



# **Anorexia Nervosa as a Passion Implications for Decision-Making Capacity**

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# Hypothesis

## Anorexia Nervosa is a Passion (An Empirical Hypothesis)

Charland, Louis C. Hope, Tony, Tan, Jacinta & Anne Stewart  
*Philosophy, Psychiatry, Psychology*, 2013, 20(4), 354-365.

# Defining Passion

A passion is a complex, embodied, dynamic, possibly progressive, long term affective syndrome, centred on a fixed idea, that directs and organizes a person's life in the pursuit of a goal (expressed in the fixed idea) through related activities, and at the same time primes the individual for specific feelings and emotional responses as they engage in those activities.

# Relevant Clinical Features

## Diagnosis

- ICD 10: “an intrusive dread of fatness”
- DSM IV: “intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat”

## Course

- Progressive worsening with gradual loss of control.
- ‘Relentless pursuit of thinness, often to the point of starvation’

## Observations

- Patients ‘often secretive, deny their symptoms, and resist treatment’
- Patients ‘typically lack a sense of autonomy and selfhood’

Kaplan Benjamin, J. & Sadock Virginia A. Synopsis of Psychiatry (9th Ed.) . Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2003, 739-741.  
Weight Criteria for Diagnosis of Anorexia Nervosa

Hebebrand, Johannes, Wehemeier, Peter M. & Helmut Remschmidt, *Am J Psychiatry* 2000;157:1024-1024. 10.1176/appi.ajp.157.6.1024

# Interdisciplinary Insights



## Two Insights

Tony Hope MD Psychiatrist

- Ribot's concept of passion helps explain Anorexia Study data

Louis C. Charland PhD Philosopher

- Anorexia Study data helps illustrate Ribot's concept of passion

# Anorexia Treatment Study



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Consultant Psychiatrist in Adolescent and Child Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, Medical Sciences Division, University of Oxford, UK. Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer.

# ‘I don’t really have the language ...’

I wouldn’t say anorexia is a thought as such. I don’t think I, it’s more of a feeling ... in a way its almost an EMOTION, anorexia.... And everyone says “well you know you’ve got to think of your heart, what do you really want in your heart?” Well it’s like I want anorexia but I know in my HEAD that I shouldn’t, because you know I know that’s why I sort of know about all the sort of risks and everything. So it’s sort of like at what point, which, where does the choice come from as well? ..... Because, there’s this little emotion that seems to accompany being thin, and I can’t it, I can’t really, I don’t really have the language to explain it, ...

Not an affective disorder of ‘mood’

Not an affective disorder of ‘emotion’

Not an affective disorder of ‘feeling’

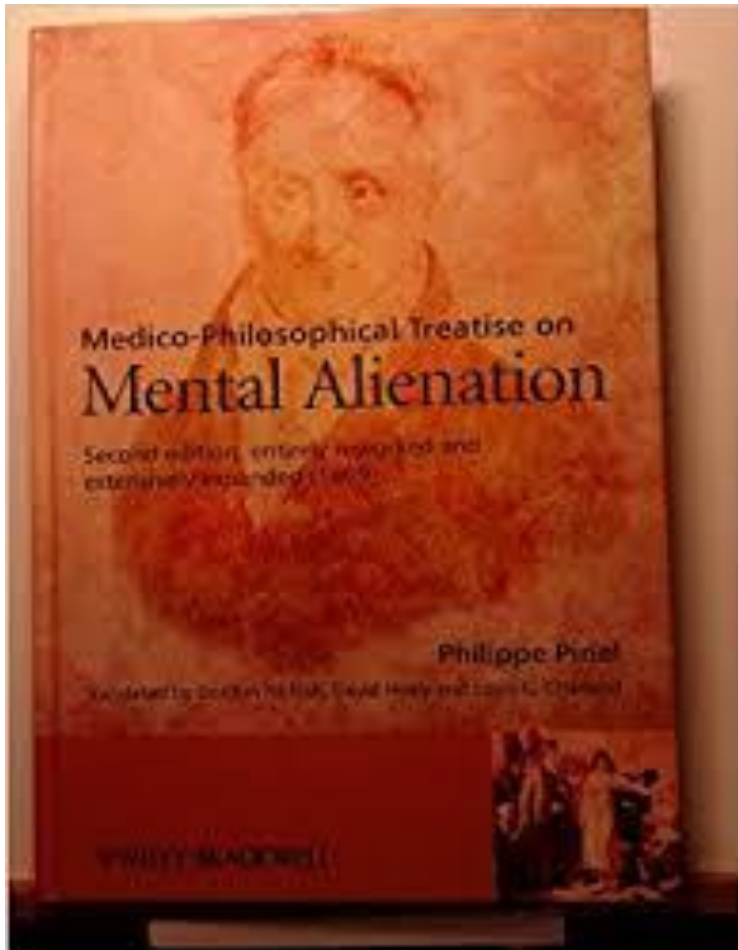
An affective disorder of **passion**

# A Passion?

Philippe Pinel 1809

*Medico-Philosophical  
Treatise on Mental  
Alienation*

Trans. Gordon Hickish, David Healy,  
Louis C Charland Wiley  
(Wiley Blackwell 2008)





