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Locke, Anger, and the State

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Abstract

While “anger” or “angry” are words often used to describe today’s societies and politics, they are not the ones that commentators of Locke use when talking about his political theory. This article argues that anger is in fact very much at the heart of his political outlook, and that focusing on this passion helps us to see an important aspect of the state. Since little has been said in relation to Locke and anger, this article starts by examining how he defined, viewed, and justified anger. It shows how Locke conceptualised a problematic component of anger, revenge, in terms of retributive punishment, which, when proportionate, can be viewed positively. The article then shows how Locke placed and tamed anger in the state’s hands to resolve the problems in the state of nature caused by anger. In this way, this article sheds light on the state’s role as an anger manager.

Keywords: Locke, anger, revenge, nature of the state

1. Introduction

The following is a reflection on the location and role of anger in the political theory of the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke. While talk of an “age of anger” is all the rage in the media today, anger has not attracted the same kind of attention in Locke scholarship.¹ Studies that deal more generally with Locke’s discussion of passions do exist, often highlighting its Stoic character (Nuovo 2008: 11–12; Kelly 2011: 46–53; Di Biase 2016).² Anger is indeed usually mentioned in these studies. However, to my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study of Locke’s discussion of anger as of yet. The impression that this lacuna gives is that anger did not occupy the philosopher’s mind very much. Against this backdrop, the thesis I wish to put forward, somewhat provocatively, is that anger does figure in Locke’s political theory, and moreover that it figures quite centrally. People in the Lockean state of nature experience great inconveniences due to an anger problem: angry people judge and excessively punish others, making those who are punished angry in turn. Locke’s solution to

1 For example, “anger” is not listed in the subject index of the *John Locke Bibliography*. See Attig 2023.

2 There are also studies that look at the impact of Locke’s ideas on the passions. See, for example, Sodano 2017, which gives an account of the eighteenth-century inheritance of Locke’s ideas on the passions. See also Radcliffe 2018: 197–213 for a general survey of the relationship between passions, reason, and action in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Locke’s place within this intellectual tradition.

the problem is the creation of the state. Looking at Locke through the lens of anger will thus help us to bring to light an overlooked aspect of the nature of the state as an anger manager.³

In the next section, I will precede my discussion of the place and role of anger in Locke's political theory with a more general discussion of how anger is defined, viewed, and justified in his thought.⁴ I do this for two reasons. Firstly, as noted, this is because little has been said or done hitherto by way of making a case for a Lockean *account* of anger. I will therefore try to reconstruct and analyse Locke's account of anger, which I believe will be a fruitful and meaningful endeavour in itself. Secondly, and more importantly in connection with my thesis, I begin with a general inquiry into Locke and anger because what anger is and how it plays out in a general context for Locke will help us to see how it fits in his political theory more clearly.

2. Locke on Anger: Definition, Evaluation, and Justification

In this section, I will first briefly introduce Locke's definition of anger. I will then survey what he says about anger. After examining how Locke views anger, I will return to his definition to discuss it more thoroughly, and also look at how he justifies the passion. Locke's most definitive account of anger appears in his philosophical work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1979. Cited by book, chapter, section), in the context of discussing how different passions are produced, from a reflection on pleasure and pain and their different causes (Radcliffe 2018: 204), Locke offers a series of definitions of various passions, including anger, which he defines as follows: "Anger is uneasiness or discomposure of the Mind, upon the receipt of any Injury, with a present purpose of Revenge" (1979: 2.20.12). This definition of anger would later be adopted and cited in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* of 1755 (Johnson 1755; Dixon 2020: 12).

Martha C. Nussbaum (2016: 5), a modern scholar who has written extensively on anger, holds that there are two components to anger: a) "the idea of a serious wrong done to someone or something of significance," and b) "the idea that it would be a good thing if the wrongdoer suffered some bad consequences somehow." In an article examining the history of the idea of anger, Thomas Dixon (2020: 12) notes that Locke and Nussbaum have "similar" definitions of anger. As can be seen, Locke's definition does indeed include the two elements Nussbaum identifies: a perception of being wronged⁵ and the idea of wanting revenge.⁶

Before proceeding to Locke's view of anger, I should note that I will be assuming that, when Locke uses the word "anger" and its cognates, he is using it in the way more or less defined in the manner above. To use Locke's own terminology, I will be assuming that he is not making a rigorous distinction between the technical, "philosophical," and everyday "civil" use of the word (1979: 3.9.3), at least not to an extent that would radically alter the twofold definition of anger.

3 I am indebted to Billy Christmas for his suggestion on how the article's argument might be best framed.

4 I do not discuss the aptness or effectiveness of anger, which are also staples of discussions of anger in the modern literature. See, for example, Srinivasan 2018; Silva 2021.

5 For Locke, injury involves an infringement of one's rights. See Shimokawa 2013: 573.

6 Victor Nuovo (2008: 12) suggests Locke may have borrowed this definition from the Stoics, citing Seneca's "On Anger." See also Dixon (2020: 12); Marshall (1994: 164n). Nussbaum's (2016: 17; 2018: 72–3) definition of anger, by contrast, is modelled on Aristotle's. It might be worth pointing out that Aristotle and Seneca had different views about anger. Whereas Seneca (2010) believed anger should always be avoided, Aristotle (1999: 61 (1125b)) argued that one who "is angry at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised."

