Taming Passion: Plutarch's Dialectical Use of Metaphors in *De virtute morali*

Orestis Karatzoglou

Abstract: *This paper examines the metaphors employed in Plutarch's* De virtute morali *to critique Stoic and Platonic models of passion. It is argued that Plutarch's metaphors reflect his anti-Stoic polemic and serve an educational agenda, advancing increasingly complex conceptualizations of passion—from inert matter, to vegetal growth, to the cognitively richer animal model. Section 1 contrasts Stoic suppression of passion with Plutarch's artisanal metaphors, which relocate* μέτρον *in a Peripatetic framework inspired by the* Timaeus. *Section 2 examines agricultural metaphors, highlighting Plutarch's preference for the symbiotic models of reason and passion. Section 3 explores the subtle influence of the* Phaedrus *on Stoic definitions of passion. Section 4 highlights how Plutarch's zoological metaphors diverge from Stoic views on animal nature, aligning ethical moderation with humane treatment of animals. While Plutarch and the Stoics employ similar imagery, their conceptualizations of passion diverge fundamentally, reflecting broader differences in their ethics and psychology.*

Keywords: *Animals, Metaphor,* De virtute morali, *Passion, Plutarch*

Recent scholarship has witnessed several attempts at foregrounding and elucidating the Plutarchan concept of πάθος: Plutarch's position is customarily construed as a response to concerns that were current in his intellectual environment and sought to clarify the role of reason and passion.[1] At one

[1] For the debate on μετριοπάθεια and ἀπάθεια, see R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* (New York 2000) 194-210. See also D. Babut, "Ἱστορία οἷον ὕλη φιλοσοφίας: histoire et réflexion morale dans l'oeuvre de Plutarque." *Revue des Études Grecques* 88 (1975) 206-219, at 217, who argues that μετριοπάθεια

Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 66.1 (2026) 42-75
ISSN 2159-3159

extreme were the Stoics, who advocated for a life free of passions (ἀπάθεια) and propped up this exhortation through the twin theses that the soul is a unitary entity and that emotions are distortions of reason to be avoided.[2] Proposing an alternative and earthy *modus vivendi* that reserves room even for emotions popularly conceived as negative, Plutarch stresses the abnormality of a passionless life.[3] Instead, he forwards in *De virtute morali* a doctrine which borrows elements from the Aristotelian theory of the mean but stems equally from the main principles of Platonic psychology and the ensuing rejection of the Stoic psychological and ethical models.[4] His approach, however, is not straightforward; for, despite acknowledging the positive contribution of passion to the virtuous life, Plutarch at times seems to imply that ἀπάθεια is key for the development of virtuous disposition.[5] This ambiguity may be owed to Platon-

is not opposed to ἀπάθεια here. J.M. Dillon, "Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics," in J.P. Anton and A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy II* (New York 1983) 508-517 argues that Plutarch is unable or unwilling to understand the Stoic position, which he combats on the grounds that it is inconsistent with the obvious truth that the soul has parts; other interpretations are briefly presented in Ch. Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (New York 2006) 230.

[2] See the illuminating discussion in M. Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of Passions." *Apeiron* 20.2 (1987) 129-177.

[3] On Plutarch's therapeutic model of moderating passions rather than eliminating them, see H.G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele* (Göttingen 1972). For an analysis of Plutarch's constructive psychology of virtue, emphasizing the positive role of passions, see B. Castelnérac, "Plutarch's Psychology of Moral Virtue: 'Pathos', 'Logos', and the Unity of the Soul." *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007) 141-163.

[4] On the polemical character of the treatise, see D. Babut, *Plutarque, De La Vertu Éthique: introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Paris 1969) 51-52; J. Opsomer, "L'âme du monde et l'âme de l'homme chez Plutarque," in M. Garcia Valdés (ed.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: ideas religiosas*. Actas del III Simposio Internacional sobre Plutarco, Oviedo 30 de abril a 2 de mayo de 1992 (Madrid 1994) 33-49, at 33; G. Roskam, *Plutarch* (Cambridge 2021) 62.

[5] See, e.g., 444c9-d9. For the view that Plutarch evokes both the ideal of μετριοπάθεια for bodily passions regulated by practical reason, and that of ἀπάθεια for the mind and abstract thought, see D. Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme* (Paris 1969) 321-333; cf. Gill, *Structured Self* 237-238. According to F. Becchi, "The Virtues and the Intelligence of Animals in Plutarch," in D.F. Leão and

ic influences, especially in light of the fact that Plato's dialogues similarly seem to offer conflicting accounts on the proper relation of reason to passion.[6] Others have argued that Plutarch's ambivalence on the issue results from a muddled notion of πάθος, which is conceived both as constructive force in engendering virtue and as mental disease.[7]

Rather than giving up hope for the reconstruction of a Plutarchan account of passion, on the disheartening impression that it is vitiated by such overriding contradictions, a fruitful alternative has been pursued recently by D. Machek, who sought to understand the role of passion in Plutarch by analyzing metaphors that relate to reason and passion. His strategy, namely, to discuss three types of metaphor, termed artisanal, zoological, and botanic, while in-

L.R. Lanzillotta (eds.), *A Man of Many Interests: Plutarch on Religion, Myth, and Magic* (Leiden 2012) 138-171, Plutarch distinguishes between natural passions housed in the body and passions stemming from mental weakness; ignorance turns natural passions to vice, a mental disease that needs to be eradicated. E. Alexiou, "On ΑΠΑΘΕΙΑ in Plutarch's *Lives*," in M. Baumbach, H. Köhler, and A.-M. Ritter (eds.), *Mousopolos Stephanos* (Heidelberg 1998) 380-389 examines all the occurrences of the term ἀπάθεια in the *Lives* and concludes that it has negative connotations when used in "normal parlance" (389), but is positively evaluated when associated with abstract values.

[6] Dillon, *Metriopatheia and Apatheia* 508.

[7] Babut, *De La Vertu Éthique* 50 suggests that the two almost contradictory accounts of the passions may be owed to the two themes of the treatise, namely, moral virtue itself and the refutation of the Stoic theory, while he (*Plutarque et le stoïcisme* 322) posits that Plutarch's negative assessment of emotions at *De sup.* 165c might be a result of Stoic influence; cf. D. Machek, "Carving, Taming or Gardening? Plutarch on Emotions, Reason and Virtue." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26.2 (2018) 255-275, at 260. A more charitable explanation would take into account the specific argumentative context of each passage: a typical example would be Plutarch's dealing with anger, and the different positions in *De coh. ira* and in the fragment from *On anger* (fr. 148 Sandbach = Stob. 3.20.70); cf. G. Roskam, "Being the Physician of One's Own Soul: on a Plutarchean Fragment on Anger (fr. 148 Sandbach)," in J.R. Ferreira and D.F. Leão (eds.), *Os fragmentos de Plutarco e a recepção da sua obra* (Coimbra 2003) 41-62. In a psychotherapeutic context, the emphasis is more on the total extinction of anger; this is not surprising, and need not reflect a Stoic point of view. For the Hellenistic trope of philosophy as therapy (the complementary of the idea that vice is a disease), see Nussbaum, *Apeiron* 20.2 (1987) 129-130.

genious and conveniently schematic, can still be enriched by considering both Plutarch's broader philosophic milieu as well as authorial intentions that may motivate the adoption of such tropes. Regarding the former, Plutarch's choice of metaphors about passion cannot be fully appreciated, unless viewed as fueled by his polemic intentions against the Stoa, in particular, Chrysippus' theory of passion as judgment, which was expounded in a four-book opus *Περὶ παθῶν* (*SVF* 3.458). Plutarch's conceptualizations of passion, as will become evident below, can be understood as a response to Stoic definitions that preserve semantic cues evoking Plato's works while activating the metaphors mentioned above: Plutarch not only counters his opponents by endorsing and expanding these tropes but also reclaims Platonic material that had been co-opted into their arsenal. At the same time, divorced from its pedagogical perspectives, Plutarch's metaphorics might appear as inane rhetorical whim; instead, we need to bear in mind that, especially in his ethical works, Plutarch sets his sights on educating his audience, and it is for this purpose that he invariably employs figurative language.[8]

All three types of metaphor are fairly represented in *De virtute morali*, a seminal work that lends itself for study not merely on its own right, but also as material that serves as a blueprint for Plutarch's use of metaphor. The metaphysical origins of artisanal metaphors are found already in the opening of the treatise, where Plutarch affirms that moral virtue has passion as its matter and reason as its form (440d1-4).[9] When describing the way in which

[8] See, e.g., 441e6-7 where education is envisaged as molding and taming (πλάσεως καὶ τιθασεύσεως). On Plutarch's imagery, see F. Fuhrmann, *Les images de Plutarque* (Paris 1964), who argues, at 16, that Plutarch was aware of the importance of comparisons as a means of demonstration, and R. Hirsch-Luipold, *Plutarchs Denken in Bildern* (Tübingen 2002). For Plutarch's use of comparison as a hallmark of his style, see J.G. López, "La naturaleza en las comparaciones de Plutarco," in J.G. López and E.C. Dorda (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Paisaje y naturalezza* (Madrid 1991) 203-220, who demonstrates that such comparisons—especially those drawing from the animal, vegetal, and mineral worlds—are not merely ornamental but serve as cognitive tools to render moral doctrines more intelligible to his audience.

[9] I refer to Plutarch's works in their traditional Latin titles and employ the abbreviations established in Plutarchan studies. For Plutarch's text, I am using

moderation is implanted in passion by reason, Plutarch combines the Aristotelian trappings of μετριοπάθεια with the creation imagery of Plato's *Timaeus*: the demiurgical aspects of the creator god of the *Timaeus* are therefore assimilated into reason, with passions corresponding to the created artifacts. As for botanic metaphors, in presenting reason as gardener and passion as plant, they invite us to grasp the abstract occurrence of affective experience through the concrete and straightforward practice of cultivating or pruning: envy, for instance, is likened to an offshoot that reason—figured as knife—must cut back (*De vit. pud*. 529b6-c4). This imagery consistently casts reason as a gardener who manages the soul's growth. More important for the purposes of this paper is the group of zoological metaphors which enable the direct association of mental events with human-animal interaction: Plutarch endorses the image of Plato's *Phaedrus*, where the soul is likened to a winged pair of horses and a charioteer (246a7), and develops it further to envisage moral virtue as a state that comes about when reason has tamed the non-rational part of the soul.[10] The control of emotion is thus consistently portrayed as animal domestication, with reason depicted as a charioteer and passions as spirited horses.

