

ABSTRACT

Seneca's On Anger

Holly Winters

Director: Robert Miner, Ph.D.

My thesis has explored Seneca's On Anger. Anger, and the affections, are brought to discussion as they were considered by Seneca. What is anger? What causes anger? Is anger useful? What is revenge? What are the remedies to anger? These questions and more are considered and explored.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Robert Miner, Great Texts Program

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: _____

SENECA'S ON ANGER

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Holly Winters

Waco, Texas

May 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	iii
Dedication	vi
Chapter One: Defining Anger	1
Introduction	1
Section One: The Main Characteristics of Anger	2
Section Two: The Unnaturalness of Anger	7
Section Three: The Uselessness of Anger	9
Subsection A: Control	9
Subsection B: Anger and Virtue	11
Subsection C: Correction and Anger	13
Subsection D: Aristotle – Anger as Arms	15
Subsection E: Anger and Justice	16
Section Four: Anger is Contrary to the Greatness of Soul	17
Chapter Two: Anger, Mind, Virtue, and Remedies	19
Introduction	19
Section One: Anger and the Mind	20
Section Two: More on the Uselessness of Anger	25
Subsection A: Anger and Vices	25
Subsection B: Anger and Sins.	26
Subsection C: Anger, Contempt, and Fear	28
Subsection D: Elimination of Anger	30

Subsection E: Nobility of Anger	. . . . .	32
Section Three: Remedies to Anger in Early Life	. . . . .	33
Section Four: Remedies to Anger in Later Life	. . . . .	35
Subsection A: Causes of Anger	. . . . .	35
Subsection B: Avoiding Anger	. . . . .	37
Subsection C: Handling Anger	. . . . .	39
Subsection D: Acting When Angry	. . . . .	42
Chapter Three: Above Anger	. . . . .	44
Introduction	. . . . .	44
Section One: The Importance of Curing Anger	. . . . .	45
Section Two: Avoid Becoming Angry	. . . . .	47
Section Three: Laying Aside Anger	. . . . .	54
Section Four: Above Anger	. . . . .	58
Conclusion	. . . . .	63
Bibliography	. . . . .	65

PREFACE

This thesis is an exploration of Seneca's *On Anger*. I follow Seneca's structure and format. Each chapter focuses on a different book in Seneca's *On Anger*. Seneca's three books tend to cover the same ground. For instance, he writes on the uselessness of anger in all three. Is Seneca being repetitive, or is there a larger reason for him discussing issues in each book?

Of course, I am inclined to argue that Seneca does in fact have a reason for covering the same material in three different places and in three different ways. Books I, II, and III each differ in their handling of material and their direction. It seems as though Book I is more generally written. In Book I, Seneca is writing to the general public. He is warning the average person about anger. In Book II, Seneca becomes a bit more nuanced. Instead of giving general warnings about the evils of anger, he begins to discuss how to handle anger and anger in regards to virtues. The difference between Books I and II is that in Book II Seneca is writing to the virtuous man. In Book I, Seneca is writing to any given person. Seneca goes beyond writing to any person and writes directly to people concerned with the virtues and with being virtuous in Book II. Seneca becomes more nuanced still in Book III. Likewise, he is also writing to a more specific audience. Book III is not aimed at men who are just virtuous; it is aimed at the wise man. Thus, Book I deals with anger in general terms, Book II deals with anger in terms related to virtuous people, and Book III deals with anger in relation to wisdom and the wise man.

The evolution in the aims of each particular book also explains the critique of Seneca as starting out strong against anger and becoming weak. When generally warning

against the dangers of anger, Seneca is very strong and without nuance because he is speaking generally to the general public. Seneca's discussions on anger become more nuanced and sophisticated as his target audience becomes more concerned with the virtues and wisdom. Seneca does not become weaker in his fight against anger. Instead, his arguments grow in sophistication as his target audience does. These points will become evident in the following chapters.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Vernice Bloedau, and my aunt, Laura Hunt. I would not be where I am today without both of you. Thank you.

CHAPTER ONE

Defining Anger

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter will take up the task of defining anger. The first chapter – Defining Anger – corresponds with Seneca’s Book I of *On Anger*.

The main characteristics of anger will be laid out in its first section. The nature of anger, the physical symptoms, and the mental and emotional effects of anger are all considered as main characteristics.

The next section of this chapter will consider anger and human nature, discussing the unnaturalness of it. Anger is counter to human nature due to two fundamental reasons. First, human nature guides humans to help one another, and anger guides humans to harm one another. Second, punishments done in anger are done for the purpose of harming. Punishments ought to always be meant for corrective and healing purposes.

The third section of this chapter takes up the important task of showing the uselessness of anger. The biggest defenders of anger, such as Aristotle, assert that anger is useful for various purposes. This section is split into five subsections. First, anger cannot be controlled, making its use dangerous. Second, anger, as a vice, cannot aid the virtues. It does not increase courage. Third, it cannot be used for corrective purposes. Correction, and punishment if necessary, ought to be done based on proper judgment, not anger. Fourth, Seneca writes directly against the Aristotelian argument that anger can be used as arms. Seneca shows that anger is useless as weapons due to its lack of control and its nature as a vice. Fifth and finally, anger cannot aid in justice. Anger, as a vice, cannot

assist in the growth in virtues; this includes justice. Justice requires a just decision to be made. One such decision cannot be made while anger controls the mind.

The fourth and final section of this chapter defining anger shows that anger does not contribute to the greatness of the soul. Anger is a vice that acts as a sickness – a cancer – to the soul. This point, the poisonousness of anger, continues through the entire thesis and all of Seneca’s works in *On Anger*. When we become angry, it is our souls at stake.

Section 1: The Main Characteristics of Anger

Anger, according to Seneca, is unique amongst the other affections¹. It is set apart by its symptoms that liken it to a madness. Anger is a distinctively human phenomenon that arises from the perception of slights and desires revenge.

Anger is differentiated from the other affections by its frenzied nature and symptoms that liken it to madness. Other affections may disrupt the mind in some ways, but they still leave the mind with some elements of peace and reason. The same is not so for anger. Seneca describes the anger in the following way:

[T]he most hideous and frenzied of all affections. For the other affections have in them some element of peace and calm, while this one is wholly violent and has its being in an onrush of resentment, raging with a most inhuman lust for weapons, blood, and punishment, giving no thought to itself if only it can hurt another, hurling itself upon the very point of the dagger, and eager for revenge though it may drag down the avenger along with it.²

Anger is frenzied and is fully contained in a rush of resentment. The angry person seeks punishment with such ferocity that owing to his anger, he may sabotage himself in

¹ The term affection is translated to emotion in the text being used. However, the Latin term used is *affectum* not the term *passio*. While *passio* is translated as emotion or passion without any loss of meaning, the term *affectum* is more closely translated to affection. Throughout this text, all quotations will use the term “affection” instead of passion/emotion where the original Latin is derived from *affectum*.

² Seneca, *Moral Essays Volume 1 – Book I On Anger*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1928), 107.

seeking revenge. Other affections at least have some element of peace and calm, no matter how small. Anger has none. It is frenzied and nothing but destructive even to the point of destroying the avenger in its quest for revenge. For this reason, anger can be characterized as a type of insanity. Seneca continues from the previous passage:

Certain wise men, therefore, have claimed that anger is temporary madness. For it is equally devoid of self-control, forgetful of decency, unmindful of ties, persistent and diligent in whatever it begins, closed to reason and counsel, excited by trifling causes, unfit to discern the right and true – the very counterpart of a ruin that is shattered in pieces where it overwhelms.³

A man possessed by anger lacks both self-control and reason. He has lost the ability to judge right from wrong and truth from falsehood. Anger will not even subside after it has succeeded in overwhelming the mind. Thus, anger is a temporary madness. So long as a man is possessed by anger, he is no longer sane. The physical aspects of anger, according to Seneca, show this to be true. “But you have only to behold the aspect of those possessed by anger to know that they are insane. For as the marks of a madman are unmistakable – a bold and threatening mien, a gloomy brow, a fierce expression, a hurried step, restless hands, an altered colour, a quick and more violent breathing – so likewise are the marks of the angry man.”⁴ Seneca goes on to describe the physical symptoms of anger in more detail:

[H]is eyes blaze and sparkle, his whole face is crimson with the blood that surges from the lowest depths of the heart, his lips quiver, his teeth are clenched, his hair bristles and stands on end, his breathing is forced and harsh, his joints crack from writhing, he groans and bellows, bursts out into speech with scarcely intelligible

³ 107

⁴ 107-109

words, strikes his hands together continually, and stamps the ground with his feet... it is an ugly and horrible picture of distorted and swollen frenzy.⁵

The madman possessed by anger hardly sounds like a man at all. In his frenzied anger, he appears to be an animalistic madman. Yet could not anger possess the quiet man? Could not anger possess the man that does not show it completely? Or is anger exclusively a phenomenon characterized by these outbursts? Seneca never handles these questions directly. He does, however, recognize that there are many shapes that anger and the angry man can take:

[W]e call the men bitter and harsh, and just as often, choleric, rabid, clamorous, captious, and fierce – all of which designate different aspects of anger. Here, too, you may place the peevish man, whose state is a mild irascibility. Now there are certain kinds of anger which subside in noise; some are as persistent as they are common; some are fierce in deed but inclined to be frugal of words; some are vented in bitterness of speech and curses; certain kinds do not go beyond a word of complaint and a show of coolness, others are deep-seated and weighty and brood in a man. There are a thousand different shapes of the multiform evil.⁶

Anger is not exclusively characterized by these animalistic outbursts. A man possessed by anger can have the frenzied affection raging within him without the outer bellows and bursts. The man possessed by anger can look any different ways, and anger can take many different forms. Nonetheless, anger is still anger no matter what form it has taken.

Moreover, anger arises and possesses the mind from an injury or from the perception of an insult. The difference between the terms “insult” and “injury” must be noted. “Injury” encompasses much more than the term “insult” and does not always lead to anger. For instance, one person can mistakenly step on the toe of another person, causing a minor injury. If the latter understands the accidental nature of the injury, he

⁵ 109

⁶ 117-119

does not feel insulted by it and does not become angry. “Insults,” on the other hand, are what lead to anger. Someone that feels something has been done against his character will feel insulted. In the example above, if the latter person perceived that the former stepped on his toe as a statement against his character, he has perceived an insult and will become angry. “Insults” rely on the person being injured to perceive that injury as an insult that ought to be revenged. “Insults” arise from the perception of injuries, but “injuries” do not necessitate “insults.” Furthermore, there are physical and emotional aspects to the difference between these two terms:

Let us make the distinction...between injury and insult. The former is by its nature more serious; the latter, a slighter matter – for men are not harmed, but angered by it. Yet such is the weakness and vanity of some men’s minds, there are those who find the slave who would rather be struck with the lash than the fist, who considers stripes and death more endurable than insulting words.⁷

“Injury” is merely a physical phenomenon. It is harm to the body. “Insult,” however, is mental. Through an insult, no harm is actually done yet men become angry. Pain from physical injuries leaves the soul of a person intact. Pain from insults, on the other hand, incites a need for vengeance. One cannot always protect against physical damage, but the same is not so for mental insults. Insults – intended, perceived, and real – give rise to the affection of anger. Seneca characterizes anger as resulting from receiving an insult or a disturbance of tranquility in some way.

