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## Great Anger

THEY ARE ANGRY. AND THEIR ANGER drives them to extreme deeds. Publicly dishonoured by Agamemnon, Achilles withdraws from the siege of Troy and refuses to take up the fight even when the tides turn against his comrades. Only Patroclus's death can call him back so that he can unleash his wrath. Even Hector's death cannot satisfy the enraged Achilles. He must defile the slain body; such is his fury that the gods alone can protect it. When Euripides's Hecuba suffers a betrayal by a guest-friend and can find no justice, she too must have her revenge. She blinds Polymestor, the Thracian king, and coldly kills his children, taking pleasure in his grief. Hecuba is dead but for revenge. In Medea's case, anger is more monstrous. Tossed aside by Jason, the lover for whom she has sacrificed everything, she desperately seeks a way to hurt him. Killing his bride cannot suffice. She takes her children's lives, *his* children, so that she might have sweet revenge.

The stories are ancient, but the themes of anger and revenge are familiar to modern ears. Human history is fraught with sobering cruelties: senseless murders; brutal rapes; horrific child abuse; vicious racism; the obscenity of genocide. War and other atrocities claimed the life of over one hundred and eighty million people in the twentieth century. There seems no denying that those devoid of anger and desires for retribution when the innocent suffer must simply not care. And yet, when we consider how anger, hate, and the thirst for revenge have figured in history, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that they have been the mightiest contributor to what might easily be seen as a history of *inhumanity*.

Other forces have also been major players in our cruel deeds. Greed, fear, indifference, and glory have lent a helping hand. Nevertheless, various schools of thought have rightly surmised that anger, particularly anger hardened into implacable hate, has been first among equals. The Stoics viewed anger as an inherently corrosive element in the soul. Even righteous anger

sees only evil; the evildoer is just an extension of evil. Lost in anger's eye are the complications of what led the wrongdoer to the vile deed. Anger's eye cares nothing for keen attentiveness to the details that might explain, soften, and plead for mercy and compassion. Anger sees a monster, and seeing only a monster can bring out monstrous things in us. Even if beastly revenge is denied, anger eats away at the soul, consuming and corroding character.

The Christian tradition may seem more ambiguous. The Old Testament is no stranger to anger, and even Jesus angrily cast the moneychangers from the temple. Nonetheless, the dominant message of the New Testament is one of love. Every sinner is a child of God. We may hate the sin, but never the sinner. Hate ignores the divine in every person and turns a blind eye to the possibility of repentance and redemption. As Jesus warned, let those who are without sin cast the first stone. Judgment is God's business; good Christians should busy themselves with God's command to love thy neighbour.

The Buddhist tradition also appeals to a common denominator. We identify with the corporeal self, but this self is just an illusion. Our true self is one we share with all sentient beings. If we can realize this fundamental truth, we can identify with all creatures and love them accordingly. Anger toward others makes no more sense than the right hand hating the left. Just as the Stoics insist that the state of one's character is what matters, Buddhists insist that one's state of mind is paramount. Enlightened beings leave anger behind when they see beyond the illusions that foster anger and hate.

Mahatma Gandhi added his voice and actions to these traditions by extolling the powers of unconditional love. The ideals of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* demand more than a refusal to act from anger. Anger must be expunged from the heart and replaced by relentless love, a love that cannot be denied to even the most brutal oppressor. Anger and hate can never win; violence can never beget moral victory. Love, and only love, is the answer to suffering and oppression. Unconditional love can eventually melt the heart of the most vicious tyrant, even if the road is a long and arduous one.

As suicide bombers claim lives and people nurse ancient wounds with ethnic cleansings, a world devoid of anger and distinguished by universal love and respect seems sublime. But like all visions of utopia, it suffers in the face of reality. Had the vision the power to capture our hearts and minds, we would still need to know what to think and feel about Stalin or Pol Pot. Even the best of all psychologically possible worlds might not eliminate the man who raped Nancy Venable Raine: "*Now I hear the words. These are the words I hear: Shut up shut the fuck up you bitch you dirty bitch you fucking cunt shut up do you hear me you fucking dirty bitch I'm going to kill you if you*

*don't shut up you bitch I'm going to kill you.*"<sup>1</sup> He left Nancy Venable Raine her life, but he stole her soul. What might we say about anger, hate, revenge, and forgiveness? A believer in the vision of an anger-less world might tell her to let go of her anger and forgive this man. But the thought of looking her in the eye and mouthing these words shames me, and not simply because these words would not be mine to say. The thought of forgiving this man, much less returning love for evil, seems like an empty platitude.

Thus, there can be no denying that anger has caused immeasurable anguish. Yet, anger seems like a fitting reaction for those who genuinely care when faced with threats and losses at the hands of those who mean to do them. The question of how anger should figure into a life and character is one of the most important questions we can ever face.

