ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF ANGER:

Narcissism and Illusions of Self-Sufficiency*

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Abstract

This paper considers an allegation by M. Stocker and E. Hegeman that Aristotle's account of anger yields a narcissistic passion bedevilled by illusions of self-sufficiency. The paper argues on behalf of Aristotle's valuing of anger within a virtuous and flourishing life, showing that and why Aristotle's account is neither narcissistic nor involves illusions of self-sufficiency. In so arguing a deeper appreciation of Aristotle's understanding of a self-sufficient life is reached, as are some interesting contrasts between Aristotle's understanding of anger, its connections to value and our own understanding of these matters.

According to M. Stocker and E. Hegeman, the proper understanding of Aristotle's account of anger reveals a narcissistic passion bedevilled by illusions of self-sufficiency.¹ As well as presenting a striking challenge to Aristotle's attempt to value anger in ways that make anger an appropriate, indeed virtuous reaction within a flourishing life, their proposals serve to challenge our understanding of anger and its place in an ethical life.

I argue that anger as understood by Aristotle (hereafter Aristotelian anger) should not be seen as narcissistic, and that we are neither narcissistic nor suffering from illusions of self-sufficiency by being angry in this way. By so arguing I do not deny that there can be displays of anger that relate to Aristotle's account (or any other feasible account of anger) that involve illusions of self-sufficiency or narcissism. But these are cases of the emotion being inappropriately felt (or a further feature of the example). They are not something required by the analysis of Aristotelian anger. On the contrary, in drawing certain contrasts between Aristotle's conception of anger and our own, I suggest that being moved to Aristotelian anger proves a laudable emotion to feel.

The argument unfolds as follows. After sketching the relevant notion of narcissism (section 1) and Aristotelian anger (section 2), I explore the accusation of narcissism from the apparent self-centredness of those of Aristotelian anger (section 3). Next, I depict an alleged tension between self-sufficiency and other dependency thought to be systemic within the Aristotelian framework, one which fosters narcissism -- particularly amongst friends (section 4).

Anger and revenge amongst friends is then addressed (section 5), as is a related concern in which differences between anger and sadness seem pressing (section 6). I then investigate the systemic tension thought to beget narcissism (section 7). Here a contrast between self-sufficiency as given in Plato's Republic versus Aristotle's understanding helps to show that and why the Aristotelian framework avoids the alleged difficulties. I conclude with reflections on how these considerations speak to our anger versus anger in Aristotle's time, and the value of understanding Aristotelian anger in psychoanalytic terms (section 8).

1. Narcissism

The concept of narcissism is taken from the psychoanalytic tradition. While acknowledging that the notion is not yet fully articulated, Stocker and Hegeman take its core and leading features to be widely accepted. Narcissism comes in varying strengths, including pathological and non-pathological forms. It can but need not be a central organising structure of a personality. Those suffering pathological narcissism in a full-blown form are thought to have shallow emotional lives, experiencing little empathy for others, enjoying life little beyond the tributes they receive from others or their own grandiose fantasies (Stocker 1996, p. 270-1). Aristotelian anger is not deemed narcissistic in this sense; the authors make it clear that those of Aristotelian anger react in ways which are utterly understandable, albeit narcissistic.

The alleged narcissism of Aristotelian anger can be seen when persons are not accorded the rank or respect they think is their due. They are wounded and suffer. These wounds and sufferings are deemed narcissistic, 'involving a deep lack, an emptiness, in the self, a profound feeling of unalterably not being good, of not being adequate, and certainly not being lovable' (268). In their attempts to regain position in their own eyes and those of others when slighted, they seem to have as their good another's suffering (282-3). Persons suffering so lack self-respect and self-regard, and their activities are often attempts to hide from themselves their feelings of not being loveable. They depend upon others to assure them of their own goodness, 'that they are the way they would like to be.' Unfortunately, they are 'like a sieve, always needing new reassurance of their goodness, because they cannot sustain this 'belief' in themselves' (269). But the problem is not fundamentally one of belief: so fragile is their psyche that they need the support necessary to hold belief. Accordingly, encouragement and support are needed, not evidence.

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Four observations about this characterisation of narcissism need to be made. First, if this describes one character trait or syndrome of character, it is one that revolves around a sense of self as unworthy, unlovable, inadequate and feeling condemned to being so. So conceived, narcissists do not believe in themselves. Their narcissistic activity is compensatory, deploying teleological strategies that serve to prop-up the narcissist. This renders them remarkably self-concerned and self-centred; they need support, and their narcissistic displays attempt to provide that support while often masking their need of it. Second, the exact way narcissism manifests itself can vary considerably, and does so in terms of other features of a personality. Third, narcissism reveals a defect in character. To say of someone that they are narcissistic, but in the nicest possible way, is to make a poor joke -- one which condemns through faint praise.² Fourth, while other conceptions of narcissism are available (e.g., the person who, without any doubt, simply glories in self-image), their existence should not detain us here. The sort of narcissism most plausibly implicated in the Aristotelian analysis is the one Stocker and Hegeman offer.

2. Aristotle's Account of Anger

Aristotle discusses anger in several works, but the accounts given in his Rhetoric and the Nicomachean Ethics are central. In the Rhetoric he defines anger as follows:

Let anger be defined as desire, accompanied by pain (distress), for conspicuous (apparent) revenge (retaliation) because of a conspicuous (apparent) slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one.³

For present purposes three features are worth distinguishing: 1) the felt nature of the passion; 2) the revenge anger strives for; 3) the slight that serves as to bring about the anger.

The affective nature of anger (1) involves but is more complex than pain brought about by being slighted. For example, simply being distressed renders one prone to anger. Matters are further exacerbated when the slight is directed toward a source of distress -- the sick when their illness is belittled, for example. Moreover, the frustration of our expectations renders us prone to anger (Rhet. 1379a14-25). All these are painful, seemingly rendering any slight all the more pronounced and thereby all the more provoking. But anger is not simply pain: anticipating, imagining, and realising its revenge are all pleasures of anger, pleasures associated with realising

anger's aim (1378b2-9, EN 1117a6-9).

