. Aristotle does not discuss them in *On Rhetoric*, presumably because they are not of interest to the orator when he tries to convince the audience of something. He discusses them, rather, in the context of his ethical theory, to which we now turn.

6. Happiness (*eudaimonia*) is for Aristotle, as for all Greek philosophers, the *summum bonum* or maximal good, but he defines it in an original way as the activity of the soul in accordance to "virtue" (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1098b) -- in a special sense of the word that will require some elucidation. To begin with, happiness is not pleasure -- especially not sensual pleasure -- but is afforded by, or rather consists in, a kind of life or prosperity. This is best understood as the successful exercise of the soul's faculties, which for Aristotle *also* gives a pleasure of a rather loftier kind. Now we know that to have a faculty is to have a capacity -- to perceive, think, act, and so on. But to exercise these faculties successfully, to become a fully realized human being, one also needs to be *disposed* to do this *well*, or in an excellent way, and this disposition is precisely "virtue." The words *ethike' arete'* mean literally "excellence of character," and are best understood as the tendency to exercise the skill of self-realization.

Having said that, how can this approach be applied to the passions? If they are realizations of some faculties, it seems to follow that happiness will also consist in the good or rather successful exercise of these faculties in the form of passion. Thus a good passion will have to be caused by a good (or true) perception or belief, will consist in a proper state of agitation of the body, and will issue in an appropriate motivation to do something. As one can see, it is very difficult to be precise in this area, and Aristotle is well aware of this. At any rate,

he suggests that the "moral" or practical virtues or excellent dispositions are concerned with voluntary actions and also with the passions, and that since every action and passion is accompanied by pleasure or pain, the moral virtues are concerned with pleasure or pain. But since pleasure and pain are a matter of degree, a "virtuous" disposition to exercise one's faculties well in the field of emotion will be, in a first approximation, a disposition to experience each passion neither too much nor too little. His famous solution is the Doctrine of the Mean, according to which a virtuous disposition lies between the extremes of excess and deficiency (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b). At first sight, Aristotle is preaching simple moderation, but on closer inspection the matter turns out to be not so simple.

We can begin with a classic problem in the ethics of the emotions for which Aristotle does have a plausible solution. He claims that one can only be held morally responsible for voluntary actions, and not for having some natural faculties or for experiencing a passion (1109b ff.). So how can there be an ethics of the passions? The answer is that the passions are involuntary, but the *disposition* to experience them in a certain way is not, and is morally accountable. It is in fact acquired, not by learning, which applies only to the intellectual virtues, but by habituation. One gets *used* to the proper and virtuous disposition to experience some passions to a certain degree. But of course, in order to apply oneself to the task of getting used to experience the passions in a proper way, one needs to exercise the rational will to do so, which for Aristotle is an intellectual faculty capable of knowing the "true" good. (To say that judgments of value can be true or false, incidentally, is a major assumption that is by no means beyond dispute, but that virtually all moralists shared, well into the Modern era.) Thus Aristotle does not abandon the distinction between the rational will and involuntary passion, but mediates their opposition by employing the notion of disposition. On the one hand, a virtuous disposition is informed and acquired by rational will; on the other, it is about involuntary experiences which must nevertheless be "capable of listening" (at least in the case of the passions proper, as opposed to sensual appetites), and it will not be implausible to suggest that they are so capable because they are at least in part the exercise of such faculties as perception and desire. In other words, for Aristotle the passions are amenable to rational control because they have at least causes and effects which are, as we say, cognitive and conative. This is an important point which

Plato had only hinted at in the *Timaeus*, and to which we will return in the following.

Before leaving the issue of the involuntary nature of the passions, it should be added that Aristotle also considers phenomena which fall outside the domain of ethics because they are not only involuntary, but pathological. This is a distinction that is by no means clear, not even in modern psychiatry. At any rate, he claims without much argument that "all cases of excessive folly, cowardice, licentiousness and irritability are either brutish or morbid" (1149a). Brutish actions, pains and pleasures are due to "congenital depravity," while morbid or pathological ones are due to disease (such as epilepsy, which was known to Greek doctors). Other states or propensities are due to "habit," which however is different from that mentioned above; Aristotle seems to have in mind the involuntary exposure to special circumstances, such as being "victimized through childhood" (1148b). Interestingly enough, he includes homosexuality among these phenomena, at least when it does not come "naturally."