2.1. Locke's View of Anger

Anger has had both its supporters and detractors. Traditionally, however, starting with Seneca's (2010) merciless onslaught, anger has tended to be criticised, and therefore has been on the defence. More recently, though, writers are coming in its defence, neatly captured by a title like *The Case for Rage*, to cite just one example (Cherry 2021). However, for Nussbaum (2016: 5), anger "is always normatively problematic, whether in the personal or in the public realm." This is because the idea of revenge—component b) above—is "normatively problematic," and so with it, anger falls too (Nussbaum 2016: 15).

Given the similarity between Nussbaum and Locke's definitions of anger, it might be supposed that Locke would also have a negative view of the passion. Yet a quick survey of Locke's writing suggests that, while anger on the whole is not good, it is acceptable and called for in some cases. Below, I will compile Locke's various remarks, both negative and positive, on anger from his philosophical, political, educational, and theological writings. After this exercise, I will return to Locke's definition of anger and consider how his way of thinking provides the conceptual tools to justify it.

Let me begin with some of Locke's negative remarks. In the *Essay* itself, anger is considered a "violent passion" that can interfere with our thought (1979: 2.21.53). Likewise, in the *Conduct of the Understanding* (1996, cited by section), passions including anger sometimes "take possession of our minds with a kind of authority," seizing the understanding. These passions are referred to as a form of "tyranny on the understanding," or a "clog" hanging upon the mind, putting people under "the power of an enchantment" (1996: §45). These negative remarks resonate with Stoic scepticism towards passions like anger (Di Biase 2016: 222). Such is the understanding of anger Locke seems to have in mind when he talks about the "chastisement" (i.e. whipping, beating) of an obstinate, crying child in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1989, cited by section). Here, he tells the parents to chastise the child—if it comes to that—"without Passion" and not "in the heat of Anger," which will cloud their judgment and cause them to overdo it (1989: §112). Once children start to see the difference between good and bad behaviour, "Kind concern and help" should be the norm rather than "the Anger and passionate Reproaches of their Tutor and Parents" (1989: §80).

As already noted, Locke's definition of anger includes a revenge component. From this perspective, it seems appropriate that we also consider his views on revenge to clarify his views on anger. As might be expected, Locke does not have a good opinion of revenge either. In the *Essay*, revenge is described as "an impatient desire," which "keeps the will steady and intent," and "having once laid hold on the will, lets it not go" (1979: 2.21.38). In *Some Thoughts*, the vengeful feelings of both children and parents are reprimanded: "The Accusations of Children one against another, which usually are but the Clamors of Anger and Revenge desiring Aid, should not be favourably received, nor hearken'd to" (1989: §109). In the context of discouraging a random application of corporal punishment, Locke writes that "if you punish a Child so, as if it were only to revenge the past Fault, which has raised your Choler," such punishment would not work (1989: §78).

Revenge is also condemned throughout Locke's political writings. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (2010, cited by page number), Locke notes that Christians are "admonished that they abstain from all manner of Revenge (*vindicta*), even after repeated Provocations and multiplied Injuries" (2010: 25). In the *Two Treatises of Government* (1988, cited by treatise, section), like the parents in the example above who punish their child excessively, revenge is brought up in the context of excessive punishment. In the state of nature, where everyone has the right to punish wrongdoers, Locke conjectures that "Ill Nature, Passion and Revenge will carry them too far in punishing others" (1988: II.13). Indeed (and as we shall see later), this is one of the major inconveniences of the state of nature: "Men being partial to themselves, Passion and Revenge is very apt to carry them too far, and with too much heat, in their own Cases" (1988: II.125).

Yet, despite all these negative remarks about anger and revenge, there are passages in Locke's work that seem to condone or approve of anger (I will discuss his views on revenge in Section 2.2). For example, in *Some Thoughts*, Locke advises parents as follows: "Parents should well consider, what Faults in their Children are weighty enough to deserve the Declaration of their Anger" (1989: §60). In the *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1999, cited by page number), commenting on what people who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah were to do, Locke notes that Jesus forbade "not only Murder, but causeless Anger" (1999: 123). What these two passages suggest is that, while some kinds of anger were unacceptable, others could be acceptable. Not all faults called for anger, but some did, being "weighty enough"; similarly, anger that was not "causeless" was not forbidden. Likewise in *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* (1987, cited by page number), Locke renders the well-known passage on anger "Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26) as follows: "If you meet with Provocations that move you to Anger, take care that you indulge it not so far, as to make it sinful: Defer not its Cure till Sleep calm the Mind, but endeavour to recover your self forthwith, and bring your self into Temper" (1987: 650).⁷ Again, the point is that there is a form of anger that can become sinful, but also, that there could be anger that was not sinful just yet.

