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Anger and the virtues: a critical study in virtue individuation

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle and others suggest that a single virtue – 'good temper' – pertains specifically to anger. I argue that if good temper is a single virtue, it is constituted by aspects of a combination of other virtues. I present three categories of anger-relevant virtues – those that (potentially) dispose one to anger; those that delay, mitigate, and qualify anger; and those required for effortful anger control – and show how virtues in each category make distinct contributions to good temper. In addition to clarifying the relationship between anger and the virtues, my analysis has theoretical implications for virtue individuation more generally, and practical implications for character cultivation.

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Introduction

A venerable tradition has it that a single virtue pertains specifically to anger. Take Aristotle.[1] He notes that this virtue is unnamed (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV.5), but calls it πραοτης, which is translated variously: good temper, mildness, meekness, and gentleness. Good temper (as I'll refer to it hereafter) is said to be a mean between two extremes, which also lack names, but which Aristotle calls irascibility (οργιλοτης) and inirascibility (αοργησια). In one sense, this way of dividing up the trait landscape should not surprise us: we commonly speak of people as having good or bad temper, and Aristotle rightly thinks that getting one's anger right is an essential element of a good life. But in another sense, good temper is an odd duck in the Aristotelian scheme. While some moral traditions differentiate multiple 'emotion virtues,' each with its own characteristic emotion (e.g. gratitude, compassion, hope, etc.), Aristotle typically individuates virtues by their respective spheres of human activity – temperance concerns

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gustatory and sexual pleasures; liberality, wealth; magnanimity, attitudes and actions pertaining to one's own worth; and so on – with various emotions potentially expressing diverse virtues and vices, depending on the circumstances. One possible exception to this pattern is courage.[2] But courage also differs from good temper (and the other emotion virtues), for Aristotle says it coordinates *two* emotions, not one, and is only concerned with a narrow range of those emotions: fear and confidence while facing death on the battlefield (*NE* III.6). The relationships between particular emotions and virtues, it seems, can be messy.[3]

One way to clean up the mess is to assimilate the emotion virtues to a sphere-based virtue individuation scheme. Nussbaum (1988, 35) suggests a way to do this: good temper is the virtue governing the 'attitude to slights and damages' sphere. While this interpretation deviates from Aristotle's language when introducing good temper, it fits fairly well with the rest of his discussion. Still, I think it is not the way to go. Nussbaum irons out the kinks in Aristotle's account. But some kinks are in order. In my view, Aristotle is right not to stick to his sphere-based individuation scheme, but he oversimplifies anger's relationship to character.

My central interest is not Aristotle's particular view, but the more general problem to which it points. When we individuate virtues we have to assign them their functions in the moral life, and if we think there is more than one virtue, we are committed to assigning different functions to different virtues.[4] Anger can express a variety of virtues and vices, often simultaneously. And different virtues have distinct functions with respect to anger. In what follows, I argue that if good temper is a single virtue, it is constituted by aspects of a combination of other virtues. I present three categories of anger-relevant virtues, and show how aspects of the virtues in each category contribute to good temper. In addition to clarifying the complex relationship between anger and character, my analysis has important theoretical implications for virtue individuation more generally, and practical implications for character cultivation. But first, a few words about the nature of anger.

What is anger?

In light of the structural and functional parallels between sense perception and emotion, several philosophers and psychologists have defended their own perceptual theories of emotion, each sharing the core idea that emotions are perceptions of value (e.g. de Sousa 1987; Roberts 2003, 2013; Zagzebski 2004). On this view, emotions are not reducible to bodily feelings, even if feelings typically accompany emotions.[5] And although we often believe what our emotions present to us, and our beliefs commonly affect our emotions, emotions are not judgments.[6] Rather, an emotion is a kind of appraisal, a quick 'sizing up' of the scenarios in which we find ourselves. More formally, emotions are 'states in which the subject grasps, with a kind of perceptual immediacy, a significance of

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his or her situation' (Roberts 2007, 11). For instance, in awe, the emotion's object is presented as being surpassingly great; in fear, the object makes a threatening impression; in hope, some aspect of one's future looks bright.

I lack the space to defend this account of emotion. For in-depth discussion and defense, see the literature cited above. My aim is to explicate and apply the view in the service of moral psychological wisdom.

So, if emotions are evaluative perceptions, what is anger? Consider the case of Walter Berglund:

> Late on a dismal afternoon in March, in cold and greasy drizzle, Walter rode with his assistant, Lalitha, up from Charleston into the mountains of southern West Virginia. Although Lalitha was a fast and somewhat reckless driver, Walter had come to prefer the anxiety of being her passenger to the judgmental anger that consumed him when he was at the wheel – the seemingly inescapable sense that, of all the drivers on the road, only he was traveling at exactly the right speed, only he was striking an appropriate balance between too punctiliously obeying traffic rules and too dangerously flouting them. In the last two years, he'd spent a lot of angry hours on the roads of West Virginia, tailgating the idiotic slowpokes and then slowing down himself to punish the rude tailgaters, ruthlessly defending the inner lane of interstates from [jerks] trying to pass him on the right, passing on the right himself when some fool or cellphone yakker or sanctimonious speed-limit enforcer clogged the inner lane, … muttering 'Unbelievable! Unbelievable!' when a driver ahead of him braked for a green light and then accelerated through yellow and left him stranded at red, boiling when he waited *a full minute* at intersections with no cross traffic visible *for miles*, and painfully swallowing, for Lalitha's sake, the invective he yearned to vent when stymied by a driver refusing to make a legal right turn on red: 'Hello? Get a clue? The world consists of more than just you! Other people have reality! Learn to drive! Hello!' Better the adrenaline rush of Lalitha's flooring the gas to pass uphill-struggling trucks than the stress on his cerebral arteries of taking the wheel himself and remaining stuck behind those trucks. This way, he could look out at the gray matchstick Appalachian woods and the mining-ravaged ridges and direct his anger at problems more worthy of it. (Franzen 2010, 290–291)[7]

Walter's driving-infraction-radar is always on alert. He has a clear vision of how his time behind the wheel should look, and sees the contravention of that vision not merely as an inconvenience, but *as an offense*, an injustice of serious magnitude. Moreover, it is clear to Walter that these offenses have agential roots: they have been perpetrated by other drivers, whom he sees *as offenders*. These 'fools' have not done wrong inadvertently; they are culpable for their malefactions. (If Walter were convinced that they had legitimate excuses, or if they simply raised an apologetic hand as he passed them, his anger would likely abate to some degree.) The other drivers and their transgressions seem to be the focus of Walter's emotional vision. But they are not all he sees. Walter also sees himself – along with the 'other people [who] have reality' – as having been *offended*. Bad driving, in Walter's eyes, is not a victimless crime; and he is among the victims. In sum, then, Walter's anger – and anger generally – is partially constituted by

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an interpretive template of offense: it is a three-term situational 'take,' involving an offens*e*, an offend*er*, and an offend*ed*.

