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Children's Pleasures and Moral Development in Stoicism

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Abstract: The Stoics, particularly Chrysippus, are often criticized for their dismissal of children's emotions and their ambiguity on children's emotional development. While they claimed that children lack genuine emotions, they seem to acknowledge that certain emotional states in children are problematic. Galen tried to resolve this "dilemma" by presupposing a persistent irrational part or power within the soul that was capable of generating emotions. This paper challenges this interpretation by zooming in on pleasure for analysis.

It argues that the Stoics, in addition to attributing neutral sensory pleasure to children, seem to suggest that children experience a form of quasi-pleasure analogous to mental pleasure or delight. However, this distinct “pleasure” does not arise from a persistent irrational aspect of the soul, but rather from erroneous perceptions and quasi-beliefs about what is the good, which may later develop into a full-fledged belief. Due to pleasure’s good-like appearance, without appropriate guidance and a favorable environment, children’s impulse to preserve the constitution in accordance with nature may transform into a pleasure-seeking impulse. However, in view of its incentive power to achieve valuable things, pleasure can play a positive role in children’s emotional education.

Keywords: children; quasi-pleasure; emotion; primary impulse; virtue.

1. Introduction

Pleasure¹ is a puzzling topic in Stoicism. The Stoics use the Greek term ἡδονή both for a bodily sensation (“a pleasant sensation”)² and for the πάθος (“delight”, “pleasant feelings at/about”). They also use χαρά for the rational counterpart to the πάθος-ἡδονή. In general, most of the Stoics appear to view pleasure

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² Scholars are divided on the issue of bodily pleasure in Stoicism. Some make a distinction between bodily pleasure and mental pleasure (e.g., Haynes, 1962; Rist, 1969; Long-Sedley, 1987), while others believe that the Stoics do not consider bodily sensations a form of pleasure because it is not a belief or opinion (e.g., Gosling-Taylor, 1982, p. 426–27; Brennan, 2003, p. 277–78). I take the former position while believing that this kind of physical feeling is not πάθος or εὐπάθεια.

unfavorably. Cleanthes (c. 330-c. 230 BC), for instance, stated that it is "neither natural nor has value in life, just as a cosmetic is not natural" (*M* 11.73 = *SVF* 3.155, trans. Bett). In the treatise *On Pleasure*, he depicted a possible picture where pleasure is mistakenly considered the end (τέλος) and virtues are merely employed to serve this end (Cic. *Fin* 2.69 = *SVF* 1.553). Chrysippus (c. 279-c. 206 BC), facing the challenge from the Hedonists, though not as radical as Cleanthes, still positioned pleasure as the primary opponent to virtue in the pursuit of the highest goal (*summi boni*, Cic. *Fin*. 2.14.44).³ What Cleanthes and Chrysippus discussed here primarily involves bodily pleasure that is akin to or accompanying hunger, thirst, and cold, occurring when an animal seeks what is fitting to its own constitution (DL 7.85–86; Stob. *Ecl*. 2.80 = *SVF* 3.136; *Strom*. 2. 491 = *SVF* 3.405). This type of pleasure is considered an indifferent (ἀδιάφορον),⁴ not an evil; a sensation, not an emotion (πάθος). Experiencing it only requires a certain level of self-awareness or self-preservation (ἐπὶ τὸ τηρεῖν ἑαυτό) (Cic. *Fin*. 3.16-18; DL 7.85). However, those sensations, which are naturally appealing and seductive and can arise prior to judgment, are susceptible to distortion (Sen. *Ep*. 51.5-6; Haynes 1962, p. 414, p. 418).

Adults, despite possessing reason, may experience mental pleasure (delight) due to the erroneous judgment that something good is present, which Stoics refer to as πάθος. Pleasure as a πάθος is generally well-studied, but the less-discussed question is why children cannot experience it and other emotions such as fear, anger, jealousy, and envy. The Stoics allow that children, lacking reason, experience the sensation of pleasure, but deny that they experience the πάθος of pleasure. According to the Stoics, what children feel during this phase of development are not genuine emotions resulting from misjudgment (Sen. *Ira* 1.2.5).

³ Seneca likewise took pleasures to be "the worst enemies" (*invisissimas*, Sen. *Ep*. 51.13; cf. Sen. *Ep*. 23.6, 31.2).

⁴ As Rist notes, Cleanthes may place good pleasures in this class (Rist, 1969, p. 46).

However, the Stoics seem to acknowledge that many of children's feelings are also problematic (i.e., not "indifferent"). How do the Stoics explain how children have those feelings if they are not *πάθη*? What accounts for the developmental pathway from childhood feelings to adult *πάθη*? In light of this dilemma, Galen censured Chrysippus for inadequate investigation on the emotions of young children and their rearing and training (Gal. *PHP.* 5.5.1-32); he claimed that children and animals, despite being non-rational, do experience emotions. Some scholars largely follow Galen and argue that, at least for the later Stoic Posidonius (c.135 –c.51 BC), it is reasonable to attribute full-blown emotions to children; both children and adults experience delight because humans possess a persistent, non-rational aspect of the human soul⁵—though adults also experience delight through rational judgment.⁶ Others contend that for all the Stoics (including Posidonius), children only exhibit a kind of pleasure that is analogous to but not identical to emotion (Fillion-Lahille, 1984; Gill, 1998; Graver, 2007; Tieleman, 1996, 2003). Since we lack primary texts from the early Stoics, the evidence of Galen will be important in the paper. However, Galen is a tricky source to use and requires careful interpretation. Thus, we must also consider the texts from the later Stoic Seneca, the relatively more neutral Cicero and Calcidius, and the equally polemical Plutarch and Porphyry. According to these sources, the Stoics seem to recognize another form of "pleasure" in children, which goes along with their other emotional states, e.g., fear, anger, jealousy, and envy. This is referred to as a quasi-(*ὥσαυτί/quasi*) emotion,⁷ which is not the same as the bodily feeling but also not the same as the emotion of pleasure.

⁵ Among those scholars, there are differing views on what the Stoic (Posidonius) believed about the nature of emotions in children and animals. Some argue that children and animals can experience emotions without cognitive judgment, although these emotions may involve a non-rational cognitive aspect (e.g., Boys-Stones 2007; Lorenz 2011; Harriman 2022). Others contend that even non-rational animals form impressions that are propositional, despite their lack of words and concepts (e.g., Sorabji, 1993, p. 20–28; cf. Caston 2025).

⁶ According to those scholars, this is precisely Posidonius's position.

⁷ Or, as Tieleman suggests, *sub-rational* (Tieleman, 1996, p. 175).

They are problematic because children are easily influenced by incorrect opinions about what benefits their constitution or what is good (ἀγαθός). This kind of language led to a lot of criticism from Plutarch and Porphyry, who considered it as superfluous given the evident facts about animals and children. Like Galen, they held that children and animals feel emotions in the same way as human adults.

