

## QUESTION 47

### The Causes of Anger, and its Remedies

Next we have to consider the efficient causes of anger, and its remedies. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is the moving cause (*motivum*) of anger always something done to the one who gets angry? (2) Is the only moving cause of anger contempt or disdain (*parvipensio vel despectio*)? (3) What is the cause of anger on the part of the one who gets angry? (4) What is the cause of anger on the part of the one whom one gets angry with?

#### Article 1

##### Is it always because of something done to himself that someone gets angry?

It seems that it is not always because of something done to himself that someone gets angry:

**Objection 1:** A man cannot by sinning do anything to God; for Job 35:6 says, “If your iniquities multiply, what will you be doing to Him?” But God is said to get angry with men because of their sins—this according to Psalm 105:40 (“The Lord was exceedingly angry with His people”). Therefore, it is not always the case that someone gets angry because of something done to himself.

**Objection 2:** Anger is a desire for retribution. But someone desires to exact retribution even for things that are done to others. Therefore, it is not always the case that the moving cause of anger is something done to ourselves.

**Objection 3:** As the Philosopher says in *Rhetoric 2*, men get angry mainly with those “who look down upon (*despiciunt*) what they themselves are especially interested in; for instance, men who are interested in philosophy get angry with those who look down upon philosophy,” and the same thing holds for other cases. But to look down upon philosophy is not to harm the individual himself who is interested in it. Therefore, it is not always the case that we get angry because of what has been done to ourselves.

**Objection 4:** As Chrysostom points out, one who remains silent in the face of an individual who is insulting him (*tacet contra contumeliantem*) provokes that man to anger. But in remaining silent, he is not doing anything to him. Therefore, it is not always the case that someone’s anger is provoked by something that has been done to him.

**But contrary to this:** In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Anger always comes from what has been done to oneself. By contrast, animosity (*inimicitia*) comes without anything having been done to oneself, since we hate anyone whom we think to be of a certain sort.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 46, a. 6), anger is a desire to harm another under the concept *just retribution*. Now retribution has a place only where there has been a previous injury. Nor is it the case that every injury provokes one to retribution; instead, it is only an injury that involves the one who desires retribution (*sed illa sola quae ad eum pertinet qui appetit vindictam*). For just as each thing naturally desires what is good for itself (*proprium bonum*), so, too, each thing naturally repels what is bad for itself (*proprium malum*).

Now an injury done by one individual pertains to another individual only if the former has done something that is in some sense against the latter. Hence, it follows that the moving cause of someone’s anger is always something done to himself.

**Reply to objection 1:** In the case of God, ‘anger’ is predicated not as a passion of the mind, but rather as a judgment of justice insofar as He wills to exact retribution for sin. For in sinning, the sinner cannot as an efficient cause do any harm to God, and yet on his own part he acts against God in two ways: (a) insofar as he shows disdain for God in His commands, and (b) insofar as he harms someone, either himself or another—something that pertains to God insofar as the one to whom the harm is done is included under God’s providence and protection.

**Reply to objection 2:** We get angry with those who harm others and seek retribution against them to the extent that those who are harmed belong to us in some sense, either by some sort of kinship, or by friendship, or at least by the nature that we share in common with them (*saltem per communionem naturae*).

**Reply to objection 3:** What we are especially interested in is such that we think of it as our good. And so when that thing is looked down upon, we regard ourselves as likewise looked down upon and judge that we ourselves have been harmed.

**Reply to objection 4:** Someone who remains silent provokes an injurious individual to anger when it appears that he is remaining silent out of contempt (*ex contemptu*) and is, as it were, treating the other's anger as of little account (*quasi parvipendat alterius iram*). For this very treating of it as of little account is itself an act.

## Article 2

### Is disdain or contempt the only moving cause of anger?

It seems that disdain or contempt (*parvipensio vel despectio*) is not the only moving cause of anger:

**Objection 1:** Damascene says, "It is when we have suffered an injury, or think ourselves to have suffered an injury, that we get angry." But a man can suffer an injury even in the absence of contempt or disdain. Therefore, disdain is not the only moving cause of anger.

**Objection 2:** To desire honor is the same thing as being saddened by disdain. But brute animals do not desire honor. Therefore, they are not saddened by disdain. And yet, as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 3, "Anger is provoked in them because they are wounded." Therefore, disdain does not seem to be the only moving cause of anger.