One can object that injury is not the source of anger, arguing that anger often arises not by an injury or insult, but by the intention of one. Notice above the terms “intended, perceived, and real.” Real or actual injury is easy enough to understand; it is an actual injury or insult against one’s person or character. Intended and perceived

⁷59

injuries, on the other hand, are not as clear-cut as actual injuries and insults. Instead they are the perception of harm. When one perceives an intended injury, he has still been insulted by the very intention of that harm. Although he was not physically harmed, the intention insults his character. Seneca writes: “It is true that we do get angry at those who intend to hurt us, but by the very intention they do hurt us; the man who intends to do injury has already done it.”⁸ The intention of injuring or of causing an insult is an insult in and of itself. Anger arising from an intended or perceived injury or insult is the equivalent of anger arising from an actual injury or insult.

Anger – arising from insults – desires to punish the offenders. Anger can simply be defined as “the desire to exact punishment.”⁹ Anger is the frenzied and ever growing desire to exact punishment by way of revenge for an intended, perceived, or actual insult.

Although the symptoms of anger, as described above, turn the man possessed by anger into an animalistic madman, anger is a distinctively human phenomenon. Men may become like animals when they are angry, but animals do not truly become angry.

Although the angry man is devoid of reason while in the midst of his possession, reason is required for anger to first take root. Seneca argues “that wild beasts and all animals, except man, are not subject to anger; for while it is the foe of reason, it is, nevertheless, born only where reason dwells... Wisdom, foresight, diligence, and reflection have been granted to no creature but man, and not only his virtues but also his faults have been withheld from the animals.”¹⁰ The ability to reason is a necessary requirement for the ability to become angry. This is fitting with the cause of anger as the perception of a

⁸113

⁹113

¹⁰ 115

slight, for a man needs the ability to reason to perceive that he has been slighted in the first place.

Section 2: The Unnaturalness of Anger

Anger is completely counter to human nature according to Seneca. The nature of man and the nature of anger are incompatible by their very definitions. “For human life is founded on kindness and concord, and is bound into an alliance for common help, not by terror, but by mutual love.”¹¹ Human nature and human life is fundamentally based on loving one another in a way that promotes the common good for all people.

The very nature of anger is counter to kindness, concord, common help, and mutual love. “Anger, as I have said, is bent on punishment, and that such a desire should find a harbour in man’s most peaceful breast accords least of all with his nature.”¹² Anger is such a frenzied affection that it turns men against their very natures.

Anger and human nature are fundamentally incompatible in their essences. “Man is born for mutual help; anger for mutual destruction. The one desires union; the other disunion; the one to help, the other to harm; one would succour even strangers, the other attack its best beloved; the one is ready even to expend himself for the good of others, the other to plunge into peril only if it can drag others along.”¹³ Anger is opposed to every aspect of the natural human life. Anger calls for destruction when men would otherwise preserve. Anger would even drive men to harm the people they love most when men would naturally be kind even to strangers.

¹¹ 119

¹² 199

¹³ 199

Some argue against human nature helping instead of harming, claiming that there are instances that call for the correction of individuals. First it must be noted that this correction is done for the purpose of helping. Correction is done “with discretion, not with anger. For it will not hurt, but will heal under the guise of hurting.”¹⁴ The laws do not require correction of lawbreakers out of anger. Instead, the corrections are meant to help guide and mend the individuals. A mother does not correct her child out of anger, but she guides him out of love. The same is true for medical procedures. While they may cause pain, the purpose is to heal and improve. Let it also be noted that while corrections are designed to help, punishment is designed for harm.

Secondly, corrections, in their efforts to help shape and mend individuals, progress in degree. Milder corrections are used first; if they prove to be sufficient, then there is no need for further corrections. However, when the mild corrections are insufficient, the corrections must increase in degree to achieve the intended effect. The same is true of medical procedures. It is the duty of the state to administer such corrections for the good of its citizenry. Seneca elaborates:

Similarly, it becomes a guardian of the law, the ruler of the state, to heal human nature by the use of words, and these of the milder sort, as long as he can, to the end that he may persuade a man to do what he ought to do, and win over his heart for a desire for the honourable and the just, and implant in his mind hatred of vice and esteem of virtue. Let him pass next to harsher language, in which he will still aim at admonition and reproof. Lastly, let him resort to punishment, yet still making it light and not irrevocable. Extreme punishment let him appoint only to extreme crime, so that no man will lose his life unless it is to the benefit even of the loser to lose it.¹⁵

Correction is always used as a tool for helping; correction is not merely used to harm others. Even in the harsher forms of correction, the intent is always to help and not

¹⁴ 119-121

¹⁵ 120-123

to harm. In cases when harm is done and the rulers must resort to punishment, the punishment is still done to help the individual being punished and the community as a whole. Furthermore, the corrections and even the punishment are never done out of anger. More will be said on the topic of corrections and punishment in the following section. “Man’s nature, then, does not crave vengeance; neither, therefore does anger accord with man’s nature, because anger craves vengeance.”¹⁶

Section 3: The Uselessness of Anger

3.A: Control

Various arguments assert that anger is useful if it can be controlled. Seneca, however, shows that anger cannot be controlled, nor is it ever useful. Affections are uncontrollable by their natures. Affections are a disturbance of the mind; they are a disturbance of reason. The nature of affection as informs Seneca’s argument against the ability to control and use the affection of anger. If reason becomes disturbed, then reason cannot be used to control the disturbing force.

The nature of affections overthrows the mind and does not yield to reason or control. In order to use anger in any way, one would have to allow for anger. Using anger allows for the entrance and even the cultivation of anger. It is easier to completely eradicate affections – and anger – than to allow them in moderation. Seneca writes: “it is easier to exclude harmful affections than to rule them, and to deny them admittance than, after they have been admitted, to control them; for when they have established themselves in possession, they are stronger than their ruler and do not permit themselves

¹⁶ 123

to be restrained or reduced.”¹⁷ In this way, anger cannot be useful because it cannot be controlled.

Since the affections cannot be controlled, they cause more damage to the mind than benefits produced by their alleged usefulness. The mind of a tranquil individual is undisturbed and ruled by reason. Part of the uncontrollable nature of anger and the affections is a disturbance not only in the mind but also in reason. Allowing for anger allows for a contamination of reason:

Reason herself, to whom the reins of power have been entrusted, remains mistress only so long as she is kept apart from the affections: if once she mingles with them and is contaminated, she becomes unable to hold back those whom she might have cleared away from her path. For when once the mind has been aroused and shaken, it becomes the slave of the disturbing agent. There are certain things which at the start are under our control, but later hurry us away by their violence and leave us no retreat.¹⁸

The very entrance of anger, no matter how insignificant in degree, is enough to contaminate our reason. Anger may give us the illusion of control at first, but at any moment the violence of the affection can overtake and enslave us. “If, however, it will not submit to authority and reason, the only result of its moderation will be that the less there is of it, the less harm it will do. Consequently moderate affection is nothing else than a moderate evil.”¹⁹ Allowing anger to take hold at all subjects us to this contamination.

Furthermore, there are two options to consider when evaluating the relationship between our reason and anger. The first option is that anger is stronger than reason; the second option is that reason is stronger than anger. Seneca answers this dilemma simply:

¹⁷ 125

¹⁸ 125

¹⁹ 133

“If [anger] is more powerful, how will reason be able to set limitations upon it, since ordinarily, it is only the less powerful thing that submits? If [anger] is weaker, then reason without it is sufficient in itself for the accomplishment of our tasks, and requires no help from a thing less powerful.”²⁰ Anger proves useless whether or not it is more powerful than reason. If it is, then the aforementioned problem of losing control is sufficient to make the use of anger impossible. If anger is not stronger than reason, then there is no need to use anger at all because our reason is a sufficient tool to achieve our goals. Anger has no utility in either scenario.

3.B: Anger and Virtue

First, anger cannot be useful because it cannot be controlled. Secondly, even if anger could be controlled, there would be no purpose in its use. Aristotle argues, however, that anger is useful as a tool to achieve another goal, that anger is useful to aid virtues.

Seneca quickly dispels this argument. Virtues are the dominant tools that allow a good man to achieve good ends. Virtues are good and useful by their natures. They are the qualities by which we fulfill our proper functions. Vice, on the other hand, are qualities that prevent the proper functioning of man. It would be paradoxical for virtues to need the aid of vice for just ends. Indeed, Seneca states that anger has no utility: “Again, anger embodies nothing useful, nor does it kindle the mind to warlike deeds; for virtue, being self-sufficient, never needs the help of vice. Whenever there is a need of violent effort, the mind does not become angry, but it gathers itself together and is

²⁰ 127

aroused or relaxed according to its estimate of the need.”²¹ It is not anger that rallies the mind to rise to the task; it is reason. Likewise, it is not anger that calms the mind when needed. Virtues are sufficiently capable of arising the mind to fulfill its needs without the aid of vice.

Vice is never needed as an aid to virtue. Even in times of war, it is reason and virtue that prevail and lead to victory. Aristotle argues that anger is needed to achieve victory in battles. He argues that anger must fill the mind and souls of the soldiers in order to inspire them to fight victoriously. “But this is not true. For if [anger] listens to reason and follows where reason leads, it is no longer anger, of which the chief characteristic is wilfulness. If, however, it resists and is not submissive when ordered, but is carried away by its own caprice and fury, it will be an instrument of the mind as useless as is the soldier who disregards the signal for retreat.”²² In the mind and on the battlefield, it is either reason that prevails over anger, or anger prevails and renders mind and the soldier useless.

Furthermore, anger and other affections do not aid or add to the virtues. It is not possible to increase in virtuousness through the use of a vice. Vices are degrading by definition. Anger does not add to courage, nor does it make men more courageous. “No man is ever made braver through anger, except the one who would never have been brave without anger. It comes, then, not as a help to virtue, but as a substitute for it.”²³ A vice does not add to or improve a virtue; it can, however, completely replace it. Men that benefit from anger – that become “braver” – are not increasing their courage because they

²¹ 129

²² 129

²³ 141

have none. Instead, men using anger are increasing their anger. In instances such as this, men use anger in place of courage. Anger cannot be used in the service of virtue. “Anger, therefore, is not expedient even in battle or in war; for it is prone to rashness, and while it seeks to bring about danger, does not guard against it.”²⁴

3.C: Correction and Anger

As mentioned earlier, human nature is nourishing and loving. It is not natural for men to cause harm or suffering. Anger seeks to punish, but human nature seeks to correct. Anger seeks to harm, but human nature seeks to help. Correction is always done for the purpose of healing. While treatment may cause pain, the goal is always to help and never to hurt. Anger aims at punishing. Anger seeks to cause pain wherever it can without regard to healing.

Despite arguments to the contrary, anger is not needed to correct wrongdoing. Indeed, corrections ought to be done in the complete absence of anger. If a man is angry when he is correcting a wrongdoer, his intent is punishment and to cause pain. Correction ought to be done from a place of reason and justice, not from a place of disturbance and anger. “The good man will perform his duties undisturbed and unafraid; and he will in such a way do all that is worthy of a good man as to do nothing that is unworthy of a man. My father is being murdered – I will defend him; he is slain – I will avenge him, not because I grieve, but because it is my duty.”²⁵ Correction is done from duty and from nothing else. A good man will perform his duties without the disturbance of anger.

²⁴ 137

²⁵ 137

Refusing to become angry does not mean being defenseless and weak. It means defending and avenging not to cause harm and not out of anger, but it means defending and avenging because it is just. “And so the man who does wrong ought to be set right both by admonition and by force, by measures both gentle and harsh, and we should try to make him a better man for his own sake, as well as for the sake of others, stinting, not our reproof, but our anger.”²⁶ A good man will not spare the wrongdoer the necessary and proper correction. He will only spare anger when doing so. In order to do what is just – in order to fulfill your duties – you must do so without disturbances of the mind, without affection, and without anger.

