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## THE ROOTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE RENAISSANCE

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*This article examines the historical development of the concept of emotional intelligence from antiquity to the Renaissance making attempts to analyse its philosophical and cultural roots.*

*In ancient philosophy Plato saw emotions as a threat to rational reason, and Aristotle saw them as an important component of human life, underlining the need to regulate them in order to achieve virtue. These ideas emphasise the importance of self-control and moderation in emotional life, forming the basis of modern emotional regulation. The Stoics argued for the importance of controlling destructive emotions which directly relates to modern approaches to emotional regulation. A historical analysis of these ideas helps to understand why the ability to control emotions was considered important not only for moral and personal growth but also for psychological well-being which in turn formed the basis of modern concepts of emotional intelligence.*

*In the Middle Ages emotions were often viewed through the prism of religious teachings. For example, Thomas Aquinas argued that emotions can be either virtuous or vicious and their control or development depends on the person's will and morality. This is consistent with modern views of self-awareness and self-regulation as key aspects of emotional intelligence. Changes in the perception of emotions during the Renaissance, when a reassessment of the importance of feelings began, also contributed to the development of the understanding that emotions have a positive and constructive meaning in human life which is an important aspect in the modern understanding of emotional intelligence.*

*Understanding how different eras interpreted emotions shows that emotional intelligence is not just skills like self-management or empathy but reflects the historical evolution of ideas about emotions and reason, morality, and personal development.*

**Key words:** emotions, reason, virtue, control, emotional intelligence.

### **Бігунов Дмитро. Витоки емоційного інтелекту: від античності до Відродження**

*У статті розглядається історичний розвиток концепції емоційного інтелекту від античності до епохи Відродження та робиться спроба проаналізувати її філософські й культурні корені.*

*В античній філософії Платон розглядав емоції як загрозу раціональному розуму, а Арістотель – як важливий складник людського життя, наголошуючи на необхідності їх регулювання для досягнення доброчесності. Ці ідеї підкреслюють важливість самоконтролю та поміркованості, що лежить в основі сучасного розуміння емоційної регуляції. Стоїки стверджували важливість контролю над деструктивними емоціями, що безпосередньо стосується сучасних підходів до емоційної регуляції. Історичний аналіз цих ідей допомагає зрозуміти, чому вміння контролювати емоції вважалося важливим не тільки для морального та особистісного зростання, а й для психологічного благополуччя, що, своєю чергою, лягло в основу сучасних концепцій емоційного інтелекту.*

*У Середньовіччі емоції часто розглядалися через призму релігійних учень. Наприклад, Фома Аквінський стверджував, що емоції можуть бути як доброчесними, так і порочними, а їх контроль чи розвиток залежить від волі та моралі людини. Це узгоджується із сучасними поглядами на самосвідомість і саморегуляцію як ключові аспекти емоційного інтелекту. самосвідомість та саморегуляцію як ключові аспекти емоційного інтелекту. Зміни в сприйнятті емоцій в епоху Відродження, коли почалася переоцінка важливості почуттів, також сприяли розвитку розуміння того, що емоції мають позитивне й конструктивне значення в житті людини, що є важливим аспектом у сучасному розумінні емоційного інтелекту.*

*Розуміння того, як різні епохи інтерпретували емоції, показує, що емоційний інтелект – це не лише навички, а результат історичної еволюції уявлень про взаємодію емоцій з розумом, мораллю та розвитком особистості.*

**Ключові слова:** емоції, розум, доброчесність, контроль, емоційний інтелект.

### Introduction

Despite the enormous interest in emotional intelligence, there is a problem of limited understanding of it in the context of its historical roots. Modern psychology tends to view emotional intelligence as a relatively new discovery, and its relationship to philosophy, ethics, and early psychological theories often remains under-researched. This limits an in-depth understanding of how different cultural and philosophical traditions have influenced the formation of the idea of emotional intelligence.

Emotions, their perception and their management are topics that have been addressed in schools of philosophy since antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as later philosophers such as the Stoics, offered their concepts of how emotions can be related to moral virtue, mind, and self-control. These philosophical ideas resonate directly with modern concepts of emotional regulation and emotional awareness which form central components of emotional intelligence.

