Cambridge University Press 978-0-521-03642-9 - Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen, Volume XXXII Edited by Susanna Braund and Glenn W. Most Excerpt More information

Introduction

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These days, the emotions are hot stuff. No doubt they always have been, and in more ways than one. For, however often and drastically they interfere with our thinking, the fact remains that the emotions are good tools for thought - not only for thought about the similarities and differences between humans and animals,¹ but even more for reflection upon the similarities and differences between humans and humans. Attributing to other human beings the same kinds of emotional states as those we attribute to ourselves is one of the fundamental strategies in all attempts at understanding across the gulfs that separate one culture from another, one age from another, one person from another. Astonishingly, such attempts seem often to succeed; but the questions of why they do, and how they fail, have provided conundra for anthropology, hermeneutics, historical studies, lexicography, and a host of other disciplines.² For at first glance emotions may well seem universal, and indispensable to anything we would wish to count as being human, and it is certain that in the end we cannot do without them as an explanatory category in our dealings with other humans and their works; yet by the same token it does not take much reflection or experience to see that what has been understood as an emotion and what has been thought proper to do with it, in private and in public, vary and have varied widely across all possible sets of parameters. How many ancient Greeks would have agreed with Adam Smith that "[t]he expression of anger towards anybody present, if it exceeds a bare intimation that we are sensible to ill usage, is regarded not only as an insult to that particular person, but as a rudeness to the whole company"?³ How many Inuit? How many Maoris? How many New Yorkers?

¹ Darwin (1998) remains an unsurpassed starting-point.

² The wider interest in the passions on the part of recent historians is now reflected in a review essay by medievalist Barbara Rosenwein (2002).

³ A. Smith (1976) 35.

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In recent years the emotions have migrated from the peripheries into the center of attention of a number of fields of scholarship which had previously scorned them as unscientific, ignored them as trivial, or repressed them as perilous. Over the past decade or so, for example, many psychologists, who a generation ago might have been studying the mechanisms of perception, the patterns of behavior, and the development of children, have been doing intensive research into the physiological basis and the conscious experience of various states of emotion. Armed not only with a new paradigm of what makes humans humans but also with an array of expensive new technologies and intimidatingly acronymic instrumentation - CAT (a.k.a. CT), fMRI (a.k.a. MRI or NMR), PET - they have already made a number of important discoveries about the processes and functions of emotional states *in situ*, *in vivo*, and in real time.⁴ And the recent tendency of philosophers to study not only language, epistemology, and the natural sciences, but also ethics, political theory, and the identity of the self, has led to a reawakening of interest in the role of the emotions in the construction of our sense of ourselves and of our world and in our dealings with other persons. An older philosophical tradition, going back in modern times to Descartes⁵ and Hume⁶ but more recently overshadowed by analytic and rationalistic tendencies, has thereby been revitalized by being brought into contact with contemporary developments in philosophical research, by stimulus from other disciplines, and by the experience of the savage irrationalities of the twentieth century and the insistent longings of our own times.7

Of course, this tradition goes back ultimately to ancient philosophy; Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoa all took strong and very different stands about the place of emotion in a happy life (or, more often, in an unhappy one). Moreover, few accounts of the role of emotions in human life have etched themselves as ineradicably into the collective memory of the Western tradition as have those to be found in Greek and Roman epic,

⁴ For a representative panorama of recent approaches and results see, for example, Plutchik (1980, 1994); Heilman and Satz (1983); Scherer and Ekman (1984); Plutchik and Kellerman (1986); Lazarus (1991); Birbaumer (1993); Lewis and Haviland (1993); Damasio (1994); Ekman and Davidson (1994); Power and Dalgleish (1997); R. Carter (1998); LeDoux (1998); Panksepp (1998); Dalgleish and Power (1999); Borod (2000); Lane and Nadel (2000); Lewis and Haviland-Jones (2000); and Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone (2001). For social perspectives on emotions, see also Harré (1986) and Harré and Parrott (1996).

⁵ Descartes (1985). ⁶ Hume (1978).

⁷ For representative recent examples, and some important older ones, see Sartre (1962); Kenny (1963); S. Williams (1973); Rorty (1980); Calhoun and Solomon (1984); Taylor (1985); de Sousa (1987); Gordon (1987); Platts (1991); Oakley (1992); R. Solomon (1993); Davies and Stone (1995); Stocker and Hegeman (1996); Griffiths (1997); Hjort and Laver (1997); Hornsby (1997); Blackburn (1998); O'Hear (1998); Wollheim (1999); and Goldie (2000). For a helpful orientation on non-philosophical usages, see Russell, Fernandez-Dols, Manstead, and Wellenkamp (1995).