Fulfillment of duty ought to be the intent for correction. Intending harm for the sake of harm is characteristic of punishment inspired by anger. This willing of harm is counter to man’s nature. Likewise, correcting men while angry cannot lead to the growth of any virtues, voiding the entire process of correction. “Consequently, there is no need that correction be given in anger in order to restrain the erring and the wicked. For since anger is a mental sin, it is not right to correct wrong-doing by doing wrong.”²⁷ You cannot hope to correct sin with sin, vice with vice, wrong with wrong. Correcting sin with sin will only lead to more sin. Virtues are needed to correct vice and so on. Punishing out of anger results in more injustice. Correcting without anger is the only hope of remedying the wrongdoer.

²⁶ 143

²⁷ 145

3.D: Aristotle – Anger as Arms

Affections, some argue, can be useful as arms. They can be weapons for us to use at will. “Aristotle says that certain affections, if one makes proper use of them, serve as arms.”²⁸ There are, however, many things wrong with this assertion. It is not possible for one to make proper use of any affection, especially anger. First, anger cannot be controlled; second, anger would be useless even if it could be controlled. Seneca continues from the passage above: “And this would be true if, like the implements of war, they could be put on and laid aside at the pleasure of the user. But these ‘arms’ which Aristotle would grant to virtue fight under their own orders; they await no man’s gesture and are not possessed, but possess.”²⁹ Once permitted, anger takes hold and controls instead of being controlled. Anger cannot be used as arms because it cannot be laid aside when no longer needed.

Furthermore, anger – or other affections – would not be useful even if they could be used as arms. Men do not need to equip themselves with anger because they are sufficiently equipped by nature. Seneca elaborates from the previous passages:

Nature has given to us an adequate equipment in reason; we need no other implements. This is the weapon she has bestowed; it is strong, enduring, obedient, not double-edged or capable of being turned against its owner. Reason is all-sufficient in itself, serving not merely for counsel, but for action as well. What, really, is more foolish than that reason should seek protection from anger – that which is steadfast from that which is wavering, that which is trustworthy from that which is untrustworthy, that which is well from that which is sick?³⁰

Reason is the only weapon or tool needed for men to achieve their aims. Reason is self-sufficient and better suited in every way. Men cannot succeed with arms that are

²⁸ 151

²⁹ 151

³⁰ 151

wavering, untrustworthy, and sick. Additionally, men need arms that are balanced to succeed. “Affection quickly falls, reason is balanced.”³¹ Anger cannot be effective arms because it is not balanced. Anger inflates and deflates as it runs its course. It can dissipate as quickly as it escalated, leaving the user armless and unable to achieve his goals.

Reason, by nature, is steady and clam.

3.E: Anger and Justice

Anger cannot be useful in making just decisions, for anger has no concern for justice nor does it have the tool – rationality – needed to distinguish what is just from what is unjust. The mind ruled by anger cannot make fair and just decisions, because anger does not allow the mind to heed facts or reason. It is self-absorbed and focused solely on its goal of revenge – regardless of justice. Just decisions stem from deliberation out of reason, not anger:

Reason grants a hearing to both sides, then seeks to postpone action, even its own, in order that it may gain time to sift out the truth; but anger is precipitate. Reason wishes the decision that it gives to be just; anger wishes to have the decision which it has given to seem the just decision. Reason considers nothing except the question at issue; anger is moved by trifling things that lie outside the case.³²

The angry man takes note of no side other than his own. He does not care for the actual justice of his decision, only for the appearance of it. The man controlled by anger is controlled by outside circumstances. He is controlled by perception of slights against his character rather than rationally focusing on the true issues at hand.

The angry man does not seek justice for the sake of duty or for the sake of justice in and of itself. The angry man seeks justice only in so far as justice conforms to his

³¹ 153

³² 153

vengeance. If justice does not conform, then the angry man will still seek vengeance and pretend that it is justice. The man possessed by anger does not respect even truth. “Anger, I say, has this great fault – it refuses to be ruled. It is enraged against truth itself if this is shown to be contrary to its desire.”³³ A tool that contaminates reason and ignores truth cannot be useful to any just ends.

Section 4: Anger is Contrary to Greatness of Soul

What is at stake when we question anger? What is it we have to lose or tarnish? It is our souls. It is human excellence. It is the ability to achieve greatness of soul. Anger cannot add to the greatness of our souls, for it has no foundation to do so. Indeed, anger is like a disease to the soul as all vices are.

It is not possible for anger to add anything to our greatness of soul because it lacks the foundation to do so. Virtues are rooted. They can be practiced and groomed. Take courage; a man can develop his courage over time. It is rooted in his habits and deeds and reason. Anger, however, has no roots. “Anger has nothing on which to stand; it springs from nothing that is stable and lasting, but is a puffed-up, empty thing, as far removed from greatness of soul as foolhardiness from bravery, arrogance from confidence, sullenness from austerity, or cruelty from sternness.”³⁴ Anger cannot be practiced nor groomed because it cannot be controlled. It is empty on any virtues and cannot possibly contribute toward greatness of soul in any way.

Anger cannot increase the greatness of soul; in fact it can only decrease it. Anger is a disease of the soul. What anger does to the soul is certainly not greatness. “That is not

³³ 157

³⁴ 161

greatness, it is a swelling; nor when disease distends the body with a mass of watery corruption is the result of growth, but a pestilent excess.”³⁵ Anger does not grow the soul; it swells it with corruption. It diseases the soul.

Just as vice can never correct vice, nothing just can ever come from something unjust. The injustice of anger can never lead to something as just a greatness of soul. Vice cannot aid the virtues in anyway. Vice cannot add to or benefit virtue. The virtues are the only just way of growing the soul because: “Virtue alone is lofty and sublime, and nothing is great that is not at the same time tranquil.”³⁶

³⁵ 161

³⁶ 165

CHAPTER TWO

Anger, Mind, Virtue, and Remedies

Chatter Two: Introduction

This chapter – Anger, Mind, Virtue, and Remedies – corresponds with Book II of Seneca's *On Anger*. This chapter focuses on anger in the mind and how it might be remedied.

The first section of this chapter explores on the effects of anger on the mind. Seneca makes an important distinction between the impulse to anger and anger itself. One is involuntary, and the other arises only with the consent of the mind. Seneca explains the growth of anger in the mind.

The second section of this chapter goes more in depth into the uselessness of anger. This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection works on dispelling the idea that virtuous men ought to be angry at vices and those that act on vice. The second subsection, similar to the first, dispels the idea that the wise and virtuous man ought to be angry at sin and sinners. The third subsection responds to the idea that anger is useful by showing that anger only inspires contempt and fear where it ought not. In the fourth subsection, Seneca takes up the task of proving why it is important to eliminate anger from our lives completely. Finally, in the fifth subsection, Seneca proves that anger is not noble nor is it useful in becoming noble.

Seneca moves on to provide remedies to anger. Section three of this chapter provides a remedy to anger that focuses on the early life – education. Section four

provides remedies to anger for the later life. Section four is split into four subsection. The first subsection is the causes of anger. The second subsection is avoiding anger altogether. The third subsection is handling anger once it is felt, and the fifth subsection is how to act when angry.

Section 1: Anger and the Mind

After thoroughly defining anger, Seneca seeks to uncover that which gives rise to anger. The question now at hand “is whether anger originates from choice or from impulse, that is, whether it is aroused of its own accord, or whether, like much else that goes on within us, it does not arise without our knowledge.”³⁷ Seneca’s answer to this question is important to understanding the nature of the relationship that anger has to the mind.

What gives rise to anger was explained in the previous chapter. Anger arises from the desire to avenge an actual, intended, or perceived insult or injury. This is still more to consider on this note. “There can be no doubt that anger is aroused by the direct impression of an injury; but the question is whether it follows immediately upon the impression and springs up without assistance from the mind, or whether it is aroused only with the assent of the mind.”³⁸ Insult or injury sets the necessary conditions for one to become angry, but that is not the end of the questions. Injuries may set the condition for anger, but the question still remains. Does anger immediately arise from injuries against our will and without our mind, or does anger need the assistance of the mind to arise?

Seneca answers:

³⁷ Seneca, *Moral Essays Volume 1 – Book II On Anger*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1928), 167.

³⁸ 167

Our opinion is that it ventures nothing by itself, but acts only with the approval of the mind. For to form the impression of having received an injury and to long to avenge it, and then to couple together the two propositions that one ought to be avenged – this is not a mere impulse of the mind acting without our volition. The one is a single mental process, the other a complex one composed of several elements; the mind has grasped something, has become indignant, has condemned the act, and now tries to avenge it. These processes are impossible unless the mind has given assent to the impressions that moved it.³⁹

Injuries and insults provide the necessary conditions for the rise of anger. The impulse to anger comes from the impression of injuries, but anger itself is not immediate or without consent. Indeed, the impulse to anger and anger itself are not one in the same. One cannot be helped and the other must be consented to by the mind before it can take hold.

Impulses are “sensations that do not result from our own volition that are uncontrolled and unavoidable.”⁴⁰ We cannot help but to shiver when we are cold or blush when we are embarrassed. Just as we have physical impulses that cannot be helped so too do we have mental ones. We are excited by music and laughter, shocked by images of punishment, and saddened by mourners. Our initial reaction to these situations is not affectionate, though our hearts may race. Our initial reaction is an impulse that cannot be helped. Seneca elaborates:

Such sensations, however, are no more anger than that is sorrow which furrows the brow at the sight of a mimic shipwreck, no more anger than that is fear which thrills our minds when we read how Hannibal after Cannae beset the walls of Rome, but they are all emotions of a mind that would prefer not to be so affected; they are not affections.⁴¹

Impulses arise in the mind due to chance or circumstances. The mind does not welcome them and is not carried away from them. Impulses arise in the mind without

³⁹ 169

⁴⁰ 169

⁴¹ 171

consent, but they do not over power us as affections do. “None of these things which move the mind through the agency of chance should be called affections; the mind suffers them, so to speak, rather than causes them.”⁴² Impulses may appear to cause an affectionate response, but they just caused by impressions and may dissipate with the circumstance that caused them.

The affections, on the other hand, are not so moved. “Affection, consequently, does not consist in being moved by the impressions that are presented to the mind, but in surrendering to these and following up on such prompting.”⁴³ If affections could be moved by impressions of the mind, then they could be controlled by the mind. Seneca explained earlier that once affection had taken root, it could not be controlled. Instead, the mind gives in to the impressions and the impulses in such a way that the mind becomes ruled by them.

It is not enough for an impression of anger to build; anger must be consented to and over through the mind and reason. “Anger must not only be aroused but it must rush forth, for it is an active impulse; but an active impulse never comes without the consent of the will, for it is impossible for a man to aim at revenge and punishment without the cognizance of his mind.”⁴⁴ The impulse to anger is not an affection nor is it actual anger. It is the consent to this impulse that allows for anger. Impulses are not active. They arise in the mind and dissipate if not consented to. Anger is active; it seeks revenge. Seneca elaborates on the difference between impulse and anger:

A man thinks himself injured, wishes to take vengeance, but dissuaded by some consideration immediately calms down. This I do not call anger, this prompting of the mind which is submissive to reason; anger is that which overleaps reason and

⁴² 171

⁴³ 171-173

⁴⁴ 173

sweeps it away. Therefore that primary disturbance of the mind which is excited by the impression of injury is no more anger than the impression of injury is itself anger; the active impulse consequent upon it, which has not only admitted the impression of injury, but also approved it, is really anger – the tumult of a mind proceeding to revenge by choice and determination. There can never be any doubt that as fear involves flight, anger involves assault; consider, therefore, whether you believe that anything can either be assailed or avoided without the mind's assent.⁴⁵

Affections, including the affection of anger, involve action. The soldier with the impulse of fear may become pale, but he can still stand his ground and fight. The soldier that has given into the impulse and now has the affection of fear will throw down his weapons and flee. Affections are active in the mind and can receive a physical expression. The same is true for anger. The impulse to anger can be ignored or controlled by reason. Once the impulse is consented to in the mind, anger overtakes reason and drives us to action – to revenge.

