

**Anger in Buddhist Philosophy:
In Defence of Eliminativism**

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Abstract

The thesis I hope to develop here aims to contribute to recent discussions in ethics on the merits of anger. In particular, it focuses on the debate between moderationists, who contend that anger is, in some way, good, and thus should be retained and utilised, and eliminativists, who contend that anger should be eliminated, i.e. that we should never allow it to arise. By the end of this thesis, I hope that I have shown that (despite its current popularity) the moderationist defence of anger is not without its difficulties. This should hopefully carve out a space for a contemporary defence of eliminativism. The eliminativist view I defend is essentially Buddhist, though it also draws upon Buddhist-inspired accounts in the Western philosophical literature. I advocate a pedagogical reading of the difficult (and perhaps seemingly unattractive) Buddhist metaphysics, that I suggest — when put into practice — might eventually lead to an openness to that metaphysical view. The consequence of both the practice and the metaphysical outlook is the elimination of anger. Far from being the loss of something beneficial or apt, I suggest that the elimination of anger is both beneficial and (from the metaphysical viewpoint) apt. I attempt to demonstrate this by applying the position I defend to the kind of case where moderationists are at their most persuasive — cases of social injustice. I hope to have at least shown that such a position can be a viable alternative to the moderationist suggestion that we harness anger for social change.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction:
OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Buddhist Characterisation of Anger

Chapter 1 surveys the Buddhist characterisation of anger (focusing specifically on the Indian Buddhist tradition). I first note the multitude of difficulties we face when attempting to work with texts that pose linguistic and cultural barriers to interpretation. The central concept under consideration — ANGER — is shown to pose many difficulties as an object of study, simply in virtue of the nature of the texts. Translations from different source languages (Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan etc.) often yield different results — sometimes the same passage is interpreted as discussing ‘hatred’ rather than ‘anger’, for example. As such, a rather broad approach is taken, incorporating all anger-related terms just as long as the topic seems to broadly match a familiar phenomenology of anger. Taking this phenomenology-centred approach, I suggest, helps us to ensure that we are dealing with the same emotion across both Buddhist texts and those from Western literature.

This approach thus relies upon a focus on the occasions of anger in the Buddhist texts, i.e. situations that give a description of the circumstances under which the emotion arises. That way we can hopefully avoid some of the linguistic ambiguities posed in translation. Of course, there may still be some cultural difficulties that cannot be overcome using this method — for instance, a Westerner may not understand why a Thai might be angry when you point and gesture towards the TV remote with your foot, rather than your hand. However, many of the occasions of anger described in the Buddhist text provide examples of situations in which we can be highly confident are associated with the emotion we are focused on. Characterising anger by examining the occasions of anger, the accompanying phenomenological character, and its effects as they appear in the Buddhist literature is also a deliberate attempt to avoid imposing a twenty-first-

century Anglo-European understanding of anger onto our reading of these texts.

The characterisation of the occasions of anger that emerges in the first chapter is that anger occurs when we perceive ourselves, or something or someone we value, to be harmed. Sometimes the cause of this harm can be impersonal — such as when we are irritated constantly by mosquitos, provoking our anger. At other times, the cause is personal — such as when someone insults us, or physically assaults us. What is notably absent in the Buddhist texts is any discussion of social injustice; the examples found in the texts are typically centred on the individual. This is perhaps unsurprising given the meditative or pedagogical purpose of many Buddhist texts, however. Moreover, the Buddhist characterisation of occasions of anger also leans on the notion of perception, i.e. what we perceive as harmful to us. This emphasis on perception reflects the possibility that we can sometimes *get it wrong* when it comes to anger — sometimes we believe we have been harmed, when we haven't, or we believe that person A harmed us, when it was person B etc. However, we see in later chapters that the Buddhist Eliminativists don't concern themselves with this particular kind of epistemic error, but with what they see as a much deeper and more significant kind arising from their distinctive metaphysical position.

Chapter 1 goes on to outline a variety of phenomenological aspects of anger. Firstly, I discuss the association of anger and pain. Discussions of anger are rife with fire metaphors, expressing the unpleasantness of the experience of anger. Similarly, metaphors of poison abound. On the Buddhist view, we see that anger is associated with a mental pain which operates over and above whatever pain comes directly from the harm we have suffered. However, we see that anger can also be associated with pleasure. In one Buddhist text, anger is described as having a “poisoned root and honeyed tip.” This acknowledges that anger, or at least some aspects of anger, can be pleasurable — for instance, anticipating revenge — but the scarcity of examples in the Buddhist texts discussing examples of pleasure (there is, in fact, just a single example) reveal a lot about the Buddhist

conception of anger. Even this single example sees anger's roots as poisonous, so the pleasure does not come without suffering.

Two further phenomenological aspects of anger are identified and discussed. Anger is shown to have a conative aspect i.e. it desires something. The Buddhist texts focus specifically on our desire for the suffering of the wrongdoer, however they are quick to stress that this suffering will not be brought about by our desires but instead by their own transgressions. Our desire might be for some awful fate to befall an enemy, or it might be a desire for an apology, but each involves some harm to the subject. We also seem to desire to end our own suffering, whether that involves avoiding the cause of it, or destroying that cause. Since anger involves desire, it is perhaps unsurprising that we often also see anger characterised as intentional i.e. 'about' or directed towards someone or something. However, I suggest that we need not see it as such, particularly when we consider anger as a mood. Under those circumstances, anger comes to alter the way we experience or perceive the world, and can encourage us to become angry at or about specific things. I suggest that this is one reason why anger is so troubling to the Buddhist — it is not the correct way in which to experience or perceive the world.

The final aspect of anger that is discussed in the opening chapter is the physical aspect. Anger is accompanied by some well-known physical symptoms — trembling, clenching of fists, a flushed face etc. These bodily changes can be connected to a readiness to act (e.g. by taking revenge) but the Buddhist discussions of anger tend towards anger's dispositions and tendencies, rather than the actions themselves. Of course, it is possible to hide one's anger too, and this is perhaps a good reason to focus on anger's dispositions rather than its outward symptoms. Moreover, the elimination of anger amounts to more than simply not displaying anger, or behaving angrily, but instead of not allowing anger to arise in the first place. It is this position that is central to eliminativist thought, and thus the position I defend in this thesis. It is at this point, then, that I turn my attention to their arguments.

Chapter 2: Buddhist Arguments for the Elimination of Anger

My second chapter serves a dual function. Firstly, it provides the rest of the background context for the arguments I make in chapters three, four and five. Secondly, it outlines the existing arguments for eliminativism in the Indian Buddhist texts. The first piece of contextual discussion is regarding the Buddhist understanding of *happiness*, and its relationship to *enlightenment*. There is not a singular understanding of happiness in the Buddhist tradition, just as there is not in the Western tradition, but we see that it is a concept perhaps much closer to the idea of *wellbeing* than it is to happiness in the hedonistic sense. As such, it connects very closely to the goal of enlightenment, which we see is the cessation of suffering. Anger, since it is seen by Buddhists as a kind of suffering, is an impediment to both happiness and enlightenment. Moreover, we see that enlightenment involves both moral and epistemic factors, and so anger is also seen as an impediment both to our moral development and to our ability to correctly perceive the world. This observation is important in developing my own Buddhist-inspired argument for eliminativism.

Another distinction needs to be drawn to help contextualise my discussion — that between moderationism and eliminativism. Chapter 2 outlines this distinction, highlighting that the positions can actually run very closely to one another in many ways, despite appearing on the surface as positions that are somewhat binary. Moderationists, we see, do not attempt to defend all types of anger, and certainly not anger in every situation. Instead, their position defends very specific kinds of anger, or anger which has been ‘transformed’. We pick back up on the types of moderationism in more depth in Chapter 3. Eliminativism, by contrast, thinks that anger should be rooted out. Some Buddhist eliminativist positions are quite forceful in their discussions, showing no sympathy at all for the moderationist view, even under quite extreme circumstances (such as being chopped up alive by our enemies). Yet other eliminativists appear to have a

slightly softer stance on anger, offering guidance on what to do with anger when it does arise, yet explicitly cautioning against allowing this to happen in the first place.

There are many reasons given by the eliminativist, and we can broadly categorise these into three main types of argument. They essentially fall under three broad claims: (1) that our actual experience of anger shows it to be both unpleasant and unhelpful, (2) that anger impairs our moral development by hindering the cultivation of specific virtues, and (3) that anger follows from an epistemic or cognitive error. The focus in this chapter is primarily on the first type of claim, since the second and third kind relate directly to the discussions in the subsequent chapters in which I establish my opposition to moderationism and offer a defence of eliminativism. My discussion of this first type of argument against anger invokes some recent empirical evidence in support of the sorts of claims we saw the Buddhists make about anger in Chapter 1. The evidence suggests that it is true that anger can occasionally be pleasant, but it is also true that anger typically involves physiological changes associated with the fight or flight response, and triggers behaviour which can be harmful to ourselves, our relationships, and those around us. This can impact on both personal relationships and public ones — such as when we are running for political office, or trying to bring about social change via a movement. As a consequence, anger can make us unhappy, and thus impair our path to enlightenment, i.e. the elimination of suffering.

This is where the connection between happiness and enlightenment is key. It is clear that happiness is a goal that virtually everyone shares, whereas enlightenment may well only be desired by a small number of people. However, if the Buddhists can persuade people that anger impairs happiness, they can also set them on the path to enlightenment — a sort of ‘bait-and-switch’ strategy which is common in their texts. I ultimately employ a version of this strategy in my own argument in Chapter 4. Part of the explanation of anger’s impairment to our pursuit of happiness comes in the ways that it clouds our judgement, or affects our ability to see things

clearly. This point is made in Seneca's work too, which emphasises the ways in which anger can undermine our rationality. Without being able to comprehend the world in the right sorts of ways, it is clearly much harder to know how to go about pursuing happiness. So what, then, should we do to pursue a life without anger? We see that the Buddhist does not simply advocate eliminating anger, but instead *replacing* anger with virtue. The Buddhist emphasises patience as a key virtue in this regard. Those who are genuinely interested in their moral development can utilise occasions of anger as opportunities to develop virtues like patience; and since this directly contributes to happiness, from the Buddhist perspective, the same argument applies to anyone who wishes to pursue that goal. And, in turn, this places us on the path towards enlightenment.

This, of course, speaks only of our moral development, and the path to enlightenment (as suggested above) also involves an epistemological aspect. For the Buddhist, the issue with anger is (fundamentally) that it follows from, and perpetuates, an incorrect perception of the world. Briefly put, here's how the argument goes: anger is a manifestation of an epistemic failure to recognise the world as it actually is; oneself and other agents, as well as our surroundings, are impermanent, interdependent, and lacking of essence i.e. they are (ultimately) not real; since anger involves one's being angry at some agent, because of some harm they have caused oneself or one's property, valued possessions, etc., then anger is irrational because one's beliefs do not correspond with the truth. This argument invokes what is known as the 'no-self' (or 'not-self') thesis from Buddhism, and this lies at the heart of Buddhist eliminativism. The success of this view, then, will depend upon somehow persuading people to accept this sort of metaphysical view, and my own argument will attempt to accomplish just that (or, at least, offer a method for doing so).

In addition to the metaphysical notion of 'no-self', the Buddhist also invokes the notion of dependent arising: that all things are inevitably affected by something else, and at the same time themselves become the factors that affect other things. This principle helps explain one of the

difficulties when trying to identify the causes of harm: we can say that a person harmed me, but that person's actions were dependent upon other things, perhaps even including my own actions towards them. In order to get rid of anger, but also to come to understand why we ought to get rid of anger, we must come to see the world as made up of these interconnected chains of events and actions. However, it is not enough to simply be aware of the metaphysical truths (as the Buddhist would have them); one must also act in accordance with them. Thus, a successful eliminativist argument should offer some instructions as to how to do this (which I hope to do within this thesis).

Our final task in Chapter 2 is to remind ourselves of the central aim for Buddhism — enlightenment. This amounts to a cessation of suffering. For the Buddhist, life *is* suffering. We don't tend to think of things in this way — we tend to think that sometimes we suffer, but we always have (hopefully many) good times too. However, the Buddhist notion of suffering is broad, and in effect suggests that they see even the good times as tinged by suffering. In part, this is because of the temporary nature of things: good things must end, or they cannot remain good forever. This, like the Buddhist position on anger, follows from the principle of dependent arising. If we truly understand the nature of our happiest moments, then we understand that they (like everything else) depend upon other things, and many of those things will be outside of our control. Thus, clinging to our desires — whose fulfillment would bring us happiness — actually engenders suffering. Moreover, we too are subject to the principle of dependent arising, and so are being made to suffer, since we cannot act without being acted upon. This suffering is thus deeply rooted, operating as it does at the metaphysical level — even when we are at our happiest, this fact remains, and so we suffer.

However, despite its deep-rootedness, suffering is not inescapable. Because suffering must have causes, then it must be possible to bring about a cessation of suffering by identifying those causes and eliminating them. The Buddhists conclude that certain mental attitudes are the cause for suffering,

and this is where the focus of this thesis comes in — anger. While we might not be able to alter the fundamental structure of reality, we can alter our approach to it, and thus at least some suffering is eliminable by us. In particular, what we can seek to eliminate are our desires (they are many, and chasing them can be exhausting); and since anger is intimately connected to desire (Chapter 1), we can also seek to eliminate anger. The first step towards doing this comes in understanding the no-self thesis and putting it to use. If we can do this, we will understand that there is no real need for desires — something cannot become my desire if there is no self to attach that desire to.

Of course, relying on such an unusual metaphysical picture may make the Buddhist eliminativist view initially unappealing to a non-Buddhist audience (or perhaps one simply disinterested in metaphysics). This means that the argument that I develop must approach this problem pragmatically, by aiming to make people open to the Buddhist position. This need not involve a direct defence of the metaphysics — indeed, I am perhaps not qualified to do so, and it would require a separate thesis to even begin such a project. Instead, I will try to develop an argument which utilises the metaphysics for pedagogical reasons, and sees the project of persuasion as one which might take some time! Before getting to that argument, however, it is necessary to see something more of the position which I am opposing — Moderationism. It is to this view that I turn in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Moderationist Arguments for Anger

Moderationist accounts, we see in Chapter 3, take varied approaches to the defence of anger. Broadly speaking, those approaches involve either (i) attempting to suggest that anger can be beneficial just so long as we can transform it, shaking off what are seen as its negative qualities while retaining its positive ones, or (ii) defending anger from a position of ‘aptness’, i.e. whether we have proper reason to be angry (regardless of its consequences). I examine moderationist accounts in Chapter 3 that take

both sorts of approach, and attempt to suggest some shortcomings of those accounts in order to create a space in the discussion for a defence of eliminativism.

‘Transformation of anger’ covers a broad variety of means. In some cases, it is simply an attempt to distance anger from its negative associations, such as violence, or the desire to harm others, while retaining its ‘energising effects’ (i.e. its tendency to motivate action) so that they might be put to good use. In many cases, the transformation process (*how* to do this) is unclear, partially because those accounts are not strictly philosophical examination. As such, those accounts are left open to concerns about whether the transformative process actually eliminates anger by removing its essential features, or whether it leaves too broad a list of positive qualities such that other emotions like compassion or generosity might well lay claim to the same benefits (e.g. they too are ‘energising’). However, we do see a more systematic attempt to explain transformation from Buddhist moderationist Emily McRae.

McRae describes a kind of anger that she calls ‘Tantric anger’. This anger is not feigned, but instead is normal anger that has undergone a ‘metabolising process’ which retains the energising effects, desire to act, and outward focus of normal anger, following therapising meditative and contemplative practices. These practices give us control over our anger, so that we can choose to deploy it or not, and when it is so deployed it aims to help rather than harm others. The meditative practices McRae seems to have in mind are those that help us come to accept the Buddhist ‘no-self’ thesis. This sort of anger, McRae argues, has a unique capacity for recognising wrongdoing that is absent in the sorts of alternatives just suggested above — compassion, generosity, patience etc.

In making this case, McRae leans on the example of a Holocaust survivor who suggests that seeing the anger of his rescuer restored the lost humanity to his situation. However, I argue that it is not clear that McRae’s account makes the best sense of this situation. Instead, I suggest, that what is

restorative of humanity here is sympathy, or common feeling — the victim recognises his own anger in the rescuer. Moreover, I suggest that McRae is too quick to dismiss the alternatives to anger here. This comes about because she works outwards from the observation that we do get angry, to the question of what we should do with anger. This, I suggest, bypasses the central point of discussion between moderationists and eliminativists, i.e. whether or not we should get angry. If anger's alternatives are a better response to these sorts of situation than Tantric anger, then we might very well still be able to argue for the elimination of anger altogether. Moreover, McRae's use of the no-self thesis leads her to a radically different conclusion than the one drawn by the eliminativist when they consider the same thesis. McRae claims that the no-self thesis leads to our understanding that it is futile to desire to harm others, since there are no other selves, just as there is no self; thus, she suggests, we should retain anger in the absence of this desire. However, eliminativists draw upon the same no-self thesis and draw the conclusion that *anger itself* is futile; thus, why retain it at all? The answer might lie in the supposed advantages of anger. It is to this issue that we turn next.

Moderationist arguments tend to claim four kinds of benefits for anger: Evaluative, Epistemic, Communicative and Motivational. However, these claims, I suggest, do not stand up to scrutiny. Firstly, the Evaluative claim states that if we truly value X, we will become angry when X is harmed. However, I suggest that this is not always the case — anger and value come apart in a number of ways. The Epistemic claim suggests that anger helps us recognise the morally salient features of our situation. Yet, when we consider a variety of empirical evidence, that turns out to not be the case — anger, in fact, simultaneously clouds our judgement and gives us false confidence in its accuracy. The Communicative claim suggests that anger lets others know what we value, expect or demand. I argue, rather, that anger makes others unwilling to listen, and often causes us to say things we do not mean, thus obstructing communication at both ends. Finally, the Motivational claim suggests that anger can move us to defend what we care about. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this energising

effect of anger is often misdirected, and that oppressed communities are the authors of some alarming statistics on ways in which their anger is frequently self-directed.

There is, however, another kind of moderationist argument that does not focus on its benefits, but instead on the aptness of anger. This argument is put forward by Srinivasan, who suggests that focusing on the productivity of anger overlooks its intrinsic value. If I try to persuade you to eliminate your anger over your partner's betrayal on the grounds that getting angry is only likely to make them do it again, then I'm simply *missing the point*. I should really be focusing on your reasons for anger. I do not fully address this view here, in part because it requires looking back at the Buddhist metaphysical position, and a more suitable opportunity to do so comes in Chapter 4 while developing my own eliminativist argument. However, I do offer some preliminary responses, which is to suggest that the Buddhist eliminativist need not disagree with Srinivasan: seeking to understand the reasons for someone's anger is a matter of compassion, which is an important virtue in the Buddhist moral system. The question of whether or not a person's anger is apt can only be dealt with by reference to the metaphysical view, and so that particular issue is pushed back until the next chapter.

The final consideration in the chapter is regarding the moderationist application of the concepts of anger and compassion. The particular concern here is with the way these concepts are related in moderationist accounts, though I do not press this issue other than to raise some questions for the moderationist to consider. The central issue is with accounts that attempt to ground anger in compassion. On the surface, these seem like two concepts that could conflict in a variety of ways, and I raise some of those issues at the end of Chapter 3. Although I think many of these issues could be addressed by the moderationist, the general strategy here is to help clear some room in the discussion for a defence of eliminativism, a view with few defenders in the contemporary literature. Hopefully, by the end of Chapter

3, this has been accomplished to some degree. As such, I turn in the following chapter to developing a positive thesis in favour of eliminativism.

Chapter 4: In Defence of Eliminativism

Chapter 4 begins by reminding us of the dual challenges of moderationism: (1) that anger can have positive effects in the world, and that (2) even if it doesn't, it is still an apt moral attitude, thus worth preserving. The former challenge, at this point, has been met to some degree — we have seen in Chapter 3 that moderationists overstate the case for anger's positive effects, and we have also seen that alternative responses (compassion, generosity, etc.) actually do yield the positive effects they claim on behalf of anger and so should be preferred. The second concern above, that of aptness, has only been partially addressed at this point, and Chapter 4 seeks to offer a broader response to this concern from a Buddhist eliminativist perspective. As we shall see, this response depends upon an understanding of the Buddhist metaphysics, and the role this plays in the elimination of anger.

The aim of this thesis is certainly not to offer a defence of the metaphysics, but rather to explicate the role that it plays in the eliminativist argument. Chapter 2 set out many of the key notions, and we return to those here — specifically the ideas of dependent arising and no-self. In Chapter 4 we look at these ideas as they are deployed by Śāntideva in his eliminativist argument, and attempt to deal with what can seem like some troubling passages in his work — troubling both for the difficulties they present in understanding them, but troubling also for what seem like the victim-blaming nature of his discussion of wrongdoing. Śāntideva utilises dependent arising and no-self to arrive at a position where we are urged to consider a situation in which we are harmed as one in which we actually do the harming. Making sense of this is also a matter of trying to build a more appealing version of eliminativism — or else we will not win over anyone to the cause of eliminating anger. I attempt to do this in this chapter.

If Buddhist texts are intended to appeal to a mass audience, we have to assume that not everyone coming to those texts will be familiar with their metaphysical view, nor will they necessarily be open to it. As such, Buddhist eliminativist views based upon this distinctive metaphysics must offer some way of winning over even those who may be initially sceptical. One way to do this is to suggest that the metaphysical view can be treated as a pedagogical tool — rather than reading the texts as literal descriptions of reality, we can begin by asking what it is that the metaphysics is intended to make us consider. The principle of dependent arising, I suggest, as it appears in Śāntideva, is intended to instruct us to consider harmful actions from a broader perspective. Śāntideva urges us to think of wrongdoers as we do impersonal causes — as things which are acted upon by factors beyond their control. Doing so is intended to bring about a different way of perceiving the world — a way which prevents anger from arising.

The account I give advocates for the development of the *patient perspective*: seeing wrongdoing towards us as enmeshed in the broadest set of interdependent causes that we can bring ourselves to do. This perspective brings in impersonal causes to contextualise the personal ones that we ordinarily focus on in cases of wrongdoing. For example, if someone were to cut me off in traffic, I could focus on the actions of the careless driver and the harm done to me, and as a result I could become angry. However, if I can come to understand those actions against a broader set of facts e.g. that he could have a pregnant wife giving birth in the back seat, that years of underfunding of the NHS has led to a shortage of ambulances, etc. then anger need not arise. That is to say, if I approach my drive with this sort of patience, then any driver who cuts me off will fail to anger me since I come to see the wrongdoer as not only acting upon me, but as acted upon by circumstances beyond his control (i.e. he is in a state of suffering; see Chapter 2). As I broaden my perspective, the personal causes become less significant, undermining the importance of considerations of agency (who did what to whom). Moreover, the eliminativist view is not restricted to simply stopping anger from arising (though that is its aim), it also seeks to replace anger with a positive response i.e. with virtues like compassion,

generosity, etc. The patient perspective, by stopping anger from arising, creates space for these virtues to operate. In turn, these virtues can reinforce aspects of the Buddhist metaphysical picture. For instance, generosity can lead to us giving up our personal possessions, and thus reducing further the significance of considerations of the self. By engaging with the texts in this way, we gradually move closer to an openness to the possibility of the truth of the metaphysical view, since the reward for prevention of anger is the reduction of suffering.

Applying the principle of dependent arising in regulating our experience of the world might be seen by aptness-moderationists as falling foul of the concerns they highlighted in Chapter 3. However, I argue that this is not the case. Instead, I argue, the broadening of perspective that the pedagogical reading of the principle of dependent arising leads to actually helps us make better sense of the criteria for aptness. Since the concern here is whether our reasons are properly connected to our emotional response (anger), a broader set of considerations allows us to better answer that question. However, a consequence of the broad perspective is also that we find few, if any, instances of apt anger. Where anger might first appear to be apt, a broader set of considerations should reveal that it is not. However, the metaphysical view can eliminate even the possibility of aptness, should it in fact be true. Since the principle of dependent arising and the no-self thesis undermine our ability to stabilise ascriptions of agency, certain kinds of reasons (e.g. ‘I am angry because X unjustly harmed me’) simply cannot function in the way the aptness-moderationist wants them to. Thus, if one accepts the Buddhist metaphysical view, then one also accepts that there is no objective way in which anger can be apt. This need not lead to callousness on the part of the Buddhist eliminativist — they can still respond compassionately, both to the angry person’s perceived wrongdoing, and towards the epistemic failure which underpins this perception.

Accepting the Buddhist metaphysics thus amounts to a radical shift in the way we do our moral reasoning. Familiar notions like agency and justice appear to be de-stabilised in ways about which many would feel

uncomfortable. However, since the moderationist depends on an alternative metaphysics, and the focus here is not to adjudicate between these, we must leave this debate unsettled. Instead, we turn our focus in the final chapter to the arena in which moderationist views are at their most powerful, and about which Buddhist eliminativist views are typically quietist — systemic social injustice.

Chapter 5: Eliminativism and Social Injustice

Chapter 5 turns to the issue of social injustice, focusing specifically on a contemporaneous movement for positive change — the so-called #MeToo Movement. This particular movement has increased significance at the time of writing this final chapter since the hearings for US supreme court nominee were ongoing amidst a seemingly credible allegation of sexual assault. This allegation is one of a number of high profile allegations, as well as an alarmingly large number of less-often-discussed cases, that have emerged from victims of sexual assault in recent months; a disproportionately large number of these victims are female, while aggressors were overwhelmingly male. The movement derives its name from the phrase used on social media to share these allegations.

Many of the victims, and the women who have otherwise joined the movement, have been vocal about their anger, and have often contemplated how this anger can be harnessed for good. However, their anger also appears to have generated much backlash against the movement. I therefore turn, in this chapter, to an analysis of what the patient perspective would have to say on this issue. In doing so, I suggest that the method I have advocated in Chapter 4 could successfully navigate the problems for eliminativists raised by moderationists, even in this very complex and difficult area.

Firstly, I argue that the patient perspective doesn't involve a denial of wrongdoing when it comes to the accused. We are reminded that the

elimination of anger is only part of the process recommended by the Buddhist eliminativist account I defend. Instead, we are meant to actively seek to replace anger with a positive virtue like compassion or generosity. Doing so, I suggest, allows us to identify wrongdoing, but it also helps us to contextualise that wrongdoing in a way that also prompts compassion for the perpetrator. The patient perspective sees the wrongdoer as both conditioning and conditioned, as per the principle of dependent arising. Factors like the culture of toxic masculinity that appears to have infected the alleged actions of Kavanaugh should help us see that he is lacking in self-control: his angry testimony in the senate demonstrates as much. The purpose of adopting this perspective is not to exonerate the accused, but instead help move us to respond to them in a way that helps them to change. This may well include punishment, whose aim would be to reduce their suffering by reducing the influence of the factors that conditioned their action. I suggest that this does not violate the concerns raised by Srinivasan about the apt anger of the victim either — we will still be prompted to respond compassionately to the victim as well.

We then turn to examine the pragmatic benefits of the patient perspective for bringing about social change, compared to the supposed benefits of anger. As we have noted in the preceding chapters, the supposed benefits of anger are overstated. However, the patient perspective can grant a clarity of thought that helps us both identify what needs to be changed and also how to go about changing it. Anger's unpredictable nature is illustrated with the example of the 1992 Los Angeles riots (since the outcome of the #MeToo movement is still unclear), where a spontaneous outpouring of anger over police brutality led to a spike in handgun sales and a correlating spike in homicides committed using handguns. A contrasting case is the (non-Buddhist) eliminativism practiced by Martin Luther King, who had greater relative success in achieving his aims. I suggest that the #MeToo movement might need to keep this in mind, particularly considering some of the hateful responses to those in the movement who defend the moderationist position.

Conclusion

By the end of this thesis, I hope that I have shown that, despite its current popularity, the moderationist defence of anger is not without its difficulties. This should hopefully have carved out a space for a contemporary defence of eliminativism. The eliminativist view I defend is essentially Buddhist, though it draws upon Buddhist-inspired accounts in the Western philosophical literature. I advocate for a pedagogical reading of the difficult (and perhaps seemingly unattractive) Buddhist metaphysics, that I suggest — when put into practice — might eventually lead to an openness to that metaphysical view. The consequence of both the practice and the metaphysical outlook is the elimination of anger. Far from being the loss of something beneficial or apt, I suggest that the elimination of anger is both beneficial and (from the metaphysical viewpoint) apt. I attempt to demonstrate this by applying the position I defend to the kind of case where moderationists are at their most persuasive — cases of social injustice. I hope to have at least shown that such a position can be a viable alternative to the moderationist suggestion that we harness anger for social change.

Chapter One:
BUDDHIST CHARACTERISATION
OF ANGER

Introduction

Despite the familiarity with the phenomenon, attempting to unpack a concept like ANGER can be complicated. As an emotion, anger is fraught with the difficulties faced when attempting to understand *any* emotion. The category ‘emotion’ in the sense we understand today is itself a relatively recent entry into philosophical vocabulary — prior to that philosophers from antiquity to the early modern period had historically opted for terms like ‘passion’¹, ‘sentiment’, and ‘affection’² to refer to comparable psychological phenomena, although the meaning of these terms then do not coincide with the contemporary usage of ‘emotion’ now.³ Neither do these terms *now* have the exact same meaning to ‘emotions’ (e.g. the notion of passions tends to be more intense, explosive, and even sexual). In this study I do not intend to delve into the discussion about the definition or history of emotion. But given the potential confusion, it should be pronounced that these terms are loosely employed here: anger is to be referred to as an emotion, a feeling, an attitude, and so on, without any categorical distinction unless noted otherwise. Evidently, emotions are bound up with subjective experience, and that is the point of departure of my adopted methodology we will see below. My own focus here, however, is on the particular emotion of anger; more specifically still, it is on anger as it is understood within Indian Buddhist philosophy.

This chapter attempts to identify and elucidate the central features of the Buddhist conceptions of anger (for there is not a singular conception in

¹ *Pathos/pathe* in Greek, as notably treated in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. The term apparently has a sense of passivity. It was historically a common choice adopted by many philosophers in the seventeenth century.

² The latter two terms are markedly in use in the eighteenth century amongst British philosophers, sometimes used in contrast with turbulent ‘passions’.

³ Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, 2–6; Schmitter, “17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions.”

play across all traditions) in order to form a general account with which to work throughout the rest of this thesis. In doing so, I describe a variety of methodological issues faced when comparing across traditions, settling on an approach which focuses on *occasions of anger* in order to unpack the general concept at play. As such, I discuss here multiple examples of anger as it appears in the Buddhist literature, examining the scope of emotional responses covered by these examples, and variously translated as ‘anger’, ‘hatred’, ‘annoyance’, and otherwise, in the texts. I argue that these various responses fall under a broad conception of anger for the Buddhist, expressed as the idea of *dosa/dveṣa*. It should be noted also, at this early point, that when we discuss occasions of anger, the choice of wording is deliberate to avoid the notion of causation — we will see, ultimately, that the *root cause* of anger for the Buddhist is not the immediate situation, which at best is a *proximate cause*, we are in (i.e. the ‘occasion’), but our own understanding of our situation (see Chapters 2 and 4 for this discussion).

1. Approaching Anger

Let us begin with some notes on methodology. I would like to avoid the assumption that anger is a universal emotion, and that its characterisation in Buddhist accounts has to be categorised in the same way that we understand it in the Anglo-European literature. By comparing descriptions of anger in the literature from both the Western tradition and Buddhist tradition, I wish to achieve two goals:

- 1) to delineate the Buddhist characterisation of anger, and
- 2) by doing so, demonstrate that the conception we’re looking into in the Buddhist literature is, in fact, the same emotion that we conceive of in Anglo-European traditions.

This first chapter, however, does not aim to give a comprehensive account of the Buddhist conception of anger but, instead, to establish that we are talking about the same mental phenomenon as those discussed in some of the Western literature. This can be concluded from some salient

qualities of anger that are recognised across accounts in spite of differences in their conceptions.

Chief among the methodological concerns for my project here are the linguistic and cultural barriers we encounter in studying the concept of anger in ancient Buddhist texts. Practitioners in the art of translation or, for that matter, even language-learners in general, know all too well how difficult it can be to find a word-for-word translation most of the time. Numerous terms can refer to the same concept, and that is also true of the notion we want to investigate: anger. In English, aside from ‘anger’, we also use ‘resentment’, ‘indignation’, ‘ire’, ‘irascibility’, ‘rage’, ‘wrath’, ‘fury’, etc. to refer to a similar idea. However, these do not pick out exactly the same concept, each having subtle differences from the others. For example, ‘wrath’ suggests a higher degree of anger than ‘ire’. ‘Rage’, by contrast, implies a lack of (self-) control, such as when we say somebody acted ‘in a fit of rage’. Given that ‘fits’ are sudden, involuntary, and often involve quite extreme physical symptoms (whether it is an epileptic seizure or a sneezing fit), we can see the possible implication of selecting ‘rage’ over ‘anger’ if we were to translate another language into English. Even within the tradition often considered as a root of modern-western philosophy such as Greek, as many are aware of but tend to forget, linguistic, cultural, and temporal barriers are inevitably also present. It has been argued that the conception of *orgē*, as well as other terms such as *cholos* and *thumos* or even Latin *ira*, is more intense than we would consider now as anger and often associated with madness.⁴

Use of ‘anger’ in the philosophical literature is equally unhelpful: there is little consistency in how the term is deployed. ‘Anger’ and ‘resentment’ are the most recurring terms. Although they are sometimes interchangeable, other times they denote slightly differently. Joseph Butler, for instance, often referred to anger as sudden and hasty, and resentment as settled and deliberate. Whereas the former is a natural self-defence, the

⁴ Harris, “The Rage of Women,” 122–25.

latter has a more moral tone as it is provoked by injustice.⁵ This resonates in the more recent work by P. F. Strawson, where ‘resentment’ seems to be deliberately chosen in the context which is principally a moral discussion and the word ‘anger’ is thus avoided.⁶ Meanwhile, David Hume talked almost solely of ‘anger’. Others do not make such necessary association, like Robert C. Solomon who deems resentment a sense of ‘intolerable inferiority’ having myriads of pettiness.⁷

Uses of the term in Buddhist texts are no less complex than in their English-language counterparts. In fact, it is arguably *more* confusing — particularly to someone from outside the tradition. Source languages of the traditional Buddhist literature are many, including Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese. To make matters easier, I will use the translations from sources mainly written in Pāli and Sanskrit (since these languages share many features and have a common origin), as well as occasionally relying upon Tibetan sources for comparison, as important writings about anger can be found in Tibetan. The first of these two languages has ancient roots that can be traced to South Asia, sharing virtually the same grammar and vocabulary. The equivalent terms for ‘anger’ in the source languages are *kodha* (Pāli)/*krodha* (Sanskrit). They, and *dosa* (Pāli)/*dveṣa* (Sanskrit) are common words used to refer to a concept related to ‘anger’ in the literature. However, we sometimes see other words such as *pratigha*⁸ (Sanskrit) and *makka*⁹ (Pāli) translated as ‘anger’ too. The former has a sense of enmity and resistance, and the latter can also mean hypocrisy. Without the knowledge of Pāliists and Sanskritists, which I fear I cannot claim to have mastered, the subtleties of these terms, mirroring as they do the same subtle differences between ‘wrath’ and ‘anger’ in English, would prove difficult to recognise.

Consider, for example, the problems from one of the main texts we will use in this study — that of *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This text, ascribed to

⁵ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, 68–74.

⁶ Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*.

⁷ Solomon, *The Passions*, 290–95.

⁸ For example, in *BCA* 6.1.

⁹ Horner, *Milinda’s Questions*, 2:289.

Śāntideva (late 7th to mid 8th century), was originally composed in Sanskrit.¹⁰ It was then later translated into Tibetan in the eighth century. The latter version had a lot of influence over Tibetan Buddhism and became a significant Buddhist account in its own right. In turn, multiple English translations, including those upon which my own study is based, have been rendered from both source languages. A version relies on Sanskrit (i.e. Crosby and Skilton), another Tibetan (i.e. The Padmakara Translation Group), while the other is mainly based on Sanskrit in consultation with Tibetan (i.e. Wallace and Wallace). When comparing the translations from Sanskrit in *BCA* Chapter 6, which is dedicated to the discussion of the virtue of patience/forbearance and includes an analysis of anger, we will see that they did not always render the words *pratigha*, *krodha* and *dveṣa* consistently. For instance, in *BCA* 6.1, while Wallace and Wallace translated *pratigha* as ‘anger’, Crosby and Skilton chose ‘hatred’ as the translation. The words ‘anger’ and ‘hate’ indeed pose some difficulties to us. In the original Sanskrit text, *dveṣa*, which is commonly translated to ‘hatred’ or ‘aversion’ (themselves with distinct connotations in English), is sometimes rendered as ‘anger’ by the translators. For example, *dveṣa* as it appears in *BCA* 6.7 is translated as ‘hatred’ by Crosby and Skilton, but ‘anger’ by Wallace and Wallace. Moreover, while *krodha* in *BCA* 6.5 is translated as ‘anger’ in both translations, it becomes ‘hatred’ in *BCA* 6.6 in both versions.

Despite the seeming minor issue about a choice of vocabulary, it is important to be aware of the inconsistencies, or perhaps fluidity, in these translations. The case of ‘anger’ and ‘hatred’ should be particularly noted as they tend to be treated as distinct, yet related, phenomena in contemporary literature.¹¹ The fact that the translators are not firmly fixed with the common translation of the words, coupled with the way these terms are employed in the same manner and discussion, may suggest that Buddhists

¹⁰ *BCA* is one of the most translated Buddhist texts. It has been translated into other traditional Buddhist languages such as Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian during pre-modern period. There are also many versions in European languages. See how purposes of translation of the text have changed over time in Nelson, “Śāntideva’s Bodhicaryāvatāra in Translation.”

¹¹ See Ben-Ze’ev, “Anger and Hate”, for example.

do not make an important distinction between them. Thus, I shall include all anger-related terms in my study.

Of course, language is in many ways inherently problematic. A (natural) language isn't a static, immutable entity, it is dynamic and constantly evolving. The implicature effects of any given word or phrase might change over time, as can the accepted meaning of a word. The word 'nice', for example, once had the meaning 'silly' or 'foolish' (deriving from Latin *nescius*, as more familiar in the English word 'nescient')¹² — a far cry from the compliment it is today! It isn't always entirely clear, then, what a translator was attempting to capture simply by looking at the word choice in the absence of a broader context. That context might include an etymological history, but such an approach might be better reserved for a linguist. Instead, I suggest that we can helpfully focus on the occasions and phenomenology of anger — that is, the *experiences of the subject in a given situation*. We will, therefore, engage in the texts of any Buddhist traditions which allow us to see how the human subjects feel, perceive, conceive and act in the context of anger. Typically, however, we can't entirely avoid relying on languages. This is possible where we have a detailed description of some particular set of circumstances of anger. In this way, we will get a glimpse of the concept in action, and where it belongs. An experience of anger, or of any emotion for that matter, is particular. It always occurs in a particular locale i.e. in an individual mind and a specific culture. More often than not, with a sufficiently detailed example, we can still empathise with the subject because of the phenomenological similarity of their actual and our imagined situation (though some situations might be lost on us because of cultural reasons — for instance, not understanding why a Thai might be angry when you point and gesture towards the TV remote with your foot, rather than your hand). Given that human beings are generally subject to the same basic set of needs and desires, and share basically the same cognitive architecture, approaching anger via specific examples equips us with a methodology that can hopefully circumvent at least some of the

¹² Dent, *What Made the Crocodile Cry?*, 92.

linguistic and cultural barriers evident at the surface level when translating texts.

Note that I do not claim completeness in terms of the coverage of Buddhist traditions. Due to immense diversity in Buddhist thought, the ideas represented here are best identified as South Asian Buddhism, including an area from Tibet to Sri Lanka. In particular, the texts I heavily cite include the English translations of Pāli *Nikāyas*, *Visuddhimagga*, and Sanskrit and Tibetan *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. These are prominent works dealing with anger in Buddhist philosophy. They represent different schools of Buddhist thought, hence defying being labeled in a sectarian manner. Still, such geographical denomination may appear deceptive as it might sound as though it excludes modern scholarship produced in Anglo-European traditions or produced for an Anglo-European audience; however, works falling under this description are also drawn upon in this research. These writings, such as *The Dalai Lama's Book of Wisdom* and Emily McRae's interpretation of Dharmarakṣita in "Metabolizing Anger", rest in some ways upon Buddhist thinkers from the subcontinent. With that in mind, let us now turn towards the task of characterising anger as it appears within the Buddhist tradition.

