

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF THE CAUSE THAT PROVOKES ANGER, AND OF THE REMEDIES OF ANGER (FOUR ARTICLES) [*There is no further mention of these remedies in the text, except in Article [4].]

We must now consider the cause that provokes anger, and its remedies. Under this head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether the motive of anger is always something done against the one who is angry?
 - (2) Whether slight or contempt is the sole motive of anger?
 - (3) Of the cause of anger on the part of the angry person;
 - (4) Of the cause of anger on the part of the person with whom one is angry.
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Whether the motive of anger is always something done against the one who is angry?

Objection 1: It would seem that the motive of anger is not always something done against the one who is angry. Because man, by sinning, can do nothing against God; since it is written ([Job 35:6](#)): "If thy iniquities be multiplied, what shalt thou do against Him?" And yet God is spoken of as being angry with man on account of sin, according to Ps. 105:40: "The Lord was

Objection 2: Further, anger is a desire for vengeance. But one may desire vengeance for things done against others. Therefore we are not always angry on account of something done against us.

Objection 3: Further, as the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 2) man is angry especially with those "who despise what he takes a great interest in; thus men who study philosophy are angry with those who despise philosophy," and so forth. But contempt of philosophy does not harm the philosopher. Therefore it is not always a harm done to us that makes us angry.

Objection 4: Further, he that holds his tongue when another insults him, provokes him to greater anger, as Chrysostom observes (Hom. xxii, in Ep. ad Rom.). But by holding his tongue he does the other no harm. Therefore a man is not always provoked to anger by something done against him.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 4) that "anger is always due to something done to oneself: whereas hatred may arise without anything being done to us, for we hate a man simply because we think him such."

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[46\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)), anger is the desire to hurt another for the purpose of just vengeance. Now unless some injury has been done, there is no question of vengeance: nor does any injury provoke one to vengeance, but only that which is done to the person who seeks vengeance: for just as everything naturally seeks its own good, so does it naturally repel its own evil. But injury done by anyone does not affect a man unless in some way it be something done against him. Consequently the motive of a man's anger is always something done against him.

Reply to Objection 1: We speak of anger in God, not as of a passion of the soul but as of judgment of justice, inasmuch as He wills to take vengeance on sin. Because the sinner, by sinning, cannot do God any actual harm: but so far as he himself is concerned, he acts against God in two ways. First, in so far as he despises God in His commandments. Secondly, in so far as he harms himself or another; which injury redounds to God, inasmuch as the person injured is an object of God's providence and protection.

Reply to Objection 2: If we are angry with those who harm others, and seek to be avenged on them, it is because those who are injured belong in some way to us: either by some kinship or friendship, or at least because of the nature we have in common.

Reply to Objection 3: When we take a very great interest in a thing, we look upon it as our own good; so that if anyone despise it, it seems as though we ourselves were despised and injured.

Reply to Objection 4: Silence provokes the insulter to anger when he thinks it is due to contempt, as though his anger were slighted: and a slight is an action.

Objection 1: It would seem that slight or contempt is not the sole motive of anger. For Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 16) that we are angry "when we suffer, or think that we are suffering, an injury." But one may suffer an injury without being despised or slighted. Therefore a slight is not the only motive of anger.

Objection 2: Further, desire for honor and grief for a slight belong to the same subject. But dumb animals do not desire honor. Therefore they are not grieved by being slighted. And yet "they are roused to anger, when wounded," as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 8). Therefore a slight is not the sole motive of anger.

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher (Rhet. ii, 2) gives many other causes of anger, for instance, "being forgotten by others; that others should rejoice in our misfortunes; that they should make known our evils; being hindered from doing as we like." Therefore being slighted is not the only motive for being angry.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 2) that anger is "a desire, with sorrow, for vengeance, on account of a seeming slight done unbecomingly."

I answer that, All the causes of anger are reduced to slight. For slight is of three kinds, as stated in Rhet. ii, 2, viz. "contempt," "despiteful treatment," i.e. hindering one from doing one's will, and "insolence": and all motives of anger are reduced to these three. Two reasons may be assigned for this. First, because anger seeks another's hurt as being a means of just vengeance: wherefore it seeks vengeance in so far as it seems just. Now just vengeance is taken only for that which is done unjustly; hence that which provokes anger is always something considered in the light of an injustice. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 3) that "men are not angry--if they think they have wronged some one and are suffering justly on that account; because there is no anger at what is just." Now injury is done to another in three ways: namely, through ignorance, through passion, and through choice. Then, most of all, a man does an injustice, when he does an injury from choice, on purpose, or from deliberate malice, as stated in Ethic. v, 8. Wherefore we are most of all angry with those who, in our opinion, have hurt us on purpose. For if we think that some one has done us an injury through ignorance or through passion, either we are not angry with them at all, or very much less: since to do anything through ignorance or through passion takes away from the notion of injury, and to a certain extent calls for mercy and forgiveness. Those, on the other hand, who do an injury on purpose, seem to sin from contempt; wherefore we are angry with them most of all. Hence the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 3) that "we are either not angry at all, or not very angry with those who have acted through anger, because they do not seem to have acted slightly."

The second reason is because a slight is opposed to a man's excellence: because "men think little of things that are not worth much ado" (Rhet. ii, 2). Now we seek for some kind of excellence from all our goods. Consequently whatever injury is inflicted on us, in so far as it is derogatory to our excellence, seems to savor of a slight.

