

## Aquinas's Account of Anger Applied to the ALF

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When I moved from Chicago to Terre Haute, Indiana to accept a university position in 1985, I began personally encountering cruelty to cats and dogs on a regular basis. For instance, one four-month-old kitten I found and subsequently brought home was crippled by four BB gun pellets in her leg and back. Another cat I took in had a flea collar embedded in her neck that had been placed there when she was a kitten. She belonged to a neighbor who let her run loose and eat out of garbage cans. An extremely emaciated dog I fed was so eager to eat anything at all that he ate the plastic spoon as I was attempting to scoop food onto a paper plate. Like a lot of dogs in the area, he lived outside on a short chain, with no shelter, and no visible food or water. Neglected cats and dogs ran loose on the city streets or were dumped in the country to fend for themselves. This continual barrage of cruelty enraged me. What could I do? I couldn't take them all home, yet I couldn't take them to the humane shelter, which would probably kill them. After attempting to change the animal control ordinance, I decided to build the first no-kill shelter for stray and abused cats and dogs in West Central Indiana. Whenever I became discouraged during the next eight years, my anger at past and current experiences of local animal abuse and neglect spurred me to continue my efforts. The shelter, a 5,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art building, opened on July 3, 2001. Not only did I fulfill a dream project, but, through the publicity the no-kill shelter generated, I found satisfaction in trying to publicly shame irresponsible animal guardians. In retrospect, if I had merely been sad about the plight of cats and dogs in this area, I would not have accomplished anything. It was my anger, controlled by reason, that made me persist in my efforts.

Many people who witness atrocities committed against animals become very angry. Some become sufficiently angry to take action aimed

at preventing these atrocities. According to a communiqué sent by the "Pirates for Animal Liberation" to a news information service, "20 holes were drilled in the right side" of a 30-foot yacht belonging to the President of Capital Markets, and "one 6" x 6" hole was sawed through the right hull. Various workings of the boat were also tampered with" until it took on water and was pushed out to sea. This was done to protest the Bank's financial services to a notorious animal testing laboratory that tests agrochemical and pharmaceutical products on puppies, cats, monkeys, rabbits, and a number of other animals, killing approximately 180,000 a year. While some people may understand the anger that triggers such actions, other people say that some of the animal rights groups formed to address these abuses take their anger too far.

St. Thomas Aquinas provides an account of anger that could help elucidate how it functions in such associations as the Animal Liberation Front and how their anger can be harnessed constructively. At first, however, it may seem that anger as Aquinas describes it would support the public image of the ALF as embittered fanatics or terrorists, or encourage animal activists to give up anger altogether. Consider Aquinas's definition of anger as a "desire to punish another by way of just revenge."<sup>1</sup> He maintains that when we feel anger we want to punish the offender and feel pleasure in doing so. Thus, in avenging animal suffering by punishing an offender, an ALF member would experience pleasure. This idea may make us uncomfortable, because it sounds vindictive and therefore reprehensible. Nonetheless, Aquinas insists that anger has a role to play in facilitating justice. Now, how can a potentially vindictive emotion help animal protectors to achieve justice? If Aquinas's description of anger is correct, shouldn't ALF members attempt to avoid anger and its incumbent desire for revenge when they seek justice for animals?

After discussing the distinction between retribution and revenge, I will explain Aquinas's general account of the nature of anger. The various features of anger I examine in the early sections of the essay will be revisited in its later sections. I will then analyze the conundrums posed by anger and conclude by suggesting how the complex nature of anger may in some cases impede and in others promote the cause of animal liberation.

### The Pleasure of Revenge

As mentioned above, Aquinas holds not only that anger facilitates justice, but also that once the angry person achieves justice, he or she

feels pleasure.<sup>2</sup> As soon as vengeance is present, pleasure ensues. In fact according to Aquinas, even before we avenge ourselves on an offender, vengeance gives us pleasure:

Before vengeance is really present, it becomes present to the angry man in two ways: in one way by hope; because none is angry except he hopes for vengeance . . . in another way, by thinking of it continually, for to everyone that desires a thing it is pleasant to dwell on the thought of what he desires.<sup>3</sup>

Revenge gives us hope and pleasure, both very positive feelings. Don't most of us enjoy the feelings of hope and pleasure? However, shouldn't a truly just person recoil at the notion of feeling pleasure in revenge?

Nowadays, it may disturb us to think of taking pleasure in revenge. Louis Pojman, writing about theories of capital punishment, advocates a retributive position, contrasting it with a position based on revenge.<sup>4</sup> The difference between the two, according to him, is that retribution is impersonal, implying fairness, whereas revenge is personal, involving bias. Moreover, he claims that seeking justice based on revenge is also unfair, since it may lead to "more suffering from the offender than the offense warrants." While Pojman does not discuss the motivation for this excessive zeal, it is reasonable to assume that it is based on anger, since it is our anger that motivates us to seek revenge. Further, revenge is usually viewed as a primitive goal, unworthy of enlightened people. Advocates of this position are disturbed by Aquinas's claim that taking revenge on someone who acts unjustly should bring us pleasure.

