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T.H. Irwin

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AUGUSTINE'S CRITICISMS OF THE STOIC THEORY OF PASSIONS

T.H. Irwin

Augustine defends three claims about the passions: (1) The Stoic position differs only verbally from the Platonic-Aristotelian position. (2) The Stoic position is wrong and the Platonic-Aristotelian position is right. (3) The will is engaged in the different passions; indeed the different passions are different expressions of the will. The first two claims, properly understood, are defensible. But the most plausible versions of them give us good reason to doubt the third claim.

1.

A full exploration of Augustine's reflexions on the nature of the passions would introduce us to some of his central moral and theological concerns. I do not intend to undertake this full exploration. I want to discuss his claim about the proper interpretation of the Stoic conception of the passions in relation to the Platonic and Aristotelian view. Augustine is not a careful or systematic historian of philosophy; but some of his historical remarks are illuminating and thought-provoking. I want to show this about his remarks on the passions.

Plato and Aristotle regard the passions as a distinct source of non-rational motivation present in a virtuous person, whereas the Stoics deny that the sage is subject to passions.

There are two views held by philosophers about these movements of the mind that the Greeks call *pathê*. Some Latin writers call them 'disturbances', as Cicero does; some call them 'affections' or 'affects'; others call them 'passions', as Apuleius does, following the Greek more closely. Some philosophers say that these disturbances or affections or passions come upon even the sage, but are controlled and subjected to reason, so that the supremacy of the mind imposes laws on them in some way, by which they are kept to the necessary limit. This is the opinion of the Platonists and Aristotelians... But others, such as the Stoics, do not agree that passions of this sort come upon the sage at all. (*De Civitate Dei* ix 4a)¹

He neither completely endorses nor completely rejects either of these views, as he understands them.

I want to discuss three aspects of his conception of the passions: (1) The

Stoic position differs only verbally from the Platonic-Aristotelian position. (2) The Stoic position is wrong and the Platonic-Aristotelian position is right. (3) The will is engaged in the different passions; indeed the different passions are different expressions of the will.

The first two of these claims seem clearly inconsistent. But I will argue that the inconsistency is relatively superficial, and that both claims are defensible. The two claims represent two ways of stating a reasonable view about the relation between the Stoic and the Peripatetic² position. I cannot adequately defend these two claims of Augustine's here, since a proper defence would introduce some complex exegetical questions both about the Stoic and Peripatetic positions and about Augustine's positions. For simplicity, I will defend Augustine's first claim, but a more circumspect defence of him would probably say that he identifies some important common elements in the Stoic and Peripatetic positions that one might otherwise miss.

Though Augustine's first two claims might provoke some initial doubts, I will try to remove these doubts. The third claim is not so obviously questionable, but I will suggest that it needs to be questioned. If we accept the most plausible defence of his first two claims, we have good reason to doubt the third claim. The relation between passions and will that Augustine assumes in his third claim conflicts with the relation that is assumed in the most plausible version of the first two claims.³

2.

Some of the Stoics's remarks on passions appear to reduce passions to false assents, so that passions do not belong to a distinct non-rational part of the soul. Here the Stoics seem to disagree sharply with the Peripatetics, who recognize a non-rational part as the seat of the passions. That is why the Stoics want to abolish precisely the passions that the Peripatetics want to moderate:

It has often been asked whether it is better to have moderate affections or no affections. We Stoics expel them, whereas the Peripatetics temper them. I do not see how any moderate condition of a disease could be healthy or useful. (Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 116.1; cf. 85.3-5)

The Peripatetics want to moderate the passions, so that they are correctly guided by the rational part of the soul. Seneca rejects this conciliatory attitude to the passions, arguing that the passions ought to be eliminated altogether.

To explain his view that the Stoic position is only verbally different from the Peripatetic, Augustine first introduces Cicero's judgment that the Stoic conception of value differs only verbally from the Peripatetic.

Now Cicero, in his book *De Finibus*, shows that the Stoics disagree with the Platonists and Peripatetics in words rather than in reality; for the Stoics refuse to apply the term "goods" to external and bodily advantages, because they take the only good to be virtue, the art of living well, and this exists only in the mind. The other philosophers, however, using the simple and customary way of speaking, call these things goods, but small, indeed trivial, in comparison to virtue, by

which we live correctly. And thus whatever these things are called by each side, whether goods or advantages, both sides attach the same value to them, and that in this matter the Stoics are pleasing themselves merely with an innovation in the choice of words. (CD ix 4b-c)

Augustine summarizes, without criticism, Cicero's suggestion that the Stoic doctrine of preferred and non-preferred indifferents really restores the substance of Peripatetic conceptions of value, despite the Stoics' insistence that virtue is the only good.

Does Augustine believe that this point about goods and indifferents also shows that the Stoics only verbally reject the Peripatetic position on passions? One might suppose so, since Augustine proceeds, immediately after the passage just quoted, to state his claim about the Stoic doctrine of passions.

It seems to me, therefore, that in this question also, about whether the passions of the mind come to the sage, or he is wholly removed from them, the Stoics raise a controversy about words rather than things. (ix 4c)

However, Augustine's 'therefore' is ambiguous. He might mean either of two things: (1) He will describe another case in which Stoic views on value make their position only verbally different from the Peripatetic position. (2) He will describe another case that is like the case of value in so far as Stoic views differ only verbally from Peripatetic. If he intends only the second claim, he implies that the Stoic doctrine of passions is verbally different from the Peripatetic, but he does not imply that the verbal difference is the one about goods and indifferents.