The metaphors Plutarch employs to describe the soul and its non-rational parts do not stand in isolation: they form a conceptual progression that moves from the shaping of passive material (artisanal), to the cultivation of organic life (agricultural), and culminates in the dynamic interaction with sentient, trainable creatures (zoological).[11] This progression is not merely rhetorical: it mirrors

the editions of W.R. Paton *et al*., *Plutarchi Moralia* I, III (Teubner 1974, 1972); for Plato, I have used J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera* I, IV (New York 1900, 1902); for Galen's *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (*PHP*), the edition of Ph.H. De Lacy, *Galen. On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, vol. I, second edition (Berlin 1981). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are from the Loeb Classical Library series.

[10] For the *Nachleben* of the *Phaedrus*' charioteer and its influence on imperial literature, see M.B. Trapp, "Plato's *Phaedrus* in Second-Century Greek Literature," in D.A. Russell (ed.), *Antonine Literature* (New York 1990) 141-174; on its use by Philo, see L. Kerns, *Platonic and Stoic Passions in Philo of Alexandria* (diss. King's College London 2013) 164-173.

[11] In a similar vein, S. Xenophontos, "Imagery and Education in Plutarch."

Plutarch's deepening concern with the autonomy of passion and its place in moral development, leading to an ethical vision wherein both animals and their metaphorical counterparts—the passions—are owed gentleness and guidance, not eradication. In addition, the fact that Plato, Plutarch, and (at least some of) the Stoics employ the metaphor that likens passions to horses may lead to facile inferences regarding its function, especially because linguistic usage obscures the different outlook they hold on the status and cognitive abilities of animals. It should be kept in mind that Plutarch's zoological metaphors, especially those involving the taming of animals, do more than illustrate psychological dynamics: they encode a polemical stance against Stoic ethics and Stoic views on animals. As will become evident, Plutarch aligns his conception of μετριοπάθεια with a broader critique of Stoic ἀπάθεια by drawing on imagery that implicitly affirms the educability, kinship, and ethical relevance of both animals and passions.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 deals with an aspect of the Stoic conception of passion that highlights the significance of measure and limit for the development of virtuous disposition. I argue that Plutarch critiques this conception through artisanal metaphors, redirecting the notion of μέτρον to its Peripatetic environment by invoking imagery reminiscent of the Timaean Demiurge. Section 2 traces the origins of Plutarch's agricultural metaphors which, I contend, must be viewed as influenced by the tensions inherent in the Platonic background regarding ἀπάθεια and μετριοπάθεια. Arguing that the Stoic exhortation to extirpate the passions is modeled after an apparent reading of *Republic* Book 9, which similarly presupposes the expulsion of passion for the sustenance of reason, I turn to Plutarch's limited use of such imagery and demonstrate his preference for symbiotic models of reason and passion as exhibited in the Platonic trope of the charioteer. Section 3 revisits the Stoic definition of passion vis-à-vis their doctrine on the nature of animals, arguing that the Phaedran metaphor is present in in-

Classical Philology 108.2 (2013) 126-138 shows that Plutarch reuses bee imagery across several pedagogical works, not only adapting it to each rhetorical context but also developing it cumulatively, building upon his earlier treatment.

choate form in their definition and conceptualization of passion. In Section 4, I analyze the zoological metaphors of *De virtute morali*, claiming that Plutarch's endorsement of μετριοπάθεια parallels his benevolent attitude toward animals. It is concluded that, while both Plutarch and the Stoics employ similar or identical linguistic expressions to describe passion, their underlying conceptualizations are ultimately opposed.

Section 1. Passion Within Bounds: Chrysippus, Plutarch, and Artisanal Metaphors

I begin with Plutarch's use of artisanal metaphors in *De virtute morali*. Machek rightly identifies the origin of the concept of imposing structure on disorderly matter primarily in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, while tracing the notion of μέτρον as a specific form of proportion to the *Statesman*, the *Laws*, and the *Republic*.[12] My analysis will show that Plutarch does not merely adopt these Platonic ideas; rather, he engages with them dialectically and polemically, reclaiming familiar Platonic tropes from the Stoics and repositioning them within a Peripatetic framework.

The idea that passion is a form of excess, commonly described as ὁρμὴ πλεονάζουσα, features prominently in Stoic definitions of passion (*SVF* 3.377, 378). This suggests that impulse—the innate, universal drive of living organisms—must become excessive or overflowing for passion to occur. While the notion of πλεονεξία introduces a metaphorical framework for understanding passion, it does not clarify what the impulse exceeds. Clemens of Alexandria offers a useful distinction that addresses this gap: passion is an excessive impulse or one stretching beyond the measures set by reason (πλεονάζουσα ὁρμὴ ἢ ὑπερτείνουσα τὰ κατὰ τὸν λόγον μέτρα, *Strom*. 2.13.59.6 = *SVF* 3.377). Chrysippus, in a fragment preserved by Galen, elaborates on this idea by defining excess in terms of a lack of symmetry between impulse and reason (Gal. *PHP* 4.2.15 = *SVF* 3.462 part):

> Κατὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ὁ πλεονασμὸς τῆς ὁρμῆς εἴρηται, διὰ τὸ τὴν καθ' αὑτοὺς καὶ φυσικὴν τῶν ὁρμῶν συμμετρίαν ὑπερβαίνειν.

[12] Machek, *BJHP* 26.2 (2018) 261-264.

> In this context, we have spoken also of excess of impulse, because their impulses exceed the measure that accords with themselves and with nature. (trans. De Lacy, modified)

To illustrate this, Chrysippus compares the walker, whose movements remain under control and can stop at will, to the runner, whose momentum exceeds the natural limits of impulse, rendering him unable to stop willingly. This analogy underscores the importance of συμμετρία—the proportional relation that obtains between natural impulse and reason (*PHP* 4.2.18 = *SVF* 3.462). Finally, Epictetus echoes the same idea, describing a striving ὄρεξις as symmetrical when directed at what is good, while irrational drives surpass measure (*Diss*. 4.1.84).[13]

In what way does reason set the boundaries that properly enclose impulse? A close reading might question whether the metaphorical hint present in Galen's quotation from Chrysippus reflects the influence of the *Timaeus* on the Stoic theory of passion:[14] the concept of συμμετρία plays a central role in Plato's account of both the Demiurge's creation of the living world and the function of perception, which relies on an analogy between the external world and the perceiver.[15] Significantly, Lactantius reports that Zeno named as λόγος the one who brought order in nature and crafted the universe (*Zeno rerum naturae dispositorem atque artificem universitatis* λόγον *praedicat*, *SVF* 1.160). The explicit ascription of Timaean vocabulary to Stoic λόγος encourages the inference that reason is here envisaged as a

[13] See the analysis in B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (New York 1987) 157-158.

[14] The Stoics simplified the Platonic model of the *Timaeus* to just two forces, namely, the active principle of λόγος and the passive principle of matter: see G. Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence. Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus* (Turnhout 1999) 43, 71-73.

[15] For the role of συμμετρία in the senses of smell and sight, see *Timaeus* 66d and 67c, respectively. Its significance in shaping the living world is emphasized at 69b, where the Demiurge brings symmetry both within individual entities and between them, transforming what was previously disorderly. Similarly, at 73c, the Demiurge selects the most isomorphic triangles from those used to form the elements and combines them symmetrically to create the marrow. Finally, at 87c, the normative role of symmetry is highlighted, as it is linked to what is good and deemed essential for any creature destined to be good and beautiful.

creator god who ordered the universe by structuring passive matter according to rational proportions. To revert to the excessiveness of passion and the boundaries of reason, an artisanal metaphor lies at the core of Stoic metaphysics and entails that the cosmos has been brought forth as an artifact by personified reason: according to Chrysippus, not only is the cosmos itself a living organism, but nature is rational (… φυσιολογεῖται ὁ κόσμος καὶ φύσις λογική, *SVF* 2.618). It is through this metaphor that impulse is described as having a "natural symmetry": human beings should strive to imitate the ideal, cosmic model, also a living organism that has impulses, which, however, cannot exceed the limit—that is, the natural laws—imposed by its creator.

Enter Plutarch: the prominent Platonist, not only embraced the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* but also developed an interpretation of his own.[16] Since he fully accepts the role of reason as the creator god who imposes order on the amorphous and unqualified precosmic matter, it is unsurprising that he adopts artisanal metaphors inspired by the Timaean model. From the very opening of *De virtute morali*, Plutarch describes moral virtue as having passion as its matter and reason as its form, incorporating imagery of mixing (μεμιγμένα at 440d7, ἄκρατος at 440e1), while he further elaborates on this mixture with a more detailed account (443c5-d1):

> 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, οὐ βουλομένου τὸ πάθος ἐξαιρεῖν παντάπασιν (οὔτε γὰρ δυνατὸν οὔτ' ἄμεινον), ἀλλ' ὅρον τινὰ καὶ τάξιν ἐπιτιθέντος αὐτῷ καὶ τὰς ἠθικὰς ἀρετάς, οὐκ ἀπαθείας οὔσας ἀλλὰ συμμετρίας παθῶν καὶ μεσότητας, ἐμποιοῦντος· ἐμποιεῖ δὲ τῇ φρονήσει τὴν τοῦ παθητικοῦ δύναμιν εἰς ἕξιν ἀστείαν καθιστάς.
>
> Therefore, also, ethical, or moral, virtue is well named, for ethical virtue is, to but sketch the subject, a quality of the irrational, and it is so named because the irrational, being formed by reason, acquires this quality and differentiation by habit, since reason

[16] See, in this regard, J. Opsomer, "Plutarch's *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*: Manipulation or Search for Consistency?" In P. Adamson, H. Baltussen and M.W.F. Stone (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, vol. I (London 2004) 137-162.

> does not wish to eradicate passion completely (for that would be neither possible nor expedient), but puts upon it some limitation and order and implants the ethical virtues, which are not the absence of passion but a due proportion and measure therein; and reason implants them by using prudence to develop the capacity for passion into a good acquired disposition.