The aim of anger is revenge (2), an aim brought about by the pain of being slighted. Revenge (and seemingly anger itself) is limited to what seems possible to the person. As revenge, it is directed to the individual who gave offence (Rhet. 1378a34-b5). By limiting it to what is taken to be possible, anger and its revenge are curtailed where revenging oneself seems outside one's reach, e.g., through fear, lack of opportunity, etc. (cf. 1380a23-4, 32-4, 1380b20-29).

Anger's reaction is often immediate and ill considered. Thus Aristotle compares rage (thumos), a form of anger, to barking dogs that react before seeing whether the knock is that of a friend (EN 1149a24-31). Even so, anger's revenge and even the anger itself are not automatic when provoked. Fear of someone, or shame before a person checks anger (Rhet. 1380a32-4); pity in view of what a person has already suffered is also possible (1380b13-15). As well, anger can be calmed in view of past kindness, by time, by the offending person admitting and repenting their slight, humbling him or herself, by the discovery that a provoking slight was involuntarily or that the opposite was intended, and so on (Rhet. 1380a10-28, b6-15). Still, where there is revenge, the revenge itself is to be conspicuous/apparent to the participants.⁴ The public nature of revenge is so important that our anger dissipates and is calmed if we learn that those against whom we would retaliate will not be aware of the retributive nature of the retaliation (1380b20-9).

The cause of anger is another's slight (3). Slighting is taken to be a voluntary act (1380a9). Aristotelian anger requires that the slight be directed toward oneself or those near one (including parents, wives, dependants, and so on, 1379b28-80a1). It involves a (voluntary) failure to take another seriously, instead treating them as of no (apparent) worth for good or evil (1378b10-13). It has various forms (insult, spite, and insolence, 1378b14), and its particular manifestations include forgetting names, mocking, rejoicing in another's misfortune, indifference to the pain brought to another, and so on (1379a28-29, b17-36). Depending on the form of slight, it serves to frustrate the aims of the person slighted, brings shame to them, or registers their unimportance (1378b14-26). Slighters, in the case of insolence at least, are seen to derive pleasure from the sense of being superior through ill-treating the slighted (1378b27-8).

As the definition indicates, in order to rouse anger the provoking slight has to be without justification. The slight that begets anger is not in return for something, nor designed to benefit

the one giving offence (1379a31-33). It seems malevolent (as we might say) rather than itself a matter of gain, anger or some other pain (cf. 1380a33-7). As well, it must be conspicuous/apparent. On Aristotle's reckoning, then, inconspicuous/non-apparent slights or slights with justification may (or may not) arouse passion, but they do not rouse anger – certainly not the focal sense or not in a form appropriate to virtue. Moreover, according to Aristotle we will be calmed, not angered, if we take ourselves to have done wrong and to now suffer justly in return (1380b16-19).

What serves to slight is not the same for all, but depends, in part, on our self-conception. We are liable to be slighted where we think we should be treated well, through birthright, skill, accomplishment, and so on (1378b36ff). Social ties also matter. Because of expectations of how we should be treated, we become angry with friends more than we do with others. So also with those who have been accustomed to honour us, those of no account, and so on (1379b1ff). Particular audiences also make a difference, presumably by affecting the extent to which the slight is rendered conspicuous (1379b24-7). It seems that we come to have special expectations of certain others, and being treated as of no worth or importance before or by them is particularly disturbing.

This depiction shows Aristotelian anger to be an ethically structured reaction within a world of values. Our own cultural preconceptions, though certainly mixed, tend to understand anger as a negative passion, something that should not be roused and should be dismissed as soon as possible. But for Aristotle the fact of passion, including anger, deserves neither praise nor blame. Rather it is how it is felt that determines praise or blame (EN 1105b25-8). Felt aptly, anger deserves praise and helps to form the virtue good temper – a virtue that enables persons to defend themselves, friends, and family from being treated as of no worth, and from having their aims frustrated (EN 1125b27-26a32). Even so, the good-tempered are inclined to forgive rather than be vengeful (1125b27ff). Of course, the blood can boil. And Aristotle is aware that anger can be felt inappropriately: it can be difficult, contrary to reason, and its revenge inappropriate (cf. 1105a8-10, EE 1222b18-25, Pol. 1312b26-8, F 660). One can be led by anger and feel it in the wrong place, at the wrong time, too strongly, too weakly, and so on, rendering persons fools, slavish, bitter, choleric, irascible, insensitive to the pains of slights, and so on (EN 1125b26-1126b10). Yet anger remains an appropriate kind of reaction, one to be fostered in particular ways in relevant situations.

The foregoing will serve for present purposes. I should emphasise that it is a very particular conception that Aristotle offers. There are many interesting points of contact between Aristotelian anger and our own conception, but the two are quite different. This is evident in the fact that Aristotelian anger requires (but our conception does not) that slights must be involved, that the precipitating cause must be (at least be perceived to be) without justification, and that one be treated as of no worth for good or ill. Aristotelian anger is also distinguished by its concern for those about one, its targeting only the person slighting, its non-reflexive nature, and so on. We properly speak of this as Aristotelian anger rather than Aristotle's articulation of a shared conception of anger.⁵

There is more to Aristotelian anger than is indicated here; Stocker and Hegeman speak to issues and draw implications that I have ignored. Still, but for one exception, Aristotelian anger has been portrayed in a way that Stocker and Hegeman should find uncontroversial. That exception concerns their view that Aristotle's account of anger is 'restricted to men' (Stocker, 1996, p. 265). It seems plausible to suppose that Aristotle's thinking owes much to reflections upon the anger exhibited by men, but I can find no evidence to suggest that the account is restricted to men. Aristotle's account is offered as an analysis of anger, not the anger of men. With this disagreement noted, we should let it pass: this difference in understanding is not central to their arguments for narcissism or related illusions of self-sufficiency.

