On Anger
Lucius Annaeus Seneca
Translated by Robert A. Kaster

To Novatus on Anger: Book 1
Book 3 of the Dialogues

1 You’ve pressed me, Novatus, to prescribe a way of soothing anger: from this I infer that you’ve rightly come to fear this passion, especially and above all, as foul and frenzied. All other passions have something calm and quiet about them; this one consists entirely in aroused assault. Raging with an inhuman desire to inflict pain in combat and shed blood in punishment, it cares nothing for itself provided it can harm the other: it throws itself upon the very weapons raised against it, hungry for a vengeance that will bring down the avenger too.

(2) Accordingly, some wise men have said that anger is a brief madness: for it’s no less lacking in self-control, forgetful of decency, unmindful of personal ties, unrelentingly intent on its goal, shut off from rational deliberation, stirred for no substantial reason, unsuited to discerning what’s fair and true, just like a collapsing building that’s reduced to rubble even as it crushes what it falls upon. (3) Moreover, you can tell that the people whom anger seizes aren’t sane by considering their very demeanor. As madmen exhibit specific symptoms—a bold and threatening expression, a knitted brow, a fierce set of the features, a quickened step, restless hands, a changed complexion, frequent, very forceful sighing—so do angry people show the same symptoms: (4) their eyes blaze and flicker, their faces flush deeply as the blood surges up from the depths of the heart, their lips quiver and their teeth grind, their hair bristles and stands on end, their breathing is forced and ragged, their joints crack as they’re wrenched, they groan and bellow, their speech is inarticulate and halting, they repeatedly clap their hands together and stamp the ground, their entire bodies are aroused as they “act out anger’s massive menace,” they have the repellent and terrifying features of people who are deformed and bloated—it would be hard to say whether the vice is more abhorrent or disfiguring.
All other passions you can hide away and nurse in secret, but anger thrusts itself forward and becomes visible in your features, seething all the more plainly the greater it grows. Surely you’re familiar with the way all animals behave, how they give off telltale signs once they’ve been roused to do harm, as their entire bodies pass out of their customary, calm condition and exaggerate their natural ferocity. (6) Boars foam at the mouth and grind their tusks to sharpen them, bulls toss their horns about in the empty air and scatter the sand with their stamping hoofs, lions roar, snakes make their necks flare when they’re provoked, rabid dogs glower: no animal is naturally so terrifying and dangerous but that its ferocity increases visibly once anger has assailed it. (7) Of course I’m not unaware that the rest of the passions, too, are difficult to hide, that lust and fear and recklessness signal their presence and can be recognized in advance. Any unusually forceful disturbance inevitably causes a stir in one’s expression. What’s the difference, then? Other passions are visible, but anger makes itself obvious.

2 With regard now to its damaging effects: no pestilence has been more costly for the human race. Butchery and poisoning, suits and countersuits, cities destroyed, entire nations wiped out, leading citizens sold on the auction block, dwellings put to the torch, then the blaze, unchecked by the city walls, turning vast tracts of land bright with the attacking flame. (2) Consider the cities of vast renown whose foundation stones can now hardly be made out: anger cast these cities down. Consider the wastelands, deserted, without an inhabitant for many miles: anger emptied them. Consider the many leaders known to history as examples of grim destiny: anger ran one through in his bed, struck another dead (sacrilege!) at the dinner table, tore another limb from limb in full view of the crowded forum, the very bosom of the law. It caused one man to shed his blood as his son’s victim, another to expose his royal throat to a slave’s armed hand, another to splay his limbs on the cross. (3) And I’m still talking about punishments visited on individuals; now set aside those whom blazing anger assailed one man at a time and consider whole assemblies mowed down, the common folk butchered when an army was loosed upon them, whole peoples condemned to die in promiscuous slaughter * * * ?

(3a) Anger turns everything from what is best and most righteous
to the opposite. It causes whoever has come into its clutches to forget
his duty: make a father angry, he’s an enemy; make a son angry, he’s
a parricide. Anger makes a mother a stepmother, a fellow-citizen a
foreign enemy, a king a tyrant. (Martin of Braga, On Anger 2)

(3b) Anger is the desire to take vengeance for a wrong or, as
Posidonius says, the desire to punish the person by whom you reckon
you were unjustly harmed. Some have defined it this way: anger is
the arousal of the mind to harm the person who has either harmed
oneself or wished to do so. (Lactantius, On the Anger of God 17.13)

(4) *** as though they’re failing to show concern for us or dis-
daining our authority. Why else does the crowd become angry with
gladiators, and so unfairly that it thinks it an offence that they’re not
glad to die? The crowd judges that it’s being treated with contempt,
and it changes—in its looks and gestures and passion—from specta-
tor to opponent. (5) Whatever that sort of thing is, it’s not anger but
quasi-anger, like that of children who want to pummel the ground if
they’ve fallen and often don’t even know why they’re angry: they just
are, without a reason and without being wronged—yet not without a
certain impression of being wronged, and not without some desire
for payback. Accordingly, they beguile themselves with make-believe
blows and are appeased when people beg their pardon with a tearful
pretense: their grievance, which is not true grievance, is removed by
a vengeance that is not true vengeance.

3 An objection: “we become angry, often, not with people who
have harmed us but with those who intend to harm us: from this
it’s clear that anger is not the product of a wrong.” It’s true that we
become angry with those who intend to harm us, but they harm us
by that very intention: one who intends to commit a wrong is already
committing it. (2) Another objection: “it’s clear that anger is not a
desire for payback, because the very weakest people are often angry
at the most powerful: they don’t desire a payback they have no hope
of achieving.” In the first place, I said that it’s the desire for exacting
a payback, not the capacity to do so; and people desire even things
they cannot achieve. In the second place, no one is so lowly that he
cannot conceive a hope of making even the loftiest pay: we are all
quite capable when it comes to doing harm.

(3) Aristotle’s definition is not very different from ours: he
says that anger is the strong desire to return pain for pain. (The
difference between his definition and ours cannot be explained briefly.) Against both definitions it’s objected that wild animals become angry, but without the provocation of being wronged and not for the sake of payback or causing another pain; even if such is the effect of their behavior, it’s not their aim. (4) But it must be said that wild animals—and all creatures save the human being—are without anger: though anger is reason’s enemy, it comes into being only where reason resides. (5) Wild animals have impulses—frenzy, ferocity, aggression—but they no more have anger than they have luxury, even though they’re less self-controlled than humans when it comes to certain pleasures. (5) There’s no reason to believe the person who says: (6)

The boar forgets to grow angry, the hind, to trust in flight, the bear to attack hardy herds.

By “grow angry” he means “be stirred up,” “be goaded”; they no more know how to “grow angry” than they know how to “forgive.” (6) Animals incapable of speech lack human passions, though they have certain impulses that resemble passions. Were that not the case, if they knew love and hate, they would also know friendship and animosity, disagreement and harmony. And though some traces of these things exist even in animals, they’re the proper possession—for good and ill alike—of human hearts. (7) Only the human being has been allotted practical wisdom, foresight, scrupulousness, deliberation: animals are barred not only from human virtues, but also from human vices. Their entire constitution, inside and out, is unlike the human: their ruling principle is differently fashioned. Just as they have a voice—but one that is inarticulate and confused and incapable of forming words—and just as they have a tongue—but one that is strictly constrained and not free to perform varied movements—so also that ruling principle is coarse and unrefined. Accordingly, it grasps the visible presentations of things that provoke its impulsive behavior, but in murky and confused form. (8) Consequently, animals’ attacks and alarms are vigorous, but they’re not fear and anxiety and sadness and anger; merely certain states similar to those passions. For that reason they quickly pass away and are transformed into their opposites: animals that have just been in a rage and a panic now graze quietly; restful sleep follows immediately on bellowing stampedes.
What anger is has been sufficiently explained, and how it differs from “wrathfulness” is plain: the same way that being “drunk” differs from being “a drunkard,” and being “afraid” differs from being “fearful.” Someone who is “angry” might not be “wrathful”; someone who is “wrathful” might sometimes not be “angry.” (2) All the other categories that distinguish different kinds of anger with a differentiated terminology in Greek lack their own labels in Latin, and so I’ll pass them by—though it’s true that we use the terms amarus [bitter] and acerbus [harsh], as also stomachosus [testy] and rabiosus [frenzied] and clamosus [ranting] and difficilis [difficult] and asper [prickly], which are all different forms of anger; you can also include among these morosus [peevish], a hypersensitive sort of wrathfulness. (3) Indeed, there are certain forms of anger that simmer down short of shouting, some that are both frequent and difficult to shake, some that are savagely physical and not very verbal, some that are let loose in a torrent of bitter abuse and curses; some forms don’t go beyond complaining and sulking, some are deep and weighty and inward-turning. There are a thousand other varieties of this polymorphous evil.

So far we’ve considered what anger is, whether it befalls any animal save a human, how it differs from wrathfulness, and how many types there are. Now let’s consider whether anger is in accord with nature, and whether it’s useful and thus should be retained to some degree. (2)

Whether it is in accord with nature will be evident if we consider the human person closely. What is milder, when its mental condition is not warped? What, on the other hand, is crueler than anger? What is more inclined to love others than a human? What is more hostile than anger? The human is born to give and receive assistance—anger, to destroy. The one wants to form associations, the other, to secede; the one wants to be of benefit, the other, to do harm; the one wants to aid even strangers, the other, to assault even the nearest and dearest. Human beings are prepared even to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others’ advantage; anger is prepared to plunge into danger, provided it drags the other down. (3) Does anyone, then, show greater ignorance of the nature of things than the person who ascribes this bestial, destructive vice to nature’s best and most polished creation? Anger (as I said) is hungry for payback; the presence of this lust in a human being’s utterly peaceful breast
in no way accords with nature. Human life is constituted by the harmonious exchange of benefits, and is held fast in a pact of mutual assistance not by fear but by mutual affection.

6 An objection: “Surely scolding is sometimes needed, no?” Of course! But reasoned scolding, without anger; for the point is not to do harm, but to heal under the guise of harming. For just as we heat some twisted metal shafts to straighten them, and use wedges to apply pressure not to shatter them but to remove the warp, so we straighten out people’s characters with physical pain and mental distress once they’ve been warped by vice.65 (2) To be sure, a physician, when faced with mild disorders, at first tries a slight modification of the daily regimen: he imposes some order on food, drink, and exercise and thereby tries to build up the person’s health simply by making his way of life coherent. The next thing is to let moderation do some good. If moderation and order do no good, the physician prunes some elements of the regimen away; if the patient still doesn’t respond, the physician forbids him food and tries to unburden his body with fasting. If these gentler measures get nowhere, he has recourse to bleeding and—if limbs do harm by spreading the disease through their attachment to the body—amputation. No treatment that has a healthful outcome is deemed harsh.66 (3) In the same way it’s appropriate that a person who administers the laws and guides a civil community should seek to heal people’s characters with words for as long as he can, and rather gentle words at that, to urge the proper course of action and instill in their minds a desire for what is honorable and fair, so that they will hate vice and value virtue.67 At the next stage he should adopt a more severe way of speaking, but one that still only warns and reproves. Finally, he should have recourse to penalties, of a sort that are still fairly mild and not irrevocable: he should impose the worst penalties on the worst crimes, on the principle that no one should die save in a case where death is a favor even to the one who is dying.68 (4) In this one respect will he differ from physicians: whereas they provide an easy escape to those on whom they cannot bestow life, he compels the condemned to depart from life scorned and covered in disgrace, not because he takes pleasure in any man’s punishment—such inhuman bestiality is far removed from the wise—but so that it might be a lesson to all, as the commonwealth benefits from the death of those who didn’t wish to benefit it while alive.
A human being’s nature, then, doesn’t seek payback; it follows that anger itself is not in accord with nature, since it does seek payback. (5) I shall also adduce an argument from Plato—what harm can it do to use others’ belongings, when they overlap with what is our own?—who says, “A good man causes no harm.” Payback harms: therefore, payback doesn’t suit a good man, and for the same reason neither does anger, to which payback is suited. If a good man takes no delight in payback, neither will he take any delight in the passion that finds pleasure in payback. Anger, therefore, is not natural.

7 “Isn’t it possible that we ought to take on anger as an ally, even though it’s not natural, because it has often been useful? It raises our spirits and spurs us on; without it courage accomplishes nothing splendid in warfare: it needs that flame set to the kindling, that goad to stir the bold and send them into harm’s way. That’s the reason some people think it best to control anger, not do away with it, and to reduce it to a healthy mean by stripping away the excess while retaining the element that prevents action from turning feeble and the mind’s vivid energy from being sapped.” (2) In the first place, it’s easier to keep harmful agents out and not admit them than to direct and control them once they’ve been admitted; for when they’ve taken up tenancy they’re more powerful than the one who would rule them, and they tolerate no cutbacks or diminution. (3) In the second place, reason itself, which is entrusted with the reins, is in control only so long as it’s kept separate from the passions; once it has mingled with them and become polluted, it cannot keep them in check, though it could have kept them out. Thought, once it has been shaken and dislodged from its proper footing, becomes a slave of the thing that shoves it along. (4) Certain things are within our control at first, whereas the subsequent stages carry us along with a force all their own and leave us no way back. People who have jumped off a cliff retain no independent judgment and cannot offer resistance or slow the descent of their bodies in freefall: that irrevocable leap strips away all deliberation and regret, and they cannot help but arrive at an outcome they would have been free to reject at the outset. Just so, once the mind has submitted to anger, love, and the other passions, it’s not allowed to check its onrush: its own weight and the downward-tending nature of vices must—must—carry it along and drive it down to the depths.
The best course is to reject straightway the initial prickings of anger, to fight against its first sparks, and to struggle not to succumb to it. Once it has begun to carry us off course it’s difficult to sail back to safety, since not a jot of reason remains once the passion has been let in and some sovereign right has been granted to it by our own will: it will thereafter do not what you allow but what it wants. (2) The enemy—I stress this point—must be held at bay on the first frontier; when it has entered and made its way through the gates, it accepts no limits from those it has taken captive. Indeed, the mind is not sequestered, keeping a watch for the passions as things external and apart, so that it can keep them from going farther than they ought. Rather, the mind itself turns into the passion: that is why it cannot summon back its useful, healthy vigor once it has been betrayed and weakened. (3) Reason and passion, as I said, don’t have separate and distinct dwelling places but are the mind’s transformation to a better and worse condition. How then will a reason that has been seized and overwhelmed by vices resurrect itself once it has yielded to anger? Or how will it free itself from a murky state in which the admixture of baser elements predominates?

(4) An objection: “But some people control themselves when they’re angry.” Is it the case, then, that they do nothing that anger dictates, or something? If nothing, then clearly anger is not needed for getting things done—the reason that you were summoning its assistance, as though it had some capacity more robust than reason. (5) Next, I put this question: is anger more powerful than reason, or weaker? If stronger, how will reason be able to set a limit on it, since as a rule only weaker entities are obedient? If weaker, then reason is sufficient in itself to get things done, without anger, and doesn’t look for the weaker party’s aid. (6) “But some people, when they’re angry, behave consistently and control themselves.” When? When anger is already at the vanishing point and is withdrawing of its own accord, not when it’s actually on the boil; for then it’s stronger. (7) “But surely sometimes, even in anger, people let off those whom they hate, unhurt and untouched, and restrain themselves from doing harm.” They do: when? When one passion has collided with another and either fear or desire has had its way. Anger then has been stilled not through reason’s favor, but through the passions’ wicked, treacherous entente.
Furthermore, anger has nothing useful about it and doesn’t stir the mind to warlike deeds. Virtue should never be assisted by vice, but is sufficient in itself. Whenever there’s need of aggressive action, virtue doesn’t grow angry but rises up and is stirred only so much as it reckons necessary, then grows calm, just as missiles let fly by catapults are in the control of the artillerymen who calibrate the catapults’ torque. (2) Aristotle says: “Anger is necessary, nor can any struggle be carried to victory without it: it must fill the mind and kindle the spirit, but it must be employed as a foot soldier, not the general.” That’s wrong; if it listens to reason and follows where it leads, it’s no longer anger, which has defiance as its defining trait; but if it fights against reason, is not still when ordered, and is carried forward by ferocious desire, it’s as useless as the mind’s servant as a soldier who ignores the signal for retreat. (3) Hence, if it allows itself to be limited, it should be called by some other name: it has ceased to be anger, which I take to be unbridled and untamed. If on the other hand it doesn’t tolerate a limit, it’s destructive and shouldn’t be counted among the auxiliaries. Thus it either is not anger or is useless. (4) For if someone exacts a penalty, not because he’s eager to punish but because it’s the right thing, he shouldn’t be counted among the angry. A useful soldier will know how to act in accordance with the strategy; passions, for their part, are equally bad as soldier and as generals.

Accordingly, reason will never add imprudent and violent impulses to its armory: over these reason itself has no authority, and it could never restrain them without setting similar counter-impulses against them, like fear against anger, anger against sluggishness, desire against fear. (2) May virtue be far removed from this evil, that reason should ever take refuge in vice! A mind in this state—protected by its own failings, unable to be brave except when angry, or energetic except when desirous, or quiet except when afraid—can find no reliable tranquility but is necessarily shaken and tossed about: a mind that becomes a slave to some passion must exist as though in a tyrant’s realm. Isn’t it shameful to make virtues depend upon the patronage of vices? (3) Furthermore, reason ceases to be capable of anything if it’s capable of nothing without passion; it begins to be passion’s twin, its match. What difference does it make if passion without reason is as ill-considered as reason without passion is impotent? The two are
equal where one cannot exist without the other. Yet who could stand to equate passion with reason? (4) An assertion: “Passion is useful if and only if it’s moderate.” No: if and only if it’s useful by nature. But if it shrugs off reason’s commands, it will achieve by its “moderation” only this: the less there is of it, the less harm it will do. A moderate passion is simply a moderate evil. (3)

An assertion: “But when faced by the enemy we need anger.” (4) Nowhere do we need it less: that’s when our aggressive actions must be controlled and obedient to commands, not given free play. For example: what does in the barbarians, who are physically so much sturdier and inured to toil, except anger, which is its own worst enemy? Gladiators too—their skill protects them, anger leaves them exposed. (2) Furthermore, what need is there of anger, when reason gains the same end? Do you suppose that a hunter feels anger toward wild beasts? Yet he both faces them as they approach and pursues them as they flee, and reason accomplishes all of this, without anger. When so many thousands of Cimbri and Teutoni poured over the Alps, what destroyed them—so utterly that their people back home learned the news only by rumor, since not even a messenger escaped—what destroyed them if not the fact they had anger instead of virtue? And just as anger sometimes has been known to provide momentum and lay low the things in its path, so it has more often been self-destructive. (3) Is there anything more spirited than the Germans? Anything keener on the attack? Anything more eager for the arms of war that they know from birth, that nurture and sustain them, that they have as their sole passion, turning their backs on all else? Anything tougher when it comes to enduring harsh conditions, thanks to the fact that they mostly leave their bodies uncovered and take no shelter from their unendingly freezing climate? (4) Yet Spaniards and Gauls and men of Asia and Syria (virtually women when it comes to war) cut them down, before one of our legions is even in sight, when their inclination to anger—and nothing else—makes them easy prey. Imagine adding reason and discipline to those bodies and minds that have not known pampering, luxury, wealth: to say the least, we will certainly have to revive our old Roman ways! (5) How else did Fabius restore our dominion’s shaken forces than by knowing how to take his time and drag things out and delay, all things that angry people don’t know how to do? Our dominion would have been lost had Fabius
dared to do all that anger urged: he took thought for our common fortunes and—having judged our strength to be such that any loss meant total loss—he set aside his sense of grievance and desire for revenge and focused solely on expedient opportunities. He vanquished his anger before he vanquished Hannibal. (6) What about Scipio? Didn’t he leave behind Hannibal, the Carthaginian army, all the things that should have roused his anger, and carry the war into Africa, taking his time in a way that made his enemies think it evidence of self-indulgent sloth? (7) What about the second Scipio? Didn’t he keep Numantia under siege a very long time, regarding with equanimity this spur to resentment—his own and the commonwealth’s at once—that Numantia was taking longer to vanquish than Carthage had? While shutting the enemy in with his siege works he drove them to fall on their own swords. (8) So you can see that anger is not expedient even in battles and wars: it’s given to rashness, and its desire to bring others into peril makes it careless of its own. The virtue that’s most reliable has looked guardedly about a good long time, has exercised self-control, and has advanced slowly toward a determinate goal.

12 An objection: “Are you telling me that a good man doesn’t become angry if he sees his father being murdered, his mother raped?” No, he will not become angry, but he’ll be their champion and defender. Why are you afraid that a proper sense of devotion won’t goad him sufficiently, even without anger? Or to follow out your same line of reasoning: “Are you telling me that when he sees his father or son being stabbed, a good man will not weep and faint?”—that is, the things we see happen to women whenever the slight hint of danger strikes them. (2) A good man will follow up his obligations undisturbed and undeterred, and in doing the things worthy of a good man he will do nothing unworthy of a man. If my father is being killed, I will defend him; if he has been killed, I will see the matter to a proper conclusion—because I know that’s right, not because I feel a grievance. (3) “Good men become angry when their friends and family are wronged.” When you plead your case this way, Theophrastus, you try to discredit more robust teachings, offering claptrap to the spectators while ignoring the judge: because each and every one of them becomes angry when that sort of misfortune befalls his family and friends, you suppose that people will reckon that what they do ought to be done, since practically everyone reckons righteous the
feeling he recognizes in himself. (4) But they do the same thing if their hot bath is not properly prepared, if a glass gets broken, if their shoe is spattered with mud. It’s not a sense of devotion that stirs that kind of anger, it’s weakness—the sort proper to children, who weep just as much whether they’ve lost their parents or some hazelnuts. (5) To become angry on behalf of one’s friends and family is the mark of a weak mind, not a mind devoted to duty. The fine and worthy thing is to come forward in defense of one’s parents, children, friends, and fellow citizens with one’s sense of obligation actually leading the way, and to do so willingly, deliberately, and prudently, not impulsively and furiously. For no passion desires vengeance more earnestly than anger, and for that very reason it’s unsuited to take revenge: too hasty and witless, like virtually every form of desire, it gets in its own way as it hurries toward its goal. For that reason it has never done any good in either peace or war: it makes peace look like war, whereas under arms it forgets that “the god of War is impartial” and falls into another’s clutches while failing to get a grip on itself.

(6) Furthermore, vicious forms of behavior shouldn’t be deemed acceptable just because they’ve been effective in some way at some time. Fevers, too, relieve certain kinds of illness, but that doesn’t mean it’s not preferable to be free of them entirely: it’s an abominable sort of cure that puts health in disease’s debt. In a similar way, even if anger—like poison or falling off a cliff or shipwreck—has at some time been unexpectedly helpful, it shouldn’t be judged healthy; for often the results have been pestilential.

Another point to consider: the things worth having are better and more desirable the more of them we have. If justice is a good, no one will assert that it will be better if something is subtracted from it; if courage is a good, no one will want it to be diminished in some respect. (2) It follows, then, that anger too should be better the greater it is; for who would reject the increase of any good? Yet it’s inexpedient for anger to be made greater. It follows, then, that it’s also inexpedient for it to exist: there’s no good that becomes an evil by becoming larger.

(3) An assertion: “Anger is useful because it puts more fight in people.” Drunkenness can be regarded in the same way: it makes people aggressive and reckless, and many have been better at handling a blade when they’re tipsy. Claim, too, that delirium and insan-
ity are necessary for strength, because madness often makes people more powerful! (4) Or consider this: hasn’t fear sometimes had the contrary effect of making someone reckless? Hasn’t fear of death roused even the most sluggish to battle? But anger, drunkenness, fear, and other things of this sort are foul and futile stimulants: they give no tools to virtue, which needs nothing that vices can give, they just give a little lift to a mind otherwise supine and abject. (5) No one becomes braver by becoming angry except the sort of person who wouldn’t have been brave without being angry: anger thus doesn’t assist virtue; it substitutes for virtue. What of the fact that anger, were it a good, would attend all the most highly developed people—whereas those who are most inclined to anger are babies and the aged and the sick? 94 Everything weak is by nature given to complaint.

14 Theophrastus objects: 95 “A good man cannot help but be angered by evils.” According to that line of thought, the better a person is, the more inclined to anger he will be—though isn’t it rather the reverse: the more calm he will be, the more free of passions, hating no one? (2) Indeed, what reason does the good man have to hate wrongdoers, since it’s error that drives them to such failings? Moreover, hating those who go astray is not the trait of a prudent man; otherwise he will have to hate himself. Let him ponder how many offenses against good behavior he commits, how many of the things he’s done call for pardon: 96 presently he’ll be angry even at himself. For a fair judge doesn’t give one verdict in his own case and another in someone else’s. (3) No one, I say, will be found who can absolve himself; anyone who claims he’s innocent isn’t thinking of his own conscience, only whether his behavior had a witness. How much more truly human to regard wrongdoers with a gentle and paternal cast of mind, not to persecute them but to summon them back. When a person is wandering through the fields in ignorance of the way, it’s better to guide him to the right path than to banish him.

15 And so the wrongdoer should be corrected both by admonition and by force, softly and roughly, and he must be made better for his own sake as much as for that of others, not without scolding but without anger. For who feels angry at the one he’s healing? But suppose that they cannot be set straight, that nothing in them is gentle or offers ground for hope: those who are going to make worse all they touch should be removed from the company of mortals, so
that the only means available might put a stop to their wickedness—but this should be done without hatred. (2) For why should I hate the person whom I most benefit at the very moment when I separate him from himself? Surely no one hates his own limbs when he amputates them, does he? That’s not anger but a pitiably form of healing. We destroy rabid dogs and kill a fierce and untamable ox and slaughter sick livestock, lest they infect the herd; we snuff out monstrous births and drown children too, if they’re born crippled or deformed. It’s not anger but reason to segregate the useless from the sound. (3) Nothing is less appropriate to one meting out punishment than anger, since punishment is all the more conducive to correction if it’s imposed as an act of considered judgment. That’s the reason Socrates said to a slave, “I would beat you, if I weren’t angry.” He put off admonishing the slave to a moment when he was more himself, but he admonished himself at that moment. Who in the world will have his passion under control when Socrates didn’t dare entrust himself to anger?

16 When it comes to restraining those who stray and commit crimes, then, there’s no need for the agent of punishment to be angry: since anger is a failure of the mind, a wrongdoer shouldn’t be the one to set wrongdoing right. “Shall I not be angry at a bandit, then? Shall I not be angry at a poisoner?” No; nor do I become angry with myself, when I let my own blood. (2) Every kind of punishment I apply, I apply by way of a remedy. “You’re still in the first stages of going wrong, and your slips aren’t serious but frequent: reproof, first in private and then published abroad, will try to correct you. You have already gone too far to be healed just by words: disgrace will keep you in check. You have to have something stronger burned into you, something you’ll feel: you’ll be sent into exile in regions unknown. In your case the wickedness is already firmly set and needs harsher remedies; both the public stocks and prison will be brought to bear. (3) Your mind, which weaves a growing web of crime, is beyond healing; already you need no motives (which the wicked will never lack) to set you off, but wrongdoing itself is a sufficiently strong motive for doing wrong. You have drunk deep of wickedness and so steeped your guts in it that it cannot be expelled save with those very guts. Long since have you been seeking to die in your wretchedness: we will earn your thanks by ridding you of that insanity by which you bedevil others and are bedeviled yourself. Now that you have been
wholly immersed in the torments that you have suffered and have caused others to suffer, we will at once put at your disposal the only good that remains for you: death.” Why should I be angry with the man whom I’m doing the greatest good? At times, killing is the best sort of pity. (4) If I had entered an army’s infirmary or a rich man’s house as a medical expert, I would not have prescribed the same remedy for all those suffering from diverse ailments. Now I’ve been recruited to heal the community, I see that so many minds offer a range of vices. Medication should be sought according to each individual’s illness: let this man be healed by a modest sense of restraint, that man by some time spent abroad, another by pain, yet another by deprivation, and this one by the sword. (5) So too, if I must reverse my magistrate’s garment and summon the assembly with the war trumpet’s call, I shall mount the tribunal neither in a rage nor with feelings of hostility but with an expression as neutral as the law, I shall recite those formal words in a voice more gentle and solemn than furious, and I shall order—not angrily but strictly—that the procedures prescribed by law be carried out. And when I command that the guilty man’s head be cut off, and sew up in a sack men who killed their fathers, and dispatch others to a soldier’s punishment, and place a traitor or public enemy on the Tarpeian rock, I shall be free of anger, with the same expression and cast of mind as when I kill snakes and poisonous creatures. (6) “Anger is needed to inflict punishment.” Do you mean that the law strikes you as angry at those whom it doesn’t know, whom it hasn’t seen, who it hopes will not exist? No, we must take on the cast of mind proper to the law, which is not wrathful but resolved. For if it’s appropriate for a good man to become angry at wicked deeds, it will also be appropriate to become indignant at the good fortunes of wicked men. Indeed, what’s more worthy of indignation than the fact that certain people flourish and abuse the kindness of fortune when no fortune bad enough to suit them can be found? But the good man will regard their advantage without indignation, just as he will regard their crimes without anger: a good judge condemns things worthy of reproof, he doesn’t hate them. (7) “Do you mean to say that when a wise man is confronted with something of that sort, his mind will be unfazed, and stirred no more than usual?” I grant that he’ll feel a certain slight and delicate stirring. For as Zeno says, in the wise man’s mind too the scar will
remain even when the wound has healed. He will therefore feel some hints and shadows of the passions, but he will be free of the passions themselves.