Which view does Augustine accept? The first view captures some of his position; for he returns to the doctrine of goods and indifferents later in the chapter, to support his claim about the purely verbal character of the dispute. But this is not the whole of his position. For before returning to goods and indifferents, he reports Aulus Gellius reporting Epictetus on the passions. The Stoic position that he derives from Aulus Gellius and (indirectly) from Epictetus introduces an aspect of the Stoic doctrine of the passions that is distinct from the Stoic doctrine of indifferents. We must therefore try to understand the position that Augustine derives from Epictetus, and then try to see the connexion between this position and the doctrine of indifferents.

3.

Augustine's effort to reconcile the Stoic with the Peripatetic position may well seem misguided. The Stoics reject the Peripatetic belief in a non-rational part of the soul that is the seat of the passions. They appear to hold an extreme cognitive and reductive view, since they identify passions with false assents. The assents are false because they treat preferred and non-preferred indifferents as goods and evils. Fear of pain, bodily injury, or poverty, for instance, is simply assent to its being bad to suffer these things.

Since these things are not evils, but merely non-preferred indifferents, the fear is a false assent.

This description of the Stoic position suggests that Augustine's reference to the Stoic theory of value is relevant, but insufficient. Suppose that we could convince the Stoics that they ought to follow the Peripatetics in calling preferred and non-preferred indifferents goods and evils. If they were convinced on this point, the Stoics would not be giving up much; indeed, they sometimes declare themselves willing to concede the point to common sense, in order to concentrate on their main substantive doctrines.⁴ Such a concession would apparently make no difference to their rejection of any non-rational part of the soul, and hence it would not affect their most basic disagreement with the Peripatetic position.

If, then, Augustine is to defend his attempted reconciliation of the Stoic with the Peripatetic position, he needs to explain why the Stoics' treatment of passions as false beliefs about good and evil does not conflict with the Peripatetic view. He explains this point in his report of Aulus Gellius and Epictetus.

The Stoic position would indeed conflict directly with the Peripatetic if it simply identified passions with false assents. Such a position would be an extreme version of a Socratic view. Socrates sometimes identifies fear with the expectation of evil.⁵ According to Socrates, fear is sometimes present in a brave person no less than in a coward. A Stoic variation on this position would identify fear with the false expectation of evil, and so would deny that the brave person is subject to fear at all.

Though some of the Stoics' remarks about passions might suggest this extreme Socratic view, Augustine sees that they do not really maintain it. For they do not identify passions with false assents without qualification; they identify them with false assents that have the appropriate causal origins. Passions are 'fresh' or 'immediate' assents in which we yield to appearances of good and evil.⁶

These qualifications of assent introduce features of passions that are not features of all false assents about good and evil. If our assent yields to appearances rather than merely agreeing with them, the appearances themselves must have some suggestive character of their own that exerts some pressure on us. If someone simply mentions the possibility that there are lions in the back garden, I may entertain the proposition that there are lions there, but in entertaining it, I find no tendency to assent to it. But if I actually seemed to see a lion eating the clothes line, even if I believed it must be some sort of illusion, the visual appearance would increase my tendency to assent, and if I assented I would be yielding to the suggestion that the appearance already presents.

The Stoics recognize this aspect of passions in identifying them with immediate assents that involve yielding to appearances. When I am afraid of being wounded, or angry at being slighted, I do not simply (in their view) believe that something bad is about to happen to me or has happened to me; I believe this on the basis of the strongly suggestive appearance. My fear presents wounds as bad, and my anger presents revenge for a slight as good. If I am undergoing no passion, and someone else simply asks me whether it is bad to be wounded or good to avenge this slight, I may have

no tendency to believe one thing or the other until I have thought about it. But when I have some passion, I have a strong tendency to assent before I have thought about it, and, unless I make a special effort, I will assent to it without thinking about it properly. In this respect my assent would be 'immediate' and would involve 'yielding' to the appearance.

If the Stoics intend to convey this suggestive character of some appearances, their conception of 'immediacy' should not be purely temporal. We might take it to mean that suggestive appearances prompt us to assent 'immediately', without delay and on the spur of the moment. If this is what the Stoics mean, we might expect them to say that passions go away when we think about them, and so do not assent without delay. But probably they mean that an 'immediate' assent is unmediated; we simply yield, without proper reflexion, to the suggestive character of the appearance. In some cases further reflexion and experience may prevent us from yielding to appearances; but we cannot guarantee that mere lapse of time will make an appearance lose its suggestive character. If we do not reflect appropriately about the appearance, the mere fact that we are used to it will not make it any less immediate, and will not make us any less prone to yield to it.⁷

This aspect of the Stoic position shows that the Stoics do not ignore the non-voluntary and non-rational features mentioned in Peripatetic accounts of the passions. In emphasizing that passions are assents, they insist that passions have a rational and voluntary element. But in treating them as immediate assents that yield to suggestive appearances, they allow that passions rest on a non-voluntary and non-rational basis. For the underlying appearances are non-voluntary, and do not necessarily reflect our rational judgments about comparative values. If I decide that I need a surgical operation, I may still have the vivid and suggestive appearance of its being bad for me to be cut open. If I am too prone to follow my appearances, I weakly yield to this suggestive appearance, and cancel the operation. If I do not follow the appearance, it may none the less persist, contrary to my judgment about goods and evils.

Stoic sages are not exempt from these non-rational suggestive appearances. They are exempt from passions, because they do not yield to suggestive appearances that present preferred and non-preferred indifferents as goods and evils. But freedom from passions does not imply freedom from the underlying suggestive appearances.

4.