At its root, anger is an emotional mobilization in the face of threat or loss. Other emotional states share this root. Fear manifests our anxiety about the potential for loss. Despair expresses the resignation that loss is inevitable and hope futile. Grief embodies the acknowledgement of the loss that fear and despair portend. Anger also faces some threat or loss, but anger rebels against it. Like these other emotional states, anger involves dissatisfaction, but there is a hostile, aggressive element to the dissatisfaction. We can understand the adaptive advantages of anger. In a hostile environment, we must prepare for flight and fight. Fear and anger provide a spirited element that can help us survive. Fear prepares the body for flight, and anger readies us for combat. The body's somatic changes all serve the cause of making us ready. As beings for whom some things matter, we must defend what we hold dear, and anger mobilizes these defences.

For the most part these capacities for fear, anger, and mourning seem to be part of our hardwiring. But these emotional capacities also require development and cultivation. The Greek idea of catharsis often conjures up the idea of purging emotions. Yet, the best way to think of catharsis is to think of the *education* of the emotions. Greek tragedies and similar experiences can shape an emotional life by inculcating an appreciation of what things matter and by calling out the requisite emotions to honour these things in the right way, at the right time, to the right degree. We need no education just to feel anger, but without some cultivation, anger can wreak havoc on us. Hot weather, growing old, indigestion, and bats in my attic can make me mad. With these things we hope for some perspective: Keep an eye on what matters, don't get worked up over lesser things, head

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Venable Raine, *After Silence, Rape & My Journey Back* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1998) 9.

off heartache, and learn to live gracefully with losses, including the erosion of your powers and eventual death. In other words, we hope for wisdom. Some things matter more. Some things are out of our control, others are difficult to control, and others can be managed with effort and a modicum of luck. Wise people direct themselves to what matters, duly cognizant of their own fallibility and fragility.

Wayward fear, sadness, or anger can produce skewed perspectives in the unwary, the unfortunate, or the unwise. These emotions manifest a way of seeing the world. Cognitive distortions find expression in distorted emotional lives, and distorted emotional lives distort the world. Paranoid people see fearful things behind every corner. They filter experience in ways that highlight and magnify threats and harms. Likewise, severely depressed people often see impotence, inadequacy, and despair in all things. In the same way, chronically angry people ferret out threats and losses that feed their anger. The fact is that anger in all its forms can be distorted. People can experience anger for no good reason. Or anger may be fitting, but the degree may be excessive. And anger's response can be inappropriate; what we do in anger can go far beyond what anger warrants. Anger can suffer from these distortions episodically, but anger can also be chronically distorted. We see this most dramatically and tragically with mad hate, cases where anger has hardened into a deeply entrenched, dogmatic antipathy.

Consider genocide. Many things can start the wheels of genocide, but anger and hate usually provide the momentum. The genius of the Holocaust was that once the system was in place, the machine could run on its own without constant infusions of hate. Unlike so many other massacres, this one did not require hate at some fevered pitch. Nonetheless, anger was the background accelerant that made the Holocaust possible. Nazi Germany was not a nation of sociopaths. Many of those responsible for the administration of the camps were physicians. How could they kill innocent people? The answer is simple, though the psychological labyrinths are complex. Nazi Germany nursed its anger with a systematic prejudice against the Jews. Conflicts of interest, envy, disappointment, personal distaste, and fear can demonize the 'other.' The need for unambiguous enemies can be powerful, even narcotic. When this happens, the details of differences and conflicts can be pushed aside for over-generalizations that corroborate the desired conclusions. Such cognitive distortions manufacture the picture one wishes to see. With the Holocaust, the Jews became the epitome of evil and pestilence.

Such collective distortions find ready analogues in individual lives. Lives are often ruined by misplaced, overblown, twisted, shameful, and

pathetic anger. The Greeks were right to suggest that emotions need education. This is so for anger, and the world would be better if such an education were the rule. So imagine that such an education puts an end to senseless anger. Henceforward, think of *great anger* in the sense of profound anger in the face of some genuine, important harm or wrongdoing. Notice that an end to petty, mindless, immature anger would not keep human beings from doing terrible things. Avarice and fear alone would be enough to make people ravage each other. And so long as there is genuine oppression, cruelty, and wrongdoing, most of us do not believe that any such education should banish anger altogether. Thus, what are we to say to and about the *desaparecidos* in South America, the millions slain in Stalinist Russia, the victims of Nanking, or the countless victims of the African slave trade?

