**Where is the Fury? On Hume’s Peculiar Account of Anger and Resentment.**

Enrico Galvagni

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**Introduction.**

Among the many studies devoted to Hume and the passions, anger appears to be an unpopular object of enquiry. After a survey of existing studies, one could even venture to say that few topics have been so far neglected in Hume’s scholarship as much as his account of anger. This passion, however, poses a series of thorny issues which are worthy of attention. One problem above all seems to mar his discussion and is probably responsible for the lack of scholarly interest in this topic: Hume’s account of anger does not seem to be about anger at all. Anger is defined in the *Treatise*[[1]](#endnote-1) as the “desire of the misery and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated” (T 2.2.6.3).

One could legitimately be puzzled about this characterization of anger. As I show in more detail throughout this paper, Hume seems to deny the existence of a distinctive phenomenological experience of anger. This passion is just a desire of another’s misery, but how can this fit with our experience? On the one hand, one can be angry with somebody else, say their daughter who got a bad mark at school, without desiring her misery. Angry parents are far from desiring their child’s misery. On the contrary, one could state they get angry precisely because they *do care* about her and they want her happiness. On the other hand, it is not difficult to think about situations in which a person is not angry, and nevertheless desires the misery of someone else. A judge who condemns a tax cheat to pay a hefty fine, for instance, does not need to be angry at the evader who now has to pay the bill for their crimes, but will nevertheless desire their misery, and their economic situation to be damaged.

This paramount problem about the very nature of anger opens up an array of other lines of research to develop in order to better understand Hume’s philosophy of emotions and the role passions play within his philosophical system. By trying to formulate an hypothesis for Hume’s peculiar account of anger, in this paper, I also touch some of these problems and put forward a solution for each.

First of all, I highlight that despite Hume’s clear definition of anger as a “desire of misery”, the few interpreters who did pay attention to this topic have often overlapped – sometimes even conflated – its discussion of anger to his analysis of resentment. This is justified by the fact that overall, Hume’s naming of the impressions of reflection is foggy, especially while discussing apparently peripheral passions such as vanity, curiosity, and anger.[[2]](#endnote-2) At times, the term ‘anger’ appears in pairs with ‘hatred’, other times is taken in isolation, frequently is analyzed in couple with benevolence, and sometimes substituted with ‘resentment’. These factors blur Hume’s account of anger, and make it difficult to fully grasp its moral and social impact within his own philosophy. However, I shall argue that anger and resentment are distinct emotions, and play different roles in Hume’s account of sociability and justice.

Secondly, it is worth noting that Hume does not categorize anger and resentment neither under indirect nor among direct passions. This distinction occurs very early in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, which is famously devoted to a study of the passions categorized by Hume according to this original division.[[3]](#endnote-3) Anger and resentment are never added to any of Hume’s lists. At the same time, anger seems to be partially analysed while discussing both the former and the latter. This appears particularly ambiguous, especially if one considers the straightforward and explicit collocation of all other passions, both those which are central in the *Treatise* (such as joy, grief, pride, humility, love, hatred, etc.) and more peripheral ones (such as despair, security, envy, vanity, generosity, etc.). [[4]](#endnote-4)

A third interesting interpretative issue concerns Hume’s apparently inconsistent description of anger. On the one hand, Hume devotes tens of pages (actually, two long sections of the *Treatise*) to an analysis of the complex intentionality of anger. On the other hand, however, he also alleges that “[w]hen I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high.” (T 2.3.3.5) In this paper, I offer a reconstruction of this problem analysing both Hume’s description of anger as a complex passion, and his claim that it has an “original existence” (*Ibid.*).

**An emotional empiricism.**

Differently from many of his contemporaries and predecessors, David Hume did not categorize the passions according to their moral value. Of course, he did recognize that the role they play in our moral life is paramount (Árdal, 1966; Baier, 1991). However, he alleged that no passion is in itself positive or negative. Despite the lack of interest in the physiological details[[5]](#endnote-5), Hume develops his own research on the emotional phenomena through an empirical study rather than a moral one. As Jacqueline Taylor (2015: 1-31) has recently shown, Hume consistently adheres to an experimental method and rejects the teleological stance of his predecessors. He insists on the idea that emotions are simple, natural and scientific facts of human moral anatomy, and they have to be observed and studied without being judged as moral or immoral. An excerpt from the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)[[6]](#endnote-6) makes this unquestionably clear:

There is no man, who, on particular occasions, is not affected with all the disagreeable passions, fear, anger, dejection, grief, melancholy, anxiety, *etc*. But these, so far as they are natural, and universal, make no difference between one man and another, and can never be the object of blame. (EMP 7.2, footnote)

Book 2 of the *Treatise* opens with a brief section devoted to the *Division of the Subject.* Here, Hume retraces the subdivision of impressions and ideas in the light of Book 1, and situates the passions in this schema. According to his categorization, “all the perceptions of the mind may be divided into impressions and ideas”, and in the same vein “the impressions admit of another division into original and secondary.” On the one hand, says Hume, we have original impressions (also called ‘impressions of sensations’), which arise in the mind “without any antecedent perception”. On the other hand, when we reflect or represent ideas and sensations, we experience some secondary impressions, or ‘impressions of reflections’. “Of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them.” (T 2.1.1.1)

