Anger Eliminativism: Stoic and Buddhist Perspectives

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Duke University

2022
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Many psychologists and philosophers hold that anger is a completely normal and often healthy human emotion. This position perhaps traces back to Aristotle, who argued that anger is morally good when it is moderated, such as towards the right people, to the right degree, and for the right reasons. Even though Aristotle’s position has widespread acceptance, this view of anger is challenged by the philosophical traditions of Stoicism and Buddhism. Despite starting from disparate premises, both conclude that anger is impermissible and ought to be eliminated, a position called anger eliminativism. Even so, there has been little critical engagement with their respective arguments as bona fide philosophical positions, worthy of consideration in their own right. This dissertation hopes to help remedy that lack. To do so, it offers a philosophical exploration of Stoic and Buddhist arguments. It contrasts and critically evaluates the views of Stoicism and Buddhism, evaluates the Buddhist metaphysical reasoning about anger, responds to existing interpretations of Stoic anger eliminativism, and presents Stoic objections to arguments from the Confucian tradition that anger is at least sometimes the morally virtuous response to perceived wrongdoing.
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Introduction

The American Psychological Association writes that “anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion.” Although the APA admits that this emotion can be destructive if allowed to become excessive, it nevertheless contends that anger is good for us when kept under control. This position, anger moderationism, holds that anger is morally good (or at least morally permissible) when it is, in Aristotle’s words, “at the right things and with the right people… in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time” (NE IV.5).1 Despite widespread acceptance, anger moderationism is rejected by some traditions, most notably Stoicism and Buddhism. Both of these traditions uncompromisingly endorse anger eliminativism, the view that anger is always morally bad, and the proper approach is avoidance and eradication, not control or management.

This dissertation is a philosophical exploration of topics related to Stoic and Buddhist anger eliminativism. In chapter 1, I critically contrast Stoic and Buddhist conceptions of anger and emotional control. I start by considering the case of Homer, an aspiring anger eliminativist who feels a hostile response to being wronged. I make the case that, for the Stoic, Homer’s response is not anger, but is considered anger according

1 Aristotle further argues that anger is sometimes even morally obligatory (NE IV.5). In my view, anger moderationists do not always keep separate two distinct positions that they might hold when it comes the deontic status of anger. They are (i) anger is sometimes morally permissible (which we might call anger permissivism), or (ii) anger is sometimes morally obligatory (anger obligationism). Although I think most people, including probably APA, hold anger permissivism (meaning that we are sometimes allowed to feel anger but not required to), other (like Aristotle) are anger obligationists and hold that some circumstances require or demand getting angry about.
to the Buddhist. I then offer two objections to the Buddhist on the Stoic’s behalf. They are (i) that people are not blameworthy for brief and unacted upon feelings of hostility, and (ii) that morally prohibiting hostile feelings is a violation of the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism. Ultimately, I argue that both objections fail. Although this chapter does not settle this dispute between Stoicism and Buddhism, it does suggest that the two traditions have deep empirical and conceptual disagreements on the nature of anger and prospects for emotional control.

Chapter 2 examines arguments from Buddhist metaphysics against anger. I start by presenting a summary of Buddhist metaphysical theory (dhamma theory), followed by outlining Buddhism’s denial of personal identity (anatta). Afterward, I present the No Self Argument, a putative metaphysical argument against anger attributed to the Buddhist by David Shoemaker. I argue that Shoemaker’s attribution rests on a misunderstanding of anatta and use this rejection to present a version of the argument that would be endorsed by the Buddhist. I then consider a series of objections to this revised argument, all of which attempt to vindicate blaming anger, the subset of anger we feel when another shows us ill-will or disregard. Ultimately, I conclude that none of these objections are successful. Finally, I end the chapter by raising my objection to the Clinging Argument, and briefly suggest a way that the Buddhist can respond.

In chapter 3, I address a recent interpretation of Stoic anger eliminativism proposed by Christopher Gill. According to Gill, Stoicism’s rejection of anger is purchased by the Stoic endorsing the following position: The objective standpoint is always the
morally good response to wrongdoing. Since being angry at another is incompatible with adopting this standpoint, it, therefore, follows that anger is never the good response to wrongdoing, or so Gill argues. In this chapter, I reject Gill’s interpretation. As I ultimately show, Gill equivocates two distinct senses of mental illness found in the Stoic literature. They are mania (the universal mental illness suffered by the morally vicious) and melancholia (the uncommon mental illness suffered by those with delusions and disordered thinking). I end by offering a Stoic analysis of the proper way to respond to wrongdoers. This analysis shows that although there is a narrow set of wrongdoers for whom the objective standpoint is warranted, the Stoic literature suggests that this standpoint would be morally inappropriate for the majority of wrongdoers.

Finally, chapter 4 presents a debate between the Stoic and Confucian traditions on the moral value of vicarious anger. It begins by examining Kwong-li Shun’s Confucian-inspired theory of morally good vicarious anger, which he calls detached indignation. I raise some difficulties for Shun’s theory and attempt to offer a series of helpful clarifications on his behalf. Afterward, I present an objection to Shun, suggested by Seneca, which seems to entail that if Shun is correct, then the morally virtuous person must be so indignant as to be miserable. I argue that this objection ends up being too strong, but that Shun remains challenged by a somewhat weaker version. Finally, I end by suggesting two ways that Shun can respond to this weaker version of the objection: (i) that the virtuous person can retreat from society to avoid becoming overly indignant, and (ii) that the occurrence and
intensity of the morally virtuous person’s indignation are moderated by this person’s ability to change circumstances for the better.
1. The Moral Wrongness of Anger in Stoicism and Buddhism

1.1 Introduction

Consider the following. Suppose Homer is an aspiring anger eliminativist. He believes that anger is never morally permissible and has made a personal commitment to avoid getting angry and never letting his anger influence his behavior should it regrettably arise. One day he discovers his apartment has been robbed. The burglar has taken many of his possessions, including several items with sentimental value that he cannot replace. After getting over the initial shock, Homer finds himself upset and wishing to harm the burglar. For example, he finds himself thinking, “If only I could get my hands on this guy,” “I wish someone would break into his house and steal his stuff,” and so forth. However, suppose these thoughts are short-lived. Homer quickly notices that his face is starting to turn red, that his fists and jaw are clenched, and that he is having hostile thoughts. He reminds himself of his commitment to anger eliminativism, about the dangers of anger, and takes a deep breath. These thoughts and feelings quickly pass without influencing his behavior.

For ease of discussion, let us refer to Homer’s reaction—i.e., redness in the face, clenching of jaws and teeth, and thoughts of harming the burglar—as $\alpha$. In my view, $\alpha$ is a very common reaction to being morally harmed by another. Unlike Homer, many of us allow $\alpha$ to grow, such as turning into resentment, even rage. But is $\alpha$ itself an example of
(or perhaps kind of) anger? In other words, by experiencing α, has Homer done something that he regards (or should regard) as morally impermissible? This chapter argues that the two main anger eliminativist traditions—Stoicism and early Buddhism—give opposing answers to these sorts of questions. As I will argue, Stoicism denies that α is anger and further contends that Homer’s reaction to being robbed is not morally wrong. Buddhism, on the other hand, reaches the opposite conclusion, judging that α is anger and thus Homer reacted impermissibly.

In section 1.2, I will make the case that Stoics would not regard α as an example of anger, followed by making the opposite case for Buddhists in section 1.3. Then, in section 1.4, I will present two objections to the Buddhist on the Stoic’s behalf. Finally, section 1.5 will offer a Buddhist response to these objections.

1.2 The Stoic Theory of Anger

According to the Stoic, emotion (pathē, in Greek) is a species of judgment (krisis). More precisely, emotion is the result of a person’s mind assenting (sunkatathesis) to two impressions (phantasia). The first is a value impression, namely that there is some object or state of affairs that is either good or evil for me. The second is an appropriateness impression, that because of this object or state of affairs I should engage in some sort of behavior. In the case of anger (orgē), it is a judgment that results from assenting to the impression that because another has unjustly harmed me (the value impression), it is therefore appropriate for me to avenge myself (the appropriateness impression).
Stoics also view anger as voluntary (voluntarii) and up to us (eph’ hēmin). What these descriptions mean is that it is always within our power to give or withhold assent from an impression, and therefore always within our power to prevent ourselves from experiencing anger. Seneca suggests as much, explaining that anger is too complex to be an automatic response. He writes:

We hold that anger ventures nothing on its own but acts only with the mind’s approval: for (a) having the impression that one has been done a wrong, (b) desiring to take vengeance for it, and then (c) combining both in the judgment that one ought not to have been harmed and that one ought to be avenged—none of this is proper to a mere impulse set in motion independent of our will. (On Anger, 2.1.3-4, from Seneca 2012)

Returning to Homer, the Stoic would argue that because α is not voluntary, it is not anger. Here the Stoic is distinguishing between voluntary affective states—emotion—and involuntary affective states—called ‘feeling’ (propatheiai) or ‘pre-emotion.’

Consider another common emotion, fear. Fear (phobos) starts with the impression that some evil is impending. The reception of this impression causes a certain cluster of cognitive, affective, and physiological changes, such as the thought, “that object is evil for me,” as well as shaking and becoming pale. These changes are not (or not yet) fear, as the person still needs to assent to them. This point is insisted by multiple Stoics, such as Epictetus:
Mental ‘impressions,’ through which a person’s mind is struck by the initial aspect of some circumstance impinging on the mind, are not voluntary or a matter of choice, but force themselves upon one’s awareness by a kind of power of their own. But the ‘assents’ through which those same impressions are cognized are voluntary and happen by one’s own choice. That is why, when some terrifying sound occurs, either from the sky or from the collapse of a building or as the sudden herald of some danger, even the wise person’s mind necessarily responds and is contracted and grows pale for a little while, not because he opines that something evil is at hand, but by certain rapid and unplanned movements antecedent to the office of intellect and reason. Shortly, however, the wise person in that situation ‘withholds assent’ from those terrifying mental impressions; he spurns and rejects them and does not think that there is anything in them which he should fear. (Discourses V, from Graver 2008).

In the case of anger, Seneca concurs, writing that:

Suppose that someone has reckoned he was harmed, wants to take revenge, and then immediately calms down when some reason urges against it. I don’t call this anger, I call it the movement of a mind still obedient to reason… (On Anger 2.3.4)

Implicit in this passage is that the would-be angry person never assents to the impression that he has been harmed and ought to avenge himself, and thus does not experience anger. In Seneca’s words, his mind remains “obedient to reason.”
Such is the case with Homer. According to the Stoic, although Homer has received the impressions that (a) he has been wronged by the burglar and (b) ought to avenge himself, these do not turn into anger. Instead, (a) and (b) only gave rise to α, which the Stoic refers to as merely the feelings that precede anger. Crucially for the Stoics, these feelings are not anger but can turn into anger through the faculty of assent.

Furthermore, the Stoic would argue that Homer in no way violated his commitment to anger eliminativism. Instead, Homer reacted to being robbed in much the same way as the morally virtuous sage. This position is suggested by Epictetus, who explains:

And they say that between the mind of the wise person and that of the nonwise there is this difference, that the nonwise person thinks that the kinds of things which when they first struck his mind impressed him as scary or harsh really are that way, and ‘adds belief,’ endorsing those same beginnings as things rightly to be feared; but the wise person, although he experiences a brief and superficial response in color and expression, does not ‘assent,’ but maintains the state and strength of his opinion which he has always had about impressions of that kind, namely, that they are not at all to be feared but alarm us by false appearance and empty fright. (*Discourses* V, from Graver 2008)

Much like the wise person, Homer had “a brief and superficial response in color and expression,” but was able to “maintain the state and strength” of his condemnation of
anger. As such, Homer did not succumb to anger, but instead had a similar response to the moral sage, which the Stoic classifies as merely hostile feelings.

1.3 The Early Buddhist Theory of Anger (or Lack Thereof)

In the last section, I made the case that, for the Stoic, α is not anger and Homer did nothing wrong by experiencing it. Let us now turn to early Buddhism which suggests the opposite.

Anger (dosa) is regarded as one of the three unwholesome mental factors (akusala-mūlas), along with greed (raga) and ignorance (moha). It is one of the reasons that sentient beings find themselves trapped in the cycle of rebirths (samsara), and Buddhists argue it is imperative that it be eliminated from our minds (more on these arguments in chapter two). One Buddhist text puts the point as follows: Just as a person would put forward “extraordinary desire, effort, zeal, [and] enthusiasm… to extinguish the fire on his clothes or head,” so too should we put forward equal effort in overcoming our anger (AN 10.55, from Sujato 2012).

But what exactly do early Buddhists mean by ‘anger?’ Unfortunately, there is not a straightforward answer. As Michael Butcher (2020) explains, there is very little scholarly research on this question, writing that most work on anger from the Buddhist literature is “better characterized as self-help than scholarly” and that “full-length scholarly accounts of anger as depicted in early Buddhist literature are so far nonexistent” (5). To make matters worse, early Buddhist texts do not provide clear or rigorous definitions of anger,
such as “discuss[ing] the phenomenon in an abstract way by unpacking the necessary and sufficient conditions for anger” (Chuosavasdi 2017, 40). Instead, discussions of anger in the suttas and commentaries almost exclusively focus on its moral value—why it is morally bad, how we eliminate it, and so forth.

The above presents an obvious problem for our project. Unlike the structure of the last section, we cannot appeal to an explicit Buddhist theory of anger in analyzing α. However, we can adduce two features of anger from Buddhist texts that make clear α is indeed anger and warrants moral condemnation under Buddhism’s analysis. These two are: (i) the situations that typically provoke anger, and (ii) anger’s conative content (or what anger directs us to do).

First, Buddhist texts state that anger is an unwholesome mental response to situations that one finds unwelcome. For the purposes of the discussion, I will refer to situations that a person finds unwelcome simply as ‘provocations.’ (Please note, the Buddhist holds that anger is caused by the mind, not by provocations. At best, provocations are common occasions for a person to experience anger. For that reason, Buddhists insist that eliminating anger requires correcting the mind’s unwholesome and destructive tendencies and not by avoiding the sorts of situations that often provoke anger.  Much more on the Buddhist psychology of anger in chapter 2.) Situations that commonly provoke anger are injuries to oneself or those one holds dear, as well as benefits towards one’s enemies (Dhammasangani 1066, from Butcher 2020). Texts also write that anger is often provoked by experiencing pain, suffering dishonor or reputational damage,
being unfairly blamed, and suffering loss (AN 8.6). Later Buddhist texts, such as Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryavatara*, claim that anger is often provoked by annoyances, such as excessive heat or mosquito bites (VI.15).

Second, early Buddhist texts appear to define anger by its conative content, or what it causes us to do. Often these texts present anger as a kind of aversion or hostility towards something unwelcome. Padmasiri de Silva (2005) writes that the early Buddhist texts conceive of *dosa* as “a wish to avoid a situation or a person that we dislike, and when we cannot do so, there is excited in us an urge to destroy, harm, fight, etc.” (52). This desire can be targeted at either the provocation itself or at what we take to be its cause (e.g., the person responsible for our pain). This urge need not manifest in outward behavior, but rather might remain a kind of mental resistance. Meditation teacher Jack Kornfield (2019) writes that most anger is subtle, often manifesting as merely a “state of mind that strike[s] against experience, pushing it away, rejecting what is presented in the moment.” As the *Dhammasanganī* of the *Abhidhamma* explains, anger has a multitude of manifestations, such as:

…hostility of the mind, repugnance, wrath, antagonism, agitation, tumult, rage, hatred, hate, ill will, malice of the mind, thoughts of hate… being angry, irritation, hatred, hating, hatefulness, malice, being malicious, maliciousness, hostility, opposition, wrathfulness, short-temperedness, [and] dissatisfaction of the mind…

(translation Butcher, 2020)
Indeed, commentaries such as the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* (*Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*), write that anger “comprises all kinds and degrees of aversion, ill will... irritation, annoyance, and animosity” (4.2, from Bodhi 2012).