This is the feature of the Stoic position that Augustine examines in his comparison of Stoics with Peripatetics. He introduces a story from Aulus Gellius about a Stoic philosopher on board a ship caught in a storm at sea.

Aulus Gellius, ... relates, ... that he once made a voyage with an eminent Stoic philosopher; and he goes on to relate ... that when the ship was tossed and in danger from a violent storm, the philosopher grew pale by the force of fear (*vi timoris expalluit*) (ix 4d)

After the storm was over, the philosopher took out his volume of

Epictetus, to show how his growing pale conformed to Stoic doctrine on freedom from passion.

Aulus Gellius says that he read in this book that the Stoics' view was that as far as appearances of the mind, which they call *phantasiai*, are concerned, it is not in our power whether or when they will occur to the mind. When they come from alarming and formidable things, they necessarily move the mind even of the sage, so that for a little he trembles with fear, or is depressed by sadness, these passions running ahead of (*praevertentibus*) the work of reason and self-control; but it does not follow that a belief that there is something bad will arise in the mind, or that the mind will accept (*adprobare*) them and consent (*consentiri*) to them.^{viii} For this consent is, they believe, in our power, and there is this difference between the mind of the sage and that of the fool, that the fool's mind yields to these same passions and fits the consent of the intellect to them, whereas the mind of the sage, though it necessarily undergoes them, yet retains with unshakable intellect a true and steady belief (*sententia*) about the things that it ought rationally to seek or avoid. (ix 4f-g)

This Stoic explanation shows why the pallor of the Stoic philosopher in the storm did not betray an insincere or incomplete adherence to Stoicism. Even the sage can be expected to behave in the same way.

Augustine says he is abbreviating Aulus Gellius' report of Epictetus. He is also modifying it in ways that a Stoic would not accept. The modifications are clear if we look at the crucial passage in Gellius.

Appearances (*visa*) of the mind, which the philosophers call *phantasiai*, ... do not belong to the will and are not in one's control ...; but approvals (*probationes*), which they call *sunkatatheseis*, by which these appearances are recognized, are voluntary and come about by a human being's control. Therefore, when some frightening sound comes from the sky or from a falling building, ... it is necessary for even the mind of the sage to be for a moment moved and to shrink and to grow pale, not because any belief in any evil has been accepted, but because of some rapid and unpremeditated movements that run ahead of the function of mind and reason. Soon, however, that sage does not endorse - that is to say, does not assent to, and does not add his belief to - such *phantasiai* - namely these frightening appearances (*visa*) - but he rejects and repudiates them, and nothing in these appearances seems (*videtur*) to him to be something to be feared (*metuendum*). And this, the Stoics say, is the difference between the fool and the sage, that the fool supposes things to be really as harsh and severe as they appeared to him to be when his mind was first struck, and once he has received them, also endorses them with his assent and adds his belief to them, as though they were rightly to be feared. ... The sage, however, while he is changed in complexion and facial expression for a short time and to a limited degree, does not assent, but at once holds on to the strength of his opinion. (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* xix 1.15-20)⁹

Augustine begins by accepting Gellius' division between appearances and assent. But he differs from him in the description of the appearances. According to Augustine, our having the appearances is sufficient for being affected by the corresponding passions. Whereas Gellius says that the appearances 'run ahead' of reason and assent, Augustine claims that the passions run ahead. In his view, the passions run ahead of reason by declaring that some state of affairs is good or bad. The difference between the fool and the sage is that the fool consents to the passions and the sage refuses assent.

All these references to the passions conflict with the Stoic position. Gellius has none of them. He accurately reports Epictetus' Stoic view, and so does not treat the appearances as passions. The Stoics do not say that the sage refuses assent to the passions; in their view, he refuses assent to the suggestive but misleading appearances, and so avoids any passions.

After this report of Aulus Gellius, Augustine returns to his main claim that the Stoics and the Peripatetics agree in the substance of their views about the passions.

If this is true, there is no difference, or next to none, between the opinion of the Stoics and that of the other philosophers regarding passions and disturbances of the mind; for both sides defend the mind and reason of the sage from mastery by passions (*ab earum dominatione*). And perhaps the Stoics say that they do not come upon (*cadere in*) the sage because the passions in no way cloud by any error or undermine by any lapse the wisdom that makes him a sage. But they do occur in the mind of the sage, without damage to his wisdom; they occur because of those things that they call advantages or disadvantages, though they refuse to call them goods or evils. For certainly if that philosopher had thought nothing of those things which he thought he was about to lose by shipwreck - life and bodily safety - he would not have been so terrified by his danger as to be betrayed by the witness of his pallor. (ix 4h-i)

Augustine has damaged his argument for this conclusion by presupposing the conclusion in his report of the Stoic position. In altering Gellius so as to imply that the Stoic sage has passions and refuses assent to them, he has erased the Stoic division between appearances and passions.

It is hardly surprising that, if we ignore this crucial division, the Stoic position seems rather similar to Peripatetic. Contrary to Augustine, the Stoics believe that the involuntary appearance is not the passion itself, but just some basis for it. Augustine overlooks or ignores the aspect of Stoic doctrine that seems to count most strongly against his assimilation of the Stoic to the Peripatetic view.

One might argue this description of the Stoic view reflects Augustine's misunderstanding. Has he perhaps failed to recognize that the Stoics would not allow anything short of assent to constitute a passion? It is unlikely that he has misunderstood them in this way, however. For he claims that the Stoic position is verbally different from the Peripatetic; but if he really thought that the Stoics sometimes recognize passions without

assents, he would have to say that they do not differ even verbally from the Peripatetics. If he thought that they sometimes affirm and sometimes deny the possibility of passions without assent, he would have to say that they are inconsistent on this issue. Neither of these misunderstandings would have led him to say that the Stoic position is verbally different from the Peripatetic.