2. Characterising Anger

Characterising anger by examining the occasions of anger, the accompanying phenomenological character, and its effects *as they appear in the Buddhist literature* is a deliberate attempt to avoid imposing our conception — a twenty-first-century Anglo-European understanding of anger — onto the first-person experience of the subject who lived in the tradition. We will first look at the *context* of anger — the situations in which anger arises (section 2.1). Comparing the occasions of anger in Buddhist texts with other cultures and traditions allows us to see the similarity of what they take to be occurrences of anger. What we shall see is that the occasions of anger vary greatly: they can be personal or impersonal, trivial or serious. Subsequently in section 3, I will attempt to characterise the notion of anger through the phenomenology of anger as found in the Buddhist literature. This may differ

in the details, but it is nonetheless the case that what is regarded as ‘anger’ in Buddhist literature is a similar mental phenomenon in other traditions. It doesn’t matter whether their attitudes and assessment of anger are distinct or similar; insofar as the points of consideration are shared across traditions, they refer to the same mental state. Conversely, any dissimilarities in the phenomenological content descriptions we may find will highlight the peculiar features of the Buddhist conception of anger. After examining the private experience of anger, the discernible effects of anger will then be looked at in section 4. While this last section can be treated as supplementary to the characterisation of anger, it is an important point that deserves a distinct treatment separately from that of the phenomenology of anger.

2.1 Occasions of anger

The situations in which anger can be provoked are various. It can be something very trivial, such as hearing spoilers of the movies we’re looking forward to watching; something less trivial, such as the persistent lateness of our regular commuter train to work; or something serious, like your partner cheating on you. It is true that some frustrating situations may generate feelings other than (or *as well as*) anger; many of us, when kept from having a barbecue that has been planned for weeks with friends, are disappointed or miserable. However, anger is not an unimaginable response to other people either. As a matter of fact, people get angry at all kinds of things, and this anger also varies in degree. This is reflected in the Buddhist literature too. We will consider some examples of the occasions of anger that are discussed in the literature across various cultures from different time periods. The purpose here is not to include an exhaustive list of examples; the examples cited should be sufficient to demonstrate that those found in the Buddhist literature are similar to the occasions of anger that we are familiar with from both Western philosophical literature and everyday experience.

In the Buddhist texts, the typical occasions of anger can be said to be when we *perceive* ourselves to be harmed by someone else. There are two elements to unpack here: one is the perception of the subject, and the other

is the harm done to the subject. The latter is a common view shared by most accounts. The scope of ‘harm’ does not have to be done only physically and directly to the subject, but can be extended to family and friends, i.e. those who are dear to the subject, as well as the subject’s desires and beliefs. In other words, harms are done to those things in the circle of one’s concerns. So the apparent injuries can be done not only to the subject, but also to *her* people, *her* desires, *her* beliefs, etc. Moreover, anger doesn’t only have to occur at the exact moment of the infliction of harm — remembering the experience could also be an occasion of anger.¹³

Occasions of anger that have moral significance to the Buddhist are diverse. Whether the anger is occasioned by seemingly insignificant things, or something which seems much more serious, they are treated seriously all the same. Let us now consider some specific occasions in the Buddhist texts that give rise to anger.

Sometimes anger can arise without involving another person:

“The irritation of bugs, gnats, and mosquitoes, of hunger and thirst, and discomfort such as an enormous itch: why do you not see them as insignificant? Cold, heat, rain, and wind, journeying and sickness, imprisonment and beatings: one should not be too squeamish about them. Otherwise the distress becomes worse.”¹⁴

Such impersonal occasions of anger are usually only causes of *annoyance* for most people, yet there is no distinction drawn in the Buddhist literature here between ‘annoyance’ and ‘anger’. If bitten by a bug, we squash it. If thirsty and peckish, we go to the kitchen and grab a glass of water and some snacks. If the temperature is not right, we adjust radiators and air-conditioners to make us feel comfortable. We don’t usually feel *angry* towards the bug, our tummy, or the air-conditioner. They only *annoy* us to

¹³ For example, *Vism* IX, 14 acknowledges that “If resentment arises in him when he applies his mind to a hostile person because he *remembers* wrongs done by that person,...” (stress is mine).

¹⁴ *BCA* 6.15,16.

take some action to put an end to it. But it is not impossible that one can get angry over these situations: imagine they happen simultaneously; a lot of annoyances could stir up anger in us too, so it is perhaps not unreasonable to see these as lying on one and the same spectrum.

In the context of those who practice meditation like Śāntideva, the author of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, these annoyances become unwelcome distractions from what they *wish* to accomplish. This kind of situation should be familiar to us all. We sometimes get angry when things don't go as planned — when we forget to save important work on the computer before shutting it down; when a car accident prevents us from boarding an aeroplane in time; when my cat ruins a jigsaw that I'm about to finish. As noted above, such occasions for anger might seem trivial. But if my cat were to delete the only copy of my thesis, we might think that this is a far more serious concern! Nonetheless, this is still an *impersonal* occasion for anger (arguments for the personhood of cats notwithstanding!) The common thread running through these examples is the thwarting of desires. In this sense, there are similarities here with another ancient tradition. Aristotle also sees that when we are in pain, or have to suffer pain by way of being prevented from getting what we desire, anger is triggered: “Men are angry when they are pained, because one who is pained aims at something.”¹⁵

However, Aristotle also recognises that there are personal occasions for anger which operate in much the same way i.e. wherein our desires are thwarted:

“[I]f then anyone directly opposes [a person] in anything, as, for instance, prevents him from drinking when thirsty, or not directly, but seems to be doing just the same; and if anyone goes against him or refuses to assist him, or troubles him in any other way when he is in this frame of mind, he is angry with all such persons.”¹⁶

¹⁵ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 9.

¹⁶ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 9.

Thwarting of desires is thus a common prompt for occasions of anger, as clearly spelled out in *BCA* 6.7: “Finding its fuel in discontent originating from an undesired event and from an impediment to desired events, anger becomes inflamed and destroys me.” And just as with impersonal occasions of anger, personal occasions vary greatly and may be regarded as trivial or serious (perhaps depending upon the strength or domain of the desire). My desire to be able to concentrate on my meditation being thwarted by an inconsiderate roommate playing her music too loud may not seem (and shouldn’t!) compelling enough to cause anger, but my desire to save my own life by aborting the foetus which threatens it being thwarted by pro-life protestors blocking my route to the clinic would certainly seem worthy of considering as an appropriate occasion of anger. Thus, this notion of anger as *occasioned by the thwarting of desires* described in the Buddhist texts is recognisable elsewhere.

Another occasion found in the Buddhist texts concerns injuries caused by insults. In the Pāli *sutta*, which partly forms the early Buddhist canonical texts, there’s a story about a follower of Brahminism being angry because another brahmin of his clan left the family to live a life of asceticism under the Buddha’s guidance, so the displeased brahmin approaches the Buddha and reproaches him with offensive words (*SN* I 7:2). In fact, similar occasions appear numerous times in the texts. In ancient India, this was considered an insult. Brahmins were considered the highest class of all the social groups; by persuading people that were perceived to be superior and privileged to leave the clan, it was as if to say that they were inferior to the Buddha — someone who rejected Brahmanism and came from an apparent lower caste (i.e. *kṣatriya* or warrior) according to their tradition — that their clan was being belittled. This kind of occasion is perhaps the most common issue in the Buddhist texts. In another place, Śāntideva acknowledges that he is also *capable* of getting angry over an insult to his religious beliefs, and he has to resist the urge to submit to his anger, saying, “And my hatred towards those who damage sacred images and stūpas or who abuse the true teaching is inappropriate, since the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not distressed”

(BCA 6.64). This example eerily rings true even today. Many people tend to get offended easily and immensely over any remarks or behaviours that seem to insult their religion. Consider, for example, the attacks on the exhibition of drawings of the prophet Mohammed at the Curtis Culwell Centre, Texas, in 2015. So clearly the idea that insults occasion anger is not something peculiar to Buddhism. Aristotle also shares a similar thought:

“Now men think that they have a right to be highly esteemed by those who are inferior to them in birth, power, and virtue, and generally, in whatever similar respect a man is far superior to another; for example, the rich man to the poor man in the matter of money, the eloquent to the incompetent speaker in the matter of oratory, the governor to the governed, and the man who thinks himself worthy to rule to one who is only fit to be ruled.”¹⁷

Noticeably, these occasions of anger are all social in nature — whether that be related directly to social standing, or indirectly to some social structure such as an organised religion. Occasions of anger related to social standing and/or social structures are seemingly those most likely to connect to a notion of self-worth, whether we want to think of it as social-influenced or wholly self-defined.

We might wish to recast insults in the language used above, i.e. that of desires and harm. An insult could be construed as harming our desire to be treated in a particular way — a way that fits how we perceive ourselves as being worthy of. A President of a country may want to be addressed according to his status and get offended when he does not get what he wants, for instance.¹⁸ Reeve argues that insults are bound to the notion of *honour* — essentially a matter of being treated in a manner proportional to our worth.¹⁹ Another person’s treatment of ourselves is taken as an

¹⁷ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 7.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Macron seemed unhappy to be called ‘Manu’ instead of ‘Mr President’. See “‘Not Manu - Call Me Mr President.’”

¹⁹ Reeve, “The Anger of Achilles.”

expression of her perception of who we are. We are insulted when we perceive ourselves as being treated in a way that falls short of our own assessment of our own self-worth (whether that assessment is warranted or not). The notion of how we perceive ourselves is central to Buddhist philosophy, whose primary project is unraveling the (apparently incorrect) perception of the self as a continuing, independent subject of experience (see Chapters 2 and 4 for discussion of the ‘no-self doctrine’, and section 2.2 below for more on anger and perception). Again, we might recast this in the language of desires — a desire to be perceived as worth more than our treatment by others suggests. And, again, the focus here could thus be on *the harm done to our desires*.

A final occasion of anger to consider from the Buddhist texts is that when harm appears to be done to someone else. Some verses in Buddhist texts seemingly indicate that people get angry even when it doesn’t involve them personally, such as when they perceive some wrongdoing to others.

“Therefore, even if one sees a friend or an enemy behaving badly, one can reflect that there are specific conditioning factors that determine this, and thereby remain happy.”²⁰

“When people harm one’s teachers, relatives, and others dear to us, one should, as above, regard it as arising on the basis of conditioning factors and refrain from anger towards them.”²¹

These verses suggest that the behaviour of both our friends and our enemies *can* anger us (though we might ‘remain happy’ if we can consider the circumstances of the matter objectively). However, it is notable from these passages that the occasions of anger that are being considered here are those which still bear a close relation to us — our teachers, our relatives, our friends, and so on. Even with our *enemies*, these are still people who have a significant role to play in our lives (if we consider an enemy as someone who

²⁰ *BCA* 6.33.

²¹ *BCA* 6.65.

has set out to deliberately harm us). Yet there is no substantive discussion of anger about more remote circumstances — such as the anger we might feel over a reported injustice in another land, whose people we have no connection to other than a shared humanity. For instance, we might be angry over the lack of support given to the people of Puerto Rico by the US government in the wake of the dual disasters of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. It is unlikely that Puerto Rico’s inhabitants would count as ‘others dear to us’, and yet we might still feel anger on their behalf. Anger over social injustices is often the focus of discussion in Western literature, yet it is largely unaddressed by the Buddhist texts (though understandably when consider how we have become more socially and mentally globalised now). I will attempt to redress this imbalance somewhat in Chapter 5 of this thesis, by applying the Buddhist Eliminativist argument I develop to an issue of social injustice.

2.2 Anger and perception

Of course, we are not always willing to take up the cudgels on behalf of others. As Śāntideva explains:

“If you argue that your dislike of one who speaks ill of you is because he is harming living beings, why then do you feel no anger when he defames others in the same way? You tolerate those showing disfavour when others are the subject of it, but you show no tolerance towards someone speaking ill of you when he is subject to the arising of defilements.”²²

We are often capable of hypocrisy when it comes to occasions of anger — we may well have no emotional response when we see others experiencing something which angered us when the same treatment was directed our way.²³ This highlights another important point about anger

²² *BCA* 6.62, 63.

²³ It is not only anger which is highlighted as a source of hypocrisy by Śāntideva — he also highlights our hypocrisy with respect to praise of others: “When your own good qualities are being praised, you want others to rejoice as well. When good qualities of someone else are being praised, you do not want happiness even for yourself. Upon generating the Spirit of Awakening out of the desire for the happiness of all sentient beings, why are you angry at

which seems to be reflected in the Buddhists' treatment of it: that our angry responses are dependent upon how we *perceive* a given occasion of anger.

We noted above (section 2.1) that Reeve argues that insults are bound to the notion of honour, and that honour is tied up with our own perception of self. However, beyond this idea (which will be addressed in Chapters 2 and 4), there is the matter of our judgements regarding who is to blame, and to what extent, within occasions of anger. The cases discussed above are all cases where our anger appears to be more or less justified; many modern philosophers, in fact, focus their discussion on moral anger in particular — where anger has been triggered by a morally wrong action. The approach taken on this sort of view is one which suggests that we evaluate the *action itself*, judging it to be immoral, and respond with anger. However, the Buddhist approach emphasises instead the *perceived harm to the subject* (and the people, things, etc. close to the subject). By emphasising the notion of perception when it comes to anger, the Buddhist approach captures the complexities present within all occasions of anger. As with perception proper, we are susceptible to error and illusion. For instance, we might react angrily when we *believe* someone to have harmed us, even though this may not actually be the case (e.g. when we falsely believe that our partner has taken the only set of house keys with them, and left us unable to leave the house as we are unable to lock the door — the reality being that the keys were in the house all along).

Acknowledging this possibility of error aligns with much work in contemporary philosophy, specifically those who believe that anger should be preserved, albeit curbed, in appropriate situations, or as I call them 'moderationists', which draws the line between anger that is reasonable and

sentient beings now that they have found happiness themselves?" (BCA 6.79-80) It seems to me that Śāntideva observes how we are often *envious* when others receive praise. In fact, Buddhism appears to have a category of emotion opposite to envy: *muditā*, or empathetic joy, the feeling of happiness when seeing other people happy, even if one does not contribute to it. Buddhaghosa specifies different states of emotions rooted in the hateful temperament that actually includes anger *and* envy (as well as enmity, disparaging, domineering, and avarice; see *Vism* XIV, 172), and thus anger and envy are derived from the same root for the Buddhist.

unreasonable, warranted and unwarranted, or justified and unjustified. In other words, there is a kind of anger that is acceptable and the other is unacceptable. Such distinctions are not made explicit in the Buddhist account of anger, and yet by emphasising perception they tacitly acknowledge that there might be occasions of anger where our judgements are impaired. Nonetheless, distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate anger are ultimately redundant for the Buddhist — as we shall see in Chapter 2, according to the Buddhist we should simply eschew *all* forms of anger. We are advised to simply disavow ourselves from any actual, attempted, or simply misperceived, harm that comes our way:

“We — who do not abuse, who do not scold anyone, who do not rail against anyone — refuse to accept from you the abuse and scolding and tirade you let loose at us. It still belongs to you, brahmin!”²⁴

In this way, the Buddhist acknowledgement of the similarities between perception and the occasions of anger still leaves the advised response to these occasions essentially untouched — it simply notes that we might sometimes be angry for a reason, and sometimes not, but regardless of this, a right-minded Buddhist should still refrain from anger altogether. For orthodox Buddhists think that there’s actually never a good reason that justifies anger. I pick up on the reasons for this in Chapter 2. Now, however, let us turn to the subjective aspect of the occasions of anger — its phenomenology.

3. Experiencing Anger

Our aim, to make sure that the phenomenon that Buddhists call ‘anger’ is one and the same phenomenon of which we also use that term, has not yet been accomplished. That is why it is important that we talk about the phenomenology of anger. It is an approach to de-clutter both linguistic and cultural elements that may be associated with the concept of anger.

²⁴ *SN* 7:2.

Philosophers have come up with different accounts of anger, and they are culturally specific. In some cultures, anger may be closely associated with the idea of justice and individualism, whereas in another culture it might be connected to a mental phenomenon like conceit. Others find it seldom occurs, and the vocabulary that indicates it is even absent altogether.²⁵ As such, it is not without difficulties for us to compare accounts of anger that are remote in place and time and be certain that they talk about the same emotion, as has been expressed by Robert Solomon who remarked, “it is not the nature of emotion that matters so much as the nature and place of particular (kinds of) emotions in a particular worldview.”²⁶ But while theories of anger may differ, anger as a phenomenon has similar effects on us all. After all, anger is primarily, though not exclusively, a mental phenomenon *experienced* by a person. It is always related to the ‘I’ which is the subject of the affect, and is something that is felt and urges us to behave in certain ways, whether we are aware of its presence or not. In this sense then, anger is a universal experience across human populations, and since anger is necessarily experienced by a subject, examining such experiences should allow us to arrive at the heart of the phenomenon.

Although an analysis of the phenomenology of anger from different accounts lets us compare our experience, we cannot examine the phenomenology of anger in Buddhist literature straightforwardly. Buddhists do not offer a theory of anger in the way we are familiar with. They do not discuss the phenomenon in an abstract way by unpacking the necessary and sufficient conditions for anger. When they talk about anger, they often talk about its value i.e. how it’s good or bad, and how to get rid of it, because that is their goal. However, we can deduce the phenomenon from the texts as some expressions of it are also present in the discussions. Again, it is reasonable to suspect that those expressions are culturally-bound, too. And while some expressions may not always be similar to ours, many *are* surprisingly similar and even the dissimilar are perfectly recognisable. This

²⁵ Briggs, *Never in Anger*, quoted in Solomon, “Some Notes on Emotion, ‘East and West,’” 171.

²⁶ Solomon, “Some Notes on Emotion, ‘East and West,’” 177.

suggests that it is more or less the same phenomenon we know as ‘anger’. This section will examine the different aspects of anger as experienced by the subject, throughout the course of the phenomenon, from the moment it arises to when it is dissolved. And as will be apparent below, Buddhists recognise different aspects of anger that make up the phenomenon in the same way that we do. Let us turn to the first of these aspects now.

3.1 Anger and pain

The emotions are not solely mental events, but are instead *embodied*. Buddhist psychological theorists well observed this complexity of emotional experiences: they often describe bodily symptoms concurring with psychological phenomena. Getting angry is, most of the time, not a nice experience. It is an uncomfortable feeling. Yet sometimes, it can somehow feel good when we get angry, especially when anger is expressed. Anger giving us such mixed feelings is, perhaps, one of the reasons why people have different opinions about it. That conflicting experience did not go unnoticed thousands of years ago either. Buddhist philosophers too recognise that anger is both an unpleasant and a pleasurable feeling but, for them, it is not a balanced experience: they see that painful, rather than pleasurable, feelings dominate the experience of anger. This conclusion is drawn from the way they describe the experience. While they have various examples of anger’s unpleasantness, there’s only a single example of the pleasure of anger that I have found (see below).

Feelings are not something easily put into words. How can we describe something that is intangible and personal for other people to understand? The available vocabulary may be too vague, inaccurate, or perhaps ineffective in spelling out our feelings. This is perhaps why we often utilise analogies to help other people understand us. For example, we may ask someone who has a near-death experience ‘What does it feel like?’ and, unable to find the right words to explain, they compare it with something else that other people may have experienced e.g. moving towards a light at the end of a tunnel, or some such thing. The privacy of the experience makes us become an everyday poet who relies on some figure of speech

when we want to say how the experience feels.²⁷ And Buddhist philosophers are no different in their reliance on such literary devices.

Indeed, Buddhist philosophers are no strangers to using metaphors to describe the experience of anger. Metaphors related to fire are amongst those most frequently used. In *AN* 7:64, they compare the experience of anger to a burning feeling: “he is tormented as if burnt by fire”. A burning sensation is something we can relate to in our experience of anger. Think about the physiological effects of anger. We usually go through a phase in which our heart-rate is increased, pumping blood to muscles all over our body creating a warming sensation, *as if* it’s burning inside. Perhaps, this is why the language of fire is a typical metaphor used to refer to an experience of anger. Elsewhere, a Buddhist account also suggests that an angry person is “like a man who wants to hit another and pick up a burning ember or excrement in his hand and so first burns himself or makes himself stink”.²⁸ Śāntideva, too, did not fail to make an analogy between anger and fire, emphasising its virulent nature.²⁹ Indeed, a fire metaphor for anger seems not idiosyncratic to the Buddhist texts, as Seneca similarly describes a person as “consumed in the flame of anger”.³⁰ Sometimes our language reflects the thought that the heat may even be visible on the surface, such as when we describe someone as “incandescent with anger”.³¹ Many other words and phrases which connect with anger are also associated with heat or fire. For

²⁷ The metaphorical descriptions of personal experience like taste, smell, sensation, and pain are certainly not uncommon. Patient-doctor communication is permeated with metaphorical descriptions and doctors are encouraged to learn the skills for effective interpretations in diagnosis as well as to convey ambiguity which is less threatening to patients (Bleakley, *Thinking with Metaphors in Medicine*.) Also, the literally indescribable experience is not limited to sensations and feelings: we use metaphors to describe music, too (Zangwill, “Music, Essential Metaphor, and Private Language.”) Conversely, physical sensation is sometimes used to describe experience of different emotions. The ancient Indian theory of aesthetics refers to emotions that are evoked by arts and dramas as *tastes*, or *rasa*. For further explanation about *rasa* theory, see Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*.

²⁸ *Viśm* IX, 23.

²⁹ In *BCA* 6, 70-71 he says: “When a house is burning down and the fire has spread towards the next house, any grass or such in which it might spread is dragged off and taken away. So, when the mind it catching alight with the fire of hatred as a result of contact with something, it must be cast aside immediately for fear that one’s body of merit might go up in flames.”

³⁰ *De Ira* I. 2.3

³¹ See, for example, Mapondera and Smith, “Malawi President’s Attack on Madonna Said to Be a ‘Goof.’”

example, ‘I *boiled* at their employees’ incompetency’; ‘The president got *steamed up* about the media reports’; ‘She was *smouldering* with rage as she talked to those scoundrels on the phone’. It can be said that fire is one of the favoured descriptions of anger even outside the Buddhist literature. But as the analogy goes, while the heat can provide us energy, being burnt, boiled, or steamed are surely painful.

It should also be noted that fire metaphor is not exclusively used for anger in Buddhist literature. Fire is a major thread running through all important conceptions in Buddhism. It is typically used to represent negative attributes or something conducive to harm in general. For example, in the *Fire Sutta*, *SN* 35.28, the Buddha compares our lives as living through fire. Our senses and the things they are in contact with i.e. whatever is involved in our experience, are all aflame. It concurs, by no means accidentally, with the term for aggregates of experience. Constituents of human experience which are made up of body/matter (*rūpa*), sensation/feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā/saññā*), volitional formations (*samskāra/saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna/viññāṇa*) are collectively referred to as *skanda/khandha*, meaning ‘heap’ or ‘pile’.³² Originally it refers to a pile of firewood for a funeral pyre. As such, fire is an allegory of life being burnt, and in turn feeds itself with more energy to perpetuate the fire. Here, fire is suffering, or *dukkha*, something that needs to be put out. Thus, it signals to the soteriological goal of nirvana, i.e. a cessation of suffering, through an analogy of fire having been extinguished.³³ These are foundational concepts in Buddhist philosophy, which will be further dealt with in Chapter 2. But for now, it is important to see the connection, or rather the conflict, between the ultimate aim and anger: life is on fire; fire has to be put out; but anger, itself a fire, keeps fuelling it. Anger, along with two other fires i.e. craving and delusion (or some other variations of *lobha/rāga*, *dosa/dveṣa*, *moha*), are exactly the opposite of what they strive for.

³² The analysis of *khandha* is commonly understood as constituents of being. However, Sue Hamilton in *Identity and Experience* argues that according to Early Buddhism they are not a set of *what* human is, these are the *processes* by which a being experiences.

³³ Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, 111–28; Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 12–13.

A burning sensation is not the only description of the experience of anger in Buddhist texts. It is sometimes described as ‘poisonous’³⁴ and like being struck by an arrow.³⁵ Those who are familiar with Buddhist narratives would not fail to recognise that these are the same metaphors used in the famous parable in *MN* 63, in which poisoned arrows represent the cause of human suffering that should be removed immediately. But even without the context, it is not hard to imagine (or is presumably not unimaginable) how painful it can be to get poisoned or have a sharp weapon piercing through your body. Essentially, the typical metaphors for anger are things that could harm, some even so powerful they could kill us.

Of course, in terms of the level of painfulness we can’t take it literally that getting angry is as agonising as getting poisoned or stabbed by a knife. To begin with, it is doubtful that the pain of getting angry is *actually* the same as physically localised pain such as when we are stabbed. But that is the whole point of using metaphors. Our experience of anger may have never been felt particularly on our forehead or our hand, but because painful feeling in the sense closer to physical sensation is more ubiquitous and accessible, and often provokes an immediate visible reflex, such a literary device is purposefully employed to that effect. The exaggerated level of pain serves to emphasise the level of danger regarded by the Buddhist whose evaluation of anger is clearly negative. Pain has a significant role to play when considered in conjunction with desire, which will be addressed in detail in 3.3. For now, we can infer that the Buddhist thinks that people respond negatively to pain. It is an aspect that motivates people to want to do something to stop the pain.

It is important to distinguish between the pain caused by the occasion of anger and the pain associated with anger itself. A mother may suffer pain or emotional distress on an occasion such as her daughter being run down by a careless driver — that is the pain that occasions whatever

³⁴ *Vism* XIV, 171; *AN* 7:64

³⁵ *BCA* 6.3 reads, “One’s mind finds no peace, neither enjoys pleasure or delight, nor goes to sleep, nor feels secure while the dart of hatred is stuck in the heart.”

responses a person may have, be it shock at the unexpected incident, fearfulness of losing her daughter, or anger at the driver. This observation is present in the Buddhist analysis of anger, where it is said that, “As this sharp pain wells up, . . . wrath wells up against one’s will”.³⁶ As discussed earlier, where we perceive some pain, anger can often be the result. Yet, the Buddhist view goes a step further to claim that an angry reaction brings with it a pain of its own. For instance, *Vism IX 22* asks us to consider the following:

“Suppose an enemy has hurt you now in what is his domain, why try yourself as well to hurt your mind? — That is not his domain.”

What appears to be suggested here is that there are, in fact, *two* episodes of pain in the phenomenology of anger. The first pain is engendered by harms — physical or otherwise — done by another person, while the second pain is felt while being angry (and never felt locally, like when you stub your toe) i.e. mental pain.³⁷ In other words, anger is self-afflictive. Therefore, it is not inevitable. This is why *Vism IX, 24* cautions us against anger, for fear that we end up “like a man who wants to throw dust at another against the wind and only covers himself with it”. Although we cannot thoroughly avoid all kinds of pain (appetites and sickness are the least *everyone* has to face), which may be one that occasions anger, but the latter pain can be eschewed (through practice) by gaining control over our responses to circumstances that would ordinarily constitute such occasions. Thus, the kind of pain accompanied with anger and identified by Buddhists is not caused, or at least not *directly* caused, by anyone else but the man’s anger; the occasion of anger is painful, but the anger itself causes pain in its own right.

³⁶ *BCA* 6.23

³⁷ This distinction between localised feeling i.e. sensation and mental feeling, which is recognised in contemporary philosophy (e.g. Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*, 14-15), is also made in some Buddhist texts. For example, in Sallatha Sutta (*SN* 36.6) it is said that a well-instructed Buddhist would not feel mental pain despite physical discomfort.

3.2 Anger and pleasure

Having discussed the painful experience of anger, now we turn to an opposing feeling associated with anger — pleasure. In *SN I 1:71*, anger is described as having a “poisoned root and honeyed tip.” This symbolises two opposing qualities of anger that can be dangerous yet so tempting.

Interestingly enough, such a description is strikingly similar to that of Aristotle’s account, which quotes it from *The Iliad*, writing: “Far sweeter than dripping honey down the throat it spreads in men’s hearts.”³⁸ Whether it is a mere coincidence or there was actually a shared culture, what we can take from both accounts is how they acknowledge the pleasure that we may derive from anger. But as sweet and delightful as honey is, it certainly makes the poisoned root even more dangerous for the Buddhist as sweetness is apparently addictive, so much so that knowing its side effects, many people still can’t divorce from wanting to taste it.³⁹ Pleasure feeling has that effect on most of us — we continue desiring it despite some pain that comes with it.

Let us dwell on the metaphor “poisoned root and honeyed tip” for a moment as it gives us insight into the experience in relation to anger. The root of a plant is long-standing and essential, but the ‘tip’ i.e. the fruit, is seasonal and inessential. The fruit is often the bit which tempts us, yet there can be no fruit without the roots. The reverse is false: a plant may have roots and no fruit. This suggests that the Buddhist conception of anger sees it as necessarily painful, yet ‘seasonally’ pleasurable. The variety and strength of the metaphors used in the Buddhist texts seem to be carefully chosen, effectively conveying anger’s connection with pleasure and pain. When metaphors are various and powerful, it requires more imaginative engagement with descriptions of such experience, which in turn stirs more of

³⁸ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 2.

³⁹ Such as those seventeenth century French royals who were afflicted by teeth cavities or current obesity problem in the modern world. There are many interesting, but not so pleasant facts, about producing and consuming sugar in Walvin, *Sugar*. Once, the comedian Bob Mortimer also remarked on the show *Would I Lie to You?* that he had lost many teeth due to his habit of adding 17 spoons of sugar in a cup of tea. Given much affliction, he still kept consuming sugar that way that he lost several teeth.

our feelings. In addition, the deadliness of the poison metaphor suggests that the experience is extremely unpleasant for them (even if it does have an associated fleeting joy). Again, Buddhist philosophers are trying to emphasise the extent of the unpleasantness of the experience of anger to their audience; given the fact that the reference to the pleasure of anger is seemingly singular, it would also appear that they are equally keen to downplay its more pleasant side.

The honey metaphor for anger is found in a Pāli sutta, and not repeated in our other main subsequent sources, including Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Śikṣāsamuccaya, Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, and Candrakīrti's *Madhyāmakāvatāra*. Considering this context, Buddhist philosophers after the Pāli sutta tradition seem to be reluctant to admit that an angry person can also experience a pleasurable feeling. Perhaps this is because of the reason that is suggested above i.e. that anger is not essentially a pleasurable experience, but it is essentially painful. This is also why we see a multitude of pain metaphors reappearing across times and traditions. Or it could be the case that, even though they acknowledged it, it did not serve their aim — namely, to convince us of the negative effects of anger. In other words, it might be a pragmatic decision taken for pedagogical reasons. In any case, the accounts show that Buddhist philosophers stress the painful feeling that anger causes us more than they do its pleasure.

Although pleasure is a contingent affect in anger, it might as well be asked why we sometimes enjoy getting angry. Perhaps, just like Aristotle's theory, they may find pleasure from anticipating revenge.⁴⁰ Whether one is actually capable of actually obtaining revenge (the target might be too powerful to fancy such action done, for example) is irrelevant as she doesn't have to succeed it to enjoy it and she can still hope that something bad could happen to him (further discussed in 3.3) In fact, a Buddhist source suggests something along those lines. In *AN* 7:64, it indicates that the pleasure we could find in anger is the thought or wish that an enemy suffers. Still, the

⁴⁰ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 2.

after-effect when one's anticipation is actualised is certainly more pleasurable. This is where it looks potentially dangerous to the Buddhists. One of the problems of pleasure for them is how it is powerful in luring us to seek something we find pleasurable. The more one is drawn to pleasure, the more driven one may want to actualise the thought i.e. to exact revenge to savour the 'honey'. This explanation can also apply to other actions that offer some sort of release such as screaming or kicking the air. For this can simply be a physiological pleasure response closely built in with anger for evolutionary reasons. This apparent connection between pain, pleasure and desire will be explored further in the following section.

3.3 Anger as conative

Anger has a desiderative aspect. It desires something. This characteristic of anger can be seen from the fact (relating to the discussion in 3.2) that an angry person is disturbed by the emotion and *wants* to act upon it. Anger seeks to satisfy itself, which may include bringing about certain actions or the occurrence of certain events, such as getting back at the person who harms you, some disaster befalling the person who harmed them, or simply receiving apologies, after which such disturbance subsides. Buddhists also recognise that in anger there is a desire, a state of dissatisfaction that needs something to be appeased. In many cases in the Buddhist texts, anger is *defined by* the desire to harm (such as when Nāgasena explains that the Buddha is free from anger as the ocean is free from the desire to harm).⁴¹ So the question that can be asked is: what is it that could occur to satiate my desire and allow my anger to subside? Perhaps more narrowly: what do Buddhist philosophers think that anger desires?

In some Buddhist accounts, they indicate that anger is appeased by the wrongdoer's suffering. In *AN* 7:64, a list of seven things we wish to befall our transgressor is laid out; if these things happen, it leaves us feeling satisfied. The list consists in wishing that one's enemy looks unattractive, loses some sleep, fails in what she does, acquires no wealth, nor achieves

⁴¹ *Mil* IV 3, 39

fame, has no friends, and goes to hell! The Buddha's intention in this account, however, is not about what an angry person wants, but to stress the negative consequences that she would inevitably meet — thus if our enemy is angry at us, they will suffer these fates because of their own doings, not from our malicious wishes. This is also expressed by Śāntideva, “Suppose something unpleasant does befall your rival. Would your satisfaction make it happen again? It will not happen without a cause, merely by your wishing it.”⁴² Likewise, if we respond with anger, such affliction will turn to ourselves.

Of course, the manners of harm are not necessarily limited to what have been listed in the Buddhist text and delineated above. We should not assume that people cannot or do not want other bad things beyond this list to happen to their enemy. As a matter of fact, it by no means exhausts all the possibilities of people's wishes to harm the wrongdoers when they get angry. But whatever wishes they may be, it is acknowledged that a typical reaction of one who has been offended is the desire to see our enemies afflicted by some kind of pain. In other words, it is a desire for revenge (as opposed to a desire to harm which is initiated by the agent and not considered a retaliation). Note the distinction between a *desire for* and an actual *act of* revenge. You may contemplate a revenge for thirty years without exacting it yourself. If you act upon it, your act is done out of vengeance and it becomes actual revenge. But for what we are talking about in the case of anger, merely the ill wish suffices. This allows you to be satisfied when unfortunate events fall upon your target.⁴³

Again, this shares similarities with Aristotle's conception of anger, whose definition includes a desire to seek revenge.⁴⁴ More recently, William Blake's poem *A Poison Tree* draws a visible line between anger and the kind of unintended revenge in which ills befall our enemies by telling the story of a pent-up anger that gives rise to a poisoned apple, eventually causing the

⁴² *BCA* 6.87

⁴³ Trudy Govier offers some examples that distinguish the myriad nuances revolving 'revenge' in *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 2-3.

⁴⁴ *Rhetoric* II. ii. 2.

death of an enemy. The poem opens with lines which advise on what happens when anger is expressed, and what happens when it is not:

*I was angry with my friend
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.*

However, at the end of the poem we see that the anger has grown into an apple tree, which bears poisoned fruit. When his enemy took the apple from the tree, Blake writes of his pleasure at seeing the consequences of his anger:

*And into my garden stole
When the night had veil'd the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.*

Note that Blake writes of being 'glad' to see his poisoned foe. For Blake, then, anger is the perfect ingredient for the dish of revenge. However, in this instance it isn't clear that Blake has taken any particular action to bring about the death of his foe (if anything, it appears to be a result of his foe's further actions), he simply allows his anger to grow, and what follows is the death of an enemy.

The desire that something bad happens to the person you are angry with, especially with *enemies*, seem entirely typical, whether those bad things happen because of actions taken yourself or they are simply what befalls them by chance. But for the same thing to happen to our loved ones seems unthinkable. Look at how Blake contrasts his treatment of friend and foe; one was spared his anger but the other was killed. People tend to draw this line between friends and foes. Śāntideva also makes an observation on this disparate treatment: "suffering, humiliation, harsh words, and disgrace: these we desire neither for ourselves nor our loved ones; but for our enemies

it is the reverse.”⁴⁵ This disparity urges us to consider whether *all* anger desires harm to happen to the wrongdoer.

Perhaps more common and more often do we find ourselves getting angry with family and friends than with ‘enemies’, but we appear to sometimes have a different way of dealing with them. A popular solution is demanding an apology or some form of acknowledgement that they were in the wrong, just like how Blake telling his friend supposedly wanting him to recognise his anger. But are apologies entirely harmless? I think it could be argued otherwise. An apology is an act of admitting our past wrongdoings. Doing so requires us to humble ourselves before the person to whom we apologise. Notable synonyms for ‘humble’ as a verb include ‘humiliate’, ‘degrade’ and ‘debase’ — an apology involves lowering one’s estimation of oneself in relation to another. In this sense, at least, our self-esteem is harmed. A demand for an apology is, therefore, arguably a desire that causes harm to the person with whom we are angry. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a feigned or genuine apology, whether they really feel regretful or not, because the expression of it is what lowers them.

And what about simply telling of our anger to the subject? This one is trickier as it appears as if we don’t want anything from the wrongdoer but an acknowledgement. To be sure, an acknowledgement must have some purpose. For an explanation for this, I think we should return to the point about pain. Typically we respond to pain in the manner of ‘pushing’, e.g. by turning away from it, retreating, or avoiding it (and the opposite is true of pleasure). In Buddhism, we can think of pleasure and pain in the sense of likes and dislikes respectively, which is more of disposition than deliberation, thus, for example, some people can find pleasure in physical pain because they *like* it. Pain prompts us to try to end or destroy whatever we think causes the pain. The methods to stop it can be varied. In this case, the friend’s wrong may damage their relationship or cause some tension between them, which is perhaps more painful than the pain that occasions

⁴⁵ *BCA* 6.11.

his anger. Telling his friend can be a way to reach a mutual understanding and reparation of their friendship, hence ending the pain.

I argue that understanding anger thus gives us a better picture of the Buddhist notion of *dveṣa*. Let me remind you that, as discussed early on, *dveṣa* — a kind of negative afflictive emotion — associates with various ‘emotions’ from anger and hatred to irritation and annoyance. While contemporary philosophers tend to distinguish these conceptual cousins from one another, Buddhist philosophers see them as manifestations of the same poisonous root, *viz.* *dveṣa*. As such, a desire to harm those who cause pain to us is not sufficient. *Dveṣa* is manifested in the form of ‘opposition’.⁴⁶ In terms of how these harms manifest themselves, irritation and annoyance might be associated more closely with avoidance behaviour than with seeking revenge. When something irritates us, we might walk away from the source of irritation, or if a person irritates us, we may simply stop talking to them. In other words you sever ties to the source of unpleasantness by retreating, but it doesn’t seem to involve the desire to harm it. However, we might sometimes act more positively to stop an irritation — by retorting to the person who irritates us, or by swatting the insect, etc. This kind of positive action isn’t done out of anger in the sense we’re familiar with, yet the outward manifestation of irritation here is very close to outward manifestations of anger, and borne of a desire to stop the unpleasant sensation.

To be precise, due to unpleasantness of, and discontent concerning, the state of affairs, there’s a desire to put an end to such feelings. What we often do in order to ‘put an end to’ these feelings is we harm, destroy, or avoid that which we take to be the source of pain, which can be persons, things, or states of affairs. Again, this requires an appraisal of the situation. If we take another person to be the cause, while feeling unhappy, we may

⁴⁶ Padmasiri De Silva thinks that, according to Buddhist psychology, *dveṣa* or *dosa* is a kind of ‘avoidance desire’ i.e. a desire to turn away from what we don’t like. He explains of the desire, “If we wish to avoid a situation or a person that we dislike, and we cannot do so, there is excited in us an urge to destroy, harm, fight, etc.” See De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, 52.

harm her so she stops causing the pain, or in anticipation she will not cause us pain again. Alternatively, although being angry, we may ask her nicely, just like the way we normally deal with loved ones. It will be clear in Chapter 2 that the definition of anger that requires a desire to harm another *agent* will not suffice for eliminativist Buddhists who argue for all kinds of anger (which includes similar but milder versions of these attitudes) to be eliminated i.e. not just anger directed towards agents, but also anger that is directed towards an object or an event. It is towards the directedness of anger that we now turn.

3.4 Anger and intentionality

Another aspect of the experience of anger that is worth turning our attention to is that of the intentionality of anger: the notion that anger is ‘about’ something, or directed at some object in the world. Related to this discussion is the distinction between anger as an emotional response, and anger as a mood. I will offer some thoughts on this distinction here, though we will see that it will not play a key role in Buddhist philosophy as they are rather seen as reinforcing each other.