However, the historical study of emotional intelligence as a holistic concept remains insufficient. Contemporary theories of emotional intelligence often abstract it from the philosophical and cultural contexts in which it was formed, leading to some simplification and limiting the perception of emotional intelligence as a purely psychological phenomenon. For example, modern approaches emphasise empathy and emotional literacy but rarely link these phenomena to virtue philosophy or medieval ethical theories which were also focused on regulating emotions as an important aspect of moral behaviour.

**The aim of the article** is to outline the historical development of the concept of emotional intelligence from antiquity to the Renaissance and to analyse its philosophical and cultural roots.

### Materials and method

In ancient philosophy emotions are seen as an integral part of human nature, playing both positive and negative roles. From Plato's point of view, the soul consists of three parts: reason (logistikon), spirit or we may say emotions (thymoeides) and appetite or desires (epithymetikon) [1; 17]. Reason, as the highest part of the soul, must manage emotions and desires, channelling them for good through knowledge and wisdom. Emotions can be both beneficial and destructive (if they get out of control). At the same time Plato sees emotions as a possible threat to logic and common sense because they can interfere with sound decision making. In his view the ability of the reason to control emotions is closely related to virtue. Harmony is achieved only if reason directs emotional energy in a positive direction, turning it into a source of moral strength. And, at the same time, lack of control over emotions leads to internal contradictions and moral degradation. Desires, from Plato's point of view, certainly play an important role because they serve as a source of motivation. However, they must also be subordinated to reason, because without proper control desires can be the cause of selfish and even morally unacceptable actions [8; 17].

As it is seen, Plato focuses attention on the necessity of the harmony of reason, emotions and desires, with reason playing the leading role. This model of the soul anticipates ideas of emotional intelligence, emphasising the importance of the balance between logic, feelings and needs. The primacy of reason in guiding emotional energy and desire in constructive ways echoes the key component of emotional intelligence – the ability to rationally reflect on one's feelings and motives in order to make conscious and ethically sound decisions. Emotional intelligence also highlights the need to take into account all levels of inner experience: logic, feelings and needs. For example, emotional awareness makes a person aware of his or her desires and experiences, and emotional regulation helps him or her not just suppress emotions but transform them into a source of motivation and inspiration. This is entirely consistent with Plato's notion of the harmony of the

soul where desires are not suppressed but are under the control of reason to serve the common goal of achieving virtue and well-being.

In addition Plato's idea that disharmony between reason, emotions and desires leads to inner conflict and destructive consequences is reflected in researches on emotional intelligence. Failure to manage emotions or to consider one's needs is often the cause of stress, impulsive behaviour and relationship problems. Thus, Plato's model of the soul not only anticipates but also deepens the modern understanding of emotional intelligence, emphasising the need for balance and harmony for personal and social development.

In turn, Aristotle in his theory of the 'golden mean' emphasises the importance of a balance between excess and deficiency of qualities, including emotions. He believes that emotions should be expressed in moderation and appropriate to the situation. Emotional maturity, according to Aristotle, is the ability to consciously manage one's emotions, finding a balance between expression and restraint. This skill involves a deep understanding of the appropriateness of emotional expression depending on the situation, as well as the ability to direct emotional energy in a way that promotes good and harmony rather than destructive consequences [1; 2].

Speaking about Aristotle it cannot but mention his idea of catharsis. Aristotle claims that experiencing strong emotions such as fear and compassion through tragedy helps the viewers to free themselves from these feelings, realise them and achieve inner harmony. Aristotle argues that emotions should not be suppressed, but that it is important to conceptualise and experience them constructively [3].

Aristotle's theory of the 'golden mean' resonates deeply with the principles of emotional intelligence. The balance between extremes, which he considered the foundation of virtue, is reflected in the modern understanding of emotional competence. For example, excessive suppression of emotions can lead to internal tension and conflict, while their uncontrolled expression often disrupts social relationships. The development of emotional intelligence is trying to find this balance, where emotions become a tool for personal growth, strengthening relationships and making ethically sound decisions.

The idea of catharsis is actively used in modern psychotherapy, including techniques aimed at processing difficult experiences, developing self-awareness and increasing emotional resilience. In this sense, catharsis can be seen as a prototype for practices related to the development of emotional intelligence where an important place is given to the realisation and adaptation of emotional experience to improve the quality of life.

Thus, Aristotle's ideas about reason, emotions and virtue anticipate modern approaches to emotional intelligence, emphasising their fundamental importance for human life. His philosophy reminds us that managing emotions is not just a skill but a path to a more meaningful, moral and harmonious existence.

