

## BOOK REVIEW

*Pain and Pleasure in Classical Times*. Edited by W. V. HARRIS. Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 44. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2018. Pp. XII + 264. Hardback. ISBN: 978-90-0437949-7.

Food, drink, and sex are primal pleasures. In this volume of twelve essays, these necessary animal activities receive attention alongside viewing art and hearing music, sleeping, solving puzzles, and *epichairekakia* (Aristotle and Plutarch's term), now known in English as *schadenfreude*. Academic philosophers produced eight of the essays, over half the pages, (mostly) delivered at a 2015 Columbia University conference. They discuss theories of emotional, physical, sensual and imagined pain and pleasure. The editor contributes a helpful introduction to two vast subjects, not necessarily dichotomous, inscribed in the recently productive "sensorial turn."

James Davidson wittily, if too generally, discusses Greek views of the origins of pleasures such as sexual intercourse, bread and wine. V. Boudon-Millot analyzes medical literature—that vast expanse of dry but inadequately explored territory of observation, magic and misinformation. Doctors comment about the nature and role of patients' pains and pleasures. She explores the place of pain (before chemical anesthesia) for physiological gain in therapeutics: gentle remedies are best, a doctrine found already in Homer and Herodotus (48). She also explores Galen's analysis of the effect of grief on health.

Harris' contribution pursues the relationship of pain to medicine, etiologies, pain management and imagined cures (contrary to more optimistic, recent scholarship), futile analyses and regretful prognoses. Opiates appear rarely in the analgesic texts, and difficulties bedevil identifying ancient plant names from the *materia medica* with vegetation still growing: "Celsus is plainly groping in the dark, like his Hippocratic predecessors" (69). Harris discounts ancient medical success rates and asks interesting questions about whether patients in the ancient world were as sensitive to or intolerant of pain as contemporaries now are—given our cornucopia of pain-killers and -alleviators. Caroline Wazer looks at the Roman *medicus* from Pliny's negative assessment of the Methodist school. She finds Pliny self-

contradictory and over-simplifying. Pliny thought this sect was more interested in pleasant than effective cures—i.e., quacks (84-7, citing *NH* 26.26-17). Indeed, the impression of ancient non-medical texts is that doctors—incompetent or immoral—were good for three jobs: analyzing love-sickness, providing poison and resuscitating the dead (viz, the seven surviving novels). Ancient medical “experts” commanded but a modest therapeutic arsenal of analgesics and could barely imagine internal surgeries. Doctors still often guess in the dark. Wazer suggests that Pliny’s distrust of Greek doctors and confidence in Italic folk medicine led the layman astray.

Katja Vogt asks “What is Hedonism” in a tightly argued paper. She manages to survey Plato’s and Aristotle’s, Epicurus’ and Stoic Seneca’s inherited doctrines and personal assertions about pleasures and calculations of pleasure. The philosophers rarely distinguished a life *accompanied by* pleasure from one lived *for* pleasure (cf. *Thuc.* 1.120.4, 2.37.2). Aristotle emerges as less hostile to “sophisticated” forms of hedonism than has often been alleged (103-4 citing *NE* 7.14). The philosophers often cite “bad pleasures,” coarser and more sensual, but will admit (except Stoics) good pleasures in knowledge, reflection and mathematical problems. Hedonism as a doctrine, she points out and Cheng agrees, forced other philosophers to scratch their heads productively. W-R Mann and V. de Harven struggle with Socrates’ apparently contradictory allegations about pleasure and the unity of the soul in Plato’s *Protagoras*. They ponder whether the dialogue presents the historical Socrates, the Platonic-pawn character, or Plato’s mere mouthpiece (137)—their view is “maximally charitable.” They conclude that in this dialogue Socrates “never commits himself to any form of hedonism” (113). Indeed hedonism—whether the psychological, evaluative or prescriptive variety—is Socrates’ convenient hammer to use against Protagoras and “the many.”

Elizabeth Asmis defends Lucretius’ notorious pleasure (*suave, nihil dulcius, voluptas*) in watching storm-troubled sailors, or armies clashing while you are safe (*DRN* 2.1-13). Does he feel condescension, pity or contempt? She believes that such base self-satisfaction constitutes first steps on the path trod while tracking carefree and fear-free wisdom. Perhaps it provides an analogue to the doctor’s honeyed cup-rim before ill children drink bitter potions (144, citing 1.942). How ironic, given how little help doctors provided, according to Harris and Boudon-Millot. She concludes that the pedagogue Lucretius is bantering, encouraging his less than fully attentive student, Memmius. Sam McVane ponders Seneca’s experience of joy and grief in *de vita beata* and in his frigid consolations. Joy (*gaudium*) is good if born from virtuous actions, *voluptas* bad when gross pleasures or others’

pain produce it. “There is an affective phenomenology to thinking in a certain way” (163). Or, in Stoic talk: “Real joy is a serious matter” (Sen. *Ep.* 23.4).

