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# Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger\*

*Glen Pettigrove*

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If asked to generate a list of virtues, most people would not include meekness. So it is surprising that Hume deems it not only a virtue, but one whose “tendency to the good of society no one can doubt of.” After explaining what Hume and his contemporaries meant by ‘meekness’, the essay proceeds to argue that meekness is a virtue we, too, should endorse.

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You are in the supermarket, and you overhear two familiar voices talking in the next aisle. They belong to your neighbors, with whom you have always maintained a cordial relationship. So, putting a bottle of sesame oil into your shopping cart, you begin to move in their direction with the intention of saying hello. Just as you reach the end of the aisle, you realize they are talking about you. At the very same moment, you hear one of them say that you are “such a meek person.” How are you likely to respond?

Your neighbor’s remark might prompt any number of emotional responses, but pride will probably not be among them. To refer to someone as meek in common parlance is rare, but when it does occur, it is seldom a term of praise. Meekness is not widely discussed in contemporary moral philosophy either, but on those infrequent occasions when it is, it is generally assumed to be a vice.<sup>1</sup> At least in this case,

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1. See Aurel Kolnai, “Forgiveness,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 74 (1973/74): 91–106, at 96; Norvin Richards, “Is Humility a Virtue?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 253–59, at 258; Donald Walkout, “Julia Gulliver as Philosopher,” *Hypatia* 16 (2001): 72–89, at 81; Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and *The Second Sex*,” *Hypatia* 18 (2003): 106–36, at 119; Gabriele Taylor, *Deadly Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146; Macalester Bell, “Anger, Virtue, and Oppression,” in *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political*

common usage and philosophical usage line up fairly closely. To call someone meek is to suggest that he or she is timid. One may also be suggesting that the person is often ill-used and lacks the self-respect to stand up for himself or herself. The only context in which one might still expect to find “meekness” used to pick out a desirable attribute is a religious one. “Blessed are the meek,” says Jesus in the King James version of Matthew’s gospel (Matt. 5:5). But even among Christians, meekness has fallen on hard times. Had one consulted the most popular English translations of the Bible at the turn of the last century, one would have found “meek” or “meekness” occurring between thirty-one and thirty-six times, depending on whether one included the books of the Apocrypha.<sup>2</sup> In more recent translations, most of these occurrences have been replaced. For example, in the Christian Standard Bible (1999), “meek” only appears once and “meekness” not at all. In the most widely sold Catholic Bible, The New Jerusalem Bible (1985), neither word appears.

Given that the term “meekness” has, at best, fallen out of use and, at worst, come to designate a personal shortcoming in religious, philosophical, and common parlance, if it makes it into her list of virtues and vices at all, the twenty-first century reader is sure to put meekness in the vice column. So she may be surprised to discover that David Hume takes meekness to be a virtue.<sup>3</sup> It is not even a borderline virtue about which we might expect an agent to feel some uncertainty or ambivalence. In “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume lists meekness alongside equity, justice, temperance, and charity as terms that “must always be taken in a good sense.”<sup>4</sup> And in the *Treatise*, he claims that

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*Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-ideal*, ed. Lisa Tessman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 165–83, at 174. Two notable exceptions are Norberto Bobbio and Peter Kreeft, both of whom praise meekness as a virtue. There is, however, some disagreement between them regarding what meekness consists in. Kreeft argues, “Meekness is, therefore, a kind of submissiveness” (*Back to Virtue* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992], 140). Bobbio, on the other hand, insists, “I would not like anyone to confuse meekness with submissiveness” (*In Praise of Meekness: Essays on Ethics and Politics*, trans. Teresa Chataway [Malden, MA: Polity, 2000], 29).

2. In the King James Version [1611] there are thirty-one occurrences; in the Authorized Standard Version [1901], thirty-three. In the Douay-Rheims [1899], which includes the books of the Apocrypha, there are thirty-six occurrences of “meek” or “meekness.”

