

EUDEMIAN ETHICS 1220 b 11–13

When characterizing *ta pathē* in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle claims that they are usually accompanied by perceptual pleasure or pain.¹ He says:

λέγω δὲ πάθη μὲν τὰ τοιαῦτα, θυμὸν φόβον αἰδῶ ἐπιθυμίαν, ὅλως οἷς ἔπεται ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἡ αἰσθητικὴ ἡδονὴ ἢ λύπη καθ' αὐτά.

By affections I mean such things as anger, fear, shame, desire – in general anything which, as such, gives rise usually to perceptual pleasure and pain. (translation by Woods)

This characterization is striking in two ways: first, nowhere else does Aristotle include the qualification of ‘perceptual’; second, it is atypical of Aristotle to introduce the qualification ‘usually’.² It is this latter qualification that interests me here.

In his commentary on this passage Michael Woods offers an interpretation of ‘usually’, one which I shall argue is mistaken.³ Woods correctly points out that Aristotle’s claim might be taken in two ways. His point might be (1) that usually the species of the genus *ta pathē* are accompanied by perceptual pleasure or pain. Hence many, but not all, species of the genus *ta pathē* are accompanied by perceptual pleasure or pain. On the interpretation that Woods prefers, however, Aristotle’s point is (2) that most instances of any given species of the genus *ta pathē* are accompanied by perceptual pleasure or pain. The difference can be illustrated in the following way. On the interpretation that Woods prefers (2), certain instances of a *pathos*, say anger, are without pleasure or pain, whereas on the interpretation I shall endorse (1) certain *pathē* are without pleasure or pain. Which is correct?

One thought that may spring to mind would attempt to circumvent the problem rather than to resolve it. It argues that the qualification ‘usually’ cannot be taken seriously. Rather, it must be seen as a slip. For Aristotle is arguing about a kind, and his characterization should be universal, not general. Now it is certainly true that we prefer universal explanations, but it is worth recalling that Aristotle is willing to reason about ‘what is for the most part’.⁴ Hence there is no *prima facie* reason for dismissing this qualification as an unfortunate slip. Quite the opposite; this qualification is firmly rooted in good Aristotelian soil. Moreover, that a similar move is made in the *Magna Moralia* supports the view that our passage is to be taken quite seriously. Thus the question ‘Which interpretation?’ must be posed once more.⁵

Woods’s interpretation (2) has its attractions. On his analysis pleasure or pain serves as a criterion – and an adequate one at that – for each species under the genus *ta pathē*, though not for every instance of any species. On my interpretation (1), although most

¹ I am grateful to D. Browning, H. Granger, S. Waterlow, and the editors of *CQ* for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. They cannot be blamed for its faults, but they have helped to improve it.

² Compare *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105 b 21–3, *Rhetoric* 1378 a 20–3, but then notice *Magna Moralia* 1186 a 12–15.

³ M. Woods, *Aristotle’s Eudemian Ethics, a translation and commentary* (Oxford University Press, 1982), especially pp. 109–10.

⁴ See, for example, *Prior Analytics* 43 b 30 ff., *Posterior Analytics* 87 b 18–26, 96 a 7–19.

⁵ W. W. Fortenbaugh’s discussion of our passage implies that we do not need to favour either alternative: Aristotle wants to maintain both (‘Arius, Theophrastus and the *Eudemian Ethics*’, pp. 208–12 in *Rutgers Studies in Classical Humanities*, 1). But the arguments I shall offer against Woods’s interpretation (2) show not only that it is not sufficient, but also that it runs counter to too much that Aristotle holds. Hence embracing both interpretations is mistaken.

species of the genus *ta pathē* involve pleasure or pain, the possibility remains that certain species of *ta pathē* do not involve pleasure or pain at all. But if this is the case, then pleasure or pain does not identify adequately the genus *pathē*; rather, pleasure or pain is a typical feature of many or most species of *ta pathē*. Those species of *ta pathē* which do involve pleasure or pain always do; those that do not never do. Aristotle's point would certainly be stronger were he offering a foolproof way of identifying *pathē*; and in this sense Woods's interpretation (2) is attractive.

Now I take it that Aristotle's willingness to reason about 'what is for the most part' shows us that the above attraction is not bewitching. Still, if there is not much to choose between the interpretations, then we ought to choose the stronger and to our thinking more alluring one. However, if we find that Woods's interpretation (2) conflicts with certain positions of Aristotle or fails to explain others or foists upon him an unacceptable theory (whereas my interpretation (1) does not or does to a much lesser extent), then I think we have to forgo this one charm for my interpretation.