Aristotle says that some passions, if used well, serve as weapons. That would be true if, like the arms of war, they could be taken up and put off at the judgment of the one who dons them. But these weapons that Aristotle gives to virtue fight all on their own; they don’t wait for the hand that wields them, they’re not possessed, they do the possessing. (2) There’s no need for other arms: nature has armed us sufficiently with reason, a missile that’s sure, ever ready, and obedient, neither double-edged nor capable of being sent back against its master. Reason suffices, in and of itself; not only for planning ahead but also for the conduct of affairs. Indeed, what’s more foolish than for reason to seek protection from anger, a stable, trusty, and healthy thing from one that is wavering, untrustworthy, and sickly? (3) What of the fact, too, that reason, by itself, is much sturdier when it comes to getting things done—the only area in which anger’s assistance seems necessary? For when it has judged that something should be done, reason perseveres in doing it: because it’s going to find nothing better than itself that should cause it to change, it stands firm once it’s made its decisions. (4) Pity has often turned anger back because, being empty and swollen, it lacks a solid core. It enjoys a violent onset, just like onshore winds and those that arise over rivers and marshes, strong but short-lived: after an initial massive assault it droops, prematurely wearied, and the anger that had contemplated nothing but cruelty and novel penalties is already broken and tamed when the punishment must be imposed. (6) Passion quickly fades, reason is well-balanced. Sometimes, however, even when anger has persisted, if there are a number who have deserved to die, it stops the killing after shedding the blood of two or three. Its first blows are sharp: in the same way the venom of snakes as they slither out of hibernation is harmful, but their fangs are harmless when frequent strikes have drained them. (7) As a consequence, people who commit equal crimes don’t suffer equal punishments, and often someone who has committed a lesser crime suffers more, because he has been exposed to a fresher onset of anger. And it’s in fact an unbalanced thing overall: now it sallies forth farther than it should, now it comes to a halt sooner than it should. It’s self-indulgent, it bases its judg-
ments on its desires, it doesn’t want to listen, it leaves no room for intercession, it keeps a grip on what it has seized, and it doesn’t allow its judgment to be wrested from its control, even if that judgment is warped.

18 Reason grants both parties time for a hearing and then seeks an adjournment for its own sake, so that it has time to search out the truth. Anger’s in a hurry. Reason wants its judgment to be fair; anger wants its judgment to appear fair. (2) Reason keeps its eye solely on the matter under consideration; anger is moved by empty and irrelevant imaginings. Too nonchalant an expression, too loud a voice, too free a way of speaking, too refined a style of dress, advocacy that’s too insistent, popular support—all these rub anger the wrong way. It often condemns the defendant out of pique at his counsel; even if the truth is shoved in its face, it fancies and upholds error. It doesn’t want to be refuted: when it’s made a bad beginning, it takes stubbornness to be more honorable than second thoughts.

(3) I recall that Gnaeus Piso was a man untouched by many vices, but he took a warped pleasure in prizing obstinacy over consistency.108 Having angrily ordered the execution of a soldier who returned from leave without his comrade—as if the soldier had killed the man he couldn’t bring forward—Piso refused the soldier’s request for some time to mount a search. The condemned man was led out beyond the palisade and was already offering up his neck, when suddenly there appeared the comrade who seemed to have been killed. (4) The centurion put in charge of the execution ordered the watchman to sheathe his sword and brought the condemned man back to Piso, intending thereby to restore Piso’s innocence when good fortune had restored the soldier’s. After the two comrades had embraced, to the camp’s great joy, they were escorted back as a great crowd gathered. Piso mounted the tribunal in a rage and ordered both soldiers executed, both the one who had not done a murder and the one who had not died. (5) What could be more unfair than this? Because one innocent man had turned up, two were perishing. Piso added a third, too, for he ordered the execution of the very centurion who had brought back the condemned man. They were decreed to be in the same condition: three men condemned to die on account of one man’s innocence. (6) Oh, how clever anger is when it comes to finding pretexts for its rages! “You I order to be executed,” Piso
said, “because you were condemned; you, because you caused your comrade to be condemned; you, because you didn’t obey your commander when ordered to kill.” He figured out a way to commit three crimes because he had uncovered no crime.

Anger—a point I stress—has this particular evil trait: it’s unwilling to be controlled. It grows angry at the truth itself, if it appears to contradict its will. It pursues its intended victims with shouting and uproar, the whole body shaking, with abuse and curses added in. (2) Reason doesn’t do this; but should the need arise it uproots whole households—silently, quietly—and destroys families that are a plague on the commonwealth, together with their wives and children, it overturns the very dwellings and extirpates the clans that are freedom’s enemies, doing all this without gnashing its teeth or tossing its head about or any other behavior unbecoming a judge, whose expression should be calm and in repose most especially when he is making an important pronouncement. (3) Hieronymus asks: “When you intend to kill someone, what’s the point of gnawing on your lips beforehand?” What if he had seen a proconsul leaping down from the tribunal, snatching the fasces from a lictor, tearing his own garments because another’s were a bit too slow in being torn? (4) What’s the point of overturning a table? Of smashing cups? Of dashing oneself against a column? Of tearing out one’s hair or striking one’s thigh or chest? How witless a thing do you reckon anger to be, seeing that it turns against itself when it cannot burst out against another as quickly as it wants? That’s why people in that condition are taken in hand by their relatives, who beg them to be reconciled to themselves.

(5) Whoever is free of anger does none of these things when imposing the penalty that each person deserves. Often he releases a person whose misdeed he has caught out: if the miscreant’s regret gives good reason to hope, if the judge sees that the wickedness is not deep-seated but sticks, as the say, to the surface of the mind, he’ll grant a suspended sentence that will harm neither the recipient nor the giver. (6) Sometimes he’ll apply a lighter rein to important crimes than to lesser ones, if the former were committed through a slip rather than cruelty whereas the latter concealed a stealthy and habitual cunning. He’ll impose different punishments on two men guilty of the same crime, if one committed it out of carelessness while
the other made a point of doing harm. (7) He will always, whenever he imposes punishment, keep this principle in mind: one penalty is inflicted to correct the wicked, another to destroy them. In either case he will keep his eye on the future, not the past (for as Plato says,\textsuperscript{113} a sensible man punishes, not because a wrong has been done, but lest one be done; what’s done is beyond recall, what’s to come can be prevented). Those whom he wants to make examples of stubborn wickedness he will kill for all to see, not only so that they themselves will die but so that by dying they will deter others. (8) You can see how the person who must weigh and judge all these factors should approach the matter at hand—the power of life and death—with the utmost calm and scrupulousness. A sword is not well entrusted to an angry man.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{20} Nor should we even suppose that anger adds something to greatness of spirit.\textsuperscript{115} For that’s not greatness; it’s a swelling, just as when bodies are stretched taut by an abundance of unhealthy fluid. The disease is not an example of growth, but of destructive excess. (2) All whose minds, in delirium, cause them to think more than human thoughts believe that they radiate something lofty, sublime. But there’s no solid underpinning; rather, what has been raised up without a foundation is apt to come crashing down. Anger has no sound footing; it doesn’t arise from something stable and destined to abide but is windy and empty,\textsuperscript{116} as far removed from greatness of spirit as recklessness is from bravery, arrogance from confidence, moroseness from sternness, cruelty from strictness. (3) There is—mark me—a great difference between a lofty mind and a haughty one. Anger sets in motion no substantial and becoming project. Quite the contrary, it seems to me the mark of a lethargic and sterile mind, aware of its own feebleness, given to chronic distress, like sore and sickly bodies that groan at the lightest touch. In this respect anger is an especially womanish and childish vice. “But it befalls men.” Yes, because men too have childish and womanish natures. (4) “Do you mean to say that angry people don’t produce some utterances that seem the products of a great spirit?” No, rather, of spirits that don’t know true greatness, like that loathsome, abominable utterance, “Let them hate, so long as they fear.”\textsuperscript{117} You could tell that it was written in the age of Sulla. I don’t know which wish is worse, to be regarded with hatred or with fear. “Let them hate.” It dawns on him that they
will then curse and plot and seek to crush him: what does he add? May the gods blast him, such a worthy cure for hatred he discovered. “Let them hate”—what, “so long as they obey?” No. “So long as they assent.” No. What then? “So long as they fear.” I would not want even to be loved on such terms. (5) Do you suppose that this was said by a great spirit? You’re mistaken; that’s not greatness, it’s brutality. There’s no reason to believe the words of angry men, who make loud and threatening noises while the mind within is in utter panic. (6) Nor is there any reason to judge true what that most eloquent man Titus Livy says when he writes: “A man of a great rather than a good nature.” The two cannot be separated. Either the nature will be good, too, or it will not be great, either. Greatness of spirit, as I understand it, is unshaken, solid through and through, balanced and stable from its base on up, the sort of thing that bad natures cannot contain. (7) They can be terrifying and riotous and deadly. Greatness, whose strength and stability is goodness, they will not have. (8) To be sure, in their speech and their strivings and all their trappings they will produce a credible impression of greatness. They will make a statement that you might reckon belongs to a great spirit, as Gaius Caesar did when he grew enraged with the heavens because thunder was noisily interfering with his pantomimes (whom he imitated more zealously than he watched), and lightning bolts (off the mark, alas) were putting a jolt of fear in his carouse. He challenged Jupiter to fight—in fact, no quarter given—while shouting out that famous Homeric line:

Either lift me or I will lift you.

(9) How crazy was that! He supposed either that not even Jupiter could harm him or that he could harm even Jupiter. I think this utterance of his made no small impact in stirring the thoughts of the conspirators: for it seemed the last word in supine behavior to put up with a man who would not put up with Jupiter.

21 There’s nothing great, then, nothing notable in anger, not even when it seems to be vigorous, despising gods and men. Or if someone thinks anger produces a great spirit, let him think that luxury does too: it wants to be carried about on ivory, dressed in purple, covered in gold, it wants to move masses of land about, dam up the seas, create waterfalls, hang forests in midair. (2) Let him think that
gread, too, is the mark of a great spirit: it broods over heaps of gold
and silver, cultivates estates that go by the names of provinces, puts
individual stewards in charge of territories larger than those allotted
to consuls. \(3\) Let him think that lust, too, is the mark of a great
spirit: it swims across straits in the sea, castrates flocks of boys, puts
itself in the way of a husband’s sword, holding death in contempt.
Let him think that ambition, too, is the mark of a great spirit: it’s
not content with annual offices but wants, if possible, to engross the
magistrate lists with a single name\(25\) and to distribute its honorific
inscriptions throughout the whole world. \(4\) All such things, no
matter how far and wide they reach, are pinched, wretched, base. Only
virtue is sublime and exalted; there’s nothing great that is not
at the same time at peace.

To Novatus on Anger: Book 2
Book 4 of the Dialogues

1 My first book, Novatus, had a more copious subject: the vices’ slip-
perry slope makes for an easy downhill run. \(126\) Now we must address
matters of narrower compass: the question before us is whether anger
begins with an act of judgment or with a mere impulse—that is,
whether it’s set in motion voluntarily or like many things that come
about inside us without our being aware. \(127\) \(2\) Our discussion must
descend to these particulars so that it can later rise to those loftier
themes. In our bodies, too, bones, sinews, joints—the things that
give the whole its strength and life, though they’re hardly attractive
to look at—are set in order first; next come the elements that give
our features all their allure; and then, after all these, the final touch,
the glow of health that suffuses the body, once it’s fully formed, and
draws the onlooker’s eye most of all.

\(3\) Now, it’s beyond doubt that anger is stirred when we have the
impression that we’ve been wronged. The question is whether anger
follows directly upon that very appearance, launching its attack with-
out the mind’s collaboration, or whether it’s stirred with the mind’s
assent. \(4\) We hold that anger ventures nothing on its own but acts
only with the mind’s approval: \(128\) for (a) having the impression that
one has been done a wrong, (b) desiring to take vengeance for it,
and then (c) combining both in the judgment that one ought not to
have been harmed and that one ought to be avenged—none of this is
proper to a mere impulse set in motion independent of our will.

2 "What’s the point of this inquiry?" you ask. The point is to know
what anger is; for if it comes into being against our will, it will never
yield to reason—indeed, any movements that occur independent of
our will cannot be overcome or avoided, like shivering when we’re
sprinkled with cold water, or revulsion at touching certain things, or
the way our hair stands on end at bad news, or the blush that spreads
when we hear obscene words, or the dizziness that comes over us
when we look down from a cliff. Because none of these responses
is in our power, no form of reason can argue against their occur-
ing.\(^2\) Anger, by contrast, is put to flight by instruction because
it’s a fault of the mind subject to our will. It’s not among the things
that happen to us just because of our lot as humans, and happen,
accordingly, even to the very wise; and among these things must be
included the initial mental jolt that stirs us when we believe we’ve
been wronged.\(^3\) This sensation comes upon us even when we’re
watching shows at theatrical games and reading ancient history:
we often seem to become angry with Clodius as he drives Cicero into
exile, or with Antony as he orders his death. Who’s not stirred when
faced with Marius’ arms or Sulla’s proscriptions? Who doesn’t hate
Theodotus and Achillas and the actual child who dared a grown-up
crime?\(^4\) Sometimes a song sets us on edge, a double-time tune,
the martial sound of war trumpets; a horrific picture stirs our minds,
or the grim sight of punishments, however justly meted out.\(^5\) For
the same reason we answer others’ smiles with our own and grow sad
in a crowd of mourners\(^1\) and feel the blood tingle while watching
other men in competition. Such responses aren’t forms of anger, any
more than what causes us to frown as we watch a staged shipwreck
is true sadness,\(^2\) or fear that flashes through people’s minds as they
read of Hannibal’s laying siege to Rome after Cannae.\(^3\) These are all
movements of minds stirred despite themselves; they’re not passions
but the first preludes to passion.\(^6\) In this same way the war trumpet
stirs a veteran soldier’s ear even after he’s resumed civilian dress in a
period of peace, and the clatter of arms makes cavalry horses’ blood
rise. They say that Alexander’s hand jerked toward his sword at the
sound of Xenophantus’s flute.\(^4\)
3 The term “passion” should be applied to none of these responses that merely chance to move the mind: the mind doesn’t so much cause them as suffer them, if I can put it that way. Passion, then, consists not in being stirred in response to impressions presented to us, but in surrendering ourselves to those impressions and following up the mind’s first chance movement. (2) Turning pale, shedding tears, the first stirrings of sexual arousal, a deep sigh, a suddenly sharpened glance, anything along these lines: whoever reckons them a clear token of passion and a sign of the mind’s engagement is just mistaken and fails to understand that they’re involuntary bodily movements. (3) Thus even the bravest man has often grown pale while donning his arms, even the fiercest soldier’s knees have trembled a bit when the signal was given for battle; the great general has sensed his heart leap before the opposing armies clash, the most eloquent speaker has felt his extremities go cold as he gathers himself to speak. (4) Anger shouldn’t just be “stirred,” it should go on the offensive; it’s a kind of pursuit, and no pursuit ever occurs without the mind’s assent, nor can one act to gain vengeance and compensation with the mind all unaware. Suppose that someone has reckoned he was harmed, wants to take revenge, and then immediately calms down when some reason urges against it. I don’t call this anger, I call it the movement of a mind still obedient to reason; anger’s something that leaps clear of reason, that snatches reason up and carries it along. (5) Accordingly, that first mental jolt produced by the impression of an injury is no more “anger” than the impression itself. The intentional movement that follows, which has not only taken in the impression but affirmed it—that’s anger, the arousal of a mind that moves willingly and deliberately toward the goal of vengeance. There can be no doubt that fear involves flight, anger a pursuit. Consider, then, whether you reckon anything can be either pursued or treated with caution without the mind’s assent.

4 Now, to make plain how passions begin or grow or get carried away: there’s the initial involuntary movement—a preparation for the passion, as it were, and a kind of threatening signal; there’s a second movement accompanied by an expression of will not stubbornly resolved, to the effect that “I should be avenged, since I’ve been harmed” or “this man should be punished, since he’s committed a crime.” The third movement’s already out of control, it desires ven-
on anger

We cannot avoid that first mental jolt with reason’s help, just as we cannot avoid the other movements that (as I’ve mentioned) befall our bodies, just as we cannot avoid having another’s yawn provoke our own, or avoid closing our eyes at the sudden poke of another’s fingers. Reason cannot overcome those movements, though perhaps their force can be lessened if we become used to them and constantly keep a watch for them. That second movement, which is born from deliberation, is eradicated by deliberation.\(^1\)

Now, too, we have to ask whether people who often behave like animals and take pleasure in shedding human blood are angry when they kill those from whom they’ve not received an injury and from whom they don’t even believe they’ve received one—I mean people like Apollodorus or Phalaris.\(^2\) No, this is not anger, it’s bestiality: it doesn’t do harm in return for an injury received, it’s prepared even to receive an injury as long as it can do harm; it seeks to thrash and tear not for vengeance but for pleasure.\(^3\) In short, this evil takes its start from anger, which is brought by full and frequent exercise to lose all thought of clemency and every human bond, until at last it’s transformed into cruelty. Such people smile with delight, take every bit of pleasure they can, and look not at all like angry folk, since they find relaxation in their savagery.\(^4\) They say that when Hannibal saw a ditch filled with human blood, he remarked, “What a lovely sight!”\(^5\) How much lovelier would he have found it if he’d filled some river or lake! Is it any wonder you’re beguiled by this sight above all, seeing that you were born to bloodshed and became an intimate of murder from your infancy? For twenty years luck will attend you, supporting your cruelty, and will ever show you sights to please your eye, around Lake Trasumene and around Cannae and, finally, around your own city, Carthage.\(^6\) Not long ago, under the deified Augustus, the proconsul of Asia, Volesus, decapitated three hundred men in one day, then strode about among the corpses with a haughty look, as though he had accomplished something splendid and wondrous, exclaiming in Greek, “Such a kingly deed!”\(^7\) What would this man have done if he had been king? This was not anger at work, but some greater evil, beyond cure.

An objection: “Just as virtue is kindly disposed to honorable behavior, so should it greet disgraceful behavior with anger.” What
if one would say that virtue ought to be both abject and magnificent? Yet that is precisely what is meant when one wishes anger to be raised up and debased. Gladness derived from right action is splendid and magnificent, whereas anger caused by another’s wrongdoing is mean, the sign of a pinched spirit. (2) Further, virtue will never make the mistake of imitating vices while seeking to check them: it holds that anger as such must be reprimanded, a thing no better—and often worse—than those faults that are its object. It’s a natural property of virtue to be glad and joyful; being angry’s no more in accord with virtue’s honorable standing than grief, whereas wrath has sadness as its companion, and it inevitably turns to sadness, either after it comes to feel regret or after it’s rebuffed. (3) Or again: if being angry at wrongdoing is proper for a wise man, then the greater the wrongdoings, the greater his anger will be, and he will be angry often; it follows that the wise man will not only experience anger, he will be wrathful by disposition. Yet if we believe that neither great nor frequent anger has a place in the wise man’s soul, why should we not then free him entirely from this passion? (4) For a limit on anger cannot exist if anger must be felt in proportion to each person’s behavior: either you will be unjust, if you feel the same degree of anger for different degrees of wrongdoing, or you will be angry in the extreme, if you feel anger’s full heat as often as misdeeds merit wrath.

7 Now, what’s more unworthy than having another man’s wickedness determine a wise man’s passion? Will the great Socrates no longer be able to return home wearing the same expression he had when he left? And yet if the wise man should always be angry at shameful behavior and be riled and gloomy because of criminal behavior, he must be the most troubled man in the world: he’ll pass his entire life in anger and grief. (2) Will there be an instant when he’ll not see things worthy of reproach? Whenever he leaves his house he’ll have to make his way through crowds of criminals and people who are greedy, spendthrift, shameless—and prosperous because of those very vices. There’ll be nowhere he can turn his glance without finding some source of indignation: he won’t have the strength to rouse himself to anger as often as the provocation demands. (3) There they go, hurrying to the forum at the crack of dawn, so many thousands—what shameful lawsuits they mount, how much more shameful still their advocates! One man
brings a suit against a father’s judgments that he would have done better not to deserve; another’s hailed his mother into court, another’s come to act as an informer on a charge of which he is more plainly guilty. A judge is chosen to pass sentence on acts that he himself has committed, while the onlookers side with the guilty parties because they’ve been corrupted by an advocate’s fine voice.

8 Why go through individual cases? When you see the forum packed with a mob, and the polling place filled with a swarming crowd, and that circus where the greatest part of the populace is on display, be sure that there are just as many vices on hand as there are people. (2) Those you see in civilian dress are constantly warring among themselves. One man’s led to destroy another for a small gain; no one profits save from another’s harm; they hate the prosperous and despise the poor, resent the greater man and afflict the lesser. Goaded by a host of desires, they lust to win some trivially pleasurable prize from any and every depravity. It’s a way of life no different from a gladiatorial school: living and fighting with the same people. (3) It’s a gathering of wild beasts—except that beasts live peacefully among themselves and don’t bite their own, whereas these get their fill by tearing each other to pieces. In this one respect they differ from animals incapable of speech: the latter behave gently toward their keepers, these in their frenzy bite the hand that feeds them.

9 The wise man will never cease to be angry once he begins. There’s a full load of crimes and vices everywhere. More crime is committed than punishment can remedy. We’re engaged in a struggle—a vast struggle—with wickedness. The desire to do wrong is greater every day, the sense of modest restraint is diminished. Regard for what is better and more just has been cast out, while lust imposes itself by force wherever it wishes. Nor are crimes now kept secret: they go on right before our eyes. Wickedness has been so broadcast and gained such power in everyone’s breast that innocence is not rare; it’s nonexistent. (2) For surely the lawbreakers aren’t isolated individuals or a mere handful, are they? No, they’ve arisen on every side, as though a signal had been given, to confound right and wrong:

Host is not safe from guest,
nor father-in-law from son-in-law, even brotherly goodwill is scarce;
the husband is bent on his wife’s destruction, and she on his; terrifying stepmothers blend ghastly poisons, the son seeks, too soon, to learn how long his father will live.\(^{150}\)

\textbf{(3)} And how small a fraction of the crimes are these? This catalog omits opposing camps where once there was a single whole, fathers and sons swearing allegiance to different sides, the fatherland set afame by a citizen’s hand, columns of enemy horsemen on the fly to find where the proscribed have gone to ground,\(^{151}\) sacred springs polluted with poisons, plague made a weapon,\(^{152}\) ditches dug to put parents under siege, prisons full, arson reducing whole cities to ashes, deadly tyrannies, secret plans for regal power and public executions, acts considered criminal as long as they can be held in check now a source of glory, rape and violation, with not even the mouth exempt from lust.\(^{153}\) \textbf{(4)} Add to this now the oaths of nations violated, treaties broken, the stronger taking off as booty whatever’s too weak to resist, cheating, theft, deceit, reneging—crimes for which three forums do not suffice.\(^{154}\) If you want the wise man to be as angry as the unworthiness of the crimes demands, he must become not angry but insane.

10 You’ll better contemplate this thought: errors shouldn’t make us angry. What if one were to become angry at people unable to put one foot surely after another in the dark? Or at deaf people who don’t listen to orders? Or at children, because they don’t pay attention to their duties but look instead to their age-mates’ games and silly jokes? What if you should choose to become angry at those who grow sick or old or tired? Among all those other disadvantages that are ours as mortals, there’s this: the murkiness of our minds, whence both the inevitability of our mistakes and our fondness for the mistakes we make. \textbf{(2)} To keep from becoming angry with individuals you must forgive all at once: the human race should be granted a pardon. If you become angry with young men and old men because they do wrong, then be angry with infants: they’re going to do wrong. Surely no one becomes angry with children of an age incapable of drawing distinctions, do they? Being human is a greater excuse, and more just, than being a child. \textbf{(3)} These are the terms and stipulations of our birth: we are creatures subject to no fewer diseases of mind than of body, neither dull nor slow, to be sure, but misusing our acuity, all
of us offering each other examples of vices. When anyone follows those who have gone before—down the wrong route—how could he not have an excuse, since he’s gone astray on the common highway? (4) A general’s strictness is unsheathed against individuals, but pardon is required when the whole army has deserted. What eliminates a wise man’s anger? The great crowd of wrongdoers. He understands how unjust it is—and how dangerous—to be angry with a vice that is pandemic.

(5) Whenever Heraclitus left his house and saw all around him such a mass of people living badly (or rather, dying badly), he wept out of pity for all the happy and prosperous people he met—the behavior of a mind that was gentle, but too weak.155 Besides, he himself was among those deserving of his tears. By contrast, they say Democritus was never without a smile in public, so hard did he find it to take seriously all the transactions being conducted in earnest.156 Where’s the place for anger there? All things deserve either our laughter or our tears.

(6) The wise man will not be angry with wrongdoers. Why? Because he knows that the wise man is not born but made, he knows that very, very few turn out wise in the whole expanse of time,157 because he has come to recognize the terms that define human life—and no sane man becomes angry with nature. That would be as pointless as choosing to wonder why fruit doesn’t hang on woodland briars, or why brambles and thorn bushes aren’t filled with some useful fruit. No one becomes angry when nature defends the vice.158 (7) And so the wise man—calm and even-tempered in the face of error, not an enemy of wrongdoers but one who sets them straight—leaves his house daily with this thought in mind: “I will encounter many people who are devoted to drink, many who are lustful, many who are ungrateful, many who are greedy, many who are driven by the demons of ambition.”159 All such behaviors he will regard as kindly as a doctor does his own patients. (8) When a man’s ship is taking on a lot of water, as the joins buckle and gape on every side, he surely doesn’t become angry with the sailors and the ship itself, does he? Rather, he runs to help—keeping the water out here, bailing it out there, plugging the gaps he can see, working constantly to counter the unseen gaps that invisibly draw water into the bilge—and he doesn’t leave off just because more water takes the place of all the water he
drains. Prolonged assistance is needed against constant and prolific evils, not so they cease, but so they don’t gain the upper hand.

An objection: “Anger is useful because it keeps you from being despised and frightens off the wicked.” In the first place, if anger is as powerful as it is threatening, it’s also hated, on account of the very fact that it arouses fear; but it’s more dangerous to be feared than to be despised. On the other hand, if it’s impotent, it’s more vulnerable to contempt and doesn’t escape mockery; for what’s more feeble than anger huffing and puffing to no purpose? In the second place, it’s not the case that certain things are more powerful for being frightening, and I wouldn’t want a wise man to be told that being feared, which is part of a wild beast’s armory, is also a weapon for the wise. Fever, the gout, a bad sore are all feared, aren’t they? But there’s not a drop of good in those things, is there? Quite the contrary, all things that are despised, disgusting, and base are for that very reason feared. Thus anger is ugly per se and not at all formidable, but it’s feared by many as an ugly mask is feared by infants. What of the fact that anger always rebounds upon the angry, while no one is feared who is himself without fear? On this point you should think of the famous line of Laberius that, when delivered on the stage in the midst of a civil war, caught the whole people’s attention just as though the voice of public sentiment had spoken:

He whom many fear must needs fear many.

Nature ordained that whatever another’s fear makes great is not free from fear of its own. How lions’ hearts quake at the slightest sounds! A shadow or a voice or an unaccustomed odor starts the fiercest beast: whatever terrifies trembles too. There’s no reason, then, why any wise man should hanker after being feared, nor should he think anger some great thing because it’s frightening, especially seeing that even the most contemptible things are feared, like poisons and plague-ridden bones and bites. No wonder that—since a line hung at intervals with feathers keeps in check very large herds of wild beasts and steers them into traps—the device is called a “fright,” after the passion itself; for silly things frighten silly creatures. The motion of a chariot and its wheels’ spinning surfaces force lions back into their pen, while the sound of a pig terrifies elephants. Thus anger is feared in the same way that a shadow is feared by infants or
a red feather by wild beasts: it comprises nothing solid and robust, but affects minds that are insubstantial.

12 An objection: “You must eradicate wickedness from the natural order if you want to eradicate anger, but neither is possible.” In the first place, one can avoid being cold, though it’s winter, and sweltering in the summer months: either a favorable location provides protection from seasonal extremes or physical toughness overcomes the feelings of heat and cold. (2) In the second place, just turn that comment of yours around: you must eradicate virtue from the mind before you welcome anger, since vices don’t coexist with virtues, and no one can at the same time be both angry and a good man, any more than he can be both sick and well. (3) A further objection: “Anger cannot be entirely eradicated from the mind; human nature doesn’t allow it.” Yet there’s nothing so difficult and arduous that human thought doesn’t overcome it and constant practice make it a comfortable companion; no passions are so wild and independent that discipline doesn’t thoroughly tame them. (4) Whatever injunction the human mind has given itself, it has maintained: some people have succeeded in never laughing; some people have forbidden their bodies wine, others sex, still others all liquid; another man has made do with little sleep and kept up a tireless vigil; people have learned how to run up very slender, sloping ropes, carry huge loads that could scarcely be borne by human strength, dive to enormous depths and endure the seas with no chance to take a fresh breath. There are a thousand other examples of persistence overcoming every obstacle and showing that nothing is difficult when the mind enjoins itself to bear it. (5) Those people I have mentioned just now had either no material reward for such zealous persistence or no worthy reward—for what grand prize do people gain from practicing tightrope walking, or supporting huge bundles on their necks, or not surrendering their eyes to sleep, or penetrating to the bottom of the sea—and yet their toil persevered to the end of the task with no great compensation. (6) Will we not summon our endurance when such a great prize awaits us, the undisturbed tranquility of a joyful mind? What a grand thing, to escape the greatest evil—anger—and along with it frenzy, savagery, cruelty, madness, and that passion’s other comrades!

