

ANGER AND THE UNITY OF PHILOSOPHY:
INTERLOCKING DISCOURSES OF NATURAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY
IN THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

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Summary

By exploring various theoretical discourses of anger in Enlightenment Scotland I intend to show that various branches of philosophy exploited the same conceptual resources while discussing phenomenon in natural, moral and religious contexts. Relying on the same concepts, various branches of theoretical inquiry were intertwined so that different layers of discourse exerted a mutual influence on one another: physiological discourses were filled with hidden moral meaning and religious content, and *vice versa*. Therefore, the discourses of the natural, psychological, social and transcendent aspects of human beings exhibited a remarkable conceptual unity in this period, just before they started to develop into specialized fields of knowledge. The present paper offers a case study as to how these conceptual interconnections worked within the Scottish Enlightenment's sphere of intellectual influence in the particular case of anger.

Introduction

Anger is at the forefront of theoretical interest in eighteenth-century natural and moral inquiry in Scotland:¹ it serves as a standard illustration in the medical, moral and theological

¹ It is also in the forefront of interest in the Enlightenment in general. For a discussion of the developments on the Continent, one however that leaves out the physiological context, see Coleman P., *Anger, Gratitude, and the Enlightenment Writer* (Oxford: 2011). However, the Scottish context deserves special attention,

discussions of fevers and violent active passions. As such it receives acute attention in connection with various *physiological* phenomena, like e.g. circulation, the animal spirits and raging fevers. In the descriptive and explanatory “science of man”, which can be understood as a middle-range theory mediating between physiological and normative (ethical and theological) considerations, anger is discussed in connection with benevolence, love, and other passions motivating actions, tempers and various appetites, as well as its role in art and poetry. In *ethical* contexts it is discussed, in a typically condemning manner, as a moral fault, in the context of corrupting the mind; and in *theological* contexts, it is considered as a passion demolishing humility. But sometimes it is also painted with more appealing colours as a state of mind necessary for the exercise of certain social virtues and self-preservation.

In this paper I will argue that these discourses of the Scottish Enlightenment are not independent of one another, quite to the contrary: various moral and natural philosophical discourses penetrate each other, linking moral philosophies to then-contemporary medical theories, and *vice versa*, lending medical theories moral and theological significance. Therefore the discourses of anger in this period are eminently suitable to illustrate the thesis that there is an intimate and remarkable connection between the discourses of natural and moral philosophy in the period.

This thesis has significance in the context of present-day historiographies of both science and philosophy that are still inclined to treat their canon separately.² By exploring the

because as Coleman (ibidem 4n7) points out ‘we do not find French equivalents to Hume’s or Smith’s reflective analysis of particular passions as part of an overall moral philosophy’.

² Although there is a tendency to merge the canons: notable examples include Janiak A., *Newton as Philosopher* (Cambridge: 2008), Garber D., *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* (Oxford: 2009), Janiak A. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Interpreting Newton* (Cambridge: 2012), and Biener Z. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: 2014). For a recent discussion of the problem see Schmaltz T.M., “What Has History of Science to Do with History of Philosophy”, in Lærke M. – Smith J.E.H. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: 2013) 301–323.

interconnections of various discourses of anger, I wish to illustrate by a case study the fundamental unity of natural and moral philosophies in the early modern period. As I will argue, the discourses of anger in these different fields are conceptually congruent and these discourses frequently merge in a rather intricate manner: physiological theories are influenced by implicit normative and religious motivations, the phenomenological psychology of the “science of man” is informed by physiological considerations and also by implicit normative agendas.

Visions of disciplinary unity and interaction

Ever since C.P. Snow’s famous essay on the ‘Two Cultures’ (1959), it has become a commonplace to refer to the divide separating the sciences and the humanities.³ This divide did not exist for those working on the questions of anger in various discourses of the Scottish Enlightenment. Instead, the participants saw themselves as contributing to a joint enterprise that could potentially converge upon a unified account of human phenomena encompassing physiological, moral and theological approaches. While the unifying character of this enterprise was considered as a matter of course, philosophy was not preoccupied with reconciling the ‘scientific’ and the ‘manifest’ image of man, as Wilfrid Sellars’ happy phrase has it,⁴ but aspired to a comprehensive explanatory understanding of human beings from their natural, cognitive and affective constitution to their moral and transcendent ends.

Early modern philosophers formulated various visions of the unity of philosophy. At one end of the early modern epistemological spectrum, Descartes’s influential vision of the sciences, in his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), as branches growing out of metaphysical

³ Snow C.P., *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: 1993).

⁴ Sellars W., “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”, in idem, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (London: 1963) 1–40.

foundations represents one version of how unity could be conceived. Descartes's original vision of method that underpinned this unity prescribed starting from intuitively clear and infallibly known metaphysical principles, the world's basic constituents, 'simple natures', through which deductive knowledge in physics and other fields of knowledge was attainable.⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, David Hume's foundational project in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739/40) aspired to empirical knowledge about the limits and prospects of human cognition, a basis upon which a 'compleat system of the sciences' could be erected.⁶

In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Scotland the unity of the sciences was typically conceived of in a Newtonian framework that postulated the primacy of experimental natural philosophy. Following the summary of his method of analysis and synthesis in Query 31 of the *Opticks* (which first appeared in the 1706 Latin edition), Newton formulated his legacy for moral philosophy in a much-quoted sentence: 'if natural Philosophy in all its Parts, by pursuing this Method, shall at length be perfected, the Bounds of Moral Philosophy will also be enlarged.'⁷ According to Newton, this enlargement should proceed through the perfection of natural philosophy, which consists in its increasing contribution to our knowledge of the attributes and intentions of God:

For so far as we can know by natural philosophy what is the first cause, what power he has over us, and what benefits we receive from him, so far our duty towards him, as well as that towards one another, will appear to us by the light of nature.⁸

⁵ On Descartes's vision of method see Garber D., "Descartes and Method in 1637", in idem, *Descartes Embodied* (Cambridge: 2000) 33–51.

