The Ancient Emotion of Disgust

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Not Tonight, Dear, I’m Feeling a Little pig-

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Over the past generation we have seen a great profusion of studies devoted to the emotions: in classics alone about thirty book-length studies have appeared, and if the tally were extended to take in other fields of literary and cultural studies, along with philosophy, psychology, and anthropology, the number would reach well into three figures. Much of this increased attention is due to an increased sensitivity to the role of cognition in emotion. There is now a broad consensus across disciplines that while the capacity to experience a range of emotions is innate in our species, the actual experience of any given emotion is determined by the judgments and beliefs that engage it and cause it to be about something. And since judgments and beliefs are products of culture, even emotions that seem to match up cross-culturally—English “anger” with Latin ira with Greek ὀργή—are liable to differ in more or less marked and culturally revealing ways.

To illustrate that point let’s consider how the Romans talked about an emotion that is quite peculiar, in this sense: though I am fairly certain that most of us have experienced it at one time or another, in its fully engaged form it matches up with no one English lexical item. Simply put, the Romans had a word for it, we do not. The Romans’ word was piget.

To start, consider the text that inspired my title for this chapter, where the emotion is fully on display and evoked in helpfully precise terms. At several points in his Love-cures, Ovid’s magister amoris uses a tactic that today we would call “aversive conditioning,” what (for example) some parents used to do if they caught young Johnny smoking: keep him smoking until the very thought of smoking is profoundly unappealing. Here is the way the magister adopts the

approach in one particularly brutal and misogynistic passage, as he sketches a
bout of lovemaking:

I blush, but I’ll say it: have sex in the position
that you think most unbecoming to the woman in question.

Then too I bid you open wide the windows and
in the full flood of light remark the base body-parts.
But as soon as your pleasure has reached its goal and come to an end,
when body and mind are drained and drooping,
while you feel pig-, so that you’d rather not have touched any girl,
and think you won’t touch one again for a good long while,
then carefully catalog all her blemishes
and keep your eyes fixed on her flaws. [1]

The magister is obviously trading on the associations that can be formed
between various forms of sight-induced aversion and postcoital tristesse, with
the expectation that the former will reinforce the latter to produce a lasting
repugnance. More important for our purposes is the way Ovid neatly brings
out both the psychosomatic and the cognitive components of the emotion. He
lodges the statement of the feeling (“while you feel pig-”: dum piget) exactly in
the middle of the description: on one side lies the lassitude that the experience
entails, “when body and mind are drained and drooping”; on the other side lie
the judgments and evaluations associated with regret and repugnance, which
look both to the fact of what has happened and to the prospect that it might hap-
pen again: “so that you’d rather not have touched any girl / and think you won’t
touch one again for a good long while.”

Ovid’s full and vivid evocation of the emotion makes plain its multidimen-
sional nature: the experience of pig- entails an unpleasant state of diminished
energy in which lassitude and aversion are combined—a weary sigh blended

2. Ov. Rem. an. 407–8, 411–18:

Et pudet, et dicam: venerem quoque iunge figura,
Qua minime iungi quamque decere putas. . . .
Tunc etiam iubeo totas sperire fenestras,
Turpiaque admissa membra notare die.
At simul ad metas venit finita voluptas,
Lassaque cum tota corpora mente iacent,
Dum piget ut malles nullam tetigisse puellam,
Tacturusque tibi non videare diu,
Tunc animo signa, quaecumque in corpore menda est,
Luminaque in vitis illius usque tene.

The Arabic numerals at the end of this and the other examples quoted in the text are used
to locate the passages in the taxonomy of pig- at the end of this chapter.
with "ugh"—as a result of performing, or at the prospect of performing, some action you regard as both taxing and repugnant. As was remarked earlier, it is likely that most of us have known this emotion: speaking for myself—and to shift the discussion away from sex about as far as possible—it is the emotion that was inspired by every single encounter with a certain colleague at the University of Chicago (not from my own department), for it was inevitable that the next forty-five minutes of my life would be lost to a pointless and repetitive conversation that would drain every last spark of energy from my brain and leave me glancing longingly at my second-story office window for a possible exit. I am also confident that it is an emotion that no single English term conveys. It is certainly not conveyed by any of the options presented in the Oxford Latin Dictionary entry for pijet, "To affect with revulsion or displeasure, irk"; "displeasure" is far too broad and featureless, while "revulsion" gets at only part of the experience; as for "irk," try plugging that into the passage from Ovid.4