**Objection 3:** In *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher posits many other causes of anger, e.g., "our being forgotten about by others, having others rejoice in our misfortunes, having others make bad things known to us, being prevented by others from fulfilling our own will (*oblivionem, et exultationem in infortuniis, denuntiationem malorum, impedimentum consequendae propriae voluntatis*)." Therefore, it is not only disdain that provokes anger.

**But contrary to this:** In *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says that anger is "a desire, accompanied by sadness, to punish someone because of apparent disdain shown in an unseemly fashion."

**I respond:** All the other causes of anger are traced back to disdain (*parvipensio*). For as *Rhetoric* 2 explains, there are three species of disdain (*tres species parvipensionis*), viz., (a) contempt (*despectio*), (b) obstructionism (*eperasmus*), i.e., preventing someone from doing what he wills (*impedimentum voluntatis implendae*), and (c) verbal abuse or insults (*contumeliatio*), and all the moving causes of anger are traced back to these three.

There are two possible ways to explain this:

The first explanation is that anger desires harm for another insofar as this harm has the character of just retribution, and so it seeks retribution to the extent that this seems just. Now just retribution is effected only in response to something that has been done unjustly, and so what provokes someone to anger always falls under the concept *unjust*. Hence, in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says, "If men think that those who have done harm are suffering justly, then they do not get angry, since anger is not directed against what is just."

Now there are three ways in which harm can be inflicted, viz., out of *ignorance*, out of *passion*, and by *choice*. An individual does something unjust especially when he inflicts the harm *by choice* or *purposefully* or *out of fixed malice* (*ex electione vel industria vel ex certa malitia*), as *Ethics* 5 says. And so we get the most angry with those whom we think to have harmed us on purpose. For if we think that it

was through ignorance or passion that someone inflicted harm on us, then either we do not get angry with him or we get much less angry, since doing something out of ignorance or out of passion diminishes the act's character as an injury (*diminuit rationem iniuriae*) and in some sense gives rise to mercy and forbearance (*est quodammodo provocativum misericordiae et veniae*). By contrast, those who inflict harm on purpose seem to be sinning out of contempt, and so we get the most angry with them. Hence, in *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, "We either do not get angry at all, or we get less angry, with those who have done something out of anger; for they do not seem to have acted in order to show disdain (*propter parvipensionem*)."

The second explanation is that disdain is opposed to a man's excellence, since, as *Rhetoric 2* says, "Men disdain what they believe to have no worth." Now it is some sort of excellence that we seek from all our goods. And so every instance of harm inflicted on us is such that to the extent that it detracts from our excellence, it seems to involve disdain.

**Reply to objection 1:** If someone suffers harm from any cause other than contempt, that cause diminishes the harm's character as an injury. Instead, it is only contempt or disdain that strengthens the character of anger. And so contempt or disdain is a *per se* cause of someone's getting angry.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even though a brute animal does not desire honor under the concept *honor*, it nonetheless has a natural desire for a certain sort of excellence, and it gets angry with whatever detracts from that excellence.

**Reply to objection 3:** All the causes in question are traced back to some sort of disdain. For forgetting about someone (*oblivio*) is an obvious sign of disdain, since we fix more firmly in memory what we regard as important (*ea enim quae magna aestimamus magis memoriae infigimus*). Similarly, it is because of a certain sort of disdain that someone does not fear saddening an individual by making sad things known to him. Again, someone who shows signs of merriment at the misfortune of another seems to care very little about what is good or bad for him. Similarly, someone who prevents another from executing his plans, but not because of any advantage that thereby comes his way, seems not to care very much about his friend. And so all such things provoke anger insofar as they are signs of contempt.

### Article 3

#### Is an individual's excellence a cause of his getting angry more easily?

It seems that an individual's excellence is not a cause of his getting angry more easily:

**Objection 1:** In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, "There are some people who get angry especially when they are saddened, e.g., the sick, the needy, and those who do not have what they desire." But all these things seem to involve defects. Therefore, defectiveness make one more prone toward anger than excellence does.

**Objection 2:** In the same place the Philosopher says, "There are some who get angry especially when there can be some suspicion that what they are looked down upon for does not exist in them or exists very weakly in them; by contrast, when they think that they excel in what they are looked down upon for, then they do not care." But the suspicion spoken of here arises from some defect. Therefore, it is defectiveness, rather than any sort of excellence, that causes someone to get angry.

**Objection 3:** What involves excellence makes men especially agreeable and full of hope. But in *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, "Men are not angry when they are playing, making jokes, taking part in a feast, completing their work, partaking in non-shameful pleasures, or when they are full of hope." Therefore, excellence is not a cause of anger.