Now that we have seen that anger is sometimes acceptable and called for on Locke's account, I want to consider how he could defend this position, especially given that he had a very negative view of one of anger's components, revenge. To do this, I will return to the postponed task of examining Locke's definition of anger.

2.2 Locke's Definition of Anger Considered

To recapitulate, Locke's definition of anger is "uneasiness or discomposure of the Mind, upon the receipt of any Injury, with a present purpose of Revenge." I will first say something about the idea of uneasiness in the definition, which will then take us to the idea of revenge.⁸ In the *Essay*, Locke tells us that uneasiness is experienced "in the want of an absent good" (1979: 2.21.31, 2.20.6). Uneasiness in turn gives rise to an equal desire to quell it. In fact, Locke says we may call uneasiness "desire," being "scarce distinguishable from it"; all the while there is a desire to ease an uneasiness, we may call it desire, and once this desire is attained, uneasiness is no longer there. If bodily pain is experienced, then ease from pain is the absent good, and there is a "desire equal to the pain" to ease it.⁹ Pain, which is uneasiness,¹⁰ is not only about bodily pain (1979: 2.20.15), but also of the "Mind" (1979: 2.20.17, 2.21.31). The uneasiness in anger, according to Locke's definition then, is of the latter kind, being "an uneasiness ... of the Mind."¹¹

This seems to be the right point at which to bring revenge into the picture. When we think about revenge in the everyday sense as "getting even" with the perpetrator, the language of uneasiness, which uses the language of equalising, makes a great deal of sense. You are wronged and want something that can neutralise the wrong

7 See, for example, Francis Bacon's (1985: 226–7) essay "Of Anger," which cites this verse. On the "delicate distinction between just and sinful anger" dogging Christian writers, see Enenkel and Traninger 2015: 4; Konstan 2020: 108–10).

8 Since this definition of anger is the one Locke uses from the first edition of the *Essay*, it is unclear whether we should make too much of the word "uneasiness," which is introduced in the second edition and is used thereafter to explain the force that determines the will (1979: 2.21.29, 31, 2.20.6). But since he did continue to use the term "uneasiness" in the definition of anger, even after the second edition, we may say that he did not find it incompatible with the discussion of volition in subsequent editions.

9 Locke notes that not all absent good is a pain, in which case desire might not accompany it (1979: 2.21.31). I suppose an example might be something like the following: the presence of a wealthy uncle might be considered a good, but at the same time, his indifference to you might not necessarily be a pain given that you are not destitute, and thus you may not experience any desire to want that uncle in your life.

10 See Locke 1979: 2.20.5. Locke replaces pain with uneasiness in the fourth and fifth edition of the *Essay* when talking about "Uneasiness or Delight." Also see 1979: 2.20.1. Pain is equated with "Trouble," although Locke (perhaps uncharacteristically) does not seem to be too interested in the wording: "call it how you please."

11 Of course, this mental pain may be preceded or accompanied by physical pain.

(Shklar 1990: 94). Could revenge play this role? It could very much for someone like Aristotle. On Aristotle's account (1926: 173 (1378b)), "anger is always accompanied by a certain pleasure, due to the hope of revenge to come." Nussbaum (2016: 17) explains that "the desire for retribution somehow responds to the injury," or more precisely, to the pain produced by the injury. The pleasure of revenge is meant to neutralise the pain. How are things with Locke though? Does revenge have a neutralising effect? To answer this question, we will need to get a better sense of what exactly revenge is for Locke.

In the *Essay*, Locke identifies revenge as a "mixed mode," or a complex idea, made of several kinds of simple ideas (1979: 2.12.5): "To conclude, Let us examine any *Modes of Action*, v.g. *Consideration* and *Assent*, which are Actions of the Mind; *Running* and *Speaking*, which are Actions of the Body; *Revenge* and *Murther*, which are Actions of both together, and we shall find them but so many *Collections of simple Ideas*, which together make up the complex ones signified by those Names" (1979: 2.22.10). As the cited passage shows, revenge involves both a mental and physical component. We have also seen above that revenge is a persistent desire, and causes people to pay back excessively. In the *Two Treatises*, Locke refers to it as an "irregular Passion" (1988: II.199). While these are features of revenge, they do not tell us much about what kind of concept it is exactly. What does the avenger do?

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, Locke does not offer a definition of revenge as such unlike his contemporary Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes (2012: 86), for example, defines revenge (*vindicta*) as follows in the *Leviathan*: "Desire, by doing hurt to another, to make him condemn some fact of his own, REVENGEFULNESSE." Also, in his explanation of the seventh law of nature, revenge (*ultio*) is defined as "retribution of Evil for Evil" (2012: 232). The law of nature tells us that revenge should "look not at the greatness of the evil past, but the greatness of the good to follow." Legitimate punishment must be about the "correction of the offender," and without the correction part, that is, "Revenge without respect to the Example, and profit to come," revenge is an act of vain-glory, and ultimately, cruelty (2012: 232). Hobbes's (2012: 542) discussion seems to suggest that revenge that is properly executed can be a form of punishment, although what he says later on seems to come into tension with this statement: "the end of punishing is not revenge [*ultio*], and discharge of choler; but correction, either of the offender, or of others by his example." In saying this Hobbes of course could have meant revenge here as improper revenge, nonetheless leaving room for a legitimate form of revenge.

