A Comparative Study of Anger in Antiquity and Christian Thought

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Abstract

Among the ancient philosophers and the early Christians, anger was understood along a continuum. Aristotle and Philodemus believed that anger, under the right conditions, could be useful and even advantageous. Some such as Seneca and Clement, refused the possibility of any sort of anger among the most enlightened, whereas Evagrius and Cassian permit anger that is expressed toward oneself for any perceived vices. Gregory of Nyssa believed that with ascetic training, anger could be transformed into the virtue of courage. Similar to Plutarch, John Chrysostom believed that anger is an expression of social tyranny and must be curbed for virtue to thrive. Tertullian is distinct for understanding anger in the context of the faith and the patience that the advent of Christ made come alive. Left uncontrolled, anger is a spiritual deception that negates the new law of Christ. Plutarch, Lactantius, and Augustine, in contrast, admit a righteous form of anger under certain conditions.

In the ancient world, philosophers disagreed concerning the value of anger for the moral life. Some, such as Aristotle, believed that anger could be useful in motivating people to undertake courageous actions that might have eluded them otherwise. Under the right conditions, anger for apparent slights that are said to be undeserved[1] deliver the drive and the passion needed to accomplish specific tasks, including those related to war and state affairs.[2] The related sensation of pain, whether physical, emotional, or social, provokes the person feeling it to remedy perceived injustices.

Other philosophers, such as the Stoic, Seneca (d. 65 AD), count anger (*ira*) among the negative emotions that the philosopher is supposed to restrain, or even eliminate entirely. This is consistent with his view that the Stoic can attain greatness by making himself invulnerable to provocation.[3] There is no place for anger in such a moral framework. Although it is true that he, like Aristotle, recognizes in anger the desire for revenge, that is where the similarity ends. To the extent that Seneca considers this sort of desire unreliable for ethical inspiration, he differs from Aristotle. To become angry, for Seneca, is to surrender to an interior force contrary to the steady operation of reason that is supposed to guide the philosopher's mind. "[With anger], the mind is driven by none more frantic nor susceptible to its own power, and, if it succeeds, by none more arrogant, or, if it fails, by none more insane."[4] In its full expression, anger overwhelms the normal processes of self-regulation to the point that the mind no longer functions rationally. Once reason has been suppressed, the person driven by anger is no longer free. There can be no freedom, and, therefore, no power once the mind relinquishes itself to the drive to dominate through the tyranny of desire.

For Seneca, anger is a compound emotional state that requires two distinct mental operations to bring it about. It needs the experience of pain, on the one hand, and the desire to avenge a perceived injustice, on the other.[5] Neither condition being met separately is sufficient to provoke anger. Corinne Gartner has said: "Several cognitively demanding elements constitute anger proper: grasping, thinking evalua-

[1] Aristotle, Rhetorica, 2.21, 378a, 31–33.
[2] Seneca, De Ira, 3.3.5–6.
[3] Ibid., 3.6.1.
[4] Nulla itaque res urget magis attonita et in vires suas prona et, sive successit, superba, sive frustratur, insana. Ibid., 3.1.5, ed. Hermes, Emil, 109, 9–11.
[5] Seneca, De ira, 2.1.3–4.

tively, condemning, punishing."[6] The complexity of the emotion argues against anger being a simple impression – a *species* – that a person responds to. There is too much mental activity involved for Seneca to count it among the incipient emotions, the so-called involuntary passions that even the Stoic wise man experiences occasionally. The impression of an injury, which the subject experiences as pain, needs the approval and assent of the mind for it to be expressed as rage.

Seneca's definition of anger accomplishes two objectives. First, it classifies anger as a passion that is uniquely problematic. Katja Maria Vogt has shown that Seneca objected to the distinctive way in which anger responds to the incipient impression of harm. Other emotions, such as fear, respond to harm more efficiently. Though fear, like anger, is triggered by the impression of impending harm, fear results in an action – escape or flight – that depends on no particular mental deliberation. The response to fear is immediate, and the action the subject takes is usually consistent with avoiding the harm she faces. With anger, in contrast, the response of the subject has no particular ethical connection to the perceived injustice. As Vogt has put it, "To set off an action through assent to an impression which doesn't present us with what we are going to do, but simply propels us into some direction, is on Stoic premises, clearly unwise."[7] Anger is unacceptable to the Stoic, for by its nature it arises when the person becomes unhinged. Anything can happen when some apparent slight then receives the mental assent and approval that lets anger thrive.

Second, Seneca's definition of anger leaves open the possibility that it can be remedied with the appropriate therapy. To the extent that mental assent is needed for anger to grow, the potential exists for developing therapies that target the mental processes involved in anger specifically. Seneca identifies three circumstances in which therapy should be used: i) to prevent anger from arising; ii) to restrain anger that has begun already; and iii) to calm anger in another.[8] To prevent anger from developing, Seneca recommended that one reflect upon its negative consequences, including the violent acts one might commit while under its control. Since anger is, as Seneca put it, petty and narrow-minded,[9] it threatens to undermine the humanity of the person expressing it. Another strategy to prevent anger from arising is to maintain a Stoic sense of calmness in the face of life's unpredictable events.[10]

To curb present anger, Seneca recommends controlling it by inhibiting its signs and concealing its effect. He offered the example of Socrates, who was known to have lowered his voice and limited his speech whenever anger threatened to erupt inside him. It made no difference that Socrates' closest friends perceived the interior struggle. The attempt to conceal the emotional challenge served as a kind of behavioral therapy. It was a way to check himself and forestall the anger before it set in. Seneca explained that Socrates thought it better to harm himself with the emotional struggle, than others with his anger.

