

THESIS

AN ESCAPE FROM ANGER AND OTHER BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
PHILOSOPHY OF EMOTIONS.

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ABSTRACT

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This paper begins with an examination of several theories of emotion in general—a ‘mixed theory’, an ‘attitudinal theory’, and a Buddhist ‘componential theory.’ I argue that the Buddhist theory has a theoretical advantage over these alternatives insofar as it avoids two ‘thin’ characterizations of emotions that exclude either affective or conative states from the concept. The Buddhist theory of emotions, I claim, has another advantage insofar as it brings practicality to the forefront, connecting our theorizing about emotions with what is most important—developing good character and bringing about the welfare of beings. Chapter 2 proceeds to an in-depth analysis of the emotion of anger in particular, examining several philosophically important accounts—those of Aristotle, Seneca, and the Buddha. I raise problems of definition, highlight some typical and contentious features of anger, and draw from several classical sources to reconstruct a Buddhist account of anger. In the final chapter, I argue that typical anger is not necessary for moral life, addressing myself to arguments from Zac Cogley and Emily McRae. I continue by demonstrating that Buddhism has resources that allow us to both eliminate or largely attenuate anger, and to approach the problems we face without anger; finally, I sketch out exactly how this can be accomplished.

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DEDICATION

For Emma.

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Chapter 1: Approaching the emotions

1.0 Introduction

In the early Buddhist literature, there is no term that is equivalent to the English term ‘emotion’. However, this is not particularly strange, since the term is only 150-200 years old and, some argue, has no prior equivalent, in the same way that ‘oxygen’ has no equivalent prior to its conceptual invention.¹ That being the case, there is a good deal of discussion of particular mental states that correspond, if imperfectly, to emotions that we are familiar with, such as anger, hatred, contentment, grief, compassion, and joy. In these coming chapters, I will argue that Buddhism has much to offer the philosophy of emotions. To begin with, the Buddhist approach is infused with a practical spirit which is unfortunately lacking from much academic philosophy today—Buddhism is deeply concerned with the cultivation of virtue in one’s own case. Along with this attitude comes a vast body of practical experience in working with the emotions—i.e., managing (undesirable) emotions and cultivating desirable ones. In these coming chapters, I aim to illustrate these advantages of the Buddhist account of the emotions, beginning with a general discussion of emotions, then narrowing the focus to one potentially problematic emotion in particular—anger. I will begin by presenting several theories of emotion in chapter 1, arguing that the Buddhist approach to the emotions has theoretical and practical advantages when compared to the others presented². In Chapter 2, I shift focus and discuss anger in particular at length, taking an in-depth look at three different theories of anger from the ancient world.

¹ Cf. Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions, the Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² There are, of course, numerous Buddhist schools and differing ideas about most topics. When I use the phrase ‘the Buddhist theory’, or variants, I am referring to the theory I argue for here.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I attempt to show that anger is not a moral necessity and that alternative ways of conducting oneself are available to the moral agent.

1.1 Theories of emotion

In *The Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction*, Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni conduct a survey of a number of contending theories of emotion before introducing their own theory, the “attitudinal theory of emotions.” This section will draw from this discussion and from an essay by Joel Marks in order to sketch out two theories of emotion which will then be compared with each other and with the Buddhist approach to the emotions.

1.1.1 Mixed theory

Deonna and Teroni’s text treats several competing theories of emotion aside from the authors’ own theory, including ‘mixed’, ‘evaluative’ and ‘feeling’ theories. The first theory that will be discussed in this section is the mixed theory; in brief, “The central contention of the mixed theory...amounts to identifying emotions with combinations of beliefs and desires.”³ One defense of such a type of theory is offered by Joel Marks.⁴ Marks defends the claim that “...emotion reduces to belief plus strong desire.”⁵ He argues that beliefs and strong desires ‘B/D sets’ are sufficient for emotions since, for one, they alone are able to account for all the relevant phenomena.

As an example intended to illustrate his claim, Marks uses an imagined case, ubiquitous in the literature, of becoming fearful upon confronting a dog that is perceived as a threat:

³ Julienn Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 30.

⁴ Joel Marks, “A Theory of Emotion,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 42, No. 2 (1982), 227-242, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4319554>

⁵ Marks, “A Theory of Emotion”, 240.

Suppose A is jogging and comes upon a fierce-looking dog. A believes that the dog is threatening to bite him and strongly desires that it not do so. My claim is that this B/D set can account for everything about A that would count as evidence that A is afraid.⁶

He continues to make a natural objection on behalf of an interlocutor, an objection that I think is ultimately insurmountable:

The obvious objection to my theory of emotion is that it is possible to have a B/D set characterized by strong desire and yet not have an emotion. My reply to this objection is simply to challenge the objector to come up with a counterexample to my claim.⁷

Marks then entertains a couple of cases that one might offer to attempt to meet his challenge; however, the examples that he offers are not excellent and involve the conflating of at least one sense of 'passion' (in the sense of something one is passionate about) and the word 'emotion'. In any case, he ends up constructing a thought experiment which features a stamp collector who is very calm; Marks proceeds to claim that the fact that the collector has strong desire more or less means that he has an emotion even absent all the 'emotional' components (what he considers to be effects) of an emotion. He says: "...typically emotion manifests itself in various forms of psychophysical agitation; but this is not necessary (being just a causal connection)."⁸ However, this is an unsatisfactory result, since (1) he is merely begging the question, and (2) his examples are few and not excellent.

I take it that the seed of a good counterexample (to accept Marks' challenge) is already present in the first example of person A encountering a fearsome dog. The mixed theory is inadequate for precisely the reasons Marks says one will object; namely, it seems quite possible for one to have a strong desire to avoid being bitten by the dog, a belief that the dog is threatening to bite and fail to experience the emotion of fear. E.g., we can imagine that the

⁶ Marks, "A Theory of Emotion", 234.

⁷ Marks, "A Theory of Emotion", 238.

⁸ Marks, "A Theory of Emotion", 239.

person is a dog trainer, say, and due to her training and vast experience remains perfectly calm in the face of such a threat; in such a case, it seems that such a person with the appropriate belief-desire pair cannot be said to be experiencing the emotion of fear. Fear, it seems, is at least partially constituted by the appropriate types of felt (bodily) feelings. Any theory that makes it possible for a state to count as fear without requiring the physical (or virtual or mental) feelings that are typical of fear is simply confused on my view. One way to pump this intuition is to make use of the classic challenge from William James:

What kind of an emotion of fear would be left, if the feelings neither of quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present, it is quite impossible to think.⁹

What can it mean to say that a perfectly calm person is afraid? Although Marks wants to distinguish between an emotion and being ‘emotional’, with the latter being related to the ‘typical’ manifestations of an emotion, i.e., physiological changes visible and invisible, the fact that being ‘emotional’ means this should point us to the conclusion that these are not merely typical but *essential* features of at least many typical emotions. Emotions are experiential states and this experiential dimension of emotion is precisely what Marks’ account is missing. For all these reasons, it seems prudent to go in search of another theory.

1.1.2 Attitudinal theory

Deonna and Teroni also find the mixed theory to be unsatisfactory, although they point to different reasons, and offer an alternative, an ‘attitudinal theory’. The basic assertion of the attitudinal theory is that “An emotion is an attitude toward an object.”¹⁰ Their version of this

⁹ William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2001), 246.

¹⁰ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 76.

theory, claim the authors, better handles various problems associated with other theories of emotion.

One important feature of this theory is that, unlike the mixed theory, it makes felt, bodily experience central to emotions, while acknowledging that the sensations themselves are not sufficient to constitute an emotional experience; they write: “We should conceive of emotions as distinctive types of bodily awareness, where the subject experiences her body holistically as taking an attitude towards a certain object.”¹¹

An example may help to illustrate what the authors have in mind: suppose that it is warm, Alice has just climbed several flights of stairs quickly, and is not in good shape. She is now perspiring, her breathing has quickened, her heart is beating rapidly, and she feels like she wants to vomit. Although physiological changes such as these might be constitutive of an emotional experience in a different context, in this case, *ceteris paribus*, they do not. Alice experiences similar sensations qua sensations but the overall *attitude* is not the same. She does not experience her body as taking an emotional stance toward an object. However, we could easily imagine a case in which, e.g., Alice was about to speak in front of a crowd and was nervous. In that case, given that the bodily sensations are part of the correct gestalt, the emotion would be constituted in part by the sweatiness, the nausea, heart palpitations, etc. This distinction, according to the authors, allows them to “move away from the curiously atomistic approach to bodily sensations implicit in many accounts of their role in emotions.”¹²

¹¹ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 79.

¹² *Ibid.*

A second important feature has to do with what it is for something to be a bodily attitude. Basically, Deonna and Teroni cash out the bodily attitude in terms of action readiness, stipulating that what is to count as action readiness is to be construed broadly:

The notion of action readiness we here appeal to should be conceived in quite an inclusive manner, for it must not only cover aspects such as the tendency to move away, towards or against a given object, but also the tendency to attend to an object, to submit or to be drawn to it, to disengage from it, or even to suspend any inclination to interact with it, and so on.¹³

A final important feature of the attitudinal theory has to do with the correctness conditions of an emotion. On their account, emotions are “correct when their objects, inherited from their cognitive bases, exemplify the relevant evaluative property.”¹⁴ For the authors, all emotions are directed at their intentional objects; the objects themselves, however, are not part of the emotion, but are provided by different kinds of mental states, e.g., perception. These other types of mental states are referred to by the authors as the ‘cognitive bases’ of the emotions. To get a sense of this idea of correctness, let us look at a basic example: Imagine that Albert is angry at Beatrice for kicking him. The fact that Beatrice kicked him (assuming she did) is information that is extra-emotional—it comes from the cognitive bases, perception in this case (or memory). The evaluative property in this instance, since the emotion is anger, will be something like ‘a wrong’; if Albert was indeed wronged when Beatrice kicked him, then his anger is ‘correct’, if he was not wronged then his anger is incorrect.

Although this account seems to do a much better job of capturing the phenomenal nature of the emotions and their relationship with our body, it seems that an available objection consists in pointing out that the attitudinal theory seems a little bit ‘thin’ insofar as it excludes the

¹³ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 80.

¹⁴ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 101.

cognitive and conative aspects that are at least intimately connected with the emotions, from being features of an emotion.

In the spirit of James, I suggest we engage in a thought experiment in which we imagine an emotion that is totally without cognitive or conative content, including what de Silva will call ‘subliminal’ tendencies; it seems that doing this might render the emotion not an emotion. What would it be like to feel compassion without having a wish for the abatement of the suffering of the object of that compassion? According to Deonna and Teroni, the kinds of desires that, in the mixed theory, e.g., are said to constitute the emotion, such as wanting to run from a ferocious dog, are *effects* of emotions. They say, “Fear is an evaluative attitude, an attitude in light of which the subject will typically form specific desires such as the desire to scamper up a tree.”¹⁵ However, it seems to me that I do not know what it would mean to have fear *prior* to the desire to, e.g., escape from the source of fear. If this reply seems a bit hand-wavy, that is because it is. However, it seems that this is unavoidable to some degree; for, either we are having a purely linguistic argument (which I am completely uninterested in continuing) and stipulation by definition is the way to solve it, or what is in question requires at least some introspection and an appeal to intuitions seems appropriate in such a case.

Another possible problem hinted at above involves the stripping of cognitive content from the emotion. I again think that this would leave us with a very ‘thin’ conception of emotion—i.e., it lacks elements that are essential to some emotions in some cases—that does not do justice to the phenomenon. If we understand bodily attitudes in a way that actually does justice to the phenomena, then we end up smuggling in cognitive and conative features. If I take a bodily stance toward a snarling dog, that bodily stance is inextricable from and constituted, in

¹⁵ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 83.

part, by the sorts of cognitive and motivational states that are occurring in connection with it in that moment—I *feel* my desire to flee in my body as emotional. In order to account for all of the phenomena involved with emotions, then, I suggest that we adopt a third kind of theory, which can better deal with these problems (or at least make them go away).

1.1.3 De Silva, A Buddhist Componential theory

The final theory that will be discussed here is a ‘componential theory’, offered by Padmasiri de Silva in his book *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counseling: Pathways of Mindfulness-based Therapies*.¹⁶ De Silva draws from early Buddhist texts to support his somewhat modernized Buddhist theory of emotions. He begins his analysis by distinguishing between two related ways in which experience can be analyzed, according to the tradition—from a ‘structural’ and a ‘dynamic’ perspective. The former concerns the Buddhist conceptual framework that analyzes a human being into five categories, called the five ‘aggregates’ or ‘heaps’ (*khandas*), namely, perception (*saññā*), feeling (*vedanā*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), and material form (*rūpa*)^{17, 18}. On a structural analysis, then, we can think of an emotion as:

...an interactive complex or construct emerging with the causal network of the five aggregates. Thus within this network it is possible to distinguish feeling, bodily sensation, desires, beliefs and appraisals as variables that go to make anger, fear, sadness and so on...The concept of *saṅkhārā*, translated as volitional activity, provides the notion of intention and accountability, crucial in the task of moral criticism.¹⁹

¹⁶ Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counseling: Pathways of Mindfulness-based Therapies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), <http://CSU.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1699359>

¹⁷ SN 22.48, “Khandha Sutta: Aggregates,” <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.048.than.html>.

¹⁸ It is important to note at this point that although the Pāli term ‘*vedanā*’ is usually translated as ‘feeling’, it would probably better be translated as ‘hedonic tone’, as it is used in this context to refer to the felt-quality of some experience insofar as it is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Cf., e.g., MN 10.

¹⁹ De Silva, *Introduction*, 61.

So, grief, e.g., could be thought of as being composed of various constitutive features: a belief that one has been separated from what is dear to one, an evaluation of this state of affairs as disagreeable, a desire or wish that the state of affairs not obtain (whether completely conscious or what de Silva calls ‘subliminal’ (*anusaya*)), bodily feelings associated with grief—perhaps ‘dark’ or ‘heavy’ feelings, typical physiological manifestations such as crying, and psychological pain.^{20, 21}

In addition to this structural description that concerns what constitutes an emotion de Silva discusses the ‘dynamic’ perspective on emotions, which concerns emotions insofar as they are situated within a causal network where they arise, persist, and fade. This discussion centers on the theory of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, (dependent origination), the Buddhist description of the process by which suffering arises and how it ceases, thus:

When this is, that is.
From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
When this isn't, that isn't.
From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.²²

By examining not only the static or structural character of emotional experience, but by looking at the “interplay of sensations, feelings, desires, volitions and dispositions,” this approach, “gives more insight into the emergence of different psychological factors”²³ De Silva highlights some of the ‘links’ in the chain of dependent origination, including the way in which, it is said, “sensory contact conditions feeling, feeling conditions craving...”, which can help to better

²⁰ De Silva, *Introduction*, 59.

²¹ According to Thanissaro Bhikku: “This term — *anusaya* — is usually translated as ‘underlying tendency’ or ‘latent tendency.’ These translations are based on the etymology of the term, which literally means, ‘to lie down with.’ However, in actual usage, the related verb (*anuseti*) means to be obsessed with something, for one’s thoughts to return and “lie down with it” over and over again.” Both usages seem appropriate to me in this context. Cf. AN 7.11: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an07/an07.011.than.html>.

²² SN 22.48, “Khandha Sutta: Aggregates,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.061.than.html>.

²³ De Silva, *Introduction*, 58.

understand *paṭiccasamuppāda*. For example, Claire insults Barry; the experience of perceiving the insult is contact (*phassa*), following contact (or simultaneously with it) arises feeling (*vedanā*), in this case, unpleasant mental feeling (*domanassa*), which in turn tends to give rise to craving (*taṇhā*)—in this case, it is *vibhava-taṇhā*, a craving for the cessation of the painful feelings he is experiencing. It is, says de Silva, after the arising of mere ‘feelings’ (hedonic tone) that negative emotions may develop, coupling feeling with other motivational, cognitive, and physiological phenomena.

De Silva emphasizes that this understanding of the dynamic perspective allows one to take a practical approach to emotional problems. “By the practice of bare attention, the possible transition from feelings to negative emotions is watched with great vigilance.”²⁴ A famous example from the Pāli Canon illustrates the thrust behind this type of work:

When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows; in the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental.²⁵

Although the *sutta* (Buddhist discourse) discusses feelings of physical pain, it seems that the same should apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to unpleasant emotions caused by more basic mental pain. For example, if Claire insults Barry, he may feel a feeling of mental pain, that is, some unhappiness, but this basic feeling need not give rise to, e.g, self-loathing coupled with distorted beliefs about his character or identity. If carefully watched with ‘wise’ or ‘appropriate’ attention, the initial displeasure can be prevented from turning into a more complex, more intense, and

²⁴ De Silva, *Introduction*, 62.

²⁵ SN 36.6, “Sallatha Sutta: The Arrow,” <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.006.than.html>.

‘stickier’ undesirable emotion.^{26, 27} If it is not possible to prevent the arising of self-loathing, then at least, by means of wise attention, one can prevent it from growing by not ‘feeding it.’

1.1.4 Discussion

Each of these theories that have been discussed so far have important differences and similarities, as well as varying degrees of plausibility. I want to argue that the Buddhist theory has a number of advantages over its competitors that are sufficiently important to warrant its adoption.

The componential theory is similar to the mixed theory insofar as it holds that an emotion is comprised of various elements, including conative elements such as specific desires, but is dissimilar insofar as it does not exclude affective states and, in fact, physiological symptoms seem to be necessary elements of at least some emotions, according to Buddhism, e.g., anger is a state that is ‘vexing’—i.e., it is inherently emotionally disturbing. As I claimed earlier, the idea that beliefs and desires without the proper kinds of bodily feelings should count as emotions is so unintuitive that allowing such feelings to count as constitutive of emotions is a theoretical advantage.

The Buddhist theory seems somewhat compatible with the attitudinal theory in a number of respects, but incompatible in others. Both systems share the view, e.g., that emotions are not

²⁶ In the *Atthasata Sutta*, the Buddha discusses various possible ways of grouping *vedanā*, including a fivefold classification that has the following members, pleasure, pain, happiness/gladness, distress/sadness, and equanimity. Thanissaro Bhikku’s translation has a footnote in which he says that another *sutta* (not available in English) explains these as experiences of physical pleasure and pain, mental pleasure and pain, and either physical or mental ‘neither pleasure nor pain’. I wonder whether or not it would be appropriate to class these basic mental feelings, translated as ‘happiness’ or ‘distress’ as the most basic emotions. Although some commentators have insisted that they are not emotions at this level, it is not clear to me that this is the case. Cf.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.022.than.html>.

²⁷ For discussions of wise attention, cf.: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn46/sn46.051.than.html> and <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel026.html>.

necessarily directed at propositions and are intimately linked with evaluative states. There are, however, two ways in which the Buddhist theory of emotion differs importantly from Deonna and Teroni's attitudinal theory. The first concerns questions about correctness conditions of emotions and the second concerns the inclusion of conative states in emotion. With respect to the former, Deonna and Teroni hold that emotions are correct when the relevant evaluation is correct; I have not yet discussed questions of correctness of emotions on the Buddhist theory but, in brief, Buddhists hold that some emotions (anger, for example) are inherently incorrect, being driven by harmful, delusional mental states. With respect to the latter, where the mixed theory characterized what Marks called the 'emotional' aspects of an emotion as merely being effects of the emotion itself, which was a pairing of a relevant kind of belief and desire, the attitudinal theory flipped this around, making the felt experience of the emotion (including physiological changes) essential and the *desires* merely effects. The Buddhist account of emotions seems like a possible middle way between these thin conceptions of emotion that lacked either cognitive and conative content, or felt, phenomenal richness as essential parts of some emotional states. For these reasons, it seems that the Buddhist account has a theoretical advantage over the other two theories.

Aside from its theoretical advantages, the Buddhist theory has another virtue that is not obviously shared by the other approaches. This virtue shows up when we recall that the Buddhist theorizing about emotional states fits into a larger project that is primarily practical, as de Silva notes. Specifically, it is ultimately concerned with bringing about the end of suffering and promoting welfare. De Silva describes this practical character:

...the Buddha...did not push these distinctions too far so that he became trapped in metaphysical issues but he used them within a context: different contexts are seen through his pragmatism and the importance of practice.²⁸

De Silva then discusses an example from the canon in which monks are arguing about how many different kinds of feelings there are. The Buddha responds to this dispute by pointing out that he has given various expositions of the different kinds of feelings, which, dividing classes of feeling differently, result in different numbers of kinds of feelings. De Silva explains: “Thus from one point of view these distinctions are important, but from another standpoint they are mere ‘designations’ to be used in appropriate context.”²⁹ The Buddhist theory is equipped to be used for practical purposes, and replete with resources that are focused on addressing what is important with respect to emotions, namely, their role in our moral lives. We care about trying to help people with psychopathology, we care about keeping roads safe (e.g., from people with a road rage problem), we care about developing healthier emotional lives and relationships with others, we care about minimizing or eliminating unnecessary emotional suffering in our own case. The Buddhist theory of emotions, unlike many current philosophical theories of emotions, is equipped to take on these issues.

Having thus endorsed a Buddhist approach to the emotions, I will continue to develop the account, discussing several important points of the theory that have not yet been touched on. I take it that Padmasiri de Silva’s reconstruction of a Buddhist theory is highly successful and will continue to draw from it throughout the present work, but will also draw heavily from source texts from within the Pāli Canon as well as from other texts that are taken to be authoritative in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition.

²⁸ De Silva, *Introduction*, 62.

²⁹ De Silva, *Introduction*, 63.