With anger’s common provocations and its conative content in place, we can see that α falls under the wide scope of what Buddhists call ‘anger,’ and for three reasons. First, it was provoked by a situation that Homer found deeply unwelcome, namely being robbed. Second, it caused Homer to contemplate harming the burglar, expressed in thoughts like, “If only I could get my hands on this guy” and “I wish someone would break into his house and steal his stuff.” Third, α could plausibly be described as a brief bout of “ill will,” and “thoughts of hate,” both of which are manifestations of anger. For the Buddhists, ‘hatred’ and ‘ill will’ are defined simply as wishes that another suffer some pain or misfortune (deserved or not). Taken together, these three make clear that by experiencing α, Homer succumbed to anger. Furthermore, the Buddhist would condemn Homer’s response and argue that he violated his commitment to anger eliminativism. As the Buddha claims in the Simile of the Saw, “inner hate” is never permissible, and “even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding” (*MN* 21, from Nanmoli and Bodhi 2005). As such, Homer did something wrong by experiencing α and needs to continue his anger eliminativist training.

1.4 Two Stoic Objections
In the last two sections, I considered the case of Homer and \( \alpha \) and argued that the Stoic would not consider \( \alpha \) to be anger and would not condemn Homer. I then argued that the Buddhist would conclude the opposite. These facts suggest that the two traditions have a disagreement over what mental states count as ‘anger,’ and thus disagree over which states are morally objectionable and ought to be eliminated. In this section, I will offer two objections to Buddhism on behalf of the Stoic.

Before proceeding, let me add some terminology. For ease of discussion, let me refer to \( \alpha \) and experiences like it as hostile feelings. Under this terminology, we can see that the Stoic and Buddhist disagree on the relationship between hostile feelings and anger. Stoics consider the two distinct (although hostile feelings can give way to anger through the faculty of assent), while the Buddhist regards hostile feeling as a subtle manifestation of anger.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will set aside the question of the relationship between anger and hostile feeling. Although it is an important question for the anger eliminativist to answer, here I want to focus on the disagreement between the Stoic and Buddhist on the moral value of hostile feeling. More precisely, I will address the following sort of question: Is it morally wrong to experience hostile feelings? As seen, the Stoic answers this question negatively and the Buddhist affirmatively. I want to develop and then evaluate two objections that the Stoic could offer in response to the Buddhist’s affirmative answer. These objections do not engage directly with the Buddhist’s philosophical arguments for the moral wrongness of hostile feelings (which are the focus
of chapter 2). Instead, they are more general anticipatory objections offered by the Stoic for those who contend that hostile feelings are morally impermissible.

1.4.1 Hostile feelings and Blameworthiness

With that in place, let us now proceed with the two objections. The first objection concerns notions of moral blame. According to the Stoic, because hostile feelings are involuntary, we cannot be blamed for them. This point is insisted by Seneca, who argues that hostile feelings “come into being against our will,” “never yield to reason,” “cannot be overcome or avoided,” are not “in our power” to stop or eliminate, and thus we cannot be held responsible for them (On Anger 2.2.1). They are no more blameworthy, Seneca reasons, than “having another’s yawn provoke our own,” “closing our eyes at the sudden poke of another’s fingers,” or “shivering when we’re sprinkled with cold water.” According to Graver (2008), fragments from Chrysippus and other Stoics support Seneca’s claims, suggesting that hostile feelings are completely outside of our control and therefore the person who experiences them is “without blame” (108).

With this reasoning in mind, we can develop and present the first objection as follows. (B1) Hostile feelings are involuntary reactions, meaning they are outside of our control, happen to us against our will, and are impossible to avoid. Furthermore, (B2) we cannot blame or condemn a person for things they cannot avoid or prevent from happening. Therefore, (B3) we cannot blame people for experiencing hostile feelings.
The Buddhist would offer two responses to this objection. The first is that (B1) is false. For the Buddhist, hostile feelings can be avoided with the right kind of mental training. I will explore this response in more detail in section 1.5, but for now, I will set it aside for what I take to be a deeper problem with this objection. Even if this argument is sound, it does not undermine the Buddhist’s position on the impermissibility of hostile feelings. Recall that the Buddhist’s position is that hostile feelings are always morally wrong. This objection only guarantees that a person is not blameworthy for her hostile feelings. As is often the case, one can fail to be blameworthy for a morally wrong action. For example, a person who murders while under delusion or compulsion might not be blameworthy even though the murder itself remains morally wrong. For that reason, this objection fails as, at most, it only shows that a person is never blameworthy for hostile feelings, not that hostile feelings are morally permissible.

1.4.2 Hostile feelings and Psychological Realism

The second objection involves naturalistic constraints on morality. According to the Stoic, morality is constrained by what is possible for humans given the limitations of human nature. This view is often presented in the slogan, “Live in accordance with Nature.” Although this slogan has multiple meanings, Lawrence Becker (2017) argues that one such meaning can be considered a commitment to an early version of the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism (PMPR). This principle, formulated by Owen Flanagan (1993), states:
Make sure, when constructing a moral theory... that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible... for creatures like us. (32)

An important corollary of PMPR is that if something is psychologically impossible for us to avoid doing, then an adequate moral theory cannot rule it impermissible.

Let us return to hostile feelings. As we saw in the previous objection, the Stoic holds that hostile feelings are impossible to avoid. The reason for this claim appears to be that hostile feelings are natural and inextricable parts of human psychology and physiology. According to Graver (2008), the naturalness of hostile feelings was frequently discussed by later Roman Stoics, who referred to them as ‘requirements of nature’ (*naturalis necessitas*) and indications of ‘humanness’ (*humanitas*) (101). Graver further explains that the naturalness of feelings was often used by Stoics to counter the claim that the morally virtuous sage, although free from emotion, is not free from feeling. She writes:

The distinction between emotions and feelings therefore serves to open up an interpretive space around a central dictum of Stoic ethics. If the psychic sensations we experience in emotion are not simply identical with the *pathē*, then the norm of *apatheia* does not have to be cashed out as an injunction against every human feeling. One might be impassive in the Stoic sense and still remain subject to other categories of affective experience. (35)

The inevitability of feelings, therefore, serves a crucial role in Stoicism’s dialectic with its opponents and shows that the apathetic person is not emotionally inert and nonresponsive.
I will have more to say about the naturalness of feelings in the next section. For now, let us construct the second objection to the Buddhist. It goes as follows: (M1) Hostile feelings are natural and inextricable parts of being human thus making it impossible for us to avoid experiencing them on certain occasions. (M2) Adequate moral theorizing is constrained by what is possible given human nature (i.e., PMPR). Therefore, (M3) if a moral theory judges that hostile feelings are morally wrong, then that theory is inadequate.

In my view, this objection presents a serious challenge to the Buddhist. If sound, it shows that the Buddhist is offering an unrealistic and hence inadequate theory given its uncompromising moral condemnation of hostile feelings. In the next section, I will present a Buddhist response to this objection.

1.5 Feelings and Human Nature

In the last section, I presented two Stoic objections to the Buddhist’s claim that hostile feelings are morally wrong. The first objection, I argued, failed, whereas the second poses a serious challenge. Here I will offer a response on the Buddhist’s behalf which I believe shows that the second objection is unsound. To be sure, I will not vindicate the Buddhist’s condemnation of hostile feelings, but merely show that the second objection ultimately fails.

As we can see, the second objection rests upon two premises. First, that hostile feelings are natural and impossible to eliminate or avoid. (Please notice that a variation of
this premise appeared in the first objection, which I promised to discuss here. I am now making good on that promise.) For ease of discussion, let us refer to this premise as the Impossibility Thesis. The second premise is a corollary of PMPR and states that if something is impossible for us to avoid doing, then an adequate moral theory cannot rule it morally impermissible.

In my view, the Buddhist will accept PMPR (or something like it) and reject the Impossibility Thesis. Starting first with PMPR, Buddhism holds that what is right and wrong is constrained by human nature. This issue is tackled directly in one sutta, where the Buddha tells his followers that his moral admonitions never demand the impossible. He explains:

Abandon what is unskillful, monks. It is possible to abandon what is unskillful. If it were not possible to abandon what is unskillful, I would not say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.' But because it is possible to abandon what is unskillful, I say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful'…. (AN 2.19, from Sujato 2012).

Flanagan (1993) rightly speculates that the Buddhist commitment to a version of PMPR might be reflected in calling the Buddha’s teachings The Middle Way. As Flanagan reasons, the Buddha recognized that people cannot live their lives completely absorbed in sensual desires, nor can they live completely ascetic lives detached from everything, and so argued that ethical life involved a middle way between these two extremes as that is the only psychologically realistic route (77).
1.5.1 The Impossibility Thesis

Next, let us turn to the Impossibility Thesis. According to the Buddhist, hostile feelings are ultimately under our control, and hence we can prevent them from happening. This claim requires clarification. For the Buddhist, we do not have anything like direct or immediate control over hostile feelings. In other words, if my mind is disposed to respond to unwelcome situations with hostile feelings, then I am powerless at the moment to prevent it. I cannot stop hostile feelings from arising in my mind through sheer force of will, for example. However, I do have control over the formation of my mind’s habits, and thus indirect control over hostile feelings. After all, the Buddhist views hostile feelings as a kind of habitual response. Although I cannot stop hostile feelings at the moment, I do have the ability to train my mind in such a way that it will no longer be in the habit of responding to unwelcome situations with hostile feelings.

Consider the following analogy. Suppose someone tells me that my running a marathon is ultimately under my control. Does this person mean that I can run 26.2 miles right now? Probably not. Instead, what she probably means is that I have the potential to run 26.2 miles if I train myself properly. Running a marathon and the skills required are the result of long-term training and habit. Although my running this distance is not under my direct or immediate control, what is under my control is engaging in the sort of practice that will allow me to run that continuous distance in the future. I can choose to go for evening jobs, eat better, take my asthma medication, and so forth. By the same
token, the Buddhist is claiming that it is in my power to train my mind in the right sort of way. Through engaging in this course of meditative training, the promise is that I will eventually no longer find my mind having hostile feelings when faced with unwelcome situations (much in the same way I will eventually no longer find myself exhausted at the 10-mile mark).

That said, it is an empirical question whether or not Buddhist mind training will have these results. My goal in this chapter is not to settle that matter. Instead, I will point out that one move from the Stoic is to deny that any sort of mind training (Buddhist or not) can eliminate hostile feelings. As I will end the chapter by showing, this move—although plausible—reveals a fatal tension in Stoicism’s view on the permissibility of hostile feelings.

Although the Stoic holds that hostile feelings are impossible to eliminate or avoid, some Stoics seem to acknowledge that their strength can be weakened with training. For example, after explaining that we cannot stop hostile feelings, Seneca speculates nevertheless that “perhaps their force can be lessened if we become used to them and constantly keep a watch for them” (On Anger 2.5.2). Elsewhere, he speculates that hostile feelings are especially weak in the morally virtuous sage, referring to them as a “slight and delicate stirring” (1.16.7). Even so, Seneca does not take the lessening of hostile feelings to in any way be a moral imperative.

The above admissions should make us raise at least two questions for the Stoic. First, if hostile feelings can be weakened through mental training (which Seneca appears
to admit), then why can’t they be weakened so much that they are eliminated or effectively eliminated? (I will address this question momentarily.) Second, even if we cannot fully eliminate hostile feelings, why are we not morally obliged to weaken them as much as possible? After all, at the core of the Stoic objection is that we have no control over hostile feelings (the Impossibility Thesis). Now it appears that we do have at least some control—i.e., the power to weaken hostile feelings with training. If so, why does the Stoic not make this admonition, namely that it is morally wrong for you to not weaken your hostile feelings as much as possible? After all, the Stoic holds that hostile feelings often turn into anger, so it seems natural to want to weaken them and further prevent anger’s occurrences. Likewise, a requirement to limit hostile feelings as much as possible is no violation of PMPR, and thus it is unclear why it cannot be made into a moral requirement.

Returning to the first question, we can now put the difference between the Buddhist and Stoic as follows: Where the Buddhist claims that hostile feelings can be weakened and eventually eliminated through mental training, while the Stoic grants that hostile feelings can be weakened but not eliminated. But why not? The answer is not obvious but appears to have something to do with human nature. According to Graver (2008), the Stoic considers feeling to be a necessary consequence of human physiology (the software that comes with the hardware, so to speak). This view of feeling is suggested by Seneca in his *Moral Epistles*, where he writes:

…natural faults of body or mind (*naturalia corporis aut animi uitia*) are not removed by any amount of wisdom: what is innate and implanted may be mitigated by
treatment, but not overcome…. Even if people are able to stand up to an unfamiliar situation, it does affect them, if their body’s natural disposition gives them a tendency to blush. For some people have lively, energetic blood that rises swiftly to their faces. This is not cast out by any amount of wisdom... (Epistle 11, from Graver 2008, 100)

Elsewhere, he writes that feelings are primarily “of the body,” and that they are not removed by wisdom “lest it should seem that what we call virtue strays outside the natural order” (Epistle 71, from Graver 2008, 101).

We can offer two responses to the Stoic here. First, even if some people’s physiology makes it difficult (or even impossible) for them to mitigate their hostile feelings, it does not follow that this fact is true for everyone. For people without that physiology, why can’t they be morally obligated to reduce their hostile feelings as much as possible? Second, even if hostile feelings are primarily physiological responses, it is not obvious that they cannot be fundamentally altered or eliminated. People train themselves to eliminate natural bodily responses or tendencies all of the time. Consider boxers who train themselves not to flinch when being punched in the face. By the same token, it might be possible to train our bodies in such a way that hostile feelings (assuming they are physiological responses) are no longer our reactions to unwelcome states of affairs. If so, then a prohibition against hostile feelings would not be a violation of PMPR.

But the Stoic thinks that no one can eliminate their hostile feelings and that this impossibility is grounded in some fundamental facts about human nature. As Graver
(2008) explains, Stoicism’s claims about the unavoidability of hostile feelings are grounded in a teleological conception of human nature. She writes that for the Stoic “norms for human conduct should reflect nature’s intentions for the species, as revealed in those features which cannot be omitted from a careful description of human psychology” (101). But why can’t hostile feelings be omitted from this careful description? After all, the Stoic omits ‘anger’ from it (102), and most people think of anger as an essential part of human psychology. The answer appears to be that eliminating hostile feelings would turn a person into something other than human. As Graver puts it, a moral requirement to rid ourselves of feelings would turn “the wise person [into] some kind of monster whose affective equipment has somehow been radically altered” (101). But Graver’s remarks appear to be about eliminating all feelings. Is it possible to eliminate solely hostile feelings, leaving all other feelings intact? The Stoic does not say.

However, notice the crucial shift from the Stoic. The Stoic response to the Buddhist started with a descriptive account of human nature, and now is utilizing a normative-teleological one. In other words, there are two senses of ‘human,’ a normative-teleological sense and a descriptive sense (i.e., as members of the species, Homo sapiens). The Stoic is no longer saying that we Homo sapiens can’t eliminate our hostile feelings, but rather that doing so violates a normative-teleological notion of what it means to be human. Zeus (the Stoic god) does not intend for us to eliminate our hostile feelings and doing so strays so far off the path we should cease being considered human. To put the point differently, when Graver writes that a person without hostile feelings would be “some kind of
“monster,” she does not appear to be saying that this person would cease being a member of the species Homo sapien, but rather that this person is no longer recognizably human under the normative-teleological conception.

This dialectical move presents two difficulties for Stoicism, the latter of which appears insurmountable. The first difficulty is that the Stoic has given us no reason to accept their particular normative theory of human nature. In other words, why should we or the Buddhist accept that Zeus exists and has “intentions for the species,” and what it means to be ‘human’ depends upon these intentions?

The second difficulty is that this dialectical move suggests that the Stoic is equivocating in her objection. Although both premises of the objection contain the word, ‘human,’ PMPR is a claim about Homo sapiens, while the Impossibility Thesis is about Stoicism’s normative-teleological conception of human nature. In other words, the Impossibility Thesis should (or should now) be read as the following: Someone can’t eliminate her hostile feelings and yet still abide by Zeus’ intentions for humanity. Although there is much to be said about this way of reading the Impossibility Thesis, the crucial point is this: These two senses of ‘human’ are distinct, and therefore the Stoic is equivocating.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the case of Homer and his response to being robbed, which I called α. I then made the case that the Stoic would not view α as anger, but rather
the feelings that precede anger, and then made the case that the Buddhist would regard α as anger and thus condemn Homer’s response as morally wrong. I then offered two objections to this condemnation on behalf of Stoicism: that people are not blameworthy for their hostile feelings, and that this condemnation violated PMPR. I argued that both objections failed, paying special attention to one premise that appeared in both objections, the Impossibility Thesis. Among other things, I argued that the Stoic gives us no reason to think that hostile feelings cannot be eliminated (especially given the Stoic claims that these feelings can be mitigated with training) and that the Stoic equivocates between two distinct senses of ‘human,’ one in PMPR (a descriptive sense) and the other in the Impossibility Thesis (a normative-teleological one).