A further feature of Walter's anger is that he sees himself *as being in a moral position to judge* the other drivers. He has an 'inescapable sense' that he alone is a model motorist, so he has a privileged perspective – a moral perch – from which to look down on others and condemn their failures. To see that this self-construal is an element of anger, imagine that as Walter fumes over the car currently hugging his bumper Lalitha points out – perhaps with a twinkle in her eye – how much the 'rude tailgater's' actions resemble Walter's treatment of 'idiotic slowpokes.' Provided that Walter doesn't simply blow up at Lalitha for pointing out his shortcomings (a very real possibility), and instead comes to see himself as guilty of the same crime he is judging, he will be knocked off his judgment seat. Undoubtedly this would dampen his anger to some extent. It is hard to look down on others when we have been put on their level.

The last feature of Walter's anger I will point out is his *desire for 'pay back*.'[8] He is quite explicit about this: he slows down to 'punish' tailgaters. That same impulse would likely yield a certain pleasure in Walter were he to see the 'jerk' who passed him on the right receiving a ticket. It might also color the way Walter passes 'sanctimonious speed-limit enforcers,' conspicuously revving his engine or aggressively cutting back into the inner lane to sting them for their blameworthy ineptitude.

Anger, then, is a complex appraisal. It presents our situation to us in terms of offense, offender, and offended; it presents us to ourselves as being in a moral position to judge; and it breeds in us a desire for pay back.[9] As such, anger can fit its target: offenses are real, we are sometimes in a position to judge, and punishment is sometimes needed. But hazards abound. Our anger is often misdirected or selectively self-centered; and even when it is not, it often flares up too quickly, blazes too hot, or burns out too slowly. In my view, multiple virtues are needed to get our anger right. I begin to make that argument in the next section.

Anger and virtue(s)

Aristotle thinks good temper is the virtue with respect to anger – the mean between irascibility and inirascibility. Some of his language notwithstanding, the mean here should not be thought of as a merely quantitative measure, as though the virtuous have their internal thermostat perpetually set to 'medium anger.' Rather, the good tempered are angry 'at the right things and towards the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time and for the right length of time' (Aristotle 1985, 105; *NE* IV.5). There are many ways to go wrong here, and Aristotle discusses several varieties of excess and deficiency with regard to anger, including the 'hot-tempered,' the 'choleric,' the 'sulky,' and the 'slavish,' among other unnamed vicious characters. To my mind, this variety suggests

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that the simple vice-of-deficiency/virtue/vice-of-excess scheme is inadequate. Yet it remains a popular model for thinking about anger.

One recent proponent of a broadly Aristotelian approach is Zac Cogley. Like Aristotle, Cogley struggles to name *the* anger virtue. He settles for 'patience,' but expresses dissatisfaction with the term, and even tries to avoid using it, since he thinks virtue can require great anger, while 'patience' has a ring of 'passivity and quietude' (Cogley 2014, 200). In his view, the virtuous person's anger is excellent with regard to three functions: (1) appraisal of wrongdoing, (2) action motivation, and (3) communication. That is, a person is 'angrily virtuous' when 'her anger is fitting, it motivates her to take assertively resistant actions, and she communicates her anger to others with nuanced attention to appropriate social norms governing its display' (217). In Aristotelian fashion, Cogley identifies two anger vices – meekness and wrath – the former being a deficiency with regard to all three of anger's functions, the latter, a triple excess. But also like Aristotle, Cogley ultimately finds the dyadic vice scheme inadequate, for he notes that one could be viciously excessive or deficient in only one or two of anger's functions, and highlights the existence of other common anger-related vice terms (e.g. 'furious' and 'resentful') that don't map neatly onto his 'meekness' and 'wrath' (217–220).

The trouble that Aristotle and Cogley have in identifying and naming *the* anger virtue and its correlated vices is not primarily a vocabulary problem. Rather, their diction difficulty points to a deeper deficiency of the single-virtue take on anger. Anger can express a variety of virtues and vices (e.g. love, justice, self-respect, arrogance, impatience, etc.). And different virtues have distinct functions with respect to anger (see below). I do not deny that we can appropriately speak of 'good' or 'bad' temper. But treating 'the disposition to proper anger' as a single virtue, without delineating its many and various parts, inevitably oversimplifies human psychology. In what follows, I argue that the good tempered need *several* dispositions (which we may collectively refer to as a single meta-disposition), and that each of these (sub-)dispositions also features centrally in some other virtue.[10] In other words, the virtue of good temper is constituted by aspects of a combination of other virtues, each of which can be expressed through one's anger (or lack thereof).

Let me clarify my view by contrasting it with another. Those who defend the 'unity of the virtues' claim (roughly) that a person cannot have any virtue without having the others (see Adams 2006, chapter 10). Aristotle held a view like this (*NE* VI.13). In response to my complaint, he might say, 'Sure, one cannot have good temper without the other virtues: the intemperate may get inappropriately angry when their disordered desires for food are thwarted; the vainglorious may be angered when their desire for glory is frustrated; etc. But virtues are individuated by the domains of activity for which they equip us to act excellently, and good temper is the virtue related to dealing with offenses. That good temper

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depends on the other virtues isn't an objection to treating it as a distinct virtue, for *all* the virtues depend on each other.'