Admittedly, his re-writing of Gellius obscures his claim about the verbal difference; for he goes so far with the re-writing that it is difficult to see how the Stoics even differ verbally from the Peripatetics. But we may reasonably take his re-writing to indicate not his attempt to display the verbal difference, but his attempt to display the absence of substantial difference. To show that the difference is merely verbal, he substitutes Peripatetic for Stoic vocabulary, and claims to have captured the substance of the Stoic position.

We can support this understanding of his paraphrase of Gellius if we consider another passage where he alludes to the same passage, and draws attention to what the Stoics say about passions.

... he brought out a book of Epictetus the Stoic, where it was read that the Stoics did not believe that no such disturbance falls on the mind of the sage, as though nothing of this sort appeared among the ways they were affected. Rather, disturbance was defined by them [as being] when reason yielded to such movements; when it did not yield, disturbance was not to be spoken of. (*Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, i 30).¹⁰

Augustine's argument is not easy to follow. He seems to say first that the Stoics acknowledge that the sage suffers 'disturbances' without assent, and then that they restrict disturbances to the results of assent. But we need not take him to contradict himself so directly. His point is clearer if we distinguish 'such disturbance', 'nothing of this sort', and 'such movements' from 'disturbance' simpliciter. In 'such disturbance' he refers to appearances without assent, and in 'disturbance' simpliciter he refers to passions, as the Stoics understand them.

5.

Why does Augustine believe that the difference between the Stoics and the Peripatetics is only verbal? He recognizes what the Stoics say, but he proposes an assessment of their remarks that they would not themselves accept. He believes that, since they recognize suggestive appearances, they recognize the very states that the Peripatetics count as passions. The Stoics agree that we are subject to non-rational appearances and movements that we cannot control on a particular occasion; but these are precisely the conditions that the Peripatetics identify with passions¹¹ and so the Stoics agree with the Peripatetics in recognizing the existence of such states. If that is so, we can use Stoic vocabulary to say what the Peripatetics say about passions; we simply need to replace Peripatetic claims about passions with Stoic claims about suggestive appearances.

But though this argument may be plausible, it may be insufficient. Let us grant that the Stoics admit the existence of the states that Peripatetics call passions. Is this degree of agreement enough to show that the difference between the two positions is purely verbal? To decide the question, we need to consider why it should matter to the Stoics to insist that a passion requires not only a suggestive appearance, but also assent to the appearance.

Both Peripatetics and Stoics believe that passions explain actions; people go wrong because they live in accordance with their passions.¹² When the Stoics insist that passions require assent, they imply that we cannot act on our passions without assent. The passions would not explain actions, as the Peripatetics agree they do, unless they implied assent, which the Peripatetics fail to recognize.

Why, then, do the Stoics claim that passions explain actions only if they imply assent? Why should suggestive appearances not move us to action by themselves? The Stoics allow suggestive appearances to explain the goal-directed movements of animals and young children. These creatures are moved only by their appearances; they have no passions, since passions require assent.¹³ We might wonder, then, why the Stoics should deny that adult human beings are capable of similar 'actions' - goal-directed movements based on appearances.

This issue bears on a dispute between Stoics and Sceptics over the argument about 'inaction' (*apraxia*). Stoics object that the Sceptical abandonment of assent prevents action (Cicero, *Ac.* ii 37). But the Sceptics seem to have an easy answer; they simply need to point out that the Stoics themselves allow goal-directed movement on appearance without assent. The Stoics concede that non-rational animals have this goal-directed movement; and that is what the Sceptics claim for themselves (Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1122a-d).

This Sceptical reply under-estimates the Stoics' objection. For the Stoics object that the Sceptics are incapable of action in some stricter sense of 'action' than the sense that counts animal motion as action. To show that this is not a purely verbal defence, simply defining 'action' so as to include the element of assent that the Sceptic has abandoned, the Stoics need to show that the Sceptics lose something significant if they lose the sort of action that is more than goal-directed movement. Action rests on assent, and assent rests on examining appearances and discriminating among them. When Sceptics claim that they can live a human life without assent, they claim that (for instance) they will act as though the stick that appears bent in water is really straight, and that they will not run away at the first appearance of danger. But they cannot explain how they do these things without discrimination among appearances, and without assent to some appearances over others.

But even if the Stoics have a good argument for their claim that Sceptics cannot really live a human life without the action that requires assent, this argument does not seem to help their claim about passions. Indeed, we might be inclined to describe the dispute by saying that the Sceptics think they can get by with passions alone, whereas the Stoics say that they need both passions and assent. The Stoics, however, deny that the Sceptics have

passions to guide their lives; they have only appearances without passions.

The Stoics can strengthen their case by appealing to another feature of human action on passions that the Peripatetics also recognize. Normally, when we act on our passions, our actions are voluntary, and are open to praise and blame. Aristotle insists on this point, and sharply criticizes people who try to evade moral judgments on their actions by pleading that they acted on their non-rational desires (*EN* 1111a24-b3).¹⁴ But he does not believe that if some creature acts on passions, it is thereby open to praise and blame; for he does not take non-rational animals to be open to such assessment.

The Stoics, therefore, have a good question to ask Aristotle: what makes human action on passion subject to moral assessment? They have a plausible answer to this question: assent is the basis for responsibility and moral assessment, and so action on passion rests on assent.