In Stoicism the concept of apathy implies liberation from destructive emotions and the attainment of inner peace through self-control and rational reflection. Philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus emphasised that apathy is not the absence of emotions but the ability to avoid their irrational manifestations which distort the perception of reality and prevent reasonable actions [18].

The Stoics believe that emotions arise from wrong judgements about external events. A person achieves harmony if he realises that happiness does not depend on external factors such as wealth, success or health but is rooted in inner virtue. Control over emotions allows a person not to be influenced by external circumstances and to remain calm even in difficult situations. A fundamental principle of Stoicism is aligning with nature which involves embracing the unavoidable aspects of life, such as illness, loss, and failure. This does not mean suppressing feelings, but it involves dealing with them wisely so that emotions do not destroy inner peace. The Stoics offer practical methods for managing emotions, including reflection, self-evaluation, and awareness of one's state. They teach to view difficulties as opportunities for growth and to learn to accept any events with

gratitude. Seneca as well as Epictetus noted that constant self-control helped to maintain peace of mind [5; 12; 20].

Modern theories of emotional intelligence echo the ideas of the Stoics. They emphasise awareness, understanding and management of emotions which promotes harmony and well-being. Like the Stoics, modern approaches highlight the importance of managing not only one's own reactions but also interacting with the emotions of others.

Thus, Stoic apathy and modern concepts of emotional intelligence stress the role of conscious management of emotions in achieving inner harmony and moral behaviour.

The works of Medieval and Renaissance scholars, although produced in a very different intellectual and cultural environment, laid the foundations for concepts that resonate with contemporary understandings of emotional intelligence. These periods emphasise the importance of emotions in religious, philosophical and social life.

In the Middle Ages morality and emotions are viewed through the prism of Christian theology. Emotions are perceived as a component of spiritual life which is capable of both helping a person and leading him astray from the path of virtue. That is why medieval theologians actively investigate the nature of emotions. For example, Peter Abelard reviews emotions as a component of conscience. Sin, in his opinion, consists not in emotion but in agreeing with it, if it leads to wrong actions. His work "*Ethica*" ("Ethics") which is also known as "*Scito te ipsum*" ("Know Thyself") considers that moral behaviour depends not only on actions but also on intentions which in turn are linked to inner experiences and emotions. Thus, his approach emphasises personal responsibility for managing feelings [9; 10]. In turn, Saint Augustine distinguishes emotions that can either bring a person closer to God or further away from Him. St. Augustine emphasises that emotions, such as anger or passion, should be directed towards the service of God and governed by reason [4; 9].

These ideas are also shared by Thomas Aquinas, one of the key philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages. In his writings, he views emotions as part of human nature, created by God, and argues that emotions, recognised and controlled by reason, can promote spiritual growth. Based on Aristotelian philosophy, he claims that emotions have a nature that can be either virtuous or sinful. He considers that emotions are neither evil nor good in themselves. Their moral value is determined by how they relate to reason and the will. Reason, according to Aquinas, should control the emotions, directing them toward the higher goal of attaining virtue and union with God. Emotions, if controlled by reason, can contribute to a virtuous life, while unreasonable indulgence in them leads to sin. Thus, for example, anger is considered sinful if it is caused by selfishness but can be justified in the form of 'righteous anger' directed against injustice; love (Lat. 'caritas' – mercy, sacrificial love) directed towards God and neighbour is the highest virtue and is contrasted with sinful 'passion' (Lat. 'cupiditas' – strong desire, passion) oriented towards material and selfish things [15; 19].

Thus, recognising emotions as a gift capable of serving higher purposes is the basis for developing of emotional intelligence which begins with understanding of one's own feelings. The management of emotions acts as a key component of it, and moral awareness and the ability to make ethically sound decisions based on an awareness of one's emotions underscores the significance of this ability, recognised even at those times.

Whereas in the Middle Ages emotions are seen as a source of sin or virtue that required strict control through religious practices, in the Renaissance emotions become a subject of study and admiration, and are considered as an important part of human nature and a source of moral choice.

The writings of Renaissance scholars are linked to modern concepts of emotional intelligence through their attention to emotions, self-awareness, managing feelings, and interacting with other people. These scholars develop ideas that contribute to the understanding of human nature, including the role of emotions in life and their relationship to reason, morality, and social relationships.