I hope to counter this criticism by showing that this distinction is meaningful for the Stoics, who neither take nor need to take Galen's route. It places pleasure in childhood within a refined epistemological framework, recognizing its distinctive features as well as its intricate and developing relationships with other emotional states as a child matures. To elaborate, even with limited sources, I will strive to consider how and when children first come to have the quasi-belief that pleasure is something good—hence ὥσανεὶ-ἡδονή, and how, as they enter adulthood, this becomes a full-fledged belief that pleasure is something good—hence πάθος-ἡδονή. According to the Stoics, the acquisition of reason begins around the age of 7 and is typically complete by the age of 14 (Aët. 4.11.4, 5.23.1= SVF 2.764; Inwood, 1985, p. 72). Obviously, there is a long developmental period from newborn to age 14, which makes untenable any strict dichotomy between child and adult. The Stoics often grouped infants (or very young children) and animals into one category, while recognizing intermediate developmental stages between infancy and maturity in humans (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.7; Sen. *Ep.* 121.15-16).⁸ Moreover, though the Stoics sometimes used the language of quasi-emotions in animals as well, animals and human children are different in many ways. With this in mind, since the nature of pleasure depends on the states and activities it accompanies, we might better understand the continuity of human moral development by exploring the emotional development from highly animal-like (new-born), to fairly animal-like (before age 7), to less animal-like (ages 7-14). Presumably, quasi-emotions arise from “weak” assent and “confused conceptions”, which start to look like judgments and are more likely to get set down during the period from 7 to 14. Animals barely have

⁸ For details, see Brittain, 2002, p. 272.

quasi-assent and quasi-conception; or strictly speaking, animals merely “yield” to impressions (Plut. *Stoic. Rep.* 1 1057A = LS 53S = SVF 3.177; also see Long-Sedley, 1987, p. 322); but an 8-year-old child might have the apparatus for quasi-opinions strong enough that they can start to shape their future development. Due to the lack of textual evidence, it might be an ambitious project to reconstruct this kind of continuity. However, it is reasonable and possible because the Stoics—for all their binary thinking about, for example, virtue and vice at the extremes—show sophisticated understanding of the continuum of human development from infancy to adulthood.⁹

To figure out how emotional development occurs as an individual transition from childhood to adulthood, we must examine whether and how this childhood pleasure persists into adulthood or undergoes some form of transformation in the epistemological context. Here it is crucial to clarify the relations between (quasi-) emotion and impulse (ὁρμή) while keeping in mind the role of οἰκείωσις.¹⁰ For the Stoics, all animals’ perception of the “πρῶτον οἰκεῖον” (the first thing that is appropriate) and the resulting “πρῶτη ὁρμή” (primary impulse) to self-preservation will persist throughout life; some human beings’ postnatal inclination towards pleasure, glory, and so on might also endure for a lifetime due to the miseducation or misdevelopment of their “πρῶτη ὁρμή”. However, according to the Stoics, none of these impulses or inclinations indicate the existence of a separate, irrational part or power of the soul.

With this understanding, this paper aims to differentiate three kinds of pleasure (and pain) of human beings, especially the distinction between pleasure as emotion (delight) and as quasi-

⁹ I accept this suggestion from the reviewer, and very much appreciate it.

¹⁰ As an application of the relations between family members and their property to that of oneself, οἰκείωσις has the basic meanings, “being akin to”, “familiar to itself and to its own constitution (σύστασις/*cōnstitūtīō*)”, “taking as one’s own, appropriation”, etc. There is no successful English translation for οἰκείωσις, so it is variously rendered as “appropriation,” “domestic instinct”, “affiliation”, “orientation”, “familiarization”, “affinity”, “endearment”, etc.

emotion; it will elucidate the continuity of human moral development from the Stoic viewpoint and explore the appropriate emotional education for children. I will argue that, while various Stoics differ on the value of different forms of pleasure, they seem to agree that children do not experience pleasure as a πάθος, but rather only as a quasi-pleasure triggered by non-rational impulse. I will begin by examining the three types of pleasure in Stoic philosophy, with emphasis on the distinctive features of quasi-pleasure and its intricate relationships with other emotional states. To elaborate, I will explore the psychological causes of children's quasi-pleasure, arguing that the impressions, impulses, and weak consent that children possess can only produce a form of pleasure resembling delight. Next, I will analyse the Stoic account of the πρώτη ὁρμή, and demonstrate that the miseducation of πρώτη ὁρμή can result in quasi-pleasure-feelings; for human beings, what remains constant is not a persistent irrational element desiring bodily pleasure, but rather the impulse to preserve the commanding faculty (ἡγεμονικόν) in accordance with nature. In light of the differences between animals and children, the paper proceeds to examine how children come to have the quasi-belief that pleasure is something good by unraveling the puzzling process by which the distortion happens. In closing, I will briefly discuss the Stoic strategies to manage quasi-pleasure, proposing that children's natural inclination towards cheerfulness and ease of satisfaction when properly raised and educated may contribute positively to their moral development and overall well-being.

2. Three kinds of pleasure

Galen claimed that Chrysippus' doctrine contradicts the fact that children and other animals not only experience emotions, but their emotions are actually "more numerous and more intense" than those in adults (Gal. *PHP* 5.5.2). However, it seems to me that Galen confused several types of pleasure in Stoic philosophy. Among them, there are two senses of pleasure that are easier to distinguish and attract the most attention. The first one is bodily pleasure, a neutral element that persists throughout a person's life, experienced by an

animal's self-perception (συναίσθησις). As Diogenes reports the Stoic view,

T1 The first thing appropriate to every animal, he says, is its own constitution and the consciousness of this. For nature was not likely either to alienate the animal itself, or to make it and then neither alienate it nor appropriate it. So it remains to say that in constituting the animal, nature appropriated it to itself. This is why the animal rejects what is harmful and accepts what is appropriate. They hold it false to say, as some people do, that pleasure is the object of animals' first impulse. For pleasure, they say, if it does occur, is a byproduct which arises only when nature all by itself has searched out and adopted the proper requirements for a creature's constitution, just as animals [then] frolic and plants bloom (DL 7.85-6 = LS 57A2-3 = SVF 3.178).

This type of pleasure is just an accompaniment or “byproduct” (ἐπιγένημα) of activities that are appropriate for an animal's constitution (σύστασις); it includes involuntary, unthinking pleasurable responses to external events. In Stoic philosophy, it has been variously classified as “natural but without value”, “neither natural nor valuable”, and “indifferent but preferred” (DL 7.102 = LS 58A4; cf. *Aur. Med.* 8.10; Long-Sedley, 1987, p. 421), reflecting the changing attitudes within the school. While the founder Zeno's (c.334 – c.262 BC) position was not quite clear, and Cleanthes held the extreme stance that it is non-natural and valueless, Chrysippus considered it both natural and preferred (*M* 11.73 = *SVF* 3.155).¹¹ Nevertheless, they all believe that bodily pleasure naturally manifests solely as a by-product, neither sought nor preferred for its own sake, and co-occurs with certain states and activities. Consequently, it is mainly categorized as an “indifferent” rather than a vice. The antithesis of this pleasure is physical pain, similar to other bodily sensations such as hunger, thirst and cold.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion, see Rist, 1969, p. 47-48.

Another variant is pleasure (ἡδονή/*voluptas*) as an emotion, also called delight (or gladness, revelry).¹² The pleasure envisaged here involves both evaluative attitudes and physical effects; it is “a fresh opinion that something good is present, at which people think it right to be swollen [i.e. elated]” (Andron. *On passions* I = LS 65B4 = SVF 3.391). As one of the four primary πάθη, delight is in the same category as pain, fear, and desire. Adults experience ἡδονή not only as a sensation but also as an emotion, which Stoics describe as a mistaken judgment, “unnatural movement” (DL 7.110), “an irrational elevation” (DL 7.114; Cic. *Fin.* 2.4.13; Stob. *Ecl.* 2.90.7) or an excessive impulse arising from the weakness or lack of tension (ἀτονία) of their souls (Plut. *Mor.* 441C-D; Gal. *PHP* 4.2.11-12). The Stoics, however, are not “unfeeling like a statue” (*Diss.* 3.2.4). After Chrysippus, they began to highlight joy (χαρά/*gaudium*) as the rational counterpart to the πάθος-ἡδονή, a good state of emotion that only the wise could experience. They defined joy as a state of well-reasoned elation arising from virtuous character and action, characterized by constancy and consistency (DL 7.115=LS 65F2=SVF 3.431; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.12; Sen. *Ep.* 23.6, 59.2).¹³

In addition to the two forms of pleasure identified, it appears that children, much like adults, can exhibit a kind of pleasure that is analogous to but not identical to emotion, something that could be referred to as a quasi(ῶσανεί)-emotion. In specialized Stoic terminology, “ῶσανεί/quasi” is often used to indicate that a term applies in a less strict, qualified yet analogous sense (e.g., “ῶσανεί τι” and “ῶσανεί ποῖον” in DL 7.61; Stob. *Ecl.* 1.136. 21 W; also see

¹² It is difficult to find the proper English word for this kind of pleasure. While delight (maybe also gladness) carries a misleadingly positive connotation, revelry seems too narrow. In this paper, I will temporarily use “delight”.