We can now appreciate the force of Augustine's view that the two positions differ only verbally. To see whether he is right, we may consider these claims:

- (1) In adult human beings, action on passion is responsible action in so far as it results from passion.
- (2) In adult human beings, action on passion is responsible only on the occasions on which it results from assent.
- (3) Assent is not necessary for passion.
- (4) Assent is necessary for responsible action.

It is easy to attribute (1) and (3) to Aristotle, and hence to suppose that Aristotle rejects (4). In that case, Augustine is wrong to suppose that the Stoics differ only verbally from the Peripatetics. They turn out to differ on (4).

But we might also try a second interpretation of Aristotle. We might take him to accept (2) and (4) rather than (1) and (3). This is not exactly the Stoic position, since (2) allows the possibility of action on passion that is not responsible because it does not result from assent. But it is close to the Stoic position because of (4). And we might say, on Augustine's behalf, that the difference between the Peripatetic and the Stoic position is only verbal; for the two positions agree on (4), and differ only on whether a suggestive appearance without assent is or is not to be called a passion. The same distinctions between responsible and non-responsible actions will be marked in different terms, and the same agents will count as responsible because of the same features.

Is this second interpretation of Aristotle defensible? Aristotle says very little to fix his views on the issues raised by (1) and (2). Not only does he lack the Stoic concept of assent; he also makes it difficult to see whether his account of action envisages a place for anything like assent. But one might reasonably doubt whether he intends to maintain as incautiously broad a claim as (1); and if he does not maintain (1), (2) is a reasonable alternative.

Further discussion would be needed to show whether this second interpretation of Aristotle is actually preferable to the first. For present purposes, it is enough to say that it is at least a reasonable interpretation. If that is

so, then Augustine's claim about the merely verbal difference between Stoics and Peripatetics on passions is defensible, since one might reasonably claim that the second interpretation of Aristotle brings him close to the substance of the Stoic position.

Augustine's position, therefore, is more plausible than it may initially appear. He is right to suggest that an important question about the interpretation of the Stoic position turns on the nature and function of suggestive appearances. Though he does not argue fully for the claim that these appearances are to be identified with passions, as the Peripatetics understand them, a reasonable interpretation of Aristotle makes this identification quite plausible. Nor is the claim that the two positions differ only verbally an uninteresting claim; it rests on a plausible interpretation and assessment of Aristotle's views on passions and responsible action.

6.

If Augustine claims that the Stoic position differs only verbally from the Peripatetic, we would not expect him to say that the Peripatetics are right in their attitude to the passions and that the Stoics are wrong. If the difference between the two positions is purely verbal, then they are substantively either right or wrong on all the same issues, and the Peripatetic position is preferable (if at all) only because it states the same points more clearly.

We might reasonably be surprised, then, that he criticizes the Stoics for errors that he does not attribute to the Peripatetics. He believes that the Christian position agrees with the Peripatetic position in affirming that passions are not in themselves bad, and that the virtuous person ought to cultivate the right passions rather than eliminate passions; for a Christian the question should not be whether someone is angry or distressed or afraid, but why (CD ix 5a).

This discriminating attitude to the passions rejects the Stoic error of seeking to eliminate all passions. The Stoics try to eliminate 'pity' or 'compassion' (*miser cordia*), because it is a passion, and therefore vicious.¹⁵ Seneca recognizes 'clemency' as a virtue (*De Clementia* i 3), but distinguishes it from pity, taking pity to include the wrong sort of assent. If Augustine rejects the Stoic criticism of pity, he must also argue that something more than what Seneca regards as clemency is morally required and praiseworthy in some circumstances.

Augustine might disagree with the Stoics in either of two ways: (1) If he believes that we ought sometimes to act on the passion of pity, as the Stoics understand it, he believes that we ought sometimes to give immediate assent to a suggestive appearance that someone is suffering evil, and act on this assent, without considering whether the assent is reasonable or not. (2) If he believes that we ought sometimes to act on the passion of pity, as an Aristotelian might understand it, he believes that we ought sometimes to be moved to action by the suggestive appearance, without any assent.

It is not clear, however, that Augustine disagrees with the Stoics in either of these two ways. For he also claims that, according to Epictetus, the Stoics allow passions 'of this sort' (*huiusce modi passiones*) into the mind of the sage whom they want to be free of all vices. Hence they believe that

such conditions are not vices if they do not interfere with the agent's virtue (CD ix 5c). Here he expresses the Stoic position in Peripatetic terms, as he did in reporting Gellius. In 'passions of this sort' Augustine refers to the sort of pity that Cicero praises, not to passions as sufficient guides to action. The Stoics express their position by saying that it is acceptable to have the appearance that is preliminary to the passion of pity; in the wise person this appearance does not produce the assent that it produces in other people, and so it does not result in a passion.

Augustine does not suggest that the Stoics are wrong to allow (as he puts it) passions that do not interfere with virtue because they do not result in immediate assents. On the contrary, when he says that passions have a legitimate place in a Christian's life, he seems to mean that they have a legitimate place as long as they do not usurp the rational and discriminating assent that is characteristic of the virtuous person.¹⁶

It is puzzling, then, that Augustine criticizes the Stoics' attempt to eliminate passions. In his view, the evils of human life are proper matters for sorrow, and someone who professes to consider them without sorrow (*dolor*) is all the more miserable to the extent that he has even lost human feeling when he thinks he has reached happiness (CD xix 7e). Augustine seems to have the Stoics in mind when he criticizes those who forbid sorrow at the death of a friend; since this sorrow is the natural result of genuine friendship, people who forbid this sorrow to us implicitly forbid friendship to us as well (xix 8c).

