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James Warren

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction: the pleasures of reason*

Human lives are full of pleasures and pains. And humans are creatures that are able to think: to learn, understand, remember and recall, plan and anticipate. Ancient philosophers were interested in both of these facts and, what is more, were interested in how these two facts are related to one another. There appear to be, after all, pleasures and pains associated with learning and inquiring, recollecting and anticipating. We enjoy finding something out. We are pained to discover that a belief we hold is false. We can think back and enjoy or be upset by recalling past events. And we can plan for and enjoy imagining pleasures yet to come. This book is about what Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Cyrenaics had to say about these relationships between pleasure and reason. It focusses on Plato, Aristotle, and these two Hellenistic schools because, as I hope will emerge from the chapters to follow, we find there some of the richest material on the topic. There are also thematic and dialectical links between these philosophers, so when we consider them together an ancient philosophical conversation arises about the pleasures of reason.

#### **Pleasure and *logismos***

Early in Plato's *Philebus*, Socrates and his interlocutor, Protarchus, come to agree that a human life must involve not only experiences of pleasure and pain but also various activities that they classify as falling under the umbrella term 'reasoning' (*logismos*). At the very opening of the dialogue Socrates gives a list of the activities he has in mind when he first introduces to Protarchus the dispute between himself and Philebus:

Φίληβος μὲν τοίνυν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι φησι τὸ χαίρειν πᾶσι ζώοις καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ τέρψιν, καὶ ὅσα τοῦ γένους ἐστὶ τούτου σύμφωνα· τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμῶν ἀμφισβήτημά ἐστι μὴ ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ μεμνησθαι καὶ τὰ τούτων αὖ συγγενῇ, δόξαν τε ὀρθὴν καὶ ἀληθεῖς λογισμούς, τῆς γε ἡδονῆς ἀμείνω καὶ λῶω γίγνεσθαι σύμπασιν ὅσαπερ αὐτῶν δυνατὰ

μεταλαβεῖν· δυνατοῖς δὲ μετασχεῖν ὠφελιμώτατον ἀπάντων εἶναι πᾶσι τοῖς  
οὐσί τε καὶ ἔσομένοις. (*Phileb.* 11b4–c2)

So Philebus here says that for all animals what is good is enjoyment, pleasure, delight, and everything consonant with this. My position, in disagreement with his, is that these are not good but that being wise, understanding, remembering and things like that, and correct belief and true reasoning, are better than pleasure and more desirable for all things that can have a share in them. Sharing in them is the most advantageous thing of all for all those who can do so, both now and in the future.

A little later, when Socrates and Protarchus consider in turn a life of just those things that Philebus thinks are good and a life of just those things that Socrates prefers, we find a similar list of cognitive capacities (21a14–d1). Socrates sets aside being wise (*to phronein*), understanding (*to noein*), reasoning (*to logizesthai*), memory (*mnēmē*), knowledge (*epistēmē*), and opinion (*doxa*). Socrates sums up a life without any of these capacities as a life deprived of *logismos* (21c5).

Socrates and Protarchus soon agree that a choice-worthy human life cannot be deprived either of thinking or of pleasure. A good human life will be a mixture that combines these activities of reason with pleasures, perhaps ideally only pleasures of a certain kind, to produce a harmonious and ordered result. That claim leaves a lot still to be worked out and many of the details of Socrates' eventual and considered proposals are unclear. What is clear, however, is that these activities of *logismos* have a series of complex relationships with pleasures and pains; certainly, Socrates does not think of a good human life as simply a collection of a set of experiences of pleasure and pain on the one hand and then, on the other hand, a set of activities of reasoning. Rather, human reasoning gives rise to pleasures and pains of its own: there are pleasures of thinking, believing, learning, remembering, and so on. And this gives rise to another of Socrates' concerns since he also insists that there are some such pleasures that should and others that should not be part of the eventual mixture of a good human life. Pleasures can be false, he notoriously maintains, and such false pleasures should not be part of a good human life. The falsehood of these false pleasures is itself not a simple thing to understand, but it is certainly connected with these pleasures being intimately involved with, or stemming from, or arising out of, certain human capacities for reasoning. To put it very crudely, the same capacity for forming true beliefs will also allow us to form false beliefs. And, in so far as pleasures may similarly arise from our taking the world to be a certain way, Socrates thinks that those pleasures themselves may also be thought of as true or false. The precise understanding of the claim that there are false

and true pleasures will return later in my discussion. For now, it is mentioned just to signal the simple point that, for Socrates in the *Philebus*, and indeed for many of the ancient philosophers, pleasures and pains can have a subtle but important relationship with our reasoning capacities: we can enjoy or be distressed by things we believe or know or calculate or remember or anticipate. And just as we can be correct or mistaken in our beliefs and calculations and expectations, there might be something similar to be said about the relevant pleasures too.