One response is to adjust our forms of caring. Any education of the emotions must include the emotions of caring, and perhaps caring could be immunized against great anger. This approach finds a clear expression in the Stoics. Only our character is fully within our power, and its perfection should anchor our lives. Anything external to character should be pursued with reservations. We mustn't care about anything in ways that might lead to the disintegration of our character if the objects of our affections meet with bad ends. We can care, but not in ways that might alter our character.

While Stoics must confront the charge that they leave out all the love, Christianity is known for its preoccupation with love. However, Christianity is committed to the view that life is a preparation for eternal life with God, and this commitment affects love for Christians. Eternal life matters most. Indeed, earthly and eternal life can hardly be compared; the latter is different in kind, and not simply degree. This has important consequences. While some see an incompatibility between Christian love and capital punishment, the two are theoretically reconcilable because of the strict superiority of eternal life. Christians must see repentance and redemption in this life as essential preparation for the next. They can never endorse capital punishment from hate. But the threat of execution could drive the reflection necessary to save one's soul. In the film, *Dead Man Walking*, Matthew Poncelet refuses to take responsibility for his role in the brutal murder of a young couple. Only when his execution is imminent does he repent.

The key point to notice is that Christian love cannot condone hating Poncelet. The gravity of his sins must be leavened by two ideas. First, the tragedy of these murders is an earthly one. The lesser good was taken, but the greater good, eternal life with God, took its place. Christians can mourn the separation from loved ones, but they must also be happy for them. Poncelet did them no lasting harm. He deprived them of earthly life,

but given the superiority of eternal life, the loss must pale to insignificance. Faithful Christians mourners cannot weep *for them*. Second, while Christians can feel righteous anger and hate Poncelet's sins, they mustn't hate Poncelet himself.

Like Christianity, Buddhism stresses love, a love that diffuses anger and prevents hate. We attach ourselves to particular people and see them as all-important. When those we love meet with bad ends, we incline toward anger and revenge. But what grieving, angry parents fail to realize is that Poncelet and their children are one. We share in the essential unity of all sentient beings. Unfortunately, we build lives around illusions, pernicious illusions that foster enmity. If we could see beyond the illusion that we are all separate, isolated beings, we would love Poncelet just as much as his victims.

No doubt there are Stoics, Christians, and Buddhists that could bring a Matthew Poncelet to justice without anger or hatred. The real-life Helen Prejean befriended those who inspired the Poncelet film character. She did not lose sight of their humanity, even though she saw their actions as sinful. But Sister Helen Prejean was a nun, not a mother. If someone were to abduct my child, rape her, torture her, thoughts of character, the afterlife, or illusions about the self would be far from my mind. As loving parent, a goodly portion of my life is about my child. No grieving parent could find sufficient comfort in good character, heaven, or the unity of all things to eliminate loss. Of course, Stoics, Christians, or Buddhists might insist that debilitating grief or vengeful anger testify to mistaken beliefs about what or how much things matter. Frankly, even if claims about mistaken evaluations are correct in some sense, I am unsure what difference the truth of these claims could make to a life in progress. Assume that my love for my child provides a large part of the sense and meaning to my life. What kind of 'fact' could a loving parent learn that would somehow banish grief and anger by rendering a child's death into something that doesn't matter enough to warrant debilitating grief or vengeful anger? This change would require a conversion, a *metanoia*, where core attachments and commitments are drastically altered. Any such person would become a different person. Of course, changes of heart can be welcome. Had Stalin fallen off a horse like Saul and changed his ways, the world would have been a better place and Stalin a better man. Typically, changes of heart take place over time. Oskar Schindler did not start out as a humanitarian bent on saving Jews. His change of heart mightn't be as profound as the change needed for a loving parent to banish grief and anger, but the example suggests that dramatic change is possible. The question is whether such change is desirable.

If an end to vengeful anger requires the elimination of caring and not simply its alteration, few people would heed the call. The Holocaust mattered, just as the wrongs done to Nancy Venable Raine mattered. Stoics might refuse to acknowledge the value of external things. But others, including Christians and Buddhists, would not withdraw from caring. Indeed, Christians and Buddhists would likely stress the expansion of care, rather than its elimination. One way that an expansion of caring might work is by way of forgiveness. The details of the case for forgiveness can vary. One strain of thought stresses the psychological survival and well-being of victims. The thought is that anger and hate create stress that devours victims. Life and character require emancipation from the wounds of wrongdoing; we cling to anger at our own peril. Another strain casts forgiveness as a positive force and not simply a matter of staving off destruction. Forgiveness is seen as a gesture of control and dignity. If my psyche is consumed by anger and hate driven by the deeds of others, perhaps they control my life. The decision to forgive can restore control and express my dignity to control my fate and character.

