

Evagrius on Anger—Discussion of Principal Texts

Praktikos 10-12, 23, 25

- Definition of Anger
Anger= “A movement directed against one who has done injury or is thought to have done so... [the thought of anger] represents to it [sc. the mind] the face of the one who has hurt” you (11), leading one to fight “in the intellect with person who has hurt you” (23).
- Relation of Anger to Sadness
When one cannot act against that person as one wishes, the frustration of one’s revenge (the failure to get “justice”) leads to sadness.
 - Sadness arises from the frustration of one’s desires (at the present, one cannot have what one hoped one would have) (10).
In some cases, sadness arises from the opposite, i.e. having the opportunity to retaliate or act against the other person, but later regretting that one drove them away with anger and alienated them (25).
 - *Reflections* 43 mentions in passing that (the unhappiness in) sadness can also lead on to (resentment and) anger.
 - It is thus possible for a cycle to exist where anger and sadness reinforce and support one another, i.e. anger leads to sadness, which leads to anger, etc.

Eulogios 5.5; 6.6

- The Psychology of Anger
 - After speaking to another person, the evil one brings to mind pictures of injuries and offences being done and inflames one’s thought against the other person.
 - Proposed response:
 - You should have acted (past) and you should act (future) against this person to set matters right.
 - If you cannot do this, you should withdraw from others and cut them off (good things should be taken away from the other person, so that the other person is deprived or injured). Compare *8 Thoughts* 4.1.
 - One should oppose this thought (refuse it/repent of it) by
 - Praying for the person one is angry with, asking that they receive good things from God.
 - Compare *Praktikos* 3.8, where only love can restrain anger, and *Refl.* 37, where desire for the good is destructive of anger.
 - Praying for one’s enemies rests on a belief that God can change them and it would better for them to be changed than to be lost.
 - Speaking peaceably and fairly to the one who has hurt you, rather than retaliating.

- Being willing to offer gratitude and thanksgiving for other things one received that were good, so that the wrong done does not become the exclusive focus of one's attention.
 - When the wrong becomes the exclusive focus of one's attention, this leads to
 - Rumination which makes prayer impossible
 - Forms of retaliation that go beyond the measure of justice
 - Resignation and despair (=acedia) when one either lacks an opportunity to retaliate or has retaliated but can find no satisfaction or peace after retaliating.

8 Th. 4.5-6,16,20

- Anger disturbs the mind with irrational movements and makes it unable to see (i.e. reason and interpret) things correctly.
 - "The movement of irascibility thickens the intellect of the angry person...a thought of resentment darkens the mind...resentment irritate[s] the mind in the time of prayer...the irascible person sees disturbing nightmares and an angry person imagines attacks of wild beasts."
 - On the mind being troubled by disturbing images involving threats, violence and savagery, compare *Thoughts* 23, 27, 29.
 - On resentment and angry thoughts hindering prayer or making it impossible, see *Thoughts* 32 (resentment and retaliation in lawsuits) and *Prayer* 13: "Everything you do to avenge yourself against a brother who has wronged you will be a stumbling block for you at the time of prayer." See also *Prayer* 12, 21-22, 24, 26-27, 47, 50, 64, 145; *Exh.* 2.2; 2.15.

Eulogios 26.27-28

- Anger can also result when one hates being limited or does not like others having authority over oneself.
 - Pride rejects limits and the unchecked self wants to pursue its desires without interference from others.
 - This leads to anger against other sources of authority, people who ask questions or propose a different way forward, and more generally against any limits or constraints.
- Anger is directed at the spiritual father/mother, with an unwillingness to follow their counsels, and speaking to others in a way that questions the knowledge, competence, character or spirituality of the spiritual father/mother.

Eulogios 11.10

- The Usefulness of Anger in Resisting/Opposing Evil Thoughts
 - Anger can be directed at the pleasure associated with flattering thoughts (vainglory) or inappropriate sexual thoughts and the images these bring to mind.

- One can therefore use anger appropriately against evil thoughts, while still being gentle and patient with the neighbor (even if the neighbor is presently deceived).
 - The reactive part of the soul (which can produce both good and bad anger) can also produce courage, which allows one to step forward and help the neighbor. Regarding the person moved by courage to help another, Evagrius says that “even if he suffers difficult things, he does not abandon charity.” (Compare *Vg.* 41, where the anger separating two people can be moderated when “gifts overcome resentment.”)
 - This approach allows one to hate sin (as God does), while also loving the neighbor in spite of his or her current flaws (as God does).
- Directing anger at sinful thoughts may be necessary to dissipate their power so that one can have pure prayer (*Praktikos* 42; compare *Thoughts* 5).
 - Otherwise, prayer may be corrupted from something God-centered into my plea for things I want (e.g., to be given pleasures, to see people I don’t like be humiliated or ruined, etc.).