But let us return to ethics. Aristotle explicitly rejects the definition of virtue as impassivity or tranquillity, because this is to dismiss the passions in general without bothering to qualify the degree and the circumstances in which they are experienced (1104b). This was to be a crucial issue in the dispute on the passions between the Aristotelians or Peripatetics and the followers of other philosophical schools for centuries to come. It is precisely because Aristotle accepts at least in principle the passions as a feature of the good life that he is forced to provide standards of goodness or appropriateness -- which is no small feat to accomplish.

There is, to be sure, one relatively easy way to deal with the ethics of the passions, and that is to forbid some *kinds* of passions altogether, regardless of their intensity, objects, and modalities. Malice, shamelessness, and envy "have names that directly connote depravity" (1107a), and do not admit of a virtuous mean anymore than adultery, theft, and murder do. But the question remains: how are we to handle the kinds of passions which are within the limits of the permissible? The Doctrine of the Mean, of which some illustrations will be offered below, seems to take only one aspect of the passions into consideration, and that is their *intensity*. Aristotle's ethics of the passions *is* to a certain extent an ethics of moderation. For example, he proposes patience together with some preparedness to get angry as a mean between irascibility and lack of spiritedness. If intensity were all that matters, then, it would only be sufficient to

say that one should be disposed to experience a kind of emotion to a moderate degree, and to indicate what this disposition is. But this is not the end of the story. To judge an emotion as appropriate, other aspects of it must be taken into account, and Aristotle is well aware of this:

to have these passions at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motive and in the right way is to experience them to an intermediate, that is to the best, degree; and this is the mark of virtue (1106b).

There is more than one aspect of the passions to be taken into account to assess their appropriateness, and none of these aspects beside intensity can be conceived as a dimension along which different degrees can be specified. Quantity is not sufficient, and quality must be brought in. Even before beginning to wonder to what degree it is appropriate to experience emotion, it will be necessary to consider *which* emotion is appropriate to the circumstances at hand. The distinction among different emotions is at least in part conceptual; for, as Aristotle tells us, we use the concept of anger to denote that emotion which is caused by (or perhaps even consists in) the idea of having been slighted, and not in connections with other situations -- although it might be noted that this conceptual scheme is too restricted, since anger has to do with damages of whatever kind which are responsibly inflicted. Now once one has a generic scheme of the situation which allows for anger, one must begin to offer examples of situations which make anger plausible. More in general, which are the circumstances that make each emotion appropriate?

Aristotle's answer can be found in the long lists of objects and situations that he offers in *On Rhetoric*, Book II. Yet it must be said that these compilations of appropriate causes, objects, circumstances, and the related behaviors, betray a confident belief in a "naturalness" of emotional reactions which the modern mind finds difficult to accept. Consider shame (*aiskhune*). It is appropriate to experience shame about those evils which bring disrespect, we are told, and these are the results of vice. But then, it all depends on what is considered vicious. "Making a profit from petty or shameful things or from helpless people, for example, the poor and the dead," and "not giving aid with money when one can give" (*On Rhetoric*, 1383b) were, we can gather, shameful actions and omissions in fourth century Athens; but they are not so obviously shameful in a

market society. "Not to share in the fine things of which all have a share, or all those like oneself" (where "those like oneself" means "those of the same nation, fellow citizens, those of the same age, relatives -- generally, one's equals") is equally shameful for Aristotle; but this judgment evidently clashes, for us, with the ethical universalism of the Enlightenment. The possibility of different criteria of shamefulness, to give one more example, is most evident to us when it comes to sexuality: "Having sexual relations with those with whom one should not or where one should not or when one should not" is shameful for Aristotle, who has in mind especially a man who accepts a passive role in any relation, whether homosexual or heterosexual (1384a); but surely most of us believe that it is not a given what sort of sexual relationship one is supposed to have.