The passions are “secondary impressions,” or “impressions of reflection.” They presuppose the original impressions (roughly, sensations), and emerge from them in two possible ways: either immediately, or through the interposition of an idea. In the former case, Hume names the passions ‘direct’; in the latter, ‘indirect’, setting up a completely new way to categorize emotional phenomena (McIntyre 2000). Among direct passions Hume comprehends “desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security,” while the indirect passions are “pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, generosity, with their dependants.” (T 2.1.1.4) Weirdly enough, anger and resentment are not listed in any of the two groups.[[7]](#endnote-7) I will return to this problem later on in this paper. However, it is interesting to remark right now that anger is analyzed in couple with an indirect passion, whose connection to it does not seem particularly intuitive: hatred.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Despite Hume’s detailed and almost chirurgical analysis of the passions and their causes in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, the first considerations on anger appear well before its quasi-systematic account of this passion in *Of benevolence and anger* (T 2.2.6). Indeed, the term “anger” emerges already in Book 1. Here, however, Hume refers to this passion mostly as an example to illustrate other points. “From the tone of voice the dog infers his master’s anger, and foresees his own punishment,” he says in *Of the reason of animals* in order to show that animals are capable of causal inference. (T 1.3.16.6) “When I look abroad, I foresee on every side, dispute, contradiction, *anger*, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance,” (T 1.4.7.2, my emphasis) writes Hume in the *Conclusion of this book*.[[9]](#endnote-9) Anger is not Hume’s focus in these excerpts. Anyway, they can be useful because indicate an account of this passion close to common sense. Anger in this passages has nothing eccentric nor *sensu stricto* philosophical. Here, anger seems to fit our everyday common usage of the term.

Hume’s detailed account of anger, however, is to be found in Book 2, Part 2, Section 6 of his *Treatise* and is opened with the following metaphor:

impressions, especially reflective ones, [may be compar’d] to colours, tastes, smells and other sensible qualities. […] [I]mpressions and passions are susceptible of an entire union; and like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to vary that uniform impression, which arises from the whole. (T 2.2.6.1)

Sometimes, passions are just so mixed up that they lose their own identity, Hume seems to say. They may be separated through abstraction, in the same way violet can be seen as the sum of blue and red, but they appear and are perceived as a sole and unique affection. With this in mind, let me explore more closely Hume’s account of anger and its proximity to hatred.

**Anger: but, where is the fury?**

Anger is arguably one of the most important emotions in a human being’s life. An array of contemporary studies show how, far from being detrimental, anger can foster one’s self-esteem, improve their social interactions, and even benefit physical and mental health.[[10]](#endnote-10) David Hume, one of the finest observers of human nature in the Western tradition, seemed to be aware of the importance of this passion. No matter if anger was – and often still is[[11]](#endnote-11) – commonly regarded as a negative and disruptive emotions by many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Hume appears to be conscious of the importance of the so-called ‘dark side’ of human emotional life:

We are not […] to imagine, that all the angry passions are vicious, tho’ they are disagreeable. There is a certain indulgence due to human nature in this respect. Anger and hatred are passions inherent in our very frame and constitution. The want of them, on some occasions, may even be a proof of weakness and imbecillity. (T 3.3.3.7)

And yet Hume’s account of anger seems to be somehow underdeveloped. Hume justifies this peculiar association of anger and hatred by writing that “by the original constitution of the mind” (T 2.2.6.6) some passions are “conjoin’d” with others. This is the case for anger, which is “different” from hatred, but “always conjoin’d” with it. To fully understand this conjunction, it is necessary to retrace Hume’s account of hatred, which is developed at length in some of the sections previous to T 2.2.6.

Hatred is, together with love, pride and humility, one of the four main indirect passions analysed by Hume in the *Treatise*. Part 2 of Book 2 is mostly devoted to an analysis of hatred and its counterpart, love. Hume proceeds here as he did in the previous pages (T 2.1.1-12), looking for the situation in which these emotions emerge. Since it is “impossible to give any definition of the passions of love and hatred [...] because they produce merely a simple impression, without any mixture or composition,” (T 2.2.1.1) he has to break down the mechanism which leads one to feel those passions.

For this reason, Hume tries to pin down the different elements composing hatred. He starts considering “the object of love and hatred,” and remarks that it “is some other person, of whose thoughts, actions, and sensations we are not conscious.” (T 2.2.1.2) Hatred, that very feeling one cannot find word to express, can be nonetheless identified referring to its object. As Hume says, we always hate “some sensible being external to us.” The object, however, “is not, properly speaking, the cause of these passions, or alone sufficient to excite them.” (T 2.2.1.3) If the person toward whom one’s hatred is directed were the cause of it, the fact that “love and hatred are directly contrary in their sensation, and have the same object in common” would be unexplained. Therefore there must be “some cause different from the object.” (*ibid*.) The presence of someone else – the ‘object’ in Humean terms – is not sufficient for us to feel hatred. We do need a reason to hate.