Is Aquinas's position on this issue obsolete? Can any philosophical or practical insight be derived from it? Consider Aquinas's observation that "by means of punishment the equality of justice is restored."<sup>5</sup> Now if justice is something that pleases us, shouldn't its restoration likewise give us pleasure? If we believe that punishment is a means to restore justice, then we may appreciate how an animal liberationist may take pleasure in punishing an animal abuser. If you have ever fumed inwardly, uttered retaliatory retorts, or raised your clenched fists to strike, you have probably thought, "I'm giving him what he deserves." "Let's give them a taste of their own medicine." "That should teach her!" These ordinary expressions suggest that we implicitly link pleasure and revenge on a regular basis, even though the issues may vary.

## The Expressions and Effects of Anger

Aware of this human tendency, Aquinas discusses three ways we express anger: in the heart, in speech, and in action.<sup>6</sup> Anger that is present in the heart occurs when we internalize our anger. We sometimes withhold our feelings and become indignant.<sup>7</sup> For instance, someone may read a newspaper account of a horrific experiment on animals and feel an inner anger that results in indignation. Anger present in the heart can also take the form of a "swelling in the mind," that is, when we savor planning various ways to take vengeance. When anger erupts into speech, "clamor, inordinate and jumbled utterance" may result. Frequently, an angry person is not able to articulate an immediate response and becomes "tongue-tied." Alternately, anger in speech may be expressed by calling the offender names or swearing at him or her, an approach often heard in traffic jams. Finally, when anger "proceeds to action, quarreling arises, under which are included all its consequences, for instance, wounds, murders and the like."<sup>8</sup> Naturally one need not express anger in only one of these ways.

Anger is expressed when someone acts in a way judged to be unjust. The judgmental nature of anger is the most manifest of all the emotions, with oneself as the court in which indictment, argument, verdict, and sentence are all carried out. The judgmental component in anger evaluates the degree to which the offense received is unjust. Thus anger is related to justice, either actually or at least in the eyes of the offended person.

But judgment is not the only component of anger. Defining anger as a judgment of personal offense, Robert Solomon emphasizes the judgmental character of all the emotions.<sup>9</sup> Since emotions are judgments, they can be rational in the same sense in which judgments can be rational. We choose our emotions and can be held responsible for them. Stressing their cognitive role and sharply minimizing the physiological aspect, Solomon explicitly denies that emotions are feelings.

Yet Solomon's view runs counter to our experience. The command "Control yourself" makes sense only when applied to one's emotions and not to one's judgments. Emotions do not always reflect conscious choices, for weakness of will (a familiar state to most of us) typically occurs when our avowed judgments are in conflict with our emotions. Additionally, while physical changes may occur in the absence of emotion, when a strong emotion is present they are never lacking. The physical changes that occur in every strong emotion include changes in blood pressure, respiration, and pulse rate.

In contrast to such intellectualist theories of emotion as Solomon's, Aquinas maintains that emotions are sensory reactions of attraction or repulsion accompanied by physiological change. They are more directly attributed to the physical powers than to the rational.<sup>10</sup> It is a matter of common experience that attraction and repulsion affect our physical desires more than they affect our knowledge. The physical changes induced by attraction and repulsion are an integral part of the emotional process, for the emotions are deeply rooted in biology.

Moreover, Aquinas believes, it is essential to justice that judgment be accompanied by a strong feeling. It is inappropriate to judge merely dispassionately that some horrific crime has been perpetrated against an innocent individual. While correct rational judgment is an important criterion of when we should become angry, the desire to inflict just punishment for suffering should accompany this judgment. Justice is demanded by an angry, morally indignant person, who seeks to relieve anger by injuring the cause of his or her pain. The purpose of revenge is to relieve that anger and thereby promote justice. To revenge ourselves for an egregious offense, to seek revenge against evil, may be the root of our sense of justice.

Besides judgment and feeling, anger, like the other emotions, also has a physiological component. Aquinas notes that the bodily effects of anger are among the most dramatic of any emotion. His description, borrowed from St. Gregory the Great, illustrates this:

The movement of anger produces fervor of the blood and vital spirits around the heart, which is the instrument of the soul's passions. And hence it is that, on account of the heart being so disturbed by anger, those chiefly who are angry betray signs thereof in their outer members. For, as Gregory says (*Moralia* v. 30), the heat that is inflamed with the stings of its own anger beats quick, the body trembles, the tongue stammers, the countenance takes fire, the eyes grow fierce, they that are well known are not recognized. With the mouth indeed he shapes a sound, but the understanding knows not what it says.<sup>11</sup>

Many of our ordinary expressions mirror Aquinas's description of anger's bodily effects, as when we speak of someone being "hot under the collar," "red with anger," or "giving a look that could kill," or when we experience our own "blood boiling." Considering its intense bodily effects, it is understandable that anger can manifest itself as an explosion.