⁶ On Hume's foundational project see especially Hazony Y., "Newtonian Explanatory Reduction and Hume's System of the Sciences", in Biener Z. – Schliesser E. (eds.), *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: 2014) 138–170 and Boehm M., "Hume's Foundational Project in the *Treatise*", *European Journal of Philosophy* (2013) doi: 10.1111/ejop.12056.

⁷ Newton Isaac, *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: 2004) 140.

⁸ Ibidem.

This self-understanding of natural philosophy was quite unlike that of modern science: it did not aspire exclusively to a descriptive, explanatory and secular knowledge of nature, but it also had intrinsic moral and theological content and implications.⁹

For Newton, the derivation of moral and theological knowledge from knowledge of nature was possible because the laws of morality, unlike the laws of nature, did not depend on God's volition. As Peter Harrison puts it, for Newton God 'wills good things – [and] things are not good because God wills them'.¹⁰ As Newton himself says, God is 'freely willing good things [...] and constantly cooperating with all things according to accurate laws, as being the foundation and cause of the whole of nature, except where it is good to act otherwise.'¹¹ Therefore, not the presupposition of God's inexplicable will, but *his goodness* should be our guide in understanding nature. Newton's inquiry is all about God's creation: it is an inquiry by which we find out about his intentions and thus about our own duty. Through the analysis of phenomena we find the laws of physics, and as these laws reflect God's will and God wills good things, *a fortiori*, the laws of physics must concur in the production of good effects.

Newton did not take decisive steps toward the fulfilment of his vision for disciplinary unity, but he clearly formulated the task and the framework for Newtonian philosophers: to refine moral philosophy within the methodological and theological framework that his natural philosophy had set. And this was a persistent heritage for Scottish natural and moral philosophers: most of them were willing with David Fordyce to '[c]onsider nature or the

⁹ Cunningham A., "How the Principia Got Its Name; Or, Taking Natural Philosophy Seriously", *History of Science* 29 (1991) 377–392, here 388. For a discussion see Grant A., "God and Natural Philosophy: The Late Middle Ages and Sir Isaac Newton", *Early Science and Medicine* 5 (2000) 279–298.

¹⁰ Harrison P., "Was Newton a Voluntarist?" in Force J.E. – Hutton S. (eds.), *Newton and Newtonianism* (Dordrecht: 2004) 39–64, 43. For a discussion of Harrison's ideas see Henry J., "Voluntarist Theology at the Origins of Modern Science: A Response to Peter Harrison", *History of Science* 54 (2009) 79–113.

¹¹ Cited in McGuire J.E., "Force, Active Principles, and Newton's Invisible Realm", in idem, *Tradition and Innovation: Newton's Metaphysics of Nature* (Dordrecht: 2004) 216.

World as the Volume or Book of God in the meanest page of which his perfections are legible'.¹² Having been committed to this understanding of the world, Colin Maclaurin in his influential mid-century introductory text to the ideas of Newton's *Principia* (1748) also insisted on the representation of natural philosophy as an enterprise 'subservient to purposes of a higher kind, and is chiefly to be valued as it lays a sure foundation for natural religion and moral philosophy'.¹³ The elaboration of the implications, as well as the critique, of Newton's programme for moral philosophy was left to the next generations, and many Scottish moral philosophers were willing to take up the Newtonian torch.¹⁴

One of the most self-conscious Newtonians, George Turnbull, in his *Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, published in two volumes in 1739/40, makes an attempt to set the principles on the basis of which moral philosophy can be made out to be continuous with the programme of Query 31.¹⁵ Turnbull's central idea is this: regular and orderly appearances are due to the fact that nature is governed by laws whose physical explanation is given if an effect is shown to be arising from those laws. Some of these laws are such that they produce 'good, perfection and beauty' in the material world,¹⁶ and an effect is thus instantly accounted for morally once it is shown to be produced by such laws. Explaining phenomena in this way is the *part* of natural philosophy that can be called moral philosophy. Just as Newton envisaged, the perfection of this part can proceed only through the refinement of natural philosophy, and our knowledge of the final causes that it provides. Probably writing under the influence of Colin Maclaurin, Turnbull proclaims that

¹² Fordyce David, "A Brief Account of the Nature, Progress, and Origin of Philosophy" [1743/44], in idem, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Indianapolis: 2003) 200.

¹³ Maclaurin Colin, *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries* (London, J. Nourse [etc.]: 1775 [1748]) 3.

¹⁴ For a discussion see Demeter T., "Enlarging the Bounds of Moral Philosophy: Newton's Method and Hume's Science of Man", in Biener Z. – Schliesser E., *Newton and Empiricism* (Oxford: 2014) 171–204.

¹⁵ Turnbull George, *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy* (Indianapolis: 2005) 1:48–50.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

all the conclusions in natural philosophy, concerning the order, beauty, and perfection of the material world, belong properly to moral philosophy; being inferences that respect the contriver, maker, and governor of the world, and other moral beings capable of understanding its wise, good and beautiful administration, and of being variously affected by its laws and connexions. In reality, when natural philosophy is carried so far as to reduce phenomena to good general laws, it becomes moral philosophy; and when it stops short of this chief end of all enquiries into the sensible or material world, which is, to be satisfied with regard to the wisdom of its structure and oeconomy; it hardly deserves the name of philosophy in the sense of Socrates, Plato, Lord Verulam, Boyle, Newton, and the other best moral or natural philosophers.¹⁷

Thus moral philosophy begins where the *conclusions* of natural philosophy are reached. The conclusions themselves are already part of moral philosophy, because they are related to the order (beauty, good, and perfection) of the material world. Precisely for this reason they have constitutive reference to moral laws, just as they are bearers of theological content with respect to the design and government of the universe.