To calm anger in another, Seneca recommends applying the same sorts of therapies that are used to soothe those who experience grief.[11] Generally, this entails reminding the person that the lapse of time will ease the pain of loss with respect to grief, and of harm with respect to anger. As part of the behavioral modification, the person is to be told that just as there is no end to the possibilities for loss, there are opportunities everywhere to feel the harm and slights that give rise to anger. In all cases, the strategy recognizes and discloses the narrow path in which anger is provoked. When many people compete for the same unimportant things, it leads, first, to disappointment and then, to anger. The tactic of self-awareness aims to demonstrate that what people value so greatly is of no measurable significance.[12]

More than a century before Seneca, the Epicurean, Philodemus (d. 40/35 BCE), posited two kinds of anger, natural and empty. He used the Greek word ὀργή (*orgē*) to denote the type of anger that was, by definition, "natural", because it was intrinsic to our biological nature as creatures "susceptible to death and pain."[13] Ὀργή (*orgē*) has several characteristics that distinguish it from the empty form of anger. It is "advantageous", if it is consistent with "a correct understanding of the nature of things", if it is a reasonable response to an "intentional offence serving the purpose of self-defense", and if "it is unavoidable."[14] Empty anger, or θυμός (*thumos*), in contrast, is a lower, more visceral form of anger that is based on false beliefs about what matters in the world. The wise man can never experience the unbridled rage of θυμός *(thumos)*, or even its more moderate expression.[15] He

[6] GARTNER, CORINNE, "The Possibility of Psychic Conflict in Seneca's *De Ira*", British Journal for the History of Philosophy 23, 2 (2015) 213–33 at 218.

[7] VOGT, KATJA M., "Anger, Present Injustice and Future Revenge in Seneca's *De Ira*", in VOLK, KATHARINA, WILLIAMS, GARETH D., eds., Seeing Seneca Whole. Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry and Politics (Brill: Leiden, 2006) 57–74, at 73.

[8] SENECA, De ira, 3.5.2.

[9] Ibid., 3.5.7.

[10] Ibid., 3.6.7.

[11] Ibid., 3.27.4.

[12] Ibid., 3.34.3.

[13] ASMIS, ELIZABETH, "The Necessity of Anger in Philodemus' *On Anger*", in FISH, JEFFREY, SANDERS, KIRK R., eds., Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011) 152–82 at 160.

[14] TSOUNA, VOULA, "Philodemus, Seneca and Plutarch on Anger", in SANDERS, FISH, ed., Epicurus, 183–210 at 195.

[15] For the two types of *orge* in Philodemus, see ASMIS, "The Necessity of Anger", 159.

can experience only the ὀργή (*orgē*) that is an appropriate and measured response to the various types of harm one might experience.[16] In distinguishing natural from empty anger, Philodemus carved a moral space between Aristotle's approval of anger and the Stoics' rejection of it. Regarding the difference, Voula Tsouna has said, "Philodemus is willing to concede that there are circumstances in which *any* decent person would feel the 'bites' associated with natural and healthy anger. . . Though there may be something bad in experiencing such bites, not feeling them would be far worse, since it would imply that one is not a properly functioning moral agent."[17] Elizabeth Asmis has argued that natural anger can be differentiated further into its necessary and optional forms. The self-control of the Epicurean wise man generally prevents him from becoming angry at every slight, or at every voluntarily inflicted harm he perceives.[18]

In contrast with the Stoics, Plutarch was cautious in ascribing the ideal of self-control to the wise man. He did not believe that every emotion should be eradicated in service of emotional tranquility (ἀπάθεια/*apatheia*), for there are certain natural passions that drive the soul with the reins of reason (λόγος/*logos*).[19] When experienced correctly, such passions motivate the wise man to perform virtuous acts. Francesco Becchi has said: "Passions, as if they were the chords and nerves of the soul, need to be tightened and relaxed in a very harmonious way in order that they be guided by reason to a right and irreprehensible mean. Without them it would be impossible to practice virtue . . . because it would be impossible to transfer judgment to works."[20] Plutarch modified the Stoic doctrine of the passions in a way that recalls Aristotle's notion of the usefulness of certain emotional drives. Though a Platonist, he quoted Aristotle numerous times, presumably because he approved of Aristotle's moderate stance concerning emotional tranquility (known as μετριοπάθεια (*metriopatheia)* in the Greek). In this way, Plutarch carved a position among the Platonists, the Stoics, and the Aristotelian Peripatetics.

For Plutarch, anger (ὀργή/*orgē*) is among the passions that may be either useful or detrimental, depending on the degree of emotional restraint that the person experiencing it exercises. For example, he recognized a useful form of anger that we might call "righteous indignation", or μισοπονηρία (*misoponēria*) in the Greek.[21] This type of anger results from the hatred of witnessing evil. The problem arises, for Plutarch, when its expression becomes violent and excessive. He connects this form of anger with the disappointment one experiences when a trusted family member or confidante behaves poorly. In such cases, anger approximates righteous indignation, because the person fails to live up to an imagined ideal. Yet there is also a sense in which this sort of anger is the result of unrealistic expectations that need to be checked. While the anger is technically righteous, its roots can be traced to the unfair demands that the subject of anger imposes upon others.