In some ways ‘the pleasures of reason’ might appear to refer to a narrower subject matter than in fact I go on to discuss. The choice of the title is determined to some extent by an attempt to respect a widespread ancient psychological presumption that humans differ from all other animals by possessing a certain rational capacity. But that might make it reasonable to question why ‘the pleasures of reason’ in this sense can include pleasures of remembering and anticipating. After all, memory and anticipation of a sort are agreed by Plato and Aristotle to be psychological capacities present not only in humans and therefore they are not capacities whose presence is dependent on the presence of a rational part of the soul. On the other hand, ‘the pleasures of cognition’ threatens to make the field too broad: it would include the pleasures of all forms of perception in so far as our ancient philosophers tend to think of the activity of our senses as a form of cognition. ‘The pleasures of thinking’ might have been a compromise between these two. I emphasise ‘reason’ rather than ‘thinking’, however, since these philosophers agreed that there is a distinctively human faculty of reason and my topic is their account of the pleasures and pains that occur in human lives because we are animals with that capacity of reason.<sup>1</sup> If some of what is said turns out also to be applicable to other animals because they too are in fact capable of some of the relevant psychological functions then that will not diminish the relevance of those same accounts for us humans. Besides, even granted that some of these are capacities we share with other animals, it seems to me that, for those of the ancient thinkers whose views on the matter we can reconstruct, this distinctively human rational capacity is what is ultimately responsible in humans for our being able to learn about and understand the world in the way that we do. It is also, furthermore, responsible for the way in which we humans can remember and anticipate, and plan ahead. Even if other animals have memories and can

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle makes the possession of understanding (*nous*), thought (*dianoia*), or *logismos* the criterion for differentiating humans from non-human animals (at least non-divine ones): *De An.* 2.3 414b16–18, 415a7–12. See Johansen 2012, 221–6.

perhaps in some sense think ahead, they do not do either of these in quite the same way that humans do.

In any case, it is a plausible idea that the pleasures and pains we humans experience through sense perception are also affected by our being rational creatures. Plato and Aristotle, for example, would happily say that we humans can enjoy seeing things that are well proportioned or listening to music that is harmonious and ordered.<sup>2</sup> Our capacity for reason makes a significant difference to how we perceive things and therefore to the pleasures and pains we experience from those perceptions. Such pleasures and pains will play only a minor role in what follows since my interest is in the main focussed on the range of activities that Socrates in the *Philebus* assigned to *logismos*. But they are perhaps worth bearing in mind as showing what the next step would be in tracing the effect that our reasoning capacities have on our experience of pleasure and pain generally.

This is merely an initial sketch of the subject matter. We can now turn to set out in some more detail the three broad categories of pleasures and pains to be discussed and outline some of the ways in which they are related to one another. Those categories are: (1) pleasures and pains of learning, knowing, and understanding; (2) pleasures and pains involved in planning and prudential reasoning; (3) pleasures and pains from anticipating and remembering.

### Knowing and learning

The clearest examples of the pleasures that might be associated with this human capacity for reasoning are the pleasures that arise from our learning, discovering, and knowing something. In Plato's *Protagoras*, Prodicus notes that there are pleasures of learning as well as those concerned with bodily experiences and explains that, in his opinion, we ought to mark this distinction linguistically.

ἡμεῖς τ' αὖ οἱ ἀκούοντες μάλιστα ἂν οὕτως εὐφραϊνοίμεθα, οὐχ ἡδοίμεσθα – εὐφραϊνεσθαι μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν μανθάνοντά τι καὶ φρονήσεως μεταλαμβάνοντα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ, ἡδεσθαι δὲ ἐσθιοντά τι ἢ ἄλλο ἡδὺ πάσχοντα αὐτῷ τῷ σώματι. (*Prot.* 337c1–4)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Arist. *EE* 3.2 1230b38–1231a5.

<sup>3</sup> Denyer 2008, 141–2, notes that this distinction is in tension with the argument at the end of the dialogue, which appears to treat all pleasures as homogeneous or, at least, commensurable. (At 358a7–b2 Socrates explicitly comments that he will ignore Prodicus' distinctions.) On Prodicus' distinctions see also Arist. *Top.* 2.6 112b21–6 and compare the vocabulary for pleasure used in the report of

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Let those of us who are listening be cheered, not pleased. For ‘being cheered’ is what happens when one learns something or shares in understanding through thinking itself, while ‘being pleased’ is what happens when one eats something or experiences some other pleasure with the body itself.