The unity of various branches of philosophy so conceived amounts to more than a mere congruence of vague methodological pronouncements: it arises from the very nature of the subject matter common to these branches. As Turnbull himself puts it, unity arises from ‘the nature of things’ as the material world had been created purposively ‘for the sake of the moral world’, so that they ‘make one strictly, connected system’.¹⁸ On the basis of this view of the world Turnbull even goes almost as far as endorsing a view akin to Berkeley’s idealism

¹⁷ Turnbull, *Principles* 1: 52–53.

¹⁸ Turnbull, *Principles* 1: 440.

when he says that the material world ‘considered apart from its effects upon perceptive beings, hath no existence’ – and he only slightly qualifies this strong metaphysical commitment by adding the proviso that ‘at least, [it] cannot be said to merit existence’.¹⁹

There is thus a constitutive reference of the material world to the world of perceptive and moral beings, a reference without which the material world cannot be accounted for.

It is thus not a bottom-up unity that Turnbull envisages for philosophical disciplines that is secured by the foundational disciplines of natural philosophy. Instead, in his vision, natural, moral and religious insights have a mutual reliance on one another: the study of the natural world presupposes perceptual and psychological capacities that can be studied both as phenomena of physiology and as distinctively human phenomena of a ‘science of man’. The unity and mutual dependence of these aspects of the world as studied in natural, moral and theological branches of philosophy are underpinned by the fact that the world is fit for purpose – that it is adapted to a certain end.

This teleological unity of the world is also reflected in Francis Hutcheson’s 1742 lectures on moral philosophy that prescribe search for the purposes in our constitution for which God and nature ‘has formed us’.²⁰ Hutcheson also finds a motivation for natural philosophy in studying what ‘these things are which our natural senses {or perceptive powers} recommend to us’, and his vision of unity is consonant with Turnbull’s. And so is Fordyce’s influential *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1754) in which he introduces philosophy as a descriptive enterprise that aspires to the knowledge of things ‘whether natural or artificial, by observing its Structure, the Parts of which it consists, their Connection and joint Action’. This descriptive knowledge of the ‘Constituent Principles’ that things follow in

¹⁹ Turnbull, *Principles* 1: 441

²⁰ Hutcheson Francis, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Indianapolis: 2007) 24.

the course of their normal functioning directly leads to knowledge of their ‘Office and Use’, which in turn leads to knowledge of the ‘common Effort or Tendency of the Whole’.²¹

Thus the dominant vision concerning the unity of philosophy conceives the union of various branches of knowledge against the background of final causes with theological and normative aspirations. In this context David Hume’s account of human nature is outstanding because his vision of unity avoids theological aspirations altogether, and aims primarily at a secular and explanatory ‘science of man’. For Hume, the unity of philosophy is conceived primarily by the means of method, and not against the background of final causes or teleological considerations.²² Yet, for the world of living organisms he retains some of the rhetoric of the mutual dependence of parts for a common purpose,²³ and due to his commitment to the methods of anatomy while exploring human nature,²⁴ this functionalistic and synoptic outlook is characteristic of his account.²⁵

The resulting knowledge of the anatomy of human nature is largely independent of its actual physiological realisation, but physiology is not irrelevant to reaching conclusions in the science of man: lessons from optics, for example, can be useful in exploring sensation, a faculty whose study belongs equally to moral and natural philosophy.²⁶ Hume also turns to a physiological explanation of mistakes in reasoning couched in terms of animal spirits, and argues from the analogies between human and animal anatomy and physiology towards the

²¹ Fordyce David, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Indianapolis: 2003) 6.

²² See Schliesser E., “Hume’s Attack on Newton’s Philosophy”, *Enlightenment and Dissent* 25 (2009) 167–203, and Demeter T., “Hume’s Experimental Method”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012) 577–599.

²³ Hume David, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: 2007) 1.4.6.12.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 2.1.12.2.

²⁵ For a discussion see Demeter T., “The Anatomy and Physiology of Mind: David Hume’s Vitalistic Account”, in Horstmanshoff H.F.J. – King H. – Zittel C. (eds.), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: 2012) 217–240.

²⁶ See e.g. Hume, *Treatise* 2.2.8.6. and 1.9.3.11. See also 2.1.1.2 where Hume proclaims that the task of his science of man with respect to sensation ends where the task of anatomy and natural philosophy begins.

conclusion that the mental capacities of animals must be similar to those of humans, and they are different mostly in degree and not in kind.²⁷ These conclusions allow for drawing further conclusions about what is good or useful for this particular constitution called human nature, and this can result in normative considerations on how to act in various situations, or how to change the circumstances so as to ensure the desirable action of those involved in a given situation.²⁸ But it certainly does not allow for drawing conclusions concerning the nature or intentions of the deity.²⁹

The unity of philosophical inquiry was just as popular an idea among natural philosophers and physiologists as it was with moral philosophers. As part of a wider European tendency,³⁰ vitalistic ideas increasingly populated various branches of natural philosophy in Scotland from the early decades of the eighteenth century. As a consequence the sharp distinction that mechanical philosophies had drawn between mind and matter was blurred,³¹ a development that could provide further support for the thesis that various branches of philosophy are united by the intricate connections among their respective subject matters. It is in this context that John Gregory could conclude in 1770 that ‘[t]he laws of union between the mind and body, and the mutual influence they have upon one another [...]