Granted, there is much more that can be said about the dispute between Stoics and Buddhists. One thing that remains to be settled is the relationship between anger and hostile feelings. Another is whether or not the Buddhist is ultimately correct that hostile feelings can be eliminated with the right sort of mental training. These points also raise further worries about the plausibility of Buddhist moral theory. Although it might be possible to eliminate hostile feelings, it also might be an unrealistic demand for most of us who lack the time and resources. These are all important questions for me and anger eliminativists to take up in the future. For now, however, I will set them aside and explore Buddhism’s philosophical arguments against anger in the next chapter.
2. No Self, No Anger: The Buddhist Metaphysical Case Against Anger

2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I explored a disagreement between Stoicism and Buddhism on what sorts of emotional responses count as anger and what it means for hostile feelings to be under our control. In this chapter, I switch focus and explore early Buddhist metaphysical reasoning about anger. It is widely known that Buddhism advocates for anatta (often translated as the Doctrine of Non-Self), the denial that people possess any sort of metaphysical selfhood. This doctrine is intended to have radical implications for how we lead our lives, as Charles Goodman (2009) highlights:

Suppose the Buddhists are right about the nonexistence of the self. What would follow[?]…Here’s one simple answer: if you don’t exist, then nothing is up to you. If there is no autonomous self, there is no autonomy. If there is no genuine boundary between self and other, there can be no genuine distinction between actions that flow from the self and motions imposed on the self from outside. (166)

Another consequence, the Buddhist argues, is that anger of any sort is never justified. Even so, it remains unclear how and why the Buddhist makes this claim, leading some philosophers, such as David Shoemaker (2017), to express confusion in response to Buddhism’s reasons for its anger eliminativism.
This chapter is an attempt to make sense of the Buddhist metaphysical case against anger. It proceeds as follows. In sections 2.2 and 2.3, I offer brief sketches of Buddhist metaphysics, followed by the Buddhist arguments against the existence of self. In section 2.4, I then consider an argument against anger grounded in anatta that Shoemaker attributes to the Buddhist. I show that this interpretation rests on a misunderstanding of Buddhist metaphysics, and offer a more faithful version in its place. Then, in sections 2.5 and 2.6, I present a series of objections to Buddhism from Shoemaker grounded in his notion of blaming anger, subsequently arguing that each is unsuccessful. Finally, I end the chapter in section 2.7 by briefly suggesting that there is a subset of anger not jeopardized by anatta and offer one way its existence can be handled by the Buddhist.

2.2 Dhamma Theory and Anger

Early Buddhism espouses a metaphysical viewpoint called dhamma theory, which consists of two positions. First, all phenomena of experience (sights, sounds, tactile objects, etc.) are reducible to smaller and discrete metaphysical simples, called dhāmmas. Second, dhāmas are the only things with inherent nature (attano sabhāvaṃ dhārentī ti dhammā) and ultimate existence (paramattha). These positions are sometimes respectively referred to as dhamma reductionism and dhamma realism (Karunadasa 2019). A consequence of dhamma reductionism and dhamma realism is mereological nihilism, the view that all composite entities lack ultimate existence. The Buddhist understands that it is sometimes helpful to make reference to composite entities, even though they are not ultimately real.
To that end, Buddhism often introduces *dhamma theory* alongside its theory of truth, the *Two Truths Doctrine*. According to this theory of truth, a statement is ultimately true if it satisfies two conditions: (1) it corresponds to facts, and (2) it only refers to objects that ultimately exist. A statement is conventionally true, on the other hand, if it satisfies two conditions: (1) it refers to any objects that do not ultimately exist, but (2) is useful in practice.

I will have more to say about the two truths doctrine in section 2.3, but for now, let us examine Buddhism’s metaphysics of personhood. The *Abhidhamma* (texts explicating Buddhist philosophical psychology) is the result of applying *dhamma theory* to human existence, which divides the individual person into two categories: *rūpa* (form or material) and *nama* (name or mind). *Rūpa* is subdivided into 28 different material simples, the material *dhammas* (*rūpa-dhammas*). Among other things, the material *dhammas* include human sense organs, various human body parts, and the so-called *Four Great Elements*: hardness (*pruthavī-dhātu*), liquidity (*āpa-dhātu*), heat (*teja-dhātu*), and air (*vāyu-dhātu*).

*Nama* is analyzed in two complimentary ways. Firstly, *nama* is subdivided into four collections of distinct psychological phenomena: Feeling (or sensation, *vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). These four, plus *rūpa*, are collectively referred to as the *five skandhas* (sometimes *five aggregates*). In a second way, *nama* is subdivided into *citta* (moments-of-consciousness) and *cetasika* (mental factors), both of which are considered the *dhammas* of mind. *Cittas* represent the discrete quanta of conscious experience, each being a momentary cognizing of some object
of sensory contact. Cittas bring into existence with them cetasika, mental factors responsible for assisting the citta in cognizing its object. Cetasika include (among many other things) common mental factors (e.g., feelings of pain [dukkha], feelings of pleasure [sukha], attention [manasikāra], and perception [saññā]), factors associated with morally good conduct (e.g., faith [saddhā], mindfulness [sati], and shame [hiri]), and factors associated with morally bad conduct (e.g., ignorance [moha], anger [dosa], and greed [lobha]). Viewed from this second analysis, nama can be seen as a moving stream of consciousness (citta-santāna), occurring so rapidly that it has the false appearance of continuous existence.

Taken together, the Abhidhammic analysis of the human individual into nama and rūpa (either by way of the five skandas, or by way of the complimentary rūpa-citta-cetasika) is intended to be exhaustive, meaning there is nothing to the person that is left out of this analysis. As we shall see in the next section, this claim of exhaustiveness serves a crucial role in the Buddhist argument that there is no self, which I will now turn to.

2.3 The Doctrine of Non-Self

In this section, I will present the Buddhist reasoning behind anatta, which relies on the framework of analysis presented in the previous section. According to the Buddhist, ‘self’ refers to any object that would explain a person’s identity or existence in ultimate reality. Here ‘identity’ is meant in two senses: (i) That a person has an ultimate existence at-a-time (synchronous), and (ii) that a person has an ultimate existence over time.
(diachronic). By denying that self exists, the Buddhist is denying that we exist in either sense. As Jay Garfield (2018) puts it, anatta can be seen as the denial that “anything retains its identity over time... [and] even at a given moment, there is no unity to who we are, and nothing in us that answers to the object of our habitual self-grasping.”

Let us examine briefly why the Buddhist denies synchronic and diachronic identity. To be clear, the following is by no means an exhaustive presentation of anatta, but rather offered to sustain the Buddhist arguments against anger considered in the upcoming sections. Starting with diachronic identity. According to the Buddhist, if the self grounds diachronic identity, then the self must be a metaphysical object whose continued existence makes an individual the same throughout time (Siderits 2007). The Buddhist argues that there are only two candidates for the diachronic self: Rūpa and nama. Rūpa, the Buddhist argues, is a composite entity made up of multiple material dhāmmas. Since the Buddhist holds that composite entities lack ultimate existence (mereological nihilism), she concludes that rūpa cannot be a self. Likewise, nama is a composite entity made up of the stream of cittas and cetasika, neither of which can be taken individually as grounding diachronic identity. Why not? Because each exists only for an instant before passing away. Since the above list is exhaustive, the Buddhist concludes that there is no diachronic self.

Let us turn now to synchronic identity. According to the Buddhist, if the self grounds synchronic identity, then it must be a metaphysical object that explains the unity of the various parts of a person at a given instant in time (Chadha and Nichols, 2021). The Buddhist position is that no such object exists, giving two reasons. First, the Buddhist
analysis of the person into five skandhas is considered to be exhaustive. Since there is no unifying self found among the skandhas, the Buddhist concludes that such an object does not exist. This answer is unsatisfactory, and the self theorist can reply that perhaps there is a missing sixth skandha that exists and does the unifying (e.g., a synchronic self to bundle the skandhas together). In response, the Buddhist appeals to parsimony by offering a theory for how the five skandhas can simultaneously co-occur without being held together by a metaphysical object. This theory is the twelve nidanas, or Doctrine of Co-Dependent Arising. Although complicated and outside the scope of this dissertation, the basic idea is that the five skandhas are bound together merely by the laws of cause-and-effect. The co-occurring of the skandhas is contingent and does not require there to be any metaphysical object holding them together.

To be sure, there is much more to be said about the above arguments, and my goal here is not to defend anatta. Even so, it is worth ending this section by highlighting at least one problem for the Buddhist that is common to all of her arguments. Notice that each argument for anatta includes the premise that dhamma theory’s analysis of the individual is exhaustive. There is reason to doubt this premise. As Mark Siderits (2007) explains, Buddhism’s opponents hold that there seems to be an enduring sense that one is an ‘I,’ or ‘knower,’ or ‘experiencer’ that is behind the stream of constantly changing mental states and not present in the five skandhas. If so, then the premise shared by all of the above-mentioned arguments is false, thus doing considerable damage to the Buddhist position.
Therefore, the Buddhist must offer a strong defense of the exhaustiveness of dhamma theory to justify her rejection of synchronic and diachronic identity.

2.4 The No Self Argument

Having presented anatta and argued that it should be read as a denial of both synchronic and diachronic identity, this section will explore the Buddhist connection between anatta and anger eliminativism. I will proceed indirectly by presenting an interpretation of this connection offered by Shoemaker (2017). I will argue that this interpretation contains a premise that the Buddhist rejects, and correcting this error allows me to present a version of the connection between anatta and anger eliminativism that is endorsed by the Buddhist.

Shoemaker introduces his understanding of the Buddhist position in the following passage:

…the basic idea [is] that anger presupposes the existence of a SELF, an enduring metaphysical object. However, that SELF is an illusion, and insofar as anger is that SELF’s response to not getting what it wants, it is metaphysically ungrounded and thus should be eliminated. (78)

There is much going on in this brief passage, but we can interpret it as suggesting a five-step argument, which I call the Not Self Argument. It goes as follows: (A1) Anger presupposes the existence of a self. (A2) Self does not exist as it is an illusion. (A3) Anger is the self’s response to not getting what it wants. Therefore, (A4) anger is metaphysically
ungrounded (from A2 and A3). Therefore, (A5) anger ought to be eliminated (from A4 and the implicit assumption that metaphysically ungrounded emotions ought to be eliminated). Since it seems that A1 does no work in the argument, I shall set it aside for the time being. (The content of A1, specifically what Shoemaker means by “presupposes,” will be addressed in the next section.) In the remainder of this section, I will make the case that the Buddhist accepts A2, rejects A3, and does not use A4 to conclude A5.

Starting with A2, which is accepted by the Buddhist. Notice that Shoemaker refers to the self as an “illusion,” a term not mentioned in the last section. Since Shoemaker’s later arguments also make use of this term (see sections 2.5 and 2.6), it is worth exploring here. According to the Buddhist, self is a ‘concept’ or ‘designation’ (paññatti). What the Buddhist means is that the notion of self arises in the mind out of its natural inclination to group dhammas into composite objects when doing so is useful. As seen in section 2.2, mereological nihilism entails that these groupings are never ultimately real, but nevertheless, some of them are useful and thus labeled conventionally true. Unfortunately, the ignorant (moha) mind is unable to recognize that self is only conventionally true, and takes it to be ultimately true, since the five skandhas appear to be unified and persisting through time (i.e., appear to serve as the basis for synchronic and diachronic identity). Bhikkhu Bodhi (2017) presents our dilemma in the following way:

...ignorance obscures the true nature of things... [making it so that] we are immersed in our experience, identified with it so completely that we do not comprehend it. We live it but fail to understand its nature. Due to this blindness
experience comes to be misconstrued, worked upon by the delusions of permanence, pleasure, and self.

Because this appearance of self is so widespread and misleading, the Buddhist sometimes refers to the notion of self as “illusory” or “mirage-like.” Although enlightened beings continue to use the self designation (e.g., through first-person singular pronouns), they have no corresponding belief or perception that the self is ultimately real.

Let us turn now to A3, which the Buddhist denies. Notice that A3 claims that the self has wants, and anger is its response to those wants being blocked. These claims are absurd for the Buddhist. Since the self does not really exist, it cannot have wants or react in any way. Unfortunately, A3 reflects a common misunderstanding of anatta which is made clear in the following passage from Karunadasa (2019):

As we all know, Buddhism rejects the notion of “self.” Then obviously, it logically and inevitably follows that from the Buddhist perspective we cannot cling to a self, for how can we cling to a thing that does not really exist? This is precisely why in the Pāli suttas we find the expression atta-vāda-upādāna, “clinging to the notion of ‘self,’” and not atta-upādāna, “clinging to the notion of self.” When one realizes nibbāna, what disappears is not self, for there is no self to disappear, but the erroneous belief in a self.

By the same token, the Buddhist does not link anger with the self, but rather with clinging to the notion of self. This distinction is crucial. Clinging to the notion of self is a deep-seated psychological tendency that causes one to hold tightly to the objects of experience
(i.e., the five skandhas) as though they are self. This clinging to the notion of self causes a cluster of three views when it comes to the five skandhas: These are mine (etam mama), these I am (eso’ ham asmi), and these are my self (eso me attā). By ‘views’ (ditthi), the Buddhist means more than mere cognitive belief states, but rather a set of complex cognitive-perceptive-affective orientations towards the world, perhaps better translated as ‘stances’ or ‘standpoints.’ The existence of anger is part of this complex orientation. As the Buddhist argues, once we cling to the five skandhas as though they are self, we develop an attachment to pleasant experiences and avoidance of painful ones. Through time, these attachments become strengthened, eventually turning into lust for sensual pleasure—which gives birth to the unwholesome root greed (lobha)—and aversion for sensual pain—which gives birth to anger (dosa).

With the above in place, we can now see that the Buddhist does not use metaphysical groundedness (A4) to conclude that anger ought to be eliminated (A5). Indeed, the above account presents a radically different picture than that sketched by Shoemaker. Rather than offering a metaphysical argument (in any direct sense), the Buddhist’s real argument is psychological-genealogical, arguing that anger ought to be eliminated because of its causal source in the mind. Anger is caused by clinging to the false notion of self, and thus ought to be eliminated on those grounds. For that reason, I will call this argument the Clinging to Notions of Self Argument.

2.5 Shoemaker and Blaming Anger
In the last section, I critically examined Shoemaker’s No Self Argument on the Buddhist’s behalf. Ultimately, I argued that although the Buddhist accepts A2, she does not accept A3 and does not use A4 to conclude A5. Instead, the Buddhist’s position is that anger ought to be eliminated as it is a harmful consequence of clinging to the false notion of self. In this section, I will consider Shoemaker’s (2017) central objection to Buddhist anger eliminativism.

To begin, we must first understand Shoemaker’s distinction between goal frustration anger and blaming anger. Simply put, goal frustration anger is the kind of anger that a person experiences when she does not get what she wants (73). Blaming anger, on the other hand, appears to be anger in response to slights, insults, and wrongdoing (73). Although these two are often felt together—e.g., I am angry that you thwarted my desires and regard your actions as insulting—Shoemaker holds that the correct way to distinguish them is by way of their emotional syndrome, the sorts of action tendencies that these kinds of anger produce. Goal frustration anger’s action tendency is to overcome or eliminate that which blocks satisfying one’s desires. Blaming anger’s emotional syndrome is harder to grasp, or so Shoemaker argues. At first pass, blaming anger is associated with retaliation and revenge. However, Shoemaker ultimately concludes that this position is mistaken (or at best incomplete), as blaming anger’s real action tendency is to communicate the fact that one is angry. (I will not concern myself with Shoemaker’s arguments for this conclusion here.)
Shoemaker’s response to the Buddhist is twofold: (1) He agrees that if *anatta* is true, then goal frustration anger is always unjustified; but (2) disagrees with respect to blaming anger, arguing that even if *anatta* is true, it does not follow that blaming anger is always unjustified. Let us start by exploring (1), then turning to (2).