While Locke lacks a definition along the lines of Hobbes, there are hints in the *Two Treatises* that might help us to get an idea as to what the former could have meant by revenge. Interestingly, what he says in this work seems to suggest that there is a form of revenge that can count as punishment and one that cannot, very much like the reading of Hobbes noted just now. At II.233 in the *Two Treatises*, Locke adduces the absolutist theorist William Barclay to show that even the "great Assertor of the Power and Sacredness of Kings" (1988: II.232) was forced to admit that resistance was permissible in some cases. In discussing Barclay, Locke offers an English translation of the relevant section from Barclay's account of permissible resistance, written in Latin. Locke notes that the "great Advocate of Monarchical Power" attached two limitations to resisting a tyrant: one, you must resist with reverence, and two (and which is relevant for the present case), you must resist "without Retribution, or Punishment" (1988: II.233). In Locke's English translation, while the term "punish" is used once, "retribution" is not used at all. Instead, "revenge" is used three times and appears in the following contexts: 1) self-defence is part of the law of nature, but for the people "to revenge themselves upon him [i.e. the King], must by no means be allowed them"; 2) the people may repulse the present attempts of the King, but "must not revenge past violences"; 3) the people may prevent mischief before it is done, but when it is done, "they must not revenge it on the King." "Punish" is used in reference to, or rather, to summarise these acts: "For it is natural for us to defend Life and Limb, but that an Inferiour should punish a Superiour, is against Nature."

It is noteworthy that Locke uses the term “retribution” or “punishment” to capture these acts of “revenges” (the use of the terms in the original text – *ultio, ulciscendi, vindicare* – each standing for “revenge” was not of Locke’s own choosing after all). In other words, this move suggests that, in Locke’s mind, retribution and revenge contain each other; they may even be interchangeable terms. If so, looking at “retribution” next might shed some light on Locke’s understanding of revenge.

Locke uses the term “retribute” twice in the *Two Treatises*, at II.8 and II.176. The first appears in Locke’s discussion of the right to punish in the state of nature. Everyone may punish a wrongdoer, but “only to retribute to him” what is proportionate. This passage is cited as an example in the aforementioned English dictionary by Johnson under “retribute,” which gives the definition: “To pay back; to make repayment of.” Indeed, punishment itself is defined in this section of the *Two Treatises* as “lawfully” doing “harm to another” (1988: II.8). The second use of retribute appears in Locke’s discussion of the appeal to heaven. If you appeal to heaven and resist an aggressor, you must be sure that you do have a just cause, otherwise God will “retribute to every one according to the Mischiefs he hath created to his Fellow-Subjects” (1988: II.176).¹² As this will be happening at God’s “Tribunal,” this retribution of God’s may be equated with punishment. Therefore in both cases, on Locke’s account, retribution is a form of payback, and is part and parcel of punishment. We may infer from this discussion that, in Locke’s thought, revenge is conceptualised as an act of payback which also features in legitimate punishment. It is this possibility that helps him to maintain that revenge, and hence, anger, may be justifiable. The question is, then, what kind of retribution is legitimate?

According to Alex Tuckness (2010: 730), Lockean punishment is legitimate insofar as it is focused on the public good or is used “to protect the rights of citizens.” To be legitimate, punishment must be proportionate to the transgression, and what is proportionate is that which serves the end of restraint and reparation (1988: II.8). As for restraint, by punishing the wrongdoer, the goal is to “make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and by his Example others, from doing the like mischief” (1988: II.8, see also II.12).¹³ As for reparation, victims—and only the victims—may demand and recover from the perpetrator the damage that they have caused.¹⁴ Within these bounds, retribution will count as legitimate punishment (See also Locke 1997: 339, “Punitive Justice”).

Let us now piece together the preceding discussion. Kept within limits, retribution counts as a legitimate form of punishment. If revenge and retribution contain each other, then just as retribution can be proportionate and legitimate, revenge can exist in a form that is cleansed from its excessive form.¹⁵ Thus, while people can experience anger, and anger includes a revenge component, given that the revenge impulse is tamed, it can be seen as an acceptable passion. Anger can be justified even with the revenge component.

12 In his translation of Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration*, William Popple renders *rependet* (repay, pay back; reward) in the context of God’s judgment as “retribute”: “God, I say, is the only Judge in this case, who will retribute unto every one at the last day according to his Deserts” (Locke 2010: 49).

13 It may be interesting to compare Locke with a particular reading of Aristotle (Scheiter 2010: 1, 7, 8). On this view of Aristotle, while punishment and revenge are different, revenge is “analogous” to punishment. Revenge is also about “preventing future injustice,” not dissimilar to what Locke says. Moreover, for Aristotle, revenge need not be severe; what is needed is pain that can cause people to repent. Yet the difference between revenge and punishment for Aristotle is that revenge is about “preventing injustice from happening to us,” that is to say, the person seeking revenge.