What, then, is it about Aristotelian anger that leads Stocker and Hegeman to see it as narcissistic?

3. The Self-centredness of Anger

The accusation seems partly based on a kind of self-centredness of the emotion. Hegeman and Stocker speak of a joyful mania, in which people are full of themselves, feel powerful and good. In such a condition, 'They and their interests become their whole world – other people and their interests do not count, and may not even be noticed. This helps explain some of the harm wrought by those caught up in mania.' In ways not fully understood ' . . . in various early childhood ways of being, there are deep, seemingly natural, connections between felt power and freedom to do what one wants' (Stocker 1996, p. 277). Grievances, hatreds, based on real or perceived slights . . . may be settled in these terms.

Aristotelian anger is thought to fit this because:

The psyche of Aristotle's angry man is, further, constituted by a desire, rising to the level of a demand, that he be a center, if not the center, of attention, concern, and understanding – much as, as psychoanalytic students of infants tell us, the very young and narcissistic infant “requires” being a, if not the, center of a parent's attention, concern, and understanding (Stocker 1996, p. 277).

The suggestion is that Aristotelian anger involves the demand to be a/the centre of attention. So understood, angry persons can be seen to operate as though they and their interests are everything of any importance, feeling a freedom to do what they want, including settling grievances in response to real or imagined slights.

To be sure, a kind of self-absorption in those angry is not unfamiliar. And one can imagine the same of those of Aristotelian anger. But before one can attribute narcissism to Aristotle's account on this basis, one must grant both that to have Aristotelian anger is for one to have a desire 'rising to the level of a demand, that he be a centre if not the centre, of attention, concern, and understanding.' Moreover, the demand itself must be shown to be narcissistic. I take up the latter now and return to the former in section five.

A demand to be a/the centre of attention, concern, and understanding can be narcissistic. This, together with the fact that such a demand is so rarely deserved, makes its characterisation as narcissistic seem plausible. Yet notice that the demand itself is neither pernicious nor unhealthy. Being a/the centre of attention can be appropriate in many settings. Where so, a demand that this be recognised may simply be demanding one's due. Accordingly, demands to be a/the centre of attention need not be narcissism's fragile psyche, insatiably requiring support, betraying feelings of being unlovable, inadequate, or not being good. They may simply be the self-confident, justified understanding that here, now, one's own concerns ought to be front and centre. Of course, a person demanding his or her due may also be narcissistic, but narcissism cannot be established either by the fact of anger, or a demand to be a/the centre of attention.⁶ Thus even granting Stocker and Hegeman's depiction of the psyche of those of Aristotelian anger, the fact of a demand to be a/the centre of attention does not imply narcissism. Narcissism, then, is not needed to explain the workings of Aristotelian anger.

But perhaps the attribution of narcissism to Aristotelian anger becomes plausible if we focus only on those demands to be a/the centre of attention that are not justified. The thought is

that because the demands are not properly founded, they should be seen to involve narcissism.

Yet this too proves unconvincing – and for two reasons. First, while unjustified demands to be a/the centre of attention can be founded on narcissism, they can have many other bases, including mistaken judgement, misperception, hubris, or malice. That there can be explanations for unjustified demands to be a/the centre of attention besides narcissism means that there is no straightforward connection between unjustified demands to be a/the centre of attention and narcissism. And so, an unjustified demand for attention itself offers no reason to characterise Aristotelian anger in terms of narcissism.

Second, an unjustified demand to be a/the centre of attention is not properly understood as a component of Aristotelian anger – at least not the focal conception involved in the virtue of good temper. The pain of Aristotelian anger is brought about by a slight that is without justification. As Stocker and Hegeman themselves note Aristotelian anger depends on slighting, and that '... to be slighted is to be denied due importance, honour, and respect (Stocker 1996, p. 266, emphasis added).' Aristotelian anger, then, is in response to inappropriate treatment. But unjustified demands to be a/the centre of attention do not seem to be responses to inappropriate treatment, but some sort of unwarranted demand for undeserved honour and respect. As such, they cannot be part of Aristotelian anger.

Of course, this is not to deny that there can be “angry-like” responses based on unjustified demands to be a/the centre of attention. While such passions are plausible within the Aristotelian framework, the ties between passion and value that Aristotle draws makes this an inappropriate passion, an excess of sorts -- perhaps even a non-focal conception of anger. But the allowance for such responses, and the suggestion that they might be narcissistic, will not further the allegations of Stocker and Hegeman. For, as suggested at the outset, any analysis of anger and related phenomena must allow for inappropriate displays of anger, and may allow that some are narcissistic. The interesting case remains Aristotelian anger, understood as the passion of those of good temper. And, so far, the case remains unproven with respect to this passion.

Our response to considerations of self-centredness in Aristotelian anger yields a dilemma: the demand to be a/the centre of attention is either justified or unjustified. If it is justified, the case can be one of Aristotelian anger, but there is no reason to conclude narcissism on this basis. If it is not justified, then while there may be marginally better reason to suspect narcissism (though concerns for misperception, mistaken judgement, and so on, refute even this), the case

is no longer the relevant one, Aristotelian anger.⁷

4. Systemic Considerations

Stocker and Hegeman offer considerations other than self-centredness to prove narcissism within Aristotelian anger. The alleged narcissism is not simply a fact about the psychology of certain individuals or groups, or even simply a feature of Aristotle's depiction of anger, but goes to deep and competing demands within Aristotle's framework. In a life seeking happiness, the aspiration to be self-sufficient yet also vulnerable to and dependant upon others is seen to create tension:

Once again, this suggests that there must be considerable tension between the demands for self-sufficiency and vulnerability to and dependence on others – in this case, friends. Thus, there is a serious and real tension, not just conceptual tension, in Aristotle's understanding of a good life, a life of eudaemonia. For it must be at once a self-sufficient life and also a life with friends (Stocker 1996, p. 277).