**But contrary to this:** In the same book the Philosopher says that men become indignant because of their excellence.

**I respond:** There are two ways to understand the cause of anger in the one who is angry:

(a) In one way, as *a disposition toward the moving cause of anger (secundum habitudinem ad motivum irae)*. And in this sense *excellence* is a cause of someone's getting angry easily. For as has been explained (a. 3), the moving cause of anger is unjust disdain. Now it is clear that the more excellent someone is, the more unjust it is to disdain him in the matter in which he excels. And so those who have some sort of excellence are especially angered if they are disdained—e.g., if a rich man is disdained in matters that involve money, or a rhetorician in matters that involve speaking, and so on for other such cases.

(b) In a second way, the cause of anger in the one who is angry can be thought of as *a disposition that is left over in him by the sort of moving cause in question (ex parte dispositionis quae in eo relinquitur ex tali motivo)*. Now it is clear that nothing moves one to anger except harm that saddens him. But what involves *defectiveness* is especially saddening, since men are who are subject to defects are more easily harmed. And the reason why men who are sick or who suffer from other defects get angry more easily is that they are saddened more easily.

**Reply to objection 1:** This makes clear the reply to the first objection.

**Reply to objection 2:** Someone who is despised in a matter in which he clearly excels to a high degree does not think of himself as suffering any diminution, and so he is not saddened and on this score is less angry. However, from the other side, to the extent that he is despised less deservedly, he has more of a reason for getting angry—unless, perhaps, he thinks of himself as being envied or scorned not out of disdain, but out of ignorance or some other cause of this sort.

**Reply to objection 3:** All the things in question impede anger to the extent that they impede sadness. However, from the other side, these things are apt to provoke anger to the extent that they make a man less fit to be despised.

#### Article 4

##### Is an individual's defectiveness a cause of his being such that we more easily get angry with him?

It seems that an individual's defectiveness is not a cause of his being such that we more easily get angry with him (*defectus alicuius non sit causa ut contra ipsum facilius irascamur*):

**Objection 1:** In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, "We are not angry with those who confess and repent and humble themselves; instead, we are gentle with them. Hence, even dogs do not bite those who sit back down." But this involves lowliness and defectiveness. Therefore, someone's lowliness (*parvitas*) is a cause of our being less angry with him.

**Objection 2:** There is no greater defect than death. But anger ceases with respect to the dead. Therefore, someone's defectiveness is not a cause that provokes anger against him.

**Objection 3:** No one judges that someone is lowly by reason of the fact that he is his friend. But if our friends harm us or do not help us, then we suffer more; hence, Psalm 54:13 says, "If my enemy had reviled me, I at least would have been able to bear it." Therefore, someone's defectiveness is not a cause of our more easily getting angry with him.

**But contrary to this:** In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, "The rich man gets angry with the poor man if the poor man despises him, and the prince gets angry with his subject."

**I respond:** As was explained above (aa. 2-3), unseemly contempt (*indigna despectio*) is what above all provokes anger. Therefore, the defectiveness or lowliness of the one with whom we are angry makes for an increase of anger insofar as it increases the unseemliness of the contempt (*inquantum auget indignam despectionem*). For just as the more prestigious someone is (*quanto aliquis est maior*), the more unseemly it is to look down upon him, so the more lowly someone is, the more unseemly it is for

him to look down upon anyone. And so nobles get angry if they are looked down upon by peasants, and the wise get angry if they are looked down upon by the foolish, and masters get angry if they are looked down upon by their servants.

On the other hand, if lowliness or defectiveness diminishes the unseemliness of the contempt, then this sort of lowliness diminishes anger and does not increase it. And in this sense those individuals diminish anger who repent of the injuries they have inflicted and confess that they have acted badly and humble themselves and seek forgiveness—this according to Proverbs 15:1: “A gentle response breaks anger,” viz., insofar as such men seem not to look down upon, but instead to think more highly of, those before whom they humble themselves.

**Reply to objection 1:** This makes clear the reply to the first objection.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two reasons why anger ceases with respect to the dead. One is that they cannot grieve or perceive, which is what those who are angry especially seek in those with whom they are angry. The second reason is that they already seem to have arrived at the worst of all evils. Hence, anger likewise ceases with respect to those who have been gravely harmed, insofar as the evil that belongs to them exceeds the measure of just retribution.

**Reply to objection 3:** The disdain that comes from one’s friends seems to be more unseemly. And so the reason why we get more angry with them if they disdain us—by harming us or by not helping us—is similar to the reason why we get more angry with those who are more lowly than we are.