## Kinds of Anger

There are also three kinds of anger, distinguished by the different things that stimulate them. Aquinas, following St. John Damascene and Gregory of Nyasa, uses Greek terms to name the three species of anger. The first kind of anger, distinguished by its quick arousal, is called *cholos* (bile). Nowadays we would call a person prone to this kind of anger "hot-tempered." The hot-tempered person not only becomes angry too quickly, but also finds his anger triggered by any slight cause. He often becomes angry "with the wrong people, at the wrong things, and more than he should."<sup>12</sup> A hot-tempered person might be aroused to anger merely by the way someone looks at him. While such people are hard to get along with, one of their redeeming features is that they do not allow their anger to fester. Their anger flares up quickly, but they soon return to a tranquil state.<sup>13</sup>

The second type of anger, termed *menis* (ill will), is caused by grief.<sup>14</sup> Aquinas uses a fanciful etymology to explain this term, supposing (wrongly) that this type of anger gets its name from the Greek *menein*, meaning "to dwell."<sup>15</sup> He adds that ill will causes a lasting displeasure, making a person "grievous" and "sullen" to himself.<sup>16</sup> Such a person harbors whatever makes him angry, replaying the insult over and over again in his memory. Aquinas says, "In this case time is needed to absorb the anger. Such persons are burdensome to themselves and especially to their friends."<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that this lingering anger replayed over and over again would produce a dour personality that few people would be willing to endure.

The third type of anger "pertains to *kotos* (rancor), which never rests until it is avenged."<sup>18</sup> Ill will and rancor are similar in that they both last a long time. But they differ in that ill will wears away with time, whereas rancor can be quelled only by revenge.<sup>19</sup> Aquinas further describes the person who feels rancor as "stern," not giving up his anger until he has inflicted punishment.<sup>20</sup> However, the desire for vengeance leads to ill temper or a stern state only when anger is excessive.

### Excessive Anger

But how do we know whether anger is excessive? Since anger lacks an internal system of controls, it can become a destructive force within us if it is permitted to run rampant, without rational restraint. Having spontaneously experienced anger, there are appropriate and inappropriate ways in which one can respond to its object. In order for

us to respond morally in a given situation, reason must determine whether the object of our anger is really good or bad and whether our anger is appropriate to the situation. It is reason that informs us whether we are "angry over the right things, with the right persons, and moreover in the right way, at the right time."<sup>21</sup> Employing the Aristotelian theory of the mean, Aquinas holds that our emotional balance can be found between poles of excess and deficiency. For instance, a person who feels only minor irritation upon witnessing a kitten being kicked responds deficiently, and a person who feels great anger over a dog barking once responds excessively.

Anger is excessive if a person is angry over the wrong things, with the wrong persons, in the wrong way, or at the wrong time. Anger is also excessive if we "desire the punishment of one who has not deserved it, or beyond his deserts, or again contrary to the order prescribed by law, or not for the . . . maintaining of justice and the correction of defaults."<sup>22</sup> The desire to punish a person who does not deserve it is not intended to avenge a particular offense, but to hurt that person. The same is true of a desire to punish a person beyond what he deserves. Thus Aquinas would agree with Pojman that *if* revenge leads us to exact more suffering from the offender than the offense warrants, it is excessive. On the other hand, he differs from Pojman, since he does not hold that revenge necessarily leads to an excessive response.

For Aquinas, anger can be excessive not only in terms of its effects on the victim, but also due to its effects on the angry person:

In the matter of vengeance, we must consider the mind of the avenger. For if his intention is directed chiefly to the evil of the person on whom he takes vengeance and rests there, then his vengeance is altogether unlawful: because to take pleasure in another's evil belongs to hatred, which is contrary to the charity whereby we are bound to love all men. Nor is it an excuse that he intends the evil of one who has unjustly inflicted evil on him, as neither is a man excused for hating one that hates him: for a man may not sin against another just because the latter has already sinned against him, since this is to be overcome by evil.<sup>23</sup>

Aquinas warns us that if we allow hatred against a person in our hearts, it will have a negative impact on our characters. In short, he maintains that anger against a sin is virtuous, whereas anger against the sinner is sinful.<sup>24</sup>

The expression of anger in an excessive manner can be so sinful that it is counted among the capital vices. Because these vices are more popularly known as the "seven deadly sins," some people may misconceive them as purely evil.<sup>25</sup> However, for Aquinas, while it is true that capital vices are never good considered in themselves, they are not necessarily evil, since they may be sources of action in virtue of good.

### *Antecedent and Consequent Anger*

Moreover, our expression of anger can be good or bad "either from being commanded by the will, or from not being checked by the will."<sup>26</sup> To experience anger in itself is morally neutral: I may not be able to control whether or not I feel angry; anger may well up in me before I have time to reflect on it. But anger loses its moral neutrality when I fail to keep my expression of it within rational bounds. For Aquinas, failing to restrain my expression of anger is just as blameworthy as having intentionally "worked myself up" into a violent rage.