### 2.5.1 Anatta and Goal Frustration Anger

Shoemaker argues for (1) in the following passage:

…we can grant that wanting something, and having that desire frustrated, presupposes an enduring SELF, a permanent ego of some sort, and we can even grant that there is no such thing… This would imply that no goal frustration anger is fitting, as it incorrectly appraises its object as blocking the desires of an enduring SELF. (79)

It is unclear what Shoemaker means by “presupposes” (a point alluded to in section 2.4), but it has something to do with fittingness. But what does Shoemaker mean by ‘fittingness?’ I must confess, I am not certain. At minimum, Shoemaker seems to suggest that emotion is fitting just in case it is correctly supported by (or justified by or rendered reasonable by) some corresponding true appraisal of value. He writes:

…fear appraises the fearsome, envy appraises the enviable, and amusement appraises the amusing. These are values meriting the emotional response in question, so when the properties constituting each value are present, one has a reason—a reason of fit—to feel the emotion appraising them as such. (75)
As indicated, one example appears to be fear. To say that my fear is fitting means that its target does indeed pose a risk to my safety. Stated this way, my fear of a venomous snake is fitting, while my fear of a plastic snake is not.

When Shoemaker claims that ‘if anatta is true, then goal frustration anger is always unfitting,’ what he appears to be saying is that ‘if there is no self, then all of goal frustration anger is like my fear of a plastic snake.’ Presumably, the basic idea is that goal frustration anger presupposes (or again is putatively justified by, or putatively made reasonable by) the existence of a self. When I feel goal frustration anger, I appraise the object in question as blocking the desires of a self—namely my self—and hence goal frustration anger is fitting only if that self exists. But if anatta is true, then the self does not exist, and thus there is no object whose desires are being blocked. Therefore, if anatta is true, then goal frustration anger is never fitting, or so Shoemaker appears to be suggesting.

Although there is something to this argument, care must be exercised. The Buddhist certainly agrees that desires (tanha) are the result of clinging to the notion of self. However, the Buddhist does not want to say that the existence of desire presupposes (logically or metaphysically) the existence of a self. Why not? Because, as we saw in sections 2.2 and 2.3, this view is contradicted by dhamma theory. According to dhamma theory, mental states (cittas and cetasika) exist even though there is no self to have or experience them. In the case of desire, dhamma theory holds that desires exist, even though there is no desirer. Furthermore, the fact that desires exist is a crucial part of Buddhist ethics and is entailed by the Second Noble Truth, since it is the existence of desire that
causes the existence of suffering. So, although the Buddhist agrees that desires are self-centered impulses that arise from clinging to the false notion of self, she does not hold that the existence of desires presupposes the existence of self, and thus I am hesitant to say that she would endorse Shoemaker’s argument for (1).

2.5.2 The Defense of Blaming Anger

Let us now turn to (2), Shoemaker’s claim that anatta does not challenge the possible fittingness of blaming anger. Shoemaker explains:

[Anatta] would imply that no goal frustration anger is fitting, as it incorrectly appraises its object as blocking the desires of an enduring SELF. But (fitting) blaming anger need not presuppose this purportedly illusory metaphysical object.

That’s because it appraises its object as having committed a slight, and so it is correct (fitting) only if that agent in fact committed a slight at that time. (79)

Shoemaker’s reasoning is unclear. As far as I can tell, he seems to be rebutting A3, which again states: Anger is the self’s response to not getting what it wants. Read in this way, the above passage seems to concede that A3 might be true for goal frustration anger, but false for blaming anger. As Shoemaker later writes, “blaming anger is not necessarily about the pernicious desires of the illusory SELF” (80). Instead, the fittingness of blaming anger only seems to suppose that its target did commit a wrong at the time (see Shoemaker’s remarks on 79-80).
In my view, the Buddhist has two responses to Shoemaker’s defense of blaming anger. First, even if Shoemaker is correct that A3 is false when applied to blaming anger, the Buddhist rejects A3, as seen in section 2.4. It does Shoemaker no good in attacking the Buddhist to attack a premise she regards as a clear misunderstanding of her position. Second, and more to the point, Shoemaker’s reasoning focuses exclusively on the self of the angry person. It overlooks the following possibility: Blaming anger might presuppose that its target, the wrongdoer, is or has a self. For example, when I am feeling blaming anger at another, I might be presupposing that this person is the same person who committed the wrong in the past, and hence assuming that he has a self which explains this diachronic identity. This result strikes me as at least plausible and suggests that if anatta is true, then blaming anger is never fitting. Assuming this fact is so, then anatta poses a significant challenge to Shoemaker. For that reason, it will be the focus of the next section.

2.6 The No Target Argument

In the last section, I presented Shoemaker’s objections to the Buddhist and offered two responses. First, the Buddhist would be hesitant to endorse Shoemaker’s claims about goal frustration anger since she does not accept that the existence of desire presupposes the existence of a self to have that desire. Second, his defense of blaming anger failed on two counts: (i) it targeted a premise that the Buddhist rejects, and (ii) it overlooked that the fittingness of blaming anger might depend on the wrongdoer having a self. In this
section, I will examine (ii) in more detail. I will begin by presenting Buddhaghosa’s argument that if anatta is true, then blaming anger is never fitting. Afterward, I will offer two responses to this argument on Shoemaker’s behalf, both of which are based on his claims about psychophysical successorship, followed by rejoinders from the Buddhist.

2.6.1 Why Blaming Anger is Never Fitting

For the sake of discussion, let us call the Buddhist argument implicated in (ii) the No Target Argument. A version of this argument is associated with the Theravada scholar Buddhaghosa (see Goodman 2009, Bingle 2019). In the Path of Purification, Buddhaghosa claims that contemplating anatta is a useful way to overcome lingering resentment (patigha) over prior mistreatment, which we can read as sufficiently similar to Shoemaker’s blaming anger. According to Buddhaghosa, when we feel blaming anger, we assume that the target of our anger exists. So, who or what is the target of our anger? Buddhaghosa immediately notes that it cannot be the wrongdoer herself since she is a composite entity and thus does not ultimately exist (see section 2.3). Instead, he reasons that our blaming anger must be directed at one of her dhammas as those possess real existence. But which one? Buddhaghosa goes through an exhaustive list of dhammas, asking among many other things:

Is it the earth element... you are angry with? Or the water element? Or the fire element? Or is it the air element you are angry with?... is it the materiality aggregate you are angry with? Or the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate,
the formations aggregate, the consciousness aggregate you are angry with?...

(IX.38)

Buddhaghosa’s implication is clear: None of these parts is the target of your blaming anger. This exercise shows that your blaming anger is unfitting, as Goodman (2009) explains: “If, in ultimate truth, there are no people and there is no self, then since none of the parts of a person can be resented [by you], there is nothing [for you] to resent” (174).

The No Target Argument can be more formally presented as follows: (T1) Blaming anger is fitting only if its target exists. (T2) The only possible target for blaming anger is either the wrongdoer or the wrongdoer’s parts. (T3) The wrongdoer is a composite entity and thus does not exist. (T4) The wrongdoer’s parts exist but none of them are the target of blaming anger. Therefore, (T5) Blaming anger is never fitting (from T1 through T4).

To be clear, Shoemaker does not explicitly mention Buddhaghosa or the No Target Argument. Even so, he does offer what could be read as an anticipatory objection to Buddhaghosa. Immediately after arguing that anatta does not render blaming anger universally unfitting, Shoemaker (2017) writes:

One might think, for instance, that holding another responsible... would be unwarranted, as the slighter isn’t a permanent SELF either but merely a psychophysical successor to the “I” who slighted me. Wouldn’t it thus be unfair to blame him for the actions of his psychophysical predecessor? (79)

Although Shoemaker is considering the legitimacy of our moral responsibility practices, the above can also be read as a fairness concern about blaming anger. The objection
appears to be that if anatta is true, then it is unfair to be angry at a wrongdoer at time t2 for what his psychophysical predecessor did at t1, presumably since doing so assumes diachronic identity from t1 to t2.

Although Shoemaker thinks blaming anger is fair even if anatta is true (more on this in his second objection to the No Target Argument), the main thrust of his response is that this objection misunderstands fittingness. For Shoemaker, reasons of fairness are distinct from reasons of fittingness. Even if we grant that it is unfair to blame you for the actions of (in Shoemaker’s words) your psychophysical predecessor, it does not follow therefore that blaming anger towards you is unfitting. After all, recall that Shoemaker’s position is that blaming anger is fitting just in case your psychophysical predecessor did in fact commit a wrong.

One way to read Shoemaker’s point is as a refutation of T2. In other words, blaming anger’s real target can be read as your psychophysical predecessor, the one who committed the wrong. Since blaming anger does not need to presuppose that the present you is identical to your psychophysical predecessor, it does not follow that the fittingness of blaming anger is jeopardized by anatta’s denial of diachronic personal identity, or so Shoemaker could be read as arguing.

How should the Buddhist handle Shoemaker’s objection to the No Target Argument’s T2? In my view, Shoemaker’s notion of psychophysical successorship implicitly assumes the existence of synchronic identity. Although Shoemaker correctly links anatta with the rejection of diachronic identity, his response still assumes that there
exists a person at the time of the wrongdoing to who we can attribute the wrong, and whom he calls the wrongdoer’s psychophysical predecessor. Shoemaker’s description of the psychophysical predecessor suggests a synchronic self, even writing that it is an “another ‘I’” that exists in a causal relationship with the present iteration of the wrongdoer (79). Although the Buddhist concedes that claims of action ownership can be conventionally true, section 2.3 made clear that the Buddhist denies the existence of a synchronic self. Since there is no such thing as persons (or wrongdoers or agents) in ultimate reality, it is, therefore, impossible to say (in the sense of ultimate truth) that a past person committed a wrong action. In short, attributability of the sort Shoemaker has in mind seems to assume the existence of synchronic identity, and hence his objection to T2 would be rejected by the Buddhist.

Shoemaker’s second objection holds that if anatta undermines blaming anger, then it must also undermine altruistic emotions like lovingkindness and compassion. As Shoemaker explains:

…one of the primary points of eliminating the illusion of the permanent self, in Buddhism, is for us to turn outward to relieve the suffering of others. But if others aren’t permanent SELVES either, then the person whose suffering one attempts to relieve won’t be the same SELF whose suffering has been relieved… (79)

As Shoemaker further argues, even Buddhists engage in practices that seem to assume something like diachronic identity, such as “returning favors, making inside jokes,
repaying debts, helping [friends] move, and so on” (79). If these practices are justified even though anatta is true, it is hard to see why blaming anger is not. Shoemaker explains:

It seems, then, that we at least have to ground altruistic treatment and practices on psychophysical succession... [then] why not ground blaming anger on the same sort of relation? In other words, as long as you are most closely psychophysically continuous with a past slighter, my blaming anger at you for that slight would be fitting. (79)

Although Shoemaker’s suggestion is intriguing, it, unfortunately, makes use of his notion of psychophysical successorship, which I argued would be rejected by the Buddhist as it implicitly assumes a notion of synchronic identity.

However, we can salvage Shoemaker’s objection by reading it as merely an accusation that the Buddhist is inconsistent. More specifically, emotions like blaming anger and compassion both require a target. If the No Target Argument entails that blaming anger is never fitting, then it seems to entail the same for compassion. But since the Buddhist endorses compassion and rejects blaming anger, she is inconsistent.

The problem with this objection is that it misunderstands compassion (karuna), or so I hold the Buddhist would argue. Let us suppose that we substitute ‘blaming anger’ with ‘compassion’ in the No Target Argument. In doing so, we would turn T4 into (C4) The wrongdoer’s parts really exist but none of them are the target of compassion. The problem for Shoemaker is that C4 is false, suggesting that blaming anger and compassion are disanalogous. The Buddhist defines compassion as the sincere wish that suffering be
eliminated (Analayo 2019). As we saw in section 2.2, suffering (*dukkha*) is a common *cetasika* and thus exists in ultimate reality. Unlike blaming anger, the Buddhist holds that compassion’s target (i.e., suffering) does indeed have ultimate existence. For that reason, the Buddhist would argue that although the No Target Argument is sound for blaming anger, it is unsound when applied to compassion. Therefore, the Buddhist is not inconsistent in her rejection of blaming anger and her endorsement of compassion.

### 2.7 The Possibility of Fitting Anger

In the last section, I offered Shoemaker’s two objections to the No Target Argument, concluding neither was successful. In this brief and final section, I wish to suggest that there is a subset of anger that the Buddhist would have to conclude is fitting even if *anatta* is true.

I will refer to this subset (perhaps comically) as *anger-directed-anger*. As the name suggests, anger-directed-anger is a kind of anger that one feels in response to the anger of another. In other words, you show me anger, and I feel anger at your anger towards me in return. Unlike blaming anger, the target of anger-directed-anger is not the wrongdoer himself. Rather, its target is anger, which is a *cetasika* (or root, to be more precise) and thus ultimately real. Just as compassion is fitting when there is suffering in another’s mindstream, anger-directed-anger is fitting when there is anger in another’s mindstream.

To be sure, the existence of anger-directed-anger does not vindicate Shoemaker’s blaming anger, as the two are distinct subsets of anger with different targets. Although
anger-directed-anger might arise in response to wrongdoing (insofar as wrongdoing is caused by anger), it does not target the wrongdoer himself. Even so, the existence of anger-directed-anger does present a problem for any suggestion from the Buddhist that all subsets of anger are rendered unfitting by anatta (should the Buddhist make such an implication).

To end, what should the Buddhist say about anger-directed-anger? In my view, the Buddhist can still rely on her reasoning from section 2.4. In doing so, the Buddhist can argue that anger-directed-anger (even when fitting) remains a kind of aversion, and thus is a psychological tendency that results from clinging to the notion of self. Although enlightened beings do not approve of anger in another’s mind stream, they do not feel anger towards it. As the Buddha declares: “Hostilities [dosa, the word for anger] aren’t stilled through hostility, regardless. Hostilities are stilled through non-hostility: this, an unending truth” (Dhammapada verse 5, translation Thanissaro).

The Buddhist can therefore grant that anger-directed-anger might sometimes be fitting, while still coherently arguing that fittingness is not the sole condition by which we judge emotions as appropriate, permissible, or desirable. Stated differently, although the Buddhist accepts: (A) If an emotion is unfitting, then it is inappropriate (or impermissible, or undesirable); she need not accept its inverse: (B) If an emotion is fitting, then it is appropriate (or permissible, or desirable). Although the No Target Argument commits her to A, it in no way commits her to B. Therefore, the Buddhist can grant that anger-
directed-anger is sometimes fitting, but not take this result as a serious challenge to her overall anger eliminativism as it is inappropriate for different reasons.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to make sense of the Buddhist metaphysical case against anger. It started by offering brief summaries of Buddhist metaphysics (namely dhamma theory and the Abhidhammic analysis of the individual), followed by outlining the Buddhist arguments against the existence of self. It then considered the No Self Argument, a metaphysical argument against anger attributed by Shoemaker to the Buddhist. It argued that this interpretation rested on a misunderstanding of Buddhist metaphysics and offered a more faithful version in its place, according to which anger ought to be eliminated since it is caused by clinging to the false notion of self.

It then presented a series of objections to Buddhism from Shoemaker, all of which attempted to vindicate the fittingness of blaming anger in the face of anatta. Ultimately, it concluded that none of these defenses were successful. Finally, it ended by proposing the existence of anger-directed-anger, a subset of anger that could be fitting even if anatta is true, and suggesting one way the Buddhist can respond.
3. Stoicism Meets Strawson: Anger, Wrongdoing, and the Objective Standpoint

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I considered the relationship between Buddhist anger eliminativism and anatta, the Buddhist denial of self. In this chapter, I turn to Stoic anger eliminativism and consider an interpretation of Stoicism presented by Christopher Gill (2004, 2006). Although it is clear that Stoicism unambiguously regards anger as the morally bad response to wrongdoing, Gill maintains that the school’s philosophical reasons against anger are less than clear (2004, 208). To that end, Gill argues that Stoicism’s rejection of anger is gained by affirming the following position: The objective standpoint is always the morally good response to wrongdoing. First characterized in P.F. Strawson’s (2008) landmark “Freedom and Resentment,” the objective standpoint is the sort of psychological stance that we take towards those who cannot be held responsible for their actions. Since being angry at another is incompatible with adopting an objective standpoint towards them, it follows that anger is never a good response to wrongdoing. As Gill explains, “According to Stoic principles, you do not blame or get angry with or hate other (non-wise) people because you see them as not, or not yet, understanding the nature of good and bad, and as needing to be educated or ‘cured’ until they do” (2004, 213).
Although Gill offers in my view an intriguing and engaging interpretation of Stoic anger eliminativism, this chapter argues that his interpretation is ultimately mistaken. I argue as follows: I begin in section 3.2 with a summary of the objective standpoint. In section 3.3, I present Gill’s interpretation of Stoicism, in which he attributes to Stoicism the view that adopting the objective standpoint is always the morally good response to wrongdoing. In section 3.4, I offer an objection to this argument on Stoicism’s behalf, arguing that Gill’s interpretation rests on an equivocation of two senses of mental illness found in Stoic literature. Finally, in section 3.5, I argue that Stoics would deny that the objective standpoint is always the morally good response to wrongdoing since it is incompatible with viewing wrongdoers as morally responsible for their actions.