But I suggest that where pijet is concerned, the lack of a neat English label is a benefit, not a loss. The lack allows us to concentrate on what the experience is actually about without being tempted by the shortcut that a comfortably familiar label seems to provide: to put it another way, understanding what Roman pudor really is about is not much helped by the fact that it corresponds roughly to English "shame," while understanding Roman invidia is positively hindered by the existence of our term "envy" that is derived from it. Without a similarly distracting English term on hand in the case of pijet, we can try to grasp the underlying structure of the idea simply by considering the data that the Romans have left us: the instances—just over two hundred of them—in which one or another form of the verb appears in extant Latin texts from Plautus to Apuleius. And as I argued in my book on Roman emotions, the best way to use the data to get at the structure of the idea is to think in terms of "scripts."

This approach starts by recognizing that any emotional experience is essentially a small drama, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In this drama, the data of life are processed in a particular way, through a sequence of cause and effect, of perceptions, evaluations, and responses. For example: hearing Joe make a comment to Jack (perception), you believe the comment was made

3. Still, "irk" is not quite as bad as J. H. Mozley's hilarious choice of "boredom" in the Loeb translation.

4. On the difficulty caused by the use of lexical "equivalents" in the cross-cultural study of emotions see Kaster 2005: 5-10 and passim; and Cairns 2008, esp. 42-51 (my thanks to Dimos Spatharas for pointing me toward the latter discussion).
about you and judge it a slur (evaluation). At once, a desire to retaliate explodes in your mind, your chest tightens, your face flushes, your vision seems to swim, your pulse and breathing rates increase, you feel tense or agitated, and you formulate some comment while advancing upon Joe, as your hands ball into fists and your lips part slightly to reveal your teeth; your response combines abnormal states in your body (breathing, pulse) and your affect (tension, agitation) with behaviors that are pragmatic (formulating a comment) or expressive (barring your teeth) or potentially both (your aggressive movement and balled fists). If you're tracking your response, you will register the playing out of this process by thinking some version of "I do believe I'm angry now," and you will typically connect this thought—and the label "anger"—with the last stage of the process, the response, and with your feeling a certain way or displaying a certain behavior. The emotion rightly so-called, however, is the whole process and all its constituent elements, experienced as the little drama that body and mind enact together from start to finish. Subtract any element of the script, and the experience is fundamentally altered: without the response—even one instantly rejected or suppressed—there is only the dispassionate evaluation of phenomena; without an evaluation—even one that does not register as such (e.g., in the flight response that precedes the conscious processing of a threat)—there is a mere seizure of mind and body that is about nothing at all.

Applying this understanding of emotion to the Romans means, first of all, reading all the texts in which a given emotion term occurs, two or three times, all the while asking, not what the term means—in the sense of what its English equivalent might be—but what kind of story is being told when that term is invoked. Or rather, what kinds of stories: because it becomes clear fairly quickly that most emotion terms provide cover for more than one sort of story and are in fact best understood as the point on which a set of distinct yet related dramatic scripts converge.

Let's turn, then, to the data that piget presents and see what sort of structure emerges. As a preliminary note, I should say that I am concerned only with the verb, not with the adjective derived from the same verbal root—piger, "sluggish," "lazy"—or the noun pigittia—"sluggishness;" "laziness"—derived from the adjective. Though those terms clearly inhabit part of the semantic field of piget that we glimpsed already in the passage from Ovid, they do not have anything like the same range and inclusiveness; and this semantic narrowing in the derivation of adjective and noun from a verbal root is familiar from other emotion terms too. Compare the case of pudet: the adjective pudicus formed from the root pud- and the abstract noun pudicitia derived from the adjective have a much narrower range of reference than the verb, being concerned only
Once, a desire to retaliate explodes in flashes, your vision seems to swim, your tense or agitated, and you form a clench. Joe, as your hands ball into fists, your response combines absorbed your affect (tension, agitation) or expressive (haptic movement and balled fists), latter the playing out of this process "angry now," and you will typically with the last stage of the pro-
terior way or displaying a certain ever, is the whole process and all little drama that body and mind any element of the script, and the the response—even one instantly passionate evaluation of phenomena not register as such (e.g., in the processing of a threat)—there is a nothing at all.