13 There’s no reason for us to look for a plea or an excuse to let us off the hook, saying that the thing’s either useful or unavoidable:
what vice ever went without an advocate? There’s no reason to say it can’t be excised: what ails us is curable, and if we’re willing to be freed of our flaws, nature herself lends a hand, for we are born to be upright. Nor is the path to the virtues steep and rough, as some have thought: the approach lies on level ground. (2) I don’t come to give you nonsensical advice. The way to the best human life is easy: just make a start, with good auspices and with the gods themselves lending a hand. It’s much more difficult to do the things you’re doing. What’s more tranquil than peace of mind? What’s more toilsome than anger? What’s more relaxed than mercy? What’s more taxing than cruelty? Chastity has time free for itself, lust is ever busy. In short, all virtues are easy to maintain, but cultivating vices carries a high price. (3) We should get rid of anger—this is granted in part even by those who say it should be lessened. Let it be entirely dismissed; it’s not going to do any good. Without it, crimes will be eliminated more easily and thoroughly, the wicked will be punished and be led to a better place. The wise man will meet all his obligations without relying on any wicked thing’s services and without the admixture of something that he must anxiously monitor and limit.

14 Thus we should never give anger entry, but sometimes we should feign it if our listeners’ sluggish minds need stirring, just as we arouse with spurs and firebrands horses that rise slowly to a gallop. Sometimes we must strike with fear those with whom reason gets nowhere. Actually to become angry is no more useful than grieving or being afraid. (2) “Yet don’t situations arise that provoke anger?” But that’s precisely when we must vigorously oppose it. Nor is it difficult to get the upper hand over your mind, since even athletes, engaged in activities involving the cheapest part of themselves, nonetheless endure painful blows to drain the strength of the opponent beating them, and they strike when opportunity, not anger, prompts. (3) They say that Pyrrhus, the greatest trainer of contestants in the gymnasium, regularly instructed his trainees not to become angry, for anger unsettles skill and has an eye only for doing harm. Often, then, reason urges forbearance where anger urges vengeance, and where we could have been clear of woe at its first onset, we end up tumbling into greater unhappiness. (4) Some people have been cast into exile when they couldn’t bear with equanimity a single word
of insult, overwhelmed with the gravest misfortunes because they were unwilling to suffer a trivial insult in silence: indignant that their full range of freedom was infringed in any way, they placed the yoke of slavery on their own necks. 172

15 An objection: “You can tell that anger has something noble about it when you see that free nations, like the Germans and Scyths, are the most disposed to anger.” 173 Yes, this happens because naturally brave and substantial characters are prone to anger before they’re softened by training. For certain traits are inborn only in better natures, like sturdy and prolific stands of trees that the earth bears, however uncultivated; a forest grows tall in fertile soil. (2) Thus naturally gallant characters are wrathful: their hot, fiery nature contains nothing slight and delicate. But their life force is unformed, as is true of all traits that arise only from the good of nature itself, without skill’s guidance: unless they’re quickly tamed, the elements suited to bravery become accustomed to recklessness and rashness. (3) “But aren’t the milder vices—like pity, love, modest restraint 174—associated with gentler minds?” Yes, and I shall often demonstrate that a good natural endowment has its own characteristic bad traits; but the fact that they’re symptoms of a better nature doesn’t mean that they’re not vices. (4) Furthermore, all those nations whose ferocity makes them free, like lions and wolves, are as incapable of being commanders as they are of being slaves, for their strength isn’t that of a human nature, but of a nature fierce and intractable: no one is able to rule who cannot also be ruled. 175 (5) That’s why, for the most part, nations that enjoy a milder climate have had empires: those who look toward the north’s chill have “natures untamable,” as the poet 176 says, “and just like their climate.”

16 An objection: “Animals that possess a lot of anger are considered the most noble.” It’s a mistake to adduce as an example for humans those creatures that have impulse in place of reason: humans have reason in place of impulse. But not even all animals are served by the same impulse: wrathfulness serves lions, panic fear, deer; attack aids the hawk, flight the dove. (2) And it’s not even true that the best animals are those disposed to anger: what about that? I would suppose that predators are better the angrier they are, whereas I’d praise the forbearance of oxen and horses that obey the reins. But why should you refer a human being to such unproductive examples,
when you have the universe and god, whom a human being, alone of all animals, comprehends, so that he alone might imitate him.\textsuperscript{177}

(3) And another objection: “Wrathful people are considered the most straightforward of all people.” Yes, in comparison with deceitful and tricky people: they appear straightforward because they act without concealment. And yet I would say that they’re not “straightforward” but “incautious”: that’s the name we give to folly, luxury, wastefulness, and all the vices deficient in cleverness.

17 More: “An orator is sometimes better when he’s angry.”\textsuperscript{178} No, when he’s acting angry: for actors, too, move their audience, though they’re not angry when delivering their lines but are acting angry. So too, before a panel of judges and at a public assembly and wherever we must move other people’s minds according to our will, we will ourselves make a show now of anger, now of fear, now of pity, to instill those feeling in others. Often simulated passions have achieved what actual passions would not.

(2) Yet again: “A mind that lacks anger lacks energy.” That’s true, if it has about it nothing more vigorous than anger. One must be neither a bandit nor his prey, neither given to pity nor cruel: the one sort’s mind is too soft, the other’s too hard. The wise man should be well-balanced, and for uncommonly brave action he should display strength, not anger.

18 Since we’ve treated the questions that anger raises, let’s move on to its cures. As I see it, however, there are two main aims: that we not fall into anger, and that we not do wrong while angry.\textsuperscript{179} Just as in taking care of our bodies some prescriptions look to maintain health, others to restore it, so we ought to resist anger one way and restrain it in another.\textsuperscript{180} So that we can avoid anger, I will offer some prescriptions that pertain to our way of life as a whole: these I will distribute between child-rearing and the time that follows.

(2) Child-rearing requires the greatest attention and will have the greatest payoff: for it’s easy to set minds in good order while they’re still tender, but difficult to prune away vices that have grown up with us.

19 An ardent mind is by nature most vulnerable to wrathfulness. There are four elements—fire, water, air, and earth—with matching properties—hot, cold, dry, and moist.\textsuperscript{181} Accordingly, the blending of the elements produces variations in places and creatures and
bodies and customs; creatures’ innate characters incline more in a
given direction in direct proportion to the greater force that the pre-
ponderance of a given element supplies. Hence we call some areas
“moist” and “dry” and “hot” and “frigid.” (2) The same distinctions
are valid for animals and humans: it makes a difference how much
moisture and heat each individual has within him; the element that
predominates in him will determine his characteristic behaviors. An
ardent mind’s nature makes people disposed to anger, because fire is
active and intransigent; a mixture in which cold predominates makes
them timid, because cold is sluggish and pinched. (3) Accordingly,
some of our sect have it that anger is stirred in the breast by the boil-
ing of the blood around the heart; this area, above all, is assigned
to anger just because the breast is the warmest place in the body.
(4) The anger of people whose makeup is predominantly moist grows
gradually, because they don’t have a ready supply of warmth, and it’s
gained only by movement. That’s why the anger of children and
women is more sharp than grievous, and rather trivial at its onset.
Stages of life that are dry have an anger that’s violent and strong, but
without increase: it doesn’t grow because cold follows upon the heat,
which is bound to slack off. Old men are difficult and querulous, as
are sick people, convalescents, and those whose heat has been drained
by either exhaustion or bloodletting. (5) People wasting away from
thirst and starvation are in the same situation, as are those whose
bodies lack a full supply of blood and are weak from malnutrition.
Wine kindles bouts of anger because it increases heat; some drunks
come to a boil, or some people who have been wounded, according
to the individual’s nature. And that is precisely the reason why blonds
and people with flushed complexions are most disposed to anger:
they naturally have the coloring that other people usually acquire
when they’re angry, because their blood is stirred up and moves
easily.

20 But just as nature inclines some people to anger, so, too, many
other factors arise that can have the same effect. Some have been led
to this condition by disease or physical injury, others by toil or ex-
tended periods without sleep, troubled nights and feelings of longing
and love; anything that has harmed either body or mind makes the
capacity for thought sickly and ready to complain. (2) But all those
factors are the first causes: the greatest influence belongs to habit,
which—when it’s unwholesome—nurtures vice. Nature is difficult to change; once the makeup of those coming into the world has been blended, it’s not open to us alter it. Still, it will be useful to know that ardent natures should be kept from wine, which Plato thinks should be denied to children, basing his prohibition on the ground that fire shouldn’t be aroused with fire. They shouldn’t even be filled full of food: their bodies will become swollen, and their minds will become bloated along with their bodies. Hard labor should give them a workout, but short of exhaustion: the aim is to diminish their ardor, not consume it, and to let their excessive fervor go off the boil. Games, too, are useful, for a moderate amount of pleasure relaxes their minds and keeps them in balance. Those natures that are moister or drier or cold aren’t at risk of anger, but you must beware of less spirited vices, like being panicky and cross-grained and hopeless and suspicious: such natures, accordingly, must be soothed, cherished, and roused to happiness. And since some remedies must be used against anger, others against gloominess—remedies not just very different but diametrically opposed—we will always try to counter the feeling that has come to dominate.

I stress the very great benefit derived from raising children in a healthy way right from the outset. Still, it’s difficult to steer the right course, since we have to try to avoid either nurturing anger in them or blunting their natural capacities. The matter requires careful monitoring, because the thing you’re trying to encourage and the one you’re trying to repress are both fed by similar things; yet similar things easily deceive even an attentive observer. License makes the spirit grow, servility diminishes it. The spirit is elated when praised and comes to form good expectations of itself—but arrogance and anger have the same origin. Accordingly, we have to steer a middle course, using now the reins, now the spurs. Let the child’s spirit suffer nothing abject, nothing worthy of a slave. See that he never needs to beg and wheedle—and see that he never gets his way by doing so. What he wants should be granted for his own sake, for his earlier behavior, and for good behavior promised for the future. When he’s competing with his fellows, we should allow him neither to be bested nor to become angry. We should make an effort to insure that he regularly competes with friends, so that he becomes accustomed to wanting to win, not to hurt the other. Whenever he’s
come out on top and done something praiseworthy, we should allow him to be elated, not to strut: joy is succeeded by exultation, which in turn is followed by a big head and too high an opinion of oneself. (6) We will grant some relaxation but we won’t allow them to sink into sloth and inactivity, and we’ll keep them well clear of luxuries. Nothing makes people more inclined to anger than being brought up soft and spoiled. That’s why the more an only child is indulged, the more license one’s wards are given, the more corrupt their minds become. The person who’s never been told “no,” whose anxious mother always wiped away his tears, whose attendant was beaten at his say-so—that person will not withstand being offended. (7) Surely you recognize that the greater each stroke of good fortune is, the greater the anger that accompanies it. This is especially clear in the case of rich men and notables and magistrates: anything frivolous and vacant in their mental makeup takes wing when the breeze is at its back. Prosperity nurtures anger, when a crowd of yes-men surrounds the arrogant man, speaking in his ear: “Really, is he to talk back to you? You don’t allow yourself the full measure of your eminence, you demean yourself,” and other things that healthy minds with a sound footing from day one have hardly withstood. (8) Accordingly, a child should be kept well clear of flattery: let him hear the truth. Let him now and then feel fear, too, and be respectful always, and rise before his elders. Let him never get his own way through anger; what has been refused to the weeping child should be given when he has calmed down. And his parents’ wealth should be there for him to see, not use. Let him be scolded for his shortcomings. (9) Giving children calm teachers and attendants will help. Anything young and tender fastens itself to the things closest to hand and grows to resemble them: the character of nurse and attendant is reflected in their charges’ character when they grow into adulthood. (10) When a child raised at Plato’s house was returned to his parents and saw his father shouting, he said, “I never saw this at Plato’s house.” I have no doubt that he more readily imitated his father than Plato. (11) Above all, see that his food is simple, his clothing inexpensive, his mode of living like that of his fellows. The child you’ve made the peer of many from the start will not be angry when someone is compared with him.

22 But these comments are relevant to our children. As for
ourselves and our own accidents of birth and upbringing, there is no further opportunity either for fault or improvement: it is what follows that must be set in order. (2) Accordingly, we must struggle against the passions’ first causes. The cause of anger is a belief that one has been wronged, to which one ought not lightly give credence. One shouldn’t immediately assent even to what is clear and obvious, for some things that are false look like the truth. One must always take one’s time: the passage of time makes the truth plain. (3) Don’t lend your ears too easily to accusers. It’s a flaw in human nature, well known to us and regarded with mistrust, that we’re glad to believe what we don’t want to hear, and we grow angry before we judge. (4) What of the fact that we’re moved not only by accusations but by suspicions, and that we grow angry at innocent people because we’ve put the worse construction on someone else’s look and laugh? One must plead the case of the absent party against one’s own interests and keep anger suspended. Punishment postponed can still be exacted, but punishment exacted cannot be undone.

23 There’s a well-known story about the tyrannicide who was captured before getting the job done. Tortured by Hippias so he’d name his accomplices, he named the tyrant’s friends who were standing around, knowing that they were fully committed to the tyrant’s well-being. After the tyrant ordered them killed, one by one as they were named, he asked who was left: “Only you,” the man said, “for I’ve left no one else who regards you fondly.” Anger caused the tyrant to lend the tyrant-slayer a hand, killing his own protectors with his own sword. (2) How much more spirited was Alexander! After reading a letter from his mother warning him to beware the physician Philippus’ poison, he took a drink Philippus offered him and downed it undeterred: on the subject of his friend he trusted more in himself. He was worthy of having a guiltless friend, and worthy of making the friend guiltless. (3) I praise this all the more in Alexander because no one was more prey to anger: yet the more uncommon self-control is in kings, the more it’s to be praised. (4) The great Julius Caesar did this too, in handling his victory in the civil war in a most merciful way. When he intercepted cases of letters sent to Gnaeus Pompey by men who seemed to have been either neutral or on the other side, he burned them. Though he was habitually moderate in his anger, he nonetheless preferred the inability to be angry
and thought it the most gratifying sort of pardon not to know what wrong each man had done.

24 Credulity does the most mischief. Often you shouldn’t even lend an ear, for in some matters it’s better to be deceived than to mistrust. You should entirely eliminate suspicion and guesswork, the most unreliable goads to anger: “That man greeted me with too little warmth. That man separated himself too quickly from my kiss. That man quickly broke off a conversation I’d begun. That man didn’t invite me to dinner. That man had a rather unfriendly look.”

(2) Suspicion will find proof to support it; straightforwardness is wanted, and a kindly judgment. Let’s believe nothing save what stare us in the face and is caught red-handed, and let’s scold our credulity whenever our suspicion has been shown to be empty. For this sort of scolding will make us slow to believe as a matter of habit.

25 From this it also follows that very trivial and petty matters will not aggravate us. The slave is not quick enough, the water’s too hot to drink, the bed has been mussed, the table’s been carelessly set: to get riled at such things is crazy. Someone whom a slight breeze has made shiver is weak and sickly; eyes that a bright white garment offends aren’t healthy; a person whose own back feels pain at another’s toil has been made effete by luxury. (2) They say that Mindyrides, from the city of the Sybarites, complained that he was becoming exhausted when he saw someone digging and lifting his hoe too high, and he forbade him to work in his sight; the same man complained that he felt worse when he lay down on rose petals that were creased. (3) When pleasures have corrupted mind and body at once, nothing seems bearable, not because things are hard but because the person experiencing them is soft. For why should someone’s cough or a sneeze send you into a frenzy, or a fly chased too negligently, or a dog that has got underfoot, or a key that slipped from the hands of a careless slave? (4) Will someone whose ears are bruised by the scraping of a bench being dragged bear with equanimity the abuse of public life and the curses heaped on him in an assembly or the Senate? Will someone who becomes angry when a slave does a bad job of melting the snow endure hunger and the thirst of a summer campaign? That’s why I say that nothing feeds anger more than luxury that’s out of control and incapable of forbearance: the mind must be treated roughly so it feels only a serious blow.
We become angry either with those who weren’t even able to wrong us or with those who were.\(^2\) In the former category are certain inanimate objects: often we’ve thrown away a book because the writing was too small and torn it to pieces because it was a bad copy, or we’ve ripped up garments because they were displeasing. How stupid, getting angry at things that neither deserved nor feel our anger.\(^3\) “But of course the people who make them are the ones giving us offense.” In the first place, we often become angry before we consciously make this distinction. In the second place, perhaps the craftsmen themselves will also offer reasonable excuses: this one couldn’t do better than he did, and it wasn’t for the purpose of insulting you that he didn’t learn better; that other one didn’t do what he did with the aim of offending you. Finally, what’s crazier than venting your spleen against objects when people are your actual target? \(^4\) What’s more, as it’s a mark of a lunatic to become angry with objects that lack a soul, so it is to become angry with animals incapable of speech, who do us no wrong because they lack the will: for it’s not a wrong unless it proceeds from an intention.\(^5\) Thus a sword or a stone can harm us, but they cannot do us a wrong. \(^6\) And yet some people think they’re being held in contempt when the same horses that obey one rider defy another—as though some things are more submissive to some people deliberately, not as a result of habit or the handler’s skill. \(^6\) And what’s more, as it’s stupid to become angry with these creatures, so it is to become angry with children and those not much more thoughtful than children.\(^7\) In the eyes of a fair judge, any wrongdoing by people of that sort can be defended by a plea, not of innocence, but of thoughtlessness.

There are certain things that cannot harm us and have only beneficial and salutary power, like the immortal gods, who neither wish nor are able to be a hindrance. For their nature is gentle and calm, as far removed from doing wrong to another as from doing wrong to itself. \(^2\) Accordingly, madmen and those ignorant of the truth hold the gods accountable for the sea’s savagery, severe downpours, winter’s stubborn grip; but in fact none of these natural phenomena that do us harm—and do us good—is aimed specifically at us. It’s not on our account that the world enjoys the cycle of winter and summer: such things follow their own laws, by which the divine purpose is carried out.\(^8\) We think too much of ourselves if we fancy
ourselves worthy of causing such great stirrings. None of these things, then, happens with the aim of wronging us—rather, quite the opposite, none of these things happens save for our well-being. (3) I’ve said that some things aren’t able to harm us and others don’t wish to harm us. In the latter category will be good magistrates and parents and teachers and judges, whose reproof should be accepted as therapy, like surgery and fasting and other things that cause pain in order to do us good. (4) Suppose we’ve been punished: we should think not only of what we’re suffering but of what we did; we should be made to reflect on our way of life. Provided we want to tell ourselves the truth, we’ll judge that we got off with less than we deserved.

28 If we want to be fair judges in all matters, let’s first convince ourselves that none of us is without fault.206 For this is the source of the greatest indignation, the thought “I’m without sin” and “I did nothing”: no, rather, you admit nothing. We resent it when we’re chastened by a word of rebuke or some restraint, though at that very moment we’re doing wrong by adding arrogance and defiance to our misdeeds. (2) Who’s that man there who claims he’s innocent before all laws? Even though that might be so, what a pinched innocence it is to be “legally good.” How much more broadly the norm of appropriate actions extends than the rule of law!207 How many demands do devotion, human feeling, generosity, justice, and good faith make, none of them confined to the tablets of the law!208 (3) But we cannot even represent ourselves as satisfying that very narrow definition of innocence: some things we’ve done, others we’ve planned, some we’ve hoped for, others still we’ve supported; in some cases we’re innocent only because we didn’t get our way. (4) With this thought in mind let’s treat miscreants more fairly and pay heed to those who rebuke us; at least let’s not become angry with the good (who’ll escape, if we’re angry even with the good?), and certainly not with the gods! It’s not through their <fault> but through the law of our own mortality that we suffer whatever unpleasantness comes our way. “But diseases and pains beset us.” Without a doubt, we must at some point die, since a decrepit dwelling place is our lot.

(5) Suppose you’re told that someone has spoken ill of you. Consider whether you did it first; consider how many you badmouth. I stress this point: let’s reflect that some aren’t doing us a wrong but are returning one; some are acting on our behalf, others under
duress, others in ignorance. Let’s reflect, too, that even those who act willingly and knowingly don’t have the wrong itself as their aim in wronging us: either the person slipped in offering some urbane pleasantry, or he did what he did not to vex us but because he couldn’t achieve his goal without getting us out of the way. Often flattery, while trying to charm, gives offense. (6) Anyone who recalls how often he’s been falsely suspected, how many of his own appropriate actions bad luck has made look like wrongs, how many people he came to like after hating them will be able to avoid becoming angry instantly, at least if he says to himself, each time he’s offended, “I myself have made this mistake too.”

(7) But where will you find such a fair judge? The same man who lusts only after another’s wife and thinks the fact that she’s another’s wife is reason enough for loving her doesn’t want his own wife looked at. The man who makes the sharpest demands on another’s good faith is faithless himself. The man who chases down lies is himself a perjurer, the one who brings false charges is terrifically annoyed at being sued himself; the man who doesn’t want his poor slaves’ chastity assailed is profligate with his own. (8) We see others’ vices right before us, but we carry our own on our backs. Hence it happens that a father reproves his son’s elaborate banquets, though he’s worse than his son; the man who has denied nothing to his own appetite for luxury forgives nothing in another man’s; the tyrant becomes angry with the murderer, the impious man punishes thefts. There’s a large segment of humanity that becomes angry not with the wrongs done but with the wrongdoers. We’ll become more self-controlled if we take a look at ourselves and ask: “It’s surely not the case that I’ve done nothing like that myself, is it? Surely I’ve gone astray that same way, haven’t I? Is it in my own interest to condemn such behavior?”

29 The great cure for anger is delay. Ask it, at the outset, not to forgive but to deliberate: its first assaults do the damage, but if it waits it will back off. Don’t try to uproot it all at once: it will be overcome entirely while you pluck it away bit by bit. (2) Some of the things that give offense are reported to us, others we hear or see ourselves. We shouldn’t quickly believe the stories that are told us: many people don’t tell the truth because they want to deceive, many because they themselves are deceived. One man tells an incriminating tale as a
way of ingratiating himself and falsely tells of wrongdoing so he can be seen to be pained that it was done. There’s a malevolent sort who wants to split up close friendships; there’s also the sort who is eager for some amusement, who watches from a safe distance the clash of those he’s pitted against each other. (3) If you were to judge a case involving a trifling amount, you’d not consider the matter proved without a witness; the witness would count for nothing without swearing an oath, you’d give each side a chance to argue, you’d allow time, you wouldn’t hold a single hearing, for the truth gleams all the more brightly the more often it’s handled. Do you condemn a friend off the cuff? Do you become angry before you hear his side, before you question him, before he has a chance to know either his accuser or the accusation? Indeed, have you already heard what is to be said on both sides? (4) The very man who brought you the story will give it up if he’s obliged to prove it: “There’s no reason to call me as a witness,” he says, “and if you do, I’ll deny it. If you insist, I’ll never tell you anything again.” At one and the same time he stirs up trouble and withdraws from the resulting dust-up. Anyone willing to speak to you only in private might as well be mute: what is more unjust than to believe a tale told in secret, but to become angry for all to see?

30 Some things we witness for ourselves: in these cases we will inquire closely into the agents’ nature and intention. He’s a child: let it be chalked up to his age, he doesn’t know whether he’s doing wrong. He’s a father: either he’s been so helpful in the past that he has the right even to do wrong, or perhaps it’s this very merit of his that offends us. She’s a woman: she makes a mistake. He was acting under orders: what just man becomes angry when compulsion’s the cause? He was harmed: suffering in turn what you did previously doesn’t count as being wronged. He’s a judge: you should trust his opinion more than your own. He’s a king: if he punished you when you were guilty, yield to justice; if he punished you when you were innocent, yield to fortune. (2) It’s an animal incapable of speech, or just like one: you’re acting no better if you become angry. It’s a disease or a disaster: it will pass over you less grievously if you endure. It’s God: you waste your time being angry with him no less than when you pray that he be angry with another. The one who committed the wrong is a good man: don’t believe it. He’s a bad man: don’t be
surprised. He’ll pay to another the penalty he owes to you, and he’s already punished himself by being a wrongdoer.\footnote{31}

There are, as I’ve said,\footnote{216} two conditions that stir up anger: first, if we have the impression that we’ve been wronged—and I’ve already discussed this sufficiently; second, if we have done a wrong unfairly—this is the topic that now must be addressed.\footnote{217} (2) People judge some things unfair on the ground that they shouldn’t have suffered them, some on the ground that they were unexpected.\footnote{218} Because we reckon as inappropriate things that are unexpected, things that happen contrary what we hope and expect cause the greatest upset: that is precisely why the most trivial things in our domestic arrangements give offense, and why we call our friends’ carelessness a “wrong.” (3) An objection: “Why, then, do the wrongs our enemies do us upset us?” Because we didn’t expect exactly those wrongs, or wrongs on such a scale. This is an effect of excessive amour propre: we judge that we should be undisturbed even by our enemies! Each of us has within us the mind of a monarch, wanting to be granted complete freedom of action but not wanting it to be used against him. (4) Accordingly, either ignorance or arrogance makes us inclined to anger. How is it strange if bad deeds proceed from bad men? How is it novel if an enemy does harm, a friend offends, a son slips, a slave does wrong? Fabius used to say that “I didn’t reckon” was the most shameful excuse for a general; I think it’s the most shameful for a human being.\footnote{219} Reckon and be on the watch for everything: even in a good character something too rough abides. (5) Human nature yields minds that are treacherous, ungrateful, lustful, impious:\footnote{220} when you’re forming a judgment about one man’s character, think about the character of men at large. Where you feel the greatest joy, you will feel the greatest fear; where you think that all is calm, there the sources of future harm aren’t lacking, just lying low. Reckon that there will always be something to offend you: no steersman has ever unfurled all his sails so carefree that he didn’t keep at hand the tackle to take them in.

(6) Reflect on this above all:\footnote{221} the power to do harm is disgusting, hateful, and most alien to a human being, through whose kindness even savage beasts become gentle. Consider the way elephants submit their necks to the yoke, bulls lend their back to be trod upon with impunity by leaping boys and women,\footnote{222} snakes slither among gob-
lets and in our bosoms, gliding harmlessly along, bears and lions as
domestic pets offer their tranquil muzzles to be stroked, wild beasts fawning on their master: it will be a shame to have exchanged our
human character with animals. (7) It’s unspeakably wrong to harm one’s fatherland; therefore, it’s unspeakably wrong to harm a fellow
citizen too, for he is part of the fatherland—the parts are sacrosanct
if the whole is worthy of our worship. Therefore it’s unspeakably
wrong to harm a human being too, for he is your fellow citizen in the
cosmopolis.223 What if the hands wanted to harm the feet, the eyes
the hands? As all our limbs are in harmony because it’s in the interest
of the whole that the individual parts be protected, so human beings
will spare each individual because they’ve been born to form a social
union, and a society cannot be sound save through the affectionate
protection of its parts.224 (8) We would not stamp out vipers and ad-
ders and any other creatures that do harm by biting or striking if we
could tame them for the future or see to it that they not imperil us
or others. A fortiori we will harm a human being, not because he has
done wrong, but to keep him from doing wrong, and punishment
will never be applied with thought to the past but with an eye on the
future:225 punishment acts from caution,226 not anger. For if each and
every person who has a warped and mischievous nature ought to be
punished, no one will be exempt.

32 “But anger entails some pleasure: it’s sweet to return pain for
pain.” Not in the least: though where favors are concerned it’s the
honorable thing to repay one good turn with another, it’s not the
honorable thing to repay wrongs with wrongs. In the case of favors,
it’s shameful to be outdone, whereas in this case it’s the outdoing
that’s shameful. “Vengeance” is a word unworthy of human beings,
for all that it’s accepted as right. The one who retaliates is not much
different from the wrongdoer, save in the order in which they cause
pain: the retaliator is just more readily excused for doing wrong.
(2) Some man, failing to recognize Marcus Cato in the baths,
knocked up against him carelessly (for who would knowingly wrong
such a man?). Later, when the man was apologizing, Cato said to
him, “I don’t recall being struck.”227 He thought it preferable not to
take notice than to take revenge. (3) You ask, “Did that man suffer
no grief for such effrontery?” No, rather, he received a great deal of
good: he began to have Cato as an acquaintance. It’s the mark of a
great spirit to regard wrongs as beneath contempt: that the offender appear unworthy of having vengeance exacted from him is the most insulting sort of vengeance. Many people, while taking vengeance, have let trivial wrongs get more deeply under their skins: the great and notable man is the one who, like a great beast, listens without concern to small dogs’ yapping.\(^{228}\)

33 An objection: “We’ll be less subject to insult if we take vengeance when we’re wronged.”\(^{229}\) If we’re seeking a kind of remedy, we should seek it without anger, with the thought that vengeance would be useful, not enjoyable. But in fact it’s often better to pretend not to notice than to get revenge. When more powerful people wrong us, we must bear it not just patiently but with a smile: they’ll do it again if they believe they’ve succeeded. This is the worst feature of minds grown arrogant with great good fortune: they also hate those whom they’ve harmed. (2) A man who grew old paying court to kings is responsible for a very well-known saying: when asked how he achieved that rarest of things at court—old age—he said, “By accepting injuries and saying ‘Thank you.’”\(^{230}\) Often it’s so inexpedient to avenge a wrong that it’s not even expedient to acknowledge it. (3) Gaius Caesar had in custody the son of Pastor, a distinguished Roman knight, because he had been offended by the young man’s refined grooming and exceptionally well-tended head of hair;\(^{231}\) when the father asked him to spare his son’s life, Caesar acted as though he’d been reminded of the young man’s punishment and immediately ordered his execution. But lest his behavior toward the father be entirely monstrous,\(^{232}\) he invited him to dinner that same day. (4) Pastor came with not a trace of reproach on his face. Caesar put eight ounces of wine before him as a toast to his health, and he stationed a guard over him;\(^{233}\) the unhappy man drank the toast through gritted teeth, just as if he were drinking his son’s blood. Caesar gave him perfumed oil and garlands, and ordered the guard to watch whether Pastor took them up; he did. On the same day that he had buried his son—or rather, hadn’t had the chance to bury his son—the gouty old man was reclining as one of a hundred banqueters and draining drinks that would be scarcely respectable on his children’s birthdays—and all the while he didn’t shed a tear, didn’t allow his grief to surface by any token: he dined as though he had gained his request for his son’s life. Why, you ask? He had another. (5) What of great Priam?\(^{234}\) Did he not hide his anger,
clasp the king’s knees, kiss the hand smeared with his son’s clotted blood, share a dinner? Yes, but with no perfumed oil, no garlands; and in his case, the terribly cruel enemy persuaded him to take some food with many words of consolation, he didn’t urge him to drain huge cups dry with a guard posted at his neck.\(^6\) As for the Roman father, I would have despised him if he had feared for himself;\(^235\) in this case devotion to family kept anger in check.\(^236\) He deserved permission to leave the banquet and gather his son’s bones, but the young Caesar, kindly and companionable (sometimes), didn’t grant even this. He harassed the old man with one toast after another, “advising” him to let his care be soothed. For his part, the old man made a show of being happy, as though he’d wiped clean the memory of what had happened that day: if the butcher hadn’t found him a pleasing dinner companion, his other son would have perished.