Anger, it is often pointed out, appears to be directed at a particular object (e.g. a friend’s offensive joke). More broadly, it is said that anger *refers to*, or *is about*, objects, persons, or events in the world.⁴⁷ Colloquially, we say ‘I’m angry with my sister’, ‘I’m angry with myself’, ‘I’m angry with the system’, ‘I’m angry that the train is late’, and so on. This kind of intentionality can be seen in Aristotle’s description of anger in *The Nicomachean Ethics* when he says, “The man who is angry *at* the right things and *with* the right people.”⁴⁸ It is present in Buddhist texts too: *BCA* 6.22, 39, for example, suggests that we get angry *at* other people for doing harm to us.⁴⁹ The way anger is described above will, I feel, be familiar to everyone. If a friend tells us they are angry, the natural questions to ask them would be

⁴⁷ Or in *some* world, perhaps, we might be angry at objects, persons or events in a fictional world too.

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 72–73 (1125b32). Emphases are mine.

⁴⁹ “I don’t feel angry *towards* bile and the like, even though they *cause intense suffering*.” Emphases are mine.

‘What about?’ or ‘With whom?’ The proximate cause which occasions anger, however, is not necessarily what anger is about or aims at. Someone might have deliberately parked in front of your driveway, although ordinarily our anger is directed at the person or the car, it can also instead be directed at the passenger sitting next to you instead. It is *about* an obstructive situation but it is aimed *at* a different thing. This means that anger can be ‘misdirected’ from what appears to cause annoyance to some innocent objects.

The observation that anger is intentional seems typically correct but not particularly revealing. A more interesting observation to make might be that, despite the common opinion that intentionality marks the difference between emotions and moods, anger doesn’t *always* demonstrate this kind of intentionality. Sometimes we are *simply angry* — we might just wake up one day feeling that way. I think that this is where we can draw a distinction between *anger as an emotion*, and *anger as a mood*.

It might be tempting to conceive of the difference between emotions and moods as one based on intensity — that an emotion like anger is more intense than a mood, such as when we are depressed. However, this doesn’t seem entirely accurate. As Colombetti points out, “emotional episodes vary considerably in intensity, ranging from the mild to the overpowering, across and within emotion categories; likewise for moods”.⁵⁰ Anxiety, although a mood, can be severely crippling; amusement, although an emotion, might be mild. A more promising candidate for distinguishing between moods and emotions might be their duration: emotions like anger appear to be fleeting, episodic, whereas moods like depression can persist for days, weeks, months, or even years. One reason for this difference in duration might be the apparent *lack of* intentionality that is characteristic of moods, yet common for emotions. If emotions are directed at the world, it is presumably much easier to ascertain what must be done to satisfy our emotional response of anger — that we get revenge, or harm our enemy (see above). However,

⁵⁰ Colombetti, *The Feeling Body*, 77.

moods do not appear to be intentional states in this way: we do not feel low *about* anything, we simply feel low. But, I wish to argue, there are times where anger has this character too, and thus anger might also be seen as a mood.

We often describe people as ‘cranky’ or ‘irritable’. But what do we mean when we use these terms? Someone who is irritable is easily annoyed, or (we might say) *quick to anger*. As we have seen, the Buddhist approach to anger doesn’t really draw a distinction between annoyance and anger — they are both manifestations of *dvesa*. And, I feel, this conceptual blurring actually captures our experience of anger, because sometimes we do simply wake up feeling angry. Some philosophers have attempted to argue that this kind of anger still has certain degree of intentionality, because in such a mood we are angry at ‘everything’, or ‘one’s whole life’, or ‘the world’.⁵¹ While there are numerous accounts of intentionality with which such arguments fit, those are not the same accounts that we have linked to emotion (i.e. it is about *specific* things, not everything or none at all). Invoking a new kind of intentionality in order to accommodate moods as intentional states seems to be an *ad hoc* solution, which likely undermines what seems like the relatively safe characterisation of emotion given above. If we take the same approach to moods that I take here to emotions, i.e. examining the *experience* of moods, we can probably avoid discussions of intentionality altogether and look more directly at the way that moods affect us. And, I think, the key observation here is in the way that they colour and shape our *emotional* responses to the world.

When I am in a cheerful mood, I respond to the world in particular ways — I smile more at strangers, I brush off unfortunate events with ease, and so on. When I am irritable, I snap at those around me over small issues, and smack my computer monitor on the side when the machine runs slowly. My mood seems to ‘facilitate’ the emotional responses I have to the world (and the reverse is perhaps also true, i.e. that repeated emotional responses

⁵¹ See Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*, 39-50; Goldie, *The Emotions*, 143-151; Ben-Ze’ev, “The Thing Called Emotion”.

might induce a certain mood; see below). When I am in an angry mood, I'm not angry at any particular person, event or object, yet I might easily become angry at *any* particular person, event or object. It seems to me that when we describe someone as in an irritable or angry mood, what we're partly describing is their proneness to angry emotional episodes, or their tendency to experience the world via anger. This seems to concur with the way Buddhists see the 'roots', which include greed, hatred, and ignorance, are salient qualities of the different emotions. They are the governing qualities that define the whole experience, just as Maria Heim puts it: "It colors and frames the rest of one's experience".⁵²

The connection between emotions and moods is explained by Colombetti via an analogy with climate and weather.⁵³ A given climate zone (e.g. tropical, Mediterranean) is characterised by specific conditions like the average rainfall, humidity and/or temperature, and these remain stable for long periods of time. Within these climate zones, the weather is changeable from day-to-day; some days will see rainfall, others sunshine, and so on. Likewise with moods and emotions: moods are protracted, and characterised by a tendency to induce certain changeable emotional responses. However, Colombetti also points out that some weather phenomena are only possible within certain climate zones. Again, she suggests, we can extend the analogy to moods and emotions: it is very difficult to be enthusiastic when we are in a grumpy mood. Moreover, dramatic shifts in the local weather patterns (for example, due to high levels of pollution) which then stabilise, bring about a change to that climate zone. Again, so with moods and emotions.

This, I think, is why Buddhism advocates so strongly against the negative emotions like anger, and suggests that it needs to be rooted out. For Buddhists, episodes of emotions and one's character are closely connected. They go so far as to call a person who gets angry even once an *angry person*.⁵⁴

⁵² Heim, "Buddhism," 23.

⁵³ Colombetti, *The Feeling Body*.

⁵⁴ Of course, they admit different degrees of an angry person, too. They liken a person who often gets angry and whose anger persists for a duration to a 'line etched in stone' which is

That is because an occasion of anger has to be based on one's disposition (which also involves certain beliefs, feelings, desires, etc.) In turn, allowing oneself to respond angrily on an emotional level can bring about a more permanent shift in character, and the consequences of this are dire (see Chapter 2). The argument I develop in defence of eliminativism in Chapter 4 will share a similar character to this observation of the effects of moods — I will go on to suggest that eschewing anger can fundamentally alter the way we experience the world, and that this way should be preferred.

The experience of anger, then, is one which can be pleasant, but is generally unpleasant. It often aims at something specific, desiring to eliminate what is obstructive. However, it does not always possess an intentional character, and can actually be characterised as a mood if it takes on a certain form. This mood can facilitate further emotional episodes of anger, and these can develop into a more stable character. But how does this character, i.e. that of the angry person, outwardly manifest itself at the physiological level? I turn to this issue now.

4. Anger Unleashed

After examining the experience from the subjective perspective, it seems sensible that now we look at the observable aspect of anger, i.e. how anger is expressed.⁵⁵ Anger, like other emotions, is psychophysical. This means that despite being essentially an attitude, anger frequently co-occurs with physical reactions. This intimacy between the psyche and the physical is no doubt striking in the case of anger. I have mentioned in 3.1 that anger is often accompanied by physiological changes such as increased heart rates, or blood pumping throughout the body, but those are bodily changes that are not directly observable to an outsider (i.e. they maybe observable via

'not easily erased by wind and water'. On the other hand, those whose anger doesn't persist long are likened to a line etched in the ground (*AN* 3:132).

⁵⁵ It may be pointed out indeed that 'expressions' of anger can be distinguished in terms of physiological changes and behaviour or action. For some may argue that such physical changes as increased heart rates and so on necessarily accompany anger and so is recognised as involuntary expression, as opposed to voluntary action. However, the distinction seems absent in the Buddhist literature, perhaps, because it does not play any significant role in their ethical discussion which aims to eradicate anger in all forms anyway.

tools like stethoscopes or heart rate monitors). Unless the surging blood on your face gives it away, anger could go unnoticed. This section examines characteristic expressions of anger — from merely physiological changes to actions and behaviours.

Our body suffers typical physiological effects when we are angry. Some telltale signs of it, as Seneca observes, include quivering lips, pressing teeth, heavy and frequent sighing, and change of colour.⁵⁶ Altogether it certainly forms a threatening look and communicates something to other people. An angry face is very distinctive and easily recognisable. In a recent study, Paul Ekman claims that angry face is recognisable even across cultures.⁵⁷ This thus has a very powerful communicative effect. However, Buddhists rarely make an observation simply in terms of physiological changes, perhaps except when they describe them in evaluative terms i.e. that an angry person is ‘ugly’, which I believe is their preferred perception of facial expressions that are supposed to be threatening.

Rather than merely bodily reactions, actions in relation to anger are observed, notably those we typically see as violent and aggressive. This includes verbal and physical abuse, and in the most extreme cases, killing. Although these individual actions may lead to grave harm to others, they do not seem to play a significant part in the discussion in Buddhist texts. Those actions are not condemned for being constituted by violence as such. Rather, they are emphasised as a sorry result from getting angry, a result that is precipitated by an impulse to act without concerns for right and wrong.⁵⁸ Buddhists pay more attention to treating anger in terms of character, tendency, or disposition. Sometimes it exhibits itself clearly. For example, in Buddhaghosa’s advice on meditation preparation, he distinguishes people in accordance with their temperament. The following

⁵⁶ *De Ira* I. 1.3-4

⁵⁷ Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*.

⁵⁸ Interesting enough, in *AN* 7:64, the moral wrongs the angry person commits are decidedly reprehensible and can be seen as self-inflicted. Killing one’s mother and oneself, who are dearest to ourselves, is a result of poor judgement that in the end makes us suffer most.

description is observed to be the behaviour of such character dominated by anger and its kin:

“One of hating temperament walks as though he were digging with the points of his feet, puts his foot down quickly, lifts it up quickly, and his step is dragged along. [The stance] of one of hating temperament is rigid ... One of hating temperament spreads his bed hastily anyhow; with his body flung down he sleeps with a scowl. When woken, he gets up quickly and answer as though annoyed....grasps the broom tightly, and he sweeps uncleanly and unevenly with a harsh noise, hurriedly throwing up the sand on each side... When one of hating temperament sees even a slightly displeasing visible object, he avoids looking long as if he were tired, he picks out trivial faults, discounts genuine virtues, and when departing, he does so without regret as if anxious to leave.”⁵⁹

Again, it appears that the Buddhist analysis of anger is consistent with Colombetti’s account we have just discussed above regarding a treatment of emotions — here, anger — in terms of emotion and mood, i.e. contrasting the episodic and explosive nature of one, and the continuous and static nature of the other. Buddhists perhaps agree with Colombetti that someone who gets (episodically) angry habitually will form such a temperament, which in turn induces more episodic anger. I suppose this account is typically the kind of case in which we will judge someone an angry person. We expect that their behaviour has some indication of their proneness to anger; they walk fast, always appear in haste, seem careless, and get annoyed easily as if they are going to snap anytime.

But, in contrast, an observation of an angry person in *MN* 21 is the opposite. This time, the angry person always appears calm, no indications (as described by Buddhaghosa) are observed. The story, which belongs to the same sutta of the *Simile of the Saw*, is told of a nimble and clever maid

⁵⁹ *Vism* III, 88-89, 91, 94

who works for a young lady named Vedehikā. The lady is known for being gentle and peaceful, while the maid has always done her work impeccably. The maid somehow wants to test Vedehikā, thinking, “How is it now, while she does not show anger, is it nevertheless actually present in her or is it absent? Or else is it just because my work is neat that my lady shows no anger though it is actually present in her?”⁶⁰ The next morning, the clever maid deliberately wakes up late and fails to do her job properly. As she finds out, the lady Vedehikā shows her well-hidden side, becoming more growly and physically violent as days pass in which she tests her out. In this account, not all angry people have to show such typical behaviour. This is perhaps a good reason to focus on anger’s dispositions rather than its outward symptoms.

In normal usage, we tend to distinguish between angry people (i.e. those who habitually get angry and are more likely to get angry), and people overwhelmed by anger (i.e. those who have episodes of anger). The latter leaves out an implication of habit and tendency. This distinction appears to be absent in the Buddhist texts: those who *rarely* become angry, but *still* get angry, are treated as angry persons. While they may be different in terms of degrees of likeliness for having episodic anger, it is not significant enough for Buddhists to address such a distinction. Rather than different, they are seen as more similar in terms of the *potential* for them to become angry.

So, given the characterisation of anger and angry people above, we may then ask ‘What distinguishes angerless people from angry people?’. In section 2, we saw that two factors have to be met: an external situation comes together with our perception. The key difference, according to Buddhism, lies in the perception; imagine the exact same situation but where two people react to it differently; we find desirability and undesirability in the external factors based on our historical mental experience. In the case of Vedehikā, she is presented with two different situations: one orderly and in control, the other untidy and resistant, and

⁶⁰ MN 21

obviously she prefers the former to the latter, for whatever reason. Vedehikā does not change the way she sees the situation to become angry, but the situation changes into one that disturbs her. She has managed to establish a reputation as a gentle person only because the world operates in ways that have been so agreeable to her. As such, how one responds to undesirable situations is what differentiates angry from angerless people. This is made possible by a certain perception of oneself and the world that does not find unpleasantness or harmfulness in the situation, and that is the aim for the Buddhists to achieve. This perception is a significant part of the Buddhist argument in favour of elimination of anger, which we shall see in the chapters that follow.

A person like Vedehikā is not angerless. Although her anger is not always observable, it will emerge when she finds something displeasing or of which she disapproves. As the Buddha explains:

“So too, *bhikkhus*, some *bhikkhu* is extremely gentle, extremely meek, extremely peaceful, so long as disagreeable courses of speech do not touch him. But it is when disagreeable courses of speech touch him that it can be understood whether that *bhikkhu* is really kind, gentle, and peaceful.”⁶¹

This is not merely an issue about the discrepancy between experiencing and expressing anger, or observable and unobservable behaviour. It is about the latent quality of anger which is rooted in our mental and emotional character. As such, rather than the root cause that we need to deal with, episodes of anger, as the Buddhists see it, are a symptom of something more problematic in our mind. As long as the root cause is left untreated, anger will emerge again when it finds something displeasing like the lady Vedehikā. This is probably why the Buddhists do not talk much about consequences of angry action *per se*, but rather about actions *motivated* by anger. Thus expressing or acting out of anger in any way, albeit typically with aggression, is a serious concern as it is a result of flawed character and a

⁶¹ MN 21

cause that tends to reinforce the character. Buddhaghosa's categorisation of people according to their temperament is much more relevant for this reason: it is part of a meditative scheme which is meant, partly, to rid oneself of anger.

We need to bear in mind, then, that the main focus of the Buddhists is anger as a motivation. The gap between *feeling* anger and *acting* angrily is important in this matter. Angry feeling does not always lead to angry behaviour, and conversely, angry behaviour does not always indicate angry feeling. While angry behaviour such as chastising, yelling, assaulting, etc. may be recognisable as aggression, some aggressive actions are not done *out of* anger. A woman in an abusive relationship may kill her partner out of fear, for example. So violence is not necessarily an angry act, it can even be motivated by some positive emotions, according to some Buddhist sources.⁶² (This is an important point that will appear again in Chapter 3.) On the other hand, acting out of anger is not necessarily violent. I can get angry and demand an apology politely from an annoying child. As such, we have to distinguish carefully between angry behaviour or action (i.e. overt expressions that we recognise as fitting the angry phenomenological state) and an action motivated by anger (i.e. expressions that results from angry phenomenological state). When the Buddhist talks about angry action, what they mean is not simply the overt display that fits the description of anger, but also the motivation of anger.

Conclusion

Working across cultures and linguistic traditions, we have seen, can pose problems. However, by focusing on the phenomenological aspects of occasions of anger, as they appear in the Buddhist texts, we can begin to overcome some of these problems and find a starting point for our analysis. We have seen that occasions of anger typically involve instances in which

⁶² For example, the story of the compassionate ship captain in the *Upāyakaṣāya Sūtra* who made a compassionate killing by killing the man who intended to rob and kill all the traders aboard the ship.

we, or something we value, suffer harm. The angry response usually demonstrates a number of key phenomenological aspects: painfulness (anger is unpleasant) or, on rare occasions, pleasure (anger is sometimes enjoyable); anger is also experienced as conative i.e. it desires something, such as revenge, or an apology; relatedly, then, anger is experienced as intentional i.e. it is 'about', or directed at, someone or something. However, I have also suggested that this latter observation need not always be true – anger can also be a mood, and this mood can effect the way we come to perceive the world. Because of this character, anger can manifest itself as both physical symptoms and behaviour. However, the Buddhist is primarily concerned with its mental or psychological effects, rather than its outward symptoms. This sets up the scope of the challenge for the Buddhist Eliminativist – not simply preventing angry actions, but preventing anger from arising altogether. I turn to their arguments in the next chapter.

Chapter Two:
BUDDHIST ARGUMENTS FOR THE
ELIMINATION OF ANGER

Introduction

Having seen what is involved in anger in Chapter 1, we now turn to an examination of the Buddhist arguments against anger. The arguments essentially fall under three broad claims: (1) that our actual experience of anger shows it to be both unpleasant and unhelpful, (2) that anger impairs our moral development by hindering the cultivation of specific virtues, and (3) that anger follows from an epistemic or cognitive error. These latter two claims are intimately connected to the Buddhist notions of enlightenment and happiness, thus section 1 outlines these ideas in order to provide appropriate background to the Buddhist arguments against anger. The Buddhist notion of happiness differs from the hedonistic conception of happiness (i.e. as pleasure), and instead bases happiness in the development of virtues. In this way, anything which impedes the development of virtues leads us away from happiness and towards suffering. This connects, in turn, to two different aspects of enlightenment: moral and epistemic. The former concerns the development of virtues (and the eschewing of vice), and the second concerns achieving true understanding of the world. Enlightenment requires both aspects to be achieved, thus claims (2) and (3) above relate to these different aspects of enlightenment. Claim (1), by contrast, is not unique to Buddhism — this claim has been defended in Western literature, but is also present in Buddhist thought. This claim is pragmatic in nature — it concerns *ordinary* happiness, since it applies beyond the Buddhist approach to anger. However, as we will see below, this claim has been disputed in recent treatments of the topic of anger, essentially leading to two distinct positions on anger: Moderationism and Eliminativism, which we outline in brief in section 2.⁶³ Moderationism is the position that at least some kind of

⁶³ This classification is owed to Peter Verneze's paper "Moderation or the Middle Way?" and Christopher Gowans' "The Elimination of Anger."

anger is sometimes good or right. Eliminativism, by contrast, holds that all anger is not good and thus should be eliminated. I will argue in subsequent chapters that the Buddhist approach to anger offers us stronger reasons to eliminate it altogether, contrary to the Moderationist position that seeks to defend some kind(s) of anger.

With the necessary background work done in the first two sections of this chapter, sections 3 to 5 delineate the arguments enumerated above, providing an overview of the arguments the Buddhist offers against anger. Clearly, this traditional interpretation of Buddhism — that we should eliminate anger — has not persuaded everyone, as the Moderationist view is currently *en vogue*. Thus, this chapter sets the stage for an analysis of moderationist arguments in chapter 3. However, before we can properly consider my own response to those, one final piece of background context is required — the Buddhist view of suffering. Section 6 introduces and outlines the Buddhist understanding of suffering, which helps us to see precisely why they feel that anger ought to be eliminated altogether. With this background in place, we are positioned to begin building the central arguments of this thesis in the remaining chapters.

1. Happiness and Enlightenment

According to Buddhism, anger can be considered harmful in a *teleological* sense; that is, anger harms certain ends that are held to be good. In other words, the Buddhist argument in favour of eliminating anger is, in part, grounded on its effects and consequences *vis-à-vis* such goals (see section 2). It will be a useful starting point for us, then, to outline precisely what the Buddhist sees as the ultimate goals in life — once we have established these, we can begin to outline and understand the three main kinds of arguments against anger.

It is well known that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is *enlightenment*, or a cessation of suffering. Buddhists claim that anger is harmful precisely because it inhibits one's progress to enlightenment (in various ways, as we

shall see below). However, while the Buddhist tries to convince us that enlightenment is what we should aim for, it nonetheless may not be the goal we want for ourselves. It is probably not mistaken to say that most people have a more mundane goal than enlightenment — namely, *happiness*. Even so, the Buddhist case against anger also applies to those who want to be happy because, according to Buddhism, happiness is another desirable goal harmed by anger. I think these two goals, enlightenment and happiness, can be the basis for our analysis of how anger is seen as a destructive emotion: anger is inappropriate because it impedes the pursuit of these desirable ends.

Although it is not possible within the confines of this thesis to give a full account and analysis of the Buddhist notion of happiness (particularly given that there is no singular account in the Buddhist literature, just as there is not in the Western literature on happiness), given its significance in relation to the Buddhist arguments against anger we must attempt to outline the central ideas therein. Happiness seems to be the most evident and basic desirable goal, not just for Buddhists, but for most human beings. Nevertheless, the notion itself raises a lot of problems, for what makes a person happy seems to vary considerably from one person to the next. Hedonists may find sensual pleasure fundamental to what it means to be happy, while others may insist on our participation in a more refined sense of happiness. What does it mean, then, when the Buddhists talk about happiness, and how does it relate to enlightenment?

Once again, to overcome language barriers, it is probably a good idea to start by identifying the term to which we are referring. It is the term *sukha*, for which ‘happiness’ is adopted as its translation here, and it is this kind of happiness that we often find as a general life pursuit for ordinary people.⁶⁴ *Sukha* varies in meaning slightly in different Buddhist contexts, but in the most common, conventional usage of the term it is characterised as a

⁶⁴ There is another term, *pīti* (or *prīti* in Sanskrit), that is close to *sukha* and so sometimes is translated as ‘happiness’. Both terms are sometimes referred together but not treated as exchangeable. See their subtle distinction in Appendix.

phenomenon of feeling.⁶⁵ To be precise, it is a pleasant feeling arising from sensual contact with the external world. It is the experience of enjoying agreeable objects such as seeing a beautiful landscape, tasting the food one likes, or smelling a nice fragrance. But the factors that give rise to the experience do not necessarily *originate from* sensational contact with the external world; they can spring from one's own mind as well. Another kind of *sukha* is often found in the meditative context in which it appears to arise at different levels of meditative progress.⁶⁶ For example, *SN* 12.23 indicates that *sukha* can be found *as a result of* tranquility of the mind and pervades the body, thus happiness in the Buddhist sense can be regarded as (stemming from) “a deep sense of serenity and fulfillment that pervades and underlies all [of our] emotional states.”⁶⁷ For that reason, it makes sense to equate happiness in the Buddhist sense with something like *wellbeing*. Despite different causes of *sukha*, it remains that the phenomenon is recognised as something to be *felt*. In other words, *sukha* is not only pleasure from sensations, but any experiences that contain pleasant feelings.

Nevertheless, there is one other notable use of the term. *Sukha* is occasionally used to describe the state of liberation as the highest happiness (*nibbānaparamam sukham*).⁶⁸ It is disputable how such a state should be understood: happiness of the highest intensity, or a categorically different kind of happiness. However, what we know for certain is that the state of liberation is said to be relieved of sensory pleasure. In that case, another option arises: it is simply a void of feeling albeit described as happiness.

⁶⁵ In a Buddhist categorisation of the mind, this element of feeling or sensation is called *vedanā* as opposed to other mental aggregates, namely perception (*saṃjñā/saññā*), mental formations (*saṃskāra/saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna/viññāṇa*). The affective quality of experience is classified into pleasant (*sukha*), painful (*dukkha*), and neutral (*adukkhamasukkha*, literally neither-pain-nor-pleasant).

⁶⁶ One finds such feeling across the early levels of concentrative absorption in which sensations are not yet abandoned. Steven Collins, relying on Pāli commentaries, explains that *sukha* as a result of Level 3 meditation is the highest level of meditation that still involves with sensation. He further explains that at Level 4 despite being said to be *sukha*, another type of happiness arises — *upekkha* or equanimity. This is not merely an absence of pleasurable and painful feelings, but a third kind of feeling that is peaceful and sublime. Ultimately at Level 9, i.e. *nirvana*, in which there is a cessation of perception and feeling, *sukha* is not a matter of feeling anymore. See Collins, *Nirvana: Concept, Imagery, Narrative*, 72-5.

⁶⁷ Ricard, *The Habits of Happiness*.

⁶⁸ For example, *Dhp* 203, 204.

While it's possible that the state can be characterised by either of the three cases, they are in fact not necessarily exclusive from one another, particularly the last possibility (void of feeling) that could be compatible with either of the former two (*sukha* of greatest degree and a totally different type of happiness). For a void of feeling may either give rise to the most intense feeling of happiness (in the sense of traditional *sukha*), or a different kind of happiness that is superior to *sukha* but indescribable due to a lack of vocabulary. Nevertheless, the first option should not be the likely phenomenon when considering that if there's a void of feeling, and if *sukha* involves feeling, then such state cannot be *sukha* in the traditional sense. So we are left with only three possibilities to think about the characteristic of enlightened state; a different kind of happiness, a void of feeling, or a void of feeling which then gives rise to a different kind of happiness. In any case, nirvanic *sukha* — or happiness that is not a feeling — is something unrecognisable for ordinary people and is not the supposed goal in this level of wellbeing.

So, how does happiness (in the Buddhist sense) connect to enlightenment? Again, the answer is rather complex, but we can outline the main points as follows. Despite being an independent goal, the goodness of happiness cannot be independent from enlightenment because if the latter is the ultimate good, any thing or action has its value determined in relation to the highest end. That is to say, something is good insofar as it is conducive to enlightenment. Therefore, if happiness is recognised as a desirable end, it has to be at least instrumental — if not necessary — to an attainment of enlightenment. Yet it is important to observe that enlightenment involves two key aspects: moral development and epistemic insight. Our moral development connects to happiness because, for the Buddhist, our moral development depends upon developing a specific set of virtues e.g. generosity, patience, loving-kindness etc. In developing these virtues, we also develop the capacity to perceive and experience the world in a new way (i.e. in a more generous, or patient etc., way; see Chapter 4), which in turn enhances our wellbeing as we come to avoid frustrations, confrontations etc. Epistemic insight, too, affords us enhanced wellbeing because it is only when

we truly understand the nature of the world that we can exercise our virtues fully. It is when we achieve both the moral and epistemic aspects that we attain enlightenment.

In this way, we can think of wellbeing as operating at two levels, as Christopher Gowans suggests: unenlightened wellbeing and enlightened wellbeing.⁶⁹ Our ordinary wellbeing may be thought of as a happy life for an unenlightened person. In contrast, the ultimate wellbeing is the perfect kind of life that is exemplified by enlightened beings. On this view, the important distinction of unenlightened (or *merely* happy) and enlightened life lies in the presence of suffering, or lack thereof. Because we know, at least, that the nature of being enlightened is an absence of suffering, we also know that an unenlightened life must be tainted by some level of suffering. To that extent, it makes sense to think that the less suffering there is, the happier the life it is, or that life *gets better* as one is reaching towards the ultimate goal that is a cessation of suffering. In other words, there are varying degrees of happiness available to an unenlightened being, but no ordinary happy life is comparable with being enlightened.

Given the essential quality of happiness is about feeling, pursuing the goal of an unenlightened life has limitations. Unlike the highest bliss, the kind of happiness that the unenlightened beings feel is as fleeting and fluctuating as everything else. Our nature dictates that the point at which our senses can be satisfied does not last. For example, even with food that is well-seasoned, we can still only enjoy it for as long as we are capable of eating it; too much of it will turn a delicious dish into a sickening one. It works similarly for other senses; no matter how good it is, one can't experience a certain thing repeatedly without getting numb to or sick of it. Pleasure can only last for a while, either because the nature of the thing we like changes (e.g. grapes are out of season now, so they are not as good as a few months ago), or our tastes change (e.g. I don't enjoy heavy metal anymore, I'm into K-Pop lately), or simply we have had enough of it, like

⁶⁹ Gowans, "Buddhist Well-Being."

food and sex — but only for now. And before long we will remember how good that experience was and crave for it again. Because of how short-lived this cycle is, we will always struggle as long as pleasurable feeling is our only goal. This is a form of suffering, which we will discuss in section 6 below. This is precisely why the Buddhist does not take happiness as the final goal. For *mere* happiness does not offer the complete absence of suffering. Yet, by striving for it one can become happier than others, and that already makes a lot of difference. From the Buddhist point of view there is a good reason why happiness makes for a suitable goal. The essential quality of *sukha*, i.e. pleasant feeling, is so simple and almost universally recognised as desirable. As most people have a leaning towards it, if anybody were to offer us a way to become happier, who wouldn't be tempted? This may be a tactic many moralists would use to persuade us to cultivate virtues they endorse. If we are convinced by this promise from the Buddhists, then we are already led, perhaps unknowingly, to actually work towards enlightenment.

Sukha should not, however, be understood as merely a pleasant feeling, as we noted above. The extensive Buddhist teaching which prescribes us how to behave would have become pointless if happiness could be attained just by doing whatever we find pleasurable. Nobody needs to be taught what we were born capable to do. Instead, the Buddhists have a prescriptive sense of happiness that we should aim for. Nāgārjuna enjoins us to understand *sukha* in terms of an elevated state (*abhyudaya*). While *abhyudaya* can also translate to 'happiness', the more common meaning of it is 'sunrise', while other meanings include 'increase', 'prosperity', 'good result' — the meanings that relate to a sense of elevation (with a formation of two prefixes, *abhi* and *ud*, which express an upward motion, hence implying superiority in rank, place, etc.)⁷⁰ This suggests how their sense of ordinary wellbeing involves more than merely self-gratification, which is undemanding and already embedded in our natural inclinations (although pleasant feelings are not *excluded* from this exalted experience). Therefore, this revised conception is only a starting point. More important is *how* to attain this state; Nāgārjuna

⁷⁰ The Institute of Indology and Tamil Studies, Cologne University, "Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries."

then promises us that such happiness can be found through faith in the teaching and possibility of enlightenment, and practicing moral disciplines in our ordinary lives.⁷¹

This approach to the greater form of *sukha* is not at all unrecognisable in other Buddhist sources. The early Buddhist canon and later commentaries generally agree that the way one can find happiness is by cultivating virtues such as faith, generosity, and ethical practices, for a start. And they even provide specific instructions to achieving them. For instance, there are cautions specifically for householders in the *suttas* to avoid killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and consuming intoxicating substances. There are also instructions for people to actively engage in acts of giving. Essentially, these are ways to avoid creating more suffering for yourself, as the less suffering you experience, the happier you get. This is because these are actions that concur with, or are conducive to, a cessation of suffering (explored more in Chapter 4). It is interesting to note that these are laid out as *suggestions*, rather than rules, for us to follow since, if we didn't follow, there would not be some external authority to punish us. However, failure to take up these suggestions would ensure that we would not be rewarded with the happiness we are after. In other words, the Buddhist motto is most likely to be "if you want to have happiness, work (as suggested) for it." This sort of pedagogical approach is important in shaping my own version of Buddhist eliminativist argument, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

These demands are not detached from daily lives. Householders, i.e. those who do not want to give up material pleasure (which should be dissolved at the level of ultimate well-being), can find a middle ground by incorporating these virtues while going about their business. We tend to believe wealth, family, and some sensual pleasures are part of wellbeing, and Buddhists do not turn away from such practical struggles either. Sources from across Buddhist traditions indicate that they recognise the pursuit of wellbeing as including a possession of wealth, respect, good friends, a long

⁷¹ Carpenter, "Aiming at Happiness, Aiming at Ultimate Truth."

and healthy life, and good rebirth.⁷² Still, the real wellbeing in Buddhism requires another condition. In many instances in the texts that recognise the desirable goals, the emphasis is actually placed on the other part of the discourse, namely the ways to attain them. For example, in *AN* 4.61 it says “May wealth come to me *righteously*,” and adds cases of “wealth that has gone to *good* use, that has been *properly* utilised and used for a *worthy* cause.”⁷³ In this sense, wellbeing is closely married to moral concerns. Consequently, one needs to be careful not to think that we can use whatever means to achieve these goals. Genuine happiness, for Buddhists, only comes with actions that are based on moral goods,⁷⁴ and this is what we should aim for.

These guidelines are in fact a part of the regime for enlightenment, leading both to happiness and an end of suffering. A prerequisite to a cessation of suffering is epistemological reorientation; that is, by understanding and internalising the nature of reality — as impermanent, interdependent, and lacking essential substance — and engaging with it accordingly. Such a view can be understood in the sense of *dharma*, which is about the ultimate truth or how things really are. Adopting this metaphysical position aids the development of moral virtues like patience and compassion, and thus in turn helps us to pursue actions which reduce suffering, enhance our wellbeing, and put us closer to enlightenment. We will explore the metaphysical picture underlying this epistemological reorientation in section 5 below, and we will come to see the same requirement that we adopt this metaphysical view applies to the elimination of anger in Chapter 4.

So, with these accounts of happiness and enlightenment set out, and their relationship established, we can start to turn our attention to the Buddhist arguments against anger. Although Buddhist commentators do not present their arguments in the way philosophers in Anglo-European

⁷² *AN* 4.61 ff.; *AN* 7.64; *MN* 135; *Dhp* XV (*Sukhavagga*); *Vism.* I 23; *BCA* VI 3-5.

⁷³ Emphases are mine.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the Noble Eightfold Path, which summarises practices that lead to liberation. It recommends us to do *right* on speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration, view, and resolve.

traditions are familiar with, I think we can still make sense of how they justify their Eliminativist position. What we shall see is that there are three main types of argument that the Buddhists raise against anger:

- (1) That our actual experience of anger shows it to be both unpleasant and unhelpful, thus harming our pursuit of happiness;
- (2) That anger impairs our moral development by hindering the cultivation of specific virtues, thus impairing our pursuit of the moral aspect of enlightenment, and;
- (3) That anger follows from an epistemic or cognitive error, thus stemming from (and reinforcing) a failure to attain the epistemic aspect of enlightenment.

These arguments may be more broadly characterised in two ways. The first two can be considered teleological arguments. This relies on the negative effects that anger has on certain desirable ends, happiness and enlightenment, with the latter being the ultimate end. However, I wish to suggest in this thesis, this kind of argument alone is not sufficient to compel the Buddhist to conclude that anger ought to be eliminated. As we shall see in section 2, before revisiting the view in depth in Chapter 3, an argument of a consequentialist nature like this can be offered for the opposite position — Moderationists insist that anger yields *positive* consequences. This argument for the Buddhist, however, could succeed if it could be grounded in the position that anger is intrinsically bad because it arises out of a misconception of reality, which is the third sort of argument, involving an epistemic failure. This claim is interlaced with the Buddhist notion of ‘no-self’ (*anātman*) and other related concepts such as the impermanent condition of things (*anicca*) and dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda* or *paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pali). When we fail to see the world from this metaphysical position, the suggestion goes, then we end up with a view of the world that leans on a sense of a substantial, static, independent self, which can be harmed (and thus angry) while, in fact, there’s no such thing to be harmed to begin with. This makes every instance of anger inappropriate and irrational, leaving no middle ground to allow even for a moderation of anger.

An initial problem might be thought to immediately arise from the characterisation just given — since the consequentialist arguments suggest the anger harms our prospects of happiness and liberation, but the second claims that no injury is actually done to ourselves by other people because there is no self to be harmed, then isn't there an apparent contradiction? Why doesn't the no-self assumption apply to both cases? The answer to this depends upon a complex Buddhist metaphysics that we cannot fully address within the scope of this thesis. However, we will see in Chapter 4 that there is a way to make sense of this issue. However, we must first detail an important distinction so far only hinted at, between *Eliminativism* and *Moderationism*. After doing this, we can begin to analyse their respective positions over the next two chapters.

2. Eliminativism and Moderationism

As is the case of most philosophical traditions with a long history, several notions in Buddhist philosophy that have been passed on and interpreted are not univocal. Anger is one of those. Certainly anger has been largely treated as a threat to the Buddhist path, but although some recognise the urgency to uproot such a toxic emotion, others contend that it can be useful and compatible with Buddhist teaching — in other words, the views within the tradition are torn between Eliminativism and Moderationism.

It would probably not be a surprise, even for people coming from a different tradition, to find out that the Buddhists generally disapprove of anger. But this conception is not peculiar to Buddhism, it is a generally accepted one and, in fact, is an opinion actually shared by moderationists and eliminativists (though they disagree on what one should aim to do with such anger). Although the eliminativist view is not as widely held as moderationism, in Buddhist hands it offers an alternative and interesting insight into the nature of anger and ourselves (as I will argue in Chapter 4). The view is also notably represented by some of the giants of the ancient world, the Stoics. Traditional readings of Buddhism hold that the Buddhist

philosophical system requires an extirpation of anger, or claims that the Buddha does not advocate any form of anger; thus, Buddhism has traditionally been seen as a form of eliminativism. Irrespective of its justification, this view regards anger as *always* a bad emotion, as it is one of the root causes of suffering according to Buddhist thought. Also, the Buddha's censure of anger is not restricted to overt *displays of* anger, it includes any angry thoughts and intentions too. That is to say, it is not enough to just suppress anger; while not showing angry behaviour, anger still lingers in our thoughts. As we saw in Chapter 1, a person with an angry thought is as much an angry person as those who express anger. Therefore, all forms of anger should be curbed when they arise, and it should ultimately be eliminated such that it cannot arise again.

A number of key texts appear to support the view that anger should not only be restrained, but ultimately needs to be removed from a person's mind. The *Dhammapada*, an early Buddhist text, praises someone who controls anger: "He who can control his rising anger as a coachman controls his carriage at full speed, this man I call a good driver: others merely hold the reins."⁷⁵ However, the goal of this section of the *Dhammapada* (*kodhavaggo*) is explicitly stated in the opening verse: it actually encourages us to "forsake anger"⁷⁶, not simply control it. Another source which supposedly is among the Buddha's first teachings says, "[Monastics] shouldn't be influenced by anger and conceit; they should live having uprooted these."⁷⁷ The thesis of absolute absence of anger is often represented by the following passage in a *nikāya*, a portion of the *Sutta Piṭaka* which partly forms the early Buddhist canonical texts:

"If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife, ... you should train thus: 'My mind will be unaffected, and I shall utter no evil words; I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness,

⁷⁵ *Dhp* 222

⁷⁶ *Dhp* 221

⁷⁷ Fronsdal, *The Buddha before Buddhism*, 135.

without inner hate.’ ... Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.”⁷⁸

The position they take is very extreme: despite brutal harms and great wrongs, one should not give in to anger. Indeed, our first thoughts reading the passage might include such questions as how we could be able to do that, or why we need to go that far when our anger is justified, questions we will discuss below. The significance in painting this horrifying picture is to warn us of the dangers of anger: that it may be more harmful than such physical torment. If we have to avoid it to the degree that relatively harmless responses such as simply cursing and feeling angry towards such cruelty is wrong, I suppose nothing can legitimise our anger, and thus there is no place for anger in a Buddhist moral life. Taking the *sutta* into account, Peter Vernezze also argues that anger does not exist in the Buddhist ideal life. His suggestion is that there is no evidence in the early texts for any endorsement of anger from the Buddha. And with an incident so extreme as *The Simile of the Saw* quoted above, we could expect him to permit such a normatively justified anger, but instead he recommends that we be concerned about the perpetrator’s wellbeing.⁷⁹ Moreover, the thesis is also supported by the characterisation of Buddhist enlightened persons as having no anger.⁸⁰

Apparently, most Buddhist philosophers and modern scholars concur that Buddhist ideals require the elimination of anger. Following the *sutta* tradition, they invoke *The Simile of the Saw* time and again. Buddhaghosa gives a direct reference to this passage by quoting it.⁸¹ Similarly, Candrakīrti joins the tradition by alluding to the barbaric act of

⁷⁸ *MN* 21

⁷⁹ Vernezze, “Moderation or the Middle Way,” 3.

⁸⁰ For example, the Buddha declared that he was without anger (*Sutta Nīpāta* 19, quoted in *Milindapañhā* III 12), and Sāriputta, one of the Buddha’s main disciple, is described as ‘the unresentful’ by a contemporary Buddhist scholar due to many provoking incidents to which he did not have an angry response. See Nyanaponika and Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 25.