3. Indeed, it will come as a surprise even to some who have published on Hume’s moral philosophy. For example, Tom Beauchamp wrongly claims in his annotated edition of Hume’s second *Enquiry* that Hume, unlike Richard Allestree, would not consider meekness a virtue (Tom Beauchamp, “Annotations to the *Enquiry*,” in David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom Beauchamp [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 248). All subsequent references to Hume’s *Enquiry* are to this edition of *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*.

4. Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste” (1777), in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 229.

meekness is a virtue whose "tendency to the good of society no one can doubt of."<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the term's decline, I shall argue that the character trait Hume and his contemporaries refer to as 'meekness' is an important attribute whose sense is not fully captured by any other contemporary English word. Section I will explain what meekness is (or was) and offer a preliminary argument for thinking it a virtue. In Section II, the account of meekness will be enriched by distinguishing meekness from three less desirable traits with which it has often been associated. Doing so will fend off several worries that one might reasonably have about the normative status of a trait like meekness. Section III will examine the scope of meekness by looking, in particular, at the relationship between meekness and what is often called 'righteous' or 'moral' anger.

## I. MEEKNESS

What, then, is meekness? A preliminary sense of its nature is suggested by the qualities with which Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Hume, and their contemporaries typically contrasted it. These include anger, resentment, wrath, rage, revenge, cruelty, and a persecuting spirit.<sup>6</sup> Meekness is the virtue whose purview is the governance of anger and related emotions. The meek person is slow to anger and is not prone to resent others, to desire their suffering, or to take pleasure in their distress. To say that the meek person is not quickly or easily provoked

5. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (1739–40; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), bk. 3, pt. 3, sec. 1, par. 11. Hereafter cited, e.g., as Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11.

6. For the contrast with anger, see Francis Hutcheson and James Moor's 1742 translation of *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), bk. xi.18; Edward Bentham, *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: James Fletcher, 1745), 54; Richard Bundy, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: J. Bettenham, 1740), 206; Ofspring Blackall, *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Ofspring Blackall, D.D., Late Lord Bishop of Exeter* (London: Thomas Ward, 1723), 1:42; Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (Dublin: John Brocas, 1699), 146–47. For wrath, see Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, xi.18. For resentment, see Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 55; Bundy, *Sermons*, 206; Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons* (1729; repr., New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), sermon 3, p. 51. (In subsequent citations of Butler, the Roman numeral will indicate the sermon and the Arabic numeral the page number in the Carter edition.) For rage, see Hume, *Enquiry*, app. 1.16; Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, xi.9; Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, iii.51; Allestree, *Whole Duty*, 146. For the contrast with revenge, see Hume, "Of National Characters," in *Essays*, 201; Bundy, *Sermons*, 206; Blackall, *Works*, 1:42. For cruelty, see Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.3.1. For a persecuting spirit, see Hume, "Of National Characters," 201, and *Letters of David Hume*, vol. 1, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), letter 112, p. 224; Henry Home, *Sketches of the History of Man* (1778; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 3:900. And for the contrast with "the turbulent passions of men," see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11.

is not necessarily to say that he is *never* provoked. Certainly the meek are much slower to anger than persons with “a warm and angry Temper,”<sup>7</sup> and they are less easily provoked than the common run of humanity. But how often (if ever), how quickly, and under what circumstances one may be provoked and still count as meek was, as we might expect, a matter of some dispute among eighteenth-century moralists. We shall return to these questions in Section III; however, we need not determine precisely where the outlying boundary is in order to recognize more central instances of the virtue.

On those rare occasions when the meek become angry, they do not remain angry for long. And in the brief period during which they are feeling angry, they refrain from showing it in their actions, refusing to treat others in ways that express their hostile emotions. John Calvin, whose influence on the moral and conceptual landscape of Hume’s and Hutcheson’s Scotland is hard to exaggerate, suggests that a definitive characteristic of the meek is that they “are prepared to endure anything rather than do the like actions to wicked men.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, in many cases the two options Calvin identifies—endure or respond in kind—do not exhaust the range of possibilities. There often are ways of resisting wrongdoers or avoiding undeserved hardship that do not involve feeling anger toward or inflicting injury upon another. However, if confronted by circumstances in which the only options are enduring evil or attempting to “overcome evil with evil,” the meek will choose the former.<sup>9</sup>