Suppose you were present during the following actual experiment. You watch as dogs are deliberately burned to test the usefulness of an anti-infection vaccine when given after severe burn injuries. Forty beagle puppies are clipped of hair from the neck to the base of their tails. Then the researchers mark with indelible ink the parts of the puppies' bodies to be burned. They inflict burns over a third of the anaesthetized puppies' body surface using kerosene-soaked gauze which is ignited, allowed to burn for 60 seconds, and then extinguished. For 18 hours following the burning, the puppies receive "light anesthesia." You are then told that 90 days later, only 16 percent of the control puppies had survived, compared with 48 percent of those given the vaccine.<sup>27</sup> As you watch the experiment, and later, as you hear the results, you may feel an abrupt surge of anger prior to reflecting on what you saw or willing yourself to feel the anger. Since emotions are spontaneous feeling states, it is natural for you to have little control over your immediate feeling of anger. You are responsible for controlling the expression of your anger, but you are not responsible for the onset of anger in the first place. The difference between the immediate presence of anger in you and the subsequent expression of anger is captured in Aquinas's distinction between anger experienced antecedent to a rational judgment and anger consequent to a rational judgment:

Anger . . . can be related in two ways to the judgment of reason: in one way antecedently, and thus of necessity anger . . .

always impedes the judgment of reason, because the soul can best judge truth in a certain tranquillity of mind. . . . In another way anger can be related to the judgment of reason consequently, namely inasmuch as after reason has judged and determined the manner of vengeance, then the passion arises to carry it out, and thus anger and other such passions do not impede the judgment of reason which has already preceded, but rather help to execute the judgment of reason more promptly, and in this way the passions are useful to virtue.<sup>28</sup>

Antecedent anger, the anger experienced prior to judgment, arises from a bodily disposition or from the operations of the senses and the imagination. It heightens the imagination and hinders our power of judgment. Sometimes antecedent anger may be so strong as to prevent the intellect from deliberating about alternative courses of action. If anger becomes the sole motive for an act, the act is no longer voluntary and forfeits its moral value. If my desire for vengeance is so strong that it obscures my rational judgment, then the anger is wrong, even if it was provoked. Since antecedent anger precedes rational judgment, it may easily become excessive and thus a capital vice. Following Gregory, Aquinas calls this kind of excessive anger "vicious anger," describing it as a "desire of vengeance that appears just but is not really just."<sup>29</sup>

Consequent anger, which we experience following a judgment, may increase the goodness of a moral act in two ways: "First, by way of redundancy; because . . . when the higher part of the soul is intensely moved to anything, the lower part also follows that movement: and thus the passion that results in consequence, in the sensitive appetite, is a sign of the intensity of the will."<sup>30</sup> For example, having rationally judged that animals should be treated with respect, I feel anger when I think about the way they are treated in laboratories or factory farms. The second way a consequent emotion may increase the value of an act is by "way of choice, when a person, by the judgment of his reason, chooses to be affected by an emotion in order to work more promptly with the cooperation of the sensitive appetite."<sup>31</sup> I may choose to pay special attention to news stories about animal cruelty, thereby arousing my anger in order to take action. In both cases, the emotions are voluntary since they follow a judgment.

In addition to adding to the moral value of an action, consequent anger enables an individual to perform an action "more promptly and easily" than if the anger were absent. Since anger "is closely connected

with a change in the body," physical movement is naturally elicited when the anger corresponds to the choice of the will.<sup>32</sup> Referring to consequent anger, Aquinas explains, "When a person is virtuous with the virtue of courage, the emotion of anger following upon the choice of virtue makes for greater alacrity in the act."<sup>33</sup> Anger is a strong motivator, stirring up activity and arousing us to energetic action. The increased adrenaline generated by a person's anger can give her the physical boost she needs to deal more efficaciously with a perceived wrong. A person who is not only rationally but also emotionally committed to a moral act is more resolved to accomplish it. Thus Aquinas praises consequent anger, since it increases the moral value of a good act and intensifies our commitment to it.

In contrast to "vicious anger," consequent anger is called "zealous anger" if it is a desire for vengeance insofar as the anger is truly just. Aquinas says that if consequent anger "is directed against vice and in accordance with reason, this anger is good, and is called zealous anger."<sup>34</sup> Zealous anger originates in the recognition that people are responsible for their actions, and thus should be held accountable for what they do.

### The Cause of Anger

In order to understand the relationship between justice and anger more deeply, we must understand the cause of anger. Aquinas holds that "All the causes of anger are reduced to slight."<sup>35</sup> People slight us when they neglect us, do not hesitate to say painful things to us, express glee about our bad luck, act indifferently toward us, or frustrate our efforts to accomplish something.<sup>36</sup> All slights belittle some particular characteristic of the victim. Our anger is caused partly by the pain of this belittlement. We desire vengeance with the intention of reestablishing the just relationship that was disrupted by the slight against us.