⁸¹ *Vism.* IX, 15

dismembering bodies,⁸² and also explicitly states that anger must be “wholly rooted out”.⁸³ The advice does not only apply to bodhisattvas: common people too should follow it.⁸⁴ In Śāntideva’s compilation, in contrast, although the *sutta* is not directly cited, the manner of offences (like tearing up one’s body) certainly conjures up a similar impression, and the instruction to harbour no angry feeling also encapsulates the central idea of the passage.⁸⁵ Some modern Buddhist scholars also see Śāntideva as representative of eliminativists, adding that the early tradition found in the Pāli canon shares the same negative view of anger,⁸⁶ although it has been pointed out that he allows an exception when anger is directed towards itself.⁸⁷ In a way, these philosophers seem to implicitly accept the anger elimination thesis, though it should not be concluded that those who do not refer to the passage do not share the view.⁸⁸ However, I do not intend to rely simply on one quoted passage to determine the view of these thinkers either, and we will examine their arguments more carefully in the sections which follow.

Given the long history and many strands of Buddhism, it is possible to have many voices in the Buddhist doctrine. For no clear definition or definite account of anger has been articulated (at least in the way we think is clear) early on in its time. In this long tradition of interpretation, the Moderationist view has vigorously developed recently among Buddhist practitioners and scholars, in feminist Buddhists in particular. Generally speaking, with regard to anger, most people are moderationist, an attitude

⁸² *MA* 3.2: “Their foes may torture them, though they be innocent, dismembering their bodies piece by piece, and cut their flesh and bones in lingering pain — but this serves only to confirm their patience for their butchers.”

⁸³ *MA* 3.11

⁸⁴ *MA* 3.9

⁸⁵ ŚŚ 185: “If all those beings should revile me and blame me, upbraid me, dishonour me, address me with lying and harsh words, bent upon doing wickedness; if they should tear up and cut up and destroy and annihilate my body in a hundred pieces like a jujube leaf; even so I must not conceive an angry thought against any being.”

⁸⁶ Gowans, “The Elimination of Anger?”; Lele, “The Rejection of Righteous Anger.”; Thurman, *Anger*.

⁸⁷ For example, in *BCA*6.41, he says, “It is better that I hate that hatred.” Amod Lele and Emily McRae (“Metabolizing Anger.” 475) see this as an exception to universal censure of anger. So it can be argued that Śāntideva is in fact a moderationist because he seems to allow a kind of anger despite it being directed at itself. But, even on this view, if not reading it as a rhetoric, anger has to be ultimately eliminated despite its usefulness nevertheless.

⁸⁸ Such as Geshe Lhundub Sopa (Sopa, Sweet, and Zwilling, *Peacock in the Poison Grove*, 41).

that can be traced back to at least the influential account of anger by Aristotle.⁸⁹ It is our intuition that anger is dangerous, as it tends to be destructive. At times it's also considered foolish when the object of our anger is not a moral agent, but instead an inanimate object (for example, when we stub our toe on a chest of drawers and become angry). But when we are wronged, we tend to think that anger is permissible (or even demanded), and as such it is often associated with such ideas as justice, righteousness, and self-respect. For instance, anger towards a bully is often lauded in popular culture. There are thousands of videos on YouTube celebrating victims standing up to bullies, with titles like 'bully karma compilation' and 'bully gets owned'; in fact, simply typing the word 'bully' into YouTube's search bar reveals a list of suggested titles, almost all of which indicate such a celebration of retaliation against alleged bullies. It is this ambivalent attitude towards anger, which permits (or even *encourages*) anger in *some* situations, that defines a moderationist.

Generally, Buddhist moderationists embrace anger for its powerful energy, which then can be used to fight inequality and injustice. Unlike their Buddhist eliminativist counterparts, they argue that some forms of anger are justifiable and compatible with Buddhist philosophy; however, each of them has provided different arguments and opinions about what the acceptable nature of anger is like. Rita Gross, speaking from her own personal practices, claims that her anger as a feminist has "transmuted" into some sort of insight, which gives her intellectual sharpness while the same conviction and energy is still maintained. With transmuted anger, she could communicate more effectively in order to alleviate suffering caused by prejudices against women.⁹⁰ Anita Barrows, in contrast, challenges the traditional Buddhist view that tries to subdue anger for causing yet another aspect of disempowerment. Insisting that anger does not equate to violence, she proposes what she calls "holy anger", which is a positive kind of anger whose aim "would not be vengeance, punishment, humiliation, the suffering

⁸⁹ His oft-quoted passages (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV. 5) express his idea of a desirable virtue — there is a point at which one acts with anger is good. It is a mean between irascibility and meekness; excesses towards either end are equally condemned.

⁹⁰ Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 171; Gross, "The Female Body," 11-2.

of the offender...because its aim would not be to continue the cycle of suffering, but rather to interrupt it and establish something new in its stead.”⁹¹ Wendy Donner, alternatively, thinks that anger can be rooted in compassion, and when used skillfully it can alleviate the suffering from gender inequality.⁹² We will look further into these arguments in Chapter 3.

A recent Buddhist scholar, Emily McRae, also contributes to the moderationist position with a unique insight from reading Dharmarakṣita, one of the Tantric masters. McRae argues that the Tantric Buddhist doctrine recognises a special kind of anger, namely a “tantric anger”, described as “that which is like anger”, which is morally effective and without the destructive effects that ordinary anger has. But this is not a feat that anybody can pull off immediately; it requires a great deal of practice and can only be achieved by accomplished moral agents, i.e. bodhisattvas, through meditative and contemplative trainings. She also emphasises that the ‘metabolisation of anger’ is not anger that is feigned (i.e. the agent is not angry, but acts as if she is), but anger which has arisen and been transformed into a kind that is not compulsive nor intended to harm. And yet it is not an emotion transformed into compassion, or at least not directly. She also argues that this kind of anger is closely linked to the idea of ‘no-self’ in Buddhist metaphysics (we will return to McRae’s view in the next chapter).⁹³

Moderationism about anger in Buddhism is a position that has emerged from a recent surge in reinterpretations of the doctrine, largely from the feminist point of view, over the past few decades. However, their interpretations are not without basis. Instead of heavily focusing on specific texts, what they do is revise the Buddhist tradition (which has been predominantly influenced by male members of the religious order) by amplifying some values in Buddhism such as compassion, emptiness, and Buddha Nature.⁹⁴ McRae’s work is an exception, since her analysis is based on both of Dharmarakṣita’s texts, i.e. *The Wheel-Weapon* and *The Poison-Destroying Peacock*, although she admits that not many examples of tantric

⁹¹ Barrows, “The Light of Outrage.”

⁹² Donner, “Feminist Ethics and Anger.”

⁹³ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger.”

⁹⁴ Shotwell, “If Buddhism, Then Feminism.”

anger are found.⁹⁵ It is worth noting that moderationist views vary with regard to their attitudes towards how willingly we should embrace anger, thus these views differ over the issue of what qualifies anger as ‘moderate’. Some, such as Gross, endorse the use of justified anger in a worldly context while others, like McRae, emphasise that justified anger (i.e. metabolised anger) can be achieved by only a few morally accomplished persons. In contrast, eliminativists have no other option but to condemn *all* anger, albeit for different reasons.

While the aforementioned commentators lay bare their positions about anger, some others’ are rather obscure. They usually take a rather negative view towards anger, but point out ways to think about or deal with it positively. For instance, Thich Nhat Hanh mainly focuses on how to deal with and prevent anger from arising; the Dalai Lama adopts the same approach, but also explains why anger is bad. Their intention to exhort us to curb anger is evident, but to which extent they want anger to be curbed is not explicitly pronounced. Although Thich Nhat Hanh talks about embracing and transforming one’s anger into positive energy, it does not seem to be an enjoinder to get angry *so that* one can make use of it. Rather, he suggests that, *if* the undesirable emotion arises, we need to immediately attend to anger by embracing it *in order to* make it disappear and stop its cycle.⁹⁶ His approach is after the fashion of eliminativists, who believe that it’s best for anger to not exist at all. He does not endorse an arising of anger to make use of it, but does encourage us to acknowledge it when it arises and offers a way to deal with it at that instance. On the other hand, we may think that the Dalai Lama implicitly subscribes to moderationism when he says: “On the basis of compassionate motivation, anger may in some cases be useful because it gives us extra energy and enables us to act swiftly,” but still admits that it *usually* leads to hatred, which always has negative energy.⁹⁷ His line of thought appears to resemble to that of feminist Buddhists, despite

⁹⁵ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 475.

⁹⁶ H̃anh, *Anger*.

⁹⁷ Dalai Lama XIV, *The Dalai Lama’s Book of Wisdom*; Gyatso, “The Monk in the Lab.”

the remaining treatment denouncing anger. In this way, he defends a form of anger that is rooted in compassion.

I think the Buddhist views in relation to anger can by and large be captured by an eliminativist-moderationist distinction nevertheless. The issue that divides them is whether anger should *ultimately* be rid. Eliminativists advocate its extermination *despite* some perceived benefits of anger, while moderationists favour a less radical measure against it *because* it can be evaluated as good in some way. However, the rich nuances among these views have to be navigated carefully to avoid sweeping generalisations which fail to consider the overall goal of each account. As we have seen, some eliminativists may take a softer tone against anger, by counseling the mitigation of anger that has already arisen (like Thubten Chodron and Nhat Hanh). However, one has to be reminded that ultimately, if you were to become an accomplished eliminativist, you would not get angry even if we were to be cut limb by limb. And some moderationists may not advocate anger, but only *permit* very few instances of anger (such as McRae).

Having set up the background, some further remarks are in order here. It is not my intention to determine whether moderationism or eliminativism is the *correct* reading of Buddhism in relation to anger. After all, what Buddhist authors have done throughout its history, subsequent to the Buddha himself, is interpret his teaching. But that is not to say that we cannot demand more arguments to support our respective views. Therefore, I will analyse both approaches to anger, but ultimately defend an eliminativist position, for a few reasons. First of all, the view that aims at an eradication of anger appears to be a historical view that spans over a long period of time and across sects. As such, in order to appreciate the eliminativist view properly it requires a sufficient level of context surrounding the thesis, e.g. the ultimate aim of Buddhism, which explains *why* anger needs to be eliminated. Secondly, as eliminativism about anger is not a common view among moralists — ancient or modern — in general, it will be an interesting inquiry into why they are compelled to abandon anger. And as will be clear, their reason for the elimination is a distinctive way of

thinking about anger, which in turn owes its validity to the notorious Buddhist metaphysics (see Chapter 4).

In contrast to eliminativists, Buddhist moderationists appear to — though not exclusively — bring political agendas to the fore, in particular women’s struggles in patriarchal societies and the independence of the minority people. I believe their aim is to employ a Buddhist perspective to take on the issues and so it is possible that they are influenced by the modern reception of anger. If that is indeed the case, I find this an interesting approach to examine how a Buddhist can deal with anger while simultaneously being actively engaged with current social problems. For without addressing such concerns, many may find Buddhism irrelevant, especially now that anger has become part of normal discourse in politics. Therefore, with that aim in mind, I will try to take up a challenging task of defending the eliminativist view, which comes across to many as queer, overly ambitious, and belonging to the distant past. My attempt is to offer a reading of Buddhism that is appealing to contemporary audiences and ‘ordinary’ people, showing that it is practicable, not just a theory for the exceptional. Indeed, my intention to defend Buddhist eliminativism thus also constitutes an attempt to draw greater attention to this view, running against the contemporary tendency towards moderationism.

With that in mind, I will now turn to the Buddhist arguments against anger. The latter two (in particular) of those three kinds of arguments identified above will be adapted and adopted in support of the Eliminativist thesis in subsequent chapters. As such, this chapter will focus more heavily on the first kind of argument, and outline the latter two in general terms, developing them substantively in the two chapters which follow.

3. Anger and its Negative Effects

Let us now examine the first kind of argument we see against anger — that our actual experience of anger shows it to be both unpleasant and unhelpful, thus harming our pursuit of happiness. By examining the

phenomenology of anger in Chapter 1, we have already seen that the experience of anger is often described in Buddhist texts as unpleasant. There we concluded that, for the Buddhist, anger has an inherent unpleasant feeling and usually involves a wish to retaliate, maybe simply wishing ill of the person who has done wrong by the subject. As such, it inevitably causes harm to both the angry person and also the target of the emotion. The target might well be innocent, and others who were not involved in the harmful act could be caught in the crossfire (as might be the case for the child of a bitter divorce). There is hopefully little need to revisit the material already outlined in Chapter 1 in much detail here, though it might serve to highlight some other sorts of evidence that supports some of the claims made in the texts discussed there. I will, therefore, begin by looking at some empirical evidence on the effects of anger. Research into the physiological components and effects of anger is (perhaps surprisingly, given its universal appearance across human populations) still relatively understudied.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, there is a growing interest in examining the physical and neurological basis of anger, as well as its impact upon cognition and behaviour. Many of these studies offer empirical support for the general and anecdotal observations made about anger in the philosophical literature discussed in Chapter 1.

We have probably all observed that anger can feel unpleasant. It is not uncommon for us to be left trembling with rage after incidents that really test our temper. However, as we have also already noted, anger isn't *always* unpleasant, and nor is it always without utility. And there are some interesting findings on the motivational force of anger (something the moderationists, we shall see in Chapter 3, count very much in its favour). It has been hypothesised that there is an asymmetry in the brain's processing of emotions, with the left hemisphere showing a dominance in the case of positive emotions like happiness, and the right hemisphere showing a dominance in the case of negative emotions like anxiety.⁹⁹ Alongside this

⁹⁸ Garfinkel et al., "Anger in Brain and Body."

⁹⁹ See, for example, Alves, Fukusima, and Aznar-Casanova, "Models of Brain Asymmetry in Emotional Processing."

supposed asymmetry in processing, is an apparent correlation in the motivating properties of these emotions, with negative emotions making us more prone to ‘withdrawal’ and positive emotions making us more prone to ‘approach’.¹⁰⁰ In other words, whether we actively engage with a person or situation (‘approach’) or we seek to avoid that person or situation (‘withdrawal’). Yet, despite anger being considered a negative emotion, findings suggest that it may be more closely associated with the *left* prefrontal cortex,¹⁰¹ and thus also more closely associated with the ‘approach’ response. It is suggested by Fox that this is because anger activates a response of aggression, which is an outward behavioural manifestation of anger e.g. attacking someone verbally or physically.¹⁰²

What is interesting about this is that we have observed that anger can sometimes feel satisfying. It is clear that by preparing us for action, anger will trigger physiological changes that might be shared by other positive emotions, thus creating a confusing bodily signal for us to process. For instance, when we’re angry we experience an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, as well as increased testosterone and decreased levels of cortisol (associated with stress). However, these symptoms are all *also* associated with sexual arousal,¹⁰³ which we might otherwise consider a positive or pleasurable sensation. Anger has also been linked to optimism and positive expectations by Lerner and Keltner,¹⁰⁴ and Gendolla and Silvestrini,¹⁰⁵ found that anger can make us perceive task completion in a more positive light too i.e. that we perceive tasks as easier to complete when we’re angry. So there is also tentative empirical support for our observations about the pleasantness of anger: its physiological symptoms have pleasant close correlates, and it can make us more optimistic both in general and with regard to accomplishing tasks.

¹⁰⁰ van Honk and Schutter, “From Affective Valence to Motivational Direction.”

¹⁰¹ van Honk and Schutter.

¹⁰² Fox, “If It’s Not Left, It’s Right.”

¹⁰³ Hamilton, Rellini, and Meston, “Cortisol, Sexual Arousal, and Affect in Response to Sexual Stimuli.”

¹⁰⁴ Lerner and Keltner, “Fear, Anger, and Risk.”

¹⁰⁵ Gendolla and Silvestrini, “Smiles Make It Easier and So Do Frowns.”

Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that the Buddhist descriptions of the positive aspects of anger were restricted to a single instance, and this weighting is arguably a fair reflection of anger's actual effects in the real world. More often than not, anger both feels unpleasant and is channeled in ways which ultimately do not help us, or which do not seek to change our own (or someone else's) situation in a positive way. It is for this reason that Buddhists (though certainly not uniquely) note that anger is often damaging to our relationships. And, again, we can see empirical evidence supporting this suggestion. One notable finding in Harrison et al. was that when we observe anger in others we tend to demonstrate either of two 'mirroring' responses: either we also display anger, or we display fear (with their accompanying physiological symptoms e.g. increased heart and respiratory rates).¹⁰⁶ These are, according to Garfinkel et al., the two aspects of the fight or flight response.¹⁰⁷ It is perhaps unsurprising then, that anger tends to elicit avoidance behavior in others¹⁰⁸ — both because we might perceive someone who is angry to be a threat, but also because we tend to 'mirror' their anger either like-for-like, or as a fear response — both responses which we typically see as unpleasant. It is fairly obvious how this empirical observation supports the suggestion in Buddhist texts that anger is detrimental to our relationships. Consider cases of road rage, for example. In these sorts of cases what tends to occur is that one driver reacts angrily to another's driving, and in response the second driver reacts angrily to the first driver's anger. This has often led to violence in the real world, sometimes with fatal consequences. But the same can be true in much closer relationships — when our partner is angry, we often react in kind, whether this is reasonable or not. But the fear response does not make for any better a relationship — it is the cycle of anger and fear that, in part, describes the nature of the trap in which victims of domestic violence are caught.

The real harm of anger in the senses just outlined, however, is said to be with regard to our pursuit of happiness. It is because the unpleasant

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, Kreibig, and Critchley, "A Two Way Road."

¹⁰⁷ Garfinkel et al., "Anger in Brain and Body."

¹⁰⁸ Marsh, Ambady, and Kleck, "The Effects of Fear and Anger Facial Expressions on Approach- and Avoidance-Related Behaviors."

sensation and harm to our relationships impacts upon our happiness that anger is bad from the Buddhist perspective, since that is one of two central life pursuits (the other being enlightenment). In this sense, Buddhist cautions against anger are concerned with both productivity (i.e. our ability to generate opportunities for happiness) and worldly wellbeing (i.e. happiness, construed in a way which is conducive to achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment). On this view then, anger is harmful because its unavoidable consequence is the disruption of one's ability to achieve happiness in this current life, resulting in future lives and thus delaying our attainment of liberation. Once again, Śāntideva contributes to our discussion of anger here; he warns us of specific ways that anger could harm an angry person, specifically with regard to happiness:

“The mind does not find peace, nor does it enjoy pleasure and joy, nor does it find sleep or fortitude when the thorn of hatred dwells in the heart. Even dependents whom one rewards with wealth and honours wish to harm the master who is repugnant due to his anger. Even friends fear him. He gives, but is not served. In brief, there is nothing that can make an angry person happy.”¹⁰⁹

These verses are only some of the many examples found in Buddhist literature, about which Śāntideva concludes that anger inhibits one's pursuit of happiness. In other words, on this account, his assessment of anger (which is clearly negative) rests on whether it is conducive for beings to flourish on the path leading to happiness. Cautioning against anger on the basis of the harm that it does to our happiness actually reflects the *strategic* role that an argument relating to happiness can have in appealing to ordinary people (an important consideration, I will suggest in Chapter 4). The damages of anger should not be focused on enlightenment alone as we can also see this relationship from the other end. If there are some elements of enlightenment in happiness, then what harms prospects of enlightenment also harms prospects of happiness. This understanding is important for attracting the

¹⁰⁹ *BCA* 6.3-5

wider audience because it is more accessible, in the sense of comprehensibility as well as attainability, than enlightenment. And I think it is probably not mistaken to assume that most people want to be happy, too. In fact, this seems to be the tactic used by many ethicists in ancient Greece and India. Amber Carpenter suggests that they tend to use a ‘bait-and-switch’ strategy, which promises us that if we follow their advice, happiness will follow, leaving us only to discover that what they meant by happiness is something else altogether — not happiness in the sense of self-indulgence like most of us would expect, but a sense of virtue and self-cultivation.¹¹⁰ On this thought, once the persuasion succeeded, the practitioner has already been on the path to the ultimate good. Although we aim for the pragmatic effects when we set off on this quest, we end up — despite unknowingly — walking on the path to enlightenment. At this point there’s a chance, upon it being proven that the suggested course of actions *works* (as the Buddhist promise — and surely they are confident because it is the *truth!*) that we pursue enlightenment deliberately later on, which involves full acceptance of their metaphysical view. It is this kind of argument I will develop in Chapter 4.

Given the ‘bait-and-switch’ strategy employed, it is fairly obvious that Buddhists see anger’s impeding of enlightenment as bad in itself. But what about impeding happiness? Because happiness derives its value from enlightenment, we may think that disrupting happiness *as such* is not a problem; but disrupting happiness which *ultimately* impedes the progress to wisdom would, of course, be a problem. There are a number of ways of interpreting this claim. One interpretation not only considers happiness as derivative of enlightenment, but also as of instrumental worth to it. By contrast, we could also say that anger is considered harmful because it impedes happiness *as well as* enlightenment. This is a reading that does not take the secondary end of happiness as simply instrumental to enlightenment, but as a connected yet distinct goal, because happiness is a

¹¹⁰ Carpenter, “Aiming at Happiness, Aiming at Ultimate Truth.”

goal worth pursuing in and of itself.¹¹¹ In any case, with all its harmful effects, anger is ultimately problematic in a teleological sense, *viz.* being an impediment to the progress of Buddhist moral life, hence, most importantly, perpetuating suffering for as long as enlightenment is unattained. We will return to the notion of suffering in more detail below, after we have outlined the remaining arguments against anger.

The Buddhists have a lot to say about the self-destructive power of anger, perhaps because what it fundamentally affects is the subject of experience. First of all, there are adverse effects on our feelings. Mental health is obviously of great concern. In Chapter 1, we saw that the Buddhist characterisation of anger suggests that its inherent affective quality is unpleasant — simply getting angry is an agitating experience, although it can occasionally be satisfying. If a pleasant feeling is a dominant feature of happiness in the Buddhist definition, being angry is in itself not (typically) a happy experience. Furthermore, the effect of such an unpleasant feeling is certainly perceptible, and although some may not find it remarkable, it should not be taken lightly, for it can be very powerful when it strikes hard, with distinctive symptoms: a clenched jaw and fists, trembling, and all the other indications noted by Seneca and discussed earlier.¹¹² While an experience of mental disturbance, mild or intense, can be said to be undesirable in itself, it also inevitably interferes with our wellbeing in other ways. This appears to be very important for the Buddhists (e.g. *AN* 7.64 also offers a similar line to Śāntideva's) because it can take a toll on leading a healthy life. For example, the Buddhists say that you cannot sleep well as a result of angry thoughts, and I think our own experience can confirm that too. And, unfortunately, sleep deprivation does have physical effects such as an inability to focus and impairments to working memory,¹¹³ which impacts our day-to-day life. In short, a disturbed mind hinders our wellbeing in

¹¹¹ This interpretation is proposed by Carpenter (2016) who offers an analysis of how both ends are associated in Nāgārjuna's ethical framework, which may be representative of the Madhyamaka philosophy.

¹¹² *De Ira* I 1.3-5

¹¹³ Krause et al., "The Sleep-Deprived Human Brain."

general, and also to the Buddhist specifically it can impede mental training integral to advancing to the highest goal i.e. enlightenment.

In addition to the unpleasant affect of anger, there's also an effect on cognition. This is the result that has already been discussed in the previous chapter, that anger clouds our judgement; it prevents us from seeing things clearly and correctly. Incidentally, the Stoics, another group of anger eliminativists, shared a similar thought about this effect of anger, perhaps offering a more detailed analysis. Seneca, for example, describes anger as “a brief madness,” and goes on to explain that “it's no less lacking in self-control, forgetful of decency, unmindful of personal ties, unrelenting intent on its goal, shut off from rational deliberation, stirred for no substantial reason, unsuited to discerning what's fair and true,…”¹¹⁴ On this ground, anger is charged with undermining the capacity for rationality — the most important attribute that mature human beings alone have in common with the gods. Therefore, anger is a vicious emotion as it engenders the failure of reason. The Buddhists, however, do not make such a strong claim about human rationality (not to mention whether they share the same conception of what ‘rationality’ is) although, roughly speaking, they recognise that right thinking is a necessary condition for enlightenment. The idea of their objection is thus: when our thinking is under the influence of anger, we lose sight of the good because anger — or so to speak, a state in which virtues such as shame and fear of wrong have been lost — decreases awareness of what one should do for the benefits of oneself and others. Buddhists also have an additional argument relating to anger and cognition, which we shall examine in section 5 below.

Anger does not stop at perturbing the subject's mind alone, as most anger is expressed in one form or another, typically with violence. Such careless actions affect one's own wellbeing on many levels. Śāntideva's advice against anger above, for example, shows what is potentially damaged is one's private life, particularly in terms of our personal relationships (a

¹¹⁴ *De Ira* I 1.2

claim for which I outlined some empirical support above). For example, an angry ‘master’ loses his or her reputation and respect from subordinates, while friends become cautious around him. It does not take much to see why they want to avoid an angry person; rather, it would be odd if anybody takes pleasure in being on the receiving end of someone else’s temper, especially when they are not enemies. Perhaps the reason why angry people are often avoided is because of fear that such hostility can turn towards them at whim, whether deserved or not. Imagine your partner comes home after getting angry at a colleague and abuses you instead, you probably think it’s unfair for you to be the victim of such anger. In effect, anger can alienate people even though it is not directed at them. With poor judgement the result of the emotion, there’s a good reason for the Buddhists to be concerned about misdirected anger as, practically speaking, it indeed occurs regularly.

As far as public life is concerned, similar situations can damage one’s interests. Some moderationists also acknowledge this consequence of anger in a political context. Pettigrove¹¹⁵ and Nussbaum¹¹⁶ discourage anger despite unjust treatment as it alienates potential allies, which in turn hinders progress of justice as a whole. One putative example of this is the opposition to Donald Trump’s presidency in the US. Rather than persuading others to see Trump’s very real flaws, the rhetoric of the self-described ‘Resistance’ often exceeds what is reasonable when, for example, they describe all Trump supporters as Nazi’s, and hurl the term at those attending his political rallies. Such behaviour, Trump’s own supporters openly and often suggest, only persuades them to double-down on their support of Trump — arguably, Hillary Clinton’s biggest mistake during the election campaign was in labeling Trump’s supporters ‘The Deplorables’, a term which they subsequently embraced and rallied around.¹¹⁷ Thus, the danger of the alienation anger can cause is in the (often unpredictable) negative reactions that follow, potentially creating enemies. The *sutta*, too, points this out: “He shows recalcitrance as a fire does a smoky crest. When his anger spreads

¹¹⁵ Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger.”

¹¹⁶ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*.

¹¹⁷ Jacobs, “Hillary Clinton Regrets.”

outward, people become angry on his account.”¹¹⁸ Angry expressions, which are likened to smoke, are irritable, and surely no one likes to be surrounded by it. Instead of making other people sympathetic to your cause, they drive people away. With anger, for the Buddhists apparently, it is difficult to establish a healthy relationship on any level, whether personal or political. These are the harms of anger from the subject’s perspective grounded on an assumption about human interaction: Śāntideva’s statement ‘he gives, but is not served’ implies the idea of *reciprocity* — that in normal circumstances, an act of giving prompts the recipient to want to return the favour. But acting angrily disrupts such reciprocal transactions as it puts people on edge.

For better or for worse, the effects so far do not directly harm the angry subject. While the agent may indirectly suffer from spoiling relationships of various sorts (friends and family wanting to avoid her, potential allies being alienated etc.), anger also provokes others to actively seek to harm her. The most vicious thing about anger is probably its desire for retaliation, which is manifested in an act of harm, and often violence. But payback will only provoke more anger and a vicious cycle of revenge, as a verse in the *Dhammapada* warns us: “For hate is not conquered by hate: hate is conquered by love. This is a law eternal.”¹¹⁹ Despite sounding like a platitude, it is reasonably sage advice. In fact, the fascinating tale behind this verse in the *Dhammapadāṭṭhakathā*, or the Commentary of the *Dhammapada*, better justifies the Buddhist antagonism against anger.¹²⁰ Said to have happened long before the Buddha’s lifetime, it is a story of two wives in a polygamous marriage, the first of whom was barren. The barren wife, in fear of losing status, caused her husband’s second wife to have miscarriages, ultimately causing her death in childbirth. Upon her deathbed, knowing who inflicted those pains on her, the second wife wished to be reborn so that

¹¹⁸ *AN* 7.64

¹¹⁹ *Dhp* 1.5

¹²⁰ It is translated as *Buddhist Legends* by Eugene Watson Burlingame (170-75). It is a text that tells the stories in which each 423 sayings of the Buddha was uttered and collected as the *Dhammapada*. I would like to thank Amber Carpenter for drawing my attention to this fascinating tale. She also offers an insightful and nuanced analysis of the story in Carpenter, “Buddhism and the Problem of Evil.” Cf. Obeyesekere and Obeyesekera, “The Tale of the Demoness Kālī: A Discourse on Evil.”

she could exact revenge upon her enemy. Her wish was granted and she had her revenge, but in turn this provoked her enemy, the barren wife, to wish the same. So, in her next life, the barren wife too saw her wish come true. This cycle kept going for life after life until, as Obeyesereke and Obeyesereke observe, it was no longer possible to keep track of who was the perpetrator and who the victim. Retribution does not end one's suffering but perpetuates it, and, just as Seneca forewarns, "greedy for vengeance...draws down the avenger with it."¹²¹

In the story above, the Buddha appeals to a practical reason that is not retrospective, which is the nature of retribution. He asked the ogress who was the perpetrator in his present life: "Why have you so done?", not wishing to hear justifications from the past, adding, "Had you not come face to face with a Buddha like me, you would have cherished hatred towards each other for an aeon."¹²² He did not care to learn who started it (although with clairvoyant power he already knew anyway), what made her want to harm the young woman, and so forth, before judging the situation and giving advice to the ogress. Instead he focused on what it might happen in future by inviting her to consider the effects of her attempt, and concluded what should be done in the present is to cease harming each other. When a retaliation to wrongdoing, however justified it is, tends to escalate the situation by provoking more anger, it is not clear why anyone should keep up with such destructive actions. With a human tendency to reciprocate, one can certainly expect enemies to reciprocate in kind. And it seems, for the Buddhists, the principle of reciprocity also extends to positive virtues, as towards the end of the story we find the frightened young woman, who could have fallen victim to the ogress had she not met the Buddha, overcame her fear and treated the ogress with generosity. The ogress then returned the favour and, in the end, they both flourished. This, we will see below, hints at the Buddhist encouragement to *replace* negative emotions with positive ones, rather than simply removing them (and this is a very important feature of Buddhist eliminativism, and will inform my own

¹²¹ *De Ira* I 1.1

¹²² Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, 1:174.

approach in Chapter 4). Moreover, payback is a transgression in itself; a distinction is not made between wrongdoing and wrongdoing as a response to being wronged, as far as the Buddhists are concerned. It doesn't make sense to say we should commit wrong to the other person *because* she committed wrong to us first, which is the kind of thinking that feeds vicious revenge cycles. Just as the famous Poisoned Arrow Parable suggests,¹²³ it is therefore of practical reason to attend to the most immediate and urgent issue that afflicts everyone alike, suffering. Asking who started it is not the priority, and in many cases does not stop the fight. Not retaliating, rather, prevents potential damages and does not risk committing wrong yourself.

To sum up, the practical dangers of anger are multifaceted, according to the Buddhist accounts. They include the inevitable uncomfortable feeling associated with anger, causing poor judgement which misguides us to do something inappropriate, the difficulties caused for establishing healthy relationships, and ultimately the provocation of more anger. If we were to accept that things like material gain, friendship, and mental and physical health contribute to a happy life, it could perhaps be agreed that anger does not seem to promote that worthy end. Moreover, the apparently positive outcomes of anger may not be problematic as counter-examples, as anger advocates will want to contend. Moderationists say we should balance our anger — we should not be excessive in our anger, but cannot be too restrained either, and our anger has to be justified — so, if it could be demonstrated that indeed anger occasionally brings about happiness, then we might think that the Buddhists would not be able to defend their eliminativist position. However, we have also seen that one's justified anger can tip easily from being moderate to disastrous, from good to bad. Even if the Buddhist eliminativists were to concede that there is a point where moderate anger is good, which indeed they are not, they still

¹²³ *MN* 63. The story is about a sceptic man who after being struck by a poisoned arrow, refused to receive treatments unless he knew which caste the man who wounded him belonged to, what he looked like, where he lived, what kind of bow it was used, and so on — in other words, questions irrelevant to his treatment. It is intended to illustrate the urgency of the current human condition that are stricken with suffering, and yet some people do not recognise such urgency to attend to it and instead inquiring about something not useful to solving the immediate problem.

think you should not be a moderationist because getting it right is too difficult, and getting it wrong is too costly, and thus unpragmatic.

Besides this, it is essential to keep in mind that Buddhists conceive of happiness in a way that involves a certain moral element. This moral element is, in fact, a *prerequisite* to happiness. This is why the Buddhists say an angry person can *never* be happy, for anger is never a part of the good. As a result, whatever effects anger may cause, happiness, which is a complex state of mind that cannot be achieved only by external conditions, does not come to pass with a person harbouring resentment. Now, how anger has such a negative moral status is our next question. We will examine this claim in detail in the next section.

4. Anger and Virtue

Given the intimate connection established above between enlightenment and happiness, it's clear that there are two perspectives from which to consider the destructive consequences of anger. We have already seen that anger is harmful because it impedes our pursuit of happiness, but in this section we will also see that it is morally harmful because it impairs the development of specific moral virtues, which in turn disrupts our progress towards enlightenment. I will not address this argument in full here, because in order to do so we need to look in more detail at some specific moderationist and eliminativist arguments — we will do this in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. However, we can nonetheless begin to outline the central aspects of this Buddhist argument against anger here, ultimately framing the discussion as one which suggests that an adequate defence of an eliminativist thesis depends upon a realignment of the Buddhist metaphysics with our understanding of how to pursue a moral life. So far, we have only seen the Buddhist objection to anger on the grounds of concerns for our wellbeing. However, in order to justify the eliminativist stance I am advocating, it seems like we need an argument that can persuade us that *all* actions motivated by anger are wrong, or else that position will be vulnerable to a simple counter-example. The view we shall explore in this section, that

anger harms our moral development and thus should be avoided, can be thought of in a teleological sense (just like the first kind of argument), but this time with enlightenment being the goal obstructed by anger. However, because of that, it is susceptible to the same issue just highlighted. For that reason, we must develop an alternative version of this argument in order to adequately defend the eliminativist position, and this challenge is taken up in the chapters which follow.

On the Buddhist view, anger is highly undesirable for those who look beyond ordinary goods. It is especially obvious in the context of aspiring bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna tradition, whose bodhisattva path involves the practice of ten ‘perfections’ or ‘virtues’ (*paramitā*).¹²⁴ Patience (*kṣānti*), which is an antidote to anger, is one of the perfections they need to cultivate for moral progress. In the chapter focusing on the virtues, Śāntideva states that, “There is no evil equal to hatred, and no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Therefore, one should develop forbearance by various means, with great effort.”¹²⁵ On the other hand, when one breaks with the virtue, anger has the power to destroy all the efforts for moral development, as Candrakīrti says, “Indeed all anger felt towards a Bodhisattva destroys within an instant merits that arise through discipline and giving of a hundred kalpas. No other evil is there similar to wrath.”¹²⁶ Interestingly enough, Buddhists were not alone in thinking that one can attain certain power with patience and then be instantly broken just by getting angry. The notion *tapas* has a similar characteristic in ancient Indian asceticism.

¹²⁴ I use the term ‘virtue’ in the Buddhist context to denote positive affective and cognitive states which are cultivated through moral training. Notable Buddhist virtues include the four Divine States (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) and the Six Perfections (generosity, moral discipline, patience, vigour, meditative absorption, and insight). These virtues are instrumental to and at least partially constitutive of the enlightened state. In this sense, it is similar to an understanding of virtues in virtue ethics in that they are excellent traits of character, motivations, dispositions, or attitudes that are expressed in good actions and enable us to achieve the Good. However, it is an open question whether we can look for similarities beyond that, especially in terms of the moral frameworks in which these virtues operate. Some have looked for possibilities for reconstructing versions of Buddhist virtue ethics (e.g. Keown, MacKenzie) while others criticise that such attempts distort the aim of the Buddhist project (e.g. Garfield) or suggest that Buddhism, at least in Theravada tradition, is ethical particularism (e.g. Hallisey).

¹²⁵ *BCA* 6.2

¹²⁶ *MA* 3.6

Literally meaning ‘heat’, and associated with creative activities in the cosmos in the early Vedic period, *tapas* later became ethicised and equated with patience. Similar to wealth that one can possess, *tapas* can be lost when one indulges in sensual pleasure or anger.¹²⁷ One has to wonder why anger has such a powerful destructive power against moral progress that it is said, “No higher rule, the Buddhas say, than patience. And no *nibbana* higher than forbearance.”¹²⁸ Yet, it is also notable that the Buddhist view sees patience as the most effective virtue in the elimination of anger. The position I develop in Chapter 4 makes the case for a certain understanding of patience as the basis of that elimination.

A passage from *Upāli-pariṣṛcchā Sūtra*, an early and influential Mahāyāna sutra, might give us a clue as to why anger sabotages all the effort to save all beings to which a bodhisattva has been committed:

“If, while practicing the *Mahāyāna*, a Bodhisattva continues to break precepts out of desire for *kalpas* as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, his offence is still minor. If a Bodhisattva breaks precepts out of hatred, even just once, his offense is very serious. Why? Because a Bodhisattva who breaks precepts out of desire [still] holds sentient beings in his embrace, whereas a Bodhisattva who breaks precepts out of hatred forsakes sentient beings altogether... if he breaks precepts out of hatred, it is a grave offense, a gross fault, a serious, degenerate act, which causes tremendous hindrances to the Buddha-Dharma.”¹²⁹

This account seems to put concerns for what we do to other human beings as central to the consideration. Compared to a wrongdoing motivated by attachment (see section 5 below), that by anger seems to be more dangerous because one tends to seek to harm another out of anger, but not out of attachment.¹³⁰ And as a bodhisattva who makes a vow to help

¹²⁷ Olson, *Indian Asceticism*.

¹²⁸ *DN* 14.3.28; *Dhp* 184

¹²⁹ Chang, *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtra*, 270.

¹³⁰ One can argue that it is not necessarily true. For we can think of a case in which someone harms other persons out of ‘love’ and jealousy. These attitudes are clearly forms of

all beings out of suffering, if she does the opposite by harming them instead, it is tragic and very wrong.

If harm against other moral agents is what makes anger so distasteful, then one way to see what is problematic about anger maybe lies in its characterisation that it involves a desire to harm. This feature of anger has already been discussed in Chapter 1. When such a malicious desire is aimed at another agent, our instinct certainly admits that it raises a moral question. A possible analysis of why anger is wrong based on this characterisation of it may be taken from Martha Nussbaum.¹³¹ The first thing that the angry person focuses on is the wrong done to her, so she wants to get back at the object of her anger hoping it will “set things right, somehow counter-balancing or annulling the offence.”¹³² But this kind of anger does not make sense because payback cannot right the wrong. Another way to think of what anger aims to harm is that, borrowing Aristotle’s account that anger is occasioned by ‘down-ranking’, the angry person focuses on the injuries done to her status rather than the wrongfulness as such. Such obsessive focus on herself and her standing in relation to others is troubling because it involves narcissistic values.¹³³

No matter how appealing the argument sounds, such analysis certainly cannot fully explain the Buddhist attitude towards anger as it doesn’t apply to *all* kinds of anger. Nussbaum’s account puts payback as an identifying characteristic of anger, which is not *necessarily* true for Buddhist accounts. This leads to a few problems if Buddhists, as eliminativists, were to adopt such an explanation. This is because it can’t explain that every occurrence of anger is morally harmful as not all anger wants ill of others. If there is indeed such anger, which we can question separately, then it is not

attachment, a desire to possess another person or to refuse the loss of them. And too often, ironically, the victims are none other than those who are regarded to be the object of ‘love’ themselves.

¹³¹ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*.

¹³² Nussbaum, 27.