¹³ Nevertheless, in Stoic philosophy, as one of the εὐπάθειαι, joy is neither the τέλος nor a prerequisite for happiness. Rather, virtue alone is deemed both necessary and sufficient for attaining happiness (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.77; Sen. *VB* 15.2). In addition to χαρά/*gaudium* (often subdivided into τέρψις, εὐφροσύνη, and εὐθυμία), the Stoics also use terms such as ἀρκούμενος (Aur. *Med.* 4.25) and φαιδρόν (Aur. *Med.* 1.16.2) to express contentment, tranquility, and gladness. Seneca seemed to offer a highly complex account of joy, one that cannot be strictly classified as among the εὐπάθειαι (Also see Graver 2023; McVane 2018).

Tieleman, 1996, p. 175; Inwood, 2007, p. 107) —“as it were,” “analogously,” “or ostensibly.” Sometimes terms such as ἀνάλογον are also used to convey a similar idea. Although children who have not yet reached the age of reasoning show signs akin to pleasure, pain, desire, and fear, these do not count as emotions in their entirety. They go along with children’s quasi-speech (*ut loquitur*) and quasi-anticipation, among other things (Varro, *Ling.* 6.56; Sen. *Ira* 1.3.6-7; Plut. *Soll. An.* 961E-F, Porph. *Abst.* 3.21-2; Brittain, 2002, p. 257, 273), and are labile and transient (Sen. *Ep.* 99.24), readily treatable, and often expressed and alleviated through symbolic means.

The above observation seems to be supported by the texts from Origen, Plutarch (and Porphyry), and Seneca:

T2 Accordingly, it has been precisely demonstrated by others that none of the emotions befalls children who have not yet completely acquired reason; if so, is not even fear beastlike? But if indeed there is something analogous to the emotions, these too, in children, are mutual and are very rapidly dispelled and cured (*Origenes comment*, in *Matthaeum* Vol. III p. 591 Delarue=SVF 3.477; cf. Gal. *PHP* 5.5, my translation).¹⁴

T3 As for those¹⁵ who stupidly assert on this issue that animals feel neither pleasure nor anger nor fear, and cannot make preparations or remember, but that the bee “as it were remembers,” and the swallow “as it were makes preparations,” and the lion “as it were displays anger,” and the deer “as it were senses fear...” (Plut. *Soll. An.* 961E, trans. Newmyer; cf. Porph. *Abst.* 3.22.5).

T4 Tell me, you might ask, why is the populace angry with gladiators-and so unfairly as to think it an injury that they object to dying? It judges itself to be despised. In look, gesture and violence, it changes

¹⁴ ὥς μὲν οὖν πρὸς τὸ ἀκριβὲς ἀποδέδεικται καὶ ἄλλοις ὅτι οὐδὲν τῶν παθῶν πίπτει εἰς τὰ μηδέπω συμπληρωκτά τὸν λόγον παιδία: εἰ δ' οὐδὲν θηριῶδες καὶ ὁ φόβος; ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἀναλογόν τι τοῖς πάθεσι, καὶ ταῦτα ἀμοιβαῖα καὶ τάχιστα ἀνασκευαζόμενα καὶ θεραπευόμενα γίνεται ἐν τοῖς παιδίοις.

¹⁵ I.e., the Stoics (my note).

from spectator into opponent. Whatever this is, it is not anger. It is a quasi-anger, like that of children who fall and then wish to thresh the ground. They often have no idea why they are angry—they just are angry, without cause and without being wronged, but not without some impressions of being wronged and not without some desire to punish. So they dupe themselves with pretended punches, placating themselves by imagining tears and pleas for mercy, dispelling spurious grief with spurious vengeance (Sen. *Ira* 1.2.5, trans. Cooper-Procope).¹⁶

Here, Origen and Seneca examined human children's quasi-emotions, while Plutarch (and Porphyry), much like Galen, critiqued the Stoics for rejecting emotions in animals. Although it is challenging to make a distinction between animals and children of different developmental periods here, we may roughly say that they share quasi-emotions to varying degrees. In contrast to pleasure in the purely sensory sense, pleasure in this analogous sense is not an inherent trait in young children at birth. However, as I argue, the Stoics concede that children might be misguided to believe that bodily pleasure is the best thing for their constitution and become attached to it. This kind of pursued pleasure, backed by misimpressions and quasi-beliefs, is apparently distinct from pleasure as a pure sensation (indifferent) and pleasure as a *πάθος*. Without recognizing the subtle differences among the three kinds of pleasures, Galen easily became confused. The crucial issue here is to figure out the complex relationship between quasi-pleasure and delight, clarifying the meaning of “analogous to” or “quasi-” in this context. I will address this in the next section.

¹⁶ *Quidquid est tale, non est ira, sed quasi ira, sicut puerorum qui, si ceciderunt, terram uerberari uolunt et saepe ne sciunt quidem cur irascantur, sed tantum irascuntur, sine causa et sine iniuria, non tamen sine aliqua iniuriae specie nec sine aliqua poenae cupiditate. Deluduntur itaque imitatione plagarum et simulatis deprecantium lacrimis placantur et falsa ultione falsus dolor tollitur.*

3. The psychological causes of quasi-pleasure versus delight

Even though children's quasi-pleasure appears similar to delight through empirical observation, the psychological processes and mental condition (or *hormetic* disposition, Stob. *Ecl.* 2. 87.11) they refer to are fundamentally different. Children, lacking reason, possess impressions of being wronged (*iniuriae speciei*), weak assent, and confused conceptions, which can only produce a form of pleasure resembling delight.

Firstly, the absence of reason is essential to understanding how quasi-pleasure arises and why it is not an emotion. According to the Stoics, the ἡγεμονικόν, the commanding faculty, performs four distinct functions as the soul's highest part: impression (φαντασία), assent (συγκατάθεσις), impulse (ὁρμή), and reason (λόγος). In the case of an adult, each impression is accompanied by a proposition (ἄξιωμα), generated by thought or the power of reasoning, which verbalizes the content of the conceptualized impression (DL 7.49 = LS 33D = SVF 2.52). However, the function of the ἡγεμονικόν is not limited to reasoning or forming judgments. Along with impression and impulse, a weak, non-rational assent is at times associated with animals in general (LS 53O = SVF 2.991, 53P, 62G6). Like animals, human children's ἡγεμονικόν serve to unify their sensory input, thereby leading them to act in their characteristic ways (Brittain, 2002, p. 261). However, a human child's ἡγεμονικόν seems to be subtly different from that of animals as they grow up. While the commanding part (*principale*) of animals is "differently moulded" (*aliter ductum*) and "insufficiently subtle and precise" (*parum subtile, parum exactum*) (Sen. *Ira* 1.3.7), in human adults, the qualities of the ἡγεμονικόν can be significantly transformed or improved by reason.