These criticisms do not affect the substance of the Stoic position, if Augustine's previous remarks about it were correct. The Stoics recognize non-rational appearances preliminary to passions; a sage has such states, which Augustine identifies with passions. In that case, the Stoics do not eliminate the states that Augustine describes as sorrow at the evils of life or the death of a friend. Augustine would reject the Stoics' view if he claimed that we ought not only to have these appearances but also to give them immediate assent, or to act on them without assent; but he makes no such claim.

Similarly, his discussion of the inevitability of passions in our earthly life does not disagree sharply with the Stoics on issues of substance. Passions did not belong to human life before the Fall (xiv 10), and will not belong to the blessed in the after-life (xiv 9l), but they are a permanent feature of our present condition. Augustine not only fails to disagree with the substance of the Stoic position, but he also reaffirms his claim that when they advocate the elimination of passions, they are not disagreeing substantively with those who take the elimination of passions to be impossible or undesirable (xiv 9a). The Stoics leave room for the states that Peripatetics identify with passions; for freedom from passions does not imply elimination of the appearances that are preliminary to passions.

Augustine distinguishes two ways of being without passions (xiv 9l): (a) 'Freedom from passion' might refer to a life without passions 'that occur contrary to reason and disturb the mind'. (b) It might refer to a life in which passions cannot occur to the mind at all (xiv 9m). The first sort of freedom from passions would, Augustine agrees, be desirable, but we cannot realistically expect it in our present sinful condition. The second sort would be undesirable; to live without fear and sorrow would be to lack the

appropriate reactions to the circumstances of human life.

In rejecting the second sort of freedom from passion Augustine does not disagree in principle with the Stoics. For he apparently does not advocate our acting on the sort of state that the Stoics call a passion - an immediate assent to a suggestive appearance. He points out that the suggestive appearance is appropriate if it is directed to the right objects and if it is used to guide us in the right direction. Since the Stoics agree that appearances can point out preferred and non-preferred indifferents to us, they can agree with Augustine's claim about the value of appearances.

Augustine's criticisms of the Stoics, therefore, do not count against his view - as we have understood it - that Stoics and Peripatetics differ only verbally. For his criticisms of the Stoics' views about the elimination of passions do not really disagree with the substance of the Stoic position; he does not claim that suggestive non-rational appearances should have a more dominant role than the Stoics allow them in guiding our action.

7.

This defence of Augustine's claim that the Stoics disagree only verbally with him depends on his identifying a passion, as he and the Peripatetics conceive it, with a suggestive appearance that precedes any assent, as the Stoics conceive it. The state that he identifies with a passion is a preliminary to rational assent, but falls short of assent. When we assent to an appearance, we have engaged our will, and we are responsible for our action.

But this separation of passions from will does not seem to reflect Augustine's consistent view. Sometimes he describes a much closer connexion between the passions and the will.

- (1) The character of a human being's will makes a difference. For if the will is misdirected, then because of this someone will have misdirected movements [i.e. passions]; if, on the other hand, the will is correct, these movements will be not only not blameworthy, but actually praiseworthy.
- (2) For the will is in all of them; indeed (immo) all of them are nothing other than forms of will (voluntates).¹⁷
- (3) For what are appetite and joy except the will in consenting to the things we will? And what are fear and sadness except the will dissenting from the things we do not will? But when we consent by pursuing the things we will, it is [called] appetite; when we consent by enjoying the things we will, it is called joy. Similarly, when we dissent from what we will not to happen, such a will is fear; when we dissent from what happens to us against our will, such a will is sadness.
- (4) And altogether, as a human being's will is attracted or repelled, in accordance with the variety of things that are pursued or avoided, it is changed and turned into one or another sort of affection. (CD xiv 6a; reference numbers added)

The different parts of this passage seem to express different claims about

the passions: In (1) Augustine simply affirms that the will influences the character of the passions.¹⁸ But in (2) Augustine passes from the influence of will on passions to the stronger claim (marked by 'immo') that the passions simply are forms or aspects of the will. The various examples in (3) suggest that he really intends this stronger claim. In (4), however, he may maintain yet another claim, that a state of the will is sufficient for a passion, without saying (as the claim about identity requires) that it is necessary.¹⁹

These different claims are differently related to the Peripatetic and Stoic positions. The claim in (1) is common ground between Peripatetics and Stoics, if we identify passions with suggestive appearances. The claim in (2) and (3), identifying passions with various states of the will, agrees with the Stoics, against the Peripatetics, in taking consent to be necessary for a passion.²⁰ But it goes further than the Stoic position in identifying assents with passions; the Stoics require passions to be 'fresh' or 'immediate' assents, but Augustine drops this restriction.²¹ The claim in (4) would allow him to say that some passions are simply assents involving the will, while others are distinct from states of the will.

It is difficult to be sure how many claims Augustine intends to make here, or how far he sees the differences between them. At any rate, he comes much closer to the Stoic position than we would have expected him to on the basis of his previous discussion. The position that he endorses is not the Peripatetic position or the Stoic position that is only verbally different from the Peripatetic; it is the strong Stoic position that takes assent to be necessary for passions.²²

8.

It is perhaps not surprising that Augustine seems to take different views in different places about the Stoic doctrine of the passions. To reach a confident conclusion about the view he ought to take would be a difficult matter, since the passions have an important role in many areas of his psychological, moral, and theological reflexions.