There is a clear process to the growth and development of anger and the affections. This growth further demonstrates the relationship between impulse and the affections. Seneca describes the steps leading to affections: “the first prompting is involuntary, a preparation for affection, as it were, and a sort of menace.”⁴⁶ This first prompting is the impulse. Regarding anger, this step is a reaction to having been injured or insulted in some way. It is an involuntary annoyance to the mind, but it is not yet affection. Seneca goes on: “the next is combined with an act of volition, although not an unruly one, which assumes that it is right for me to avenge myself because I have been injured.”⁴⁷ At this stage it is no longer just an impulse. By desiring revenge, I am willfully consenting to the initial impulse. Finally, “the third prompting is now beyond

⁴⁵ 173

⁴⁶ 175

⁴⁷ 175

control, in that it wishes to take vengeance, not if it is right to do so, but whether or no, and has utterly vanquished reason.”⁴⁸ It is at this third stage that we have full-fledged anger. Thus, it can be seen that the mind is essential for the rise of anger. Although impulses are involuntary, the consent to these impulses comes from the mind and results in anger.

Moreover, there is another involving the affection of anger: “whether those who are habitually cruel and rejoice in human blood are angry when they kill people from whom they have neither received injury nor think even themselves that they have received one.”⁴⁹ Anger seeks revenge for an injury or insult, but are men who torture and kill others that have never harmed them angry? These men are not seeking revenge of an injury. Seneca answers: “this is not anger, it is brutality; for it does not harm because it had received an injury, but it is even ready to receive one provided that it can harm, and its purpose in desiring to beat and to mangle is not vengeance but pleasure.”⁵⁰ Brutality is not anger, for anger seeks to harm people for revenge for something. Brutality seeks to harm people purely for pleasure. Anger and brutality are not unrelated. “This source of this evil is anger, and when anger from oft-repeated indulgence and surfeit has arrived at a disregard for mercy and has expelled from the mind every conception of the human bond, it passes at last into cruelty...No, this was not anger, but an evil still greater and incurable.”⁵¹ Anger is a disease of the soul, and cruelty is the untreated corpse left behind by the disease.

⁴⁸ 175

⁴⁹ 175

⁵⁰ 175

⁵¹ 177

Section 2: More on the Uselessness of Anger

2. A: Anger and Vices

Some argue that not only is it useful for virtue to be angry at sins, but that it is the duty of the virtuous to be angry at sins. This logic dictates that what is just becomes angry with what is unjust; what is good becomes angry with what is evil. It seems reasonable to say that good will be angry at evil and that virtue will be angry with vice. Seneca answers this argument:

And yet this is what he does say – he would have [virtue] be both exalted and debased, since joy on account of a right action is splendid and glorious, while anger on account of another’s sin is mean and narrow-minded. And virtue will never be guilty of simulating vice in the act of repressing it; anger in itself [virtue] considers reprehensible, for it is in no way better, often even worse, than those shortcomings which provoke anger. The distinctive and natural property of virtue is to rejoice and be glad; it no more comports with [virtue’s] dignity to be angry than to be sad.⁵²

Just as vice never produces virtue, virtue never produces vice. Vice cannot grow out of greatness of soul, and virtue will not use vice for greatness of soul. Virtue will not turn to vice when confronted with vice. Goodness does not turn to evil to overcome another evil. The nature of anger – and of vice altogether – is counter to the nature of virtue.

Moreover, if the wise and virtuous man became angry at every sin and fault he saw, he would allow the actions of others to control his affections and his tranquility of mind. “And what is more unworthy of the wise man that that his affection should depend upon the wickedness of others?”⁵³ If the wise man were to become angry at every vice, he

⁵² 179

⁵³ 179

would not control his own affections. Likewise, he would not control his own mind or tranquility if he were to become angry at the wickedness of others.

Additionally, the man that became angry at every vice he saw he would always be angry. All people have vice to some degree that must be dealt with. “But if the wise man is to be angered by base deeds, if he is to be perturbed and saddened by crimes, surely nothing is more woeful than the wise man’s lot; his whole life will be passed in anger and in grief.”⁵⁴ The wise man that is angered by every vice he sees will be angered wherever he goes, for vice and wrongful deeds are everywhere. It is not only in the face of vice the wise man will be angry, but all the time. “Never will the wise man cease to be angry if once he begins. Every place is full of crime and vice; too many crimes are committed to be cured by any possible restraint.”⁵⁵ There is vice in all men, whether restrained or set free, intentional or accidental, large or small.

The wise man will always to be angry if he is to become angered by any vice at all. Anger is a disease that ought not to be submitted to. “If you expect the wise man to be as angry as the shamefulness of crimes compels, he must not be angry merely, but go mad.”⁵⁶ And indeed, no madman can be considered wise.

2.B: Anger and Sins

First, a side note must be made on the term “sin.” There has been discussion in the academic community as to whether or not pagan, or non-Christian, philosophers such as Seneca having a concept of “sin” as Christians. However, the Latin terms used by Seneca are derived from the word *peccatus*. *Peccatus* is the same term often used by Christian

⁵⁴ 179

⁵⁵ 183

⁵⁶ 185

philosophers to describe sins, so it can be noted that the terminology Seneca is using for sin is the same used by Christian philosophers. Is Seneca's understanding similar to the Christian understanding of sin? Yes, in so far as sin is a turning away from the good and from the true purpose of man. To Christians this means turning away from God's plan. Here is where Seneca's conception of sin differs from Christian theology. You can infer that sin is a turning away from the good without a reference to the divine according to Seneca. Please note that this is meant to be a brief summarizing point on Seneca's conception of sin and is no way a complete understanding of this concept. This brief side note is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. Further analysis is outside of the scope and purpose of this thesis.⁵⁷

It is true that if the wise man is to be angered by vice and sins he will always be angry to the point of madness, but that is not the only reason that the wise man should not be angry at the wicked. "This rather is what you should think – that no one should be angry at the mistakes of men."⁵⁸ We ought to avoid anger for sake of ourselves because being angry at these mistakes will disturb our own tranquility of mind and for the sake of the sinners as well.

The wise man would look upon the mistakes of individuals and of mankind with forgiveness. "That you may not be angry with individuals, you must forgive mankind at large, you must grant indulgence to the human race. If you are angry with the young and the old because they sin, be angry with the babies as well; they are destined to sin."⁵⁹ If

⁵⁷ The article *Seneca and the Divine: Stoic Tradition and Personal Developments* written by Aldo Setaioli can give more insight into the concept of the idea of sin and Seneca's writings as a pagan.

⁵⁸ 185

⁵⁹ 185

the wise man will not forgive the mistakes of men, then he must be angry at everyone that makes them. This includes infants that have not yet committed mistakes but will.

Instead, the wise man will forgive the mistakes and sins of men. Not only will he forgive these mistakes, but he will not be angered by them in the first place. “The wise man will have no anger toward sinners. Do you ask why? Because he knows that no one is born wise but becomes so, knows that only the fewest in every age turn out wise, because he has fully grasped the conditions of human life, and no sensible man becomes angry with nature.”⁶⁰ The wise man knows that not everyone is so; he knows that it takes time, education, and forgiveness to become wise. A teacher would not become angry at students who did not know material that they had not yet been taught.

Like the teacher, the wise man will not become angry at sinners because by sinning they show that they have not yet learned enough to be wise. “And so the wise man is kindly and just toward errors, he is not the foe, but the reformer of sinners.”⁶¹ The wise man does not get angry at sinners. He forgives and teaches them. He reforms their sins. “He will view all these things in as kindly a way as a physician views the sick.”⁶² A doctor is not mad at a sick patient, instead he works to make them well; the wise man works to make the soul of the sinner well.

2.C: Anger, Contempt, and Fear

Seneca responds to two more arguments for the usefulness of anger. The first argument Seneca responds to is that the angry man escapes contempt. Much like his response to reason’s ability to control anger, Seneca responds in two parts. “In the first

⁶⁰ 187

⁶¹ 189

⁶² 189

place, if the power of anger is commensurate with its threats, for the very reason that it is terrible it is likewise hated; because it is more dangerous to be feared than to be scorned. If however, anger is powerless, it is even more exposed to contempt and does not escape ridicule.”⁶³ If anger is powerful enough to escape contempt, then it is hated; if it is not powerful enough to escape contempt, then it is subject to ridicule. In either scenario, anger is not useful or beneficial.

The second argument for the usefulness of anger that Seneca responds to asserts that anger is useful because it inspires fear in sinners. Again, there is a two part response in why anger is not useful in this manner. First, Seneca answers that the wise man would not wish to inspire fear because it would cause him to fear as well:

Nature has so ordained it that whatever is mighty through the fear that others feel is not without its own...Whatever terrifies must also tremble. There is no reason, then, why any wise man should desire to be feared, not should he think that anger is a mighty thing simply because it arouses dread, since even the most contemptible things, such as poisonous brews and noxious bones and bites are likewise feared.⁶⁴

To inspire fear in others is to inspire fear in yourself. The wise man would not seek to produce fear in either others or in himself. In this way, anger cannot be useful to inspire fear in sinners.

There is an additional reason why anger is not useful to inspire fear. Anger is not fearful except to the foolish, “for to the foolish foolish things are terrible...And so we fear anger just as children fear the dark and wild beasts fear a gaudy feather. Anger is itself has nothing of the strong or the heroic, but shallow minds are affected by it.”⁶⁵ Only

⁶³ 189

⁶⁴ 191

⁶⁵ 193

the foolish fear anger, and the wise are to educate and reform the foolish not strike fear in them.

2.D: Elimination of Anger

Sin and wickedness is a natural part of life. Even infants are destined to sin in their lifetimes according to Seneca. This is due to the concept that no person is completely free from vice. Some argue that to completely eliminate anger we must first eliminate wickedness – or vice. However, they claim that it is not possible to rid human nature of wickedness since humans are naturally inclined and even destined to sin.

Seneca responds to this argument in a couple of ways. “In the first place, one *can* avoid being cold although in the scheme of nature it is winter.”⁶⁶ Assuming that vice is natural, it can still be avoided. “In the second place, reverse this statement: A man must banish virtue from his heart before he can admit wrath, since vices do not consort with virtues, and a man can no more be both angry and good at the same time than he can be sick and well.”⁶⁷ Truly, vice must be eliminated from the heart before virtue can be admitted.

Finally Seneca responds that overcoming and eliminating anger from the mind completely is not an impossible task. “Yet nothing is so hard and difficult that it cannot be conquered by the human intellect and be brought through persistent study into intimate acquaintance, and there are no affections so fierce and self-willed that they cannot be subjugated by discipline.”⁶⁸ Even anger is not so strong that it cannot be overcome and eliminated by discipline of the wise mind.