Aristotle's account of emotional appropriateness is rather sophisticated, because it goes beyond the simplistic claim that the passions should be experienced to a moderate degree; but by suggesting this view he betrays his commitment to a cultural localism of which he is not aware -- or rather, of which he is even proud. It should be stressed that this does not mean that his *concept* of shame, or fear, or anger, is culturally determined, and this is a remarkable fact in its own right. What is culturally determined, rather, is the set of circumstances in which it is appropriate to experience, for example, shame, the simple reason being that shame is (together with pride and guilt) the ethical and hence social emotion *par excellence*. But even beyond the domain of the ethical, it appears sufficiently clear to the modern mind that judgments about the appropriate objects, motivations, and modalities of every emotional episode depend on the conception of what is *desirable*, which is far from being objectively given. This is to say that emotional episodes simply cannot be either true or false, regardless of whether the perceptions and beliefs which cause them, or constitute them, are true or false. The assessment of emotional episodes, to be sure, is an enterprise in which we all engage every day; but we do this by applying (or disputing) standards of appropriateness which are by and large typical of a community or a way of life, and it remains very difficult if not impossible to devise standards applicable to all people in all circumstances. Perhaps it is not possible to go beyond Aristotle's localism, much as we are now aware of it. What is required, rather, is the exercise of a virtue that Aristotle calls *phronesis*, or the ability to judge particular cases one by one. But this, of course, leaves the problem as open as it was at the beginning.

7. We have seen that for Aristotle the practical virtues or dispositions are concerned with pleasure and pain, which are the result of every action and accompany every passion. Both actions and passions are exercises of the generic faculty of motivation or desire (*orexis*), among others, but sensual pleasures in particular are obtained by actions motivated by a special kind of desire, the bodily appetites (*epithumiai*). This is a field in which the criterion of the mean may seem to be easier to apply. Aristotle speaks of "natural" appetites for food, drink and sex, which give "necessary" and sometimes excessive pleasures; but then he also mentions desires for specific objects which may be just wrong, or pursued in the wrong way (*NE*, 1118b), and this is sufficient to undermine the simple criterion of moderation. Not all pleasures are alike. Beside those which for lack of a better term may be called "spiritual," and are afforded by learning or civic distinction, there are those given by sight, hearing, and smell, which may be accepted -- and here again it is not a matter of moderation (1117b). Those derived from touch and taste instead, which are shared even with animals of lower species, are especially the domain of licentiousness (*akolasia*), and here it does make sense to speak of excess in respect of pleasure. Temperance (*sophrosune*), by contrast, is the virtue of desiring these pleasures with moderation. Notice by the way that Aristotle sees this moderation as a mean between licentiousness and a complete "insensibility" (*anaesthesia*) which is also not commended.

Continence or self-control (*enkrateia*) with respect to pleasure, and endurance (*karteria*) with respect to pain, are not quite virtues like temperance, but are exercised over the same domain, that of bodily pleasures and pains. Their opposites are incontinence (*akrasia*) and softness (*malakia*), respectively (*NE*, 1145a). The incontinent man, when he experiences a strong desire, gives himself to (excessive) pleasure despite knowing that that is the wrong thing to do, whereas the licentious man *chooses* to do so -- and the temperant chooses not to. Aristotle introduces these categories because he recognizes the possibility of the weakness of the will even in the case in which a man knows what is good. Socrates had denied this, and had argued that it impossible for someone to know what is good and behave otherwise: bad behavior must be due to sheer ignorance (and learning what is good was the solution). This was an extremely intellectualistic approach to the problem of unethical behavior. Aristotle is more a man of the world, and wisely replies that one may well know what is good in general, but may be taken by the prospect of a particular and pleasurable (or

painful) sensation, and give in. The solution cannot be only learning, as is the case for the intellectual virtues, and lies instead in acquiring the habit to act in the right way. In the case of licentiousness, which is the performance of bad actions by choice, the rational will must replace that choice; in the case of incontinence, it must only counteract the contingent sensation which tends to prompt a reproachable behavior.