²⁷ Hume, *Treatise* 1.2.5.20 and Hume David, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: 2000) 9.1.

²⁸ See Demeter T., “Morals before Objectivity: On the Relation of Moral Cognition and Moral Philosophy in Hume”, in Traninger A. – Murphy K. (eds.), *The Emergence of Impartiality* (Leiden: 2014) 335–359.

²⁹ This is the lesson of Hume, *Enquiry*, Section 8/2, and Section 11.

³⁰ See Reill P.H., *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: 2005). See also the useful collection Wolfe C.T. (ed.), *Special Issue: Vitalism without Metaphysics? Medical Vitalism in the Enlightenment. Science in Context* 21 (2008).

³¹ See Wright J.P., “Substance versus Function Dualism in Eighteenth-Century Medicine”, in Wright J.P. – Potter P. (eds.), *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment* (Oxford: 2002) 237–254.

is one of the most important enquiries that ever engaged the attention of mankind, and almost equally necessary in the sciences of morals and of medicine.’³²

The search for the laws of psychophysical unity connected the field of human physiology to morals and religion. In very much the same manner as Maclaurin understood natural philosophy as being subservient to purposes of a higher kind, George Cheyne, the fashionable Scottish doctor, proclaimed in 1724 that ‘[t]he infinitely wise author of nature has so contrived things that the most remarkable rule of preserving life and health are moral duties commanded us, so true it is, that “Godliness has the promises of this life, as well as that to come.”’³³ Thus conceived, medical research contributes to fulfilling our moral duty and transcendent aspirations by preserving our health in accordance with God’s commandments, and it also helps us understand the world better by explaining what our creator has actually intended to us.

The interconnections among various branches of philosophy are thus not ensured by one-way influences, but rather, as most authors emphasize, they constitute a system of mutual dependencies. Irrespective of the widespread reference to a theological framework, the central point of these visions, as is commonly acknowledged by natural and moral philosophers, is an aspiration to knowledge of ‘the nature, laws & connections of things, [...] & from thence deduce rules for the conduct & improvement of human life’³⁴ – that is a comprehensive account of the world of dead and living matter, of morals and, for most philosophers, of God. The aim is thus a coherent account of the world, where *coherence* is not primarily a logical property of theories. Instead, it is used in the context of terms like “connection” and “order”, the bestowing of which upon the variety of things being the main task of philosophy. This is,

³² Gregory John, “Observations on the Duties and Offices of a Physician, and on the Method of Prosecuting Enquiries in Philosophy”, in idem, *John Gregory’s Writings on Medical Ethics and Philosophy of Medicine* (Dordrecht: 1998) 128.

³³ Cheyne George, *A Treatise on Health and Long Life* (London, William Kidd: 1787) 4.

³⁴ Fordyce, “A Brief Account” 166.

as Adam Smith puts it, ‘the science of the connecting principles of nature’. Philosophy is responsible for ‘representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances’.³⁵ The success of this enterprise is partly measured by the coherence various theories forge in a world of disordered phenomena.

Let us now turn to the question of how the coherence of the natural, moral and divine world is established when inquiry is conducted with the acute awareness of the relevance of one discipline to the larger scheme of the sciences.

Anger as a disease of body, mind and society

Anger is probably ideal for the illustration of how a phenomenon can travel through various disciplines and find its way into various descriptive and normative discourses, at the same time revealing a remarkable unity among them. Physiology and the “science of man”, understood as a theory of the mind and society of moral beings, aspire to a descriptive and explanatory account of what anger consists in and how it is situated among other phenomena of the human condition. In normative moral and theological contexts, the questions concern the moral standing and the proper attitude toward anger, and its place in God’s creation. These discourses, as one might expect on the basis of what we have seen above, penetrate each other: *prima facie* descriptive discourses are filled with moral significance and theological connotations, and at the same physiological ideas also enter moral and religious contexts.

That physiology and descriptive psychology are mutually relevant was obvious to many, once vitalistic ideas concerning the union of mind and body became common currency.

³⁵ Smith Adam, “The History of Astronomy”, in idem, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects (1795)*, ed. W.P.D. Wightman – J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis: 1982) 33–105, 45–46.

It was gradually acknowledged that living bodies should be studied differently from the non-living parts of nature, because animal economy is not just mere mechanism, and living bodies are not Cartesian automata for which a iatromechanical outlook could be the proper approach and neither could the activity of human bodies be derived exclusively from some mental substance. It was increasingly acknowledged that ‘mechanism takes Place and operates in it self only, on dead *Matter*’.³⁶ Thus it seemed natural to approach the activity of the mind as naturally combined with the internal activity of living matter, and to build theories of human functioning with the commitment that ‘the Works of *Imagination* and *Memory*, of *Study*, *Thinking*, and *Reflecting*, from whatever Source the Principle on which they depend springs, must necessarily require bodily Organs’.³⁷ And *vice versa*: in order to understand phenomena of life, recourse must be taken to a ‘*Self-active Principle*’ to which bodily mechanism is subordinated in ‘organized bodies fit for *Animation* and living Functions’.³⁸ The psychological discussion of cognitive functions was therefore underpinned by, and conjoined with, the physiological discussion of living functions, and eventually it would drive toward a unified account of mental and physiological aspects of human beings, and abandon the image of man advocated by substance dualists.³⁹

This approach may have seemed even more appropriate? for affective functions and faculties, simply because more than cognitive faculties they were perceivably accompanied by bodily symptoms and processes. Anger is a phenomenon that aptly illustrates the mutual dependence of the affective and physiological realm because it has a place both in the physiological category of “raging fevers” and in the psychological category of “violent

³⁶ Cheyne George, *The English Malady* (London, G. Strahan: 1733) 94.