Aquinas claims that "whatever injury is inflicted on us, in so far as it is derogatory to our excellence, seems to savor of a slight."<sup>37</sup> Feeling that we excel in some way, we want to be recognized for it. If, instead, someone acts contemptuously toward that which we believe we excel in, we become angry. *Excellentia*, according to Aquinas, refers to any positive asset. Our excellence is our self-worth. Aquinas recognizes that people assess their self-worth in different ways. Some may be concerned with their outward excellence, such as power and position. Others find self-worth in their knowledge and virtue.<sup>38</sup> Aquinas is

aware, however, that the common people, the masses, "acknowledge none but outward excellence."<sup>39</sup> This is probably just as true today as it was in his time.

Discussing Aquinas's concept of excellence, Diana Fritz Cates writes that the powerful have a tendency "to identify their economic, political, and social privileges as excellences that compose an objective scale of value against which all people are to be measured."<sup>40</sup> She notes in passing that Aquinas also includes virtue as an excellence, but adds that he easily "assimilates social, political, and economic goods to the good of virtue."<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, Aquinas not only separates the excellence of virtue from the external excellences, as noted in the passage cited above, but he deems the former to be more deserving of honor. In numerous passages, Aquinas makes it clear that the excellence we should be honored for is moral virtue. For instance, he observes, "Private individuals are sometimes honored by kings, not because they are above them in the order of dignity, but on account of some excellence of their virtue,"<sup>42</sup> and he clearly notes that excellence belongs to virtue more than to external goods, writing that "Honor denotes attention to someone's excellence, especially the excellence which is according to virtue."<sup>43</sup> In short, Aquinas admits that economic, political, and social excellences are those that the masses acknowledge, but the excellences worthiest of honor are those associated with virtue.

Since our excellence is our self-worth, it is when people slight *us*, have contempt for *us*, that anger arises. Anger is usually direct and overt in its projection of our personal values onto the world. Expressing our anger makes people realize that we are serious, and so they pay attention to us. Even if our anger is not expressed, it is our insistence upon our own ideals. It records our disapproval that the world does not live up to our expectations, and shows our desire to punish those who would not comply with our deeply held beliefs. Aquinas very clearly argues that we are angry only about personal offenses:

Nor does any injury provoke one to vengeance, but only that which is done to the person who seeks vengeance: for just as everything naturally seeks its own good, so does it naturally repel its own evil. But injury done by anyone does not affect a man unless in some way it be something done against him. Consequently the motive of a man's anger is always something done against him.<sup>44</sup>

Anger defends the self. Consider that a person will not get angry if she says to herself, "It is none of my business."

### Identification with Others

Just as clearly as Aquinas argues that we are angry only about offenses to our own selves, he insists that injustice is concerned about our dealings with others.<sup>45</sup> But then how can justice, with its concern for others, be reconciled with anger, a concern for injury to self?

Aquinas was not unaware of the seeming incompatibility between anger as a response to a personal offense and justice as a concern for what is due others. In reply to an objection that it is not always harm done to us that makes us angry, he says, "When we take a very great interest in a thing we look upon it as our own good, so that if anyone despises it, it seems as though we ourselves were despised and injured."<sup>46</sup> Recognizing that we are able to identify with others and will their good as another self, he writes, "For when we love a thing, by desiring it, we apprehend it as belonging to our well being."<sup>47</sup> Love denotes the principle of the movement by which our desire tends toward the object we love. Desire urges that a union with the object loved is good for us. Aquinas tells us that what is loved is in our "will as the term or a movement arising from the conformity it has with the lover."<sup>48</sup> Through love our will is conformed to the object, causing the object to be effectively present in us. Consequently, love seeks an intimate union with the object loved—a union so strong that it amounts to an identification.

This means that we take personally not only our physical and psychological characteristics, but also what happens to other individuals whom we identify with. These identifications break down the barrier between subject and object, creating an expanded self. According to Aquinas, each person is this expanded self, comprised of other things and individuals we love and thereby with which we identify. By punishing a person who has injured those with whom we identify, we demonstrate that we are not simply isolated individuals, each pursuing his or her own egoistic concerns. In contrast to Pojman, Aquinas insists that revenge is and *should* be personal. While we think that observing the injustice done to others causes our anger, the political is always personal. Our anger is always about ourselves, even if it about our expanded self.