We should be clear about forgiveness since contemporary conversations suffer from a great deal of loose talk. For one thing, forgiving and forgetting are different things, and many appeals to the well-being of victims often seem closer to the latter. Any sense of forgetting cannot be a literal banishment from memory. Presumably the idea would be that victims would do best to put the wrongdoing away from their mind and move on. Advice to 'forget about it' can make sense. The advice is apt when the wrong is not so serious and there is real danger that a victim is unduly fixed on the wrong. In such cases, the best thing that victims can do is put the experience behind them; the costs of hanging on to wrongs or working through them can be too great to warrant the efforts. However, when the wrongs are traumatic, 'forget about it' does no justice as a piece of advice. Traumatic wrongs attack a victim's sense of a secure moral order. Studies with victims of trauma like torture show that there can be no recovery by wilful banishment. Indeed, trauma can change the brain in ways that create a sense of being 'stuck.' People who work with victims report that constructing a narrative that provides the possibility for an emotional reckoning is paramount for recovery. Thus, the last thing that victims of serious wrongs should wish to do is forget their experience, even if they could.

The fact that people so often talk about 'forgiving and forgetting' in the same breath suggests that we acknowledge some difference between the two, but that we also link them. The sense of 'forgetting' has to do with not keeping the wrong waiting in the wings, ready to wield at a moment's

notice. This idea works in tandem with forgiveness because true forgiveness involves a change of heart where you no longer hold something against a person. There is no rejection of a judgment of wrongdoing. If you change your mind and conclude that you were not wronged, then there is nothing to forgive. Forgiveness entails a judgment of wrongdoing, together with the banishment of any claim against the wrongdoer. Genuine forgiveness wipes the slate clean.

There is little doubt that an inability to forgive wrongs would be a flaw in character. We are not creatures who can reasonably expect perfection in others. People are destined to disappoint us, just as we are bound to disappoint others unless we set our sights low. When the wrongs are minor, a refusal to forgive is a flaw. Even with more serious wrongs, we can imagine cases for forgiveness. If the details are right, we can imagine an end to anger and another chance for the wrongdoer. Victims must beware the pitfalls of hanging excessively on the hurt. But important as the possibility of forgiveness is, those who sing its praises also should be careful to get the tune right. Some may believe that evil always has its roots in a cycle of cruelty and callousness that might be destroyed if it could only be interrupted by mutual understanding and a shared commitment to peace. This vision, noble as it may be, cannot be squared with Stalin, a man who burned the midnight oil composing lists of Russians to be killed in the wee hours of the night. Gandhi would tell us that love could melt this man's heart. I think not. Gandhi faced Churchill, not Stalin. To anyone else who would embrace the idea of unconditional love and forgiveness, consider this: What would it mean to forgive the man who raped Nancy Venable Raine? The true believer in the goodness of every person might insist that even a man capable of such brutality is capable of repentance. I doubt it. The chasm between such cruelty and genuine remorse seems psychologically unbridgeable. And convincing me otherwise would require more than a profession of faith. Such unprovoked brutality is no accident. It has roots and one might trace them if one knew enough about the assailant. One might even identify key crossroads and make meaningful conjectures that but for this or that event in this man's life, he would not have become this kind of man. Yet, this genealogy would change nothing about the assessment of his character or the character of his actions. In real life and not some dreamland, we should not expect to find a repentant soul should this man ever be caught. His actions were hardly the actions of a man torn by conflicting desires. For any save those dogmatically attached to forgiveness as a panacea, asking this woman to forgive this man would be an obscenity.



Just thinking about Nancy Venable Raine's experience should be enough to move good people. The likely reaction is equal parts sadness and indignation, sadness for her profound losses and indignation for the monstrous cruelty that spawned these losses. Human pathos and inhumanity move good people, even at a distance. And the interest good people take in oppression, brutality, and injustice goes beyond some detached, dispassionate judgment that some important moral principle has been flouted. What we feel says everything about who we are, and good people cannot witness such things without feeling sympathy and indignation.

If we are lucky, the distance between these deeds and us is great. As respectful, caring people, we are saddened and angered by such abominations. But the distance holds anything like profound rage at arm's length. Rage is a double-edged sword. We abhor the rage of Nancy Venable Raine's assailant. But if we were closer to the wrongdoing, if we were victims, a victim's loved ones, or a victim's liberators, might our own anger turn into a rage that might transform our character? Might the Stoics have been right about anger, and might we all be Medea, Hecuba, and Achilles in waiting? These victims are consumed and undone to one extent or another by rage. We should reconsider these ancient characters to see if they have anything important to say.