This passage directly challenges the Stoic thesis that passions must be entirely eradicated. It is no coincidence that Plutarch pairs the term συμμετρία with μεσότης to counter the Stoic technical term ἀπάθεια. Demonstrating his acute reading, he draws on Chrysippus' use of συμμετρία to describe the nature of impulse under ideal conditions. However, Plutarch reclaims the term, rooted in Platonic thought, and aligns it with the Peripatetic notion of virtue as a mean: the artisanal metaphor is introduced through the participle πλαττόμενον, immediately framing reason as the craftsman who shapes the cosmos; this idea is reinforced by the sequence of participles (βουλομένου, ἐπιτιθέντος, ἐμποιοῦντος), which attribute to reason the qualities of an active and deliberate agent; ultimately, the last clause solidifies reason's role as the grammatical subject and active force, while συμμετρία and μεσότης are embedded within the irrational part of the soul as distinct dispositions representing limit and order.[17]

Plutarch also addresses the Stoic notion of passion as an excessive force. Rather than delving into complexities arising from equating passion with reason gone astray, he offers an Aristotelian analysis of virtue based on the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, which give rise to two types of virtue: wisdom (σοφία) and prudence (φρόνησις) (443e9). The key difference lies in their objects: wisdom, focused on stable and unchanging truths, requires no deliberation (βουλή) to achieve its goals, as its conclusions are certain. For example, a geometer does not need to deliberate whether the sum of a triangle's angles equals two right angles; it is

[17] Some additional parallels with the *Timaeus*: order is what the demiurge brings to disorder (εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, 30a5), while he delegates to the lesser gods the task of molding mortal bodies (τὸ δὲ μετὰ τὸν σπόρον τοῖς νέοις παρέδωκεν θεοῖς σώματα πλάττειν θνητά, 42d5-7). Plutarch similarly traces the origin of the non-rational to the body (τοῦ ἀλόγου τὴν γένεσιν αὐτόθεν ἔχοντος ἐκ τοῦ σώματος, 450e7-8).

simply known (443f2-444a6). Prudence, however, deals with matters subject to variability and uncertainty: it must engage (notice the mixture metaphor: ἐπιμίγνυσθαι, 444a7) with contingencies and deliberate whenever judgments are influenced by the irrational part of the soul (444a9-b1). Plutarch then proceeds to discuss the role of ὁρμή (444b1-8):

> ὁρμῆς γὰρ δέονται· τὴν δ' ὁρμὴν τῷ πάθει ποιεῖ τὸ ἦθος, λόγου δεομένην ὁρίζοντος, ὅπως μετρία παρῇ καὶ μήθ' ὑπερβάλλῃ μήτ' ἐγκαταλείπῃ τὸν καιρόν. τὸ γὰρ δὴ παθητικὸν καὶ ἄλογον κινήσεσι χρῆται ταῖς μὲν ἄγαν σφοδραῖς καὶ ὀξείαις ταῖς δὲ μαλακωτέραις ἢ προσήκει καὶ ἀργοτέραις.
>
> For they [sc. the judgments], as a matter of fact, need its impulse. The impulsion of passion springs from moral virtue; but it needs reason to keep it within moderate bounds and to prevent its exceeding or falling short of its proper season. For it is indeed true that the passionate and irrational moves sometimes too violently and swiftly, at other times more weakly and slothfully than the case demands. (trans. Babbitt, modified)

Impulse is depicted as an essential element of passion, but it must be regulated by reason to ensure it is present in the right measure, avoiding both excess and deficiency. The use of ὑπερβάλλειν here clearly recalls the terms ὑπερτείνουσα and ὑπερβαίνειν found in the Stoic accounts of passion. Plutarch explicitly draws on the Timaean metaphor of the creator god to frame his argument. Furthermore, his account appears more intuitive, as it emphasizes the kinetic aspect of passion, aligning with its phenomenological experience—often described as an extrarational force that "moves" or "overwhelms" us into action.[18] The natural role of practical reason is ultimately described as correcting the deficiencies and excesses of passion (444c1-2). This is further illustrated through metaphors reminiscent of two Empedoclean elements (441c2-9): when impulse is lacking, reason rekindles it (depicting impulse as fire that is

[18] M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York 2001) 44 identifies the "kinetic or affective" aspect of emotion as the adversary's main objection to the neo-Stoic account that passions are judgments. I concur with R.C. Solomon, "Review of M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*." *Mind* 111.444 (2002) 897-901, at 899 that it is precisely in this regard that her otherwise brilliant account is found wanting.

about to be extinguished); conversely, when impulse surges excessively and threatens to exceed its bounds, reason curbs its intensity (portraying ὁρμή as water flowing uncontrollably).[19] These metaphors build on the creative imagery introduced earlier, reinforcing the idea that the aim is moderation, not the eradication, of passion: just as both water and fire are essential elements in practical life—serving not only as foundational components for creating artifacts but also as indispensable tools in any artisanal process—so too are passions seen as integral to human experience when properly managed by reason.

To sum up, this section examined two key Stoic texts on the conception of passion as excessive force, uncovering references to the *Timaeus*, particularly Chrysippus' use of συμμετρία to describe the measure reason imposes on impulse under ideal conditions. I concluded with Plutarch's rejection of the Stoic model and his reappropriation of the Timaean creator god: his use of συμμετρία and frequent reliance on artisanal metaphors highlight a polemical engagement with Stoic thought. Yet while artisanal metaphors convey the need for rational measure and control, they still conceptualize the passions as passive materials or mixtures to be managed. The next set of metaphors—agricultural—begins to shift the terms of Plutarch's polemic, treating passion not as inert matter but as something that can grow and flourish. This marks a departure from both Platonic and Stoic models, and the following section explores how Plutarch mobilizes this imagery to challenge their underlying assumptions.

Section 2. Revisiting Platonic Ambivalence: Domestication Over Extirpation

Plato's dialogues offer varied approaches to the relation between reason and passion, wavering between suppression and moderation.[20] This duality is captured in two tropes: the mythological beast (*Republic* Book 9) and the charioteer and horses (*Phaedrus*). The former casts passions as adversarial, requiring suppression to ensure

[19] For Plutarch's comparisons involving the four elements, see López, *Comparaciones* 209.

[20] Sorabji, *Emotion* 201.

the soul's integrity, while the latter suggests a more symbiotic dynamic, where passions, like horses, are essential but must be guided by reason. Plutarch largely ignores the combative model, focusing instead on the charioteer metaphor to define a balanced relationship between reason and passion. This section examines Plato's stance on grief in the *Republic*, arguing that it leans toward suppression as the virtuous response. I then contrast this with Plutarch's rejection of such suppressive attitudes, which he reserves only for envy.

The discussion of grief in the *Republic* highlights the difficulty of extracting a consistent view of Plato's attitude toward passion. At first blush, the dialogue seems to advocate moderation: in Book 10, Socrates and his interlocutors agree that a virtuous person would feel grief at the loss of a son (603e). The phrase μετριάσει δέ πως indicates that, while insensitivity is unattainable, moderation is the appropriate response.[21] Yet the mere acknowledgment of insensitivity as an ideal suggests that the passionless life, though unrealistic, remains a goal. The virtuous person, distinguished by bearing misfortunes more easily, is expected to grieve the least at the loss of a son or a brother (387d11-e8). Furthermore, grief is deemed an obstacle (ἐμποδών, 604e), hindering clarity of thought much like the body and passions in the *Phaedo*. This view aligns with the image of the self as a mythological beast in Book 9, where Socrates describes the human soul as comprising a multicolored beast, a lion, and a human, sewn together into the form of a single being (588c5-e1). Injustice empowers the beastly elements (588e3-589a3), while justice strengthens the inner human, enabling it to tend to the beast like a farmer, cultivating the gentle heads and restraining the wild ones (τοῦ πολυκεφάλου θρέμματος ἐπιμελήσεται ὥσπερ γεωργός, τὰ μὲν ἥμερα τρέφων καὶ τιθασεύων, τὰ δὲ ἄγρια ἀποκωλύων φύεσθαι, 589b1-3).[22] Similarly, in Book 10, yielding to grief nourishes the inferi-

[21] See *Plt.* 284e-285c, which seems to foreshadow Aristotle's view of virtue as a mean (Dillon, *Metriopatheia and Apatheia* 508). For Plato's *Republic* Book 4 as a precursor of the theory, see D.R. Morphew, *Passionate Platonism: Plutarch on the Positive Role of Non-Rational Affects in the Good Life* (diss. Univ. of Michigan 2018) 21 n. 78.

[22] The metaphor has becomes a mixed one by drawing on terms from the

or part of the soul at the expense of reason, which is weakened and disrupted (τοῦτο ἐγείρει τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τρέφει καὶ ἰσχυρὸν ποιῶν ἀπόλλυσι τὸ λογιστικόν, 605b3-5). The overarching message seems clear: grief, like the wild offshoots of the beast, must be controlled or uprooted.[23]

Plutarch is unhappy with the limitations such an idealization entails for our emotional life since it involves suppressing an essential component of human life. There are instances of emotions though for which he seems to subscribe to this agricultural model, which he introduces through the story of Lycurgus of Thrace (*De virt. mor.* 451c5-10):[24]

> ὅθεν οὐ Θρᾴκιον οὐδὲ Λυκούργειον τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἔργον ἐστί, συνεκκόπτειν καὶ συνδιαφθείρειν τὰ ὠφέλιμα τοῖς βλαβεροῖς τοῦ πάθους, ἀλλ' ἥπερ ὁ φυτάλμιος θεὸς καὶ ἡμερίδης, τὸ ἄγριον κολοῦσαι καὶ ἀφελεῖν τὴν ἀμετρίαν, εἶτα τιθασεύειν καὶ

domain of agriculture to describe animal control. For mixed metaphors, see M. Zawisławska, *Metaphor and Senses. The Synamet Corpus: A Polish Resource for Synesthetic Metaphors* (Berlin 2019) 50. Perhaps the conflation is owed to the term τιθασεύω which can be applied both to cultivating the land and taming an animal. Grube and Reeve thus translate "… he should take care of the many-headed beast as a farmer does *his animals* […]." However, that the imagery is not about husbandry but farming can be established through *Euthphr.* 2d1-4: ὀρθῶς γάρ ἐστι τῶν νέων πρῶτον ἐπιμεληθῆναι ὅπως ἔσονται ὅτι ἄριστοι, ὥσπερ γεωργὸν ἀγαθὸν τῶν νέων φυτῶν εἰκὸς πρῶτον ἐπιμεληθῆναι, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ τῶν ἄλλων. Cf. *Tht.* 167b-c.