³⁷ Cheyne, *The English Malady* 53.

³⁸ Cheyne, *The English Malady* 95. This is an idea characteristic for Enlightenment vitalists, see Reill, *Vitalizing* 128–132, 148–154.

³⁹ See Wright, “Function versus Substance Dualism”.

passions”. From a physiological perspective, anger in its primary form was typically conceived as an acute disease. As Cheyne put it:

Hatred, for example, anger and malice, are but degrees of a frenzy, and a frenzy is one kind of a raging fever. From all which it is plain the violent and sudden passions, are more dangerous to health, than the flow and Continued, as acute diseases are more destructive than chronical.⁴⁰

Anger is thus represented as a condition with destructive consequences for the human body. Thus if people are concerned about leading a healthy life, then excesses of passions should be avoided because these excesses are as dangerous to ‘the preservation of integrity of their intellectual faculties, or the bodily organs of them’ as are the ‘excesses in high food, or spirituous liquors’.⁴¹

Cheyne had an explanation of the destructive consequences of anger primarily in terms of bending and stretching the nervous fibers, which violently speeds up the circulation of blood and bodily juices, and blocks secretion. This line was also followed several decades later by William Cullen when he proclaimed that ‘[a]mong the causes increasing the force of the Circulation, anger and other violent active passions are to be reckoned’,⁴² which is due to the influence of the brain’s energy upon the heart.⁴³ This process can have potentially destructive consequences ‘in urging not only previous determinations with violence, but also in urging to excess inequalities, otherwise innocent.’⁴⁴ The physiological consequences of anger can be so excessive that they constrain conscious agency by limiting ‘the power of

⁴⁰ Cheyne, *Treatise* 125.

⁴¹ Cheyne, *Treatise* 124.

⁴² Cullen William, *Works of William Cullen*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: 1827) 2: 215.

⁴³ *Ibidem* 2: 366.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem* 2: 214.

reasoning or choosing means to ends',⁴⁵ but Cullen doubts that this disease typically entails a lasting or 'desperate' condition of the brain.⁴⁶

Richard Mead, who was not of Scottish origin but belonged to the sphere of Scottish intellectuals,⁴⁷ devoted his *Medica Sacra* (published posthumously in 1755) to the enlightenment project of naturalizing the spiritual diseases as represented in the Bible. His central point is that 'the divinity ought not to be made a party concerned in imposing diseases, which may possibly have natural causes'.⁴⁸ He undertakes the task of 'removing vulgar errors, especially those related to religion'⁴⁹ by giving medical explanations and suggesting cures for Biblical diseases, most importantly for 'daemoniacks', i.e. demonic possession. According to Mead's diagnosis, the symptoms associated with this condition are just those of *madness*, 'a disease of an injured imagination, which derives its origin from the mind, having been too long a time fixed on any one object'.⁵⁰ Anger, whose physiological description in Mead is also couched in terms of increased circulation,⁵¹ is a principal cause of madness, because as he says elsewhere, 'inordinate affections, dwelling long on the mind, frequently become

⁴⁵ Ibidem 1: 107.

⁴⁶ Ibidem 1: 566–567.

⁴⁷ Mead studied medicine with Archibald Pitcairne in Leiden and belonged to the Pitcairne Circle which consisted mostly of Scottish medical men like George Cheyne, George Hepburn, and William Cockburn. Like many other members of the circle he wished to place medicine on Newtonian footing. Thus he easily fits with Scottish context. For further discussion see e.g. Guerrini A., "Tory Newtonians: Gregory, Pitcairne and Their Circle", *Journal of British Studies* 25 (1986) 288–311; Brown T.M., "Medicine in the Shadow of the *Principia*", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987) 629–648. On the influence of Scottish medicine well beyond the borders of Scotland see Wild W. (ed.), *Medicine-by-Post: The Changing Voice of Illness in Eighteenth-Century British Consultation Letters and Literature* (Amsterdam: 2006).

⁴⁸ Mead Richard, "Medica Sacra", in idem, *The Medical Works of Richard Mead* (Dublin, Thomas Ewing: 1767) 475.

⁴⁹ Ibidem 444.

⁵⁰ Ibidem 471.

⁵¹ See Mead Richard, "Mechanical Account of Poisons" in idem, *The Medical Works of Richard Mead* (Dublin, Thomas Ewing: 1767) 3–113, 52. This essay was written in 1702 under the influence of Pitcairne without much mathematics but under the ideology of turning medicine Newtonian.

tedious diseases’, which reflect their respective natures, and if untreated, ‘anger ends in fury and madness’.⁵² Thus anger comes in two forms, and for Mead, unlike for Cheyne, it is more dangerous in its chronic than its acute version because the former has a capacity to develop into a serious mental disorder.

The typical tone in which moral philosophers discuss anger is in tune with the medical discourse in emphasizing its destructive consequences for body, mind and society. Turnbull concurs with the physiological discourses of anger when he describes it as a ‘boiling, scorching fever’.⁵³ As such it is a source of misery of the body, and it also belongs to the group of ‘evil passions, which sadly degrade and corrupt the mind’.⁵⁴ Thus anger is both a moral *and* a medical condition that cries for a cure. Hutcheson also agrees that these passions are ‘immediately uneasy and tormenting’, ‘we are the worse for them’,⁵⁵ and therefore it is a *duty towards ourselves* to restrain these passions.