And what about erotic love, the passion that had fascinated (and preoccupied) Plato so much? Aristotle is not a man of passion in that sense of the word; he mentions it almost as an aside and rather condescendingly, where he says that it is typical "of the young and lusty" (1118b). What he has to offer instead is an elaborate theory of friendship (*philia*) which includes family relations, and is accompanied by the sentiment of friendliness or affection (*philesis*; *NE*, Book VIII). He recommends the higher possible kind of friendship, that between two excellent men who respect above all each other's goodness, as opposed to friendships pursued for the sake of gain, let alone of simple pleasure.

8. Incontinence of temper -- which is incontinence "by analogy" anyway, since it does not concern sensual desires -- is for Aristotle less shameful than incontinence in respect of one's sensual desires. This is because

temper seems to pay some attention to reason (*logos*), but to hear it imperfectly -- just as eager servants go darting off before hearing the end of what is said to them, and then mistake their instructions, and dogs bark at a mere noise before investigating whether it is a friend: in the same way temper, owing to the heat and impetuosity of its nature, hears, but does not hear the order given, and so hurries to take revenge (1149a).

Temper is amenable to the influence of reason, because when reason or the imagination inform that one has been slighted, temper "infers" that the offender is to be treated as an enemy, whereas sensual desire proceeds from information to action and pleasure without inference whatever. One might conclude that temper is *more* reproachable than uncontrolled desire, precisely because it *could* listen to reason, but this is not Aristotle's opinion. He argues that temper may well be irrational but is not a completely a-rational urge, and that

therefore it is more natural (that is, closer to the essence of man) than excessive and unnecessary pleasures which man has in common with animals.

Temper or anger was defined as the desire for revenge, but of course this is not a sensual desire or appetite, and with it we are back to the field of the passions proper. To stay with anger, then, the virtuous mean between irascibility and lack of spiritedness is, in a first approximation, patience (*praotes*, 1108a). But Aristotle is far from commending a complete imperturbability, which is indeed to be blamed and equated to foolishness: he who puts up with insults to himself or his friends is deficient in perceptivity and sensitivity (i.e., does not exercise these faculties well), and is regarded as servile because he is incapable of defending himself (1125b). For Aristotle, in the end, patience is not quite the right mean; for him the right disposition is rather that to get angry in the right way, at the right time, and at the right people, and this is precisely what neither lame nor irascible people are disposed to do. As one can see, we are far from the Christian offering of the other cheek; the virtuous man of Aristotle is a respectable and respected citizen, who knows when and how to defend his interests and honor. Understatement, or irony (*eironeia*) about oneself, which Socrates had at least feigned, is not virtuous, although it may make "a pleasant impression" (1127b): the virtuous man is neither boastful nor self-deprecating, and simply tells the truth (1108a). Modesty is not a virtue, either, although in a first approximation it lies between the extremes of shyness and shamelessness; for it is not a disposition after all, but a passion in its own right: "modesty makes people blush," just as the fear of death turns them pale (1128b). It is appropriate only to the youth, because it restrains them "from making mistakes," but it is not the emotion of a good man, because bad actions are simply not his.

But to return to anger, or rather indignation (*nemesis*). The latter consists in a distressing state concerning not insults that one has suffered but the experiences of one's neighbors; the disposition to experience righteous indignation at undeserved good fortune is defended, thus confirming Aristotle's vision of the social and political animal called man (1108b). Here however he gets rather muddled over the corresponding excessive and defective dispositions. For he tells us that envy (supposedly a defective disposition) is distress not at *undeserved* good fortune, but at *any* good fortune -- so that its mean would have to be something like congratulation, not indignation. And that spite or malicious enjoyment (supposedly an excess) is directed at *bad* not good fortune, so that its mean would have to be not indignation but something like

concern or pity. In other words, here Aristotle gets confused precisely because against his own advice he tries to force into a purely quantitative scheme dispositions which are directed at different *objects*.