¹³³ Nevertheless, Nussbaum does not condemn all kinds of anger, just those that centralise payback. She believes that there’s a kind of anger that is acceptable; she calls it Transition-Anger which is forward-looking, rather than looking for retribution, but she thinks it is extremely rare.

an ideal explanation for why anger is so morally destructive for Buddhist eliminativists. Moreover, despite no clear definition of anger, Buddhists appear to recognise some forms of anger, according to their categorisation seen in Chapter 1, that do not necessarily involve malicious intent directed at a moral agent, such as frustration and annoyance. These mental phenomena are occasioned similarly to anger — that is by a perception that the subject (or whatever is in the subject’s concern) is being harmed or thwarted — and can be said to be a milder form of anger. That is, it could be the case that one does not have any ill will towards another moral agent, but simply feels annoyed when a friend does not show up on time, for example. Or it could be the case that one’s anger involves an urge to harm, not another human being, but some inanimate object. Such cases are not only excluded from the above explanation, but also defy our instinct that it could cause a moral harm. So if it is not because anger inflicts pain on other people that we should eliminate anger, then what could be the reason?

There is another problem with the Buddhist argument given above, which is that it is applied specifically to those seeking the highest of ethical lives — the Bodhisattvas. As we have noted previously, it is possible that ordinary people might not have such a life as their aim, and so are unlikely to be persuaded by such an argument. We could, perhaps generalise the sort of argument given in the *Upāli-paripṛcchā Sūtra*, to make it more applicable to the ordinary person. This would constitute another argument from pragmatism that the Buddhist might employ against anger, but this time relating to our moral development. Such an argument might run as follows: in order to develop the virtues of compassion or patience, we must practice them. This requires acting in situations where such responses are *genuinely* available to us. As a well-known Tibetan proverb suggests: “Without someone to make you angry, how can you practice patience?”¹³⁴ One cannot practice patience, for example, with someone who does not frustrate us, or make us wait, or present us with some other situation in which patience is an available response (we will examine the specifics surrounding

¹³⁴ Bommarito, “Patience and Perspective,” 272.

patience in more detail in Chapter 4). Philippa Foot makes a similar point when she suggests that our moral concepts are ‘fixed’ to facts about the world.¹³⁵ In Foot’s view, we can’t describe just anything we like as ‘rude’, just as we cannot be ‘proud’ of the sky. To be proud of something, it seems like we must have some personal connection to it e.g. that we created it, nurtured it, were involved in its development, etc. Whether a moral concept applies in a given situation is, according to Foot, dependent upon whether the descriptive content for that concept matches up with the facts about the world. In the case of being proud of the sky, it simply isn’t true that we can be said to have created it, nurtured it, and so on. As such, we cannot rightly apply the moral concept of pride in that situation. In much the same way, then, there are only certain situations in the world in which moral concepts like patience or compassion can be said to correctly apply.

What is important to note about anger and virtues like patience and compassion is the overlap in real-world situations in which those concepts correctly apply. Consider, for instance, the road rage example mentioned above — when a driver does something we would have preferred them not to have done, we could respond angrily, but we could *instead* exercise patience. Given that virtues are cultivated through practice, there will only be a finite number of opportunities in which circumstances are such that we can *actually* be patient (or compassionate, etc.), and thus there are limited opportunities for us to practice the virtues. Since there is much overlap between the situations surrounding anger and these opportunities to practice virtues, as a practical matter for those interested in developing a good moral character, every angry response is a *missed opportunity*. And there is every reason to think that most people value the development of a good moral character — very few people appear to be *immoralists* i.e. people who think it is *good* to be (morally) bad, and it is clear that people at least want to be seen as virtuous. This discussion is reflected in the first book of Plato’s *Republic*, where Socrates is shown to be responding to the challenge of immoralism, and where he also argues that we don’t merely want the benefits of virtue’s

¹³⁵ Foot, “Moral Beliefs.”

accompanying reputation. We need not get into those arguments here, since the argument from pragmatism just offered can be said to at least apply to those who are *genuinely* interested in their own moral development.

Still, it is clear that this argument from pragmatism has the same limitations as the one outlined in section 3 — that it probably does not fully establish the case for eliminativism. Do we need to practice the virtues *exclusively* in order to develop them? If this were the case, the bar would be set very high for any virtue theory, and thus it would be unlikely to encourage anyone to take up this approach. The purpose of this sort of ethical approach is to get us to strive towards the virtues, and to discourage vicious behaviour, so it is important to see bouts of anger as moving us away from enlightenment (we will revisit this notion later, as I wish to argue that anger shouldn't merely be seen as a step backward, but instead as orienting us away from enlightenment — thus, the moderationist position points us in the opposite direction to our ultimate goal). We should always try to remember that the Buddhist version of virtue ethics differs from its Western counterparts in that Western virtue theories tend to posit the aim of moral life as attaining *only* wellbeing (whether that is cashed out as happiness, Eudaimonia, or whatever else). However, this is only *one of* the goals for the Buddhist — the other aim being achieving enlightenment. We have already suggested that moral development is central to this, since our moral development directly impacts upon our happiness (section 3), and happiness and enlightenment are interdependent. We have seen, however, that there are also two aspects to enlightenment: one related to our moral development, and another to do with our epistemic or cognitive development. It is this latter issue to which we turn in section 5.

5. Anger and Epistemic Failure

While the pragmatic arguments against anger raised above arguably leave the eliminativist position open to the charge that anger can also be fruitful, the final kind of argument offered by the Buddhist attempts to demonstrate a specific way in which anger is always bad. I will ultimately

argue in Chapter 4 that understanding the relationship between the kind of argument being given here and the Buddhist notions of enlightenment, happiness and a moral life is central to coming to accept a specifically Buddhist form of Eliminativism. Such a position will no doubt initially seem unpersuasive, and perhaps unintuitive, since it depends upon what is likely to be a metaphysics alien to most Western audiences. However, I will go on to suggest in later chapters that the alternative view, Moderationism, is not without problems of its own, and that the way we utilise the Buddhist metaphysics — both in practice, and in our arguments for Eliminativism — is of central importance to eliminating anger.

The final kind of argument we are looking at suggests that anger follows from an epistemic or cognitive error, thus it stems from (and reinforces) a failure to attain the epistemic aspect of enlightenment outlined in section 1. With this, we arrive at what is, for the Buddhist, the root cause of anger. As noted in Chapter 1, Buddhists tend to call someone who is angry a ‘fool’, suggesting that the problem with anger is associated with our cognition. As much as anger is a social emotion (i.e. being triggered by external factors), a precondition for anger to arise, however, is a certain way of seeing ourselves, the world, and the relation between them (see Chapter 1, section 2.2). Coupled with the distinctive Buddhist metaphysical position, these things are fundamental to the argument for the elimination of anger.

Broadly speaking, here’s how the argument goes: anger is a manifestation of an epistemic failure to recognise the world as it actually is; oneself and other agents, as well as our surroundings, are impermanent, interdependent, and lacking of essence i.e. they are (ultimately) not real; since anger involves one’s being angry at some agent, because of some harm they have caused oneself or one’s property, valued possessions, etc., then anger is irrational because our beliefs do not correspond with the truth. Put another way: the reality of Buddhist metaphysics does not warrant us to feel wronged, and the problem lies in our (mis)perception of reality. And, in turn, responses based on such irrational thoughts and misperceptions are what perpetuate suffering. In other words, anger is both a result of

ignorance i.e. an epistemically unenlightened state, and itself causes suffering (which perpetuates that unenlightened state). The moral problem of anger discussed above is thus underpinned by an epistemic problem — we cannot achieve enlightenment through moral development alone. Let us now unpack this argument.

Anger makes an important ontological assumption. It is an assumption about the agency of both the agent and the patient. Victims of *perceived* injuries become angry because, in normal circumstances, they believe that the aggressors deliberately harm them, or if it was an accident, they might still be angry because they believed that those who caused the harm were not careful enough, for example. But if they lacked full capacity to act (e.g.'s, 'she is a child', 'she is schizophrenic', 'she was coerced to act') then we tend to pardon the apparent aggressor. What differentiates these cases from ones which *typically* trigger anger are whether we see the perpetrator as a fully *responsible agent*.¹³⁶ The agent (the supposed wrongdoer) is recognised as a distinct individual, with a capacity to fully control herself and who is not acting under determining influences of other persons or circumstances. On the other hand, the patient (the offended) also conceives of herself in the same way; an autonomous and independent entity who, in this *particular* case as a patient, is totally innocent or undeserving of the harm.

This view is precisely the mistake in our thinking, according to the Buddhist, because *ultimately* it is self-fabricated. Buddhist philosophers call into question our deeply rooted sense of the self, suggesting it is not in line with reality. Consider some thought from Buddhaghosa:

“Since states last but a moment’s time, those aggregates, by which was done the odious act, have ceased, so now what is it you are angry with? ‘Whom shall he hurt, who seeks to hurt another, in

¹³⁶ Let us be reminded by the discussion in P. F. Strawson’s monumental essay “Freedom and Resentment”

the other's absence? *Your* presence is the cause of hurt; why are you angry, then, with *him*?"¹³⁷

This passage calls upon the notorious 'no-self' thesis, which works closely with the claims that all is impermanent and independent. A person is referred to as a heap of aggregates (as mentioned in Chapter 1, *skanda/khandha*), and Buddhaghosa wants to undermine that commonly mistaken self — rigid and self-defining — by pointing out how, as a person (as well as everything else), we change all the time. The problem pointed out here starts with our thinking that demarcates between oneself and the others. By identifying with any sense of a self, we start to draw the line and form a circle around the *I* — 'this is *my* friend'; 'such and such belong to *me*'; 'I *am* the humblest person in the world' (how ironic such an announcement is!)¹³⁸ The more you attach yourself with such modifiers, the 'bigger' you become. And this is significant in creating more chances for the arising of anger. As discussed in Chapter 1, anger is triggered when there is a *perceived* harm to oneself and whatever one values. That means that when whatever you identify as or with yourself suffers, you become angry.

Aristotle's account of anger (*Rhetoric* II. II 5-7), which incorporates a condition about social status, actually illustrates the Buddhist point very well. In Aristotle's view, anger can only arise when the superior are slighted by the lower classes, but not *vice versa*. This interaction is tied to the *worth* of the sufferers; the more worth the person has, the angrier she is (allowed) to become, for the superior have more worth, while those who are 'worthless' do not get to get angry. But 'worth' is not something that always remains unchanged and true (just like the worth, or worthlessness rather, of slaves no longer exists), it is something constructed. The worth of yourself is about what you see yourself as. That is to say, it is an appraisal of oneself which is determined not just by oneself, but also influenced by other factors such as

¹³⁷ *Viism* IX, 22. Emphases belong to the original text.

¹³⁸ As Peter Harvey notes about the idea of self in Buddhist philosophy, "Self is practically equivalent to 'what pertains to Self, I, mine, 'I am.'" (*The Selfless Mind*, 50)

social norms (although in the ancient Greece the worth of a person according to classes was largely determined by the latter).

Further passages from the Buddhist texts gesture us towards the bigger picture of reality, inviting us to see all phenomena as embedded in chains of events. This time, let Śāntideva speak:

“Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are, all arise through the power of conditioning factors, while there is nothing that arises independently.”¹³⁹

“The much-sought-for ‘primal matter’, or the imagined ‘Self’, even that does not come into being after deciding ‘I shall become.’”¹⁴⁰

As introduced in the discussion about suffering, all things are inevitably affected by something else, and at the same time themselves become the factors that affect other things; this is the principle of *dependent arising*. No-one and nothing is free from conditions — Śāntideva is appealing to that truth. There is no ‘Self’ that could conjure something up out of *sheer* will. As much as we cannot decide to walk on the Sun and succeed (due to our biological and physical restrictions), we cannot decide to transgress without the influences of conditions. If we had to identify what gives rise to the evil deeds, it has to be all the conditions which have to be traced back through a tremendously complex web of interconnection, and perhaps it might include what the sufferer has done herself.¹⁴¹ But as the point stands, seeing oneself as distinct from the problem is an oversight. And it is probably not an exaggeration to say that tracking down *all* the causes is impossible.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *BCA* 6.25

¹⁴⁰ *BCA* 6.27

¹⁴¹ In *BCA* 6.42, it says: “Previously, I too caused just such pain to living beings. Therefore, this is just what I deserve, I who have caused distress to other beings.” The same thought can be found in *BCA* 6.45, 47, 49.

¹⁴² This reminds me of an example from a comedy series called *Santa Clarita Diet*. It is about a woman who was turned into a human cannibalistic zombie. All madness engulfs her and her complicit family because she has to eat human beings in order to survive. At one point, they start to discover that the cause for her transformation into a human flesh-eater is the clams she ordered for the dinner on a night out. Then she starts to blame herself for

Here, Śāntideva treats all causes equally and suggests that this is how we should also see things. This is made clear in *BCA* 6.22: “I am not angered at bile and the like even though they cause great suffering. Why be angry at sentient beings, who are also provoked to anger by conditions?” Whether bile or a sentient being, they are treated equally as causes of pain here. But we tend to treat these causes differently: we don’t blame ‘bile’ for the suffering it causes to our body (like when a friend feeds us spicy food at a dinner party that causes us an upset stomach).¹⁴³ This impersonal view is significant in our therapising of anger. By recognising that we and our offender are just like everything else, not independent from conditions and in total control, we lose the sense of agency that holds someone in particular as the sole cause of our pain. We will return to this idea of utilising the Buddhist metaphysical view as a cognitive tool in the treatment of anger in Chapter 4.

Such a theory of anger is strongly cognition-orientated. The occasions of anger that *appear* to give rise to anger are only the immediate factors that contribute to its arising. Yet, we blame the person. Digging deeper we will find that the thought that ‘I am made to suffer by a *responsible agent*’ requires a more basic assumption. Such an appraisal of the situation supposes agents in a way that they are completely independent, which, the Buddhists argue, is wrong. Therefore, anger can never be justified because it results from our failure to recognise things as they actually are. An implication of this conception is that they do not consider anger as an instinctive reaction i.e. being simply somatic or non-cognitive feedback, because all anger is considered to be processed through one’s (mis)apprehension, of which most of us are unaware, before we react. In

ordering the dish, then remembering how her decision was influenced by the waiter. But her husband thought it might have been because of him, because that night a football match was on, so he wanted to watch football instead of cooking before she came back. And he also lied to her to get out of trouble and suggested going out instead. They kept tracing the course of events back to find out that it seems to go on indefinitely. In the end, when they try to pinpoint a single cause that is responsible for her becoming a zombie, they were bogged down by the ever-increasing factors upon thinking back on all that happened.

¹⁴³ See further detailed analysis of Śāntideva’s arguments against anger in Chapter 4.

fact, even our likes and dislikes, which are sometimes seen as a natural disposition are, according to this argument, also founded upon these epistemic assumptions. It could be instinctive only in the sense that anger is triggered impulsively from an already-formed attitude which is partly constituted from beliefs.

In a sense, this is good news for those who genuinely want to eschew anger: if the problem lies in our misunderstanding, there's a solution. This formulation of anger, as such, allows the Buddhists to deal with *every* instance of it, rather than having to admit to uncontrolled anger. Although Buddhist eliminativists may offer different methods to deal with anger, the necessary requirement for eliminating anger altogether is by correcting one's belief to align with reality. Suppressing, subduing, or controlling anger would only calm anger temporarily, but as long as the misconception still persists it can resurface anytime. Thus to 'uproot' that false attitude is a very apt expression for the elimination indeed, for it could be likened to a root, most likely, of grass: as long as its roots are left untouched, you will definitely see it grow though there may only be a few drops of rain.

It might very well be observed that such cognitive transformation does not come by easily. A person afflicted by such a state of 'ignorance' or 'confusion', otherwise known as *moha*, cannot be undone by just learning about the metaphysical facts. False belief is not simply a lack of information or absence of knowledge about this metaphysical reality, otherwise we would immediately attain enlightenment as soon as it is explained to us. Instead, it is a positive imposition of one's beliefs on the world, and we must actively engage with the world in ways that correspond with this belief. Thus, an eliminativist argument must go further than merely pointing out the epistemic error — it must provide a path towards acting in accordance with correct understanding (which, I hope, is what my own thesis offers). *Moha* is considered, like hatred and greed, a mental affliction or *klesā*. It is something that requires complete removal because it is deeply rooted and actions that stem from it become habit. It is for this reason why the second kind of argument above, regarding the importance of moral training, is significant

for the eliminativist argument. We will therefore return to this in due course. Before doing so, however, we will examine problems with the Moderationist alternative. More immediately, however, we need to say something about *why* we should pursue the Buddhist goal of enlightenment by trying to eliminate anger.

6. Suffering and Enlightenment

We have talked a lot above about the Buddhist ultimate goal of enlightenment, and we have identified two aspects of how we go about achieving it. Yet, it is still unclear what kind of feeling one has when enlightened. With a description like ‘happiness without a feeling’ (i.e. the void of feeling described above), it leaves us perplexed as it is such an unimaginable experience for anyone who has never experienced it, and that is probably almost all people. How can we *feel* happy without feeling it? Is it really going to be a pleasant experience then? This may make us wonder if such a goal is actually worth pursuing. Other goals, such as survival or pleasure, are understandable because their value is self-evident and everyone knows more or less what they mean to us. For us to see that the Buddhist goal is really desirable, it has to be explained in relevant terms. So instead of spelling it out as the positive state “happiness without a feeling”, enlightenment can be better appreciated by a negative thesis, which is a *complete absence of suffering*.

Now an assumption is being made here, and it is a very important one: that there is suffering in our life. This perception about life seems to be true and it is agreed that suffering is not something desirable. And Buddhists, then, are right in convincing us to get rid of it altogether. However, simply ‘there is suffering’ is not precisely true of Buddhist thought because the quantification is not right. While we tend to believe that our lives are sporadically filled with suffering, Buddhists claim that everything is suffering. This is a contentious claim that many may not find exactly accurate. Surely, we do have bad moments like when we have toothache, or lose our job or a loved one. But there are good moments, too, like winning

the lottery, seeing our children grow up happily, and so on. The proportion between happiness and suffering may differ from one person to another, but generally we think that life is a mixed bag of good and bad. Despite illnesses and disappointments, most of us whose lives are quite decent (for certainly we are fortunate enough to afford to contemplate this matter, rather than just worrying about survival) do genuinely enjoy pleasure in life — we are not always pervaded by suffering. And so perhaps, we think, suffering is not necessarily bad because there's some good in among this bad, and the bad times highlight the good ones. Without suffering to highlight the good moments, we can't appreciate how good life is, and certainly suffering does not define life itself. Apparently, this attitude towards life is at odds with the Buddhist claim. To successfully persuade us that enlightenment is actually worth pursuing, Buddhists have to show that there's actually a ubiquity of suffering in life and that it is something we should seek to eliminate.

The Buddhist analysis of suffering (*dukkha* or *duhkha*) cannot be simply equated to the term 'suffering' as we use it, because it's meaning is more far-reaching. We often associate suffering to undesirable conditions that someone has to endure or deal with over a period of time. For example, people living in poverty or having chronic diseases are said to be in suffering. We also use the verb 'suffer' when we lose something (e.g. 'She suffered a loss of her family in the fire.') or encounter something undesirable (e.g. 'The nation has suffered economic recession for over half a decade.') From our way of using the term, suffering is an undesirable condition that tends to be relatively more severe than what other people have to face. But if we consider our own experience, it doesn't have to be that extreme to make our life suffer as it can come in many subtler ways. Suffering spreads through every aspect of life, from "[B]irth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair association with the unloved, separation from the loved, and not to get what one wants."¹⁴⁴ We live everyday with some sort of uncertainty, anxiety, and unsatisfactoriness; we are pained by illnesses, stressed out by overwhelming loads of work, bored with

¹⁴⁴ SN 56.11

commuting, nervous about a job interview, disappointed by our football team's results, grief-stricken by our parent's death, fearful of our own death. These phenomena are the many faces of our suffering that is more pervasive than we thought, and so we need to figure out a sense of 'suffering' that embodies all of them.

There are many senses that can be employed to refer to suffering. The first sense is rather obvious. It is a crude sense of physical pain that is allowed by our natural make-up as a corporeal being. We have some pains which are just mild discomfort, from simply hunger and thirst to headaches and small cuts from a knife, and some that are so excruciating like childbirth. It's impossible for anyone to avoid this kind of suffering throughout the cycle of life despite our efforts. Still, it doesn't dominate every moment of our existence, at least for the vast majority of us; there are times that we can walk without the aid of a cane, where we have enough to momentarily satiate our appetites, where don't have to sleep rough on the street. Not every moment we are faced with is suffering, and bar those moments we think we have a happy and good life.

But there is also a form of suffering that is subtler and more complex than the previous sense. It is the mental phenomena that react to pain. Because we want to avoid such pain, we become anxious, uneasy, miserable and fearful. But this kind of suffering doesn't arise only from physical pain, it includes other sources that we usually associate with painful feeling, such as 'separation from loved ones' and 'not getting what one wants'. This association deepens and widens the notion of reflexive suffering because of the discrepancy between our desires and the way the world works. We want things to go as we wish but most of the time they do not. And sometimes in spite of all the efforts we make to achieve our desire, we still fail. Our lack of control of the world will often leave us frustrated and disappointed. This is due to the fact that everything changes, whether it is our aging body that aches more and more everyday, or our children who once the source of our happiness suddenly have a premature death. In any case, nothing is permanent, not even happiness.

The final sense of suffering is the most profound and all-embracing. It is the suffering of dependent arising — the pervasive condition that nothing is independent from other things, noted above. Our lives are affected, whether good or bad, by other conditions that are not in our full control. For example, the safety of Syrian citizens was suddenly and dramatically undermined as soon as a war broke out; likewise, when there is an outbreak of disease we become more vulnerable to sickness and death; and infants are helpless with regard to their own survival, and can survive only when they are nurtured by someone else. Our failures and successes are not guaranteed by our own efforts only, but also depend on other things that have effects on us. This is pervasive as every other thing is also subject to the same condition i.e. it is dependent on something else beyond its control. And the lack of complete control is *itself* suffering because we are in the position where we are being acted on, being made to suffer. This is suffering at the deepest level because the fact about causal dependence, together with impermanence, pervade everything and cause us to feel worried that misfortunes will befall us at anytime. Even when we are not aware of the fact and live our lives happily, our impotency and dependency are still ultimately inescapable. One may have the happiest moments in life, but the complex conditions that cause such desirable outcomes are subject to change without us being in full control of it. As such, suffering is seen as an unwanted condition.¹⁴⁵

Now if suffering dominates and pervades our life to that degree, one may ask, what's the point of knowing about this and what is Buddhist teaching is for? Surely this is inescapable!¹⁴⁶ Despite this seemingly grim view towards life, all is not lost, for Buddhists are actually optimistic that there is a

¹⁴⁵ Also see Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, particularly Chapter 1, for detailed discussion of suffering as well as Four Noble Truths, and Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 6-9.

¹⁴⁶ There's also an interesting discussion about suicide as a way to escape suffering. The debate whether Buddhists should hold on to the idea of the afterlife or reincarnation, or renounce it (as those who advocate the naturalised reading of Buddhism would have it) is the context in which suicide plays a crucial role. The latter position believes that mental activities stop with the end of the physical body. And if life ends there then it is a sensible solution to end suffering by ending one's life. See further discussion and some proposed solution to the problem in Westerhoff, "Buddhism without Reincarnation."

way out of this malady. Using the same principle of causal dependence, one can arrive at the conclusion that there can be a cessation of suffering: suffering has to arise due to certain causes, and if we can identify the causes, then we can prevent suffering from arising by eliminating the causes. It cannot be emphasised enough how this premise that life is pervaded by suffering is important to Buddhist philosophy — so much that it can be said that the whole Buddhist theoretical and practical system has been developed in order to eliminate, or at least alleviate, suffering. And at the same time, the opposite of it, *viz.* the end of suffering, has to be emphasised even more, and that's the whole point of practising Buddhism. For if anyone really sees the truth about suffering, they would have a sense of urgency and see that it's worthwhile to try to eliminate suffering. Now, before proceeding to see how to eliminate those causes for suffering, they first have to be identified. The Buddhists conclude that certain mental attitudes are the cause for suffering, and this is where the focus of this thesis comes in — anger.

From the above analysis of suffering, we may appreciate the phenomenology of suffering from two aspects: suffering as an objective fact, as reality of the world, and suffering as a felt phenomenon, as a subjective response to such reality. This distinction is helpful for recognising that not all suffering is inevitable. Indeed, the former sense, metaphysical suffering, is fundamental to the structure of how the world really is; that things are impermanent, lacking of essence and not self-determining. As such, there's nothing much we can do to change that structure of reality. But the latter sense, phenomenological suffering, is a consequence of your interaction with the world. Though ubiquitous, it is in fact within your control *to a certain extent*. Because it is not something embedded in the world, but something we do, it's the way we think, this gives us a clue about the kind of suffering that we can alter — either by eliminating or perpetuating it.

Desire is precisely what conditions suffering. Desire, or 'craving' as often used in the Buddhist term, is not a general kind of mental activity, as distinct from intention, cognition, feeling, and so on, which is the subject of contemporary philosophy of mind. It has a connotation of desire, like the

word ‘craving’ suggests, that is powerful, incessant, excessive — like I crave for a bar of chocolate or thirst for a pint of beer; the thought of it is really tempting that I have to have it, and as it turns out it tends to lead to another bar or pint or many more; but once I’m satisfied soon I’ll crave for it again.¹⁴⁷ A desire for something in this sense makes us suffer because of the impermanent condition of both the object of desire and ourselves; it could be that my favourite chocolate might change the recipe due to an increased price of cocoa which makes it not as delicious as it once was, or I have had it everyday for two weeks such that no matter how heavenly it was I started to feel sick of it. And, in fact, we have an inexhaustible number of desires like this, so simply chasing every one of them is a hard work, let alone the fact that some of them cannot be fulfilled and those that can be succeeded will not stay forever. Most of us want to have material comforts so we have to work hard to buy them, but once we have those possessions they become a burden, for fear that they would be damaged, lost, stolen, or burnt down. As it turns out, the fulfilled desires also come with a constant fear of losing what we have.

Indeed, it is not the material things *per se* that we desire; we want to experience pleasurable things, whether it is actually a thing or a state in which we associate with pleasure. On the other hand, we also want to avoid things that appear to be painful. From such inclinations, it’s only to be expected that we want continued existence of things we like, and non-existence of things we don’t like. If I had a child, I would want her to grow up happily, and of course for my life to be long enough to see doing so. At the same time, I would fear the thought of my child choosing the wrong path, hurting herself, or some accident depriving me of her, or that I contract cancer and die, preventing me from seeing her grow up. This is indeed life, and we see that people have different levels of ability to cope with it. The more attached you are the harder it is for you to cope when

¹⁴⁷ Physical desires are typical examples of craving in Buddhist literature. While it resonates with Plato’s idea that this kind of desire needs to be restrained, Gowans (*Philosophy of the Buddha*, 131) points out that for Buddhists there is also a sense of one kind of desire higher than another. However, it is not because it is bodily that makes it a lower desire, but because craving (*tanhā*) is the most undesirable kind of motivation.

something is lost, the more averse you are the harder it is for you to live even when you have everything you want. It is either sorrow or constant fear of sorrow. We are made to suffer by our own desire because the wish for continued existence of pleasurable things and non-existence of painful things is a wish that cannot be fulfilled by the world that constantly changes. Unfortunately, this is what we tend to do when there are incongruities between our desire and the world; instead of accommodating ourselves to the world, we assume that the world has to bend to fit our needs, which cannot always be done. However, this should not be understood as an exhortation to become apathetic, for the concern for the wellbeing of oneself and others also has to be cultivated, as we shall see in the discussion of compassion — an emotional state that requires an ability to recognise other beings' suffering — in a later chapter.

Aversion is like the other side of the same coin as attachment. If the latter pulls us to things we like, the former pushes us away. As we noted in Chapter 1, anger and hatred are treated similarly in Buddhist literature. This is because they are rooted in the same form of desire, aversion (*dveṣa*, *dosa*). Anger is a phenomenological occurrence that involves a desire to avoid the object of harm, or for the object to cease to exist or to exist differently. For this reason, when being harmed, we have the tendencies to retaliate against the *apparent* cause of pain in order to remove it. For example, when stubbing a toe on a chair, some people get angry and kick it (foolishly thinking, knowingly or unknowingly, that harming it would stop it from harming them again). Or similarly, people also want to retaliate against their enemies, or even obliterate them, so that the source of harm becomes non-existent. Wishing an ill upon another is fundamentally a manifestation of a desire that something that makes us suffer stops existing, and because we associate another as a cause of our pain, we want that person to stop causing us pain by harming or even eliminating them. Yet, even when anger doesn't wish ill of another, it still has the same desire, i.e. to get rid of what there is or what is in our possession and avoid what we do not have that we don't like. Again, we make ourselves suffer for fear that we won't be able to avoid what we don't like, which is not always possible to do, especially if there are

many things you are averse to. In fact, the more desires you have, the more likely you are met with disappointment by the unfulfilled desires. As such, craving is not appropriate and has to be eliminated because anger and other actions that are rooted in craving perpetuate the suffering that is already entrenched in the world. The fundamental problem of desire lies in its presupposition that there is a distinct, autonomous, unchanging self that can permanently attach itself to or avoid some other things or agents of the same nature. As we saw in section 5, Buddhists believe this is a mistake we often make, and precisely the one that causes suffering because it conflicts with reality. The desire in anger that seeks avoidance of things we don't like is a mark of dissatisfaction. In this sense anger is not just a cause of suffering, but is itself a symptom of suffering caused by the lack of awareness of the metaphysical truth.

Conclusion

Having set out these crucial aspects of the Buddhist arguments for eliminating anger, and the underlying metaphysical picture which underpins them, we can now turn to the opposing view — Moderationism — in more detail. In order to motivate a defence of (the currently unpopular!) Eliminativism, we must show what is wrong with the far more prevalent moderationist arguments. I turn towards this task in Chapter 3.

Chapter Three:
**MODERATIONIST ARGUMENTS FOR
ANGER**

Introduction

This chapter examines moderationist accounts, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, in favour of anger. All accounts — as far as moderationism goes — argue that *some* kinds of anger are good or right and thus cannot be eliminated. On their view, eliminating anger altogether eliminates something of irreplaceable value, though they can concede that not all anger is good, or that anger is not always appropriate. We will first examine the general approach of the Buddhist moderationists, which involves the ‘transformation of anger’. What this means varies across accounts, as do the terms used to describe this process (it may be referred to as a ‘transformation’, as ‘metabolisation’, as ‘transmutation’, and so on). Essentially, it is the moderationist attempt to recharacterise anger, which deviates from the generally accepted notion. I will highlight what I see as some methodological concerns about this approach, though I do not intend for these concerns to be regarded as defeating of moderationism. After looking at the general approach taken, we will focus more narrowly on one specific moderationist account — that of Emily McRae — which gives us the most detailed account of what is involved in transforming anger, and what the supposed benefits are of doing so. We will then examine other supposed benefits in the section which follows, raising issues with these claims. Again, my rebuttals are simply meant to show that they are not convincing enough for eliminativists, and not to totally dismiss moderationism. In section 4, we deal with an argument for ‘apt anger’ by Amia Srinivasan. I will identify what the concerns of this unique account are and give some preliminary responses from the Buddhist eliminativist perspective, before going on to develop my own response in Chapter 4. Finally, we turn to examine the odd relationships between anger and compassion as proposed by moderationists. This pairing is peculiar to arguments in favour of anger. I will show that there are many issues

surrounding this pairing that moderationists have to respond while eliminativists are not faced with the same problems. The central aim of the chapter is to cast sufficient doubt on the moderationist position to allow for a defence of eliminativism in the chapters which follow.

1. The Transformation of Anger

Many Buddhist moderationist accounts attempt to recharacterise anger, specifically by shaking off its negative aspects via a process of transformation and redeploying what is left of the emotion in a productive or ‘creative’ way.¹⁴⁸ In this section we will examine the nature of this transformation (to the extent that is possible given the lack of detail on this process which is typical of many accounts) and suggest some concerns the moderationist may need to address. What we shall see is that moderationists lean on a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘transformed’ anger, with the former sharing the characterisation given in Chapter 1, with its many negative associations and effects, and the latter offering a far more useful emotion for deployment in a variety of ways and contexts. As we saw in Chapter 2, some moderationists see this transformation as part of a therapising of anger i.e. what we should do with anger once it arises, whereas others see the project as trying to find a way of ‘getting anger right’ i.e. developing a way of responding angrily to the world which doesn’t carry its negative effects. We also saw that some eliminativists, such as Thich Nhat Hanh, are sympathetic to the therapising project, but ultimately defend a view that it would be better if anger did not arise at all (thus rejecting the notion that we should try to get anger right so as to make use of it).

In Chapter 1, we saw how the Buddhist characterisation of anger is closely linked with a tendency to seek to harm others. In some cases, this could be manifested as violence. Moderationists, however, seek to disassociate anger and violence, defending the claim that anger is not *necessarily* violent. Barrows, for example, complains that “In our culture we

¹⁴⁸ Barrows, “The Light of Outrage,” 53.

frequently confuse anger with violence... We are conditioned by the very order of the society to expect little to intervene between our experience of anger (ours or anyone else's) and the impulse to act on it hurtfully."¹⁴⁹ The thought here is that violence is necessarily bad, but anger is not. As we often mistakenly equate anger to violence, such association ruins anger's potential to be good. Thus, in order to come to accept the moderationist view, we have to stop conflating anger and violence and, instead, condemn *violent* anger while permitting *peaceful* anger. As such, not all incidents of anger should be seen as bad just so long as we refrain from acting violently.

This is a fair point to make. Not all anger leads to actual aggression, or in fact to any action at all. However, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, according to the traditional Buddhists, anger is essentially a mental phenomenon, i.e. without an expression or someone else recognising it, it is no less anger.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the moderationist recharacterisation of anger along these lines is not actually inconsistent with the Buddhist account. That anger is a primarily mental phenomenon in fact seems to play into the moderationist argument that we can simply suppress our mental anger and then express it creatively somehow. We can see, therefore, that there is agreement between moderationist and eliminativist views on this particular characterisation of anger. However, simply pointing out that anger can be dissociated from violence is not likely to persuade the eliminativist to embrace anger since, as we pointed out in Chapter 2, merely suppressing anger would not address the concern of the Buddhist eliminativists that the (phenomenological) experience of anger itself is inherently undesirable. As such, the eliminativist has *additional* reasons to reject anger, regardless of how closely it may or may not be connected to violence.¹⁵¹ As such, the

¹⁴⁹ Barrows, 53.

¹⁵⁰ That the violent action is impulsive in Barrows' quote doesn't make a significant difference. Anger that leads to impulsive violent action is primarily a mental phenomenon just as much as anger that leads to a carefully deliberated act of violence. One might be severely paralysed, thus unable to act on a violent impulse, yet still have that impulse. The central point here is that we can agree that violence and anger (of various sorts) can come apart. Barrows' point is that they are *too closely associated within our culture*.

¹⁵¹ The question regarding what constitutes violence is open for debate. Eliminativists may wish to object that simply getting angry is itself violent, if the definition of violence involves something forceful and likely to cause harm. Then, we cannot even feel anger because such would commit violence which in itself is inherently wrong. However, I do not intend to

moderationist would need to show us that anger can be further transformed so as to remove the residual negative aspects of anger, or else persuade us that the benefits of anger outweigh those negative aspects. We shall come to this latter sort of argument later; for now, we will focus on the transformation of anger.

Another way in which the moderationist seeks to recharacterise anger is by suggesting that anger does not always involve a desire to harm others. Barrows, again, wants to argue that anger can sometimes lack the desire to harm or act out altogether. She proposes a so-called ‘holy anger’ as different from the normal kind of anger as a forward-looking emotion, rather than one which desires the suffering of others (the characterisation typical in Buddhist texts, as we saw in Chapter 1). She suggests of holy anger that “its aim would not be vengeance, punishment, humiliation, the suffering of the offender. It would take no delight in fantasies of the other’s defeat; it would not be satisfied by these, because its aim would not be to continue the cycle of suffering.”¹⁵² Instead, anger is lauded for its energising effects — a common claim across moderationist accounts.¹⁵³ Thus, the aim of the transformation of anger is to harness its energy in service of non-violent aims, aims which also do not seek to harm others. By eliminating anger, the thought goes, we sacrifice something which is of significance and value. As Barrows explains, in “attempting to abdicate our anger, we lose touch with a deep wellspring of strength and a positive force for many kinds of change.”¹⁵⁴

pursue this line of argument. For, again, we lack enough discussion about violence in the moderationist accounts. Moreover, violence has a tricky place in Buddhist ethics. There is some indication that violence, such as killing, may be acceptable in some exceptional circumstances, in Buddhist philosophy. A notable source for such dispute is, e.g., in the Mahāyāna text *Upāyakaśalya Sūtra* (cited in Chapter 2) See the contemporary discussion in, e.g., Gethin, “Killing Compassion,” and Keown, “Compassionate Killing,” (for the Theravada context specifically), and Jenkins, “Auspiciousness of Compassionate Violence”; Jenkins, “Compassion and Violence,” (for the wider Buddhist context generally).

¹⁵² Barrows, “The Light of Outrage,” 54.

¹⁵³ Barrows, 52; Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 171; hooks, “Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness.” Non-Buddhist moderationists make a similar claim. See, for example, Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” 280.

¹⁵⁴ Barrows, “The Light of Outrage,” 53.

Such a position on anger has a lot of intuitive appeal. As we noted in Chapter 1 (2.1), we tend to closely associate justice with anger, as when we feel angry about some grave social injustice. This is one of the main motivations for feminist moderationists in particular when they advocate on anger's behalf. However, there is a possible methodological concern that the moderationist may need to contend with: by transforming anger so drastically, do they in fact bring about its cessation in favour of some other emotion? This is a concern that moderationists themselves raise — McRae, for instance, addresses this kind of problem (we shall examine her account specifically in the next section). I suspect that there are actually *two* concerns at play here. First of all, by stripping anger of its negative properties, there is a possibility that anger simply ceases to be anger. This is a concern because it renders talk of 'transmuted anger', 'holy anger', 'Tantric anger', and so on, a series of misnomers — it is simply not accurate to talk of those concepts in terms of anger, and thus those positions, in fact, argue for the elimination of anger. The second concern is that the characterisations given to transformed anger are so generic that any argument in favour of those characterisations could simply be used in favour of some other emotions as well. I will try to explain these two concerns a little further.

Our first concern is a conceptual one. In effect, the moderationist appears to unpack the concept of anger, identifying its properties, in much the same way that we did in Chapter 1. However, in doing so, the transformative process — a process which is not explained in many moderationist accounts — seeks to establish a new concept of anger which discards the negative properties and retains only its positive ones. Barrows, for example, discards the desire to harm others which is characteristic of normal anger, and retains anger's energising effects, resulting in 'holy anger'. However, it is debatable as to whether this method for establishing the new concept really displays any philosophical rigour. The eliminativist might wish to suggest that there must be some necessary conditions for something counting as anger, or else anger may not be distinguishable from other emotions. And unfortunately Buddhist moderationists have not been engaged enough on that front. Anger is something both commonly

experienced and universal across human populations, and we typically have no trouble identifying it in ourselves and others. That would suggest that there might be some essential characteristics of anger, which perhaps also make it so easily recognisable. The danger of the transformative process the moderationist employs is that such necessary conditions may simply not be met by the new concepts this process yields.

The second, related, concern, is that even if what is left over from the transformative process is sufficient for us to regard that emotion as anger, the newly produced emotional response might simply share too many of its positive features with other, non-angry, emotions. For instance, if what is retained of anger is its energising effect and its intentionality, advocating transformed anger on this basis might be quite unpersuasive if we can simply point to an alternative emotion which has those same benefits, and possibly more. As we have noted above, there is much to be said for those positive aspects of anger — if it is energising and externally directed at some specific person, cause, object etc. in the world (i.e. is intentional), then it is clear that transformed anger could be a force for social change. However, the eliminativist might equally wish to point out that what the moderationist values in their transformed anger is actually present in other positive emotions like compassion and generosity. If transformed anger amounts to nothing more than ‘an energising and intentional emotional state’, then this description fits other emotions just as well, and thus we may simply adopt these other emotions rather than (transformed) anger. Generosity, for example, can be both energising and intentional — consider the ‘spring in your step’ that you get from giving a homeless person the ‘benefit of the doubt’ when you give them your last bit of money on the promise they won’t spend that money unwisely. Here, our attitude of generosity is both energising and intentional. Being committed to doing good, as we might have experienced, can very well give us such energy to create change for the better even at a broader social level. If transformed anger has no special claim to the positive aspects it claims, then there is no reason to prefer it over the alternatives. Moreover, there are reasons to reject it — if the transformative process *goes wrong*, then we might be left with normal anger

(in some degree), and thus there is a risk of trying to operate on the basis of transformed anger while only normal anger is present.

