

## Academic and Peripatetic Views on Natural and Moderate Passions and a Case of Intertextuality in Plutarch

[Puntos de Vista Académicos y Peripatéticos sobre las Pasiones Naturales y Moderadas y un Caso de Intertextualidad en Plutarco]

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### Abstract

An example of intertextuality in Plutarch and Cicero shows the use of a common source stemming from the treatise *On Grief* of the Academic philosopher Crantor. The use made of this source in both authors reveals a line of reasoning advocating the natural character and utility of certain passions. The advocacy of the natural character of passions is further connected in both Plutarch and Cicero to the normative ideal of 'moderation of passions' (*metriopatheia*) and is contrasted to the Stoic ideal of 'absence of passions' (*apatheia*). This may be further linked to a Plutarchan hermeneutical approach which conflates Academic and Peripatetic ethical views for the sake of constructing an alternative to the Stoic approach towards the elimination of passions. This strategy, which has its starting point in passages in Cicero which draw on Antiochus, is indicative of the way Plutarch connected Platonic and Aristotelian/Peripatetic authority in the domain of ethics in order to answer to Stoic positions in ethics which he found unpalatable.

**Key-Words:** Plutarch, Cicero, *Metriopatheia*, *Apatheia*, Ethics.

### Resumen

Un ejemplo de intertextualidad en Plutarco y Cicerón evidencia el uso de una fuente común que remonta al tratado *Sobre el dolor* del filósofo académico Crantor. El uso de esta fuente en ambos autores revela una línea de razonamiento que defiende el carácter natural y la utilidad de determinadas pasiones. La defensa del carácter natural de las pasiones está relacionada en ambos, Plutarco y Cicerón, con el ideal normativo de la 'moderación de las pasiones' (*metriopatheia*) y contrasta con el ideal estoico de la 'ausencia de pasiones' (*apatheia*). Este debe vincularse con una aproximación hermenéutica de Plutarco que confunde el punto de vista académico y peripatético con la intención de establecer una alternativa a la propuesta estoica de eliminar las pasiones. Esta estrategia, que arranca de pasajes de Cicerón inspirados en Antíoco, ilustra la forma en que Plutarco conectó la autoridad platónica y aristotélica/peripatética en el campo de la ética para dar respuesta a las posiciones éticas del estoicismo que consideraba insostenibles.

**Palabras-clave:** Plutarco, Cicerón, *Metriopatheia*, *Apatheia*, Ética.

# 1. *Crantor in the Consolatio ad Apollonium and Tusculanae Disputationes*

The consolatory letter to Apollonius, which has come down to us in the Plutarchan corpus<sup>1</sup>, contains a collection of quotations from famous poets and other accounts which all contribute to the theme of consolation for evils that befall humans. One of the multiple sources that Plutarch uses are also the philosophical views on the passions from the Academic philosopher Crantor, a member of Plato's Academy before its skeptical turn<sup>2</sup>. Among them is a fragment of Crantor which is quoted at the beginning of the treatise:

μη γὰρ νοσοῖμεν” φησὶν ὁ ἀκαδημαῖκός Κράντωρ, “νοσήσασι δὲ παρὲν τις αἴσθησις, εἴτ’

οὖν τέμνοιτό τι τῶν ἡμετέρων εἴτ’ ἀποσπῶτο. τὸ γὰρ ἀνώδυνον τοῦτ’ οὐκ ἄνευ μεγάλων ἐγγίγνεται μισθῶν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· τετηριῶσθαι γὰρ εἰκὸς ἐκεῖ μὲν σῶμα τοιοῦτον ἐνταῦθα δὲ ψυχὴν. (*Cons. Ap.* 102d7-d12<sup>3</sup>)

May we not become ill,” says Crantor of the Academy, “but if we are ill, may some sensation be present in us, whether one of our members be cut off or torn out. For this insensibility to pain comes to human beings only at a high price; for in the former case, one may assume that one's body has been brutalized, but in the latter case one's soul.

In the above passage, Crantor advocates the value of experiencing bodily pain, presumably because the ability to experience

<sup>1</sup> The treatise has been rejected as spurious on stylistic grounds, see e.g. R. VOLKMANN, *Commentatio de Consolatione ad Apollonium pseudoplutarchea*, Halle 1867, a verdict which is adopted by many modern scholars, cf. e.g. POHLENZ, 1909, pp. 15-19. However, HANI, 1972, pp. 42-49, makes a case for the authenticity of the treatise and defends the view that the stylistic peculiarities of *Cons. ad Apoll.* are due either to the fact that the treatise was written in haste or constitute the preliminary notes for a consolatory work (p. 42). A further argument for the treatise's authenticity is that it makes reference to the concept of ‘moderation of passions’ (*metriopatheia*), which is prominent in a Plutarchan treatise (*De Virtute Morali*) whose authority is not questioned. Focusing on the latter concept, I will treat the *Cons. ad Apoll.* as Plutarchan material.

<sup>2</sup> POHLENZ, 1909, p. 16 suggests that the consolatory work which has come down to us under the name of Plutarch wholly depends on Crantor's *On Grief* and attempts in pp. 15-19 to offer a reconstruction of the latter. For a refutation of POHLENZ's view and the idea that we find in *Cons. ad Apoll.* only scattered fragments of Crantor's work, see HANI, 1972, pp. 46-47. BOYS-STONES, 2013, advocates the more broadly Platonic character of the major consolatory themes which appear in the work and reads it as an attempt to offer an ‘ethical pedagogy’ on the basis of the Platonic dialogues *Alcibiades*, *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*, as exemplified in the late Platonist Olympiodorus' reading of Plato.