I am not merely saying that one must be, say, temperate and humble to be good tempered. Rather, I am suggesting that even if the virtues are individuated in part by their respective spheres of activity, *multiple* virtues contribute directly to dealing with offenses. Indeed, if we begin by attending to anger's relationships to this broader set of virtues, we might find that there is no *further* work for an *additional* virtue of good temper to do (see below). We still might have reason to try to describe a virtue whose special province is anger. But in so doing, we must avoid the pitfall of isolating one aspect of the complex meta-disposition we call 'good temper' (e.g. patience) and treating it as *the* anger virtue, thus overlooking the roles other virtues play in getting one's anger right.

How, then, should we proceed? I think Cogley is onto something in focusing on 'functions' in his analysis of virtuous anger. I suggest, though, that we would do better to think through the functions *of the various virtues that relate to anger*, being guided by anger's grammar. Recall that anger is a perception of blameworthy offense wherein the subject sees herself as in a moral position to judge, and which produces a desire for pay back. As such, anger, like the other emotions, is an expression of *concern*:[11] 'You don't get angry unless you *care*' (DeYoung 2009, 121–122; italics original). In other words, to be disposed to anger's way of seeing, one must care about something in such a way that the contravention of one's concern is perceived in anger's terms (i.e. as a blameworthy offense). For anger to be *proper*, the agent must care about the right things in the right way, so that *genuine* offenses are the only ones that *look* like offenses, and so that her anger has the right texture, duration, etc. The relevant concerns and correlated perceptual sensitivities include not only those that make culpable offenses emotionally salient, but also those that attune the agent to factors that should rule out, mitigate, delay, or qualify anger. Collectively, these dispositions would make one virtuously anger-ready. But if even the best (actual) humans are subject to some inappropriate anger (as I'll assume), fine-tuning one's anger also requires whatever psychological characteristics enable agents to control their anger actively. Thus, if good temper is a single virtue, it is, in reality, a complex meta-disposition made up of various sub-dispositions (concerns, perceptual sensitivities, and self-management strengths), each of which makes its own contribution to the rightness of the subject's anger.

In what follows, I attempt to analyze the virtue of good temper by deciphering its parts.[12] To highlight the distinct roles that aspects of various virtues play in good temper's psychological makeup, I begin with these other virtues, which fall into three categories: (1) virtues that (potentially) dispose one to anger; (2) virtues that delay, mitigate, and qualify anger; and (3) virtues for effortful anger control. Once we see how anger relates to these virtues, it will become apparent that each of good temper's sub-dispositions is also a constituent of some other virtue. My analysis does not imply that good temper isn't a real virtue;

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but it does complicate and clarify our understanding of anger's relationship to the virtues (plural). Moreover, it has important theoretical implications for how we individuate the virtues, and practical implications for character cultivation.

Before getting to the analysis, though, a procedural remark is needed. There are deep divides both within and across moral outlooks about both anger's normative standards and the trait(s) that make for virtuous anger. An exhaustive comparative study is not possible here, but it will be instructive if we keep an eye on the differences one's moral outlook might make to one's understanding of the relationship between anger and character. Thus, as I sketch several putative anger-relevant virtues,[13] I'll note some ways that Aristotelian, Christian, and Stoic understandings might diverge.[14]

Virtues that (potentially) dispose one to anger

The Stoics capture the insight that anger is concern-based when they prescribe detachment as the chief anger cure. By non-Stoic lights, though, this prescription poisons the patient. For even if *partial* detachment is a wise way of correcting one's anger, there are many goods that we should 'be for' (in Robert Adams's terminology), and passionately so. 'Being for the good' is a diverse notion, encompassing 'loving it, liking it, respecting it, wanting it, wishing for it, appreciating it, thinking highly of it,' and more (Adams 2006, 15). Following Adams, I suggest that some virtues – the 'motivational' ones – are 'defined by motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is for in having them' (33). Examples include self-respect, love, and justice. Someone with one of these virtues will have characteristic concerns, and these forms of caring – these 'attachments' – are dispositions to anger (and other emotions). Let's consider each of the three virtues just mentioned.

The self-respecting person is 'for' her own dignity (Pelser 2015). That is, she has a proper appreciation of her value as a person, and so is appropriately concerned that others not mistreat her. When she is mistreated, then, anger might be in the offing. For, as we've seen, anger involves seeing oneself as having been offended. But unlike Walter, the road rager we met above, the virtuous won't interpret every inconvenience as an assault on their dignity. Indeed, a strong sense of dignity is a protection against relatively insignificant slights, so that, to borrow a phrase from Seneca, the self-respecting person will 'feel none but a heavy blow' (1995, 63; *On Anger*, II.25).[15] But she also won't be immune to slights (contra Seneca's official doctrine). By Aristotelian standards, a complete lack of sensitivity to personal offense is slavish (*NE* IV.5); by Christian standards, it shows a lack of appreciation for the image of God resident in oneself. Of course, danger lurks, for putative personal offenses abound. So self-respect must be accompanied by other virtues if one's anger is to be properly ordered.

One accompanying virtue is love. Love orients the heart of the self-respecting person beyond the protection of her own dignity, placing her will

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squarely on the well-being of others (Pettigrove 2012a, 86–95; Roberts 2003, 294). In this way, love keeps the self-respecting person's anger from being selectively self-centered. After all, if you love others, blameworthy offenses against *them* may also draw your ire. As Nussbaum points out, the centrality of love in the Christian outlook is a primary source of the disagreements between Stoic and Christian wisdom concerning anger:

> In some manner Christian love has reopened the space within which fear, and anxiety, and grief, and intense delight, and even anger, all have their full force. And correct love promises no departure from these other emotions – if anything, it requires their intensification. (Nussbaum 2001, 530)

Nussbaum is correct that one's anger often is, and ought to be, directly proportionate to one's love: the more one loves a victim of injustice, the more anger one will tend to feel toward the perpetrator. But as we'll see below, love's relationship to anger gets more complicated.