Recalling some of the definitions of different *pathē* will assist our project. We should observe the pivotal role pain takes.

Let fear be defined as a painful or troubled feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain. (*Rhetoric* 1382a20–2, translated by Freese)

Let us then define anger as a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends, when such a slight is undeserved. (*Ibid.* 1378a31–3, translated by Freese)

On Woods's view it will sometimes happen that the above-mentioned emotions arise, but are not painful. Now this is not too strange a suggestion for us. For our conception of emotion encompasses both emotion as a disposition and emotion as an occurrence. So, if I claim to be angry with you, I might be speaking of a disposition. Here it is unsurprising that though anger is accompanied by pain I still feel nothing. But the case is considerably different for Aristotle. When he speaks of *ta pathē* he is speaking of an occurrent phenomenon as opposed to a disposition, state, etc.⁶ *Pathē* are not *pathē* unless they are occurrent. In our terms Aristotle means to define the occurrence of fear and anger, not the disposition to these. Thus Woods's interpretation (2) saddles Aristotle with the view that there are occasions in which one is in the midst of one of these occurrences yet feels nothing.⁷ Given that *pathē* are occurrent, given the stated role pain is to play in these particular *pathē*, how can this be possible? Again, *Categories* 10a10 indicates that *ta pathē* are not qualities, but being affected in a certain way. Now it is impossible to be affected by the pain of anger yet feel nothing. That is, it is not the case that there are certain instances of *pathē* which are set forth as pains that could possibly arise without our being pained.⁸ Here Woods's interpretation fails because the implications of it are in conflict with Aristotle's stated position.

Suppose these problems could be papered over, and we imagine that Aristotle holds what Woods suggests he does. If so, then when Aristotle defines different species of

⁶ See, for example, the passages mentioned in note 2.

⁷ Woods does not suggest (nor should he) that on those occasions in which pleasure or pain is not felt, something else is. Pleasure or pain is what is felt here if anything is, according to Aristotle.

⁸ One minor qualification here. *De Somniis* 460b32–461a3 makes room for not noticing, say, the pain of anger because, say, the pain of a nail in one's foot is so overpowering. However, this does not help Woods's position. For it will remain the case that this *pathos* is accompanied by pain.

pathē we should expect him to say that they are usually pleasant or painful, or at least make note that sometimes instances arise without our feeling pleasure or pain. But nothing of this sort occurs in the above definitions, or the surrounding passages. And as far as I can tell, Aristotle nowhere makes such a move. Once more, this interpretation does not do justice to the text and foists a most unlikely doctrine upon Aristotle.

I have just argued that the Aristotelian framework cannot admit Woods's interpretation. Rather, if a given *pathos* is a sort of pain and the *pathos* arises, the pain must be felt. Any lingering doubts that Aristotle would agree should be removed by the following passages.

...but everyone who acts in anger acts with pain...
(*Nicomachean Ethics* 1149b21)

For incontinence due to anger is a pain, for no one feels anger without being pained. (*Magna Moralia* 1202b26–7)

All this provides us with very good reasons to abandon Woods's interpretation (2) of our passage. It would seem that if we can adopt an interpretation of Aristotle in which the above-mentioned problems are avoided, we should adopt it. I maintain that such a position is the one that Woods rejects (1). For it does not ask that there be occurrences of anger or fear that are not felt. This leaves in harmony the placement of pleasure or pain in various *pathē* and his description of *pathē* as occurrent, a being affected somehow. Moreover, Aristotle's failure to mention instances of fear or anger that are not felt, and his claim that anger is always painful, is no longer taken to be a failing, but a natural consequence of his position. And, of course, this interpretation appreciates the force of *epi to polu*. Opting for this interpretation (1) is hasty, however, until we show either that there are no additional and viable interpretations or that Aristotle discusses *pathē* that are not felt. I shall consider the possibility of additional interpretations first.

One might take the qualification *aisthētikē*, perceptual, to speak of the bodily pleasures and pains. If so, one might then argue that the reason for the qualification *epi to polu* is that there are certain *pathē* which stir our mind rather than our body. This, then, would provide a third explanation (3) for what Aristotle is up to in our passage. One feature of this third view is that it maintains that there is always stirring involved with *pathē*, whereas the two considered above maintain that there are occasions in which there is no stirring involved – though they differ about just which those occasions are. It is also noteworthy that this view (3) itself admits of two different interpretations. The claim might be (3.1) that on occasion a given *pathos* stirs the mind though usually it stirs the body, or it could be (3.2) that certain *pathē* stir the mind only, while certain others stir the body only.