<sup>3</sup> I adopt here the punctuation of METTE, 1984, p. 17.

bodily pain is indispensably linked to the ability to experience pleasure as well. Applied to the soul, this alludes to the importance of experiencing psychic passions as indispensable indicators of values which constitute human happiness. The human condition, according to this view, necessarily involves the experience of passions but the latter may also be indispensable for reaching a higher state of human existence. The quotation is supplemented by a line of reasoning advocating the natural basis and corresponding utility of the passion of grief<sup>4</sup>. Thus, it is argued that the ‘the pain and pang felt at the death of a son comes from a natural starting point of grief (φυσικὴν ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς λύπης), over which we have no control (οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν)’<sup>5</sup>. The idea is embedded into a short polemic against unknown opponents (apparently the Stoics) who ‘extol a harsh and callous lack of passions’ (τοῖς ὕμνοῦσι τὴν ἄγριον καὶ σκληρὰν ἀπάθειαν), however such a state is ‘both

impossible and unprofitable’ (ἔξω καὶ τοῦ δυνατοῦ καὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος οὐσαν)<sup>6</sup>.

The impossibility of eradicating passions is premised in the text both on the idea that passionate feelings do not merely depend on us, i.e. on our reason, but have an independent source in the human psyche but also on what may be called a ‘functional’ explanation, according to which passions serve a particular purpose and human utility (as suggested by the use of the word συμφέρον). With regard to the latter, the author draws attention to the detrimental effects that an elimination of passions would have for human life. Thus, a total lack of passions would amount to the impossibility of experiencing states such as the ‘good will’ (εὐνοία), which results from the reciprocal exchange of friendly affection (φιλία) among human beings<sup>7</sup>. Such, however, it is further stated, ‘it is necessary to preserve above all else’ (τὴν παντὸς μᾶλλον διασώζειν ἀναγκαῖον), suggesting that

<sup>4</sup> Although Plutarch’s text does not clearly signal this line of reasoning as deriving from Crantor, one may assume that it is an exact quotation or paraphrase from the same treatise from which the explicit quotation comes from. See also METTE, 1984, p. 17, who prints the whole sequence of the passage as a fragment from Crantor.

<sup>5</sup> *Cons. ad Apoll.* 102c6-8 Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀλγεῖν καὶ δάκνεσθαι τελευτήσαντος υἱοῦ φυσικὴν ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς λύπης, καὶ οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν. Cf. *De virt. mor.* 451c: μέτεστιν οὖν αὐτῷ καὶ τοῦ ἀλόγου, καὶ σύμφυτον ἔχει τὴν τοῦ πάθους ἀρχὴν, οὐκ ἐπεισόδιον ἀλλ’ ἀναγκαίαν οὔσαν, οὐδ’ ἀναιρετέαν παντάπασιν ἀλλὰ θεραπείας καὶ παιδαγωγίας δεομένην.

<sup>6</sup> *Cons. ad Apoll.* 102c5: οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε συμφέρομαι τοῖς ὕμνοῦσι τὴν ἄγριον καὶ σκληρὰν ἀπάθειαν, ἔξω καὶ τοῦ δυνατοῦ καὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος οὔσαν.

<sup>7</sup> On the way goodwill (εὐνοία) is dependent upon an underlying passion akin to empathy, cf. *De virt. mor.* 451e: φιλίας δὲ φιλοστοργίαν ἢ φιланθρωπίας ἔλεον ἢ τὸ συγγαίρειν καὶ συναλγεῖν εὐνοίας ἀληθινῆς οὐδὲ βουλόμενος ἂν τις ἀποσπάσειεν οὐδ’ ἀποτήξειεν.

it is an indispensable part of the human condition<sup>8</sup>. Accordingly, the state of *apatheia* is connected in the quotation of Crantor to the idea of a ‘brutal’ (θηριῶδες) and, in Plutarch’s words, a ‘harsh’ (ἄτεγκτον) soul, which does not befit the image of the noble person.

Crantor’s views, as found in Plutarch’s consolatory treatise, are mirrored, with almost verbatim equivalents, in the third book of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* which is devoted to the discussion of passions<sup>9</sup>. There, Crantor’s views are not embedded into a consolatory epistolary context (as in the case of Plutarch) but feature in a dialectical exercise on the nature and value of passions. Thus, in an exchange between the two interlocutors represented in the manuscripts by the letters A. and M. (in all probability standing for Antiochus and Marcus sc. Tullius Cicero) the latter attributes to his interlocutor the view that grief befalls even the sage<sup>10</sup>. The position is contrasted to the Stoic one, whereas Cicero assumes in the debate the role of the Academic sceptic who opposes the two camps in

order to examine the extent to which each position approximates the truth<sup>11</sup>. As a rationale for the position that grief will befall even the sage, Cicero puts into the mouth of his character the same fragment that we encounter in Plutarch’s *Cons. ad Apoll.* in a Latin translation. The passage reads as follows:

There is some sense in what Crantor says, who was one of the most eminent members of our Academy. ‘I cannot by any means’, said he, ‘agree with those who extol some kind of insensibility (*indolentiam*). Such a thing is neither possible, nor beneficial (*quae nec potest ulla esse nec debet*). ‘Let me escape illness: should I be ill’, he said, ‘let me have the capacity for feeling I previously possessed, if some part of my body is to be cut open or even amputated. For this state of insensibility to pain (*nihil dolere*) comes at a high price (*non sine magna mercede*), namely cruelty in the soul and

<sup>8</sup> *Cons. ad Apoll.* 102c5-d1: ἀφαιρήσεται γὰρ ἡμῶν αὕτη τὴν ἐκ τοῦ φιλεῖσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν εὐνοίαν, ἣν παντὸς μᾶλλον διασφῶζειν ἀναγκαῖον.