A term occurs, two or three times, in the sense of what its English is being told when that term is use it becomes clear fairly quickly more than one sort of story and are set of distinct yet related dra-

Revising, and enduring the burden of long toil, often causes pig—why balk at telling the truth? When you're writing, the very effort gives a pleasant boost and makes the effort less.

But just as revising is as much less a challenge as great Homer was greater than Aristarchus, so it strikes the mind with a dull chill and does it hurt. [2]

Ovid's spirits droop at the thought of self-correction, and it is not mere laziness—not just the prospect of hard work—that produces the feeling: it is

5. *Ov. Pont.* 3.9.19–25:

saepe piget—quid enim dubitem tibi vera fateri?—
corrigere et longi ferre laboris omus.
Scribentem iuvat ipse labor minuitque laborem
cumque suo crescent pectore fervet et
Corrigere ut res est tanto minus ardua quanto
magnum Aristarcho maior Homerus erat,
sic animum lento curarum frigore laedit.

with sexual propriety. Compare also the case of *amare*: the adjective *amicus* formed from the room *am-* and the abstract noun *amicitia* formed from the adjective again have a much narrower range of reference than the verb. It happens that both *pudet* and *amare* also have common cognate nouns—*pudor* and *amor*—that are less limited than *pudicitia* and *amicitia* and are accordingly as helpful as the verb in approaching the thought as a whole. But since the root pig-generated no comparable common noun—the noun *pigror* occurs only as a jeu d'esprit of Lucilius (fr. 391 M., *obrepitque pigror torporque quietis*)—we are left with the verb.

To start, we need to identify the relevant perception and the resulting response, the aspects of *pig* that correspond, say, to the thought, “Upon perceiving that I have been wronged I experience a painful desire for revenge,” in the case of anger. For the perception and response we have a good starting point in the passage from the *Remedia*, which as we have seen imagines a state of lassitude and aversion brought on by behavior perceived to be more than a bit taxing and more than a bit repugnant—indeed, behavior that, when perceived through the emotion’s lens, is seen to be unbearable. Other texts that reveal how the emotion is generated and embodied point in the same direction.

Consider, for example, Ovid again, now speaking of the labor entailed in revising what he has written:5

Revising, and enduring the burden of long toil, often causes pig—for why balk at telling the truth? When you’re writing, the very effort gives a pleasant boost and makes the effort less.

But just as revising is as much less a challenge as great Homer was greater than Aristarchus, so it strikes the mind with a dull chill and does it hurt. [2]
the contrast with the joy of writing. In the first flush of creation, the very effort, *ipse labor*, gives him a lift and literally warms his heart: the line "*cumque suo crescens pectore fervere opus*” is especially telling, as is the contrast with the *lentus frigor*—the chill that dulls the mind—which revision is said to inspire at the passage’s end. As Ovid might have said if he had our idiom available, the thought of revision is just too damned depressing, and he wants no part of it. Much the same feeling is shared, in quite different circumstances, by the cow who has lost her calf, as imagined in highly humanized form by Statius. Depressed, unable to eat, she finds unbearable the thought of returning to the stable.⁶

The mother, bereft, stirs now the valley, now the streams with lament, now the herds, and seeks among the empty pastures; the prospect of returning home causes *pig*—then, and from the field of mourning she’s last to leave, from the grasses that come her way she turns aside unfed. [3]

Or take the disgraced consul Terentius Varro conjured up by Silius Italicus:⁷

> Nonetheless aggrieved by his failure, and vastly distraught in his shame, the consul walked unsteadily toward the walls in tears: he felt *pig*—at the prospect of raising his downcast glance and, by looking on his homeland, stirring his pain anew. [4]

Varro already feels *pudor* because of a *culpa*, an action that was “up to him,” for which he believes he is morally responsible. He embodies that emotion through tears, an unsteady gait, and a downcast visage; and because he feels *pudor* thus embodied, he also experiences *pig*—feelings: dispiritedness, depression, and the sense that he just cannot bring himself to perform


>nunc vallum spoliata parentis, nunc lumbina questus,
nunc armenta mover vacuose interrogat agros;
tunc *piget* ire dominum, maestoque novissima campo
exit et oppositas impasta avertitur herbas.