So, self-respect and love can give rise to anger. So can a passion for justice. The virtuously just person cares deeply that justice be done, and is thus emotionally sensitive to instances of justice and injustice (Rawls 1963; Roberts 2010). Anger is (in part) an appraisal of a situation as characterized by injustice (offenses against objective justice). Thus, the just person, in virtue of her passion for justice, will be disposed both to fitting anger (i.e. anger that gets the justice appraisal right) and to just expressions of anger (e.g. punishments that fit the crime). This is one area where Walter's anger might be appropriate: if in fact the 'mining-ravaged ridges' of Appalachia evidence the culpable mistreatment of nature – a blameworthy failure to give the mountains their due – then a failure to be moved to anger upon contemplating this state of affairs might reveal that one is insufficiently concerned about injustice (or at least *this* injustice).

The three virtues outlined so far are related, but non-identical. Self-respect has a justice module; because the self-respecting person appreciates her dignity, she is concerned that injustice not be done to her. But self-respect is not simply a self-directed passion for justice. And justice, like love, is concerned for the well-being of others. But justice's benevolence is less direct, and less extravagant, than love's. Strictly speaking, the just person is 'for' justice, so her motivational disposition includes a desire that others get the goods they are due; but the just person need not be directly concerned for the good of the other. The lover, by contrast, is directly 'for' the other. Yes, she wants others to get their due; but she may also generously desire that they receive goods beyond what justice demands, because she cares about them for their own sake, and not merely for the sake of justice. In actual cases, these three virtues may (and ideally, will) harmonize in such a way that sorting out the unique contribution of each would be difficult.

We have briefly considered three motivational virtues, each of which is characterized by its own concern the contravention of which might rightly give rise to anger. Now, good temper is supposed to be *the* disposition to proper

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anger. We've just seen, though, that the concerns and perceptual sensitivities that define the virtues of self-respect, love, and justice are anger dispositions. Ultimately, any concern is (potentially) an anger disposition. (Thus, the Stoics' recipe for an anger-free life: across-the-board detachment.) But morally excellent anger (Stoic protestations aside) must be rooted in self-respect, love, or the desire for justice (broadly construed). Otherwise, anger's object, reason(s), and/or desire for pay back won't be 'right.' Thus, the anger of the good tempered must be rooted in these concerns and perceptual sensitivities; or, to put the point differently, it is the concerns and patterns of perception that partially constitute the virtues of self-respect, love, and justice that make the good-tempered person anger-ready. Thus, the virtue of good temper is partially constituted by these aspects of these virtues.[16]

But there is more to good temper than these concerns and sensitivities. In order for anger to be properly delayed, mitigated, and qualified, the good tempered also need to 'be for' various goods other than their own dignity, the well-being of victims, and the doing of justice, and they need to be *un*concerned about and *in*sensitive to certain other factors. To some of these (un)concerns and (in)sensitivities we now turn.

Virtues that delay, mitigate, and qualify anger

We've seen that love can be an anger disposition. But love also tends to delay and dispel anger. Here's one reason this is so: love's vision is generous. The lover has eyes to see the good in the beloved (Pettigrove 2012a, 77–86; Roberts 2003, 286–289). In fact, the lover *actively looks* for the good in the beloved. When a reader puts the best conceivable spin on an author's argument, takes ambiguous claims in a favorable light, and so on, we say she 'reads charitably,' and rightly so; charity, after all, is a form of love, and this is just the way the lover 'reads' the beloved. By contrast, the object of anger's vision *looks like an enemy*, at least for as long as anger endures, but sometimes longer. For anger all too easily turns to hatred: a dispositional view of the-other-as-enemy that is diametrically opposed to love's take. And if, as in Christianity, love is to be universal, then enemies and offenders – not merely victims – are to be viewed with love's generous gaze. In this way, love tends to decelerate, mitigate, and otherwise qualify anger by inclining one to see putative offenders in benevolent terms, and love facilitates forgiveness.

If he has not already fallen into a hateful view of other drivers, Walter is dangerously close to doing so. To get a better sense for love's anger-mitigating tendencies, let's imagine that Walter is cut to the quick about his freeway fury, and aims to remediate it by practicing love. For starters, Walter could follow Seneca's advice and make it a general policy to 'plead the other person's case in his absence' (1995, 61; *On Anger*, II.22). Yet, if he's practicing love, Walter's motivation won't be his own attainment of *apatheia*. Rather, he'll read fellow motorists

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charitably because he wills their good (or at least wills to will their good). So, when a sanctimonious speed-limit enforcer clogs the inner lane, Walter makes himself say, perhaps aloud, 'she likely means well.' Or, when passed on the right, he actively attends to the fact that there might be a bona fide emergency. In each case, Walter actively disrupts his offense template, either by reinterpreting an offense as a non-offense, or providing an excuse to a would-be offender. Thus, he undercuts his anger. Putting a loving spin on such situations when anger cues are present takes effort, especially at first. (More on the virtues needed for such active anger control below.) But as it becomes second nature for Walter to read charitably, he will not have to try so hard to 'put on' love; he will simply love. Such love would be anathema to the strict Stoic;[17] it is the very center of the Christian's vision of her neighbor.[18]

So love can decelerate and mitigate anger. It can also qualify anger. The qualification I have in mind is conceptual. One advantage of the perceptual view of emotions is that it allows us to understand how various moral outlooks can have not only distinctive takes on various virtues, but also outlook-specific versions of particular emotions (see Roberts 2007). Consider Martin Luther King, Jr.'s righteous anger over racial injustice. King's self-respect, love for his fellow sufferers, and passion for justice come together in a morally admirable form of anger. Indeed, his case against racism would have been less powerful had it been totally anger-free. But it is hard to imagine that King's anger, rightly aimed at the perpetrators of injustice as it is, was not also colored by his Christian love for them. In his anger, and in the anger he seems to have wanted to inspire in others, the offender is not *merely* an offender. Since the Christian is called to love the enemy, the enemy's offensiveness must not totally occlude love's vision. Thus, the fully integrated Christian with righteous anger will ideally always have a rider attached to her anger: here is a real offender, but an offender-who-is-made-in-God's-image, a real enemy, but an enemy-for-whom-Christ-died-and-whose-good-I-will.