⁶⁶ 193

⁶⁷ 193

⁶⁸ 193

The elimination of anger is more in line with nature than being angry. “It is not for you to say that anger cannot be eradicated; the ills from which we suffer are curable, and since we are born to do right, nature herself helps us if we desire to be improved.”⁶⁹ Just as our bodies want us to become well when we fall ill, so too does our soul want us to improve toward virtue when we are infected by anger and vice. Human nature is even more inclined to the good than it is to the bad; and if it is able to admit anger at the expense of virtue, then it can admit virtue at the expense of vice.

Not only is it possible to eliminate anger from our minds, not only is our nature more inclined towards the good and towards improvement, but it is also easier to eliminate anger than it is to live in and with anger. “It is no idle tale that I come to tell you. The road to the happy life is an easy one; do but enter on it – with good auspices and the good help of the gods themselves! It is far harder to do what you are now doing. What is more reposeful than peace of mind, what more toilsome than anger?”⁷⁰ It is far easier to live with peace of mind than with the disturbance of anger. It is easier to be disciplined and eliminate anger from the mind completely than to constantly struggle with it and be disturbed by it:

In short, the maintenance of all the virtues is easy, but it is costly to cultivate the vices. Anger must be dislodged – even those who say that it ought to be reduced admit this in part; let us be rid of it altogether, it can do us no good. Without it we shall more easily and more justly abolish crimes, punish the wicked, and set them upon the better path. The wise man will accomplish his whole duty without the assistance of anything evil, and he will associate with himself nothing which needs to be controlled with anxious care.⁷¹

If liberating ourselves from anger is so easy, the why doesn't everyone do it?

Why aren't all people free from anger? Seneca does not directly answer these questions,

⁶⁹ 195

⁷⁰ 197

⁷¹ 197

but it seems that he does imply a two part answer. First, that the people indulging in anger are doing so because they are unwise. They do not fully understand the dangers of anger and do not know the benefits of living without it. This may be why Seneca focuses so much attention on showing the nature of anger as completely useless and counter to human tranquility. The second part of the answer is that all humans are flawed. Although it may be easy to rid anger from our minds and lives, we may be in possession of other flaws – such as envy, greed, and pride – that prevent us from even trying.

Anger is not needed by the wise man or by the wise society. Vice and evil is not needed, nor can it be used by, virtuous people. The better life is characterized by disincline and virtue not by vice and struggles. Thus, anger and vice can easily be eliminated from our natures.

2.E: Nobility of Anger

Some claim that anger is noble and is useful for that reason. Great leaders are said to succeed their greatness in part because of anger. Men often attribute anger to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Winston Churchill, asserting that these men were able to change history due to their anger. They argue that anger is what spurred these men to action and victory over injustice. Noble men may appear to owe their success and nobility to their disposition towards anger, but Seneca asserts that an evil, even in a noble man, is still evil. “Accordingly, I can often prove to you even by a man’s own evils that his natural bent is good; but these evils are none the less vices even though they are indicative of a superior nature.”⁷² While a man might be in possession of a superior

⁷² 201

nature in addition to the vice of anger, anger in and of itself is still a vice. Anger does not add to the man's nobility. Instead anger endangers it as proven time and time again.

Furthermore, some still argue that anger is noble, using animals such as lions as an example. As discussed previously, anger is a uniquely human phenomenon due to its reliance on reason. Additionally, "it is wrong for one to hold up creatures in whom impulse takes the place of reason as a pattern for a human being; in man reason takes the place of impulse... For what reason, however, do you direct man to such miserable standards when you have the universe and God, whom man of all creatures alone comprehends in order that he alone may imitate him?"⁷³ Men cannot be compared to animals because men operate according to reason, not merely impulse, and comparing man to animals degrades what it means to be human according to Seneca.

Section 3: Remedies to Anger in Early Life

After expounding on the causes, dangers, and uselessness of anger, Seneca moves on to providing remedies to anger – ways to prevent from arising and to cure it if it has arisen. Seneca writes "there are but two rules – not to fall into anger, and in anger to do no wrong... so we must use one means to repel anger, another to restrain it."⁷⁴ The first rule – and the rule that will be focused on in this section – is designed to prevent anger, to guard the mind against it.

In order to repel anger, Seneca argues that we must focus on education in early life so that children grow up with the mental tools to guard against anger. Seneca calls for great focus and attention on education of children. "The period of education calls for the greatest, and what will also prove to be the most profitable attention; for it is easy to train

⁷³ 201-203

⁷⁴ 203-205

the mind while it is still tender, but it is a difficult matter to curb the vices that have grown up with us.”⁷⁵ The purpose of education is to prevent the vice of anger from ever forming and is therefore the most important remedy.

Thus, Seneca believes that education in early life is the best way to guard men against developing anger as a vice. “It will be of the utmost profit, I say, to give children sound training from the very beginning; guidance, however, is difficult, because we ought to take pains neither to develop in them anger nor to blunt their native spirit.”⁷⁶ The education of children is not meant to be easy or quick. It must encourage in them good behaviors while discouraging bad ones, and it must do all of this without crushing their spirits.

Furthermore, those educating the young must be perceptive of even the faintest hints of potential vices. “The matter requires careful watching; for both qualities – that which should be encouraged and that which should be checked – are fed by things, and like things easily deceive even a close observer.”⁷⁷ This is the first difficulty of educating the young against anger. The teacher must be perceptive and trained to see behaviors and tendencies in the children that may grow into vice, meaning that the teacher himself must be wise and have been educated against anger as well.

This education ought to be structured in such a way that allows the spirit to grow without being crushed but does not allow it to grow in such a way that would develop vices. “By freedom the spirit grows, by servitude it is crushed; if it is commended and is led to expect good things of itself, it mounts up, but these same measures breed insolence

⁷⁵ 205

⁷⁶ 209

⁷⁷ 209

and temper; therefore we must guide the child between the two extremes, using now the curb, now the spur.”⁷⁸ The key – and the second difficulty – of educating the young against anger is structuring education in such a way that balances between two extremes. The same methods used to encourage good behavior can be construed to encourage bad ones as well. Again, the educator must also have been educated against anger so that he has the wisdom to guide the children in their education.

Seneca’s key to not falling into anger – to guard the mind against becoming angry in the first place – is to educate children in such a way that they do not develop the vice of anger early on. This remedy, however, focuses on curing the young from becoming angry. Seneca’s remedy for anger in later life will be discussed in the next section.

Section 4: Remedies to Anger in Later Life

4A: Causes of Anger

Remedying anger is deeply rooted in understanding its causes. One cannot guard against anger or cure anger without understanding its source. “We ought, therefore, to make our fight against the primary causes. Now the cause of anger is an impression of injury, and to this we should not easily give credence.”⁷⁹ If the source of anger is the impression of injury, then avoiding this impression avoids anger. A man that does not feel the impression of an injury is never injured; a man that is never injured does not become angry or seek revenge. Thus, the best remedy to anger is to not fall into the causes of anger by not believing impressions of injuries.

⁷⁸ 209-211

⁷⁹ 215

We ought not to be led to [anger] quickly even by open and evident acts; for some things are false that have the appearance of truth. We should always allow some time; a day discloses the truth. Let us not give ready ear to traducers; this weakness of human nature let us recognize and mistrust – we are glad to believe what we are loth to hear, and we become angry before we can form a judgment about it... Therefore we should plead the cause of the absent person against ourselves, and anger should be held in abeyance; for punishment postponed can still be exacted, but once exacted it cannot be recalled.⁸⁰

It may appear that a man is acting to insult or injure you, but it is best to postpone judgment and to not receive the impression of injury. Postponing judgment prevents injury and puts off punishment until it is determined to be just. By simply not believing to be injured or insulted, a man is not insulted and does not become angry. “Credulity is a source of very great mischief. Often one should not even listen to report, since under some circumstances it is better to be deceived than to be suspicious.”⁸¹ Believing to be insulted is being insulted. Avoiding the belief of an insult also avoids the suspicion of someone attempting to insult you. Avoiding both helps to further prevent anger and enacting a punishment that cannot be undone whether just or not:

Pretext for suspicion will not be lacking. But there is need of frankness and generosity in interpreting things. We should believe only what is thrust under our eyes and becomes unmistakable, and every time our suspicion proves to be groundless we should chide our credulity; for this self-reproof will develop the habit of being slow to believe.⁸²

It is best to not believe or suspect impressions of injury because this avoids injury and anger as a whole. Going back to Seneca’s two rules – not to fall into anger, and to do no wrong when angry – being slow to believe and not becoming suspicious helps repel anger according to the first rule.

⁸⁰ 215

⁸¹ 217

⁸² 217-219

4B: Avoiding Anger

Moreover, there are more ways to repel anger than just avoiding the causes of anger. Seneca outlines circumstances in which people often become angry but ought not. The first of which is becoming angry in frustrating situations.

Seneca points out that people often become angry in situations that are mild and ought not to inspire anger. “We should not be exasperated by trifling and paltry incidents.”⁸³ Modern day examples of this are people that become enraged in traffic, in long lines, or at restaurants when they feel like they received subpar service. All of these situations can be frustrating, but they are not reasons to truly inspire anger. Seneca states that we ought not to become angry at all in these situations. He also states that becoming angry in these situations is indicative of a weaker nature:

When pleasures have corrupted both mind and body, nothing seems to be tolerable, not because the suffering is hard, but because the sufferer is soft... Nothing, therefore, is more conducive to anger than the intemperance and intolerance that comes from soft living; the mind ought to be schooled by hardship to feel none but a crushing blow.⁸⁴

People that do not know adversity are not as adept at handling situations without becoming angry because they have not been exposed to suffering. Those that are lived through hardship can better handle lesser situations without becoming disturbed by them. The answer is not that all people must suffer in order to avoid becoming angry at trifling incidents, but rather all people must have perspective. You do not have to truly suffer to know that a traffic jam is not true suffering.

Another circumstance in which you ought not to become angry is when there is no one to actually be angry at. In other words, one should not be angry is the object of their

⁸³ 219

⁸⁴ 219-221

anger is just an inanimate object, animal, or otherwise something or someone not reasonable and capable. “How foolish it is to get angry at these things which neither deserve our wrath nor feel it!...But as it is the act of a madman to become angry at things without life, it is not less mad to be angry at dumb animals, which do us no injury because they cannot will to do so; for there can be no injury unless it arises from design.”⁸⁵ It is not reasonable to perceive insult or injuries from things that have no will nor intention of insulting or injuring.

It is not reasonable to become angry at your car for not starting. Your car did not will to stop working; it is not intending to anger you in any way. Inanimate objects are just that: objects. They cannot will any sort of injury. Likewise with animals. Animals, while they may intend to harm by biting or charging, they are not doing so out of a reasonable place of will. They are acting out of impulse and have no intention of insulting character. The same can be said of a small child or a mentally disabled person that hits or screams. It is not reasonable to become angry at any of these things (and people) because they have no way of reasonable intending insult or injury.

Finally, we ought not to become angry because we have all been in situations in which others might become angry at us. Perceiving an insult or injury from someone means that you have judged that person in a way that condemns his actions. “If we are willing in all matters to play the just judge, let us convince ourselves first of this – that no one of us is free from fault.”⁸⁶ When we are put in a situation to judge someone’s actions, we must remember that we are not free from fault or sin. “Some sins we have committed, some we have encouraged; in the case of some we are innocent only because we did not

⁸⁵ 221

⁸⁶ 225

succeed. Bearing this in mind, let us be more just to transgressors, more heedful to those who rebuke us.”⁸⁷ When faced with a situation in which we might become angry with someone, we must remember that have put someone else in the same situation. Thus, we must meet others with grace when we would otherwise meet them with anger or rage.