3.2 The Objective Standpoint

According to Gill, his interpretation of the objective standpoint comes from his reading of Strawson’s (2008) Freedom and Resentment” (see Gill 2004, 208). As Strawson originally argues, there are two psychological standpoints that humans adopt towards one another. They are (i) the participant reactive standpoint (2008, 10; sometimes also called the involved standpoint, 12; see also Strawson 1985, 37) and (ii) the objective standpoint (or objective attitude, 2008, 9; sometimes also called the detached standpoint, see Strawson 1985, 37). From the participant reactive standpoint, we view others as participants in ordinary interpersonal relationships with ourselves (2008, 8). Based on this view, we are prone to feel what Strawson calls the participant reactive attitudes. These attitudes are “essentially”
emotional responses to another person’s “quality of will” towards us (15). By “quality of will,” Strawson means another’s “good or ill will or indifference or lack of concern” towards us as “manifested in their behaviour” (15). The participant reactive attitudes, for Strawson, comprise a “general [emotional] framework” (14) as well as a “continuum” (24), which includes gratitude, anger, resentment, and mutual love (10). Strawson contends that these attitudes, and our proneness to them, constitute our participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships with other humans (10-12). On this basis, Strawson questions whether any theoretical philosophical commitment could convince us to give this framework of attitudes up, writing:

The human commitment to participation in ordinary inter-personal relationships is, I think, too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them; and being involved in inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question. (12)

According to Strawson, giving up the participant reactive attitudes entails adopting the objective standpoint (9). This standpoint, Strawson explains, is the one we adopt when we judge another person as somehow incapable of participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships. Typical cases where we adopt the objective standpoint for Strawson include:
‘He wasn’t himself’, ‘He has been under very great strain recently’, ‘He was acting under post-hypnotic suggestion’… ‘He’s only a child’, ‘He’s a hopeless schizophrenic’, ‘His mind has been systematically perverted’, ‘That’s purely compulsive behaviour on his part’. (8)

In each of these cases, we judge that the other person as, either temporarily or permanently, excluded from participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships on account of a psychological incapacity or abnormality (12). Regarding the other person in this way causes a “profound” shift in our emotions towards her (9). In particular, we cease being able to feel the participant reactive attitudes in response to her. To be sure, Strawson is less than forthcoming about whether this inability reflects a conceptual impossibility (i.e., the objective standpoint is conceptually incompatible with feeling the participant reactive attitudes) or a merely psychological one (i.e., humans who adopt the objective standpoint find it psychologically impossible to feel the participant reactive attitudes even though there is nothing logically or conceptually ruling them out). In a later work, Strawson (1985) admits that although the participant reactive standpoint and the objective standpoint are “profundely opposed… [they are] not mutually exclusive” (37). He writes:

    Standpoints and attitudes are not only different, they are profoundly opposed.

    One cannot be whole-heartedly committed to both at once. It will not do to say that they are mutually exclusive; since we are rarely whole-hearted creatures. But they tend in the limit to mutual exclusion. (37)
Although this passage might be taken to suggest a psychological impossibility, Strawson’s reasoning remains unclear.

In any event, what is clear is that when we adopt the objective standpoint towards another, Strawson holds that we no longer emotionally respond to her with our participant reactive attitudes (e.g., anger if she negligently harms us). Instead, we view and emotionally respond to her as someone who ought to be “managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided” (2008, 9-10). To be more specific, our emotions shift away from the participant reactive attitudes to what Strawson calls the “detached” or “non-participant” attitudes (5, see also 1985, 37, 41), which are the sorts of emotions we are naturally prone to feel towards natural objects, nonhuman animals, and sometimes small children (2008, 9-10, 20-21). Although Strawson does not offer a list of detached attitudes, he does offer the following characterization:

…the objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways: it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity or even love, though not all kinds of love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in interpersonal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other. (10)

In addition to changing the attitudes we find ourselves naturally prone to, the objective standpoint shapes our judgment of another in two related ways. Firstly, when we adopt
the objective attitude towards another person, we judge that she cannot be reasoned with (10). As Strawson writes:

If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though... you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend... to reason with him. (10)

Strawson appears to be suggesting that if I adopt the objective standpoint towards another person, I will judge any attempt to sincerely reason with her as futile. To the extent that I do outwardly appear to reason with her, I am only doing so under the guise of pretense, much in the same way I pretend to reason with my pets when they beg for dinner early. Secondly, Strawson explains that when we view a wrongdoer from the objective standpoint, we do not judge her as responsible for her actions, and thus do not view her as the proper recipient of retributive punishment (23-24). Rather, Strawson suggests that the objective standpoint entails viewing her wrongdoing as a problem to be solely understood in terms of “social policy” (9), and punishment should be given to her only insofar as it helps to maximize “social utility” (24). Taken together, when I adopt the objective standpoint towards another person, I cease seeing her as responsive to reasons, no longer view her as morally responsible for her actions, and thus view her behavior as something which needs to be controlled or managed for the overall good of society.

Although much more can be said about Strawson’s objective standpoint, I wish to explicitly list three of its features that will be relevant for the remainder of this chapter:
O1. We adopt the objective standpoint towards another when we judge she is incapable of participation in interpersonal relationships.

O2. When we adopt the objective standpoint towards another, we view her as incapable of being reasoned with.

O3. When we adopt the objective standpoint towards another, we do not view her as morally responsible.

With O1 through O3 in place, let us turn to Gill’s argument.

3.3 Gill’s Interpretation of Stoicism

In this section, I present Gill’s proposed interpretation of Stoic anger eliminativism. As explained in chapter one, Stoics view all emotion as pathē and thus morally impermissible. In the case of anger directed at wrongdoers, Gill presents the Stoic reasoning as follows: (1) Anger is always the morally bad response to wrongdoers because (2) the objective standpoint is always the morally good way to view wrongdoers.

Gill contends that we can see the commitment to (1) and (2) most clearly in the works of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. He focuses mostly on Marcus’ morning ritual, where Marcus instructs the reader to:

Say to yourself at the start of the day, I shall meet with meddling, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, and unsociable people. They are subject to all these defects because they have no knowledge of good and bad. But I, who have observed the nature of the good, and seen that it is the right; and of the bad, and
seen that it is the wrong… I, then, can neither be harmed by these people, nor become angry with one who is akin to me, nor can I hate him… To work against one another is therefore contrary to nature; and to be angry with another person and turn away from him is surely to work against him. \((\textit{Meditations} \ 2.1, \ \text{from Gill} \ 2003)\)

In a footnote, Gill also cites the following supporting passage from the \textit{Meditations}:

\begin{quote}
[You are behaving wrongly] whenever you grow angry at [others’] bad behaviour. For it is surely the case that they are simply drawn towards what they consider to be suitable and beneficial to themselves. ‘Yes, but they are wrong to think that.’ Well, instruct them, then, and show them the truth, without becoming annoyed. \((6.27)\)
\end{quote}

Notice that, in both of these passages, the wrongdoer’s actions are caused by her ignorance, in particular her ignorance of what is genuinely good or bad (much more on this point momentarily.)

Similar claims are made by Epictetus, who, in discussing Medea’s murder of her children, argues that the proper emotional response to Medea is not anger but rather pity \((\textit{Discourses} \ 1.28)\). Pity, at least the kind Epictetus has in mind, is not a participant reactive attitude, but rather a detached attitude, in that, according to Gill, pity is an “objective response to another’s [moral] error” \((\text{Gill} \ 2003, \ 212)\). Epictetus further explains that:
…whoever keeps clearly in mind [the core truths of Stoicism] will never be irritated with anyone, never be angry with anyone, will never criticize or blame or hate or take offence at anyone. (Discourses 1.28.10, from Gill 2003)

For Gill, Epictetus is suggesting that if a person fully accepts and lives by Stoic principles, then this person will no longer feel the participant reactive attitudes in response to wrongdoers because this person has instead adopted the objective standpoint towards them.

According to Gill, these passages demonstrate that Stoics have a deep moral commitment to the objective standpoint. In particular, their view is the objective standpoint is the morally good way to view wrongdoers. Wrongdoers are ignorant of what is genuinely good and evil, which leads Marcus and Epictetus to conceive of any relationship with them in “strongly asymmetrical terms” (213). Gill is not entirely clear what he means by ‘asymmetrical.’ However, he appears to suggest that Marcus and Epictetus view wrongdoers as psychologically compromised and therefore incapable of participation in healthy interpersonal relationships (208). Marcus and Epictetus view the relationship between themselves and the wrongdoer as something like the relationship between a therapist and her patient (213, see also footnote 11). The hallmark of this kind of relationship is that it is asymmetrical. As Gill explains, the “superior” member of the relationship adopts the objective standpoint in response to the “inferior” one, writing:

This kind of relationship [between a Stoic and wrongdoer] is unequal or asymmetrical; the leading or superior partner [the Stoic] refrains from the kind of
reactive attitude that would be appropriate for an equal partner in personal
interaction. She also does not treat the other person [the wrongdoer] as a fully
responsible agent nor does she praise or blame or resent her accordingly. (208)

Although the case at hand is about responding to wrongdoers, Gill makes clear that Stoics
apply the above reasoning to everyone who is not wise (213). Since virtually no one is
wise, Gill’s position strikingly suggests that Stoics endorse the objective standpoint when
it comes to interacting with every human being.

In any event, Gill reasons that Stoicism’s rejection of anger follows from their
viewing wrongdoers as psychologically compromised and thus the proper targets of the
objective standpoint:

In effect, [the Stoics] are treating other people as... psychiatric patients. According
to Stoic principles, you do not blame or get angry with or hate other (non-wise)
people because you see them as not, or not yet, understanding the nature of good
and bad, and as needing to be educated or “cured” until they do. (213)

Indeed, the kind of ignorance Gill has in mind is routinely considered by Stoics to be a
kind of insanity, called mania (much more on this point in the next section). Because all
wrongdoers are insane, they are incapable of participating in interpersonal relationships
according to Stoics. Gill argues:

[For Stoics,] human beings are seen as being fundamentally capable of achieving
this understanding [what is good and evil], rather than as being fundamentally
capable of mutual interaction as responsible agents, as is normally assumed in conventional ethics. (213)

Taken together, Gill’s reading of Stoicism is that until a wrongdoer is “cured,” she is to be (a) regarded as incapable of participating in interpersonal relationships and (b) therefore needs to be viewed from the objective standpoint (213). A consequence of this is whenever we see a wrongdoer engaging in behavior that we would otherwise regard as blameworthy or deserving of punishment, we should instead understand that her behavior is a manifestation of her underlying mental illness. Therefore, we should adopt the objective standpoint towards her, which entails not feeling anger or resentment, but rather pity because she is mentally unwell and needs treatment.

3.4 Impairment and Interpersonal Relationships

In this section, I reject Gill’s interpretation of Stoicism. To be clear, this rejection is intended on descriptive grounds, meaning that as a descriptive matter, Gill is mistaken in his interpretation of what he thinks Stoics are claiming. This rejection consists of two steps: First, Gill overlooks that there are two distinct kinds of mental illness identified in Stoic literature: mania and melancholia. As we shall see shortly, mania is the universal mental illness suffered by ordinary people (i.e., the non-wise), while melancholia is an uncommon form of mental illness suffered by persons typically regarded as insane, such as those suffering from hallucinations or delusions. Second, Stoics appear to associate the objective standpoint (or something like it) only with melancholia and not with mania. I, therefore,
conclude that there is nothing in the Stoic literature indicating that Stoics adopt the objective standpoint when responding to manic persons.

### 3.4.1 The Nature of Mania

Let us begin with the Stoic slogan that “all non-wise are insane.” Here Stoics are referring to mania, which is described by them as the state in which a person lacks practical wisdom (phronesis). This is the mental illness considered by Gill (see 2003, 212). Because the sage is the only person who truly possesses practical wisdom, and thus fully understands what is good and evil (namely moral virtue and vice, respectively), she is the only person cured of mania. While the sage acts excellently because she acts in accordance with wisdom, ordinary people, such as wrongdoers, lack practical wisdom and thus “do everything in accordance with madness” (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers 7.124, from Inwood and Gerson 2008).

Stoics also define mania as “a certain relative disposition… which makes one’s impulses unstable and fluttery,” or, more succinctly, “a fluttery ignorance” (Stobaeus 2.7.5b13, from Inwood and Gerson 2008). According to Graver (2003), “fluttery” (ptoiōdēs) refers to the so-called “vehement impulses,” which is another way to refer to pathē or emotions (47). Defined as a “fluttery ignorance,” mania can thus be understood as susceptibility to pathē, such as fear, grief, and anger (47). Since the sage is cured of her mania, she can therefore be seen as no longer being susceptible to experience pathē. Ordinary people, who do not (or do not yet) possess practical wisdom, still suffer from
mania and are thus susceptible to experience pathē and act out accordingly (screaming in rage, collapsing in grief, fleeing in terror).

3.4.2 The Nature of Melancholia

Let us now turn to melancholia. According to Stoics, melancholia is a form of mental illness whereby a person receives false, confused, or erratic impressions, and covers the sorts of cases that we typically regard as insanity, such as hallucinations and paranoid delusions. One traditional example of melancholia comes from Sophocles’ play, Ajax, wherein a mentally unstable Ajax is so distraught that Achilles’ armor was awarded to Odysseus that he slaughters a flock of sheep after assenting to the confused and false impression that they are his fellow Greek soldiers. Central to my response to Gill is the following point: The sort of insanity suffered by Ajax is, for the Stoics, very different than the universal insanity suffered by all non-wise. Graver explains:

Although the Stoics argue... that “all the non-wise are insane,” they recognize a category of insanity in the sense of complete derangement, characterizing it by the reception of false or erratic impressions. Thus Ajax, when he slaughtered a flock of sheep in the mistaken impression that they were fellow-Achaeans, was not merely “insane” as all those not wise are insane... [which is why Stoics] offer two different terms, mania for the madness of non-sages, and melancholia for derangement like Ajax. (81, from Cicero 2002).
In summary, mania refers to the universal mental illness suffered by ordinary people. It is defined as a fluttery ignorance, meaning that it is caused by not understanding the true nature of good and evil and therefore renders ordinary people susceptible to pathē. Melancholia, on the other hand, refers to complete psychological derangement on account of receiving erratic impulses. Whereas mania is universal and treated by philosophical therapy, melancholia is a rare medical condition that needs to be treated by surgery or other physiological means, such as draining excess black bile. Furthermore, these two conditions have drastically different normative implications when it comes to understanding the agency and moral responsibility of those affected by them, which is the subject of the next section.

3.4.3 Rejecting Gill’s Interpretation

Having distinguished mania from melancholia, I will now show that melancholia, and not mania, is associated with the objective standpoint. For the Stoics, wrongdoers are mentally ill typically only in the sense of mania, while the sort of mental illness associated with impairment from interpersonal relationship (and hence the adoption of the objective standpoint) is melancholia. It is therefore false, at least according to the Stoics, that suffering from mania automatically renders a person incapable of participating in interpersonal relationships.

The Stoics view melancholic people as receiving false or erratic impressions. The receptivity to these impressions has several tragic consequences when it comes to a
person’s moral agency. For starters, Stoics view melancholic persons as no longer fully rational beings and thus no longer fully responsible for their actions. Indeed, the notion that melancholic persons are morally responsible agents would be regarded by Stoics as absurd. As Graver (2003) writes:

[According to Stoics,] persons in this condition [melancholia] need to be controlled, but their behaviors do not have the same meaning as they would if performed by a rational being. To hold them responsible would be like indicting a pit bull for felonious assault. (53)

Of central importance for our purposes is that, also like nonhuman animals and small children, melancholic persons are viewed as incapable of regulating their behavior in socially acceptable ways. Indeed, melancholic persons are sometimes described as “feral” or “bestial,” and in a certain sense, are worse off than nonhuman animals. Graver writes:

The dog’s impressions are presumably of a simpler kind than those of a human, but they need not be indiscriminate or skewed. The feral human is more dangerous in that he rages about “at random,” his behavior lacking even the rudimentary and semiconceptualized logic of the animal. His impressions… represent to him states of affairs which have no justification at all… This is not rationality merely getting out of hand, carried away in some moment of strong emotion [as is the case in mania]. It is actually the disintegration of rationality. (53)

As such, melancholic persons are viewed as fundamentally incapable of conforming their behavior to social norms and thus not viewed as participants in ordinary interpersonal
relationships. Seneca, as an example, writes that attempting to get a *melancholic* person to engage in ordinary interpersonal behavior would require constantly "[telling him] how he ought to speak, how he ought to walk, how he ought to conduct himself in public and in private" (Epistle 94.17, from Seneca 1925). This effort would be futile and make one "more of a lunatic than the person he was advising" (94.17).