Anger is also a disease of society, and not only of the individual mind and body. The anti-social consequences of anger and similar violent passions are at the forefront of theoretical interests on the threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment. Gershom Carmichael, accepting the Stoic understanding of anger as a ‘short insanity’, emphasizes that anger has the most ‘unsocial’ consequences, and recommends refraining from action ‘in a state of blazing’ and diligence in ‘restraining our anger’.⁵⁶ Carmichael’s legacy is reflected in Hutcheson’s approach; he defines anger as a violent ‘Propensity to occasion Evil to another, arising upon

⁵² Mead Richard, “Medical Precepts and Cautions”, in idem, *The Medical Works of Richard Mead* (Dublin, Thomas Ewing: 1767) 426.

⁵³ Turnbull, *Principles* 1: 195.

⁵⁴ Ibidem 2: 552.

⁵⁵ Hutcheson Francis, “Reflections on the Common Systems of Morality” [1725], in idem, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge: 1993) 104.

⁵⁶ Carmichael Gershom, “Supplements and Observations upon Samuel Pufendorf’s *On the Duty of Man and Citizen according to the Law of Nature, composed for the Use of Students in the Universities*” [1724], in idem, *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Carmichael* (Indianapolis: 2002) 65.

apprehension of an Injury done by him'.⁵⁷ As such anger is essentially an anti-social, 'Selfish Passion', whose satisfaction yields 'Pleasures opposite to those of the publick Sense'.⁵⁸ Anger therefore drives us in the opposite direction than benevolence, which is for Hutcheson the central cohesive force of the social world analogous to Newton's gravity in the natural world.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Hutcheson warns against taking the presence of such selfish passions as an indication that due to 'the great and good' God's intentions 'men have not been equipped by nature for social life'. Anger and related passions arise only in the context of 'conflict of interests, rivalry, jealousy, or by some thought of previous injury or cruelty,' so albeit destructive of social bonds, these passions are only secondary to natural benevolence.⁶⁰

Because we are aware of its potentially destructive consequences, anger is thought to preclude a sympathetic response of bystanders. Although sympathy is a faculty of human nature that facilitates the communication of affections, it works in the reverse way with anger and the like passions precisely because they are anti-social. As Adam Smith explains in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

The hoarse, boisterous, and discordant voice of anger [...] inspires us with either fear or aversion. We do not fly towards it [...]. It is the same case with hatred. Mere expressions of spite inspire it against nobody, but the man who uses them. Both these passions are by nature the objects of our aversion. Their disagreeable and boisterous appearance never excites, never prepares, and often disturbs, our sympathy.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Hutcheson Francis, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (Indianapolis: 2002 [1728]) 58.

⁵⁸ Ibidem 31, 95.

⁵⁹ See Hutcheson Francis, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Indianapolis: 2008 [1725]) 150.

⁶⁰ Hutcheson Francis, "On the Natural Sociability of Mankind" [1730], in idem, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind* (Indianapolis: 2006) 209–210.

⁶¹ Smith Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: 2002) 45.

For this reason the imitations of anger and similar passions can be very moderately exploited in artistic creation, as it could facilitate at most a ‘very strange entertainment’.⁶² Lord Kames explains the underlying mechanism in greater detail his *Elements of Criticism* (1762): imitations of anger are ‘so far from causing any emotion similar to themselves, to incite a spectator to imitation, that they have an opposite effect’ even if it is moderate.⁶³ In Kames’s account this feature of anger arises from the fact that its expression puts the audience on the defensive, and therefore the one expressing anger invites a negative moral judgment: he is duly condemned for abandoning the standards of good taste and stepping outside the community of amiable men – a social consequence best avoided by a preventive cure.

The cures of anger

Due to its potentially destructive consequences for body, mind and society, anger needs to be treated, but the suggested cures differ according to the outlook and temperament of the therapist. We have seen that anger is both a medical and a moral condition, it is as much a fever as an evil or selfish passion. As such, it is a vice for which the agent is to be held responsible, and consequently he loses our sympathy. ‘Sudden passionate motions of anger’ are listed in Hutcheson’s *System of Moral Philosophy* as middle-range vices, less vicious than original malice, impiety or selfish design, but more vicious than partiality, or weakness when facing temptations or threats.⁶⁴ Therefore it is immoral to cure acute anger by unleashing it for taking revenge, and it is also psychologically inadvisable because anger and revenge, as

⁶² For a useful overview of the British aesthetic context see Stauffer A.M., *Anger, Revolution and Romanticism* (Cambridge: 2005) 18–37.

⁶³ Home Henry, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: 2005) 1:131.

⁶⁴ Hutcheson Francis, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (London, R. and A. Poulis: 1755) 1.4.11.

Turnbull points out, ‘when their end is accomplished, what else is it but a short-lived relaxation from the most tormenting pain, which is quickly followed by remorse and just fears?’⁶⁵

The suggested cures for anger also depend on the guise under which it is represented in various discourses, but one consensual way to avoid anger as a violent passion is preventive: one should have ‘well regulated affections’ which can save us from vice, the mind’s ‘greatest enemy, as well as debaser’ and which can keep ‘its health and peace’.⁶⁶ Thus anger, considered as a psychological problem, can be prevented if we ‘strengthen as much as possible, by frequent Meditation and Reflection, the calm Desires’.⁶⁷ An alternative route could lead through

[t]he love of God, as it is the sovereign remedy of all miseries, so, in particular, it effectually prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds; and, by the unspeakable joy, and perfect calm, serenity and tranquility it gives the mind, becomes the most powerful of all the means of health and long life.⁶⁸

Preventing anger is the best way of avoiding all the unwelcome consequences of this condition, and it also has the side effect of strengthening the mind and body in general.

If prevention proves to be unsuccessful, then some rational reflection can help in acute cases, at least in Hutcheson’s understanding. Given that anger is a self-centred passion, it can be cured if one realises that it arises from a ‘partial View of publick Goods’, i.e. a biased

⁶⁵ Turnbull, *Principles* 1:195

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Hutcheson, *Essay* 111.