The detrimental form of anger is more common. It is the anger that tortures maids and beats the servants. As Plutarch put it, quoting from an unknown Greek tragedy, "The only music heard within the house of an angry man/Is wailing cries."[22] Because there is nothing righteous about it, this sort of anger is supposed to be eliminated entirely. Almost as problematic is the persistent anger that leads to irascibility in the soul, resulting in outbursts, moroseness, and spitefulness. The person afflicted with this form of chronic anger is easily offended and likely to find fault with even the most trivial offenses.[23] Plutarch also disapproved of the anger that might be considered righteous under certain conditions. For example, he did not think that anger, especially excessive anger, was necessary on the battlefield. As he put it, "The Spartans use the playing of pipes to remove from their fighting men the spirit of anger, and they sacrifice to the Muses before battle in order that reason may remain constant within them."[24]

The target of therapy, for Plutarch, is precisely this detrimental anger, which one might categorize among the unnatural passions that are supposed to be controlled.[25] Similar to the other passions, anger needs to be restrained by committing oneself to a rigorous process of habituation.[26] One strategy he recommends for fostering self-discipline is to practice restraining one's anger while interacting with the servants. This approach isolates anger from such other passions as envy and rivalry, which the master of the household is unlikely to feel toward those under his command. Because of the unequal distribution of power, the master-servant relationship tends to produce angry outbursts and fits of rage. For Plutarch, this makes such unequal power relationships the perfect setting in which to hone the emotional discipline

[16] TSOUNA, "Philodemus, Seneca and Plutarch", 196.
[17] Ibid., 196.
[18] ASMIS, "The Necessity of Anger", 179, 182.
[19] PLUTARCH, De tranquillitate animi, 465A; see trans., HELMBOLD, WILLIAM C., Plutarch's Moralia (Loeb Classical Library 337; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1939) 169.
[20] BECCHI, FRANCESCO, "The Doctrine of the Passions: Plutarch, Posidonius and Galen", in LANZILOTTA, LAUTARO R., GALLARTE, ISRAEL M., eds., Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity (Brill: Leiden, 2012) 43–53, at 44.
[21] PLUTARCH, De cohibenda ira, 463B; see text/trans., HELMBOLD, Plutarch's Moralia, 150f.
[22] 'ἀεὶ δ' ἀοιδῶν μοῦνος ἐν στέγαις' ὀργίλου ἀνδρός 'κωκυτὸς ἐμπέπτωκε. Ibid., citing TrGF 913,387.
[23] PLUTARCH, De cohibenda ira, 454B–C.
[24] PLUTARCH, De cohibenda ira, 458E; see trans., HELMBOLD, Plutarch's Moralia, 127.
[25] TSOUNA, "Philodemus, Seneca and Plutarch", 206.
[26] PLUTARCH, De cohibenda ira, 459B.

necessary to keep anger under control. Another strategy for containing the anger that arises in the context of friendships and the household is for the angry person to reconsider how he is being perceived. Plutarch observed that, in many instances, anger develops from the false impression that the objects of our wrath treat us with disrespect, when, in fact, they assume merely that our good-natured disposition will let their faults pass undetected. In addition, Plutarch recommends that we cultivate a care-free approach to the trivial comforts of the world, such as fine food and other luxuries. Undue attention to such delicacies produces the selfishness and discontent that lead to anger when the thing we so desire fail to manifest.[27] Finally, anger's submission to reason (λόγος/*logos*) is, for Plutarch, a life-long commitment, for "The power of reason is not like drugs, but like wholesome food, engendering an excellent state, together with great vigor, in those who become accustomed to it."[28]

Among the three ancient philosophers outlined here, Seneca, Philodemus, and Plutarch, similarities and differences arise. Regarding their apparent differences, Tsouna has observed that while Seneca perceived anger as a threat to political and civic life, and Philodemus to the flourishing of the Epicurean schools, "What disturbs [Plutarch] most is the pain and ugliness that anger brings to private life – reviled wives, abused children, tortured slaves and offended friends."[29] Seneca, the most straightforwardly Stoic among the three, believed that anger can be eradicated in the wise man once he subscribes fully to the view that the circumstances and conditions of living in the world are not significant or meaningful enough to justify anger. The goal is to cultivate the wise man's tranquility. The Epicurean, Philodemus, combined aspects of the demanding Stoic with the flexibility of Aristotle to create a middle position that validates certain kinds of righteous anger, while continuing to prohibit anger for trivial slights felt by the Epicurean wise man. Plutarch, the most eclectic of the three, blended a reconstructed Platonism with the Aristotelian Peripatetics to produce a therapeutic treatment that targets certain behavioral trigger points. Through learned self-control in the context of provocation, the person prone to anger is supposed to modify his actions for the well-being of those with whom he interacts.

Most of the early Christians who wrote about anger, including Clement, Tertullian, Evagrius, Cassian, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Lactantius, and Augustine, all of whom are considered here briefly, incorporate and respond to the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition. The most educated among them would have read the philosophical treatises directly, while others may have absorbed the material in a digested form in school exercises and in compilations. Situating the early Christians in this context suggests both similarities and significant differences. In this way, the distinctiveness of the early Christians, along with their priorities and commitments, comes into focus.