Let us now see why *mania* does not ordinarily jeopardize a person from participating in interpersonal relationships. Unlike *melancholic* people, *manic* people are viewed by Stoics as rational agents who are responsible for their actions. Relevant to our purposes is that Stoics do not view *manic* people as somehow incapable of conforming their behavior to the dictates of ordinary interpersonal relationships. As Seneca remarks, “The very people whom we call mad [*manic*] we admit to the ballot box and the bench” (On Benefits 1.35.2, from Seneca 2014).

However, care needs to be used in describing the Stoic position on *mania* and self-control. Stoics certainly understand that *manic* people are susceptible to strong emotional outbursts. For example, consider a person who explodes with road rage after being cut off on the freeway. We naturally describe her as being “out of control.” Indeed, she might later say that she “blackened out” during the incident or “saw red.” Is this irascible person in control of herself during her road rage?

Stoics would answer ‘no’ but would also make clear that she is morally responsible for her rage and whatever it causes her to do. Here is why. *Manic* persons who succumb to their *pathē* often lose self-control. Recalling from chapter 1, Stoics view emotions as
within our control. Although we are not in control during the fit of anger, we can control whether we enter this fit in the first place. This reasoning is found in numerous Stoic texts on anger, such as Seneca’s On Anger, wherein he writes:

   Certain things are within our control at first, whereas the subsequent stages carry us along with a force all their own and leave us no way back. People who have jumped off a cliff retain no independent judgment and cannot offer resistance or slow the descent of their bodies in freefall… Just so, once the mind has submitted to anger… it’s not allowed to check its onrush: its own weight and the downward-tending nature of vices must… carry it along and drive it down to the depths. (On Anger 1.7.4)

Although manic persons are susceptible to these emotional outbursts during which they temporarily lose self-control, it does not follow that manic persons are never in control. As Cicero writes:

   But they [the Stoics] explain that when they say “all fools are insane,” it is like “all bogs stink.” Not always! But disturb the bog, and you will smell it. Even so the irascible person is not always angry—strike him, though, and you will see him go mad. (Tusculan Disputations, 4.54, from Cicero 2002)

Furthermore, Stoics do not view mania as operating as a global or local exemption from moral responsibility. Pathē are voluntary, and people are thus responsible for their pathē-fueled actions.
Stoics, therefore, regard *mania* as culpable insanity. Although a *manic* person might not be able to control herself once she enters into an emotional outburst, Stoics insist that she can control whether she enters into the outburst in the first place. As explained in chapter 1, *pathē* are voluntary impulses, meaning they are ‘within our power’ or ‘up to us’ (*eph’ hemin*). *Manic* persons are therefore responsible for whatever they do during an emotional outburst.

In any event, Stoics associate the objective standpoint with the *melancholic*, not the *manic*. *Melancholic* people are incapable of reason and can no longer conform their behavior to the demands of ordinary interpersonal relationships. *Melancholic* persons are the exception, not the rule, as Graver (2003) makes clear:

But “melancholic” insanity as we have seen it so far cannot possibly be what is intended in those Stoic texts which ascribe insanity to the vast majority of humankind… And it is not the intention of Stoic ethics to exempt people in general from accountability for their actions. With this in mind, it is worthy of note that the term melancholia is never used in connection with humankind in general. (46)

Therefore, Gill is mistaken when he attributes to Stoics the view that the objective standpoint ought to be adopted towards wrongdoers. These wrongdoers suffer from *mania*, not *melancholia*, and there is no evidence Stoics view them as incapable of reason and participation in interpersonal relationships. Quite the contrary, Stoics frequently argue that we should address wrongdoers by appealing to their capacity for reason, a topic I will consider at length in the next section.
3.5 Objective Standpoint and Wrongdoing

Having denied Gill’s interpretation of Stoicism, I end the chapter by assessing the following claim on the Stoic’s behalf: We are morally obligated to adopt the objective standpoint towards those who wrong us. In my view, the Stoic would reject this claim. I offer two reasons: (R1) If we adopt the objective standpoint towards a person, then we do not regard that person as a moral agent, but (R2) For the Stoics, a manic person is a moral agent. In other words, if we adopt the objective standpoint towards all wrongdoers, then we will view most of them incorrectly, as we will cease viewing them as moral agents when, in fact, they are.

Although the above argument uses the term, ‘moral agent,’ it is far outside the scope of this dissertation to offer a theory of moral agency. Instead, by ‘moral agent,’ I have in mind two necessary conditions of moral agency. They are: (i) the person is morally responsible and (ii) the person is capable of responding to reasons. Notably, both (i) and (ii) are excluded when I view another from the objective standpoint. However, Stoics hold that most wrongdoers are moral agents because, in part, they satisfy (i) and (ii). (I use ‘most’ because there is a small subclass of wrongdoers that arguably do not satisfy (i) and (ii), called ‘depraved,’ and who might not be moral agents and thus be the proper target of the objective standpoint; more on this point near the end of this chapter). Let us begin by briefly examining (R1).
The reasons for (R1) were suggested in the first section of this chapter but are worth stating explicitly here. Recall that I called attention to three features of the objective standpoint, the last two of which stated that:

O2. When we adopt the objective standpoint towards another, we view her as incapable of being reasoned with.

O3. When we adopt the objective standpoint toward another, we do not view her as morally responsible.

As we can see, it follows straightforwardly from O2 and O3 that adopting the objective standpoint towards a wrongdoer entails that one does not view her as a moral agent. After all, adopting the objective standpoint toward this wrongdoer involves viewing her as incapable of reason (i.e., O2), and not morally responsible (i.e., O3).

Let us now turn to (R2), which I will defend in two ways. I will first argue that Stoics view wrongdoers as typically morally responsible, and then that wrongdoers are typically viewed as capable of reason. To begin, it is worth noting that Stoics are compatibilists about free will and moral responsibility. In their view, although everything is pre-determined by fate (Zeus’ divine plan for the cosmos), it is not the case that fate undermines free will and moral responsibility. When it comes to the case of wrongdoers, Stoics routinely argue that it is fair to blame them for their morally vicious acts. These arguments are often given in response to claims that fate renders attributions of praise and blame unjustified. Chrysippus, for example, appears to have explicitly rejected this argument, having taken on the claim that “neither praise nor blame nor honors nor
punishments are fair” (see Cicero, On Fate 40-41, from Cicero 1968). In Chrysippus’ view, it is fair to praise, blame, and punish persons because moral virtue and vice are within their power. Similarly, Alexander of Aphrodisias recounts that when confronted with the claim that blame and punishment are morally bad because it is “not in the power of [bad] people to cease being bad (26),” Stoics typically respond that:

…it is absurd to say that the virtues and vices are not in our power and that they are not the objects of praise and blame. Therefore, ‘what is in our power’ is not like that. (26)

Although a full examination of Stoic compatibilism is outside the scope of this chapter, these passages make clear that Stoics view holding wrongdoers morally responsible as fair and morally justified. For that reason, Stoics regard wrongdoers as morally responsible, the first condition for moral agency.

I will now argue that wrongdoers are typically regarded as capable of reason. Recall that wrongdoers, like all other non-wise humans, suffer from mania. Crucially for Stoics, mania, conceptually speaking, requires that a person possess reason. In other words, if a person either lacks or is severely compromised in terms of her capacity for reason, then she cannot be manic. But why? From section 3.4, we saw that mania is a “fluttery ignorance,” which means that it renders a person susceptible to pathē. Stoics view pathē as reason being exercised in the wrong sort of way. As Graver (2003) explains, Stoics view pathē as reason “getting out of hand” and allowing itself to be “carried away” (53).
Indeed, another way to put it is that *mania* is a “condition of flawed rationality” (50).

Consider the following passage from Plutarch:

> For [Stoics] say that desire and anger and fear and all such things [*pathē*] are bad opinions and judgments and that they do not arise in some one part of the soul, but are cases of the inclination, yielding, assent, and impulse of the leading part of the soul, and in general are activities which can change... (On Moral Virtue, 447a, from Inwood and Gerson 2012)

Notice here that Stoics refer to *pathē* as “bad opinions” (*doxa*) and “judgments” (*krisis*). As explained in chapter 1, Stoics view anger (*orgē*) as the result of the mind assenting to the false impressions that another has harmed me unjustly and thus I ought to be avenged. This psychological process is too complicated for anger to count as merely an automatic reflex, meaning that anger is not something that overpowers or circumvents reason, but rather something that requires it. A consequence of this view is that nonhuman animals cannot experience anger:

> Wild animals have impulses—frenzy, ferocity, aggression—but they no more have anger than they have luxury... (1.3.4)

The same goes for persons who have lost their ability to reason (e.g., the *melancholic*) or those who have not yet sufficiently developed it (e.g., small children). Since humans were uniquely endowed by Zeus with the possession of reason, *pathē* are exclusively human phenomena:
Animals incapable of speech lack human passions, though they have certain impulses that resemble passions. Were that not the case, if they knew love and hate, they would also know friendship and animosity, disagreement and harmony. And though some traces of these things exist even in animals, they’re the proper possession—for good and ill alike—of human hearts. Only the human being has been allotted practical wisdom, foresight, scrupulousness, deliberation: animals are barred not only from human virtues, but also from human vices. (1.3.6-7).

As Seneca’s reasoning suggests, what makes humans unique is that they possess the capacity for reason. For Stoics, to view and treat a person as though she is not a rational being is, in effect, to treat her as though she is not fully human.

In any event, manic people are considered capable of reason. When combined with my first point (manic persons are morally responsible), we can see that Stoics view wrongdoers as moral agents. For that reason, Stoics would not recommend adopting the objective standpoint toward wrongdoers.

3.6 The Stoic Stance Towards Wrongdoers

I end the chapter by considering a model case of how Stoics recommend that we treat wrongdoers. As we shall see, this case involves treating the wrongdoer as a moral agent, and not as a target of the objective standpoint.
The case I have in mind comes from Seneca. In this example, Seneca considers the claim that morally good punishment requires anger, a thesis he uncompromisingly rejects (On Anger 1.6). As part of the discussion, Seneca offers the example of a “wise judge,” a virtuous person whose job is to “administer the laws and guide a civil community” in moral development (1.6.3). According to Seneca, a wise judge believes the correct way to handle wrongdoers is by engaging with their capacity for reason. Seneca’s discussion suggests that the wise judge’s response to wrongdoers can be divided into four escalating sets of cases.

The first set of cases concerns wrongdoers who have committed only minor offenses. In these cases, the wise judge will engage with wrongdoers by offering them “words” that are “rather gentle” (1.6.3). What Seneca means is that the judge aims to appeal to the wrongdoers’ rationality in the hopes of “urg[ing] the proper course of action and instill[ing] in their minds a desire for what is honorable and fair” (1.6.3). To put it in a slightly different way, the judge seeks to correct these wrongdoers by giving them reasons to “hate vice and value virtue” (1.6.3).

The second set of cases is when confronted with slightly more severe or repeated offenses. In these cases, Seneca explains that the wise judge will continue to view wrongdoers as rational agents, but “adopt a more severe way of speaking” (1.6.3). The goal here is to give reasons in the form of “warn[ings] and reproval[s],” letting the wrongdoers know that if they do not change their ways, then they will experience harsher and more painful forms of punishment in the future (1.6.3).
The third set of cases concerns wrongdoers who have committed serious transgressions or those for whom the wise judge has exhausted his attempts to reason with the wrongdoer verbally. In both cases, the wise judge must give “penalties,” which is harsh treatment aimed at morally improving the wrongdoer, as Seneca explains:

For just as we heat some twisted metal shafts to straighten them, and use wedges to apply pressure not to shatter them but to remove the warp, so we straighten out people’s characters with physical pain and mental distress once they’ve been warped by vice. (1.6.1)

Although these penalties are painful, they are to be “fairly mild and not irrevocable,” and offered in the hopes that wrongdoers might see the light and change their ways (1.6.3).

Finally, the fourth set of cases is rare and concerns wrongdoers who Seneca labels as “depraved” (1.6.3). These persons are so morally vicious that it is difficult to describe their behavior as human (2.5.1). Depraved people “often behave like animals and take pleasure in shedding human blood,” Seneca writes, “[and] are angry when they kill those from whom they’ve not received an injury and from whom they don’t even believe they’ve received one” (2.5.2). Depraved individuals suffer from an evil “greater” than mere irascibility and are “beyond cure” (2.5.5).

The wise judge, Seneca suggests, treats depraved individuals as incapable of being reasoned with (1.6.3). In a sense, these wrongdoers are lost causes, and need the most severe of punishment, such as the death penalty (1.6.3). The goal in giving these
punishments is not to engage with the reason of the depraved wrongdoer (she is beyond hope), but rather engage with the reason of onlookers. Seneca writes:

…whereas [physicians] provide an easy escape to those on whom they cannot bestow life [through euthanasia], [the wise judge] compels the condemned to depart from life scorned and covered in disgrace, not because he takes pleasure in any man’s punishment—such inhuman bestiality is far removed from the wise—but so that it might be a lesson to all, as the commonwealth benefits from the death of those who didn’t wish to benefit it while alive. (1.6.4)

Although there is much that is controversial in this passage, we do not need to explore those features here. Rather, what is important for our purposes is that it is only when a wrongdoer has become so morally vicious that she is depraved and beyond cure that Stoics would recommend no longer viewing and treating them as responsive to reason.

Taken together, we can see that the wise judge does not adopt the objective standpoint towards the first three cases of wrongdoing. In all three cases, the wise judge engages with the wrongdoer as a morally responsible person capable of reason (i.e., as a moral agent). For Seneca, as well as other Stoics, the proper view of most ordinary wrongdoers is that they can change their behavior through rational engagement, such as by giving them philosophical instruction and reasons in favor of virtue and against vice. For these reasons, we can see Stoics would endorse the claim that most wrongdoers are moral agents. It is only when the wrongdoer has become depraved that she is a proper target of the objective standpoint. Depravity is considered a rare condition according to
the Stoics and therefore we should adopt the objective standpoint only in the direst of cases.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter offered a rejection of Gill’s interpretation of Stoicism. I presented Gill’s reasons for his interpretation. I then rejected this interpretation, contending that it rested on a conflation between mania and melancholia. Finally, I ended by offering a Stoic analysis of the claim that we ought to adopt the objective standpoint toward all wrongdoers. Although I suggested there is a narrow set of cases for whom the objective standpoint is appropriate (the depraved), I argued that Stoics would reject this claim for the majority of wrongdoers.
4. Don’t Take It Personally: The Virtuous Person and Indignation

4.1 Introduction

Having touched on the nature of Stoic anger eliminativism in the last chapter, this chapter explores a disagreement between Stoicism and the Confucian tradition. I do so by addressing a theory of morally virtuous anger proposed by Kwong-li Shun (2015). Shun takes inspiration from the early Confucians, who themselves had much to say about the moral value of anger. In some places, these thinkers appear to agree with the Stoics, such as Zhu Xi who proclaimed, “The sage does not have anger” (*Topically Arranged Conversations of Master Zhu*: 776, from Shun 2015). Other places disagree, such as Confucius praising his star pupil, Yan Hui, for only ever being angry at the right things (*Analects* 6.3, from Shun 2015). Shun takes these perplexities and uses them to develop his theory of morally virtuous anger, under which morally virtuous anger has something to do with what Shun calls *detached indignation*. To be clear, although Shun’s theory is inspired by Confucian thought, it is not an interpretation of early Confucianism. In his own words, the goal is “to build on ideas that can be extracted from Confucian texts… and develop an account that is philosophically appealing and hopefully also relevant to our contemporary ethical experiences” (2015, 301). Even if the theory is “recognizably Confucian,” it would be a mistake to read it as an attempt to “approximate the thinking of the Confucians” (302).
My goal in this chapter is to critically examine Shun’s theory, doing so partially from a Stoic viewpoint. Although I am not endorsing Stoicism, part of my goal is to examine how Shun’s theory handles an objection suggested by Seneca. Since there appears to be a significant overlap between Shun’s theory and Stoicism, it is therefore philosophically interesting to see where and why the two diverge. I will proceed in the following way. In section 4.2, I will present Shun’s analysis of anger which focuses on a subset of anger called indignation. In section 4.3, I will explore the conditions for morally virtuous indignation, which have something to do with a person’s indignation being detached. I will highlight one uncertainty with Shun’s analysis, then offer a solution. In section 4.4, I adapt a version of an objection presented by Seneca, which addresses the prospect of morally virtuous indignation. Ultimately, I will conclude that this objection is too strong, and thus propose a revised version on the Stoic’s behalf. Finally, in section 4.5, I end the chapter by presenting two ways Shun can respond to this revised objection.