It would seem that the conceptual qualifications built into the structure of such anger will tend to hasten the exchange of anger for a more completely benevolent view of the offender. Giving up one's anger in this way is at the core of Christian forgiveness, a theme that characterizes King's speeches as often as does his decrying of injustice. (Thus, my speculations about his love-colored anger.) On King's view, a gracious readiness to 'love our enemies … is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity' (King 1963/1981, 54). The virtuous disposition to forgive – a trait Roberts (1995) calls 'forgivingness' – is one form of Christian love, and one of its central functions is the removal of fitting anger. The forgiving person does not deny that the offender has offended her; nor does she necessarily give up her claim to just recompense; but she does foreswear her angry construal of the offender in favor of a loving one. This function of forgivingness is distinct from the functions of the other virtues mentioned so far. Plausibly, a person could be quite

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prone to inappropriate anger, but also quite adept at giving up her anger in the interest of love. Likewise, one could be disposed to get angry in the right way, for the right reasons, and so forth, yet tend to be unwilling to forgive bona fide offenders. (This seems to be the position of the person with Aristotelian πραοτης.)[19] Thus, forgivingness's intelligent willingness and ability to give up anger's eyes in favor of love's – an aspect of the disposition to be angry 'in the right way … and for the right length of time' (Aristotle 1985, 105; *NE* IV.5) – joins the dispositions that partially constitute the other virtues we've considered so far – e.g. justice's concerns and perceptual sensitivities that make one wisely anger-ready – in collectively making the ideal agent's anger 'right.' As such, these many and varied dispositions are not merely *external aids* that come alongside the virtue of good temper and scaffold it. They are the very dispositions in which good temper *consists*; they are the latter virtue's *ingredients*.

The concerns and sensitivities of other virtues can also temper anger, even if this function does not define those virtues. One brief example – contrition – will suffice. The contrite person is painfully aware of her moral failings, and so is less prone (than, say, the self-righteous) to take on anger's judgmental stance. As Seneca suggests, one 'can avoid immediate anger, especially if he says quietly to himself at every vexation "I too have done this myself"' (1995, 66; *On Anger*, II.28). Yet, the contrite non-Stoic won't fall into the Stoic's pattern of exonerating everyone simply because everyone fails. Yes, everyone falls short morally; but someone with a robust sense of justice will deny the Stoic inference, 'therefore, no one is guilty' (cf. *On Anger* II.10). Instead, contrition decelerates and qualifies anger: here is a real offense, but an offense-I-too-might-have-committed.

So far my analysis has focused entirely on what Adams calls 'motivational virtues' – those that are 'defined by motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is for in having them' (Adams 2006, 33). If all the virtues were motivational, we could presumably individuate them on the basis of their characteristic motivations. Daniel Russell offers an attractive model here. Russell argues that virtues are individuated on the basis of their characteristic reasons – that is, he thinks each virtue is the virtue it is, and isn't a different virtue, because of the 'sorts of considerations for which persons with that virtue characteristically take themselves to be called into action' (Russell 2009, 183). Russell's model works fairly well for individuating the motivational virtues. It is not clear to me whether his model allows us to individuate good temper from the motivational virtues we've considered, since good temper's characteristic reasons overlap with theirs.[20] It is clear, though, that Russell's reasons-based individuation model will prove inadequate if any virtues lack characteristic reasons (motives, concerns, sensitivities). As the discussion to follow indicates, some virtues do lack such reasons (cf. Roberts 2013, 205–206).

One way an agent's anger will be tempered is if she *lacks* certain concerns and sensitivities. In my view, some virtues are characterized not by what the agent

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is *for* – as the motivational virtues are – but by that to which she is intelligently *insensitive*. Two examples are humility and patience.

Humility often depends on 'having one's heart in the right place.' But what makes a humble heart humble is not the goods to which it is responsive, but rather, that to which is it *un*responsive. For, as Roberts and Wood (2007, chapter 9) persuasively argue, humility is fundamentally an intelligent lack of viciously prideful concerns (and thus, an intelligent lack of responsiveness to the reasons characteristic of vicious pride), where 'pride' is shorthand for a family of vices that includes vanity, arrogance, and many others.[21] The tradition of the capital vices rightly sees the vice of wrath as an offspring of the vice of pride (see DeYoung 2009, chapter 6). Thus, humility, as the virtue contrary to pride, is a protection against wrath. Since the humble person's heart is intelligently insensitive to issues of comparative glory, honor, status, and so on, she is less apt to notice the snubs that give rise to so much anger in the vain, the conceited, and the arrogant. In this way, humility's insensitivity is a counterweight to self-respect's sensitivity.[22]

Patience – or one form of it anyway – is also a virtue of insensitivity. This might be one reason Cogley is uncomfortable naming *the* anger virtue 'patience,' for he wants to make room for great anger in the virtuous. One reason I am uncomfortable naming the virtue that Cogley describes 'patience' is that his analysis leaves out what I take to be most central to patience. 'Patience' has a temporal connotation, and Cogley's discussion lacks any reference to the temporal dimension in anger. The patient person is unruffled by delay, prolonged difficulty, and so on. The OED nicely captures the temporal dimension of patience, which it defines as 'the calm, uncomplaining *endurance* of pain, affliction, inconvenience, etc.; the capacity for such endurance' (italics added). In the purest case, the patient person's equanimity requires no exertion of willpower (though there is also a 'willpower' version of patience). Rather, it is second nature for him to be intelligently insensitive to the call to leave the present moment. What captures his attention in the moment may be anything at all: caring for his fussy child; working through a difficult math problem; waiting for the perfect time to begin the heist. This lack of a characteristic concern is what keeps patience from being a motivational virtue, and blocks its individuation by characteristic reasons. What is distinctive of patience is the ability to 'wait, and wait, and wait with a smile.'[23]

Delays, prolonged pain, and inconveniences are often sources of anger, for they are easy to construe as offenses. And bona fide offenses often involve delay, etc.; but not always. Thus, patience's characteristic function is not solely related to anger. It also relates to dealing with boredom, inconveniences for which no one is morally culpable, and so on. Still, forestalling certain instances of anger is one of patience's functions. If your ideals include slowness to anger, patience is important because it protects you against overly quick anger (among other things).