34 We must, then, keep anger at a distance, whether the party who ought to be challenged is a peer or a superior or an inferior. With a peer, conflict can turn out this way or that; with a superior, it’s daft; with an inferior, it’s ignominious. It’s the mark of a very small and wretched person to try to get back at someone who nips him: mice and ants turn to bite if you lay a finger on them—weak things think they’re harmed just by being touched.\(^2\) Our temper will be gentled if we reflect on the good that the person we’re angry with once did us: his deserts will redeem the offense. Think, too, how a reputation for clemency will cause us to rise in others’ estimation, and how many people pardon makes into useful friends.\(^3\) Let’s not become angry with the children of personal and public enemies: it is among the signal instances of Sulla’s cruelty that he barred the children of the proscribed from public life.\(^4\) There’s nothing more unjust than a person’s inheriting his father’s feuds.\(^4\) Whenever we find it hard to forgive, we should consider whether it’s in our interest that everyone be beyond the reach of pleading. How often the person who has denied a pardon has in turn sought one! How often he’s groveled at the feet of a man he’s shoved away from his own! What’s more glorious than trading anger for friendship? What allies more faithful do the Roman people have than those who were its most stubborn enemies? What would our dominion be today if a salutary foresight had not thoroughly blended the conquered and their conquerors?\(^239\)
(5) Suppose someone becomes angry with you. You, by contrast, should challenge him to match you in kindness. Conflict subsides immediately when one party leaves it behind: there can be no fight without a pair of fighters. With anger, however, there’s contention on both side, and conflict. The one who withdraws first is the better man; the one who wins, loses. Suppose someone struck you: step back. By hitting back you’ll give an opportunity, and an excuse, for more frequent blows, and you won’t be able to extricate yourself when you want. [35] Surely no one would want to run an enemy through so vehemently that his own hand would be stuck in the wound, leaving him unable to withdraw from the blow, would he? Yet that’s the sort of weapon anger is: it’s withdrawn only with difficulty. We look for arms that are ready for action, a sword of a suitable size and easy to handle: will we not avoid the mind’s assaults that are vehement, oppressive, and irrevocable? (2) Speed is acceptable if and only if it can stop in its tracks on command, go no farther than its determinate goal, be guided, and be brought back to a walk from a run. We know that our muscles are unwell when they move against our will: it’s an aged or infirm person who runs when he wants to walk. We should reckon that the healthiest and soundest movements of the mind are those that will proceed according to our judgment, not be borne along as they wish.

(3) Still, nothing will serve quite so usefully as a deterrent as looking closely first at anger’s ugliness, then at its peril. No other passion’s features are more disturbed. It turns the fairest faces foul and renders wild those that were utterly placid. Angry people lose all sense of propriety. If their dress is arranged comme il faut, they’ll tear it off and lose all concern for their appearance. If their hair is arranged attractively by nature or by art, it bristles as wildly as their minds. Their veins swell, their chests are shaken by rapid breathing, their necks strain with the frenzied eruption of their voice; their joints tremble, their hands are restless, their whole body is buffeted as if by waves. (4) What do you imagine the mind within looks like, when its outward appearance is so foul? How much more terrifying is its aspect within the breast, its breathing more ragged, its assault more focused, sure to burst if it doesn’t burst forth! (5) Like the sight of enemies or wild beasts dripping with blood or going to the kill; like the underworld monsters poets have imagined, girt with serpents.
and breathing fire; like the most terrible divinities that issue from Hell to stir up war, spread discord among nations, and tear peace to shreds\textsuperscript{241}—that’s how we should picture anger in the mind’s eye: its eyes ablaze, making a din with its shrieking and bellowing and groaning and hissing and any sound that is more hateful, brandishing its weapons in both hands (nor indeed is it concerned to shield itself), fierce, bloody, scarred, and bruised by self-inflicted blows, striding in a frenzy, cloaked in darkness, attacking, laying waste, putting to flight, stirred in its travails by a hatred of everyone and everything—itself most of all—as it seeks to confound earth and sea and sky, if it can cause harm no other way, hating and hated at once. (6) Or, if you prefer, let’s take it to be as our bards describe it:\textsuperscript{242}

the goddess of War brandishing a bloody whip in her right hand

or

her mantle in shreds, Discord makes her way rejoicing

or whatever more dreadful image of this dreadful passion can be imagined.

36 Some angry people, as Sextius said,\textsuperscript{243} have benefited from looking in a mirror. They were taken aback to see such a great change in themselves: brought, as it were, to the scene of the crime, they didn’t recognize themselves—and how little of their true deformity did that image reflected in the mirror show them! (2) If the mind could be made visible and shine forth in some material form,\textsuperscript{244} its black, blotchy, seething, twisted, swollen appearance would stun the viewers. Even now, when it makes its way through bones and flesh and so many other obstacles,\textsuperscript{245} its deformity is enormous: what if it could be shown uncovered? (3) To be sure, you’ll believe that a mirror could deter no one from anger. Of course: someone who approaches a mirror in order to change himself has already changed. Angry people find no image more comely than one that’s savage and grim—just as they want to appear.

(4) We should rather consider how many people anger has harmed all by itself. Some people have burst blood vessels in their excessive ardor, and spit up blood from shouting louder than their strength could bear, and blurred their vision when weeping forced water into their eyes too vigorously, and relapsed into illness when
they were sick. (5) No path leads more quickly to insanity: many, accordingly, have prolonged anger’s frenzy and never regained the capacity for thought once they let it go. Frenzy drove Ajax to suicide, but anger made him mad.246 Angry people curse their children with death, themselves with poverty, their households with ruin, and they deny they’re angry just as madmen deny they’re insane. They’re enemies to their closest friends, people to be shunned by their nearest and dearest. Without thought for the law unless they can use it to do harm, apt to be stirred at the slightest provocation, beyond the reach of conversation and dutiful attention, they do violently whatever they do, ready both to do battle with the sword and to fall on it. (6) For they’ve been seized by the greatest evil, one that surpasses all vices.247 Others make their entry little by little; this one’s force acts suddenly and all at once. In short, anger makes all other passions its subjects. It overcomes the warmest affection—that’s why people have stabbed through the bodies they’ve loved and fallen to lie in the embrace of those they’ve killed. Anger has trampled on greed, the toughest and most unbending evil, and compelled it to scatter its wealth and make a bonfire of its dwelling and all its gathered possessions. Has not a man fueled by ambition cast aside highly valued symbols of office and spurned the honor offered to him? There’s no passion over which anger does not hold dominion.

To Novatus on Anger: Book 3

Book 5 of the Dialogues

1 Now, Novatus, we’ll try to do what you chiefly wanted: excise anger from our minds, or at least rein it in and slow its assaults.248 Sometimes we should do the job openly and frankly, when the evil is still slight enough to allow that; sometimes we must do it stealthily, when its heat is too high and it grows greater when any obstacle aggravates it. How strong and fresh it is determines whether we should beat it back and force it to retreat, or yield to it while the first storm gusts are spending their fury, lest it snatch up and carry off the very remedies we attempt.249 (2) Our strategy must be based on each person’s character.250 Some are won over by entreaties, while others abuse and harass the submissive. Some we’ll frighten into a calm state,251 while others are deterred by reproach or confession or shame or delay—a sluggish remedy for a headlong evil, which we must use as a last
(3) For all other passions tolerate being put off and are to be treated slowly, but anger’s violence, once it has been aroused and is hurrying along, doesn’t progress little by little but is complete at its onset. It doesn’t just trouble our minds, in the manner of other vices; it leads them astray and drives them on when they lack self-control and are eager even for an evil in which all will share. It rages not only against the targets it’s marked out, but against whatever gets in its way. (4) All other vices give our minds a shove; anger pitches them headlong. Even if it’s not possible to resist one’s passions, at least the passions themselves may come to a standstill: this one accelerates, just like lightning bolts and storm gusts and any other things that can’t be called back because they don’t just move, they plunge. (5) Other vices rebel against reason, this one rebels against sanity; others approach gently and increase without our noticing, but in anger our minds are hurled straight down. Accordingly, no passion is more stunning in its force, eager to follow its own violent course, arrogant in success, crazed when frustrated. Not even when it’s beaten back is it compelled to say “enough is enough”: when the adversary has had the good luck to get away, it turns to biting itself. Nor does it matter how great the source is whence it’s arisen: it passes from the most trivial beginnings to the weightiest consequences.

2 Anger exempts no stage of life, and no class of people either. Some nations, thanks to the boon of poverty, don’t know luxury; some, because they’re nomads ever on the move, don’t know laziness; some with an uncivilized and rustic way of life don’t know trickery and deceit and any of the evils that the forum breeds. There’s no nation that’s not goaded by anger: it holds sway as much among Greeks as among barbarians and is as deadly to those who fear the law as it is to those for whom might makes right. (2) Finally, whereas all other vices seize upon individuals, this is the one passion that a whole populace sometimes contracts. An entire people has never burned with love for a woman, nor has an entire community placed all its hopes on money or gain. Ambition seizes individuals one at a time; loss of self-control is not an evil shared out among a whole people—but a whole people has often become angry en masse. (3) Men and women, old and young, the foremost and the mob come to share a single thought, and the whole multitude, whipped up by a word or two, outstrips the agitator himself; straightway they scat-
ter to seize torches and declare war on their neighbors or wage it amongst themselves. (4) Whole houses are incinerated, together with their entire households, and a man who was just now highly honored for his winning eloquence becomes the victim of the anger his own harangue has aroused. Legions have turned their spears on their own commander; commoners have split from patricians. The Senate’s policy has not waited for a levy to be held or a commander to be named, but has of a sudden chosen men to spearhead its anger, hunting down and executing notable men throughout the city’s dwellings. (5) When embassies have suffered violence, contrary to universally recognized principles, a community has been carried away by unspeakable frenzy. No delay to allow the public’s inflamed feelings to simmer down, but directly fleets are launched, soldiers hastily recruited embark; marshaling forth without auspices, with due custom cast aside, with their own anger as their leader, the people seize whatever they chance to come upon in place of proper weapons—and thereupon suffer a huge disaster, the price for rash and reckless anger. (6) This has been the outcome for barbarians who rush at random into war. When their minds, being easily swayed, are struck by the impression of an injury, they’re instantly set in motion: drawn by their sense of grievance, they fall upon our legions like a collapsing building, without order, without fear, without caution, actually seeking to put themselves in harm’s way. They exult in being struck, in pressing against the sword that stabbed them, in putting their weight into the spear that’s pierced them, and in coming out the other side of their own wound.

3 “There’s no doubt,” you say, “that anger’s force is great and diseased: so show how it ought to be healed.” But yet, as I’ve said in the earlier books, Aristotle stands as a defender of anger and forbids us to excise it: he says it’s a spur to virtue, and removing it will leave the mind defenseless and too sluggish and supine to undertake great actions. Accordingly, it’s necessary to prove its disgusting and bestial character and to make you see how monstrous it is for one human being to rage against another, and how violently anger attacks, dealing destruction at the cost of its own destruction and seeking to sink those whom it can drown only if it drowns with them. (3) Does anyone really call sane a man who doesn’t move on his own but is made to move as though in a hurricane’s grip, who is a slave to a fren-
ried evil, who doesn’t delegate the job of taking vengeance but acts as his own avenger, savage in thought and deed at once, butchering those dearest to him and those he’ll mourn as soon as they’re lost? (4)

Does anyone make this passion virtue’s helpmate and comrade, when it confounds the deliberations that virtue needs to get anything done? Its strength is fleeting and sinister, capable only of harming itself, the sort of strength that the onset of disease stirs in a sick man. (5) There’s no reason, then, to suppose that I’m pointlessly wasting time in defaming anger as if people were of two minds about it, since there’s a philosopher—indeed, a distinguished one—who assigns it tasks and summons it to battle, to the conduct of affairs, to anything needing some heat for its execution, as though it were a useful source of vigor. (6) No one should be fooled into thinking that it will be profitable at some time or in some place: its unbridled, lunatic frenzy must be made plain, and its proper paraphernalia must be handed over to it: the rack, the grate, the cross, fires set around half-buried bodies, the hook, too, used to drag corpses, different sorts of bonds, diverse kinds of punishments, limbs torn, foreheads tattooed, the cages of monstrous beasts. Let anger take its proper place among these implements, a loathsome thing whose shrieks make you shiver, fouler than all the tools of its frenzy.

Though its other aspects might be in doubt, it’s certain that no passion wears an uglier expression, which I’ve described in the earlier books: harsh and fierce, now pallid, when the blood withdraws in flight, now flushed and bloody-looking, when all the heat and spirit return to the face, veins swollen, eyes now darting and frantic, now fixed and staring. (2) Add the sound of teeth ramming against each other as though they were trying to mimic boars grinding their own weapons to a point; add the crack of knuckles from hands being wrung, breast beaten time and again, panting and heartfelt groans, dizziness, incomprehensible words produced in sudden shouts, lips now quivering, now pursed, expelling some loathsome, hissing noise. (3) Beasts, by Hercules—whether they’re driven by hunger or pierced in the guts with a spear, trying to bite the hunter with their dying breath—beasts look less disgusting than a man ablaze with anger. Come, if you’ve time to listen to menacing sounds, hear what sorts of words belong to a tortured mind!

(4) Won’t anyone want to summon himself back from the brink
of anger once he realizes that it begins by doing him evil first? Don’t you want me, then, to warn those who put their anger to work from a position of supreme power—thinking prompt vengeance proof of their strength, counting it among the grand benefits of great good fortune—that the person who is the captive of his own anger is not powerful, or rather, cannot even be called free? (5) Don’t you want me to warn people—so that each will be more careful and circumspect—that the mind’s other evils are associated with all the worst people, but an angry disposition steals upon even the cultured and those who are in other respects sound? In fact it’s reached the point that some people think that an inclination to anger is a sign of honesty and that all who are most subject to it are commonly believed to be most free and easy.  

“What’s your point?” you ask. That no one should reckon himself safe from it, since it provokes to savage violence even those who are gentle and calm by nature. Just as a sound physique and carefully maintained health do no good at all against a plague (for it attacks the weak and strong indiscriminately), so anger is equally dangerous for unquiet characters and those that are settled and relaxed—and it’s all the more shameful and destructive for the latter, since it works more of a change in them. (2) But since the first goal is not to become angry, the second is to cease when angered, and the third is to cure another’s anger too, I shall first tell how to avoid succumbing to anger, then how to free ourselves from it, and finally how to restrain angry people, calm them, and lead them back to sanity. (3) We’ll succeed in avoiding anger if we promptly lay out before us all of anger’s vices and form a sound estimation of it. It must be arraigned before us and condemned; its evils must be searched out and made plain; it must be set side by side with the worst vices, so the sort of thing it is becomes clear. (4) What greed acquires and heaps together, a better person might put to use: anger is spendthrift, cost-free to only a few. How many slaves has a wrathful master made fugitive, or killed! How much more has he lost through his anger than the loss that angered him to begin with! Anger has brought a father grief, a husband divorce, a magistrate hatred, a candidate defeat. (5) It’s worse than luxury, which enjoys its own pleasure: anger enjoys another’s pain. It outdoes malice and envy, which want others to be made unhappy and take delight in strokes of bad luck: anger
makes others unhappy and can’t wait for luck to harm the people it hates—it wants to harm them itself. (6) There’s nothing more grievous than quarrels: anger causes quarrels. There’s nothing deadlier than war: the anger of powerful men explodes in war—yet even the everyday, private sort of anger is a form of war that lacks the force of arms. Furthermore—to set aside the consequences of anger, the losses, the treachery, the unending anxiety when one struggle leads to another—it is punished in the act of punishing. It betrays human nature, which urges us toward love and bids us to benefit others: anger urges us toward hate and bids us to do harm. (7) Add the fact that though its indignation comes from an excessively high opinion of itself, so that it fancies itself high-spirited, it’s in fact puny and petty. For anyone who judges himself despised is inferior to the one who despises him, but the one who is indeed a great spirit and a true judge of his own worth takes no vengeance for an injury, because he just doesn’t feel it. (8) Missiles rebound from a hard surface, and solid objects, when struck, cause pain to the one striking them; just so, injury cannot cause a great spirit to feel it, because it is more fragile than the thing it attacks. How much finer it is to rebuff all injuries and insults, as though impervious to any missile! To take vengeance is to acknowledge pain: a great spirit is not bowed down by a wrong. The one who has harmed you is either stronger or weaker than you: if he’s weaker, give him a break; if he’s stronger, give yourself a break.

6 There’s no more certain proof of greatness than remaining unprovoked by whatever happens. The upper part of the universe, being more orderly and closer to the stars, is not compacted to form a cloud nor driven to make a tempest nor whirled about to produce a tornado: it experiences no upheaval, while the regions below are blasted by lightning. Just so, the lofty mind is ever peaceful, firmly moored in its tranquil anchorage, suppressing all of anger’s components, controlled and august and orderly. And you will find none of these qualities in an angry man. (2) For who surrenders to anguish and rage without first casting off modest restraint? Who attacks another wildly without jettisoning whatever respectable qualities he had? Who keeps orderly account of his duties once he’s been stirred up? Who controls his tongue? Who restrain any part of his body? Who can govern himself once he lets go the reins? (3) We will profit
from Democritus’s salutary teaching, which shows that the path to tranquility lies in undertaking few activities, and none beyond our strength, in both private and public affairs. When a person is bustling this way and that to handle many transactions, the day never passes so felicitously that someone or something doesn’t cause an offense that primes the mind for anger. Just as when we’re hurrying through the city’s crowded spaces, it’s inevitable that we’ll bump into many people, tripping here or getting stuck there or being splashed some other place, so in leading a life that’s scattered and undirected we run into many obstacles, and many causes for complaint. This one has deceived our hope, that one has delayed its fulfillment, another one has put it to an end: our projects have not progressed smoothly in accordance with our plans. No one is so much fortune’s darling that he’ll find her always responsive to his many endeavors. It follows, then, that the person whose plans have been set back has no patience for people or things but becomes angry for the most trivial reasons, now at a person, now at a transaction, now at a place, now at fortune, now at himself. For the mind to be quiet, then, it must not be in turmoil or wearied by activities that, as I said, are either numerous or substantial, seeking ends beyond our means. It’s easy to shoulder light burdens and transport them this way and that without a slip, but we have a hard time supporting the burdens that others place upon us. Overwhelmed, we shrug them off at the first opportunity; even while we stand beneath the bundle, we totter because we’re unequal to the weight.

The same thing, of course, happens in both civic and domestic affairs. Dealings that are free from encumbrances and easy to handle comply with the agent’s wishes. Those that are massive and beyond the agent’s powers don’t yield readily and, once undertaken, oppress him, lead him off course, and—just when success seems in his grasp—bring him and the whole enterprise down. So it frequently happens that a man who doesn’t undertake easy things, but who wants the things he’s undertaken to be easy, has his intentions foiled. Whenever you’re going to attempt something, be sure to gauge yourself and the undertaking and your preparation for it all at once: regret for a task left incomplete will make you irritable. Here it makes a difference whether one’s nature is ardent or cold and abject. Failure elicits anger in a noble man, depression in one who
is limp and supine. Our undertakings, then, should be neither small nor reckless and wicked, and our hopes should stay close to home. We should attempt nothing that—once we’ve succeeded—will leave us surprised that we did.

8 Because we don’t know how to tolerate a wrong we should take care not to suffer one. Our intimates should be very calm and easy to get along with, not nervous and cross-grained. We pick up habits from our companions, and just as some disorders are transmitted by bodily contact, so the mind passes on its defects to those closest at hand. A drunkard has made his tablemates fond of unmixed wine. Mingling with the sexually abandoned has made even a rugged man effeminate, though he had the nature of flint. A greedy man has transmitted his infection to his neighbors. (2) It’s the same way with virtues, but in reverse. They make mild everything that is within their orbit, and just as poor health profits from being in an advantageous region and a more healthy climate, so minds wanting in strength profit from keeping company with a better crowd. (3) You’ll understand how effective this is if you’ve seen that even wild animals become gentle from living with us. Not even a monstrous beast retains its violent character if it’s been able to share human quarters for a long time. All harshness is smoothed away and unlearned, little by little, in placid company. There’s also the fact that someone in daily contact with calm people not only becomes better by their example but also lacks reasons to become angry and doesn’t indulge his own vice. He will accordingly avoid all who he knows will goad his inclination to anger.

(4) “Who are those?” you ask. Many people will have this effect, for a range of reasons. An arrogant man will offend you with his contempt, a smart-mouth with an insult, an unruly man with an injury, a spiteful man with his malice, an aggressive man by picking a fight, a lying windbag with his vanity. You won’t put up with being viewed suspiciously by the fearful, being bested by the stubborn, being regarded with an upturned nose by the overrefined. (5) Pick people who are straightforward, affable, and self-controlled, since they’ll neither provoke your anger nor put up with it. More beneficial still will be those who are sweet-tempered, humane, and unassertive—though not to the point of being yes-men, for excessive compliance provokes people who are inclined to anger. Certainly I used to have a
friend who was a good man but too ready to anger: it was no safer to sweet-talk him than to badmouth him. (6) It’s a well-known fact that the orator Caelius was extremely irascible. The story goes that he was dining in his private chamber with a client whose forbearance was exquisite—though finding himself in those close quarters, he had a hard time avoiding a quarrel with his patron. He reckoned it best to follow along with whatever Caelius said and play second fiddle. Caelius couldn’t bear this continuous agreement and shouted, “Contradict me somehow, so there’ll be two of us!” But even Caelius, angry because the other didn’t become angry, soon left off, finding himself without an opponent. (7) If we know we’re quick to anger, then, we should pick even companions like this, the sort to follow our every look and utterance: to be sure, they’ll spoil us and put us in the bad habit of hearing nothing against our wishes, but they’ll do us the service of giving our anger a bit of quiet time, thanks to their own vice. Even those who are naturally difficult and violent will put up with someone who sweet-talks them: no creature stays harsh and severe while you’re petting it. (8) Whenever a discussion turns overlong and quarrelsome, we should try to put a stop to it at the first stages before it gains strength. Disagreement feeds upon itself and keeps a grip on those immersed too deeply in it. It’s easier to abstain from a conflict than to extricate oneself.

9 People inclined to anger should give up unusually demanding fields of study, too, or at least shouldn’t pursue them to the point of exhaustion. Their minds shouldn’t be employed on hard subjects but should be entrusted to the pleasant arts—let them be soothed by reading poetry and beguiled by legends from history: the goal is a softer and more comfortable mental regimen. (2) Pythagoras used to play the lyre to settle his mind when it was upset. Who doesn’t know, furthermore, that war horns and trumpets are meant to excite, whereas certain beguiling songs are conducive to mental relaxation? Looking at green objects helps when our vision is all ajumble. Some colors calm our glance when it’s unsteady, just as the brightness of some others dazzles it. In the same way, studies that give pleasure soothe our capacity for thought when it’s sickly. (3) We ought to avoid the forum, advocacy, the courts, and all pursuits that irritate the vice of anger. We should equally beware of physical exhaustion, for it uses up whatever is mild and calm in us
and rouses the things that are fierce. (4) That’s the reason why people whose temper is unreliable take some food to balance their bile when they’re about to undertake matters of greater moment. Becoming wearied especially stirs up bile, either because it forces all bodily heat into the middle regions, damages the blood, and stops the circulation because the veins become overtaxed, or because the body when it’s weakened and unsteady presses its weight upon the mind (that’s certainly the reason why people worn out by disease or age are more inclined to anger). Hunger and thirst should be avoided for the same reasons, too: they irritate and inflame our minds. (5) There’s an old saying that a tired man goes looking for a fight—and that’s equally true of a hungry man, a thirsty man, any man who’s galled by anything. For just as sores hurt at a slight touch, and even the mere thought of a touch, so a mind that’s impaired is offended for the slightest reasons, to the extent that a greeting, a letter, a speech, a question provokes some people to a quarrel. Whatever’s sickly always squawks when it’s touched.

Accordingly, it’s best to be your own physician when you first sense the evil, and to keep your words on a tight leash, too, and prevent aggressive movement. (2) Moreover, it’s easy to diagnose one’s passions as they first arise: symptoms precede the disease. Just as signs of a rainstorm arrive before the storm itself, so there are certain signs that announce the coming of anger, love, and all those storm gusts that vex our minds. (3) People who chronically suffer from epilepsy recognize that the disease is already approaching if their extremities grow cold, their vision swims, their muscles tremble, their memory falters, and their head spins. Accordingly, they anticipate the onset with the usual remedies: they use an odor or a taste to drive off whatever it is that makes their minds strangers to themselves, or they use warm poultices to counteract the stiffening chill in their limbs; and if medicine fails, they stay away from a crowd and suffer their seizure where no one can see. (4) It helps to recognize your disease and to check its strength before it spreads. We should consider what especially riles us. Insulting speech moves one person, insulting actions another. This one is sensitive about his notable status; that one, about his good looks. One person wants to be thought exceptionally refined; another, exceptionally learned. This person can’t stand arrogance; that one, defiance. That fellow over there doesn’t think slaves
worthy of his anger; this one here is a beast at home, a lamb abroad. One man thinks he’s being wronged when he’s asked a favor; another thinks he’s being insulted when he’s not asked. Not all people feel the blow in the same part of themselves, so it’s proper to know your own weak spot, in order to give it special protection.

II It’s not a good idea to hear and see everything that goes on. Let many injuries just pass us by: the person who doesn’t register most of them doesn’t suffer them. You don’t want to be inclined to anger? Don’t be inquisitive. The person who asks what remarks were made about him and unearths nasty gossip even if it was kept secret just upsets himself. Interpreting certain things a certain way makes them look like injuries. The proper course is to defer some things, laugh off others, and forgive still others. (2) Anger should be hedged about in various ways; most things should be turned into a joke. When Socrates was struck on the head (the story goes), he made no response save to say that it was a bother people didn’t know when it was a good idea to wear a helmet when leaving the house. (3) What makes a difference is not how an injury was caused, but how it’s borne, and I fail to see why self-control is difficult, since I know that even tyrants—bloated with good fortune and license though their natures are—have checked their own savagery. (4) It’s certainly recorded in the history books that when a drunken dinner guest offered a long critique of the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus’ cruelty, and there was no lack of those willing to lend a hand in vengeance—with men on every side trying to light a fire under Pisistratus’ anger—he bore it calmly and said to those who were trying to stir him up him that he was no more furious than if a blindfolded man had run into him. 287

12 Many people manufacture their own causes for complaint through false suspicion and by exaggerating things that are trivial. Anger often comes to us, but we more often go to it. Yet we should never summon it: even when it comes our way, we should reject it. (2) No one says to himself, “This thing that’s making me angry—either I’ve done it myself, or I could have.” No one gauges the agent’s intention, only the act itself. Yet it’s the agent we ought to consider closely. 288 Was his act voluntary or accidental, was he compelled or deceived, was he acting out of hatred or for a reward, did he gratify himself or lend his services to another? The wrongdoer’s age should
be taken into account, and also his fortune, making forbearance a matter either of kindness or of expediency. (3) We should put ourselves in the place of the person we’re angry with: from that perspective we see that an unfair valuation of ourselves makes us angry, and that we don’t want to suffer an act that we’d willingly commit. (4) No one says to himself, “Wait a minute”—yet the greatest remedy for anger is postponement, so that its initial ardor might slacken and the darkness that overwhelms the mind might either pass or be less thick. Not a day but a single hour will mitigate some of the things that are sending you headlong, others will completely vanish. Even if the adjournment you sought accomplishes nothing, it will now have the appearance of a trial, not a rage. Whenever you want to know the character of a thing, entrust the job to time: no careful discriminations are made in flux. (5) When Plato was angry with his slave, he couldn’t get himself to grant a delay but ordered the slave to doff his tunic and offer his back for lashes, which he intended to administer with his own hand. After he realized he was angry, just as he raised his hand, he kept it raised in midair and stood there like someone poised to strike; then when a friend who happened on the scene asked him what he was doing, he said, “I’m punishing an angry man.” (6) Like someone paralyzed, he maintained the pose—grotesque for a wise man—of someone on the verge of savagery, having now forgotten the slave because he’d found another more deserving of rebuke. He accordingly deprived himself of such power over his household: when more than usually upset by some misdeed, he said, “Speusippus, you chastise that no-good slave with a whipping; for I’m angry.” (7) By so doing, he avoided doing wrong because another had done wrong. “I’m angry,” he said, “and I’ll do more than I should, and more gladly; that slave shouldn’t be in the control of one who can’t control himself.” Does anyone want vengeance to be entrusted to an angry man, when Plato himself revoked his own powers of command? When you’re angry, you should allow yourself nothing. Why? Because then you want to allow yourself everything.