<sup>9</sup> Crantor’s fragment is one among multiple themes that Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* shares with the *Cons. ad Apoll.*. For a listing of all the common themes between the two treatises, see GRAVER, 2002, Appendix A.

<sup>10</sup> *Tusculan Disputations* 3.12: *Cadere, opinor, in sapientem aegritudinem tibi dixisti videri. -Et vero ita existimo.*

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cicero’s remarks at *Tusculan Disputations* 4.47. For Cicero’s role in the *Tusculan Disputations* as an Academic sceptic who subjects every philosophical position to dialectical scrutiny, see GRAVER, 2002, p. 84.

callousness in the body (*inmanitatis in animo, stuporis in corpore*). *Tusc.* 3.12-13<sup>12</sup>

In Cicero's restating of Crantor's views the polemical remark for those (sc. the Stoics) who praise 'insensibility' (*indolentia*), which, however, 'neither can nor should exist' (*quae nec potest ulla esse nec debet*) is attributed explicitly to Crantor himself. The phrase mirrors the Plutarchan ἔξω καὶ τοῦ δυνατόυ καὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος οὖσαν and suggests that passions are, on the one hand, dependent upon a source which is not entirely under rational control, and, on the other hand, that they serve a 'functional' role, which suggests that they should not be eliminated. Cicero offers a further variation to Crantor's views by differentiating between two different undesirable effects that result

from insensibility in the case of the body and the soul (thus referring to *stupor* in the case of the body and *inmanitas* in the case of the soul), whereas Plutarch refers to both as a form of 'brutalising', making use of a single verb (τεθηριῶσθαι).

Cicero, similarly to Plutarch, connects the quotation from Crantor to a theory of 'natural' passions. Thus, reporting Crantor's view he states that 'it is nature that causes grief' suggesting that (to a certain extent) we cannot help but surrender to this passion<sup>13</sup>. In line with this, the words of Crantor in *Tusculan Disputations* 3.12 are prefaced by a reference to the 'tender and sensitive' aspect of our soul, which by nature (*natura*) is prone to be shaken by distress (*est natura in animis tenerum quiddam atque molle, quod aegritudine... quatiatur*)<sup>14</sup>. This position is, however, attacked by Cicero with polemical re-

<sup>12</sup> *nec absurde Crantor ille, qui in nostra Academia vel in primis fuit nobilis, 'minime' inquit 'adsentior is qui istam nescio quam indolentiam magno opere laudant, quae nec potest ulla esse nec debet. ne aegrotus sim; si' inquit 'fuero, sensus adsit, sive secetur quid sive avellatur a corpore. Nam istuc nihil dolere non sine magna mercede contingit inmanitatis in animo, stuporis in corpore.'*

<sup>13</sup> *Tusculan Disputations* 3.71: *natura adfert dolorem, cui quidem Crantor, inquit, vester cedendum putat.*

<sup>14</sup> One may compare to these ideas another fragment from Crantor, part of his consolation to a certain Hippocles for the death of his children, which Plutarch cites at *Cons. ad. Apoll.* 104c1-15. There (104c9-15) we find the idea that the mortal seeds participate in the portion of evil which is allocated to humans upon birth and which is responsible for the lack of natural power (ἀφύια) of the human soul, as also for diseases of the body and other calamities: ἡ τ' ἄδηλος αὐτῇ τύχῃ πόρρωθεν ἡμῖν καὶ ἔτ' ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἡκολούθηκεν οὐδ' ἐφ' ἐνὶ ὑγιεί, φυομένοις τε μίγνυται τις ἐν πᾶσι κακοῦ μοῖρα· τὰ γάρ τοι σπέρματα εὐθὺς θνητὰ ὄντα ταύτης κοινωνεῖ τῆς αἰτίας, ἐξ ἧς ἀφύια μὲν ψυχῆς, νόσοι τε καὶ κήδεα καὶ μοῖρα θνητῶν ἐκείθεν ἡμῖν ἔρπει." This seems to chime well with the Plutarchan view that the origin of the passions is to be found in the 'soul itself', i.e. the pre-cosmic soul, which is the source of irrationality and evil, see OPSOMER, 2012, pp. 316-17.

marks in the very next lines of *Tusculan Disputations* 3.13 as appearing to be indulging the ‘weak and soft parts of us’ (*sed videamus ne haec oratio sit hominum adsentantium nostrae inbecillitati et indulgentium mollitudini*)<sup>15</sup>.

Cicero also picks up on the theme of the functional role of passions which emerges from Crantor’s fragment, albeit offering us more ample examples to illustrate the case. In his presentation of the ‘Peripatetic’ view on passions at *Tusculan Disputations* 4.43-46, he discusses the way grief is ordained by nature for the sake of great utility (*non sine magna utilitate a natura... constitutam*), so that one may be pained at the rebuke or punishment or disgrace for wrongdoings<sup>16</sup>. By suffering bites of conscience, it is argued, one is aware of the

value of right conduct. Again, fear of laws, poverty, disgrace, death or pain leads, according to this line of argument, people to adopt a more careful conduct of their lives, directing their decisions towards the right kind of values<sup>17</sup>. The passage ends in a way reminiscent of the language in Crantor’s fragment by stating that ‘it is neither possible nor necessary’ (*nec posse nec opus esse*) to extirpate passions<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. *Metriopatheia* in *De Virtute Morali*