Among them, Clement of Alexandria is distinguished for the breadth of his learning, including the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics, which he puts on display in his trilogy, *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, and *Stromata*. Clement's understanding of anger (ὀργή/*orgē*) emerges in the context of his theology of the passions (πάθη/*pathē*), which Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., has described like this: the one kind of passion "is necessary for the preservation of the body (*Stromata* 6.9.71), the other is a suffering of the soul. The latter, in particular, must be subdued in a Christian if he is to be a Gnostic; in Christ, πάθη/*pathē* of the soul are quite unthinkable. On the other hand, bodily sufferings are necessary for the ordinary man (κοινὸς ἄνθρωπος/*koinos anthrōpos*) because of the 'economy,' to maintain bodily life."[30] Among ordinary human beings, a degree of suffering is inevitable, for we are obliged to satisfy natural bodily functions, including such basic desires as hunger and thirst. This is not the case for Christ, who, we are told, ate food with his disciples to avoid the misunderstanding that his body merely appeared to be that of a human being. There being no suffering of body or soul in Christ, He is the model of impassivity that the ideal Christian – the Gnostic, in Clement's usage – aspires to and imitates. In human beings, the soul, the suffering of which is neither automatic nor necessary to support life, is the subject of this imitation. Focusing on the soul, the ideal Christian can learn to practice a form of self-control that leads to emotional tranquility.

For Clement, there is no middle ground, no moderate expression of emotion that the ideal Christian is permitted to feel. "He is compelled into impassivity (ἀπάθεια/*apatheia*) with his Teacher."[31] Even the desire for God, which, according to Clement, some make necessary to motivate virtuous acts and attain the beautiful, must be eliminated for the soul to flourish and soar. "Nor will he, then, desire to become like the beautiful, because he has possession of the beautiful through love."[32] Clement's view of emotional tranquility rests upon his understanding that, first, divine love is impassive and, second, our affinity to that love is relational, rather than emotional. "For love is not, then, a desire on the part of the one who loves, but is an affectionate inclination, returning the Gnostic to the unity of the faith, not bound by time and place. But he who by love is already in those things he

[27] See ibid., 461B.

[28] Ibid., 453E; see trans., HELMBOLD, Plutarch's Moralia, 97.

[29] TSOUNA, "Philodemus, Seneca and Plutarch", 210.

[30] GRILLMEIER, ALOYS S. J., Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 1 (John Knox Press: Atlanta, GA, 1965, 1975) 137.

[31] βιάζεται τῷ διδασκάλῳ εἰς ἀπάθειαν. CLEMENT AL., Stromata 6.9.72. Ed. O. STÄHLIN, GCS 15, 468,4.

[32] οὐδ' ἄρα ζηλώσει ἐξομοιωθῆναι τοῖς καλοῖς <τὸ> εἶναι δι' ἀγάπης ἔχων τοῦ κάλλους. CLEMENT AL., Stromata 6.9.73. Ed. O. STÄHLIN, GCS 15, 468,23f.

will be, having anticipated hope by knowledge, does not desire anything, possessing as much as possible the very thing desired (*Stromata* 6.9.73)."[33] This highest form of love is something the ideal Christian possesses rather than aspires to. It is not a longing for God, but a relationship with God. Surrounded by love and in its midst, the one who has suppressed and surpassed the passionate engagement with the world exists in a single, undifferentiated state, in affinity with God. For Clement, this state is brought about by the knowledge that anticipates hope. It is the perfect knowledge one attains by becoming like God. It is prior to hope, because it is the product of assimilation, rather than longing. In such a relationship formed by likeness, there is no desire, only the knowledge attained by loving spiritually (γνωστικὸς ἀγαπῶν/*gnōstikos agapōn*). It makes sense that even such virtuous emotions as courage and joy are impossible for the ideal Christian, for they derive from the negative emotions of fear and pain respectively. There can be no courage without the feeling of fear, no joy without the possibility of pain.

In taking such a stance against the opportunities for emotional expression, Clement departs from the Greek philosophers, Philodemus and Plutarch, discussed above. He does not view emotions as judgments about reality stemming from mental reflection and deliberation, but as signals of one's relationship to the body. Is the body controlled properly through discipline, or is it permitted to roam through the avenues of its desires, expressing whatever emotion it wishes? There is no room to negotiate the meaning and purpose of the emotional life, because emotions are not opinions or beliefs. They are a function of our bodily nature. Properly speaking, they have nothing to do with real knowledge, which, for Clement, resides in love and is synonymous with truth. It reveals that nothing – no form of anger – justifies overriding our existence in God's impassible love. Anger does not need to be quieted or controlled in the manner of the Graeco-Roman philosophers, because it simply does not arise. The ideal Christian who is focused on God does not feel anger, because such a person has nothing to hate and, therefore, remains in the unvarying and tranquil state of the knowledge of God. Like the apostles who modeled their training on Christ, the ideal Christian understands that "knowledge produces discipline, discipline [produces] habit or disposition, and that such a condition as this [produces] impassibility, not moderation of passion (μετριοπαθεία/*metriopatheia*)."[34] Anger is impossible in the light of such commitments, even when it stems from righteous indignation.

Unlike Clement, Gregory of Nyssa viewed certain emotions, such as anger, fear, hatred, and love, as consistent with virtue, once they had been trained and subjected to reason.[35] In his *Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection*, for instance, he considered whether desire and anger (θυμός/*thumos*) are extrinsic to the soul or essential to its nature. He reasoned, first, that many emotional states arise from anger, none of which are bodily and, not being bodily, they are "certainly intellectual (νοητὸν πάντως/*noēton pantōs*)."[36] Next, he argued through his interlocutor, Macrina, that Moses overcame desire and anger, which he could not have achieved "if these faculties were nature and referred to the principle of [his] essence."[37] The resolution lies somewhere in between. Anger is neither extrinsic to the soul nor essential to its nature. It lies on the border (μεθόριος/*methorios*) of the soul and, for that reason, is counted among its accretions.[38] It is not among the most virtuous emotions that human beings have acquired through likeness to God: "for the likeness of man to God is not found in anger, nor is pleasure a mark of the superior nature; cowardice also, and boldness, and the desire of gain, and the dislike of loss, and all the like, are far removed from that stamp which indicates Divinity."[39] Anger is rather like the passions animals use for self-preservation. Consistent with the immediate needs it reacts to and serves, anger, when left to its own devices, is impetuous and inherently short-lived. The problem arises when thoughts intervene and persist, so transforming the momentary loss of self-control into such persistent and treacherous ailments of the soul as envy, deceit, conspiracy, and hypocrisy.[40] The remedy is to hold anger back with the reins of reason to produce the virtue of courage. In viewing emotions as possible avenues for virtue to develop and thrive, Gregory shares more with Aristotle than he does with his predecessor, Clement.