The absence or restraint of anger, while a necessary constituent of being meek, is not yet sufficient. Restraining one’s anger simply out of the belief that to do otherwise will lead to punishment is not meekness, says Shaftesbury, but servility.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, if the absence of anger reflects one’s indifference to the well-being of oneself or others, or if it indicates that one has given up in despair, then one is not manifesting meekness but some quite different trait.<sup>11</sup> To see what else meekness involves, it is useful to consider the partially synonymous terms with which it is frequently associated: moderation, fortitude, patience, toleration, calmness of temper, gentleness, clemency, for-

7. Bundy, *Sermons*, 206.

8. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (1558), vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (1845) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 261–62.

9. George Whitefield makes a similar point in “The Good Shepherd” (1769), in *Select Sermons of George Whitefield*, ed. J. C. Ryle (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 189.

10. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 183.

11. John Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse II” (1771), in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 5:262; Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, xi.9.

givenness, charity, compassion, graciousness, generosity, and kindness.<sup>12</sup> The attributes at the beginning of this list share an important quality with meekness, namely, self-control.<sup>13</sup> Those near the end share another essential quality, namely, benevolence.<sup>14</sup> Both benevolence and self-control are necessary constituents of meekness.

Meekness, then, can be characterized as follows:

Agent *M* manifests the virtue of meekness when he or she characteristically responds in a calm and kindly fashion to aggravating treatment.

'Aggravating treatment' is meant to cover a wide range of actions or attitudes that commonly provoke an emotional response in the anger family.<sup>15</sup> Many of the occasions on which meekness might be manifested are mundane moments in domestic life—a disagreement with one's spouse or the disobedience of one's child.<sup>16</sup> They include commonplace transgressions, such as a peer's disrespect, a rival's slander, or a neighbor's deception. However, the range includes quite dramatic instances of wrongdoing, as well. In Hume's *History*, the occasions where he is lauding someone for meekness are often cases where they have been (or are about to be) subjected to harsh, life-

12. For the association with moderation, see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11, and "Of National Characters," 201; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 387. For fortitude, see Hume, *The History of England* (1778; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 3:217; Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, iii.11. For patience, see Hume, *History of England*, 3:217; Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, ix.11; Bundy, *Sermons*, 213; Blackall, *Works*, 1:42; and Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 270. For toleration, see Home, *Sketches*, 3:900. For calmness of temper, see Hume, *History of England*, 5:324 and 5:509; Francis Hutcheson, *Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (1747; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 225; Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 54; Blackall, *Works*, 1:42; Allestree, *Whole Duty*, 146. For gentleness, see Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, xi.18; Blackall, *Works*, 1:42; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 183. For clemency, see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11; Bundy, *Sermons*, 213. For forgiveness, see Hume, *History of England*, 5:324; Bundy, *Sermons*, 209–10. For charity, see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11, and *History of England*, 4:238; Bundy, *Sermons*, 209; Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, xii.148; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 32. For compassion, see Bundy, *Sermons*, 209; Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, iii.51 and xii.148; Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 54; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 5th ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1782), sec. IV, par. 650. For graciousness, see Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, ix.11. For generosity, see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.11, and *History of England*, 5:324; Bundy, *Sermons*, 219. For kindness, see Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, introduction, 4.

13. Hutcheson and Moor (*Meditations*, v.9) and Allestree (*Whole Duty*, 147) emphasize the importance of self-control as an aspect of meekness.

14. David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 180.

15. Hume, at the time he was writing the *Treatise*, might have preferred to call it the hatred family.

16. Hutcheson, *Short Introduction*, 225.

threatening, and decidedly unjust treatment. One such case is that of Thomas Bilney, a priest who was condemned to be burned at the stake for preaching Protestant doctrines. "When brought to the stake," his "patience, fortitude . . . devotion . . . [and] meekness" gained him the sympathy and admiration both of the crowd and of a number of Catholic clergy who were present.<sup>17</sup> Another case, which Hume discusses at length, is that of King Charles I, whose meekness was displayed in his "equitability of temper" both with respect to his change in fortune after he had been placed under house arrest and also toward his political enemies in the lead up to his execution.<sup>18</sup> It was manifested in the charge he gave to Bishop Juxon "to inculcate on his son the forgiveness of his murderers," which Charles reiterated as he stood before the executioner's block.<sup>19</sup> And it was exemplified in the autobiographical *Eikon Basilike*, which was published after his death.<sup>20</sup> Although Thomas Bilney and Charles I recognized that the treatment to which they were being subjected was reprehensible, they did not consider anger the appropriate response.