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lyric, tragedy, and other genres. So it is hardly surprising that the fashion for passion has increasingly invested classical studies within the past years. The current debate about the passions in antiquity took root among classicists in the 1990s in the work of scholars such as Martha Nussbaum,⁸ Douglas Cairns,⁹ David Konstan,¹⁰ and Richard Sorabji,¹¹ among others. The passions in Roman culture were the subject of a conference which resulted in a volume published in 1997 by Susanna Braund and Christopher Gill.¹² The present volume continues the work of these scholars, as of others, and focuses upon one emotion, anger, in particular. It is thus complementary to William Harris' *Restraining Rage: the Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2002). It is our hope that our publication, taken together with that of Harris, will set a new agenda for the study of ancient anger and will provoke and inspire work by many other scholars both within and beyond the field of classics.

This volume is an outcome of a colloquium on "Anger in Antiquity" organized by the present co-editors and held at Heidelberg University in September 1999; it consists of eleven of the papers delivered on that occasion, modified for publication in the light of our discussions. Although there are inevitably numerous gaps in our coverage – for example, Greek and Roman iamb, satire, and comedy, Jewish and Christian literature, and the archaeological record receive no discussion at all, or much too little¹³ – the eleven chapters nonetheless cohere closely and take the debate forward significantly in the areas of the cultural specificity of anger, anger and philosophy, anger and gender, and anger in epic poetry.

Anger and epic seem to go hand in hand. If different genres are particularly associated with different emotions, then epic surely lays claim to anger. The "wrath of Achilles" in the *Iliad* famously makes anger the first word in Western literature, and the debate about the anger of Aeneas at the end of the *Aeneid* continues to rage. We therefore make no apologies for the unabashed focus upon epic in this volume. Of the eleven chapters here, the first two and last three investigate many aspects of rage in Greek and Latin epic poetry; Homeric epic remains a point of reference too for many of the rest. The other recurring text is Aristotle's account of anger in the *Rhetoric*, which receives detailed discussion in one chapter and informs many others. But the phenomenon of anger is by no means confined to epic and philosophical prose. This volume finds anger everywhere – in

⁸ Nussbaum (1994, 2001). ⁹ Cairns (1993). ¹⁰ Konstan (1994, 1997, 2001).

¹¹ Sorabji (2000). ¹² Braund and Gill (1997).

¹³ So too, there is no specific discussion of Seneca's *De ira*, though the chapter by Braund and Gilbert covers in an appendix some of that material.

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the Athenian law courts, in drama, comic and tragic, in magic spells, in the Greek novel, and in the medical writer Galen. We do not claim that this volume presents a comprehensive or exhaustive treatment of ancient anger, but we do hope that by raising new questions about anger as it appears in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts in ancient culture it will make a substantial contribution to the current debate about the passions in antiquity.

We decided to organize the chapters in this volume in a broadly chronological sequence, although other principles of arrangement informed the colloquium and there are many possible collecting-points that could be used to organize a discussion of anger – for example, the terminology, psychology, physiology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics of anger. All these topics are discussed at various points in the volume and several general questions relating to anger and its spheres of operation recur. To what extent is anger culturally specific or universal? Is it better to see anger as a psychological phenomenon, as an emotional state open above all to our own introspection, or rather as a sociological one, as a form of behavior manifested by specific individuals so that specific audiences can note and appreciate it? How can we analyze the vocabulary of anger? How do ancient constructions of ethics and politics map onto modern assumptions about anger? Does anger belong in the public or the private domain? How is anger connected with issues of status and with issues of gender and age? In the outline of the eleven chapters which follows we attempt to highlight the central problems they consider and the rich interconnections between them.

The first chapter in the volume raises many issues central to the study of ancient anger. In "Ethics, ethology, terminology: Iliadic anger and the cross-cultural study of emotion", Douglas Cairns argues that emotions have universal and culture-specific aspects and that dialogue between ancient cultures and our own is possible. Emotions have evolved to help to promote social co-operation. In the case of anger, which is a human universal with specific neurophysiological changes, it is usefully seen as "a response to a breach of co-operation which . . . guarantees and makes credible the threat inherent in the offended party's reaction . . ." But, as with other emotions, the taxonomy of terms for anger differs from culture to culture. Cairns' focus is the construction of anger in the Homeric worldview. After his justification for the study of Homeric anger, Cairns maps it against Aristotle's definition to find an overall coherence. He analyzes in detail the Homeric terminology for anger, including *menis*, cholos, and nemesis, concluding that "Homeric anger-terms clearly demonstrate the location of the emotion of anger in the ethics of reciprocity." This requires a slight

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revision of Aristotle's definition, while retaining his association between anger and *timē*. Cairns concludes with a discussion of the centrality of $tim\bar{e}$ to Greek notions of selfhood and identity as social phenomena, with a focus especially upon the eyes, the gaze, and the look as deployed and as withheld.