Tertullian is similar to Clement in the sense that he, too, understood anger (*ira*) in the context of his theological assertions with respect to God. They differ, though, in how they perceive God. Whereas for Clement, God is thoroughly impassive and, therefore, models a passionlessness that Christians are supposed to emulate, for Tertullian, God is judge, ruler, and examiner (*judex*, *arbiter*, *dispector*).[41] That being so, Tertullian believed that the relationship between

[33] [ἀγάπη] οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἔτι ὄρεξις τοῦ ἀγαπῶντος ἡ ἀγάπη, στερκτικὴ δὲ οἰκείωσις, εἰς τὴν ἑνότητα τῆς πίστεως ἀποκαθεστακυῖα τὸν γνωστικόν, χρόνου καὶ τόπου μὴ προσδεόμενον. ὃ δ' ἐν οἷς ἔσται, δι' ἀγάπης ἤδη γενόμενος, τὴν ἐλπίδα προειληφὼς διὰ τῆς γνώσεως, οὐδὲ ὀρέγεταί τινος ἔχων ὡς οἷόν τε αὐτὸ τὸ ὀρεκτόν. CLEMENT AL., Stromata 6.9.73. Ed. O. STÄHLIN, GCS 15, 468, 17–22.

[34] CLEMENT, Stromata, 6.9.74.

[35] GREGORY OF NYSSA, De hominis opificio, 18.5 (PG 44, 194–196).

[36] GREGORY OF NYSSA, De anima (PG 46, 49).

[37] GREGORY OF NYSSA, De anima (PG 46, 53).

[38] GREGORY OF NYSSA, De anima (PG 46, 57).

[39] GREGORY OF NYSSA, De hominis opificio, 18.1 (PG 44, 192); see trans., MOORE, WILLIAM/WILSON, HENRY A., in NPNF 5, 408.

[40] Ibid., 18.4.

[41] TERTULLIAN, De testimonio animae, 2.19; ed. WILLEMS, RADBODUS, CChr.SL 1, 177f.

God and human beings is shaped by certain emotional drives that correspond to God's primary characteristics. God, as judge, for instance, incites naturally the fear of judgment among Christians, who dread the possibility of God's anger. "Where, then, does the soul's natural fear of God come from, if God cannot be angry? How is there any dread of whom nothing offends? What is feared, if not anger? Where does anger come from, if not from reproach, where reproach, if not from judgment?"[42] The feeling of fear motivates Christians to conform their actions more closely to God's will, so as to avoid God's wrath, the possibility and implications of which are an inherent feature of the relationship to God.

For Tertullian, there is no analogy between divine and human anger. Christians navigating the emotions they experience in their daily lives find little to guide them by examining the nature and circumstances of God's wrath. Instead, Tertullian understood the human feeling of anger in the context of cultivating the virtue of patience.[43] This involves more than the ethical instruction to control one's emotions that Seneca, for instance, articulated in a Stoic context. Patience is part of the larger narrative of redemption that incorporates Abraham's obedience to God as the paradigmatic expression of faith. "Abraham believed God and was credited by God with righteousness; but it was patience that proved his faith, when he was commanded to immolate his son."[44] Abraham was blessed because he was faithful, and faithful because he was patient. For Tertullian, faith and patience are intimately connected, patience having been illuminated by faith in Christ, through whom grace superseded the law. To the extent that patience makes faith come alive, it also assists faith, as Tertullian put it, by enlarging and fulfilling the law.[45] This means that prior to Christ, there was no patience, because there was no faith. Human beings killed each other in anger and for revenge. But with the advent of Christ, "anger is restrained, passions are controlled, the impudence of the hand is held back, and the venom of the tongue removed."[46] Anger is unacceptable, not simply because it is a passion left untamed, but because it is a symptom of a greater spiritual deception, namely, that the logic of the law continues to operate.

Like Tertullian, John Cassian acknowledged that God sometimes expresses anger (*ira*). In spite of the fact that God is, as Cassian put it, ἀνθρωποπαθῶς (*anthrōpopathōs*), God, being the judge of human actions and the avenger of evil deeds, expresses a divine type of anger that stimulates a sense of fear among Christians, which then motivates righteous acts. In that God's anger does not merely express God's righteousness, but also provokes righteousness in others, it is different from human anger. That is why Cassian warned against citing God's wrath to justify our expression of anger, which he called *hic animae perniciosissimus morbus*. "They say that it is not harmful if we are angry with wrongdoing brothers, because God himself is said to be enraged and angered with those who do not want to know him or who, knowing him, disdain him."[47] Viewed in the context of its purpose, human anger has no connection with the wrath of God's righteousness, for "Man's anger does not work God's righteousness."[48] Among the most insidious of human emotions, anger arises, as Cassian saw it, in the context of relationships. It is addressed most effectively not alone in the desert, but in relationship with others, along with the social and personal challenges that press upon the individual. Cassian believed that a danger of the ascetic life is that solitude can sometimes give the false impression that certain vices, such as anger, have been corrected, when in fact they have been merely held at bay in the absence of provocation. "Indeed, vices that have lain hidden emerge at once there, and like unbridled horses nourished by a long period of quiescence they eagerly break out of their restraints, all the more violently and savagely endangering their charioteer."[49] To suggest that human anger is anything other than untamed emotion is to enter into rhetorical argumentation, in which scriptural passages describing God's righteous wrath are used to justify corrupt behavior among Christians.