Moreover, we are also put in situations in which we undeservedly accuse others, or we falsely become suspicious of others. “If any one will recall how often he himself has fallen under underserved suspicion, how many of his good services chance has clothed with the appearance of injury, how many persons whom once he hated he learned to love.”⁸⁸ We have all falsely inspired anger or suspicion in others, so we must be graceful when faced with a situation in which we may be falsely suspicious. If we can learn to love someone we hated, then surely someone else can learn the same. Seneca simply advocates us to treat others charitable and give them the benefit of the doubt.

4C: Handling Anger

Of Seneca’s two rules involving anger – not the fall into anger, and to do no wrong while angry – the second rule is now handled by Seneca. It may not be enough to simply learn to repel anger; one must also learn to restrain anger in the case they do fall into anger.

The most effective way to handle anger is to postpone it. “The best corrective of anger lies in delay. Beg this concession from anger at the first, not in order that it may pardon, but in order that it may judge. Its first assaults are heavy; it will leave off if it waits. And do not destroy it all at once; attacked piecemeal, it will be completely

⁸⁷ 225

⁸⁸ 227

conquered.”⁸⁹ Often times, anger will dissipate if someone takes time to contemplate. Time and reason will often help someone judge that they do not have as much reason to feel insulted or injured than they thought at first. Allowing the disturbance and the affections in the mind to cool down with time will often result in a dissipation of anger. Moreover, it is easier to take time to allow anger to dissipate and to use reason to be rid of it altogether, than it is to attempt to suppress it all at once in the moment.

Another way in which people can handle anger is by considering the person by whom they believe themselves to have been insulted or injured by. “To some offences we can bear witness ourselves; in such cases we shall search into the character and the purpose of the offender.”⁹⁰ Considering the character and the intention of the offender allows us to consider the person by which we are offended and allows us to look at them objectively. In many cases, such consideration will allow us to find that we are not truly insulted or injured.

Finally, the handle anger by going back to the original source and caused of anger. “There are, as I have said, two conditions under which anger is aroused: first, if we think that we have received an injury – about this enough has been said; second, if we think that we have received it unjustly – about this something now must be said.”⁹¹ We are moving on to how to handle anger in situations in which we believe we were injured or insulted unjustly.

There are two reasons why a person will judge an action against themselves as unjust: first, they believe that they do not deserve the action, or second, they did not expect the action in the first place. “Men judge some happenings to be unjust because

⁸⁹ 229

⁹⁰ 231

⁹¹ 233

they did not deserve them, some merely because they did not expect them. What is unexpected we count undeserved.”⁹² Seneca answers that both judgments are based in a character failing, excessive self-love: “This, in turn, is due to excessive self-love. We decided that we ought not to be harmed even by our enemies; each one in his heart has the king’s point of view, and is willing to use licence, but unwilling to suffer from it. And so it is either arrogance or ignorance that makes us prone to anger.”⁹³ We judge that we do not deserve injury, or we do not expect injury, because we have determined that we are above injury and ought not to have injury befall us.

As Seneca points out, this misguided assumption is made out of excessive self-love – arrogance, or it is made out of ignorance. Either way, there is still a way to avoid becoming angry at unexpected injuries or insults: to always beware of injuries and insults. Not to always expect misfortune, but to know that misfortune is always a possibility in life. “When you are about to rejoice most, you will have most to fear. When everything seems to you to be peaceful, the forces that will harm are not nonexistent, but inactive. Always believe that there will come some blow to strike you.”⁹⁴ Always be grateful for what you have, and always know that physical things are temporary and subject to outside forces. Being prepared and being aware for the external forces that can always act against you will prevent you from becoming angry at injuries and insults that might otherwise be unexpected.

⁹² 233

⁹³ 233

⁹⁴ 235

4D: Acting When Angry

Finally, and still pertaining to his second rule, Seneca elaborates on how to act – or how not to act – when angry. First, anger in and of itself is a desire to exact revenge – to punish – for the perception of an insult or injury. However, punishment ought never to be done out of anger. “Neither, therefore, shall we injure a man because he has done wrong, but in order to keep him from doing wrong, and his punishment shall never look to the past, but always to the future; for that course is not anger, precaution.”⁹⁵

Punishment done out of anger is not punishment; it is revenge. Punishment looks to the future; revenge act based on actions in the past. Some argue that there is punishment in revenging a wrong. Seneca answers:

Not at all; for it is not honourable, as in acts of kindness to requite benefits with benefits, so to requite injuries with injuries. In the one case it is shameful to be outdone, in the other not to be outdone. “Revenge” is an inhuman word and yet one accepted as legitimate, and “retaliation” is not much different except in rank; the man who returns a smart commits merely a more pardonable sin.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, a sin is still a sin. There is nothing honorable, noble, or pleasurable in returning an injury for an injury; doing so is a sin regardless of reason. It is best to restrain oneself and not act out of anger at all. “Only a great soul can be superior to injury; the most humiliating kind of revenge is to have it appear that the man was not worth taking revenge upon. Many have taken slight injuries too deeply to heart in the act of revenging them.”⁹⁷ The best revenge is to not take revenge at all. It is best to be above the injury and the injurer in soul. The better man is the one that does not become angry; he is the one that does not seek revenge:

⁹⁵ 237

⁹⁶ 237

⁹⁷ 239

But if anger shall be rife on both sides, if the conflict comes, he is the better man who first withdraws; the vanquished is the one who wins. If some one strikes you, step back; for by striking back you will give him both the opportunity and the excuse to repeat his blow; when you later wish to extricate yourself, it will become impossible.⁹⁸

The best ways to handle anger are to not become angry in the first place, or to restrain anger until it subsides and reason can overcome it. Acting on revenge further injures the revenger.

⁹⁸ 245

CHAPTER THREE

Above Anger

Chapter Three: Introduction

The third and final chapter – Above Anger – corresponds with the third and final book in Seneca's *On Anger*. This chapter renews the task of proving that anger is an evil that ought to be banished before exploring how to banish anger.

The first section takes up the first task: proving that anger is something that needs to be banished. Seneca shows that anger is uniquely dangerous even amongst the other affections. Anger is on a larger scale than other affections and vices. It is both individual and communal.

In the second section Seneca explains that the best way to handle anger is by avoiding becoming angry in the first place. Seneca goes on to detail several ways in which we can avoid anger from knowing our weaknesses, avoiding anger-inducing situations and people.

The third section explains how to lay aside anger after you have already become angry. The best and most effective method to do so, according to Seneca, is to delay action and judgment. In addition to delaying anger, Seneca discusses concealment and suppression as methods of laying aside anger.

The fourth and final section of this chapter – and of the entire thesis – shows how the great man is above anger. Wisdom and solidarity give us the grace to forgive offenders, knowing that we may be offenders ourselves. Seneca concludes by discussing trivial matters that inspire anger but are not important to the soul.

Section 1: The Importance of Curing Anger

Time and time again, Seneca has shown the dangers of anger. Banishing anger from the mind – curing ourselves from anger – required first that we truly see anger as something to banish. “We shall now...attempt to do what you have especially desired – we shall try to banish anger from the mind, or at least to bridle and restrain its fury.”⁹⁹ Again he takes up the task to proving that anger is an evil that can be of no use or benefit so that we can see the importance of curing it.

Anger is uniquely dangerous even amongst and compared to the other affections and vices. If it is important to not become overwhelmed by affection, then it is even more important to rid ourselves of anger so that we do not become overwhelmed by it. Anger disturbs the mind in such a way that it takes over and gains control of the mind. This vice does not take root slowly; its effect is immediate and violent. Anger overwhelms and controls the mind by force. Other affections tempt the mind but do not control it. Other affections slowly take root in the mind. There is a controlling factor in anger. Anger is overwhelming to the mind:

For while the other affection admit of postponement and may be cured more leisurely, this one in hurried and self-driven violence does not advance by slow degrees, but becomes full-grown the moment it begins; and, unlike the other vices, it does not seduce but abducts the mind, and it goads on those that, lacking all self-control, desire, if need be, the destruction of all, and its fury falls not merely upon the objects at which it aims, but upon all that meet it by the way. The other vices incite the mind, anger overthrows it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Seneca, *Moral Essays Volume 1 – Book III On Anger*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1928), 253

¹⁰⁰ 253-255

Anger cannot be put into the service of reason, nor can it be controlled by the mind. Other affections disturb the mind, they incite or seduce it to vice. Anger, on the other hand, completely over takes and controls the mind. It cannot be left unrestrained; it does not increase by small degrees as other affections do. Instead, anger over takes the mind as soon as it is permitted. “Other vices are a revolt against intelligence, this one against sanity.”¹⁰¹ Anger is the most frenzied affection and the most destructive vice.

Not only is anger something that is dangerous to us as individuals, it is dangerous to all people at all times. No one is completely safe from anger. “It passes by no time of life, makes exception of no class of men... There lives no race that does not feel the goad of anger.”¹⁰² No matter who you are or where – no matter your age, race, wealth, gender – you are subject to the effects of anger. Anger can influence any person. Thus the importance of banishing and restraining anger is that much greater as it is useful to every person.

This particular vice goes even further than just capturing the individual. “Though the other vices lay hold of individual men, this is the only affection that can at times possess a whole state.”¹⁰³ Imagine the dangers of an entire nation controlled and spurred on by anger. Imagine the dangers of an entire nation acting without reason on a quest for revenge. Even the new millennium as wars such as this. Wars that are inspired out of vengeance instead of justice. Seneca warns against rushing into war based on anger and revenge instead of justice and prudence. Destruction waits for armies that rush into war in this way. What affection other than anger can drive a whole nation of peoples to war?

¹⁰¹ 255

¹⁰² 255

¹⁰³ 257

Moreover, in order to fully demonstrate the need to banish and restrain anger we must discount virtue ethics that argues for the use and cultivation of anger. “Aristotle stands forth as the defender of anger, and forbid us to cut it out; it is, he claims, a spur to virtue, and if the mind is robbed of it, it becomes defenceless and grows sluggish and indifferent to high endeavor.”¹⁰⁴ Aristotle and like philosophers argue that anger is needed to rally the mind into action and to aid in virtues such as courage. These are the arguments made for the usefulness of anger.

However, the uselessness of anger according to Seneca has already been shown in the previous chapter. Still, Seneca takes up the challenge of showing anger to be something to be cured rather than be cultivated. “Therefore our first necessity is to prove its foulness and fierceness, and to set before the eyes what an utter monster a man is when he is enraged against a fellow-man, with what fury he rushes on working destruction – destructive of himself as well and wrecking what cannot be sunk unless he sinks with it.”¹⁰⁵ Seneca again takes up the task of proving the destructiveness of anger, the uselessness of anger, and the need to be rid of anger. This task will be continued in the following sections.

Section 2: Avoid Becoming Angry

The best way to be rid of anger – to banish anger completely – is to simply be above anger in the first place. “That no man may consider himself safe from anger, since it summons even those who are naturally kind and gentle into acts of cruelty and violence.”¹⁰⁶ The best cure to anger is to avoid becoming angry. Banishing and

¹⁰⁴ 259

¹⁰⁵ 259

¹⁰⁶ 265

restraining anger must be laid out because everyone is subject to its dangers. Even kind and gentle people can become overcome by anger and resort to cruelty and violence. “But since the first requirement is not to become angry, the second, to cease from anger, the third, to cure also the anger of others, I shall speak first how we may avoid falling into anger, next of how we may free ourselves from it, and lastly of how we may curb an angry man – how we may calm him and restore him to sanity.”¹⁰⁷ The first undertaking we will take is to avoid anger.

