Abstract on The Acceptance of the Stoic Thesis on Affections (*Pathē*)

In this paper, I argue that the Stoic claim that one should strive towards having no affections (*pathē*) is a plausible and, moreover, true claim given the context of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*) in relationship to their philosophy of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Given the conception of affections (*pathē*) that the Stoics intended, the irrefutability that one should strive towards having no affections (*pathē*) is found in the Stoic conception of impulse (*hormē*) and of value (namely how affections (*pathē*) lack value). Further, in the Stoic philosophy, there is identification of goods, bads and indifferents, which is an important contributing factor to the plausibility of the thesis. Taken together, these lead to the coherent acceptance of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*), specifically that the allowance of affections (*pathē*) should be avoided.

The Acceptance of the Stoic Thesis on Affections (*Pathē*)

In this paper, I discuss the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*). I argue that the Stoic claim that one should strive towards having no affections (*pathē*) is a plausible and, moreover, true claim. First, I will provide the context of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*) in relationship to their philosophy of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Following, I will discuss affections (*pathē*), as the Stoics intended. In order to support the irrefutability of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*), I present the following premises. For the first premise, I discuss the Stoic thesis of impulse (*hormē*) in relationship to affections (*pathē*). For the second premise, I present the Stoic belief of value, focusing on how affections (*pathē*) lack value. For the third premise, I show that, in the Stoic philosophy, there is identification of goods, bads and indifferents, which is an important contributing factor to the plausibility of the thesis. Thus, the premises support the plausibility and, in fact, lead to the coherent acceptance of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*), specifically that the allowance of affections (*pathē*) should be avoided.

I now discuss the importance of affections (*pathē*) to Stoic philosophy. According to Stoic philosophy, the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life, being the purpose for which all thought, words and actions are done, is happiness (*eudaimonia*). For the Stoic, happiness (*eudaimonia*) is synonymous with living one’s life as true to nature, that is to say living in accordance virtue. For the Stoics, the so-called Sage is the person who lives a happy life, true to nature (both one’s nature and nature as a whole) and in accordance with virtue. Additionally, the Sage is the only person who possesses knowledge; that is to say, he or she never makes a false supposition, never assents to non-apprehensive impressions, and, importantly, does not have any affections (*pathē*). As such, the Stoics aim to achieve the status of the Sage as doing so means the achievement of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Therefore, the Stoic thesis that one should strive to have no affections (*pathē*) is central to their philosophy because having affections (*pathē*) impedes one from becoming a Sage and from achieving the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life.

Given the context of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life, I now describe the Stoic understanding of affections (*pathē*). An affection (*pathe)* is commonly translated as a “feeling” or “passion” which is subjective, being unique to each individual. For the Stoics, however, an affection (*pathe)* is not considered to be only a mere physical sensation. Rather, the Stoics believe that, for the average individual (being the non-Sage), an affection (*pathē*) is the result of an impulse, which is excessive and disobedient to reason, such that it is the result of an irrational movement of the “soul”. The Stoic individual that experiences the impulse of an irrational movement of the “soul” lives a life that is not in accordance with nature. As such, the Stoics suggest that one should strive to hold no affections (*pathē*) so as to live in accordance with nature.

According to Stoicism, there are four basic affections (*pathē*) for the average individual (being the non-Sage): pleasure, appetite, distress, and fear. Pleasure and appetite are affections (*pathē*) that are considered good whereas distress and fear are affections (*pathē*) that are considered bad, though none are beneficial to the achievement of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Pleasure is the present-tense affection (*pathē*) that results from one’s opinion that he or she should be presently “swollen” for a given something because of its goodness whereas appetite is the the affection (*pathē*) that results from one’s opinion that he or she should reach towards a given something that is in the future because of its goodness. Distress is the present-tense affection (*pathē*) that results from one’s opinion that a given something should be avoided as it is bad while fear is the affection (*pathē*) that results from one’s opinion that he or she should avoid a given something due to its quality of being bad.

In order to understand affections (*pathē*), it is important to grasp the Stoic definition of impulse (*hormē*). An impulse (*hormē*) is stimulated by an “impulsive impression” (*hormētikē phantasia*) towards what is “befitting” (*kathēkon*) for the individual who experiences it. More precisely, an impulse (*hormē*) is the movement of the “soul” towards something. For rational beings, that is for human beings, impulse is beneficial in the achievement of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life only when it is rational, such that it is the movement of thought towards a natural something that is involved in one’s action.

Thus, when an average (being the non-Sage) individual allows himself or herself experience affections (*pathē*), he or she experiences excessive, irrational movement of his or her “soul”. Said excessive, irrational movement is the result of misplaced impulses. Thus, the experience of affections (*pathē*) causes one to live in a way that is discordant to nature. As such, any impulse toward the affections (*pathē*) of pleasure, appetite, distress, or fear results in the incorrect identification of what is “befitting” (*kathēkon*). Therefore, in accordance with the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life, the Stoics rightfully reject trusting their affections (*pathē*). Thus, I urge that, given the context of impulse, the Stoic claim that one should strive towards having no affections (*pathē*) should be accepted as true.