The challenge, according to Cassian, is to confront the source of the anger and cut it off at the root, not justify its expression at the expense of others. Apparently, there were some in his community who had used a scriptural variant of Matthew 5:22 ("But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister [added: 'without cause'] will be subject to judgment") to make the case that anger "with cause" was justified to rebuke a fellow monk. Cassian argued that the phrase "without cause" was actually an interpolation meant to validate the expression of anger, rather than eliminate it, as

[42] Unde igitur naturalis timor animae in deum, si deus non novit irasci? Quomodo timebitur, qui nescit offendi? Quid timetur nisi ira? Unde ira nisi ex animadversione? Unde animadversio nisi de iudicio? TERTULLIAN, De testimonio animae, 2.34–37; ed. WILLEMS, RADBODUS, CChr.SL 1, 177, 35–38.

[43] TERTULLIAN, De patientia, 5, 6.

[44] Ibid., 6, lines 2f.; see trans. THELWALL, SYDNEY, Of Patience, in ANF 3, 711.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid. line 17.

[47] Dicentes non esse noxium, si deliquentibus fratribus irascamur, siquidem ipse deus contra eos, qui eum vel scire nolunt vel scientes contemnunt, furere atque irasci dicatur. CASSIAN, JOHN, De institutis coenobiorum, 8.2; ed. PETSCHENIG, MICHAEL, CSEL 13, 152,3–6; see trans., RAMSEY, B., John Cassian. The Institutes (The Newman Press: New York, NY, 2000) 193.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Emergunt quippe ex eo confestim vitia quae latebant, et velut equi infrenes certatim e suis repagulis otio longiore nutriti acrius ad perniciem aurigae proprii ferocius que prorumpunt. CASSIAN, De institutis, 8.18; ed. PETSCHENIG, MICHAEL, CSEL 13, 162, 12–15; see trans., RAMSEY, John Cassian, 201.

ascetic practice required. For Cassian, the only righteous use of anger is the anger that is aimed at our own faults and shortcomings. This is what he called a healthy (*salubris*) form of anger.[50] It is the anger we feel toward ourselves that makes us tremble at the wrongs we have committed in the sight of God. In this way, a limited and self-directed anger is channeled away from the narcissistic expression of the self, with its false impression of virtue, and aligned with the righteousness of God.

Similar to Cassian, Evagrius believed that anger (most often, θῦμός/*thumos* and ὀργή/*orgē*) is really about the person – the monk – who is feeling it, how and when it arises, and how best to control it. There is no sense in which monks are to exercise the divine anger of righteous indignation: "there is absolutely no such thing as just anger against your neighbor. If you search you will find that it is possible even without anger for the matter to be settled properly."[51] The logic of this assertion, which Evagrius does not articulate explicitly, is similar perhaps to that of Cassian, outlined above. To the extent that anger is a loss of self-control that is by definition self-involved, it cannot be relied upon to correct other people's faults.

For Evagrius, anger is connected to the irascible part of the soul. Left unchecked, it festers and damages the mind by occupying it with all sorts of imagined sleights and opportunities for revenge. One of its most troublesome expressions often happens in the quiet reflection of prayer, during which monks fall victim to the further vice of *acedia*, a distracted state that interrupts spiritual practice.[52] When configured properly, and in certain conditions, anger can be productive. Its combative energy can be used, for instance, to defend against demons. Gertrude Gillette has shown, "Because of its ability to be used for good or evil, Evagrius compares the incentive power (θυμός/*thumos*) to a watchdog. As a virtue, a power under our control, anger is a kind of watchdog, trained to attack the wolves (demons). But if the power in anger is misused and turned on other men, then the dog becomes destructive."[53] Subtlety with respect to this power is required, nonetheless. Once the irascible part has been triggered, Evagrius warned that a demon could interfere with resolving the perceived difficulty by suggesting further withdrawal or ἀναχώρησις (*anachōresis*), instead of social interaction.[54] In such cases, anger does not combat the demons, but invites their further meddling.

John Chrysostom's view of anger is reminiscent of Plutarch's. He, like Plutarch, was concerned with the maltreatment that anger inflicts, for example, upon servants unable to defend themselves against a master's rage. In such cases, anger is not just about the loss of self-control. It is about the social injustice that the angry person commits when he vents his rage against someone lower in the social hierarchy. For Chrysostom, expressing anger (ὀργή/*orgē*) in such a context destroys body and soul, being worse than either drunkenness or possession by a demon.[55] The comparison should not be dismissed as simply a rhetorical flourish meant to impress a congregation with the dramatic imagery of his words. There are deep-seated theological reasons for his comparing the expression of anger toward those lower on the social hierarchy to the subjection of one's humanity that takes place in demon possession. The angry master berating a servant is no different from a man who has lost his bearings. Confused about the nature of reality, he prioritizes the trivial ranking of human societies over the fact that all human beings share a common nature and possess the same gifts from God. In telling himself this lie, he degrades his soul in much the same way as the demons, which are known for their powers of deception. For Chrysostom, the truth of the matter is that the servant who endures her master's wrath is wiser than the master venting his rage, because she fears wisely, while the master has overlooked foolishly the coming wrath of God. The problem with the angry master is that he has set himself up as a kind of false god who imposes a tyrannical fear. The remedy for his self-deception is to calm himself by reflecting upon their common nature and then to humble himself by recalling his transgressions.