Indeed, Hume lists a considerable number of “causes of love and hatred,” which are “very much diversify’d” and includes “[t]he virtue, knowledge, wit, good sense, good humour” but also “bodily accomplishments, such as beauty, force, swiftness, dexterity” and “the external advantages […] of family, possessions, cloaths, nation and climate” (T 2.2.1.5) in the case of love. Their opposites cause the emergence of hatred: “There is not one of these objects [i.e. causes], but what by its different qualities may produce love and esteem, or hatred and contempt”[[12]](#endnote-12) (*ibid*.).

Proceeding in a parallel with the previous discussion on pride and humility, Hume states that at this point we have to trace “a new distinction betwixt the *quality* that operates, and the *subject* on which it is plac’d.” (*ibid*.) The former is a feature of the latter, which contributes to excite the passion. Take an object of hatred, say a man, and a cause of this passion, for instance the dilapidated shack in which he lives (quality + subject). According to Hume we would naturally hate (i.e. disdain and feel contempt for) this man. From this discussion it should be clear that hatred and love, as well as humility and pride, have a threefold structure, composed by an object, a subject and a number of qualities.

The association between anger and hatred extends all over Book 2. Passages like the following, for instance, give an idea of how closely related these two passions are in Hume’s eyes (emphases are mine):

We may be mortified by our own faults and follies; but never feel *any anger or hatred*, except from the injuries of others. (T 2.2.1.2)

Whoever can find the means either by his services, his beauty, or his flattery, to render himself useful or agreeable to us, is sure of our affections: As on the other hand, whoever harms or displeases us never fails to excite *our anger or hatred*. (T 2.2.3.2)

However, the connection between these two passion becomes clear only when, in T 2.2.9.3, Hume puts forwards for the first time a clear definition of anger, describing it as “the appetite, which attends hatred,” the “desire of the misery of the person hated, and an aversion to his happiness.” We can legitimately be surprised by this definition. If anger is a desire of misery, what is left of hatred itself? And would not be more intuitive to describe hatred as a desire of someone’s misery, and anger as a boiling passion, a burning impulse which can support hatred, but can also become a dynamic force?

It is easy to think about a person who is angry and still does not desire the misery of anyone else at all. My mother was surely filled up with anger when my brother got suspended from high school for misbehaviour back in the years. That happened many times. My mother’s anger became more and more burning as her son continued getting in trouble for misbehaving at school. And yet I have no doubt that she never hated him, nor she desired his misery by any means. This does not dissolve her anger. On the contrary, I am convinced that she got angry precisely because she did care about him and was deeply concerned with his happiness. This is an easy counter example to Hume’s description of anger as “desire of the misery of the person hated”, a definition which seems to better fit hatred itself.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to think about situations in which a person is not angry, and nevertheless desires the misery of someone else. An intuitive case could be a judge who is willing to condemn a tax cheat to pay a hefty fine and spend some years in prison. In this case, the judge does not need to be angry at the evader who now has to pay the bill for their crimes and whose freedom will be limited. Nevertheless, the decisions she takes speak for her desire of their misery, by wanting their economic situation to be damaged and their freedom to be restricted.

However, Hume explicitly associate hatred and anger. As counterintuitive as it may sound, his words leave no doubt about it:

love and hatred are not compleated within themselves, nor rest in that emotion, which they produce, but carry the mind to something farther. Love is always follow’d by a desire of the happiness of the person belov’d, and an aversion to his misery: As hatred produces a desire of the misery and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated.

One could legitimately ask what is “that emotion, which they produce” before “carry[ing] the mind to something further” if not a desire of misery. Hume does not have an answer, nor can he describe what kind of feeling he labels as hatred. Anger seems almost to be the manifestation of it, the visible effect of a passion which would otherwise be unperceivable from the outside. Anger is the facade of hatred.

So, where is anger in Hume’s account? Where is that strong impulse, that burning emotion we feel when we are angry as all hell? Where are the flushed face, the clenched fists, where is the fury? Although Hume seemed to share a common-sense idea of anger in his examples to be found in Book 1 of the *Treatise*, when it comes to the discussion of the technical details in Book 2, he never considers the physical nor the phenomenological effects of anger.

**Angry, thirsty, sick, or “more than five foot high.”**

Here, a strange paradox in Hume’s account seems to emerge. As we have seen so far, he claimed that “[t]he passions of love and hatred are always followed by, or rather conjoin’d with benevolence and anger,” they “are not compleated within themselves, nor rest in that emotion, which they produce, but carry the mind to something farther.” (T 2.2.6.3) Love produces benevolence, i.e. a desire of the happiness of the person one loves, while hatred is always followed by anger, i.e. a desire of another’s misery. At the end of the day, anger appears to be a complex passion. In her classic *A Progress of Sentiments*, Baier puts it clearly when she says. “anger […] does, like every desire, have an “end,” in this case to hurt the one we are angry with. It shares the “object” of the hatred that it “attends,” and its distinctive causes, some “painful” injury or disservice, are among the many possible causes of hatred. [Hume] is accepting [a] triple intentionality for benevolence and anger” (1991: 162). Anger has “three objects, to which [it] direct[s] our view,” it does not only copy, but rather “refer[s] to them” (*ibid*.).