A reasonable tentative conclusion, however, brings Augustine's views close to those of both the Peripatetics and the Stoics. At the beginning I mentioned three of Augustine's claims: (1) The Stoic position differs only verbally from the Platonic-Aristotelian position. (2) The Stoic position is wrong and the Platonic-Aristotelian position is right. (3) The different passions are different expressions of the will. I have argued that the conflict between the first two claims is only superficial, and is easily resolved. But the conflict between the first two claims (properly understood) and the third is not so easily resolved; for the third claim rejects the separation of passion from will that is essential to the other two claims. We have found good reasons for advising Augustine to stick to the first claim and reject the other two. The first claim distinguishes the non-rational suggestive appearance, which Augustine sometimes identifies with the passion, from the rational assent that may or may not follow it. According to this division, the differences - on this issue - between Augustine's position and the Stoics' position are relatively unimportant.

In support of this conclusion we may simply notice some of the places

where Augustine seems to rely on this division between appearance and consent. He agrees with the Stoics in taking consent to separate human from animal motion. Rational animals are guided by the arbitration of the will in consenting or not consenting, whereas non-rational animals lack this judgment.²³ Augustine appeals to consent in his discussion of St Paul on flesh and spirit, to explain the limited freedom of people under law:

Under the law, we fight, but we are overcome; for we admit that the things we do are bad, and in admitting that they are bad, we certainly are unwilling to do them, but because grace has not yet come, we are overcome. (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos* 13-18)

Though some desires of the flesh, as long as we are in this life, fight against our spirit and lead it towards sin, still the spirit, not consenting to these desires, since it is fixed in grace and the charity of God, ceases to sin. For we sin not in the depraved desire itself, but in our consent. (*Prop. Rom.* 13-18)

Grace does not take away the desires that lead us towards sin, but it helps us not to be overcome by them.

In suggesting that before we are under grace we are overcome, Augustine might be taken to claim, on St Paul's behalf, that our sin is not the product of our free will, but simply the inevitable result of our corrupt desires. But this is not what he means; he insists that the sin consists in the consent by the will. Even under law, therefore, erroneous consent, not corrupt desire that produces sin. Paul does not deny the free judgment of the will (*Prop. Rom.* 60). God does not choose one person rather than another on the basis of good works, but on the basis of faith:

That we believe, comes from us. That we do good works, comes from him who gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him. (*Prop. Rom.* 60).²⁴

The will consents or refuses, and is not coerced by non-rational desires.

In ascribing this role to consent, Augustine insists that we must acknowledge incontinent action as our own.

Someone is much deceived, however, who while consenting to the lust of his flesh, and deciding to do what it desires and determining (statuens) to do it, supposes he ought still to say 'It is not I that do it', even if he hates <himself> because he consents. For two things are true of him at once: he himself hates, because he has recognized that it is bad, and he himself does it, because he determines to do it. ... The one, therefore, who says 'It is now not I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me', if he simply has the lust, he speaks the truth; but it does not speak the truth if he decides by the consent of his heart (cordis consensione decernit) and also carries it through by the service provided by his body. (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia* i 31)

What is the 'turning aside of the heart' but consent? For whoever in his heart²⁵ has not consented with any turning aside of the heart to the suggestions that strike him from whatever appearances there may be, has not yet spoken. But if he has consented, he has already spoken in his heart, even if he has not made the sound with his mouth. Even if he has not done the action with his hand or any part whatever of his body, he has done what he has already determined by his thought that he ought to do. (*De continentia* 3).

We may hate our actions, but if we consent to the misguided desire to do them, they are still our actions, and we cannot claim that we are not the ones who do them. Incontinence consists in wrong consent, just as continence consists in withholding it.²⁶

These aspects of Augustine's position make it easier to see why he agrees with the Stoics in requiring consent by the will for action on passion. In his view, action without consent would not be free and responsible action at all; if passions moved us without consent, they could not be the source of free and responsible action. Since Augustine rejects this conclusion, he insists that passions move us to responsible action only in so far as the will consents to them. Both his moral psychology and his moral theology would be seriously damaged without this central point of agreement with Stoicism. Given this agreement, we may take some of his attacks on the Stoic view with a generous pinch of salt.

I have defended Augustine's claim that the Stoic position differs only verbally from the Peripatetic and from his own. But a more illuminating statement of the relation between his position and the two Greek positions might say that his position and the Peripatetic position differ only verbally from the Stoic position. Though this is an exaggeration, it signals the important point that Augustine derives from the Stoic position: the division between appearance and rational assent. While one might argue that this division is not alien to Aristotle, one must admit that the Stoics are the people who articulate it, and that Augustine relies on their articulation of it. If we conclude that, in the respects I have examined, the Augustinian, the Peripatetic, and the Stoic position differ only verbally, this does not mean that the Stoics contribute nothing important. On the contrary, Augustine derives some of the basic features of his account from the Stoics.²⁷

Cornell University

NOTES

1. Cited hereafter as *CD*. I have used J. E. C. Welldon's edition (London: SPCK, 1924) and included his lettered subdivisions of chapters.

2. I will use 'Peripatetic' to refer to the Platonic-Aristotelian position, in the respects where Platonic and Aristotelian views on the passions coincide.

3. Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 206-12, discusses Augustine and Stoics on the passions. She seems to me to under-estimate the extent of agreement; she does not specifically discuss the claims in *CD* ix about purely verbal disagreement.

Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 378-84, argues that Augustine's claims rest on misunderstanding of the Stoic view. I discuss his argument below in Part 4. Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition* (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1985), ii 207-25, discusses Augustine's treatment of the Stoic doctrine at length, but does not analyse the claims about verbal disagreement. Her concluding summaries are puzzling: '... Augustine endorses their [sc. the Stoics'] insistence that the passions arise from false intellectual judgments ...' (236). '... the passions as well as correct moral judgments arise in the intellect ...' (237). It is difficult to reconcile this description with Augustine's sharp contrast between passion and assent.