Euripides's *Medea* has disturbingly familiar elements. All we need do is tinker with the genders. Men kill their lovers far more often than women kill theirs. In the vast majority of cases, women kill their lovers in self-defence. Men most often cite infidelity or a fear of infidelity as a primary reason for domestic violence and homicide. *Fatal Attraction* notwithstanding, men are more likely to resort to violence against unfaithful lovers or against former lovers in the aftermath of abandonment. Of course, Medea does not kill her lover. But what stops her from doing so is the desire to hurt him. Review the basic story. Medea falls in love with Jason and helps him procure the golden fleece. With her father in pursuit, Medea kills her brother, Absyrtis, and casts his dismembered body into the sea. She knows that Aeetes will cease the chase to give him the proper burial rites. When they return to Jason's homeland, Medea uses her sorcery against Jason's uncle, Pelias, who has usurped Jason's throne. She tricks Pelias's daughters into killing their father. Having burned another bridge, they make for Corinth, and Medea bears Jason two sons. But Jason abandons Medea and marries the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. He justifies his actions as an attempt to secure a future for his sons, but the explanation is unconvincing. At this point, there is no escaping the fact that Jason is handing Medea a raw deal. She has sacrificed mightily for him and now she is to be cast aside. Out with the old and in with the new.

As she contemplates how to take revenge, she has moments of conflict about killing her sons. But the thought of Jason's wrongs steel her. Ultimately, Medea has her violent revenge and flees Corinth with the dead bodies of her children after showing them to Jason. Even if Medea is right that her pain will be greater than the pain given Jason, this does nothing to change the fact that revenge rather than her children's good rules the day. Raging hate can be like this. Yet the appropriate response to Medea's rage is that anger can never be better than the angry person. Medea's excesses are an indictment of neither anger nor love. A good person might think of many ways to punish Jason. But killing one's children would not be one of the ways. Medea's attachment to Jason is such that she cannot acknowledge the importance of any competing concerns and loves. She must have Jason *no matter what*. When her love is thwarted, her children become little more than a means to exact revenge. This is twisted love, a form of moral madness. As such, it inspires revulsion, not pity. Medea proves nothing about anger except that great anger can widen pre-existing cracks in character. Modern readers may sympathize with Medea as a woman done wrong by a man and admire her refusal to accept the wrong passively. But the details speak against sympathy or admiration. It is one thing to admire Medea's fighting spirit as a powerful woman who refuses to suffer wrongs and indignities without some response. It is something else to look past her specific deeds.

Euripides's *Hecuba* is a very different story. By the end of the play, Hecuba's character has taken a turn for the worse, just like Medea. When she blinds Polymestor and has his children killed, she is obsessed with revenge and lives only to hurt him. She mocks and takes delight in his pain. The possibility that she might return to her old self is implausible. There can be no return from the dark place where Hecuba now dwells. But unlike Medea, the details of the story inspire pity rather than revulsion.

Hecuba has no tragic character flaw that fate exploits. She is a good person. She has lost almost everything in the fall of Troy and she has borne the losses nobly. When she learns that the Greeks mean to sacrifice her daughter, she understandably wonders whether life can be worth living. When Odysseus comes to claim Polyxena, she has reason aplenty for bitterness, but she bears up with dignity. During the siege, Hecuba held Odysseus's life in her hands when Helen recognized him as a spy. Hecuba spared his life, and Odysseus repays the debt by arguing for Polyxena's death. When Hecuba brings the debt to his attention, the plea falls on deaf ears. Odysseus mouths galling platitudes about honour. Faced by such unfairness and loss, Hecuba finds cold comfort in how Polyxena faces her death. In the midst of her grief she takes solace in the supposed immutability of good character

and the enduring moral order of the cosmos: "Human nature never changes: / the bad stay bad to the end; / the good, even touched by disaster, / are as changeless as the stars." The rest of the play proves Hecuba's comfort baseless.

At this point, Hecuba is no bloodthirsty monster; she is a woman who has suffered beyond imagination, someone hanging on by a thin psychological rope. Only when she learns of her son's murder *and* is denied any justice does she suffer the death of everything save revenge. Everyone she cares about and everything she can have faith in has been destroyed. The guest-friend relation between Polymestor and Hecuba is a solemn one. Polymestor's betrayal shakes the moral order of Hecuba's universe. She could expect nothing better than the Greeks to slay her children and reduce her to slavery; such are the cruel rules of war. Polymestor's blow is different in kind.