It is sometimes pleasant to discover a new truth; it is sometimes pleasant to acquire a belief. It can also be painful to learn things or to come to believe things. All these pleasures and pains are such that they seem to be available to us humans and not to other animals in virtue of our possession of a certain kind of intellectual or rational capacity. This will be the first kind of ‘affective thinking’: pleasures and pains brought about by learning, discovering, and knowing. Examples of this kind of affective thinking are the pain Oedipus experiences when he discovers his true ancestry and the pleasure the philosopher-ruler of Plato’s *Republic* is supposed to experience when he or she comes to know the Good.

These capacities for learning and knowing involve the use of memory and recollection in various ways. Learning has an obvious connection with memory, both in the sense of learning skills and learning facts. Plato, at least in some of his dialogues, offers the most radical connection between learning and remembering by simply identifying the two. At *Meno* 81d4–5 Socrates asserts that ‘inquiry and learning, as a whole, are recollection (*anamnēsis*)’. And he means by recollection here the retrieval of what a person’s immortal soul has learned prior to entering into a body (81c5–d5). Of course, this need not mean that everything a living person can be said to know in any reasonable sense of the word ‘know’ is somehow recalled from a prior non-corporeal existence, but Socrates is sure that some forms of learning and knowledge are to be explained in that way. Others follow his lead in exploring the role of memory in learning and inquiry in more mundane ways. Aristotle is interested in the relation of memory to experience, skill, and the acquisition of knowledge, most obviously in *APo.* 2.19 and *Metaph.* A.1. And the Epicureans are interested in the role that memorising the central tenets of their philosophy can play in assuring a good and pleasant life. Having available a stock of important lessons and arguments is important for equipping the Epicurean with ready material to counter any novel anxieties or challenging situations. It is perhaps best to treat memory of this kind as part of the general mechanism of learning and retrieving

Prodicus’ story of the choice of Heracles: Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.23–4. Wolfsdorf 2011 discusses all the evidence and argues that this passage from the *Protagoras* does not faithfully report Prodicus’ view. Timaeus distinguishes between *hēdonē* and *euphrosynē* at *Tim.* 80b5–8, noting that harmonious music produces the former in fools and the latter in the wise because only the wise appreciate how these mortal movements imitate divine harmony.

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learned information. This is distinct from ‘autobiographical memory’, which I shall introduce below.

### Planning ahead

Humans also possess the ability to think about, evaluate, plan, and deliberate about different possible future courses of action. This capacity is relevant to the present study in two ways. First, there are discussions of the use of reason to plan ahead and maximise pleasures and minimise pains. In this way our rational capacity is considered prominently in Plato’s *Protagoras* in connection with a specifically hedonist axiology and Socrates there famously develops an account of a hedonic calculus, recommending ways in which we might better plan and evaluate future outcomes in terms of the pleasures and pains involved and thereby maximise our pleasures and minimise our pains over the course of a life. The afterlife of this account of hedonist prudential reasoning and its use in more recent accounts of consequentialist reasoning might itself warrant our considering the *Protagoras* in this study. Epicurus, for example, takes up something like this model of hedonist calculation and recommends it as part of a good and pleasant life. But there is another connection that is rather more important, in part because it is relevant for considerations of practical reasoning that are not themselves committed to a hedonist account of value.

The account in the *Protagoras* does not consider the use of our reasoning capacities in the evaluative procedure it recommends to be potentially pleasant or painful itself. But in the *Philebus* Plato notes that planning of this kind can produce pleasures and pains because it involves some kind of anticipatory consideration of the various goods and bads (including pleasures and pains) on offer and such anticipation can be pleasant or painful. He also notes that such pleasures and pains can be termed ‘false’ if they are produced by inaccurate estimations of the future experience. Aristotle does not pursue the idea of false pleasures, but he does recognise in rational creatures the faculty of deliberative imagination (*phantasia bouleutikē*), which involves some kind of measuring by a single standard (*De An.* 3.11 434a5–10; he does not there discuss whether in the process of such imagination there might also be experienced pleasures and pains but it is reasonable to think that he would agree that there might). Epicurus notes that ideally such a procedure will not only ensure pleasure in the future but will also generate a pleasant confidence in the present. These accounts of the affective aspect of thinking ahead to future experiences are best considered in tandem with a similar discussion of the affective aspects of remembering past experiences.