We might quibble over details of the character trait described above or about which persons or occasions provide the most exemplary instances of it. However, suitably qualified, the disposition Hume and his contemporaries called meekness is something many of us would appreciate and admire in our associates and that we might well try to nurture in ourselves and our children. According to almost any relevant criterion, meekness will number among the virtues. Certainly, given Hume's criteria, it is no wonder he deemed meekness a virtue.

Hume's most common way of describing a virtue is as a "mental quality in ourselves or others [that] gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflection."<sup>21</sup> Sometimes he varies the formula slightly, substituting "principles in the mind and temper" or "character" for "mental quality"<sup>22</sup> or replacing the giving of satisfaction with the evoking of "pleasure," "approbation," or "esteem."<sup>23</sup> But it is clear that he takes these different ways of putting the criterion to be synonymous. A quality may give satisfaction to the surveyor by being immediately agree-

17. Hume, *History of England*, 3:217.

18. *Ibid.*, 5:509.

19. *Ibid.*, 5:542.

20. *Ibid.*, 5:548. The *Eikon Basilike* presents itself as having been written by Charles I. Although the authorship of the work was questioned by a number of people, Hume argued that Charles was, in fact, its author.

21. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.3.

22. For "principles in the mind and temper," see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.2.1.2; for "character," see 3.3.1.17.

23. For "pleasure," see *ibid.*, 3.3.1.3; for "approbation," see 3.3.6.2; and for "esteem," see 3.3.1.25.

able, either to the agent herself or to those with whom she interacts. Or it may give satisfaction on account of its tendency to be useful, either to society or to the agent herself.<sup>24</sup> "If we examine the panegyrics that are commonly made of great men, we shall find, that most of the qualities, which are attributed to them, may be divided into two kinds, viz. such as make them perform their part in society; and such as render them serviceable to themselves, and enable them to promote their own interest."<sup>25</sup> For the most part, the lists generated by utility and agreeableness overlap. However, there are some qualities which are "agreeable" even though they do not have any clear benefit to society and, perhaps, some which have social utility even though they are not immediately agreeable. And these qualities, too, Hume insists are virtues. Putting these conditions together, we get the following disjunctive criterion:

A virtue is a quality of mind or temper that tends to be useful or agreeable to oneself or to others.

Rosalind Hursthouse has criticized this Humean criterion on the grounds that there may be conflicts among the disjuncts.<sup>26</sup> For example, a quality that is useful to me may be disagreeable to others, or vice versa. However, in the case of meekness this possibility need not bother us, since meekness is a quality that is useful and agreeable to oneself and others.<sup>27</sup>

Let us begin with social utility. A monarch who does not become angry or vengeful, who continues to act in a dignified manner and to manifest an overarching concern for the well-being of the kingdom he has served even when he is imprisoned and about to be executed clearly displays a quality of temper that is conducive to the benefit of society. To bring the example a bit more up-to-date and to generalize it to political leaders whose circumstances are less grim than those Charles I was facing, the person who does not grow angry when she is being maligned in the press will have less cause for distraction and, on that ground alone, will be better positioned to focus on promoting common goods. The person who remains calm even when members of his household have been inconsiderate or have failed to fulfill their

24. Ibid., 3.3.1.9ff.

25. Ibid., 3.3.1.24.

26. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 25 (1999): 67–82. Kate Abramson responds to this charge in "Sympathy and Hume's Spectator-Centered Theory of Virtue," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth Radcliffe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 240–56.