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From what I have said about humility and patience, they might appear to be psychological privations, holes in the virtuous person's motivational structure. Thus, it might seem wrongheaded to include them among good temper's ingredients. (A baker doesn't include a lack-of-cockroaches in her cookie recipe; why should good temper include a lack-of-vicious-pride?) The confusion here lies in thinking of these virtues simply as privations. Take patience. Even if we cannot point to a particular concern that defines patience, we *can* point to the ordering and texture of the patient person's concerns to explain her insensitivity to what aggravates the impatient. A patient driver, say, might want to get to work on time, but she is slower than her impatient counterpart to construe a traffic jam as a reason for anger because her desire for punctuality has a different *location* in her motivational structure (other things matter more, so she isn't so emotionally sensitive to lateness),[24] and/or because punctuality has a different *meaning* for her (lateness is 'encoded' in her heart in such a way that it isn't easily construed as an offense for which others are blameworthy). Something similar could be said about the humble person's priorities and understanding of her own importance. Thus, there is something positive (i.e. non-privative) that characterizes both patience and humility: motivational structures whose order and texture mitigate anger. As such, each can join the motivational virtues we've considered – justice, love, and the rest – in contributing to an agent's good temper.

Virtues for effortful anger control

Few of us attain the fine-tuned motivational structure described above. More commonly, our disordered loves render our motivational architecture wobbly enough that if we want to feel and act in accordance with our considered values, those values require active reinforcement. Such reinforcement is the job of what Adams calls the 'structural virtues' – traits like self-control, perseverance, and the 'willpower' form of patience wherein one exerts effort to remain gladly in the present moment. These traits represent a third class of virtues, distinct from the motivational virtues and virtues of insensitivity. As Adams puts it, 'the excellence of structural virtues is a matter of personal psychic strength – of ability and willingness to govern one's behavior in accordance with values, commitments, and ends one is for' (2006, 34). Like the virtues of insensitivity, the structural virtues lack characteristic reasons, so they too resist Russell's reasons-based virtue individuation method. In my view, at least some self-management strengths are among good temper's constituents. In saying so, I admittedly part ways with Aristotle, who thought the fully good-tempered person would never need to control her anger actively. I have doubts about Aristotle's effort-free ideal, though I lack the space to raise them. Even if he's right, though, it's worth considering the relationship between anger and the structural virtues, for at least two reasons. First, few are likely to achieve Aristotle's automated ideal. Thus, if we want to understand the sort of anger excellence that is achievable

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for actual humans, we should attend to those traits that less-than–fully-mature people need to approximate (automated) good temper. And second, to the extent that automated good temper *is* achievable, it depends developmentally on the effortful virtue practice that the structural virtues enable. In this way, the latter are at least historical features of (automated) good temper, even if they remain as mere vestigial traits in the fully virtuous. Let's consider two anger-relevant structural virtues: self-vigilance and self-control.

One of anger's natural functions is to serve as an early warning system. As Glen Pettigrove (2012b, 364–365) puts it, anger works on 'the smoke detector principle': 'when responding to potential threats, [anger] is naturally set to generate many more false alarms than true ones.' The motivational virtues and virtues of insensitivity discussed already help fine-tune our anger's 'natural setting.' But, in an inescapably ambiguous world, we will often sense smoke that isn't there, and fail to sense smoke that is. So we need virtues that help correct for a perennial human problem: our tendency to rush in, hoses blazing, at every chirp of our early warning system. If our various concerns and sensitivities collectively make up our smoke detector, and anger is the audible alarm, self-vigilance is the smoke detector's monitor. This attitude and capacity for self-watchfulness is akin to what the Stoics call 'attention.' 'Attention … is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude. It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind,' which 'allows us to respond immediately to events, as if they were questions asked of us all of a sudden' (Hadot 1995, 84–85). Such vigilance has two aspects. The first is a kind of self-reconnaissance; the second, a tactical implementation of the intel gathered via the first.[25]

'If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles' (Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*). In the battle for virtuous anger, the objects of the warrior's knowledge – the enemy and the self – partially unite. But what kind of knowledge will do? Various traditions have identified common sources of inappropriate anger – a misdirected passion for justice, an inflated sense of our own importance, over-attachment to material goods, unrealistic expectations of others – and familiarity with these patterns of 'irascibility' (which seem not to form a unified trait) would surely help the would-be anger combatant. But generic 'head knowledge' about such factors will prove insufficient. My knowledge must not be simply of the *human* condition, but of *my* condition; and it cannot be merely a matter of 'knowing the facts' about myself, but must include *appreciation*, a measure of evaluative self-understanding that motivates reform.

We can arrive at self-insights via various avenues – reading ethically rich literature in a morally receptive posture, opening our life to the wise gaze of others (friends, psychotherapists, etc.), unbidden 'aha! moments,' etc. Whatever the pathway of discovery, the inappropriately angry person, armed with self-intel, can tactically implement her appreciative self-knowledge in the battle for her character. How? By learning to recognize internal and external cues of

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impending anger and acting preemptively to control it. Such ongoing watchfulness is analogous to defensive driving. Experienced drivers appreciate the devastating consequences of inadequate caution, and intuitively monitor for potential pitfalls. Orange cones appear, our brake leg goes on alert, and we scan for altered traffic patterns; a truck blocks our view, and we double-check for pedestrians; etc. Similarly, the self-vigilant person working on her temper appreciates her own liabilities and monitors for cues that anger may be just around the bend. For instance, Walter might come to realize that his commitment to what DeYoung calls the 'Me-first agenda' – 'I want what I want, and woe to anyone or anything that gets in my way' (2009, 122) – is what primes him to erupt over even brief delays, even though (when calm) he recognizes that being delayed for '*a full minute*' hardly qualifies as a grave injustice. When he sees that he isn't going to make a light, then, Watchful Walter warns himself: 'Beware! Potential overreaction ahead!' Having thus braced himself, he is better positioned to forestall his tantrum. The irascible will not come to appreciate their hot spots over night; and it will require time and effort to take what are currently cues to *get* angry and refashion them into cues to *control* anger. With enough experience, though, anger-vigilance can become as instinctive as checking for children when a ball bounces into the street.