4. See Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantis* 1048a, in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 58H.

5. See Plato, *Protagoras* 358d5-7.

6. Fresh assents: Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* iii 74-5. I have discussed some of the following points about the Stoic theory more fully in 'Stoic Inhumanity' in *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. T. Engberg-Pederson and J. Sihvola (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), and in 'Socratic paradox and Stoic theory' in *Companions to Ancient Thought 4: Ethics*, ed. S. Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

7. I have discussed some of the evidence on immediacy in 'Socratic paradox', 180n. Sorabji discusses the evidence more fully, *Emotion*, 111f. I am less confident than he is that the Stoics changed their position over time.

8. Augustine uses 'adprobare' and 'consentiri' to represent *sunkatathesis*. Cf. *Contra Academicos*. i 11; iii 26; iii 30-6. R.A. Gauthier, *Aristote: L'Ethique à Nicomaque* (2nd edn., Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1970), i 259-61, discusses Augustine's use of consent. He maintains, for unimpressive reasons, that Cicero and Augustine misunderstand the Stoic view.

9. This passage from Aulus Gellius is printed in fr. 9 of Epictetus in H. Schenkl's edition (2nd edn., Leipzig: Teubner, 1916). Schenkl comments on Augustine's report: 'Habet S. Augustinus ... haud paucis ad arbitrium suum mutatis'.

10. ... ubi legebatur non ita placuisse Stoicis, nullam talem perturbationem cadere in animum sapientis, quasi nihil tale in eorum appareret affectibus, sed perturbationem ab eis definiri, cum ratio talibus motibus cederet; cum autem non cederet, non dicendam perturbationem. Sorabji, *Emotion* 380, adduces this passage to illustrate Augustine's misunderstanding of the Stoic position. But if I am right to contrast 'talem perturbationem' (etc.) with 'perturbationem' simpliciter, Augustine shows that he is aware of what the Stoics actually say. Cf. his use of 'huiusce modi passiones' in *CD* ix 5 (discussed in Part 6 below).

11. Here I probably over-simplify both the Peripatetic position and some of the corresponding elements of the Stoic position.

12. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169a5.

13. See Cic. *Tusc.* iv 31; Origen, *Commentarium. in Matthaeum* xii 16 (printed in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim [4 vols, Leipzig: Teubner, 1905] iii 477). The evidence on this point is conflicting, since some passages imply that the Stoics attribute assent to all animals. See Nemesius, *De Natura Hominis* 35.291; Alexander *De Fato* 182.16, 183.22; Cicero, *Academica* ii 37. For discussion see Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, i 322; Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), ch.3, esp. 77-9. Augustine agrees with the Stoics in denying passions to animals. In *CD* viii 17a-b he endorses the Stoic view that a passion is a movement of the mind against reason, and argues that since animals lack reason, they lack movements of the mind against their reason.

14. I have discussed Aristotle's position more fully in *Aristotle's First*

Principles (Oxford: OUP, 1988), ch. 15.

15. See Seneca, *De Clementia* ii 5; Cicero, *Tusc.* iii 20-1.

16. This is the conclusion Aquinas draws from this chapter, at *Summa Theologiae* 1-2 q59 a1 obj 3, ad 3.

17. Or 'acts' or 'expressions' of will. Lit. just 'wills'.

18. Augustine claims that citizens of the city of God have affections: 'And because their love is correct, they have all these affections correctly directed' (xiv 9a). He implies that the correct condition of the will is sufficient for correct passions.

19. He cannot say that every tendency of the will in every rational agent is an affection. God (ix 5d), Adam and Eve before the Fall (xiv 10), and the blessed in the after-life (xiv 9) have wills without passions. We must take the suggestion that different states of the will invariably involve different passions to be an over-statement.

20. Gauthier, *Ethique à Nicomaque*, i 262n comments on this passage: 'tout le passage est d'inspiration stoïcienne et montre dans les passions non seulement des voluntates, mais des consentements.' This is true, but Gauthier does not mention the respect (noted in the text) in which the passage goes even further than the Stoic view.

21. In this passage Augustine uses 'adfectio' to refer to passions. He would hardly accept the claims if 'perturbatio' were substituted for 'adfectio'.

22. Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), mentions the claim in xiv 7 that the passions are forms of volition both before (47) and after (49f) he summarizes the passage in ix 4 on Aulus Gellius. He does not say whether he takes the claim about volition to be consistent with the view expressed in ix 4, but he does not suggest that he sees any inconsistency.

23. See *De Gen. ad Litt.* ix 25.

24. In *Retrac.* i 23.2, Augustine corrects himself: '... I would certainly not have said that if I had then known that faith itself is found among the gifts of God that are given 'in the same Spirit'. Both, therefore, are our own because of the judgment of the will, and yet both are given through 'the Spirit of faith' and charity ... (3) Both belong to God, because he himself prepares our will; and both belong to us, because they do not come about unless we are willing.' The effect of this correction is not to diminish the place of free will, but to extend it; for Augustine affirms that something can be both the gift of God and the effect of free will.

25. I follow C. L. Cornish's translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), iii 380, in taking 'in corde' with 'consensit' rather than 'occurrentibus'.

26. On consent cf. *Epistulae* 98.1: 'One is not held liable to punishment by the sin of another without one's consent.' (peccato alterius sine sua consensione non tenetur obnoxius.) Augustine affirms this in the context of a discussion of original sin.

27. I have benefited from helpful comments on this paper by Charles Brittain.