The problem appears to be a quite general one. Anger amongst friends seems to be especially revealing of the tension, and the problem of narcissism. In the case of friends, Stocker and Hegeman observe:

Thus, unless our friends are attentive to our needs, we will desire a conspicuous and pleasing revenge against them. Here we should compare what Kernberg says of pathological narcissists, "When abandoned or disappointed by other people they may show what on the surface looks like depression, but which on further examination emerges as anger and resentment, loaded with revengeful wishes, rather than real sadness for the loss of a person whom they appreciated" (Stocker 1996, p. 278, emphasis added).

Here instead of real sadness responding with revengeful wishes is deemed narcissistic, fostered by the tension between self-sufficiency and other dependency, and caused by a friend's inattentiveness to needs. Narcissism proves to be a feature of the Aristotelian framework, not simply something about Aristotelian anger. Within this context, Stocker and Hegeman speculate about the underlying thought of those of Aristotelian anger:

His anger embodies and enacts the thought – whether or not he explicitly thinks it -- “I am hurting and if those other people did not have an ‘actively entertained opinion of’ me ‘as obviously of no importance’ they would notice this, and having noticed would attend to me and my needs.”

This might be seen as expressing, once again, these men’s excessive expectations or demands for attention, especially from their friends. It might also be seen as expressing their expectation or demand that their friends “see into them,” know what they want and need, even, or especially without being told this. As such, it comes at least close to expressing an expectation or even a demand for a mystical union of care and understanding. The narcissism of these expectations and demands is obvious (Stocker 1996, p. 280, emphasis added).

These difficulties connect to the specific claims Aristotle makes:

So, friends are required to pay very great attention to friends: "Again, we feel angry with friends . . . if they do not perceive our needs . . . for this want of perception shows that they are slighting us – we do not fail to perceive the needs of those for whom we care" (Rh II.2, 1379b13 ff.) (Stocker 1996, p. 277).

Whether any of this serves to explain or reveal narcissism within Aristotle’s framework and Aristotelian anger depends on a number of matters, including the tension described, its connection to narcissism, the extent to which it is inherent within the Aristotelian framework, as well as the glosses on Aristotelian anger, especially amongst friends. Let us deal with the glosses on Aristotelian anger in the context of friends, then turn to the framework itself. Are the authors right in suggesting that Aristotelian anger makes 'excessive expectations or demands for attention, especially from their friends' or demands that their friends 'see into them,' or comes close to 'a demand for a mystical union of care and understanding,' or condones 'a conspicuous and pleasing revenge against them' when these or like expectations are not met?

5. Anger Amongst Friends

A reminder of some salient features of friendship based on Aristotle's understanding will help in

assessing these claims. Friendship in its primary sense is complete, rare, and something that takes time to develop (EN 1156b25-33, 1157a32). It is the friendship of the good who are similar in virtue. A friend loves his or her friend, wishing her or him goods for his or her own sake, with those wishes reciprocated (1156b6-13). Friendship is enduring and proof against slander (1157a21, 1158b9-10). A friend is another oneself, and someone one wishes to spend one's days with (1157b20-4).

Now consider the possibility of anger amongst such friends. Aristotelian anger depends on being slighted. The slights that most interest Stocker and Hegeman concern inattentiveness to needs. Inattentiveness to needs surely can slight – especially amongst those whose good one wishes for and who wish for one's own good. Hence this route to Aristotelian anger amongst friends is possible. Yet the issue is not simply the possibility of Aristotelian anger amongst friends, but whether its emergence should be understood in terms of the glosses that Stocker and Hegeman offer. To determine this let us recollect some of the conditions necessary to Aristotelian anger and appropriate Aristotelian anger (section 2).

To begin, inattentiveness per se does not slight. Aristotelian anger, the desire for conspicuous revenge, and the taking and enjoyment of the revenge do not arise simply because of inattentiveness to a friend, even to a friend's needs. As earlier discussed, in order for inattentiveness to serve as a slight causative of Aristotelian anger, the inattentiveness must be without justification. Thus Aristotle's position does not express a myopic vision of "the world as mine," a world in which the Aristotelian framework fuels a self-centredness in friendship that endlessly demands attention or offence is taken. Rather, his position centres on being given one's due, here due attention to needs.

Further, even where there is an inattentiveness to needs that is undue, this is still not sufficient to rouse Aristotelian anger toward a friend (or any other). To rouse Aristotelian anger, the undue inattentiveness has to amount to treating the other as of no worth, no importance. Aristotle's point, I take it, addresses the depth or magnitude of the undue inattention, rendering it egregious – particularly amongst friends. As well, recall that a slight that rouses (a friend's) Aristotelian anger must not be to benefit the one slighting, but must be simply to diminish the slighted (friend), for example by regarding them as unimportant, or by thwarting their wishes, or by bringing shame to them. Here Aristotle addresses the motive of the one giving offence, requiring that it be malicious (as we would say). Further, the definition of Aristotelian anger

requires that the slight be conspicuous/apparent. Precisely what this qualification itself implies for Aristotle is controversial, but it suggests that to rouse Aristotelian anger the slight must be of considerable magnitude as well as public in display.

Drawing these points together, we can say that Aristotelian anger toward a friend (or any other) is not roused by simple inattentiveness to needs (or any other important good), but by inattentiveness which slights in an unjustified way, where this is so egregious as to render the friend wholly unimportant, where it is motivated in a malicious way, where it serves to bring shame to the slighted or pleasure to the sligher, and where this is done publicly and with sufficient magnitude to damage and bring notice. Anything less and we do not have what Aristotle would consider to be anger.⁸

Given this depiction of what is required for Aristotelian anger and appropriate Aristotelian anger, there is no basis for the claim that 'unless our friends are attentive to our needs, we will desire a conspicuous and pleasing revenge against them.' Needs of friends and attention to them are relevant to Aristotelian anger, but the full implications of Aristotle's account show that considerably more than a simple inattention to needs or perceived needs is required to rouse Aristotelian anger. Similarly, the conditions for Aristotelian anger do not exhibit 'excessive expectations or demands for attention, especially from their friends' nor demand 'a mystical union of care and understanding.' Further (to return to the claim set aside in section three), the angry person's psyche shows no sign of 'a desire, rising to the level of a demand, that he be a centre, if not the centre, of attention, concern and understanding.' Any demands present are better seen in terms of being treated in a justified way.