4.2 Shun’s Theory of Indignation: Personal versus Detached

According to Shun (2015), indignation is a subset of anger in which I, the indignant person, am angry in response to the perception that someone (the victim) has been mistreated by another (the offender). By ‘mistreated,’ Shun means that I regard the offender’s actions as violations of norms or standards that I endorse and that I believe this violation has resulted in some sort of “tangible injury” to the victim (304). When I experience indignation, Shun argues that I view the actions of the offender as
“unacceptable” and “inappropriate” (305) and that my anger is likely a consequence of me caring about the norms or standards that were violated. Although I typically experience indignation on behalf of others, Shun specifies that I can feel indignant on my own behalf (much more on this point below). Finally, Shun notes that indignation often, but not always, motivates me towards action. I might be motivated to openly condemn the offender’s actions, and even might be motivated to intervene (perhaps physically) on the victim’s behalf.

There are at least two subsets of indignation: personal indignation and detached indignation. Personal indignation is held by Shun to be morally vicious, while it is unclear how exactly detachment is related to morally virtuous indignation (much more on this point in the next section). According to Shun, my indignation is personal when I take my mistreatment as a “personal affront” or “personal attack” (307). To be clear, this anger is more than the mere intellectual recognition that I am the victim, and not all indignation over my mistreatment counts as personal (as we will see below, some can be detached). What makes ‘indignation on my own behalf’ into ‘personal indignation’ is that I am angry that I personally have been victimized. As Shun writes, the perception that I am victimized must be given “weight” by me, and it must play a “prominent” role in my anger (311). Shun then reasons that personal indignation takes the offender’s mistreatment as expressing a lack of respect (306), “disregard” (305), or even “contempt” (305) towards me. Shun refers to attitudes like these three as “insulting” or “disgraceful” (306), explicitly flagging that he uses these two words synonymously.
Perhaps surprisingly, Shun argues that I can sometimes feel personal indignation when the victim is not me, but someone close to me. For example, Shun considers a case where my child is mistreated by an offender. According to Shun, I might feel personal indignation because I interpret the situation as an attack on me. As Shun writes: “the thought is not just that some injury has been done to my child, but that the offender is specifically doing this to my child... and showing contempt for me” (305). Elsewhere, Shun suggests that I cannot (or perhaps cannot easily) feel personal indignation on behalf of strangers or mere acquaintances, probably because these sorts of people are not in close enough relationships with me to take their mistreatment as a personal afront.

As far as I can tell, personal indignation has two elements. The first is that I take the mistreatment personally, meaning that I am angry at the fact that I myself am the victim of mistreatment. Although all indignation is anger in response to a victim being mistreated, personal indignation is anger in response to the victim being me. The second element involves anger at the perception that the mistreatment is disgraceful for the victim. For these reasons, we can say that anger is personal indignation if and only if it satisfies the following two conditions: (PI1) it is in response to a perception that I personally am the victim of mistreatment; and (PI2) it is in response to the disgrace caused by the mistreatment.

Let us move on to detached indignation. According to Shun, detached indignation has a “structural similarity” to the indignation that I feel on behalf of others (314). What
this description means is not immediately obvious. Shun introduces it in the following way:

I will… use the term “detached” to describe… the kind of structural similarity…

That is, not putting weight on the fact that it is me myself who has been treated inappropriately, my response to inappropriate treatment of myself is not structurally different from the way I would have responded if someone else were the victim. (314)

In a footnote, Shun clarifies that by “someone else,” he means someone with whom I have no close relationship, such as a stranger (see footnote 37).

In the above, Shun seems to be suggesting that the defining feature of detached indignation is that it satisfies a vicarious or impersonal version of PI1. In other words, rather than being angry at my own mistreatment, detached indignation is anger that some person has been mistreated, where it does not matter who the person is nor how she is related to me. As stated explicitly, my anger is detached indignation if and only if it satisfies the following: (DI1) it is the anger felt in response to a perception that someone has been the victim of mistreatment where it is irrelevant who this victim is. This interpretation of detached indignation is supported by Shun’s subsequent description of detached indignation, where he writes:

…not putting weight on the fact that it is me myself who has been treated inappropriately [i.e., DI1 is true], my response to inappropriate treatment of
myself is not structurally different from the way I would have responded if someone else were the victim. (314).

To be sure, detached indignation on my own behalf involves the awareness that I am the victim, but this fact plays no role in my anger. Someone who feels detached indignation on his own behalf “has a conception of his not having been treated in the way he should” but “this conception is not highlighted in his thoughts” (311).

Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to notice that Shun’s framework suggests the existence of two subsets of detached indignation. How so? Notice that detached indignation is any indignation that satisfies DI1. As such, my indignation can be detached if it satisfies DI1 but not PI2 (i.e., I am angry at the offender’s mistreatment of the victim but do not feel that this mistreatment is disgraceful or insulting to the victim), but also counts as detached when it satisfies both DI1 and PI2 (i.e., I am angry at the offender’s mistreatment of the victim as well as angry that this mistreatment is disgraceful or insulting for the victim). As far as I can tell, Shun assumes that only the former subset of detached indignation exists and does not mention the latter. As we shall see in the next section, this division is important as it shows that detached indignation cannot automatically count as morally virtuous (contra what Shun might be read as suggesting).

4.3 The Moral Value of Indignation

In the last section, I presented Shun’s theory of indignation, including his division between personal and detached indignation. I then argued that his theory suggests the
existence of two subsets of detached indignation: one which focuses only on the mistreatment of the victim and the other which focuses on mistreatment and disgrace.

With these distinctions in place, I will now examine the moral value of indignation. In my view, it is unclear how Shun connects detachment to morally virtuous indignation. As far as I can tell, the most that Shun writes is that morally virtuous indignation is “characterized” by being detached (315). Two possible interpretations present themselves: (1) detachment is necessary for indignation to be morally virtuous, and (2) detachment is sufficient for indignation to be morally virtuous. As I will argue in the next two subsections, Shun’s reasoning appears to reject (2) and perhaps endorse (1).

4.3.1 The Moral Wrongness of Personal Indignation

Here I will explain why Shun regards personal indignation as always morally wrong. I shall also make the case that his reasoning shows that detachment cannot be a sufficient condition for morally virtuous indignation.

One way to read Shun is that PI1 and PI2 are both morally wrong. Starting first with PI1, which Shun links with being “resentful” (305). According to Shun, I am resentful when I have bitter or hateful feelings towards an offender who has mistreated me. Although taking mistreatment personally does not always lead me to become resentful, I cannot be resentful without first taking the mistreatment personally. Shun writes: “Being resentful... involves one’s focusing on oneself and on the offender in the manner
described earlier, and so presupposes” taking mistreatment personally (305). Put simply, PI1 is a psychologically necessary but not sufficient condition for becoming resentful.

Shun then argues that being resentful is morally wrong for at least two reasons. The first is that if I am resentful, then I might develop vengeful feelings towards my offender. If these feelings are strong enough, then they might cause me to act out and take revenge (something Shun seems to assume is always morally wrong). The second is that if I am resentful, then I might dehumanize my offender. As Shun reasons, when I am resentful, there is always the temptation to see my offender “as somehow evil or less than human” (305). If so, then I might be inclined to tolerate or approve unjust treatment of this person.

Next, I examine the arguments against PI2. As far as I can tell, Shun associates PI2 with a false understanding of what is disgraceful. At the risk of distorting slightly, let us refer to this false understanding as to the folk theory of disgrace, since Shun seems to suggest it is the view of disgrace and insult held by most people. Under the folk theory of disgrace, an offender’s actions cause disgrace for the victim if they express ill will, disrespect, contempt, or disregard. Shun regards this theory as morally bad for two reasons. First, the folk theory of disgrace is associated with desiring revenge (which recall Shun assumes is morally bad). According to Shun, if I accept the folk theory of disgrace, then I regard disgrace as causing shame (chi). This shame represents a kind of impurity or contagion. Rather than trying to hide, shame in this sense motivates me to “cleanse [my]self of what is tainting,” which is accomplished by me “avenging the situation” (307). When the folk
theory of disgrace is widely held, it runs the risk of leading to bitter infighting and social disruption. For that reason, this view of disgrace was condemned by early Confucians (307).

The second reason against the folk theory of disgrace appears to be that it is false. Although I will not defend this reason, I will present Shun’s rationale for it here. Shun argues that the correct understanding of disgrace is suggested by the early Confucians, most notably Xunzi (3rd Century BCE). Shun explains:

…Xunzi’s own position… advocates [for] a transformation in what one regards as truly disgraceful. According to him, what we regard as disgraceful should not be tied to the way others view or treat us, but should be a matter of our own ethical conduct, which also includes the way we respond to others’ treatment of ourselves. (307)

Under this theory, hereafter the Confucian theory of disgrace, the only thing that is disgraceful is one’s own unethical conduct. Although an offender might injure me through mistreatment, the Confucian theory of disgrace entails she cannot disgrace me as the only person who can disgrace me is myself.

Although there is much more to be said about the Confucian theory of disgrace, I will not explore that matter here. Instead, notice that if Shun’s reasoning is sound, then both personal indignation and some subsets of detached indignation are morally vicious. As we saw above, Shun concludes that PI1 and PI2 are morally bad. Since personal indignation has PI1 and PI2 as necessary and sufficient conditions, we can now see why
Shun condemns it as morally vicious. However, similar reasoning applies to detached indignation that focuses on the disgrace suffered by the victim. Since this subset of detached indignation presupposes the folk theory of disgrace, it too is morally vicious. For this reason, we can reject the view that detachment is sufficient for morally virtuous indignation.

4.3.2 The Necessity of Detachment for Morally Virtuous Anger

In this subsection, I will suggest that detachment should be regarded merely as a necessary condition for morally virtuous indignation under Shun’s framework. To do so, I will examine Shun’s example of morally virtuous indignation and show that it is a case of detached indignation that focuses only on the fact that a victim was mistreated.

The example goes as follows: Suppose there is a morally virtuous Confucian official who seeks to institute moral and political reforms in a corrupt government. He is surrounded by political rivals who use their offices to secure personal benefits and regard the Confucian reforms as a threat to their power. For that reason, they spread vicious rumors about him. This slander tarnishes his legacy and impairs his ability to pass the legislation his country desperately needs.

According to Shun, this official will probably (but not necessarily) become indignant on his own behalf. Indeed, Shun even seems to suggest that the official might even be intensely angry, referring to the official’s interpretation of the situation as “deeply hurtful” (310). However, Shun’s presentation makes clear that this indignation is not
personal, and the official does not regard this mistreatment as disgraceful. Instead, the official is angry only at the fact that a person (himself) was mistreated by his rivals. To see why I will make three points: (a) the official’s anger satisfies DI1, (b) it does not satisfy PI1, and (c) it does not satisfy PI2.

I will begin with (b). According to Shun, although the official certainly recognizes that he is a victim, he does not take the mistreatment personally, as Shun is careful to explain:

…he has a conception of his not having been treated in the way he should and is aware of the inappropriate attitude others display toward him in such treatment. Even so, this conception is not highlighted in his thoughts, which are not focused on the way he has been treated and is not linked to a desire to assert himself to counter the attitude that others display. (311)

As the above passage suggests, the official’s anger does not satisfy PI1. Shun reasons that the official, therefore, avoids several of the moral pitfalls associated with PI1 highlighted in the last subsection. Most notably, the official “is not vulnerable to resentful feelings” and does not feel “the urge to take revenge” (311).

Turning to (c), the official does not regard the mistreatment he suffers as disgraceful. As suggested by the last subsection, the official holds the Confucian theory of disgrace, meaning that the only thing that is disgraceful is one’s own unethical conduct. Shun explains:
What would be truly shameful to [the official] would be if he had responded in problematic ways to the situation, such as by acting out of vindictiveness. This he would regard as true disgrace, but something that he alone can do to himself. (315) Put differently, what would be truly disgraceful in the eyes of the official would be to “let himself be corrupted by this political environment,” resulting in him becoming “a lesser person” (310). For these reasons, we can see that the official’s anger fails to satisfy PI2.

Finally, let us turn to (a). Shun argues that the official’s anger is directed only at the fact that someone was mistreated. As stated above, although the official is aware that he himself is the victim of this mistreatment, this fact plays no part in his anger. Shun writes that the official’s “anger is directed at the problematic behavior of others, not at what was done to him” personally (313). For this reason, Shun concludes that the official’s anger is detached since it is “not structurally different from the way [he] would have responded if someone else were the victim” (313). The official’s anger, therefore, satisfies DI1 but does not satisfy PI1 or PI2, and so it follows that it is an instance of detached indignation that focuses only on mistreatment. That fact, combined with Shun’s earlier claim that morally virtuous indignation is characterized by detachment, should lead us to believe that detachment is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for morally virtuous indignation.

4.4 Seneca and the Objection to Morally Virtuous Indignation

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In the last section, I offered Shun’s analysis of the moral value of indignation. I argued that detachment appears to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for morally virtuous indignation. In the remainder of this chapter, I will develop and respond to an objection to this position suggested by Seneca. I will conclude that this objection is too strong, and offer a modification on the Stoic’s behalf. I thus end the chapter by offering two responses for Shun to this modified version of the objection.

4.4.1 The Senecan Objection

The objection to Shun comes from Seneca’s On Anger. Early in Book 2, Seneca considers the following proposal from his interlocutor:

Moral virtue demands we become angry when we witness wrongdoing and dishonorable conduct (2.6.1).

(Astute readers will immediately notice that this proposal is stronger than Shun’s own position. More on this point momentarily.) Seneca offers a series of objections to this claim (see 2.6.2-4), but ultimately settles on a reductio. It goes:

And yet if the wise man should always be angry at shameful behavior and be riled and gloomy because of criminal behavior, he must be the most troubled man in the world: he’ll pass his entire life in anger and grief. Will there be an instant when he’ll not see things worthy of reproach? Whenever he leaves his house he’ll have to make his way through crowds of criminals and people who are greedy, spendthrift, shameless—and prosperous because of those very vices. There’ll be
nowhere he can turn his glance without finding some source of indignation: he
won’t have the strength to rouse himself to anger as often as the provocation
demands. (2.7.1-3)

Here we see that Seneca is describing a subset of anger where the virtuous person is angry
at the constant mistreatment of those around him. He even writes that this mistreatment
constantly provokes the virtuous person’s indignation (*indignatio* in Latin). For that
reason, and because Seneca condemns all anger, we can read this passage as including
Shun’s detached indignation within its scope. I will thus interpret the objection as
targeting detached indignation, even though Seneca intends it as a rebuttal of all forms of
vicarious anger.

Insofar as the argument is concerned, Seneca’s reasoning appears to have four
steps. First, Seneca assumes for the sake of reductio that the virtuous person will
experience detached indignation in response to witnessing mistreatment. For ease of
discussion, let us refer to the virtuous person ‘witnessing mistreatment’ as a ‘provocation.’
Although there are many provocations for anger, for this chapter I will restrict my use of
‘provocations’ only to instances where a victim has been mistreated by an offender in a
way that the virtuous person regards as a violation of norms or standards. Stated in this
way, the first step is to suppose that the virtuous person feels detached indignation
whenever he encounters a provocation.

Second, Seneca argues that provocations are near-constant, widespread, and
unavoidable. Although many might dispute this claim as pessimistic, Seneca insists upon
it. He devotes multiple paragraphs to describing just how unavoidable mistreatment is, referring to it as a “pandemic” (2.10.4). Seneca’s view appears to suggest that the only way the virtuous person can avoid being constantly provoked to detached indignation would be to withdraw from society and live alone, as non-wise persons are inherently selfish and morally vicious (2.10.6).

Third, Seneca concludes from the first two steps that the virtuous person will be indignant most of the time. After all, it stands to reason that if (1) the virtuous person encounters provocations constantly throughout his day, and if (2) he becomes indignant (in the detached sense) at every provocation, then (3) he will spend most of his day angry.