Unlike Medea, who acknowledges nothing important but Jason, Hecuba's many loves are systematically destroyed until she has nothing left. So long as Polydorus lives, Hecuba can have some comfort in the world, albeit mixed with unimaginable loss. At least she can live for Polydorus in a key sense. When he is coldly murdered by Polymestor, what could sustain her? What might we offer Hecuba? Books? Hobbies? Travel? Old memories? Faith in a loving God? Many have been sustained through hard times by faith. Yet, perhaps they have simply had it easy compared to Hecuba. There is Job, but he seems like a feat of biblical imagination rather than a plausible example of human psychology. Consider Job's descendants. Few Jews emerged from the Holocaust with a firm conviction that what they had gone through was part of a benevolent God's master plan. Fewer still would have made it at all without the hope that *someone* cared. Hecuba doesn't have the luxury of a sympathetic audience. Facing the life she faces is bad enough. When Agamemnon expresses sympathy but refuses to grant her justice, he adds insult to profound injury. What this says to Hecuba is something like this: We refuse to acknowledge your loss and share your outrage; you are utterly, completely alone in your anger, so do what you will. We should not be surprised if such a world with such a message brings out monstrous anger. Beastly rage can be the last gasp of a dying life.

Anger does not do in Hecuba in any sense that should leave the impression that there would be much left without her anger. Hecuba is a good person with loving attachments and commitments. Grief by itself would be enough to desolate her character. People who lose everything and can no longer sustain the conviction that there is a trustworthy moral order are never more than a shell of themselves. They may not slide all the way

into vice but surely they cannot hold on to all their good qualities either. Hecuba's anger completes a disintegration that is integrally tied to being a loving woman.

Nevertheless, there is no denying the grave difference between a Hecuba who gives into despair and one who transforms into a dark avenger. We should understand her metamorphosis as a function of love and respect. Because she loves her son and takes justice seriously, she suffers indignant rage, a rage that hardens into hatred. If she cared less for her loved ones and less about justice, she might avoid her metamorphosis. But if she cared less, she wouldn't be the good person she is before her transformation. The vital question is whether Hecuba's fate is evidence of great anger's inherent inhumanity.

Looming in the background of Hecuba's case are two rival perspectives that are deeply at odds. With the first, the aspiration is to understand the roots of wrongdoing, to understand what brings this person to do this particular bad thing. The emphasis is on the possibility for redemption, remorse, and change for the better; the evil deed itself is seen against the context of the whole person and the potential for goodness. The hope is that there might be some common ground of understanding where people who are deeply at odds can share an understanding of justice and an eventual reconciliation born from the mutual commitment to do right by one another. This is a view that hopes victims and victimizers can beat their swords into ploughshares as they come to see each other as human beings worthy of respect and compassion. On this view, anger is an affliction, a suffering voice crying out in the wilderness for the restoration of human solidarity, a voice that laments the terrible rift that wrongdoing inflicts between human beings.

This is an attractive view. Of course, the thought of incorrigible evil-doers changing their ways is pure nonsense, at best a piece of philosophical fantasy, and a potentially pernicious one at that. But anyone with a sense of history knows that many horrible things have been done by *decent* people caught up in angry violence. This perspective targets decent people caught in the throes of potentially corrosive anger. Perhaps we can save good people from grave deeds if we can only defuse their understandable anger.

The second perspective is darker but no less human. On this view, our deepest attachments and commitments define us. Our loves shape our orbit and fuel our passage through life. Serious threats or harms to what or whom we love attack us at the center of our being. Such attacks close the door to any compassionate yearning to know those who harm us or those we love. Homer's Achilles sees one thing when he sees Hector: This is the

man who has killed my Patroclus; today he must pay the price. Achilles has no interest in seeing the world from Hector's point of view. He does not want to think about the suffering that his family will experience. He does not want to be his friend. He cares nothing for any remorse Hector might have. When he kills Hector he is not driven by a detached attachment to some principle. He is driven by love and honour to revenge.

Of course, Hector's crime is hardly injustice. He has killed Patroclus and this is nothing more than we could expect from any warrior. One might insist that he is a party to Paris's theft of Helen. But this has nothing to do with Achilles's wrath. No abstract principle fuels Achilles's rage. Hector has wronged him only by killing his friend. For *this* Hector must die. Surely we can understand how Achilles experiences this as a wrong in the most basic, fundamental sense. After all, Hector has slain Achilles's closest friend in the world, a friend for whom Achilles feels responsible.

I think that the conventional view is that Achilles's wrath is a moral strike against him. Maybe I am wrong about this. But if I am not, I would temper any simple judgment. I should say that it is a good thing that we do not let revenge run rampant. Locke was right: We are partial in judging our own case; we tend to mete out more punishment than is warranted; those in the right haven't always the might to exact punishment; the assurance of impartial judgment and punishment can prevent a cycle of retaliation. And though Locke didn't mention it, sometimes we are given a gift when we are prohibited from acting on our great anger. We would be a lot better off with people who are slow to anger, particularly where the stakes aren't so high.