So concluding is not to deny that friendship on Aristotle's understanding (like our own) makes serious demands on friends, including those that concern a friend's needs. We expect and demand more from our friends – as Aristotle's thought that we become angry more quickly with friends than strangers suggests. Slightings from friends through inattentiveness -- especially to needs -- cut more deeply than the actions of anonymous others. Still, there is a very great distance between this and the characterisations offered by Stocker and Hegeman.

Moreover, I would suggest that Aristotle is right about all this. Friends who slight us in ways that treat us as having no worth for good or ill, doing so maliciously, publicly... have so violated the limits of what we and Aristotle suppose friendship to be that anger (Aristotelian and otherwise) seems an appropriate response to this abuse. Once more, matters of appropriateness,

not narcissism, serve to explain the arousal and nature of Aristotelian anger.

What about the role given in Aristotelian anger to revenge and associated pleasure? For Stocker and Hegeman are struck by these, especially the seeming ease with which they are roused. And, to be sure, the thought of taking revenge on friends and enjoying the same seems harsh, and might itself suggest a certain narcissistic self-absorption.

Some of the apparent harshness of revenge taken upon a friend dissipates when we consider what Aristotle takes to be involved in revenge. Aristotle offers the example of being angry with one's parents yet not seeming to want to retaliate as a tentative objection to a role for revenge in anger's analysis (Topics 156a30-b2). He responds not by repudiating the place for revenge in anger, but by concluding that revenge is achieved with some people (here parents) by causing them pain and making them sorry. In part, his point is that in certain circumstances what counts as revenge can be quite mild. What the Topics suggests regarding parents seems plausibly applied to anger amongst friends. And so, the harshness in the thought of taking revenge upon one's friends dissipates.

We should also notice that even within the context of an unjustified slight, evident/conspicuous, done for pleasure, where the limits of friendship are thoroughly transgressed, Aristotle's analysis does not require a response of anger, revenge and/or associated pleasures. While Aristotle allows that an angry reaction can be immediate and even ill-considered, much properly intervenes. For example, we have seen that one will be calmed rather than angered by slights that normally rouse anger upon discovering that the slight was an accident or that the person did not intend it, or by the slighter humbling her or himself, and so on. So too pity and the passage of time serve to offset anger and thereby its vengeance. Further, Aristotle grants that one gives special allowance to others, including friends in view of past kindness. And so, one angered may overlook matters, rather than seek revenge and take pleasure therein. Moreover, persons of good temper (persons who have rightly integrated Aristotelian anger in their lives) are inclined to be forgiving.

Concerns that those of Aristotelian anger wish to revenge themselves and do so too readily should be put to rest. A 'conspicuous and pleasing revenge' is not necessary; where it is desired, it need not be severe in nature. Given this, the thought that Aristotelian anger, through its revenge and pleasures, displays narcissism or narcissistic self-indulgence loses its basis.

The connections between Aristotelian anger, demands for attention, revenge, and

pleasure depend on connections that Aristotle maintains between anger and value. I have been arguing against the allegations of Stocker and Hegeman by exploring how Aristotelian anger is a passion that we can be moved to, moved to appropriately, too much, too little, and so on. My contention has been that Aristotle's psychological analysis which explains why one is angered or calmed is structured, in part in terms of values, in such a way that one is moved to Aristotelian anger (or appropriate Aristotelian anger) only after a great deal of excusing on the part of the person moved to anger, and intransigence on the part of the person who slights. It is only where the damage is severe and the intransigence stands that anger, revenge, and its enjoyment come into play. So understood, the demands Aristotelian anger makes do not seem excessive, nor reveal extravagant expectations for attention, nor unrealistic demands that friends see into one. Nor do they depend on a narcissism of character, fragile psyches that leave one feeling inadequate, unlovable, bent upon vengeance or the suffering of friends. Rather the expectations are ethical requirements that concern appropriate treatment by others. Further, in reviewing Aristotle's account of the damage and the intransigence necessary to provoke Aristotelian anger and its revenge, I have stood with Aristotle, suggesting that the conditions are indeed appropriate. And so, while narcissism certainly may characterise a personality, it is unneeded in the explanation of Aristotelian anger and appropriate Aristotelian anger amongst friends. Matters of one's due fully explain the phenomena.

6. Sadness Rather Than Anger

While I take the preceding to show that and how Aristotelian anger is a reasonable response to a provoking situation (rather than betraying excessive self-concern, demands for attention, pleasures of revenge, and so on), a related and in some ways more menacing possibility is worth noting -- one that finds that anger of itself is inappropriate and narcissistic, especially amongst friends. Kernberg's contrast (referred to by Stocker and Hegeman) between real sadness versus anger in response to the same situation is suggestive. For Kernberg sees in a narcissist an incapacity or limited capacity for depressed emotions such as guilt and sadness.⁹ With this thought in mind, we should consider the possibility that the structure of, and values within, an Aristotelian world and our own are narcissistic: populated as both are by frequent eruptions of anger and revenge rather than guilt or sadness. The suggestion is that sadness or guilt are more appropriate and non-narcissistic by virtue of their sympathy toward others.

I want to comment briefly on this suggestion, beginning with two points of clarification.

First, the fact that anger amongst friends reveals a failure of sorts does not support the contention that the Aristotelian framework or our own is faulted or narcissistic. For sadness amongst friends likewise represents a failure of a similar sort. The fact that each passion responds to failing is not proof that the one (or the other) itself is a failing – still less a narcissistic one. Second, while it is some defence of the Aristotelian framework and our own that each does make room for depressed emotions (e.g., shame), and that considerable room is made for the calming and dispelling of anger, these defences are insufficient here. That is to say, the menacing possibility that anger and revenge – especially amongst friends – is narcissistic remains. That there is also room for reactions deemed “non-narcissistic” helps only a little.