As I said above, these methodological concerns need not be defeating of moderationism — they are simply left as concerns to be addressed. Part of the problem with understanding the moderationist notion of transformation of anger is that many moderationist accounts are not philosophical texts that seek to outline the concepts they bring into play with any degree of precision. As such, the transformative process is often left unexplained, and the characterisation of transformed anger might simply emptier than it was actually intended. However, there are some more substantive moderationist accounts that we can examine to see if they can address those concerns, and offer arguments that should trouble the eliminativist. One such account is that of Emily McRae, who advocates for ‘Tantric anger’. We turn to that account now.

2. McRae’s Tantric Anger

Emily McRae attempts to make the case for moderationism by advocating what she calls ‘Tantric anger’. McRae identifies six features, based on two Tantric Buddhist texts by Dharmarakṣita — *The Wheel Weapon that Strikes at the Enemy’s Vital Spot* and *The Poison-Destroying Peacock Mind Training*,¹⁵⁵ which she claims distinguish Tantric anger from ‘normal anger’, i.e. the everyday kind. The first characteristic is that tantric anger is *transformed* anger, as opposed to merely *feigned* anger. The thought here is that an eliminativist might argue that any beneficial consequences of anger might be just as easily obtained by pretending that we are angry, i.e. that it is not actually anger that should be defended. However, Tantric anger is not pretended — it is real anger that has undergone a ‘metabolising’ process (more on this below). This brings us to the second distinguishing characteristic — Tantric anger has been “transformed or metabolised into ‘that which is like anger’”.¹⁵⁶ By this, McRae seems to mean that Tantric

¹⁵⁵ Sopa, Sweet, and Zwilling, *Peacock in the Poison Grove*..

¹⁵⁶ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 473.

anger retains the “power, energy, desire to act, and external focus paradigmatic of normal (unmetabolised) anger”.¹⁵⁷ The third characteristic distinguishing tantric and normal anger is that the former is “accomplished through meditative and contemplative practices that function as therapies for the emotions”.¹⁵⁸ This is the process by which anger seems to be metabolised, and McRae cites Buddhist ‘mind-training’ as an example of such a process. A fourth distinguishing characteristic is that Tantric anger is *non-compulsive*, i.e. a person who is ‘tantrically’ angry is in control of that anger, and can drop it when it is no longer useful. This is meant to contrast with the compulsion to act out associated with normal anger. Tantric anger’s fifth distinguishing characteristic is that it is not oriented towards harming others, but instead towards helping them. Normal anger, by contrast, is often defined with reference to a desire to harm those who have wronged us. Lastly, tantric anger is “intimately connected with the Buddhist metaphysical view of ‘no-self’, the idea that there is no substantial, enduring, permanent, independent self”.¹⁵⁹

We can see that the recharacterisation strategy mentioned earlier is deployed here too. Some of the claims, including that no ill-desire is involved, that it means to help, etc. have been discussed to a certain extent above, with some objections. However, given McRae’s far more detailed argument, I think we should reconsider this set of complex claims carefully to evaluate whether this special kind of anger can be a valid contender for moderationism.

McRae attempts to methodically argue that a view that defends Tantric anger is both more attractive than the eliminativist position, and is a more nuanced view than many of the moderationist alternatives. Eliminativists, as she notes, have highlighted the irrationality and destructive tendencies of anger, but the Tantric thesis, she believes, “preserves the commitment to the cultivation of positive regard for all members of the

¹⁵⁷ McRae, 479.

¹⁵⁸ McRae, 473.

¹⁵⁹ McRae, 474.

moral community while still recognising a robust role for anger in moral life”.¹⁶⁰ Certainly, McRae’s argument for a more refined account of anger offers a very clear strategy for the moderationist against the eliminativist — moral life is incredibly complex, and on the surface one of the great failings of the eliminativist position is that, by advocating that we eradicate specific emotional responses, it might be thought to restrict and simplify the possible range of moral actions. But we must examine McRae’s arguments more closely to see whether she achieves the aims she sets out for Tantric anger.

One of McRae’s targets is Glen Pettigrove’s defence of ‘meekness’. On that view:

“Meekness is the virtue whose purview is the governance of anger and related emotions. The meek person is slow to anger and is not prone to resent others, to desire their suffering, or to take pleasure in their distress.”¹⁶¹

Pettigrove is not, strictly speaking, an eliminativist. His position is instead that, even if we think anger is sometimes morally appropriate, the better response to wrongdoing is still meekness. It is in discussing Pettigrove’s view that McRae introduces us to a central example in which she thinks anger, or Tantric anger in particular, would be a better response than meekness. The standards against which we measure this include which response helps reveal to us what we value, which helps us to better recognise wrongdoing, which helps us communicate what we value or expect, and which motivates us to defend the things we value or to challenge injustice (more on this in section 3 below). The example that McRae cites as a challenge to Pettigrove’s claim that meekness ought to be preferred to anger comes from Martha Nussbaum:

“Elie Wiesel was a child in one of the Nazi death camps. On the day the Allied forces arrived, the first member of the liberating

¹⁶⁰ McRae, 467.

¹⁶¹ Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger,” 343.

army he saw was a very large black officer. Walking into the camp and seeing what was there to be seen, this man began to curse, shouting at the top of his voice. As the child Wiesel watched, he went on shouting and cursing for a very long time. And the child Wiesel thought, watching him, now humanity has come back. Now, with that anger, humanity has come back.”¹⁶²

Certainly, this is a striking example. The horrors of the Holocaust are well-known to virtually everyone. McRae thus asks us to imagine a similar scenario in which the officer, instead of cursing, began to cry — under that situation, she asks, would that have ‘restored humanity?’ In McRae’s view, such a response would fail to properly recognise the Nazi guards’ *wrongdoing*, because the outward expression of sadness captures only loss, pain and a *certain kind* of suffering. It is not, she suggests, specific enough to capture the kind of suffering caused by injustice, and thus it would fail to capture an important aspect of Wiesel’s reality. It is anger, she asserts, that does what meekness cannot in this situation.

This is an interesting claim, but one which I feel needs closer scrutiny. The underlying thought of this situation seems to be one that an expression of anger shows your humanity, i.e. shows that you understand and care, which is a common argument among moderationists. However, one reason that McRae’s point seems appealing, it seems to me at least, is that we find comfort in others *sharing* our emotional perspective. If Wiesel was angry at his treatment at the Nazi death camp soldiers, as we might well expect, then seeing the anger of the Allied officer would assure him that there was a *sympathetic* response to his tragedy. One way in which we can characterise sympathy is with reference to ‘common feeling’, i.e. shared emotion. An angry Wiesel might well see anger as restoring humanity, because that reflects and validates his own feelings about the situation. It is undoubtedly reassuring to know that others feel the same way as we do in moments of heightened emotion. But it seems to me that we could also re-describe Wiesel’s situation above in such a way that meekness can replace

¹⁶² Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 403.

anger: where weeping openly would be the restorative act required. As we have noted elsewhere, anger is (typically) intentional, i.e. directed at someone or something specific. But the Holocaust, while affecting and involving specific people, goes beyond those individuals' experiences in terms of its moral significance. This is why many Holocaust memorial ceremonies today specifically reference ongoing genocides, in acknowledgement that such horrors have not yet ended. Discovery of the Nazi death camps revealed something much deeper about humanity — that even in such extreme situations, a total *absence of compassion* is possible, and that humanity is at its worst when we allow that to happen. It seems that Hannah Arendt had something like this in mind when she spoke of 'the banality of evil': that compassion, or 'caring' if you like, can be pushed out when structures are set up in such a way as to dehumanise others, and the consequences of this are well-documented.

In fact, Elie Wiesel himself has made this very point, saying "The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference... To be in the window and watch people being sent to concentration camps or being attacked in the street and do nothing, that's being dead."¹⁶³ As such, an Allied officer openly weeping at 'seeing what there was to be seen' might well be thought of as *precisely* bringing back humanity, for it was *compassion* that needed to be brought back to the victims of the Nazi death camps, not anger. This seems particularly true in this situation since the injustice that needs to be recognised here is not localised to a single individual, but spread across an entire population. What Wiesel, or anyone, may have been looking for was simply a sign that the rescuers understand and care, which is what anger is supposed to signify in this case. However, understanding and caring are also the foundation for compassion, a positive emotion that can function just like anger, but without risking the negative 'side-effects' identified in Chapter 1. It was, in fact, anger and hatred that had led them to places like Auschwitz and Belsen to begin with, as the anger of the political classes fuelled the creation of a mechanised system of mass slaughter.¹⁶⁴ None of this is to deny

¹⁶³ Wiesel, quoted in "Elie Wiesel - Wikiquote"; and "Elie Wiesel - Oxford Reference."

¹⁶⁴ Thanks to Andrew Haggerstone for our discussion and pointing out to these examples.

that Wiesel was angry, but that is not the central question here — our concern is establishing what the better response to this tragedy would be.¹⁶⁵

If there is any merit to the point above, then it highlights a further worry about whether the restoration of humanity could be the result of the metabolising process McRae describes. That worry is that tantric anger might not have the restorative property that Wiesel observes of the Allied officer's actions. I have suggested above that the reason Wiesel might have taken the officer's actions to be restorative of humanity is because they reflected his own anger at the situation. But it is arguable that the kind of anger in play here is simply *normal* anger — anger that *did* aim at harming the wrongdoer, and that *was* an instinctive (i.e. compelled) reaction, rather than Tantric anger, which is the result of careful deliberation, and does not aim at harming the wrongdoer. If, it transpires, what is restorative in the situation is *common feeling*, then normal anger on the part of the soldier would be a closer reflection of Wiesel's own anger, and thus truly more sympathetic. As George W. Harris explains:

“What is it that makes such anger appropriate? If we take Wiesel's story as a guide, it is the inhumanity of the perpetrators... [T]he unadulterated fact is that you cannot be a Nazi at heart and have much humanity left... Not to think of them as the enemy, not to think of them as fitting objects of anger, not to think of them as deserving of punishment and pain for pain inflicted, and not to think of them as less than human is to signal a loss of one's own humanity.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, there are other interpretations of the Holocaust that suggest the victims were stripped even of their capacity to feel: “[W]hile Arendt may be referring to the particularly extreme state of death-in-life that has come to be called ‘Musselman,’ Améry explicitly states that this is *not* what he is primarily concerned with... The Musselman, if you will, is not one who no longer *acts* spontaneously, thus also becoming incapable of asserting his uniqueness, but one who no longer *reacts* (feels). This is an extremely important qualification for Améry, which Arendt — since she only counts the experience of *actors* — fails to observe.” (Shai, “Reductio Ad Moralem,” 838.)

¹⁶⁶ Harris, *Dignity and Vulnerability*, 113.

It therefore seems to be the case that what carries out the restoration of humanity in this situation is normal anger, and I suggest that this is because it chimes with the victim. Tantric anger might not rule out the kind of *display* the officer gave, but that does not mean that it has the explanatory power that normal anger does with reference to how humanity is restored by anger in this situation. Instead, Tantric anger precisely *lacks* this power because it fails to properly apprehend key features of Wiesel's own anger — such as the desire to harm the oppressor. Humanity is restored by the reconnection of the victim's feelings with the rest of the world, having been reduced to less than human by his oppressors. But Tantric anger has no *special* claim to this property, and neither does anger itself — whichever emotion is felt by the victim could see humanity restored should he recognise it in his rescuers (including meekness, compassion etc.)

McRae attempts to anticipate other objections to her view, and to deal with them in turn. However, she is not always successful in this regard. One such example concerns McRae's worry that metabolised anger might end up simply functioning as a middle ground between the destructive normal anger and the effective compassion in response to injustice, i.e. that metabolised anger is a better response than normal anger, but just not as good as skipping straight to compassion. This problem is reflected in the methodological concerns I raised above — can the moderationist really make a case for the specialness of transformed anger over and above some other emotional response?¹⁶⁷ This worry emerges, in part, from the Buddhist aim of helping others, and attempting to not impede their happiness (which we saw in Chapter 2 is not simply the hedonistic kind of happiness). In discussing this worry, McRae poses the following question: “What is the point of this middle ground of metabolized anger if what we really should do

¹⁶⁷ McRae also wrestles with the second sort of methodological concern I raised above — that transformed anger might not be anger at all. Her response to that concern is simply to point to the similarities between transformed anger and normal anger. However, as I noted above, this sort of response is surely inadequate where those similarities are shared by vastly different emotions like compassion and generosity.

is care more for others, something that compassion and love are much better suited to accomplish?”¹⁶⁸

McRae seems to have an ‘easy’ answer readily available: the fact is that we *do* get angry, so “if we take the tendencies of human psychology seriously the relevant question isn’t ‘Should we get angry?’ but, instead, ‘I’m angry, so now what?’”¹⁶⁹ For McRae, the answer is obviously that we transform that anger into tantric anger. However, this is a puzzling episode for McRae, since it seems to beg the question. The relevant question for moderationists might well be ‘I’m angry, so now what?’, but what is under examination in the central debate moderationists find themselves in within the context of Buddhism absolutely is ‘Should we get angry?’ In other words, the question that she asks, ‘I’m angry, so now what?’, is exactly the same kind of question that eliminativists ask, that is ‘What should we do with our anger?’ Denying that simply begs the question in favour of moderationism, since it only seeks to put anger to good use rather than asking whether we should attempt to stop it arising altogether. But her reason for doing that is not sufficiently strong. True, it follows from an empirical observation about human psychology, but (for me, at least) this misses the point entirely. But the question about *what is* and *what ought to* are different questions. We might respond that *if you take Buddhist philosophy seriously*, then you have to understand that examining the nature of human psychology is part of the inquiry into human conditions, which results in the central question of whether we should get angry to begin with, or instead prevent it from arising (assuming this Buddhist aim is achievable). It is only the case that we need to consider what to do with anger if we have first concluded that it ought not to be eliminated.

This is not the only way in which McRae’s account breaks with central concerns in Buddhist philosophy. McRae’s treatment, or rather use, of the ‘no-self’ doctrine is also puzzling. McRae’s Tantric anger is supposed to be “intimately connected with the Buddhist metaphysical view of ‘no-self’,

¹⁶⁸ McRae, “Metabolizing Anger,” 477.

¹⁶⁹ McRae, 477.

the idea that there is no substantial, enduring, permanent, independent self".¹⁷⁰ However, the way this connection is explained leaves some questions unanswered. Firstly, McRae suggests that a central aspect of the relationship between anger and the no-self thesis is that the intensity of normal anger disrupts our normal patterns of thought and perception. As such, McRae suggests, we can utilise normal anger in helping us to understand the no-self thesis. This, she asserts, is itself a kind of metabolisation of anger since it is anger put to good use. She also suggests that "the understanding of no-self results in a kind of de-identification with one's emotional experiences, which allows the tantric master to have the freedom to choose his or her emotional responses."¹⁷¹ In addition, this understanding also "reveals that the usual distinctions between self and other are spurious,"¹⁷² and this — she suggests — is what leads to the elimination of the desire to harm others in the metabolising process.

This discussion from McRae leads her to a rather different conclusion to the one that Buddhist eliminativists reach when considering no-self. We will return to this in more depth in Chapter 4, but it is important to make some points here also. In McRae's view, normal anger helps us to accept the no-self thesis, and then once it is accepted, we can choose whether or not to become angry. Yet, part of the intellectual resources we now have at our disposal is a recognition that there are no 'others' at which to get angry, just as there is no self. That being the case, it would seem that the obvious thing to do would be to abandon anger altogether — since we recognise its futility. This is the position the eliminativists end up in. Yet, McRae thinks that, instead, we will retain anger and simply shake off the aspect of anger that seeks to *harm* others.

The only explanation that seems to give us reason to cling to (what is left of) anger under these epistemic conditions seems to be the ways in which McRae thinks replacing the desire to harm with an intent to help can bring

¹⁷⁰ McRae, 474.

¹⁷¹ McRae, 474.

¹⁷² McRae, 474.

about good consequences. However, this brings us back to considerations of pragmatism, and we can ask once again whether anger is better than some alternative (e.g. compassion, patience, etc.) for these purposes. We will discuss these pragmatic concerns in section 3 below, but given the Buddhist characterisation of anger as one which involves suffering, even when there is no corresponding desire to harm others (see Chapter 1), then this seems like an unusual route for McRae to take. There are other problems with McRae's account, but hopefully I have already done enough here to give us reason to think it may not have defeated the eliminativist entirely. So what does the moderationist have left to say in favour of anger?

3. The Supposed Benefits of Anger

Pettigrove offers the following broad characterisation of the kinds of moderationist argument:¹⁷³

1. The Evaluative claim: that if we truly value X, then we will become angry when X is harmed (as long as we know about it);
2. The Epistemic claim: that anger helps us to recognise the morally salient features of our situation;
3. The Communicative claim: that anger lets others know what we value, expect, or demand, and;
4. The Motivational claim: that anger can move us to defend what we value, and to challenge injustice.

These four claims are intended to show the benefits of anger. Incidentally, they are similar to those made by Buddhist moderationists. We shall address these in the order presented above, starting with the Evaluative claim.

One objection to the Evaluative claim seems fairly obvious: that it is simply not true in all circumstances. Consider a case where a dear friend

¹⁷³ Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger."

intentionally destroys your prized possession. It is conceivable that under these circumstances you might not get angry — if you (for some reason) are already worried that your anger will harm your friendship, then you may not respond angrily to that discovery. This does not suggest that you do not value the possession, it simply might be that you value your friendship more. Pettigrove suggests another case — that the Dalai Lama’s apparent lack of ‘moral’ anger does not make us think that he does not value the Tibetan people or care about their expulsion, or that he does not think they have been harmed unjustly. In the latter case, anger does not arise at least in part because of years of mental training to that end.

The connection between what we value and our anger simply is not as tight as the Evaluative claim suggests. It seems that, besides not always getting angry at harm done to things we care about (despite us believing the harm was unjust), we can also get angry at harm done to things we, on balance, care very little about. There are many cases of people becoming angry over relatively minor inconveniences — a housemate using the last of the toilet roll and placing the cardboard tube on top of the bin, rather than inside the bin; your husband leaving a wet towel on the bedroom floor; the outcome of a football match, and so on. Moreover, our anger isn’t always proportionate with regards to what we value — sometimes feel more angry about one of these minor inconveniences than we do about morally serious cases. That is not to say that this is how things *should* be, it is just to point out that the relationship between anger and value is rather imperfect.

The Epistemic claim is intended to capture the idea that anger can somehow give us insight. In particular, it is supposed to give us another perspective on the world, allowing us to view events or facts differently to the way they would otherwise be commonly viewed. Alison Jaggar, for example, suggests that anger “may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are.”¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Buddhist moderationists

¹⁷⁴ Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 167; See also Frye, “A Note on Anger,” 87; Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” 280.

highlight anger's effect on the subject. Hooks, for example, says that holding on to one's anger can help clarify our reflection, particularly on 'compassion and struggle'.¹⁷⁵ Gross too argues that anger, when 'transmuted', changes from a cloudy mind to clear thought. She claims that anger articulates itself as 'analytical clarity' while lacking disturbing effects one would expect in the emotion.¹⁷⁶ In suggesting this, then, proponents of this sort of argument are once again disagreeing with the characterisation of anger given in Chapter 1 as an emotion which tends to obscure our understanding of the world. Of course, the moderationist doesn't deny that such obfuscation is possible, nor do they claim that all anger (or that *anger always*) grants us such insight. Instead, it is moderated anger, or anger which has been properly transformed, which can yield these benefits. Let us hear Gross describe the experience:

“With practice, the anger that had been so much a part of my feminism had started to transmute. I no longer experienced so much of the time that painful state in which clarity and anger are totally mixed up. The clarity remained but the anger started to settle. My body no longer tensed with hot, explosive energy; instead I began to hold a relaxed body state that has nothing to do with giving in and everything to do with furthering communication.”¹⁷⁷

What seems to be described here is the slow dissipation of anger, and the gradual increase in control over the emotion. While the physiological *reflexes* (like the tensing body) that accompany anger are overcome, it does not necessarily mean that she becomes less angry; but nonetheless she gains mental clarity. This fits with what Pettigrove points out: that one method which moderationists think can help transform anger into its more epistemically useful kind is via the passage of time. The thought is that anger is most intense when it is an immediate response to a person or situation which has harmed or frustrated us. Over time, the thought goes, our anger

¹⁷⁵ hooks, “Contemplation and Transformation.”

¹⁷⁶ Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*.

¹⁷⁷ Gross, “The Female Body,” 11.

dissipates somewhat. In order to mitigate the initial intensity of anger, moderationists “have often appealed either to the judgment of the victim at a later time — after the heat of passion has had an opportunity to pass — or to the vantage of a bystander, each of which is thought to offer a more reliable perspective.”¹⁷⁸ This, according to Pettigrove, has provided the benchmark for the epistemically useful form of anger that moderationists advocate.

However, we might still wonder if this kind of transformed anger has any special claim over alternative responses when it comes to epistemic value. For the moderationist to make their case and win out against eliminativism, it is not enough to simply highlight some upsides to anger, since the issue is not simply one of whether we should get angry *or else do nothing*, but instead one of whether we should get angry *or do something else instead*. The Buddhist view does not suggest that we should simply ignore wrongdoing, it instead suggests that we should respond to wrongdoing compassionately, or patiently, or generously, and so on. Our actions are not regarded as causally inefficacious — doing nothing would create a different causal chain than responding angrily, or responding compassionately, etc. Thus, the eliminativist can approach this debate by advocating a *better* response than anger. This is the approach that Pettigrove takes when he advocates ‘meekness’, though not from the Buddhist perspective.

Pettigrove also highlights some empirical data that challenges the moderationist claim that (moderated) anger can be epistemically valuable. Keltner et al., for example, engaged study participants in reasoning tasks after they had induced anger in a variety of ways (through participants’ memories, through works of fiction, via news reports and videos, through pulling angry faces). The results were consistent across each of the methods of inducing anger, and each showed impairments to reasoning — even when the level of anger was moderate (as could be expected of such experimental situations) and also in cases in which we are not personally involved. Thus,

¹⁷⁸ Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger,” 361.

neither the dissipation of anger nor removing our personal connection to the situation (i.e. being a bystander) yielded the improvements to reasoning claimed by the moderationists.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, other studies suggest that anger can make us underestimate risk — of being caught up in a natural disaster, of heart disease, of divorce, and of various other scenarios covered by the study — compared to other emotional states.¹⁸⁰

Despite these impairments, when we are angry we tend to falsely think we actually become *more* insightful and objective. Lerner and Tiedens, for example, propose that the evidence of the kind of false optimism shown in the studies mentioned above (and it is *false* optimism, since angry people are actually *more* prone to at least some of the risks they were assessed on e.g. heart disease and divorce) suggests that angry people favour a kind of exceptionalism about the self. They suggest that angry people would see themselves, for instance, as not only being far less likely to be caught in a traffic jam, but also of being better placed to navigate their way out of it. Other studies suggested that angry people are more prone to irrelevant bias in their judgements: being more inclined to judge a person guilty of a crime if his name was Juan Garcia than if his name was John Garner.¹⁸¹

It is worth noting here that these criticisms do not only apply to moderationists who seek to transform anger, but also to those who seek to moderate it in other ways. Aristotle, for instance, sees anger as good when it is anger with the right person, in the right degree, at the right time and place, for the right purpose. This is of epistemic benefit for it supposedly helps us apprehend the world correctly: our anger has hit upon the morally salient features of the situation (who committed the moral transgression, how bad the transgression was, etc.) However, this is clearly not what the evidence suggests. If the response is merely that anger would be useful under such circumstances, it remains an open question with those circumstances could obtain. There is another way to read the Aristotelian position, which

¹⁷⁹ Keltner, C. Ellsworth, and Edwards, “Beyond Simple Pessimism.”

¹⁸⁰ Lerner and Keltner, “Beyond Valence.”

¹⁸¹ Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer, “Negative Affect and Social Judgment.”

is as defending the aptness of anger. We will explore another version of this view below in section 4.

Pettigrove cites yet more studies to serve the same point about the epistemic shortcomings of anger, and we need not go into quite so much depth here. The general picture that the empirical evidence paints is one suggesting that anger does not appear to give the epistemic clarity that the moderationists try to claim on its behalf — though clearly an angry moderationist would optimistically disagree, if the evidence is accurate! So what of the other supposed benefits of anger? Let us now turn to the Communicative claim.

Moderationists suggest that anger has particular worth in letting others know what we value, expect, or demand. Certainly, someone snapping at you when you try to take their last chocolate from the box seemingly communicates just how strongly they feel about that chocolate! That anger expression signals that you have trespassed against her and there is highly likely a chance that she is going to harm you in order to protect her valued chocolate, or prevent you from taking advantage of her again. However, exactly how effective is anger as a communicative force?

Pettigrove suggests that one impairment that anger causes to communication is with regard to uptake. A moral message that is delivered angrily can make the recipient of that message defensive, and thus less open to listening. Pettigrove points out that “one of the first things couples therapists teach their clients is how to communicate their objections to... their partner without expressing anger, because it increases the likelihood that their message will be heard and understood.”¹⁸² Few are willingly open to embrace an angry message, especially when it is directed at them. We see this problem not only at the personal level, but also at the political level too — cable news shows are full of panels who utterly fail to engage in debate

¹⁸² Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger,” 367.

because of their heightened anger surrounding issues like Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency.

It is unsurprising, in a way, that anger might not actually help us communicate. Anger is not *in itself* referential, i.e. angrily saying 'that's my chocolate!' does not give any more specificity about *what* is valued than calmly saying 'I would prefer if you didn't eat my last chocolate'. Emotions might help us convey the *degree to which we care* about something, but that still depends on an underlying ability to channel that anger into effective communication. However, when angry, we seem to have a tendency not to utter what we actually mean. How often have we angrily chastised someone for doing one thing when we are, in fact, angry about them doing something else altogether? It seems a common occurrence for our anger to make us say something which is actually unconnected to that emotional response, such as when we are angry that our partner came home late again, but we angrily chastise her by saying 'You woke me up!' In this example, I am not angry at being woken up, but (for the moderationist) my anger suggests otherwise, thus communicating the wrong message. But it is precisely because what we actually say and what we feel come apart that we have the choice of using a better tool than anger to communicate what we value, expect or demand. Language is, in itself, sufficient for carrying all of the important information in that regard, as Pettigrove points out: "being slow to anger will enable the meek agent to use some other tool — typically language — to communicate his or her moral objection more effectively."¹⁸³ As such, given anger's tendency to attach itself to utterances that fail to communicate what is important to us (and thus turn us into unreliable witnesses on our own behalf) it might be better for us to avoid anger when we wish to communicate something morally important.

If the arguments above have any merit, anger can create both bad listeners and bad speakers, and so the Communicative claim might also have some problems to overcome. But what of the supposed benefit to

¹⁸³ Pettigrove, 367.

motivation, i.e. that anger can move us to defend what we value, and to challenge injustice? Surely the enduring picture of an angry Malcolm X leading the charge for civil rights is proof of anger's motivational benefits? Or what about the fury of the Suffragettes?

Again, Pettigrove suggests otherwise, pointing at a variety of studies to suggest that the picture is far more complex than this. Across a variety of populations we see moral anger *misdirected*. This misdirection might be the result of an impossible situation, i.e. where the oppressor is simply too powerful, or otherwise unreachable. However, where this moral anger is misdirected it tends to find alternative targets close at hand. Al-Krenawi and associates' analysis of rates of domestic violence among Palestinian Youth,¹⁸⁴ Powell's study of the impact of societal systems on black male violence,¹⁸⁵ and Oliver and Hairston's analysis of domestic violence perpetrated by former prison inmates,¹⁸⁶ all suggest that "the highest rates of child abuse and domestic violence occur within populations that are the victims of systematic injustice."¹⁸⁷ None of this is to suggest that moral anger is the sole factor at play in these cases, but neither can it be denied that it is a contributing factor. And as Pettigrove also notes, the effects of anger within oppressed populations might move outside of the home but still not find their true target — there is plenty of evidence about the aggression and violence that members of those groups direct towards each other.

Rather than being a motivational force for correcting systemic injustices then, moral anger can often be misdirected and end up harming the very groups who the moderationists suggest it should help. Situations like domestic violence and gang conflict are, unfortunately, the norm, whereas positive social change as a result of anger are (at best) exceptions. It is fairly obvious why this is the case — it is much easier for the anger of an individual to be misdirected than it is to unify the anger of many individuals

¹⁸⁴ Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Sehwal, "Tomorrow's Players under Occupation."

¹⁸⁵ Powell, "The Impact of Societal Systems on Black Male Violence."

¹⁸⁶ Oliver and Hairston, "Intimate Partner Violence During the Transition from Prison to the Community."

¹⁸⁷ Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," 369.

and focus that on an appropriate target. Similarly, while a single individual's anger might well (at least theoretically) provide sufficient motivational force for change, a single individual within an oppressed population is unlikely to have the other prerequisite conditions (social status, economic conditions, influential audience etc.) in place to be able to effectively channel that anger.

So, many benefits are claimed for (moderated, transformed) anger, but upon closer inspection many of these supposed benefits fall away. However, there is another moderationist approach which is less concerned with what we can gain from anger, and instead focuses on its intrinsic value. It is to that view which we now turn.

4. 'Apt' Anger

The arguments we have discussed so far predominantly appraise anger in terms of its benefits. However, Amia Srinivasan suggests that anger is assessed in such cases for its prudence, and that this can be contrasted with assessing the *aptness* of anger.¹⁸⁸ Reasons of prudence, she says, are of instrumental value, concerned with anger's effects. As we have seen both in Chapter 1 and in the discussion above, the prudential reasons for rejecting anger include impairment to rational capacity, alienation of would-be allies, aggravation of conflicts, and how it compromises the pursuit of just outcome. Advocating anger based on supposed positive effects such as analytical clarity, powerful communication, and motivation, also appeals to anger's instrumental value. Srinivasan argues that by focusing on the instrumental value of anger we fail to appreciate its intrinsic value, i.e. to *appreciate* the injustice of the world, which leads to what she calls an 'affective injustice'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger."

¹⁸⁹ Srinivasan's proposition about the nature of 'affective reason' i.e. apt anger is a curious one. She thinks that getting aptly angry is a kind of 'appreciation' of the world as it is. It is a sort of capacity comparable to aesthetic appreciation, except that it does more; anger calls for others to share its negative appreciation of injustice. I find it difficult to understand what the nature of apt anger really is. However, such a capacity, to me, seems simply like a result of our perception or evaluation of the world, and therefore it shouldn't be cast out in purely affective terms, as Srinivasan suggests. In fact, she admits an evaluative attitude of anger, while denying a cognitivist account of anger — an account that judgement (partially)

Srinivasan's position is a kind of moderationism, and as such her approach also involves some revision of anger in order to make it defensible. That is to say, she does not defend all kinds of anger, but instead anger which meets certain criteria, namely those for aptness. Her approach differs from other moderationists in that she does not feel that there is any need to defend anger from the charge that it is 'counterproductive', i.e. that it lacks any instrumental benefits (such as those outlined in the claims in section 3 above). Instead, Srinivasan suggests that "the counterproductivity critic faces the burden of explaining why, in such conflicts, reasons of prudence trump reasons of aptness."¹⁹⁰ In other words, what matters when we assess the value of anger is not whether or not it helps us achieve some particular ends, but instead whether or not it is *apt*. To understand this defence of anger, we must first outline what Srinivasan means by 'apt anger'.

Essentially, Srinivasan's notion of apt anger centres on our *reasons* for anger. With that in mind, the first criterion that Srinivasan identifies for aptness is that "one's anger that *p* is apt only if *p* constitutes a genuine moral violation."¹⁹¹ What Srinivasan has in mind with this is that the transgression in question has violated the subject's view of how things *ought* to be, not merely how they *wished* things to be. So, anger is not apt if it is anger at, say, simply not getting what you want. Instead, it should involve some genuine moral violation, such as a broken promise, a betrayal, etc. In addition, in order for someone to be aptly angry, it is not sufficient that such a moral violation has occurred — it requires that the person *knows* that this violation has occurred. I cannot have a reason to be angry at your betrayal if I do not know that I have been betrayed. Moreover, my anger must be *motivated by* that reason, and be *proportional to it*. My anger would fail to be apt if you had betrayed me, but I was angry at you because I falsely believed that you had

constitutes anger (notes 22, 25). I think her deploying the term appreciation is, partly, to emphasise its involuntary nature and its value as a 'natural' capacity. However, as she recognises in her note 19, it is not *totally* involuntary, but simply not under our *direct* voluntary control.

¹⁹⁰ Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 127.

¹⁹¹ Srinivasan, 129.

stolen from me; similarly, my anger should not exceed a level appropriate for the nature of the moral violation.^{192, 193}

Srinivasan's strategy for the defence of anger, then, amounts to something like this: because apt anger is possible, by shifting the focus from the aptness of anger to the counter-productivity of anger, anger critics fail to be sensitive to the value of what has been harmed when anger is apt. If I am angry over a betrayal, your saying to me, 'Well if you are angry at me I'm only going to be more likely to betray you in future!' simply *misses the point*. In cases of apt anger, there is a moral violation, thus something of value has been harmed; and it does not matter if my anger is counter-productive, you should be focused instead on my reasons for anger. Failure to do so is a kind of affective injustice, for it fails to treat my emotional state with the respect it deserves. This argument is certainly quite unique among moderationist accounts. However, I'm not convinced it presents a great challenge for the Buddhist eliminativist. I will develop this line of thought more in the next chapter, but I can at least respond briefly here to this challenge.

The Buddhist eliminativist could, and perhaps would, concede that failure to engage with the reasons for someone's anger is a kind of affective injustice, or at least is a moral failing. They would do so, however, on the grounds that it would constitute a lack of *compassion*. Being compassionate is

¹⁹² Undoubtedly, more detail is required from Srinivasan on this point, but it does not matter too much to me here — there are more important points to focus on in Srinivasan's account than the scant detail given in her account of 'aptness'. In Srinivasan's defence, she does not aim to give an exhaustive list of criteria nor a full defence of the ones she offers. Compared to Aristotle's account of virtuous anger, i.e. that one must get angry at the right things, with the right persons and proportionate in terms of time and manner to the offence, she professes that apt anger's demands are rather lower; one can have apt anger without always perfectly meeting the right target and proportion.

¹⁹³ In setting up her account, Srinivasan makes an interesting move that is difficult to make sense of. She seeks to reject the idea that anger is inherently bound up with the idea of seeking revenge, or seeking to harm others. In doing so, she argues that sometimes we simply demand that others 'recognise' our anger. However, by this, she suggests that what we want is for the person who has wronged us "to experience that suffering that comes precisely from taking part in my own" (129). Yet this seems to be precisely the definition of revenge. It's an odd move for Srinivasan to make, because it seems unnecessary given her general strategy for assessing anger, i.e. whether or not the anger is apt. Perhaps it is motivated by a concern that wanting others to suffer is *never* a good thing, and so our reason for anger would somehow be undermined if (apt) anger cannot exist without a commitment to wanting someone else to suffer.

a matter of sympathising with, and showing concern for, the suffering of others. To become fully engaged with their situation, the compassionate person would be able to recognise that someone is suffering, i.e. in the state of being angry, and that they were made to suffer, i.e. they have been wrongfully harmed. Alternatively, in the latter sense of suffering, we can talk in a more Buddhist fashion by saying that compassion recognises that the angry person, as well as everyone else, are constantly in the state of ‘being done to’ — a state of suffering in a metaphysical sense which has been discussed in the previous chapter. As such, the Buddhists are likely to agree with Srinivasan that simply moving the conversation from exploring the reasons for someone’s anger to whether or not that anger is productive would seem morally insensitive. But what is important to note here is that Srinivasan’s focus is on how we *respond to* angry people. As such, this is not directly an argument in favour of anger itself — it is, seemingly, a charge against what she sees as an *inadequate response to* anger. In this sense, what Srinivasan’s account seems to demand is for someone to care or recognise that victims have understandable reasons for being angry, which is what Buddhists urge everyone to do through compassion. In other words, to avoid the affective injustice that Srinivasan identifies, what is required is that we respond to apt anger compassionately.¹⁹⁴ This would involve seeking out the reasons for someone’s anger, and trying to sincerely understand them. In doing so, however, that does not commit the Buddhist eliminativist to a *defence* of anger, nor does it commit them to agreeing that the anger in any form is actually apt (i.e. meets all of the criteria Srinivasan sets out). It would be sufficient to prompt compassion if there has simply been a moral violation; perhaps the mere presence of anger of any kind should prompt compassion. As such, if the angry person were to ask ‘What should I do with my anger?’, the Buddhist eliminativist could very well still advise them, ‘Eliminate it!’, all the while being (or attempting to be) understanding of why they were angry in the first place.

¹⁹⁴ Arguably, the correct response to in-apt anger should also be compassion: pointing out to an angry person that their reasons are not sufficient for anger might seem callous, even if you are correct in your assessment!

This is possible for the Buddhist eliminativist because the reasons to eliminate anger, on their view, go beyond the issue of its counter-productivity, placing them on similar footing to Srinivasan. Srinivasan's strategy of moving away from talking about what one should do with anger to what anger is about is precisely the Buddhist approach. What sets them apart is what it is they take to be an objective description of the world. It is *normatively* true that apt anger is a response to an unjust harm, which we know is acknowledged by the Buddhist. However, they are not happy to settle the matter on this basis, and instead offer additional insight into the mental process that explains how anger arises. For Srinivasan, there is a presupposition underlying her view that it is fully autonomous agents who are wholly responsible for wrongdoing, which the Buddhists argue is not the correct description of the world (more on this in Chapter 4). In this sense, the Buddhist criterion for 'aptness' (or its equivalent in Buddhist terms) is not led by constructed norms, but by reality. For this reason, Srinivasan's worry that we are caught up in between valuing things for their instrumental value rather than their intrinsic value is not a genuine dilemma, since the Buddhist concerns extend to the intrinsic too. Since the Buddhist is concerned with the nature of reality in their appraisal of anger, their concerns are with things of intrinsic value also i.e. truth. We shall examine more of this claim in the next chapter.

As it stands, it seems to me that the Buddhist can avoid the charge of callousness that is linked to the counter-productivity thesis by exercising compassion, and still caution against anger altogether, without any genuine conflict arising between these two positions. I turn now to a final concern with the moderationist position, which is a concern about the relationships between moral concepts that they employ in trying to defend anger. Specifically, I focus on the relationship they describe between anger and compassion.

5. Anger and Compassion

A common claim in Buddhist moderationist arguments for anger is that anger can be ‘rooted’, or employed in the service of, compassion. I wish to raise some initial concerns with this notion here, though I do not claim these to be defeating of the arguments for this kind of position. Instead, I intend to simply raise some questions for the moderationist to answer. Since the eliminativist wishes to get rid of anger altogether, there are no conceptual issues to answer on how anger can be employed compassionately, or how it can be grounded in compassion; the eliminativist is free to help themselves to any successful moderationist strategies in order to deal with anger when it *does* arise, but the main focus of the eliminativist position will always be on preventing that rather than remedying it. However, the success of at least some moderationist views relies on their ability to make sense of the relationship between these two concepts.

At first glance, there may seem to be nothing odd about relating anger and compassion. Wendy Donner, for instance, suggests that:

“In the context of feminist virtue theory, Buddhist feminists advance arguments that maintain that in some circumstances anger has the potential to do good, by promoting spiritual and emotional healing and awareness, as well as by challenging patriarchy. Thus anger can be virtuous if rooted in compassion and wisdom.”¹⁹⁵

Barrows makes a similar suggestion about how we ground our anger, saying that, “Such [‘Holy’] anger would be replete with authority, grace, confidence. It would not be petty. It would embrace complexity and be channelled compassionately.”¹⁹⁶ Both Donner and Barrows seem to suggest that by linking anger to compassion, anger can become a force for good. But what, precisely, is the nature of this link?

¹⁹⁵ Donner, “Feminist Ethics and Anger,” 76.

¹⁹⁶ Barrows, “The Light of Outrage,” 54.

It seems to me that we could make sense of it in a number of ways. The simplest way is to suggest that anger and compassion could have a *successive* relationship — that anger is useful when it gives way to compassion, or is exchanged for compassion. However, this sort of relationship doesn't seem to be sufficient for a defence of anger, for reasons I have pointed out above (i.e. where the defence rests upon something like the energising effects of anger then being deployed in the service of compassion, since — I have argued — compassion has its own energising effects). Another way to cash out the relationship is to say that anger and compassion can co-exist; however, this relationship could admit of a number of variants. We will examine some of these below.