**Remembering and anticipating**

In addition to the general capacity for memory that is part of the mechanism of learning and the general capacity for anticipating the future, we humans are also able deliberately and reflectively to look backwards to recall our own past experiences and to look forwards to anticipate possible future experiences. This ability allows us to stitch our lives together across time and also to have some kind of access in the present to temporally remote parts of our lives. Memory and anticipation in the sense I mean here are to be distinguished from a more general ability to think about the past and the future. Rather, in this particular sense, they are involved in a person's thinking about his or her own past and own future.<sup>4</sup> By 'memory' therefore I mean what is variously called 'personal memory', 'autobiographical memory', 'recollective memory', 'episodic memory', 'experiential memory', or 'introversive memory'.<sup>5</sup> By 'anticipation' here I mean just the counterpart of this sense of memory: not the ability to look forward into the future generally and wonder what might or might not happen, but an agent's ability to consider, bring to mind, or think over what he or she might do and experience in the future. We can call it 'introversive anticipation'.

This might be thought to be a limited activity of a more general ability since memory in this sense is restricted to a person's thinking of past events in his or her own life. However, memory and anticipation in this sense are also richer than the bare ability to think about the past and future. They allow us to do things such as remember pains and pleasures or anticipate joy and sadness. Our ability to think about our own past and future affective experiences also allows us to plan and consider how best to maximise our pleasures by thinking in a useful way about different possible future experiences. It allows us to draw on our past experiences to learn and benefit from them. And perhaps most intriguing of all, the ability to look forward and backward to our future and past experiences allows us to generate further affective responses in the present. We can remember and anticipate with pleasure or with pain. We can remember our pleasures with pleasure and be pained when we anticipate pains.

I will not offer my own account of what precisely is involved when we remember an experience with pleasure or look forward to an experience

<sup>4</sup> This is what makes memory interesting to people who are trying to offer an account of the criteria for the persistence of a person over time. It also makes it unclear whether memory can serve as such a criterion or, rather, is itself dependent on there being some persistent subject to prior parts of whose life memory then may give access.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Annas 1992, 299–300; Bernecker 2010, 11–45.

with trepidation.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, that we do engage in both of these kinds of introspective thinking and are affected as we do so is itself not a trivial observation and it attracted the attention of thoughtful ancient writers too. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8 I explore some of what they had to say about it. There are two important themes that deserve to be briefly noted here. First, there is in these thinkers' discussions a strong emphasis on the connection between memory, anticipation, and the agent's character over time. Autobiographical memory and the affective aspects of autobiographical memory, for example, are related to how the agent's character changes or remains constant over time. In brief, they tend to think that a person of good and stable character ought to take pleasure in and be pained by the same things now as in the past. This is also supposed to hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for an agent's affective responses to considerations of future experiences. Second, I suggest that we might distinguish in these thinkers two broad ways of thinking about the fact that we can take pleasure and pain in our memories and in our anticipations.

On the first model, anticipating and recalling are thought to be means of, so to speak, reaching out to the past or future and hauling some temporally remote experience from there into our present. Within this model, we can distinguish two further ideas. The first idea is that this ability to set together a present with a non-present affective state allows an agent to arrange some kind of comparison between the present affective state (pleased, pained, neither pleased nor pained) and the anticipated or recollected state (pleased, pained, neither pleased nor pained). The comparison between the two is then noted and used to draw various further conclusions, for example about the nature of pleasure and pain themselves, or this particular person's consistency of character and the like. The second idea is that the recollected or anticipated pleasure can be used to help to improve one's state in the present by allowing us to 're-live' or 'pre-live' a pleasure. For example, the Epicureans claim that recollecting and thereby reliving a past pleasant experience is useful in producing a balance against a present pain.

The second model is a less common approach and is perhaps best illustrated by contrast with the dominant form. In brief, unlike its counterpart, this model does not assume that an experience that was painful to us in the past will always be painful when we remember it. Sometimes a past painful experience can be recalled with pleasure. What is more, the pleasure we may feel in recalling that past painful experience is not simply because,

<sup>6</sup> Such an account would need to build a story about affective content into a general account of introspective memory or anticipation. The analysis in Bernecker 2010, ch. 8, offers some helpful steps in this direction.



when placed in comparison with our present situation, that past experience is merely revealed not to have been as bad as we once thought. Rather, we can recall even with pleasure something that was genuinely painful at the time. While this picture is less common in the ancient texts, we can detect signs of it in Aristotle's discussion of pleasure and memory in *Rhet.* I.II.