14 Indeed, John Dunn (2003: 60, 62) refers to the right of reparation as “the right of individual *revenge*” or “the right to *avenge* individual injuries” (emphasis added).

15 Thinkers today, such as Robert Nozick (1981: 368), argue that revenge and retribution are distinct. Nozick does admit that retribution and revenge “share a common structure,” namely “a penalty is inflicted for a reason . . . with the desire that the other person know why this is occurring and know that he was intended to know.” Yet Nozick maintains they are not the same. See also Walen 2020. For Locke, revenge and retribution are concepts that contain each other, and so we may say that he does not share Nozick’s view. Also, against Nozick’s view, see Fassin 2018: 36.

We may add here that the idea of revenge as a form of retributive punishment suggests that it is for the most part meant to be applied to inter-personal relationships; or, to put it another way, it is meant to hold *someone* rather than *something* morally accountable (cf. Callard 2020: 18). For example, tennis players sometimes throw their racket in anger, blaming it for their bad performance, thereby seeking revenge on it metaphorically. If, however, revenge is about punishment, then on Locke's account it will not make sense to say that you are punishing the racket. Just punishment, for Locke, implies a moral agent, someone who could have done something otherwise but did not, while the racket in this specific case could not have of its own power (1979: 4.17.4).¹⁶ Locke did, of course, entertain the possibility that there could be rational monkeys (1979: 3.11.16), and so technically speaking, punishment may, in theory, be justly inflicted on non-human animals or things. Perhaps a case can be made for this with respect to, say, AI robots in the future, but it seems to make sense to focus on revenge as applying to other human beings for the most part in the present discussion. Seeing revenge, and hence anger, in this light will help us to appreciate it in the next section as a political concept, and the appropriateness of its mobilisation and use by the state.

Before ending this section, I want to rewind a little bit and go back to the discussion about the relationship between uneasiness and revenge, now that we have a better sense of Lockean revenge. The question under consideration was: what is the relationship between revenge and the pain one experienced, accompanied by the desire to quell it? Speaking of (envy and) anger, Locke argues that they are not caused by "Pain and Pleasure simply in themselves, but having in them some mixed Considerations of our selves and others, are not therefore to be found in all Men, because those other parts of valuing their Merits, or intending Revenge, is wanting in them" (1979: 2.20.14). Given that Locke says other passions, such as love and hate, that terminate "purely in Pain and Pleasure" are "found in all Men," it seems he is saying that the intent of revenge is distinct from mere pain, and on that account anger is not experienced by every person.¹⁷

There may be a number of ways to interpret Locke here. First, he could be saying that anger is about wanting a wrong to be righted *and also* wanting revenge *separately*. While the first part might be experienced by all people, the second might not. Thus, the desire for relief from the injury, or pain, and the desire to exact revenge, are different. For this reason, anger is not universally experienced. If this is the case, then the equalising "getting even" metaphor seems to collapse. There is a desire for something to equal the wrong (and to that extent, the idea of equality might be there), but this is not through revenge. Revenge on this account would be a random, independent act.

In a similar vein to this possibility is the following. Anger is a sense of being wronged, accompanied or expressed by a desire for revenge. In his discussion of the parents' declaration of anger in *Some Thoughts*, Locke rephrases anger as the parents' "Displeasure" being declared "to a Degree that carries any Punishment with it." He also talks about the "Marks" of displeasure (1989: §60). Perhaps there is displeasure accompanied by a displaying of one's eagerness to exact revenge, which amounts to anger, and simple displeasure, which does not entail this expression of vengefulness. Not everyone might express their displeasure to such a degree, and as a result might not experience anger. Revenge would be less of a random act being a mode of expression of anger, but, insofar as the equalising effect of uneasiness is concerned, it is a separate act. Nothing is being satisfied through it.

¹⁶ It is possible to see this in the following way too. You could say that you are seeking revenge on yourself by destroying your property, i.e., your tennis racket.

¹⁷ Di Biase (2016: 221) refers to the "special status" of anger. Lehmann (2015: 18, 22) suggests that anger is not universally experienced because, for Locke, anger "counts among the privileges of an honourable man: without a desire for revenge there can be no anger," where revenge is for the injury done to one's socially established rights. And alas, not everyone can enjoy these privileges. On this account, Locke comes close to Aristotle's outlook, where the "powerless are incapable of feeling anger" (Konstan 2020: 103).

The third possibility is precisely one in which revenge satisfies something. Like Aristotle, Locke could be saying that anger is about wanting a wrong to be righted and wanting to do that *through* revenge. But because not everyone wants to right a wrong through revenge, anger is not experienced by everyone. The “getting even” metaphor fits the language of uneasiness and equalness. This reading suggests that the intent of revenge and pain are intertwined. Also, this reading makes sense if anger is a “mixed mode,” a complex idea made of several kinds of simple ideas (1979: 2.12.5). It might be pointed out, against this understanding of anger being a mixed mode, that Locke says that pain is a simple idea, and that passions are “Modifications” thereof, and moreover that his discussion of mixed modes is introduced only later in II.xxii (1979: 2.20.5). Yet Locke also does seem to suggest that anger is not merely a variation of pain. In this case it would be a simple mode, but mixes another element—revenge—with it. As we have seen, revenge is itself a mixed mode. If this is the case, pain and revenge can both be parts of the complex idea of anger.