Firstly, let us consider a *dominance* relation between emotions. Consider first the relationship between fear and love. It seems initially plausible to say that someone in an abusive relationship may both fear and love their partner. Imagine, then, a situation in which their partner is mortally wounded, and requires a blood transfusion that (for whatever reason) only they can provide for their partner. Such a situation offers a way out of the abusive relationship, and thus a way in which fear could prompt the avoidance behaviour for which the emotion exists. Conversely, they could choose — out of love — to save their partner's life by giving blood. Whichever course of action they choose, we might be tempted to say that one emotion has dominated the other in making that choice (just as a desire for chocolate ice cream might dominate a desire for sticky toffee pudding in our choice of dessert). However, the situation might not be so simple.

One consideration here is that our emotions are attached to reasons. In the example above, the subject's fear might be attached to the historic instances of abusive behaviour, and their love might be attached to the occasions in which their partner has made them feel secure, desirable, useful, and so on. The question, then, is whether we can adequately attend to both emotions and sets of reasons at the same time so that one can dominate the other, or whether one set *pushes out* the other. A dominance relationship depends upon both things being present, but if one pushes out

the other then the situation just described is actually another instance of the emotions occurring successively. The question here is whether we have the cognitive resources to process both sets simultaneously. If not, then the dominance relation collapses into a successive one.

Applying this to our understanding of the moderationist account of anger and compassion then, we might wonder whether we can attend to the reasons for anger and the reasons for compassion in the way required for a dominance relation. Certainly it may seem like I have suggested above that this might be possible — when the Buddhist eliminativist attempts to see the ‘aptness’ of someone’s anger, are they not attending to both the reasons for anger and the reasons for compassion? However, it is worth keeping in mind that in this situation the anger belongs to someone else; it is not an instance of both emotions co-occurring. As such, this does not describe a dominance relationship. For the moderationist, what is required for a dominance case is that reason acts as an arbiter between emotions that are both present, and helps us channel anger in the right way. It is likely that this arbiter is something moderationists have to deploy consciously, which could be a result of their commitment to act compassionately and is part of their practice. However, we may add that the mediating reasons that help us channel anger into compassion are a different set of reasons than those that evoke anger to begin with. As such, despite simultaneously co-occurring, anger and compassion can still be distinguished through their reasons. This certainly matches the aims set out by some of the moderationists discussed above, however, we have already seen that this kind of approach is replete with difficulties. When reason acts as an arbiter in this way, the result seems to be that anger is stripped of its defining traits and becomes unrecognisable, leading to the conceptual difficulties identified in section one above. Moreover, if what the moderationist is doing is advocating for the consistent dominance of compassion over anger, then they are, in effect, arguing for a kind of eliminativism *in practice*.

Another way to cash out the co-occurrence of anger and compassion might be to construe it as a kind of *emergence* relationship. The thought here

would cover cases such as those where we say things like ‘I am angry at you *because* I feel compassion for you’. In other words, it is because of my compassion for you that I feel anger at what you are doing e.g. in cases of self-destructive behaviour. In this way, my anger *emerges from* my compassion. But does this capture what the moderationist needs to say of anger in order to defend it?

One concern here would be that the revision of anger here is only to its cause, and not to its character. In other words, anger born out of compassion differs only from anger born out of jealousy in virtue of what gives rise to it. However, I think the moderationist would want to deny that. The idea must be that anger born of compassion lacks some features that anger born of other sources possesses. But this, again, brings us back to the criticisms outlined in section one above, i.e. that anger lacks its distinctive characteristics, and may fail to be anger. Moreover, when we say we are angry because we feel compassion for someone, this suggests that we must have felt compassionately toward them to begin with. If this is so, we *already recognise their suffering*. If this is the case, then such anger would presumably lack the epistemic benefits that at least some moderationists claim for this kind of anger, since we must already be aware of the morally salient features of this situation in order to first feel compassion.

So what alternatives does the moderationist have? One might be to advocate for a *blending* of anger and compassion. This is consistent with the language used by many moderationists e.g. ‘transformation’, ‘transmutation’ etc., and it could arguably avoid the problems of the successive and dominance relationships above. A blended emotion (retaining characteristics of each) could be thought to incorporate the presence of both emotions, and it might also have a shared set of reasons. However, what marks this sort of relationship out as difficult to grasp is the apparent conceptual incompatibility of anger and compassion. If anger really does involve the desire to inflict suffering on others, can it really be successfully blended with compassion, whose defining feature is its concern for such suffering?

It may be possible for these traits to co-exist, depending on how we understand these characterisations of anger and compassion. For one, we might simply reject that desiring the suffering of others is a necessary condition for anger (which many moderationists do). However, I think I have shown in the arguments presented above that they do not make an entirely convincing case for this claim. Another way in which such co-existence would be possible would be a way in which we are internally conflicted by such a kind of anger. If I desire your suffering, but I also sympathise with it at the same time, then my (blended) anger involves bringing suffering upon myself, i.e. by feeling guilt. But clearly this is not an intended consequence of the moderationist account. Although we may imagine moderationists will say they are happy to sacrifice their own suffering for the righteous cause, this raises another complication to the issue. For if moderationists think that their anger is justified, guilt would usually indicate otherwise. Transformed anger is, instead, primarily intended to alleviate both my suffering and that of those around me, given that its primary use is in fighting social injustice.

Again, I want to reiterate that these are simply issues for further consideration for the moderationist. I do not claim that these are points that they cannot respond to, but nor are these concerns that would trouble the eliminativist, since the eliminativist advocates something even simpler than a successive relationship between these emotions — the total elimination of one in favour of the other!

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter how the moderationist attempts to revise the account of anger in ways that remove the negative aspects identified in Chapter 1. However, we also saw that this leads either to conceptual difficulties, or to a place where anger has no clear advantages over alternative responses. We see these worries play out in more detail when analysing McRae's moderationist account in particular. What we see is that the moderationists are themselves concerned that their revision of

anger may remove the aspects that make it distinguishable as anger, but we do not see any adequate response to this issue, even in more detailed accounts like McRae's. Shifting the terms of the discussion to the more general benefits of anger does not seem to help the moderationist either. It turns out that many of the supposed benefits of moderated anger do not stand up to empirical scrutiny. Moving the discussion further to whether or not anger is apt — where the measure of anger's value is no longer focused on its instrumental value, but instead its intrinsic value — does not seem to advance the case for the moderationist either: what is appealing about that account can actually be retained by Buddhist eliminativism that advocates for compassion instead of anger (an idea we will pursue more in the next chapter). But this move toward compassion is also a move we see the moderationists try to make themselves, though it seems more needs to be done to address how anger and compassion relate. All in all, I hope I have done enough to at least carve out space in the conversation for a defence of eliminativism.

Chapter Four: In Defence of Eliminativism

Introduction

This chapter begins by reminding us of the dual challenges of moderationism: (1) that anger can have positive effects in the world, and that (2) even if it doesn't, it is still an apt moral attitude, thus worth preserving. I take it that the first challenge, at this point, has been met to at least some degree — we saw in Chapter 3 that moderationists overstate the case for anger's positive effects, and that rather than anger it is, in fact, virtues like compassion, generosity, etc. that actually yield the kinds of positive effects they claim on behalf of anger, and so these responses should be preferred. This is in keeping with the Buddhist eliminativist view that we should counter anger with these sorts of virtue. The argument I develop takes this sort of approach by developing the view that we can learn how to change the way we see the world by reflecting on the Buddhist teachings on metaphysics in particular ways. This new way of seeing the world is via a patient perspective, and involves broadening the set of relevant considerations in moral reasoning.

The second concern above, that of aptness, as noted in Chapter 3, has only been partially addressed at this point, so Chapter 4 seeks to offer a further response to this concern from a Buddhist eliminativist perspective. As we shall see, this response depends upon an understanding of the Buddhist metaphysics, and the role this plays in the elimination of anger. I argue that the patient perspective has a dual function, in this regard: firstly, it can help us prevent anger from arising (rather than simply therapising it when it does arise), and that this creates the space to practice other virtues. As we come to develop these virtues, I suggest, we move towards a way of responding to the world which more closely aligns with the metaphysical picture the Buddhist wants us to accept. This makes the metaphysics less alien, and thus more credulous. It is in the eventual acceptance of the metaphysics that our moral outlook is radically transformed, dissolving

concerns about aptness as related moral concepts — agency, justice — are eroded and now fail to apply in the ways that aptness-moderationists assume.

1. The Moderationist Challenges

Let us be reminded of the moderationist concerns. Moderationism can be typically identified in two ways: arguments with consequential concerns, and those with normative concerns. The former argues for anger's positive effects in terms of motivation and communication, for example. Moderationists of this sort may seek to minimise negative aspects of anger by way of 'transforming' it. In other words, anger is good when it is moderated in such a way that it becomes a positive force. The second sort of moderationism involves an assessment of anger in terms of epistemic coherence, i.e. the aptness or appropriateness of anger. That is to say, anger is good or right when our reasons fit with our emotional response. These are the two kinds of argument the moderationists make in challenging anger-eliminativists.

Now, let us also reiterate the eliminativist view. It argues that there is no single instance of anger that is good or right, and thus, in keeping with its denomination, it seeks to eliminate it altogether (though they can agree with the moderationist that *should* anger arise, we ought to seek to minimise its negative effects). However, Buddhist eliminativists, at least,¹⁹⁷ do not want to simply reject anger, but to do so *and replace it with something else*. This is an important point we need to keep in mind for, without anger, Buddhists can demonstrate that we are not deprived of an irreplaceable moral attitude. Therefore, their responses to the moderationists will have to address both concerns of the moderationist — are the consequences of eliminating anger worse than transforming or moderating it, and does eliminating anger disregard an apt emotional response to the world?

¹⁹⁷ The Stoics, for example, are also eliminativists and so arguments can be varied. See Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions."

The first concern has already been dealt with, to a certain extent, in earlier chapters. We have seen that anger is likely to cause negative consequences. The moderationists are themselves wary of it, which leads them to transforming or moderating anger. Nevertheless, most accounts in relation to transformation of anger have not provided enough information about the process, and it remains unclear whether anger actually survives the transformative process at all. Deliberately or not, this makes it difficult for us to assess whether such positive forms of anger are plausible and I have raised many questions for them to answer in Chapter 3. Moreover, the Buddhists can demonstrate that positive attitudes such as compassion and generosity are at least as, if not more, productive than anger, and capture many or all of the benefits they identified for transformed anger. We will address this issue again below.

Nevertheless, before proceeding on the assumption that we've carved out space for a Buddhist eliminativist thesis here, the Buddhists have to overcome a serious charge that they wrongly dismiss the righteousness of anger. While we offered a preliminary response to Srinivasan in Chapter 3, that response focused on how we can respond sensitively to anger, but left the question of whether or not that anger is apt essentially untouched. Buddhists have a hard time defending themselves against both charges; considering some of the passages that we have seen, their arguments appear insensitive to the victim's suffering when they are unjustly wronged. Let us consider some of the controversial verses from Śāntideva.

“I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry with the sentient? They too have reasons for their anger.”

“If, disregarding the principal cause, such as a stick or other weapon, I become angry with the person who impels it, he too is impelled by hatred. It is better that I hate that hatred.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ *BCA* 6.22, 41

What is notable in these verses is how Śāntideva demands us to treat persons in the same way that we treat bile and sticks. This argument — cease distinguishing the two types of causes, personal and impersonal (person and bile/stick) — surely makes moderationists unhappy; how can we take such an argument seriously if they don't see the *obvious* difference that persons have free will while bile and sticks do not? Our normal practice of blame within anger becomes arbitrary, or inapt, when we cannot properly recognise harms made by persons as distinct from harms made by impersonal causes (e.g. natural disasters). Without the distinction, moderationists would say, we fail to tell apart *wrongdoing* and simply *unfortunate events*.¹⁹⁹ This is why we have commemorative events for World War One and World War Two, but never have something similar for the victims of Spanish flu despite the size of its impact being felt around the globe.²⁰⁰ And it makes sense, we say, when we think that the causes of the World Wars are man-made — recognising it as such will remind us of a preventable tragedy, shame the perpetrators, and do justice to the victims — while flu cannot be held morally responsible for it because it does not have the *will* to harm. Śāntideva's conflating the two causes is simply insensitive, if not morally failing. Buddhist eliminativism becomes even more unattractive, assuming it is practicable at all, when Śāntideva goes on to say something of a victim-blaming nature: "Those who injure me are really impelled by my actions. For this they will go to the realms of hell. Surely it is they who are harmed by me?"²⁰¹ Imagine this advice from the perspective of a victim of domestic abuse — there is no reason to be angry towards your abuser; moreover, it is your abuser who is harmed by you. Clearly, such a position appears to radically fall short of meeting the challenge posed by moderationists concerned with aptness. In Chapter 3 I offered some preliminary responses to the challenge posed by defenders of the aptness of anger view, but stopped short of a full defence because we had not, as yet, fully outlined the connection between the Buddhist metaphysical outlook and their elimination of anger. I turn to that issue now.

¹⁹⁹ Carpenter, "Ethics Without Justice."

²⁰⁰ Meierhans and Wainwright, "Spanish Flu."

²⁰¹ *BCA* 6.47

2. The Metaphysics of Eliminativism

Instead of just indulging ourselves in the bad impression these passages from Śāntideva give, we should take a step back and assess the argument carefully. The Buddhist invokes their view of metaphysics constantly in relation to the elimination of anger. Buddhaghosa rejects anger due to the view that there is no enduring self over time; “Since states last but a moment’s time; Those aggregates, by which was done; The odious act, have ceased, so now; What is it you are angry with?”²⁰² Candrakīrti also refers to no-self, but thinking of it not in reductionist terms like Buddhaghosa; self is merely a reflection of something truer: “[Those] who see the absence of the self, agent, object, time, and manner of the wounds — all things are like the image in a glass. By understanding thus, all torments are endured.”²⁰³ Śāntideva supports his above argument by appealing to causality:

“A person does not get angry at will, having decided ‘I shall get angry’, nor does anger well up after deciding ‘I shall well up’.
Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are,
all arise through the power of conditioning factors, while there is
nothing that arises independently.”²⁰⁴

In this way, these metaphysical views seem to be their compelling reasons for abandoning anger.

²⁰² *Viśm* IX, 22; It could be objected that this passage refers to the doctrine of impermanence rather than no-self. However, this depends on which aspect of the three marks of existence i.e. impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anattā*) we're focusing on. More importantly, I see that the notion of *anicca* as already built into the idea of *anatta* as applying to human beings i.e. that there is no such thing as unchanging, permanent self. And so we see the verses that immediately follow the quotation express more precisely the idea of no-self, "Whom shall he hurt, who seeks to hurt another, in the other's absence? Your presence is the cause of hurt; Why are you angry, then, with him?"

²⁰³ *MA* 3.3

²⁰⁴ *BCA* 6.24, 25

There are many explanations of the lack of self in the Buddhist tradition.²⁰⁵ How the concept of ‘no-self’, or ‘not-self’ as it is sometimes translated, is cashed out varies across traditions, and even between authors within traditions. The precise history of this concept and the debate whether it is true need not be discussed here — it is certainly the task of another thesis altogether! However, its role in relation to anger remains the same across texts — that anger should be eliminated as a result of this metaphysical notion. Another, related, metaphysical notion at play here is that of *dependent arising*. The idea is similar to our notion of causality, and claims that all phenomena arise in dependence upon other phenomena, such that if one exists, so does the other, and if one ceases to exist, so does the other. This encompasses both the psychological and the material realms. This notion relates to our discussion of anger in a number of ways (some of which we will explore below), but one significant role for this metaphysical notion is in relation to the ideas of enlightenment and suffering. Enlightenment can only be achieved by ending suffering (which admits of various kinds; see Ch. 2), and ending suffering depends, in part, on eliminating anger, and vice versa. We shall see below *why* anger, for Buddhists, is never apt and has to be eliminated, and *how* embracing this metaphysical notion of dependent arising can help us to eliminate anger, and thus (ultimately) eliminate suffering.

While there are many interpretations of no-self thesis, I shall mention only those made in connection with the elimination of anger. One view is that while Śāntideva’s argument that anger is irrational, it is irrational only in a practical sense, not in an epistemic sense.²⁰⁶ That is to say, the metaphysics simply offers a way to reduce anger, but cannot be taken as true. While the advice to those who aim to have a better life on reducing anger may be sage, it was arguably not the Buddhist intention to dismiss their own metaphysics as purely instrumental, for they would face the question of whether anything the Buddha says is true at all if it were to be

²⁰⁵ For discussions of problems arising from different interpretations of no-self offered by Buddhist philosophers, from Abhidharmika to Pudgalavādin and Mādhyamika schools, see Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, especially chapters 6 and 7.

²⁰⁶ Bommarito, “Bile and Bodhisattvas.”

taken as purely pedagogical.²⁰⁷ Moreover, such a reading is not sufficient for the Buddhist to claim to eliminate anger, as I will argue below.²⁰⁸

Charles Goodman has another view. Recognising the dual purpose in the Buddhist texts, he sees their argument invoking the Buddhist metaphysics as a reflection of a hard deterministic view in Buddhist ethics. From a Buddhist view, wherein there are no persons but only simple, impermanent composites, interrelated by a complex web of causal chains, the answer regarding free will would be that:

“If you don’t exist, nothing is up to you. If there is no autonomous self, there is no autonomy. If there is no genuine boundary between self and other, there can be no genuine distinction between actions that flow from the self and motions imposed on the self from outside.”²⁰⁹

Moral responsibility being rejected as such, Goodman thinks that it does not affect morality itself, since good and bad actions can still be determined without someone being responsible for them. Moreover, this repudiates reactive emotions such as anger because the negation of moral responsibility renders anger irrational. If this reading is right, then the Buddhist has apt reason to abandon anger altogether, as we cannot be blamed for something for which we cannot be held morally responsible.

The point that distinguishes these two interpretations is the notion of autonomy. Goodman, like most hard determinists, sees that causal chains necessitate the lack of autonomy. The sense of autonomy at play here is that

²⁰⁷ See Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul* for the discussion about two aims of the Buddhist texts, i.e. the aim to “turn around” the audience way of thinking and the aim to convey truth.

²⁰⁸ I’m tempted to think that Bommarito’s rejection of the epistemic reading of the Buddhist metaphysics was not totally dismissive as he recognises that, from the perspective of some contemporary philosophers in the West, the argument can’t be made sense of, yet “Buddhists might have other grounds for accepting that anger is never warranted in the philosophical sense.” And he wants to show that the value of the argument can be appreciated independently of the success of the argument for the Buddhist metaphysics itself; Bommarito, “Bile and Bodhisattvas,” 378.

²⁰⁹ Goodman, “Resentment and Reality,” 362.

of full autonomy, where an agent's autonomy is not undermined by external factors. Bommarito, on the other hand, argues that the absence of unchanging self does not necessarily warrant a complete lack of autonomy. Certain mental and physical states in a collection embedded in causal chains including desires and intentions (not a soul or some static essence) can have autonomy. Bommarito points out that autonomy can come in degrees, and therefore resists Śāntideva's conclusion of the total lack of autonomy from dependent arising. What this means for Buddhist eliminativists is that it does not suffice to simply state that the metaphysics of no-self and dependent arising is true. In order to deny moral responsibility, they have to take the route that rejects an agent's autonomy — even if it is only partial — whether that route is hard determinism or otherwise. As such, it seems that a successful argument against moderationists requires that Buddhist eliminativists insist upon a total absence of autonomy due to the notion of no-self.

I should emphasise that this doesn't mean that Bommarito's reading of the metaphysics is not possible or that it doesn't exist in the Buddhist system. My point is to iterate that Buddhist eliminativists who want to reply to aptness-moderationists, regardless of doctrinal differences, rely heavily on the metaphysics or ultimate reality that rejects autonomous agency, whatever that form of the Buddhist system is, e.g. determinist and semi-compatibilist.²¹⁰ Some Buddhists who reject the truth claim of the metaphysics will have a hard time convincing aptness-moderationists for they lack the decisive reason to eliminate anger to begin with, and without it, they are only left with prudential reasons for eliminating anger, and thus don't respond to the moderationist concerns about free will and moral responsibility proper.

Those Buddhists like Bommarito who don't posit the truth claim could respond to aptness-moderationists by conceding that there are indeed

²¹⁰ See Mark Siderit's paleo-compatibilism position which distinguishes two compatible levels of reality between determinist ultimate reality and libertarian conventional reality, for example.

aptness conditions of anger, but these conditions will likely never obtain (as I argue in section 3.1 below). However, this response can only go so far as to making instances of apt anger unlikely to occur in practice — conceding that there are conditions that could be met that would render anger apt means that it is theoretically possible that such anger can occur. If that is the case, then the elimination of anger would lead to the loss of something valuable (as Srinivasan sees it), and thus the truth of the metaphysics is the more stable basis for the eliminativist argument.

In the Buddhist argument for the elimination of anger, we can appreciate their metaphysical view provides them reason as well as a means to eliminate anger. These two approaches are complimentary to each other. One provides reason to eliminate anger, the other provides the tool to execute it. This thesis relies in part on the truth claim of the metaphysics and it is my view that they indeed make such a claim. It is required to respond to aptness-moderationists in particular, but not consequentialist moderationists. However, I must admit that the burden to prove the metaphysical truth may be heavier for Buddhists as it is against what we might regard as common sense (i.e. the position held by most non-philosophers). But since my aim is not to give a defence for the Buddhist metaphysics, I will only give the provisional answer above to address their concern. As such, we're left with two views of anger predicated upon different metaphysics. To move forward from where we are, instead of simply defending eliminativism by bringing up a totally different picture of metaphysics, I shall try to offer what is accepted as a common ground between Buddhist eliminativists and moderationists, that is a way to moderate anger.

Therefore, my own approach will be to try to persuade anybody interested in moderating anger to adopt the method. I want to argue that, independent of whether we initially believe in the Buddhist metaphysics or not, the Buddhist methodology of what I shall call 'broadening perspective' has some merits in our conversation with moderationists. Although this approach may be more acceptable to moderationists who are concerned with prudence, I will try to show that the methodology should be part of the

apt-anger criteria, and that it would result in minimising anger to the point where we may find far fewer instances that still arise. The idea is that approaching the Buddhist argument from the practical point of view better equips us with tool that can be shared among eliminativists and moderationists. However, I think that these tools can actually take us beyond a moderationist view and into an eliminativist one, eventually leading to the acceptance of the Buddhist metaphysics.

3. Eliminating Anger

From a Western perspective, abandoning a metaphysical concept like the self might seem like a leap too far. As such, our eliminativist argument is likely to face resistance if this is the *starting point* for eliminating anger. However, as we have just seen, the Buddhist metaphysics can be read in two ways. The first is purely pedagogical, i.e. the metaphysical claims aren't literally true, but we should act as though they are if we want to learn how to eliminate anger. The second is that the metaphysical claims are, in fact, a description of reality. We do know that the Buddhists want their texts to be both “the text as *vehicle* for self-transformation, and the text as bearer of declarative *content*.”²¹¹ In other words, the texts are intended to persuade the audience to the course of Buddhist life, affecting their way of thinking, but this new way of thinking is also regarded as matching reality. The position I develop here will attempt to demonstrate how the pedagogical reading can lead, eventually, to an acceptance of the metaphysical truths. In order to do this, I will seek to integrate an understanding of patience from the Western literature into the Buddhist framework for the elimination of anger. Doing so, I argue, not only puts us on the path to accepting the Buddhist metaphysics, but also gives us a way to respond to concerns about the aptness of anger that are raised by the moderationist.

In discussing whether or not the Buddhist texts require us to really believe in the metaphysics underpinning their discussions, or whether we

²¹¹ Ganeri, 97.

can instead just treat them as advice on how to look at situations differently, Amber Carpenter suggests that there is a clear and strict limit on the latter sort of approach:

“[T]here is only so far this... can go in mitigation, for the text, and the Buddhist eliminativist view of anger, certainly intends to challenge and transform our ordinary notions... [If] Śāntideva is not *really* saying there is no difference between the assailant’s responsibility and that of the weapon he uses, then he is not giving us any reason or means to abandon afflictive emotions associated with perceiving oneself with having been *wronged*.”²¹²

I believe that Carpenter is correct here in thinking that abandoning afflictive emotions such as anger will, ultimately, require the acceptance of the metaphysics, and that in doing so we will find a resultant transformation of our moral notions. I will outline precisely what Carpenter has in mind in a subsequent section. However, Carpenter here provides a useful springboard for discussing the limitations of the pedagogical reading of the Buddhist texts by suggesting it gives us no reason or means to abandon afflictive emotions. I will argue, instead, that it can provide both reasons and means.

Firstly, I think it is important to remember that the Buddhist teachings are intended for a universal audience. By this, I mean that the advice of the Buddha should hopefully be applicable to people of any background, including those whose culture embraces a radically different metaphysical outlook. If one already embraces a metaphysics without the self, for instance, then in a way the Buddha’s teachings are unlikely to reveal quite so much that is new or interesting. By contrast, approaching Buddhism from a traditional Western philosophical perspective, precisely what is interesting about Buddhism is its departure from this perspective — Carpenter makes this very point herself. However, what is not emphasised sufficiently strongly in Carpenter’s argument in this specific paper, is that

²¹² Carpenter, “Ethics without Justice,” 318-9.

persuading someone to abandon one metaphysical view in favour of another will require some preparatory work. We might compare, metaphorically, abandoning belief in a continued self as a leap from a cliff edge; if this shift in metaphysical outlook is just such a leap, then the pedagogical reading of the Buddhist texts is the trail of breadcrumbs which gets us to the cliff edge to begin with.

As we have noted above, this sort of reading is not out of step with Buddhist thought. In fact, it mirrors the Buddhist methodology quite closely. They believe the metaphysics to be literally true, but their texts are also meant to serve the dual purpose of helping us come to understand and accept this metaphysics.²¹³ The extent to which Buddhists concern themselves with practical issues is evident in the texts. *Visuddhimagga*, for example, where Buddhaghosa discusses the metaphysics of no-self in relation to anger, is telling. The text is generally recognised as a detailed meditational manual: it begins by covering every minute detail about how one should prepare bedding, seating, etc. according to the temperament of the reader (which we saw in Chapter 1 are also detailed so that the meditators can identify their type). Buddhaghosa leads us step-by-step to what one should think to combat anger, from focusing on our own benefits ('It's gratifying to see those who get angry and harm me having sleepless nights without me punishing them at all'),²¹⁴ to thinking about good things in the other person,²¹⁵ and invoking the metaphysics of no-self. The Buddhists recognize that transforming one's perception of reality is not an easy feat. In fact, traditional belief in rebirth or reincarnation helps explain the extent to which it is seen as difficult to achieve: it takes several aeons spanning innumerable lifetimes to become enlightened. But precisely for that reason, it is urgent for us to take a step, however tiny it is, to accomplish

²¹³ Cf. Goodman, "Resentment and Reality" and Bommarito, "Bile and Bodhisattvas." Goodman, like most Buddhist readers, also recognises the dual purposes of the texts, but he thinks the metaphysical argument is a reflection of the Buddhist deterministic view. In contrast, Bommarito argues that Śāntideva's argument can be taken as advice only, and not as philosophically argument.

²¹⁴ *Viśm* IX, 15.

²¹⁵ *Viśm* IX, 16ff.

it. It is in keeping with this spirit that I think a defence of the pedagogical reading of the Buddhist texts is important.

But is Carpenter correct in suggesting that a purely pedagogical reading fails to give us reason or means to abandon anger? I wish to suggest that this is not the case. Firstly, the reasons to abandon anger are partly inherent in the characterisation of anger itself — we have seen the many negative aspects of anger in Chapter 1. The moderationist attempts to transform it, assessed in Chapter 3, ultimately did not persuade — it turned out that even transformed anger did not yield the epistemic benefits they claimed, for instance. Moreover, I think a pedagogical reading of the texts does give us a means to abandon anger: by changing the way we look at the world we can prevent anger from arising, creating the opportunity to replace anger with other, positive, emotional responses. I will now develop this suggestion further.

3.1 Patience and perspective

A pedagogical reading of the texts can assist us in our attempts to eliminate anger. I suggested in Chapter 3 that it is perhaps a misconception among moderationists that the elimination of anger amounts to *doing nothing*. I have suggested that this is not so — the choice isn't *get angry or do nothing*, it is *get angry or do something else instead*. And, for the Buddhist, that 'something else' is acting in accordance with a particular set of virtues; virtues which follow from adopting the metaphysical outlook described above. In particular, I wish to argue that the pedagogical reading of the text encourages us to utilise the notion of dependent arising, as well as an undermining of the concept of self, in order to come to see instances of harm or wrongdoing from a new perspective. This new perspective involves a broadening of what we take into consideration when we look at the world, i.e. it is a *broadening of perspective*.

Consider again the passages from Śāntideva above about bile and the stick. A reading that is available to us here, given what we have said

about the prevalence of meditative teachings in Buddhist texts, is that we are meant to consider occasions of wrongdoing from a perspective that at least includes the broader set of material or mechanical causes of wrongdoing. In other words, we shouldn't focus merely on the agent's wrongdoing, but we should instead broaden our considerations to include the circumstances that made that wrongdoing possible. The principle of dependent arising reminds us that we are not actors operating independently, but that we are also acted upon in ways we cannot control, and this is why we all suffer (see Chapter 2). By considering these broader factors, we can come to reassess whether our anger is apt in a given situation, as we shall see below.

Consider, for example, someone cutting me off in traffic. If I come to understand that this person has a pregnant wife giving birth in the back seat, I might no longer see anger as an apt response. Without this broader perspective, I may have otherwise felt that I had reason to be angry. Abstracting further still to the consideration of an underfunded NHS leading to a shortage of ambulances is likely to end any pretensions to the aptness of my anger altogether. We could push this to macroeconomic levels where we consider a system which fails to collect tax from the richest corporations while simultaneously encouraging greed. What will bring about the cessation of anger will differ from person-to-person i.e. some of us require more perspective than others.

Note here that this method is not simply one of how we can remedy anger — it is also one concerned with preventing it from arising in the first place. It is true that considering factors like those mentioned above might help alleviate anger once it arises, but this is not the point for the eliminativist. If this was what this position amounted to, then it could only be a defence of moderationism. Instead, what we are attempting to do with this method is to *approach* the world in a certain way. To return to the example above, if I set out on my drive working on the assumption that other drivers are faced daily with concerns like pregnant spouses, then my anger will not arise when someone cuts in front of me. If it does, I should set out on my next journey keeping in mind that there are pregnant spouses and

a shortage of ambulances, and so on. In this way, my broader perspective prevents my anger arising — and prevention is better than cure.

The method we are employing here is one which also treats the Buddhist view of no-self quite seriously — it diminishes the role played in moral reasoning by factors linked to agents and patients (the driver’s wrongdoing, the harm caused to me) in favour of a view which incorporates where that agent sits in relation to broader social, material, etc. contexts. In broadening our perspective in this way, we ‘zoom out’ from our focus on the agent’s actions, eventually to a point that we are far enough out that the role of the self (agent, patient) is so small in our moral picture that (eventually) it is practically non-existent. In the process, we find that both our anger, and the aptness of our anger, disappears.

Far from being a matter of simply abandoning anger, though, the broad perspective we are describing here is, *in itself*, a kind of positive virtue: patience. Whereas Hume and Hutcheson see patience as valuable only in virtue of its impact on our conduct in life, Bommarito argues that there is an alternative way to conceive of patience which recasts it as impacting in a morally important way upon our relation to things of value in the world.²¹⁶ In setting up his (Buddhist-inspired) account of patience, Bommarito addresses Kupfer’s suggestion that impatience is ‘anger in the modality of time’.²¹⁷ The thought here is that someone who is impatient is someone who is unable to wait, or that must have instant gratification. However, Bommarito points out that by paying special attention to patience’s corresponding vice, Kupfer may be missing something important about the virtue of patience. Not *every* case of being patient is a matter of waiting for things calmly, Bommarito points out; instead, it can be characterised with reference to enduring frustration or suffering (such as putting up with a colleague’s insensitive behaviour, or calmly waiting for improvement).

Bommarito argues that the calm acceptance of frustrations actually closely aligns with the Buddhist view of patience, specifically as it is

²¹⁶ Bommarito, “Patience and Perspective.”

²¹⁷ Kupfer, “When Waiting Is Weightless,” 279.

translated from the Sanskrit term ‘*kṣānti*’ (in Tibetan, ‘*bzod pa*’). In the Buddhist texts, we see *kṣānti* contrasted with anger (or hatred, of which anger is a substrate, as we saw in Chapter 1). Śāntideva, for instance, has the following to say: “There is no vice like hatred, and there is no austerity like patience.”²¹⁸ Gampopa, similarly suggests that patience is “Not being disturbed, not retaliating, and not holding resentment in the mind.”²¹⁹ Patience, for the Buddhist then, is characterised as peacefully facing of whatever suffering comes our way, whether that is simply annoyance or greater suffering like physical/emotional pain. However, there is an important difference between this Buddhist characterisation of patience, and the Western characterisation given above. The Western view of patience tends to focus upon behaviour, or the absence of certain types of behaviour, e.g. not retaliating when someone persists in annoying us. However, the Buddhist view of patience (i.e. *kṣānti*) sees it primarily as a mental virtue, rather than a behavioural one. As Bommarito explains:

“Someone who gets angry when insulted but bites their tongue and does not reply might have patience, but they don’t have *kṣānti*. Someone with *kṣānti* is not simply someone who gets angry and manages not to act on it, but someone who fails to get angry in the first place.”²²⁰

This type of view of patience reinforces the traditional notion that Buddhism should be primarily seen as advocating an eliminativist viewpoint on anger. Bommarito, however, despite making the observations above, does not attempt to defend an eliminativist view (his focus is instead on showing that patience is of intrinsic rather than merely instrumental value). However, his work here does point to ways in which we can develop a defence of eliminativism, along the lines I have suggested above. Perhaps more importantly, his analysis of patience illustrates a way that Western

²¹⁸ *BCA* 6.2

²¹⁹ Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

²²⁰ Bommarito, “Patience and Perspective,” 271.

philosophy can look to the Buddhist account of patience to enrich its own analysis of the concept by considering it a mental virtue.

For Bommarito, our analysis of patience should centre not on what patience has us do, but instead on how patience has us look at the world. This idea rests on the suggestion that for something to count as patience, it requires more than calm endurance of suffering — it also requires us to calmly endure suffering for the *right reasons*. Bommarito leans upon Ven. Rerukane Chandavimala Mahathera to support this argument, who notes that “calm endurance of oppressions fails to count as patience when due to folly, lack of courage, desire for wealth, or hypocrisy.”²²¹ As Bommarito points out, we might endure suffering calmly simply because we are exhausted, or under the influence of drugs. However, this would not count as patience. It is therefore a necessary condition of patience to endure suffering, but this alone is not sufficient for patience.

Bommarito calls upon fourth century Buddhist thinker Asaṅga to further explain this notion:

“Practice patience by cultivating the five attitudes: perception of feeling close to the one who harms you, perception that everything depends on interdependent conditions, awareness of impermanence, perception of suffering, and perception of fully embracing sentient beings in your heart.”²²²

Asaṅga’s view thus leans upon the distinctive Buddhist metaphysics discussed above, in much the same way as I have suggested we can do in taking a pedagogical reading of these texts. What Bommarito takes to be important about his teaching is that it encourages a certain sort of perception and awareness:

²²¹ Bommarito, 273.

²²² Asaṅga, cited in Bommarito, 273.

“The patient person is patient because she perceives the world in a certain way... to be patient is to be in a particular affective state, one free of anger, because one has certain perceptions and awareness.”²²³

In particular, Bommarito argues, possessing the virtue of this kind of patience grants its possessor a sense of perspective, or a *sense of scale*. Bommarito suggests that patience can do this in two ways. Firstly, patience can help give us perspective on the relative worth of our *particular* desires and values and our desires and values *in general*. For instance, although I might strive to complete a PhD thesis because this is important to me, if my husband were to contract an irreversible terminal illness that might make me realise that it is more important to me to spend every available moment with him than it is to complete the thesis. Secondly, patience can help give us a sense of perspective in that it can help us to see our place in a wider context, i.e. as a member of a team, as part of a community, etc., giving us a sense of proportion.

Bommarito's analysis of patience provides us with a philosophical grounding for the eliminativist view that I defend i.e. one which suggests that we should read the Buddhist metaphysics (at least initially) pedagogically. The kind of patience described by Bommarito is precisely the kind that should follow from a pedagogical reading of dependent arising — if we see everyone as both acting and acted upon, then we can consider the ways in which they are acted upon in assessing their actions. This leads to a broadening of perspective (Asaṅga points out the other important requirements in attaining this kind of patience e.g. feeling close to the one who has harmed us, as well as other aspects of the Buddhist metaphysical picture like impermanence and suffering). However, I think there is an additional function for this kind of patience when it comes to the elimination of anger: clearing the way for us to bring other virtues into play.

²²³ Bommarito, 273.

3.2 Patience and the virtuous Life

As I argued above, the ‘patient perspective’ is a way of preventing anger from arising. And since the eliminativist argument is that we should not only avoid anger, but also replace it with something else, it seems to me that the patient perspective is a way we can create space for that replacement to move in. If we are angry, then it is much harder to be compassionate (as I suggested in Chapter 3), and so the patient perspective makes it easier to apply such virtues by helping us avoid anger to begin with. At this point, we can start to apply compassion, generosity, etc., to occasions of harm. In this way, the patient perspective opens up the possibility of a virtuous life, even under quite difficult circumstances.

If, as a result of the patient perspective, we can come to practice the virtues more easily, then we can begin to condition ourselves into responding to others in a variety of other virtuous ways. Those ways, too, might offer their own benefits with regard to eliminating anger. Generosity, or *dāna*, for example, might also bring us closer to an acceptance of the no-self thesis, and thus further help us to prevent anger arising. By giving away our material possessions via acts of generosity, for example, I erode my sense of self-importance, I stop laying claim to things as ‘belonging to me’, and thus minimise the amount of things with which I self-identify (this is no longer ‘my MacBook’, or ‘my house’ etc.) So, by initially reading the Buddhist texts as intended as pedagogical tools, we can not only find ways to minimise instances of anger, we can also bring ourselves closer to a point where we might be able to take the leap from the metaphorical cliff described above, i.e. to a point where we might be more open to accepting the Buddhist metaphysics as *true*.

However, the attitude of generosity is in itself the aim of its own practice, which means that on the Buddhist view our moral and epistemic development go hand in hand. Their connection comes, as we saw in Chapter 2, because of the connection between happiness and enlightenment. Enlightenment, for the Buddhist, is the elimination of

suffering. Alleviating suffering, we can also become happier. In stopping anger from arising we reduce the felt experience of suffering, and so practicing virtues like generosity is, in itself, rewarding, since it stabilises that virtue as a response to the world and thus further alleviates suffering and leads to happiness. Thus, the dual rewards of generosity are greater tendencies towards generous behaviour, and the reduction of suffering. If we can come to apply virtues like generosity, compassion, etc. consistently — that is to say, at all times — as a result of applying the pedagogical reading, then this arguably amounts to an acceptance of the Buddhist metaphysics.

There are other ways in which adopting a pedagogical reading of the texts might bring us closer to the cliff edge. By undermining the importance of agency in our moral reasoning, as a consequence of adopting the broad perspective on the world that I described above, this might also come to diminish the significance of other moral concepts that typically play a part in our assessment of an occasion of anger. For instance, once we move away from the concerns about the role that agents play in a situation (e.g. the driver's wrongdoing, the harm done to me) then a consequence of this is that moral concepts like praise and blame also become less significant within our new perspective. As we adopt the broader view, we stop trying to look at *who* is responsible, and instead start to look at the wider causes of our current situation. A natural consequence of this, then, is that this will reduce instances of anger further still, since anger requires a perception that *I* (or those persons or things we care about) have been harmed *by someone*. What this amounts to, as Carpenter observes, is a dramatic shift in the way we conceive of moral situations, and how we experience them. I will return to this thought in section 4 below when we consider the further role that the Buddhist metaphysics can play in this shift.

Being patient then, when properly done, does not amount to being inactive and complacent in a moral situation. While the principle of dependent arising helps us understand that we are conditioned, we are not rendered totally powerless. In fact, the Buddhist recognition of the need to act in order to develop virtues is reflected through the order of virtues we

should perfect. After chapter six, which discusses *kṣānti*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* recommends us to practice *vīrya*, which is translated as perseverance, vigour, energy. At the opening, it strikes to the point:

“Patient in this way one should cultivate vigour,... For without vigour there is no merit, just as there is no movement without wind. What is vigour? The endeavor to do what is skilful. What is its antithesis called? Sloth, clinging to what is vile, despondency, and self-contempt.”²²⁴

Our moral development will be in vain if we don’t keep striving. Even worse, we may be left with a crippling sense of helplessness. However, if we follow Śāntideva’s, or generally Mahāyāna’s, scheme of perfecting virtues, we would be less likely to get such a shock therapy from working with the alien metaphysical view that we are engaging with.