Struggle with yourself: if you have the will to overcome anger, it cannot overcome you. You begin to overcome it if it’s kept concealed and not given an outlet. We should disguise its signs and keep it, to the extent possible, hidden and secret. (2) That will cost us great distress (for it wants to leap forth, set the eyes ablaze, and
change our expression), but once it’s been allowed to reveal itself outside us, it has mastery over us. We should conceal it in the deepest recesses of our breast; we should bear it, not be borne away by it. No, quite the opposite—we should modify its telltale signs, relaxing our expression, softening the voice, slowing our step. Little by little, our inner state comes to conform to our outward appearance. (3) It was a sign that Socrates was angry when he lowered his voice and spoke less volubly; that made it plain that he was resisting his own impulses. 292 Accordingly, his friends used to lay hold of him and reprove him, nor did he resent their reproach of his lurking anger: why shouldn’t he rejoice that many recognized his anger but no one felt it? They would have felt it, however, if he hadn’t authorized his friends to scold him—the same role he had assumed vis-à-vis his friends. 293 (4) How much more ought we adopt this practice! We should ask all our closest friends to reproach us candidly just when we will be least tolerant of that candor, and not to second us in our anger. Against this powerful and pleasing evil we should summon assistance while we still have the sense and self-possession to do so. (5) People who can’t hold their wine and fear the rash, wild consequences of drunkenness give their friends the job of taking them home from a banquet. People who have experienced a loss of self-control in illness forbid others to obey them when they’re unwell. (6) It’s best to look for obstacles to put in the way of our known vices and, above all, to have our mind so composed that even when it’s suddenly and very grievously shaken, it either doesn’t feel anger or draws the anger back deep inside and doesn’t acknowledge its own anguish, when the magnitude of an unexpected injury has caused it to start. (7) It will be plain that this can be done if I offer a few examples from the huge crowd available. From these it will be possible to learn two lessons: how much evil anger has within its grasp when it uses all the might of extraordinarily powerful persons, and how much it can stay in command of itself when it has been checked by a greater fear. 294

14 King Cambyses was excessively devoted to wine. 295 Praexaspes, one of his dearest friends, advised him to drink more sparingly, saying that drunkenness was shameful in a king, the cynosure of all eyes and ears. The king replied, “Just so you can be sure that I’ll never cut back, I’ll prove that both my hands and my eyes can do their duty
when I’ve been drinking.” (2) Thereupon he drank more freely than usual, from larger cups, and when he was already woozy and stinking drunk he bade the son of the man who had reproved him to go out beyond the threshold and stand with his left hand raised above his head. Then he bent his bow and pierced the young man to the very heart (for that’s the target he’d specified); cutting open the chest and displaying the dart lodged in the heart, he looked back at the father and asked whether his hand had been steady enough. The father affirmed that Apollo couldn’t have made a surer shot. (3) May the gods waste that man—no better than a slave, in his mind if not his station! He offered an encomium of a deed that it was intolerable even to have witnessed. He reckoned it an opportunity for flattery, that his son’s chest had been split in two, with the heart still beating beneath the wound. He should have taken Cambyses to task on the subject of glory and called for a second shot, so that the king could have the pleasure of showing that his hand was still steadier in slaying the father himself. (4) O bloody king, who deserved to have all his people turn their bows against him! Though I’ve cursed him for bringing his banquet to an end in deadly retribution, still, praising that shot was more atrocious than the shot itself. We will consider at another time how the father ought to have behaved, standing over his son’s dead body, a murder he had both witnessed and caused. As for the point under discussion, it’s obvious that anger can be suppressed. (5) He didn’t curse the king; he didn’t utter even a word of lamentation for his disaster, though he saw his own heart pierced no less than his son’s. One could say that he rightly swallowed his words; for had he said anything in the character of an angry man, he could have done nothing in his character as a father. (6) It could appear (I stress this point) that he behaved more wisely in his misfortune than he did in recommending moderation in drink to a man better off drinking wine than blood: when his hands were busy with his cups, peace reigned. And so Praexaspes joined the company of those who have shown, through their own disasters, how high a price kings’ friends pay for their good advice.

15 I’ve no doubt that Harpagus, too, gave some such advice to his own king, the king of the Persians: taking offense, the king served him his own children for dinner and then asked whether he liked the seasoning; and when he saw that Harpagus was quite overcome
by his woes, he next ordered that the children’s heads be brought to him, and he inquired how he received them. The poor man wasn’t at a loss for words, his mouth didn’t clamp shut: “At the palace of the king, every banquet is pleasing.” What did he gain by this piece of flattery? Not being invited to the leftovers. (2) I don’t say that the father shouldn’t condemn his king’s action, I don’t say he shouldn’t seek condign punishment for so savage a monster, but I draw an inference that is relevant now: even anger provoked by enormous wickedness can be concealed and compelled to speak in a way quite unlike itself. (3) Reining in one’s anguish in that way is necessary, not least for those whose lot in life brings them to a king’s table. That’s the way one eats, drinks, answers in their presence—the rule is “Smile while your family members die.” I’ll consider on another occasion whether life is worth so high a price: that’s a different question. I’ll not palliate with consolation a chain-gang way of life—so grim—I’ll not urge you to bear the commands of butchers: I’ll demonstrate that in every form of slavery the path to freedom lies open. A person who has the license to end his miseries is miserable only because of his own weak mind, his own fault. (4) Both to the man who fell in with a king who shot arrows at his friends’ breasts and to the man whose lord fed fathers full with their children’s flesh, I shall say: “Why groan, madman? Why wait, either for some foreign enemy to avenge you by destroying your nation or for a powerful king to fly to your aid from afar? Wherever you look, there’s the end of your woes. See that cliff? The way down is the way to freedom. See that sea, that river, that well? Freedom abides there, in its depths. See that tree, stumpy, shriveled, barren? Freedom hangs from it. See your own neck, your own throat, your own heart? They’re the escape routes from slavery. Are the exits I’m showing you too toilsome? Do they demand too much strength of mind? Do you ask what path leads to freedom? Any vein in your body.”

16 Now, as long as we find nothing so unbearable as to drive us from life, we should get rid of anger, no matter what our station in life will be. Anger is destructive for those serving in subordinate positions. All resentment works a form of self-torture and feels commands to be all the more burdensome the more defiantly they’re endured. That’s how a wild animal tightens a trap’s noose while jerking it about; that’s how birds end up smearing bird-lime all over their
feathers while shaking themselves to shed it. No yoke is so tight that it doesn’t hurt the compliant less than the recalcitrant. The one relief for massive woes is to endure them and submit to the constraints they impose. (2) But though it’s useful for subordinates to control their passions, and this wild, unbridled passion especially, it’s still more useful for kings. When fortune permits what anger urges, all is lost, nor can any power long abide that’s exercised at the cost of many people’s woe: it’s put at risk when a common fear unites those who are lamenting by themselves. Many have been slaughtered—some by individuals, some by all acting together—when the anguish shared by a whole people drove them to unify their anger. (3) And yet many have employed their anger as though it was an emblem of kingship. (4) Take Darius, for example, who first held Persia and a large part of the east after wresting dominion from the Magus. When he declared war on the Scyths, who were encircling the east, he was asked by Oeobazus, an aged notable, to leave one of his three sons as a consolation for his father and use the services of the other two: promising more than was asked, Darius said that he’d send all three back to him—then had them killed and dumped before their father’s eyes, since he would have been cruel had he taken them all on campaign. (4) But how much more easygoing was Xerxes! (5) When Pythius, the father of five sons, asked that one of them be released from service, Xerxes allowed him to choose the one he wanted, then had the one he picked split in two, with each half placed on one side of the road, as a sacrificial victim to purify his army. He accordingly met the outcome he deserved: defeated, his forces scattered far and wide, seeing all that was his razed to the ground on every side, he marched in the midst of his people’s corpses.

Such, in their anger, was the savagery of barbarian kings, who had not been steeped in learning and literary culture. Now I’ll give you—from the bosom of Aristotle—king Alexander, who killed Clitus, his dearest friend from childhood, with his own hand while feasting, because Clitus was insufficiently fawning, and loath to pass from freedom as a Macedonian to slavery as a Persian. (2) Again, he threw Lysimachus, an equally close friend, to the lions: but when Lysimachus had the good luck to escape the lions’ maw, he wasn’t any gentler for the experience when he himself came to rule, was he? (3) For when he had done the job of pruning Telesphorus of Rhodes
all about, cutting off his ears and nose, he long maintained him in a cage like some sort of new and extraordinary animal, though the ugly docking and mutilation of his face had destroyed his human features; to this was added the wasting hunger and squalor and filth of his body, abandoned in his own feces. (4) Not only that; when his hands and knees, which the narrow cage forced him to use as feet, grew calloused pads, and his back and sides developed sores from the rubbing, he was a sight no less disgusting than fearful to look at. Made monstrous by his punishment, he had lost all claim even on pity.  

Still: though the man who suffered such things was utterly unlike a human being, the one who caused them was still less human.  

I only wish that such savagery had remained confined to foreign examples, and that the barbarism of punitive rage had not passed over into the Roman character, along with other immigrant vices. Marcus Marius—to whom the people had raised statues in one neighborhood after another, to whose image prayer-offerings of incense and wine were made—had his legs broken, his eyes gouged out, and his tongue and hands cut off at the order of Lucius Sulla, who tore him apart little by little and joint by joint, as though he could kill him every time he wounded him.  

Who was the servant who carried out this order? Who but Catiline, already giving his hands employment in every sort of crime? He was butchering Marius before the tomb of Quintus Catulus, doing grievous wrong to the ashes of that mildest of men, as over those ashes Marius shed his blood drop by drop, a man who set a bad example in his policies but who was still a man of the people, loved by them not undeservedly but too well. Marius was worthy of suffering such things, Sulla, of ordering them, Catiline, of doing them, but the commonwealth didn’t deserve to have its body pierced by the swords of enemies and defenders alike. (3) Why rummage about in ancient history for examples? Not long ago Gaius Caesar whipped and tortured, in a single day, Sextus Papinius (son of a former consul), Betilienus Bassus (his own quaestor and son of his procurator), and others too, both senators and Roman knights, not while conducting an investigation, but because he felt like it. (4) Furthermore, he could so little endure postponing pleasure, which his cruelty demanded in massive amounts and all at once, that while strolling on his mother’s estate, along a walkway separating a portico from the riverbank, he decapitated by lamplight some of
those I have just mentioned in the company of Roman matrons and other senators. Why was he in such a hurry? Because the space of a single night threatened some public or personal peril? How small a thing it would have been, in short, to wait until dawn, so that senators of the Roman people might not be killed by a man in flip-flops.

Knowing how arrogant his cruelty was is relevant to the matter at hand, though someone could judge that I’m deviating from my subject and going off on a tangent; but this very trait of his will be characteristic of anger when its savagery is extraordinary. He had whipped senators: his own prior behavior made it possible to say “This sort of thing happens.” He had tortured them, using all the most ghastly means the world knows—the grate, ankle clamps, the rack, fire, his own face. (2) Here someone will say: “Big deal! So he took turns using whips and fire on three senators, as though they were worthless chattel—a person who used to contemplate slaughtering the whole Senate, who used to wish that the Roman people had a single neck so that he could concentrate his atrocities, otherwise dispersed over so many sites and occasions, into a single blow on a single day.” Is there anything more unprecedented than an execution carried out under cover of night? Though acts of banditry are usually concealed in the shadows, punishments more effectively set edifying examples the more notorious they are. (3) And here someone will say to me: “The behavior that leaves you agog is that beast’s daily regimen: he lives for it, he keeps watch for it, he burns the midnight oil for it.” True enough; you’ll find no one else who commanded that all whose execution he ordered have their mouths stopped up with a sponge, so that they couldn’t utter a sound. Was anyone on the point of death ever kept from groaning? He was afraid that their final anguish would produce speech of uncommon candor, that he’d hear what he didn’t want to hear. He knew, moreover, that there were countless things that none would dare cast in his face save on the point of death. (4) When sponges weren’t at hand, he ordered that the wretches’ garments be torn up and the rags stuffed in their mouths. What kind of savagery is that? Let the wretch draw his last breath, give the soul a way to leave the body, don’t make him send it forth through a gaping wound. (5) It’s too much to add that on the same night he also killed the fathers of the men he murdered—that is to say, the soft-hearted man freed them from their grief—by sending
centurions around to their homes. It’s my aim to describe not Gaius’s savagery but the savagery of anger, which doesn’t vent its rage on one man at a time but rends entire nations, battering cities and rivers and entities immune from feeling pain.

20 So the Persian king cut an entire people’s noses off in Syria, whence the place is named “Dock-Nose.” You reckon that he spared them, because he didn’t cut off the heads? No, he just took pleasure in a new kind of punishment. (2) The Ethiopians, who are called “the Long-lived Ones” (the course of their life goes on and on), would have suffered some such fate too, for Cambyses was in a lather because they didn’t accept slavery with gestures of grateful submission but gave the ambassadors he sent the sort of candid responses that kings call insulting. Without seeing to provisions, without scouting out the way, he set about dragging through trackless deserts the whole disorderly mass of men who could be of any use in war. Right at the journey’s start he lacked the necessary provisions, nor was anything supplied by the region, barren, uncultivated, untouched by any trace of humankind. (3) At first their hunger was relieved by the tenderest leaves and treetops, then by fire-softened hides and whatever necessity turned to food. After the roots and grasses, too, gave out in the midst of the sands, and the wasteland seemed bereft even of animals, they drew lots: every tenth man provided food more harrowing than their hunger. (4) But anger still drove the king headlong—though he had lost one part of his army and eaten another—until he feared that even he himself might be summoned by the lot. Then and only then did he give the signal for retreat. All the while noble birds were being tended for his sake and camels were carrying the paraphernalia for his feasts, though his soldiers were determining by lot who would die an awful death and who would still more awfully live.

21 Cambyses was angry with a nation both unknown and undeserving, but at least capable of perception; Cyrus was angry with a river. When he was hastening to attack Babylon in war, which turns decisively on opportunities seized, he tried to ford the broad course of the river Gyndes—something that’s scarcely safe even when the river has felt the summer’s heat and been reduced to its smallest flow. (2) There one of the white horses that customarily drew the king’s chariot was swept away: powerfully moved, the king swore
that he’d so reduce the river that carried away his entourage that even women would be able to tread upon it while crossing. (3) He thereupon shifted all the machinery of war to this end and settled down to the job, until he divided the river’s main bed with 180 channels, dispersing it among 360 streams and leaving it dry as the water flowed off in different directions. (4) And so he wasted both time—a great loss in great undertakings—and the soldiers’ zeal—which the pointless labor undid—and the opportunity to attack his opponents unexpectedly, while waging with a river the war he’d declared on the enemy. (5) This frenzy—for what else would you call it?—has befallen Romans too. For Gaius Caesar tore down the most beautiful villa in Herculaneum because his mother had once been imprisoned there—and made its fortune notorious by that very act. When it was still standing we used to sail right past it, but now people ask why it was destroyed. (22)

These should be considered examples to avoid. Now, conversely, some examples to follow, of controlled and gentle behavior on the part of people who lacked neither a reason to become angry nor the power to take revenge. (2) Take Antigonus: nothing would have been easier for him than to order the execution of the two common soldiers who, while leaning against his tent, were doing what people do with the greatest peril and the greatest pleasure—expressing a low opinion of their king. Antigonus heard everything, since only a curtain separated the speakers and their audience: lightly drawing the curtain aside, he said, “Go a bit farther off, so the king doesn’t hear you.” (3) Here’s another story about Antigonus. One night, when he heard some of his soldiers heaping curses on their king because he had led them onto a muddy trail from which they couldn’t extricate themselves, he went up to those who were having the hardest time and helped them get unstuck, though they didn’t recognize their helper: “Now,” he said, “curse Antigonus, through whose fault you landed in this misery, but bless the man who got you out of this mud hole.” (4) Antigonus bore the abuse of enemies and citizens alike with equal mildness: when he had the Greeks under siege in some two-bit fort and they—confident in their position and despising their enemy—made many jokes about Antigonus’s ugliness, mocking now his short stature, now his smashed nose, he said, “I’m delighted, and can reasonably hope for some good outcome, if
I have Silenus in my camp.”  

When he had reduced these smart-mouths through starvation, he took the captives and distributed among his own companies those who were fit for soldiering but put the rest up for auction as slaves, saying that he wouldn’t have done it save that it was in their own interest to have a master, seeing that they had such wicked tongues.

23 Antigonus’s grandson was Alexander, who used to hurl a spear at his dinner companions, who threw one of the friends I mentioned just before to a lion, and made the other his own prey. Still, of these two, the one who was thrown to a lion survived. (2) Alexander didn’t inherit this vice from his grandfather, nor even from his father; for if Philip had any virtue, it was forbearance even in the face of insults, a great and useful tool for safeguarding his rule.  

Demochares—nicknamed “Free-talker” for his exceedingly aggressive way of speaking—had come to Philip on an embassy with other Athenians. After receiving the embassy, kindly Philip said, “Tell me what I can do to please the Athenians,” to which Demochares replied, “Go hang yourself.” (3) Such an uncivilized response roused the indignation of those assembled, yet Philip ordered them to keep silent and to let “that great Thersites” go safe and unharmed. “But the rest of you ambassadors,” he said, “tell the Athenians that the people who say that sort of thing are much more arrogant than those who hear them and leave them unpunished."

(4) Many memorable deeds and sayings of the deified Augustus also make plain that anger had no dominion over him. The historian Timagenes had made certain remarks about Augustus himself, his wife, and his whole household, and hadn’t let his pithy words go to waste: indeed, rash wit enjoys a wider circulation and lives on people’s lips. (5) Caesar often warned him to use his tongue with greater restraint, then barred him from his house when he kept it up. Afterwards, Timagenes grew old as an intimate of Asinius Pollio and was the toast of the town. The fact that Caesar’s house was closed to him barred him from no other threshold. (6) He recited the history that he’d subsequently composed and placed the books containing the accomplishment of Caesar Augustus on the fire. He conducted a feud with Caesar, but no one feared his friendship, no one fled from him as though he’d been struck by lightning, and there was one who offered him refuge after his great fall. (7) Caesar
put up with this patiently, as I said, and was not even disturbed that Timagenes had attacked the praise he’d won and the things he’d accomplished; he never complained to the man who played host to his enemy. (8) He only said to Asinius Pollio, “C’est une bête farouche que tu as sous la main”, and as Pollio made ready to offer an excuse, Augustus stopped him and said, “Enjoy, my dear Pollio, enjoy!” When Pollio said, “If it is your bidding, Caesar, I shall bar him from my house at once,” Augustus said, “Do you think I’d do that, after getting the two of you back together?” For Pollio had been angry with Timagenes at one point; his only reason to stop being angry with him was the fact that Caesar had begun.

24 So each person should say to himself, whenever he’s provoked, “I’m not more powerful than Philip, am I? But he was abused with impunity. I don’t have the kind of power in my own home that the deified Augustus had over the whole world, do I? But he was content just to put some distance between himself and the man who was insulting him.” (2) Why should I punish with whips and shackles a slave who spoke too loud and looked a little too defiant and didn’t come in response to my merest whisper? Who am I, that it should be a sin to bruise my ears? Many people have forgiven foreign enemies; shall I not forgive those who are lazy or careless or talkative? (3) A child should be excused because of his age, a woman because of her sex, a stranger because he is a free man, a member of your household because of your intimate relationship. This one is a first-time offender: let’s consider how long he’s found your favor. That one has given offense often on other occasions: let’s bear what we’ve long borne. He’s a friend: he didn’t mean it. He’s an enemy: what else should he do? (4) Let’s trust the one who’s more than ordinarily shrewd and forgive the one who’s more than ordinarily stupid. Let’s repeat to ourselves, in each man’s defense, “Even the wisest men have made many a slip.” No one’s so circumspect that he doesn’t at some point forget to be careful, no one’s so experienced that something or other doesn’t goad his dignity into some overheated action, no one’s so fearful of giving offense that he doesn’t slip into offensive behavior even as he tries to avoid it.”

25 The fact that even great men’s fortunes are unsteady has comforted the insignificant in their afflictions. The man who has seen funeral processions led sadly forth even from the palace has mourned
his own son with greater equanimity in his little nook. Just so, whoever reflects that there’s no power so great as to escape a wrong bears it with greater equanimity when someone harms or insults him. (2) But if even the most prudent do wrong, who doesn’t have good reason to go astray? We should recall how often we were too careless about our duty when we were young, too unrestrained in our talk, too intemperate when it came to wine. If someone’s angry, we should give him room to discern what he’s done: he’ll scold himself. Finally, we should let him be the guilty party; there’s no reason for us to match his deeds. (3) There’s one thing that’s beyond doubt: whoever has disdained those who seek to provoke him has set himself apart from the crowd and stood taller. It’s a special trait of true greatness not to feel the blow when struck; that’s the way a huge beast regards dogs’ barking, without concern, or the way an ocean swell leaps against a great crag, to no effect. (4) That man whom I just now described as standing taller than any vexation holds the greatest good, as it were, in an embrace. He can say, not just to another person but to fortune herself, “Do what you may, you are too puny to eclipse my serenity. Reason, to which I’ve entrusted my life’s direction, forbids this. Anger is going to do me more harm than any wrong—how could it not? A wrong has a determinate limit, but I don’t know how far anger will carry me.”

26 You object: “I can’t be forbearing; putting up with a wrong is burdensome.” You’re not telling the truth; who is able to put up with anger but not a wrong? Not only that; the way you’re carrying on, you’re putting up both with anger and with a wrong. Why do you put up with a sick man’s distemper, a maniac’s ravings, children’s rude poking? Obviously because they seem unaware of what they’re doing. How is that different from what anyone does wrongly but unintentionally? Lack of intent provides the same defense in all circumstances. (2) You go on: “Well then, is he to get off scot-free?” No, not even if you wanted him to. The greatest punishment for doing wrong is having done it, and no one suffers more grievously than the person sentenced to regret. (3) Furthermore, we must consider the basic terms of our human condition, so that we can fairly judge all that befalls us: the person who reproaches individuals for a vice we all share is unjust. An Ethiopian’s color is not a distinguishing feature among his own kind, nor is red hair put up in a bun unbecom-
ing for a man among the Germans: you’ll not judge remarkable or disgusting in an individual any trait that’s the common possession of his nation. And the traits I’ve mentioned the common practice of one region, one corner of the world, defends: consider now how much fairer it is to pardon those traits that are spread abroad among all humanity. (4) We’re all inconsiderate and careless; we’re all unreliable, complaining, grasping; we’re all—why conceal with euphemism the open wound we share?—wicked. Each and every one of us will find in his own breast the fault he rebukes in another. Why make special note of that man’s pallor or that man’s emaciated looks? It’s an epidemic. And so we should be gentler with one another: we are wicked, living among the wicked. There’s one thing that can give us peace: agreeing to cut each other some slack. (5) “That man’s harmed me, but I haven’t yet done anything to him.” But perhaps you’ve already hurt someone, but perhaps you will hurt him. Don’t take this hour or this day into account; examine the overall condition of your thought. Even if you’ve done not a jot of evil, you’re capable of it.

27 How much better it is to heal an injury than to avenge it! Vengeance wastes a lot of time; it exposes itself to many injuries while feeling aggrieved over one. We all spend more time being angry than being hurt. How much better to take the opposite course and not compound one fault with another! A person who kicked a mule back or bit a dog back wouldn’t seem sane, would he? (2) You object: “But those creatures do wrong unwittingly.” In the first place, how unfair is a person who finds being human an obstacle to pardon! Second, if the fact that they lack deliberation exempts other animals from your anger, anyone who lacks deliberation should be in the same boat, as far as you’re concerned. What difference does it make if he has some other traits unlike animals incapable of speech, if he has the trait that exculpates such animals in all wrongdoing: murkiness of thought? (3) He committed a wrong: well, was this the first? The last? There’s no reason to believe him if he says, “I won’t do it again.” Not only will he do wrong, but another will wrong him, and his whole life will be spent in a wallow of error. Ungentle creatures must be treated gently. (4) What’s commonly said, to great effect, when someone’s grieving, will be no less effective when someone’s angry: will you cease at some point, or never? If you’ll cease at some point, how much better to abandon your anger than to be abandoned by it! Or will you
remain perpetually upset? Do you see what a life of turmoil you’re sentencing yourself to? What sort of life will the person have who’s forever inflamed? (5) And now add the fact that when you yourself have wound yourself up and come up with one reason after another to apply the spurs, your anger will depart all of its own, and time’s passing will sap its strength. How much better that you overcome it than that it overcome itself.

28 You become angry with this person, then with that one; with your slaves, then with your freedmen; with your parents, then with your children; with acquaintances, then with strangers. There are reasons in abundance on every side, unless your mind has interceded to plead for clemency. Rage will seize you on one person’s account on this side, on another’s on the other, and your frenzy will continue as new sources of irritation continually arise. Come, unhappy man, will you ever feel love? Oh, how you’re wasting good time in a bad business! (2) How much better it would be now to make friends, soothe enemies, serve the public interest, shift your energy to domestic concerns, than to look around for a bit of mischief to do to someone by harming his status or his estate or his person, when you can’t succeed without a dangerous struggle, even if you’re in conflict with a lesser man! (3) Suppose he should be handed over to you in bondage, liable to suffer whatever you wish: the one doing the whipping has often dislocated a shoulder by applying excessive force, or gashed a muscle on teeth he’d smashed. A disposition to anger has left many disabled, many enfeebled, even when it’s found an unresisting target. Now add the fact that nothing is by nature so weak as to perish without endangering the one who crushes it. Sometimes pain, at other times chance, makes the weak equal to the strongest. (4) Consider also the fact that many of the things that make us angry offend us rather than harm us. It makes a big difference, however, whether someone foils my intention or lets me down, wrests something from me or doesn’t give it to me. And yet we regard it as all the same whether someone takes something or refuses it, whether he cuts my hope short or postpones its fulfillment, whether he’s acting against me or in his own interest, from affection for another or hatred of me. (5) Indeed, some men have reasons to oppose us that aren’t only just but honorable. One man is looking out for his father, another for his brother, another for the fatherland, another for a friend. Yet we don’t forgive
these men for doing what we’d criticize them for neglecting—or rather, which is beyond belief, we often value the deed but condemn the doer. (6) But by Hercules! a great and just man looks up to all the bravest among the enemy, the most unwavering in defense of their liberty and their country’s well-being, and he wishes that such men were his fellow citizens, his own comrades in arms.

29 It’s disgraceful to hate the man you praise. How much more disgraceful to hate someone for the trait that should earn him pity, if he retains some remnants of freedom when he’s suddenly been reduced to slavery as a captive, and doesn’t nimbly hop to perform base and demanding tasks; if he doesn’t run as fast as his master’s horse and cart because he’s lazy after a life of leisure; if sleep has overtaken him because he’s exhausted from having to spend days on end awake; if he refuses a peasant’s toil or doesn’t sturdily go to meet the hard work in store when he’s been transferred from the city, where his slavery was like a holiday! (2) We should distinguish between the incapable and the unwilling; we’ll let many off the hook once we begin to use our judgment before becoming angry. As it is, though, we follow up our first impulse and then, though we’ve been stirred up for no substantial reason, we persevere, lest we appear to have begun without a reason—and what’s most unfair, the fact that our anger’s unjustified makes us the more stubborn. (2) We keep a grip on it and make it greater, as if being seriously angry proves that one is justly angry.

30 How much better to take a careful look at those first stages and see how frivolous they are, how harmless! You’ll find that the same thing happens to a human being as happens to animals incapable of speech: we’re made upset by trivial, empty things. A reddish color excites a bull, an asp rises to strike at a shadow, a piece of cloth provokes bears and lions: everything that’s naturally wild and fierce is unsettled by insubstantial things. (2) The same thing happens to natures both restless and dull-witted: they’re struck by suspicion about what’s going on around them—indeed, to such an extent that they sometimes label “injuries” what are really modest favors, which offer the most common fuel for anger, and certainly the most acrid. For we become angry with those dearest to us because they’ve given us less than we imagined they would, and less than others received from them, though there’s a remedy at hand for each of these causes. (3) Suppose
another’s been treated more generously: we should take pleasure in what we have without making comparisons. People tormented by others’ greater happiness will never be happy themselves. Suppose I have less than I hoped; well, perhaps I hoped for more than I should have. We should most of all fear anger that arises from this quarter, for it’s the most destructive and most inclined to attack all the things we most hold sacred. (4) More friends than enemies finished off the deified Julius; he hadn’t satisfied their insatiable hopes. Of course he wanted to—for no one made more generous use of victory, from which he claimed nothing for himself save the wherewithal for giving—but how could he satisfy such relentless desires, when each one of them lusted after all that a single man had in his power. (5) And so he saw his fellow soldiers surround his seat with their swords drawn: Tillius Cimber, who had just before been the keenest defender of his faction, and others who sided with Pompey only after Pompey was gone. These impulses have turned kings’ arms against them and driven the most loyal men to plan the deaths of those on whose behalf, and before whom, they had vowed to die.