7. Sil. Pun. 10.630–35:

> nec minus infelix culpae grandique pudore
    turbari, consul titubantem ad moeniumgressum
    portabat luctuosa; detectum attollere vulsum
    ac patriam aspicere et luctus renovare *pigebat*. 
actions that would remind him of his pain. Or consider, finally, the force of *piget* found, for example, when Livy comes to speak of Alexander the Great's megalomania:

When speaking of so great a king, I feel *piget* at the thought of reporting the arrogant style of dress he adopted, his demands that men prostrate themselves to pay their respects, . . . foul forms of punishment, friends slaughtered at drunken banquets, the empty folly of lineage falsely claimed. [5]

Because he is a decent person (we are to understand), Livy feels a kind of dispirited distaste at the prospect of saying such things about so great a figure: the emotion provides Livy with a form of *praeteritio*, so that he can say what he needs to say while saying he has no desire to say it.

So let us say that the fundamental perception and response that *piget* means to convey can typically be expressed in these terms: "I experience some form of dispirited aversion when I perceive as deeply undesirable . . ."—what? What decisive plot-points then follow in the various narratives of *piget*?

My combing of the data suggests that three general distinctions are important in determining the sort of *piget* narrative we are facing: first, and most important, whether the deeply undesirable action or state of affairs is merely a *prospect* or a *matter of fact*; second, whether that action or state of affairs is my responsibility or someone else's; third, whether or not there is something ethically at stake for me—whether experiencing the emotion says something about my worth as a person. Let's consider just a few examples of each of these distinctions in turn, before I try to draw the whole picture together.

The first of these distinctions has a fundamentally temporal dimension: is the emotion aroused by contemplating some action that lies in the future (typically, the immediate future), or does it emerge from something already done, that is, an action completed or now underway? This distinction between behavior that is merely in prospect or already a matter of fact underlies the earliest definition of *piget* that we have, preserved in Pompeius Festus' epitome of the first and greatest Latin dictionary of antiquity, created by Verrius Flaccus at the end of the 1st century BCE: *pigere* is accustomed to

8. Livy 9.38.4, *referre in tanto rege piget superbum mutationem vestis et desiderias humi iacentium adulationes. . . . et foeda supplicia et inter vinum et epulas caedes amicorum et vanitatem ementiendae stirpis* (cf., e.g., Livy 23.51.2; Columella, *Rust. 6 pr. 5*).

9. On Livy's negotiation of the "politics" of disgust more generally, see Ayelet Haimson Lushkov's essay in this volume.
being used sometimes in place of *tardari*, sometimes in place of *paenitere.*”

What Flaccus clearly meant is that *pigere* takes on the sense of *paenitere*, “regret,” when the relevant action is a matter of fact, for the realm of fact is the natural home of regret (anticipatory regret might in principle be possible, though in practice it would probably be experienced most often as some form of “caution”). In contrast, the sense of being “slowed” or “held in check,” *tardari*, is plainly relevant to the prospect of undertaking some action not yet begun.

The distinction could easily be illustrated from any of the passages I’ve cited so far, but let me give you a few new examples. Thus in Plautus’ *Trinummmus* (127) one character asks, “Did you pay the money?” and the other replies, “I did, and I don’t feel *pig*-that I did” (*megaronides dedistin argentum? callicles factum, neque facti piget* [6]). Or Livy, writing of an unpleasant turn of events for the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War, says:

As the Carthaginians counted it glorious that they had come all the way to Rome’s walls with no opposition, so it was causing them *pig*- that their undertaking had come to naught, and *pudor* at being held in such contempt that while they themselves were encamped at the city’s walls, a Roman army was led out of another gate and off to Spain. [7]

And when the nymph Byblis first makes a botch of telling her twin brother Caunus of her more-than-sisterly love, but nonetheless decides to press on, the narrator of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* remarks, “So she spoke, and—such is the discord of an irresolute mind—though she feels *pig*-at having tried, she feels pleasure at the thought of trying again” (9.630–31, *dixit et (incertae tanta est discordia mentis) cum pigeat temptasse, libet temptare* [8]).

And for illustration of the other side of the distinction, the prospective force of *piget*, consider three passages from the same authors. So in Plautus, again, one character says to another, “Please don’t feel *pig*-at answering clearly the question I’ll ask you” (*Aul. 210, quaoes, quod te percontabor, ne id te pigeat proloqui* [9]).