The anger directed at those who have harmed those whom we identify with can be better understood by returning to the concept of "zeal-

ous anger." Recall that zealous anger is a desire of vengeance insofar as it is really just. If we identify with something we love, zeal may become aroused when that thing is harmed. Aquinas elucidates this relationship:

Zeal . . . arises from the intensity of love. For it is evident that the more intensely a power tends to anything, the more vigorously it withstands opposition or resistance. Since therefore love is a movement towards the object loved . . . an intense love seeks to remove anything that opposes it.<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, zealous anger has its source in love, wanting good for someone else. If someone opposes that which we love, we will seek to remove the opposition. One motivated by zealous anger will demand that the offender stop expressing his contemptuous attitude to those with whom she identifies. If the demand is ignored, zealous anger will issue in action. Ingrid Newkirk, co-founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, writes:

How many of us would be content writing letters to the editor and politely talking about the situation if our very own loved ones had been snatched away from us and were being imprisoned and tortured? Would we sit back if our sisters were being force-fed bleach? Well, someone's sister is being force-fed bleach. . . . We know about it, but we continue sitting here. Should we blame the ALF for getting up and trying to stop it?<sup>50</sup>

The zealous anger an ALF member experiences "arises from the intensity of love." She may identify with the dog being force-fed bleach as her own relative or her own self. The more she identifies with the animal victim, the more "vigorously" she will seek to remove the oppressor.

### Anger and Animal Rights Activism

Much of Aquinas's account of anger has great significance for those engaged in animal liberation efforts. The aim of animal rights activists is to improve the lives of oppressed animals, thereby restoring justice. Moreover, animal rights activists identify with these animal victims and become angry at their unjust treatment. Offenses against animals and slights against their particular cause commonly elicit their anger. And

many do seek revenge against those they perceive as oppressors. Since Aquinas's description of anger and its cause seems applicable to those activists, his account may be able to help them understand how their anger may be used constructively.

First, however, let us examine how anger can counteract the activist's efforts to help the oppressed. Recall that a person feeling anger undergoes physiological changes. The physiological factors of anger result in increased activity and intensified strength, facilitating an immediate response to the offender. But the angry person may seek revenge, not as a reasonable response to a circumspectly calculated injustice, but as a physically incited, impetuous reaction to an immediately perceived attack. In some instances, the bodily changes that normally accompany anger may become so turbulent as to short-circuit reason. Thus an activist can become consumed with anger. Such a condition should be avoided, for it can lead to extreme or unsuitable behavior, such as "wounds, murders, and the like." We need only think of the anger that led one "pro-life" activist to murder a physician who performed abortions. Clearly, anger is always a dangerous impulse, and needs observant management.

In the heat of a confrontation, an activist whose reasoning process is diminished can lose sight of his or her constructive objective. Aquinas reminds us that a tranquil state of mind is necessary for planned anger and effective revenge. The difference between anger as an impetuous reaction and planned anger is embodied in Aquinas's distinction between anger experienced prior to rational judgment and anger experienced consequent to rational judgment. For example, Alex Pacheco, an animal-rights activist, worked undercover at the Institute for Behavioral Research in Silver Springs, Maryland. In this laboratory primates were crippled through surgery and then tormented in attempts to make them use their deadened limbs. For Pacheco, the vivisector's ridicule, neglect, and torture of the animals was certainly an unmerited slight. The sorrow and pain he felt upon seeing the primates' plight was naturally followed by anger. Had Pacheco acted on his antecedent emotion of anger, he might have uttered hostile, threatening words at the laboratory technicians or even physically assaulted one of them. But if he had acted in this way, his attempted revenge would have turned against both him and his cause. Instead, he used his consequent anger and waited four months to build a case sufficiently strong to initiate the first-ever police raid on an experimental laboratory—a raid that also led to closing the laboratory and resulted in the first criminal conviction of an experimenter on charges of cruelty to animals in the

United States. Acting on his consequent anger, Pacheco must have taken pleasure in exposing and halting the blatant cruelty of the vivisector. Moreover, in line with Aquinas's exhortation, Pacheco accomplished all of this without focusing on the character of the vivisector, but on his action.

Activists should also pay heed to Aquinas's description of hot-tempered anger and ill will. When we continually dwell on what makes us angry without showing "outward signs of anger," this internalized anger can easily lead to depression. When we become angry quickly and for relatively trivial reasons, activist burnout can occur. "Burnout" is a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by a devotion to a relationship, a way of life, or a cause that fails to produce the expected results. Excessive anger may deplete an activist's energy and cause her to lose touch with herself and her movement. In extreme cases, the person who once cared very deeply about a cause may insulate herself to the point that she no longer cares at all. As time elapses, her enthusiasm dies and she becomes continually angry, or angry over almost everything. The anger may erupt continually or may be bottled up within her, but if she allows it to continue unchecked, the result is burnout. In these cases, anger can be a whirlpool: overwhelming, frustrating, leaving a person feeling helpless or incapable of acting.

Not knowing how to channel anger may lead to an unhealthy condition. If we combine Aquinas's account of hot-tempered anger and ill will with his recognition of anger's bodily effects, it should not surprise us that the hormonal changes associated with these types of anger have been directly linked to cardiovascular and gastric disease. And studies show that the stress associated with a quick temper and with continually dwelling on offenses can cause severe anxiety and depression, and indirectly contributes to diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. Clearly, anger can be a counterproductive force, socially, biologically, and psychologically.