In further support of the acceptance of the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*), I now detail value as it is understood in the context of Stoic philosophy. For the Stoics, all which is natural has value (*axia*) while all of which is unnatural has disvalue. For example, health has value while disease and illness have disvalue. According to the Stoics, that which has value is “preferred” (*proēgmena*) whereas that which has disvalue is “dispreferred” (*apoproēgmena*). Because the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life is to live in accordance with nature, one experiences an impulse toward things of value (as they are natural) while one experiences an impulse to avoid things of disvalue (as they are unnatural). Additionally, there is a broad spectrum, such that there are things of high value, of low value, of no value nor disvalue, of high disvalue and of low disvalue. One’s impulse to strive towards, avoid or be unmoved towards a given something is dependent on the amount of value, disvalue, or neither that said something contains.

Because affections (*pathē*) are the result of excessive impulses that result from the irrational movement of the “soul”, affections (*pathē*) considered to contain disvalue for Stoics. Because affections (*pathē*) are determined to have disvalue, affections (*pathē*) are unnatural. In being unnatural, affections (*pathē*) delay and, ultimately, prevent the Stoic individual from achieving the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Because of the framework provided by Stoicism, the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*) is plausible and should be accepted as valid.

Furthermore, having discussed value and impulse (*hormē*), I now turn to the Stoic understanding of the goods, the bads, and the indifferents. According to Stoicism, there are things that are worthy of pursuit due to their goodness as they are beneficial, called the goods, and there are things that should be evaded due to their badness as they are harmful, called the bads. For example, virtues are goods whereas vices are bads. Moreover, there are indifferents, which are things, that are valuable yet are neither beneficial nor harmful and, as such, may be “preferred” or “dispreferred”. The goods contribute to happiness (*eudaimonia*), which is the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life, whereas the bads detract from happiness (*eudaimonia*), thereby interfering with achievement of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life.

Importantly, for the average (being the non-Sage) individual, the four basic affections (*pathē*) of pleasure, appetite, distress, and fear are the result of mistaken identification of indifferents. When one experiences pleasure or appetite, the Stoics believe that it is due to the false labeling of an indifferent as a good. Similarly, when one experiences distress or feared, the Stoics believe that it is the result of erroneous association of an indifferent as a bad. Additionally, the Stoics acknowledge that each average (being the non-Sage) individual makes said judgements differently, which results in varying numbers and intensities of affections (*pathē*) among them.

In contrast, the Stoic Sage does not suffer from the four basic affections (*pathē*). Instead, the Sage experiences “good feelings” (*eupatheia*). These include joy, wishing, and watchfulness. For the Stoic Sage, joy can be understood as the opposite of pleasure, such that it is “swelling” that is reasonable as he or she possesses the knowledge that a given something is, at the present time, good and for which it is worth being “swelled”. Similarly, wishing can be viewed as the opposite of appetite because it is the reasonable “feeling” that one should aim for a given something in the future due to certain knowledge that said given something is a good. In contrast, watchfulness is the opposite of fear in that it is the well-reasoned avoidance of a given something in the future due to certain knowledge that said given something is a bad that should be evaded.

Consequently, I argue that the incorrect recognition of indifferents as goods or as bads is important to the Stoic thesis that one should strive towards having no affections (*pathē*). Because affections (*pathē*) are the result of false application of one’s understanding of the goods and of the bads, I believe that trying to reject affections (*pathē*) is the only plausible methodology by which to live the Stoic life. Given the definitions of the goods, the bads, and the indifferents in the context of Stoicism, the Stoics are correct in their belief that affections (*pathē*) should be avoided as affections (*pathē*) restrict them from becoming a Sage and from achieving the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Furthermore, by successfully rejecting any acceptance of affections (*pathē*), the Stoic becomes closer to becoming a Stoic Sage and experiencing the “good feelings” (*eupatheia*) of joy, wishing, and watchfulness in the place of the basic affections (*pathē*).

Thus, I believe that, taken together, the three aforementioned premises support the Stoic thesis that urges for the rejection of affections (*pathē*). I have detailed why said rejection is a plausible claim as impulse, value and the assignment of good, bad, or indifferent of any said given shows that affections (*pathē*) are not something towards which one should strive nor for which one should want. Ultimately, affections (*pathē*) are most problematic in their resulting impediment to the achievement of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life. Thus, the philosophical significance of the Stoic thesis that affections (*pathē*) must be considered within the context of Stoicism. When considered in respect to Stoic philosophy, the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*)*,* specifically that affections (*pathē*) should be avoided and rejected, is coherent.

Therefore, I feel that based on the context of Stoic philosophy, the Stoic thesis that affections (*pathē*)should be avoided and rejected is found to be plausible and valid. As the Stoic belief of the ultimate goal (*telos*) of life suggests, everything that one does should be to achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*), such that he or she is lives a life in accordance with nature and virtue. Because affections (*pathē*) detract from the achievement of living in accordance with nature, one should not strive to maintain affections (*pathē*). Rather, one should strive to reject any affections (*pathē*) that he or she holds. Further support of the plausibility of the rejection of affections (*pathē*)is found in understanding the framework provided by the Stoic definitions of impulse and value. Additionally, I have shown that affections (*pathē*) are the result of the mistaken identification of an indifferent as a good or as a bad, which supports the plausibility of the Stoic theory on affections (*pathē*) as one should not accept nor strive to accept any belief that is false or based in falsehoods. In conclusion, the Stoic thesis on affections (*pathē*) is a valid and plausible claim supported by the premises presented.