Lactantius, advisor to the emperor Constantine and tutor for his imperial court, examined anger (*ira*) in the context of the wrath of God. In contrast to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers who believed that God is emotionally passive and, therefore, free from anger, God's anger, for Lactantius, is relevant to the way in which the emperor's power is conceived and exercised. As Kristina A. Meinking put it, "For Lactantius, God's identity as supreme judge is a role that comes to God as administrator of the world, the overseer of all human affairs, and the most supreme deity. It is in this capacity that God is most comparable to the emperor: both are construed as the highest rulers in their respective realms, both are saddled with the responsibility of government, and both wield the greatest possible power over their respective

[50] CASSIAN, De institutis, 8.9; see trans., RAMSEY, John Cassian, 197.

[51] Οὐκ ἔστι δὲ δίκαιος θυμὸς κατὰ τοῦ πέλας τὸ σύνολον· ἐὰν γὰρ ζητήσῃς, εὑρήσεις, ὅτι δυνατὸν, καὶ δίχα θυμοῦ καλῶς διατεθῆναι τὸ πρᾶγμα. EVAGRIUS, Chapters on Prayer, 24; ed. GÉHIN, PAUL, SC 589; see trans., SINKEWICZ, ROBERT E., Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003) 195.

[52] EVAGRIUS, Praktikos, 5.23; see trans., SINKEWICZ, Evagrius of Pontus, 102.

[53] GILLETTE, GERTRUDE, Four Faces of Anger. Seneca, Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian and Augustine (University Press of America: Lanham, MD, 2010) 25.

[54] EVAGRIUS, Praktikos, 5.22; see trans., SINKEWICZ, Evagrius of Pontus, 101.

[55] JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, In Joannem homilia 1–88, 26.3; PG 59, 156, lines 51–52.

subjects."[56] As God's representative on earth, the emperor administers justice ideally to reflect his relationship to God as a kind of terrestrial proxy. Eusebius articulated this political theology, for instance, in his *Oration in Praise of Constantine*.

With respect to anger, Lactantius rejected the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Peripatetic view: the Epicurean for thinking that anger in God also implies fear, the Stoic for failing to distinguish just and unjust anger, and the Peripatetic for advocating emotional moderation.[57] He dismissed the Epicureans because they confused the changeable and diverse nature of human beings with the immutable God. In other words, they had assumed incorrectly that God's anger was analogous to ours. Whether he fully grasped the Epicurean worldview is another matter. John Penwell has shown that Lactantius read Epicureanism through the lens of Cicero and never understood fully its commitment to atomistic materialism.[58] The Stoics were also problematic, according to Lactantius, for failing to differentiate just from unjust anger.[59] Among the philosophers, Aristotle had come closest to articulating the truth that unjust anger, such as the desire to alleviate pain or to exact revenge, operates in human nature alone, and that just anger, such as the desire to correct injustice, operates in both God and human beings. The problem Lactantius saw with the Peripatetics was that they, too, failed to distinguish just from unjust emotions. In carving out a middle position that allowed for a degree of emotional expression, they had failed to articulate the conditions under which emotions become virtuous. Joy felt in moderation might lack virtue if it were expressed for the wrong reason and in the wrong context, for example, taking moderate delight in someone else's distress. Although the feeling is regulated, it is, nonetheless, morally unacceptable. Just anger is different. As Lactantius put it: "that anger which we may call either fury or rage ought not to exist even in man, because it is altogether vicious; but the anger which relates to the correction of vices ought not to be taken away from man; nor can it be taken away from God, because it is both serviceable for the affairs of men, and necessary."[60] The reason that God's anger can be distinguished from that which is felt and acted upon by human beings is that, first, it is eternal, as opposed to being impulsive and transitory, and, second, it is regulated by God's will, which is always perfectly just.[61]

Augustine defined anger as a lust for revenge that needs to be restrained by wisdom and reason. In doing so, he followed Cicero along a philosophical trajectory that can be traced to Aristotle.[62] Interpreted along these lines, anger is, for Augustine, a kind of shadowy imitation of the law of retribution, in which those who do evil are made to endure the same.[63] This lust for revenge was not always present. In paradise, anger and, for that matter, lust were not "vicious" (to use Augustine's word) emotional states.[64] Only after the fall did such emotions arise from the opposition of reason and a so-called "right will (*recta voluntas*)" that tried, but often failed, to control them. The human struggle with anger is, therefore, a function of the sickness of our disobedience, rather than the health of our nature. Anger is not, in other words, a natural state. The struggle it entails reflects the internal opposition we experience between reason and will, which persistently challenges each and every human life after the fall.