⁶⁸ Cheyne, *Treatise* 135.

misrepresentation of intentions, actions and their consequences.⁶⁹ If put in the proper light, it becomes apparent that anger typically arises from ‘ignorance or accident’:⁷⁰ if we ‘force our Minds to examine the *real Springs* of the resented Actions’⁷¹ and contemplate our selfish passions by giving ‘just ideas of their objects’,⁷² we will find, more often than not, that the action giving rise to our anger is not due to malice but to ‘selfish Temper’ for which the author of the action is to be pitied rather than hated, as it is ‘really more pernicious to himself than to others’.⁷³ Thus the reasons for? anger largely disappear if the action that gives rise to it is contemplated from a broader, moral point of view.

Mead is more interested in chronic and pathological cases for which he suggests both psychological and medical treatment. From the medical angle the task is to reduce increased circulation, because the right treatment requires the ‘disorderly motion of the animal spirits [...] to be calmed’. This can be achieved by blood-letting, blisters, setons or the cooling of the head, but in more severe cases taking medication like myrrh, galbanum, camphor or niter can also be suggested. As for its psychological treatment, Mead suggests not to investigate the causes of anger, quite the contrary: the patient should turn his attention to ‘thoughts directly contrary to those, which possessed it [i.e., the mind?] before’ in order to bring his mind out of the state it was in before.⁷⁴

The emphasis in all these suggestions falls on therapies and techniques that could foster a physiological and affective equilibrium in individuals that live in a social world of conflicting interests and aspirations that provides ample occasions for anger. Coleman’s point about the enlightenment debates on anger on the Continent can be driven home in the Scottish

⁶⁹ Hutcheson, *Essay* 76 see also 126.

⁷⁰ Hutcheson, “On the Natural Sociability” 210.

⁷¹ Hutcheson, *Essay* 124.

⁷² Hutcheson, “Reflections” 104.

⁷³ Hutcheson, *Essay* 124.

⁷⁴ Mead, “Medica Sacra” 476–477.

context as well: these theories directly relate to practical issues about the range of behaviours that are compatible with a cohesive society, about how people respond to one another, and how they understand themselves.⁷⁵ The therapies that facilitate the maintenance of a harmonious inner world serve the purpose of peaceful and virtuous social coexistence. From this perspective, physiological, psychological and sociological diagnoses are subservient to, and are unified with, moral, social and sometimes religious agendas.

Anger as natural and virtuous

It is precisely the awareness of the social and religious significance of anger that eventually leads to a more balanced account of the phenomenon in several authors. Despite the overwhelming negative rhetoric of anger as a disease, mental disorder, vice and threat to the sociability of mankind, the very same authors are frequently sensitive to the function of anger in society and in God's creation.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume discusses anger as a natural ingredient of human affective constitution. He is not concerned with an evaluative account of anger as a vice or as a threat to society; instead he provides a naturalistic and phenomenological account of how anger is related to other passions, what role it plays in the motivation of action, and what its functions are in the context of human coexistence. For Hume, moderate anger is a normal and necessary constituent of our moral constitution:

We are not, however, to imagine, that all the angry passions are vicious, tho' they are disagreeable. There is a certain indulgence due to human nature in this respect. Anger and hatred are passions inherent in our very frame and constitution. The want of them,

⁷⁵ Coleman, *Anger* 29.

on some occasions, may even be a proof of weakness and imbecility. And where they appear only in a low degree, we not only excuse them because they are natural; but even bestow our applauses on them, because they are inferior to what appears in the greatest part of mankind.⁷⁶

Maybe because Hume primarily aspires to a naturalistic theory, and he has no normative moral commitments that precede his descriptive account of human nature,⁷⁷ he refrains from a condemning tone on anger. As a consequence, he does not see a problem with communicating anger, just like any other passion, via sympathy: unlike for Kames and Smith, anger for Hume is a passion whose communication ‘takes place among animals, no less than among men’.⁷⁸

Hume is not alone with this insight: Hutcheson and Turnbull are even more detailed in explaining the positive role anger plays in the context of human sociability. The core idea, as Hutcheson puts it, is that ‘[o]ur *Anger* itself is a necessary Piece of Management, by which every pernicious Attempt is made *dangerous* to its Author.’⁷⁹ This idea is also implicit in the passage from Hume quoted above, but Turnbull explains it in great detail in terms of its teleological, one could almost say: evolutionary, function. For him anger is a useful ‘instinct’ that is ‘in reality the necessary operation of self-defence’. Anger in its primary form is ‘momentary’, it is a reaction against ‘natural evil’ or someone’s intention to harming us. As such it operates without reason, and it should be so because without government there is no time to deliberate when ‘sudden resistance is the only security’.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Hume, *Treatise* 3.3.3.7.

⁷⁷ Or at least normative moral content is at most derivative on Hume’s descriptive and explanatory enterprise. See Demeter, “Morals before Objectivity”.

⁷⁸ Hume, *Treatise* 2.2.12.6.

⁷⁹ Hutcheson, *Essay* 119.

⁸⁰ Turnbull, *Principles* 2: 764–765.

Reason itself can give rise to a different kind of anger when contemplating injustice. This kind of anger is a reaction to ‘moral evil’, and in this sense it has ‘an inseparable connexion with the sense of virtue’, because it is a desire of having the vice punished – and it is, as Turnbull warns us, is ‘by no means malice’. In this sense anger is not at all a threat to society, quite the contrary: ‘it is one of the common bonds by which society is held together: a fellow-feeling which each individual has in behalf of the whole species, as well as of himself.’⁸¹ This moral anger is however weaker than the natural because the latter is induced by harm intended towards ourselves, and our regard for ourselves are much greater than our regard for society or mankind.

