Ancient emotions are very much under scrutiny at the moment. Recent important studies include J. Sihvola and T. Engberg-Pedersen (eds.), *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 1998), Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: from Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford, 2000), and—another study of a single emotion—William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001). Konstan’s book is the first one (in any language) solely devoted to pity in the ancient world. Its objectives are partly set by the series in which it appears—Classical Inter/Faces, with a focus on the relationship between ancient and modern ideas.* Pity Transformed* sets out both to explore key aspects of the conception and role of pity in Greek and Roman culture and also to correlate these with salient features of modern thought and practice.

Konstan sets out his working assumptions in an introductory chapter on current thinking about the nature of emotions in general and pity in particular. Although he acknowledges that emotions may rest on certain core universal instinctive functions, he stresses much more the idea that emotions are conceived—and experienced—differently in different cultures. He also adopts the view, widely shared in most contemporary and some ancient theories, that emotions have an important cognitive dimension and that they embody a positive or negative valuation of the object or situation in question. These assumptions underlie the specific content of the four main chapters of the book. These focus on significant divergences between Greco-Roman and modern conceptions of pity (or rather, of *eleos, oiktos, misericordia, clementia* on the one hand and pity, compassion and sympathy on the other), which are related to larger differences in the thought-world and social structure of the culture involved. The evidence for ancient thinking about pity examined here illustrates the meaning of key terms and the analysis of emotions in philosophy. But it centres on the way that the understanding of pity is conveyed through the presentation of concrete situations in, for instance, law-court oratory, literature and historiography. The focus is on the *contextualisation* of the emotion of pity in the life-forms of ancient culture.
Chapter 1, ‘Pity and the Law’, centres on one salient divergence between ancient and modern life. Whereas in modern legal practice, the appeal for pity can co-exist with an admission of guilt, reinforced by the expression of remorse, this is not so in ancient courts. Pity is invited there as a proper response (based on a reasoned judgement of the situation) to a case of unjustified bad treatment. This thesis is supported by reference to Aristotle’s analysis of pity in Rhetoric Book 2, a central text for this study (examined closely in an Appendix), correlated with evidence from Greek law-court speeches. Konstan’s discussion serves to refine the common view that appeals to emotion in ancient courts are designed to counteract reasoned judgement of the facts; rather, such appeals are best understood as inviting an emotional response (anger or pity) which is based on such judgement.

In ch.2, ‘Pity and Compassion’, Konstan highlights a second such difference. Whereas in the modern world, pity is sometimes analysed as ‘fellow-suffering’ (sympathy or compassion), and, relatedly, ‘self-pity’ is a conceptual possibility, a contrasting pattern is found in Greek and Roman thought. There, pity is a response of imaginative projection to those at some distance from oneself; even in the case of relatives or close friends, the appropriate reaction is not pity but some version of shared feeling (‘com-passion’ in a literal sense). Self-pity is, correspondingly, not seen as a conceptual possibility, except in certain deliberately artificial contexts (e.g. Lucretius 3.881-7); it appears more regularly in Christian authors but does not lose its air of paradox. Konstan’s claim might be supported by the suggestion I have made elsewhere that ‘reciprocity’ or ‘the shared life’, rather than ‘altruism’, functions as the main ancient norm of interpersonal ethics (in my contribution to C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford, eds., Reciprocity in Ancient Greece, Oxford, 1998). Ancient pity, we might suggest, is extended under appropriate circumstances to those with whom one’s relationships are shaped by reciprocity, and pity might be expected from them in return under different circumstances. By contrast, relationships with family and close friends (and oneself) are conceived in terms of a fully ‘shared’ life.

Chapter 3, ‘Pity and Power’, focuses on a specific type of situation in ancient life, the treatment by victors of those defeated in war. Konstan highlights, in particular, three striking accounts of debates following victory, in Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, and Appian. He notes
especially cases in which speakers appeal not for pity to be shown (which would imply that the defeated have, in some specific way, deserved this response) but, rather, a more generalised attitude of *philanthropia*. This is a generous, humane response to the sheer dreadfulness of the plight of those defeated, and one which reflects well on the character of the one who refrains from a justified revenge. Konstan finds a parallel for this attitude in the *clementia* (by contrast, perhaps with *misericordia*, the normal Roman equivalent of *eleos*), which is a virtue claimed by emperors such as Augustus. *Clementia* also constitutes an attitude of generous forbearance by someone in authority rather than a response that acknowledges the specific moral claims of the recipient.

In ch.4, ‘Divine Pity’, the book returns to the theme of contrast between ancient and modern perspectives on pity. Pity is not a standard trait of Greek and Roman gods, although it is sometimes shown (for instance, by Homeric gods for their human favourites or offspring). The absolute distance between mortal and immortal works against the imaginative identification with the other’s situation which is crucial for pity. However, in texts both real and fictional of the Imperial period, prayers for divine pity become increasingly common, paralleled to some extent by appeals for pity from the emperor or his governors, who had a quasi-divine status for their subjects. Part of the reason for this shift may be the influence of Jewish and (especially) Christian ideas about God as merciful; Konstan traces the Roman reception of the Christian view in writers such as Lactantius, whose assimilation of pity (*misericordia*) to *humanitas* (the Latin analogue of *philanthropia*) marks the start of the modern chapter of the history of pity.

This, relatively short, book is, obviously, selective in its treatment and does not claim to be comprehensive. Greek evidence outweighs Hellenistic or Roman; among theorists, Aristotle, perhaps understandably, figures most prominently. But Konstan’s decision to focus in some depth on a limited number of themes makes for an illuminating and suggestive study. His claims about the configuration of ancient pity and the contrast with modern ideas seem to me highly convincing and are well supported by a thoughtful reading of the evidence. The book is structured and written in a clear, attractive form that opens up this important subject to a wide range of readers. It is a valuable contribution to the burgeoning literature on ancient emotions and their social context. One final plea:
can Duckworth or the Series Editors be persuaded to replace endnotes with footnotes for future works in this series and so make life easier for attentive readers (but no more difficult for casual ones)?

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