10. Festus 211 L, “Pigere intenham pro tardari, intenham pro paenitere poni solet.” Festus’ distinction is taken over in the *Uli* article on *piget* (10, 1: 2313, 38–2314, 38). *significator motus animi cius, qui gravitatem aliquae re, aegre fari vel repudiat, non vult aliquid, sc. saepe ad praecentia vel instantia, ut praeculent motus pudoris, tardis, causticatioris sin... puto varius ad praecentia. ut praeculent color paenitenti, doloris sin.

11. Of the concept of “prospective metamoia,” a theoretical construct found in late philosophical writings, see Fulkerson 2013: 33 and n. 101.

12. Livy 26, 375, “Carthaginenses... ad munia urbis Romanam nullus prohibebat se pervenisse in gloria possessione, ita pigebat inviti incepti, pudebatque adeo se spectos ut scientiibus ipsis ad Romanam munia alia porta exercitus Romanus in Hispaniam duceret.”
Or Livy, writing in his character as a scrupulous historian of the Third Samnite War, says,13

I find it stated in three annalistic accounts that a letter was sent [sc. by the consul Appius Claudius] to summon his colleague [Volumnius] from Samnium; yet I feel pig- at treating it as a matter of fact, since that very point was a subject of discussion between the two consuls, with Appius denying, Volumnius affirming that the letter had been sent. [10]

And Ovid's magister amoris, suggesting travel as a cure for lovesickness, warns the victim that he'll need to be resolute:14

Perhaps you'll feel pig- at leaving your father's house,
    But still you will leave; and when next you want to return,
    It will not be your father's house that calls you back but the love for your girl. [11]

In each case the emotion is assumed to be provoked not in response to something the person has done or is doing, but at the very thought of doing it.

As the emotion is organized around the distinction between action performed and action in prospect, we can see that the response to an anticipated action is a more or less keenly felt form of aversion—a matter of "can't bring oneself to," of "not having the heart" or "not having the stomach"—while the response to a matter of fact is a form of regret that is essentially a retrospective, counterfactual species of aversion: the thought is, "Given it to do over again, I certainly wouldn't do that, or want that outcome." It is important to note, however, that though the distinction is clear, the two alternatives are not mutually exclusive: it is possible to experience pig- simultaneously at what one has done and at the prospect of doing it again. The very first text we examined, from the Remedia amoris, makes this plain: recall the magister's words,

while you feel pig-, so that you'd rather not have touched any girl,
    and think you won't touch one again for a good long while. [1]

13. 10.18.7, litteras ad collegam accessorundam ex Samnio missas in trinis annalibus invenit: piget tamen in certo poneré, cum ea ipsa inter consules populi Romani, iam iterum eodem honore fangerent, disceptatum fuerit, Appio amente missas, Volumnio adfirmante.

Forstian a laribus patris exire pigebit
Sed tamen exibis: deinde redire voles;
Nec te Lar patrius, sed amor revocabit amicae.
where the feeling looks both to what the lover has done and what he might do again. For another example, consider the sage advice the slave Tranio gives himself in Plautus’ *Mostellaria*:\[5\]

This calls for attention, this is the duty of a shrewd man: that one’s rascally plans and deeds may all turn out smoothly and without mishap, lest he come to have a reason to feel pig- at living. [12]

Plainly, if the rascal’s plans and deeds did not turn out smoothly, his emotion would respond to the wreckage, the way his life’s course had gone to that point: we might say that he was “sorry he’d been born” or “sorry to be alive.” But equally plainly, he could well “feel pig- at living” in the sense of being reluctant for that state to continue: in his aversion at the prospect of living amid the wreckage, he might wish he were dead. Though the distinction between fact and prospect is an important fault line in the data that allows us to describe different scripts of *piget*, it is also characteristic of any emotion’s scripts that more than one of them can be experienced simultaneously.