31 No man who looks at another’s possessions is pleased with his own. We grow angry even with the goods we have because another’s ahead of us, forgetting how much of humanity is behind us and what monstrous envy stalks the man who envies only a few. Still, people are so unreasonable that however much they’ve received, they count it an injury that they could have received more. (2) “He gave me a praetorship, but I’d hoped for a consulship; he gave me twelve fasces but didn’t make me an ordinary consul; he wished that the year be reckoned by my name, but I still don’t have a priesthood; I’ve been chosen to be a member of a priestly college, but why only one? Now he’s crowned my social standing, but he’s contributed nothing to my estate; he’s given me what he was obliged to give, but he’s extended nothing on his own.” (3) Rather, say “thank you” for what you’ve received. Wait for the rest and be glad that you don’t yet have all you can; it’s one of life’s pleasures to have something left to hope for. Suppose you’ve surpassed all others; be glad that you’re first in the heart of your friend. Suppose many surpass you; consider how many more are behind you than ahead of you. You want to know your biggest fault? You don’t keep true accounts: you put a high value on what you’ve given, a low value on what you’ve received.
Different considerations should deter us in different cases: we should avoid becoming angry at some people out of fear, at others out of respect, at still others out of disdain. No doubt it would be a great achievement for us to toss some wretched little slave in the workhouse! Why are we in a hurry to give a beating right off the bat, to break someone’s legs straightway? Our ability to do so won’t be lost if it’s deferred. (2) Let the time come when we ourselves are giving the orders. Now we’re doing anger’s bidding when we speak. When it’s passed, then we’ll see what value should be assigned to the complaint. For this is where we chiefly go wrong: we resort to the sword, to capital punishment; we use chains, prison, and starvation to avenge a matter that should be rebuked with lighter lashes. (3) You object: “How can you bid us to keep in mind that the things that seem to harm us are paltry, wretched, and childish?” For my part I would only urge you to become great-spirited and see how low and base are the things that cause us to bring suits and go haring off this way and that, panting and gasping—things that should win the respect of no one who can imagine anything lofty and splendid.

There’s no end of shouting about money: it wears out the courts, sets fathers and children to fighting, causes poisons to be mixed, puts swords in the hands of assassins and legions alike. Money is drenched with our blood; because of money husbands and wives make the nights resound with quarrels; a mob surges against the magistrates’ tribunals; kings rage, seizing and destroying communities built by the labor of centuries so they can poke about in the cities’ ashes for silver and gold. (2) We like to gaze upon money bags lying snug in a secluded spot; they’re the reason why eyes are poked out in a brawl, why court chambers resound with shouts, why judges summoned from afar sit to determine whose greed is more righteous. (3) What about an old man, destined to die without an heir, who busts a gut, not over a money bag—oh no, over a handful of bronze or a denarius that a slave claimed as an expense? What about the ailing usurer, with arthritic hands and feet unfit to use for counting, who raises a ruckus over interest of even one-tenth of one percent per month and demands that the debtor post bond so he can claim his pennies even as his illness assails him? (4) Should you offer me all the money from all the mines that are right now being dug, should you reveal all the treasures that vaults conceal (let greed put back
underground all that it has wickedly unearthed!), I wouldn’t reckon
the entire heap worth a frown on a good man’s brow. What laughter
ought to attend the things that make us weep!354

34 Come now, run through in your thoughts all the other provo-
cations: food and drink and the showy refinements acquired for their
sake; insulting words, gestures, and movements that convey too little
respect; stubborn draft animals and lazy slaves; suspicions and mali-
cious constructions of another’s talk, which cause the human capacity
for speech to be counted among the way nature wronged us. Trust
me, the things that cause us to lose our temper in no trivial way are
themselves trivial, the sorts of things that move children to scrap and
fuss. (2) None of the transactions we conduct with severe looks is
serious, none of them is great: that’s why (I stress this point) anger is
also a form of insanity—you assign great value to paltry things. This
man wanted to deprive me of an inheritance, that one denounced
me to a man I’d long courted in the hope of being named in his will.
This other one lusted after my concubine: the thing that should be a
bond of affection—a community of desires355—is a cause of dissen-
sion and hatred. (3) A narrow path stirs quarrels between passersby,
but a broad way that’s spread wide open doesn’t cause even whole
nations to collide: because they’re paltry, because they can’t be given
to one person without being taken from another, the things you seek
incite the people who go after them to battle and brawl.

35 You’re indignant that a slave answered back to you, and a freed-
man too, and your wife, and a client. Then you turn around and
complain that the free speech you’ve destroyed at home has been torn
from the commonwealth. Or conversely, if a slave you questioned
was silent, you call it defiance. (2) Let him speak and be silent—and
laugh too! “In his master’s presence?” you ask. No; in the presence
of the household’s father.356 Why shout? Why raise a ruckus? Why
go for the whip in the middle of dinner because slaves are talking,
because you don’t have in one and the same place a crowd the size of
an assembly and silence worthy of a wilderness? (3) You don’t have
ears only to take in sounds that are well-balanced and soft and sweet
and orderly; you must hear both laughter and weeping, both smooth
talk and lawsuits, both good news and sad news, both people’s voices
and animals’ growls and barks. Why do you start at a slave’s shout,
unhappy man, or at the clang of brass or the slam of a door? Delicate
though you might be, you’ve still got to hear the sound of thunder. (4) Now take what I’ve said about your ears and apply it to your eyes, which are equally oppressed by feelings of disgust if they’re not well trained: they’re offended by stains and dirt and silver that’s not sufficiently gleaming and a pool that’s not crystal clear to its bottom. (5) No doubt these eyes, which can’t bear the sight of marble unless it’s multicolored and freshly burnished, or of a table unless its grain is sharp and dense, which don’t want surfaces at home to be trod on unless they’re more precious than gold—these eyes look with utter equanimity, when abroad, at scruffy, muddy alleys, at the filth of most people they encounter, at the walls of apartment blocks that are eaten away, cracked, crooked. Why, then, should the thing that causes no offense in public cause upset at home? No reason other than a judgment that’s fair and patient abroad but cross-grained and querulous at home.

All our senses must be toughened: they have a natural endurance, once the mind has ceased to corrupt them; and the mind must be called to account every day. This was Sextius’s practice: when the day was spent and he had retired to his night’s rest, he asked his mind, “Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better?” (2) Your anger will cease and become more controllable if it knows that every day it must come before a judge. Is there anything finer, then, than this habit of scrutinizing the entire day? What sort of sleep follows this self-examination—how peaceful, how deep and free, when the mind has been either praised or admonished, when the sentinel and secret censor of the self has conducted its inquiry into one’s character! (3) I exercise this jurisdiction daily and plead my case before myself. When the light has been removed and my wife has fallen silent, aware of this habit that’s now mine, I examine my entire day and go back over what I’ve done and said, hiding nothing from myself, passing nothing by. For why should I fear any consequence from my mistakes, when I’m able to say, “See that you don’t do it again, but now I forgive you.” (4) In that discussion you spoke too aggressively: from now on don’t get involved with people who don’t know what they’re talking about. People who’ve never learned don’t want to learn. You admonished that fellow more candidly than you should, and as a result you didn’t correct him, you offended him; in the future
consider not just whether what you say is true but whether the person you’re talking to can take the truth. A good man delights in being admonished, but all the worst people have the hardest time putting up with correction.

37 “At that banquet certain people’s witty remarks, and words bandied about to bruise you, got under your skin; remember to avoid unrefined gatherings—because people there have no sense of shame even when they’re sober, their idea of what’s permissible is still more relaxed after they’ve been drinking. (2) You saw your friend become angry with some lawyer’s or rich man’s doorkeeper because he thrust him aside as he was entering, and you yourself were angry with that utterly low chattel on his behalf; will you become angry, then, with a chained dog? And a dog, after it’s had a good bark, becomes gentle when you toss it a treat. (3) Stand back a bit farther and laugh! That fellow thinks he’s someone now because he keeps watch over a threshold thronged by people pursuing lawsuits; the man who now reclines within prospers as fortune’s favorite and thinks a door that’s hard to enter is the mark of a rich and powerful fellow. He doesn’t know that the hardest door is the prison door. Anticipate that you must put up with many things: no one’s astonished that he’s cold in winter, is he? Or seasick on the sea, or shoved in the street? The mind faces bravely the things it’s prepared to encounter. (4) Seated in a place of less distinction you began to become angry with your fellow guest, with the man who invited you, with the man who was given preference over you. Madman, what difference does it make what part of the couch you plant your weight on? Can a pillow make you more honorable or more shameful? (5) You gave someone a dirty look because he spoke ill of your talent; do you accept this as a principle of behavior? Then Ennius, in whom you take no pleasure, would’ve hated you, and Hortensius would declare a state of feud between the two of you, and Cicero, were you to mock his poetry, would be your enemy. And you aim to face the voters with equanimity as a candidate?  

38 “Suppose someone insulted you: it wasn’t a worse insult than Diogenes the Stoic suffered, was it? Just when he was lecturing on anger, a rude young man spat in his face. He bore it gently and wisely, saying, ‘I’m not in fact angry, though I think maybe I should be.’ (2) Our countryman Cato did much better. When he was arguing
a case, the notorious Lentulus—a wild, divisive statesman in our
fathers’ lifetime—spat squarely in his face with all the slimy spittle
he could muster. Cato wiped his face and said, ‘I’ll bear witness to all,
Lentulus, that those who say you have no talent are dead wrong.’”

Now we’ve succeeded, Novatus, in squaring away the mind in
good fashion: either it doesn’t feel anger or it’s stronger than anger.
Let’s see how to soothe another’s anger; for we want not just to be
sane, but to make others sane.

(2) We won’t dare use soothing speech on the first onset of anger,
which is deaf and mindless; we’ll give it room. Remedies work in
periods of remission; we don’t test the condition of swollen eyes if by
moving them we’re going to aggravate the force that causes them to
be fixed and staring, and the same is true of other faults when they’re
in the acute phase: rest is the cure for the first stages of disease.

(3) You object: “A lot of good your remedy does, if it calms anger
when it’s already stopping of its own accord.” In the first place, it
makes it stop more quickly. In the second place, it guards against a
relapse. And though the remedy doesn’t dare try to soothe the first
onslaught itself, it will deceive and deflect it. It will get all means of
vengeance out of the way. It will feign anger on its own, as though
it were a helpmate sharing in the grievance, to have more authority
in giving advice. It will spin out reasons for delay and cause anger
to postpone immediate vengeance while it looks for a more sub-
stantial sort. (4) It will use every trick to give rage a respite. If the
anger is too forceful to resist, it will either shame or frighten it.

If the anger is rather weak, it will introduce pleasing or novel top-
ics of conversation and so distract it by exploiting the eagerness to
learn. A story: when a doctor was obliged to heal a king’s daughter
and couldn’t do so without surgery, he applied a scalpel covered in
a sponge while gently bathing her swollen breast. Though the girl
would have struggled had the remedy been openly applied, she bore
the pain because she didn’t anticipate it. Some things are healed only
by deception.

To one person you’ll say, “Watch out, don’t let your enemies
take pleasure in your anger,” to another you’ll say, “Watch out; don’t
let that great-spiritedness of yours, that oak-hard strength many
people credit you with, come to nothing. I share your resentment, by
Hercules, and can see no limit to the anguish, but we have to wait
for the proper opportunity; he’ll pay. Just keep this thought in mind: when you can, you’ll pay him back, and with interest for the delay.”

(2) But scolding angry people and actually getting angry in response only riles them. Take an approach that’s flexible and winning—unless you chance to have the sort of authoritative persona that enables you to overwhelm the other’s anger, as the deified Augustus did when dining with Vedius Pollio. One of his slaves had shattered a crystal cup. Vedius ordered him seized, intending to kill him in no ordinary way: he directed that he be thrown to the massive morays that he kept in a fishpond. Anyone might suppose that Vedius’s expensive tastes had provided the motive, but it was savagery.

(3) The slave slipped from his captors’ grasp and took refuge at Caesar’s feet, intending to seek only another way of dying, so he wouldn’t become bait. Caesar was moved by Vedius’s unprecedented cruelty, and in fact ordered that the slave be released—and further ordered that all the crystal cups in his sight be smashed and the fishpond filled in.

(4) That was the right way for Caesar to rebuke a friend, making well-judged use of his power: “You order that people be snatched from a banquet and torn apart in a newfangled sort of payback? A human being will be drawn and quartered if your cup has been smashed? You’ll be so pleased with yourself that you’ll order a man’s execution in Caesar’s presence?” That’s the way for someone to act who’s so powerful that he can approach anger from a position of superiority and treat it roughly—but only the sort of anger I’ve described: bestial, monstrous, bloodthirsty, on the point of being incurable if something still greater doesn’t give it a good scare.

41 We should put our minds to rest—the sort of rest we gain by constantly rehearsing sound teachings, by conducting our affairs correctly, and by keeping our thoughts focused on a desire for the only honorable goal. We should satisfy our own conscience and lift not a finger for reputation; let even a bad reputation attend us, as long as it derives from doing good. (2) “But the common run of men admire the high-spirited; the reckless are respected while the placid are regarded as slugs.” At first sight, perhaps; but as soon as the even tenor of their lives has convinced people that the cause is not sluggishness of mind but peace of mind, that same common run of men revere and worship them. (3) That foul and hostile passion, then, has nothing useful about it; quite the contrary, it has all that’s evil—fire and the
sword. Once anger’s trampled a sense of shame underfoot, it befouls its hands with slaughter, scatters the limbs of children, leaves nothing free from crime, forgets glory, shrugs off ill repute, and becomes incorrigible once it has hardened into hatred.  

We should free ourselves from this evil, cleanse our thoughts, and tear out by the roots any traces, however slight, that will grow back wherever they’ve clung fast. We shouldn’t control anger but destroy it entirely—for what “control” is there for a thing that’s fundamentally wicked? We will, moreover, succeed, provided we make a real effort. (2) And nothing is more conducive to this than contemplating our own mortality. Each person should say, to himself and to the other: what good does it do to proclaim our feuds, as though we were born to live forever, and to waste the very brief time of life that he we have? What good does it do to take the days we could spend on honorable pleasure and devote them instead to another’s anguished torment? Those true concerns of yours can’t stand the loss; we don’t have the spare time to waste. (3) Why do we rush into battle? Why do we create conflicts for ourselves? Why do we forget our weak state and take on vast feuds, rising up to crush another when we’re so easily crushed ourselves? Any time now a fever or some other illness will prevent us from conducting those feuds that we implacably wage; any time now death will come between the fiercest combatants, separating them for good. (4) Why do we in an uproar and throw our lives into confusion, divided against ourselves? Our fate stands right above our heads, entering in our account the days as they perish, coming closer and closer. That moment you’ve marked out to achieve another’s death is perhaps appointed for your own.

Why not rather take stock of your own brief life and make sure it’s peaceful, for yourself and everyone else? Why not rather cause all others to love you while you live and miss you when you’ve gone? Why do you want to drag down that fellow who’s dealing with you highhandedly? Why try to use your own strength to rub out that one who’s barking at you—a low and despicable fellow to be sure, but galling and annoying to his betters? Why grow angry with your slave, your master, your king, your client? Bear with it a bit and—lo and behold—here’s death to make you equals. (2) At the morning shows in the arena we often see a bull and a bear tethered together and set to fighting: when each has had at the other, each
is handed over to a waiting executioner.\textsuperscript{376} We do the same thing
when we provoke someone who’s bound to us,\textsuperscript{377} though the same
end looms—indeed, at no great distance—for both victor and van-
quished. We should rather spend the little bit of time we have quietly
and at peace: let no man look with hatred on my body when it lies
dead. \textsuperscript{(3)} Often a fire alarm raised in the neighborhood has resolved
a quarrel, and a wild beast happening on the scene has separated a
bandit and a wayfarer; we don’t have time to struggle with lesser
evils when we’ve spied a greater terror. What business do we have
with conflict and treachery? That person you’re angry with—you
don’t wish him anything worse than death, do you? He’ll die without
your turning a hair. You’re wasting your effort if you want to cause
what is anyway going to be. \textsuperscript{(4)} You object: “I don’t actually want
to kill him; just make him suffer exile, disgrace, loss.” I have more
understanding for someone who wants to wound an enemy than for
someone who wants to give him a blister: that’s not just evil-minded,
it’s small-minded. But whether you contemplate the worst punish-
ment or something milder, how little time there is, either for him
to be tormented by his punishment or for you to take your wicked
pleasure from it! \textsuperscript{(5)} Any time now we’ll cough up our last breath.
For now, while we breathe and are among our fellow humans, let’s
cherish the qualities that make us human. Let’s cause no one fear
or peril; let’s show we’re above losses and injuries, above abuse and
carping; let’s bear our brief inconveniences magnanimously. As the
saying goes,\textsuperscript{378} “No sooner do we turn and look around than death
is at our elbow.”
On Anger: Book 1

33. After stressing anger’s awful nature and consequences (§§1–2.3), S. defines anger and addresses some related issues (§§2.3b–4.3); he then takes up the question, crucial to a Stoic, of whether anger exists “according to nature” (§§5–6), and the related question of whether anger is “useful” (§§7–13), in both cases meeting anticipated objections. The book then concludes with extended discussions of anger’s relation to justice (§§14–19) and “greatness of spirit” (§§20–21); these recall the previous, briefer discussions of anger’s relation to courage (§7.1–4) and family devotion (pietas: §12.1–5).

34. The word S. uses, impetus, appears more than two dozen times in the treatise to denote either some form of vigorous pursuit—as here—or the mind’s movement that impels the pursuit. For all animals except adult humans (and for adult humans when judgment or belief is not involved: cf. 2.16.1), that mental movement is merely “impulsive” in the common sense of the term, a response to some impression entailing no commitment to the impression’s truth (cf. 2.1.1, impetus versus “judgment”). For adult humans, that movement typically—and in the case of passions, always (cf. §§3.4, 8.1, 2.2.1nn.)—entails assent to an evaluative perception expressible as a proposition (e.g., “that I have been unjustly harmed”). The mind’s action is in that sense deliberate, though not necessarily conscious.

35. Anger’s willingly self-destructive character is among S.’s commonest themes: see the simile at the end of the next sentence and also §§5.2, 11.8, 2.35.5, 3.2.6, 3.2, 5.6. The point is philosophically important: the angry person’s willingness to harm himself contradicts our innate impulse to self-preservation (2.31.7n.) and corroborates the view that anger is not “according to nature” (§5.2ff.).

36. S. here speaks of “madness” in the ordinary sense, and the equation of such madness and anger is a commonplace (e.g., Moral Epistles 114.3 with Otto 1890:177). But Stoicism held that all who are not wise are “mad” (“ill,” etc.), and the false judgments of people “mad” in this sense (virtually all of us) cause them to experience all the common passions.


38. Cf. 3.4.2, a very similar passage, in which the cracking of knuckles is meant.

39. If the text is sound, S. seems to quote part of an iambic verse; for quotations unmarked as such by S. cf. §12.5 (proverb), 2.9.2 (verse extract).

40. That S. will soon deny anger to animals, the orthodox Stoic position
(§3.4ff.), does not prevent him from ascribing it to them here, where it suits his rhetorical aim of stressing anger’s awfulness in commonsense terms familiar to his audience.

41. S. might have specific instances in mind in what follows (see notes), but when he launches into a catalog of this sort he is mainly concerned with heaping up examples, often of a plainly generic sort; cf. esp. 2.9.3, 3.2.3f.

42. Literally “the mourning dress of defendants by turns.” A Roman on trial commonly assumed mourning, to signal his distress and seek pity. S. thinks of enemies who conduct their feud by bringing each other to trial.

43. S. seems to refer to the proscriptions first instituted by Sulla (81 BCE) and repeated under the Triumvirs (43 BCE): in that case it would not be the persons themselves (principum . . . capita, literally “leading men’s heads”) that were auctioned off, but their property, which was confiscated when the proscribed lost their civic rights (another sense of capita).

44. S. presumably means cities like Argos, Mycenae, and Troy.

45. “Sacrilegious” because the protocols binding guest and host were divinely sanctioned; cf. Alexander’s murder of Clitus, adduced at 3.17.1.

46. S. perhaps recalls the praetor Sempronius Asellio, lynched in 89 BCE while sacrificing in the forum.

47. The extant manuscripts’ common ancestor had a large gap at this point. The lengths of the three books as they are now (approximately 5600, 7600, and 9300 words respectively) suggest that even if Book 1 was originally shorter than Book 2 by as much as Book 2 is shorter than Book 3, the loss still ran to hundreds of words. But two later writers quote from or paraphrase the lost material and give some idea of its contents: St. Martin of Braga’s epitome of S.’s On Anger (sixth century CE) shows that S. continued to depict the passions’ dire effects. More important, in his On the Anger of God (ca. 315 CE) Lactantius quoted four definitions that Seneca had cited (§3bn).

48. Like the wicked stepmother in Cinderella, the Roman stepmother (noverca) was stereotypically cruel.

49. Lactantius’s text continues by quoting Aristotle’s definition given at §3.3 below, thus guaranteeing the relative location of the other three definitions in S.’s original text. Since to be done a “wrong” (iniuria) is precisely to be “unjustly harmed” (inique laesum; cf. below), the first two definitions substantially overlap: S. perhaps offered the first—a commonplace without specific philosophical pedigree—as a general statement of the concept, then adduced the second, from Posidonius of Apamea’s On Anger (frag. 150 Edelstein-Kidd), as a more precise Stoic definition that makes explicit the judgment entailed (“you reckon”; cf. Cicero Tusculan Disputations 4.21, SVF 3.395–97). The third, which stresses intent (“. . . or wished to do so”), is probably Epicurean (Procopé 1998:176f., citing Philodemus On Anger XL.32ff., XLI.40ff.), and in any case it is consistent with S.’s own emphasis on intent (see §3.1, 2.26.4, 30.1, 3.12.2,
26.1). S.’s subsequent remarks show that he takes anger to be a strong desire for punishment (*cupiditas poenae*, §2.5; cf. §§3.2, 5.3) in response to being harmed unjustly (thus the term *iniuria*, §§2.4–5 and passim; the criterion is made explicit at 2.31.1), in line with the Stoic definition noted above.

50. When the transmitted text resumes, S. is addressing putative objections centering on a proper understanding of the “wrong” (*iniuria*) that is anger’s object.

51. “It’s not anger but quasi-anger”—so called because it responds not to a wrong (*iniuria*) but to a quasi-wrong; cf. Cyrus’s anger at the river Gyndes, 3.21.1–4.

52. S. uses the technical term *species* (= Greek *phantasia*), here denoting an evaluative impression (not just “that I have been struck,” but “that I have been struck wrongly”). An adult can assent rationally (if mistakenly) to such an impression, but very young children are incapable even of rational assent and so, like animals (§3.4n.), cannot experience true passions.

53. S.’s response here is weak, and to a degree it depends on the same verbal slippage found in the objection between mere “harm” (*laedere*) and “wrong” (*iniuria*). Because Stoic doctrine holds that true evil lies in making wrong moral choices whether or not the choices result in effective action, the person who forms an evil intention could plausibly be said to be “harmed” thereby. That he could be said to “already commit the wrong” is less clear, however, and it is quite murky how his evil intention actually “harms” the other person.

54. Capable, that is, in our own minds, where the true evil lies. See preceding note.

55. As throughout in such contexts, “ours” (*nostra*) means “belonging to us Stoics,” as “we” (*nos*) means “we Stoics.” The definition attributed to Aristotle here is one he gives *exempli gratia* in *On the Soul* 403a30f., as the sort of definition “experts in dialectic” might give. For other definitions of anger that Aristotle gives as his own, see *Rhetoric* 2.2.1 1378a31–33, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.8 1135b28–29.

56. The important differences presumably include the fact that Aristotle speaks only of “pain,” without reference to the actor’s intention or the victim’s desert.

57. Because for the Stoics all passions depend on assent to impressions expressible as propositions, and because animals (like human infants) lack language (§6), they cannot experience the kind of impression from which anger properly begins; cf. Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 4.31.


59. A Stoic technical term (*regium illud et principale* = Greek *hēgemonikon*) denoting the soul’s leading faculty (the other faculties are the five senses, the power of reproduction, and in humans the power of speech): located in the chest, it produces impressions, assents, perceptions, and impulses (Aëtius
4.21.1–4 = LS 53H, cf. 2.36.2n.) and as such is the closest equivalent to “mind” in our sense.

60. This is the distinction between an “occurrent” passion (an episode of anger actually experienced) and an affective “disposition,” the settled character trait comprising an inclination to experience a given passion; cf. Cicero Tusculan Disputations 4.27–28.

61. The Stoics categorized all specific (terms for) passions under four broad types: “delight” or “distress” (at some present fact) and “desire” or “fear” (at some future prospect); see introduction, n. 10. “Anger” and its related kinds are species of “desire.”

62. For a Stoic, the answer to the first question (“no”: §§5–6) determines the answer to the second (“no”: §§7–13).

63. S. refers to “the human person/being” (homo) here, and below, in Stoicism’s normative sense, “the human being properly so called.” Thus the statement that human beings willingly sacrifice themselves for others (below) is true for the Stoics not as an empirically verifiable fact (though it might be that also) but as a description of behavior that is “according to (our) nature” as humans (§3). The most important element of Stoic anthropology is the belief that humans are “born to give and receive assistance,” a trait that follows from our being “born to form a social union” (2.31.7; cf. 3.5.6, On Clemency 1.2.1, 2.5.3, 6.3). This “natural sociability” of ours (cf. esp. Cicero On Ends 3.62ff., On Appropriate Actions 1.11–12, 158, 2.73) supports both the argument that anger is “against nature” and the morally based therapies urged in Books 2 and 3; cf. the closely related argument that cruelty is contrary to our human nature, On Clemency 1.25.

64. That is, in the lost segment of text in which S. gave his own definition: §.3n.

65. Cf. On Clemency 2.7.4, the image of the good farmer who trains his crooked plants to grow straight.

66. Where a healthful outcome is impossible, euthanasia is permissible (§4 just below); cf. §§15.2, the acceptance of infanticide in the case of deformed births.

67. See the advice given to the prince in On Clemency 1.17.


69. Cf. §9.4: the key word is “seek” (adpetens), for we may seek “naturally” only what is unconditionally good (cf. 2.28.2n.), just as the only thing we may shun “according to nature” is vice, which alone is unconditionally evil. All else is properly a matter of selecting among possibilities that are neither good nor evil per se.

70. This is the argument in Plato Republic 1.33B1ff. On the meaning of “our own,” cf. §3.3n.
71. S. alludes to Aristotle, for whom virtue lay in a settled disposition to experience neither an excess nor a deficiency of any given passion, but a mean between the two. For Aristotle, mildness (praotēs) is the mean pertinent to anger, between “spiritlessness” and various forms of irascibility (Nicomachean Ethics 4.5 1125b27ff.). It plainly distorts Aristotle’s doctrine to suggest that he believed “moderate” anger should be cultivated as a means of maintaining “the mind’s vivid energy,” like a flame that keeps a pot simmering. The distortion—whether due to S. or to a source that had taken up Aristotle’s banner while oversimplifying his views—is extended below; see §9.2n, and cf. §12.3n. on Theophrastus. Aristotle’s intellectual descendants, the Peripatetics, are criticized in similar terms in Cicero Tusculan Disputations 3.71–75, 4.38–47, and in Philodemus On Anger XXXI.24ff.

72. Here and later S. speaks of passions as entities somehow distinct from the mind or reason, which can accordingly “assail” or “pollute” them—a conception that has less to do with Stoic principles than with the commonsense view of passions as things that “come over us”; cf. next note, 2.36.6, 3.1.3. A more orthodox view is introduced at §8.2: “Indeed, the mind is not sequestered . . . .”

73. Cf. Plato’s image of the soul as a charioteer controlling a team of winged horses, one noble and one base (Phaedrus 246A6ff., cf. Republic 4 436A8ff.).

74. The comparison, stressing the irresistibly “excessive” character of passions, occurs also in Cicero Tusculan Disputations 4.41, and might go back to Chrysippus; cf. 3.1.4, where the “headlong fall” is said to be peculiar to anger. For another analogy derived from Chrysippus, see 2.35.2n.

75. On these “initial prickings,” see S.’s full discussion at 2.2–4.

76. Reference to “our will” entails a core Stoic doctrine: because passions follow from our assent to certain kinds of impressions, and because it is within our power to grant or withhold that assent, all true passions are voluntary.

77. Stoic psychology held that passions were not entities distinct from the mind’s reasoning faculty, but changes in the reasoning faculty itself (Plutarch Moralia 441C = LS 61B9). In S.’s next remark, the passions alone would more properly be said to entail a “transformation,” since “reason” is the mind’s natural condition.

78. Cf. the stories of Pastor (2.33.3–4), Praexaspes (3.14), and Harpagus (3.15.1), all involving anger suppressed by fear.

79. But cf. 2.33.6, where S. describes a virtue (family devotion or pietas) keeping anger in check.

80. Aristotle adopts nothing like this position in his extant works, but categorizes something like it as a form of false courage (Nicomachean Ethics 3.8 1126b23ff.). These remarks are based on the distortion of Aristotle’s doctrine already found at §7.1; he continues in this vein at §17.1, 3.3.1.
81. Both alternatives are consistent with the “falling body” view of the passions; cf. §7.4, 3.1.4.

82. If it is useful by nature, it is useful without reservation or limit: §13.1–2.

83. S. intends the phrase “a moderate evil” as an oxymoron, tantamount to saying “impossible” (cf. *Moral Epistles* 116.1). For Stoics, both good and evil are unities, without degrees or parts (cf. just below).

84. This is the position Cicero attributes to “the Peripatetics” in *Tusculan Disputations* 4.43; cf. §7.1n.

85. German tribes threatened to overwhelm north Italy in the late second century BCE. The Teutoni were defeated by Marius at what is now Aix-en-Provence in 102, and the Cimbri by Marius and Quintus Catulus at Vercellae in 101.

