

## 03: The Passions that Drive Us

It has been discussed that the passions we feel towards subjects, objects, or occasionally an entire culture of people have a lot to do with the amount of pleasure or pain that we feel towards those particular topics. Despite the fact that one cannot definitively label one topic as passionate due to the varying viewpoints of others, scholars often suggest that passion is a sensation that naturally occurs within the souls of individuals in one way or another. However, it is important to note that the way in which a person identifies their passion is through a particular sensation that provides them with a sort of drive to further explore and understand the passions they feel. It is a drive that encourages us all to travel the world, educate ourselves on new subjects, practice a new skill, and other things that motivate us to be better in touch with our own interests as well as the vast amount of interests shared by others all over the world.

The drive to discover the passions inside of us all is not something that a person must inspire within themselves, but it is rather something that seems to develop naturally inside of everyone, much like passion itself. This being said, if this drive is shaped inside of all mankind similarly to how passion is shaped, then it can be inferred that an individual's drive to go out and find his or her passions are just as important as passion in regards to developing one's personality. This drive to discover passion can often be acquainted with a person's innermost desires, however small or large they may be. But it is important to make the distinction that passions are not solely influenced by a person's desires. Diderot clarifies this idea in the *Encyclopédie* when he states:

*"the simple desire for an object would not lead us with so much force into so many false judgments; it would even soon vanish at the first glimmers of common sense; but when this desire is animated by love, increased by hope, renewed by joy, strengthened by apprehension, aroused by courage, emulation, anger, and by a thousand passions each attacking reason in its turn from all sides; then it conquers it, subjugates it, enslaves it."*

Essentially, an individual's desire, whether it is fueled by positive or negative intentions, does not truly become a passion until another strong emotional force becomes associated with said desire. Similarly, people do not discover the drive they might have towards a particular passion until they are prompted to do so, either through their own emotions or occasionally through the emotions of others. It is an idea that Samuel Johnson briefly touches upon in his preference to his annotated *Plays of William Shakespeare*. In his piece, Johnson dissects the mechanics and techniques of Shakespeare's work, discussing how the characters in his plays are written in a way that makes their dialogue seem very natural, which makes the conversations that the characters have on stage seem like one that two people in real life could be having. He also discusses how other, more contemporary writers, "disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents, so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world" (2730).

What Johnson is alluding to in this passage is exactly how Shakespeare utilized his storytelling abilities to intellectually inspire his audiences. The reason Shakespeare's writing was so unique had a lot to do with how real the stories, conflicts, characters, and themes felt to the average person during the time. Instead of hiding important elements in the subtext, he raised them up to the surface not only so that the audience understood the messages he was trying to get across, but to also spark their interests and desires. His purpose behind this was to give people something to contemplate after the curtains were lowered, providing them with a drive that encouraged them to explore an aspect of the story that they just might find passion in exploring.

However, this is not to say that this drive to explore our passions is something people do out of desire, but it can also be something that a person discovers that they need to do. Occasionally, there are times in life when people find themselves faced against a particular tragedy or grief and feel a drive to either cope with it or rid it from their lives forever. An example of this scenario is portrayed in Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. In the book, there is a scene in which Toby, Tristram's uncle, wishes to tell others the story of how he obtained his war wound but quickly learns that the military maneuvers in his story will easily confuse the listener as well as himself. To avoid this problem, he gains a giant map of Namur which he uses to plot out the many locations and military technicalities of his tale. However, he finds that plotting on this map sparks his interest, and he immediately begins to study it: "...for nothing being of more importance to him than his recovery depending, as you have read, upon the passions and affections of his mind, it behoved him to take the nicest care to make himself so far master of his subject, as to be able to talk upon it without emotion" (72).

Not only does the map assist Uncle Toby in telling his story, but he also comes to the realization that by being able to share the tale of his war wound with others, it makes it easier for him to live with the reality of his disability. In other words, he seems to be utilizing the passion that he finds in the map as a sort of coping mechanism. The passionate drive that Uncle Toby is displaying is not only one that Sterne references in the passage, but also one that Diderot discusses in his article: the concept of affection. Similar to admiration, affection is an emotion that occurs within people whenever they experience strong feelings of love, pleasure, or satisfaction. However, in contrast to admiration, affection is an emotion that an individual can express towards themselves as well as other people. While we experience admiration through strong feelings of respect and appreciation towards something other than ourselves, we experience affection through self reflection as well as through a reflection of our surroundings. Diderot writes that when we reflect on things that cause us pleasure or pain, it gives us a sense of penchant, which helps us separate the good from the evil in our lives:

*"It is this penchant, this taste which directs us toward the good or what appears to us to be so, and that we call affection or desire, depending on whether one possesses the object or hopes to do so; this is what keeps us away from evil or what we judge to be so, and which, if this evil is present, is called aversion, if it is absent, is called avoidance. This is how the beautiful or what pleases us, moves us with a feeling which in turn arouses desire and gives birth to passion."*

Tristram's uncle Toby rightfully sees his wound as a negative thing because it serves as a constant reminder of what he had to lose in the war. When he finds the map of Namur, not only does he discover a genuine feeling of enjoyment out of studying it, but he also sees it as a way for him to properly deal with his loss. The reason he applies himself to the map as much as he does relates to Diderot's statement: the affections, or penchants, that an individual finds in his or her life assists them in escaping from the evils that he or she may encounter, taking on the characteristics of a type of [self reformation](#). In this sense, the map and the wound can be seen as the good and the evil (respectively) in Toby's life. He feels a drive to finally come to terms with his loss, and this sentiment is expressed through the passion he feels towards studying his map because it is a subject that brings him joy and distracts him from the evils he has been forced to encounter over the years. While others may see the map as what it is in its simplest form, to Toby, the amount of passion that he puts into developing his map and the [narrative](#) he is trying to tell with it, transforms it from just a simple map into an extension of himself.

The drives and inspirations that passions bestow onto us prove to be a very complex topic to properly define. It seems that while there are instances where we are encouraged to explore our passions through the words of others, there are also times where we encourage ourselves to do the same only for both personal and occasionally therapeutic reasons. But regardless of how people decide to examine the passions that reside within their souls or the motivating forces that encourage them to do so, it seems that they both serve as opportunities for people to truly improve and develop themselves as individuals. Passions can help people gain control over the chaos in their lives, which in turn provides them with a self-imposed sense of [morality](#). Passions can also encourage people to go out of their comfort zones in order to help them deal with their problems and to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. As Diderot states, "the passions are what set everything in motion, which animate the stage of this universe, which give so to speak soul and life to its various parts."