The suggestion to be contemplated, then, is that simply to be angered, to want revenge, to enjoy the same because of a friend’s slight (rather than sadness over the same) reveals inherent narcissism, the narcissism of anger, Aristotelian and otherwise.

The thought that anger, particularly amongst friends, is and must be wholly without justification instantiates one side of a schism within ethical thought which includes those who would have us turn the other cheek, withdraw from the world, or suppose that it is no part of an ethical concern to harm another. On the other side are those who think that claws are needed – even amongst friends. Aristotle stands with the latter, and his account of anger, its revenge, and their value embody such connections. We have seen that its application within friendship occurs only where a friend has failed her or his friend terribly and maliciously, yet steadfastly stands by that failure. We have seen that the revenge need not be severe. And I have suggested that from within our own experience of morality and Aristotle’s, this is wholly appropriate. But we need not side with Aristotle on this, nor attempt to resolve the larger ethical issue here. For it is enough to observe that whichever way this schism is to be resolved, the mistaken view is in the first instance a mistaken ethical vision and not thereby deserving or requiring the psychoanalytic classification of narcissism. Of course, a mistaken ethical view and a life in accord with such a view might independently deserve classification as narcissistic. To prove that would take a great deal more than drawing attention to the contrasting roles for emotions such as anger and sadness. Perhaps an argument can be mounted to support this, but the evidence we have considered does not establish this, nor that anger and revenge – even amongst friends -- require narcissism.

7. Tension Within Aristotle’s Framework

Even if Stocker and Hegeman are wrong to understand Aristotelian anger and its revenge as

narcissistic, their explanatory basis of tension within Aristotle's framework remains formidable. For it provides systemic reasons for supposing that Aristotle's framework is inherently conflictual, thereby leaving those leading an Aristotelian life with incompatible demands. Not only does this seriously impair the framework itself, and the lives lead in these terms, but also it provides a basis that may yet be deployed to help show that and how particular cases of appropriate Aristotelian anger truly are narcissistic. We should, then, consider the tension too.

The purported tension is to be found in the demand to be self-sufficient yet also to be other dependant and vulnerable in realising the good life. In the case of friendship the tension is meant to manifest itself as follows:

If his friends fail to meet his needs, they strike a serious and deep blow: they show he is not self-sufficient and thus not good. They also show, or at least suggest, that he is too weak and unimportant to command respect and respectful, attentive consideration (Stocker 1996, p. 278).

The main difficulty seems to be what Stocker and Hegeman dub 'narcissistic illusions of self-sufficiency (279).'

Sense can be made of their understanding. An Aristotelian seeks to flourish, doing so in ways that require self-sufficiency. Yet one is also to be dependent upon and vulnerable to others, as the place of friendship displays. Where friends slight, anger may well be roused. Where so, a loss of self-sufficiency seems involved, highlighted and exacerbated through one's considerable vulnerabilities to friends. If so, a friend's slight and one's anger in response renders and reveals inadequate one's sense of self, one's project of a self-sufficient and flourishing life. It is plausible, then, to suggest that it reveals 'a deep lack, an emptiness, in the self, a profound feeling of unalterably not being good, of not being adequate, and certainly not being lovable (Stocker 1996, p. 268).'

The inadequacy, if not precisely entailed, has been fostered by competing demands within a eudaemonic framework, self-sufficiency versus other dependency and vulnerability.

Yet before this can be properly attributed to the Aristotelian framework, we need delve into these matters more deeply, particularly the notion of self-sufficiency and how it relates to other dependency.

Stocker and Hegeman are right about the prominence and significance of self-sufficiency and other dependency within Aristotle's eudaemonic framework. A life to flourish must be self-sufficient (autarkeia, EN 1097b6-8); friendship is one form of other dependency important to flourishing (cf. 1155a1ff). Moreover, one can see how "self-sufficiency" on a fairly natural reading might suggest non-dependency and independence from others. So understood, tension between self-sufficiency and the ends of friendship surely arises.

Consider, by way of a stalking horse, Plato's discussion of self-sufficiency and the appropriate reaction of a friend to the death of a decent person:

...We surely say that a decent man doesn't think death is a terrible thing for someone decent to suffer – even for someone who happens to be his friend.

We do say that.

Then he won't mourn for him as for someone who has suffered a terrible fate.

Certainly not.

We also say that a decent person is most self-sufficient (autarkes) in living well and, above all others, has least need of anyone else.

That's true.

Then it's less dreadful for him than for anyone else to be deprived of his son, brother, possessions, or any such things.

Much less.¹⁰

A conception of self-sufficiency which features having the least need of anyone else certainly will be in tension with ordinary commitments to, vulnerabilities to or dependence upon friends. Not only will ordinary commitments to friends render us particularly vulnerable to wounding by them, but also those commitments weaken and reveal weaknesses in the realisation of this kind of self-sufficiency. Given this, wounds from friends and vulnerabilities to them will cut particularly deeply in part because they reveal failure in our aspiration to this kind of self-sufficiency. Passion roused herein may well manifest itself in a narcissistic fashion, trying to compensate for a failed sense of self. The narcissism of the passion or its outburst serves as a (failed) strategy to regain self-sufficiency.

Even though the understanding of self-sufficiency is credible and reasonably seen to

beget conflict and some of the narcissism that Stocker and Hegeman speak of, none of it applies to Aristotle. For the notion of self-sufficiency that Aristotle promotes is not the one we see in Plato, is not that of non-dependence upon or independence from others, or of least need of others. Indeed, it reacts against such notions.¹¹ Accordingly, the purported basis for 'narcissistic illusions of self-sufficiency' is absent, and, therein, cannot shape Aristotelian anger or someone leading the life Aristotle recommends. Put in other terms, there is no reason to suppose that leading a life in Aristotelian terms involves tension between vulnerability to others and self-sufficiency. If so, any systemic basis for understanding Aristotle's position in terms of retreats into narcissism through tension within the framework proves unfounded. This, in turn, undercuts any impetus to search further for cases of narcissism within Aristotle's depiction of anger.