1.2 Wholesome and unwholesome emotion

Given the discussion of the practical character of the Buddhist approach to the emotions, it should be expected that the Buddhist philosophy of emotions will not be neutral with respect to questions concerning, simply, which emotions are moral and how it is that the good ones can be brought about while the bad are abandoned. This often neglected facet of emotion studies will be an essential element of a Buddhist theory. The following discussion will briefly discuss the moral status of some prototypical emotions within Buddhism to further develop the Buddhist theory of emotions and to set up later discussions of the moral status of anger in particular.

1.2.1 ‘Negative’ and ‘positive’ emotion

One way to describe and distinguish emotions that is both natural and common in the philosophical literature, is to talk about emotions as being ‘positive’ or ‘negative.’ Again, because it is so natural to talk in this way, these terms may end up, as Kristján Kristjánsson notes, being used in diverse and confused ways, he says: “...the term ‘negative emotion’ has, in the emotion literature, become a grab-bag of ill-assorted, and often internally conflicting, elements.”³⁰ Among the ‘elements’ that constitute the meaning of various usages ‘negative emotion’ are, he says, a lack of moral justifiability, an evaluation as lacking moral justifiability, unpleasantness, and an evaluation of the object of the emotion as negative. So, for example, anger evaluates its object—some state of affairs, a slight against oneself, perhaps—negatively and so might, in this sense be called ‘negative’. However, anger might also be thought by some theorists to be ‘positive’ in some cases, insofar as it is thought to be an appropriate and laudable

³⁰ Kristján Kristjánsson, “On the Very Idea of ‘Negative Emotions’”, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 33, No. 4 (2003): 351-364.

response to some injustice. Compassion, as another example, might be called a ‘negative emotion’ since it involves evaluating its object—some form of suffering—negatively, whereas, as it is generally thought of as a moral emotion, it could also be called ‘positive.’ Ultimately, Kristjánsson concludes:

The term ‘negative emotion’ thus stands revealed as a red herring in emotion research: one which should be discarded as soon as possible or, perhaps better still, sent down to Doctor Leon’s useful Web Glossary of useless psychobabble (<http://www.drleons.com/babble.htm>). Incidentally, I think that much the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the term ‘positive emotion,’ although an exploration of that issue will...be left for another day.³¹

This analysis is helpful inasmuch as it helps us to get clear about the various possible usages of ‘negative’ and acts as an admonishment that should help remind us to avoid being vague or lazy on this point. Keeping this in mind, let us turn to a Buddhist analysis of emotion, and think about which of Kristjánsson’s elements would be important in a Buddhist evaluation of emotional states.

1.2.2 Unwholesome emotions in Buddhism

Some of the elements, as discussed above, will clearly be relevant to a Buddhist analysis of emotions. It is certainly possible to talk about emotions that are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, or that have pro or con attitudes toward their content. Anger, for example, evaluates its object negatively; i.e., it has a con attitude toward the object of the anger, with its root of aversion or hate (*dosa*), and is unpleasant. Joy that arises on the basis of the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is associated with pleasant feeling, evaluates its object favorably and takes a pro attitude toward it. There is no doubt that such analyses are useful, yet the most important kinds of distinctions to draw, on the Buddhist view, will be moral ones.

³¹ Kristjánsson, “Negative Emotions”, 358.

There are a number of common phrases that come from the *suttas* in the Pāli Canon which would make a division of emotional states into moral categories quite natural. Some states are those that (are): ‘unskillful’, ‘to be abandoned/subdued/removed/dispelled’, ‘censured by the wise’, ‘lead to the affliction of self, other, or both’, ‘not conducive to tranquility’, ‘not conducive to *Nibbāna* (Skt: *Nirvana*)/the goal’, ‘unbeneficial’.^{32, 33}

A very representative example of such a classificatory scheme in action can be seen in the following paired analyses, in which the Buddha divides his mental states into two kinds:

The Blessed One said, “Monks, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened *Bodhisatta*, the thought occurred to me: ‘Why don’t I keep dividing my thinking into two sorts?’ So I made thinking imbued with sensuality, thinking imbued with ill will, & thinking imbued with harmfulness one sort, and thinking imbued with renunciation, thinking imbued with non-ill will, & thinking imbued with harmlessness another sort.”

This division is quite natural and corresponds to two of the three most basic roots of suffering, greed (*lobha*) and aversion (*dosa*) (the third and most fundamental unwholesome root is delusion (*moha*), which is present in all unwholesome mental states.)^{34, 35} After distinguishing these types of thinking, he explains a number of the consequences of such thinking:

And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with ill will arose in me. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with ill will has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to Unbinding.’ As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others... to the affliction of both... it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to Unbinding, it subsided. Whenever thinking imbued with ill will had arisen, I simply abandoned it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence.

And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with non-ill will arose in me. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with non-ill will has arisen in me; and that

³² AN 5.161, “Aghatavinaya Sutta: Subduing Hatred (1),” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.161.than.html>.

³³ MN 19, “Dvedhavitakka Sutta: Two Sorts of Thinking,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.019.than.html>.

³⁴ AN 3.33, “Nidana Sutta: Causes,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.033.than.html>.

³⁵ Bhikku Bodhi, ed., *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, (Onalaska: Pariyatti Publishing, 2000).

leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, & leads to Unbinding. If I were to think & ponder in line with that even for a night... even for a day... even for a day & night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking & pondering a long time would tire the body. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed; and a disturbed mind is far from concentration.’ So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, & concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind would not be disturbed.³⁶

What we have then, are a set of important Buddhist values. These values are independent from each other in some sense, i.e., mental and emotional tranquility is not the same thing as discernment, yet they are, according to the tradition, importantly linked. There is some sense in which all of the elements on the above list are unified under the ultimate goal of Buddhism: *Nibbāna*, unbinding, the destruction of craving, the deathless, freedom, the unmanifest, the peaceful.³⁷ Whatever is conducive to *Nibbāna* or causes one to incline towards this goal of liberation is, in some ultimate sense, ‘to be pursued’ and whatever does not incline one’s mind toward *Nibbāna* is ‘not to be pursued,’ *ceteris paribus*³⁸. Again, this relates to the ultimately practical nature of Buddhist teachings and practice insofar as this distinction—what should be done and what should not—is perhaps the most basic and important one to make.

With this distinction in hand, we can begin to think about specific emotions that ought to be abandoned or cultivated and what features of those emotions make them useful or problematic. In the next two chapters I will focus on anger and its closely related states in particular, but there are many other emotions that traditional Buddhist thought takes to be problematic: lust, envy, certain kinds of fear and anxiety, and grief, for example.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bhikku Bodhi, ed., *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 364-365. (SN 43:1-44, combined; IV 359-73).

³⁸ Excluding practical considerations. Monastics, e.g., are expected to follow a stricter code of conduct than lay people. Although *Nibbāna* is the highest goal, other teachings are given which detail how to achieve mundane happiness.

This last emotion, grief, perhaps deserves a brief discussion insofar as it is sure to be a contentious claim that grief ought not to be indulged, ought to be abandoned. In fact, on this point, de Silva departs from the traditional line, holding that grief can sometimes be a ‘positive emotion’. He says: “While anger, hatred and aggression are negative from both a moral and psychological perspective, sadness and grief are natural and may provide a base for positive activity”³⁹ It seems like de Silva wants to classify grief as a wholesome or at least an acceptable emotion, which is beneficial in at least some cases. With some caveats, however, this claim seems to be at odds with the tradition he draws from. Consider the following:

Marvelous it is, most wonderful it is, bhikkhus, concerning the Perfect Ones [Buddhas], that when such a pair of disciples [the Buddha’s two chief disciples] has passed away there is no grief, no lamentation on the part of the Perfect One. For of that which is born, come to being, put together, and so is subject to dissolution, how should it be said that it should not depart? That indeed, is not possible.⁴⁰

In a closely related text, a disciple comes aggrieved to the Buddha and talks to him about the death of one of his (the Buddha’s) chief disciples, Sariputta. The Buddha responds by asking the monk if Sariputta took his virtue from him and proceeds to gently admonish him, pointing out that he should have expected it, that to wish otherwise is foolish since it is impossible that any composite thing should persist forever.⁴¹ The basic idea of what makes grief problematic, it seems, is that it involves a misperception of reality in some sense. Even if one will say, “Yes, I accept that some day everyone that is dear to me will die,” there is some sense, it seems the Buddha is saying, that she not accepting the reality, even if this is at the ‘subliminal’ (*anusaya*) level, in de Silva’s terms. One might argue, perhaps, that although grief is ultimately unbeneficial and ought to be eliminated, it may sometimes be appropriate as an expedient means

³⁹ De Silva, Introduction, 21.

⁴⁰ SN 47.14, “Cunda Sutta: At Ukkacela,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn47/sn47.014.nypo.html>.

⁴¹ SN 47.13, “Cunda Sutta: About Cunda,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn47/sn47.013.than.html>.

for one to cope with some life situation. This argument has some intuitive appeal, but I am aware of nothing in the tradition that supports this kind of claim.

1.2.3 Wholesome emotion

As we saw above, emotions and thoughts that have greed and aversion as their roots, will end up being classed as unwholesome (*akusala*) and, naturally, emotional states that are based in wholesome roots will be states that are considered skillful (*kusala*). Perhaps simply as a feature of the Pāli language or perhaps because of some other reason, or both, the Buddha of the discourses often couches things in terms of opposites and ends up talking about concepts in complementary pairs, where one of the members is the negation of the other—for example, the opposite of ‘aversion’ (*dosa*) is ‘non-aversion’ (*adosa*). However, in Bhikku Bodhi’s commentary to the *Abhidhamma*, he points out that this opposite quality is not merely a lack of ill will, ‘*adosa*’ also “comprises such positive virtues as loving-kindness, gentleness, amity, friendliness, etc.”⁴² These positive virtues are among those found in a number of mental states discussed in Buddhism that would fall under the heading of ‘wholesome’ or ‘skillful.’

Wholesome states would include emotions like contentment with one’s material goods, reverence for the wise, and peaceful tranquility. In addition to these, there are four major wholesome mental states, called the ‘*brahamavihāras*’ (divine abidings), which are of particular interest and hold a prominent place in discussions of virtuous emotions within Buddhism. The following discussion of these wholesome states will serve to continue to develop a Buddhist account of the emotions.

⁴² Bodhi, *Manual of Abhidhamma*, 86.

The four *brahmavihāras* are *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *uppekhā*; these are variously translated, but fairly standard renditions are: ‘lovingkindness’, ‘compassion’, ‘sympathetic joy’, and ‘equanimity.’⁴³ Sometimes the term ‘*mettā*’ is used to refer to this group as a whole, and is usually the first of these states to be cultivated. It is often recommended that the cultivation of *mettā* is done using phrases as a support; such a recommendation has a basis in the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, appears in the *Visuddhimagga*, and is prevalent in modern practical instruction.

With some minor variation, the Pāli phrases that are used traditionally are usually translated as:

May I/you/they be free from enmity and danger.
May I/you/they be free from mental suffering.
May I/you/they be free from physical suffering.
May I/you/they care for myself/yourself/themselves, happily.^{44, 45}

One thing that is immediately evident is that these phrases are basically symbolic of conative states. Another interesting feature of *mettā* is revealed insofar as it is said that “It’s [*mettā*]’s proximate cause is seeing loveableness[goodness] in beings.”⁴⁶ This is further clarified if we look at some of the initial practice instructions:

So he should first, as example, pervade himself with loving-kindness. Next after that, in order to proceed easily, he can recollect such gifts, kind words, etc., as inspire love and endearment, such virtue, learning, etc., as inspire respect and reverence met with in a teacher or his equivalent or a preceptor or his equivalent, developing loving-kindness towards him in the way beginning, ‘May this good man be happy and free from suffering.’⁴⁷

⁴³ There is some question about whether ‘lovingkindness’ is the best translation for the term ‘*mettā*’. Alternatives include ‘friendliness’ and ‘goodwill.’ For an argument that ‘goodwill’ is most appropriate, cf.: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/metta_means_goodwill.html.

⁴⁴ Ven. Dhammarakkhita, *Metta Bhavana: Loving-kindness Meditation*, (Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., 2001), 2, http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/scrn_metta.pdf.

⁴⁵ It is traditionally recommended that one begin by generating *mettā* for oneself; however, Ajahn Brahm, a modern teacher, e.g., recommends developing *mettā* for oneself last. He explains that for many people having friendliness for, forgiving...etc., themselves is more difficult than doing so with respect to others. Cf. Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*.

⁴⁶ Bhikku Ñānamoli, trans., *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), 311.

⁴⁷ Ñānamoli, *Vism.*, 293.

Here we have several factors combining to produce an experience of *mettā*, attention is directed toward some memory of a perception of characteristics of a person or her actions that are evaluated as ‘lovable’ or good; by so reflecting, one cultivates the wish for that person’s well-being. One element that is not explicitly referred to here is the felt, bodily aspect of an emotion which I said was an element of emotions on the componential theory. However, one does not have to search far to find one; in the explanation of the (etymological) meaning of the quality of compassion, it is said: “When there is suffering in others it causes (*karoti*) good people’s hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion (*karunā*).”⁴⁸

Aside from these emotional components, de Silva also describes Buddhism as having a ‘strong cognitive orientation’; earlier in the text, de Silva borrows Lyons’ definition of a cognitive theory as “One that makes some aspect of thought, usually a belief, central to emotion.”⁴⁹ To support this claim, he points to the *Vittakasanṭhāna Sutta*, a text which offers five methods for subduing unskillful thoughts. The text says:

When evil unskillful thoughts connected with [sensual] desire, hate, and delusion arise in a bhikkhu through reflection on an adventitious object, he should, (in order to get rid of that), reflect on a different object which is connected with skill. Then the evil unskillful thoughts are eliminated; they disappear. By their elimination, the mind stands firm, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated, just within (his subject of meditation).⁵⁰

An alternate translation by Thanissaro Bhikku has it that the unskillful thoughts are ‘imbued’ with desire, hate, and delusion.⁵¹ A natural question is: Are the thoughts themselves part of the emotion or are they merely causing (or being caused by) the emotion? The same question applies equally to questions about one’s attention to an object and one’s evaluation as ‘lovable.’ If we

⁴⁸ Ñānamoli, *Vism.*, 311.

⁴⁹ De Silva, Introduction, 56 & 65.

⁵⁰ MN 20, “Vittakasanthana Sutta: The Removal of Distracting Thoughts,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.soma.html>.

⁵¹ MN 20, “Vittakasanthana Sutta: The Relaxation of Thoughts,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.than.html>.

think about the analysis of the *brahmavihāras* and earlier passages given above as well as other sources, it seems that we should interpret the sort of thoughts that would be arising in the context of this *sutta* to be of a couple kinds; one kind would be related to evaluations as, rather than ‘loveable’, something like ‘vexing’ (*paṭigha*), as illustrated in this passage from the *Dhammapada*: “He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.”⁵² Another would be thoughts related to ill-wishing, again opposed to the thoughts one would generate in cultivating *mettā*, e.g., “may that person come to harm.” With regard to the former type, insofar as they contain or symbolize evaluations, at least some people outside of Buddhism would take them to be constitutive of an emotion.⁵³ The latter type are components of the ill will itself and, although they may be more motivational than cognitive, the fact of their specificity entails that there are cognitive elements. In any case, there is certainly an intimate connection between cognitive elements such as attention and various kinds of thinking, and the emotions. I suggest we tentatively allow that in some cases, cognitive, conative, and evaluative states are necessary components of the *brahmavihāras* and some other emotional states, since it is clear that they are components of those states in the minimal sense that, from the dynamic perspective that de Silva discussed, these states are causally linked to each other in a causal way. When one attends in a certain way to the lovable qualities of some person, then *mettā* arises; when one reflects in a certain way on the negative qualities of a person, *mettā* does not arise, but anger does.

⁵² Dhp 1-20, “Yamakavagga: Pairs,” <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.01.budd.html>.

⁵³ Zac Cogley, “A Study of Virtuous and Vicious Anger,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, eds. Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to provide a somewhat broad overview of several, competing theories of emotion, with an emphasis on presenting the Buddhist theory. It was argued that the Buddhist theory offered a more sensible mean between the other theories which resulted in 'thin' conceptions of emotion and that the practical nature of Buddhist philosophy of emotions was itself an important advantage. In the following chapters, I will examine one emotion in particular, anger, at length, trying to get a good philosophical grasp on it and arguing that Buddhism has valuable resources for approaching the philosophy of anger.

Chapter 2: Anger

2.0 Introduction

Unlike many other emotional states, there is a fair amount of contention concerning whether anger should be classed as moral or immoral, whether it should be moderated or banished, whether it is necessary or unnecessary for social life. There is further contentiousness associated with anger; namely, there is difficulty connected with providing a precise definition for the term 'anger'. If emotion is a combination of belief and desire on a given theory, without necessarily having a felt component, then anger amounts to a combination of the relevant kind of belief and desire and need not be felt. If emotions are bodily attitudes and conative states are excluded from the emotional, then "Anger is an attitude in the light of which a subject will form the desire to avenge himself in this or that way,"⁵⁴ and so on.

There is a further problem with giving a universally acceptable definition insofar as I suspect that one's culture and upbringing have an influence on what one takes the emotions in general and anger in particular to be, since we often learn these terms by ostensive definition. An extreme example: A child who has a terrifyingly angry father who beats her may have a very different idea of what anger is than one whose father sits her down calmly but sternly and says: "when you behave like that it makes me feel very angry." Aside from external influences, it seems clear that different persons have different emotional experiences and related states that may vary widely. Just as in the examples above, one person may become angry and dwell on it and allow it to escalate and vent her anger by breaking things and starting to think that she would like to kill someone. Another person, either through natural predisposition, education, or both,

⁵⁴ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 83.

might never become more than mildly angry with another person and when she does become angry, it is brief and harmless. Various discussions with some of my colleagues confirm that different people define anger in importantly different ways and although there are many cases in which people will agree, they also disagree about what constitutes anger in specific examples.

Although these problems of definition and uniformity of use of the term are prevalent, it is nevertheless possible to examine specific theories of anger on their own terms; this approach allows for fruitful discussion while avoiding conceptual imperialism—i.e., imperatives of the form, “you must use ‘anger’ to mean x.” In this chapter, I will examine several accounts of anger that are historically important to the philosophy of emotions, starting with Aristotle, then proceeding to Seneca, and ending with a Buddhist account, highlighting some important, typical and contentious features of anger. Following this initial examination will be a comparative analysis of the various theories.

2.1 Aristotle

*It has been well said about wrath,
“Sweeter it is by far than the honeycomb
Dripping in its sweetness
And spreads through the hearts of men.” – Aristotle⁵⁵*

In Book II of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle provides an explicit definition of anger:

Anger may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one’s friends. If this is a proper definition of anger, it must always be felt towards some particular individual, e.g. Cleon, and not ‘man’ in general. It must be felt because the other has done or intended to do something to him or one of his friends. It must always be attended by a certain pleasure—that which arises from the expectation of revenge. For since nobody aims at what he thinks he cannot attain, the

⁵⁵ W. Rhys Roberts, trans., Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), Kindle edition, Book II, Ch. 2.

angry man is aiming at what he can attain, and the belief that you will attain your aim is pleasant.⁵⁶

2.1.1 What is Central?

For Aristotle, then, anger is most prominently an ‘impulse’, a conative state; specifically, it is a desire for revenge—to return harm for unjust harm. This definition has several implications: first, anger must consist not merely in a *wish* (i.e., a hope for a state of affairs that one believes cannot obtain) for another to come to harm, but in the actual *desire* (in a more restricted sense) to harm; second, the overall desire is one that is complex insofar as it is either partially constituted by or closely related to high-level cognitive content. So, it is not possible on this view to be angry if one merely wishes, hopes, or prefers that another suffer, but she must desire to inflict that punishment herself. Aristotle further elaborates on the conative content of anger in contrasting it with his understanding of hatred:

The one [anger] aims at giving pain to its object, the other [hatred] at doing him harm; the angry man wants his victims to feel; the hater does not mind whether they feel or not...for the one would have the offenders suffer for what they have done; the other would have them cease to exist.⁵⁷

So, anger is primarily a desire to make its object suffer, that much is clear; this description in itself probably contains a fair amount of cognitive complexity, yet a full characterization of anger on this view is more demanding still. That is, one is not properly said to be ‘angry’ unless she holds the belief that she or her friends were ‘slight[ed]...without justification’, and the belief that she is capable of harming the object of her anger; the point here is simply that the concepts of ‘a slight’ and ‘justification’, e.g., apparently require advanced cognitive capacities. One way of thinking about this relationship between cognitive capacities

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Rhetoric*, Book II, Ch. 2.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Rhetoric*, Book II, Ch. 4.

and anger is characterized by Aristotle in the following way: “argument or imagination informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and anger, reasoning as it were that anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightaway.”⁵⁸ The fact of the (at least partially) cognitive nature of anger will have important implications for questions concerning the possibility of non-human anger; the specifics of that cognitive content will impact the answers to questions concerning what anger may properly take as its object and the moral status of anger.

2.1.2 Object of anger

For Aristotle, not only must anger have an object, i.e., anger in general without direction is not possible, there are very specific restrictions on what that object may be. To begin, there are two more general requirements: (1) it must be felt towards some specific individual, and (2) it must be felt toward beings as opposed to inanimate objects.

By consulting the above definition given above, it is not completely clear whether Aristotle means simply that anger must have some object and cannot be, as I said, without direction, or that anger cannot be directed at any collective whatsoever. However, it seems clear from his discussion of the differences between anger and hatred that he means the latter; he says: “Anger is always concerned with individuals—a Callias or a Socrates—whereas hatred is directed also against classes: we all hate any thief and any informer.”⁵⁹

The second general requirement follows from the fact that, on this view, anger is something that is the result of one being ‘slight[ed]...without justification’, which logically

⁵⁸ W.D. Ross, trans., Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, Part 6, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Rhetoric*, Book II, Ch. 4.

entails that there was some being capable of slighting another; since inanimate objects cannot slight beings, they cannot properly be an object of anger.