This third possibility makes greater sense given the nature and function of Lockean revenge. Revenge as retribution is about inflicting harm on others so as to prevent them and others from harming you and others in the future. It is also about recompensing the harm done to you. In these ways, it does give you pleasure in that you can expect a more peaceful and safer future, and also in that you can regain your former possessions and capabilities, albeit by other means. In this proper form of revenge, you are not meant to get pleasure in the Aristotelian or sadistic sense by getting to inflict pain on others to satisfy your bloodthirstiness or simply for the fun of it (Nozick 1974: 138; Simmons 1992: 157). While the sadist’s revenge may be proportionate—namely, the perpetrator may have deserved the degree of punishment inflicted by the sadist—motivation also matters for an act to count as punishment (Simmons 1992: 157). Of course, things may not always be perfect, and people’s vengeful impulses may exceed the proportionality needed to quell the original uneasiness caused by the pain, or may derive pleasure for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, when our vengeful appetite operates correctly, the language of uneasiness captures what is going on when we are angry. The question then is how we can vent our anger properly. This brings us to Locke’s discussion of the state.

3. The Anger Problem in the State of Nature and the State as an Anger Manager

The story of the origin of the state, for Locke, begins in a pre-political state of nature. It is a state of perfect freedom and equality of all people under the law of nature (1988: II.4). The state of nature is not the state of war for Locke as it was for Hobbes, but it is still a state of “inconveniences” (1988: II.13, 19, 127). Locke gives three reasons for why people find themselves in this “ill condition.” The first reason is that there is no set of laws that people have agreed upon to be the “Standard of Right and Wrong” (1988: II.124). True, the law of nature exists, and people can in principle know what it demands, but people often either fail to apply the law to themselves or, more fundamentally, fail to make an effort to learn what it requires of us. The second reason is that there is no impartial “Judge and Executioner of the Law of Nature” (1988: II.125). While everyone has the right to play this role in the state of nature, “Passion and Revenge” makes people overdo punishment, particularly when a case involves themselves. Lastly, sometimes people will not be able to execute punishments simply due to a lack of power (1988: II.126).

We see that even if people know what the law of nature demands, and have the means to punish the perpetrator, being who they are, emotional, they could show favour towards themselves and their close ones and tend to be harsher to others, this harshness precipitated by vengeful passions such as anger (1988: II.13). There is a problem in the state of nature caused in part by anger and its effects. Even if two key obstacles can be overcome, there is

the third (by which I mean the second reason above) that renders life in a state of nature inconvenient—the anger problem, wherein angry people judge others, causing anger in those who are subject to this judgment.

The solution Locke proposes is the state. Let us see then what the state can do to remedy the anger problem. In political society, the legislative will create standing laws, and indifferent judges will judge according to these laws (1988: II.131). Wronged and angry people will not themselves be judging their own cases. When wronged, people will have a place to make an appeal. That said, there are cases even in political society where you may lack this relief. The particular case Locke has in mind is when a thief is robbing you. In this case you lack political and legal relief because you do not have time to appeal to the common judge (1988: II.19, 207). But on the whole, you can and do enjoy the benefit of appealing to the law in political society, and moreover you are expected to do so rather than taking matters into your own hand, as the right to punish is given up to the body that is appointed by the members (1988: II.127). Members must now use their natural force “to assist the Executive Power of the Society” (1988: II.130). The state is equipped by angry people, and on their behalf exercises anger and revenge against wrongdoers at a proportionate level.

In a sense, therefore, a Lockean state is not unlike an Aeschylean one, or at least on one reading of Aeschylus. To illustrate this point, let me compare Locke’s position to an example that Nussbaum often cites, the ending of Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, the third play in the *Oresteia*.¹⁸ In this tragedy, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, is being pursued by the Furies, the ancient goddesses of revenge, for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, who were responsible for murdering Agamemnon, Clytemnestra’s husband and Orestes’s father. Through the intervention of the god and goddess Apollo and Athena, Orestes is set to be judged by the citizens of Athens in court rather than falling into the vindictive hands of the Furies. The jury gives its verdict, and the votes are split. However, Athena casts her vote in favour of Orestes, and he is acquitted. The Furies are angry. Yet Athena appeases the Furies by offering them a venerable place in the city.

According to the traditional interpretation, the “Furies agree to accept the constraints of law, but they retain an unchanged nature, dark and vindictive”. What this means is that the Furies must be honoured as they are (Nussbaum 2018: 65). Nussbaum disagrees with this interpretation. Nussbaum notes that, at the end of play, the Furies are not only received into the city; they are also transformed. Indeed, it is this transformation from the Furies to the “Kindly Ones” that is important and underlies what she calls “Transition-Anger.” The message, according to Nussbaum (2018: 67), is that while the Furies (i.e. revenge) “are still needed” given an imperfect world, “they are not wanted or needed in their original form.”