In the context of Stoic emotion theory, when a child experiences "pleasure", "anger", or "fear", these are not true emotions as they lack the involvement of a functioning "reason" faculty. Similarly, an adult may be non-rational in the sense of not engaging reason(s),

which is insufficient to classify their experience as a true emotion. As illustrated in T4, the crowd's apparent anger towards a gladiator, characterized by similar look, gesture and violence, is actually a quasi-anger. This is because, as Seneca stated elsewhere, it lacks several complex cognitive components that constitute genuine, full-blown anger: "realization, indignation, condemnation, revenge" (Sen. *Ira* 2.1.4).

Secondly, quasi-pleasures are indeed linked to mis-impressions that present pleasure as the genuine good) and quasi-belief, but not incorrect evaluative judgments. While children have primary cognitive abilities like perception and the ability to form impressions, those non-rational capacities are not sufficient to produce emotions. According to the Stoics, all children possess a perceptual capacity relating to their bodily constitution, in the sense that they "understand" their functions (Sen. *Ep.* 121.10-12). "It is easier to understand nature than it is to describe it" (Sen. *Ep.* 121.11, trans. Graver-Long). Their capacity to perceive themselves and others enables them to form basic impressions and give weak assent, which creates impulses. Due to their lack of reason, impulse, along with impression, become the supreme power in the souls, and living naturally implies living in harmony with appropriate impulses. Their images and impressions, however, are disordered and confused (Sen. *Ira* 1.3.7). Children over 7 years old may acquire language and comprehend concepts (ἔννοιαι) before their reasoning reaches maturity, but this does not mean that they can abstractly form general definitions (also see Harriman 2024, p.475), for example, understanding the definition of constitution. They might be able to conceptualize their experiences in the form of quasi-speech, but such conceptualization does not yet guide their actions. They may also possess the preconception (πρόληψις) of good, a concept that arise naturally through perception, memory, and experience (Aët 4.11.1-4= LS 39E= SVF 2.83). However, their cognition is elementary and susceptible to mistakes. Thus, prior to the acquisition of reason, children may form wrong quasi-beliefs about what is best for their constitution based on mis-impressions, weak assent and confused conceptions. Their quasi-pleasures might be related to these quasi-

beliefs. As Seneca argued in T4, although children experiencing quasi-anger may not comprehend the cause of their anger or its real target, the mere impression of being wronged makes them angry and triggers a desire to punish.¹⁷ Giving weak assent to this groundless quasi-belief, their symbolic hurt can be easily soothed through symbolic imitative gestures such as “pretended punches” (*imitatione plagarum*), “imagining tears and pleas for mercy” (*simulatis deprecantium lacrimis*), “spurious vengeance” (*falsa ultione*). Overall, quasi-anger are driven by impressions rather than by judgments; so too is quasi pleasure.

Thirdly, similar to delight, the psychology of children’s quasi-pleasure can also be described and understood in physical terms. During the pre-rational phase, human self-perception or self-consciousness (συνείδησις/συναίσθησις, DL 7.85), as a form of quasi-intelligence, is basically a natural awareness of their bodily constitution, a natural and primal closeness to the body.¹⁸ Ideally, children’s emotional development progresses steadily as their constitution and faculties continue to develop. However, since children relate to their constitution differently, the conditions of the tenor (ἔξις) of πνεῦμα, which determine the psychological state of the ἡγεμονικόν, can vary greatly among them, with most lacking tension in reality. Quasi-emotions as transgressing “Nature” are thus very common in children, just as emotions are common in adults. Both are related to lack of tension and mental weakness, though with different structures of ἡγεμονικόν.

Generally speaking, the peak of an animal’s capabilities is defined by its ability to live efficiently, avoiding actions contrary to its nature, and striving for what aligns and enhances its nature. However, human children differ from animals in their potential to cultivate virtue and develop preconceptions. Despite a similar

¹⁷ Again, it paralleled Chrysippus’ two-opinion analysis in an analogous way: (1) I am wronged; (2) it is appropriate to take vengeance.

¹⁸ Seneca’s well-known definition of an animal’s “constitution” is “the commanding part of the soul disposed to the body in a certain way” (*principale animi quodam modo se habens erga corpus*, Sen. *Ep.* 121.10)

intellectual status, young children carry the “seeds of virtue” (or reason, knowledge) (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.2; Sen. *Ep.* 94.29, 120.4, 124.10) — the primary mental qualities which incline us to pursue primary things in accordance with nature (Cic. *Fin.* 5.17-20 = LS 64G). Furthermore, while animals and infants do not have cataleptic impressions and their understanding of their own constitution is “vague, rudimentary, and unclear” (Sen. *Ep.* 121.12, trans. Graver-Long), older children are able to achieve cataleptic impressions and eventually form “natural concepts”.¹⁹ As the rational faculty progressively develops between ages 7 and 14, children presumably begin to experience the quasi-emotions that are most closely resemble fully-fledged emotions. It seems that the Stoic view of children’s moral development must have been identical to that of Antiochus in *Fin.* 5.43, which says:

T5 Human capacity is so constituted by nature that it appears designed to achieve every kind of virtue; hence children, without instruction, are actuated by semblances of the virtues, of which they possess in themselves the seeds, for these are primary elements of our nature, and they sprout and there comes about a quasi-sprout of virtue (*virtutis quasi germen*). (Cic. *Fin.* 5.43, trans. Rackham, modified)

This resemblance allow children, who possess a basic moral consciousness, to correctly comprehend physical good through observation and experience, and eventually understand the good by analogical “reasoning”. As they mature, the natural and right reason will become the standard, rather than feelings. While all pre-rational children have the potential to develop toward virtue, the Stoic thesis is that what actually happens in nearly all (or maybe all) cases is that we acquire false beliefs about value and become subject to the emotions. If an adult perceives indifferents (especially bodily pleasures) as something good and assents to the false judgement

¹⁹ Brittain convincingly argues that, compared to animals, children “may be conscious more often or of more of their perceptual content” (Brittain, 2002, p. 273, n.57), and through cataleptic impressions, they can develop concepts based on perception, memory, and experience (p. 263, n.34).

underlying them, their reason will go astray. In view of this, it seems convenient to assume, as Galen did, that children's pleasure and the relevant quasi-beliefs arise from a non-rational, affective part or power²⁰ of the soul, contributing to the continuing presence of (quasi-) emotions into adulthood. This topic is subject to long-standing scholarly controversy.²¹ It further highlights the challenge

²⁰ Besides, some consider it an affective soul-part (Long, 2017, p. 39–40; Lorenz, 2011, p. 191–92, 194), while others view it as an independent non-rational power or function (Engberg-Pedersen, 1990, p. 182; Cooper, 1998, p. 73). Fillion-Lahille 1984, Gill 1998, Graver 2007, and particularly Tieleman 2003, advocate for Posidonius' succession to Chrysippus. Although opinions vary widely, current scholarship largely emphasizes Posidonius' adoption of Chrysippus' ideas over their differences.