Everything rests on Aristotle's notion of self-sufficiency. Aristotle associates self-sufficiency with the kind of life that is happy.¹² That life is something choiceworthy and lacking nothing (NE 1097b15). Aristotle's understanding of a life so lived does not involve independence from others or least need of others. According to Aristotle a self-sufficient life is not 'what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life'.¹³ Creatures with no need of others, who suffice in isolation, are, in Aristotle's view, either beasts or gods (Pol. 1253a27-9). Rather, as creatures of the polis, a self-sufficient life for a human is one of inter-dependence, one which will suffice with and for others, including 'parents, children, wife and in general for friends and fellow citizens' (EN 1097b9-11). This life involves genuine concern for others as well as dependence upon them: our desire to live together remains even when we do not require help (Pol. 1278b20-30, 1252b13 ff.). And while we are solitary animals too, we are through and through a social animal and have goods in common (HA 488a8-10). Others, then, are integrated into a human's self-sufficient life, rather than standing as separated goods that in some cases may conflict with that life. Other dependency and vulnerability are integral to (rather than conflict with) a human's self-sufficient life.

Aristotle's conception of selves living the good life, then, is not as discrete, self-defined existences with goals of self-reliance or least need of others, yet conflicting commitments to other reliance. We are better understood in terms of parts which belong to a whole (Pol. 1253a19-25) – where our inter-dependence is explained in terms of self-sufficiency rather than in contrast to it. Thus Stocker and Hegeman depend on an inappropriate understanding of Aristotle, Aristotelian anger and self-sufficiency when suggesting that a self-sufficient life is in tension

with concern for, dependence upon, or vulnerability to others. Because concern for and involvement in the lives of others is part of what is needed for a life to be self-sufficient, the Aristotelian framework does not suffer 'narcissistic illusions of self-sufficiency,' nor the tension thought to beget such illusions.¹⁴

Interestingly, this notion of humans as social creatures rather than an idealisation of them as isolated, non-dependent beings is reflected in the way that Aristotle structures his accounts of various emotions, including anger. As we have seen, the slight that rouses Aristotelian anger concerns oneself and those close to one rather than more distant others. The concern here is, in part, for one's group. In this Aristotle's approach to human passion is quite unlike more modern approaches, in which a self versus others contrast forms one axis of analysis (e.g. Hume). So, not only is there no general tension between self-sufficiency and other dependency, but also Aristotle's explication of the passions, including anger, does so in ways that deter an understanding in terms of an isolated self versus others.¹⁵

Notice that if all of this is so, it does not deny that blows from friends wound deeply in the Aristotelian framework. For the wounds from friends do matter, and do threaten the self-sufficiency of our life. But this is so because friends help comprise a self-sufficient life. Because such a life is not at odds with other dependency or vulnerability, the wounds from friendship do not lead to a retreat into an independent self or create the sort of conflict that Stocker and Hegeman describe.

8. Our Anger, Anger in the Society of Aristotle, and Psychoanalytic Classification

My argument has concerned an alleged narcissism within Aristotle's account of anger. I have argued that there is nothing in the Aristotelian scheme which requires or makes it likely that to be moved to Aristotelian anger involves narcissism or related illusions of self-sufficiency. So understood, these conclusions concern Aristotle's account of anger, and a life lived within an Aristotelian framework. Moreover, throughout it has seemed that being moved to Aristotelian anger is appropriate, rather than inappropriate.

Yet in applying this to particular lives, we can wonder whether this is so for us living in our world, those of Aristotle's world, or both. Arguing with Aristotle's conceptions, I have tried to make my arguments in ways that would allow application to us and to those Aristotle was familiar with. Stocker and Hegeman, while wishing to speak to both, are only confident in speaking about us. Their hesitation to speak of those in Aristotle's world is founded on the

considerable difficulties of cross-cultural comparison. The difficulties are real: the application of contemporary conceptions to other times and to frameworks that pose matters in different terms is often treacherous. Even so, if we can be confident that the present arguments say something about us and our lives, we can also say that there is no reason to suppose – and every reason to doubt – that narcissism and narcissistic illusions of self-sufficiency are attributable to anger on Aristotle’s account within his society.

Finally, if the attempt to diagnose and illuminate Aristotelian anger in psychoanalytic terms has proved unilluminating, the sort of failing is worth noting. It is not that the attempt to reveal the moral by the psychoanalytic itself has been found misguided. On the contrary, we have been able to intelligently explore and apply narcissism to concerns raised by Aristotle and Plato; indeed the claimed narcissism has seemed plausible on a particular understanding, and is applied with some plausibility to a passage from the Republic.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Aristotelian anger proves not to be usefully explained or illuminated by the psychoanalytic turn. Rather, the illuminations of Aristotle’s position have come from considerations of the nature of that anger, its value, and related concerns about human flourishing, friendship, and a self-sufficient life.¹⁷

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Notes

¹ See Michael Stocker with Elizabeth Hegeman, Valuing Emotions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially chapter 10.

² In what seems an aside, Stocker and Hegeman do allow that forms of narcissism can be entirely healthy (VE, p. 269). I take their point to be a reminder that on certain theories of the development of the self narcissism is taken to be a necessary and appropriate developmental stage, and also (in view of their argument strategy elsewhere in their book) that in certain situations a narcissistic response can be apt to its situation – just as in certain situations (it is sometimes suggested that) a paranoid response best meets the situation.

³ See Aristotle, Rhetoric 1378a30-33, based on G. Kennedy's translation (On Rhetoric. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), with numeration added and some of its more controversial renderings indicated. Further references to the works of Aristotle will be incorporated into the main text, using conventional short forms. Throughout, I shall try to side step the debates over the controversial terms.