However, Hume seems to deny any possibility for anger to have a reference to external objects. This passion seems to be a mere bodily state. He affirms the following:

When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. (T 2.3.3.5)

Such declaration leaves us astonished. From the Hume’s analysis retraced above it is clear that anger is one of the “few passions [which] have not only a cause and an object but also an end, and direct our view to all these things. The passions, then, refer or direct our attention beyond themselves to a great many ideas” (Cohon 1994: 180); so, how can Hume simply affirm that being angry is akin to being thirsty? Hume’s account can sound rhapsodic of even incoherent. Voices against his affirmation concerning the lack of ‘reference’ of the passions have been raised. Phillips for instance writes: “Hume is wrong to think that passions cannot represent: anger, his own example, typically has cognitive content (one is angry with a person, institution, etc.)” (2005: 311). However, I think Hume’s statement has not to be read as being about the passions’ cognitive content, but on their effects on us, on their phenomenology, on the way they are projected on the screen of the mind. A quote from the *Second Enquiry* can help us to navigate this apparent paradox:

Were we to attempt a *definition* of this sentiment [belief], we should, perhaps, find it a very difficult, if not an impossible task; in the same manner as if we should endeavour to define the feeling of cold or passion of anger, to a creature who never had any experience of these sentiment. ([EHU 5.12](https://davidhume.org/texts/e/5#12))

This excerpt – if read in parallel with his detailed discussion of the passions as having objects, subjects, and ends in Book 2 of the *Treatise* – reveals a double conception of the passions in Hume’s work. On the one hand, a passion can be described according to its components (such as its object, cause, and end); on the other, however, every passion is an “original existence.”[[13]](#endnote-13) As Hume states in T 2.3.3.5, a “passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification.” This is why it is “impossible to give any definition” of the passions, “because they produce merely a simple impression” (T 2.2.1.1). This does not mean, I believe, that Hume’s theory is contradicting as some interpreters have claimed (see again Phillips 2005; Merivale 2009). Hume is simply identifying two different approaches to the study of the passion: a sort of structuralist approach; and, a phenomenological one. As we have seen so far, he clearly prefers working with the former.

After all, talking of the phenomenology of a passion would be like trying to describe a color without naming it. Imagine I want to set up a theory of colors, and I want to start describing the color red. I would have a very hard time doing so trying to express my own phenomenological experience of that color. What it seems more easily doable is to refer to it pointing out the situations in which I see that color. In front of a rose, for example. I can say red is the color of blood, the light of the sun turns to red during the sunset, and so on. While describing the passions, Hume is proceeding in the same way. He knows that conveying the very emotion one feels when they are proud, ashamed, angry is “a very difficult, if not an impossible task.” What is therefore better to do in order to write a book on the passions is describing the causes of emotional phenomena. This is why, I believe, Hume seems to contradict himself alleging that the passions have both an ‘original existence’ with no reference to anything else and at the same time they possess a complex structure.

Despite this clarification about Hume’s philosophy of emotions, both Humean hatred and anger seem to be rather different from our common-sense understanding of these emotions, the former being a sort of invisible contempt, the latter more similar of what we would today call ‘hatred.’[[14]](#endnote-14) But, the enquiry on the essence of anger in Hume’s philosophy cannot be limited this discussion. As I show in the following section, another passion can supply for the lack of an account of anger closer to our common sense idea.

**Resentment, proto-morality, and justice.**

Beside Hume’s account of anger, the reader of the *Treatise* can easily recognize the introduction of another “angry passion”[[15]](#endnote-15): resentment. Hume has stated that “anger [...] is a desire of the misery of the person hated, and an aversion to his happiness” (T 2.2.9.3). To get closer to resentment, one has to read further until the section *Of the influencing motives of the will* (T 2.3.3). Here Hume is exploring a very particular type of sentiments: those “calm desires and tendencies, which, tho’ they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind” (T 2.3.3.8):

These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts *originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment*, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, consider’d merely as such. (*ibid*., my emphasis)

A similar list is drawn in T 2.3.9.8 where Hume says that some “direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse [...] Of this kind is the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites.” The two lists of T 2.3.3.8 and T 2.3.9.8 are different, at least because the former is composed of passions which are often mistaken for manifestations of reason, while the latter includes bodily appetites. However, apparently very different to each other, these lists share a fundamental trait. Referring to the passions of T 2.3.3.9 Hume states that they are “independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself.” In the same vein, discussing the list of passions in T 2.3.9.8, he writes that “properly speaking, [they] produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections.” Put together the two passages and you will have the full account of Hume’s “non-hedonic passions” (the expression is Baier’s, 1980: 138), namely those very particular passions which differently from all others impressions of reflection do not arise from pain and pleasure, but generate them.