So, the self-vigilant appreciate their propensity to anger, and are poised to notice cues of its imminent onset. The actual control of anger is the province of another virtue: self-control. In its broadest application, the term 'self-control' covers all the virtues by which one actively regulates oneself (such as the 'willpower' form of patience mentioned above). In this broad sense, self-control involves at least three aspects: 'muscular' toughness of will, the disposition to exert that 'muscle,' and know-how with self-management techniques.[26] 'Self-control' is often defined more narrowly, though, as the virtue responsible for actively regulating one's anger.

There is nothing uniquely anger-oriented about self-control's muscular element. What sets this trait apart from the other self-regulatory virtues are the disposition to exert the muscle in the interest of controlling one's anger and the anger-mitigating skills that partially constitute it. We have already considered one application of self-control in which Walter calls on love's resources to counteract his rage. This pattern is characteristic of the kind of self-control I have in mind: the agent either chooses to act contrary to her angry impulse, or actively calls upon anger-mitigating considerations that bear on her situation to which the virtuous are naturally attuned but to which she is currently not attending in her anger, in the interest of disrupting her angry take on the situation. To initiate this process, one needs a background sensitivity to the fact that such anger-mitigating considerations are there to be called upon, and a sensitivity to one's tendency to be insensitive to them. That is self-vigilance's task. The self-controlled person actually calls on them. The permutations are legion, varying both with the particularities of the situation and the anger-tendencies

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of the agent. One example will illustrate the point. Since we've already looked at a case involving calling virtuous considerations to mind, let's consider a case of behavioral self-control.

Seneca suggests that 'the start of the conquest [of anger] is to conceal it … . We should suppress its symptoms and keep it, so far as possible, hidden and secret' (1995, 89; *On Anger* III.13). Anger's symptoms are many: clenched jaw, bulging eyes, raised voice, aggressive movement. Even apart from active re-construal of one's situation, one can fight anger by replacing these symptoms with gentler corollaries. 'We should turn all its indications into their opposites: the face should be relaxed, the voice gentler, the pace slower. Little by little, the externals will be matched by an inner formation' (ibid.). Here's how it can work.[27]

Rosa has several pet peeves: texters in the movie theater, slow walkers in the grocery aisle, loud chewers at the dinner table, and more. Her (second-) natural reactions to such scenarios can range from a conspicuous eye roll, to a curt rebuke, to picking an all-out quarrel. But Rosa has come to appreciate this about herself, and is vigilantly poised to counteract her anger by practicing gentleness. So, when her fellow moviegoer's smartphone illuminates the cinema, Rosa follows a gentleness script. She breathes deeply, yet silently, to avoid slipping into an exasperated sigh. She musters a smile, unclenching her teeth if needed. And if she says anything to the offender, she addresses him respectfully, rather than using the four-letter vocabulary that springs to mind; she uses her 'inside voice,' rather than her instinctive holler; and she laces her request – not her demand – with pleases and thank-yous. In some cases such practices control only the *expression* of anger; one can appear gentle while secretly seething. But, as Seneca suggests, the therapy can, and tends to, go deeper. Gentle behavior can provide the agent with a self-construal that is in such deep tension with anger that it indisposes her to see herself as the victim of an offense. Moreover, remaining outwardly 'cool' buys time to search for considerations that count against anger – considerations that angry eyes typically overlook. Thus, exercises of behavioral self-control buttress their more 'cognitive' cousins. Over time, Rosa's practice of gentleness may shade toward genuine gentleness, and her kneejerk take on movie-theater texters, grocery-aisle meanderers, and dinner-table smackers may shift from enemies-to-smite to something a bit more charitable.

I noted above that the idea that good temper could involve effortful anger control presses against an Aristotelian model according to which automaticity characterizes the virtues. Perhaps, though, we can have both active anger control and automaticity. For if, as I've suggested, self-vigilance can become automated (like defensive driving), it may be that the instigation of self-control practices could itself become an automated aspect of the good tempered person's repertoire. In this way, good temper's 'right manner' with regard to anger might include 'with the right kind of effort, using the right self-management

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skills' – at least if we're considering the psychology of the good-tempered-yet-flawed humans who actually exist.

Conclusion

We have been exploring the motivational structure of the good-tempered person in an attempt to understand what it means to say that one is properly disposed to anger. I've suggested that good temper is a meta-disposition made up of properly ordered concerns and perceptual sensitivities – some of which underwrite anger, and others of which delay, mitigate, and/or qualify it – along with certain structural supports (at least in actual, flawed humans). More specifically, good temper's ingredients include an appreciation and concern for one's own dignity (self-respect), a concern for others' well-being (love), a passion for justice (justice), a generous gaze (love again), an intelligent willingness and ability to let go of one's anger (forgivingness), an appreciation for one's own moral shortcomings (contrition), an intelligent lack of vicious pride (humility), an ability to 'wait with a smile' (patience), watchfulness (self-vigilance), and the 'muscle,' interest, and skill needed to manage one's inappropriate anger (self-control). The goal of my analysis has not been to debunk the notion that good temper is a virtue. Rather, I have been attempting to understand the virtue of good temper by deciphering its parts. And, as it turns out, all of its parts (or at least the ones I've identified) seem (also) to belong to other virtues.

Is there any *further* work for the *additional* virtue of good temper to do? We might think so. After all, there is more to tennis excellence than a great forehand, backhand, serve, etc.; an excellent tennis player *integrates* these sub-excellences in a unified whole. Analogously, we might think a good-tempered person not only has the sub-dispositions surveyed above, but also organizes them in a coherent way. Couldn't we say that good temper's function is to integrate the concerns and sensitivities of the various anger-relevant virtues? This is an attractive position. But it does not clearly provide a positive answer to the question with which this paragraph began. After all, the task of coordinating various virtues has traditionally been assigned to another virtue, which has yet to appear in our analysis: practical wisdom. If this view of practical wisdom is correct, then even if we say good temper's function (in part or in whole) is to integrate the concerns and sensitivities of the other anger-relevant virtues, we still will not have identified a unique task for good temper. Rather, we will have established yet another point of overlap between good temper and another virtue.