86. Speaking of “virtue” here, rather than of some more specific quality, accords with the Stoic position that virtue is an absolute, integrated whole (cf. *On Clemency* 1.5.3): one cannot be brave without also being just, wise, and temperate; courage and wisdom are just distinguishable ways in which virtue expresses itself, not discrete elements from which a virtuous character is assembled.

87. These non-Roman peoples provided the cavalry and light infantry that engaged the enemy in advance of the legionary forces. The parenthetical slur concerns only the “men of Asia and Syria,” whom Roman stereotype held to be “soft” (*molles*).

88. The Roman *imperium* was “shaken” by Hannibal’s victory at Cannae in 216 BCE; the tactics described here earned Quintus Fabius Maximus the honorific nickname *Cunctator* (“Delayer”). The honor of “vanquishing” Hannibal, however, went to Scipio Africanus (see next note), not Fabius.

89. In 204 BCE, with Hannibal still in Italy, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus crossed with an army to Africa. Hannibal returned and Scipio defeated him at Zama (202), ending the Second Punic War.

90. His enemies included, especially, Fabius: *Livy* 28.40ff., 29.16ff.

91. Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, grandson by adoption of the first Africanus, destroyed Carthage to end the Third Punic War (146 BCE) and captured Numantia in Spain after an eight-month siege (133).

92. Theophrastus of Eresus (ca. 371–ca. 287) headed the Lyceum after Aristotle, whose wide-ranging interests he matched. The views ascribed to him here and in §14.1 are not found in his extant writings, which are preserved much less fully than Aristotle’s (cf. §§7.1, 9.2nn.).

93. A proverbial phrase going back to Homer *Iliad* 18.309.

94. Babies’ cognitive limitations make them incapable of anger for much the same reason that anger is denied to animals: see §3.4n.; cf. §2.5, 2.10.2. For the anger of the aged and ill, see 2.19.4, 3.9.4.
95. Cf. §12.3n.

96. Urging self-awareness of this sort is a major theme in the treatise’s therapeutic part: see 2.28.1ff., 3.12.1, 25.2.

97. Cf. 2.31.7n., for the relationship among our limbs modeling our relations with other people as fellow citizens of the “cosmopolis.”

98. The translation substitutes Madvig’s *irrogata* for the manuscripts’ nonsensical *lata* obelized by Reynolds.

99. The same story is attached to Plato (Riginos 1976:155) and the Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum (e.g., Cicero *Republic* 1.59, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.78, Plutarch *Moralia* 10D, 551B); cf. also the stories told about Plato at 3.12.5–6. On the theme of checking one’s anger, see 3.10.1n.

100. That is, in medicinal bleeding: §6.2.

101. For the following progression, cf. §6.2–3, where S. also compares the magistrate treating the “body politic” to a physician.

102. The translation retains the reading *exercitus ut sciens* with Madvig and manuscript A’s *domus* (gen. sing.); the exact form of words is uncertain, but the meaning is clear.

103. A magistrate pronouncing a capital sentence put on mourning dress (Valerius Maximus 9.12.7), and S. here implies that a magistrate executing the sentence did the like: the “reversed garment” (*perversa vestis*, cf. Petronius *Satyricon* 58.12) must be the magistrate’s *toga praetexta*, worn in such a way (e.g., inside out) that the bright purple border along its upper edge was concealed. The trumpet summoned the people to witness: Tacitus *Annals* 2.32.

104. Decapitation, preceded by flogging, was the usual form of execution for both civilians and soldiers. Parricides were flogged, sewn up in a sack with a rooster, snake, monkey, and dog, and then thrown into the sea (Cicero *On Behalf of Sextus Roscius* 30, *Digest* 48. 9. 9. pr.; cf. *On Clemency* 1.15.7, 23.1). Traitors were thrown from the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitol, named for the legendary Vestal virgin Tarpeia, who betrayed the citadel to the Sabines during their war with Romulus.

105. This “slight and delicate stirring” must be distinct from the “mental jolt” that even the wise man is said to experience in the discussion of the “pre-passions” at 2.2–4. The wise man experiences the latter because it is an ineradicable part of human nature; the metaphor of “scar” and “wound” (attributed to Zeno only here) suggests that this “slight stirring” is not innate in our human makeup but is a residue of the “wounds”—the episodes of passion—that the wise man’s mind suffered when he was still a fool, for “wise men are not born but made” (2.10.6, with *On Clemency* 1.6.4).

106. See §§7.1, 9.2nn.


108. Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso (consul in 7 BCE) governed Syria in 17 CE when his clash with Tiberius’s adoptive son, Germanicus, led to his death; this
anecdote belongs to an earlier stage of his career, when he was a proconsul (§3) commanding an army, probably in Africa. The violent, obstinate character given him in the anecdote is consistent with Tacitus’ thumbnail sketch at Annals 2.43.2.

109. According to Roman historical legend, the houses of two men executed for aiming at tyranny in the early Republic, Spurius Cassius (485 BCE) and Spurius Maelius (439 BCE), were razed after their deaths (Livy 2.41.11, 4.16.1).

110. Hieronymus of Rhodes (ca. 290–230 BCE), a philosopher active at Athens, began as a Peripatetic and then founded his own school; his writings included a treatise On Not Being Angry. His question contrasts the enormity of murder with the attempt, trivial by comparison, to stifle the attendant passions.

111. Piso snatches the fasces—one of the bundles of wooden rods carried by attendants of an official with imperium—because outside Rome the bundle’s central rod was tipped with an axe, symbolizing the power of life and death. In S.’s colorful elaboration, Piso wants to do the job himself.

112. The translation reflects Gertz’s quam amentem for the manuscripts’ quantam, obelized by Reynolds.


114. Cf. Publilius Syrus E.11: “One should snatch a weapon from an angry man, not give him one.”

115. Though not a distinctively Stoic quality, “greatness of spirit” (magnitudo animi = Greek megalopsychia) was an important facet of Stoic virtue, enabling its possessors to know what was truly important, regard all else as indifferent, make true judgments, and be consistent in all their choices. Cicero, following the Stoic philosopher Panaetius, made it one of the four “cardinal virtues” (On Appropriate Actions 1.61–92), supplanting courage; S.’s On the Wise Man’s Consistency is essentially a meditation on the quality, which he repeatedly enjoins in this work, see 2.32.2, 3.5.7, 32.3, and cf. On Clemency 1.5.3–5, 20.3.

116. S. glances at an important issue in the Stoic theory of the passions: the kind of assent that produces them. Anger, grief, and the like result from “weak” assents to relevant impressions, and they are “weak” because they rest on inconsistent and false beliefs, in contrast with the wise man’s “strong” assents, which rest on the wholly coherent, true, and interentailing beliefs that constitute knowledge.

117. A line from the fragmentarily preserved Atreus of Lucius Accius (b. ca. 170), quoted elsewhere by S. in deprecation of tyranny (On Clemency 1.12.4, 2.2.2) and allegedly quoted in earnest by the monster Caligula (Suetonius Caligula 30.1, cf. §8n.). “The age of Sulla” in the next sentence is shorthand for the 80s BCE, a decade of civil war that ended in the bloody dictatorship of Sulla (81; cf. esp. On Clemency 1.12.1–2); pace S., however, the Atreus was prob-
ably written in the 130s (implied by Gellius 13.2.2–6), and Accius was certainly dead by the 80s.

118. This form of the saying was reportedly used by the emperor Tiberius (Suetonius Tiberius 59.2).

119. Livy frag. 66 Weissenborn-Müller; the “man” in question is unknown.

120. Son of Germanicus (1.18.3n.) and grandson (by adoption) of Tiberius, whom he succeeded in 37, Gaius Julius Caesar ruled four years before being assassinated in the coup to which S. alludes below; he is more familiarly known by the nickname his father’s soldiers gave him, Caligula (“Little Boots”). His enormities serve a similar, exemplary purpose at 2.33.3ff., 3.18.3ff., 21.5, and he figures throughout S.’s writings as the favored example of extreme wickedness.

121. A pantomime wordlessly acted out stories, typically from Greek tragedy, accompanied by music and a chorus. Distinct from the earthier, often bawdy “mime,” it was an art form requiring considerable skill and training. For Caligula’s interests, cf. Suetonius Caligula 54–55.1.

122. Homer Iliad 23.724, Ajax’s challenge to Odysseus in a wrestling match. Caligula’s taunt, though not the context, is reported also at Suetonius Caligula 22.4.

123. The building mania of the rich was a favorite theme of Roman moralists. See 3.35.5 with, for example, Moral Epistles 89.21, 114.9, 122.8 (forests planted on roofs; cf. “hang forests in mid-air”), Edwards 1993:137ff.

124. S. refers to the “senatorial” provinces governed by proconsuls, as opposed to the “imperial” provinces governed by the emperor through his legates. The most prestigious senatorial provinces were Africa and Asia.

125. The names of the two consuls who entered office on 1 January of a given year (the “ordinary” consuls: cf. 3.31.2n.) were inscribed in the consular calendar (fasti) and were thereafter used to identify that year, as we use numbers in our calendar.

On Anger: Book 2

126. Book 2 falls into two distinct halves. The first half opens with the treatise’s philosophically most important segment, §§1.1–4.2, on the cognitive sequence that constitutes any episode of anger. S. then spends §§5–17 answering questions raised by the theoretical discussion on this point, with some repetition of matters discussed in Book 1 (§5, Is anger the same thing as “bestiality”? §§6–10: Does the wise man feel anger for wickedness? §11: Is anger a defense against being treated with contempt? §§12–14: Can anger be extirpated completely? §§15–16: Is anger part of a noble character? §17: Is anger useful?). With §18, the theoretical part of the treatise ends and the

127. Taking *sua sponte* to mean “voluntarily” (*OLD* s.v. *spons* 2.a), parallel with *iudicio* (“with an act of judgment”), makes it unnecessary to conjecturally insert *non* in the following clause (*<non inscis*), with Reynolds and other editors, and allows that clause to say what it more naturally appears to say.

128. “We” sc. Stoics: cf. 1.3.3n.

129. S. introduces the important doctrine of the “preparations for passion” (2.4.1), or what came to be known as the “pre-passions” (*propatheiai*, a term first used by the Christian philosopher Origen, third century CE). These are involuntary psychophysical effects, comparable to what we term “reflex,” that are an ineradicable part of our human nature and as such are experienced even by the wise; S. explains their role in passions in §4.1–2. The concept, which probably goes back to Chrysippus (Graver 1999, 2002b, 2007:85–108), is first expressly attested here (cf. also *Moral Epistles* 11.1, 57.3–6, 71.29), but there is a hint of it already in Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 3.82–83. Philo of Alexandria, writing shortly before S., offers another trace (*Questions on Genesis and Exodus* 3.56); it is also elaborated in detail by Epictetus (frag. 9 = Gellius 19.1), writing later than S. but probably independent of him. The responses belonging to this category or analogous to it, mentioned just preceding and continuing through §3.4 (cf. also §4.2), seem a jumbled lot, since they include behaviors that clearly involve perceptions with propositional content (e.g., reacting to bad news) and those that clearly do not (e.g., shivering when splashed); but they are unified by features both phenomenological (they are all experienced as involuntary) and cognitive (they are all experienced without assent to the truth of an impression and so are, in Stoic terms, involuntary).

130. Cicero’s exile in 58 BCE resulted from laws passed by the tribune Publius Clodius Pulcher; his death in 43 BCE, from his inclusion on the proscription lists approved by the triumvirs Octavian, Lepidus, and Antony. The clashes between Marius and Sulla and their followers, begun in 88 BCE and culminating in Sulla’s dictatorship and proscriptions in 81, dominated Roman politics in the 80s (cf. §34.3n. with 1.20.4, 3.18.1–2nn.). The “child,” Ptolemy XIII (b. 63), brother of Cleopatra, was persuaded by his teacher Theodotus and the general Achillas to order the murder of Pompey, who fled to Alexandria after his defeat at Pharsalus in 48 BCE.


132. The staged sea battle (*naumachia*), involving “crews” of condemned criminals and war prisoners, was a spectacle not quite a century old at Rome when S. wrote this treatise.

133. Hannibal defeated two Roman armies at Cannae in 216 BCE. But though he made a feint in Rome’s direction in 211 BCE (Livy 26.7–11), he never besieged the city.
134. Literally “Xenophantus’s tune,” played on the aulos, a double-reed pipe used in military settings, among others. But the player probably was not Xenophantus, who was at the height of his reputation in 283/282 BCE (Plutarch Demetrius 53.2), forty years after Alexander’s death; Dio Chrysostom (On Kingship 1.1–2) tells a similar story of Alexander and Timeotheus, who is known to have played at Alexander’s wedding (Athenaeus 12.54 538f).

135. Literally “extremities become stiff” (summa riguerunt), but S. uses rigor to denote a deep chill; thus the “unendingly freezing cold” (perpetuum caeli rigorem) of the Germans’ climate (1.11.3 and often elsewhere).

136. On the relevant sense of the term impetus, see 1.1.1n.

137. S.’s formulation here could mislead, insofar as the sequence “passions begin or grow or get carried away” could suggest that the second of the three mental “movements” about to be described is itself “passion.” On S.’s meaning, see introduction, section 2. For the cognitive sequence expressed in slightly different terms, see Moral Epistles 113.8.

138. Thus §3.4 just above: “someone reckoned he was harmed . . . calms down when some reason urges against it.”

139. Two exemplars of cruelty paired also at On Favors 7.19.5f.: Apollodorus, tyrant of Cassandreia in Macedonia (ruled 279–276 BCE), bound his supporters to him by implicating them in cannibalism; Phalaris of Acragas, first of the Sicilian tyrants (ruled ca. 570–549), became proverbial for the bronze bull in which he roasted his enemies (e.g., Moral Epistles 66.8, Cicero Tusculan Disputations 2.17–18, 5.75). On the sort of “bestiality” discussed here, cf. On Clemency 2.4.1–3.

140. The anecdote is not otherwise attested, but Hannibal is generally treated as the epitome of cruelty, treachery, and greed.

141. The second-person singular addresses here are examples of apostrophē (“turning away”), a figure in which the speaker is moved by strong feeling to turn aside from the main line of his discourse and address an absent individual; but S.’s error in placing Hannibal’s final defeat near Carthage, where he never fought, rather than Zama (202 BCE; cf. 1.11.6n.), is due less to strong feeling than to an urge to score a rhetorical point. Hannibal did, however, inflict grievous defeats on Roman armies at Lake Trasumene in Tuscany (217) and at Cannae in Apulia (216, cf. §2.5, 1.11.5nn.).

142. Lucius Valerius Messalla Volesus (cos. 5 CE), proconsul of Asia in 11/12, was tried by Augustus before the Senate for extortion and cruelty (Tacitus Annals 3.68.1). For other “kingly deeds” done in anger, cf. 3.16.2ff.

143. Thus the point of the anecdote concerning Plato at 3.12.5.

144. S. refers to the “good passions” (eupatheidai) of the wise, whose “joy” (gaudium; cf. Moral Epistles 59) corresponds to the common passion of “delight” and results from assent correctly given to the impression that a genuine good (virtue) is present for oneself.
145. Though S. treats Plato, Socrates' foremost interpreter, as a philosopher alien to “our [Stoic]” doctrine (cf. 1.6.5), the Stoics took “the great Socrates” himself to be their direct forebear and treated him as something very close to the vanishingly rare “wise man”; see esp. Long 2002: 68ff. For his tranquil expression, characteristic of the “great-spirited” man (1.20.n.), see Moral Epistles 104.28, Cicero Tusculan Disputations 3.31 (the same phrasing used by S. here), On Appropriate Actions 1.90, Giannantoni 1990 vol. 1C65, and cf. 3.11.2.

146. The judgments presumably involved the son’s disinherittance, a common theme in the declamations that S.’s father recalls (e.g., Controversies 1.1, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8); cf. On Clemency 1.14.1.

147. “Those in civilian dress” are the togati (literally “wearers of the toga,” a symbol of peace).

148. S.’s line of thought recalls Plautus’s phrase, “Man is a wolf to man” (Asinaria 495), appropriated by Hobbes—except that such “bestial” behavior, S. holds, is not in accord with human nature. For animals sparing their own kind, cf. On Clemency 1.26.4.

149. The translation retains the phrase hoc uno, which Reynolds obelized as illogical after the difference between beasts and humans already introduced (“except that . . .”). S. is capable of contradicting himself for the sake of a pointed epigram, but he usually avoids doing it so obviously. For like carelessness, cf. the two wholly tautologous clauses on fruit and brambles combined in a single sentence at §10.6, with On Clemency 1.8.6, 2.2.3nn.

150. Ovid Metamorphoses 1.144–48: the last line refers to a son’s use of astrology to determine when he will inherit his father’s estate.

151. That is, those whose names were posted in lists of people summarily deprived of civic rights and property; cf. §2.3, 1.2.1, 20.4nn.

152. On the poisoning of wells and springs and the use of “biological warfare” in antiquity, see Mayor 2003.

153. Oral sex, generally condemned in Roman moralizing (e.g., Richlin 1992:26–29), repelled and fascinated S. to an extreme degree: see esp. Natural Questions 1.16.

154. The “three forums” in S.’s time were the “Roman forum” (the city’s original political center), the “Julian forum” (established by Julius Caesar), and “Augustus’s forum.”

155. On the “weakness” of pity, see On Clemency 2.5–6.

156. The atomist Democritus of Abdera (b. ca. 460 BCE) came to be thought of as the smiling or laughing philosopher because he wrote On Cheerfulness (cf. 3.6.3n.), while his pairing with Heraclitus of Ephesus (b. ca. 540 BCE?) seems due to Sotion (Stobaeus 3.20.53), a teacher of Seneca, who uses it similarly in On the Wise Man’s Consistency 15.2; it later became a commonplace. The pairing’s aptness is doubtful: tradition generally presents Heraclitus as arrogant, unstable, and misanthropic (Pliny Natural History 7.79–80, Diogenes
Laertius 9.1–17), while Democritus said, “Being human, we should weep, not laugh, at human misfortunes” (frag. 68B107a Diels–Kranz).

157. The Stoics held that we can all, in principle, become wise and thus embody the human ideal. Identifying actual humans who have achieved that state is a different matter (cf. §8.1n.); there have surely been far fewer Stoic wise men than Christian saints.

158. S.’s point is not that vice is “according to nature,” but that humans are by nature both perfectable and deeply fallible: contrast §13.1 and compare §31.5.

159. A form of the prophylactic “rehearsal of evils to come” (Cicero Tusculan Disputations 3.29), recommended as a way of lessening the impact of the unexpected (cf. §31.2, Consolation to Polybius 11): it is a common Stoic therapy, though not theirs originally or uniquely (see Graver 2002a: 96–97).

160. The translation reflects the reading eo ipso, which Reynolds tentatively suggested for the manuscripts’ ipso quo.

161. In 46 B.C.E. Julius Caesar, then dictator, invited Decimus Laberius (b. ca. 106 B.C.E.), a Roman knight and writer of mimes, to perform in one of his own pieces, an act that would entail forfeiting his standing as a knight. Construing the invitation as a command, he used the prologue and the verse cited here (frag. 126 Ribbeck3) to stir ill will against Caesar (Macrobius Saturnalia 2.7.1–5; cf. Suetonius Julius Caesar 39.2). Cicero cites the same verse, to make the same point, at On Appropriate Actions 2.24–25.

162. On the device, perhaps a Roman invention, see Mynors 1990:236, and cf. On Clemency 1.12.5.


164. According to Diogenes Laertius 8.20, Pythagoras avoided laughter. The elder Pliny says that Lucius Licinius Crassus (b. 140 B.C.E.), noted orator and mentor of Cicero, never laughed (Natural History 7.79), while Crassus’s contemporary, the satirist Lucilius, granted him one laugh (Cicero On Ends 5.92, Tusculan Disputations 3.31).

165. Pliny, in Natural History 7.78, mentions a man ordered by doctors to drink no liquid from childhood to old age.

166. The “two paths”—the more difficult leading to the more desirable goal—were a commonplace since Hesiod Works and Days 287–92, developed most influentially in the “choice of Heracles” (Xenophon Memorabilia 2.1.21ff.); for the proverbially “steep” path, Otto 1890:36, Nisbet and Rudd 2004:289.

167. The phrase S. uses, beata vita (literally “fortunate life”; cf. his essay of the same title), is the standard Latin rendering of the Greek eudaimonia, which Aristotelian, Epicurean, and Stoic philosophy each had as its goal, though they differed in defining it and in prescribing means to attain it: it can be construed as “happiness,” “flourishing,” or (as here) “the best human life.”

169. That S. lightly accepts the need to frighten others—causing them to experience a passion as flawed, to a Stoic, as the anger he is denouncing—is in accord with both the treatise’s stress on practical therapy (cf. the fear used in raising children, §21.8, or combating anger, 3.39.4) and the aggressive, even threatening tone that a Stoic teacher can adopt (cf. Long 2002: 52ff. on Epictetus).

170. That is, their bodies. S. is evidently thinking of boxers.

171. Pyrrhus is not otherwise known; S. makes a similar point about gladiators at 1.11.1.

172. The “full range of freedom” would include the ability to retaliate for an offense against one’s honor. In traditional Roman ethics, the only person expected to tolerate insults is the slave, who has no honor. S. further equates the slave, who has no civic rights, with the exile, who has lost his civic rights.


174. “Vices” (vitia) because they are all passions, though not as obviously destructive as anger.

175. S. is fond of this epigram, deploying variants of it also at Moral Epistles 40.4, 94.5f.

176. FLP Anonymus frag. 24: the poet is unknown, but probably after Ovid (the first phrase recalls Metamorphoses 15.85).

177. For the proper contemplation of god’s works, cf. On Leisure 4.2, On Favors 4.4–8; for the Stoic view that human beings exist “to contemplate and imitate the universe,” see Cicero On the Gods’ Nature 2.37.

178. In his rhetorical writings, Cicero holds that not displaying conventionally appropriate passions damages the advocate’s cause (esp. Brutus 278–79), and he tends to the view that displaying them convincingly requires experiencing them (esp. On the Orator 2.188–96, cf. Orator 132). In his late, Stoicizing ethical work, he takes a line consistent with S.’s here (Tusculan Disputations 4.55).

179. The rest of Book 2 deals with the first concern defined in this “division” of the topic; the second is among the topics addressed in Book 3. Though the discussion of prevention in Book 2 does not explicitly differentiate between dispositional and occurrent forms of anger (cf. 1.4.m.), the remarks in §§19–21, on child-rearing, are plainly aimed at preventing an irascible disposition from developing, while the remarks in §§22–34 are largely aimed at avoiding outbursts of anger, esp. by repeatedly stressing that “the great cure for anger is delay” (§29.1).

180. “Resisting anger” answers the preceding aim of “not falling into anger.” “Restraining anger” corresponds to “not doing wrong while angry,” since S. (if he is self-consistent) must intend the former phrase to mean “restraining our behavior in anger,” having already endorsed the view that anger itself, if
it is really anger, cannot be restrained (cf. esp. §4.1, 1.7.4). The first part of the medical analogy (“maintaining health”) is merely a positive version of “not falling into anger”; the second part (“restoring health”) does not match the other elements here or in the balance of the work, which has almost nothing to say about “curing” anger but approaches the angry person as a problem in damage control.

181. The doctrine that everything in the sensible world is a blend of four elemental qualities (hot, cold, dry, wet) characterizing four “roots” or “elements” (earth, air, fire, water) goes back to Empedocles of Acragas (b. ca. 492); accepted by Aristotle, it became the dominant view in antiquity. Cf. 3.9.4n.

182. This resembles the “scientific” definition of anger given by Aristotle at On the Soul 403a31f. We do not know which Stoics held this view, though it is consistent, for example, with locating the mind’s “ruling principle” in the chest (1.3.7n.) and with Chrysippus’ description of anger as “rising in a vapor from the heart, being forced outward, and blowing upon the face and hands” (SVF 2.886; my thanks to Margaret Graver for pointing me toward this fragment).

183. Cf. 1.2.4.

184. Aristotle mentions categories very much like this, to similar effect, at Rhetoric 2.2 1379a16ff.

185. Plato Laws 2.666A2–6; but at §19.4 the natures of children (and women) are said to be predominantly “moist” (associated with the “passive” element, water).

186. Put thus, the statement contradicts §19.4. But in speaking of ira here, S. perhaps means “wrathfulness,” the strong disposition to anger (1.4.1n.). In casual usage, Roman writers often interchange the terms ira (“anger”) and iracundia (“wrathfulness”).

187. Children who had not yet reached puberty when both parents died became wards of guardians, typically named in the father’s will, who watched over the wards’ persons and resources.

188. The paedagogos, a slave who served as the child’s body servant and accompanied him to school (throughout these remarks, S. is thinking only of children of elite households). With the general point here, cf. the remarks on the effects of luxury in §25.1–4.

189. For “useful” fear, cf. §14.1n.

190. The anecdote is attested nowhere else.

191. See 1.2.3n., on S.’s definition of anger. Both the definition and S.’s remarks here take as given two more fundamental beliefs: that being wronged is an evil, and that revenge for being wronged is a good (see introduction, sections 2 and 3). The discussion of “being wronged” begun here continues through §25. The line S. takes—that anger can be provoked by misjudging a wrong—is not specifically Stoic; cf. Aristotle Rhetoric 2.3 1380a9ff.

193. Hippias, tyrant of Athens (ruled 527–510 BCE), has been imported from the story of his brother, Hipparchus, and the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogiton (Herodotus 5.55f., Thucydides 1.20, 6.54f.). This tale of the clever tyrannicide is usually set in Sicily, sometimes with Parmenides’ pupil Zeno of Elea as hero: e.g., Valerius Maximus 3.3(ext.).2, Diogenes Laertius 9.26.  

194. The story is dramatically told at Curtius Rufus 3.6.4ff. (cf. Plutarch Alexander 19.3–5)—where, as more usually, Parmenio, Alexander’s second-in-command, gives the warning.  

195. See 3.17.1–2.  

196. See Pliny Natural History 7.94, adding that Caesar did the same thing when he captured the dispatch cases of Scipio Nasica at Thapsus. The mercy S. praises here was a trait recognized by Caesar’s friends and enemies alike (for a survey, see Konstan 2005); but Caesar is absent from S.’s On Clemency.  

197. S. otherwise consistently holds that “moderate anger” is impossible; see, for example, 1.10.4.  

198. For a similar list of social slights, see On the Wise Man’s Consistency 10.2.  

199. Mindyrides (or Smindyrides) of Sybaris in southern Italy (early sixth century BCE) was a byword for extreme luxury by the late fifth century (Herodotus 6.127.2). S. is the only classical Latin writer to mention him.  

200. The Romans’ sole, luxurious source of cooling, and a favorite target of moralists: On Providence 3.13, Moral Epistles 78.23, Natural Questions 4b.13.7–8, Pliny Natural History 19.55, 32.64. Plutarch includes it among luxuries that produce an irascible disposition (Moralia 461B).  

201. The sentence is a formal “division” of the topic treated in §§26–30. “Those who weren’t even able to wrong us” include inanimate objects or beings lacking intention (§26.2–6) and beings lacking bad intention (§27). In treating “those who were able to wrong us,” S. shifts focus from apparent wrongdoers to ourselves as apparent victims: §28, are we sure of our own moral standing? §29, are we certain of the facts? §30, are we taking the character of the apparent wrongdoer into account?  

202. The sentence recalls Chrysippus on our irrational anger at inanimate objects: SVF 3.478. My thanks to Margaret Graver for this reference.  

203. For this emphasis, see also §30.1, 3.12.2, 3.26.1, and cf. 1.3.1.  

204. S. presumably means women, who have the same predominantly “moist” nature as children (2.19.4).  

205. The natural world’s order meets human needs (On Favors 6.23.3), but was not established for that end.  

206. For this thought, cf. 1.14.2.  

207. In Stoic doctrine only “right actions” (Greek katorthômata) can properly be sought (cf. 1.6.4n.), and only the wise are capable of seeking them. The rest of us should aim to select “appropriate actions” (Greek kathékonta = Latin
officia), the category to which this norm (regula) pertains. On the concept of "selection," Graver 2002a:167–68.

208. Literally "public tablets": all Roman laws were inscribed on bronze tablets for permanent public display.

209. A weak example. The wrong was not done for its own sake but as a means to some other end, yet it was still a wrong and was done intentionally; cf. Chrysippus’ example of the footrace, Cicero On Appropriate Actions 3.42.

210. Literally "our own are behind us." For the proverb, cf. Catullus 22.20–21: "Each of us is allotted his own sort of failing, / but we don't see the bit of knapsack we have on our backs." Otto 1890:209.


212. The translation reflects Haase’s deletion of the manuscripts’ impossible suspicax.

213. Something Novatus at one time or another very likely did as provincial governor.

214. That is, the very fact that we are in his debt—for a Roman, a position of inferiority—tends to make us resent him. The Roman social psychology of debt required that good turns be done tactfully (esp. On Favors 2.2ff.) lest they offend the recipient by highlighting his neediness.

215. The Socratic principle that it is worse to do than to suffer wrong—the main ethical argument of Plato Gorgias and Republic—is central to Stoic ethics also.

216. Presumably in the definition that S. offered in the portion of text lost near the start of Book 1. The criterion of “fairness” is, in any case, present in Posidonius’ definition that S. quoted (see 1.2.3n.); and the presumption that anger is a response to a “wrong” (iniuria) underlies his entire discussion.