[23] In Book 3, the self-sufficiency of the virtuous person is portrayed as making them less vulnerable to feelings of loss, as they would have no need for friends (387d4-6). For such a person, grief would either be absent or seen as unnatural, opposing the ideal of self-sufficiency. If grief does arise, the *Republic* suggests it should be suppressed as much as possible. Given that the dialogue begins with Socrates' account of justice as inherently choiceworthy and positions the analysis of grief within the framework of a self-sufficient city, grief appears incompatible with this ideal, for it undermines the notion of self-sufficiency at both individual and civic levels. This sentiment is metaphorically expressed in the image of the mythological beast in Book 9, which implies that, under ideal conditions, negative emotions should be entirely suppressed.

[24] On botanic imagery in Plutarch, see Machek, *BJHP* 26.2 (2018) 268-273. Cf. also *De vit. pud.* 528c1-d5, 529a10-c2; *De genio Socr.* 584e8-f1; *De aud.* 39d8-13.

παριστάναι τὸ χρήσιμον.

> Therefore the work of reason is not Thracian, not like that of Lycurgus—to cut down and destroy the helpful elements of emotion together with the harmful, but to do as the god who watches over crops and the god who guards the vine do—to lop off the wild growth and to clip away excessive luxuriance, and then to cultivate and to dispose for use the serviceable remainder.

Consider envy (φθόνος), for instance: this emotion never contributes positively to our well-being and can therefore be justifiably eradicated (cf. *De aud*. 39d8-13). Yet, Plutarch advises against lumping together indiscriminately all emotions so that we fail to differentiate between harmful and beneficial ones, for otherwise one runs the risk of being misguided by a theory that deprives the self of the full range of human experience which accommodates both the cognitive and the affective element. Insisting that the relation obtaining between the two parts of the soul is not exhausted to an outright dismissal of passion as a cognitive hurdle, he traces a common heritage between them which enables the development of a symbiotic and synergistic relationship: reason is σύμφυτος with passion and as such is incapable of independent existence (σύμφυτον ἔχει τὴν τοῦ πάθους ἀρχήν, οὐκ ἐπεισόδιον ἀλλ' ἀναγκαίαν οὖσαν, 451c2-4).[25] Were passions completely eradicated, reason would falter, much like a ship's captain left to navigate without wind (452b1-4): passion, in this image, is the wind in our sails, but its general association with ὁρμή suggests that it is conceived as a vehicle that facilitates our transportation (καθάπερ ὅρμημα τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ ὄχημα τὸ πάθος, 452c6).[26] For Plutarch, the goal is not to eliminate passion, as the Stoics propose, but to channel it harmoniously under reason's control (443c).

Plutarch rejects the view that passions are obstacles, instead highlighting their positive and necessary role in human life. In the *Con-*

[25] For the metaphysical counterpart of this claim, again occurring within the context of criticizing Stoic metaphysics, see *De an. procr*. 1015b3-6 with Babut, *De La Vertu Éthique* 42.

[26] On the symbolic use of wind imagery in Plutarch, see Fuhrmann, *Images* 98 n. 1.

solatio ad Apollonium,[27] it is argued that grief, though painful and beyond our control, is natural, whereas insensitivity is both unnatural and harmful, leading to a brutalized soul (102c5-e1).[28] Plutarch reverses the common view of grief as a soul's disease, instead framing lack of emotion as pathological (cf. *De frat. am.* 497c9-d8). To the Stoic claim that all passions must be uprooted because they cannot be selectively retained, he counters that we must allow space for negative emotions to preserve positive ones: "Lack of emotion," he argues in the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, "will deprive us of the benevolence of being loved and loving, which we must preserve more than anything" (ἀφαιρήσεται γὰρ ἡμῶν αὕτη τὴν ἐκ τοῦ φιλεῖσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν εὔνοιαν, ἣν παντὸς μᾶλλον διασῴζειν ἀναγκαῖον, 102c10-d2).[29]

[27] Let me here anticipate the possible objection that I am extrapolating Plutarch's own views from a work of disputed authenticity. This line of argument loses its force as soon as we consider that Plutarch follows a similar reasoning in a work of unquestioned authenticity: in the *Consolatio ad uxorem*—a text Plutarch wrote to his wife, Timoxena, after the death of their daughter—the philosopher advises his wife against shying away from painful thoughts lest she completely abolish the memory of their daughter (608d9-f5). The bibliography on the problem of authenticity of the *Cons. ad Apoll.* is summarized conveniently in L. van der Wiel, *An Opaque Mirror for Trajan. A Literary Analysis and Interpretation of Plutarch's 'Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata'* (Leuven 2024) 315 n. 983, 316 n. 985.

[28] Brutus, one of the first two consuls of the Roman Republic, is described in the life of *Publicola* as unmoved by the execution of his sons in his presence: ἢ γὰρ ἀρετῆς ὕψος εἰς ἀπάθειαν ἐξέστησεν <αὐτοῦ> τὴν ψυχήν, ἢ πάθους μέγεθος εἰς ἀναλγησίαν. οὐδέτερον δὲ μικρὸν οὐδ' ἀνθρώπινον, ἀλλ' ἢ θεῖον ἢ θηριῶδες ("For either the loftiness of his virtue made his spirit incapable of suffering, or else the magnitude of his suffering made it insensible to pain. In neither case was his act a trivial one, or natural to a man, but either god-like or brutish," *Publ.* 6.5). Plutarch appears to admire ἀπάθεια here, yet he explicitly states that insensitivity arising from virtue is neither common nor characteristic of human nature: it is a heroic quality that inspires wonder, but heroism is not always the ideal. Cf. Epictetus' remark at *Encheiridion* 3 that one should not be more vexed at the death of one's son than at the breaking of a favorite mug (Ch. Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally: Stoic Ethics and its Modern Significance* [New York 2023] 242-246 argues, however, that the passage, when read along with its longer version at *Discourses* 3.24, aims at illustrating the universality of impermanence, without intending to undermine one's feeling of φιλοστοργία).

[29] As he is often wont to do, Plutarch may be arguing here from a Stoic thesis against it, since the Stoics claim that emotions form a unity: you cannot

Following Crantor, who likened losing all emotions to giving up sentience to avoid illness (102d7-10), Plutarch concludes that enduring negative emotions is essential, as they enable the positive feelings that define a good life.

What follows from the above analysis is that Plutarch's metaphors are deliberate and reflect his views on the relationship between the parts of the soul. He identifies Platonic texts that advocate a moderated form of ἀπάθεια and reinterprets them to counter Stoic doctrine. Recognizing that some emotions hinder ethical growth, Plutarch employs agricultural metaphors to depict the non-rational mind as a garden, where emotions are shoots to be cultivated or pruned. These metaphors help articulate the idea that passions, while in need of management, are still organic parts of the soul's development. Even so, the asymmetry persists: in these metaphors, reason cultivates, but passion remains rooted in passivity. It is in the zoological metaphors—with their emphasis on taming, training, and mutual responsiveness—that Plutarch's ethical vision reaches its fullest expression. The domestication model, which likens passions to animals, aligns with the Platonic bipartite or tripartite soul, attributing autonomy to passions while emphasizing their need for rational control.[30] Before turning to this framework, it is essential to briefly examine the Stoic perspective on emotions: also rooted in the Platonic tradition, Stoic ideas profoundly influenced both philosophical and popular thought, shaping Plutarch's response.

Section 3. Bridling Impulse: Stoic Passion and Equine Disobedience

In *De virtute morali*, Plutarch consistently emphasizes the natural affinity between the non-rational and rational parts of the mind. He extends this idea to the relationship between humans and animals,

have one emotion without making yourself vulnerable to the rest; see Nussbaum, *Apeiron* 20.2 (1987) 141.

[30] For what counts as Platonic doctrine, see G.R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York 2001) Ch. 6; see also his *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250* (Cambridge 2018) Ch. 1, on the Platonist reconstruction of philosophical history and its implications for doctrinal authority. On bipartition in the early Academy, see D.A. Rees, "Bipartition of the Soul in the Early Academy." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77.1 (1957) 112-118.

aligning closely with Peripatetic thought as developed by Theophrastus and Strato of Lampsacus.[31] Plutarch devoted three treatises (*De soll. an.*; *Gryllus*; *De esu*) to the relationship of humans and animals, occasionally exploring the continuity between human and animal mentality and arguing that animals share in reason and deserve humane treatment.[32] The Stoics, by contrast, held opposing views: they denied emotions a distinct locus in the mind and rejected any affinity between humans and animals, asserting that animals exist solely for human use, without ethical obligations. This section examines the Stoic ideal of ἀπάθεια, focusing on how their belief in the harmful effects of passions on happiness grounds their assertion that animals are to be used without regard for ethical considerations.

The doctrine of ἀπάθεια, especially in the canonical form it received from Chrysippus,[33] originates from the ideal of self-sufficiency reflected in Plato's *Republic*:[34] passions make us vulnerable by exposing us to external desires and conditions beyond our control, undermining happiness and imperturbability. Also in parallel with the *Republic*, the Stoics claim that εὐδαιμονία depends entire-

[31] See W.W. Fortenbaugh, "Theophrastus and Strato on Animal Intelligence," in M.-L. Desclos and W.W. Fortenbaugh (eds.), *Strato of Lampsacus. Text, Translation, and Discussion* (London and New York 2011) 399-412. See also R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (Ithaca, NY 1993) 132; J.-F. Lhermitte 2015, *L'Animal vertueux dans la philosophie antique à l'époque impériale* (Paris 2015) 169-170; cf. Porph. *Abst.* 3.25.

[32] All three works appear to be animated by opposition to Stoic doctrine; see J. Mossman and A.V. Zadorojnyi, "Plutarch and Animals," in F. B. Titchener and A.V. Zadorojnyi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plutarch* (Cambridge 2023) 282-302, at 289.