These cognitive requirements have further implications beyond these general ones; it is only a person that one believes to have acted unjustly who can be the object of anger:

[people are not angered] if they feel that they themselves are in the wrong and are suffering justly (for anger is not excited by what is just), since men no longer think then that they are suffering without justification; and anger, as we have seen, means this.⁶⁰

Aristotle's definition also stipulated that: "nobody aims at what he thinks he cannot attain, the angry man is aiming at what he can attain." This too has implications for what may be the object of one's anger; namely, it is not possible to become angry with someone that one believes herself incapable of causing to suffer. This latter point is related to the claim that a mere *wish* to avenge oneself is insufficient to constitute anger; i.e., if I have been wronged by some powerful figure yet believe myself incapable of harming her, although I might wish that I could do so, I cannot be said to be angry. Aristotle explicitly says: "We are not angry with people we fear or respect, as long as we fear or respect them; you cannot be afraid of a person and also at the same time angry with him."⁶¹

To sum up the discussion of what anger's object may be like, it will be useful to reflect on Aristotle's own summary from the end of Book II, Chapter 3 of the *Rhetoric*:

It is now plain that when you wish to calm others you must draw upon these lines of argument; you must put your hearers into the corresponding frame of mind, and represent those with whom they are angry as formidable, or as worthy of reverence, or as benefactors, or as involuntary agents, or as much distressed at what they have done.⁶²

⁶⁰ Roberts, *Rhetoric*, Book II, Ch. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

As a point of clarification, Aristotle held that growing calm was the opposite of anger; so, in this passage he is saying that if you wish to remove anger from another person, it will be useful to portray the object of anger in a way which either weakens anger or makes it impossible. Lack of agency and fearfulness are, as was described, properties of an object that make anger impossible, while the remainder either do so or at least tend to ameliorate the anger.

2.1.3 Felt experience

Another important feature of anger, the central feature on some views of emotion, is the felt experience. Aristotle does talk about anger as something that ‘we feel’ and there are a number of passages in the *Rhetoric* and the *Nichomachean Ethics* that discuss the felt experience of anger.⁶³ Anger is described in the texts as being something that ‘boils up’ and has a ‘warmth and hastiness...[to] its nature.’⁶⁴ The imagery here alludes to the felt bodily experience of anger and to the fact of its being an agitated state; Aristotle discusses the agitated nature of anger explicitly, holding that “Growing calm is the opposite of growing angry, and calmness the opposite of anger.”

Finally, for Aristotle, anger has elements of both pain and pleasure; specifically, the pain that arises in connection with anger is the pain of having been slighted and the pleasure is based on the expectation of revenge. It is worthy of note that these feelings of pain and pleasure described in the definition are described as things that anger is ‘accompanied by’ or ‘attended by’, suggesting that, as I claimed, they are not the most central feature of anger.

⁶³ Ross, *Ethics*, Book II, ch. 5.

⁶⁴ Roberts, *Rhetoric*, Book VII, ch. 6.

2.1.4 Morality

On Aristotle's account, anger is considered to be a 'passion,' one of only three kinds of things found in the soul, the other two being 'faculties' and 'states of character.'⁶⁵ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides a lists of states that he calls 'passions': "By passions I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, emulation, pity, and in general the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain."⁶⁶ These passions, he says, are morally neutral; it is only virtues and vices that have moral status, and these are 'states of character.'⁶⁷ One reason that is given for making this distinction involves an appeal to agency; Aristotle holds that virtues and vices are bound up with agency, whereas passions are not:

We feel anger and fear without choice, but the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice. Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the virtues and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way.⁶⁸

On this view, viciousness consists in failing to have a good temper, which either means having an overly passionate disposition, in the case of anger, 'irascibility', or at the extreme of deficiency, failing to have a minimal acceptable level of passion, 'inirascibility'. Virtue, then, consists in having a good temper; the good-tempered or virtuous person, according to Aristotle, does not hold onto anger longer than appropriate, nor does he fail to become angry when it is called for; he "is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought."⁶⁹ He does not fall into deficiency, which is 'slavish', and tends to make others think that one is 'unlikely to defend himself'; the virtuous person is nevertheless "thought to err rather in the direction of deficiency; for the good-tempered man is

⁶⁵ Ross, *Ethics*, Book II, Ch. 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Ross, *Ethics*, Book IV Ch. 5.

not revengeful, but rather tends to make allowances.”⁷⁰ This final point is important to emphasize for the purpose of ensuring that the picture of Aristotle being developed here does not represent him as advocating something that we might think of as hot-headedness.

2.2 Seneca

“How great a blessing is it to escape from anger, that chief of all evils, and therewith from frenzy, ferocity, cruelty, and madness, its attendants?” – Seneca⁷¹

In the style of letters addressed to Novatus, in *De Ira*, Seneca lectures on what anger is, what tends to produce it, whether human beings alone can be angry, the evil nature of anger, how anger is to be overcome, and, finally, addresses numerous objections to the claim that anger ought to be banished from our emotional lives.

2.2.1 What is central?

Concerning the question of how anger is to be defined, Seneca says: “Aristotle's definition differs little from mine: for he declares anger to be a desire to repay suffering.”⁷² So, for Seneca too, anger is primarily a conative state; he elaborates on the nature of this desire:

[Anger]...is worse than either spitefulness or envy; for they wish that someone may become unhappy, while anger wishes to make him so: they are pleased when evil befalls one by accident, but anger cannot wait upon Fortune; it desires to injure its victim personally, and is not satisfied merely with his being injured.^{73, 74}

Anger, then, does not merely contain ill will in the sense of wishing harm to other beings as other emotions that are vicious on his view, but an active desire to harm the other.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Aubrey Stuart, trans., Seneca's *De Ira*, (1900), Kindle edition, Fourth Book, Ch. xii.

⁷² Stuart, *De Ira*, Third book, Ch. iii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Stuart, *De Ira*, Ch. v.

Another important and related facet of Seneca's understanding of anger is revealed by his stipulation that anger is an impulse that takes over the mind, supplanting reason and being endorsed by the will:

A man may think himself injured, may wish to avenge his wrongs, and then may be persuaded by some reason or other to give up his intention and calm down: I do not call that anger, it is an emotion of the mind which is under the control of reason. Anger is that which goes beyond reason and carries her away with it: wherefore the first confusion of a man's mind when struck by what seems an injury is no more anger than the apparent injury itself: it is the subsequent mad rush, which not only receives the impression of the apparent injury, but acts upon it as true, that is anger, being an exciting of the mind to revenge, which proceeds from choice and deliberate resolve.⁷⁵

On this definition, it is possible to feel emotions of some sort that, insofar as they remain under the control of reason, are not to be considered to be the *passion* of anger. An essential component of the anger then is the endorsement; this seems to entail both, as Seneca says, a cognitive state, i.e., a belief that one was harmed, and the *willful* desire to harm another in revenge. So, although it seems that a desire is the central component of anger on this view, that desire, being the result of 'deliberate resolve' and having requisite, complex concepts, such as 'injury' and 'revenge', must be coupled or imbued with high-level cognitive states. Seneca elaborates on this point:

Our (the Stoics') opinion is that anger can venture upon nothing by itself, without the approval of mind: for to conceive the idea of a wrong having been done, to long to avenge it, and to join the two propositions, that we ought not to have been injured and that it is our duty to avenge our injuries, cannot belong to a mere impulse which is excited without our consent. That impulse is a simple act; this is a complex one, and composed of several parts. The man understands something to have happened: he becomes indignant thereat: he condemns the deed; and he avenges it.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. iii.

⁷⁶ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. i.

2.2.2 Object of anger

As Seneca's account stipulates that anger entails a desire for revenge, it seems to entail that the object of anger is minimally an entity capable of suffering. Seneca, however, does discuss the possibility that the object of anger is an inanimate object, acknowledging that this sometimes occurs:

We are angry, either with those who can, or with those who cannot do us an injury. To the latter class belong some inanimate things, such as a book, which we often throw away when it is written in letters too small for us to read, or tear up when it is full of mistakes, or clothes which we destroy because we do not like them. How foolish to be angry with such things as these, which neither deserve nor feel our anger! 'But of course it is their makers who really affront us.' I answer that, in the first place, we often become angry before making this distinction clear in our minds.⁷⁷

So, Seneca allows that, as a descriptive fact, people do in fact sometimes become angry with inanimate objects and, he says elsewhere, animals. However, Seneca holds that although we can be 'hurt' by inanimate objects and animals, we cannot be 'wronged' by them, since they cannot perform intentional action. Since deliberately assenting to the belief that one was wronged is a necessary condition for becoming angry, it follows that Seneca takes people who are angry with objects and animals to have made a cognitive error; indeed, he says that to become angry with an animal or object is 'the act of a madman'.⁷⁸ It should be understood, then, that, on Seneca's account, although it is a psychological fact that people become angry with non-humans, anger may only take a human as its proper object.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. xxvi.

⁷⁸ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. xxvi.

⁷⁹ 'Proper' should be understood here to mean 'not having made a very basic cognitive mistake'; of course, Seneca's view is that anger is never proper in the moral sense.

2.2.3 Felt experience

Although a desire is the central element of anger on Seneca's view, he nevertheless talks about anger as something that is 'felt' and as a 'human feeling.' He discusses both the hedonic tone of anger and its typical physiological manifestations. With respect to hedonic tone, Seneca allows that anger may be experienced as pleasant. As in the previous section, a distinction between the descriptive and normative is appropriate; that is, Seneca allows that, as a matter of fact, people do tend to perceive revenge as being pleasant; however, he insists that this is an optional feature of the experience and encourages us to turn away from this tendency, saying that even if we act in a way that returns harm for harm for some practical purpose, "Let us use it [revenge] without anger, and not regard revenge as pleasant."⁸⁰ So, again, descriptively, it is possible for anger to be attended by pleasant feelings. However, it seems that Seneca would also insist that anger, even when it has a pleasant element, would also have a negative hedonic tone; for, being injured is unpleasant and, furthermore, anger is 'frenzy' and 'madness', opposed to tranquility, and "Virtue alone is lofty and sublime, nor is anything great which is not at the same time tranquil."⁸¹ I think it would be correct, then, to characterize his position as holding that, descriptively, anger is always unpleasant, and sometimes pleasant; normatively, anger should always be unpleasant.

Seneca acknowledges that there are typical physiological states that are associated with anger, some of these he lists:

The signs of angry men, too, are the same [as madmen]: their eyes blaze and sparkle, their whole face is a deep red with the blood which boils up from the bottom of their heart, their lips quiver, their teeth are set, their hair bristles and stands on end, their breath is laboured and hissing, their joints crack as they twist them about, they groan, bellow, and burst into scarcely intelligible talk, they often clap their hands together and stamp on

⁸⁰ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. xxxiii.

⁸¹ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Ch. xxii.

the ground with their feet, and their whole body is highly-strung and plays those tricks which mark a distraught mind, so as to furnish an ugly and shocking picture of self-perversion and excitement.⁸²

As was previously discussed, however, such physiological symptoms and bodily feelings, whatever they be, are not sufficient in themselves for anger:

Whoever imagines that paleness, bursting into tears, lustful feelings, deep sighs, sudden flashes of the eyes, and so forth, are signs of passion and betray the state of the mind, is mistaken, and does not understand that these are merely impulses of the body. Consequently, the bravest of men often turns pale while he is putting on his armour; when the signal for battle is given, the knees of the boldest soldier shake for a moment; the heart even of a great general leaps into his mouth just before the lines clash together, and the hands and feet even of the most eloquent orator grow stiff and cold while he is preparing to begin his speech. Anger must not merely move, but break out of bounds.⁸³

Looking only at the letter of these two passages, there appears to be a contradiction; first Seneca says that observable bodily behaviors are signs of anger, then he says bodily symptoms are not signs of passions. However, this apparent contradiction can be made sense of: on the one hand, the ‘mere impulses of the body’ are the beginnings of a stirring of a passion and so are not, as I said, sufficient for the presence of a passion; that said, once one consents to anger, endorses it with the will, the emotional, physiological symptoms will not abate as they would if one did not assent, but rather they are almost certain to increase.

Finally, some of the typical feelings and bodily changes associated with anger will be found in both the angry and in the non-angry; indeed, even the sage will “feel certain hints and semblances of passions; but he will be free from the passions themselves.”⁸⁴ We should, therefore, regard the physiological signs and felt emotional experience of anger, on Seneca’s view, as necessary but not sufficient for the passion of anger.

⁸² Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Ch. i.

⁸³ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book Chap. iii.

⁸⁴ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Chap. xvi.

2.2.4 Morality

Seneca held that anger is under no circumstance justified, and many lines of *De Ira* concern its immorality, both in itself and in the types of acts that it tends to inspire. Many reasons are given by Seneca for thinking that anger is inherently immoral. To begin, anger is, by his definition, a state that overrides reason, the ‘lawful ruler’ of the psyche, and destroys tranquility. This is, in itself, already morally problematic insofar as ‘without [calm reason] virtue can do nothing.’^{85, 86}

Seneca elaborates on the nature of anger:

It is equally devoid of self control, regardless of decorum, forgetful of kinship, obstinately engrossed in whatever it begins to do, deaf to reason and advice, excited by trifling causes, awkward at perceiving what is true and just, and very like a falling rock which breaks itself to pieces upon the very thing which it crushes.

Given that this is the case, it is natural that Seneca should be aptly identified with a position that Zac Cogley calls ‘hydraulic pessimism.’ Someone who is a hydraulic pessimist about anger believes that (1) “Anger produces relatively stable motivational effects, which then relatively reliably lead to action,” and (2) “The normal motivational effects that are the result of anger are problematic.”⁸⁷ Concerning what he takes to be the kinds of acts towards which anger tends, Seneca says:

If you choose to view its results and the mischief that it does, no plague has cost the human race more dear: you will see slaughterings and poisonings, accusations and counter-accusations, sacking of cities, ruin of whole peoples, the persons of princes sold into slavery by auction, torches applied to roofs, and fires not merely confined within city-walls but making whole tracts of country glow with hostile flame.⁸⁸

He later continues:

⁸⁵ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book Chapter vii.

⁸⁶ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fifth Book, Ch. iii.

⁸⁷ Cogley, “A Study,” 6.

⁸⁸ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Ch. ii.

There is, then, nothing useful in that hideous and destructive passion of anger, but on the contrary, every kind of evil, fire and sword. Anger tramples self-restraint under-foot, steeps its hands in slaughter, scatters abroad the limbs of its children: it leaves no place unsoiled by crime, it has no thoughts of glory, no fears of disgrace, and when once anger has hardened into hatred, no amendment is possible.⁸⁹

As a consequence of this view, Seneca naturally holds that one should not merely moderate anger, but should eradicate it insofar as is possible. Since anger is, by its nature, ‘disobedient to authority and reason’, he says, “all that we gain by its moderation is that the less there is of it, the less harm it does: wherefore a moderate passion is nothing but a moderate evil.”⁹⁰

A last point concerning the morality of anger is that Seneca holds that anger is never ultimately justified; aside from both the fact that anger is evil by its nature and its effects, it has another deficiency—it is based upon what Seneca holds to be an error of appraisal; he says: “what reason has he [the good man] for hating sinners, since it is error that leads them into such crimes?”⁹¹ And “before a just judge, ignorance would be as effective an excuse as innocence.”⁹² We should not hate people and treat them harshly, as anger tends to do, simply because of making mistakes, says Seneca, for “No one is born wise.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fifth Book, Ch. xli.

⁹⁰ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Ch. x.

⁹¹ Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, Ch. xiv.

⁹² Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. xxvi.

⁹³ Stuart, *De Ira*, Fourth Book, Ch. x.

2.3 The Buddha

*[The Buddha:] Having killed anger you sleep in ease. Having killed anger you do not grieve. The noble ones praise the slaying of anger—with its honeyed crest & poison root—for having killed it you do not grieve.*⁹⁴

As the above quotation makes clear, the early Buddhist attitude towards anger was rather hostile. Although there is a great deal of discussion about anger in the Buddhist canon, it is not easy to find an explicit definition of anger, on par with Aristotle's, either in the Buddhist *suttas* or in the other literature, including the *Abhidhamma* and the *Visudhimagga*, which do contain explicit definitions of other kinds of mental states. That being said, it seems possible to reconstruct a Buddhist account of anger by examining the various texts. Even as I proceed to this task, it seems worth mentioning again that the Buddhist approach is always a practical one; as this is the case, what is of primary importance is the furthering of the explicit goals of Buddhist practice. In other words, it is far less important to have an explicit definition of anger than it is to dispel it.

2.3.1 What is central?

On the classical Buddhist account of anger (*kodha*), I argue, the most central element of the angry state is, just as it was for Aristotle and Seneca, a conative state. My argument for the centrality of this conative aspect is threefold: First, volitional states are of the utmost importance in Buddhist thought and practice. Second, anger is directly opposed to *mettā*, and *mettā* is primarily a conative state. Third, the Pāli terms for a cluster of emotional states that have a conative state as their common ground are sometimes treated and translated interchangeably. Let me elaborate on these three points.

⁹⁴ SN 1.71, "Ghatva Sutta: Having Killed," <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn01/sn01.071.than.html>.

Intentional action (*kamma*) plays a central role in Buddhist practice, whether one aspires to mundane happiness, or to supra-mundane awakening. Concerning the former, it is precisely because of performing wholesome (*kusala*) conduct with body, speech, and mind, that one experiences good mundane results in the present, the future, and in future lives.⁹⁵ So, e.g., if one lets go of anger and substitutes *mettā*, one good result in the present will be the release from unpleasant mental feeling (*domanassa*) and the arising of pleasant mental feeling (*somanassa*). If one does not often get angry and abuse others, she will likely have more friends who will spend time with her and come to her aid later in life if she falls on hard times. If one controls her anger and abstains from killing out of anger, one may experience long life and beauty in a future birth as the fruit (*phala*) of that abstention from killing and anger respectively.

Concerning the latter type of aspiration, the aspiration for liberation, it is again *kamma* that allows one to accomplish her ends:

And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.^{96, 97}

So, given that *kamma* (intentional action) plays such a central role in Buddhist practice and that it is precisely by means of volition (*cetanā*), that an action can be said to be wholesome or unwholesome, it makes sense to think of the conative element as the most important feature of any emotion.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “The result of *kamma* is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that. This is called the result of *kamma*.” AN 6.63, “Nibbedhika Sutta: Penetrative,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.063.than.html>.

⁹⁶ AN 4.235, “Ariyamagga Sutta: The Noble Path,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an04/an04.235.than.html>.

⁹⁷ Liberation is identified here with the end of *kamma*; the liberated individual creates no *kamma* of any kind.

⁹⁸ Cf. Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 80, e.g.

Another reason to think that anger should be understood as primarily a conative state is that anger is said to be opposed to *mettā*, which is primarily a state of goodwill towards its object; in the *Visuddhimagga* it is said:

...Ill will, which is dissimilar to the similar greed, is its [*mettā*'s] far enemy like a foe ensconced in a rock wilderness. So loving-kindness must be practiced free from fear of that; for it is not possible to practice loving-kindness and feel anger simultaneously.⁹⁹

Ill will then—a preference, a wish, or a desire that another come to harm—is, according to this passage, either a necessary condition for anger, or is identical with it. In fact, as was hinted at, some sources have it that anger (*kodha*) and ill will (*vyāpāda*) are synonyms.¹⁰⁰ Now, it is clear to me that in English, ‘anger’ and ‘ill will’ are not precisely synonymous. For, it may be possible that I could feel hatred, which is different from anger, for someone without being angry with them; yet, ill will is necessary for hatred. Even in this case, there is clearly a close relationship between these two emotions; there do, however, seem to be important features by which we distinguish anger from hatred. Different authors have distinguished them variously but what I take to be one prominent, distinguishing feature is bodily feelings; ‘anger’ typically refers to a ‘heated’, emotional state in which one tends to act impulsively, whereas hatred may be described as being ‘cool’ or ‘cold;’ a hateful person could even sometimes be described as ‘icy’ and may be ‘calculating.’ Anger consists, in part, in the ‘boiling of the blood’, clenching of fists, rapid breathing, where hatred need not be so overtly ‘emotional’, yet hatred contains the possibility of erupting into anger or rage.

⁹⁹ Ñāṇamoli, *Vism.*, 313.

¹⁰⁰ Piya Tan, “Vyāpāda,” <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/32.5-Vyapada-piya.pdf>.

On the Buddhist account then, we want to think of something like ill will, broadly understood, as a necessary and central element of anger, but not a sufficient condition for anger.¹⁰¹ This claim is further supported by the analysis of mental states by roots (*mūla*);

Consciousness rooted in hatred (*dosa*) is expounded under the synonymous term aversion (*paṭigha*). *Paṭigha* includes all degrees of aversion, from violent rage to subtle irritation. The word means literally ‘striking against,’ which indicates a mental attitude of resistance, rejection, or destruction.¹⁰²

It is precisely this aversion that is central to anger, as well as to other similar emotional states; this point leads us to the third reason for thinking of anger as primarily conative.

As was touched on above, across different contexts, various Pāli words for states rooted in *dosa* are translated into English in a way that treats them as synonyms; e.g., the word ‘*āghāta*’ is translated as ‘annoyance,’ ‘hatred,’ ‘malice,’ ‘ill will,’ and ‘anger’.^{103, 104, 105, 106, 107} According to De Silva, anger appears ‘as ill will’ in the classification of the hindrances (to the development of wisdom); some Buddhist meditation teachers, including Ajahn Brahm and Gil Fronsdal take ill will, in the context of the hindrances, to be something more what is referred to by the more general term ‘*dosa*’ (aversion), covering a wide range of aversive mental states. Gil Fronsdal says ill will as a hindrance should be understood as:

¹⁰¹ That is, understood in a way that does not require it to have complex, cognitive features—understood in the way it is characterized in the context of the discussion of the hindrances just below.