27. Thus, it satisfies "the ultimate test of merit and virtue" that Hume articulates in *Treatise*, 3.3.3.9.



household duties, who continues to treat them with kindness even when they have been selfish or rude, has one of the principal qualities of an exemplary spouse or parent. The friend who is slow to take offense, who continues to show us goodwill even when we have been inconsiderate or disagreeable, possesses a quality without which deep and lasting friendships—one of life's great goods—would be impossible. Nearly every social role requires one to continue to interact in a productive, nonantagonistic way with other people who have transgressed against accepted norms. There can be little doubt, then, that meekness is a quality that is useful not only to individual others but to society more generally. This alone would be sufficient for it to qualify as a Humean virtue.

Those of a less Humean persuasion might grant that the disposition to respond in a calm and kindly fashion to aggravating treatment is likely to produce good consequences for others, but nevertheless worry that it is likely to produce too many good consequences for others and not enough for the meek agent herself. Before granting that it is a virtue, then, they might require some indication that meekness is of benefit to the agent as well as to society. However, even if we broaden the scope of relevant consequences to include those enjoyed or suffered by the person possessing the trait, meekness will be a virtue. It is not hard to see how a disposition to remain calm, a persistent goodwill toward others, and even "a readiness to forego our right for the sake of peace" (on suitable occasions) would tend to benefit the individual who possessed it.<sup>28</sup> In the introduction to his translation of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, Hutcheson suggests that it is meekness that enables us to respond productively to instruction and criticism and to engage in fruitful intellectual debate.<sup>29</sup> It helps us coordinate our actions successfully with others and to continue doing so even after we have encountered their moral faults. Since many of those with whom we must do business are anything but paragons of virtue, it will be to our own benefit if we have the capacity

28. This is how Joseph Butler characterizes meekness (*Fifteen Sermons*, xii.148). Edward Bentham offers a similar account, which he appears to have cribbed from Butler, whose work he frequently cites with admiration (*Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 54).

29. Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, introduction, 10. See also Bundy, *Sermons*, 206. Research conducted by June Tangney, Roy Baumeister, and Angie Boone reinforces Hutcheson's and Bundy's claims. They have found that self-control, which includes most of the constituents of what Hume and his contemporaries call meekness—being slow to anger, not readily displaying anger even when provoked, and not ruminating about provocations for a long time afterward—is positively correlated with better academic performance and high-quality personal relationships. See "High Self-Control Predicts Good Adjustment, Less Pathology, Better Grades, and Interpersonal Success," *Journal of Personality* 72 (2004): 271–322.

to interact with them in a calm and kindly way in spite of their shortcomings. Finally, as Hume's examples so consistently highlight, meekness enables us to meet adversity with dignity. Meekness is a trait, then, with the potential to benefit both its possessor and those with whom she interacts.

Likewise, meekness is immediately agreeable to others. Some of the most dearly loved and widely admired figures in history have been distinguished by their meekness: Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama are each esteemed for manifesting this trait of character. With some of the persons whose meekness he discusses—most notably in the case of Charles I—Hume draws our attention to the wider social benefits that result from their possession of this quality. However, in other cases, such as those of Thomas Bilney or Mary Queen of Scots, he describes people who, because of their meekness, strike us as agreeable quite independently of any thought regarding the social consequences of their meekness. The person who continues to manifest benevolent concern for others, including those who are attempting to execute him, can evoke the admiration even of those who disagree with him in other fundamental respects.<sup>30</sup> Henry James's protagonist, Christopher Newman, who is persistently and unshakably affable even when he is being treated with manifest contempt by the family of his beloved, has the makings of an ideal romantic partner.<sup>31</sup> Dickens paints us an endearing portrait of meekness of an even more down-to-earth variety in the character of Pip's brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, in *Great Expectations*.

Finally, meekness can be agreeable to the agent herself. Insofar as anger, resentment, and the like are unpleasant feelings, a tendency to remain calm and not experience such emotions will be agreeable by comparison. The person who is not easily provoked will avoid feeling displeasure in a number of circumstances in which others would commonly be upset.