I can more briefly treat the next important point of distinction—whether the relevant action or state of affairs is my responsibility or someone else’s—since what primarily needs to be shown is that the distinction exists at all: if *piget* is all about more or less dispirited forms of aversion, of regret and repugnance, can it really be about the actions of anyone other than the person experiencing it? The answer is yes, it really can, but—as it turns out—in only a limited set of circumstances, as three examples can illustrate. In the first, from Terence’s *Adelphoe*, the morose brother, Demea, is being goaded by the slave Syrus with reports of his brother Micio’s liberalit and its consequences:\[6\]

DEM. That such things should happen!
Syr. It’s the foolish laxity of [your brother] and his wicked leniency.
DEM. Indeed, I feel shame and pig- at my brother.
Syr. Between the two of you, Demea, (I don’t say this just because you’re here) there’s all too great a difference. [13]

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\*5. *Mostell.* 412–15:

verum id videndum est, id tibi docti est opus,
quae desinata sint et facta nequiter,
tranquilla cura et ut proveniat sine male,
ne quid potiatur, quam ob rem piget vivere.

\*6. *Ad.* 390–93:

dem. haccin fieri!
syr. inequa lenitas patris et facilitas prava.
dem. fratres me quidem puell *pigetque*.
syr. nimium inter vos, Demea, ac (non quia adest præsens dico hoc) permitinimum interest.
After his death and whatever fate has in store for him, the slave Tranio gives him some advice: he is a shrewd man: that one’s rascally youthful and without mishap, lest he be troubled. [12]

If it did not turn out smoothly, his emotions would have taken his life’s course had gone to that point in such a way that living” in the sense of being receptive to the prospect of living amid the daily affairs of life; the distinction between fact and fiction allows us to describe different types of emotion’s scripts that more accurately reflect the important point of distinction—whether the person or someone else’s—since the distinction exists at all: if piget is all about regret and repugnance, can it be that the person experiencing it? The answer is no, in only a limited set of circumstances. In the first place, from Terence’s Adelphoe,Syrus with reports of events: [16]

We should by now feel justified in identifying Demea’s pig as a form of heart-sick regret, which here keeps company with shame: both of these emotions would plainly be appropriate if the foolish laxity and wicked leniency in question were his own; that they are appropriate when the alleged vices are his brother’s is due, no less plainly, to the kind of bond that exists between brothers, which can cause each to regard the other as an extension of himself. This is the sort of identification familiar in the case of parents and children, though it is by no means limited to family members. So in the second example, from Plautus’ Trinummus, the upright young man Lysiteles responds to his wastrel friend, Lesbionicus, whom he has assisted:[17]

LESB. I knew the appropriate behavior, I just couldn’t bring it off, wretch that I am: so, held fast by Venus’ power, a slave to idleness, I came to grief. And now—just as you deserve—I could not be more grateful.

LYS. Still, that my efforts go to waste and you don’t take to heart what I say is beyond endurance, and at the same time I feel pig—that you feel too little shame. [14]

The one friend says that he feels heart-sick regret because the other doesn’t feel sufficient pudor, and I think we would be justified in supposing that the statement would be equally valid were the verbs piget and pudet reversed: the identification between friends is such that the one could appropriately say he feels shame because the other is insufficiently heart-sick with regret. For a last example, consider the way that Sallust rounds off his moralizing excursus at the beginning of the Bellum Jugurthinum: “But I have gone on too freely and too far, while experiencing pig at the civil community’s character and feeling that I’ve had it up to here. I now return to my subject” (4. 9 verum ego liberis altiusque processi, dum me civitas morum piget taeedetque. nunc ad inceptum redeo [15]).

We are to understand that Sallust feels what he feels—regret, joined with a sense of being at the end of his tether—as a loyal Roman citizen faced with behavior unworthy of the Roman civitas: the implied premise is that there are times when any decent patriot experiences that emotion, just as a friend or brother might; also implied, I suspect, is the notion that: here are times when experiencing that emotion shows by itself that you are a decent patriot.

Indeed, in each of these cases we could say that the person’s feeling pig has ethical implications: it is evidence that he is playing the role of brother, friend,

17. Trin. 657-61:

**LESB.** scibam ut esse me deceret, facere non qui barbar miser; ita vi Veneris vincit, otio captus in fraudem incidi, et tibi nunc, proinde ut merere, summam habeo gratias.

**LYS.** At operam perire meam sic et te haec dicta corde spernere perpeti nequeo, simul me piget parum pudere te.
or patriot in an appropriate way, and it should cause an observer to think well of him in that role. And that in fact brings us to the last important point of distinction in understanding the basic structure of piget: whether or not there is something ethically at stake—whether my experiencing the emotion says something about my worth as a person.

