

Stoic view of passions / patheia vs the Epicurean view

Post by “Matteng” of October 31, 2025 at 2:32 PM

Hi,

How do you see the Stoic theory/ view of the passions/ pathei/apatheia/ eupatheia and how differ it in the Epicurean view ? I know Philodemus did there much.

[Stoic passions - Wikipedia](#)

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2025 at 7:17 PM

That is an excellent question Matt and I like that you posted the link that Joshua mentioned in the podcast.

It's a deep subject that I suspect others are better equipped than me to deep dive on, but in the last analysis it seems to me that the Stoics have decided that "reason" and "logic" are the hill that they are going to die on, and just as with Mr. Spock no emotion of any kind is going to be approved of as all emotion is illogical if logic itself is the highest good.

They can dance all they like around phrasing that arguably indicates that they are ok with some types of emotions, but for someone who thinks that the summit of virtue is the only part that counts, and focused on how you can drown even just below the surface of the water, the implications of the bottom line are clear - there is no kind of pleasure that they are going to consider as good, and no kinds of pain that they are going to consider go be evil.

Post by “Matteng” of November 1, 2025 at 6:19 PM

First I see is that it is all about mental (self caused) Emotions, bodily pain/ pleasure is out. In Stoicism this are indifferents and in control of fate/nature/logos.

When I understood Philodemus right, I think the Epicurean view would only match with the Stoic view when the Emotion

- 1) has harmful consequences (pleasure then is not choiceworthy for example)
- 2) is irrational, based on empty believe
- 3) is based on unnecessary desire

In short when the Emotions lead to more pain than pleasure.

From wikipedia:

Distress (lupē)

[Distress](#) is an [irrational](#) contraction, or a fresh [opinion](#) that something bad is present, at which people think it right to be [depressed](#).

Fear (phobos)

[Fear](#) is an irrational [aversion](#), or avoidance of an expected [danger](#).

Lust (epithumia)

[Lust](#) is an irrational desire, or pursuit of an expected [good](#) but in reality bad.

Delight (hēdonē)

Delight is an irrational swelling, or a fresh opinion that something good is present, at which people think it right to be [elated](#).

Two of these passions (distress and delight) refer to emotions currently present, and two of these (fear and lust) refer to emotions directed at the future.^[9] Thus there are just two states directed at the prospect of good and evil, but subdivided as to whether they are present or future:^[10]

Present Future

Good Delight Lust

Evil Distress Fear

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 3, 2025 at 10:37 AM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

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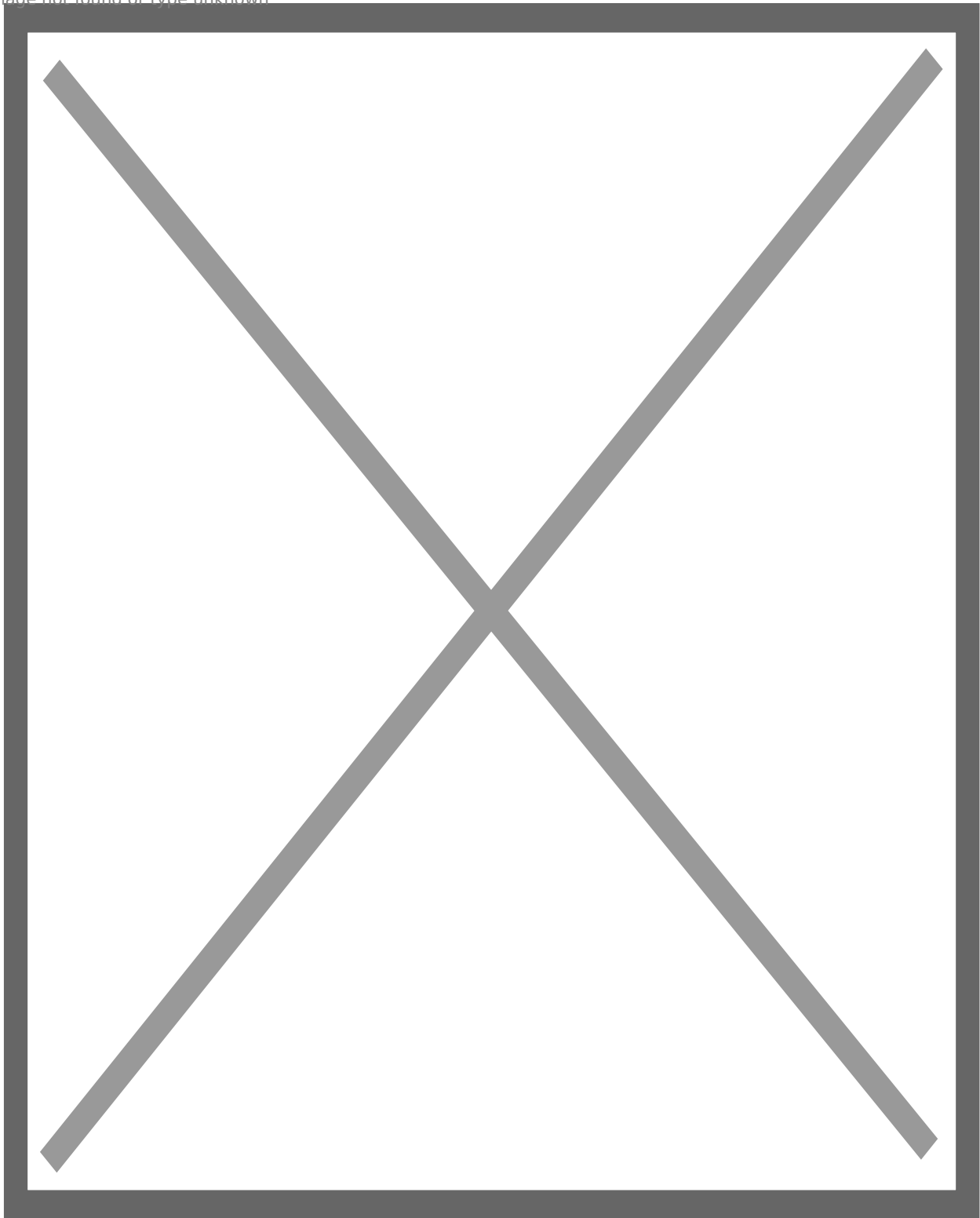
Thank you [Matteng](#) for pointing this out.