Wei Cheng illuminates the Severan-age philosopher/commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias’ discussion of pleasure and pain in Aristotle’s corpus (especially *EN* 7 and 10). His (?) *Problemata Ethica*, explored the difficulties of “supervenience” (*epiginomenon ti*). Pleasure is *epiphenomenal* to certain activities, not inherent. Cheng claims that Alexander wished “to ‘purify’ Aristotle’s analysis from even the slightest hedonistic hint” (185), although contemporary scholars think differently. Aristotle fails to supply a satisfactory account of pain (182). The essay imperfectly suits the general audience that the cover blurb envisions. David Konstan’s “On Grief and Pain” intelligently explores a subdivision of pain, emotional disturbance at loss of a person (or thing). A discussion of the emotions in *Rhetoric* 2 clarifies that pleasure and pain are not emotions but “constituents of emotions” (201). Grief is instantaneous and unreflecting, like the misery of Lucretius’ mother cow who has lost her calf (*DRN* 2.352-66), more primitive than the mental processes that envy or even anger require. Feelings of bereavement are unavoidable, even for the sage, since they are prior to emotions which involve cognition—“a moral and social dimension” (211, cf. Sen. *de ira* 2.1.4). Konstan asks whether emotion is “an abstract and trans-historical category” (211), consequently whether Aristotle and this volume’s researchers and readers concur on the nature of anger, envy and joy.

Marcus Folch’s “Nero in Hell: Plutarch’s *de sera numinis vindicta*” closes the volume. This dialogue of “philosophical apologetics” justifies the troubling and depressing fact that powerful wicked men, e.g. some tyrants and emperors, can flourish for long and unto their death. Many Christians, as Folch notes, have found this essay congenial. Dante certainly would have admired its closing (Platonic) myth describing the soul of Aridaeus’ trip to the land of post-mortem punishment and its grisly spectacles. The lapse of time between committing outrage and healing reformation allows souls of the living to realize their mistakes. Actually, wrongdoers’ successes may be “part of the punishment” (218) in Delphic Plutarch’s theology of “ancestral reciprocity” (*Mor.* 558c1). The wicked man’s greatest punishment is to watch his children and friends suffer terrible calamities for his/her crimes—writhing, coiling, ulcerating, being chilled, flayed and burned, etc. Even in life, however, penalties are only partly delayed—miscreants suffer from self-awareness of their criminal acts and premonitions of punishments to come.

Plutarch's moralistic mythologizing cap contorted arguments "proving" divine providence (224; cf. 239). Folch's finale, analyzing Plutarch's finale, produces a Winklerian surprise (like Apuleius' finale to *Metamorphoses* book 11). Plutarch's contemporary, the vicious ruler Nero, now joins the antique examples of past oppressors—although the gods owed a kindness to the liberator of the Greeks! (568a3, cited 230). Plutarch may have observed Nero's visit to, and plundering of, Delphi (Suet. 40.3). The autocrat has now died by suicide and has long been pierced by fiery rivets in the Otherworld. As mitigation, the gods transformed him into an unnamed "singing creature haunting marshes and lakes." Inquirers wonder whether Plutarch alludes to frog or swan, or perhaps both. Literary allusions fail to clarify, including the mystifying Frog-Swans of Aristophanes' Otherworld (*Frogs* 207). Did Plutarch play a pro- or anti-Neronian hand? Folch suggests that Plutarch leaves the issue unresolved, whether to protect himself or to invite second readings in which Nero would suffuse the entire essay's discussion of delayed punishment, not merely cap it (239).

Bereaved Phaedo felt a weird mixture of pain and pleasure during Socrates' last hours, something he described as *atopon ti moi pathos*, combining [Homeric Andromache's] laughter and tears (*Phaed.* 58e-59a). This conflicted emotional state provides an opening (mentioned but) unexplored here. Further research should feature both more ordinary writers and ordinary people (real and fictional) experiencing pleasurable and painful sensations, as the novels, frescoes and graffiti present. This volume will offer most enlightenment and pleasure to students of ancient Greek and Roman philosophies.

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