The second chapter in the volume, by Glenn Most, shares with Cairns' study a focus upon anger in the *Iliad* but illuminates Iliadic anger through an examination of Iliadic pity. In Most's reading of the Iliad, "Anger and pity in Homer's Iliad," the central question raised is, what does it mean for an epic of wrath, which starts with "anger" and which offers so many manifestations of anger, to culminate in an episode of pity? Rather than accept the opening words of the poem as essentially programmatic, Most sees the structure of the poem as an invitation to explore the relationship between anger and pity, including self-pity. His central argument is that in the poem's incidents of what characters take to be undeserved suffering, the anger inspired by the perpetrator and the pity inspired by the sufferer, so different from Christian concepts, are not mutually exclusive but intimately interconnected: "a Homeric character cannot ever feel pity . . . without at the same time actually or potentially feeling some degree of anger at the agent or agents who caused this suffering." In Homer "pity and anger are two sides of the very same coin." Most proposes that the Iliad is structured in three stages: (1) Achilles' pity for himself and anger at Agamemnon; (2) his pity for Patroklos and his anger at Hector and the Trojans; (3) his pity for Priam; and he offers an analysis of salient elements of the poem to support his reading, culminating in Achilles' evolution of character which enables him to begin, too late, to master his own anger.

In the chapter by Danielle Allen, "Angry bees, wasps, and jurors: the symbolic politics of $\partial \rho \gamma \eta$ in Athens," we meet a non-Homeric term for anger, *orgē*. Allen explores the significance of *orgē* in democratic Athens as instantiated in tragedy, comedy (Aristophanes' *Wasps*), and especially forensic oratory. She starts from a passage in Demosthenes to suggest that "the job of law . . . was to determine how much anger ought to be applied to particular types of wrongdoing" and proceeds to argue that *orgē* was "a central term in the ethical discourses that produced Athenian definitions of the good citizen, justice, and just behavior." She shows how in the public sphere, that is, for men, hot-blooded anger was seen as appropriate or even necessary. By contrast, for women anger was out of bounds: the problems caused by the intrusion of anger into the household are explored in tragedy. Allen goes on to suggest that this binary opposition illuminates the phenomenon of sycophancy at Athens. After discussing the erotic and iretic

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signification of figs, she states that "the rhetoric of sycophancy established an ethics for the male use of anger that kept aggressive competition from doing damage to the public sphere, just as the ethics for the female use of anger kept the Athenian valorization of *orgē* from doing damage to the private sphere." In other words, Athenian constructions of *orgē* supported the designation of men but not women as political agents, capable of acting legitimately on anger.

All three of these chapters take Aristotle's definition of anger as a point of reference; and the fourth contribution to the volume, David Konstan's "Aristotle on anger and the emotions: the strategies of status," presents a detailed examination of Aristotle's account of anger in the Rhetoric. In his close analysis Konstan situates Aristotle's treatment of anger in the context of his framework of the passions (including pity) in general, arguing for the relevance of cognitive as well as physiological theories of emotion. He sees Aristotle's distinction between anger and hatred as crucial: anger is a personal matter, "the impulse to right a wrong done to oneself, in regard to opinion or reputation," in contrast with hatred, which can be directed against a group. He concludes that Aristotle's view of anger "as an attack upon one's social standing or honor" which creates a desire for "a compensating act of retribution" illuminates the role of anger more generally in the classical period. Konstan situates the characteristic pattern the slight is offered, there is pain at the slight, then revenge for the slight and pleasure in the revenge - thoroughly in the context of social life, thus linking with ideas about honor and public image explored by Cairns and Allen. This chapter makes a strong case for the difficulty of analyzing in modern terms the ideological construction of the emotions in Greek antiquity.