¹⁰² Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 37.

¹⁰³ Ñāṇamoli, trans., AN 5.161, “Aghatavinaya Sutta: Removing Annoyance,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.161.nymo.html>.

Ñāṇamoli, *Vism.*, 776.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Hatred’: Thanissaro, AN 5.162, “Aghatavinaya Sutta: Subduing Hatred (1).”

¹⁰⁵ ‘Malice’: Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 371.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Ill will’: <http://goo.gl/1Zxeq3>

¹⁰⁷ ‘Anger’: <http://goo.gl/9PNXMg>

the desire to strike out at something. It is motivated by hostility. It manifests as wanting to hurt, attack, push away or turn away from something [in an unskillful way]. It can operate in a range from the subtlest inclinations of mind to the grossest behavior.”^{108, 109}

All this evidence points to the fact that the most central and important feature of anger is that it contains some form of an unwholesome (*akusala*) and aversive conative state. This fact will have important implications concerning anger’s moral status, and will be important as well with respect to the path of practice for the dispelling of anger.

2.3.2 Object of anger

Although most of the discussion of anger in classical texts takes place in a context in which one human is angry toward another human and, in fact, I could not find a single *sutta* in which anger toward an object or animal was discussed, the commentarial literature from the *Majjhima Nikāya* does discuss an example in which it is implicitly allowed that one could become angry with, e.g., the stump of a tree or grass.¹¹⁰ The scarcity of references to anger at non-human objects makes sense insofar as the basic attitude toward anger and related aversive states is that they are states that are to be removed, and practical means for removing them are of great importance; since the most problematic aversive states, insofar as they last the longest, obsess us the most, and cause the most harm, are those that deal with other human beings, it

¹⁰⁸ De Silva, *Introduction.*, 178.

¹⁰⁹ “The Hindrance of Ill Will,” <http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/the-five-hindrances-handouts/the-hindrances-of-ill-will/>,

Ajahn Brahm, *Kindfulness*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2016), Kindle edition, “Working with Obstacles to Kindfulness.”

¹¹⁰ “Further, when one gets angry with the stump (of a tree), a thorn, grass or leaves one should ask oneself: With whom are you angry? Or who is it that is angry? Is it the earth-element or the water-element? To one who reflects on the elements (*dhatumanasikara*) anger in regard to inanimate things vanishes. Therefore the reflection of the elements of the object (internal or external — the thinker or the thought which produces anger) is the different object.”

“The Commentary to the Discourse on the Removal of Distracting Thoughts,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel021.html#ch-2>.

makes perfect sense to focus on those. On the other hand, it is a common experience to become angry with an object and, as evidenced by Seneca's account, this was common in the ancient world as well.

Another reason for thinking that one should regard the Buddhist account as holding that inanimate things may be the object of anger can be discovered by examining a class of Buddhist practices. One of the practices for one in training involves the development of various 'perceptions' (*saññā*); the utmost of these are the perceptions of the three marks of existence, impermanence (*aniccasaññā*), unsatisfactoriness/suffering (*dukkhasaññā*), and not self (*anattasaññā*).¹¹¹ However, in addition to these, there are more mundane perceptions that are also to be developed at times, e.g., the perception of repulsiveness of the body and the loathsomeness of food. These are said to, when properly developed, incline the mind away from pursuing sexual activity and 'the craving of flavors', respectively.¹¹² This facet of the teachings fits into the discussion of anger insofar as it seems possible to perceive something as annoying that is generally not perceived as annoying or to stop perceiving as annoying something that generally is or has been perceived as annoying. In the same way that our perceptions concerning sense pleasures are malleable—i.e., people generally find sex to be agreeable and worth pursuing and to delight in delicious foods—one can 'denourish' and decrease the inclination to perceive an object in a given way or 'nourish' that inclination.¹¹³ Understanding perceptions to be malleable in this way accords with known facts about how people in fact perceive and relate to objects; people may come to relate to inanimate objects in a sexual way, as in the case of certain fetishes e.g., and even in the canonical literature, cases of non-normative perceptions can be

¹¹¹ AN 7.46, "Sañña Sutta: Perceptions," <http://www.accesstoisight.org/tipitaka/an/an07/an07.046.than.html>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Cf. Thera, "The Five Mental Hindrances and their Conquest," <http://www.accesstoisight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel026.html>.

found: “I, a monk, gone to the charnel ground, saw a woman cast away, discarded there in the cemetery. Though some were disgusted, seeing her—dead, evil—lust appeared, as if I were blind to the oozings.”¹¹⁴ If perception is indeed subject to variation of this kind, then it seems clear that anger could similarly be directed toward anything.

A final note about the object of anger is that the reasons given above for thinking that anger could take a non-human as an object, as well as the fact that loving-kindness or compassion might be directed at a group, give us ample reasons to think that it should be allowed that anger and hatred, which are in some sense parallel to those wholesome states, could also be directed at groups.

2.3.3 Felt experience

According to the *Abhidhamma*, anger is a state that is always unpleasant. Recalling that, earlier, hedonic tone on the Buddhist account was discussed under the heading of ‘*vedanā*’, it is important to note that hedonic tone is, again according to the *Abhidhamma*, one of the ‘universal’ mental factors; i.e., mental factors that are present in any mental state. Since anger is a state that is rooted in *dosa* (aversion) and *dosa* is a state that is always accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling (*domanassa*), it is necessary that anger be unpleasant.¹¹⁵

As was alluded to earlier, this insistence on anger being a state that is mentally unpleasant may seem to be a bit of a puzzle and is potentially problematic insofar as it must answer to the objection that anger can putatively feel good; in fact, the canonical quotation above portrays

¹¹⁴ Thag 5.1., “Rajadatta,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thag/thag.05.01.than.html>.

¹¹⁵ Worth noting in passing is that, according to the *Abhidhamma*, a more precise formulation of the relationship between aversion and unpleasant mental feeling is as follows: one experiences aversion just in case one experiences unpleasant mental feeling; this has interesting implications including entailing that those who have achieved the Buddhist goal of liberation never experience unpleasant mental feeling or aversion in any degree. This claim is potentially a matter of dispute. Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*.

anger as having a ‘honeyed crest and poison root’, implying that there is at least some *semblance* of sweetness. Although Aristotle, as we saw, held that anger, in fact, *must* be accompanied by pleasure, the strongest form of the objection may be formulated simply as: anger is sometimes pleasant to the angry. Now, it must be allowed that, at least to casual introspection, anger does seem at times pleasant in experience to some people, and this simply because people sincerely claim that it does. Therefore, those who would maintain that the *Abhidhamma* is “the most perfect expression possible of the Buddha’s unimpeded omniscient knowledge” must answer to the objection.¹¹⁶

That being said, whoever wants to maintain that the *Abhidhamma*’s position is correct have a number of plausible ways to handle this objection. Emotions in general and anger in particular have an episodic nature; that is, I may say “I have been angry for the past ten minutes.” Of course, in a case such as this, I likely do not (necessarily) mean to say that my mind has wholly and continuously been angry throughout this entire period; rather, I mean that the emotional tone of the past ten minutes has predominantly been anger—and even this claim would be suspicious if made by one with sloppy introspective skills or who is not in the habit of being self-aware. On the *Abhidhamma* view, many, many different kinds of mental states have been arising and vanishing over those ten minutes, some of which, perhaps even most of which, were rooted in *dosa*. Almost certainly there were gaps in which one briefly let go of the feelings of ill will, e.g., and thought about something else. So, it is possible that when one experiences pleasure along with anger, it is pleasure that is not rooted in anger, but perhaps in *mettā* (*adosa*) or greed (*lobha*). Upon personal introspection, I find a plausible way in which the Aristotelian notion/common intuition can be made sense of on the *Abhidhamma* account: when one thinks of

¹¹⁶ Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 3.

attaining her goal, as Aristotle put it, namely, the other person being punished, it is possible to then have feelings of self-love. This offers one possible way in which it would be possible to maintain the *Abhidhamma* view, while accounting for pleasant feelings associated with or accompanying anger; for, if on thinking of one's goal being achieved, she lets go of ill will and embraces goodwill for herself, aroused by the thought that she will have properly stood up for herself perhaps, then the *vedanā* would change from unpleasant mental feeling to pleasant mental feeling. Other possibilities exist here: e.g., instead of *mettā* for oneself, perhaps, upon imagining revenge, one feels pride (*māna*), a greedy state that could be accompanied by pleasant feeling, perhaps even alternating with goodwill.¹¹⁷ Another possibility: perhaps one becomes angry and, because of that, the mind and body become aroused—i.e., one's blood starts pumping, respiration speeds up, the body prepares itself for battle, one feels powerful—the mind then switches from an angry state to a state in which one is experiencing bodily sensations as pleasant (probably accompanied by conceit), which is unproblematic for the account.

Yet another possibility exists; drawing more from contemporary philosophical discussions of the phenomena, one might argue that people who describe anger as pleasant are either (1) mistaking a pro-attitude for pleasure, or (2) experiencing pleasure that is based on some kind of loop that is created by having a pro-attitude towards one's own anger—i.e., one *wants* to continue being angry, perhaps because one thinks her anger righteous—and continues having that desire satisfied. All of these and other examples offer plausible explanations of how the *Abhidhamma* account can handle these ordinary intuitions.

¹¹⁷ “Conceit (*māna*): Conceit has the characteristic of haughtiness. Its function is self-exaltation. It is manifested as vainglory. Its proximate cause is greed dissociated from views. It should be regarded as madness.” Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 84.

Still, if one wanted to press further, one might object that sometimes it is apparently not the case that she is switching back and forth between mental states, but experiencing pleasure and pain together with anger and that it is precisely the anger itself that is pleasant. To this, a sensible reply is to call the abilities of the introspector into question. Buddhists claim to have heightened abilities of introspection; that is, they can claim that one's mind must be sharp when introspecting in order to see the relevant data clearly; it is only by means of very sharp discernment that one could discern that states that appear to co-occur to an average mind in fact do not or that some feeling of pleasure that seems to be caused by anger is actually caused by pride. This reply, if unsatisfying, is at least appropriate; for, as I claimed earlier, it is only by introspection that we come to know about the nature of emotional experience. If it is possible to be better and worse at introspection and to conduct an investigation with a sharp or average or dull mind, which there is every reason to believe is the case, then these considerations are highly relevant.

A final reason I will offer to think that this claim that anger is always unpleasant is plausible, is that it seems correct and uncontroversial that goodwill (*mettā*) is always pleasant. Of course, one might dispute this claim and introspection is the only way to settle it; I nevertheless submit that it seems that way to me in experience and that I cannot recall ever having heard someone suggest that pure goodwill (i.e., not a situation in which you have mixed feelings of 'love' and 'hate' in their usual meanings) feels bad. If one believes that anger is, as the tradition declares, opposed to goodwill, then this offers some evidence for the belief that anger is unpleasant.

All that having been said, if one begins without the supposition that the *Abhidhamma* is the most perfect exposition of the nature of reality that exists, there are reasons to call some of its

claims into doubt, even from within the Buddhist tradition. One way to do this is to question whether its contents are the fruits of the introspection of the Buddha or even a wise disciple, or simply what Bodhi admits they seem to be at first glance: “The texts appear to be merely a scholastic exercise in manipulating sets of doctrinal terms, ponderous and tediously repetitive.”¹¹⁸ The possibility of expert abilities of introspection that far surpass the average person within the Buddhist tradition are, I submit, claims that we should take very seriously. If assertions about the nature of experience are made on the basis of such heightened abilities, then they should be given much more evidentiary weight than if they are merely the result of a ‘scholastic exercise’ in interpreting and systematizing prior texts. This standard should stand on its own but is also commonplace within the Buddhist tradition itself.

I propose that the way we should think about this problem is to consider the question of what the hedonic tone of anger is as parallel to the way the same question (but with respect to sense pleasures) is treated in the *Māgandiya Sutta*; in the *sutta* the Buddha engages another recluse, *Māgandiya*, in conversation about sensual pleasures. The Buddha compares sense-pleasures to a burning charcoal pit, and those who indulge in them to lepers cauterizing their wounds at the pit; the conversation continues with the Buddha asking *Māgandiya* to imagine a leper who was healed and then, at a later time, was seized and dragged against his will toward that burning pit:

‘What do you think, *Māgandiya*? Would that man twist his body this way and that?’

‘Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because that fire is indeed painful to touch, hot, and scorching.’

‘What do you think, *Māgandiya*? Is it only now that that fire is painful to touch, hot, and scorching, or previously too was that fire painful to touch, hot, and scorching?’

‘Master Gotama, that fire is now painful to touch, hot, and scorching, and previously too that fire was painful to touch, hot, and scorching.’

‘So too, *Māgandiya*, in the past sensual pleasures were painful to touch, hot, and

¹¹⁸ Bodhi, *Abhidhamma*, 2.

scorching; in the future sensual pleasures will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and now at present sensual pleasures are painful to touch, hot, and scorching. But these beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, have faculties that are impaired; thus, though sensual pleasures are actually painful to touch, they acquire a mistaken perception of them as pleasant.’¹¹⁹

If we treat emotions rooted in *dosa*, including anger, in a way parallel to the treatment of greed-rooted ones here; it could be said that although it is true that just as ordinary people “find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment” in connection with sensual pleasures, they do so as well in connection with angry states; however, they are actually confused about their experience and have a ‘mistaken perception’.¹²⁰ In other words, one can simply allow that there is some sense in which it makes sense to talk about anger being pleasant, but there is a more important sense—perhaps the way in which an epistemically ideal agent, a sage, would perceive it—in which anger is thoroughly unpleasant.

The drawback of this solution is that it highlights a contradiction between the *Sutta Pitaka* (collection of suttas) and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (*Abhidhamma* collection) insofar as, if we take the view that sense pleasures are ‘mistakenly’ perceived as pleasant in the same way as anger is, then the *Abhidhamma* texts should class them as having the same *vedanā*; i.e., it should be possible, on this view, for aversive states to be accompanied by positive hedonic tone or it should be impossible for greed-rooted states (such as enjoying sensual pleasures) to be accompanied by positive hedonic tone. In fact, it seems that the *Abhidhamma* view should hold that states of sensual pleasure as having a negative hedonic tone, since that is ultimately how a Buddha, one without impaired faculties, perceives it, according to the *sutta*. Again, however, if we do not assume that the *Abhidhamma* has privileged status and that there are tensions in the

¹¹⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., MN 75, in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2009).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

canon, I think that this interpretation better accounts for the common reports that claim anger is pleasant and fits in better with the overall body of teachings.

With that being said, I want to add a final emphasis that the view for which I am arguing still maintains that the perception of anger is ‘mistaken’ and is caused by impaired faculties. I emphasize this because I think that it ultimately is correct, based on my personal experience, and that having this understanding can be very important practically; if one understands that anger is not pleasant, but *mettā* is, then the mind will naturally incline away from anger, since it sees it as unpleasant. If this is correct, then a rational person would only intentionally become angry or prolong one’s anger if there were some good reason to do so, perhaps a moral reason.

2.3.4 Morality

Throughout the Pāli Canon, the Buddhist position on anger is consistently that anger is an inherently immoral state of mind that tends to lead to immoral actions.

Aversion itself is unskillful. Whatever an aversive person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskillful. Whatever suffering an aversive person — his mind overcome with aversion, his mind consumed — wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, [with the thought,] ‘I have power. I want power,’ that too is unskillful. Thus it is that many evil, unskillful qualities — born of aversion, caused by aversion, originated through aversion, conditioned by aversion — come into play.¹²¹

It is clear from this passage that aversion is unskillful or unwholesome (*akusala*) prior to it manifesting in any sort of outward, bodily action; merely hating someone or becoming angry with them is already unskillful. Of course, actions driven by anger are going to be unskillful as well; the Buddha too falls into the category of ‘hydraulic pessimists.’

An angry person is ugly & sleeps poorly. Gaining a profit, he turns it into a loss, having done damage with word & deed. A person overwhelmed with anger destroys his wealth. Maddened with anger, he destroys his status. Relatives, friends, & colleagues avoid him.

¹²¹ AN 3.69, “Mula Sutta: Roots,” <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.069.than.html>.

Anger brings loss. Anger inflames the mind. I'll list the deeds that bring remorse, that are far from the teachings. Listen! An angry person kills his father, kills his mother, kills Brahmans & people run-of-the-mill. It's because of a mother's devotion that one sees the world, yet an angry run-of-the-mill person can kill this giver of life. Like oneself, all beings hold themselves most dear, yet an angry person, deranged, can kill himself in many ways: with a sword, taking poison, hanging himself by a rope in a mountain glen. Doing these deeds that kill beings and do violence to himself, the angry person doesn't realize that he's ruined.¹²²

There are countless passages throughout the canon that make it clear that anger is not appropriate under any circumstance. One text tells a story of a previous life of the Buddha in which a king cut off his limbs while he patiently bore this mistreatment without becoming angry.¹²³ Along similar lines, another *sutta* makes it clear that no matter how others treat one, anger is never appropriate but *mettā* always is:

Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be upholding my Teaching. Even then you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.¹²⁴

Practically, anger is a state that one should endeavor to eliminate completely; according to Buddhist theory, this occurs only at the third of four stages of enlightenment, with the fourth stage being complete liberation. So, anger is a state that is never found in an ideal agent, an

¹²² AN 7.6, “Kodhana Sutta: An Angry Person,” <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an07/an07.060.than.html>. (Note: This passage occurs in verse and the format has been changed here.)

¹²³ Piyatissa, *The Elimination of Anger: With two stories retold from the Buddhist texts*, 1994, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/piyatissa/bl068.html>.

¹²⁴ I have drawn from both translations; specifically, I preferred Buddhārakkhita’s ‘following my Teaching’ to Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s “doing my bidding.”

Thanissaro: MN 21, “Kakacupama Sutta: The Simile of the Saw (excerpt),”

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.than.html>.

Buddhārakkhita: MN 21, “Kakacupama Sutta: The Parable of the Saw (excerpt),”

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.budd.html>.

enlightened one. That said, until one reaches the lofty state of the third stage of enlightenment, one is subject to anger. So, until then, there are practical methods that are taught for the regulation of anger and its related, aversive states, as well as for their thorough, though temporary, suppression.

2.4 Conclusion

For each of the three authors that were discussed, a conative state was the central feature of anger. For Seneca and Aristotle, this state was a desire, albeit a complex one, to harm another person in return for a harm done. One consequence of the fact that a desire for revenge was a necessary condition on these views, is that anger then necessarily contains high-level, cognitive elements. One might object that these views therefore make it impossible to say that animals or infants, e.g., could become angry. Some take this to be evidence against any theory of emotion that has such cognitive requirements; this objection is well-stated by Deonna and Teroni with respect to the emotions in general, yet the same objection, *mutatis mutandis*, could be raised against a theory of anger:

We commonly attribute emotions to animals and infants, though this clearly conflicts with such a requirement. Given a choice between dropping the idea that infants and animals have emotions, and dropping...[a cognitively demanding theory of emotion], many would incline towards the latter.¹²⁵

The Buddhist view also potentially faces this objection insofar as it holds that all beings are ‘fettered’ by ill will; since ill will proper is putatively a state that has complex conceptual thought as a necessary condition, it does not seem to be something that is properly attributable to

¹²⁵ Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 55.

infants and animals. The Buddha, according to the *suttas*, anticipates this objection and gives a teaching to his disciples in order to be able to account for it:

[Someone might object to the idea of an infant being fettered by ill will]: A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion ‘beings,’ so how could ill will towards beings arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to ill will lies within him.¹²⁶

De Silva offers a promising way to account for the possibility of animal and infant anger within the Buddhist view, yet maintain our normal intuitions about anger typically being a response to a slight; he does this by distinguishing between several different classes of anger:

Simple anger is a reaction we have when something obstructs our plans; for instance, we kick the ground in a mood of frustration. Anger proper is based on a belief that some offence has been committed to oneself and the desire to set the offence right, or even retaliate. Indignation is the anger over the violation of a moral principle that one cherishes, like not keeping up to a promise or violating the essential ingredient of a good friendship, or on a more objective scale, seeing an injustice done to an innocent person, whose cheap labour is exploited.¹²⁷

So, by this threefold distinction, it is possible to maintain the concept of anger that arises in the context of being slighted, as well as to account for anger in cases where it seems more basic and animalistic, which Seneca said were mere impulses that resemble human emotions. This approach makes it possible to consider a wide range of states as being states of anger, including those with complex cognitive and conative elements, without making those elements necessary conditions for anger. It can then be maintained that there are cases of anger which amount to little more than the simplest bodily and mental reactions to aversive stimuli, as in the case of a child throwing a temper tantrum. However, it can also be said that there are cases in which people have complex states that are constitutive of anger, e.g., a case in which one, having been harmed by her neighbor, specifically wishes ‘I hope you lose your job.’

¹²⁶ MN 64, “Mahāmālunkya Sutta: The Greater Discourse to Mālunkyaṅputta,” <http://www.wisdompubs.org/book/middle-length-discourses-buddha/selections/middle-length-discourses-64-mahamalunkya-sutta>.

¹²⁷ De Silva, *Introduction*, 179.