Perhaps there is a way to fine-tune the differences, however, and especially because both feelings and emotions are important for making sense of the world, and so we need them as valid input for making good choices. Feelings and emotions have important input and shouldn't just be brushed aside in a "stoic" fashion. If something *is* actually "irrational" you would want to take the time to fully understand why, and that means you need to be able to tolerate the discomfort of seeing and understanding the big picture.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 3, 2025 at 1:50 PM

Here is a modern psychology article that is a must-read for anyone interested in the role of feelings and emotions in well-being:

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[The Key Skill We Rarely Learn: How to Feel Your Feelings](#)

I feel my feelings! Probably not. But with courage and practice, we can cultivate the skill to deeply connect to ourselves and our values, opening up a world...

Post by “Martin” of November 4, 2025 at 4:55 AM

Quote

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- 3) is based on unnecessary desire

There seems to be a mix-up of two different usages of "irrational":

The usage in the quote seems to indicate that "irrational" is something "bad", against reason, to be avoided.

The other usage is neutral and refers to sensations, emotions, feelings being fundamentally, by definition, irrational, in contrast to something we have obtained with reasoning.

In cases 1) and 3) from the quote, the hedonic calculus may justify pursuing the concerned desire:

- 1) We sometimes willfully risk pain/harm to obtain greater pleasure or less pain in the future.
- 3) Epicurus' philosophy does not make us reject all unnecessary desires. Instead, we pursue some of the unnecessary desires when they are natural.

It seems that the Stoic and Epicurean views match far less than what the quote indicates. The Stoic vocabulary in the Wikipedia article is misleading from an Epicurean perspective.

Post by “Eikadistes” of November 4, 2025 at 8:09 AM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

Hi,

How do you see the Stoic theory/ view of the passions/ *pathei/apatheia/ eupatheia* and how differ it in the Epicurean view ? I know Philodemus did there much.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoic_passions

As far as I know, each tradition's evaluation of "desire" and "passion" contradict.

For Epicureans, "feeling", itself, is one of the principle criteria of knowledge. We accept that the "affective sympathies" we feel are as informative as the colors we see. As Epíkouros writes, wise people will feel anger at injustice, and will experience pain upon being tortured. In each case, the lack of anger, or pain would make us numb and passive. We would feel apathy and indifference.

Meanwhile, "apathy" and "indifference" are preferred by those who see emotions, themselves, as deviant ripples that disrupt the pure, unblemished surface of the clear pond that is the mind. I think we'll find other parallels to many contemplative traditions that view pleasant emotions with suspicion, and privilege a sort of pure, neutral state to fun and laughter.

[Quote from Matteng](#)

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I think you're on-point, there. Anger with harmful consequences, irrational anger, or anger based on unnecessary desires marks the line over which we are recommended not to cross, in which anger metastasizes into wrath or rage, as Philódēmos reinforces in *On Anger*.