[33] On Chrysippus' authority in the crystallization of the doctrine of ἀπάθεια, see Sorabji, *Animal Minds* 122-125; *Emotion* 206-207. For emotions in Stoicism, see M.R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago and London 2007) Ch. 2. For Zeno's view that passion is an exceeding impulse of the soul, see *SVF* 1.205 ff. Galen reports at *PHP* 6.25 that Posidonius veered from Stoic doctrine by positing an irrational part in the soul. Gill, *Structured Self* 214 argues that Posidonius "*was translating Platonic ideas into Stoic form*" (emphasis in the original); cf. 210 n. 10.

[34] For the influence of the *Republic* on Chrysippus, see Gill, *Structured Self* 304-322.

ly on virtue, not externals like wealth, power, health, or pleasure, which, though preferred, are indifferent to true happiness: for the Stoic sage, virtue alone secures happiness, making passions—*qua* false judgments about the value of externals—obstacles to the ultimate goal of life. Here lies a crucial divergence between Stoic and Plutarchan ethics: Plutarch sees passions as essential to human nature, and their removal as a mutilation of our psychological make-up; the Stoics, by contrast, argue that we should "live in accordance with nature," they define this nature as the divine λόγος that permeates the cosmos and urge us, through their notion of οἰκείωσις, to align with reason and eliminate passion.[35] In short, passions distort reason and, therefore, must be eradicated to restore harmony with nature and achieve true happiness.

The Stoic theory of human development highlights an unbridgeable gap between human and animal nature despite their shared origins: as one source informs us, the Stoics argued that the soul consists of eight parts, namely, the five senses, the capacities for speech and reproduction, and the ἡγεμονικόν, that is, the governing part (*Placita* 4.21 = *SVF* 2.827). In humans, the ἡγεμονικόν matures into rationality, while in animals it remains irrational:[36] accordingly, humans are, or at least should be, governed by reason, whereas animals act purely on instinct, driven by ὁρμή ("impulse").[37] The absence of reason from the animal soul is furthermore corroborated by factual experience since, for the Stoics, animals do not possess innate reason (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), which controls and regulates speech (λόγος προφορικός): animal utterances, so argues Philo, are no different than sounds produced by wind instruments, which resemble human speech but are meaningless.[38]

[35] For references on οἰκείωσις, see S.T. Newmyer, "Speaking of Beasts: The Stoics and Plutarch on Animal Reason and the Modern Case against Animals." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 63.3 (1999) 99-110, at 103 n. 12.

[36] S.T. Newmyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics* (New York 2006) 25; see also Newmyer, *QUCC* 63.3 (1999) 102.

[37] DL 7.85; cf. S.T. Newmyer, *Plutarch's Three Treatises on Animals. A Translation with Introductions and Commentary* (New York 2021) 4.

[38] *De animalibus* 99. Cf. Sorabji, *Animal Minds* 21-28; K. Jażdżewska, "Dialogic Format of Philo of Alexandria's *De animalibus*." *Eos* 102 (2015) 45-56, at 49.

The imperfection of the animal soul creates a growing divide between human and animal nature, shaping the Stoic stance on animals. This divide precludes any social bond, as Cicero argues in *De officiis*: the inability of animals to produce or understand λόγος excludes them from the natural kinship that unites humans (*Off.* 1.50). More critically, lacking reason, animals have no concept of justice, and humans have no ethical obligation to treat them as subjects of justice: according to Diogenes Laertius, Chrysippus maintained that justice cannot exist between humans and animals due to their fundamental dissimilarity, while he is reported by Cicero as holding the view that no injustice can be done against animals, which exist solely for human use (*Fin.* 3.67 = LS 57F5; cf. *Nat. D.* 2.37 = LS 54H1). Porphyry even cites the same philosopher as maintaining that pigs were created for sacrifice and that their souls were given as "salt" to make them tasty (*Abst.* 3.20.6-9 = LS 54P1 = *SVF* 2.1152).[39] Ultimately, then, it can be argued that the Stoic doctrine of οἰκείωσις underpins their view that justice does not extend to animals, rendering any treatment of them ethically permissible.

However, there is evidence that the Stoics as well employed the Platonic image of the charioteer to conceptualize passion. The following excerpts lend support to the supposition that the conceptualization of passions as horses may have been part and parcel of Stoic descriptions of psychological conflict. First, let us look at the definition of passion, preserved by Stobaeus (*Anth.* 2.7.10.1-3 = LS 65A1 = *SVF* 3.378; cf. DL 7.110 = *SVF* 1.205; Galen, *PHP* 4.2.10-11, 4.4.17):

> <Πάθος> δ' εἶναί φασιν ὁρμὴν πλεονάζουσαν καὶ ἀπειθῆ τῷ αἱροῦντι λόγῳ ἢ κίνησιν ψυχῆς <ἄλογον> παρὰ φύσιν …
>
> They [the Stoics] say that passion is impulse which is excessive and disobedient to the dictates of reason, or a movement of soul which is irrational and contrary to nature … (trans. Long and Sedley)

While this definition does not explicitly evoke the Phaedran meta-

[39] Cf. Plutarch *De stoic. rep.* 1044d for the Stoic view that bugs and mice were created for the sake of humans, the former to prevent them for oversleeping, the latter to force them to keep things tidy. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1256b16-18.

phor, a related passage sheds light on the connection between disobedience and the image of passion as a horse (Stob. *Anth.* 2.7.10a2-8 = LS 65A6 = *SVF* 3.378):

> Πᾶν γὰρ πάθος βιαστικόν ἐστι, ὡς πολλάκις ὁρῶντας τοὺς ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν ὄντας ὅτι συμφέρει τόδε οὐ ποιεῖν, ὑπὸ τῆς σφοδρότητος ἐκφερομένους, καθάπερ ὑπό τινος ἀπειθοῦς ἵππου, ἀνάγεσθαι πρὸς τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτό …
>
> For every passion is overpowering, since people in states of passion frequently see that it is not suitable to do this but are carried away by the intensity, as though by a disobedient horse, and are induced to do it … (trans. Long and Sedley)

While one might question whether the reference to the disobedient horse in the latter report should be read as implicit in the definition of passion as excessive impulse,[40] there are indications that the met-

[40] Chrysippus uses similar terms (ἀπειθῶς, ἀπειθές, μὴ εὐπειθῶς, ἀλόγως φέρεσθαι, ἐκφέρεσθαι) to characterize the experience of the runner who cannot stop at will, while he describes passionate behavior as "being carried away" (*SVF* 3.462, 476, 478); cf. Nussbaum, *Apeiron* 20.2 (1987) 169. Stobaeus' *Anthology* Book 2.7 provides Arius' summary of Stoic ethics; see Ch.H. Kahn, "Arius as a Doxographer," in W.W. Fortenbauch (ed.), *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics. The Work of Arius Didymus*, vol. I (New York 1983) 3-14, at 3; Graver, *Stoicism* 223-224 n. 6. The Platonic heritage of the image is already mentioned by A. Bonhoeffer, *Epiktet und die Stoa* (Stuttgart 1890) 284. I.G. Kidd, "*Euemptosia*-Proneness to Disease," in W.W. Fortenbaugh (ed.), *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics. The Work of Arius Didymus*, vol. I (New York 1983) 107-113, at 111 argues that the simile goes back to the platonizing Posidonius; ἐκφερομένους might be picking up on ἐκφόρων of fr. 31 E.-K, but see Ph.H. De Lacy, "Comments on Professor Kidd's Paper," in W.W. Fortenbaugh (ed.), *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics. The Work of Arius Didymus*, vol. I (New York 1983) 114-117, at 116, who counters that expressions related to ἐκφέρεσθαι and ἀπειθῶς had been used by Chrysippus in his discussions of πάθη. Recall also Chrysippus' definition of ὁρμή as φορά διανοίας (*SVF* 3.169, 377); cf. T. Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul* (Leiden 1996) 163. Relevant in this regard is Sextus Empiricus' report at *Adv.Math.* 7.19 on Posidonius' remark that philosophy should be likened to a living organism. See now B. Harriman, "Posidonius' Two Systems: Animals and Emotions in Middle Stoicism." *Archiv für Geshichte der Philosophie* 106.3 (2022) 1-37 on Galen's report that Posidonius connects the non-rational aspect of the soul with the animal part of humans. See also Inwood, *Ethics* 141: "When a dualistic contrast of reason and the irrational part of the soul in its undifferentiated formulation was preferred, an anal-

aphor underlies all formulations that describe passion as disobedient: observing that ἀπειθής and its verbal cognates are often used to describe disobedient horses,[41] let us turn to a passage from Galen's *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* to clarify the significance of ἀπειθεῖν. Galen, distinguishing between error and affective action, contrasts the behavior of someone sacrificing their child for the sake of their country with Medea's murder of her children (4.2.26-27). In Medea's case, the act results not from reason persuading her—she fully recognizes the horror of her crime—but from anger clouding her judgment (4.2.27.4-8):

> … τὸν θυμὸν δὲ εἶναι κρείττονα τῶν βουλευμάτων, τουτέστιν οὐχ ὑποτετάχθαι καὶ πείθεσθαι καὶ ἕπεσθαι καθάπερ τινὶ δεσπότῃ τῷ λόγῳ τὸ πάθος ἀλλ' ἀφηνιάζειν καὶ ἀποχωρεῖν καὶ ἀπειθεῖν τῷ προστάγματι, ὡς ἑτέρας τινὸς ἔργον ἢ πάθημα δυνάμεως ὑπάρχον, οὐ τῆς λογιστικῆς.
>
> … that is, her affection has not been made to submit and does not obey and follow reason as it would a master, but throws off the reins and departs and disobeys the command, the implication being that it is the action or affection of some power other than the rational. (trans. De Lacy)

The use of ἀφηνιάζειν explicitly links ἀπειθεῖν to the Phaedran metaphor, conceptualizing overpowering anger as a horse refusing to be reined in.[42] This connection lends credence to the idea that the charioteer metaphor of the *Phaedrus* is subtly embedded in Stoic

ogy with only one horse was substituted." Similarly, at *Quaest. Plat.* 1009a-b, the obedient horse seems to have been assimilated with the disobedient one (Machek, *BJHP* 26.2 [2018] 266). Cf. Ch. Gill, "Did Galen Understand Platonic and Stoic Thinking on Emotions?" In J. Sihvola and T. Engberg-Pedersen (eds.), *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Dordrecht 1998) 113-148, at 136-137. For the influence of Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus* on Chrysippus' thought, see Gill, *Structured Self* 291-322.