There is no sense in which Augustine strives to eliminate anger (*ira*) entirely from the repertoire of emotional possibilities. "For instance, anger with a sinner in order to reform him . . . with such [a feeling] I hardly suppose that anyone of sane and thoughtful mind would find fault."[65] Anger, by itself, is not the worst of the negative emotions. As Augustine put it: "A mote in the eye is anger; a beam in the eye is hatred. When therefore one who has hatred finds fault with one who is angry, he wishes to take a mote out of his brother's eye, but is hindered by the beam that he carries in his own eye."[66] The distinction between anger and hatred is especially relevant to the raising of children, with whom Augustine thought it reasonable to express anger from time to time, but never hatred.[67] It is also relevant to life in a mo-

[56] MEINKING, KRISTINA A., "Anger and Adjudication. The Political Relevance of *De ira dei*", Journal of Late Antiquity 6, 1 (2013) 84–107 at 101.

[57] LACTANTIUS, De ira dei, 15 and 17; idem., Divinae institutiones, 6.

[58] PENWELL, JOHN, "Does God Care? Lactantius v. Epicurus in the *De Ira Dei*", Sophia 43, 1 (2004) 23–43, at 36.

[59] See NUSSBAUM, MARTHA C., Anger and Forgiveness. Resentment, Generosity, Justice (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016) 41.

[60] Ira autem quam possumus vel furorem uel iracundiam nominare, haec ne in homine quidem debet esse quia tota vitiosa est, ira vero quae ad correctionem vitiorum pertinet, nec homini adimi debet nec deo potest, quia et utilis est rebus humanis et necessaria. LACTANTIUS, De ira dei, 17; ed., BRANDT, SAMUEL/LAUBMANN, GEORG, CSEL 17, 114, 15–19; trans., FLETCHER, WILLIAM Lactantius, in ANF 7, 274. In contrast with Lactantius, Augustine was reluctant to ascribe any sort of anger to God, concerning whom he preferred to speak of tranquility. AUGUSTINE, Enarrationes in Psalmos, 6.3.

[61] LACTANTIUS, De ira dei, 21.

[62] AUGUSTINE, De civitate Dei, 14.15; CICERO, Tusculanae Disputationes, 3.5.11; 4.9.21.

[63] AUGUSTINE, De civitate Dei, 14.15.

[64] Ibid., 14.19.

[65] Ibid., 9.5; see trans. WIESEN, DAVID S., Augustine. The City of God Against the Pagans (Loeb Classical Library 413; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1968) 169.

[66] Festuca in oculo, ira est: trabes in oculo, odium est. Quando ergo qui odit reprehendit irascentem, festucam vult de oculo fratris sui tollere: sed trabe impeditur, quam ipse portat in oculo suo. AUGUSTINE, Sermones ad populum, 32.1; PL 38, 506; trans. MACMULLEN, RAMSAY G./SCHAFF, PHILIP, NPNF 6, 357.

[67] Ibid. 32.

nastic community, where anger toward a brother or sister has the potential to erupt into the hatred associated with murder (1Joh 3:15).[68] There are several reasons Augustine found the limited expression of anger acceptable. There is the possibility of it motivating a necessary correction, as in the case of anger at a child who has put himself in danger. It is by nature impulsive and, therefore, transitory. And, speaking words in transitory anger is much less objectionable than "keeping an insidious purpose shut up in the heart."[69] Augustine was alluding to the fact that anger, being impulsive and immediate, expresses an honest emotion. Its suppression often hides insidious intentions and produces the conditions under which deception thrives.

We have seen that Clement was distinct among the early Christians in permitting no form of anger either to God, whom he viewed as impassive, or to the ideal Christian who modeled himself on God. In such a theological framework, anger does not need to be controlled, because it never arises. In contrast, Tertullian rejected the notion of an impassive God and, in doing so, distinguished the anger of God, as recorded in Scripture, from the anger expressed by human beings. For Tertullian, anger is less about the loss of self-control than it is about self-deception. It arises in the Christian who fails to understand that the law of vengeance and retribution no longer operate after the advent of Christ, through whom faith and patience are now intimately connected. Illuminated by faith, patience is the remedy for anger.

Like Tertullian, Cassian and Evagrius differentiate human anger from the just anger expressed by God. To the extent that human beings are concerned generally with their own needs and desires, there is no possibility for them to exercise a righteous indignation modeled on God. The only righteous form of anger is the anger aimed at one's own faults and shortcomings. John Chrysostom is similar to Plutarch in viewing anger in the context of social and familial relationships. Anger, for Chrysostom, involves the social injustice and theological self-deception that occurs when a master vents his rage on a servant. In such circumstances, the angry master presents himself as a false god who terrorizes those lower in the social hierarchy into obeying his commands. Lactantius and Augustine are the only early Christians examined here who permit anger to be expressed toward others, though they make this exception only once certain conditions have been met. For Lactantius, as for Augustine, the Christian can express anger beneficially to correct vices. Augustine is distinct, however, in attributing to anger the additional benefit of releasing certain pressures before they evolve into either hatred or hidden intentions.

The comparative method used here highlights the similarities and differences between the ancient philosophers and the early Christians, and between and among the early Christians themselves. As a method, it poses the same basic question to each of the sources: how do the philosophers and theologians considered here understand anger? The question invites comparisons that i) bring into relief the various ways in which anger was imagined and construed and ii) confirm that the philosophy and theology of anger was far from uniform. The limitations of the method suggest further avenues of research. First, it might be useful to examine the way in which such theologians as Tertullian, John Cassian, and Lactantius understand the anger of God as described in Scripture and then bring that understanding to bear upon their theology of anger. Second, further research might consider, for instance, the view of anger articulated by Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa in the context of their moral psychology of the passions. Finally, a study of anger and ascetic practice in Evagrius and John Cassian might produce new insights into the ways in which anger was regulated in the monastic setting.

[68] GILLETTE, Four Faces of Anger, 98.
[69] Ibid.

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