Hence, we might say that meekness is not only a virtue, on Hume's account, but an exemplary one, insofar as it is useful and agreeable to others as well as to the agent herself. Further, meekness, unlike the artificial virtue of justice, is a natural virtue. That means "that the good, which results from the former, arises from every single

30. See Hume, *History of England*, 5:509ff. In this respect, although in few others, Hume is in agreement with the sermon preached by Ofspring Blackall before the House of Commons on the forty-ninth anniversary of King Charles I's execution, in which the king is frequently praised as an exemplar of meekness (*Fourteen Sermons Preached Upon Several Occasions*, 2nd ed. [London: J. Leake, 1706], 324–35).

31. Indeed, Christopher Newman's defining, heroic virtue is meekness. See Henry James, *The American* (1877; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

act, and is the object of some natural passion: Whereas a single act of justice, consider'd in itself, may often be contrary to the public good; and 'tis only the concurrence of mankind, in a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous."<sup>32</sup> So one might even claim that, since it is more consistent in generating good outcomes than is justice (as Hume understands it), we should be even more enthusiastic in our support of meekness than we are of justice.

My objective here is not to defend Hume's account of virtue, or any other account of what makes a character trait a virtue, for that matter. Rather, it is to suggest that we ought to deem meekness a virtue. And for this purpose, demonstrating that meekness satisfies all of Hume's conditions is useful, since together they encompass many of the current accounts of virtue. So, for example, Hursthouse suggests that various forms of eudaimonism can be characterized as endorsing "the view that the virtues are (by and large) useful *and* agreeable, to their possessor *and* to others."<sup>33</sup> In other words, for them a virtue can be defined by the conjunction of Hume's disjuncts. As we have just observed, meekness satisfies this condition. And if it satisfies this rather demanding condition, then meekness will also satisfy Julia Driver's more modest criterion, according to which a virtue is defined as "a character trait which, generally speaking, produces good consequences for others."<sup>34</sup> Philippa Foot, in *Virtues and Vices*, suggests that a virtue is a disposition that is (a) beneficial to an agent himself or to those with whom he has to do, and (b) corrective of "some temptation . . . or deficiency of motivation."<sup>35</sup> We have already observed that meekness satisfies the first of Foot's conditions, and it is not hard to see that it also satisfies the second, insofar as our anger and ill will commonly stand in need of correction.<sup>36</sup> If, as Linda Zagzebski argues, we identify virtues by identifying the constituent traits of "paradigmatically good persons,"<sup>37</sup> then the exemplars named above will recommend meekness as a virtue. Indeed, following the lead of Michael Slote, one might go so far as to suggest that our

32. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.12.

33. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," 70.

34. Julia Driver, "The Virtues and Human Nature," in *How Should One Live?* ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122.

35. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–4 and 8.

36. See, e.g., the work of Susanne Denham and her colleagues, which draws attention to how significant learning to regulate anger is for childhood development (Susanne Denham, Kimberly Blair, Elizabeth DeMulder, Jennifer Levitas, Katherine Sawyer, Sharon Auerbach-Major, and Patrick Queenan, "Preschool Emotional Competence: Pathway to Social Competence?" *Child Development* 74 [2003]: 238–56).

37. Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

admiration for the calm and kindly way in which these exemplars responded to aggravating treatment shows that meekness's status as a virtue "is intuitively obvious and in need of no further moral grounding."<sup>38</sup> Meekness, in short, shares the defining characteristics of attributes that, upon reflection, we endorse as virtues.

## II. GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

Given the argument of the preceding section, one might wonder how 'meek' came to be a term of derision. This is not the place to canvass all of the contributing factors, but it may be useful to draw attention to three, which will help to clarify the nature of meekness and to distinguish it from other qualities with which it is sometimes confused. First, a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors who praised meekness associated it with humility.<sup>39</sup> If being humble involves not having an inflated sense of one's own importance,<sup>40</sup> then it is quite reasonable to expect meekness to be connected to humility. Someone who has an exaggerated opinion of herself is more likely to find herself in conditions where people around her do not accord her the respect or deference she believes she is due. She will "see" causes of provocation that would not confront a humbler person in the same circumstances.<sup>41</sup> So the link between meekness and humility (in this sense) is both plausible and unproblematic. However, whether or not a person is thought to be humble in this sense will depend on what such a person is thought to merit. And the latter notion was profoundly influenced during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries by the doctrine of total depravity. "All are by birth vicious and depraved," argued John Calvin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559).<sup>42</sup> Consequently, if we reflect honestly on our merits, Calvin

38. Michael Slote makes this claim about courage and benevolence in *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21 and 38. Insofar as meekness shares the qualities of inner strength and compassionate concern for others that he suggests evoke our admiration for courage and benevolence, meekness is a plausible candidate for Slote's catalog of virtues.