The idea that passions have a natural source and serve a useful aim (according presumably to a teleological plan of nature) underpins further in Plutarch the normative ethical ideal that passions should be moderated, rather than extirpated<sup>19</sup>. Thus, after reassuring

<sup>15</sup> *sed videamus ne haec oratio sit hominum adsentantium nostrae inbecillitati et indulgentium mollitudini*. Cf. *ibid.* 4.38: *Quocirca mollis et enervata putanda est Peripateticorum ratio et oratio, qui perturbari animos necesse dicunt esse, sed adhibent modum quandam, quem ultra progredi non oporteat*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 4.45: *Ipsam aegritudinem, quam nos ut taetram et inmanem beluam fugiendam diximus, non sine magna utilitate a natura dicunt constitutam, ut homines castigationibus reprehensionibus ignominiis adfici se in delicto dolerent. impunitas enim peccatorum data videtur eis qui ignominiam et infamiam ferunt sine dolore; morderi est melius conscientia*. On the educational role of fear and repentance cf. *De virt. mor.* 452c: αὐτούς γε μὴν τούτους ὁρᾶν ἔστι πολλάκις μὲν ἐπαίνοις τοὺς νέους παρορμῶντας πολλάκις δὲ νοουθεσίαις κολάζοντας, ὧν τῷ μὲν ἔπεται τὸ ἡδεσθαι τῷ δὲ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι (καὶ γὰρ ἡ νοουθεσία καὶ ὁ ψόγος ἐμποιεῖ μετάνοιαν καὶ αἰσχύνην, ὧν τὸ μὲν λύπη τῷ γένει τὸ δὲ φόβος ἐστί), καὶ τούτοις μάλιστα χρῶνται πρὸς τὰς ἐπανορθώσεις.

<sup>17</sup> *Tusculan Disputations* 4.46: *metum vero si qui sustulisset, omnem vitae diligentiam sublatam fore, quae summa esset in eis qui leges, qui magistratus, qui paupertatem, qui ignominiam, qui mortem, qui dolorem timerent*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 4.46: *Haec tamen ita disputant, ut resecanda esse fateantur, evelli penitus dicant nec posse nec opus esse et in omnibus fere rebus mediocritatem esse optimam existiment*.

<sup>19</sup> BECCHI, 2005, pp. 388-400 shows that Babut’s opinion that Plutarch in some passages contradicts his defence of *metriopatheia* by defending the total absence of passions



Apollonius that grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a son, Plutarch goes on to say that what is ‘against nature’ (παρὰ φύσιν) is when grief goes ‘beyond measure’ (πέρα τοῦ μέτρου) and results in a passionate exaggeration<sup>20</sup>. The state that is commended is expressed in a single word with the concept of ‘moderation of passions’ (*metriopatheia*), a word which may well postdate Crantor himself<sup>21</sup>. This again finds an equivalent in Cicero. Thus, in the reconstruction of Old Academic views in the *Lucullus* 135 *metriopatheia* (translated in Cicero’s Latin as *mediocri-*

*tas*) is connected to Crantor’s treatise and to the ‘functional’ explanation of passions which was defended there<sup>22</sup>.

In the less rhetorical context of Plutarch’s treatise *De virt. mor.* one may find Plutarch’s preoccupation with the idea of the ‘right measure’ of passions, as also an attempt to present it as a fundamental tenet of both the Academy and the Peripatos<sup>23</sup>. Although *metriopatheia* itself is a post-Aristotelian term<sup>24</sup>, it seems applicable to a central idea found in Aristotle, namely that virtue of character is a kind of *mesotēs*

(*apatheia*) cannot be sustained. The commendable kind of *apatheia* turns out to be identical to the Academic (and Peripatetic) ideal of *metriopatheia*. This seems to result from the ambiguity of *pathos* as relating to both a neutral and an excessive state.

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch refers at *Cons. ad Apoll.* 113b9-13 to the ‘barbarian’ practice of mutilating parts of one’s body in order to gratify the dead as a passionate exaggeration which departs from the ‘moderation of passions which is according to nature in such cases’ (ἀπαρτῶμενοι τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις μετριοπαθείας).

<sup>21</sup> See METTE, 1984, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> *mediocritates illi probabant et in omni permotione naturalem volebant esse quendam modum. legimus omnes Crantoris veteris Academici de luctu; est enim non magnus verum aureolus et ut Tuberoni Panaetius praecipit ad verbum ediscendus libellus. atque illi quidem etiam utiliter a natura dicebant permotiones istas animis nostris datas, metum cavendi causa, misericordiam aegritudinemque clementiae.* Crantor’s treatise is also quoted at *Tusculan Disputations* 1.115; cf. D.L. 4.27. For the use of Crantor’s treatise as a source by Cicero see GRAVER, 2002, Appendix A. DILLON, 2003, p. 225 claims that there is a Polemonian underpinning for Crantor’s views relating to the idea that passions are according to nature (*kata physin*).

<sup>23</sup> On the way *De virt. mor.* incorporates Aristotelian/Peripatetic features, such as the bipartition of the soul into a rational and irrational element or the positive role of the passions, into an anti-Stoic polemic, see BECCHI, 1990, pp. 43-48, who also argues against the association of the treatise with ‘middle Platonism’ (ibid. pp. 37-43).

<sup>24</sup> As DILLON, 2003, p. 227, n.123 notes the word *metriopatheia*, as opposed to *apatheia*, is not attested before Philo of Alexandria (*Abr.* 255-7). He further notes, however, that we cannot be sure that it does not go back to the earliest phase of Academic opposition to Stoic *apatheia*. It first appears in (post) Hellenistic literature in connection with Aristotelian ethics in the Peripatetic doxography of Diogenes Laertius (5.31), where we read with reference to the Aristotelian sage: ἔφη δὲ τὸν σοφὸν ἀπαθῆ μὲν μὴ εἶναι, μετριοπαθῆ δέ.