The two lists are different but not completely distinct. In fact, they do overlap in two points: benevolence and resentment of T 2.3.3.8 have to be associated with “the desire of punishment to our enemies” and the desire “of happiness to our friends” of T 2.3.9.8. I see little room for doubt: the equation to be drawn from this double list is that “resentment” (or “benevolence”) in the first list is described as “desire of punishment to our enemies” (or of “happiness to our friends”) in the second.

At this point, one could be lead to think that resentment, associated with some of the most calm passions such as “the love of life, and kindness to children,” could be a calm version of anger. This would seem to fit also our phenomenological intuition. A *resentful person* is probably less furious than an *angry person*. However, Hume goes on writing that:

Beside these calm passions [i.e. generally violent passions in a tranquillized form], which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. When I receive any injury from another, I often feel *a violent passion of resentment*, which makes me *desire his evil and punishment*, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. (T 2.3.3.9, my emphasis)

This sentence seems to undermine the idea that Hume is consistently using the term resentment to talk about a calm anger.[[16]](#endnote-16) One can feel a violent form of resentment, which seems therefore arguably different from anger. But where has the distinction between anger and resentment to be traced?

From what has been said until now, the proximity between anger and resentment should be clear. Further, both of them are sometimes coupled by Hume with benevolence, and seem to fit similar descriptions. It is well known that in the *Treatise*, Hume often analyses passions in pairs (such as pride/humility; love/hatred; fear/hope; grief/joy; etc). Anger is no exception. Its counterpart is benevolence. The phrase “benevolence and anger” appears no less than five times in the *Treatise*[[17]](#endnote-17) and in many other occasions Hume explicitly draws a clear parallel between these two passions. The following cases are straightforward examples:

benevolence has been already found to be connected with love, by a natural and original quality, and anger with hatred [...] (T 2.2.9.3)

Since, therefore, a parallel direction of the affections, proceeding from interest, can give rise to benevolence or anger, no wonder the same parallel direction, deriv’d from sympathy and from comparison, shou’d have the same effect. (T 2.2.9.9)

At the same time, benevolence is also opposed to resentment, as in T 2.3.3.8 (quoted above). These parallel, however, should not bring one to expect Hume uses resentment and anger as synonyms, as a sort of variation to embellish his style. On the contrary, he does use two different terms, because he is dealing with two different passions. If in T 2.3.3.8 Hume abandons the previous term for a new one (‘resentment’), this is no oversight.[[18]](#endnote-18)

In one of the very rare contributions about Hume’s concept of resentment, Annette Baier has underscored the fact that in his *Second* *Enquiry* Hume names a “new condition” for the emergence of justice, namely “a certain measure of equality, or limited inequality – justice is owed, he says, only if there is a society of more-or-less equals; and only to those who are members of it. The equality in question concerns the ability of candidate society members to ‘make us feel the effects of their resentment’” (Baier 1980: 133). This is remarkable, and shows clearly that interpreters who deny the importance of resentment for Hume’s account of justice are just wrong (e.g. Pritchard wrongly writes that “Hume [...] did not see resentment as playing a key role in explaining our sense of justice,” 2008: 68). Resentment, in Hume’s mature social account,[[19]](#endnote-19) is a necessary condition for justice to emerge.

Were there a species of creatures, intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment [...] [o]ur intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality. (EMP 3.18)

Resentment is clearly different from anger. It is not a desire of another’s misery, but rather the very passion one feels when they perceive an insult or an attack. Resentment is by definition a “desire of punishment to our enemies,” not of the misery of a generic “other person” as in the case of anger. As one realizes that according to Hume “[p]unishment, without any proper end or purpose, is inconsistent with our ideas of goodness and justice” (*Of the Immortality of the Soul*, par. 21), it becomes clear that resentment plays an important role. It can become a desire of justice:[[20]](#endnote-20) in this sense the definition put forward by Arthur Kuflik is the most accurate among the interpretation in existing secondary literature: “Resentment is a very special variety of anger: it is anger inextricably bound up with the thought that one has been badly or wrongly treated” (Kuflik 1998: 63).

In the light of this discussion, I think Annette Baier is wrong when she writes that “[a]nger, as discussed by Hume [...] in Book Two, is always directed at someone for some perceived insult, injury or harm.” (1991: 161) This definition of anger is also silently assumed in the discussion about this passion in Baier and Waldow (2008: 79-81). However, I disagree with their assumption that anger emerges by a perceived insult. Indeed, for Hume, anger is associate with hatred, and hatred can be directed to someone who never did anything wrong against us.[[21]](#endnote-21) In Humean terms, one could be said to hate, for instance, poor or ugly individuals simply because they tend to produce a sort of sympathetic pain in us due to their disadvantaged situation.[[22]](#endnote-22) *“They didn’t do anything bad* – one could cry from our Century perspective – *so, that feeling can’t be hatred!”* On the contrary, there is enough textual evidence to claim that Hume does use the words “hate” and “anger” with this wider meaning rather unfamiliar (and somehow disturbing) to us.