None of this implies that good temper is not a real virtue. For we can approach virtue analysis from a number of starting points (e.g. spheres of activity, emotion types, etc.), and our starting points are, to a large extent, a matter of our (and/or our tradition's) choice. Given the large problem that anger is in human life, it makes sense to carve out a virtue that specializes in it. What I take my analysis to show is that when we allow for multiple starting points for virtue analysis

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(as we surely must), we end up with virtues that both differ in kind and partially overlap. This raises serious theoretical difficulties regarding the search for a single principle of virtue individuation. Various principles have been offered. Aristotle is often taken to individuate virtues on the basis of their characteristic spheres of activity (Nussbaum 1988); Urmson (1980) suggests that virtues map onto emotion types in a one-to-one way; Russell (2009) thinks virtues are individuated by their characteristic reasons; and so on. I have argued against each of these views. I've tried to show that multiple virtues can bear directly on the same sphere of activity, and that a single virtue can bear on multiple spheres of activity; I have argued that even good temper – the front-running candidate – doesn't fit well with Urmson's account; and I have suggested that many virtues lack characteristic reasons (e.g. humility, self-vigilance, etc.), which spells trouble for Russell's purely reasons-based account. If a unified model is to work, it will have to be generic enough to account for the plurality of *kinds* of virtues that exist, as well as the possibility that some – or even *all* – virtues partially overlap with or are constituted by aspects of other virtues. I tentatively suggest that we are likely to be thwarted in our search for such a unified model.

My analysis also has a practical upshot. For the person who struggles with inappropriate anger, or who fails to get angry when she should, the advice to 'cultivate good temper' is too vague to be developmentally helpful. By contrast, if we recognize the distinct relationships between anger and the various virtues surveyed above, we can seek, find, and offer more targeted remedial advice: this person needs to work on her vanity, another on his self-respect, probably all of us on our love, and so on. I've indicated a few ways to apply such self-knowledge in the service of character growth, but more detailed discussion of anger and virtue cultivation must remain for another day.[28]

Notes

1. Aristotle is representative, but not unique. Cf. Urmson (1980), Russell (2009, 181), and Cogley (2014).
2. Another is the disposition to proper shame (*NE* IV.9), but Aristotle says it isn't a virtue.
3. Urmson (1980) thinks otherwise, arguing that virtue types map onto correlated emotion types. For discussion, see Hursthouse (1999) and Russell (2009, 180–182). Russell thinks Urmson's account succeeds vis-à-vis anger and good temper, but fails otherwise. I am less optimistic than Russell (see below).
4. Thanks to Bob Roberts for help clarifying this point.
5. Contra 'feeling' theories (e.g. Prinz 2004).
6. Contra 'judgment' theories (e.g. Nussbaum 2001).
7. Thanks to Karla West for recommending this passage.
8. Seneca (*On Anger*, I.2), Aristotle (*NE* IV.5), and Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II.158.2) agree that anger's grammar includes the desire to punish.
9. Here, I follow Roberts (2003, 204), who suggests anger's formal 'defining proposition' is 'S has culpably offended in the important matter of X (action or

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omission) and is bad (is to some extent an enemy of what is good); I am in a moral position to condemn; S deserves (ought) to be hurt for X; may S be hurt for X.'

10. In calling good temper a 'meta-disposition' I am not marking any deep differences between that virtue and any others. (Perhaps every virtue is a 'meta-disposition' in my sense.) This terminology simply highlights the often-overlooked complexity of this virtue.
11. Roberts (2003) calls emotions 'concern-based construals.'
12. Good temper's 'parts,' in my usage, are the dispositions in which it consists (its ingredients, its psychological constituents). Thus, parts are not equivalent to necessary conditions. Perhaps having a body is a necessary condition for good temper (Aquinas, at least, thought anger requires a body; see *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.89.3); it wouldn't follow, though, that the property of having a body is a part of good temper.
13. No doubt my sketches are controversial. It cannot be helped. A defense of my take on each trait would pull the discussion away from its central purpose: to illustrate the variegated connections between anger and character.
14. Given the debate within these traditions concerning anger (see Harris 2004), each foil in the ensuing discussion should be understood as but one possible instantiation of its tradition.
15. Compare Aristotle: 'it is not the part of a proud man to have a long memory, especially for wrongs, but rather to overlook them' (*NE* IV.3).
16. The foregoing analysis highlights an important function of anger distinct from those Cogley identifies: anger's role in expressing one's virtuous concerns. On the expressive value of emotions, see Bell (2013, chapter 4).
17. But, see Seneca's endorsement of generous feelings in *On Favours*. For discussion of Stoic qualifications of the thesis that passions are bad, see Roberts (2013, chapter 2).
18. For related discussion of love's role in mitigating contempt, see West (2015).
19. Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out.
20. Russell does discuss how distinct virtues can share 'the same reasons' (2009, 175–208), and his distinctions might enable him to individuate good temper from justice, love, and the rest. But this case is at least more complicated than those he explicitly addresses.
21. Other pride vices include 'conceit, egotism, hyper-autonomy, grandiosity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, impertinence (presumption), haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency' (Roberts and Wood 2007, 236).
22. Note that self-respect is not a concern for status, but an affective appreciation of one's dignity.
23. http://wechoosevirtues.com.
24. Compare Socrates' discussion of 'the order of one's cares' in *Apology* 36d.
25. The following sketch of self-vigilance draws on West (2014, 22–24). For a more detailed exposition of the virtue, see Roberts and West (2015, 2563–2570).
26. For an account of willpower along these lines, see West (n.d.).
27. The following paragraph draws on West (2014, 25–26).
28. Thanks to Bob Kruschwitz, Christian Miller, Adam Pelser, Bob Roberts, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on previous drafts of this essay. Support for this work was funded in part by a grant from the Templeton Religion Trust. The opinions expressed in this paper are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Templeton Religion Trust.

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