### Reason and emotion

In some cases it is less clear whether, in the view of these ancient philosophers, the cognitive capacities involved in the relevant affective experience belong exclusively to humans – and are therefore candidates for being 'pleasures of reason' – or may also belong to non-human animals. I have already mentioned the pleasures and pains of perception. Another class of pleasures and pains that might be approached in a similar fashion are those associated with emotions or, as the ancient Greeks would describe them 'affections': *pathē*. These will not form a major part of my discussion, but it is worth dwelling on them just briefly. In humans emotions such as anger or fear are certainly accompanied by pleasures and pains. And in humans emotions might be thought to involve some kind of cognitive component since they seem to involve 'taking things to be' in a certain fashion. Fear, for example, might involve an agent in taking there to be some impending danger or harm and therefore involve some cognitive input besides what is plausibly given by sensory perception alone. Anger, for example, often seems to involve the angry person in having a belief such as that some undeserved slight has been suffered. On the other hand, it is also common both nowadays and in our ancient sources to ascribe emotions such as fear and anger to non-human animals that are incapable of reasoning or of forming beliefs.

The moral psychology of the *pathē* is a large and difficult topic which would demand a different treatment for each of the various ancient philosophers and schools.<sup>7</sup> For the Stoics, for example, the answer is relatively clear because they take an extreme view of the nature of emotions. For the Stoics, non-human animals are not able to experience emotions and their relevant pleasures and pains since emotions – *pathē* – are attendant upon if not identical to a belief of some kind (e.g. the belief that someone has illegitimately wronged you). For a Stoic, a dog cannot, properly speaking, experience the emotion of anger since it cannot form such a judgement.<sup>8</sup> For Plato,

<sup>7</sup> For a good introduction see Price 2009.

<sup>8</sup> It also follows that all emotions are based on false judgement since they take things to be good or bad that are neither good nor bad; virtue is the only good and vice the only bad.

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things are more complicated. We should probably say that different dialogues offer different accounts of the emotions since they offer different general accounts of the soul. Some seem to envisage the human soul as exclusively a reasoning soul; others famously divide the embodied human soul into distinct parts only one of which is identified as the rational soul and between which there can be conflict as well as harmony. The analysis of the emotions will depend upon these more general accounts which determine which activities are psychic activities and which psychic activities are activities of the rational or non-rational parts of the soul.

The case of Aristotle is perhaps more complicated still. Some commentators argue that Aristotle's account of the emotions does not see a necessary role for rational capacities in every experience of a *pathos*.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle sometimes talks about emotions arising when we come to believe something, for example that something terrifying is present (e.g. *De An.* 3.3 427b21–4). But he also sometimes talks about emotions being triggered just because things 'appear' to us a certain way, despite a belief to the contrary or in the absence of a relevant belief.<sup>10</sup> We can feel fear, for example, even in the absence of the belief that things are as they currently appear to us (e.g. *De Insom.* 2 459b32–460a27). We may not act always on the basis of such an appearance when there is a belief to the contrary but in the absence of such a belief we will instead act and be moved, as non-human animals act and are moved, simply on the basis of how things appear to us. We might therefore also be subject to various emotions just on the basis of how things appear to us.<sup>11</sup> The pleasures and pains that are associated with emotions are not necessarily, in that case, to be connected with our human rational capacities. Any animal capable of perceiving or equipped with *phantasia* has the requisite psychological equipment for experiencing emotions and the pleasures and pains they involve.<sup>12</sup> The alternative, and now perhaps the less common, interpretation of Aristotle's view of the emotions holds that the references to the human agent 'being appeared to' in a certain way in cases of emotion is

<sup>9</sup> For a clear introduction to the debate see Moss 2012a, 69–71, and see the remainder of the chapter for her own view.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *NE* 7.6 1149a32–b1: either *logos* or *phantasia* can 'make clear' to a person that he has been slighted, after which spirit (*thumos*) 'as if having reasoned it out' (ὥσπερ συλλογισάμενος) becomes enraged. Aristotle argues that *phantasia* and opinion must be distinct capacities because the sun 'appears' to be about a foot in diameter even to people who believe that it is vastly larger than Earth (*De An.* 3.3 428b2–4; cf. *De Insom.* 2 460b18–20).

<sup>11</sup> For interpretations of Aristotle's account of the emotions on these lines see Cooper 1996 and Striker 1996a. See also Moss 2009 and 2012a, 100–33, who builds on such a view to interpret Aristotle's account of *akrasia*.

<sup>12</sup> The discussion in Sihvola 1996 makes good use of references to animal emotions in the biological works.