[41] E.g., Xen. *De re eq.* 3.6.4, 3.12.3, 6.10.1, 8.13.5.

[42] Cf. 4.5.18.5. The fact that, right before introducing the *Medea* example, Galen cites Chrysippus and references the definition of passion as disobedient motion of the soul (4.2.24-25) might serve as evidence that ἀφηνιάζειν is not an interpolation by Galen himself. For the view that Galen is here summarizing Chrysippus, see Gill, *Did Galen Understand?* 136. For Chrysippus' use of Euripides' works specifically to discuss πάθη, see Graver, *Stoicism* 3, 61-62, 70-71,

definitions of passion.[43]

These considerations suggest that Plutarch's domestication metaphors, while rooted in Platonic descriptions of psychological conflict, also reflect his effort to reclaim Platonic imagery and critique its Stoic misappropriation.[44] In *De libidine et aegritudine*, Plutarch adopts the definition almost *verbatim* to argue that desire and grief are integral to the human being as a whole (καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως ὁρμὴ μὲν πλεονάζουσα τὸ πάθος, τῷ ἀλόγῳ <τὸ> σφοδρὸν ἔχουσα καὶ ἀπειθές, 7.17-18).[45] Though less explicit in *De virtute morali*, he references this definition when discussing the origin of vice in the soul according to Stoic theory (441c10-13; cf. 449c5-6) and incorporates the term κίνησις in his definition of emotion, likely to capture its phenomenological aspect.[46] Building on Christopher Gill's observations (*Structured Self* 233), it can be argued that Plutarch reconceives the Stoic definition of passion to fit his part-based psychology, portraying ὁρμή as the defining element of emotion and the primary point of interaction with practical reason (e.g., 441b1-4, 444b10-c9, 444f2-445a2). In the next section, I examine Plutarch's use of the charioteer metaphor in *De virtute morali*. Unlike the Stoics, who em-

[43] Philo connects the dots and talks about application of the bridle to the excessive force of the impulse: δύνανται γὰρ οὗτοι χαλινὸν ταῖς ἀλόγοις δυνάμεσιν ἐμβαλόντες αὐτῶν ἐπιστομίζειν τῆς πλεοναζούσης τὴν φορὰν ὁρμῆς, *De agricultura* 94.4. On Philo's ample use of the charioteer metaphor, see Kerns, *Passions in Philo* 164-220. One might even argue that the metaphor implicit in the definition has been carried over to Latin since no less an eminent Stoic than Seneca employs it systematically to describe control of emotion: see, for example, the formulation *voluptates tenere sub freno* at *Ep*. 23.4; cf. *libidinem frenat* 88.4.1, *effrenatam* 92.8.4, *refrenavit* 104.13.2, *cupiditates refrenari* 120.11.2, *refrenemus* 123.14.6. On Seneca's use of animal imagery as a tool of moral and philosophical reflection, see F. Tutrone, *Filosofi e animali in Roma antica* (Pisa 2012) Ch. 6. Cf. Lucr. 4.1085; Varro fr. 177.3; Cic., *Cat*. 1.25.2; *Sen*. 40.1; *Dom*. 115.2; *Fin*. 3.36.10; *Tusc*. 4.12.13; Quintilian, *Inst*. 8.6.41.

[44] For the view that Plutarch's conception of virtue as harmonic mean and good tension aims at reclaiming Platonic imagery that had been adopted by Chrysippus, see A.A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Berkeley 1996) 214-215.

[45] The work has been disputed, but see F.H. Sandbach, "Plutarque était-il l'auteur du "De libidine et aegritudine?" *Revue de Philosophy* 43 (1969) 211-216 for arguments in support of its authenticity.

[46] 443d6: τὸ δὲ πάθος κίνησίς τις ἤδη τῆς δυνάμεως, 444c7: τὴν παθητικὴν κίνησιν. Cf. 444f2, 451f7.

phasize the disobedience of impulse and its hindrance to reason, Plutarch highlights the obedience of the non-rational soul and its essential role in achieving virtue.

Section 4. Under the Reins: Passions as Horses in Plutarch De virtute morali

Although Plutarch emphasizes the responsiveness of passion to reason, he is careful to note that, without proper education to align with reason in fostering virtue, the irrational mind becomes unruly and leads to vice (443c5-d3). In *De virtute morali*, this educational process is portrayed as domestication: παιδαγωγία is described as τιθάσευσις (441e7), with reason often depicted as the charioteer and passions as the horses. Several passages reinforce this imagery, with the metaphor from the *Phaedrus* either subtly present or explicitly referenced. This section explores the conceptualization of passions as horses in *De virtute morali*, demonstrating how Plutarch employs metaphors of chariot riding and domestication to reclaim the Phaedran imagery. Additionally, it examines Plutarch's engagement with Stoic ethical theories on the relationship between humans and animals.

The first passage in which Plutarch employs the charioteer metaphor comes early in the treatise, addressing those who wonder how the irrational part can heed reason, even though it is ἄλογον (442c6-d4):[47]

> Οἱ δὲ θαυμάζοντες ὅπως ἄλογον μέν ἐστι λόγου δ' ὑπήκοον οὔ μοι δοκοῦσι τοῦ λόγου περινοεῖν τὴν δύναμιν 'ὅση πέφυκε καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον διέρχεται' τῷ κρατεῖν καὶ ἄγειν οὐ σκληραῖς οὐδ' ἀντιτύποις ἀγωγαῖς ἀλλὰ τυπικαῖς καὶ τὸ ἐνδόσιμον καὶ πειθήνιον ἀπάσης ἀνάγκης καὶ βίας ἐχούσαις ἀνυσιμώτερον. ἐπεὶ καὶ πνεῦμα δήπου καὶ νεῦρα καὶ ὀστᾶ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ μέρη τοῦ σώματος ἄλογ' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅταν ὁρμὴ γένηται, σείσαντος ὥσπερ ἡνίας τοῦ λογισμοῦ πάντα τέταται καὶ συνῆκται καὶ ὑπακούει·
>
> Those who wonder how it is that this part is irrational, yet subservient to reason, do not seem to me to reflect thoroughly upon the power of reason, "How great it is, how far it penetrates," through its mastery and guidance, not by harsh and inflexible methods,

[47] For Aristotle's two senses of ἄλογος, see *EN* 1102a. Babut, *De La Vertu Éthique* 142-43 compares with *De genio Socr.* 588f-589a.

> but by flexible ones, which have a quality of yielding and submitting to the rein which is more effective than any possible constraint or violence. For, to be sure, even our breathing, our sinews and bones, and the other parts of the body, though they are irrational, yet when an impulse comes, with reason shaking the reins, as it were, they all grow taut and are drawn together in ready obedience.

Plutarch argues that such critics underestimate the power of reason, which can shake the reins, as it were, and bring the body—bones and sinews—under its control, whenever an impulse arises: reason takes the role of the charioteer, while the body, presumably representing the seat of the passionate soul, assumes the position of horses under the yoke. The term ἀγωγή frames the relationship between reason and passion as akin to that of teacher and pupil, but, as Babut (*De La Vertu Éthique* 142) observes, the description of the passionate soul as πειθήνιον ("persuaded, obedient") clearly connects to the *Phaedrus* metaphor. Although the influence of the *Phaedrus* is undeniable, another dimension emerges through the use of distinctly Stoic vocabulary: the presence of πνεῦμα as well as the terms ὁρμή and κίνησις calls to mind the Stoic accounts of passion as excessive impulse disobeying reason and suggests that Plutarch may have adopted the metaphor in direct opposition to Stoic doctrine.

The next significant use of a zoological metaphor in Plutarch appears less explicitly and seems more influenced by Plato than by the Stoa. In the *Timaeus*, the appetitive part of the soul is likened to a wild beast, tied and kept apart to avoid disrupting deliberation (70d7-71a3): the imagery suggests a necessary but controlled relationship between reason and desire, echoing the dynamic of the *Phaedrus*' charioteer and unruly horse.[48] However, while the *Timaeus*

[48] In the *Phaedrus*, the soul is housed in the body (κατοικισθεῖσα, 246c3; cf. *Ti.* 70a3: κατῴκισαν); the charioteer positions the horses at the manger (πρὸς τὴν φάτνην, 247e5; cf. *Ti.* 70e2: οἷον φάτνην); the soul is thrown into confusion by the horses (θορυβουμένη ὑπὸ τῶν ἵππων, 248a4; θόρυβος, 248b1; cf. *Ti.* 70e7: θόρυβον καὶ βοὴν ὡς ἐλαχίστην παρέχον). The *Republic* assumes a similarly suppressive attitude regarding the control of animals in the *kallipolis* since its founders commit to curtailing the liberties enjoyed by domestic animals in democracies, where horses and donkeys roam the streets proudly and freely

emphasizes restraint, Plutarch reinterprets the metaphor to stress harmony and mutual dependence: in *De virtute morali*, he likens the irrational soul to an animal, challenging the Stoic claim that the non-rational part cannot respond to reason. Using everyday examples of trained animals, he highlights their ability to follow reason through habituation, while drawing on Homer's image of Achilles urging both men and horses into battle (443b1-c4):