My reading is closer to the traditional reading, and this helps us to see the nature and function of the Lockean state. The first point to highlight is that the Furies are invited and do accept a place in the city, leaving aside whether their nature is changed or not. The Furies, moreover, will be in the city eternally. The reception and inclusion of the Furies suggests that the revenge component is not incidental, but is an integral part of the city’s order (Aeschylus 1979: lines 891, 897). People’s impulses to get back at the wrongdoer must be taken seriously and cannot be brushed aside easily. Whether outside or inside the courtroom, people need and will seek some sort of payback. Likewise, Locke retains the revenge component in his definition of anger as a way to hold people accountable; moreover, he equips the state with the power to mobilise anger against wrongdoers, or more simply, to retribute them.¹⁹

18 I want to emphasize that I am bringing this play up only to illustrate Locke’s position clearer. My concern is not to offer an accurate interpretation of the play. I neither pretend to do so, nor do I believe I have to in order to make my point.

19 Again, it is interesting to compare Locke’s position to Hobbes’s. Hobbes (2012: 84) defines anger as “Sudden Courage.” Courage, which is also defined, is fear “with hope of avoyding that Hurt by resistence.” See also Hobbes’s (1966) discussion in *The Whole Art*

On Nussbaum's account, the Furies, however, are transformed, and do not remain bloodthirsty and vindictive. They embrace love. Similarly in Locke's case, the revenge component is weakened and the bloodthirstiness is stripped away at the political level. However, this is where I part ways with Nussbaum's reading. Yes, the Furies make some change, but they are neither completely transformed into agents of love as Transition-Anger might suggest, nor do they lose their previous *lex talionis* mentality (Nussbaum 2018: 94). The Kindly Ones' words for the citizens, "But may each give joy to each" (Aeschylus 1979: 219, line 984), a passage Nussbaum cites, is rendered "may they return joy for joy" (Aeschylus 1971: 365) or "may they reciprocate joys" (Aeschylus 2002: 111) in different editions.²⁰ Also, Athena remarks, right after this benediction, "From these fearsome faces / I see great good for these the citizens. / For if, kind in return for kindness, you do them ever great honor" (Aeschylus 1979: 219, line 993). What this remark indicates is that, in return for the Kindly Ones' kindness, if people honour them, the city will prosper: the Kindly Ones will in turn show the people kindness. These passages together suggest that the mentality of *lex talionis*, returning good with a proportionate good or bad with proportionate bad, is very much alive in the city. Furthermore, the Kindly Ones reciprocate, but they are not all about reciprocating love: they say: "May they [i.e. citizens] hate with one accord" (Aeschylus 1979: 219, line 986). Thus, hating, or returning enmity with enmity, is still on the list of activities.²¹ What is important is that we hate with one heart.²²

Applying this to Locke's case, revenge is there, but altered. However, it need not be transformed completely into love. The revenge that can constitute a justified anger is one that is not bloodthirsty but is proportionate to the wrong experienced, and that can secure the citizens' rights by preventing future wrongdoings and exacting reparation from the perpetrators. Inflicting harm, or wanting to do so, is appropriate insofar as it is within these bounds.

Therefore, on Locke's account, anger is something to be tamed, not eradicated. This perspective allows us to see why anger can be both the problem and solution in Locke's political theory. On the personal level in the state of nature, there may be both acceptable and unacceptable anger. However, people in this state also have executive power. When this power is combined with bad anger, then it creates the anger problem—angry people judging their own cases, fuelling further anger in society. Thus, anger needs to be tamed, and this is achieved through the creation of the state. The state places the executive power in the hands of impartial judges. The point of the state is to try to put the executive power in the hands of a third party who do not have a conflict of interest. While there may be people who experience anger, they will not be the ones who will be judging their own cases.

In this respect, anger seems to be taken away. Nevertheless, it can be said that those who exercise the executive power are engaged in a form of anger. They observe a wrongdoing, hold someone accountable, and give

of *Rhetoric*, an abridged translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. So, while anger includes a resistance component, it does not include a revenge component (Jaede 2017: 841). For Hobbes, anger is a "primordial passion that aims at overcoming any kind of hindrance, including enemies threatening to inflict hurt" (Jaede 2017: 841). By doing so, he "distinguishes anger from revengefulness" (Jaede 2017: 842). By contrast, revenge according to Hobbes (2012: 112), or rather, "excessive desire of Revenge" is "Rage," which is "Madnesse." Revenge is associated here with anger, but anger that is out of control. Thus, while anger itself is a passion to fight off an obstacle, combined with revenge, it becomes an unjustifiable madness. Anger must be purified of revenge to be viable.

²⁰ The term is *antididoien* (ἀντιδίδοιεν), which may be rendered in any of the ways cited here.