Fourth, Seneca treats the third step as a reductio. He appears to offer two reasons. The first reason is that humans cannot be angry all of the time. The second reason is that being angry all of the time, even if somehow psychologically possible, would make the virtuous person miserable. Although Seneca does not elaborate on his second reason, it is intuitive. Near-constant anger is exhausting, bad for one’s mental and physical health, and leaves no room for positive emotions, like happiness or joy. It is worth mentioning that Shun too would regard the third step is undesirable. For him, the virtuous person has a “natural emotional calmness” and values tranquility (2015, 316). Although this calmness permits occasional anger, Shun suggests it does not allow the virtuous person to be so angry that he is miserable. I will return to these claims in the next subsection.

In my view, Shun has at least two responses to this Senecan Objection. First, he can argue that the supposition is too strong to capture his actual position. Second, he can
deny Seneca’s second step, that mistreatment is so prevalent in the society that it is constant and unavoidable for the virtuous person. I will start with the second response.

Although society certainly has more than its fair share of norm violations, Shun might argue that it does not have so many that the virtuous person would be provoked to anger nearly all of the time. After all, the number of norm violations in a community is an empirical question, and it does not automatically follow that the virtuous person finds himself in a community where that number is outrageously high. In my view, this response is not persuasive. Charitably read, Seneca’s objection is intended to be theoretical. He appears to be pointing out that if one holds that the virtuous person is required to feel indignation whenever provoked, then one is also committed to the conclusion that the virtuous person can be so angry that he is miserable. Put differently, we can modify the second step into a hypothetical without doing damage to Seneca’s overall argument. Thus, if one thinks that the virtuous person cannot be miserable, then one should also think there is something wrong with the original supposition, or so Seneca can be read as arguing.

Let us now examine the first response. Shun can rightly argue that the first step is too strong. Notice that Seneca suggests that the virtuous person will become indignant whenever he is provoked. As Seneca repeatedly puts it, his opponent’s position is the following: mistreatment “demands” indignation from the virtuous person (2.7.2, see also 2.9.4). Shun’s position is significantly weaker. It is only that the virtuous person might experience indignation when provoked. Nowhere does Shun indicate that the perception
of mistreatment is a sufficient condition for the virtuous person’s indignation. Therefore, Shun can reject the Senecan Objection and argue it does not follow from his position that the virtuous person will be miserable when surrounded by constant provocations since there is no requirement that he be indignant in response.

### 4.4.2 Revising the Senecan Objection

Although the Senecan Objection is unsuccessful, the Stoic can modify it in such a way that it poses a problem for Shun’s weaker position. To start, the Stoic can call attention to Shun’s elsewhere claims that the virtuous person is sometimes required to be indignant. One example is when the victim is a close friend or family member of the virtuous person. Shun writes that the virtuous person often feels “obligated” to be indignant on this victim’s behalf (303). Shun is explicitly endorsing a Confucian normative ideal, under which “emotional obligations” are “grounded in different social relations” (303). What Shun appears to be suggesting is that the nature of the relationship between the virtuous person and the victim generates certain emotional obligations for the virtuous person. One such obligation is the demand to become indignant over mistreatment, which appears to exist (at least some of the time) when the victim is a close friend or family member.

To be clear, Shun is not suggesting that the virtuous person takes the mistreatment of close friends or family personally. In an endnote, he explains that when satisfying this obligation for indignation, the virtuous person still feels detached indignation that focuses
only on the mistreatment of the victim, without being angry that the victim was his close friend or family member. As Shun clarifies, although the virtuous person tends to regard himself as “connected to all humans,” he also holds that “differential relations to [him] might make appropriate a differentiation in obligation and emotional engagement” (endnote 32). The virtuous person’s indignation is thus “structurally unaffected” by the nature of the relationship, even if the obligation for indignation is not (endnote 32).

In any event, the Stoic can present the following objection. Suppose some provocations obligate the virtuous person to become indignant. Let us call these sorts of provocations obligatory provocations. The Stoic can thus modify Seneca’s example as so: Suppose the virtuous person finds himself in a corrupt society where (a) people constantly mistreat one another, and (b) a sufficiently large number of these mistreatments count as obligatory provocations for the virtuous person. Since Shun does not offer a complete analysis of obligatory provocations, it is unclear what this set of circumstances would look like. Even so, the Stoic can assume that it is prima facie possible for this set of circumstances to obtain. If Shun disagrees, then the Stoic will insist that the burden of proof is on him to explain why.

In any event, the Stoic can ask: Does the virtuous person in this set of circumstances live up to all of his obligations for indignation or not? Shun can answer either ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ If ‘yes,’ then the virtuous person becomes indignant at every one of these obligatory provocations, and thus is miserable because he spends most of his time angry. Seneca’s original conclusion still seems to follow. If ‘no,’ then the virtuous person
might avoid being miserable, but has nevertheless failed to satisfy at least some of his
obligations for indignation. After all, he failed to be indignant at some mistreatments that
he believes deserved his indignation. Thus, it appears that Shun is left with the following
dilemma: Either the virtuous person is miserable or fails to satisfy his obligations.

4.5 Responding to the Revised Senecan Objection

I will end the chapter by offering two ways that Shun can avoid this dilemma. The
first way is the following: If the virtuous person finds himself surrounded by obligatory
provocations, then he will retreat from society and cease interacting with most other
people. As Shun (2015) writes, in times of widespread mistreatment and injustice, for
which the virtuous person can do nothing to better the situation, he will seek to “[avoid]
the frustration with… corruption” and withdraw into “private life” (318). It is unclear how
far from society the virtuous person will withdraw, but some of Shun’s remarks suggest
that he might become something of a recluse. As Shun writes, the virtuous person will not
become a hermit but will limit his interactions to only his “students and close associates”
(319). Shun points to Confucius as an example. Near the end of his life, Confucius
withdrew from society out of frustration over entrenched moral corruption. Confucius
told his students:

Show yourself when the Way prevails and hide yourself when the Way falls into
disuse. It is shameful to be poor and humble when the Way prevails in the state,
and it is equally shameful to be wealthy and noble when the Way falls into disuse in the state. (*Analects* 8:13, translation Shun)

As Shun elaborates, the above highlights a common thread in Confucian thought, namely that in times of extreme moral corruption, the virtuous person withdraws from society and engages only with a small group of like-minded people (see also Hourdequin 2010).

In response, the Stoic might ask: Why does the virtuous person withdraw from society in times of widespread corruption? Shun gives two answers. The first answer is to avoid slipping into moral vice. If one is surrounded by wrongdoers getting away with their misconduct, then a virtuous person might be tempted to compromise his ethical standards to ensure that they get what they have coming (319). The second—which is relevant to our case—is to avoid being miserable. As suggested earlier, Shun holds that the virtuous person values tranquility and calmness of mind (317-319). Since the virtuous person is surrounded by obligatory provocations, he would withdraw from society to not waste “emotional energy” and avoid being “bitter and resentful” (316). By limiting his exposure to these provocations, the virtuous person thus limits how often he is required to be angry.

I wish to raise two points here. (1) This answer highlights a crucial difference between Shun and the Stoic. For the Stoic, the virtuous person is invulnerable. A consequence of this view is that there are no circumstances that could ever make the virtuous person miserable. *Contra* Shun, the Stoic would insist the virtuous person never needs to limit his interactions with others to maintain his moral virtue or tranquility. Shun
disagrees. According to him, the virtuous person is not completely invulnerable, but instead, his virtue and tranquility are susceptible to outside influence. To be clear, Shun does not view the virtuous person as vulnerable in the same way as an ordinary person. Where it is often easy for an ordinary person to succumb to moral vice, this outcome appears profoundly difficult for the virtuous person. Shun thus describes the virtuous person as invulnerable “in a sense” (315). What Shun appears to mean is that the virtuous person understands that although others might injure him, they cannot disgrace him, since the only disgrace would be his unethical conduct. That said, the difference between the Stoic and Shun can be put as follows: The Stoic argues the virtuous person cannot be tempted to moral vice, while Shun admits that such temptation is possible. For that reason, the Stoic sees no need for the virtuous person to ever retreat from society, while Shun admits that the virtuous person might sometimes be required to.

(2) The Stoic might object that it is morally vicious to withdraw from society to preserve one’s own tranquility. After all, it seems to prioritize one’s own mental well-being over the material well-being of others who the virtuous person knows are continually suffering mistreatment. Although I will not fully defend Shun here, he does seem to suggest that the virtuous person will retreat from society only as a last resort. As Shun argues, the virtuous person withdraws only when corruption is so widespread that “there is nothing that he could do to counter the corruption and bring about [any moral] reform” (318). In any event, this first response is controversial and probably unsatisfying for most, so I will set it aside.
Let us move on to Shun’s second possible response, which does not appear to require that the virtuous person retreat from society. Under this second response, a necessary condition for an obligatory provocation is that the virtuous person is capable of doing something to correct the underlying mistreatment. Stated differently, if there is nothing that the virtuous person can do to improve the situation for the better, then the provocation is not obligatory. A direct corollary of this necessary condition appears to be that if provocations are so numerous that they start to overwhelm the virtuous person’s abilities to help the victim, then they cease being obligatory.

This move is suggested by Shun’s discussion of le (‘joy’) and ming (‘fate’ or ‘destiny’). Le is a sense of joyful and relaxed contentment, which is the result of contemplating one’s morally virtuous conduct amidst difficult situations (317). In this way, le is “not a state of emotional exhilaration or excitement,” but rather a state “of calmly and contentedly moving along with the flow of things, unobstructed and without deliberate effort” (317). In the case of rampant mistreatment, Shun suggests that the virtuous person will not feel indignant, but rather instead feel le at his virtuous conduct amidst troubling times. Shun writes:

[The virtuous person surrounded by mistreatment] accepts the unfortunate situation he is in and takes contentment in following the ethical path and in knowing that whatever treatment he [or others] might have received, he has not been diminished in any way that is of significance. Though he might still be pained
by the situation, he at the same time takes on a more detached posture that enables him to stay emotionally unaffected. (317)

Shun further explains that this state of mind is not “joy in the usual sense” (317), but rather something like contentment, that the virtuous person is doing the best that he can do given the unfortunate circumstances.

This sense of le is bolstered by ming, which is “[an attitude of] willingly accepting unfavorable conditions of life that are not within one’s control or are of such a nature that altering them requires improper conduct” (20). Shun explains that the virtuous person regards these additional provocations (i.e., the ones that he is incapable of doing something about) as under the control of Heaven and thus part of fate. Here Shun cites Confucius, who explains:

If the Way prevails, it is ming; if the Way falls into disuse, it is ming… (Analects 14.36, translation Shun 2015)

Taken together, Shun argues that the virtuous person will therefore feel a kind of joyous equanimity towards these otherwise obligatory provocations (318).

The above thus presents the following response to the Stoic: It is a necessary condition for an obligatory provocation that the virtuous person be able to do something to improve the situation for the better. If the number of prima facie obligatory provocations overwhelms the virtuous person, then many (or most) of them must be non-obligatory. Rather than feeling anger at the additional provocations, the virtuous person will instead greet them with le (joy at his virtuous conduct in handling what he can), and ming (a sense
of fate that much of the situation is out of his hands). For that reason, even if the virtuous person is surrounded by otherwise obligatory provocations, it does not follow that he will be so angry that he is miserable. Rather, he will be angry at the few provocations he can genuinely do something about and regard the rest as mīng. For that reason, Shun can reject the Stoic’s dilemma.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter critically examined Shun’s analysis of morally virtuous anger. I first offered a summary of Shun’s theory of indignation, arguing that there were two subsets of detached indignation: one that focuses only on mistreatment, and the other that focuses on mistreatment and disregard. Afterward, I presented an analysis of the moral value of indignation. I argued that many of Shun’s reasons against personal indignation also count against the second subset of detached indignation, thus suggesting that detachment cannot be a sufficient condition for morally virtuous indignation. I then presented Shun with a different objection from Seneca. Ultimately, I rejected this objection as too strong and offered a revised version. I ended by offering two responses to this dilemma on Shun’s behalf.

Unfortunately, this chapter did not directly address an emerging disagreement between the Stoic and Shun on the nature of tranquility. For the Stoic, anger of any shape or form is a mental disturbance and thus incompatible with me being tranquil. One way to read Shun is by offering an opposing conception of tranquility, under which a certain
amount of detached indignation is compatible with me remaining tranquil. Thus, the Stoic views the tranquil agent as anger-free, while Shun holds that the tranquil agent can be angry sometimes. If we think that tranquility is a moral good, then it is worthwhile to determine if tranquility requires eliminating all negative emotions (as the Stoic insists), or whether it is compatible with some amount of negative emotionality (as Shun suggests).
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have sought to explore, clarify, and critically evaluate philosophical issues concerning anger raised by the Stoics and Buddhists. I first investigated how these two traditions classify anger by presenting the case of Homer, a person who feels a short-lived, hostile, and negative emotion in response to being wronged. I argued that Stoics and Buddhists offer different answers as to whether or not Homer was angry. I considered two objections from Stoicism directed at the Buddhist answer. I argued that although the first objection is unsound, the second is more plausible and warrants serious consideration. Even so, I ultimately concluded that the second objection rests on an equivocation. Through the discussion, I highlighted that the Stoic and Buddhist have deep conceptual and empirical disagreements over what emotions are under our control.

I then considered the early Buddhist metaphysical arguments for anger eliminativism, with an eye toward how they are understood in the current philosophical literature. I clarified the relationship between Buddhism’s anatta and the rejection of anger. I considered a version of the Buddhist argument against anger offered by Shoemaker, concluded that it was grounded in a misunderstanding of anatta, and offered a more accurate version of the argument. I then addressed a series of objections to Buddhism from Shoemaker, all of which sought to defend blaming anger. I ended the
chapter by presenting my objection to Buddhism, that there is nothing inconsistent in Buddhist metaphysics with feeling anger at anger itself.

Next, I considered arguments implicating anger eliminativism found in the Stoic tradition. I responded to an interpretation of Stoicism proposed by Gill. Under this interpretation, Stoics purchase their rejection of anger by arguing that we ought to adopt the objective standpoint in response to those who wrong us. I argued that Gill’s interpretation is mistaken as he equivocates between two distinct senses of mental illness found in the Stoic literature: mania (the mental illness suffered by the non-wise) and melancholia (the mental illness suffered by those subject to erratic thoughts and impressions). I argue that although Stoics agree wrongdoers suffer from mania, they deny that wrongdoers typically suffer from melancholia, which is the sort of mental illness that warrants the objective standpoint. I also addressed the substance of Gill’s interpretation. Under my reading, the Stoic literature suggests that wrongdoers are typically participants in ordinary interpersonal relationships and not proper targets of the objective standpoint.

Finally, I considered how Stoicism might intersect with Confucian thinking on anger. To accomplish this task, I considered Shun’s Confucian-inspired theory of detached indignation. I presented and developed an anticipatory objection to Shun gestured at by Seneca, which holds that if indignation is morally good, then the morally virtuous person will be indignant all of the time. After arguing that this objection is too strong, I offered a revised weaker version that presents a problem for Shun. I concluded by offering two responses to this revised objection on Shun’s behalf.
Traditional arguments that we ought to rid ourselves of anger—despite being insisted upon by some schools of philosophical thought—have received little serious attention in contemporary literature. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum (2016) and Owen Flanagan (2016) are certainly helping to remedy this error. I hope that this dissertation makes a positive contribution as well. Although I have not argued that these arguments are sound, I wish to have shown that there is much to be gained by philosophically engaging with them. Although many of us might deny that anger ever can truly be eliminated, engaging with these arguments and traditions can expand our horizons about what sorts of emotional lives are possible and worth aspiring towards.
Bibliography


Biography

Bobby Bingle received his Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics from Saginaw Valley State University’s College of Education in 2008 and Master of Arts in Philosophy from Georgia State University in 2016. He is the author of “Blaming the Buddha: Buddhism and Moral Responsibility,” published in Sophia in 2019, and is co-author of The Happiness Agenda: Why Happiness is Not the Answer, which is forthcoming with Columbia University Press. Bobby began his doctoral studies at Duke University’s Department of Philosophy in 2016. During his time there, he has benefitted from the Duke Graduate Student Fellowship, Summer Research Fellowship, Kenan Graduate Fellowship in Ethics, Bass Instructional Fellowship, and Evan Frankel Fellowship.