The capability of expressing our desire of punishment against those who hurt us – of expressing resentment – is not the same as the irrational desire of another’s misery. Resentment, differently from Hume’s account of anger, plays a proto-moral role in making us able to stand up and fight for our dignity. It is closer to our common sense conception of anger, revealing a curious twist in Hume’s naming of the passions. As I showed above, Hume seems to call ‘hatred’ the passion which we would name ‘disdain’ or ‘contempt’; he labels ‘anger’ the desire for another’s misery, which we would rather call ‘hatred’; and talks about ‘resentment’ when we would just say ‘anger.’

That said, I think we have further elements to consider the question about the place of anger and resentment in Hume’s taxonomy. There are some passions which cannot stand alone. Hatred is one of them – remember the metaphor with which Hume opened the section of the *Treatise* devoted to anger? The passions “like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to vary that uniform impression, which arises from the whole” (T 2.2.6.1). Even if conceptually one can keep hatred separated from anger, their colours are always so mixed, that we can never found them in their pure form. Speaking metaphorically, the blue of mere hatred, and the red of unmixed anger are never found in our everyday life, Hume seems to say. All we experience is their mix, something like a deep violet, that he calls simply “hatred,” but would be better described as an indissoluble union of a phenomenological impression of aversion “to some sensible being external to us,” and a desire of their misery. Anger and benevolence cannot exist in isolation, without being preceded by hatred and love, respectively. Anger is not listed among indirect passions in Hume’s opening list simply because it is thought of as a form of hatred. Anger – as Hume defined it – cannot not stand by itself. In other words, anger is excluded from the list of indirect passions only in appearance. On closer inspection, one realizes that with the word ‘hatred,’ Hume is naming the union of pure hatred and its attendant desire of another’s misery, namely anger.

On the contrary, if my reconstruction is correct, resentment is a passion defined as a “desire of punishment to our enemies.” But resentment is part of a particular group, namely the non-hedonic passions, which are explicitly said to be direct, but not listed at the beginning of Book 2, because of their curious nature which is explained in detail by Hume later on in the *Treatise*. Naming these passions at the very beginning, while listing the “normal” direct passion such as fear, hope, grief, joy, etc. could have been confusing for his reader. This is why Hume simply excludes anger and resentment from those lists, and should not obscure the nature of the former as an indirect passion and of the latter as a direct one.

But a further question has to be answered. Even if we identify to which place these passions belong, it is nonetheless undeniable that Hume’s description of *how they feel* is feeble. Why does Hume spend hundreds of pages analysing pride, and devotes so little attention the effects of anger on one’s body and mind?

**“Not in my temper:” Hume’s separateness from anger.**

I opened the first section of this paper with Hume’s statement about the natural and universal essence of “all the disagreeable passions, fear, anger, dejection, grief, melancholy, anxiety, etc.” (EMP 7.2, footnote). And yet, a thorough inspection of his account of anger shows that this does not mean he could fully embrace these passions. Even if he pursues an enquiry of the passions which tries to be free from any moralistic trace, in more private writings he seems not to be completely persuaded that the so-called ‘negative emotions’ are just part of human nature and can be as good as ‘positive’ ones. Despite his awareness than their lack may “be a proof of weakness and imbecility” (T 3.3.3.7), he seems rather proud about being untouched by them, and he declares his separateness from anger as follows:

I had fixed a resolution, which I inflexibly maintained, never to reply to any body; and not being very irascible in my temper, I have easily kept myself clear of all literary squabbles. (*My Own Life*, par. 9)

Hume appears to be smug of his anger-free temperament. In his famous autobiography penned during his last months, Hume identified his “ruling passion” to be “love of fame,” pointing out his separateness from anger.[[23]](#endnote-23) Being especially keen to feeling pride and enjoying the esteem gained by his hard work, already in his first published book, Hume explicitly characterized anger as not naturally belonging to him:

A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. (T 2.1.11.2)

Of course, Hume’s self-representation is more of a attempt to shape his public persona than to describe his real character. An anecdote in particular can shed light on the fact that Hume was not such a quiet and meek man and that he is omitting something when he says “I have easily kept myself clear of all literary squabbles.” I am referring to the dispute with James Beattie, who in his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability* *of Truth* (1770) accused him of being a dangerous sceptic. As James Fieser has pointed out “Hume is reported to have reacted with anger to the publication of the *Essay*” (1994: 73) and would later refer to Bettie as a “bigotted silly Fellow” (cit. in Fieser 1994: 82). Not quite benevolent, one could say. Hume’s anger at Bettie’s abusive attack can be seen as a justified reaction. And yet, it is striking that such a dispute – which involved many magazines, including the *London Review* and enflamed the public debate – is not mentioned at all in Hume’s autobiographical résumé.

This is just an anecdote, but it shows clearly that when it comes to anger, Hume is not unsullied as he would like us to think. In the *History of England*, he states that “pride and anger [are] passions difficult to tame” (Vol. 2, Ch. 15, par. 23). It is probably true that he never had to struggle to keep the latter within the limits of polite sociability; but, he would have some hard time putting a stop to the former. In the name of pride, Hume’s self-representation tend to exclude his anger and all the ‘dark side’ of his emotional life, which he tried to assess empirically in his theoretical works.