> ἀλλὰ ταῦτ' ἐάσας ἡδέως ἂν αὐτῶν πυθοίμην, εἰ κύνας καὶ ἵππους καὶ ὄρνιθας οἰκουροὺς ὁρῶντες ἔθει καὶ τροφῇ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ φωνάς τε συνετὰς καὶ πρὸς λόγον ὑπηκόους κινήσεις καὶ σχέσεις ἀποδιδόντας καὶ πράξεις τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ χρήσιμον ἡμῖν ἐχούσας Ὁμήρου τ' ἀκούοντες τὸν Ἀχιλλέα λέγοντος 'ὀτρύνειν ἵππους τε καὶ ἀνέρας' ἐπὶ τὴν μάχην ἔτι θαυμάζουσι καὶ διαποροῦσιν εἰ τὸ θυμούμενον ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦν καὶ λυπούμενον καὶ ἡδόμενον ὑπακούειν τε τῷ φρονοῦντι καὶ πάσχειν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ συνδιατίθεσθαι πέφυκεν, οὐκ ἀποικοῦν οὐδ' ἀπεσχισμένον οὐδὲ πλασσόμενον ἔξωθεν οὐδὲ τυπούμενον ἀνάγκαις τισὶν ἢ πληγαῖς, ἀλλὰ φύσει μὲν ἐξηρτημένον ἀεὶ δ' ὁμιλοῦν καὶ συντρεφόμενον καὶ ἀναπιμπλάμενον ὑπὸ συνηθείας.
>
> But, letting these subjects pass, I would gladly learn from my opponents whether, when they see dogs, horses, and domestic birds, through habituation, breeding, and teaching, uttering intelligible sounds and moving and assuming postures in subordination to reason, and acting in a manner conformable to due proportion and our advantage; and when they hear Homer declaring that Achilles "Urged on both horses and men" to battle—whether, I say, they still wonder and are in doubt that the element in us which is spirited and appetitive and experiences pain and pleasure, does, by its very nature, harken to the intelligence, and is affected and harmoniously disposed by its agency, and does not dwell apart from the intelligence, nor is it separated therefrom, nor moulded from without the body, nor formed by any extraneous violence or blows, but that by its nature it is dependent upon the intelligence and is always in association with it and nurtured together with it and influenced by familiar intercourse.

Here, Plutarch emphasizes the cooperative potential of the irratio-

without yielding to those coming their way (563c3-d2). For a positive appraisal of animal cognitive abilities in Plato, see E.B. Cole, "Plato on the Soul of Beasts," circulated to *Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Chicago 1991).

nal part, which he no longer depicts as a wild, uncontrollable beast but as naturally yielding to reason. In contrast to the *Timaeus*, where the appetitive soul is kept apart, he envisions the passionate soul as integrated, responsive, and essential for achieving virtue. This interpretation directly challenges the Timaean and Stoic dismissal of the irrational as inherently resistant to reason.[49]

Referencing Plato directly, Plutarch reverts to the metaphor later in the work, in a discussion of Aristotle's distinction between the self-controlled and the temperate person in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2 (445b6-c8):

> νῦν δὲ σωφροσύνη μέν ἐστιν, οὗ τὸ παθητικὸν ὥσπερ εὐήνιον θρέμμα καὶ πρᾶον ὁ λογισμὸς ἡνιοχεῖ καὶ μεταχειρίζεται, περὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας χρώμενος ὑπείκοντι καὶ δεχομένῳ τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ εὔσχημον ἑκουσίως, ὁ δ' ἐγκρατὴς ἄγει μὲν ἐρρωμένῳ τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ κρατοῦντι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν, ἄγει δ' οὐκ ἀλύπως οὐδὲ πειθομένην ἀλλὰ πλαγίαν καὶ ἀντιτείνουσαν, οἷον ὑπὸ πληγῆς καὶ χαλινοῦ καταβιαζόμενος καὶ ἀνακρούων, ἀγῶνος ὢν ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ θορύβου μεστός· οἷον ὁ Πλάτων ἐξεικονίζει περὶ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ὑποζύγια, τοῦ χείρονος πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ζυγομαχοῦντος ἅμα καὶ τὸν ἡνίοχον διαταράττοντος ἀντέχειν ὀπίσω καὶ κατατείνειν ὑπὸ σπουδῆς ἀναγκαζόμενον ἀεί, 'μὴ βάλῃ φοίνικας ἐκ χειρῶν ἱμάντας' κατὰ Σιμωνίδην.
>
> But the fact is that temperance belongs to the sphere where reason guides and manages the passionate element, like a gentle animal obedient to the reins, making it yielding in its desires and willingly receptive of moderation and propriety; but the self-controlled man, while he does indeed direct his desire by the strength and mastery of reason, yet does so not without pain, nor by persuasion, but as it plunges sideways and resists, as though with blow and curb, he forcibly subdues it and holds it in, being the while himself full of internal struggle and turmoil. Such a conflict Plato portrays in his simile of the horses of the soul, where the worse horse struggles against his better yoke-fellow and at the same time disconcerts the charioteer, who is ever forced to hold out against

[49] Plutarch's criticism of Plato is very subtle, as he mentions neither the *Timaeus* nor Plato himself; cf. G.E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?* (New York 2006) 89: "[Plutarch] generally appears to refrain from criticizing Aristotle's views, or else criticizes them mildly and implicitly, that is, without naming Aristotle."

him and with might and main to rein him in, "Lest he let fall from his hands the crimson thongs," as Simonides has it.

Plutarch presents reason as the charioteer and passions as the horses that quarrel with one another under the yoke. In the temperate soul, he explains, passion corresponds to an animal that accepts the rein willingly and follows reason gently without causing trouble; on the contrary, the charioteer in the self-controlled person must administer heavy blows to keep in check his desire which resists and plunges sideways. The Phaedran metaphor is furthermore applied in an innovative way to illustrate Aristotle's distinction (446c10-e2):[50]

τὸ γὰρ δάκνον καὶ τὸ λυποῦν καὶ τὸ ἀγανακτοῦν οὔπω τὴν ἐγκράτειαν ἀπολέλοιπε· τῆς δὲ σώφρονος ψυχῆς τὸ πανταχόθεν ὁμαλὲς καὶ ἄσφυκτον καὶ ὑγιαῖνον, ᾧ συνήρμοσται καὶ συγκέκραται τὸ ἄλογον πρὸς τὸν λογισμὸν εὐπειθείᾳ καὶ πραότητι θαυμαστῇ κεκοσμημένον, … ὧν δ' ἡ φύσις ἀναγκαίως δεῖται, ταῦθ' ὁμοπαθῆ καὶ ὑπήκοα καὶ φίλα καὶ συνεργὰ πεποιημένου ταῖς πρακτικαῖς προαιρέσεσιν, ὥστε μὴ προεκθεῖν τοῦ λογισμοῦ μηδ' ὑπενδιδόναι μηδ' ἀτακτεῖν μηδ' ἀπειθεῖν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν ὁρμὴν εὐάγωγον οὖσαν 'ἄθηλον ἵππῳ πῶλον ὡς ἅμα τρέχειν' …

For continence is not yet free from remorse and pain and indignation; but in the soul of the temperate man there is serenity on all occasions, freedom from violent changes, and sanity, by which the irrational is harmonized and blended with reason, when this is equipped with great persuasion and a wonderful gentleness. … and those movements which Nature absolutely requires had been made sympathetic, submissive, friendly, and, when the man chose a course of action, willing to co-operate, so that they did not outstrip the dictates of reason, nor fall short of them, nor misbehave, nor disobey, but so that every impulse was easily led "As new-weaned foal beside his mother runs"…

Terms, such as εὐπείθεια and ἀπειθεῖν, link this passage to the *Phaedrus*;[51] yet, it departs subtly from Plato's image of a yoked horse

[50] See Machek, *BJHP* 26.2 (2018) 265. On Plutarch's adaptation of Aristotelian psychology to combat Stoic monism, see F. Becchi, "Aristotelismo ed antistoicismo nel *De virtute morali* di Plutarco." *Prometheus* 1 (1975) 160-180 and "Aristotelismo funzionale nel *De virtute morali* di Plutarco." *Prometheus* 4 (1978) 261-275.

[51] δάκνειν may relate to equine behavior: see Xen. *De re eq.* 5.3.5, 6.10.1. It

obeying a charioteer, shifting instead to Semonides' verse (fr. 5), which evokes the intimate bond between a mare and her well-behaved foal. This relationship serves as a richer metaphor for the interaction between reason and passion: rather than a dynamic of coercion and restraint, it highlights one of trust, harmony, and natural cooperation.

Toward the end of the treatise, Plutarch reaffirms the necessity of retaining passions, arguing that their complete elimination would amount to uprooting the subservient part of the soul. Emphasizing their utility, he compares passions to rebellious oxen and horses (451d2-e4):

> καὶ γὰρ βοῶν καὶ ἵππων τὰ πηδήματα καὶ τοὺς ἀφηνιασμοὺς οὐ τὰς κινήσεις οὐδὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀφαιροῦσι, καὶ τοῖς πάθεσι δεδαμασμένοις χρῆται καὶ χειροήθεσιν ὁ λογισμός, οὐκ ἐκνευρίσας οὐδ' ἐκτεμὼν παντάπασι τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ὑπηρετικόν. 'ὑφ' ἅρμασι' γὰρ 'ἵππος' ὥς φησι Πίνδαρος 'ἐν δ' ἀρότρῳ βοῦς· κάπρῳ δὲ βουλεύοντα φόνον κύνα χρὴ τλάθυμον ἐξευρεῖν'· ὧν πολὺ χρησιμώτερα τὰ τῶν παθῶν θρέμματα τῷ λογισμῷ συμπαρόντα καὶ συνεντείνοντα ταῖς ἀρεταῖς, ὁ θυμὸς τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ, μέτριος ὤν, ἡ μισοπονηρία τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἡ νέμεσις ἐπὶ τοὺς παρ' ἀξίαν εὐτυχοῦντας, ὅταν ἅμ' ἀνοίᾳ καὶ ὕβρει φλεγόμενοι τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπισχέσεως δέωνται.
>
> It is, in fact, the rebellious kicking and plunging of oxen and horses that men do away with, not their movements and activities; even so reason makes use of the emotions when they have been subdued and are tame, and does not hamstring nor altogether excise that part of the soul which should be its servant. For "The horse is meet for the chariot," as Pindar says, "the ox for the plough; But if you think to slay a boar, you must find a stouthearted hound." Yet much more useful than these beasts are the whole brood of passions when they are present in the service of reason and help to intensify the virtues: anger, if it be moderate, will assist courage, and hatred of evil will aid justice, and righteous indignation will oppose those who are prosperous beyond their deserts when their

is also used for the horse biting the bit: see Pl. *Phdr*. 254d; E. *Hipp*. 1223. For the long history of biting as metaphor for grief, see Graver, *Stoicism* 29 with n. 47. Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 4.15 (… *ut aegritudo quasi morsum aliquem doloris efficiat* …). For the use of δάκνειν by Chrysippus to describe emotions, see Galen *PHP* 5.1.4, 4.3.2, 4.2.4-6.

