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Aristotle's *pathē* : Why they matter

Abstract:

My dissertation project falls in the intersection of ancient philosophy, moral epistemology, and aesthetics. I ask after the importance of emotions in Aristotle's thinking in ethical contexts broadly construed and consider some of its implications for contemporary discussions. Aristotle is famously a cognitivist about emotions, but the radical nature of his thinking on emotions is, I think, not fully recognised and appreciated. For Aristotle, I argue, emotions are integral to ethical discernment as they allow us to grasp the significance and magnitude of ethical harm and disclose the direction for deliberation and action. Relatedly, they are essential for grasping the ends for which others act in particular situations, and for furnishing preliminary evaluative judgments in light of our shared ethical commitments particularly in political and legal contexts. I also consider Plato's concern with the use of emotions in the public sphere and develop an Aristotelian response for it. I propose that affective responses are voluntary in that they can (and ought to be) modulated through the use of imagination and they would be reflectively endorsed when elicited in ways that conform to Aristotle's art of rhetoric. Finally, I argue that 'moral' emotions such as indignation, pity (or emotions understood in Aristotle's sense) allow us to grasp moral wrongs that are hitherto unnamed and for communicating under conditions of hermeneutical injustice more generally.