[Quote from Martin](#)

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This is a great point, and just to demonstrate the fluidity of the usage, Diogénēs' records Epíkouros as having employed the word ἄλογός (*alogós*), or "irrational" to refer to *sensation*:

"'For every' [Epíkouros] affirms 'sensation is **irrational** and moved by no single memory...'" (10.31)

In the *Epistle to Herodotos*, the Hegemon uses another declension of that same word ἀλόγω (*alógoi*) to refer to the veracity beliefs that are incoherent, foolish, or absurd:

"...[the study of nature] will banish anything **irrational**..." (10.81)

Post by “Matteng” of November 4, 2025 at 4:13 PM

[Martin](#) , yes in core the hedonic calculus, an yes maybe a better word for the difference would be arational (I have never read it) for unconscious or without needed reason and irrational (often negative seen).

@Eikadistes , yes the difference between the Faculty of pleasure/pain and Pleasant/Painful Things/situations is crucial, that will play a role below in my post you will see.

[Kalosyni](#) , thank you, now it would be interesting to go deeper in this subject of Feeling/Emotion in regard how to value them and what exactly is to avoid or pursue (Feeling, things, situations)

In discussion with Stoics I notice that they would agree with the article and would say that the Epicureans are the one who doesn't accept Pain and try to avoid it.
Epicureans say Stoics doesn't accept or want avoid (Painful/harmful) Emotions.

How can we get there more clear ?

I could imagine this would be a response of each school:

- Start of fictional discussion between the schools -

Epicureans: We want not fight the Feelings like Pain, but the circumstances/causes. We want to change the situation, things, relationships, ideas/views, the faculty of pain/pleasure and the prudent reflection of them and judgment with our feelings is our main way of life.

-> Stoic objection: one cause for Feeling pain is your Faculty of Pain, wouldn't you take Tranquilizers for getting rid of pain your greatest evil ? Or when you want (have a desire/wish for) that a friend is getting well, do you want it for the pleasure (desire satisfaction/whish fulfilling) than a pill who let forget you your friend or his illness could do the same ? Or do you want it indepentend of the consequence feelings ?

Stoics: We only want to root out passions / harmful Emotions not for the Painful Feeling (that is an indifferent for us) but because it dims our rationality/sociality so our human nature and our

Character, our only good (Virtue or Progress to Virtue) and we do more harmful Things to us and others.

-> Epicurean objection: So you value your human Nature/Character/Virtue yourself, others and Passions/harmful Emotions damages these ? The idea of this damage is "mental pain" that lies on the core of your judgement. You "want/like" to live in Agreement with Nature/Logos/Virtue/Human Nature, that is an affection, that is in core in the end a Feeling of Pleasure/Pain.

- End of fictional discussion between the schools -

So that are my currently not finished and Maybe confused ideas about that, what to do with that 😊 ?

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 4, 2025 at 8:57 PM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

the Epicureans are the one who doesn't accept Pain and try to avoid it.
Epicureans say Stoics doesn't accept or want avoid (Painful/harmful) Emotions.

Epicureans seek pleasure, but at times they endure pain when it prevents a greater pain or leads to the pleasures that come with necessary things like food/shelter/health of the body and happiness of the soul -- This can be found in the Letter to Menoeceus.

I'm guessing that Stoics think that they need to be indifferent toward pleasures because they don't believe that there are certain pleasures which are easy to get, and also they don't trust that pleasure can lead to good results. And it seems that they may see pleasures as a distraction from being perfectly courageous (etc.) and a distraction from having the appearances in front of others of being virtuous. (Stoics want esteem in the eyes of others, but this won't necessarily lead to a happy life).

Emotions are a motivator for desiring, but if someone doesn't know how to prudently pursue pleasure, then they may think that they need to avoid feeling desire (and any emotions that lead to desire).

Post by “Pacatus” of November 5, 2025 at 1:12 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Stoics want esteem in the eyes of others, but this won't necessarily lead to a happy life

Actually, the likes of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius criticize and reject seeking such esteem. On the rest, I think you are spot on. 😊

Post by “Pacatus” of November 5, 2025 at 1:20 PM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

We only want to root out passions / harmful Emotions

In their somewhat technical language, the Stoics differentiate between πάθη (the “bad” passions/emotions, e.g. anger, resentment) and εὐπάθη (the “good” passions/emotions, e.g., joy).

Post by “Matteng” of November 5, 2025 at 5:41 PM

Yes they want get rid of bad emotions. The good emotions relate (depends on sources) only about Virtue or what partakes in Virtue.

In a strict sense only the Stoic Sage has good Emotions, all others only proapatheia(bodily unconscious Pre-Emotions) , and bad Emotions. Whereby there are text quotes from Epictetus and Seneca that progress to Virtue means also progress to good Emotions (Eupatheia) but don't know what that exactly means.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 12, 2025 at 3:20 PM

Here is an article that takes a different view from the one that I posted above, and which makes good points also:

<https://www.npr.org/2025/02/06/nx-s1-5276331/you-have-more-control-over-your-emotions-than-you-think>