# Hero of the Story

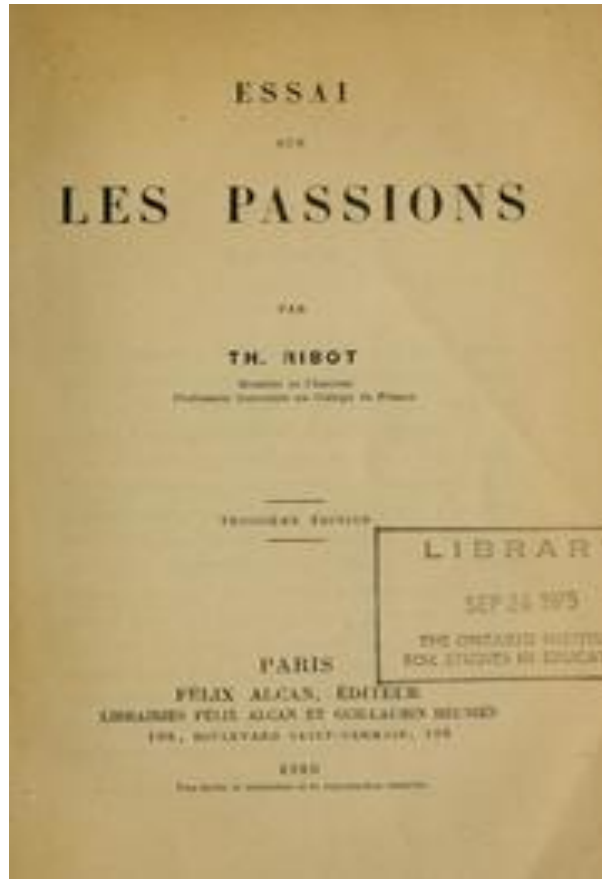


**Théodule Armand  
Ribot**

Dec 8, 1839 - Dec 18, 1916

# Essai Sur Les Passions

1907



1. Long-term affective orientation
2. Fixed ideational focus (idée fixe)
3. Felt aspects and motivating power
4. Organize feelings and emotions
5. Integrated with cognition and reason
6. Progressive, cumulative, course
7. Possibly morbid consequences

# Examples

- Jealousy
- Guilt
- Ambition
- Drunkenness
- Collecting

Note: Not all names of passions are names of emotions.

# 1. Long-Term Orientation

the illness is so consuming you can't see past it, it IS everything you think about all the time. It's how you make every single decision, it's how you get up each morning and go to bed each night, it is everything.

## 2. Fixed Ideational Focus

it [losing weight] was the most important thing in  
my life at the time

# 3. Motivating Power

I still can see facts as they are. What I've lost is the ability to apply them for myself because emotions have taken over...

# 4. Organizes Emotions

I love the feeling I get when I can feel my bones sticking out. I love feeling empty. I love knowing I went the whole day without eating. I love losing weight. I love people telling me 'you're too skinny!' I hate being this so-called normal weight. I feel like a fat, blubbery, nasty lardbag.

# 5. Integrated with Cognition

if you're anorexic then you think that you need to lose weight and so if you think that you need to lose weight your next logical step is "how am I going to lose weight", so then your thought process is "ok I'm going to eat less or I'm going to, like, do more" like work out more.



# 6. Progressive Course

I think it was just something that I slipped in to and I did without realising ... I think losing the weight just becomes SO compulsive that ...you don't think there was an active decision to give things up ... it almost wasn't a conscious decision.

# 7. Morbidity

I think that striving to be thinner prevents people from being able to say wait, stop and say, wait actually I am too thin and I do need help and I think that's why people are unable to make proper decisions.

# Implications

# What Kind of Disorder?

An affective disorder of **passion**

- Cognitive therapies have principled limitations
- Emotion regulation must consider passion
- Can borrow from old therapies for the passions

# Addictive Grip

you're not doing it because you want to ... It's not something that you've chosen to have, you haven't gone out and said "well I'm gonna be an anorexic." It's something that's, that's captured you not the other way round.

# Loss of Control?

I really wasn't in control of what I was doing

# Voluntary Consent?

emotions have taken over

# Appreciation?

It's how you make every single decision



# Conclusion

- Decision-making can be compromised at various stages in course of illness
- Not paternalistic to say subjects have lost control or are vulnerable. (These are their words.)
- Lack of insight and appreciation and ability to consent questionable at some stages

# Queries

- Is the insistence that persons suffering from severe anorexia nervosa are capable of refusing treatment perhaps a cultural projection?
- (Note parallel with addiction.)
- Are clinical instruments to assess decision-making capacity possibly biased in favor of autonomy because of our autonomy culture?



## **Thank you**

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