



Selezione d'Istituto

TRACCIA n°2 - Ambito etico

Le nostre passioni sono i principali strumenti della nostra conservazione: è dunque un'impresa tanto vana quanto ridicola il volerle distruggere: è lo stesso che controllare la natura, che riformare l'opera di Dio. (...) La loro sorgente è naturale, è vero, ma mille rivoli estranei l'hanno ingrossata [...] Le nostre passioni naturali sono molto limitate; sono strumenti della nostra libertà e tendono a conservarci. Tutte quelle che ci soggiogano e ci distruggono hanno altra origine: non è la natura a darcele, siamo noi stessi che, con suo danno, ce le procuriamo.

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Emilio o dell'educazione" in Opere, Sansoni, Firenze 1972 pp 493-494)

Passions make us rather unhappy slaves

Feelings have been influencing our actions for millennia. On some occasions they have saved lives, but on others their effect has been devastating. On a daily basis we experience joy, compassion, love, but also hate, anger, envy and fear. We might wonder about the purpose of our feelings. Are they to be treasured or dismissed? Are these passions good or harmful?

What is important to highlight is that passions dominate us and are the cause of our unhappiness and our dissatisfaction. In this essay I will demonstrate firstly, how our emotions deprive us of our freedom and secondly, how harmful they can be to us.

In the first place, passions do not have a noble purpose in our lives. Indeed, the Stoics supported apatheia, which is a state of absence of emotions. They saw emotions as an illness that afflicted common people. Men of wisdom rejected them because they knew that there was no need to worry for what happened and would happen in their lives, as the universe was perfect. They believed that everything that happened was

necessary, so it would make no sense to rejoice or grieve. Feelings would only cloud their judgment and prevent them from gaining knowledge of themselves and their surroundings.

However, we may argue that feelings sometimes do have an end, as they contribute to our survival. While examining the concept of self-consciousness, Hegel stated that a struggle for recognition would occur between men. In this struggle one would put aside his doubts and fight, the other would fear for his life and surrender. One might believe that the winner would be freer than the one who lost. Surprisingly, it is the loser who can experience true freedom, because his fear freed him from all the bonds he had to worldly matters. That is to say that emotions free us.

Despite this, we must not forget that when we depend on our feelings, we are setting reason aside and making our decisions in an irrational way. While in truth, the only way to be free is by using reason. If we let our passions decide for us, we are not free. If we decide according to what we like and what we don't like, we are not choosing, rather our tastes are deciding for us. Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserted that we have positive freedom only when we impose ourselves a law. In addition, Immanuel Kant also believed that we could only be free when acting rationally.

In the second place, passions and desires are evidence of our unhappiness. As Schopenhauer affirmed, all desires are only the perception of the lack of something. As a result, in perceiving our emotions we would only have a constant reminder of our shortages and shortcomings. So, it would not be very reasonable to undergo such an experience. In fact, that could only be harmful to our well-being.

In opposition to this, we might argue that without passions we might get bored and boredom is just as harmful as despair. It deprives us of the desire of living. Schopenhauer admitted that in the moment when we do not desire, we suffer from boredom which is a particular type of pain. In addition, an experiment by Virginia and Harvard University, later re-enacted in the first episode of the tv programme "Mindfield", demonstrated that people often prefer fifteen minutes of pain rather than of boredom.

Nevertheless, we might have to consider that our life is not just a succession of passions and boredom. Human beings should strive for a greater condition of fulfilment.

We can aim for ataraxia, which is the absence of worries and distress in our soul, or long for a true absence of desires by gradually giving up all passions to reach a sense of peace, as in the asceticism proposed by Schopenhauer himself.

To sum up, we have shown that feelings have no purpose rather than subjugate us, as we are free only when using reason and emotions might get in their way and prevent us from acting rationally. Moreover, passions do not make us happy. They actually increase and highlight our own despair.

In conclusion, we can demonstrate that emotions can be harmful to our wellness and a state of calm and fulfilment is to prefer to one of uncontrollable joy.