Humanists such as Pico della Mirandola, Desiderius Erasmus and others see man as a being endowed with reason and emotions that can be harmoniously united. Thus, Giovanni Pico della

Mirandola emphasises the value of human freedom and the capacity for self-development. In his famous “The Oration on the Dignity of Man” (Lat. “Oratio de hominis dignitate”) emotions are seen as part of human nature that can be transformed through self-awareness and philosophical reflection. Mirandola stresses that human beings have the freedom to choose between lower instincts and higher virtues [16].

In turn, Erasmus explores human weaknesses in his writings, including the influence of emotions on behaviour. He highlights the importance of education and reflection in achieving inner harmony, teaches to be critical of one’s emotions and to strive for rational behaviour, and sees self-control as the key to morality and a harmonious life. Compassion and empathy, on which his ideas are based, are important virtues [6; 7].

Michel de Montaigne explores emotions as an integral part of human nature. He considers fear, love, envy and joy as normal human experiences that should be understood, not suppressed. Montaigne emphasises the importance of moderation in emotions (the influence of the Aristotelian ‘golden mean’) because it leads to harmony and moral perfection [13].

At the same time, Niccolo Machiavelli offers a pragmatic approach to emotions and analyses emotions through the prism of power. He believes that a politician must skilfully manipulate the emotions of his subjects, such as fear and love, in order to hold power and maintain order. Machiavelli also recognises the importance of emotional control, especially for political leaders who must hide their feelings in order not to lose power. Thus, emotions are seen as a tool rather than an obstacle to rational governance [11].

The philosophical ideas of Benedict Spinoza and Thomas More also echo the concept of emotional intelligence. Spinoza views emotions as natural phenomena that can be understood through rational reflection. This understanding allows emotions to be directed to achieve a virtuous life which corresponds to a key aspect of emotional intelligence – recognising and managing one’s feelings to achieve higher goals [21]. Thomas More in “Utopia” describes a society where harmony is achieved through mindfulness, understanding and empathy – the core components of social awareness that are the basis of emotional intelligence [14]. His idea of a harmonious society shows how a developed capacity for empathy can contribute to an environment where interactions are based on respect and understanding. Thus, the philosophical views of Spinoza and More illustrate how the awareness and use of emotions can serve as the foundation for both personal growth and the building of a harmonious society.

The ideas of ancient, medieval and Renaissance thinkers had a significant influence on the formation of the concept of emotional intelligence, although the term itself appeared only in the 20th century. The philosophers of antiquity stressed the importance of understanding emotions and their influence on human behaviour. They noted that managing emotions in accordance with virtue was the basis of a moral life which is consonant with the modern idea of regulating emotions to achieve harmony in relationships and in society.

In the Middle Ages philosophers integrated Christian views with ancient thought, viewing emotions as a gift given to man to achieve spiritual growth which echoes the idea of using emotional intelligence for ethical self-improvement. This period emphasised moral responsibility for one’s feelings which anticipates modern views on mindfulness and empathy.

The Renaissance, with its humanistic orientation, brought a new way of looking at man and his inner world. Thinkers emphasised rational reflection on emotions as a way of managing them to achieve a virtuous life, and how empathy and social awareness can promote harmony in society. These ideas are directly related to components of emotional intelligence such as empathy and social interaction.

### Conclusions

Thus, thinkers from different eras have laid the philosophical foundations for understanding the role of emotions in human life. They foreshadowed many aspects of emotional intelligence, linking

the awareness and management of emotions to personal growth, ethical decisions, and social harmony. Modern research on emotional intelligence can be seen as a development of ideas that have remained relevant throughout the ages and have inspired humanity's search for inner and outer balance.

It becomes obvious that emotional intelligence is not a new phenomenon but a natural extension of the development of scientific and philosophical ideas about the importance of harmony between reason and emotion for the full functioning of the individual and effective interaction with others. Understanding the historical context allows for a deeper comprehension of the nature of emotional intelligence and reveals its multilayered relationship to philosophical, ethical, and psychoanalytic traditions. This helps not only to avoid a simplistic approach to emotional intelligence but also to integrate the deeper, interdisciplinary views of emotions that have been developed over the centuries. Such approach allows not only a fuller understanding of the nature of emotional intelligence but also a more effective application in various areas of life, from education to psychotherapy, ensuring harmony between reason, emotion and personal development.

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