217. Turning from cases in which the wrong is only apparent to cases in which it is a matter of fact and the question turns on “fairness,” S. distinguishes between things judged unfair because they are “unmerited” and things judged unfair because they are merely “unexpected.” Having reminded us that the merely unexpected can be confused with the truly unmerited (§31.1–5), S. rounds off the book with a suite of arguments that largely resume arguments made in Book 1 (§31.6n.).

218. On the effect of the unexpected on anger, cf. Aristotle Rhetoric 2.2 1379a24–26. On passions more generally, see esp. Cicero Tusculan Disputations 3.52ff.; cf. Plutarch Moralia 449E, 463D. Diminishing this effect was one of the aims of the "rehearsal of evils to come"; see §10.7n.

219. Fabius is "the Delayer"; see 1.11.51. For the ethical point, cf. Consolation to Marcia 9.5, On Tranquility 11.9.

220. S. does not mean that being treacherous is "according to nature," but that our normatively good human nature is turned to bad ends ("warped,"
§8 below) by individual humans (cf. §7.2ff.). The point is put most strongly at 3.26.4: “we are wicked, living among the wicked.”

221. After addressing the question of what is “according to nature,” (§31.6–8), S. turns to questions more likely to appeal to a reader’s self-concern: §32: What reflects well on you as a great-spirited and therefore admirable person? §33–35.2: What behavior is expedient, either in dealing with a superior or in your social relations more generally? §35.3–36.6: What behavior is becoming and healthy?

222. That is, in an acrobatic display; cf. Martial 5.31.

223. Literally “the greater city”—alluding to the distinction, as old as Zeno, between our earthly civil communities and the universal community that gods and humans share as rational creatures. In this view we are all “bound” to each other (cf. 3.43.2); our whole-hearted commitments should, “according to nature,” embrace not just ourselves, or our families, or our fellow citizens, but every other human being (cf. next note). Indeed, the universe’s rational order can be conceived as one sublimely well-run community (Cicero *On Ends* 3.64); hence Socrates’ claim that “he was an inhabitant and citizen of the entire universe” (Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 5.108; cf. *On Tranquility* 4.4, Epictetus *Discourses* 2.10.3 = LS 59Q3, and S.’s *On Leisure* 4.1 = LS 67K).

224. For the doctrine of “natural sociability,” cf. 1.5.2n.; for the analogy of limbs to a body as citizens to a city, cf. 1.15.2 and esp. Livy 2.32.9–11 (the parable of Menenius Agrippa). The doctrine of “appropriation” (*oikeiôsis*) made the analogy apt for Stoic ethics and social thought: as we all from a very early age naturally “appropriate” our own lives and bodies—that is, recognize them as objects of concern and wish to ensure their well-being (cf. *Moral Epistles* 14.1)—so, as our reason matures, we also see that other people rightly have the same status as objects of concern deserving our commitment (cf. esp. Stobaeus 4.671.7–673.11 = LS 57G).

225. Cf. 1.19.7, where S. refers the thought to Plato.

226. Corresponding to the ordinary and bad passion “fear,” “caution” is a “good passion” (*eupatheia*; cf. §6.2.n.)—a contraction of the mind at the prospect of a true evil (vice)—and is appropriately experienced by the wise man.

227. Marcus Porcius Cato (b. 95 BCE), conservative senator and statesman, was the most noted Stoic in the late Republic. Already a figure of great moral authority when he committed suicide rather than accept Caesar’s clemency after the battle of Thapsus (46 BCE), his stature as a model of “great-spiritedness” increased in later generations. S. cites him as an exemplary figure scores of times: another anecdote appears at 3.25.3, where see note.

228. The image is repeated at 3.25.3, where see note.

229. S. replied to this argument at §11.1.

230. For an application of this principle, see the story of Harpagus in 3.15.1.
S. himself reportedly ended every audience with Nero by saying “thank you” (Tacitus Annals 14.56.2).

231. For the emperor Gaius (Caligula), see 1.20.8n. For his violent reaction to others’ dress and hair, see Suetonius Caligula 35.1–2; and see ibid. 50.1 for his sensitivity about his own hair loss.

232. This is sarcasm. The invitation, of course, only compounded the monstrosity.

233. Not only was the toast untimely and unusually large but it was probably unmixed with water, contrary to Roman custom, since S. later says that the drinks would have been “scarcely respectable” under the best of circumstances. For fondness for unmixed wine as a vice, see 3.8.1.

234. Priam of Troy supplicated Achilles, seeking to ransom his son Hector’s body, at the end of the Iliad (24.477ff.).

235. Thus S.’s comment on the similar case of Praexaspes in 3.14.3.

236. S. argued that anger could be checked only by another, countervailing passion in “the passions’ wicked, treacherous entente” (1.8.7, cf. 1.10.1); but devotion to family (pietas) was a virtue.

237. The argument that mercy is expedient for the merciful plays a major role in S.’s On Clemency; cf. also 3.16.2.

238. Inherited personal enmities were common among men of S.’s class. Male descendants of those proscribed by Sulla were forbidden to hold public office until 49 BCE, a full generation after the proscriptions.

239. Compare Claudius’s speech on admitting citizens from Gaul to the Senate: Tacitus Annals II.24.

240. S. alludes to Chrysippus’s analogy between an angry person and a runner who has more difficulty stopping or changing direction than a person walking; see Galen On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s Doctrines 4.2.10.16 = LS 65J7.

241. That is, the fury Allecto of Vergil Aeneid 7.323ff., who probably also suggested the details just previously mentioned; cf. esp. Aeneid 7.349ff., 447–49, 456f.

242. The second verse is certainly Vergil Aeneid 8.702; the first recalls Aeneid 8.703 but more closely resembles Lucan Civil War 7.568, though that poem had not yet been written when S. composed this treatise. The verse’s origin remains controversial.

243. Quintus Sextius, a Roman philosopher active in the Augustan age, elaborated an original ethical system with Stoic and Pythagorean elements and an ascetic bent; his followers included Papirius Fabianus and Sotion (cf. §10.5n.), both of whom taught S. in his youth.

244. The mind, in Stoicism, is itself material (see next note), though invisible. S. is speaking in commonsense terms.

245. The mind “work[s] its way through” the body’s tissues because the Stoics took the mind to be composed of fine, gaseous matter (Greek pneuma),
centered in the chest (cf. 1.3.7n.) and extending through the body in a way not unlike the nervous system as we know it. It was compared to a tree’s branches and trunk (Calcidius 220 = LS 53G7) or to an octopus and its tentacles (Aëtius 4.21.2 = LS 53H2).

246. When the weapons of the dead Achilles had been awarded to Odysseus rather than to himself, the great warrior Ajax’s fury led to madness and suicide: Sophocles’ Ajax represents the story’s last stages.

247. S. speaks in commonsense terms rather than as a Stoic, who would hold that—because vice (evil), like virtue (good), is a unity and absolute (1.11.2n.)—no one “evil” can be worse than “all the vices.”

On Anger: Book 3

248. At 2.18.1, S. announced two goals: “that we not fall into anger, and that we not do wrong while angry.” Since the balance of Book 2 addressed the first aim, we expect this book to address the second, and—as the reference here to “rein[ing] in . . . its assaults” suggests—it eventually does so. But when we reach a formal statement of the book’s plan, we discover that S. conceives its purpose more broadly, and in a way that entails reengaging some material covered in 2.18ff. (§5.2n.). First, however, S. wishes to impress us, again, with anger’s terrible power and disgusting nature: §§1–4, accordingly, recall 1.1.1ff. Turning up the rhetorical heat occasions some repetition and self-contradiction (see notes), and Aristotle gets another turn under S.’s lash (§3.1).

249. Cf. 2.3.4: anger “snatches up reason and carries it along.”

250. S. quickly glances at the job of healing anger in others, which he treats at the book’s end (§§39–40).

251. Cf. 2.14.1n.

252. In speaking of the mind as a separate object on which the “vices” act, and of a difference among the “vices,” S.’s manner is rhetorical rather than philosophical; cf. 1.7.2 and 2.36.6nn.

253. Contrast 1.7.4, where the “headlong fall” characterizes all passions.

254. Cf. 1.1.2n.

255. Children too young to reason do not know anger (1.3.4n.; but cf. 1.13.5, where S. attributes anger to babies).

256. The contrast between loss of self-control (impotentia) and anger is odd, given that loss of self-control is the central trait in S.’s portrait of anger throughout the treatise.

257. For the sort of catalog that S. begins here, cf. 1.2.1f.

258. Troops turning on their commanders: cf. Livy Epitome 75, Valerius Maximus 9.7(mil.).2–3. The second clause refers to the “secessions of the plebs” (494, 450, 287 BCE) by which the mass of Roman citizens extorted political concessions from the ruling patricians.
259. S. speaks of the *ius gentium* (literally “law of nations”), the principles that all peoples were taken to recognize, which sanctioned the safe conduct of embassies: cf. Cicero *On the Manilian Law* 11, stirring a Roman crowd on just these grounds and citing precedent and “ambassadorial law” (*ius legationis*).

260. Cf. 1.11.2f.

261. S.’s Latin might mean “dying by their own wound” (i.e., a self-inflicted wound: so apparently *OLD* s.v. *exeo*)? But the wounds described are not quite self-inflicted, and the surreally graphic image seems both a fitting climax and consistent with S.’s taste for the gruesome (cf., more tamely, 2.35.1).

262. For the distortion of Aristotle’s doctrine cf. 1.7.1, see 1.9.2n.

263. Thus the Hercules of S.’s own *Hercules Furens*.

264. To mark anger’s sadistic character, S. catalogs its implements: the first two (*ceuleus, fidicula*) were both forms of the rack (cf. §19.1); the third, a form of execution (Cicero *Letters to Friends* 10.32.3, *Gellius* 3.14.19, Appian *NumidianWar* frag. 3); the fourth was used to drag corpses of the executed for display before they were thrown in the Tiber (e.g., Juvenal 10.66; Novatus reportedly joked that the emperor Claudius had been lifted by a hook to heaven, Cassius Dio. 61.35.4).

265. Cf. 1.2.3–4, 2.35.4–6.

266. Cf. 1.16.3.

267. This is a formal “division” of the treatment: S. addresses the first aim through §9 (cf. already 2.18.2ff.) and the second in §§10–38, though a clear distinction is hardly maintained; the third aim is addressed in §§39–40. The method here combines deterrence—stressing the nature of anger and its costs (§5.3–7)—with the promotion of self-discipline—maintaining a “great-spirited” calm (§§5.8–6.2)—especially by limiting demands on mental and physical resources (§§6.3–7.2, 9.1–5) and by choosing companions carefully (§8.1–8).

268. On the Stoic doctrine of human beings’ natural sociability, see 1.5.2. n.

269. Cf. the anecdote of Cato at 2.32.2: such “great-spiritedness” is the precondition for the “impervious” desiderated in the next sentence, which in turn makes possible “tranquility of mind” (thus S.’s treatise of that title) or “cheerfulness” (Greek *euthymiē*, cf. §6.3n., Plutarch *Moralia* 464Eff.). All these entail the ability to assent correctly to the impressions we confront: cf. esp. 2.2.1, 2.4.1nn. and introduction, section 2.

270. Cf. §32.1, 2.34.1.

271. S. quotes from Democritus’s treatise *On Cheerfulness* (frag. 68B3 *Diels-Kranz*), cf. §5.7n.

272. Cf. 2.19.1–3.

273. Cf. 2.33.4n.

274. Cf. the tame lions and bears at 2.31.6.

275. Cf. 2.21.7–8.

276. Marcus Caelius Rufus, orator, rascal, and protégé of Cicero (Cicero
On Behalf of Caelius, Letters to Friends 8, 2.8–16), died leading an ill-conceived insurrection in 48 BCE.

277. Pythagoras of Samos (b. ca. 550 BCE) spent most of his life in Croton in southern Italy. Beyond the geometric theorem attributed to him, he devised the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in reincarnation and discovered the harmonic principles governing lyre strings. For Pythagorean use of the lyre’s harmonies to gain tranquility, cf. Cicero Tusculan Disputations 4.3, Plutarch Moralia 384A.

278. Cf. Vitruvius 5.9.5, Pliny Natural History 37.63.

279. As the universe was thought to be constituted from four “roots”—earth, air, fire, and water (2.19.1n.)—humans were thought to have four corresponding constituent humors: black bile, blood, yellow bile, and phlegm. Both forms of bile were associated with qualities conducive to anger; earth and fire corresponded to hot and dry (cf. 2.19.2, 4 and next note).

280. Since the mind was thought to be dispersed throughout the body (2.36.2n.), the pressure of the body’s weight on the mind is to be taken literally. For the anger of the ill and aged due to their “dry” natures, see 2.19.4, cf. 1.13.5.

281. Cf. Vitruvius 5.9.5, Pliny Natural History 37.63.

282. S. now apparently moves on to the second aim stated at §5.2, “to cease when angered”; but though §§10–15 include advice on how to stifle anger when it arises, and historical examples to show that it can be done, much in that section and essentially all of §§16–38 resume the topic of anger prevention: see introduction, section 3.

283. Literally “the comitial disorder”—so called because if a citizen suffered a seizure in a voting assembly (comitia), the assembly had to be disbanded.

284. Obliviousness to injury, otherwise linked to “great-spiritedness” (§5.7, 2.32.2), is here associated with the more easily cultivated trait of minding one’s own business.

285. The anecdote is otherwise ascribed to Diogenes the Cynic (b. late fifth century BCE); e.g., Diogenes Laertius 6.41, 54. For Socrates’ forbearance, cf. Plutarch Moralia 10C.

286. Pisistratus was tyrant on and off from ca. 560 BCE until his death in 527 BCE; for the story, cf. Valerius Maximus 5.1 (ext.). 2; for the analogy with the sightless offender, cf. 2.10.1.

287. The point is put strongly at 2.26.4 that “it’s not a wrong unless it proceeds from an intention”; cf. also §26.1, 2.30.1.

288. Cf. 2.22.2, 2.29.1; at §1.2, by contrast, using delay to blunt another’s anger is called “a sluggish remedy for a headlong evil, which we must use as a last resort.”
290. With this and the following story, compare the story told about Socrates at 1.15.3. For the first anecdote, see also Riginos 1976:155f.

291. Speusippus was Plato’s nephew and successor as head of the Academy; for the story see Valerius Maximus 4.1 (ext.). 2, Plutarch _Moralia_ 10D, 1108A; cf. Riginos 1976:155.


293. That is, in the role of “gadfly” that Socrates claimed for himself (Plato _Apology_ 30E).

294. On passions keeping each other in check in a “treacherous entente,” see 1.8.7.

295. This story of the Persian king Cambyses (ruled 530–522 BCE) is derived from Herodotus 3.34f.

296. Cf. the dissimulation of Pastor in 2.33.6, motivated by the desire to save his remaining son, with S.’s comment that he would despise a Roman father who feared for his own life in such circumstances.

297. S. slightly garbles Herodotus’s story (1.108–19) of the Median king Astyages punishing Harpagus for failing to kill the infant Cyrus as ordered.

298. The remark that S. here calls “flattery” merely puts into specific effect the courtier’s principle adduced with approval at 2.33.2, to survive “by accepting injuries and saying ‘Thank you.’”

299. Cf. 1.12.1–2, on the correct attitude to adopt on witnessing your father’s murder.

300. That is, through suicide; see esp. _Moral Epistles_ 77 with, for example, 58.32ff., 70.4ff. Though Stoic doctrine sanctioned a “well-reasoned departure from life” (_SVF_ 3.757ff.) in certain limited circumstances, S. commends it with unusual frequency and warmth. No earlier Stoic is known to have endorsed suicide for the reasons involved here, which follow from willingly paying court to a tyrant; S.’s emphasis on “freedom,” in particular, seems to owe more to traditional Roman thought than to Stoic doctrine (Rist 1989:2004f.). S.’s own suicide in 65 CE, after he was implicated in a plot against Nero, is represented at Tacitus _Annals_ 15.62–64.

301. Bird lime is a sticky mixture of tree sap and slaked lime; spread on branches, it causes a bird’s feathers to stick together, hampering flight.

302. Thus the line of Laberius quoted at 2.11.3, “He whom many fear must needs fear many.” The expedience for the ruler of merciful restraint is a central theme of _On Clemency_; cf. also 2.34.2.

303. Cf. the “kingly deed” claimed by Volesus at 2.5.5. The following story of Darius, third Achaemenid king of Persia (ruled 521–486 BCE), is derived from Herodotus 4.84.

304. Darius’s son Xerxes (ruled 486–465 BCE) led his forces against Greece in the Persian War of 480–79. This story is derived from Herodotus 7.38f. S.’s
compressed version does not make clear that Xerxes made his army march between the body’s two halves.

305. S. alludes to Aristotle’s tuition of Alexander to connect the former’s “unsound” views on anger (1.7.1, 9.2nn.) with the latter’s behavior. Alexander murdered Clitus, who had saved his life in the battle of the Granicus (334 BCE), in a drunken rage at Clitus’s perceived disloyalty: see also Moral Epistles 83.19 with, for example, Curtius Rufus 8.1.30–51.

306. S. refers to Alexander’s treatment of his bodyguard Lysimachus also at On Clemency 1.25.1, and variants occur in other sources (the story is denounced as false at Curtius Rufus 8.1.14–17). After Alexander died, Lysimachus ruled Thrace for four decades; his treatment of Telesphorus for insulting his wife is recalled also at Plutarch Moralia 606B and Athenaeus 14 616C.

307. The statement assumes that the object of pity not only suffers undeservedly (cf. On Clemency 2.5.4) but is also recognizably like ourselves in his suffering (cf. Aristotle Rhetoric 2.8 1385b13–16, 1386a1–3, 25–29); sheer horror tends to drive out pity (ibid. 1386a22–24).

308. Nephew of the great Marius (1.11.2n.) and praetor in 85 BCE, when his attempt to control debased coinage made him popular (hence the statues), Marcus Marius Gratidianus was murdered in Sulla’s proscriptions (81)—according to S., by his brother-in-law Lucius Sergius Catilina, Sulla’s legate and later leader of the insurrection (63) to which S. alludes. Murdering Marius at the tomb amounted to sacrificing him to the shades of Quintus Lutatius Catulus, the hero of Vercellae (1.11.2n.), who killed himself when Marius prosecuted him for treason in 87. S. combines two versions of the story, in which Marius was either beheaded by Catiline or savaged limb by limb by Catulus’s son.

309. That is, Caligula; cf. 1.20.8n. This enormity is not otherwise reported; for a catalog of his “savagery,” see Suetonius Caligula 27ff.

310. Caligula’s mother was Agrippina the elder, daughter of Marcus Agrippa and Augustus’s daughter, Julia. Her estate, on the right bank of the Tiber, probably stood between the river and the modern Piazza di San Pietro.

311. Thus the usual rendering, making the matrons and senators witnesses; but the Latin, which is ambiguous (“quosdam ex illis cum matronis atque alis senatoribus ad lucernam decollaret”), is perhaps more naturally taken to mean that they were victims (“together with their wives and other senators”).

312. Literally “clad in soleae,” a simple sandal consisting of a sole and thongs. The choice compounds the lack of decorum condemned below, §19.2n.; cf. Seneca Controversies 9.2.25.

313. Such “extraordinary” anger is no longer anger but sadistic cruelty. S. means to put Caligula in the same category as a Phalaris, according to the distinction drawn at 2.5 between anger and “bestiality.”

314. The “grate” (fidicula) and “rack” (eculeus) have already been mentioned
at §3.6; “ankle clamps” (talaria) were implements of torture perhaps used to suspend a person upside down.

315. For the wish, see Suetonius Caligula 30.2, Cassius Dio 59.13.6.

316. Execution was supposed to be carried out in public, in a solemn ceremony that included a trumpet summons of the whole people (1.16.5n.), to give the event maximum impact for deterrence.

317. The belief that the soul leaves the body with the last breath is widespread. At Rome, see for example Moral Epistles 78.4, Natural Questions 3 pr. 16, Cicero against Verres 2.6.118, Vergil Aeneid 4.684f.

318. Cambyses was the Persian king fondest of this sort of cruelty (cf. just below and §14), but the story—an obvious attempt to explain an odd place name (“Dock-Nose” = Rhinokolura, derived from Greek rhino- / nose + kolourein / dock, prune)—is not otherwise told of him. (Strabo attributes the act to “one of the Ethiopians,” 16.2.31).

319. Literally “with hands held palms up” (supinis manibus), a gesture of prayer and thanksgiving.


321. Cf. Herodotus 1.89. Despite S.’s implication to the contrary, Cyrus went on to capture Babylon. Cyrus’s anger at the river equates him with children who irrationally feel quasi-anger at the ground when they are hurt by a fall (1.2.5).

322. Agrippina (cf. §18.4n.) was banished in 29 CE to Pandateria, a desolate island off the Campanian coast, where she died in 33. She perhaps was first held at Herculaneum, on the Bay of Naples.

323. S. takes the advice already given at §11.2 on the benefit of treating an apparent injury with mildness, and offers examples from the behavior of persons of high rank.

324. Antigonus I Monophthalmus (“One-Eyed”), governor of Phrygia under Alexander, engaged in war and intrigues for control of Asia from Alexander’s death until his own (301 BCE). Plutarch tells the first anecdote (Moralia 182C–D, 457E) and a version of the third (458F); for Antigonus’s mildness in old age, see Plutarch Moralia 182A-B.

325. A satyr-like figure, part human and part animal, noted for his ugliness (hence the point here), vigorous physical appetites, and (in some versions) wisdom.

326. Alexander’s grandfather was Amyntas III of Macedon. S. was probably confused by the fact that Antigonus had a son with the same name as Alexander’s father, Philip.

327. Lysimachus and Clitus: cf. §17.1–2nn.

328. Philip II (382–36 BCE) made Macedon a great power before his son made it a world-historical power. A number of stories are told of the sort of forbearance displayed here (e.g., Plutarch Moralia 143F, 177D-E, 178A), but
this tale is unlikely to be authentic since Demochares, nephew of the orator Demosthenes, was no more than about twenty-five years old when Philip died; the role given him here better suits the time of his political prominence after 307 BCE.

329. At Homer Iliad 2.212ff., the ugly, ignoble Thersites abuses the great Agamemnon in an assembly and receives a beating from Odysseus in return.

330. For Augustus as a model of forbearance, cf. On Clemency 1.9f.

331. For Timagenes’ rise from slave to cook to litter-bearer to friend of the emperor, cf. Seneca Controversies 10.5.22.

332. Literary man, orator, general, and statesman, Asinius Pollio (76 BCE–4 CE) supported Julius Caesar and Mark Antony in the 40s, then retired from public life after holding the consulship in 40 and celebrating a triumph in 39. In retirement he wrote an influential history of the period 60–42 BCE. The anecdote is typical of his independence vis-à-vis Augustus; his reply (“If it is your bidding, Caesar . . .”)—stiff in form and invidious in intent—gives a flavor of his character.

333. A person struck by lightning was consecrated to the gods, and so outside the realm of ordinary human contact. He was buried on the spot where he was struck, which itself then became consecrated. Cf. On Clemency 1.7.1.

334. Augustus made his remark in Greek, as a cultivated English-speaker today might slip briefly into French.

335. For S.’s views on the humane treatment of slaves, see esp. Moral Epistles 47.

336. For the thought, cf. 2.31.4.

337. S. uses “wise” loosely sense here. The “wise man” of the Stoic normative ideal, who “does everything well” (Stobaeus 2.66.14–67.4 = LS 61G), would have neither cause for regret nor need of pardon.

338. For the woes borne by the great used in consolation, cf. Consolation to Marcia 12.6ff.

339. The image of large beast and small dogs appeared to like effect at 2.32.3, but joined here with the ocean crag it recalls the similes of epic poetry: cf. Aeneid 10.707ff. (simile of boar and dogs) and 7.586ff. (wave-buffeted crag, elaborating Homer Iliad 15.618ff.)


341. Cf. 2.30.2n.

342. For the actual wickedness of individual humans versus the perfectable goodness of their shared nature, cf. 2.31.5n.

343. On the link between the capacity for speech and the capacity for deliberation, cf. 1.3.6, 2.26.4.

344. Cf. Plutarch Moralia 112B–C, 114F.

345. S.’s example supposes the enslavement of a free adult person—not a
rare occurrence in antiquity, thanks to war, piracy, kidnapping, etc.—who fails to be a good slave in his new station.

346. On the crucial assent to this “first impulse,” see 1.8.1, 2.2.1nn.
347. Cf. esp. the anecdote of Gnaeus Piso at 1.18.3ff.
348. Julius Caesar, accorded divine status after his death, was the first Roman to be so honored since Romulus.

349. For the scene, see Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 82, Plutarch *Caesar* 66.3–7. The conspiracy comprised men who had served with Caesar against Pompey—including Tillius Cimber, whose approach to Caesar was the signal for the attack—as well as men whom Caesar had pardoned for serving with Pompey, most notably Marcus Brutus.

350. “He,” of course, is the emperor—the only person with magistracies and priesthoods in his gift. The consulship (with twelve fasces: cf. 1.19.3n.) was a greater honor than the praetorship (with six fasces); being an “ordinary” consul, who entered office on the first of January (cf. 1.21.3n.), was a greater honor than being a “suff ect” consul, who was appointed in the course of the year. Because by S.’s time it was common for a consul to hold office for only part of the year, opportunities for honors—and distinctions among them—were multiplied.

351. Cf. 2.34.1.
352. On this quality, see 1.20.1n., cf. §5.7, 2.32.2.
353. The basic Roman bronze coin was the as (actually issued in copper in S.’s day), sixteen of which were worth one silver denarius. A denarius could buy one measure of unmilled wheat, which could sustain an adult male for about a week. At the height of his power S. had a fortune of perhaps 75,000,000 denarii (Tacitus *Annals* 13.42).

354. Cf. 2.10.5, on Democritus’ smile, and §37.3: “Stand back a bit farther and laugh!”

355. For two men “to want, and not want, the same thing” is a definition of friendship (cf. *Moral Epistles* 109.16, Sallust *Catiline’s War* 20.4); for one man “always to want, and not want, the same thing” is a definition of wisdom (*Moral Epistles* 20.5).

356. The head of a Roman household was both the formidable dominus (“master”) to his slaves and the normatively benevolent pater familias (“father of the familia,” which included both kin and slaves).

357. I adopt Haase’s calcari (passive, “to be trod on”), which is preferable to the manuscripts’ calcare (active, “to tread on”) unless we assume S. was indifferent to the anomaly of “eyes” (the grammatical subject) doing the treading. For the point, cf. *Moral Epistles* 86.7.

359. S. is known to have been married both before his exile in 41 CE (implied by *Consolation to Helvia*) and in the 60s, at the latter time to Pompeia Paulina. We do not know if there was more than one marriage or, if there was, which wife is meant here.

360. Since S. regularly addresses his notional reader as “you,” it is not quite clear where this self-address ends and the remarks to Novatus resume. I take it that the self-address extends through §38.

361. The power attached to the doorkeeper’s position, common in any substantial household, is all the more galling because it was typically held by a slave, hence “chattel” (*mancipium*) here; cf. *On the Wise Man’s Consistency* 14.1–2.

362. The seating at a Roman dinner party was hierarchically arranged according to an elaborate protocol; cf. esp. *Pliny Epistles* 2.6.

363. The poet Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE) was remembered for his tragedies and for being the first to write epic in Latin using the dactylic verse form of Homer, but he was regarded as stylistically uncouth in S.’s day (cf. *Moral Epistles* frag. 8 = *Gellius* 12.2.11). Cicero’s poetry, especially that written on his own career (*FLP* frag. 5–14), was criticized for both its technique and its conceit. Quintus Hortensius (114–50 BCE) was the foremost orator at Rome until Cicero supplanted him; S. alludes to his florid style.

364. That is, if you cannot bear criticism in a private matter, what will you do in the rough-and-tumble of politics? For the argumentative move, cf. esp. 2.25.4.

365. Diogenes of Babylon (ca. 240–152 BCE), a head of the Stoa, left influential writings on language and ethics; he visited Rome in 155 BCE. This anecdote is told of him only here.

366. For Cato’s “great-spirited” imperviousness, cf. 2.32.2n. S. cites another instance in which he was spat upon at *Moral Epistles* 14.13 and *On the Wise Man’s Consistency* 2.1ff. There were many Lentuli in the late Republic: the only known candidate who could be called “wild and divisive”—Publius Cornelius Lentulus Sura, executed for participating in the Catilinarian conspiracy as praetor in 63 BCE—seems a bit too early to be placed “in our fathers’ lifetimes” (S.’s father was probably born in the late 50s BCE).

367. S. makes an untranslatable triple pun on the phrase “have no *os*,” which can mean “have no mouth” (proved false by Lentulus’ spitting), “have no eloquence,” or “have no shameless audacity” (from *os* = *os* *durum* / *ferreum* = “a hard / iron face”—that is, incapable of blushing).

368. This approach is exemplified in the second piece of “advice” given just below, §40.1.

369. For the use of fear, cf. 2.14.1n.

370. Contrast the hard line that S. is prepared to take with grief; see *Consolation to Marcia* 1.7f.
371. Publius Vedius Pollio (d. 15 BCE), a freedman’s son who rose to the rank of knight, was a partisan and (in his will) benefactor of Augustus. For the anecdote, cf. On Clemency 1.18.2, Pliny Natural History 9.77.

372. That is, the vice beyond anger exemplified by Caligula (§19.1) and Phalaris (2.5.1).

373. Thus the standard Stoic definition of hatred as anger that has become inveterate: SVF 3.395–98.

374. Cf. the simile of the great beast beset by barking dogs at §25.3.


376. For S.’s disgust at the games, see Moral Epistles 7.

377. As all other humans are, for we are all fellow citizens of the “cosmopolis”: 2.31.7n., and cf. 1.5.2n.