But sometimes the stakes *are* high. I do not know what more to say to anyone who denies this. When the stakes are high, great anger is a reflection of who we are at our core. Consider anger's roots. Anger and grief drink from the same source and neither is comfortable to experience or witness. Grief can change a person episodically or constitutionally. We hope that the loss can be limited, that something can be salvaged from grief's wreck. But if we love and respect a grieving person we do not dismiss the grounds of grief. We do not ask the mourner to "get over it" and "move on." Grief should not be seen as an affliction along the lines of a disease. The price of immunity from grief would be the obliteration or distortion of love. Paying this price or asking anyone to pay it would dishonour the mourner. Grief should command solemn respect.

As it is with grief, so it is with appropriate anger. And because anger is tied to caring, I understand Achilles's wrath and identify with his rage, just as I can understand Hecuba even as I pity her. Mind you, I am glad for

Achilles's return from darkness at the end of the *Iliad*. Homer's scene with Achilles and Priam is equal parts grace and insight. The sight of a grieving Priam stirs Achilles's compassion by occasioning thoughts of his own father. And these thoughts bring Achilles back from his dark world.

So he spoke, and stirred in the other a passion of grieving for his own father. He took the old man's hand and pushed him gently away, and the two remembered, as Priam huddled at the feet of Achilleus and wept close for manslaughtering Hektor and Achilleus wept now for his own father, now again for Patroklos. The sound of their mourning moved in the house. Then when great Achilleus had taken full satisfaction in sorrow and the passion for it had gone from his mind and body, thereafter he rose from his chair, and took the old man by the hand, and set him on his feet again, in pity for the grey head and grey beard, and spoke to him and addressed him in winged words: "Ah, unlucky, surely you have had much evil to endure in your spirit. How could you dare to come alone to the ships of the Achaians and before my eyes, when I am one who have killed in such numbers such brave sons of yours? The heart in you is iron. Come, then, and sit down upon this chair, and you and I will even let our sorrows lie still in the heart for all our grieving."<sup>2</sup>

In this scene we see the tension between the two perspectives that are at the heart of our humanity. Take away our capacity for compassion and you twist and deform us. We should mourn compassion's death in Hecuba, just as we should herald its return to Achilles. In her case a good woman has been laid bare and permanently stripped of everything save anger and hate. But take away our capacity for great anger in the face of threats and harms to what or whom we love and you threaten our capacity to care as we cherish caring and being cared for. One can try to construct a psychology that defuses anger by creating compartments and labyrinths where anger gets lost or spends itself. Practically speaking, I have doubts about the wisdom of such strategies. Anger silenced or driven underground usually finds some fault line to escape. True enough, entire cultures or subcultures can educate people to bury their anger. With this kind of education, we run the grave risks of misplaced, misdirected anger. Today's denied anger can be tomorrow's explosion. Certainly we know well from empirical examples of grief that thwarted grief usually reverberates in the recesses of a life and character.

Yet even if some such strategy works, the strategy dishonours anger and disfigures integrity. Both grief and anger testify to what a life is about. If tragedy strikes and my loved ones meet with a bad end, whether through wrongdoing or bad luck, my anger and grief will be expressions of my funda-

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<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 488.

mental attachments. They will express *who I am*. There is nothing poignant, beautiful, or beneficial about living through such a tragedy. Watching a good tragedy is one thing; living one is another, and every tragedy is nothing but hell. Profound anger is neither pretty nor pleasurable; such anger is simply an essential element in any character with commitments and attachments that define the self.

In the same breath, it is worth stressing once again that much of the anger we witness is a grave mark against the angry person's character. Not all anger is great anger. Agamemnon epitomizes petty indignation and destructive macho anger. With the siege going badly, the Greeks learn that Apollo is punishing them for Agamemnon's refusal to ransom a concubine. Agamemnon reluctantly agrees to return her but only if a suitable replacement is found. When Achilles assures Agamemnon that there are no such prizes left to give and asks him to trust that he will be repaid when Troy falls, Agamemnon threatens to take some fellow Greek's concubine. Agamemnon is driven by nothing better than petty indignation: He cannot suffer a blow to his status. At a time like this, small thoughts should not enter a commander's mind. Achilles responsibly warns him against dishonouring a fellow Greek. He reminds Agamemnon that these men are fighting the Trojans as a favour to him and his brother. As Achilles points out, no Trojan has ever wronged *him* and yet he fights, contenting himself with a smaller share of the prizes even though he does the lion's share of the fighting. If Agamemnon persists with his selfish plan, then Achilles sees no point in fighting on his behalf. Achilles's words are a justified reproach to Agamemnon's rash threat. But far from seeing the wisdom of his words, Agamemnon takes direct aim at him. His response is macho anger at its worst. The threat to take Briseis is the exclamation point to a humiliating public affront.