As it happens, about one-third of the time the matter is ethically neutral: whether or not one experiences pig- depends simply upon a calculation of utility or advantage. The calculation is particularly clear in this exchange between the wily slave Pseudolus and the pimp Ballio:18

PSE. He [viz., the youth Calidorus] is quite ashamed about what he promised you, ... that he hasn't even yet paid you those twenty minae for his mistress.

BAL. What causes shame is much more easily borne than what causes pig$: he feels shame for not having paid the money, I feel pig- because I haven't got it. [16]

This dimension of piget also emerges nicely when Ovid imagines the reaction of a grief-stricken Phoebus after his son Phaethon's fiery death:19

He hates the light and the day and himself, he surrender his thoughts to mourning, with anger added in,

and refuses to do his duty for the world. "Enough," he says, "from time's beginning my lot has been thankless enough, and I feel pig- at the labors I've performed without end, without honor!" [17]

Phoebus, we would say, is "sick and tired" of performing the same act day in, day out: this is heartfelt regret, and it is felt not only because the situation has lasted so long but also because it has lacked adequate compensation. As commonly with the statement "I am sick and tired of doing X" in English, the regret is tinged with resentment and indignation, which implies a judgment that

18. Plaut. Pseud. 279–82:

PSE. Hunc pudet, quod tibi promisit, . . . quia tibi minas viginti pro amica etiam non dedit.

BAL. Nimio id quod pudet facilest fertur quam illud quod piget. non dedisse istunc
pudet: me quia non accepit piget.

19. Met. 1.383–87:

lucemque odit sequi ipse diemque
daque animum in lucius et lucibus addit item
officinium negat mundo "satis" inquit "ab aevi
sors mea princi piis fuit iniquieta, pigetque
actorum sine fine mihi, sine honore laborum!"
someone is at fault or at least that the circumstances are blameworthy. But it entails no overt judgment on Phoebus himself.20

But about twice as often as not, experiencing pig- does entail or invite some sort of ethical judgment; and the judgment is differently colored depending on whether the emotion is prompted by a matter of fact—a completed or ongoing action—or by the mere prospect of some action. There is no need to spend much time on the variety of ethical pig- that concerns matters of fact, since it has figured already in a number of the examples we’ve seen; but let me add one more. The rhetorician and imperial confidant Fronto wishes to commend a friend to the emperor Verus, and commending him requires that Fronto describe their relations:21

From his early youth Gavius Clarus has looked after me in a friendly fashion, not just through the dutiful attentions by which a senator junior in age and rank cultivates a senior senator and earns his gratitude; but our friendship gradually reached the point that neither he felt pig- nor I felt shame in his offering the forms of compliance that loyal and industrious clients and freedman provide—and this out of no arrogance on my part or servility on his, but our mutual affection and true love released each of us from any feeling of resistance that would put a limit on our dutiful attentions. [18]

Fronto’s premise is clear. Absent this marvelously transformative affection, he would be expected to feel shame because of the arrogance (insolentia) entailed in self-interestedly misusing Gavius—treating him as much more lowly than he was for his own ends—and Gavius would be expected to feel pig- at performing actions unworthy of himself but worthy of a freedman—his gorge would rise, and he would feel a profoundly dispirited regret. In fact, we can suppose that Gavius would feel not just pig- but shame as well.

When ethical pig- is felt at merely prospective behavior, it certainly can convey a creditable reluctance to perform a discreditable action (e.g., Livy’s scruple at n. 8). More commonly, however, it appears as a culpable reluctance to perform some commendable action: this, in fact, is the one area where there is

20. I say “overt judgment” because (as Don Lateiner has very attractively suggested to me) Phoebus’ statement could imply that in allowing himself to be exploited Phoebus believes he has not adequately defended his personhood and so feels shame at having played the fool. That a similar dynamic is at work in Belli’s case is less likely in view of the sharp distinction between padet and piget that structures the thought.