The first step in avoiding anger is to be familiar with the evils of anger. Knowing anger and knowing the faults of anger are key to arming the mind against it. “We shall forestall the possibility of anger if we repeatedly set before ourselves its many faults and shall rightly appraise it. Before our own hearts we must arraign it and convict it; we must search out its evils and drag them into the open.”¹⁰⁸ In order to avoid anger, we must know and understand it. Putting anger on trial before our minds allows our reason to guard against the dangerous affection. The faults of anger are without number:

Anger brings to a father grief, to a husband divorce, to a magistrate hatred, to a candidate defeat. It is worse than wantonness, since that finds satisfaction in its own enjoyment, this in another’s pain. It exceeds spite and envy; for they desire a man to be unhappy, while anger tries to make him so; they delight in the ills that chance may bring, while it cannot wait for chance – to the man it hates it not merely wishes harm to come, but brings it. There is nothing more baleful than enmity, yet it is anger that breeds it; nothing is more deadly than war, yet in that the anger of the powerful finds its vent; none the less anger in the common folk or private persons is also war without arms and without resources.¹⁰⁹

Anger brings destruction to all those that take part in it. Anger is the source of war, the source of hatred, and often times the bringer of grief. These are anger’s faults.

Anger does not just have faults. Anger in and of itself is a fault. “Anger pays for the

¹⁰⁷ 265

¹⁰⁸ 265

¹⁰⁹ 267

penalty it exacts – it renounces human nature, which incites to love, whereas it incites to hate; which bids us help, whereas it bids us injure.”¹¹⁰ Men ought to – and can be – above anger because anger is counter to man’s fundamental nature. Man is above anger by nature. Succumbing to anger is counter to the nature and the purpose of man.

The best way to avoid anger is to not become angry in the first place. The best way to not become angry in the first place is to not feel an insult or injury that would need revenge. “But the really great mind, that mind that has taken the true measure of itself, fails to revenge injury only because it fails to perceive it.”¹¹¹ The great mind is above anger because it has not felt any injuries to become angry about. Becoming angry, seeking revenge, is an admission of having felt an injury to inspire anger and a desire for revenge. “Revenge is the confession of a hurt; no mind is truly great that bends before injury. The man who has offended you is either stronger or weaker than you: if he is weaker, spare him; if he is stronger, spare yourself.”¹¹² Seeking revenge is confessing to having been hurt. Having been hurt is indicative of a weakness in the mind. With this weakness, you are either stronger or weaker than the person that has hurt you.

Being subject to anger is having weakness. The surest way to avoid anger in all circumstances is to not have any such weaknesses. “There is no surer proof of greatness than to be in a state where nothing can possibly happen to disturb you.”¹¹³ With a well-reasoned and truly great mind will admit no weakness for harm to take place.

However, not all people are in possession of such a truly great and tranquil mind, so we must prepare ourselves to guard against injury and anger. Aside from being above

¹¹⁰ 267

¹¹¹ 267

¹¹² 267-269

¹¹³ 269

being insulted and becoming angry, the best way to avoid becoming angry is to avoid situations that would make you angry. “We shall do well to heed that sound doctrine of Democritus in which he shows that tranquility is possible only if we avoid most of the activities both private and public life, or at least those that are too great for our strength.”¹¹⁴ We avoid anger simply by avoiding situations in which we might become angry.

We avoid these situations by understanding ourselves and our limitations.

“Whenever you would attempt anything, measure yourself and at the same time the undertaking – both the thing you intend and the thing for which you are intended; for the regret that springs from an unaccomplished task will make you bitter.”¹¹⁵ We ought to avoid putting ourselves in situations in which we are destined to be disappointed. This assertion can be construed to mean not to strive for greatness, not to try to succeed beyond ourselves, not to better ourselves and our lives. However, a better understanding is simply to understand our own limitations. Seneca is not advocating for us to settle for fear of disappointment. Instead, he is advocating for us not to put ourselves in situations in which we cannot handle the outcome. We should try for success and greatness, but we should also be prepared and able to handle the consequences.

If someone cannot handle the consequences of falling short of a goal, then that is not a realistic goal to strive for according to Seneca. “Let our activities, consequently, be neither petty, nor yet bold and presumptuous; let us restrict the range of hope; let us attempt nothing which later, even after we have achieved it, will make us surprised that

¹¹⁴ 269

¹¹⁵ 271-273

we have succeeded.”¹¹⁶ We should hope, but we should do so realistically. We should be constructive, we should strive, we should hope, but we ought to keep our limitations in mind when hoping. Hoping without restriction – hoping without consideration of our limitations – leads us to disappointment and anger if we do not succeed.

Moreover, we can prevent becoming angry by surrounding ourselves with people that do not inspire anger in us. “Since we do not know how to bear injury, let us endeavor not to receive one. We should live with a very calm and good-natured person – one that is never worried or captious; we adopt our habits from those with whom we associate, and as certain diseases if the body spread to others from contact, so the mind transmits its faults to those near-by.”¹¹⁷ We should surround ourselves with people that do not easily become angry and that will not make us angry. Living our lives with tranquil people will prevent us from becoming angry from lack of insult and injury. “Moreover, the man who lives with tranquil people not only becomes better from their example, but finding no occasions for anger he does not indulge in his weakness. It will, therefore, be a man’s duty to avoid all those who he knows provokes his anger.”¹¹⁸ We are influenced by the people that surround us; tranquil people will make us more tranquil by example.

Seneca goes as far to say that we have a duty to avoid people that cause anger. When choosing the people that surround us, we have a duty to choose people that do not provoke our anger. We ought to choose tranquil people that will make us better by example. “Choose frank, good-natured, temperate people, who will not call forth your anger and yet will bear with it.”¹¹⁹ We ought to choose people that will not make us

¹¹⁶ 273

¹¹⁷ 273

¹¹⁸ 275

¹¹⁹ 275

angry, but will still bear with us if we do become angry. Likewise, we ought to bear with people that become angry with us.

However, it is not easy to choose people to surround ourselves. We cannot choose our family. We cannot choose our teachers, our classmates, or our coworkers. We live in a society that is deeply connected and deeply dependent on others. We cannot survive without other people; people whom we do not always have the liberty of choosing. Today we must learn to cooperate with people the people that surround us instead of just choosing them. Even for today, Seneca's suggestions can still apply. In so far as we can choose who we surround ourselves with, we still ought to only choose people that to not anger us. We are not required to invite our teachers, classmates, or our coworkers into our private lives. Additionally, we can choose the people we care about. We can choose the people we let into our lives in an intimate manner.

Moreover, we can avoid anger by not participating in situations that would make us angry. Even after surrounding ourselves with tranquil people, there is still the possibility of becoming angry. "Whenever a discussion tends to be too long or too quarrelsome, let us check it at the start before it gains strength. Controversy grows of itself and holds fast those that have plunged grows of itself and holds fast those that have plunged in too deeply. It is easier to refrain than to retreat from a struggle."¹²⁰ We can still find ourselves in a conversation that will potentially make us angry when talking to the most tranquil of people. Seneca says simply to retreat from these conversations. If we know that a topic of discussion will anger us, we should not participate in that discussion. This applies both to the people we have chosen in our lives and the people that we were not able to choose.

¹²⁰ 277

We ought to retreat and refrain from conversations that have the potential to make us angry. We ought to check and potential for anger as soon as it arises. “It is best, therefore, to treat the malady as soon as it is discovered; then, too, to allow oneself the least possible liberty of speech, and to check impulsiveness. It is easy, moreover, to detect one’s affections as soon as it is born; sickness is preceded by symptoms.”¹²¹ Anger originates from the mind yielding to an impulse to affection and allowing it to take root. Thus it is important to check the impulse as soon as it is felt, checking the impulse before the affection arises will prevent it from overthrowing the mind.

The best way to check our influences and to avoid anger is to know how to avoid and insults and injuries that inspire anger. If we know our weakness, then we know where are how we could possibly be hurt by insults and injuries. “We are not all wounded at the same spot; therefore you ought to know your weak spot is in order that you may especially protect it.”¹²² To prevent ourselves from being hurt we need to know where and how we would be hurt. Knowing our points of weakness allows us to guard those areas more carefully.

Finally, Seneca suggests that we avoid anger by not searching for information that will anger us. It is better for us to be ignorant of things that have no bearing on our lives other than to cause anger to arise. “It is well not to see everything, not to hear everything. Many affronts may pass by us; in most cases the man who is unconscious of them escapes them.”¹²³ We cannot be hurt by something we have no knowledge of according to Seneca. At the same time, though, there is an inherent value in knowledge. So how do we square this with Seneca? It is better, it seems, to face the truth than to be ignorant of

¹²¹ 279

¹²² 281

¹²³ 281

it. Do not intentionally seek out information that will cause anger to arise. On the other hand, be able to handle the truth in whatever form it may come. If the mind is well ordered, then secret affronts made against your character ought to be handled just as well as open affronts against your character.

Section 3: Laying Aside Anger

If anger cannot be avoided, then anger must be laid aside by either by suppression and concealment or by restraint. We must not go seeking anger. Just as seeking to know everything that is said about your character seeks to be harmed, we often seek anger by fabricating circumstances at which to become angry. “A great many manufacture grievances either by suspecting the untrue or by exaggerating the trivial. Anger often comes to us, but more often we go it is. It should never be invited; even when it falls upon us, it should be repulsed.”¹²⁴ We should not invite anger into our minds by allowing false or trivial things to insult or injure us. Even if the situation is true or nontrivial, we should still repel anger from taking root in our minds.

One way of not inviting anger is to understand the objects of our anger. If a person is making us angry, we need to consider and understand that person’s character and intentions. Understanding the offender better will allow us to better protect against becoming angry. “The age of the offender counts for something, his station for something, so that to tolerate or to submit becomes merely indulgence or deference. Let us put ourselves in the place of the man with whom we are angry; as it is, an unwarranted opinion of self makes us prone to anger, and we are willing to inflict.”¹²⁵ The young and the elderly must be excused from their offenses, particularly the young. Their want of

¹²⁴ 283

¹²⁵ 285

education and wisdom results in offense where none was intended. Likewise, people from different stations may unintentionally offend each other due to differing costumes.

Beyond understanding the character and intentions of the offender, we can also avoid or lay aside anger by identifying with the person with whom we are about to become angry.

We have all been subjected to the anger of another person. We have all made mistakes.

We have all sinned. We all have vices. Just as we would want to be forgiven for our offences, so too ought we forgive the offences of others.

The most effective way to forgive the offences of others – to lay aside anger once you have become angry – is to wait. Waiting allows the initial overwhelming affection of anger to subside while reason regains control. Without waiting, actions inspired by anger could be violent and damage everything in their path. Seneca asserts:

No one makes himself wait; yet the best cure for anger is waiting, to allow the first ardour to abate and to let the darkness that clouds the reason either subside or be less dense. Of the offenses which were driving you headlong, some an hour will abate, to say nothing of a day, some will vanish altogether; through the postponement sought shall accomplish nothing else, yet it will be evident that judgment now rules instead of anger.¹²⁶

Judgments and decisions regarding justice and virtue cannot be made while anger rules the mind. Reason must be in full control in order to make just judgments.

Postponing action and judgments when angry prevents you from taking an unjust – vengeance inspired – course of action. Postponement allows for anger to dissipate and reason to take control once again. With reason in command, a proper judgment can be made regarding the situation that inspired the anger. At this point, justice can be determined and sought without being corrupted by revenge.