Throughout this paper, I have shown that even if Hume attributes a paramount role to the “angry passions,” he hardly explores their phenomenology. Hatred, anger, and resentment, in different ways and with various outcomes affect our social life. Hume identifies their roles and their importance – providing them with a place in his theory of emotions, which has been overlooked by many interpreters. However, Hume seems not to be very happy to acknowledge his own angry passions, even when they would be justified as in the case of Bettie’s attack.

In conclusion, one feature in particular makes Hume’s account of anger difficult to accept to us – and maybe even for Hume himself, namely the fact that he precludes the possibility of getting angry to oneself. For Hume I can never be angry at myself. This is just impossible: “We may be mortified by our own faults and follies; but never feel any anger or hatred, except from the injuries of others” (T 2.2.1.2). Both anger and resentment are desires of *another’s* misery or punishment, respectively. But what about those situations in which we misbehave and get angry to ourselves? No one wants their own misery, nor is able to consider themselves as their own enemies and seek out an appropriate punishment. And yet, everyone has felt the strong boiling feeling of anger at themselves at least once in life. Getting angry to ourselves can be a powerful means to achieve moral improvement. Hume’s account of anger and resentment seems to be somehow underdeveloped also because it excludes a priori the possibility of self-anger. Exploring Hume’s reflections on anger and resentment, however, allowed me to touch some important point of his theory of the passions, his methodology of enquiry, and his account of justice, providing the reader both with an answer about the nature of anger and resentment as an indirect and a direct passion respectively, and the apparent paradox about Hume’s treatment of non-representational nature of the passions.

I have concluded this paper with an overview of Hume’s ambivalence concerning anger which is prized in theory but avoided in practice. I have suggested that this attitude could derive from the fact that anger and resentment – given his definitions – can hardly be tools of moral self-development. But why would he set up a whole account of these passions deprived of this possibility? On the one hand, this possibility may be cut off because Hume’s even-tempered character never brought him to dive deep into the experience of anger. He may really have been the benevolent, placid man he depicted in his autobiography. If so, his limited phenomenological self-observation of the angry passions could be the cause of the rough account of anger and resentment. On the other hand, however, we cannot exclude the hypothesis that Hume intentionally attempted to dissimulate an equable character precisely because he could not bring himself to fully embrace what he stated all along a life of writing: that anger and resentment are useful emotions, and the lack of them “may even be a proof of weakness and imbecility.” Intriguing as it may sound, this is a question with no definitive answer.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Enrico Galvagni