⁴ The word translated as 'apparent/conspicuous' is phainomenon. Commentators such as J. Cooper take Aristotle's point to be, roughly speaking, subjective, i.e. to speak to an appearance of something without implication about belief or judgement ('An Aristotelian Theory of the Emotions. In Aristotle's Rhetoric, edited by A.O. Rorty, 238-257. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Others, such as E.M. Cope, have taken it in a more emphatic, objective sense, 'conspicuous' (The "Rhetoric" of Aristotle, with a Commentary. Edited by and Revised by J.E. Sandys. 3 vols. Vol. 2. Cambridge University, 1877.). The difference is significant, as are its ramifications. The matter, unfortunately, is too complex and delicate to pursue here. Thus I mean to leave both options open, and develop my arguments in ways that satisfy either understanding.

⁵ It is interesting that many of the features found in Aristotelian anger but absent in our own conception are to be found in our conception of resentment, e.g. the role of slighting, the restriction to persons, the importance of justification, and so on. While it would be misguided to think that Aristotle is discussing resentment, nevertheless it is instructive to look at Aristotelian anger from this vantage. My thanks to D. Browning for bringing this matter to my attention.

⁶ Some may be inclined to respond that any demand for one's due is inappropriate because more humility is called for. Arguably, but not obviously so. And even if a more humble response could be proven appropriate, the failure by those who demand more would be in the first instance an ethical failure – but not thereby and not necessarily a failure deserving psychoanalytic diagnosis.

⁷ On one reading of Aristotle's definition of anger, Aristotle's concern is not for conspicuous slights being without justification, but about whether there appeared to be slights, ones (appearing to be) without

justification. If this understanding is correct, the preceding arguments will need to be recast in like terms. The upshot remains that there is no need to understand appropriate Aristotelian anger in terms of narcissism. But the basis will be different in places. In particular, in those cases where there is appearance of slight, but that perception arises through misconstruing either the fact of a slight itself or its lack of justification, then that the appearing lacks justification means (not that the person is not experiencing a form of Aristotelian anger but rather) that the person is not experiencing the focal conception relevant to the virtue of good temper.

⁸ Of course friends can and do respond to lesser matters than these, but either these responses are not Aristotelian anger at all, or Aristotelian anger inappropriately felt.

⁹ See Otto Kernberg, 'Factors in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities.' Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 18 (1970): 51-85.

¹⁰ See Plato, Republic 387D-E (Translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992.). The passage reveals not only a particular view of self-sufficiency, but also striking views of the bonds of friendship, and the importance of death. Here I am concerned with the conception of self-sufficiency only. Accordingly, the arguments to follow do not depend upon or use the notion of friendship displayed in this passage, and do allow for cases of friendship in which one takes the death of a friend to be a terrible fate.

¹¹ According to A.W.H. Adkins:

Self-sufficiency is the ideal for the Homeric and later Greek head of family, in so far as he considers himself agathos. The ideal is incapable of realization: the agathos is certain to need agatha, including philoi, which he does not possess; but this fact is minimized as much as possible ("Friendship' and 'Self-Sufficiency' in Homer and Aristotle." Classical Quarterly 13 (1963): p. 44.).

Stocker and Hegeman, in effect, follow Adkins on this, and allege tension within the Aristotelian framework. The argument I am developing shows how these claims can make sense and might be correctly applied when using the Republic's notion of self-sufficiency. But it denies any application to Aristotle, holding that to a considerable extent Aristotle seems to have seen the problem and to have re-conceptualised the ideal of self-sufficiency in order to render it a realisable goal – where its realisation allows for, indeed demands, commitments to others, including friends.

Interestingly, the notion of self-sufficiency that Adkins describes and Plato deploys has had a powerful hold on theorists. For example, if G. Harris is right, then a descendant notion is to be found in

the works of the Stoics, Kant and present day Kantians (see G. Harris Dignity and Vulnerability. (1997) Berkeley, University of California Press).

¹² As well, Aristotle associates self-sufficiency with a person rather than simply a feature of the life they lead (cf. EN 1177b6-7). So also he associates it with a political community (Pol. 1261B10-15), with a king (EN 1160b4), and so on. However, the application we will be most concerned with has to do with human lives and the possibility of flourishing.

¹³ See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b8-9, translated by T. Irwin (Hackett Publishing Company, 1985).

¹⁴ Arguably, the discussion of self-sufficiency in book 10 runs in a different direction from the notion discussed here. While there are differences, I do not think that the notion offered in book 10 can be seen as a return to the conception found in Plato. Moreover, even if it were, it is not widely enough deployed to support the tensions alleged by Hegeman and Stocker.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that at certain points Aristotle introduces a notion of self-sufficiency more akin to the one Plato deploys to ponder whether so conceived it is suitable to a life for us. Part of his point is that the ideal of self-sufficiency that we naturally apply to the Gods does not apply to us. Our self-sufficiency includes worthy others. (EE 1244b1ff)

¹⁶ My claims about the Republic are cast in terms of “plausibility” because my interest in the passage concerns the use of self-sufficiency only. These I have yoked together with Aristotle’s understanding of friendship, and the issue of other dependency and vulnerability, doing so to show that and how the tension described by Stocker and Hegeman can manifest itself, and manifest itself in narcissistic ways. It is in this sense only that the considerations advanced show that and how the passage from the Republic might deserve the sort of analysis Stocker and Hegeman provide. Plato’s own unique understanding of friendship and the significance of death, however, also seem to forestall the tension described – though in quite different ways. Whether so, why or why not are complications I have left to the side because my interest at the moment concerns the Aristotelian picture.

¹⁷ This paper was read before the Philosophy Colloquium at Queen’s University, where I particularly profited from remarks made by E.J. Bond, C. Gonzalez-Prado, H. Laycock, T. dos Santos and A. Macleod. It has also received the scrutiny of a number of friends, including R. Bosley, D. Browning, G. Harris, and L. Judson. I would like to thank these and many others for the much appreciated support that enabled me to complete this project.