On the other hand, anger can be a positive force, an impetus for social change. The physical changes of anger can facilitate virtuous action against a person who has either actually harmed or potentially could harm those for whom we care. Anger can serve as energy for action, increasing our internal strength and resolve. Recurrent surges of anger can provide a continual source of energy for our social commitments. Our zeal to avenge an offense can make us take up the gauntlet of activism. As an outlet for anger, activism can overcome one's sense of isolation in that one joins with a group of like-minded people. A group identity not only creates a culture of support and sol-



idity for anger, but can also have a much broader impact than our revenge as isolated individuals.

In his discussion of how we express anger, Aquinas has warned us that anger residing solely in the heart may lead to unfulfilled indignation. In speech, it may lead to vitriolic words spewed out in haste. Commonly, novice activists charge angrily into the fray without stopping first to reason what action may constitute the most effective approach to the perceived injustice. They risk triggering anger in others, either against the individual activist, against the cause that is represented, or both.

Using a rational approach, our anger is not eliminated. Instead our anger becomes the kind of moderate anger that Aquinas praises. We still feel anger, but in a moderate, less intense way, when we take action governed by reason. At this point we can more effectively focus on resolving our grievances. The excess anger that we no longer feel has become the energy, the fuel to help us keep actively involved in the animal rights movement. Think of anger as a fire within us. When we nourish anger excessively, we add fuel to the fire. Naturally, this may lead to an unfortunate explosion. However, when we moderate our anger by allowing reason to control it, the fire still burns, but the fuel is channeled into constructive action impelling us forward rather than adding to the fire. Using anger as a catalyst for constructive growth and change can be liberating for activists themselves, as well as for the animals they seek to benefit.

Aquinas's analysis of anger provides a further insight into this passion that may help animal rights activists. In fact, their very activism can expose the root of anger that Aquinas identifies, namely, love, inspiring love to work in partnership with justice. We want animal abusers to acknowledge the excellences of our movement and of the animals we love. We want these animals to be treated as valuable, worthwhile individuals by the people who have slighted them. The acknowledgment we hope for and the treatment we desire shows, as John Giles Milhaven observes, that anger is not only love of the victims, but also love of the offender. He says that one who does not take others seriously is lacking (in human goodness). Thus when we compel an animal abuser to take animals seriously, it is "a way of loving her."<sup>51</sup> By making her confront the unjust way she has treated animals, we provide her with the opportunity to restore her human goodness. Our belief that the abuser can be better than she is and our desire to make her so can be considered a type of love. The activist who is aware of the love for both victim and offender that underlies her anger will be

more inclined to moderate her passion and seek constructive ways to express it. And knowing that anger is grounded in love can help us to better accept it than if we perceive it as a raw, hostile passion we should expunge from our lives.

Finally, activists can learn from Aquinas's observation that anger is caused by a slight against our excellence. Identifying their excellence with justice, animal liberators may come to understand why a slight against their movement arouses their ire. They may feel vindicated by Aquinas's claim that their excellence is more deserving of honor than the excellence of those concerned with outward trappings. The fact that the masses acknowledge only the excellences of wealth, power, and position may help us to understand why more people may not appreciate liberators' efforts on behalf of animals. This is especially true when activists represent an oppressed group with which the masses do not identify. For instance, the masses may take the sinking of an animal testing laboratory executive's yacht more seriously than they take the fact that their laboratory kills 500 animals on a daily basis. So they will not recognize the justice of the ALF's action. Not valuing the activists' identification with the animals and not seeing any property, wealth, or power that the activists stand to lose, the majority may become suspicious of animal rights activism. Moreover, if the property, wealth, or power of animal abusers is threatened by animal rights activists, the majority may be expected to side with the offenders.

No wonder animal rights activists feel anger so frequently! Yet rather than approaching justice through an impersonal retributive standpoint, the personal quality of anger and the revenge it seeks, if moderated, can provide a greater motivation for accomplishing the activist's goals pertaining to justice. Aquinas's account of anger, due to its intense association with justice, can help those involved in animal rights activism to better understand their own anger, the most salutary expression of it, and its usefulness as a tool to enhance the effectiveness of their cause.

## Notes

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1944), 47, 1. Further references to this work will be noted as *S. T.*
2. "The movement of anger arises from a wrong done that causes sorrow, for which sorrow vengeance is sought as a remedy. Consequently, as soon as vengeance is present, pleasure ensues, and so much the greater according as the sorrow was greater." *Ibid.*, I-II 48, 1.
3. *Ibid.*