²¹ According to this interpretation, this kind of emotions continue to exist throughout a person's life, with two types of emotions being possible in adults: as a result of the judgement of the rational part, and as a result of the activity of the non-rational, affective, animal part of the soul (Harriman, 2022). This viewpoint is believed to align with Posidonius' real view, as a revision of Galen's report and comments (Gal.PHP 5.5.21= F 169EK= LS 65M8). However, is it genuinely Posidonius' idea? Does this provide a better explanation of human affective responses and behaviors, and a more accurate depiction of an individual's moral development? This complex question cannot be fully addressed here. Suffices it to say that Posidonius may want to highlight the significant impact of humans' physical and physiological conditions and the resulting mental weakness, which can lead to the proneness to emotion or sickness (εὐκαταφορία) (associated with the postnatal inclination towards pleasure and glory we discussed above) as time progresses (Here I agree with Tieleman's proposal that Posidonius, while describing emotions and underlying weak or diseased character analogous to bodily ailments, employed the notion of proneness to emotion to a much greater extent [Tieleman, 2022, p. 220]). Short temper (ἀκροχολία) is precisely taken as a proneness to sickness by the Stoics (Stob. Ecl. 2.93.1-13 = LS 65S = SVF 3.421). Precipitancy (προπέτεια) is neither a pre-emotion (προπάθος) nor an emotion, but is more akin to a εὐκατάφορος as a ἔξις. Both the precipitant person seeking delight and the child pursuing quasi-pleasure develop certain tendencies due to erroneous impressions. However, for the former, it is the result of acting on impressions and forming hasty beliefs without (adequate) contemplation (it is still rational, based on a weak mind or reason), whereas, for the latter, it is due to lack of proper perception of impressions. The Stoics do not deny that there are so many occasions where a person's mind is not under the control of reason, such as in the case of a drunkard or a madman. This even applies to a wise person who is sleeping, or experiencing pre-emotion due to involuntary, uncontrollable, erroneous first impressions (Also see Long-Sedley, 1987, p. 421). There seems to be no need to presuppose a non-rational, affective, and animal aspect in the human soul, just like there is no need to predefine a plant or god component in the soul.

of capturing the continuity in human emotional development while making a distinction between animals and children within Stoic philosophy.

In order to elucidate the ongoing emotional growth from childhood to adulthood, it is crucial to dig deeper into the Stoic principle of “πρῶτον οἰκεῖον”, as Hierocles deemed it the highest ethical principle. This concept may be connected to the process of human development (called in Stoicism οἰκείωσις/*conciliatio*) by identifying what objects accord with the child's natural constitution. As I will show, as the orientation to one's own constitution, the perception of “πρῶτον οἰκεῖον” (as ἡγεμονικόν) and the resulting impulse to self-preservation are constantly developing throughout life. This not only clearly demonstrates that animals, contrary to the Epicurean position, are not primarily pleasure-oriented, but also significantly bridges the “gap” between the Stoic perspectives on child psychology and rational human behavior. This understanding allow us to delve deeper into how quasi-pleasure interacts with bodily and mental pleasure during human psychological and moral development.

4. Bodily pleasure and primary impulse

In the debate about neonatal motivation, or the primary object of οἰκείωσις, both the Stoics and Epicureans aim to provide insight into the structure and content of the human τέλος (Brunschwig, 1993). Thus, what occurs in infants and non-rational animals not only signifies starting-points but also has a connection to the final end (Cic. *Fin.* 2.11; cf. Klein, 2016, p. 158; Boeri, 2020, p. 140). Specifically, the Stoics view the primary impulse as self-preservation while Epicureans perceive it as the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. The Stoics argue that the tendency to self-preservation precedes the pursuit of pleasure ²² and is determined by the infant's

²² In addition to the argument by Chrysippus (DL 7.85-6 = LS 57A = SVF 3.178) and Hierocles (Hierocl. 1.34-9, 51-7, 2.1-9 = LS 57C2-3), Cicero and Seneca also

innate awareness of its constitution and functions. Pleasure, as a bodily feeling, is merely a byproduct and not a necessity (Clem. *Strom.* 2.491=SVF 3.405), presupposing the living being's affinity with itself.²³ According to the Stoics, both pleasure and pain are outcomes of οἰκείωσις, understood as a form of self-preservation (Sen. *Ep.* 121,6-15=LS 57B; Cic. *Fin.* 3.16-18, 20; SVF 3.182, 187-189). The fear of pain cannot prevent the animals from developing their natural movement either (Sen. *Ep.* 121.5-8). Hence, bodily pleasure cannot be the primary impulse of a living being. This is evident not only in the behaviors of newborns but also throughout their development. The orientation to oneself or one's constitution remains constant throughout life, even as one's constitution and its function are changing and the primary concern is continuously evolving. As Seneca put it:

T6 Each stage of life has its own constitution: one for the baby, another for the child, another for the young person, and another for the mature... So, although each thing's constitution changes, it is attached to its constitution in the same way. (Sen. *Ep.* 121.15-6, trans. Graver-Long)

With varying constitutions at different life stages, one's impulse towards self-love also systematically expands as part of this process, guiding one to perform the corresponding appropriate actions (καθήκοντα). Inwood believes that the Stoics, when discussing “primary impulse” or “primary natural things”, were not envisioning a distinct form of impulse or specific behavior patterns solely characteristic of newborn animals, but included pre-rational humans of all ages. He correctly highlights that the *πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν* are not

evidently advocated for the priority of an animal's self-preservation or self-love over its pursuit of bodily pleasure.

²³ However, unlike his predecessors, as Rist proposes, Chrysippus recognized that pleasure can be an incentive to the achievement of both what has value and what has not. This is particularly the case for *χαρά*, which encourages us to seek the valuable (or preferred) things which bring it about. This allowed Chrysippus to admit the obvious fact that nature aims at pleasure (DL 7.149), while still denying the Epicurean view that pleasure is the first natural aim of man (Rist, 1969, p. 48). His position was largely taken up by most later Stoics.

a collection of infantile desires that evolve into later inclinations (Inwood, 1985, p. 222). In my view, however, Stoic οἰκείωσις is a natural and moral process of developing selfhood in terms of constant adaptation of one's constitution; the primary impulse is not exclusive to pre-rational humans, but a general disposition that guides actions typical for all animals.²⁴ Hence, the primary impulse to self-preservation persists through the whole life of animals. Although the ideal developmental path is for οἰκείωσις to continue to develop as the constitution develops, with other-concern inherent in mature self-love, few can perfectly follow this path.

Galen criticized Epicurus for only recognizing the appropriate relationship belonging to the soul's worst part, i.e., pleasure, while opposing the Stoic belief that children lack a natural tendency towards pleasure. On Galen's tripartite view of the soul, Galen gave us every reason to think that the emergence of reason in one's development from childhood to adulthood does not erase or transform such non-rational capacities. The merely animal goals of pleasure and the desire for victory persist as permanent characteristics of the otherwise rational adult soul (Harriman, 2024, p. 464). However, if we assume a strong correlation between the primary impulse and the τέλος, it follows that the Stoic discourse on human development cannot encompass multiple distinct starting points for human τέλος. More importantly, there is insufficient evidence to suggest a Stoic disagreement on this matter: excessive

²⁴ Contrary to Inwood and other scholars like Julia Annas (Inwood, 1983, p. 190–201; Annas, 1993, p. 265), I embrace the “one οἰκείωσις, one developmental process” view by taking οἰκείωσις as a progressive extension from the relationship one has to oneself and one's parts, to one's offspring, and thence to all other humans (Yu, 2017). On this issue, I concur with Klein's proposal: An animal's impulse to self-preservation, “should not be identified with an impulse to pursue its physical well-being per se, nor with a form of motivation that is radically altered or replaced in the fully rational case. Rather, it should be identified with an impulse to preserve (τηρεῖν) its leading faculty or ἡγεμονικόν in a condition of conformity to nature” (2016, p. 160; cf. Brennan, 2005, p. 164–5).

impulses (emotions) in adults are based on the assent of reason.²⁵ They differentiated between rational and non-rational impulses (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.86= LS 53Q= SVF 3.169),²⁶ and discussed the transformation from non-rational impulse to rational ones.²⁷ Nevertheless, they did not suggest that emotion emerges from the irrational impulse (allegedly motivated by the non-rational part or power of the soul in both children and adults, as Galen claimed) or that it is equivalent to irrational impulse. This partly explains why they maintain that children only experience quasi-pleasure (with non-rational impulses which they cannot fully control) and are rarely, if ever, culpable,²⁸ while insisting that the delights of adults are culpable.