3.3 Aptness, again!

Having now set out crucial aspects of my position, let us now address the lingering concern of aptness. Consider again the case of Elie Wiesel, outlined in Chapter 3. There is a danger here that, in advocating for the patient perspective, that it will appear to apt-anger-defenders like Srinivasan that we might therein be failing to take Wiesel’s reasons for anger sufficiently seriously.²²⁵ If the result of advocating the patient perspective is that I am contending that Wiesel *should not have been angry*, then surely this is so! However, I think there is a response available here to those who would defend an aptness-moderationist position. This response is, in fact, bound up with another potential criticism — that we might be being asked to reduce agents to mere automata when we are asked by Śāntideva to consider them as we would bile or a stick, thus *dehumanising* them. However, I want to suggest that taking a broader perspective on someone’s harmful actions

²²⁴ *BCA* 6.1-2

²²⁵ It was actually the *soldier’s* anger that was described in this case, but to make the point as strongly as possible for the moderationist I think the reasons for the hypothetical anger of a Holocaust survivor is a good example to work with.

towards us does not amount to treating them as though they are mere automata. Questioning why we treat ‘the sentient’ differently to bile on the pedagogical reading isn’t intended to make us dehumanize others, but instead to make us understand that the sentient are not exempt from the sorts of laws that govern everything else. They too follow the principle of dependent arising, and so their harmful actions occur (or arise in dependence) as a result of many things, including some beyond their control. Far from being dehumanizing, this is precisely a *humanising* process, and one which is familiar to us within our justice system. When a judge considers sentencing for a crime, they factor in the circumstances under which a crime was committed: was the theft of the loaf of bread a wanton act, or was it born of necessity? We *could* condemn the action and assign blame regardless, but our response to it is mitigated by a broader consideration of the circumstances. At a certain point of abstraction, we might find assigning blame to individuals the least relevant consideration — for instance, where there is systemic injustice, the patient perspective might help us to focus on the need for broader social change rather than punishing specific individuals who have brought about this injustice (I will discuss this further in Chapter 5).

We also value this sort of broad perspective approach in other domains. Consider, for instance, aesthetic appreciation. We can respond to artworks in isolation, but we tend to think that the better responses — *real art appreciation* — come as a result of understanding where the work sits in relation to a broader set of facts about its history, artistic traditions, and so on. It might only be possible to properly appreciate the work of Cézanne, for instance, if one knows something about representationalism, the invention of photography, etc. Our judgements about artwork might be considered *more apt* under such a perspective, since our reasons would (all things being equal) better support such judgements. As such, this sort of perspective applied in the moral realm could be thought to have similar consequences i.e. our emotional responses to moral situations will be more apt when they are informed by a broader perspective, and *most apt* when they are informed by the *broadest* perspective. Thus, proponents of moderationism who take the

approach of Srinivasan would presumably admire this methodology when it comes to ethics. As such, I think the approach I am suggesting does take concerns of aptness very seriously.

In this way, there is a point of convergence between apt-moderationist and Buddhist eliminativists: they can both agree on the benefits of the method although for different purposes. The moderationists probably would and should want to improve the criteria for the aptness of anger, and taking a broader perspective serves this very purpose. For Buddhists, however, adopting such a perspective is meant to help you get rid of suffering. As such, the advantage of approaching this problem from the pedagogical reading is that we find some means that we could possibly share, instead of simply acknowledging that they have different ethical and metaphysical conceptions which may not lead to any solution at all. However, it must be admitted that such a solution plays into the Buddhist plan. Even though moderationists initially want to resist the Buddhist metaphysics, by adopting a broader perspective they already take one step further to the Buddhist mode of thinking — the very mode that begins to erode the moral concepts that we usually employ, and that make us push back against the metaphysical view (agent, patient, praise, blame, etc.)

It is at this point, then, that we need to say something more on the way that the Buddhist metaphysical view erodes our familiar way of doing moral reasoning. It does not fall within the scope of this thesis, nor does it yet fall within the scope of my expertise, to make a defence of the metaphysical picture here. However, we *can* explore the implications of accepting this position. What we shall see, below, is that the implications of the truth of the metaphysical system bear out the claims made above about the pedagogical reading of the texts.

4. Why Eliminating Anger is Apt

We turn here to Carpenter's discussion of Buddhist eliminativism, of Śāntideva in particular, which explores the implications for the Anglophone-

standard moral scheme should the Buddhist metaphysical picture turn out to be true.²²⁶ The position she outlines helps us make further sense of the apparent insensitivity of some of his claims, which at times look like instances of victim-blaming, by focusing on the way that accepting the Buddhist metaphysics actually requires (or yields) a radical shift in moral perspective.

Explaining Śāntideva's methodology, Carpenter sees his instruction to look at the harmful actions of others in the same way we do the irritations caused by bile as an attempt to help us see the mistake in thinking that "I am being made to suffer *by* someone else, who, as responsible, should be held to account (is a fitting target of revenge)."²²⁷ We come to see this mistake once we accept that there is no distinction between the personal and impersonal causes of anger, since these are both subject to the principle of dependent arising: someone's "wicked intention did not choose to be, any more than a flower chooses to grow,"²²⁸ and the causal explanation of the existence of such an intention has an interminably long list of causes, each with its own causal story to explain. Attempting to answer the question 'Whose fault is this?' is, therefore, an exercise in futility. However, this position appears, on the surface quite at odds with our normal conception of justice — that which seeks to punish wrongdoers. Rather than seeing this as *accidentally* leading to a problematic position where justice is undermined — since we are no longer assigning blame for wrongdoing — Carpenter suggests that this is an *intentional* consequence of the metaphysics. Undermining the significance of the self in our moral reasoning is precisely meant to erode our familiar ideas about justice and moral responsibility:

“By insisting on the embeddedness of all causes, and by refusing to distinguish one kind as special, Śāntideva removes any warrant for that special moral emotion, blame... Seeing the stick-wielder as impelled by malice, say, does not absolve him of [moral]

²²⁶ Carpenter, "Ethics without Justice."

²²⁷ Carpenter, 322.

²²⁸ Carpenter, 323.

responsibility... because I am not even asking the question of responsibility. The lack of control he has over the malice is not exonerating, but it is pitiable; to lack control, and be riven with afflictive emotions, is suffering.”²²⁹

We are here, once again, reminded of the ultimate aim of the Buddhist eliminativist — the elimination of suffering. Śāntideva implores us to reflect “‘Such are his conditions,’ and be at ease,”²³⁰ when we consider the stick-wielder. But being ‘at ease’ here doesn’t simply mean that we are to accept the wrongdoing nonchalantly; it is, instead, pragmatic advice intended to help us avoid anger and thus avoid adding further suffering into the situation. The person who has fully integrated Buddhist thinking into their moral reasoning understands the we should, at all times, be seeking to eliminate suffering; by refraining from being drawn into answering the question of who is to blame, we can instead address the issue of what is to be done.

Yet there is more going on in the Buddhist metaphysical picture here. An implication of the no-self thesis is an accompanying dissolution of the distinction between self and other. As Carpenter explains:

“Buddhist no-self *replaces* a metaphysics of beings (distinct, well-defined, autonomous individuals) with becoming (dependent arising)... Individuation is an activity of mind, not a perception of reality. It is liable, therefore, to criteria of efficacy; individuation is correctly done not when it maps reality but when it facilitates achievement of our ends.”²³¹

This metaphysics replaces distinct agents and patients with a view where everything is both agent and patient, if we so choose to identify it as such. Since there is no distinction *in reality* between agent and patient, there

²²⁹ Carpenter, 323–24.

²³⁰ *BCA* 6.33; This is Wallace and Wallace's translation where ‘be at ease’ can be compared with Crosby and Skilton’s version which translates to ‘remain happy’.

²³¹ Carpenter, “Ethics without Justice,” 325.

is no ultimate truth that could function as a standard of correctness against which to check the ascriptions we choose to apply. However, since the primary concern of the Buddhist is eliminating suffering, we can apply a standard of efficacy. Suffering of any kind is real and bad, and so ascribing agency serves a purpose only when such mental activity is conducive to ending suffering. By dissolving the notion of agency, this “undermines the ability to generate anger, for anger presupposes some agent at whom we can direct our hostility.”²³² In other words, full acceptance of the metaphysical position makes anger impossible. Consider again, then, the implications suggested for the pedagogical reading of the texts above regarding the role that our concerns about the self, and blame, come to play in our moral reasoning. The suggestion was that as our perspective becomes broader, these concerns become smaller or, perhaps better, so enmeshed in an increasingly large web of interdependent causes, that anger does not arise. From Carpenter’s suggestion, it seems like the logical end of this i.e. the *broadest* perspective, is the one in which we come to accept a metaphysics in which anger is impossible — and the Buddhist metaphysical picture is just such a view.

Carpenter is careful to point out that it isn’t simply that agency is dissolved in this metaphysical picture — there is, instead, no longer “a clear and stable distinction in reality between agent and patient.”²³³ As such, the view doesn’t collapse into determinism, where everyone is simply acted upon, for the metaphysical view which has replaced agency — dependent arising — sees everything as both acted upon and as acting upon others. It is for this reason that, as suggested above, everything can be seen as both agent and patient, should seeing things in this way be conducive to the elimination of suffering. This is also why, Carpenter suggests, reading Śāntideva as victim-blaming is too simplistic an analysis: the Buddhist view does not turn everyone into patients, but “rather reveals all aspects of person to be involved both as condition and as conditioned.”²³⁴ This metaphysics

²³² Carpenter, 325.

²³³ Carpenter, 326.

²³⁴ Carpenter, 327; Thank you to my examiners Tom Stoneham and Stephen Harris for raising a point here that I had perhaps hoped to side-step! They ask why it is that

therefore offers the Buddhist eliminativist a route to escape the aptness problem: since agency is fundamentally destabilised, so too is the possibility of reasons such as ‘X unjustly harmed me’ being objectively true. The eliminativist can assert that this is false i.e. it is not a description of reality, and that belief that it is true (and thus apt) follows from a misapprehension of the world. They would, however, still wish to avoid the charge of callousness; simply pointing this metaphysical picture out to someone who is angry would seem to be exactly that. However, they can avoid callousness via the means suggested in chapter 3 — by taking the angry person’s subjective experience of ‘apt’ anger seriously, and responding compassionately. The Buddhist’s compassion is motivated here on two fronts — both in seeking to alleviate the suffering the angry person experiences from their subjective point of view, but also in virtue of the epistemic failure that has induced the former suffering.

In response to the moderationist arguments which seek to claim that anger perceives something about moral reality, the Buddhist view suggests the opposite. Understanding the world as the Buddhists argue, anger does not reveal nor confirm anything about reality. The only thing anger reveals is about ourselves; that we misconceive reality; that we think of the world in self-regarding terms which do not correspond to how the world really is. Instead, the Buddhist metaphysical view offers us a route to the elimination of suffering, and of anger, which the Buddhists are clearly aware is a difficult

determinism too might not also reveal all aspects of a person to be involved both as condition and conditioned. Determinism may well be viewed in this light (though Carpenter does not see it this way). One recurring concern that plagued me in writing this thesis was whether the Buddhist metaphysics was required as a basis for the patient perspective if an alternative like determinism might well lead one to the same point. However, a central difference (it seems to me, at least) between the Buddhist metaphysical picture and determinism is that the former is inseparable from its ethical project, whereas determinism might be regarded as a purely metaphysical view (albeit one with moral implications). In other words, determinism is an attempt to describe the way in which the universe behaves i.e. in terms of cause and effect, but Buddhism is fundamentally an attempt to explain how human beings ought to behave. Dependent arising and determinism may arguably amount to the same thing, but dependent arising is just one of many metaphysical concepts at play in the Buddhist system, and they cannot be coherently adopted in isolation. In particular, the Buddhist view posits suffering as inherent in human existence, and thus the elimination of suffering becomes the primary aim of human moral action (see Chapter 2). Since determinism lacks a moral aim, one could argue that it is less useful as a metaphysical basis for an ethical theory. This argument requires further expansion no doubt, but the place for that is not in this thesis.

challenge. Whatever the merits of this metaphysical view, it is worth noting that a moderationist view which denies the no-self thesis, or dependent arising, is inevitably committed to some metaphysical view of its own, and thus the merits for that view would have to be assessed against any defence that can be given for the Buddhist metaphysics. Again, this is not the task here.²³⁵

Conclusion

At this juncture, we have developed a Buddhist eliminativist argument which integrates a view of patience taken from the Western literature, but that is based upon the Buddhist texts. I have argued that position outlined above can prevent anger from arising and resolve concerns about whether doing so removes an apt moral attitude. Buddhist texts don't, however, concern themselves with the same sorts of issues that most trouble moderationists — as we noted in Chapters 2 and 3, many moderationist accounts come from feminist philosophers, who are concerned not only with their individual oppression, but with a widespread, systemic oppression of a group to which they belong. I therefore turn, in my final chapter, to such an issue so that we can examine how the view I defend would attempt to deal with that issue.

²³⁵ Having said that, there is some evidence to suggest that we *do* project agency onto the world. The Heider-Simmel task, for instance, requires experiment participants to watch an animation in which geometric shapes move around a series of lines. Participants routinely describe the thing they observe in terms of agency, though clearly these shapes do not possess agency. For example, they will use descriptions such as 'the big triangle is chasing the smaller one'. This might constitute tentative evidence that suggests that it is at least an open possibility that agency is projected onto the world rather than 'read off' it. See, Heider and Simmel, "An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior."

Chapter Five:
**ELIMINATIVISM AND SOCIAL
INJUSTICE**

Introduction

One final strength of the moderationist position needs to be addressed here still. The moderationist defence of anger seems at its most persuasive when it is applied to the most morally serious cases — specifically those of widespread social injustice. It is largely in service of such causes that moderationist views emerge, for instance in the Feminist movement. When confronted with (often undeniable) evidence of systemic social injustice, our instincts may tend towards anger, so the question that arises for us to answer here is can the eliminativist position I have defended offer a satisfactory response to such cases?

1. Anger? #MeToo

As I write this thesis, there is an incredibly significant confirmation hearing underway in the United States — that of Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination for the US Supreme Court. His appointment would see the Republican party disproportionately balance the number of judges in favour of conservative legislation, possibly for decades to come. Ahead of the hearings, most of the discussion surrounded whether Kavanaugh’s appointment would herald the repeal of significant legislation governing the legality of abortion, and whether the nominee Kavanaugh believed a sitting president could be indicted of a crime. However, the focus of the hearings would suddenly change when a former high school acquaintance, Christine Blasey Ford, came forward with an accusation of sexual assault against Kavanaugh — an assault which allegedly took place some 30+ years ago, when Kavanaugh was 17 and Ford just 15.

The accusation follows a recent trend in women coming forward to speak of sexual assaults and/or sexually inappropriate behaviour that they

have been subjected to at some point in their lives. A smaller number of men have also come forward. Many of these accusations have surfaced on social media, accompanied by the hashtag ‘#MeToo’ — intended to emphasise both how alarmingly common these sorts of assaults are, but also that it is only recently that victims have felt that they are able to speak up. Responses to the ‘#MeToo Movement’ have been polarised, which is typical of much public moral and political discourse today. The earliest high profile allegations against movie producer Harvey Weinstein were greeted by most as a welcome sign of change, and prompted frank and open conversation about the issues. However, as the movement has grown, people have become suspicious of the motives of the accusers and started to push back against the movement as a whole. This has particularly been the case when the accusations have strayed into the realm of politics, which has become particularly partisan in the US recently. President Trump’s own response to Kavanaugh’s accuser has been to question why the victim didn’t come forward with the allegations at the time of the assault, seemingly having missed the general gist of the conversation that the movement started (perhaps unsurprisingly, since the president himself stands accused of multiple sexual assaults).

After so many decades of silently enduring sexual assault, it is understandable that the mainly female victims have finally had enough. And they are certainly angry. Journalist Emily Sargent explains how widespread this anger has become:

“Something has shifted in the past couple of months. The seed was sown last year when a qualified, experienced woman lost out to a sexist, racist, alleged rapist in the American elections. A comic comparison in eligibility if it hadn’t also broken my heart. But it set a ball in motion. And it has been a year of savage blows to women since. Speaking to other women, many say they’re also charged with this new alien anger.”²³⁶

²³⁶ Sargent, “2017 Was a Start, But Women Need to Stay Angry.”

Sargent, in this passage, confirms the observation of the moderationist: widespread social injustices prompt anger as an energising response. And this anger is somewhat seductive (consider the discussion of anger and pleasure in Ch.1, section 3.2) — Sargent, rather than feeling the need to curb her anger, concludes instead that it needs to be harnessed:

“Maybe, though, this fire in women’s bellies is burning extra savagely for a reason. Something we’ve learnt from our history about fury, change and the limited window of time in which we can harness its power. Right now we are poised. A collective heart, beating red and bloodied. We can’t repress what we have always known to be true any more. The monster has grown too big for the blanket that used to hide it.”²³⁷

How can the eliminativist argument I have defended here make sense of both the emotional response of the members of the movement, but also follow up on their demands for social change? In other words, can we deal with the apparently apt anger of the victims, and bring about social change in the absence of the energising effects of anger (since our position is one which would seek to prevent anger from arising to begin with)? I turn to these questions now.

2. Turning Theory into Practice

How would the position I advocate deal with the problem identified by the #MeToo Movement? The approach to anger I have advocated is eliminativist, which means it seeks to prevent anger from arising altogether. The patient perspective described in Chapter 4 is the method we can use to achieve this ends. However, one issue with social movements such as the #MeToo Movement is that anger has already arisen. As such, the method defended by the eliminativist needs to show that it has a place both as prevention *and* cure as regards to anger.

²³⁷ Sargent.

By taking the instruction of Śāntideva as pedagogical, my hope is that the result is a broadening of perspective, where we first see the actions of wrongdoers contextualised against a web of personal and impersonal causes. As noted in the previous chapter, the Buddhist view is that these webs are interminable, and thus they admit of many potential levels of abstraction when it comes to the patient perspective. I have suggested that, at a certain level of abstraction, anger is eliminated. This method can be used as a means of therapising anger — it asks us to reconsider our anger in light of this perspective, but its primary aim is in getting us to approach the world with that perspective such that wrongdoing does not prompt an angry response to begin with. So what might this perspective encompass with regards to the concerns of the #MeToo Movement?

Speculation here on which factors could prevent us from becoming angry as either a victim of sexual assault, or as someone simply concerned at its prevalence in our culture, is obviously tricky ground to cover. Srinivasan is worried about the insensitivity we might show towards those who are angry by focusing on the outcome of their anger, rather than their reasons. However, the focus here is on both — it attempts to take the reasons for anger very seriously, and offers criteria for aptness that I have suggested moderationists might be willing to accept. In addition, it seeks to identify the best way in which to achieve the results we want. Nevertheless, we must tread carefully here too, as this is clearly an emotive issue.

Firstly, it should be noted that this process *can* go wrong. Although not explicitly following the method of the patient perspective, I believe we can see what it would look like for us to get things wrong by examining some actual reactions to the Brett Kavanaugh case. US news station CNN conducted an interview with a group of female Republican voters (whose party nominated Kavanaugh for the position on the supreme court), and asked their opinions on the accusations he faced.²³⁸ Their responses included pointing to facts about Kavanaugh's past (that he was an altar boy,

²³⁸ CNN, *GOP Voter on Kavanaugh*.

and a scout), that the accusation only included groping and not rape, that Kavanaugh was a seventeen-year-old boy and thus fuelled by hormones, and even the suggestion that *every* boy does this sort of thing at that age. The merits of these claims need not be addressed here, and it should be obvious that some of them are hyperbole at best. Instead, what I suspect we are seeing here is a case of something like *the patient perspective gone wrong*.

What these women are doing is attempting to take a broader perspective on the assault accusation — to include facts about human biology, about society, about the relative seriousness of certain actions, about the broader moral character of the accused, and so on. This perhaps reveals an instinct towards taking a broad perspective in moral reasoning. However, without the guidance of the Buddhist metaphysics and suffering, this process is rather unwieldy. The Buddhist view attempts to give purpose to broadening perspective as, with all things, it aims to reduce suffering. The broadening of perspective undertaken by the women in the interview appears to be aimed at something else: exonerating the accused, or reinforcing existing bias towards their political view (thus narrowing their view of the world, rather than broadening it).

Moreover, the patient perspective is only *part* of the process I have advocated in the previous chapter. The function of this perspective is to prevent anger from arising so that we may replace it with positive emotions like compassion, generosity and so on. It seems to me that the response of the women here highlights a danger the Buddhist is wary of, as discussed in Chapter 4: that the metaphysical picture can lead to complacency or inactivity. If we utilise the teachings of the metaphysical view *only* to eliminate anger, then we fail to develop the other virtues central to the Buddhist moral life; but they are clear in their instruction that we must develop these, even suggesting a particular order in which to do it! It seems like the response of the women in the interview has been to take a broad perspective only to prevent or dismiss outrage, instead of trying to objectively understand what the factors in the situation really are, and thus

there is a failure to move beyond that and into a compassionate, generous, etc. response to the world.

So, what does the patient perspective look like when it is *done right* with regards to this case? We can actually take our lead here from Feminist moderationists, I think. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, the term ‘toxic masculinity’ has become part of the discourse when attempting to explain the causes of frequent sexual assault and violence against women. The term refers to aspects of masculinity or male behaviour that are seen as harmful, including attempting to dominate others in all situations (the ‘alpha male’), the devaluation of women,²³⁹ and a restricted view on what constitutes permissible emotions — in particular, what is permissible may be restricted only to expressions of anger (which often manifest themselves as violence).²⁴⁰ Encouraging men to indulge in those aspects of masculine culture, it is suggested, explains a tendency towards inappropriate sexual behaviour towards women. Thus, feminists have to some degree made toxic masculinity the target of their own anger (the target isn’t simply men, despite this being claimed by many reacting to the movement), and the #MeToo Movement is characterised by attempts to highlight instances of such behaviour (often on social media).

By identifying such phenomena as toxic masculinity, gender studies (particularly from a feminist perspective) helps to highlight many of the causes of harmful behaviour that should form part of our moral perspective. However, the patient perspective would seek to have us view the alleged behaviour of Brett Kavanaugh (and others) as both proponents *and* symptoms of just such a culture. Kavanaugh’s own response to Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony was dominated by anger; his performance in the senate was angry, belligerent, and confrontational — all indications of the effects of toxic masculinity. But Śāntideva’s teachings remind us that this is ‘pitiable’ behaviour, since it indicates a lack of self-control. It shows that Kavanaugh is conditioned by many factors, including toxic masculinity, and

²³⁹ Kupers, “Role of Misogyny and Homophobia in Prison Sexual Abuse.”

²⁴⁰ Liu, “How Trump’s ‘Toxic Masculinity’ Is Bad for Other Men.”

thus he also suffers. Acknowledging this suffering does not somehow ‘push out’ acknowledging the suffering of the victim, nor the wrongdoing in Kavanaugh’s alleged actions; it does not amount to ‘victim-blaming’. Instead, by attempting to prevent anger from arising by taking the patient perspective, we hope to leave the space for compassion to take anger’s place in our response to the wrongdoing.

That men as well as women can suffer at the hands of toxic masculinity shouldn’t really be surprising, in a way, given the characterisation of anger in Chapter 1. In Kavanaugh’s case, Blasey Ford’s calm and measured testimony seems to have spoken louder than Kavanaugh’s anger, given that the net result of the two was the opening of an FBI investigation into the allegation; perhaps Kavanaugh’s angry response contributed to this outcome. But there is evidence from elsewhere that toxic masculinity can be harmful. According to Terry Kupers, the American prison system operates within a culture of toxic masculinity, affecting both the inmates and the guards. In his view, suppressing emotions other than anger, i.e. emotions that are perceived as showing weakness, directly contributes to suicide among male prisoners.²⁴¹ This being the case, even though we do not here dispute the wrongdoings of these men, they nonetheless may still call for our compassion.

2.1 Eliminativism and punishment

Having compassion for both Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh, then, what are we to *do*? Our response to Blasey Ford appears to call for some action to improve her situation, but we might think that compassion for Kavanaugh stands in the way of an adequate response. However, we must remember that the patient perspective is *not* an attempt to exonerate, excuse, or even forgive the perpetrator (that, we have seen, would potentially be the *wrong* way to do it), but to instead understand the complex conditions that give rise to the occasion. We hope to recognise the wrongdoing without

²⁴¹ Kupers, “Men and Masculinities.”

getting angry. In fact, this recognition is built into the attitude of patience, for understanding the mechanics of how things come to be — seeing factors of causes and effects and their relationship to make a judgement that it is wrong — is just such a recognition. More importantly, the process of abstracting to broader contexts will help us to see what actions we should bring about through our compassionate response.

The eliminativist view that I have defended does not suggest that we cannot engage in the *practice* of praise and blame. Buddhists are constantly engaged in this practice, in fact. They look into the quality of their actions, examining whether they are good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy, wholesome or unwholesome.²⁴² However, we also need to be aware that the attitude of blame is independent from the *quality* of blameworthiness, in both the Buddhist view and the Western one; both acknowledge that we can get it wrong when we ascribe praise and blame. However, the Buddhist metaphysical view, as we saw in Chapter 4, sees the practice of praise and blame as a matter of pragmatism: it isn't attempting to get ascriptions of praise and blame *right*, it rather praises or blames when doing so *contributes to the reduction of suffering*.

It is in this way that the eliminativist account can come to find a role, also, for punishment. Those who harm others should be punished with a view to affect change in them so that we might reduce suffering. What constitutes adequate punishment is perhaps not possible for me to say. In Kavanaugh's case, perhaps being publicly held to account in the way that he already has will be sufficient to affect change in his future behaviour; perhaps it will take a formal prosecution (should the FBI investigation find sufficient warrant for a criminal charge). However, it should be noted that the scope of the effects of punishment here isn't limited only to Kavanaugh's case — the hope with high profile cases is that they will come to serve as deterrents to others. And at least one hope of the #MeToo Movement is that these high profile cases will force all men into thinking deeply about

²⁴² See Harvey, "An Analysis of Factors Related to the Kusala/Akusala", for the criteria found in the Pāli texts, for example.

their interactions with women. By seeing everyone as both conditioned and conditioning, the Buddhist understands that punishment does not only affect the punished.

Of course, it is also the view of some people that the method of public condemnation utilised by the #MeToo Movement — with many accusations being made via social media platforms like Twitter, rather than through the traditional legal process — is one of the movement's greatest concerns. Kavanaugh's outrage, on full display at his hearing, is predicated on his innocence and the subsequent damage to his reputation. In such instances, the Buddhist eliminativist's primary concern is unchanged — we still seek to reduce suffering. This is why the eliminativist would counsel Kavanaugh, guilty or not, to approach his situation in a way which seeks to eliminate his anger, rather than using it to fuel his response. In applying the patient perspective, one would hope that Kavanaugh could come to see the importance of his own case in relation to the many others that the #MeToo Movement concerns itself with. Even if he is innocent, his response here affects himself and others; as someone vying for a position on the highest court in the US, we might hope that he could see the potential damage he could do to real victims of sexual assault in terms of their willingness to speak out. This, perhaps more than the mere allegation, is what ought to disqualify him from the position he is seeking.

3. The Benefits of Eliminating Anger

We saw in Chapter 3 that Srinivasan was concerned that, in focusing on the counter-productivity of anger, eliminativists were overlooking the intrinsic value of anger. The considerations above, I hope, do something to address the kinds of concerns raised by Srinivasan about how we can deal with morally serious situations in which the anger of those concerned appears to be apt. But I think we can also say something here about the productivity of the Buddhist eliminativist approach compared to those who defend anger as useful for instigating or bringing about social change. There

is no reason for eliminativists to focus only on aptness *or* productivity — since Srinivasan raises a legitimate and serious difficulty, and (at least some) moral theories should hopefully be action-guiding, the eliminativist would do a better job to focus on *both* aptness and productivity. The second kind of concern here will be that eliminating anger might prevent a movement like #MeToo from arising, and thus the good that such a movement does (and it remains to be seen what the effects of this particular movement will be) will be sacrificed by the eliminativists alongside anger. I do not believe that this is the case, for reasons I will now outline.

Not only do eliminativists use the patient perspective to better understand a given situation, they can also use it to therapise anger. Thus, one benefit to the approach I have advocated is that victims of sexual assault can, hopefully, reduce their own suffering in letting go of their anger. The opposing view, that of the moderationist, wishes victims to harness their anger rather than giving it up. But should victims really be told to cling to their resentment in service of some greater cause? In a way, that also seems like a form of callousness. That is particularly so if anger can be eliminated and replaced with something else which will further alleviate their suffering, and also bring about the social change desired.

Moreover, we have seen in Chapter 3 that the supposed benefits of anger — communicative, epistemic, etc. — were overstated. Instead of giving epistemic clarity, for example, even transformed anger skews our ability to make accurate judgements. This is of great significance as an individual, but it is of greater significance still for members of a movement, who seek to make changes that will affect society as a whole. Without the influence of anger, we do not tend to act rashly and overestimate ourselves, as we saw in Chapter 3 is an issue associated with anger. The patient perspective is a method that, like the Buddha's inquiry in the Four Noble truths,²⁴³ is pragmatically geared towards solving an identified problem. The

²⁴³ The teaching about suffering, origin of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path to end suffering may be treated in terms of questions: 1) What is the problem? 2) What is the cause of the problem? 3) What is the end of the problem? And 4) How to solve the problem?

pedagogical reading is a guide for us to reduce the immediate pain of anger and hence practically effective to allowing us to focus on what is to be done. Since individuals rarely have the capacity to bring about widespread social change on their own, this responsibility often falls upon popular movements and their collective focus. Thus, the elimination of anger (and its therapising by utilising the patient perspective, just so long as we are unenlightened), can help individuals have the clarity of mind to see not only *what must be changed*, but also to identify *how it can be changed*. A movement populated by individuals like this would surely be more effective in bringing about social change than a movement populated by individuals unsuccessfully attempting to harness their anger.

As noted above, the #MeToo movement has not, as yet, ceased, and thus it is difficult to utilise that particular case to illustrate the point above. So, to illustrate this point, we can look at a different movement and attempt to identify the challenges faced by patient and angry approaches therein. A useful comparison here, I think, are the ongoing challenges faced by the African-American community. A striking example of the negative effects of anger in response to social injustice can be seen in the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Following the trial of four police officers for the beating of an African-American man named Rodney King following a high-speed chase, spontaneous riots erupted in Los Angeles prompted by the not-guilty- verdicts in favour of the officers. The riots largely targeted Asian-American owned businesses, purely in virtue of their geographical location i.e. they happened to be in the areas in which the riots took place. These riots were fuelled by simmering anger over police brutality towards the African-American community, but this anger was misdirected towards another minority group who were unconnected to the issue (as is so often the case; see Chapter 3).

This event had some unpredictable consequences — consequences which reverberated beyond the original geographical regions in which the riots took place. One consequence of the riots was a spike in sales of handguns, as people across the country sought to protect themselves should

a similar event occur where they lived.²⁴⁴ However, it is also notable that homicides committed using handguns similarly spiked during the same period.²⁴⁵ At the best of times, the full consequences of our actions are difficult to foresee. But if we look at even transformed anger's tendency to cloud our judgement, and then compare that to the approach of the patient perspective, we can see that the latter at least attempts to approach the world with a perspective that considers factors beyond the immediate situation with which we are confronted. As such, the patient perspective should be able to better identify the course of action we should take. A useful contrast to the LA Riots here is with the approach of Martin Luther King, who wrestled frequently with anger within his activism. King wrote in his autobiography of these struggles and his eventual realisation that he needed to eliminate his anger to achieve the ends he sought. Following failure to negotiate the end of segregation on buses, King reflected on what he saw as the cause of his failure:

“That Monday I went home with a heavy heart. I was weighted down by a terrible sense of guilt, remembering that on two or three occasions I had allowed myself to become angry and indignant. I had spoken hastily and resentfully. Yet I knew that this was no way to solve a problem. ‘You must not harbor anger,’ I admonished myself. ‘You must be willing to suffer the anger of the opponent, and yet not return anger. You must not become bitter. No matter how emotional your opponents are, you must be calm.’”²⁴⁶

Although clearly not advocating the patient perspective, or any sort of Buddhist perspective here, it is notable that Martin Luther King's relative success at achieving his aims was predicated upon an attempt to eliminate anger. If we return briefly to the #MeToo movement and our observation in an earlier chapter that anger can beget anger (i.e. that others 'mirror' our angry responses), it is notable that the response to anger within the #MeToo

²⁴⁴ Harris, “Gun Sales Soar After L.A. Riots.”

²⁴⁵ Cooper and Smith, “Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008.”

²⁴⁶ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Movement has done just that. The article by Emily Sargent quoted in section 1 above was shared, presumably by her, from her Twitter account in December 2017. The article is a defence of anger, and although quite nuanced by the end of the piece, it begins with an unrepentant anecdote of her angrily pushing a man in a bar after losing patience with his drunkenly swaying into her, and asking her to ‘Give me a smile’. To date, her Tweet has had just 14 replies. All but 2 of those replies are aggressive and threatening, calling her disgusting, a coward, a ‘Feminazi’, and a number of more colourful terms that I will not repeat here. This sort of backlash against the women of the #MeToo Movement is alarmingly common on Twitter — more common and extreme, I hope, than the backlash they receive in real life — but the worst of it seems to be reserved for the women who dare to express their anger. What is frustrating about this sort of dialogue is that it appears to polarise the very groups the movement is hoping to reconcile on better terms. Rather than creating effective dialogue aimed at change, it drives people on both sides towards demonising their opponent. If compassion, or generosity, etc. turns out to be a more effective tool than anger then, given the seriousness of the issue, I hope that the movement can come to embrace those kinds of approach as an automatic response to these sorts of provocation.

Conclusion

The elimination of anger via the patient perspective, I believe, could be a catalyst for change by replacing the collective mind-set of a movement with virtues that make people more outward-looking. As we become aware of the prevalence of suffering, we can eliminate our anger and develop a generous spirit and a sense of compassion i.e. a wish for someone to be freed from suffering. This applies to both victims of oppression and to anyone else who engages with the pedagogical reading of the Buddhist texts; in doing so, the patient perspective creates individuals predisposed towards activism. Coupled with the epistemic clarity that the elimination of anger brings, they

can take action effectively in creating social changes in the best way they can.

Appendix

Sukha, *pīti* (*prīti*), and *dukkha* (*duḥkha*)

There is a variety of proximate terms of happiness in early Buddhist classification, notably *sukha* and *pīti* (or *prīti* in Sanskrit). In loose usage they are almost identical and sometimes found together. Because their distinction is absent in modern English, they are difficult to render. While *sukha* is sometimes translated to pleasure, bliss, and happiness, *pīti*, which can also be sub-categorised further into five kinds, may be translated as joy, delight, rapture, zest, as well as happiness. However, these translations do not capture the subtlety in the original languages. In his comprehensive analysis, Buddhaghosa explains the difference between *sukha* and *pīti* in *Vism.*: “Pīti is the contentedness at getting a desirable object, and *sukha* is the actual experiencing of it when got,” adding that the experience is analogous to the following situation:

“If a man exhausted in a desert saw or heard about a pond on the edge of a wood, he would have *pīti*; if he went into the wood’s shade and used the water, he would have *sukha*.”²⁴⁷

It is further characterised that *pīti* includes an element of mental construction while *sukha* is a felt experience itself.²⁴⁸ As Heim observes, the former denotes a person’s will, i.e. enthusiasm or anticipation, that adds into the experience, and the latter is a more passive activity of savouring the pleasure that results from contacts with external objects.²⁴⁹

Considering mental factors involved in the activities, *sukha* is defined simply in terms of feeling while *pīti* also require an additional factor of mental formation (*saṅkhāra/saṃskāra*). By excluding the dimension of desire towards an object, it is the more basic and wider sense of happiness, and includes larger instances of overall pleasurable feelings. In other words, it

²⁴⁷ *Vism* IV, 100. A similar line of analysis can be found in another Buddhaghosa’s work, *Atthasālinī* 117-18.

²⁴⁸ *Atthasālinī* 115-18; *Vism* IV 94-98.

²⁴⁹ Heim, “Buddhism,” 23.

means that *sukha* requires fewer mental faculties to be completed, which may include the phenomena of *pīti*. This is made clear by Buddhaghōṣa: “Where there is *pīti* there is *sukha*; but where there is *sukha* there is not necessarily *pīti*.”²⁵⁰

This subtlety has some implications in the context of what should be a Buddhist goal. Since the experience of *sukha*, which is often treated as a desirable goal, is not necessarily defined by a fulfilment of enthusiasms or desires; happiness is not resulted from just doing whatever one wants. This is important because had *pīti* been the Buddhist ordinary life pursuit, it could have potentially undermined the Buddhist foundation about self-control against bad desires. For we have to fulfil our desires to pursue *pīti* in spite of bad consequences. Although *sukha* is by definition inclusive of *pīti*, but because self-gratification is not the only cause of *sukha*, there are ways to attain it without contradicting with their own premises.

Sukha has a far more important place in Buddhism than *pīti*. Perhaps, an etymological analysis can offer more contexts. Antonymous to *sukha* is *dukkha* (*duhkha* in Sanskrit), the term for suffering or pain and undisputedly the most important concept in the Buddhist philosophy. The prefixes *su-* and *du-* in both terms denote the quality good and bad, respectively, to what they precede. In this case their original meanings are ‘having a good/bad axle hole,’ thus rendered as chariots running smoothly or badly. Merely the prefixes are telling of the place of these concepts in the Buddhist thought. Their low opinion of *dukkha* is made known clearly and loudly and therefore we may infer that from the etymology *sukha* is the opposite. It is, for some parts, but not entirely true.

As a kind of feeling, *sukha* appears to be the direct opposite of *dukkha*. An example can be found in the Buddhist analysis of *vedanā* or feeling/sensation, which is one of the mental aggregates. It is manifested in three ways: *sukha*, *dukkha*, and *upekkhā* (pleasure, pain, and not pleasure nor

²⁵⁰ *Vism* IV 100.

pain, respectively). So in this categorisation, *sukha* has the opposite quality to *dukkha*. And yet, they are not antithetical when it comes to their values. *Sukha* is indeed more desirable than *dukkha*; however, unlike *dukkha* which is the most undesirable state in the Buddhist universe, *sukha* is, strictly speaking, not the most desirable state. The opposite of *dukkha* and the most desirable state is in fact an absence of it, viz. nirvana. Such a state requires a person to break off from the capacity to feel either negatively or positively, or even neutral. In this sense, no matter what the hierarchy of these feelings is, they would not be as good as putting an end to it.

This discrepancy is what we should be aware of. *Sukha* and *dukkha* may be opposite in some sense, but they cannot be taken as completely antonymous. Whereas *sukha* is essentially a mental phenomenon of feeling, *dukkha* has many layers of meanings which extends more than just mental suffering. It includes some metaphysical sense that is not captured in *sukha* (see the full depth of *dukkha* in Chapter 2 section 6). For this reason, they cannot be compared as opposite in every sense of the terms.

Abbreviations

The texts used in this work are drawn from across Buddhist traditions, although only those mentioned several times are abbreviated, as following. Some of them are available in many versions, which sometimes are used for comparison, especially when the original traditional texts are found in different languages including Sanskrit, Pāli, and Tibetan. However, the references listed here are the versions used in citations, unless stated otherwise. I have tried to use the more accessible and yet reliable texts when possible. Referencing numbers follow the tradition set by the translation versions chosen here, typically in the format of book, chapter, verse, whichever applies to them.

- AN* *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated as *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*.
- BCA* Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Two versions are the main sources of consultation. One based on Sanskrit, the other on Sanskrit and Tibetan. The Sanskrit-based version which is translated by Crosby and Skilton as *The Bodhicaryāvatāra* is my primary reference. However, in some occasions, when the other version by Wallace and Wallace is used as it conveys less confusion, it will be noted otherwise.
- Dhp* *Dhammapāda*. Translated with annotations by Gil Fronsdal as *The Dhammapāda*.
- DN* *Dhīgha Nikāya*. Translated as *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*.
- MA* Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Translated as *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakīrti's Madhyamakavatara*.
- MN* *Majjhima Nikāya*. Translated as *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*.
- Mil* *Milindapañhā*. Translated as *Milinda's Questions*.
- ŚS* Śāntideva, *Śikṣā Samuccaya*
- SN* *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Translated as *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*.
- Vism* Buddhaghōṣa, *Visuddhimagga*. Translated as *The Path of Purification*.

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