Concerning anger's object, Aristotle again had the most stringent requirements, holding that only an individual human could be anger's object. Seneca allowed that descriptively anger at objects and animals is possible, but involves a conceptual mistake. The Buddhist account held that it is possible to become angry at both inanimate objects and with groups of people. It seems to me that on this point, the looser restrictions are preferable, since they allow us to call cases that clearly seem to be anger, 'anger'. Imagine a man, Carl, stubs his toe on a chair, howls in pain, undergoes various physiological changes: his eyes bulge, his heart races, his breath quickens, his fists clench. He proceeds to swear at the chair, take it outside, chop it up with an axe, and set it on fire, watching with great delight as it burns. On Aristotle's view, it seems that we must say he was not angry, since the object of his attention was an inanimate object. Imagine another case: Diane is upset after 9/11 and attacks a number of Sikhs precisely because she wants revenge and associates the wearing of a turban with terrorism. Again, on Aristotle's view, even though she explicitly seeks revenge for a conspicuous injustice, she cannot be said to be angry since the object of her emotion is a group. Although Aristotle does allow that 'hate' can be directed at groups and we do refer to such acts as 'hate crimes', it seems that if her motive is, as was stipulated, revenge, brought on by a distinct wrong, we should want to call that anger. Therefore, it seems that Aristotle's account, being so rigid, is unable to account for a number of cases that many people would want to describe as 'anger'. Less rigid accounts seem more capable of doing justice to the way we normally employ the word and will tend to avoid petty disputes. If that is so, then either there should be very good reasons for adopting such a narrow definition or we should reject it.

Similar reasoning applies to discussions of hedonic tone; that is, stringent requirements should only be adopted if there are very good reasons for doing so. This applies to the

Abhidhamma view that anger must be unpleasant and it applies as well, I think, to Aristotle's stipulation that anger must be in some sense pleasant. We ought to be slow to adopt a view that makes it impossible to experience anger without pleasure, and slow to adopt a view that makes it impossible to experience anger as pleasant.

Finally, these three theories vary concerning the moral status of anger; Aristotle held that anger would sometimes be moral and that the practical consequences sometimes render anger the best response. Seneca's view and the Buddhist view hold that anger is under no circumstance moral—anger has exclusively negative effects and it ought to be eradicated if possible. It is precisely this debate concerning whether anger should merely be moderated or whether one should endeavor to eliminate it completely that will occupy the third and final chapter.

Chapter 3: An escape from anger

3.0 Introduction

In the previous section, three positions were presented; Aristotle held that anger was sometimes an appropriate response and championed moderation, thinking that the elimination of anger would be problematic. Both Seneca and the early Buddhists took the position that anger is never appropriate and it seems correct to class both as ‘eliminativist’ views although there are important differences between those views. These two positions appear to be the only serious options available, as no one advocates, e.g., simply abandoning oneself to anger¹²⁸.

In this chapter, I will argue that we should be eliminativists with respect to anger. I will attempt to establish this by addressing various preservationist arguments from the philosophers Zac Cogley and Emily McRae, in an attempt to clear away the idea that anger is morally required. I will proceed by drawing from empirical literature and the reader’s experience to support (what I take to be the uncontroversial) claim that anger has harmful consequences. Then, I will argue that Buddhism has resources both to eliminate or largely attenuate anger, and to effectively approach the problems we face without anger and the burdens it carries.

¹²⁸ With some caveats; Kristin Borgwald, e.g., suggests that ‘selfless women’ ought not to repress or suppress their anger. This does not amount to a claim that anger ought to normally be left unrestrained. Even if this were true, it would not count against the eliminativist view I am arguing for, as one could (as one possible option) simply allow that people with strong psychological imbalances, as in this case, (i.e., they think that their own needs and well-being are not important), should not repress anger in order to serve the psychological function of increasing one’s sense of self-worth, and, once this has been accomplished, strive to eliminate it.

3.1 Moderation

For a modern defense of a moderation view, I call the reader's attention to Zac Cogley's "A Study of Virtuous and Vicious Anger." In the text, Cogley argues that there are three psychological functions of anger: appraisal, motivation, and communication.¹²⁹ He argues that anger can, in a given case, be excellent or deficient with regard to each of these three functions. A person whose anger is excellent in all three respects can be said to be possessed of virtue with respect to anger.¹³⁰ I want to focus on two of anger's putative functions, which are related to claims that are commonly used to defend 'moral anger': (1) Anger has desirable motivational effects, and (2) anger is useful in moral communication.

3.1.1 Motivation

According to Cogley, a necessary condition for moral anger is that one's anger is excellent with respect to the function of motivation, "One should...be motivated by anger to act in the right way to be excellent."¹³¹ He continues to argue for the inclusion of anger in our emotional set by contrasting the motivational effects of anger with those of two other emotions, sadness and fear. He says:

The characteristic motivational responses of sadness are to yield or submit; for fear they are to escape or avoid. Certainly such responses to a dispute may sometimes be rational, but they do nothing to address or change the terms of the dispute. Both sadness and fear can mean giving in or giving up. Anger has more beneficial motivational effects in that it moves angry people to engage with perceived wrongdoers.¹³²

¹²⁹ Cogley, "A Study", 199.

¹³⁰ He refers to virtuous anger as 'patience'. Cogley comments: "I largely avoid describing the angrily virtuous person as 'patient' to avoid the contemporary connotations of passivity and quietude associated with the term." Cogley, "A Study", 200.

¹³¹ Cogley, "A Study", 203.

¹³² Cogley, "A Study", 207.

There are a number of points to address in unpacking this passage. First, although one might admit that the typical motivational effects of anger are more desirable under certain circumstances than those of sadness or fear—i.e., addressing some problem rather than submitting or avoiding it may be the best course of action—one might still hold that anger is not *necessary* to motivate us to address wrongs. Cogley, however, makes a stronger claim, barring this middle ground; he says: “...given that [agents are not perfectly beneficent], anger is *required* for us to take the stands that need taking, rather than passively acquiesce in the face of wrongdoing.” (emphasis mine)¹³³

For Cogley’s strong claim—that anger is a moral necessity—to be defended, it must be the case that anger is the only way or the best way, all things considered, to achieve the motivational end in question in at least some cases.¹³⁴ Although it seems true enough that sadness or fear tend to have drastically different motivational effects than anger, by no means are these the only emotional or motivational states available to the moral agent. A sense of duty, compassion and concern (including self-compassion), or bravery can be powerful motivators that do not have the negative effects associated with anger; it is by no means clear that there are any cases in which anger is the *only* emotion (or state) capable of motivating one to action. Agents regularly cope with situations in which those that they care for have come to harm (but not at the hand of a moral agent) without anger. In such cases, in fact, anger is not only not required, but is an inappropriate response, ‘the act of a madman’, in Seneca’s words. Some might still claim that, where moral agents must be confronted, anger is needed to overcome fear of confrontation. Yet, anger is not thought to be *needed* to overcome fear in other fearsome situations where unpleasant

¹³³ Cogley, “A Study”, 208.

¹³⁴ This point is natural, and it, or some variant, is made by others, e.g., Pettigrove 2012.

interactions with other agents are involved, e.g., to undergo a panel-style job interview or to talk with one's children or significant other about an uncomfortable topic. There is no doubt that anger tends to promote approach rather than withdrawal and does lead people into confrontations they might be reluctant to initiate and would fear absent the emotion, however, the same effects can be obtained by drinking alcohol; from this it does not follow that alcohol is needed in order to 'take the stands that need taking.'¹³⁵ It seems that the only thing we can say anger offers motivationally that is not offered by other emotions is that it makes confrontation easier and perhaps less unpleasant. Glen Pettigrove makes a point in a slightly different context that applies well here; even if it is difficult to (motivate oneself to) confront others without the aid of anger: "by itself that would not pose a problem, since ease has seldom been advanced as one of virtue's selling points."¹³⁶

3.1.1 Correction and Communication

Another typical defense of 'moral anger' concerns what Pettigrove calls the 'communicative claim', that "anger communicates important moral messages."¹³⁷ This corresponds to what Cogley called the 'communicative' function of anger. According to Cogley, anger is not merely a personal matter, but a social one:

Virtue with respect to anger is determined not just by what you do, but by what you do together with others in expressing and communicating your anger to them in an effort to influence their appraisals and behaviors...[Angry] communications are...observed, responded to, or ignored by other people and the responses—or lack thereof—provide another opportunity for emotional engagement and transformation.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Seneca may make this same point.

¹³⁶ Glen Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," *Ethics* 122 (2012): 341-370, doi:10.1086/663230.

¹³⁷ Pettigrove, "Meekness," 359.

¹³⁸ Cogley, "A Study," 210.

There are two distinct ways in which anger is claimed to be useful for moral communication: (1) For communicating with a being who has committed some (apparent) harm or wrong; (2) for communicating with those who have done no harm, but who you wish to join you in condemning some acts or who you wish to motivate to some action by causing them to become angry.

According to Cogley, effectively communicating anger requires attention to cultural 'display rules'.¹³⁹ On Cogley's view, when one correctly displays anger, she aims to communicate to her anger's object and others that she appraises the object of that anger's conduct as wrong.¹⁴⁰ There is no doubt that anger sometimes does send this message, or that anger sometimes does cause people to share one's appraisal of a situation and to motivate them accordingly. However, anger is clearly not the only way to send this message; e.g., one can simply say: "I feel that you committed an injustice." Neither is calling others to anger the only way to convince others to share your appraisal, since merely bringing the facts the attention of others may do the trick. One could argue, however, as I think is the prevalent intuition, that anger is useful in cases where the interlocutor is not disposed to care about moral matters or to be sensitive to normal or subtle communication. Cogley discusses one case that features just this sort of interlocutor, quoting from the work of Jody Miller:

Girls' responses to harassment, when assertive or aggressive, often resulted in more vicious mistreatment, especially in the forms of gender harassment and violent overtures. Their attempts to defend themselves were read by young men as disrespect, and the incidents quickly escalated into hostile confrontations when young women challenged young men's sexual and gender entitlements. Thus, young women were in a lose lose situation. Every available avenue for responding to sexual harassment reproduced their disempowered positions vis-a-vis young men.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Cogley, "A Study," 212.

¹⁴⁰ Cogley, "A Study", 211.

¹⁴¹ Qtd. in: Cogley, "A Study," 212-213.

Original source: Jody Miller, *Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and Gendered Violence*, (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

This case is meant, by Cogley, to show a possible instance in which angry communication may result in a misconstrual of its message due to non-sensitivity to different display rules across cultures. My purpose is different: I want to highlight a clear case where anger is not only ineffective for communicating, but makes the situation worse. Recognizing that anger can sometimes fail to have the desired effect (and may worsen the situation) as in the case above, yet wanting to maintain that anger can be an excellent response, Cogley rejects what I will call a ‘success approach’ and adopts an ‘idealized success approach’, saying:

We should count a person as communicatively excellent when she displays her anger in a way that would be received well by suitably virtuous interlocutors. Saying exactly when someone’s angry communication is excellent, excessive, or deficient will thus be a complicated matter in that it will depend on characterizations of how compassionate, humble, temperant, just, and prudent people would respond to a given bout of angry communication.¹⁴²

In other words, *ceteris paribus*, anger is virtuous if virtuous people would receive it well. This is surely a puzzle. The only reason that the claim that anger is sometimes justified or virtuous was plausible was that it actually had beneficial effects, one of which was that it actually communicated important moral information. If we take away the beneficial effects in precisely the kinds of cases in which we most hope anger will help, then the entire project of trying to make anger seem justified loses much of its force. We do not care much whether, by becoming angry, one can get her virtuous spouse to wipe the peanut butter off the rim of the jar before screwing the lid back on, nor do we care about other trifles. We want to use anger, if we want it at all, to prevent or correct serious injustice or harm. Yet, those who are most in need of moral correction may be those who are least sensitive to angry communications of any kind. On the

¹⁴² Cogley, “A Study,” 213.

other hand, people who are ‘compassionate, humble, temperant, just, and prudent’ would almost certainly receive a clear, non-angry communication just as well as an angry one.

If we consider another of the other examples that were discussed, the failings of the idealized success criterion are further highlighted; Cogley says: “a particularly cutting reply to the insult you direct at me might be excellent in being just the thing to get you to reconsider your behavior.”¹⁴³ This example, however, implicitly draws upon an actualized success approach. If, in fact, a cutting remark, uttered in anger, is effective at getting someone to reconsider her behavior, then that certainly offers some reason in favor of angry communication. However, as before, there is no reason to think that an angry response would be needed in order to get a ‘compassionate, humble, temperant, just, and prudent’ agent to reconsider her behavior (assuming that the behavior is actually vicious) or that getting angry is a necessary element of the response—i.e., one might just make the cutting remark without anger. There is, however, every possibility that an angry reply will worsen the situation, making one’s relationship with the other worse and possibly escalating the conflict.

Another problem with Cogley’s idealized success approach is that it seems to imply that, in the case of Miller’s example, the young women in question would have been communicating excellently by expressing anger even if they knew that doing so would, in fact, make everyone involved worse off; this result seems highly unsatisfactory. Of course, I have stipulated that *everyone* would be worse off in this example in order to make the point. But it is clearly possible that there would be some benefits accrued to the young women because of expressing themselves angrily at mistreatment. Cogley says:

An excellently angry person rightly looks with pride toward disputes where she effectively communicates her complaint (she avoids meek capitulation) while not resorting to insult or

¹⁴³ Cogley, “A Study,” 207.

injury (she avoids aggressive behavior), even when she fails to achieve what she aimed with the assertively resistant confrontation.¹⁴⁴

Surely there are times when standing up for oneself or engaging in ‘assertively resistant confrontation’ are at least among possible virtuous responses; neither can there be any doubt that doing so may carry with the act certain psychological benefits for the resistant.¹⁴⁵ However, it is once again not clear that assertive resistance needs the assistance of anger.

If one is worried about actual success—that is, that one’s communication achieves some moral goal, ‘influenc[ing]...appraisals and behaviors...emotional engagement and transformation,’ then, it might be argued, that although angry expression may sometimes fail to achieve these goals, the typical ‘display rules’ for angry expression, e.g., vocal tone and volume, bodily posture, facial expression, are *sometimes*, in actuality, very effective, even the best means for achieving those goals. This claim is plausible; it does seem that there is something primal about angry expression that makes it likely that humans will (sometimes) be disposed to respond to bouts of anger in certain, possibly predictable ways. If typical features of the expression of anger are indeed the best tool for achieving moral ends in some cases, e.g., by posturing to get someone to cease performing an immoral action, then that would indeed offer some good reason to at least consider anger as an appropriate response. That being said, it seems that a more appropriate test for excellence in angry communication emerges as something like: “Does the person who is communicating angrily have good reasons to think that there is a good chance that this type of communication will effect the desired kinds of changes and will make the situation better rather than worse for all involved (or at least oneself).”

¹⁴⁴ Cogley, “A Study,” 209.

¹⁴⁵ However, the legend of the Buddha patiently enduring his mutilation (in a former life) and murder or Socrates refusing to flee and drinking poison point to plausible examples of non-resistant virtue even in the face of the worst kind of injustice.

Once one adopts this criterion, it is worth thinking about whether anger is necessary for achieving desired consequences, even in cases where prototypical angry displays are deemed the best action. The Buddhist tradition has a distinction that I feel speaks well on this point; one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, ‘Right Speech’ (*Samma Vaca*), may be analyzed into five complementary pairs. It is said that speech may be timely or untimely, true or false, beneficial or unbeneficial, harsh or gentle, spoken with a mind of goodwill or spoken with inner hate.¹⁴⁶ There are a number of *suttas* according to which the Buddha explicitly endorses using harsh speech as a tool, e.g.:

Now at that time a baby boy was lying face-up on the prince's lap. So the Blessed One said to the prince, ‘What do you think, prince: If this young boy, through your own negligence or that of the nurse, were to take a stick or a piece of gravel into its mouth, what would you do?’

‘I would take it out, lord. If I couldn't get it out right away, then holding its head in my left hand and crooking a finger of my right, I would take it out, even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have sympathy for the young boy.’

‘In the same way, prince...In the case of words that the *Tathagata* [the Buddha] knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & disagreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them’.¹⁴⁷

There are a number of other passages from the canon which discuss this facet of the teachings: in one case the Buddha is said to refer to someone repeatedly as a ‘worthless man’, in another he has a discussion with a horse trainer in which he explains that he sometimes trains people by harsh means (namely, teaching about the connection between bad conduct and unfortunate consequences, e.g., future birth in hell). The point here is to highlight the fact that

¹⁴⁶ Thanissaro, trans., MN 21, “Kakacupama Sutta: Simile of the Saw (excerpt),” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.than.html>.

Buddharakkhita, trans., MN 21, “Kakacupama Sutta: Parable of the Saw (excerpt),” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.budd.html>.

¹⁴⁷ MN 58, “Abhaya Sutta: To Prince Abhaya (On Right Speech),” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.058.than.html>.

the harshness of the (speech) act, the actual consequences of that act, and the intention and emotional state of the speaker come apart. If this is correct then there needs to be some additional reason for actually becoming angry, even if one wants to make use of the typical behavioral features of anger to accomplish her end in a given case. I have thus far argued that there is no such strong reason, yet, before claiming I have met the burden of argument, I want to consider one more possibility, which is discussed by philosopher Emily McRae.

3.2 Tantric anger

Emily McRae, in *Metabolizing Anger: A Tantric Buddhist Solution to the Problem of Anger* offers a potential third alternative to the moderation and elimination approaches: rather than moderate or eliminate anger, we should transform it.

How precisely this is to be done is only touched on in the article, however, she does discuss this in brief, stating that this is done by means of: “contemplative practices that function as therapies for the emotion.”¹⁴⁸ Through the course of practice, one is to contemplate that all blame should be directed toward “one’s own ego-clinging and the accompanying inability to fully comprehend the full moral significance of other members of the moral community.”¹⁴⁹ In so doing,

We are invited to radically revalue our suffering (both the suffering that causes anger and the suffering caused by anger), learning to see it as an opportunity to disrupt our habits of privileging the self in morally problematic ways. By engaging in practices such as these, one metabolizes anger; the end state of such practices is tantric anger.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Emily McRae, “Metabolizing Anger: A Tantric Buddhist Solution to the Problem of Moral Anger,” *Philosophy East and West* 65 (2015): 473, doi:10.1353/pew.2015.0041

¹⁴⁹ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 473.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The ‘tantric anger’ or ‘that which is like anger’ has a number of qualities that distinguish it both from normal or feigned anger. Unlike ‘normal anger’, metabolized anger is non-compulsive and can be dropped at will; it is oriented toward beneficence, being ‘grounded in love and compassion’, and therefore lacks a desire to harm.¹⁵¹

This anger (tantric anger) becomes qualitatively different from what it was before (normal anger). In moderation views, such as Aristotle’s, the anger is moderated but not transformed, and therefore moderated anger is still, for the most part, normal anger.¹⁵²

McRae emphasizes, through the use of a traditional metaphor, that tantric anger is also unlike feigned anger insofar as one actually becomes angry and then transforms that emotion, as opposed to never becoming angry in the first place, “The peacock does not pretend to eat the poison; it actually eats and is able to metabolize it.”¹⁵³

McRae is critical of both ‘feigned anger’ and moderated, normal anger, holding that they both have moral drawbacks. Concerning the former, she implicitly claims that ‘feigned anger’, while potentially ‘a part of an effective moral agent’s repertoire’, is lacking the energetic and motivational intensity that anger brings, which will render ‘feigned anger’ unable to rise to the moral occasion in some cases, making an eliminativist approach to anger potentially morally problematic.¹⁵⁴

‘Normal anger’, alternatively, is morally problematic insofar as it “includes, or at least is usually accompanied by, a desire to harm the one who does (or is perceived as doing) wrong” and, in fact, often harms not only its object but the angered one as well; for this reason, normal

¹⁵¹ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 472-474.

¹⁵² McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 478.

¹⁵³ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 473.

¹⁵⁴ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 473-474.

anger carries with it ‘serious moral dangers’ which its mere moderation may not be sufficient to address.¹⁵⁵

‘Tantric anger’ or ‘metabolized anger’, however, is claimed to be capable of accomplishing the moral work we sometimes want anger to do without the drawbacks of ‘normal anger’:

Metabolized anger makes use of the desire to harm by recruiting its power and energy into a larger project of beneficence and spiritual/moral development. This is what makes metabolized anger so useful: it neither represses the desire to harm nor gives it free reign, but rather transforms it.¹⁵⁶

By not eliminating anger, but rather by transforming it into tantric anger when it does arise, one gets, it seems, all the benefits of anger with none of its drawbacks, since it is situated in “the presence of an overarching deeply ingrained, caring orientation (*bodhicitta*).”¹⁵⁷

3.2.1 Puissance

I want to begin by responding to McRae’s claim about energy and power by discussing one possible alternative energy source, so to speak—specifically, a sense of duty. To develop this idea, I will relate a relevant event in which I was involved a number of years ago. I scarcely recount this tale, primarily for fear of immodesty, but it is exceedingly appropriate to the discussion at hand. I will try to make the details as accurate as possible.

I was driving home from working in downtown Phoenix one afternoon and saw two people beating up a third person. The third person was on the ground and one of the others was stomping on him. I felt that I had a moral duty to assist in the situation since it was two against one and pulled my car over. Without much thought, I jumped out of the car and began approaching the scene. I shouted ‘HEY!!’, trying to appear ferocious and continued approaching. The young man who had been doing the stomping immediately retreated to the nearby bus stop where perhaps half a dozen or so bystanders were looking

¹⁵⁵ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 469, 474.

¹⁵⁶ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 474.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

on. The other assailant, a large young woman, stopped beating the man on the ground and approached me. She started yelling at me and telling me that the man hit her sister and that this was street justice and I didn't understand how it was on the street. I said, "Okay, it's over" and remained calm but without backing away, since doing so I feared would show weakness and draw aggression from her. The young man who had been beaten soon staggered to his feet and fled the scene, at which point I immediately excused myself and got back in my car.