It is now evident that Galen misinterpreted Chrysippus, especially concerning the latter's views on the primary impulse. Galen maintained that young children (and animals) do not just feel anger, distress, and pleasure, but they also laugh and cry, clearly exhibiting a myriad of emotions; their primary impulse is toward pleasure, not towards good (Gal. *PHP* 5.5.2-3). However, as mentioned above, Galen appeared to conflate pleasure as a neutral

²⁵ Plutarch seemed to indicate that Posidonius took an intellectual position by identifying emotions with judgments. See Plut. *SR* 1056B, p. 216. B; Lib. *et aegrit?* 6 (F154 EK).

²⁶ Τὸ δὲ κινεῖν τὴν ὁρμὴν οὐδὲν ἕτερον εἶναι λέγουσιν ἀλλ' ἢ φαντασίαν ὁρμητικὴν τοῦ καθήκοντος αὐτόθεν, τὴν δὲ ὁρμὴν εἶναι φορὰν ψυχῆς ἐπὶ τι κατὰ τὸ γένος. ταύτης δ' ἐν εἶδει θεωρεῖσθαι τὴν τε ἐν τοῖς λογικοῖς γιγνομένην ὁρμὴν καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις· οὐ κατ'ὀνομασμέναι δ' εἰσὶν. “What activates impulse, they [the Stoics] say, is precisely an impression capable of directly impelling a proper function. In genus impulse is a movement of soul towards something. In species it is seen to include both the impulse which occurs in rational animals and the one found in the non-rational; but these species have not been given corresponding names.” (trans. Long-Sedley)

²⁷ Also see Frede 1994. Scholars, however, divide on the link between non-rational and rational forms of motivation in Stoicism. For an excellent discussion on the continuity between the objects of non-rational impulse and the aims of fully rational motivation, see Klein 2016.

²⁸ In the next section on “double perversion,” I will further show why children's quasi-pleasures are rarely culpable, whereas adults should bear greater responsibility in this process (cf. Plat. *Tim.* 87B).

concept with two other forms of pleasure. Stoics recognized pleasure as bodily sensation, but they rejected the idea that children have a natural predisposition towards pleasure. Here in this debate they were more concerned with the impulses triggered by irrational impressions in children, which can cause quasi-emotions, but not emotions.

Galen also overlooked the link between the primary impulse and the changing constitution. He pondered the origin of evil (affinity to victory and pleasure), presupposing that if we are born good, evil should not arise. Therefore, he proposed the existence of a seed of vice within us (Cal. QAM 78.8 Müller=820 K; cf. F 169EK). However, for children disposed to perceive pleasure as the highest good, the weakness of soul in Chrysippus' view²⁹ is exactly the internal triggers for quasi-emotions. The assumption of an inherent seed for vice in humans only complicates training and education.

To sum up the above discussion, I have explained how the quasi-pleasure arises, as a mis-education of the πρώτη ὁρμή. I argue that, in the cases of both children and adults the preservation of one's constitution in accordance with nature is the primary object of appropriation. Humans can deviate from this principle at any point in their lives. In the case of adults, erroneous value judgments can give rise to delight when choosing natural things. Adults may behave like children or even infants by failing to engage in reason(s) (Sen. *Ep.* 4.2, 24.11). As for children, with mis-impressions and non-rational impulses but not reason, they can experience a form of pleasure resembling delight. Influenced by their environment and the nature of things, children with distorted cognition might not choose natural things based on the integrity of the ἡγεμονικόν. Instead, they might initially seek pleasure and avoid pain, even though the impulse to self-preservation should take precedence over pleasure. The process by which the distortion happens is puzzling and requires detailed explanation, which I will offer in the next section.

²⁹ This also applies to the tendency toward sickness (τὸ εὐέμππττον εἰς νόσον) in Posidonius' thoughts.

5. Quasi-pleasure and what is naturally advantageous

As shown above, the Stoics noted that animal and human behavior are alike in that preserving oneself and looking after one's young are natural and appropriate to both (Long-Sedley, 1987, p. 352). However, strictly speaking, only (older) human children can develop the quasi-belief that pleasure is something good. Their souls not only carry the “seeds of virtue” and are inclined to discover what is good, but are also more malleable to the constant influence from the rational beings in both good and bad ways (*Diss.* 4,9.15-16). The question is, how do children come to misidentify neutral sensory pleasure as something good from the very beginning?

In the Stoic view, nature designs us to acquire naturally specific notions or conceptions of things, including the notion of the good. Those notions, which constitute reason, help us to reasonably succeed in orienting ourselves in the world and look for the way things are (Frede, 1999, p. 74). So it is natural for humans to seek what they think is good; yet when children form their concept of the “good,” they often go wrong, failing to see their true nature and selecting things that do not benefit their ἡγεμονικόν, thus missing the beginnings of the good. Almost immediately after birth, they may begin to be drawn into bodily pleasure and imitate adults in pursuing it, leading lives dominated by it rather than by virtue. In doing this, they will set themselves up for the emotions later on, as the erroneous opinion will persist (Chalcid. *In Tim.*c.166= *SVF* 3. 229).³⁰ Indeed, given pleasure's good-like appearance and its motivational power, they may opt for pleasure over virtue and glory over honor when developing their understanding of goodness and acting upon it. According to the Stoics, this misguided preference occurs because of a double perversion (duplicem perversionem, Chalcid. *In Tim.* c.165; Gal. *PHP* 5.5.14-15=F 169EK; DL 7.89). The first source of

³⁰ The relevant Stoic term for this is νοσήματα (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.93.1-13=LS 65S3=SVF 3.421; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.24-33), that is, ingrained dispositional beliefs about the goodness or badness of certain external objects.

corruption (διαστροφή) is the potential for misinterpretation due to the “persuasiveness of external things” (τὰς τῶν ἑξωθεν πραγμάτων πιθανότηας) (DL 7.89; cf. Gal. *PHP* 5.5.19). These external influences are persuasive because pleasure tends to closely resemble or co-occur with objects that preserve our constitution, like a warm bath, drinking milk, or a parent’s embrace (Graver 2012, p. 126; 2016, p. 136). The second source of corruption is the damaging influence of others, which may be due to incorrect demonstrations, guidance, or poor education from parents, nurses, poets, painters, and sculptors. On this point, Calcidius’ explanation of the source of corruption provides a crucial complement to Galen’s perspective.³¹ As Margaret Graver points out, in contrast to Galen, Calcidius recognized that the Stoics offered an explanation for the allure of pleasure, wealth, and the like, despite their not being intrinsically good and irrespective of transmission (2012, p. 126). For our purposes, I will focus on how the process of corruption begins before reason is acquired, embedding the psychological mechanism of quasi-pleasure in a spatiotemporal context.

In ways reminiscent of Plato (*Leg.* 643c, 653a–c)³² and Aristotle (*EN* 1104b8–13), the Stoics also emphasized the importance of cultivating and habituating the right feelings of pleasure and pain in children’s moral development. In the Stoic view, the child should develop accurate perception and appropriate impulse to preserve the constitution; they must recognize the status and value of pleasure and avoid excessive indulgence in pleasurable activities. Regrettably, even newborns bathed in warm water begin to experience bodily pleasure in an inappropriate manner.

T7 This arises both from things in themselves and from the promulgation of what people say. For the moment children separate from the mother’s womb, the birth takes place accompanied by a certain amount

³¹ Further discussions of the twofold causes can be found in Diogenes Laertius (DL 7.89), Origen (C. Cels. 3.69=SVF 2.233) and Cicero (Cic. *Leg.* 1.17.47=SVF 3.229b; Cic. *Tusc.* 3.2).