(a mean state in a continuum with extremes of excessiveness and deficiency) which relates both to *pathē* and actions<sup>25</sup>. Still, the Aristotelian position of a 'mean state' is more nuanced since it does not refer to an absolute mean state but one that is adjusted to the circumstances at hand in line with the dictates of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)<sup>26</sup>. The adjective 'moderate' (*metrion*) does not point to a mathematical intermediate such as the 'mean' (*meson*) and also does not necessarily presuppose two extreme points of exaggeration and deficiency. *Metriopatheia* is thus a more apt term to refer more generally to the idea of limitation and ordering, which seems to be applicable to both the traditions of the Academy and the Peripatos<sup>27</sup>.

In *De virt. mor.* the idea of putting the right measure to passions is embedded into a larger context, which highlights

the way this view corresponds to a dualistic psychological model which differs fundamentally from the Stoic one. Throughout the treatise, Plutarch sees a fundamental agreement between Plato and Aristotle in that they both allow for the existence of a passionate part in the human soul, which should be subject to control rather than be eradicated<sup>28</sup>. This is compatible with Plutarch's dominant Platonist orientation. Thus, the treatise shows how the moderation of passions corresponds to Platonic cosmological considerations about measure and limit as a principle of order. Accordingly, Plutarch refers to Plato's *Timaeus* and the double nature of the soul involving both a non-rational and a rational element (imposed by the Demiurge on the original soul), represented by the circles of the 'same' and the 'different'<sup>29</sup>. This is followed by

<sup>25</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1106b16-18: λέγω δὲ τὴν ἠθικὴν· αὕτη γὰρ ἐστὶ περὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις, ἐν δὲ τούτοις ἔστιν ὑπερβολὴ καὶ ἄλλειψις καὶ τὸ μέσον.

<sup>26</sup> On the differences between the *metriopatheia* ascribed by Cicero to the Peripatetics and the actual Aristotelian position see also GRAVER, 2002, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> Plutarch uses both terms *metrion* and *meson* at *De prof. virt.* 84a: ἡμῶν δὲ δεῖται μὲν πῶς τὰ ἄνω καὶ τὰ κάτω περικοπῆς, εἰ μέλλομεν εἰς τὸ μέσον καθίστασθαι καὶ μέτριον. One may note that there are some Platonic passages, which seem to anticipate the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue as a mean, see e.g. *Politicus* 284eff.: Δῆλον ὅτι διαιροῦμεν ἂν τὴν μετρητικὴν, καθάπερ ἐρρήθη, ταύτῃ δίχα τέμνοντες, ἐν μὲν τιθέντες αὐτῆς μόριον συμπάσας τέχνας ὁπόσαι τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ μήκη καὶ βάθη καὶ πλάτη καὶ ταχυτῆτας πρὸς τοῦναντίον μετροῦσιν, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον, ὁπόσαι πρὸς τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸν καιρὸν καὶ τὸ δέον καὶ πάνθ' ὁπόσα εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀφικίσθη τῶν ἐσχάτων.

<sup>28</sup> As DILLON, 1983, p. 511 notes, the main issue surrounding the debate of *metriopatheia* and its opposing term *apatheia* turns on the structure of the soul.

<sup>29</sup> *De virt. mor.* 441f. On the way the individual soul mirrors the cosmic soul and on the cosmological foundation of Plutarch's views on *metriopatheia* in *De virtute morali* see FERRARI, 2011, p. 34. Cf. OPSOMER, 2012, pp. 320-21.



a reference to the tripartite soul of the *Republic* and the suggestion that this tripartite division maps onto the bipartite Aristotelian division between a rational and a 'passionate' part of the soul<sup>30</sup>.

At the same time, Plutarch resorts in particular to Aristotelian material to make a case for the moderation of passions<sup>31</sup>. He makes thereby use of the etymological derivation of *ēthos* (character) from *ethos* (habit), which prefaces Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1<sup>32</sup>. The connection of *metriopatheia* with a dualistic moral psychology seems further to fit with the Aristotelian position that rationality supplements, directs and organizes passionate and motivational forces but does not substitute them. The latter still remain a necessary condition for virtuous action and provide orientation for reason to

process into full-fledged reasons for action. Plutarch refers in this context to the way judgment (*krisis*) needs impulse in order to bring about actions<sup>33</sup>.

Further, Plutarch points in this context also to the difference between self-control and temperance on the one hand, and incontinence and vice on the other. This is a way to defend the dualistic moral psychology of the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition on the basis of phenomenology and shared experience. Thus, the fact that we differentiate between these states is sufficient proof for him that there is a difference between a rational and non-rational part of the soul<sup>34</sup>. Plutarch also uses the charioteer analogy from the *Phaedrus* in order to show that Plato anticipated Aristotle in making the relevant distinctions: thus, the passionate part of the soul of a temperate person is illustrated as guided by

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 442b: ταύταις ἐχρήσατο ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ἐπὶ πλέον Ἀριστοτέλης, ὡς δὴλόν ἐστιν ἐξ ὧν ἔγραψεν· ὕστερον δὲ τὸ μὲν θυμοειδὲς τῷ ἐπιθυμητικῷ προσένειμεν, ὡς ἐπιθυμίαν τινὰ τὸν θυμὸν ὄντα καὶ ὄρεξιν ἀντιληψέως. On the introduction of the tripartition of the soul in *De virtute morali* on the basis of a consideration of Plato's *Republic* and on the way Plutarch 'shifts' this idea in a way that leads to the endorsement of the Aristotelian division of a rational and an irrational 'part' of the soul see OPSOMER, 2012, pp. 321-22.