As I said, this was many years ago now, but as I recall it, there was no anger in my heart throughout the episode; it was absolutely not the motivating force behind my action. I felt primarily moved by a sense of duty and compassion, yet was able to 'feign' anger to some degree and it seemed to be highly effective—the beating stopped and I did not have to engage with the assailants physically. The victim was saved a more severe beating and the assailants were saved from further harm to themselves through the act itself, or possible consequences such as jail time if the victim had been more severely injured, e.g. I take this to count as evidence against the idea that a desire to harm is somehow a necessary condition for being powerfully motivated and energized in a way that is apparent to others. Since McRae gives no evidence to support her claim apart from an implicit appeal to experience, the burden of proof required to render it suspicious is, I think met by this anecdotal evidence.

3.2.2 Spiritual development

Aside for its usefulness in combatting injustice, McRae argues that tantric anger may be useful for moral or spiritual development. She says "Sometimes it is useful to be angry at one's own faults to motivate overcoming them."¹⁵⁸ Again, she argues that tantric anger offers an effective mean between the two alternatives being discussed—normal anger and feigned anger. Feigned anger cannot work in this context, she argues, because "Frustration directed at oneself

¹⁵⁸ McRae, "Metabolizing Anger," 475.

could not...be feigned, since presumably one would be aware that it is feigned and so it would lose most, if not all, of its efficacy.”¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, if one were to employ normal anger, one would merely exacerbate one’s condition:

We would only be...adding another affliction—anger—to the afflictions we already have. Even if one were effectively to eliminate the original affliction through anger, it seems unlikely that the whole process would yield any net benefit. I would not be much better off, in terms of moral and spiritual development, if I were to replace my jealousy, for example, with self-directed anger and self-hatred.¹⁶⁰

By avoiding these two extremes and transforming anger into an ally, McRae argues, one can effectively foster spiritual development in her own case:

The desire to ‘mortally strike’ one’s dysfunctional habits has the intensity and urgency of normal (un-metabolized) anger, but is oriented toward beneficence, in this case one’s own moral development and happiness. By directing one’s anger at one’s own bad habits, the urge to do harm (which is characteristic of normal anger) is recruited in the larger project of moral self-cultivation and is thereby transformed.¹⁶¹

According to the passage, it is ‘by directing anger at one’s own bad habits’ that the transformation of the desire to harm occurs; although I readily admit ignorance of and lack of experience with tantric practices, this seems questionable insofar as it is unclear to me why the result of directing anger at one’s faults would transform it, rather than heaping affliction on affliction. Putting this aside, it seems that it might be, as I argued was the case for dealing with injustices, that there are preferable alternative methods for dealing with one’s faults. McRae clearly acknowledges the existence of alternatives, yet still believes that this method will be useful:

Sometimes (perhaps usually) straightforward love, compassion, and forgiveness are more effective methods for dealing with one’s own faults, just as they can be more effective in dealing with other people. But when these methods are not efficacious, or when we

¹⁵⁹ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 476.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

already feel persistently angry about our faults, a moral agent should learn to metabolize her anger.¹⁶²

Fair enough. If, in fact, these methods are efficacious and nothing else is, and if the net benefits outweigh any harms, then this seems like a perfectly reasonable strategy for dealing with anger, especially given that it has already arisen. Of course, we may still wonder if anger is actually necessary for this purpose. One way to proceed along this line of inquiry is to examine actual, practical, alternatives from the classical Buddhist texts. The *Vitakkasaṅḥana Sutta*, which was briefly discussed earlier, outlines five techniques for dealing with unwholesome mental and emotional states; if the first four fail, one is encouraged to apply the fifth method, which is described as follows:

If...there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind...then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside.¹⁶³ With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too...a monk beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind.¹⁶⁴

Now, the imagery used in the metaphor here is quite violent; however, it should be understood, I think, that anger is neither being thought to be required nor being recommended in this case for several reasons. Just as McRae noted, using anger to combat anger would be unlikely to be effective and would seem to be creating an underlying, habitual tendency to become angry, which seems counterproductive. According to Buddhaghosa's commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the relevant passage means that "The unskillful state of mind [anger, e.g.,] should be

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Thanissaro Bhikku has it that a contemplative should "crush his mind with his awareness" and Soma Thera says: "beat down the (evil) mind by the (good) mind." Cf.: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.than.html> & <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.soma.html>

¹⁶⁴ Bhikku Bodhi, trans., MN 20, in *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 278.

checked by the skillful state of mind.” Since anger is not a skillful state of mind, it cannot be that anger is being checked by anger if Buddhagosa is correct. He continues to explain that, in relation to this metaphor, it should be understood that a contemplative should follow the instruction by ‘whipping up great energy.’¹⁶⁵ This passage, then, seems to suggest that one can use force and energetic effort without actively cultivating or making use of anger for that purpose, which is in line with the arguments I have offered this far.

3.3 Benefits and burdens of anger

3.3.1 Benefits

I have now argued that there is no good reason to think that there are any advantages conferred by anger that cannot be obtained without actually being angry, yet it cannot be denied that there are desirable effects that come with anger; the motivational and communicative effects as discussed above are not exhaustive of these. I want to briefly discuss some specific cases of these other benefits and try to ward off the idea that these alternatives might offer a justification for anger.

One, as yet undiscussed benefit concerns the effects of anger on others’ views of oneself; e.g., one study found that in political and business contexts “anger expressions created the impression that the expresser was competent,” which resulted in higher rates of ‘status conferral’ than did expressions of sadness.¹⁶⁶ Another study found that angry expression sometimes led to

¹⁶⁵ “The Removal of Distracting Thoughts” with commentary, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel021.html#fn-1>.

¹⁶⁶ Larissa Tiedens, “Anger and Advancement Versus Sadness and Subjugation: The Effect of Negative Emotion Expressions on Social Status Conferral,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, no. 1 (2001): 86, 93. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.80.1.86.

higher rates of concession in some types of negotiation scenarios.¹⁶⁷ There are no doubt numerous desirable social effects to add to this list; none of that is in dispute. However, the fact that anger confers social benefits in the context of business and politics is not enough to, in itself, conclude that anger is sometimes a moral emotion, but only an expedient one. A one-dimensional analysis of this kind leaves out many important facts that would be relevant to whether anger should be counted as a moral response. The fact that lying sometimes confers an advantage in politics or business, as a parallel example, does not, I think, provide good reasons to think that lying is therefore a moral response. To take a more extreme case, I do not doubt that beating people cruelly would lead to greater rates of concessions even than angry expressions.

Aside from these social effects, one might claim that anger has desirable cognitive effects; e.g., one might argue that a lessening of risk-aversion and optimism about one's prospects could be beneficial in some contexts and anger might thereby be justified in such cases. Or, one might claim that, as one study found, anger may tend to 'inhibit processing of nontarget information and enhance selective attention,' which makes anger useful at times.¹⁶⁸ Such arguments still fail to count as good reasons to regard anger as a moral response; the former because accurate assessment of risk and likelihood of success should be praised whereas cases in which inaccurate assessments are paired with lucky outcomes offer nothing in the way of reasons for promoting anger. The enhancement of selective attention might, however, seem like a simple, cognitive benefit of anger, and, in fact, I can imagine primitive (and even nonprimitive) scenarios in which this might confer an actual advantage in some cases. However, this advantage

¹⁶⁷ Hajo Adam and Jeanne Brett, Context matters: The social effects of anger in cooperative, balanced, and competitive negotiation situations, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 61 (2015): 44-58, doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2015.07.001.

¹⁶⁸ Anne Finucane, "The effect of fear and anger on selective attention," *Emotion* 11 (2011): 970-974, doi: 10.1037/a0022574.

carries with it a heavy burden insofar as this ‘enhancement’ is not under voluntary control and is an unintelligent, uneducated process. In fact, it may be that the last thing I in a dangerous situation, e.g., is the inability to pull my attention away from the object of my anger. It seems that in dangerous scenarios where there are physical threats, it would be preferable to have a well-disciplined, educated mind, such as is developed through martial arts, for example, which would make anger, again, unnecessary.

3.3.2 Burdens

Given that there are advantages to anger, if there were no drawbacks to it, relative to the other options, it would be just as good a response as any. However, that anger has many drawbacks and dangers is not a contentious claim.

As I discussed previously, there is no single definition of ‘anger’ and different people think about it differently. That being said, each of the accounts of anger that were discussed in detail in chapter 2 shared an important element, as far as morality is concerned—namely, a hostile intention was a central and essential element of anger. Whether or not one’s own theory of emotion makes conative states in general or ill will in particular necessary for anger or not, there is widespread agreement that anger is often, and perhaps necessarily accompanied by, if not constituted by, hostility. This being the case, it is possible to point to that hostility, *inter alia*, as a wrong-making feature of anger.

Anger, on my view, is problematic in at least four ways, being associated with or constituted by four ethically problematic states or behaviors: (1) hostility, (2) loss of self-control, (3) cognitive distortions, and (4) intentionally harmful behaviors. Again, as a hostile conative state of some kind was a central element of each of the theories surveyed and is particularly in need of further analysis, some discussion is warranted.

Of the range of conative states that may be implicated in anger, from having a pre-personal, subliminal tendency to hostility to merely wishing that a person suffers, to full blown revenge motivation, the proper desire to harm that was the primary and necessary component of anger on the Aristotelian and Senecan view of anger (and was one possible, perhaps the most typical component on the Buddhist view) is particularly morally problematic. The desire to harm, on this analysis, entails wanting a person to come to harm and the other's harm being the end at which one actually aims. This should importantly be distinguished from desiring another end that has harm as an incidental or necessary consequence, for example, a doctor desiring the health of a patient who causes her some pain by giving her an injection or even killing a poisonous spider (without enjoyment) in order to safeguard one's family. At other times, it may be (perhaps often) that these states come mixed: one wants to make sure that society is safe from a child molester, perhaps, but also feels angry at him and wants to make him suffer; perhaps both motivations are present simultaneously or alternate, varying in degrees.

I want to begin to attempt a justification of my claim that ill will is a wrong-making feature of anger by reflection on an imagined case (which is actually a blend of true events) that I think should stir our intuitions. It is easy to imagine someone with ill will behaving in the following way in conversation:

Ernie: I have a friend who, as a child, was the victim of child molestation and continues to suffer because of it to this day. I'm telling you right now: If I knew that I would not be sent to prison or suffer other consequences, I would personally kill that person.

Frida: What is the point of that? Where is the good in that?

Ernie: It would make me feel better.

This final declaration is unaltered and is etched in my memory—that it would make him feel good. Here we have a perfect example of revenge motivation, complete with a desire to perform the act oneself and the prospect of pleasure at achieving your end. Again, the act is not

being conceptualized as a necessary evil, i.e., a means to an end, perhaps to prevent others from being harmed, or something to be accomplished (regrettably) out of a sense of duty, as Seneca thought was permissible; the act of killing the other person, personally, perhaps with his bare hands, perhaps drawing it out to make him suffer, is precisely what he is aiming at and the thought of doing this brings pleasure.

A proper desire to harm such as this is, I think, clearly a vicious state. We should never aim at or desire *as an end* the suffering or harm of another being. It is a rare and, indeed, a shocking event when one hears someone (especially, as in this case, a professor of ethics), announce that he has a desire to kill someone, that this is his end, without making any reference whatsoever to the welfare of beings or the good. This shock, I think, is the appropriate response and is connected with the correct intuition that this declaration is outside of the bounds of normal ethical discourse.

One way to bolster this argument is to, following a Buddhist line, suggest that one seek out experiences in which passions are completely absent, and to investigate one's own psychology and morality at those times. According to the Buddhist teachings, ill will, *inter alia*, is a hindrance to discernment that weakens wisdom and, as such, one should seek to overcome it. Until this is accomplished, one's perceptions and views will be distorted by aversion, greed, and delusion.

Without having overcome...[sense desire, ill will, doubt, restlessness and remorse, and sloth and torpor] it is impossible for... [one] whose insight thus lacks strength and power, to know his own true good, the good of others, and the good of both.¹⁶⁹

The Buddhist tradition holds, and my limited experience suggests to me, that, in the absence of such cognitive distortions, one with a clear mind will see that in fact these states are

¹⁶⁹ Nyaponika Thera, ed., "The Five Mental Hindrances and Their Conquest: Selected Texts from the Pali Canon and the Commentaries," 1994, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel026.html>.

inherently opposed to what is good. This is, perhaps, akin to a kind of intuitionist defense given by W.D. Ross; i.e., given sufficient ‘mental maturity’, one will intuitively *know* that a desire to harm is morally incorrect as plainly as one knows that *modus tollens* is valid.¹⁷⁰

Apart from the hostility that is at least typical of anger, experience and empirical data support my claim that that anger is associated with ethically important, negative effects.

According to one paper:

The experience of this emotion [anger] has been shown to have a negative effect on several cognitive variables, such as attention span, perception and information processing.¹⁷¹

And a review of the literature on ‘driving anger’ found that:

Aggressive driving, risky driving, and driving errors, were all positively related to driving anger. In addition, a higher road accident risk was found to be related to driving anger and young drivers were found to be more susceptible to the adverse effects of driving anger...To the extent that driving anger was and remains significantly associated with accident risk, it continues to pose a serious threat to public safety.¹⁷²

Although this review focused on studies of ‘driving anger’ only, combined with experience, it should be enough to suggest that aggression, engaging in risky behavior, and making errors are not specific to ‘driving anger,’ but apply to anger across contexts. Thus, anger is associated with cognitive impairment that translates into actual failures to properly accomplish behavioral tasks.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930/2002), 29.

¹⁷¹ David Herrero-Fernández, “Psychophysiological, subjective and behavioral differences between high and low anger drivers in a simulation task,” *Transportation Research Part F* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.trf.2015.12.015.

¹⁷² Tingru Zhan and Alan Chan, “The association between driving anger and driving outcomes: A meta-analysis of evidence from the past twenty years,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 90 (2016): 57, doi: 10.1016/j.aap.2016.02.009.

¹⁷³ As I take the claim that anger has cognitive drawbacks to be relatively uncontentious, and relied, in part, on the reader’s experience to confirm these claims, I have only offered minimal evidence here. Pettigrove has a more expansive discussion of empirical evidence that supports these claims; for the interested reader, cf. Pettigrove, “Meekness,” 361-365.

Prototypical anger is inherently unpleasant, stressful physically, mentally, and emotionally, and is connected with hostility, lack of self control, and impaired judgment. And, at last, there are reasons to think that all or most of the desirable effects of anger can be achieved through means that do not carry the burdens that anger brings.

3.4 Discussion

If anger is as I have presented it, we ought to favor elimination. Still, as I noted in the introduction, more or less any account, eliminativist or moderationist, will want to employ techniques for the regulation of one's emotions. Aristotle, Seneca, McRae, and the classical Buddhists all offered techniques for regulating one's emotions (and some for dealing with the emotions of others). Here, the Buddhist account in particular has much to offer to the philosophy of emotions, insofar as it putatively offers a body of technical knowledge and experience concerning the regulation, suppression, and, eventually, the complete eradication of anger and other afflictive emotions. This body lends credence to the claim that anger, in fact, can be controlled, thoroughly suppressed, and eventually eliminated, as well as offering clear instructions on how to accomplish this. The next section will begin a discussion of Buddhist techniques for overcoming anger which will be supported by some modern empirical evidence that attempts to bolster their epistemic status by grounding them in third-person science.

3.5 Abandoning anger

3.5.1 Support for BDIs

In the Pāli *suttas*, there are numerous discussions of anger which include clear, explicit instructions on how to regulate one's anger and closely related psychological states that fall into

the class of *dosa*-rooted states. These techniques involve the (active) manipulation of various psychological factors, including cognitive, attentional, motivational, and affective factors. The following table provides short summaries of a number of these techniques. Although multiple factors are regulated in some or all of the techniques, I have sorted them according to what I take to be the primary psychological element that is manipulated.

Table 1

SUTTA	PRIMARY TYPE	INSTRUCTION IN BRIEF
AN 3.68, SN 46.51	Attentional	Do not attend unwisely to the characteristic/theme/sign of irritation.
MN 20	Attentional	Pay no attention to <i>dosa</i> -rooted thoughts. (Benign neglect)
AN 5.161	Attentional	Pay no attention to the person who is the object of one's hatred (<i>āghāta</i>).
AN 5.162	Attentional	Pay attention to the good conduct of the object of one's hatred (<i>āghāta</i>), not to the bad conduct.
MN 10	Attentional	Mindfully observe anger, ill will, and hatred; develop a clear understanding of these states, including the conditions under which they arise, persist, and vanish.
MN 19	Cognitive	Notice that ill will leads to the detriment of self and other.
MN 20	Cognitive	Reflect on the fact that mental states rooted in <i>dosa</i> are ignoble and lead to suffering—develop a con-attitude towards them.
AN 7.60	Cognitive	Reflect on specific, undesirable consequences of anger and realize that they are the same as what an enemy would wish for one.
MN 21	Cognitive	Establish the correct view: there is no circumstance under which one should become angry.
AN 10.80	Cognitive	Change one's beliefs or expectations to fit with reality.
AN 5.161	Cognitive	Frame immoral behavior as analogous to sickness.
AN 5.161	Cognitive	Reflect on the Law of <i>Kamma</i> .
SN 7.2	Affective/motivational	'Mindfully grow calm.'
MN 20		
AN 5.161 MN 20	Affective/motivational	Develop opposing states, namely, the four <i>brahmavihāras</i> — <i>mettā</i> , <i>karuṇā</i> , <i>muditā</i> , and <i>upekkhā</i> (goodwill, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity).
SN 11.4	Affective/motivational	Forbear, remain mindful and calm.

The table, I hope, does several things: it acts as a reference point for discussion of specifics of Buddhist practice, provides some evidence that our emotional lives are malleable—that we can take an active role in shaping our emotional experience, and shows precisely how it is that one might effect an escape from anger.

¹⁷⁴ **Row 1, AN 3.68, SN 46.51:** What I have rendered noncommittally as ‘characteristic/theme/sign’ is the Pāli term ‘*nimitta*’, which is variously translated and changes meaning depending on context. Thanissaro Bhikku tends to translate the term ‘*nimitta*’ as ‘theme’ and this definition is one of those given by the Pali Text Society dictionary entry. The PTS entry also gives other definitions which may be at play, including ‘a portent’, which could mean attending unwisely to the first signs of oncoming anger. ‘Characteristic’ and ‘phenomena’ are also given, which may mean focusing on the features of the phenomenon that are causing one to be annoyed or the phenomena as a whole in an unwise or inappropriate way, which is similar to making it a ‘theme’ for (unwise) reflection. In fact, in this case it appears in the compound ‘*paṭighanimittam*’, which Thanissaro Bhikku translates as ‘theme of resistance’ or ‘theme of irritation’, but PTS dictionary offers ‘anger’, ‘repulsion’, and ‘repugnance’ as possible alternative translations of ‘*paṭigha*’. The commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta, sensibly I believe, says “Indeed, wrong reflection on an object of resentment produces anger. In this connection anger itself as well as the object which causes anger is called the resentment-object, or the sign of resentment.” Cf.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wayof.html#anger>

¹⁷⁵ **Row 3, AN 5.161:** I have used the term ‘hatred’ here simply because Thanissaro Bhikku uses it in his translation, which I am making use of. However, as I noted earlier, I have seen this term, ‘*āghāta*’ translated as ‘annoyance,’ ‘hatred,’ ‘malice,’ ‘ill will,’ and ‘anger’. Again, as I have said, the central element of the state that relates these terms is hostility and in this context, all of the methods discussed seem to apply to any of these variants.

¹⁷⁶ **Row 12, AN 5.161:** The relevant passage states: “When one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should direct one’s thoughts to the fact of his being the product of his actions: This venerable one is the doer of his actions, heir to his actions, born of his actions, related by his actions, and has his actions as his arbitrator. Whatever action he does, for good or for evil, to that will he fall heir.’ Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.” It is not clear to me whether the idea behind this reflection is to remove or diminish a belief that the object of one’s hostility is not ultimately responsible for her actions, or to remove or diminish a belief that justice will not be upheld unless one punishes her (or both).

¹⁷⁷ **Row 16, MN 20:** This seems to be a ‘last-resort’ technique.

¹⁷⁸ Sources from Table 1 (that have not already appeared):

AN 3.68, “Titthiya Sutta: Sectarians,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.068.than.html>.

Thanissaro, trans., “Ahara Sutta: Food (For the Factors for Awakening),”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn46/sn46.051.than.html>.

AN 5.162, “Aghatavinaya Sutta: Subduing Hatred (2),”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.162.than.html>.

MN 10, “The Satipatthana Sutta,” <http://www.wisdompubs.org/landing/satipatthana-sutta>.

AN 10.8, “Aghata Sutta: Hatred,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.080.than.html>.

SN 7.2, “Akosa Sutta: Insult,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn07/sn07.002.than.html>.

SN 11.4, “Vepacitti Sutta: Calm in the Face of Anger.”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn11/sn11.004.olen.html>.

Although these techniques involve, as I said, various kinds of technologies for working with psychological states, one technology in particular has become significant to the scientific community.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest within the secular, scientific world in what Shonin, Van Gordon, and Griffiths call ‘Buddhist-derived interventions’ (BDIs)—psychological interventions that draw from philosophies, methodologies, and techniques that have their roots in one or another Buddhist tradition.¹⁷⁹ Although there are a number of complicated issues raised by this practice, there seems to be a burgeoning body of scientific evidence that supports the claims of effectiveness of Buddhist techniques.¹⁸⁰

The greatest focus of the psychological community in terms of BDIs is centered on the idea of ‘mindfulness’. The word is derived from the Pāli ‘*sati*’; one scientific source, which points to definitions from Nyaponika Thera and Thich Nhat Hanh, offers a definition that seems to track well the scientific understanding of mindfulness: “It is most commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.”^{181, 182} According to a review of the mindfulness research, there is empirical evidence that supports a belief in the

¹⁷⁹ Edo Shonin et al., “The Emerging Role of Buddhism in Clinical Psychology: Toward Effective Integration,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6 (2014): 123-137, 10.1037/a0035859.