³² For helpful comments, see Meyer, 2015, p. 209–210.

of pain because of the fact that they move from a warm and moist environment to the cold and dryness of the ambient air. To counteract this pain and cold experienced by babies the specialized care provided by midwives is enlisted in place of medicine... Thus from both sensations equally, pain and pleasure, a kind of natural opinion emerges to the effect that everything soothing and pleasurable is good and, conversely, that what causes pain is bad and to be avoided. As they reach a more mature age, a similar, indeed identical, opinion is maintained with respect to need and satiety; their blandishments and rebukes, which is why once confirmed in that age they persist in an opinion formed earlier, thinking that everything pleasing is good, even if it is of no utility; and everything painful bad, even if it is advantageous. Consequently; they are excessively devoted to wealth, in which they perceive the primary means to pleasure, and embrace glory instead of honor (Chalcid. *In Tim.* c.165-166, trans. Magee).

This text is essential for understanding children's emotional development, particularly how the "opinion" that whatever is pleasing is good arises from the double perversion and then persists, developing into a tendency towards πάθος-ἡδονή (εὐεμπτωσία) and, in time, becomes ingrained —from a quasi-belief into a real belief. Specifically, the first perversion lies in the nature of things and in the interplay between things and the soul, which is reflected in both physical and cognitive aspects of quasi-pleasure. Chrysippus is said to have been perplexed (ἀπορεῖ) as to why even a perfect education does not prevent children from being corrupted and susceptible to emotion. However, he did recognize that (quasi-)emotion involves a complicated psychophysical activity, including both the misleading appearance of externals and the vulnerability of the corporeal soul's conditions. In a similar vein, Posidonius contended that "the affective movements of the soul always follow the state of the body" (τῶν παθητικῶν κινήσεων τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπομένων ἀεὶ τῇ διαθέσει τοῦ σώματος, Gal. *PHP* 5. 5.23). At the physical level, the greatest surge of vices in childhood is related to the concretion of bodily humors — an excess or deficiency can make us more prone to lust and irascibility (Chalcid. *In Tim.* c.167). This relates mainly to their

nature, but is also affected by the uprising. As seen in the case of newborn bathing, the physical πνεῦμα of the embryo solidifies upon cooling during the first breath after birth, thereby acquiring the characteristics of psychic πνεῦμα, especially the appropriate level of tension and strength. Midwives, despite their good intentions, weaken the soul's strength from the start by opposing this natural cooling process (Tieleman, 2003, p. 189). At the cognitive level, the way children perceive pleasure and pain, and represent themselves and things, may become distorted over time, affecting how they recognize different kinds of things in their impressions. As a result, their souls will become too weak to resist any persuasive impressions, gradually developing a proneness towards quasi-emotions.

The second perversion arises from unfavorable environments and flawed education. Children are often imbued with false conceptions of good by adults who present pleasure, wealth, and glory as intrinsic goods or ultimate goals.³³ For instance, while midwives practice rituals like bathing and swaddling newborns to restore their natural constitution, these soothing practices can inadvertently create misconceptions. Since these activities are frequently pleasurable, it is easy for an undeveloped mind to value the pleasure itself rather than the benefits to our bodies' natural functioning and familial harmony (Also see Graver, 2012, p. 126). The "experience-based error" is so prevalent that newborns may start life with incorrect values and imitation of the bad behaviors. The assumption that "everything soothing and pleasurable is good" often becomes almost a "a kind of natural opinion".³⁴ As T7 shows, this early influence helps explain why most people are inclined to misidentify pleasure as the highest good (happiness) in later life: false opinions endure and become

³³ It is worthy to note that these observations about the corrupting environment do not absolve individuals of moral responsibility for their moral states.

³⁴ For a detailed treatment of "a kind of natural opinion," see Tieleman, 2020, p. 199.

ingrained, shaping long-term perceptions and values.³⁵ Cicero noted that “mothers and teachers even punish children for acting or speaking too cheerfully while the house is in mourning; they scold them or even beat them to make them weep” (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.64, trans. Graver). These adults view such emotional responses as “genuinely right and appropriate,” and thus seek to provoke similar emotional reactions from children. As one might expect, instilling these misguided quasi-beliefs in children and having them imitate adult behavior can only distort their perceptions of pleasure and pain and negatively shape their mental disposition.

As we can see, it is a complex developmental process for human children to form the quasi-belief that pleasure is something good. According to some texts, there seem to be no significant differences between young children and certain animals. As Seneca claimed, animals only possess certain impulses which are similar (similes) to emotions, such as traces of friendship and enmity, discord and harmony (Sen. *Ira* 1.3.6).³⁶ This also applies to young children. Nevertheless, unlike animals, the seed of virtue in children continues to grow as they are raised to become potential rational beings within human society. So Epictetus argued that:

T8 It's impossible to resist the charm and exuberance of small children— impossible not to join in their games, crawl on the ground with them, and babble baby talk with them— but who wants to play or bray with a donkey? It may be small, but it's still a small donkey (*Diss.* 2.24.18, trans. Waterfield).

Epictetus's words resonate with Chrysippus' remark that we cannot extend human οἰκείωσις and therefore justice to animals which are not in our society, and are not proper objects of our

³⁵ Of course, this does not imply that virtue cannot be acquired in later life; rather, it underscores the Stoics' commitment to therapy and rehabilitation. For a comparison between the Stoics and Aristotle on this point, see Gill, 2022, p. 160.

³⁶ “*Muta animalia humanis affectibus carent, habent autem similes illis quosdam impulsus. Alioquin si amor in illis esset et odium, esset amicitia et similtas, dissensio et concordia; quorum aliqua in illis quoque exstant vestigia, ceterum humanorum pectorum propria bona malaque sunt*”.

appropriation (Porph. *Abst.* 3.1.4, 3.12.1, 3.19.2). While games are helpful in teaching children appropriate ways to experience pleasure (Sen. *Ira* 2.20.3; cf. Plat. *Leg.* 643c), socialization and education can lead to either good or bad outcomes. Due to the double perversion, children tend to form mistaken opinions about bodily pleasure because it is quite similar to a natural good (Cic. *Leg.* 1.31, 47). That is why Seneca called pleasure “treacherous (*insidiosa voluptate*)” (Sen. *Ep.* 31.2) and Cicero described pleasure as the “imitator of the good and that mother of all bad things”, adding that “those who are corrupted by her flatteries do not sufficiently notice what things are good by nature, because they lack this sweetness and itch” (Cic. *Leg.* 1.47=SVF 3.229b, trans. Fott). All those pose great challenges to child-rearing and education, which are crucial for both nurturing children’s natural inclination towards virtue and protecting them from harmful emotional expressions.

6. Childhood pleasure and education

Concerning the above analysis of the developmental trajectory of children and the double source of corruption, Galen’s assertion that “even if they are brought up in good habits and properly educated, they are always seen to do something wrong” (Gal. *PHP* 5.5.11-2 = LS 65M4) does not seem outrageous. It at least serves to highlight the critical need to develop correct perception of pleasure and pain from the earliest stages of life. That is where education starts. With this in mind, although the Stoic evidence on cultivating childhood pleasure is scarce, this section seeks to draw out the implications for educational theory from the analysis in Sections 2–5. I will argue that even if children’s self-preserving impulse may transform into a pleasure-seeking impulse, pleasure—given its motivational power to achieve valuable things—can positively shape children’s emotional education. It shows that managing quasi-pleasure need not conflict with children’s natural cheerfulness; rather, it underscores the need to foster balanced habituation.