> souls are inflamed with folly and insolence and they need to be checked.

Plutarch argues that, just as people do not seek to disable animals entirely but only to curb their rebellious behavior and resistance to the rein, reason should aim to tame passions rather than immobilize them. Citing Pindar, he underscores the indispensability of animals in human life and suggests that passions, even more so than animals, play a critical role in supporting reason and fostering virtue: properly subdued, passions like moderate anger, hatred of evil, and righteous indignation contribute to courage, justice, and the restraint of those whose folly and arrogance must be restrained.

The examples above illustrate Plutarch's conviction that passion is essential to human life. Rather than simply framing the relationship between reason and passion as that of an active craftsman shaping a passive product, a gardener overseeing the automatic growth of plants, or a charioteer punishing his horse, Plutarch uses the charioteer metaphor to highlight the benevolent aspects of this dynamic: this metaphor conveys both the distinct, autonomous existence of reason and passion and their deep interconnectedness and interdependence. To conclude, I will offer a few remarks on Plutarch's perspective on the relationship between humans and animals: exploring Plutarch's view on animal nature will shed light on his conceptualization of passion and how it diverges from the Stoic framework, which is grounded in a fundamentally different understanding of animals.

Conclusion: Passion and Kindness

The idea that horses belong to the chariot and oxen to the plough might suggest that Plutarch viewed animals as merely instrumental to human wellbeing. Indeed, the Platonic framework prioritizes reason and, by extension, humans, yet Plutarch's position is far more nuanced than the Stoic stance:[52] he acknowledges an affinity between humans and animals and uniquely argues for ethical

[52] See, in this regard, Epict. *Diss.* 1.6.18, who distinguishes between animals made to be eaten and others to be used as tools.

treatment of animals.[53] Like emotions, he sometimes sees animals as devoid of reason, but at other times suggests a sliding scale of reasoning ability, albeit inferior to humans.[54] However, the novelty of his view lies less in attributing thought to animals and more in challenging Stoic notions of justice, which he critiques as both inconsistent and inhumane. As already pointed out, the Stoics justified unjust treatment of animals by claiming they lack reason and the concept of justice: Plutarch counters this in *De amore prolis*, arguing that justice originates in affection for offspring and recognition of kinship,[55] also noting that even irrational animals display natural parental love, though their limited cognition prevents the full development of justice (495b6-c6).[56] While ambiguously phrased, an argument directed against Stoic doctrine may be latent here:[57] since even Chrysippus admitted that animals' affection for their offspring

[53] Newmeyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason* 103; *Three Treatises* 3. On the human / animal dichotomy in Greek thought, see R. Renehan, "The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 85 (1981) 239-259.

[54] For the view that humans are superior to animals because they can reason, see *De fort. Rom.* 98c and *De frat. am.* 478e. For the view that animals care for nothing other than pleasure, see *Adv. Col.* 1125a. Cf. Newmeyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason* 60-62.

[55] Newmeyer, *Three Treatises* 9.

[56] On the philosophical tradition of φιλοστοργία, see G. Roskam, "Plutarch Against Epicurus on Affection for Offspring. A Reading of *De amore prolis*," in L. van der Stockt and G. Roskam (eds.), *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics* (Leuven 2011) 175-201, at 178-184, who nonetheless views the argument as aimed against Epicurus' rejection of φιλοστοργία as a natural feeling. One should bear in mind, though, that the Stoics provided a definition of φιλοστοργία as a skill (φιλοτεχνία) pertaining to friends and relatives and as found only in the good, and therefore being extremely rare (*SVF* 3.292, 731). The previous tradition, especially the Peripatetics, employed the term with regard to animals: most appropriately for my analysis here, Aristotle describes the race of horses as φύσει φιλόστοργον (*HA* 611a11); cf. Roskam, in *Plutarch Against Epicurus* 180; Lhermitte, *L'Animal vertueux* 290-293.

[57] On the "anti-stoic coloring" of the treatises (termed *tierpsychologischen* by K. Ziegler, "Plutarchos." *RE* 41.1 [1951] 636-962, at 732), see F. Becchi, "Irrazionalità e razionalità degli animali negli scritti di Plutarco. Ovvero: Il paradosso della superiorità razionale ed etica degli animali." *Prometheus* 26 (2000) 205-225, at 205.

arises from recognizing kinship, and Zeno tied justice to οἰκείωσις, it would follow that the principle of justice should also extend to animals.[58]

Plutarch emphasizes that treating animals kindly ultimately benefits humans as well. While the Stoics justify injustice against animals on the grounds that otherwise humans would be reduced to living a life of beasts (cf. *De cap. ex inim.* 86d9-11), Plutarch offers a more nuanced view in *De sollertia animalium*: there, Soclarus defends the Stoic claim that no injustice is done to animals, as they lack respect for others' interests (964b10-11). Autobulus, however, counters this by arguing that animals friendly to humans should be domesticated to aid in tasks, in line with Pythagorean thought (964f1-965a3).[59] He rejects the Stoic dichotomy of "convenience or justice" and asserts that it is not the use of animals that is unjust but their harmful and neglectful treatment (965b5-7). Autobulus, speaking for Plutarch, underscores this ethical stance by referencing his son (Plutarch) as one who, following Plato, guides others toward justice (964d1-5).[60] Plutarch further develops this in his critique of Cato Major, who treated slaves as disposable tools, selling them when old: he argues that, while law and justice govern human relationships, kindness, which flows naturally from gentleness, extends further (*Ca. Ma.* 5.2), and he concludes that living beings should not be discarded like worn-out tools but treated gently, if only as practice in kindness

[58] For Chrysippus, see *De Stoic. rep.* 1038b8-10 = LS 57E2 = *SVF* 2.724; for Zeno, see Porph. *Abst.* 3.19.

[59] Cf. Porph. *Abst.* 3.20: οἱ δὲ Πυθαγόρειοι τὴν πρὸς τὰ θηρία πραότητα μελέτην ἐποιήσαντο τοῦ φιλανθρώπου καὶ φιλοικτίρμονος ("But the Pythagoreans made kindness to beasts a training in humanity and pity," trans. Clark).

[60] *Contra* Ph.S. Horky, "The Spectrum of Animal Rationality in Plutarch." *Apeiron* 50.1 (2017) 103-133, who, at 114, identifies this Autobulus as Plutarch's son, not his father. A. Pabst, ""Klarere Spiegel des Göttlichen" - Plutarch und die Tiere." *Millenium* 16.1 (2019) 75-92, at 89-90 argues that Autobulus' reference establishes Plutarch's presence and infers, on the basis of the remark at 964c2-5, that Plutarch adopts the maieutic method to encourage the readership to reach new insights. On the aporetic ending of the work as an academic exercise on finding arguments for both sides of a given topic, see Th. Tsiampokalos, "Plutarch in the Middle of a Conflict between Epictetus and Favorinus," in K. Jażdżewska and F. Doroszewski (eds.), *Plutarch and his Contemporaries* (Leiden 2024) 110-124.

toward humans (*Ca. Ma.* 5.5):

> οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑποδήμασιν ἢ σκεύεσι τοῖς ψυχὴν ἔχουσι χρηστέον, κοπέντα καὶ κατατριβέντα ταῖς ὑπηρεσίαις ἀπορρίπτοντας, ἀλλ' εἰ διὰ μηδὲν ἄλλο μελέτης οὕνεκα τοῦ φιλανθρώπου προεθιστέον ἑαυτὸν ἐν τούτοις πρᾷον εἶναι καὶ μείλιχον.
>
> We should not treat living creatures like shoes or pots and pans, casting them aside when they are bruised and worn out with service, but, if for no other reason, for the sake of practice in kindness to our fellow men, we should accustom ourselves to mildness and gentleness in our dealings with other creatures.

Plutarch ties kindness (ἡμερότης) to the domestication of passion, framing it as a mark of virtuous character: the just person, as he notes in *De virtute morali* (452a11), is "neither cruel nor spiteful" (οὐκ ὠμὸς οὐδὲ πικρὸς); conversely, cruelty risks habituating us to treating humans harshly and estranging us from love and affection, which, as he argues in the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, must be safeguarded above all else.[61]

These considerations suggest that Plutarch's rhetorical choices in *De virtute morali* are intricately tied to its content, with domestication metaphors taking center stage to emphasize the crucial role of the non-rational mind in shaping virtue: unlike mixture metaphors, which reduce passions to passive ingredients, or agricultural metaphors, which depict them as unconscious growths, domestication metaphors elevate passions to the status of animals—responsive agents capable of following reason. Plutarch thus draws on a familiar Platonic trope while reshaping it to portray the passionate soul as an obedient, cooperative animal. Furthermore, by linking passions with animals, he underscores their intrinsic value and the respect they deserve. Such a perspective stands in contrast to the prevailing Stoic view of animals during Imperial times, which justified their mistreatment through the theory of οἰκείωσις. Noting parallels between Stoic cruelty toward animals and their advocacy of ἀπάθεια, Plutarch likely employed these metaphors to caution

[61] Seneca, *De brev. vitae* 13.6-7 recognizes a possible connection between the violence against animals in Pompey's shows for the dedication of the temple of *Venus Victrix* in 55 BC and the blood that would soon be shed among Romans; see Tutrone, *Filosofi e animali* 225-227 with n. 31.

against replicating such dismissiveness in the mental realm. Instead, he drew on Platonic and Pythagorean traditions to promote kindness and affirm the value of passion, rejecting the harshness of ἀπάθεια and its dispossession of passion's inherent worth.

Acknowledgments

This paper was presented at the *Plutarch and Emotions* workshop (Hamburg 2023) and at the Faculty of the Classics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2024). I am grateful to the audiences of both events for their valuable feedback. Special thanks go to my colleagues at the University of Warsaw. This article was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, under the project "Thinking of Thinking. Conceptual Metaphors of Cognition in the Plutarchan Corpus" (UMO-2021/42/E/HS3/00259).

University of Warsaw
o.karatzoglou@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0009-0008-3499-2286