¹⁸⁰ E.g., some people think that stripping these practices from their traditional contexts does a disservice to them, while others think these practices are religious and have no place in the secular world.

¹⁸¹ Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan, “The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84 (2003): 822-848, doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822.

¹⁸² There is some contention concerning this definition of ‘mindfulness’; as Thanissaro Bhikku and others have pointed out, ‘*samma sati*’ (right mindfulness) in the *suttas* is sometimes described in terms of an active process. Thanissaro characterizes *sati* in the following way: “Its role is to draw on right view and to work proactively in supervising the other factors of the path to give rise to right concentration, and in using right concentration as a basis for total release.” I tend to agree with him that *sati* in the Pāli is not sufficiently described by the non-judgmental awareness that is often associated with mindfulness in the west. That being said, mindfulness, as present moment awareness, clearly seems to be a facet of *samma sati*. In this chapter, I discuss some of the more active kinds of techniques that are recommended by Buddhist scripture and so I have not neglected this ‘proactive’ aspect of practice, even if scientific research has, by proceeding with a definition of mindfulness that is closer to that given by Brown and Ryan.

Thanissaro Bhikku, *Right Mindfulness: Memory & Ardency on the Buddhist Path*, 2012, 7, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/rightmindfulness.pdf>.

following benefits of mindfulness, thus understood: ‘emotion regulation’, ‘decreased reactivity and increased response flexibility’, better relationships, ‘increased immune functioning’, enhanced well-being, ‘increased attentional skills’, increased empathy, increased compassion, and decreased stress, anxiety, and depression.¹⁸³ While some of the effects listed above, such as emotional regulation, are obviously and straightforwardly related to the elimination of anger so as to not warrant detailed analysis, I want to continue the discussion by focusing on one of the putative beneficial effects of mindfulness—it’s tendency to promote healthy coping—that further supports the claims that anger is not a necessary response and that Buddhist techniques in particular offer us effective tools for overcoming anger.

3.5.2 Approach and avoidance

The psychological literature describes a pair of related concepts that are of particular interest to the discussion at hand: approach and avoidance coping. The former, in brief, is characterized by a ‘turning toward’ aversive conditions and the latter by a problematic ‘turning away’¹⁸⁴ I want to argue that the Buddhist methodology for dealing with stressors both internal and external, which incorporates mindfulness—exemplifies an approach coping strategy, which gives us further reason to think that there are plausible, morally unsuspecting, psychologically healthy, alternatives to anger.

A 2009 paper which documented four studies of mindfulness found that:

Across the four studies...results demonstrated that mindful individuals made more benign stress appraisals, reported less frequent use of avoidant coping strategies, and in two

¹⁸³ Daphne Davis and Jeffrey Hayes, “What are the Benefits of Mindfulness? A Practice Review of Psychotherapy-Related Research,” *Psychotherapy* 48 (2011): 198-208, doi: 10.1037/a0022062.

¹⁸⁴ Netta Weinstein et al., “A multi-method examination of the effects of mindfulness on stress attribution, coping, and emotional well-being,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 43 (2009): 375, doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2008.12.008.

studies, reported higher use of approach coping...[which] partially or fully mediated the relation between mindfulness and well-being.

This putative effect of mindfulness is particularly relevant to the discussion of anger insofar as it is often claimed that one of the reasons we need anger is for approach motivation. If it is possible to increase approach motivation (broadly understood) and emotional regulation simultaneously, this would potentially offer scientific support for the belief that anger is not necessary, as well as an explicit, alternative path. Some of the evidence cited above serves to support this possibility: the evidence concerning approach coping combined with the fact that mindfulness is negatively associated with reactivity while positively associated with response flexibility offers reasons to think that anger is not necessary, since anger is a reactive emotion, unlike, e.g., feigned anger which is a flexible response.

At first glance, it may seem strange to associate reduced avoidance with mindfulness, purely given some of the details about the historical context in which it originated and was practiced; that is, mindfulness or *sati* in the context of meditative practice was developed and popularized by a renunciant who dwelt in and praised seclusion, and whose goal was to escape from suffering. If we look at how the authors of the paper talk about healthy and unhealthy coping, however, *some* of the strangeness of this juxtaposition goes away; they define avoidant coping in the following way:

Avoidant coping reflects a defensive form of regulation that involves ignoring, distorting, or escaping threatening stimuli. Several research groups have conceptualized avoidant coping in terms of behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, and denial.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Weinstein et al., “Examination”, 375.

Some of the strangeness, as I said, now disappears, since any view that is recognizably Buddhist is clearly and directly opposed to inappropriately ignoring, distorting, or denying the way things are.¹⁸⁶ Approach coping, on the other hand:

...involves a cognitive, emotional, or behavioral ‘turning toward’ stressful situations. Three predominant forms have been consistently identified: active coping (direct action to deal with a stressful situation), acceptance (cognitive and emotional acknowledgement of stressful realities), and cognitive reinterpretation (learning, finding the good in the threat, harm, or loss situation, or choosing to use the situation to develop as a person) ...Approach coping is generally considered adaptive in that effort is directed toward resolving stressful situations or overcoming the stress associated with them. As a result, these strategies are believed to facilitate the assimilation and transcendence of stress in a way that ultimately enhances well-being...¹⁸⁷

In the very first teaching of the Buddha, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The Setting in Motion the Wheel of *Dhamma* Discourse), the discussion of the four noble truths offers a typical and excellent method of handling stress, which is in fact an adaptive, approach method. This approach is further applied in the context of teachings on mindfulness in the Buddhist canon; I will offer a detailed analysis of how this works, offering a clear way forward in disagreeable circumstances without anger.

According to the Buddhist discourse mentioned above, there are four ‘noble truths’—truths about reality as it really is—that were clearly seen and appropriately responded to by the Buddha; the realization of these truths and appropriate action served as the basis for his enlightenment.¹⁸⁸ The four noble truths are the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the truth of the origin

¹⁸⁶ The caveat I have in mind is that there are appropriate forms of benign neglect. E.g., the technique in the second row of the table involves turning attention away from an agitating object. Surely there are many cases, both in coping with one’s psychological states and with coping with actual worldly events, in which these types of strategies are healthy.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ I have used phrases from four translations of this sutta.

SN 56.11, “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.piya.html>.

SN 56.11, “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.nymo.html>.

of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Each of these have three aspects, leading to twelve knowledges: the first in each case is simply of the fact of the matter, e.g., ‘This is the noble truth of suffering’, the second aspect is normative, and concerns how one should relate to each truth; respectively, the truth of suffering is to be fully comprehended, the origin of suffering should be extirpated, the cessation of suffering should be attained, and the path leading to the end of suffering should be practiced.¹⁸⁹ The third aspect is simply the actualization of the normative directive: the full comprehension of the truth of suffering, the eradication of the causes of suffering, the experience of the cessation of suffering, and the walking of the path that leads to the end of suffering.

This model, although it concerns the lofty goal of the complete elimination of suffering, can also serve as a basis for coping with worldly stressors, both psychological and external, and provide an alternative to moral anger that utilizes all three approach coping strategies that were mentioned above: active coping, acceptance, and cognitive reinterpretation. Drawing from several of the techniques that were given in the table above, I want to offer several examples that outline how precisely such coping would take place.

Suppose someone, Darmen, became angry because of having been wronged—someone stole his car, let’s say. One technique for dealing with this emotion derives from the *Āghāta Sutta* (Row 8 from table 1) and exemplifies approach coping sans anger: “Thinking, ‘He has done me harm. But what should I expect?’ one subdues hatred... One does not get worked up over

SN 56.11, “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel (of Vision) of the Basic Pattern: the Four True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled Ones,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.harv.html>.

SN 56.11, “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

impossibilities.” In this case, in parallel to the first noble truth, one acknowledges and accepts the reality of the situation—one has been harmed. The next noble truth concerns the origination or causation of suffering, and in parallel, the next step in coping with anger should be to understand the conditions under which anger arises. In the case of this *sutta* this step is not made explicit but elsewhere it is, e.g., in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*:

...there being ill will in him, a bhikkhu understands: ‘There is ill will in me’; or there being no ill will in him, he understands: ‘There is no ill will in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unarisen ill will, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen ill will, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned ill will.¹⁹⁰

In the case of the *Āghāta Sutta*, this work has already been done; according to the instructions in that *sutta*, one condition that is involved in sustaining one’s hatred or annoyance (*āghāta*) is the expectation that things should be other than they are. Following the normative aspect of the second and third noble truths, one should abandon the causes of the stressor and realize the cessation of hatred, in this case, one proceeds (in parallel to the fourth noble truth) by using cognitive reinterpretation to reframe the problem, as I understand it, something like: “It is impossible that I should never be harmed, to wish otherwise would put me at odds with the way of reality. My expectation was out of touch with what the way the world is. I should expect that people will harm me and those that I care about.” Just as in games in which one has opponents, the expectation that the opponent will try to thwart your efforts and harm you (in some sense) tends to ameliorate or eliminate ill will towards opponents, this *sutta* suggests that the same can be done by regarding unwished-for events in this way.

Buddhists claim that the roots of all evil are to be found in psychology, and that those roots in one’s own case (first and foremost) are what one ought to focus on, rather than some

¹⁹⁰ MN 10, “The Satipatthana Sutta,” <http://www.wisdompubs.org/landing/satipatthana-sutta>.

worldly state of affairs. Further, as these teachings are directed primarily at renunciants, the techniques I am discussing aim at reformation of psychological states, yet the overall model can be made to serve worldly purposes unproblematically.¹⁹¹ For example, Dharma could use the same method to manipulate other causes (although perhaps less fundamental ones) in the environment. He could accept the fact that his car is gone, understand the causes of its theft and its recovery if it is possible, understand how to prevent future theft, and work to realize his goals, all without giving rise to anger.

3.5.3 Psychological flexibility

We should strive, then, to respond to internal and external conditions in beneficial ways, rather than merely being a passive victim of whatever psychological states arise in our consciousnesses. MacKenzie and Park, in a discussion of mental training as described by the 8th-century Buddhist master, Śāntideva, well-describe the desideratum here: “The upshot of this training is to develop the insight and cognitive-affective flexibility...to [*inter alia*] respond compassionately and effectively to others.”¹⁹²

Now, some psychologists, I think, would consider attempts to eliminate anger to be at odds with the development or presence of psychological flexibility; however, I want to claim that consistently striving to eliminate anger increases psychological flexibility.¹⁹³ One author, Todd Kashdan, defines psychological flexibility in the following way:

Psychological flexibility actually refers to a number of dynamic processes that unfold over time. This could be reflected by how a person: (1) adapts to fluctuating situational

¹⁹¹ It seems that the distinction between monastics who were contemplatives and lay people were not, although admitting of exceptions, was more stark in the Buddha’s milieu than it is today.

¹⁹² Matthew MacKenzie and Park, “Cultivating Compassion,” to appear in *Enacting Wisdom*, 39.

¹⁹³ Of course, as I mention in another footnote, there may be cases where allowing oneself to become angry is actually beneficial. Again, perhaps Borgwald’s ‘selfless women’ would be an example of this.

demands, (2) reconfigures mental resources, (3) shifts perspective, and (4) balances competing desires, needs, and life domains.

Kashdan goes on to talk specifically about anger, claiming that anger can be a flexible response and that we ought not to eliminate it from our emotional set:

These findings are intriguing because anger is labeled as a negative emotion ...and outward anger expression is often viewed as a ‘toxic’ reaction to aversive conditions... Yet, our summary of recent research shows that just like any so-called negative emotion, the experience and outward expression of anger can be productive in certain situations. To ignore this is to minimize how adaptable and context sensitive people can be.¹⁹⁴

Now, it seems clear that there is *some sense* in which disallowing anger or always striving to be without anger is inflexible, merely insofar as it restricts our possible responses. However, restricting possible responses, if intelligently done, need not lead to the relevant kind of psychological and affective rigidity. As I have said before, and as most theorists agree, anger is a reactive emotion that either needs to be checked or eliminated. The process of becoming angry does not begin with a conscious, deliberate choice, and therefore should not itself be thought of as a flexible response. Further, anger itself *involuntarily* restricts our possible psychological responses much more than *voluntarily* striving to not become angry does. If one succeeds at not becoming angry, many cognitive and affective states are available to her, yet if she fails, she has only a narrow set of anger-driven responses that she is not really choosing, which seems much more inflexible. Kashdan further discusses the relationship of deliberate choice with psychological flexibility:

Executive control allows a person to re-focus or rapidly shift cognitive sets and thereby shift attention, which is a critical element of self-control and goal-directed behavior...Essentially, executive functioning provides critical neuropsychological support for self-regulation... In fact, as discussed below, it is hard to imagine psychological flexibility without at least adequate performance in this domain.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Todd Kashdan, “Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Mental Health,” *Clin Psychol Rev.* 30 (2010): 865–878, doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.001.

¹⁹⁵ Kashdan, “Flexibility,” 11.

Experience and some of the empirical data I have referred to confer support for the belief that anger inhibits the ability to voluntarily control attention; it is the one who controls and eliminates her anger who has the most attentional control and, therefore, the greatest ability to ‘adapt to...situational demands,’ ‘reconfigure mental resources,’ ‘shift perspective’, and ‘balance competing desires, needs, and life domains;’ in short, she has the most psychological flexibility. Once one’s anger is well under control, it again becomes the case that alternatives to anger are going to be preferable to anger, insofar as they are not toxic in the way that anger is.

3.5.4 Poisons and antidotes

*He who can curb his wrath
as soon as it arises,
as a timely antidote will check
snake's venom that so quickly spreads.*¹⁹⁶

I have outlined some possible ways of using mindfulness and cognitive techniques in particular as methods to cope with anger, yet there is another class of techniques for this purpose that has also become the subject of scientific interest in recent times, namely, techniques that aim at the cultivation of wholesome emotional states which are said to stand in opposition to the unwholesome ones, such as anger. One way to conceptualize what is at work with these practices is by use of the poison and antidote analogy. According to Buddhist thought, unwholesome mental states are like poisons that harm their bearer, one poignant description along these lines comes from the *Visuddhimagga*:

Herein...[it] means they hate, or it itself hates, or it is just mere hating, thus it is *hate* (*dosa*). It has the characteristic of savageness, like a provoked snake. Its function is to spread, like a drop of poison, or its function is to burn up its own support, like a forest fire. It is manifested as persecuting (*dūsana*), like an enemy who has got his chance. Its

¹⁹⁶ Nyaponika Thera, “The Worn-out Skin: Reflections on the Uraga Sutta,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel241.html>.

proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance...It should be regarded as like stale urine mixed with poison.¹⁹⁷

Rather than attempt to ‘metabolize’ these poisonous states, e.g., or simply allow them to arise and pass away of their own accord, one may actively attempt to counteract them.¹⁹⁸ In the traditional Buddhist analysis, each of the *brahmavihāras* can serve as an antidote that opposes its direct opposite: *Mettā* opposes ill will, *karuṇā* opposes cruelty, *muditā* opposes aversion (boredom and/or envy/jealousy), and *upekkhā* opposes both resentment and greed.^{199, 200}

As before, there are techniques in the canon which explain how these replacement or antidote strategies are to be accomplished.

When one gives birth to hatred (*āghāta*) for an individual, one should develop good will (*mettā*) for that individual. Thus the hatred for that individual should be subdued.²⁰¹

While this passage denotes the general thrust of this type of strategy for dealing with unwholesome states, like anger, other *suttas* supplement and elaborate by providing precise instruction for how to accomplish this. Two *suttas* are particularly useful here: The first gives us instruction that is more direct:

When evil unskillful thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion arise in a bhikkhu through reflection on an adventitious object, he should, (in order to get rid of that), reflect on a different object which is connected with skill. Then the evil unskillful

¹⁹⁷ Ñānamoli, Vism., 478.

¹⁹⁸ An example of a non-interference type meditation: “Let body and mind settle in its own place, Its own way, Its own time, As it is. Natural breath and energy, Natural flow Let it go, Free from interference, evaluation or manipulation...and enjoy the joy of Natural Meditation Don’t be deceived or seduced by momentary thoughts and experiences. Allow all experiences to pass freely, like clouds In a vast, open sky. Simply Observe, Allow and Accept. Embrace and surrender. Letting go means letting come and go, letting be. This is the essence of inner freedom and autonomy.” (Note: This passage was originally in verse; I have modified for compactness but have left capital letters as they appeared after line breaks). Cf. <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/Mar/1/sky-gazing-meditation-lama-surya-das/>.

¹⁹⁹ Additionally, there are opposing relationships that are not precisely direct opposites in this way. E.g., equanimity opposes and is incompatible with anger, though not its ‘far enemy.’

²⁰⁰ The *Visuddhimagga* says that “aversion (boredom)” is the opposite of *Muditā*, yet some modern Buddhist teachers, e.g., Tina Rasmussen and Stephen Snyder, have said (in correspondence) that envy or jealousy are its opposite. Although it makes sense to think of joy as being opposed to boredom, the latter interpretation seems much more natural and fitting with the first two cases.

²⁰¹ Thanissaro, AN 5.161.

thoughts are eliminated; they disappear. By their elimination, the mind stands firm, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated...

Like an experienced carpenter or carpenter's apprentice, striking hard at, pushing out, and getting rid of a coarse peg with a fine one, should the bhikkhu in order to get rid of the adventitious object, reflect on a different object which is connected with skill. Then the evil unskillful thoughts connected with desire, hate and delusion are eliminated; they disappear. By their elimination the mind stands firm, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.²⁰²

Another text, noted at row 4 of table 1, AN 5.162, is even more concrete, offering a clear example of how this should be done. If one becomes angry at some person, one ought to regulate her attention, directing it at skillful or wholesome episodes of the other's mental, verbal, or bodily conduct. If we think back to the previous discussion of wholesome emotions, "seeing loveableness[goodness] in beings" was the proximate cause of *mettā*; thus, one counteracts ill will by developing good will.

The cultivation of wholesome states may further serve to oppose states like anger and hatred by acting as prophylactics—if one develops and cultivates compassion and kindness and becomes predisposed to that, is possessed of a kindly and compassionate character, it should follow that she will not be prone to giving rise to opposing states like cruelty and anger.

3.5.5 Approach coping

Aside from canonical testimony that supports the efficacy of such practices, there is some evidence to suggest that lovingkindness and compassion practices offer a range of benefits consistent with some of the claims made by the Buddhist tradition, including increased compassion²⁰³, increased happiness and reduced stress and anxiety²⁰⁴, reduced depression²⁰⁵ and

²⁰² MN 20, "The Removal of Distracting Thoughts," <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.soma.html>.

²⁰³ Erika Rosenberg et al., "Intensive Meditation Training Influences Emotional Responses to Suffering," *Emotion* advance online publication (2015). 10.1037/emo0000080.

²⁰⁴ Weinstein et al., "Examination."

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

improved relationships.²⁰⁶ That being said, there are a couple of specific findings that are particularly relevant to the discussion of anger.

One study of participants in *mettā* meditation retreats that were led by Bhante Sujato found evidence for a number of positive effects of the practice, including “reductions in avoidance and revenge.”²⁰⁷ Just as was the case with mindfulness and other practices, a decrease in avoidance by the development of something that is putatively opposed to anger, should further support the idea that anger is not a necessary response. Another study offers more support still: the study tested meditators on intensive, 3-month retreat in a Tibetan practice tradition. Participants received meditation instruction that included both attentional (concentration) training, and training in the development of what the Tibetans call the ‘four immeasurables’, states that are equivalent to the four *brahmavihāras* which have been discussed.²⁰⁸ The study found a reduction in what they called the ‘rejection emotions’:

Operationally, we defined rejection emotions as anger, contempt, and disgust—a triad of emotions that has been recognized as relevant to hostility...and as moral emotions that reflect how a person regards others...Such feelings of hostility run counter to the concerned, compassionate stance developed through contemplative training...Based on the philosophical perspective of the teachings from which these practices originate...we use the term *rejection* as the opposite of *engaging with* what is at hand, however infuriating, immoral, or repulsive it might first appear to be.²⁰⁹

‘Rejection emotions’, then, are conceptually related to avoidance, rather than approach coping. According to the study:

When confronted with unpleasant images and scenes of suffering, rather than recoil, participants display sadness; when confronted with potentially immoral behavior, the amount of rejection emotion is reduced. Finally, associations between felt sympathy and

²⁰⁶ Bert Uchino et al., “Loving-Kindness Meditation Improves Relationship Negativity and Psychological Well-Being: A Pilot Study,” *Psychology* 7 (2016): 6-11, doi: 10.4236/psych.2016.71002.

²⁰⁷ Beatrice Alba, “Loving-kindness meditation: A field study,” *Contemporary Buddhism: An Inter-disciplinary Journal* 14 (2013): 188, 10.1080/14639947.2013.832494.

²⁰⁸ Rosenberg et al., “Intensive.”

²⁰⁹ Rosenberg et al., “Intensive,” 3.

emotional behavior in training participants support the notion that that the observed patterns of emotional behavior may indicate a shift toward a more prosocial emotional response to suffering.²¹⁰

Again, cultivating the *brahmavihāras* was related both to an increase in emotions and motivations which are related to concern for the welfare of others, as well as to an increase in willingness to engage. Thus, the canonical and empirical evidence I have offered in combination with the analysis of the Buddhist approach to coping, as found in the teachings on the four noble truths, supports the idea that there are viable alternative stances to anger to take with respect to wrongs, and that anger is therefore, not a moral necessity.

Having accomplished my main task for this chapter, I want to circle back and add some nuance to the discussion of the morality of anger, address some potential problems or exceptional cases that have not yet been treated at length, and briefly discuss future directions for research before concluding.