Thus anger for Turnbull is a phenomenon with many faces. It is true that it is a medical and psychological condition, a fever that corrupts the mind, and it is also an evil passion that must be constrained, but at the same time, it is a natural means of self defence under the relevant social circumstances (i.e. without central government), and in its higher form can even be genuinely moral – and taken as such it is a genuine virtue and not a vice. Moral anger, however, is not a selfish passion, it arises from the violation of public good, and its aim is not taking revenge but due punishment.

Although Turnbull’s account is evolutionary in the sense that it explains why and how anger is necessary for survival and the moral stability of society, it is thought to function under the auspices of divine providence. Turnbull alludes to God’s design by emphasizing that there is a ‘reason and end’ for which ‘men was made liable to this passion’, namely ‘to prevent and remedy [...] injury’.⁸² For Hutcheson, too, anger is part of human nature due to divine contrivance, and as such it responds to the needs of living in a society of conflicting interests arising from the self-love of individuals. Under such circumstances ‘[t]here could not [...] be a wiser contrivance to refrain injuries than to make every mortal some way formidable

⁸¹ Turnbull, *Principles* 2: 765.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

to an unjust invader, by such a violent passion.’⁸³ Anger has thus found a way from the discourses of a disease and vice to the discourse on the signs of divine providence.

Conclusion

Anger is a phenomenon that travelled back and forth between various discourses on human nature in the Scottish Enlightenment. As Thomas Dixon have pointed out, the concepts and categories of these discourses, in our case ‘passions’, ‘affections’, ‘self-love’ and so on, are common currencies of physiology, moral philosophy and theology.⁸⁴ Due to the common conceptual resources, these disciplines not only studied the same phenomena, but they discussed them in the same language, and as a consequence they drove toward a unified account. Thus anger is a ranging fever, but as such it was not only a physiological and psychological phenomenon, but it also had moral significance as a violent passion, which quickly turned into a vice disagreeable to God and society.

Cheyne is perhaps an ideal example of integrating all these aspects in a single account: he conceives of anger as an acute disease, avoiding it is a moral obligation, a duty toward ourselves, and the love of God is its best preventive cure. But even those not dwelling on all aspects of anger are aware of the various contexts in which the same language is applied. Turnbull, for one, seems to be equally well versed in the physiological, psychological, moral and religious discourses of anger, and paints a fairly balanced picture of it, albeit hardly discussing its physiological facets. But the same language is spoken by those not especially sensitive to the moral and religious implications of physiological processes, like Cullen.

⁸³ Hutcheson, *Essay* 46.

⁸⁴ Dixon T., *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: 2003) 5.

Anger is thus a phenomenon through which a remarkable conceptual unity among early modern disciplines of human functioning can be illustrated. Due to this unity various aspects of human functioning had been represented as aspects of an organized unity. One consequence of this representation was the increasing tendency of naturalizing the spiritual, moral and psychological aspects of human beings by showing the physiological correlate of these aspects. For most authors the point of this naturalization was driven home in the context of Newtonian *natural theology*: by exploring the various aspects of the human frame and their interconnections the design and intentions of God could be explored. Mead illustrates this stance clearly; he thinks that his naturalizing project should not erode belief in divine power, as it is not less ‘manifested by the cure of the most grievous diseases, performed in an instant at his command; than by the expulsion of evil spirits’. Restoring ‘firmness and flexibility to relaxed and contracted nerves’ or ‘changing the properties of the elements’ testify both God’s omnipotence and presence in the world.⁸⁵

At the same time, the continuity of these discourses also provided an inspiration in the opposite direction, namely that of *secularisation*. In the present context, Hume and Cullen are interested in naturalisation without aspiring for religious consequences. Hume made explicit the epistemological reasons of his refusal to extend the conclusions of either moral or natural philosophy to implications on transcendent matters: our cognitive apparatus is so limited that we cannot expect epistemic benefits from such inquiries.⁸⁶ Hume’s ideas influenced Cullen’s methodology and metaphysics for chemistry and physiology, and as a possible consequence he also refrained from drawing moral or religious conclusions from natural inquiry.⁸⁷ This

⁸⁵ Mead, “Medica Sacra” 443.

⁸⁶ See Demeter, “Liberty”, and also Demeter T., “Natural Theology as Superstition: David Hume and the Changing Ideology of Natural Inquiry”, in Demeter T. – Murphy K. – Zittel C. (eds.), *Conflicting Values of Inquiry: Ideologies of Epistemology in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: 2014) 176-199.

⁸⁷ Donovan A., *Philosophical Chemistry in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Doctrines and Discoveries of William Cullen and Joseph Black* (Edinburgh: 1975) 56–61.

reluctance is reflected in the telling irony in his explorations of the possible causes and treatments of gout. Although Cullen also mentions the ‘passions of the mind’ among the occasional causes of gout, he refuses to speculate on possible therapies in this case, because ‘[h]ow they are to be avoided I must leave to the philosophers, or, if you will, to the divines.’⁸⁸

Hume sees the role of his descriptive anatomy of human nature quite distinct from that of the normative discourse of the moralist, and Cullen similarly, but in a more reserved tone, separates his physiology from the questions of normative ethics and theology. Thus despite the language they share with those forging a common framework for human phenomena from natural philosophy to theology, Hume and Cullen turn away from normative and religious connotations of the study of human phenomena. By distancing the discourses of anger and other passions from theological considerations, they implicitly challenged the foundations of conceptual unity. Thus beside the conceptual unity of the discourses of anger, the tendencies to dissolve this unity and the drive toward disciplinary differentiation received? a crucial impetus.

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