William Harris takes up the same point at the beginning of his contribution to this volume, "The rage of women," which develops further several points made in the relevant chapter of his book *Restraining Rage*. Starting (again) from Aristotle, Harris associates rage with action in order to distinguish it from mere irritation, and he notes the frequent association of rage with madness. He offers an overview of ancient ideas, from Homer through the Hellenistic period and into the Roman period, about the reining in of anger which still allowed for legitimate anger on the part of men and then turns to his main topic – women and anger. Harris' focus makes a shift into the domestic sphere which complements the civic emphasis of previous chapters in the volume. He tracks the negative stereotype of women as especially susceptible to anger from Homer onwards, including tragedy, Herodotus, Aristophanes, Plato, oratory, and Herodas into Greek

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literature of the Roman period, including Philodemus and Plutarch. He demonstrates that the stereotype "implies that there was almost no legitimate place for women's anger in the classical city" and asks why Greek men wanted "to reserve anger for their own use." This delegitimization of female anger he sees as an essential element in male psychological control. The chapter concludes with an examination of four tragedies in which the stereotype is subjected to scrutiny, Euripides' *Medea*, *Hecuba*, and *Electra* and Sophocles' *Electra*. These exceptions to the general rule seem only to confirm the stereotype that excluded women from political life and deprived them of what Harris styles "the right to rage."

In the next chapter, "Thumos as masculine ideal and social pathology in ancient Greek magical spells," Christopher Faraone explores women's experience of the anger of men in Greek culture, using the evidence afforded by spells designed to restrain the *thumos*. This chapter distinguishes between "black magic" curses and "white magic" amulets: the former traditionally operate between social equals while the latter are typically used by social subordinates (wives against their husbands, petitioners against rulers). Faraone finds a tension between constructions of masculinity and the role of anger. In the curses, the aim is to bind one's rivals' anger, competitive drive, or erotic passion, designated by thumos or orge (cf. Allen's chapter in this volume), which are seen as integral to the male psyche. But in the amulets and closely related love potions deployed by women and other social subordinates, the superior male's thumos is viewed negatively as a pathology or disease in need of cure. Faraone comes to the conclusion that "using magic to bind a man's *thumos* not only controls his anger; it also involves a much more diffuse attack on a man's will, courage, and sexual desire - character traits and faculties that are very closely tied to his masculinity" - his machismo. This chapter thus offers a rare glimpse of the female experience of male passions.

The chapter by David Scourfield, "Anger and gender in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*," picks up issues about anger and gender already raised by Allen, Harris, and Faraone. Scourfield demonstrates the centrality of anger in Chariton's narrative and highlights the complex intertextualities whereby the novel reworks important moments of anger from earlier Greek literature, including Homer, Euripides, and Menander. He focuses first upon the character of Chaereas who, he argues, develops from a youth who is unable to restrain his anger into a man who shows proper self-control (cf. Most's chapter in this volume). Then he turns the spotlight upon the lack of anger shown by the heroine Callirhoe. Scourfield argues not that she is incapable of anger but that she can control it through her

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rationality: "Chariton shuns the standard view of women as weak emotional creatures," challenging the stereotype (which is depicted in Harris' chapter). He concludes that the novel creates two potential readerships, depending on how the relation between gender and anger is construed.

The next chapter, " 'Your mother nursed you with bile': anger in babies and small children," by Ann Ellis Hanson, offers an exploration of the experience of anger in infancy and childhood. Starting from the assertion in *Iliad* 16 that Achilles was nursed on bile (cholos), Hanson focuses upon ancient views of the formation and suppression of anger in babies and children. Her chapter uses texts of philosophers and medical writers, including Plato and Galen, to examine the shaping of character in the very young through their physiological and psychological treatment. She discusses the practice of swaddling newborn babies, toddlers' first attempts at locomotion, teething and socialization in play, and at every point indicates the ways in which the Homeric poems map onto later theories. The central issue emerges as the advisability of avoiding prolonged frustration to the infant "lest angry responses become habitual." She concludes that although Achilles' angry temperament was acquired, "the child-rearing practices imagined for epic . . . offer no encouragement to the notion that Achilles was allowed to practice anger at home."

Continuing the focus upon anger in epic poetry, Christopher Gill offers a new examination of the vexed question of the relationship between Hellenistic philosophical ideas about anger and Virgil's Aeneid in "Reactive and objective attitudes: anger in Virgil's Aeneid and Hellenistic philosophy." He sets out "to sharpen our conceptual and critical means" for defining the complexity of this text "by the distinction between reactive and objective attitudes and by linking this distinction with various ancient philosophical approaches." Accordingly, he takes as his starting-point the philosopher Strawson's distinction between "reactive" and "objective" attitudes in interpersonal relations, a distinction which hinges upon the relationship of the two individuals as being either one of equals or asymmetrical. He then analyzes the Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean attitudes to anger in those terms, concluding that the Aristotelian attitude is essentially "reactive" and the Stoic essentially "objective," with the Epicurean attitude falling in between. Turning his attention to the Aeneid, Gill first resists critical attempts to find in such a complex poem a single approach to anger. He proposes that the poem offers "a coherent synthesis" of the reactive and objective strands and through a close reading of the most salient episodes he demonstrates its philosophical complexities. He proposes that "there is a relatively systematic attempt to associate Aeneas with a more objective attitude" but

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that at times, including at the poem's finale, Aeneas is deflected from the high ethical standards to which he aspires.