For children who have not yet conceptualized the notion of good, early education should focus on developing the faculty of representation and appropriate impulses. That is, cultivating their ability to distinguish between what is truly good and what only seems good to their constitution, and responding properly to impressions.³⁷ This is possible because children can get correct verbal messages from their teachers and parents and conceptualize their experience in the right way. These practices can help maintain an optimal tension of their psychic πνεῦμα. Apparently, the good character of educators proves essential in this endeavor — a principle so fundamental that Chrysippus advocated for philosophical training even among nursemaids (Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.4–5, 1.1.16).

Conversely, if a proper perception of pleasure and pain is not nurtured, and related and reasonable values are not cultivated, pleasure will be the principle of action in childhood. This situation may significantly impede children’s moral development, as the early-formed predispositions and habits tend to have enduring effects on emotional responses and behaviors throughout life. Many human adults still follow childhood patterns (Sen. *Ep.* 115.8). As Cicero argues, nature has only provided us with the “tiniest sparks of understanding”, which may quickly be put out, as we are distorted by our wrongful habits and beliefs (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.2). In this sense, the source of evil mainly resides within the human mind, not from outside.

However, this does not mean that childhood pleasure cannot play a positive role in emotional education to strengthen one’s mind and develop positive behavioral patterns. Rather, children’s natural inclination towards cheerfulness and ease of satisfaction may contribute to their mental development and overall well-being. As we can see in the account of Chrysippus and Seneca, bodily pleasures

³⁷ A prevalent view posits a distinction between two types of goods - moral good and initial good (Boeri, 2020). However, this stark dichotomy can cause misunderstandings. When a child develops incorrect feelings and opinions about what is beneficial for a living being in the first stages of life, it makes no sense to say that its nature is unperturbed at all.

are natural and good pleasures are valuable. With the help of their educators, children may experience something like quasi-χαρά, though this kind of positive habituation is relatively rare. No wonder Epictetus said that we should clap back when children come up to us clapping their hands and cheering about the Saturnalia (*Diss.* 1.29.31). This does not mean that we should let children indulge in bodily pleasures and rest content with quasi-pleasures. Rather, we need to correct and help them according to their cognitive development level and individual circumstances (*Diss.* 3.19.5). The crucial thing is not to spoil them with too many pleasurable experiences based on wrong beliefs. Hence, Seneca warned of two extremes: excessive indulgence in pleasure and an overly rigid upbringing (Sen. *Ira* 2.20.3). In contrast, “pleasure in moderation (*modica voluptas*) relaxes and balances the mind” (Sen. *Ira* 2.20.3). Children should be allowed to enjoy themselves in moderation rather than being spoiled with excessive pleasure.

Posidonius, who once discussed “the arts of childhood” (Sen. *Ep.* 88.21), apparently made significant contributions in this regard. He argued that children “must be reared and trained in order that the affective and non-rational aspect of the soul (το παθητικόν τε καί αλογον τῆς ψυχῆς) may exhibit due measure in its motions and obedience to the commands of the rational aspect (τό λογιστικόν)” (Gal. *PHP* 5.5.32= F148 EK, trans. De Lacy, modified). While many scholars followed Galen and attempted to interpret this passage through the lens of Plato’s tripartite soul, an alternative interpretation is possible. Simply put, the “affective and non-rational aspect” could be analogously interpreted as the ἡγεμονικόν in its pre-rational state, particularly emphasizing its representative power and impulses.³⁸ It should show proper moderation in its movements, especially concerning pleasure. In contrast, the “rational aspect” could be understood as reason itself, which cannot be identified with the ἡγεμονικόν, yet has the capacity to influence and transform the

³⁸ Hence, for the adult, an important training method is dwelling in advance (προενδημεῖν), which Posidonius suggested for training one’s mind and preventing emotional surges (Gal. *PHP* 4.7.7-9= F165 EK).

ἡγεμονικόν as it develops and matures. Besides enhancing their environment and physical condition, the crucial thing for children is to improve mental condition by focusing on impressions in behavior and bringing about a gradual habituation to it.³⁹ This approach aims to improve the discriminatory capacities of children and prevent the development of incorrect feelings and opinions about what's beneficial in the early stages of life.

Like his Stoic predecessors, Seneca also underscored the importance of early education in shaping a child's emotional development. His insights on preventing children from experiencing quasi-anger are applicable to managing quasi-pleasure as well.⁴⁰ More interestingly, in light of the central position of pleasure in children's lives, managing quasi-pleasures is also important for controlling other quasi-emotions. It involves both physical and mental sides: implementing proper regimens, creating a supportive environment, and offering appropriate guidance to ensure that children's minds are not dominated by pleasure or misguided opinions.

Seneca initially discussed the profound impact of natural endowment (the mixture of elements), physical condition, and mental state on emotional development. For children with a hot temperament, he suggested fostering moderate pleasure to reduce their inclination to anger through diets, exercise, and games (Sen. *Ira* 2.20.2-3). For children with a cold nature, however, the best policy would be to rouse them to joy, as they are more threatened by sluggishness than anger. Clearly, this method of improving physical and mental well-being could potentially be extended to prevent children other quasi-emotions, an idea that aligns with both Platonic and Stoic positions.

While it is hard to change one's nature and avoid certain circumstances, Seneca emphasized that "the most powerful factor is

³⁹ As a later development, Epictetus put great emphasis on training to deal with impressions (*Diss.* 3.8.1; cf. *DL* 7.48).

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Margaret Graver for this suggestion.

habit (*consuetudo*)” (Sen. *Ira* 2.20.2, trans. Cooper-Procope) and the greatest help is “a sound upbringing” (Sen. *Ira* 2.21.1). In view of pleasure’s positive role, Seneca favored a balanced approach to encourage children without excessive praise and joy (*gaudium*).⁴¹ He believed that children should not grow up in constant comfort without experiencing hardship. They should not be allowed to seek pleasure through other quasi-emotions, like anger or sadness. This requires that kindly teachers and tutors who possess good character effectively demonstrate by example to children (Sen. *Ira* 2.21.5-10).

Conclusion

The Stoics, particularly Chrysippus, have been roundly criticized for their dismissal of children’s emotions and for the ambiguity in their stance on child education. Although they claimed that children do not experience genuine emotions, they seem to acknowledge that certain emotional states in children are problematic. The critic Galen tried to resolve this “dilemma” by presupposing a persistent irrational part or power within the soul that was capable of generating emotions. This understanding is said to elucidate the approach to children’s wrongdoing and their education, and account for the intractable wickedness in rational adults.

This paper responds to this criticism through an analysis of the Stoic thinking on the pleasure of children. It argues that the Stoics, in addition to acknowledging neutral sensory pleasure, allow that children experience a form of quasi-pleasure analogous to the emotion delight, which can easily develop into full-fledged emotion in adulthood. However, this quasi-pleasure does not arise from a persisting irrational part of the soul, as Galen maintained, but rather from erroneous perceptions and quasi-beliefs about what the good, which may develop, later in life, into a full-fledged belief. Children, lacking reason, possess impressions, impulses, and weak consent, which can only produce a form of pleasure resembling delight.

⁴¹ Seneca said that “joy leads to exultation, and exultation leads to swelling pride and excessive self-esteem” (Sen. *Ira* 2.21.5).

Without appropriate guidance and a favorable environment, the impulse to preserve the constitution in accordance with nature, which persists across all life stages, may transform during childhood into a pleasure-seeking impulse. Furthermore, desires for glory or wealth can easily derive from the pursuit of pleasure, which closely resembles the genuine good and tends to foster all kinds of emotions as reason matures. To ensure that a child's primary impulse does not focus excessively on pleasure, and to prevent other impulses from becoming excessive later in life, it is important to train and help children to scrutinize their impressions and develop accurate perceptions of pleasure. The best policy would be to let children enjoy themselves in moderation rather than be spoiled with excessive pleasure.

Data availability

Not applicable.

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