¹²⁶ 285

Before and in addition to postponing anger, anger can be conquered in part by concealing it. “Fight against yourself! If you will to conquer anger, it cannot conquer you. If it is kept out of sight, if it is given no outlet, you begin to conquer.”¹²⁷ Even when anger is felt, the fight against it is won in part by willing to fight. Concealing anger is the first step in conquering it once it is felt. When anger is concealed, you will not act on it. No one will know of your disturbance of mind but you. Keeping a cool exterior while there is a storm within will begin to lessen the winds. “Let the countenance be unruffled, let the voice be very gentle, the step very slow; gradually the inner man conforms itself to the outer.”¹²⁸ You can lessen your anger by concealing and suppressing it.

It is, indeed, possible to suppress anger even in the gravest of circumstances. Seneca gives several warning examples of men becoming angry with their kings to disastrous consequences. In one example, a man tells his king that he ought not to drink so much wine. The king, angered, invited the man and his son to a feast. He proceeded to drink liberally the entire night. After the end of the meal, the king had the son of the man that offended him hold an apple. The king attempted to shoot the apple, but missed in his drunken state and pierced the boy’s heart. The boy’s father – heart broken – simply said that Apollo could not have better aim. Another, and more gruesome, example used by Seneca is of a man invited to dine with a king he had angered. At the end of the meal, the king revealed that he had fed the man his own son. In the face of such atrocity, the man complimented the seasoning of the food. “And what did he gain by this flattery? He

¹²⁷ 287

¹²⁸ 287

escaped an invitation to eat what was left.”¹²⁹ In the face of such horror, anger is still not the answer. Seneca continues:

I do not say that a father must not condemn an act of his king, I do not say that he should not seek to give so atrocious a monster the punishment he deserves, but for a moment I am drawing this conclusion – that it is possible for a man to conceal the anger that arises even from a monstrous outrage and force himself to words that belie it. Such restraint of distress is necessary, particularly for those whose lot is cast in this sort of life and who are invited to the boards of kings.¹³⁰

Seneca uses these examples to illustrate two very important points. First, that it is possible to conceal anger in any situation, and second, that it is necessary to conceal anger. These examples show that it is particularly necessary to conceal anger when the offender is more powerful. If you are in a situation in which you have no advantage, then becoming angry will only hurt your cause more. Seneca also argues that even the powerful ought to restrain and conceal their anger. Entire nations have been ruined by kings that marched into war based on anger.

Finally, we can lay aside our anger by understanding the nature of man. All men have faults. All men make mistakes. All men struggle with vices. We, just as well as the people that anger us, have faults that anger others. “Whoever it may be, let us say to ourselves on his behalf that even the wisest of men have many faults, that no man is so guarded that he does not sometimes let his diligence lapse, none so seasoned that accident does not drive his composure into some hot-headed action, none so fearful of giving offense that he does not stumble into it while seeking to avoid it.” Better men than ourselves have faults. Surely we ought to forgive those that have offended us as we would want to be forgiven by those that we have offended.

¹²⁹ 293

¹³⁰ 293-295

Section 4: Above Anger

The truly great mind is wise; it knows the nature of the world. A man with such a mind would not be so self-absorbed to believe that hardships are unique to him. Wisdom – knowing that you are not the only one that may suffer – offers solidarity in place of anger. “As to the humble man, it brings comfort in trouble that great men’s fortune also totters, and as he who weeps for his son in a hovel is more content if he has seen the piteous procession move from the palace also, so a man is more content to be injured by one, to be scorned by another, if he takes thought that no power is so great as to be beyond the reach of harm.”¹³¹ We do not derive pleasure from the pain of others, but there is comfort in knowing that we are not alone in our suffering. Every person – no matter how privileged – could suffer. A wise man knows this about the world; he would gain comfort in this solidarity instead of anger at his misfortunes.

We can be above anger by identifying with each others’ pain and suffering. We ought to also identify with the man that does become angry. Instead of becoming angry with him in turn, we ought to show him compassion and to give him the chance to correct himself. “If a man gets angry, let us give him enough time to discover what he has done; he will chastise himself. Suppose in the end he deserves punishment; then there is no reason why we should match his misdeeds.”¹³² We ought to give an angry man time to repent on his own. If he ought to be corrected or punished, our judgment ought to come from a place of reason and our actions ought to be based on justice. Punishing the angry man out of anger just adds vice to vice and does not heal or promote justice. It is a sin for both parties. Moreover, the greatest punishment for the man that realizes that he has

¹³¹ 317

¹³² 317-319

committed an injustice is having committed an injustice in the first place. It may not be necessary to punish the angry man at all because he may punish himself with remorse, “for the greatest punishment for wrong-doing is the having done it, and no man is more heavily punished than he who is consigned to the torture of remorse.”¹³³

To be above anger, we must be just and prudent in our judgments of others and ourselves. We must be wise. Not only is suffering universal to all of mankind, but faults and vices are universal to all of mankind. We must consider this before we condemn another for a vice we all possess. Seneca argues:

Again, we must consider the limitations of our human lot if we are to be just judges of all what happens; he, however, is unjust who blames the individual for a fault that is universal... Consider now how much more justly excuse may be made for those qualities that are common to the whole race. We are all inconsiderate and unthinking, we are all untrustworthy, discontented, ambitious – why should I hide the universal sore by softer words? – we are all wicked. And so each man will find in his own breast the fault which he censures in another.¹³⁴

We cannot blame one man for a vice we all possess. We cannot be angry and desire to harm someone for the very sin we are also committing. It is not in man’s nature to be destructive in this way. Instead we ought to seek to correct one another in order to heal. Universal faults ought not to be punished for punishment’s sake; they ought to be healed. “How much better it is to heal than to avenge an injury! Vengeance consumes much time, and it exposes the doer to many injuries while he smarts from one; our anger always lasts longer than the hurt. How much better it is to take the opposite course and not to match fault with fault.”¹³⁵ Healing, rather than seeking revenge, prevents more injuries to ourselves as well as others.

¹³³ 321

¹³⁴ 321

¹³⁵ 321-323

Since these faults are universal, they are found in all people at all times. If you were to become angry at vice every time you saw it, you would live your life in perpetual anger. “You will be angry first with this man, then with that one; first with slaves, then with freedmen; first with parents, then with children; first with acquaintances, then with strangers; for there are causes enough everywhere unless the mind enters to intercede. Rage will sweep you hither and yon, this way and that, and your madness will be prolonged by new provocations that constantly arise.”¹³⁶ Indeed, you will be mad, for you will never be reasonable while in perpetual states of anger. If you are to become angry at faults and vice, you will even become angry at yourself. Life such as this would be a vicious cycle of anger and madness that cannot be broken. It is clear that anger is counter to human nature and counter to achieving greatness of soul.

Anger often stems for other vices. Envy, pride, and greed inspire us to be angry at our neighbor for having more than us when we believe that we deserve better. We envy what others have received, we believe that we are worth having more, and we desire to receive as much as we can:

No man when he views the lot of others is content with his own. This is why we grow angry even at the gods, because some person is ahead of us, forgetting how many men there are behind us, and how huge a mass of envy follows at the back of him that envies but a few. Nevertheless such is the presumptuousness of men that, although they may have received much, they count it an injury that they might have received more.¹³⁷

The same wisdom that proves solidarity in suffering can be used here. There are always people better off and worse off than us. Instead of being envious, greedy, and prideful, we ought to show gratitude for what we have. “Express thanks rather for what you have received; wait for the rest, and be glade that you are not yet surfeited. There is a

¹³⁶ 325

¹³⁷ 331

pleasure in having something left to hope for.”¹³⁸ Wisdom ought to give us perspective not only that we should not envy those ahead of us because we are the object of envy to those behind us, but also that we ought not to focus on material wealth in the first place.

Material wealth inspires anger and creates rifts in the most intimate relationships. People from all classes are made angry by monetary wealth. “Most of the outcry is about money. It is this which worries the courts, fits father against son, brews poisons, and gives swords alike to the legions and to cut throats; it is daubed with our blood.”¹³⁹ Money causes husbands and wives to fight and kings to go to war. Money tears families apart, turning father against son and brother against brother. The wise man would not be disturbed by something as petty as money. To the wise man, money is not worth much. “If you were to offer me all the money from all the mines, which we are now so busy in digging, if you were to cast before my eyes all the money that buried treasures hold – for greed restores to earth what it once in wickedness drew forth – I should not count that whole assembled hoard worth even a good man’s frown. With what laughter should we attend the things that now draw tears from our eyes!”¹⁴⁰ Money is trivial to the wise man. It is not the maker or breaker of happiness or greatness of soul.

There are many such things in man’s life. There are many things in our lives that we believe to be more important than they are. There are many things in our lives that inspire us to become angry beyond measure when they are worth little to our souls. “Believe me, these things which incense us are not a little are little things, like the trifles that drive children to quarrels and blows. Now one of them, though we take them so tragically, is a serious matter, not one is important. From this, I say, from the fact that you

¹³⁸ 331-333

¹³⁹ 335

¹⁴⁰ 335

attach great value to petty things, come your anger and your madness.”¹⁴¹ We are made hugely angry – hugely mad – by things that are worthless in our lives. We assign importance. We fabricate value for valueless things then we allow those things to disturb our minds and throw us into anger.

But cannot we be above that? Cannot we value valuable things and give little notice to valueless things? Money is nothing to our souls, so why should we contaminate ourselves with anger for the sake of it? Why should we contaminate ourselves with anger at all? Be above anger.

¹⁴¹ 337

CONCLUSION

What is at Stake?

What is at stake according to Seneca? What is it that anger endangers? It is our soul. For Seneca, greatness of soul and of mind is characterized by tranquility – the lack of disturbances. Aristotle and Aristotelian philosophy strive to achieve eudaimonia, human flourishing. Human flourishing, or happiness, is a habitual act. It is practiced over the course of life. It is determined by our actions and habits. The same is not so for Seneca. For Seneca, the state of our mind and soul is more important than our external actions. Tranquility is an internal state of mind, not an external collection of acts.

Greatness of soul and of mind is superior to material actions in this world. Achieving virtue, according to Aristotle, depends on acting according to virtue. In the Stoic tradition, achieving virtue and greatness of soul depends solely on the state of our souls. Our duty to our souls is more important than external duties. Internal justice, harmony of the mind, is just as important – if not more so – as external justice. Whereas Aristotle would bid you act and achieve physical justice, Seneca prioritizes maintaining a just mind and soul over achieving physical justice.

This ties into Seneca's rejection of the physical world. We ought to worry about our minds more than anything external to us because all material goods do not contribute to our greatness of mind or soul. Our wealth, our homes, our families, even our bodies are all things that are external. We, as people, are our mind according to Seneca. We ought to only be concerned about the greatness of our mind over and above all external things. Internal harmony of the soul affects our tranquility, our greatness of soul. External justice

may be needed, but it is better to wait and ensure internal harmony than it would be to achieve external justice at the cost of our souls.

Finally, what is truly at stake is our soul. Anger corrupts who we are as people; it corrupts our souls. The other vices are corrupting to one particular virtue. Cowardice corrupts bravery; gluttony corrupts temperance, and so on. Each vice corrupts our potential for a particular virtue. Anger does not correspond to one virtue. Instead, it corrupts our potential for all virtue. Anger corrupts human nature and damages our capacity for all virtues. Anger corrupts who we are as people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seneca, *Moral Essays Volume 1 – Book I, Book II, Book III On Anger*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1928).