The Agamemnons of the world give anger a bad name. Achilles's anger is fearsome but he is no Agamemnon. Certainly there is nothing to glorify in Achilles's horrific rage when he mercilessly wades through Trojan blood to get to Hector. Solemn respect and understanding for anger and glorification of the same are different things. Knowing what we know about warfare's effects, we should refrain from painting Achilles as a monster. Take a person with deep loves and honour and induce prolonged stress accompanied by a sense terrible wrong and you are likely to get an Achilles.

Forgiveness for grievous wrongs is not always a possibility. Sometimes anger can only be managed, the way we manage grief's losses. Some wounds prohibit complete recovery, and not because the victim is flawed or weak. Great anger that cannot subside usually hardens into some form of hate. We are used to thinking of hate as a spiritual cancer. Perhaps the lion's share

of the world's hate should be put to rest as senseless hate. But suppose, like Nancy Venable Raine, you are a victim of profound, undeniable brutality. If you are fortunate, anger can spend itself and you can move on. But no matter what happens, what happened could never fade into something inconsequential. Could you imagine wishing your assailant well or having no feelings about him? I doubt it. I find it difficult to imagine not having deeply entrenched, persistent, powerful desires for no good to come to this man. This is nothing less than hate. If you are lucky, your life would not be consumed by hate. But calling hate by another name does not change its nature. We fear the word "hate," and not simply because senseless hate has left brutal scars on human history. Hate of any kind is always a burden, a burden we can hardly wish on anyone we love. But the same is so for grief.

Senseless, misguided hate is easy to reject. But suppose we know enough about a someone to know that his brutal deeds are consistent with his character or that the evil of his deeds eclipses any "redeeming" elements of his character? Suppose we spent time with Nancy Venable Raine's rapist. Suppose we saw some kindness. Perhaps he is good to his dog or generous with his buddies. One way we can head off hate is to remind ourselves of the humanity of victimizers. This can be enough to head off implacable hate. But depending on the details, the sensible result can also be hate. The shreds of goodness can be too small or irrelevant when juxtaposed with the enormity of the evil.

The idea that hate might have some legitimate place in a good person's life may itself seem hateful. The idea that good people must never wish intentional harm on others for its own sake has a long history. After all, isn't the desire to inflict suffering on Nancy Venable Raine's assailant a mirror image of the assailant's brutality? The avenger seeks to even the score. Of course, revenge is often futile in the sense of literally evening the score or erasing the harm. Even if Nancy Venable Raine's rapist were to be tortured, his suffering would not change what was done to her. No revenge that Hecuba might take could restore Polydorus. Hector's death and defilement cannot end Achilles's suffering.

Dire warnings about the futility of hate and revenge make sense. We cannot be restored from the worst wrongdoings; there is no balm for these wounds and taking revenge never makes us whole. Innocence lost is lost for good. And when we go down the road of acting on our understandable hate, we often invite new suffering into our lives. But the vilification of the desire to return bad for bad is nothing more than a pernicious slogan, a dogmatic platitude that dishonours emotions that are central to us. This



desire is merely the flipside of the commendable desire to return good for good. We curb personal revenge with a justice system, and we are wise to do so. But the roots of justice and revenge drink from the same waters; they share a genealogy.

The truth is that we cannot leave the capacities for anger and hatred behind without changing elements of human character that most of us prize. Some may contend that these elements are overvalued, that their alteration would be worth the price to eliminate anger and hatred's ill effects. But most of us would not make the deal. If a Gandhi can love a sadistic killer, then he does not love people the way most of us do. An admirer may say that this is precisely the point. I will not disparage Gandhi's love. But this is not a parent's love. Neither is it the love of a brother, sister, son, daughter, friend, or romantic partner. Try as we may to sanitize our emotions, attachments, and commitments, we must face the fact that there are inherent dark sides to the things that matter to us. If we are honest, we must face ourselves as we really are.

While we must not dishonour anger, we must not love anger itself. We can be drawn in by its seductive charms. No life is better for the misfortune and grief of having just cause for anger. We should do our best to shape the capacity for anger in ways that do justice to the loves that define us, taking care to discriminate between those things that matter and the things that matter less. A good world will educate the Agamemnons to leave their anger behind and eliminate the circumstances that breed a Hecuba. Great anger should be a precious commodity, used sparingly and only when the circumstances demand it.

We have no ready term to name the virtue that shapes, moderates, and mobilizes anger. This is a pity. Given our world, the capacity for anger, even extreme anger, comes with the territory. Some things should make us *very* mad. When American forces liberated the death camps, many commanders forced German citizens to tour the camps so that they might see the horrors with their own eyes. These orders were a manifestation of profound indignation and a call to our shared humanity: Look upon these wretched sights with shame for what human beings didn't do, anger for what they did, compassion for what was suffered, and a firm resolve to never allow these horrors again. No doubt the gesture was not lost on the survivors. Finally, someone cared enough to be angry.