<sup>31</sup> For a general overview of Aristotelian/Peripatetic elements in Plutarch's ethics, see BECCHI, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *De virt. mor.* 443c: Διὸ καὶ καλῶς ὠνόμασται τὸ ἦθος. ἔστι μὲν γάρ, ὡς τύπῳ εἰπεῖν, ποιότης τοῦ ἀλόγου τὸ ἦθος, ὠνόμασται δ' ὅτι τὴν ποιότητα ταύτην καὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἔθει λαμβάνει τὸ ἄλογον ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου πλαττόμενον.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 444a-b: τῷ δὲ πρακτικῷ τὸ βουλευτικὸν ἐκδεχομένην ἐνεργεῖν ἤδη καὶ τοῦ ἀλόγου συμπάροντος καὶ συνεφελομένου ταῖς κρίσεσιν. ὁρμῆς γὰρ δέονται.

<sup>34</sup> *De virt. mor.* 445b: Ἐν ᾧ δὴ καὶ μάλιστα δοκεῖ τὸ ἄλογον τῆς πρὸς τὸ λογικὸν διαφορᾶς αὐτοῦ παρέχειν κατανόησιν, καὶ δεικνύειν τὸ πάθος ὡς ἕτερόν τι κομιδῇ τοῦ λόγου ἐστίν. οὐ γὰρ ἂν διέφερε σωφροσύνης ἐγκράτεια, καὶ ἀκολασίας ἀκρασία περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας, εἰ ταῦτόν ἦν τῆς ψυχῆς ᾧ ἐπιθυμεῖν ᾧ τε κρίνειν πέφυκε.

reason like a gentle animal obedient to the reins, willingly receptive of moderation and propriety<sup>35</sup>. By contrast the self-controlled person while she directs her desire by reason, yet does not do so without pain, but resists, being full of internal struggle and turmoil<sup>36</sup>. Reference to the Platonic simile ends with the idea that self-control is not a virtue in the absolute sense but ‘less than virtue’ (ἐλαττον ἀρετῆς)<sup>37</sup>, which is reminiscent of the Aristotelian rejection of a virtue of *egkrateia*, the latter being characterised as a ‘middle state’ between virtue and vice<sup>38</sup>.

The reference to specifically Aristotelian views on moral psychology concludes at *De virt. mor.* 443c with the statement that reason does not aim at completely eradicating passion but on imposing on it ‘some limit and order’ (ὅρον τινὰ καὶ τάξιν). The subsequent remark that ‘it is neither possible nor better (i.e. more expedient)’ (οὔτε γὰρ δυνατόν οὔτ’ ἀμεινόν) to eradicate passion completely is

again reminiscent of the phrase ‘both impossible and unprofitable’ (ἔξω καὶ τοῦ δυνατοῦ καὶ τοῦ συμφέροντος οὔσαν), which we encountered in the *Cons. ad Apoll.* The passage ends by defining moral virtues as ‘due proportions and mean states’ (συμμετρίας παθῶν καὶ μεσότητος) which connects the Aristotelian idea of a ‘mean state’ with the mathematical ideal of ‘proportion’ (*symmetria*)<sup>39</sup>. Later on in his treatise, Plutarch alludes to his ideas about the ‘original soul’ as the source of movement (and the origin of passions) by making explicit reference to the way reason limits the ‘passionate movement’ (παθητικὴν κίνησιν) and brings about in the irrational part of the soul the moral virtues which are mean states between deficiency and excess<sup>40</sup>.

### 3. The ‘harmony’ of Plato and Aristotle and the value of passions

One may ask how Plutarch justifies the blending of Platonic and Aristotelian

<sup>35</sup> Cf. OPSOMER, 2012, p. 325.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 445c: οἷον ὁ Πλάτων ἐξεικονίζει περὶ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ὑποζύγια, τοῦ χειρόνος πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ζυγομαχοῦντος ἅμα καὶ τὸν ἡνίοχον διαταράττοντος ἀντέχειν ὀπίσω καὶ κατατείνειν ὑπὸ σπουδῆς ἀναγκαζόμενον αἰεὶ.

<sup>37</sup> ὅθεν οὐδ’ ἀρετὴν ἀξιοῦσιν αὐτοτελεῆ τὴν ἐγκράτειαν ἀλλ’ ἐλαττον ἀρετῆς εἶναι.

<sup>38</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1128b34-35: οὐκ ἔστι δ’ οὔδ’ ἡ ἐγκράτεια ἀρετὴ, ἀλλὰ τις μικτή.

<sup>39</sup> *De virt. mor.* 443c: οὐ βουλομένου τὸ πάθος ἐξαιρεῖν παντάπασιν (οὔτε γὰρ δυνατόν οὔτ’ ἀμεινόν), ἀλλ’ ὅρον τινὰ καὶ τάξιν ἐπιτιθέντος αὐτῷ καὶ τὰς ἠθικὰς ἀρετάς, οὐκ ἀπαθείας οὔσας ἀλλὰ συμμετρίας παθῶν καὶ μεσότητος, ἐμποιοῦντος. At 444eff. Plutarch connects the idea of *symmetria* with musical harmony and attunement: γίνεται δὲ μεσότης καὶ λέγεται μάλιστα τῇ περὶ φθόγγους καὶ ἀρμονίας ὁμοίως. For Plutarch’s use of the harmony metaphor and the way in which he connects the latter with the Peripatetic doctrine of moral virtue as a mean see also OPSOMER, 2012, p. 326.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 444c: οὕτως δ’ ὀρίζων τὴν παθητικὴν κίνησιν ἐμποιεῖ τὰς ἠθικὰς ἀρετάς περὶ τὸ ὄλογον, ἐλλείψεως καὶ ὑπερβολῆς μεσότητος οὔσας.