4. Louis Pojman, "Yes, the Death Penalty is Morally Permissible," in *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, edited by Louis Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1996), 547.
5. S. T. I-II 108, 4.
6. Aquinas, *De Malo*, 12, 5. Cf. Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, Chapter 4, Lecture 10.
7. In the process of becoming indignant we are first sorrowful, then immediately desire revenge, and finally imagine that whatever offends us is an insult. If the insult goes unpunished, we feel indignant.
8. *De Malo*, 12, 5.
9. Robert Solomon, *The Passions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 184.
10. S. T. I-II 22, 3.
11. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 4, Lecture 13.
12. *Ibid.*
13. S. T. I-II 46, 8.
14. According to Pierre Chantraine's *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1974), the origin of *menis* is unknown, although Chantraine does observe that the ancients commonly regarded the term to be derived from *menein*.
15. S. T., II-II 158, 5.
16. *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 4.
17. *Ibid.*
18. S. T. I-II 46, 8.
19. *Ibid.*, II-II 158, 5, ad 2.
20. *Ibid.*, II-II 158, 5.
21. *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 4, Lecture 13, 346.
22. S. T. II-II 158, 2.
23. *Ibid.*, II-II 108, 1.
24. *De Malo* 12, 1.
25. Solomon Schimmel comments, "The terms *vice* and *sin* are often interchanged in medieval writings, but they are not identical. Vices and virtues were the concepts and terms of the Greek and Roman philosophers; sins of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Vices are character traits. Sins are specific acts of commission or omission. Once Judaism and Christianity adopted the concepts of vice and virtue from the Greek and Roman moralists, vices were often called sins and the sins vices. The seven deadly 'sins' are also called the deadly 'vices,' which is more accurate. They are basic, perhaps universal human tendencies from which sins result." *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14.
26. S. T. I-II 24, 1.
27. Dr. Richard Sharpe, *The Cruel Deception* (Wellingborough, England: Thorsons Publishing Group), 271.
28. *De Malo*, 12, 1. Cf. S. T. II-II 158, 1 ad 2.
29. *Ibid.*, 12, 2.
30. S. T. I-II 24, 3 ad 1.
31. *Ibid.* On the other hand, Aquinas observes that consequent emotions may also increase the malice of an act if used to serve a morally bad judgment. For instance, if I judge that animals may be treated cruelly, my emotion of anger toward animals increases the malice of my acts of cruelty toward them.
32. *Ibid.*, I-II 59, 2 ad 3.

33. Thomas Aquinas, *On Truth* 26, 7. Cf. *De Malo* 12, 1 reply 4.
34. S. T. II-II 59, 2 ad 4.
35. *Decendum quod omnes causae irae reducuntur ad parvipensionem*. S. T. I-II 47, 2.
36. Neglect is a form of slighting; we take the trouble to remember things that are important to us. Again, it is a mark of slight regard for another if one does not hesitate to hurt him in bringing bad news. One who expresses glee in the midst of another's bad luck seems to be indifferent to his good fortune or bad. So, also, one who frustrates another's effort to accomplish something, without himself deriving any benefit, does not care a great deal about his friendship. Thus all of these provoke anger because they indicate contempt. *Ibid.*, II-II 47, 2 ad 3. See John Giles Milhaven's detailed illustrations of different kinds of slights in *Good Anger* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 130-31.
37. *Ex omnibus autem bonis nostris aliquam excellentiam quaerimus. Et ideo quodcumque nocumentum nobis inferatur, in quantum excellentiae derogat, videtur ad parvipensionem pertinere*. S. T. I-II 47, 2.
38. *Ibid.*, II-II 102, 1 ad 2.
39. *Ibid.*, II-II 186, 7 ad 4.
40. Diana Fritz Cates, "Taking Women's Experience Seriously: Thomas Aquinas and Audre Lorde on Anger," in *Aquinas and Empowerment* by G. Simon Harak, S. J. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 64-65.
41. *Ibid.*, 86 fn. 91. Cates quotes S. T. II-II 63, 3 in support of her contention.
42. *Ibid.*, II-II 2 ad 4. Elsewhere Aquinas says, "Since the magnanimous man pursues great aims, he must strive chiefly for those which involve some excellence, and avoid those which involve defect. Now noble action, generosity, and the return of more than one receives are marks of excellence. He therefore applies himself eagerly to those acts, on the grounds of their excellence. . . . It is a defect to exaggerate the importance of certain external goods or evils to the extent of abandoning justice or some other virtue." *Quia magnanimus tendit ad magna, consequens est quod ad illa praecipue tendat quae important aliquam excellentiam, et illa fugiat quae pertinet ad defectum. Pertinet autem ad quamdam excellentiam quod aliqua benefaciat, et quod sit communicativus et plurimum retributivus. Et ideo ad ista promptum se exhibet, in quantum habent rationem cuiusdam excellentiae. . . . Ad defectam autem pertinet quod aliquis intantum magnipendat alia exteriora bona vel mala, quod pro eis a justitia vel quaecumque virtute declinet*. S. T. II-II 129, 4 ad 2. Aquinas connects "excellence" and "virtue" in 78 different places in his various texts.
43. *Ibid.*, I-II 47, 2.
44. *Ibid.*, II-II 58, 2.
45. *Ibid.*, I-II 47, 1 ad 3.
46. *Ibid.*, I-II 28, 1
47. *Ibid.*
48. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 19.
49. S. T. I-II 28, 4.
50. See Newkirk in this volume.
51. Milhaven, *Good Anger*, 138.