The first version (3.1) seems most unlikely. But rather than displaying the advantages and failings of each, I want to offer considerations which show that these alternatives (3.1 and 3.2) are the least plausible of all. First, the evidence for such interpretations here is just too scanty to say with any surety that this is Aristotle's position. For example, had Aristotle intended either of these views, we could have expected him, at the very least, to allude to intellectual pleasures or pains in emotion. His silence here and elsewhere must make us most reluctant to attribute either of these views to our text. Second, there is no way to fit these interpretations in with Aristotle's claim that *ta pathē* are bodily, *De Anima*, 403a16–19. These interpretations, then, would thrust a contradiction upon Aristotle. Third, they imply an almost Cartesian distinction between mind and body. It is not apparent that Aristotle holds to such

a distinction even though he may distinguish, say, bodily and intellectual desires. For all these reasons we must not embrace either of these interpretations (3.1 and 3.2).

I do not see that there are other plausible interpretations of our passage. We have found that Woods's interpretation (2), as well as (3.1) and (3.2), foists inconsistencies and philosophical blunders on the Aristotelian framework. Our interpretation (1) has no such problem, and it must thereby be recognized as the preferable interpretation of our passage. Moreover, there is evidence to confirm its claim that certain *pathē* are not felt.⁹

Surely, part of the attraction of Woods's interpretation is that things Aristotle includes as *pathē* are ones which we think of as pleasant or painful. Moreover, as the definitions discussed above would indicate, Aristotle also thinks of them in this way. So there seems a natural move to universalizing this over all *ta pathē*, and thereby a natural move to Woods's view. However, Aristotle definitely does not make this move. In the *Rhetoric* he speaks of various *pathē*, defining, discussing, contrasting and comparing them. At one point he contrasts one of his initial examples of a *pathos*, anger (cf. 1378b31), with something which has already been considered a *pathos* (cf. 1380b34) and here is naturally understood as a *pathos*. He says:

Now the things which cause pain are all perceptible, while the things which are especially bad, such as injustice or folly, are the least perceptible; for the presence of vice causes no pain. Anger is accompanied by pain, but hatred not; for he who is angry suffers pain, but he who hates does not. One who is angry might feel compassion in many cases, but one who hates, never; for the former wishes that the object of his anger should suffer in his turn, the latter, that he should perish. (1382a11–17, translated by Freese)

This is extremely significant. For his position is not that there are certain instances of hatred that are without feeling (Woods's view); nor is it that there is always stirring involved with *pathē* (the third view); rather, the whole point is that hatred, one of the things he seems willing to count as a *pathos*, is not painful (and clearly not pleasant).¹⁰ Thus our passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* must be interpreted as I suggest. For he affirms the consequences of my interpretation, whereas he explicitly rejects the consequences of Woods's interpretation (and the third view).

Why Aristotle might hold the view he does about hatred is an interesting and difficult question. Clearly, his position about this emotion is not attractive to our intuitions.¹¹ Still, concerning the issue here, the point must be that it is his position. At least one *pathos* is without feeling. We must conclude that his point in *Eudemian Ethics* 1220b11–13 is that though most species of *pathē* are accompanied by pleasure or pain, certain species are without pleasure or pain.

Florida International University

STEPHEN R. LEIGHTON

⁹ I observed at the outset that the disadvantage of this interpretation (1) compared to Woods's (2) is the loss of a foolproof criterion for species of *pathē*. We should notice that this point was not lost on Aristotle, as the dropping of *epi to polu* from the characterization of *ta pathē* in the *Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* would suggest. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b13–15.

¹⁰ How many other *pathē* are without feeling is unclear. By the characterization in the *Rhetoric* loving and kindness are not painful or pleasant, though realizing or failing to realize their end may be. Since desires are considered *pathē* in the *Eudemian Ethics*, we might also want to include *boulēsis*. (For a fuller discussion of the different uses of '*ta pathē*' as employed in the *Ethics* versus the *Rhetoric* and the force of 'accompanied by pleasure and pain' see my paper 'Aristotle and the Emotions', *Phronesis*, September 1982.)

¹¹ Elsewhere I have tried to explain why Aristotle might have made this move. (See note 14 of my article, mentioned above.) A very different and interesting explanation is offered by Fortenbaugh (*ibid.*). I should add that a bodily nature seems to be a very central component to a *pathos* (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1128b10–15).