²¹ Writers often distinguish between hatred and anger, as does Nussbaum. But she also notes how, when we focus on revenge, or the payback impulse, "things are more complicated," for "wanting payback looks like a kind of hatred of the person" (Nussbaum 2016: 50). For a more sceptical view, see Dixon (2020: 13–16).

²² Harris (2001: 162) suggests that the end of the play is about how anger should not be directed at each other but rather how the Athenians "are to concentrate on foreign wars (which recalls the beginning of the trilogy)," i.e., the Trojan War. The Trojan War itself was an expedition "commanded by Zeus to avenge the violation of a crime against hospitality" (Nussbaum 2001: 33).

condign punishment. Anger is not removed from the state, but rather managed. Since the punishment it delivers is controlled, the state puts an end to the vicious cycle of excess punishment leading to further acts of retaliation. The state manages the anger exercised by the executive power, and through this minimises the anger-provoking moments that previously existed in the state of nature. Moreover, through the creation of the state, people have a place to take their anger. The courts may be a place full of anger, but cases will not be judged by people who suffer from the anger problem.

It should be noted that the creation of the state in and of itself will not entirely do away with the anger problem. Tyrants may rule, and, when affected by anger, may behave worse than people in the state of nature, thus making the situation worse than a merely inconvenient state (1988: II.199, 225). Unless an appropriate ruler is in power, the anger problem will remain, even under a government. The solution in this case is to overturn the government. However, Lockean citizens now seem to have a different problem: they tend to be too patient and will not rise up easily (1988: II.224-228). The goal of overturning the unjust government, however, is not to return to the state of nature, but to replace the unjust ruler with an appropriate one. While the state itself is susceptible to the anger problem, this susceptibility does not render it useless. It is still the solution. A ruler is needed—just not a tyrant.

4. Conclusion

Anger has been a neglected topic in Locke studies. Therefore, one aim of this article has been to fill in this gap. As we have seen, Locke's general view of anger was that it is for the most part not a good thing, but that in certain cases it is justifiable. The justifiability of anger in turn seems to hinge on one of the components of anger, the revenge component. Proportionate and controlled revenge can be a form of legitimate retributive punishment, and insofar as the desire for revenge remains within this scope, anger is justifiable.

Channelled through the state, our vengeful appetite is tamed. Just as it is appropriate to get angry at injustice and seek revenge proportionately, so the state will be expected to undertake this task. While, in the state of nature, things could get too personal and out of hand, the state is at an advantage because it can adopt an impartial perspective. The state is itself a product of the vindictive power of the people in the state of nature, but one that is regulated. The state uses anger's energy and makes it its solution to the anger problem. There is still the possibility that the executive may suffer from uncontrolled anger, and so the people need to remain vigilant.

The above consideration has also shed light on an oft-unsung aspect of the function of the state, namely as an anger manager. Locke states in the *Two Treatises* that the reason why governments are formed is to enable people to preserve their property, property being defined broadly as their 'Lives, Liberties and Estates' (1988: II.123-124). The state has the power to enact laws and punish those who break them. The state also protects people from foreign injury (1988: II.3). Quite naturally, common descriptions of the Lockean state have tended to focus on its character and identity as an "umpire" or "judge" (Grant 1987: 74; Ashcraft 1987: 8; 1994: 248), "common executor of the law of nature" (Mack 2013: 77), or a "protective agency" (Nozick 1974: 22).²³ Focusing on the state's function as an anger manager does not prompt us to deny any of these characteristics. The Lockean state does serve as a judge; it does execute the law of nature; it does protect people's rights. While confirming these roles, the article's

²³ For how these different roles might be connected, see Simmons 1992: 313-17.

focus expands our understanding by showing us more specifically and fundamentally why and how the state goes about doing these things—by identifying anger as a crucial problem and by managing it.²⁴

As noted, the article shows that a key role of the state is to ensure impartiality of the power exercised over others so that those who are subject to that power will have no good cause to retaliate in return. Importantly, while the state may be impartial, it is not entirely impersonal. *Qua* state, it experiences anger and releases that anger. To that extent, it is emotional. However, it is meant to control that anger in order to control the overall level of anger in society, thereby maintaining peace and order. All this serves as a good reminder that governments are run by people who have ups and downs. Yet, by creating the right conditions, people can use their emotions and natural powers in the right way. Hereby, government by *people*, *qua* emotional being, for *people* likewise emotional is made possible.

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²⁴ More generally, studies tend simply to note that the state exists to protect property or that it exists for the public good (e.g. Tully 1993: 14; Harris 1998: 241–2). They may go further to say to what end the state does this, namely to help achieve God’s intention to preserve humankind (Dunn 1969: 124–5; Harris 1998: 241). Again, I am not contesting the validity of these points. These studies, however, tend to pass over the role of anger in creating a situation in which people’s property become precarious in the first place (Harris 1998: 242). Dunn (1969: 126) does talk about how people’s sinfulness can affect human relationships in the state of nature, but the problem is nevertheless not pinned on anger (See also Hampsher-Monk 1992: 102–03). And if anger is not identified as a problem, then it is no surprise that managing it is not noted as the solution, and hence as one of the functions of the state.

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