39. See, e.g., Hutcheson and Moor, *Meditations*, introduction, 4; Allestree, *Whole Duty*, 146; Ofspring Blackall, "The Blessedness of the Poor in Spirit," in *Five Sermons upon Several Occasions* (London: R. Wilkin, 1717), 5; Bundy, *Sermons*, 206; and Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 53–54.

40. Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 53.

41. The characters of Alexandra McCaffrey and John Robert Rozanov in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Philosopher's Pupil* (New York: Viking, 1983) provide a nice illustration of this point. John Wesley has a much shorter, but equally illuminating, discussion of this phenomenon in "The Danger of Riches" (in *Works of John Wesley* 7:12).

42. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), bk. 2, chap. 1, sec. 6, p. 216. Hereafter cited, e.g., as Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.6, 216.

suggests, we will “blush for shame, . . . feel dissatisfied with ourselves, and become truly humble.”<sup>43</sup> Under Calvin’s influence, then, humility became equated for many with thinking ill of oneself and feeling badly as a result.

Calvin’s conception of human nature came under fire from other Christian theologians from the moment of its publication. Nevertheless, it gained a significant following, especially in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland. However, even in these locations it began to lose considerable ground from the mid-eighteenth century onward. As conceptions of human nature shifted in a more positive direction, humility in Calvin’s sense came to seem more vice than virtue. The advocate of meekness who wished to break with Calvin had two options. He could cede to Calvin the meaning of the term ‘humility’ and attempt to sever the link between humility and the virtue of meekness. (This was Hume’s strategy.) Or he could retain the link between humility and meekness but challenge Calvin’s construal of the former. (This was Bentham’s strategy: “To be humble therefore is not to deny our selves to be what we are, but to conceive rightly of our selves.”)<sup>44</sup> Nothing about meekness required that it be tied to humility in Calvin’s sense. Nevertheless, in pulpit and popular consciousness alike, the two were often linked, which proved detrimental both to the understanding of the virtue of humility and to the understanding of the virtue of meekness.

A second factor adversely affecting the fate of ‘meekness’ was the tendency to link it to a fatalistic notion of submission. This linkage can be seen most vividly in a sermon on meekness by Richard Bundy—canon at Westminster, vicar of St. Bride’s Fleet Street, and chaplain-in-ordinary to King George II—published in 1740. “The Word is indeed generally understood as opposed to Anger only; and by a meek Man we usually mean, one who is of so cool and so dispassionate a Disposition, as to be able to bear Injuries without those Transports of Resentment and Revenge, which a warm and angry Temper generally discovers on such Occasions.”<sup>45</sup> However, Bundy argues for a more expansive account of meekness, according to which it would be “opposed not to Anger only, but also to Pride and Discontent.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, he proposes, “by Meekness . . . I understand such an humble, inoffensive, and easy Temper of Mind as is open and ready to receive Instruction, willing to forgive Injuries, and patient and sub-

43. *Ibid.*, 2.1.1, 210.

44. Bentham, *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, 53.

45. Bundy, *Sermons*, 206.

46. *Ibid.*, 207.

missive to all the Dispensations of God's Providence."<sup>47</sup> Bundy clearly takes himself to be departing from the standard meaning of the term 'meekness'; however, if one reads other sermons from the period, one finds a number of people who, like him, emphasize the link between meekness and an attitude of willing submission to providence.<sup>48</sup>