views in his discussion about the nature of moral virtue. To be sure, Plutarch's primary philosophical allegiance is a Platonic one. He is a pioneer of Platonic exegesis in the way he reads Plato in his *On the Creation of the Soul according to the Timeaus* (*De An. Procr.*), attempting to establish unity and consistency among the dialogues, while also doing justice to the aporetic character of Platonic philosophy. However, his exegetical stance also grants him considerable freedom with regard to Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition as well. That is, even if Plato is recognized as the supreme philosophical authority, and as the originator of philosophical truth, there is still room to accommodate specifically Aristotelian, or more generally Peripatetic views, into his philosophical expositions. It seems that this is particularly the case in ethics, where Aristotelian/Peripatetic views may seem to systematize and develop in a more elaborate way Platonic insights<sup>41</sup>.

The origin of the hermeneutical stance which permits the connection of Peripatetic ideas with the exposition of

Academic philosophy may be detected in Cicero as well and, in all probability, reflects the teaching of Cicero's teacher Antiochus of Ascalon, the first one to turn to a dogmatic reading of Plato in the first century BCE. Thus, in Varro's (the spokesperson of Antiochus) exposition of the 'old Academic' system of philosophy in the second edition of Cicero's *Academic Books*, we find a similar attempt to present a unified system of doctrines for both the Academy and the Peripatos. A positive attitude towards the passions and an accommodation of them in the ideal of virtue is one of the points which are included in the fundamental doctrines of the 'Old Academy'. Thus, in a passage which contains the main headings of 'old Academic' views on ethics, passions are presented as 'natural' and in the same breath it is stated that the 'ancients' endorsed a psychological dualism which placed desire and reason in different parts of the soul; to this, Varro contrasts Zeno and his view that passions are voluntary and (merely) an outcome of judgments<sup>42</sup>. Even though the strategy of 'co-opting'

<sup>41</sup> For the way Aristotle, as the founder of the Peripatetic philosophical tradition, functions as a 'privileged ally' for the 'Platonist' Plutarch and his attacks against other schools (especially in *De Virtute Morali*), see ROSKAM, 2009, pp. 41-42. Cf. OPSOMER, 2012, p. 316. For a further analysis of Plutarch's endorsement of the idea of Platonic and Aristotelian 'harmony' (especially in the case of ethics), see KARAMANOLIS, 2006, pp. 115-123. As ROSKAM, 2009, p. 28-29 argues, however, KARAMANOLIS does not do justice to the 'auxiliary' role that Aristotle's doctrines have for the elucidation of Plato's views. BECCHI, 1990, p. 46-48, on the other hand, defends the predominantly Aristotelian (or rather 'middle Aristotelian') character of *De virt. mor.*, leaving the aim of reconciliation with Platonic views aside.

<sup>42</sup> *Academic Books* 38-9: *cumque perturbationem animi illi (sc. Academici et Peripatetici) ex homine non tollerent naturaque et condolescere et concupiscere et extimescere et effferri*

Aristotelian or Peripatetic ideas to convey the views of Plato (or, in the case of Antiochus, those of the old Academy as whole) is similar in both Plutarch and Antiochus, one should not overlook that there are crucial differences between the two thinkers with regard to their philosophical identity and their approach towards Plato's authority<sup>43</sup>.

A last example from Plutarch's treatment of the topic of the moderation of passions suggests that his views, while aiming at conveying the (unified) tradition of the Academy and the Peripatos, developed in close interaction with the Stoic positions on the passions as well. This may be seen in

the way Plutarch endorses what one may call a cognitive explanation for excessive passions, which, contrary to their 'natural' counterparts, are reproachable and do not befit the sage. Thus, Plutarch argues explicitly that, in the case of excessive grief, passionate excessiveness results in the soul by virtue of a 'bad belief in us' (ὕπὸ τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν φαύλης γίνεσθαι δόξης)<sup>44</sup>. Whereas this excessive passionate reaction should be dismissed as 'injurious and base' (βλαβερὸν καὶ φαῦλον) and 'not befitting the noble man' (σπουδαίσις ἀνδράσιν ἥκιστα πρέπον), one should not disapprove of a 'moderation of passions' (*metriopatheia*)<sup>45</sup>. Although

*laetitia dicerent, sed ea contraherent in angustumque deducerent, hic omnibus his quasi morbis voluit carere sapientem. cumque eas perturbationes antiqui naturales esse dicerent et rationis expertes aliaque in parte animi cupiditatem alia rationem collocarent, ne his quidem assentiebatur.* For a discussion of the passage see also BONAZZI, 2009, pp. 46-47.