21. Ep. ad Ver. imp. 1.7.3, a prima aetate sua me curavit Gavius Clarus familiariter, non modo iis officiis quius se senatum aetate et loco minor maiorem gradus atque natum senatorum probe colit ac praeceperit, sed paucis amicitia nostra ea processit ut neque illum piget neque me padet ea illumin oboedire mihi, quae cipientes, quae liberti fidèles ac laboriosi obsentur; nulli hoc aut nea insolentia aut illius adulatione, sed mutua caritas nostra et amor verus ademit utrique nostrum in officiis moderandis ommem despectationem.
complete overlap between the verb *piget* and the adjective and noun derived from it, *piger* and *pigritia*, both of which have almost invariably negative ethical implications. For example, Appius Claudius is imagined by Livy to have spoken in these terms when urging his countrymen to pursue the war against Veii: 22

By God, the very disgrace of it, if no other reason, should have demanded that we keep at it! Once upon a time all of Greece united to besiege a city for ten years for the sake of a single woman—how far from home? with how many lands and seas standing between? But *we* feel *pig*—at the prospect of completing a one-year siege not twenty miles away, nearly in sight of our own city. [19]

Plainly, Appius Claudius is engaging in a shaming tactic: he wants his audience to see themselves being seen as slackers without gumption, so that they will be moved to prove him wrong. And that is the typical way that this form of *pig*—is spoken of: not as something I feel but as something I attribute to others, either because I want to show them up for the shameful slugs that they are or because I want them to show that they are not shameful slugs after all. Thus one last example, also from Livy, book 5, and the great speech in which Camillus tries to persuade the Romans not to abandon the city after it has been redeemed from the Gauls: 23

When there was nothing in these parts but woods and marshes, our ancestors, refugees and shepherds, built a new city in a trice: do we—when Capitol and citadel are intact, when the temples of the gods still stand—do we feel *pig*—at the prospect of rebuilding what has been burned? [20]

The only acceptable answer to such a question is: certainly not.

If we assemble all these pieces, then, what we find is distilled in the partial taxonomy of *piget* scripts shown in figure 7.1. 24 Whereas the retrospective and anticipatory incidents of *piget* fall out fairly even (< 10 percent difference in distribution), the distinction at the next level—as to whether the action or state of affairs is or is not “up to me”—could hardly be sharper: overwhelmingly, in

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22. 5. 4. 12 si herculae multa sit causa, ipas indignitas persevereratiam imponere debuit. decem quoniam annum urbem oppugnatio est ob omnium mediocrem ab universa Graecia, quam praelabat ab domat, quot terras, quot maris distant? nos intra vicem stimulam, in conspectu prope urbem nostra, omnem oppugnationem perseque piget.

23. 5.53-9, maiores nostri, convenere pastoresque, cum in his locis nihil praeter silvas paludesque esset, novum urbem tam brevi assequerant: nos Capitoli, arce incolunt, sanctus templus deorum, ac suffosum incensa piget.

24. The Packard Humanities Institute Latin database (25-3) reveals 205 texts in which *piget* and its forms appear in classical Latin. The count at each level in the taxonomy does not add up to 205 (e.g., 93 + 111) because some texts are too fragmentary to analyze, while others present scenarios in which more than one script is enacted simultaneously; the numbers in parentheses (“nos. 1 . . .”) in figure 7.1 refer to the examples cited in the text above.
I have an unpleasant psychophysical experience combining lassitude and aversion when I perceive as deeply undesirable (N = 209)

an accomplished or ongoing course of action / state of affairs ("a matter of fact")
(N = 93)

that is another's responsibility (N = 9)
with material/practical consequences for me
(N = 3)
(nos. 16-17)

with ethical consequences for me
(N = 6)
(nos. 15-15)

that is my responsibility (N = 83)
with material/practical consequences for me
(N = 25)
(nos. 6, 7, 12)

with ethical consequences for me
(N = 58)
(nos. 7, 8, 12, 17, 18)

a possible or proposed course of action / state of affairs ("a prospect")
(N = 111)

that is another's responsibility (N = 0)
with material/practical consequences for me
(N = 33)
(nos. 1-3, 9, 11, 12)

with ethical consequences for me
(N = 79)
(nos. 4, 5, 10, 12, 19, 20)

Figure 7.1 Piget-Scripts: A Partial Taxonomy
the case of the retrospective emotion, and absolutely, in the case of the anticipatory, I am (or at any rate should be) the master of my own emotional fate. And according to a less strongly weighted but still very clear tendency, whether or not I display that mastery says something about my worth as a person. In this respect we can with every justification add pīget to the lexicon of ethical emotions that was available to the Romans, a lexicon that was, where this emotion is concerned, somewhat richer than our own.
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