University of Cologne

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1. I shall quote Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* as T followed by book, part, section, paragraph. All emphases are Hume’s (unless otherwise indicated). In this work, two sections are devoted to an analysis of the complex composition of anger (including its cause, object, and end): T 2.2.6 and T 2.2.9, whose titles are respectively “Of benevolence and anger” and “Of the mixture of benevolence and anger with compassion and malice.” [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On the ambiguity of Hume’s usage of the term “vanity” see Reed (2012), and Galvagni (2020). On the twofold value of curiosity, see Gelfert (2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion of the originality and some problems of Hume’s account of this distinction see Immerwhar (1994) and McIntyre (2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hume never classes the passions according to their importance, but he does analyze in details a certain number of emotions (esp. pride, humility, love, hatred, hope, fear), while he tends to give lesser importance to others, which he brings up but does not fully develop. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hume declares that he will not examine the physiology of the passions in T 1.1.2.1 and T 2.1.1.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. I shall quote Hume’s *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* as EMP followed by section and paragraph number. I do the same for the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* using the abbreviation EHU. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Some interpreters simply assume anger to be a direct passion. Henderson for example writes “The direct passions, for example, joy and anger, are also simple according to Hume. In calling the passions simple Hume seems to be referring only to the impression we experience by itself, isolated from any antecedent cause” (1990: 35). This claim is not supported by any textual evidence. A closer inspection of Hume’s discussion will lead me to uphold the view that anger – differently from resentment – is an indirect passion. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. On the story of hatred and its connection to anger from Aristotle to contemporary discussion see Paola Giacomoni’s chapter in this book. As it will be clear as my paper proceeds, Hume’s account of the interaction between these two passions is puzzling. In spite of the long-standing associating hatred and anger in philosophical analysis of the passions, Hume’s discussion is unprecedented. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Many examples of a similar common sense usage of the term are to be found in the *History of England*, such as: “The pope and cardinals entered into the consistory enflamed with anger” (History of England, Vol. 3, Ch. 30, par. 51); “Her anger, naturally prompt and violent, rose at this provocation” (*Ibid*., Vol. 4, Ch. 43, par. 45), etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. For a wider discussion of the beneficial effects of anger see Giacomoni’s *Ardore. Quattro prospettive sull’ira da Achille agli Indignados* (2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See, for instance, Nussbaum’s *Anger* *and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford, 2016) or Flanagan’s *The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility* (Oxford, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. It is worth noting that this excerpt reveals the deep meaning of the terms “love” and “hatred” in the *Treatise*. Hume’s vocabulary is quite different from our contemporary naming of the passions. Love and hatred are particularly prone to this kind of distortion, mostly due to the legacy of late 19th Century Romanticism which informed our contemporary usage of these terms. Differently from us, when Hume says “love” he means mostly esteem, “thinking highly of someone” as Árdal nicely put it (1966: 34). “Love and esteem are at the bottom the same passions.” (T 3.3.4, footnote 88) Symmetrically, when Hume refers to “hatred” has often in mind a form of unease that we would associate with contempt. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Concerning the passions as original existence see the brilliant discussion in Radcliffe (2018: 89-111). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. As a foil for this difference, I want to take the case of envy. We do associate this passion with hatred, which is often a effect of the former. For us it is difficult not to hate someone we feel envy for (an hater-free envy is simply an emulative esteem). On the contrary, for Hume we can hardly feel hatred and envy towards the same person. Since the former emotion presupposes the other person to be inferior and the latter needs her to be superior to us, hatred and envy will hardly be passions one can feel for the same “object.” “[E]nvy is excited by some present enjoyment of another,” (T 2.2.8.12) while hatred arises from the interaction with a person who has no “beauty, force, swiftness, dexterity,” no “virtue, knowledge, wit, good sense, good humour,” no good “family, possessions, [or] cloaths” (T 2.2.1.4). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Hume’s uses the phrase “angry passions” three times in his whole work, two times in the *Treatise* (T 3.3.3.7; and T 3.3.3.8), one in the *Second Enquiry* (EMP 7.21). When he does so, he seems to have in mind a loose definition of “angry.” As a quick reading of the text shows, Hume does not offers a consistent list of the “angry passions”, but rather uses the expression as a hypernym, an umbrella term including many other unspecified passions. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. This seems to be the interpretation of Baier, who writes: “Resentment can turn to disorderly anger, when, as it often is, it is in conflict with other desires.” (1991: 167) Resentment can be violent, but this is not enough to say that it turns into anger. For a discussion concerning the relations between calm and violent passions in Hume’s account see Immerwahr (1992). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. T 2.2.6 (*title*); T 2.2.6.3; T 2.2.6.6; T 2.2.9 (*title*); T 2.2.9.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Annette Baier commenting this passage remarks that “Hume gives little space to discussing resentment, but significantly he does include it in the list of basic passions, ones which produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections.” (1980: 137) She saw that there is a difference between resentment and anger. Nonetheless, I think that this difference should be articulated further, before jumping to the conclusion that “[r]esentment [...] is the form anger takes when it is provoked by what is seen as a wrong, and when the striking back which is desired is seen as punishment.” (Baier 1980: 138) [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. For a brilliant scrutiny of some differences between Hume’s *Treatise* and his mature moral account see Taylor (2009) and (2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. For Hume’s conception of punishment (and capital punishment) see Mazza (2019: 128-29) [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. This should be clear from Hume’s description of hatred as something closer to our idea of contempt. However, a quick analysis of love can help me to make a further case for the idea that we can love (and hate) in a Humean sense someone who has not done anything unfair against us. While discussing love, Hume lists no less than three apparently very different circumstances for love to arise. (1) Love can be the *high consideration* we have of another person, due to her possession of a positive thing and/or quality; (2) There is also a form of *romantic love*, “that tender emotion, which is excited by a friend or mistress” (T 2.2.1.2); (3) Love is also *appreciation*, the feeling of affection we direct to someone who “can find the means either by his services, his beauty, or his flattery, to render himself useful or agreeable to us” (T 2.2.3.2). One has no doubt that *high consideration*, *romantic love* and *appreciation* are very different from each other, but they all have in common the fact they are directed to others and they produce pleasure. In the same vein, hatred, generally speaking, is in Humean terms the feeling we have towards people which are for us a source of pain. This does not mean they personally have to harm us in any particular way. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. In order to give a sense of this dynamics, it is important to keep in mind the well-known role of sympathy in Hume’s *Treatise*. Greco puts it nicely when he says that sympathy plays a fundamental role within Hume’s philosophy “in clarifying to ourselves the passions we have.” (2012: 195) Sympathy is broadly described as consisting in the conversion of an idea into an impression, (T 2.1.11.3) which, in the case of hatred, is an impression of pain. Hatred arises for this painful reflective impression, which, Hume says, is always followed by the desire of another’s misery. As Margaret Watkins remarks in her recent book: “We might observe another’s pain, sympathetically feel pain ourselves, and consequently develop a repugnance to the suffering person. It can be difficult to accept that we have such reactions. But consider the widespread repulsion toward beggars in city streets or how difficult it is to remain friends with someone undergoing a long period of depression or illness.” (2019: 76-77) [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. For interesting anecdotes concerning Hume’s temper see Mazza (2012: 29-33). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. A previous version of this paper has been presented at the *Oxford Brookes Postgraduate Research Seminar*, Oxford, UK, 11th December, 2018. I am grateful to all the participants in the Seminar for their useful comments and the following lively discussion. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)