<sup>43</sup> Antiochus' identity is more inclusive since he identifies himself as an '(old) Academic', whereas Plutarch identifies himself as a Platonist. For the peculiar approach of Antiochus towards Platonic authority see TSOUNI, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> For a parallel see Aspasius' *In EN* 44.20-24 Heylbut, where πάθος is described as 'an irrational movement of the soul owing to a *supposition* of good and bad' (πάθος εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς κίνησιν ἄλογον δι' ὑπόληψιν κακοῦ ἢ ἀγαθοῦ). The cognitivist interpretation of excessive passions may also be traced at Cicero's *De Finibus* 5.28-9 as part of Antiochus' account of Peripatetic ethics. Antiochus' views suggest that in the case of grief, erotic passion, or excessive anger, the underlying cause of the passion is the supposition that such an attitude is 'most to the agent's interest', and is thus the mark of a vicious character: *neque enim, si non nulli reperiuntur, qui aut laqueos aut alia exitia quaerant aut ut ille apud Terentium, qui 'decrevit tantisper se minus iniuriae suo nato facere', ut ait ipse, 'dum fiat miser', inimicus ipse sibi putandus est. sed alii dolore moventur; alii cupiditate, iracundia etiam multi efferuntur et, cum in mala scientes inruunt, tum se optime sibi consulere arbitrantur. itaque dicunt nec dubitant: 'mihi sic usus est, tibi ut opus est facto, fac'*. Still, the Antiochean views (specifically) at *De Finibus* 5 do not suggest any endorsement of *metriopatheia*, see BRUNNER, 2014, pp. 199-202.

<sup>45</sup> *Cons. ad Apoll.* 102d2-7: τὸ δὲ πέρα τοῦ μέτρου παρεκφέρεσθαι καὶ συναύξειν τὰ πένθη παρὰ φύσιν εἶναι φημι καὶ ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν φαύλης γίνεσθαι δόξης. διὸ καὶ τοῦτο

the passage fails to refer explicitly to the way in which such moderation is effected, we may assume that this role is played by (right) reason, which holds the passionate impulses ‘within bounds’.

It is suggestive that the concession that reproachable passions are due to false beliefs seems to derive from considerations coming from the Stoic camp<sup>46</sup>. Thus, Cicero, reporting a Stoic line of reasoning at *Tusculan Disputations* 3, entertains the view that the belief (*opinio*) that one should mourn in an excessive way brings about ‘deep grief’ (*gravis aegritudo*)<sup>47</sup>. The Stoic position considers passions as states of a single psychological aspect, which the Stoics identify with the leading part of the soul (*hēgemonikon*), which in humans is utterly rational. What underlies all passions according to the Stoic view is merely a rational impulse

guided by a false judgement, which takes hold of the soul becoming strong and overpowering<sup>48</sup>. The ideal for the Stoic sage is to entertain no false beliefs and corresponding passions, a state captured by the word *apatheia*.

Further, by exploiting the ambiguity of the word *pathos* in its Academic/Peripatetic use (both as something which can be excessive and reproachable but also as something which can be natural and within bounds), Stoics polemically identified all the uses of *pathos* with its negative version. The implication of this strategy, most prominent in Ciceronian passages which dialectically advocate the Stoic position, was the claim that the idea of moderate passion makes no sense, since passions are *inherently* excessive<sup>49</sup>. This sparked reactions of the type recorded in Plutarch, who stresses that excessive passions,

μὲν ἑατέον ὡς βλαβερὸν καὶ φαῦλον καὶ σπουδαίοις ἀνδράσιν ἥκιστα πρέπον, τὴν δὲ μετριопάθειαν οὐκ ἀποδοκμαστέον.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. DILLON, 1983, p. 511.

<sup>47</sup> See *Tusculan Disputations* 3.61: *Sed ad hanc opinionem magni mali cum illa etiam opinio accessit oportere, rectum esse, ad officium pertinere ferre illud aegre quod acciderit, tum denique efficitur illa gravis aegritudinis perturbatio.*

<sup>48</sup> See the way Plutarch reports the Stoic position at *De virt. mor.* 441d: καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάθος εἶναι λόγον πονηρὸν καὶ ἀκόλαστον ἐκ φαύλης καὶ διημαρτημένης κρίσεως σφοδρότητα καὶ ῥώμην προσλαβούσης. Cf. *ibid.* 447a.

<sup>49</sup> On this point is based the dialectic of the *Tusculan Disputations* at 3.22. There, the alleged absurdity of the Peripatetic position, consisting in the moderation of passions (*mediocritates*), is compared to the absurdity of praising the moderation of bodily illness: *nam Peripatetici, familiares nostri, quibus nihil est uberius, nihil eruditius, nihil gravius, medicocritates vel perturbationum vel morborum animi mihi non sane probant. omne enim malum, etiam mediocre, malum est; nos autem id agimus, ut id in sapiente nullum sit omnino. nam ut corpus, etiamsi medicocriter aegrum est, sanum non est, sic in animo ista medicocritas caret sanitate.* Cf. also *Ibid.* 4.41-42.

which occur under the influence of false beliefs, do not comply with the utility ordained by nature and are reprehensible states which should be differentiated from the measured passionate ones<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> BONAZZI, 2009, p. 49 argues that Antiochus based his critique of the Stoics on the same point as well. For another dialectical instance in the debate between the Academic-Peripatetic camp and the Stoics, see a definition of passion ascribed to Aristotle in the late Hellenistic doxography of (Ar.?) Didymus, which survives in Stobaeus. There, passion is defined as an irrational movement of the soul which can admit of excess (ἄλογος ψυχῆς κίνησις πλεοναστική). This can be contrasted with the Stoic definition of πάθος as a ὁρμή πλεονάζουσα, an impulse *already* grown to excess. See (Ar.?) Didymus apud Stobaeus, *Eclogai* 2.7.1.20-25 (p. 38.18-24 W.): Πάθος δ' ἐστίν, ὡς μὲν Ἀριστοτέλης, ἄλογος ψυχῆς κίνησις πλεοναστική (...) τὸ δὲ 'πλεοναστικόν' κατὰ τοῦ πεφυκότος ἐπιδέχσθαι πλεονασμόν, οὐ κατὰ τοῦ ἡδὴ πλεονάζοντος.



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