3.6 Apology

Although I have argued that we should adopt an eliminativist stance toward anger; it remains that this emotion, complete with ill will, is a natural and largely unavoidable aspect of human psychology in most cases.²¹¹ Whether or not one wants anger to arise, anger is likely to arise. Not only that, but the thing that one's angry motivation is pushing one to do may be the very thing that ought to be done. In fact, there are many cases in which anger is caused by actual oppression and to resist that oppression, even forcefully, seems to be both what anger would

²¹⁰ Rosenberg et al., "Intensive," 12.

²¹¹ According to the Buddhist tradition, e.g., anger is completely eliminated at the 3rd of 4 stages of enlightenment; thus, the *anāgāmi* (non-returner) and the *arahant* (a fully liberated being) are completely without anger and it is not possible for it to ever arise in them again. Cf., e.g., entries for '*anāgāmi*', '*saṃyojana*', '*arahant*' at: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/glossary.html>.

have one do and what is good. One example from Seneca (horrible in one sense, excellent in another), discusses this point: “This is why Socrates said to the slave, ‘I would strike you, were I not angry.’ He put off the correction of the slave to a calmer season; at the moment, he corrected himself.”²¹²

This passage, although morally incorrect qua endorsing corporal punishment of a slave, makes the point that what ought to be done and what anger wants done may coincide and one can do that with or without anger. If we turn this example around to fit with a proper understanding of morality, we can imagine a slave thinking “I would strike you and escape, were I not angry.” Although I want to advocate for this as the ideal—that is, action, even when violent, is better performed without anger—sometimes situations may arise in which contextual pressures do not permit the delay of action. Further, there is an important distinction between the original quote and its reimagined version insofar as Seneca’s quote concerns punishment or correction, he says, “Nothing becomes one who inflicts punishment less than anger, because the punishment has all the more power to work reformation if the sentence be pronounced with deliberate judgment.”²¹³ In the case of the slave, if she merely wants to escape (rather than extract revenge), it seems that anger is much less problematic. Even in Buddhism, with its clear con-stance with respect to anger, apologies are made in certain instances.

According to the Buddhist Monastic Code (*Pātimokkha*), its commentaries, and derived works, there are 227 rules of behavior for monks (*bhikkus*) and 311 for nuns (*bhikkunis*); infractions in terms of conduct are analyzed into their component parts, including things like intention and result.²¹⁴ There are a number of infractions that are specifically related to anger,

²¹² Stuart, *De Ira*, Third Book, ch. xv.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Thanissaro Bhikku, trans., *Pātimokkha*, 2007, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/vin/sv/bhikkhu-pati.html>.

including, e.g., rules 74 and 75 of the *bhikkus*' code and their equivalents in the *bhikkunis*' code (152, 153), which state:

Should any bhikkhu, angered and displeased, give a blow to (another) bhikkhu, it is to be confessed.

Should any bhikkhu, angered and displeased, raise the palm of his hand against (another) bhikkhu, it is to be confessed.²¹⁵

Being motivated by anger, it is an infraction of the discipline to strike another or even to raise a hand against one, however, the motivation is crucially important here; Thanissaro Bhikku's translation and analysis of the Monastic Code explains:

According to the *Vibhāṅga*, there is no offense for a bhikkhu who, trapped in a difficult situation, gives a blow 'desiring freedom.' The Commentary's discussion of this point shows that it includes what we at present would call self-defense; and the K/Commentary's analysis of the factors of the offense here shows that even if anger or displeasure arises in one's mind in cases like this, there is no penalty... 'Result' is not a factor here. Whether the other person is hurt—or how badly he/she is hurt—does not affect the offense. If one intends simply to hurt the other person, but he/she happens to die from one's blow, the case is treated under this rule, rather than under Pr 3 [the rule forbidding intentional killing, which would result in expulsion from the order].²¹⁶

Thanissaro Bhikku, departing from the sub-commentary, suggests that this rule be reserved only for instances in which one is in 'physical danger' and not be applicable in cases where one, e.g., 'desires freedom' from excrement being left by an animal.²¹⁷ This he argues, would open up a 'large loophole' for claims of 'desiring freedom' from anything that is not to one's liking.

Several important points can be drawn from this discussion. First, as Buddhist monastics spend their lives isolated from worldly concerns, devoted to training in morality, meditation, and wisdom, I take it that the expected moral conduct of a Buddhist monastic is in some important sense parallel to what one would expect from the performance of a professional in another field;

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Thanissaro Bhikku, *The Buddhist Monastic Code I: The Patimokkha Training Rules Translated and Explained*, 2013, 398, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/bmc1.pdf>.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

that is, monastics can be thought of as ethical professionals, moral athletes.²¹⁸ Therefore, it seems that the conduct deemed appropriate for them can help us to gauge what is appropriate for a non-professional, so to speak. Clearly, if anger is not cause for censure in situations of self-defense, even for monastics, it should not be cause for censure for non-monastics.

That being said, there is an interesting tension created by the juxtaposition of this aspect of the Monastic Code and the earlier passage from the *Kakacūpama Sutta*; the former declares that one is blameless who, desiring freedom, gives rise to anger, strikes another person, even killing the other, whereas the latter declares, recall, that even if one were being savagely sawed apart, limb by limb, that she who got angry would not be following the Buddha's teaching.²¹⁹ I think that the best way to handle this tension is to simply allow both declarations to stand; that is, it is always appropriate to temper or dispel anger, and anger is never praiseworthy; the ideal is to never be angry. At the same time, one may do what is required for self-defense and as long as anger with its root of hatred is not the central, motivating factor of a harmful action, that anger is blameless.

I also want to suggest that, although Thanissaro Bhikku's worries seem to be well-placed and are shared by me, it may be possible to extend the scope of excusability of anger a bit further.²²⁰ I have in mind cases of oppression that do not involve imminent, physical danger. One example of such oppression concerns that lack of social equality of people of color in America, and Dr. Martin Luther King's resistance against such oppression is, I take it, an excellent topic of

²¹⁸ I did not invent the phrase 'moral athletes' but am unsure of its origin.

²¹⁹ MN 21, "Kakacūpama Sutta: The Parable of the Saw (excerpt)," <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.budd.html>.

²²⁰ it is important to note that the Monastic Code is not intended as a guide to such issues as I have a mind to discuss, the following analysis is what I take to be an appropriate analogy in worldly life. Also, to be clear, Thanissaro Bhikku's comments regard the Monastic Code specifically, and I am not in disagreement about that case.

discussion insofar as his is a praiseworthy example and the narrative has many features that are pertinent to the issues at hand.

This example is so rich, for one, because whether or not Dr. King was expressing anger is a point of contention. Some have used King as an example of non-angry resistance, while others have called his movement an exemplar of righteous anger. Zac Cogley, for example, says that King has set an example of ‘angry virtue’ and has demonstrated what it is to be ‘properly angry.’²²¹ Cogley claims that in his I Have a Dream speech, Dr. King, by pointing to unjust circumstances such as segregation,

...implicitly asks his audience to share his appraisal of the state of American society under segregation and to be angry about it. That he implicitly seeks to incite anger in his audience is supported not just by his listing injustices for which anger is fitting, but also by describing the situation of blacks using metaphors like ‘defaulting on a promise’ and ‘being given a bad check.’²²²

Glen Pettigrove on the other hand, claims that King “displayed the virtue of meekness at the same time that...[he] resisted (and encouraged others to resist) both individual wrongdoers and an unjust social order.”²²³ ‘Meekness’, according to Pettigrove,

...is the virtue whose purview is the governance of anger and related emotions. The meek person is slow to anger and is not prone to resent others, to desire their suffering, or to take pleasure in their distress...On those rare occasions when the meek become angry, they do not remain angry for long. And in the brief period during which they are feeling angry, they refrain from showing it in their actions, refusing to treat others in ways that express their hostile emotions.”²²⁴

Meekness can further be understood, in part, by reference to the states to which it is opposed:

“These include anger, resentment, wrath, rage, revenge, cruelty, and a persecuting spirit.”²²⁵

²²¹ Cogley, “A Study,” 200.

²²² Cogley, “A Study,” 211.

²²³ Pettigrove, “Meekness,” 355.

²²⁴ Pettigrove, “Meekness,” 343-344.

²²⁵ Pettigrove, “Meekness,” 343.

Now, here we putatively have two incompatible analyses of King (although it is possible that there is some degree of talking past each other happening, based on two definitions of anger). Clearly Pettigrove took anger to be connected with resentment, desire to harm others, sadism, and hostility. Although Cogley never gives a precise definition of anger himself, he does commit to anger being an appraisal of wrongful conduct that reliably leads to approach motivation.²²⁶ He also implicitly allows that anger sometimes contains revenge or aggressiveness: “Whether or not angry revenge is vicious will depend quite a bit on the form that the revenge or aggression takes.”²²⁷

It is my view that if King were inciting anger, that action would be suspect. Again, regardless of whether one’s definition of anger has it that any of the four problematic elements I have discussed above (hostility, loss of self-control, cognitive distortions, and intentionally harmful behaviors) are necessary to anger, I am confident that inciting anger in a large group of people will reliably lead to all four on a large scale and for this reason would be improper. While I agree with Cogley that King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is an example of communicative excellence, we have reasons to think it is not an example of angry communication.

Throughout the speech, at no time does King use the word ‘anger’; instead he uses the phrase, which we should feel assured was a careful, intentional choice, ‘legitimate discontent,’ to refer to the attitude which he is endorsing and encouraging.²²⁸ He further explicitly *discourages* hostility: “In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.”

²²⁶ Cogley, “A Study,” 200, 201, 206.

²²⁷ Cogley, “A Study”, 207.

²²⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream” (speech, Washington, DC, August 28 1963) <https://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>.

King begins his speech by calling the gathering the ‘greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation,’ talks about the ‘quest for freedom,’ uses the phrase ‘let freedom ring’ or a variation of it 12 times, and ends his speech with a final call to freedom: “Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty We are free at last.” It seems that, perfectly in line with the discussion from the *Pātimokkha*, he simply desires freedom and the fact that his desire for freedom motivates him, rather than anger, is what makes his example so powerful, such an easy example of virtue. And what is it that he desires freedom from? Freedom from: Police brutality, poor housing-conditions, discrimination, and segregation. Although, in line with Thanissaro Bhikku’s worries about the parallel case in the Monastic Code, there is danger of over-excusing anger and circumspection is required in discriminating between legitimate and illegitimate claims of oppression, the elements that Dr. King mentions are clear cases of the former. Therefore, in cases of oppression such as this, it seems that even if one were to become angry, although it would not be ideal—we should always prefer non-toxic motivational states as alternatives to anger—it would be understandable, forgivable, and blameless.

In Cogley’s essay, he also quotes from another of King’s works:

I think we have come to the point where there is no longer a choice now between nonviolence and riots. It must be militant, massive nonviolence, or riots. The discontent is so deep, the anger so ingrained, the despair, the restlessness so wide, that something has to be brought into being to serve as a channel through which these deep emotional feelings, these deep angry feelings, can be funneled. There has to be an outlet, and I see this campaign as a way to transmute the inchoate rage of the ghetto into a constructive and creative channel. It becomes an outlet for anger.²²⁹

Again, I read this passage, contra Cogley, as favoring the elimination of anger. Implicitly, King takes anger to be an emotion that is associated with destruction, since he wants to change it into something that is ‘constructive and creative’. Rather than wanting to incite and increase

²²⁹ Qtd. in Cogley, “A Study,” 10-11. Original source: Martin Luther King Jr., “Showdown for nonviolence.”

destructive anger, which is already plentiful, he wants to ‘transmute’ the anger, in a way that sounds similar to McRae’s discussion of metabolizing it, amounting to its elimination. King’s approach is to acknowledge the reality of anger in a way that is understanding, forgiving, and non-censuring, while looking for a means to prevent anger from taking its natural course, which would lead to violence, rioting.

To reiterate: cases of real oppression such as those that spurred the civil rights movement are not ethically equivalent to cases in which agents become aggressive and angry without provocation. Cases of oppression and perhaps others may offer cases in which anger is, in some important sense, blameless. That being said, the development of a con-attitude towards anger, moderating anger, and striving for anger’s ultimate elimination are still crucial for moral well-being of oneself and for others. In walking the path toward the elimination of anger, however, it is worth being aware of some possible dangers along the way.

3.7 Caution

Although I have advocated for the use of Buddhist, contemplative techniques throughout the body of this work, I feel it is important to issue a note concerning exercising reasonable caution about the use of such practices. There is evidence both from traditional texts within Buddhism and from reports of modern contemplatives that are currently being studied scientifically, that contemplative practices can lead to non-normal psychological states, including some that are highly unpleasant.²³⁰ One traditional Tibetan text lists a number of experiences (*nyam*) that could arise in the course of contemplative practice:

²³⁰ Willoughby Britton at Brown University, is conducting “The Varieties of Contemplative Experience” study, which aims to track all experiences associated with contemplative practices, including any adverse effects. Her work is, I am told, also being reproduced by a scientist in Germany.

The impression that all your thoughts are wreaking havoc in your body, speech, and mind, like boulders rolling down a steep mountain, crushing and destroying everything in their path... A sharp pain in your heart as a result of all your thoughts, as if you had been pierced by the tip of a weapon... the ecstatic, blissful sense that mental stillness is pleasurable but movement is painful... the perception of all phenomena as brilliantly colored particles... intolerable pain throughout your body, from the tips of the hair on your head down to the tips of your toenails... the sense that even food and drink are harmful... an inexplicable sense of paranoia about meeting other people... compulsive hope in medical treatment, divinations, and astrology... such unbearable misery that you think your heart will burst... a constant stream of anxieties... everything around you leading to all kinds of hopes and fears... uncontrollable fear, anger, obsessive attachment, and hatred whenever images arise... the vanishing of all your suffering and the saturation of your mind with radiant clarity and ecstasy, like pristine space, although such radiant clarity may be preceded by rough experiences.²³¹

Now, all of these experiences are thought to be, despite initial appearances in many of the cases listed, signs of *progress* that result from *correct* meditation practice.²³² That being said, according to Alan Wallace, it is possible for these states to become problematic: “Just as an animal becomes caught in a snare and cannot move, so we can be snared in the nyam that arise in the course of this practice.”²³³ So, it seems that there are documented dangers to be aware of on the contemplative path, without even considering the possibility of incorrect practice. Thus, any individual or institution interested in practicing, teaching, or advocating contemplative practices would do well to become informed about potential problems that could arise during practice.

The data on mindfulness that I have cited supports, as I have pointed out, numerous beneficial effects of the practice and there is little or no evidence in the literature to support claims that typical mindfulness interventions have (significant) undesirable side effects.²³⁴ That being said, it seems likely that certain types of *intensive practice*, like retreat practice, which

²³¹ Wallace, Alan B, *Stilling the Mind: Shamatha Teachings from Dudjom Lingpa's Vajra Essence*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), 135-141.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Wallace, *Stilling the Mind*, 126.

²³⁴ Although this may be due to lack of research rather than the absence of such phenomena.

typically entails social decontextualization, isolation, and sensory deprivation, are more likely to have the potential for adverse and unusual effects than a typical daily practice or intervention wherein one gets a much lower dosage of meditation, so to speak, and which entail none of these things.

As with any domain that contains risks, being informed about possible risks and having those who are experienced and expert in that field to shape curricula and establish safety guidelines would do much to make such risks acceptable. Having said that, there does seem to be the further potential for novel problems to arise due to the importing of practices to cultural contexts that are significantly different from those in which the practices developed and have been practiced. There may be contemplatives from traditional Asian cultures, e.g., who are absolutely expert practitioners, yet lack an understanding of western psychology in a way that leaves them unable (at least for some time) to handle certain kinds of psychological difficulties that westerners might encounter during practice. One famous, yet relatively mild example concerns the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan teachers who, I have heard, did not have a concept of low self-esteem, possibly even refusing to believe that such a thing exists. Although there is good reason to think that western practitioners, and western and non-western teachers would be capable of adapting to account for these cultural differences, these potential problems should be thought about carefully.²³⁵

²³⁵ The Dalai Lama story is very famous and I am unsure of the original source but it is referenced at the following. “Feeling Insecure? How to Get a Self-Esteem Boost”, <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Boost-Your-Self-Esteem-with-Meditation>.

3.8 Future directions

Throughout my thesis I often spoke about practical Buddhist techniques for working with emotions, especially anger. At this time, I would like to make a distinction between what I consider a tactical approach to dealing with anger—an approach that deals with a concrete episode of anger—and strategic approaches—with deal with long-term, preventative and preparatory measures.

The techniques that I have discussed in this paper are tactical approaches; an example of a successful tactical operation would be as follows: anger arises in one's mind, she applies a specific method to attempt to evict that arisen anger in the moment, perhaps by changing the object of her attention or challenging some relevant beliefs, the anger abates. These tactical maneuvers are, I claim, important and necessary for the elimination of anger, but so is having good *strategic* plans in place. This too, is a place in which Buddhist thought is replete with resources.

The renouncing of worldly possessions by monastics, e.g., is a strategic idea that affects the ability of one to eliminate anger in specific cases. For example, suppose someone, let's call him Franklin, owns a piece of land, a house, and a car. Such ownership acts as a basis for many instances of anger. Any infinite number of scenarios concerning his property might be conducive to anger: the government might decide that it needs his land and force him off of it, his house might burn down, someone might steal his car. By removing conditions that are conducive to the arising of anger, anger will tend to arise less and, if and when it does arise, the anger should be much more manageable, making the use of tactics more effective.

Of course, not everyone wants to be a renunciant. Still, there are strategic ideas that can be applied to non-monastic life as well, both with the aim of preventing anger in one's own case,

and to prevent it on a social scale. Non-monastics would, e.g., be encouraged in the Buddhist tradition to maintain some reasonable level of moral conduct. As before, such conduct will prevent many undesirable circumstances from arising, as well as (according to the tradition) having beneficial effects on one's own psychology. Concerning social-scale strategic planning, things such as social justice become quite important. If society is organized such that people are treated fairly and individuals and groups have opportunities to flourish, then people will tend not to become angry so often. Further, when such structures are in place, people will not be required, as they would under oppressive conditions, to put forth heroic efforts in order to subdue their anger. Although heroic efforts may be important and even necessary for moral life at times, it seems unintelligent to set up a society such that many individuals are constantly required to put forth such effort in order to achieve one or another desideratum. Instead, intelligent effort should be put forth to try to make, e.g., controlling one's anger, as easy as is possible for people at large. Such intelligent structuring of society should also include things like emotional education; just as we do not place the burden solely on individuals to learn to read, e.g., we should not place the burden on them re learning to cope with difficult emotional states skillfully.

Future research into how to best use strategic ideas from Buddhist traditions (adapting them if necessary) to accomplish goals related to emotional health privately and publicly, including anger management, would be, I think, a very fruitful endeavor.

3.9 Conclusion

Much of contemporary philosophy concerns purely theoretical exercises that lack the practical character that was an integral component of many earlier philosophical systems. The Buddhist tradition offers a modern philosopher the promise of the possibility of developing self-

regulatory abilities to high levels (behavioral, emotional, attentional), as well as practical means for achieving these goals. With respect to anger in particular, I have argued, we should minimally strive to develop a character in which anger is well under control. Although the pinnacle of virtue that is endorsed by Buddhism is loftier than this—the Buddhist sage has undergone a radical motivational/affective transformation such that it is not possible for her to become angry—that ideal is by no means easily attainable. For the average person who is not able to eradicate her afflictions at the roots, or for one who remains uncommitted to the elimination of anger, keeping one’s anger well-controlled is still a goal worth striving for. Although one might intellectually assent to this type of character as being desirable, one might also think that even this is too difficult to attain, since strong emotions, especially anger, are difficult to regulate. That is why practical techniques like those I have discussed are of such great importance and should be a staple of any philosophical tradition.

Although there is already starting to be a scientific and academic interest in and movement toward this type of education, with the ubiquitous interest in mindfulness and burgeoning field of contemplative studies, one might object to such proliferation on the grounds that these contemplative techniques are religious and are, therefore, not properly the kind of thing that should be taught, e.g., in university philosophy classes. Although there is some legitimate concern here, many of the techniques I have discussed above, although they originate with a religious figure, need not be religious in any important sense. There is nothing religious about reflecting on the negative consequences of anger. There is nothing religious about investigating causal relationships between various elements of one’s subjective experience.

There is nothing religious about directing one's attention to admirable features of someone's behavior rather than to features one finds aggravating.²³⁶

Philosophy ought to aim at producing not only intellectually capable individuals, but men and women who are possessed of virtue. That virtue, there is little doubt, depends upon self-regulatory capacities, which can be intentionally cultivated. I am certain that many individuals within the field of philosophy, individually, do strive to cultivate their characters, yet it seems that this process could be further improved by incorporating this aim and specific methodologies for achieving it explicitly into educational curricula.²³⁷

I have suggested that the Theravadan Buddhist tradition has much to offer that could be useful for philosophers, yet there is no need to limit ourselves to this tradition; the tantric methods, e.g., that are discussed by Emily McRae might be quite useful for curbing anger. Further still, there is no reason to think that we need to limit ourselves even to Buddhism; Seneca and Aristotle both offer a number of useful cognitive techniques that seem like excellent practical tools for regulating the emotions of self and other. That being said, the Buddhist tradition I have discussed here has a long history of developing methods for addressing and working with problems pertaining to affective, motivational, and attentional self-regulation, and so offer us an excellent place to begin.

²³⁶ Similar points are made throughout Sam Harris' body of work.

²³⁷ With appropriate safeguards in place, in line with the previous discussion.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR BUDDHIST SOURCES

AN	Āṅguttara Nikāya
Dhp.	Dhammapada
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Thag.	Theragāthā
Vism.	Visuddhimagga