The focus upon epic anger continues in the next chapter, "The angry poet and the angry gods: problems of theodicy in Lucan's epic of defeat," by Elaine Fantham. Fantham expands the discussion of anger to include the anger of supernatural agencies – the gods and Fortuna – and the anger of the superhuman figure of Caesar in Lucan's epic poem about the civil war. The paper starts with an overview of the motif of divine retribution (ira deorum) in earlier Latin literature, especially Livy and Virgil, both important intertexts for Lucan. Fantham then draws attention to the dominance of anger at the start of Lucan's epic, in the forms of the divine hostility to Rome implicit in Lucan's statement *uictrix causa deis placuit* ("the gods favored the conquering side") and of Caesar's anger. She observes that though the gods do not intervene in the action, Lucan implies their active hostility. While noting the shift of focus from the gods to Fortuna after Pharsalus, she concludes that "Lucan does not see Fortuna as a causality distinct from the gods." Fantham also examines the authorial anger expressed in the apostrophes that protest against Pompey's defeat and death. She ends by arguing that Caesar, who is characterized by anger, enacts divine anger against Rome: she links Caesar, "the human thunderbolt," with the traditional weapon of the angry Jupiter, "not just as analogue, but as the actual representative and embodiment of the divine anger which overthrew the Roman Republic." Given the degree to which the question of anger dominates discussion of the Aeneid, it seems surprising that no one before Fantham has so carefully analyzed the role of anger in the Bellum Ciuile.

The final chapter in the volume, by Susanna Braund and Giles Gilbert, is "An ABC of epic *ira*: anger, beasts, and cannibalism." This is an examination of the psychopathology of the warrior on the battlefield as presented in Roman epic poetry from Virgil to the Flavians. Braund and Gilbert conduct a close examination of *ira* in the texts of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, and Silius Italicus, which reveals a strong tendency to depict the epic warrior's anger not directly but indirectly, through the medium of similes which liken the warrior to a fierce beast. The chapter includes an analysis of these similes, similes whose significance has not been fully appreciated: some depict anger as a positive and indeed necessary element for the warrior, while others suggest a negative moral interpretation of epic *ira*. Braund and Gilbert make a connection between Statius' depiction of the young Achilles' diet of raw and still-living animals (*Achilleid* 2: their starting-point, and cf. Hanson's chapter in this volume) and his depiction of Tydeus' act of cannibalism on the battlefield (*Thebaid* 8: their finishing-point), which

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is clearly a case of *ira* beyond bounds. They conclude that anger has to have its limits.

The variety and range of the issues raised in this volume might well seem daunting. But let us suggest in conclusion that one convenient and engaging way of focusing many of them is to consider in the light of the contributions collected here the Hellenistic mosaic signed by the artist Dioskourides of Samos, which is in the collection of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and of which an illustration graces the front cover of this book. It seems to show an angry old woman captured in a private moment with two other women and a boy; and, in fact, conventionally anger is very often associated in antiquity with the old, and with privacy, and above all with women. Yet of course it is not an old woman we see represented here, but a male actor wearing the mask of an old woman in the stage production of a comedy. What seems to be a woman is a man's (the actor's, the author's) representation of a woman; what seems to be private is a public representation of the private domain taking place within an institutionalized civic space devoted to that very purpose; what seems to be anger is a dramatic representation of anger, tactically deploying the well-established and thoroughly familiar symptomatology of that emotion in order to convince spectators (the other three on the stage, the audience of the comedy) that s/he is in its grip. Was s/he really angry? If so, how and why was she angry, and how did the ancients know she was, and how do we know she is? How much can we finally know about what angry ancient women, or for that matter angry ancient men, really felt in the privacy of their homes, and of their minds? Can we hope to penetrate through all the levels of play-acting, one after another, to reach some core of authenticity that would not be play-acting? Or is it not better to inquire into the profound truths revealed about ourselves and our cultures by what we choose to enact and how we choose to do so? The complexities of what might at first seem to be a very straightforward scene begin to exfoliate in layers of increasing richness as soon as we start to reflect upon it.

The articles collected here raise questions and make suggestions that, taken seriously and followed through thoughtfully, promise ultimately to help us better to understand at least some of these complexities: those of that character, an angry old woman – but also those of the actor who played her, the author who invented her, the artist who depicted her, the audiences of the play who laughed at her and the spectators of the mosaic who decorated their home with her – and, perhaps, in the end, those of ourselves as well.