Reply to Objection 1: Any other cause, besides contempt, through which a man suffers an injury, takes away from the notion of injury: contempt or slight alone adds to the motive of anger, and consequently is of itself the cause of anger.

Reply to Objection 3: Each of those causes amounts to some kind of slight. Thus forgetfulness is a clear sign of slight esteem, for the more we think of a thing the more is it fixed in our memory. Again if a man does not hesitate by his remarks to give pain to another, this seems to show that he thinks little of him: and those too who show signs of hilarity when another is in misfortune, seem to care little about his good or evil. Again he that hinders another from carrying out his will, without deriving thereby any profit to himself, seems not to care much for his friendship. Consequently all those things, in so far as they are signs of contempt, provoke anger.

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Whether a man's excellence is the cause of his being angry?

Objection 1: It would seem that a man's excellence is not the cause of his being more easily angry. For the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 2) that "some are angry especially when they are grieved, for instance, the sick, the poor, and those who are disappointed." But these things seem to pertain to defect. Therefore defect rather than excellence makes one prone to anger.

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 2) that "some are very much inclined to be angry when they are despised for some failing or weakness of the existence of which there are grounds for suspicion; but if they think they excel in those points, they do not trouble." But a suspicion of this kind is due to some defect. Therefore defect rather than excellence is a cause of a man being angry.

Objection 3: Further, whatever savors of excellence makes a man agreeable and hopeful. But the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 3) that "men are not angry when they play, make jokes, or take part in a feast, nor when they are prosperous or successful, nor in moderate pleasures and well-founded hope." Therefore excellence is not a cause of anger.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 9) that excellence makes men prone to anger.

I answer that, The cause of anger, in the man who is angry, may be taken in two ways. First in respect of the motive of anger: and thus excellence is the cause of a man being easily angered. Because the motive of anger is an unjust slight, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). Now it is evident that the more excellent a man is, the more unjust is a slight offered him in the matter in which he excels. Consequently those who excel in any matter, are most of all angry, if they be slighted in that matter; for instance, a wealthy man in his riches, or an orator in his eloquence, and so forth.

Secondly, the cause of anger, in the man who is angry, may be considered on the part of the disposition produced in him by the motive aforesaid. Now it is evident that nothing moves a man to anger except a hurt that grieves him: while whatever savors of defect is above all a

men who are weak, or subject to some other defect, are more easily angered, since they are more easily grieved.

This suffices for the Reply to the First Objection.

Reply to Objection 2: If a man be despised in a matter in which he evidently excels greatly, he does not consider himself the loser thereby, and therefore is not grieved: and in this respect he is less angered. But in another respect, in so far as he is more undeservedly despised, he has more reason for being angry: unless perhaps he thinks that he is envied or insulted not through contempt but through ignorance, or some other like cause.

Reply to Objection 3: All these things hinder anger in so far as they hinder sorrow. But in another respect they are naturally apt to provoke anger, because they make it more unseemly to insult anyone.

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Whether a person's defect is a reason for being more easily angry with him?

Objection 1: It would seem that a person's defect is not a reason for being more easily angry with him. For the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 3) that "we are not angry with those who confess and repent and humble themselves; on the contrary, we are gentle with them. Wherefore dogs bite not those who sit down." But these things savor of littleness and defect. Therefore littleness of a person is a reason for being less angry with him.

Objection 2: Further, there is no greater defect than death. But anger ceases at the sight of death. Therefore defect of a person does not provoke anger against him.

Objection 3: Further, no one thinks little of a man through his being friendly towards him. But we are more angry with friends, if they offend us or refuse to help us; hence it is written ([Ps. 54:13](#)): "If my enemy had reviled me I would verily have borne with it." Therefore a person's defect is not a reason for being more easily angry with him.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 2) that "the rich man is angry with the poor man, if the latter despise him; and in like manner the prince is angry with his subject."

I answer that, As stated above ([Articles \[2\],3](#)) unmerited contempt more than anything else is a provocative of anger. Consequently deficiency or littleness in the person with whom we are angry, tends to increase our anger, in so far as it adds to the unmeritedness of being despised. For just as the higher a man's position is, the more undeservedly he is despised; so the lower it is, the less reason he has for despising. Thus a nobleman is angry if he be insulted by a peasant; a wise man, if by a fool; a master, if by a servant.

If, however, the littleness or deficiency lessens the unmerited contempt, then it does not increase but lessens anger. In this way those who repent of their ill-deeds, and confess that

Prov. 15:1: "A mild answer breaketh wrath": because, to wit, they seem not to despise, but rather to think much of those before whom they humble themselves.

This suffices for the Reply to the First Objection.

Reply to Objection 2: There are two reasons why anger ceases at the sight of death. One is because the dead are incapable of sorrow and sensation; and this is chiefly what the angry seek in those with whom they are angered. Another reason is because the dead seem to have attained to the limit of evils. Hence anger ceases in regard to all who are grievously hurt, in so far as this hurt surpasses the measure of just retaliation.

Reply to Objection 3: To be despised by one's friends seems also a greater indignity. Consequently if they despise us by hurting or by failing to help, we are angry with them for the same reason for which we are angry with those who are beneath us.