When it comes to fear and/or confidence, Aristotle puts Plato in his place, for starters, by noting that "spiritedness" (recall the *thumos* of the military) should not be confused with authentic courage since it is a passion, not a virtue, and beasts are not courageous "simply because, impelled by pain and anger, they rush into danger" (1116b). Next, he criticizes the fearlessness of those who are afraid of nothing -- "not even of an inundation or an earthquake, as they say of the Celts" (1115b) -- because that is to be a maniac or insensate; and he has stern words for rashness (*thrasutes*) as well, which is in fact a pretense of courage and often turns out in fact to be cowardice (*deilia*). The coward is also to be blamed, because he exceeds in fearing, but also because "he fears the wrong things in the wrong way:" We are clearly beyond the criterion of sheer intensity, and we are asked to consider the proper *objects and modalities* of fear. The mean between fearlessness and rashness on the one hand, and cowardice on the other, is courage (*andreia*, or virility). But the courageous man, it should be noted, is not completely free from fear: "He will fear what is natural for man to fear, [...] the right things for the right reason in the right way and at the right time" (1115b). So which are the right objects of fear? Disgrace, poverty, sickness, friendlessness -- and of course, death. In particular, Aristotle makes clear that

the more completely a man possesses virtue, and the happier he is, the more he will be distressed at the thought of death. For to such a man life is supremely worth living; and he is losing the greatest blessings, and he knows it; and this is a grievous thing (1117b).

Other philosophers will disagree with Aristotle about this, just as they will disagree with his judgment of suicide, which for him only shows weakness of character (1116a).

But however much he is prepared to concede to the "natural" fear of death or social disgrace -- a position which makes him quite different from an ascetic sage -- Aristotle has something else in mind. Authentic courage is for him a virtue or excellent disposition which is typically exercised in war, and has a proper *end*, which is honor: "Thus it is for a right and noble motive that the courageous man

faces the dangers and performs the actions appropriate to his courage" (1115b). In the end, the "mean" turns out to be something very different from a simple moderate intensity. It is rather a disposition to experience (some) fear and yet to face danger and possibly death, in the special circumstances of war, ultimately for the sake of honor and glory.

9. Aristotle did not add anything new to Plato's theory of the relation between the passions and the body, because he also saw them as seated in peripheral organs, especially the heart. But unlike Plato, he did develop a complex theory of the passions as special actualizations of some faculties of the soul, within a general view of the latter as a set of bio-psychological capacities typical of organized matter. Like Plato, he suggested that some passions involve, or are even identified with, desires to act, but he was the first to focus on the cognitive aspect of the passions as caused or perhaps constituted by images, beliefs, and expectations, and as ensuing in changes of judgment.

Aristotle's ethics of the passions, like several others, appeals to the control on the part of reason, but is unique in ancient thought for its acceptance of moderate passions in the good life of the citizen. His central ethical prescription is to acquire by habituation the right disposition (or temperament) which will allow an individual to experience adequate emotions at least to a moderate degree. Yet he goes beyond the simple prescription of moderation, and is aware that judgments of appropriateness must consider the choice of the right objects, circumstances, and modalities of emotional reactions.

To the Platonists, who saw the passions as obstacles in the journey of the soul to the otherworldly realm of the pure Forms, or at most as the first rung of the ladder of wisdom, Aristotle replied that there is no such realm, and that the goal of man is to exercise his faculties here and now, including the experience of actual passions, within a community of citizens. In particular, Aristotle's citizen is not self-sufficient in his pursuit of virtue and self-realization -- as Plato's philosophers-rulers were -- but depends on relationships such as friendship, which may fail.

This, at least, is the picture that one gathers from the *Ethics* until the last few pages of the book. There Aristotle comes to argue that true self-realization lies in the exercise of one's most "divine" faculties, which are intellectual not moral, and consist in the activity of *theoria*, the study and contemplation of timeless truths (*NE*, 1177a). It goes without saying that there is not much room

for public and private passions in that kind of life. Whether this is a turn of face which betrays the thrust of Aristotle's entire ethical enterprise, is open to judgment. What is certain is that it left other thinkers dissatisfied, who were more concerned with the everyday life of the common man. But this life could not be a return to the political activities and passions of Aristotle's citizen, either, because that world had come to an end, and times were changing.