Again, within a certain theological framework, the link between meekness and submission is perfectly sensible. When the individual whose actions are the potential source of aggravation is a morally perfect, all-knowing, and loving God, then the meek person will not be provoked to anger but will submit to the divine will because he believes that his own understanding of the situation is inferior to God's understanding of it and that God is "working all things together for good" (Rom. 8:28). But, two changes occurred between Bundy's day and ours that made the link with submission a liability for the virtue of meekness. The more obvious change is the decline in belief in a personal God who takes care of his creatures. Perhaps the more important change, however, is in attitudes toward submission. For centuries, Paul's remarks in the opening verses of Romans 13 concerning the relationship between the first-century Christian community and the Roman magistrate had been used (contrary to the spirit of the passage) by those in power to support not only the divine rights of kings but the divine rights of the Haves over the Have-nots: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:1–2). The class and station into which one was born, it was suggested, determined the place God intended one to occupy in society. To want more (or less) was to fail to appreciate what God had given. The virtuous would submit to the will of God, which was identical to submitting to those financially and politically more powerful than oneself. When this concept of submission was combined with Calvin's notion of humility, what emerged was something like the following figure, put forward as an exemplar for the lower classes: "The man who accepts his lowly position as what is due him."<sup>49</sup> If that was the stance which was thought to stand behind meekness, then it is no wonder that meekness came to appear of dubious worth, particularly

47. Ibid., 206.

48. As Kreeft points out, this position has an important precedent in Thomas Aquinas's remarks on meekness in the *Summa Theologica* (Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 140).

49. Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 17.

in the changing economic and political environments of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Europe and its colonies.

A third factor contributing to the shift in attitudes toward meekness between Hume's day and our own was the role meekness came to play in antifeminist discourse. One can see this factor in a particularly striking way in a late work by best-selling author Richard Allestree. Allestree is best remembered as the author of *The Whole Duty of Man*, which Hume read as a boy and mentions in correspondence with Hutcheson. The discussion of meekness in the *The Whole Duty of Man* is consistent with the account offered above: "Meekness . . . is a calmness and quietness of Spirit, contrary to the Rages and Impatiencies of Anger."<sup>50</sup> The argument he presents on behalf of meekness in *The Whole Duty of Man*, appealing as it does to the usefulness and agreeableness of the trait both for the one who possesses it and for those with whom he interacts, could easily have been endorsed by the young Hume. The same cannot be said for Allestree's later book *The Ladies Calling*. There he devotes an entire chapter to meekness (as compared to the two sentences in which meekness is mentioned in passing in *The Gentleman's Calling*). Meekness, he argues, is "a necessary feminine Vertue; this even nature seems to teach, which abhors monstrosities and disproportions, and therefore having allotted to Women a more smooth and soft composition of body, infers thereby her intention, that the mind should correspond with it. . . . Nature . . . never meant a serene and clear forehead should be the frontispiece to a cloudy and tempestuous heart."<sup>51</sup> Allestree did not invent the link between meekness and an especially odious conception of women's roles in society. But he certainly did much to popularize it. Over time, the link became so strong that John Stuart Mill would point to the encouragement of the quality of meekness in women as one of the chief means by which men had selfishly held them in subjection for centuries.<sup>52</sup> This linkage to the subordination of women, together with the ties to humility and submission, contributed significantly to the shift in the meaning of 'meekness' and of attitudes thereto between Hume's day and ours.

In light of the association between meekness and this trio of vices masquerading as virtues, it is unsurprising that meekness should acquire a bad name. However, as should be clear from the preceding discussion, these associations are not necessary. Having an unduly low opinion of oneself may prevent a person from becoming angry when

50. Allestree, *Whole Duty*, 146.

51. Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, 12th impression (Oxford: The Theater, 1727), 31.

52. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (New York: Appleton, 1869), 28.

wronged. But the absence of anger in such circumstances is not a clear indication that one has an unduly low opinion of oneself any more than the presence of anger is a clear indication that one has an accurate opinion of oneself. Neither must the meek submit to injustice, as is clear from the examples of Lincoln, Gandhi, and King, each of whom displayed the virtue of meekness at the same time that they resisted (and encouraged others to resist) both individual wrongdoers and an unjust social order. And the fact that misogynists often spoke out in praise of meekness and used it to keep women in a servile state—which more than anything else contributed to giving meekness a bad name—gives us no more reason to reject meekness than to reject courage or justice, whose praises they also sang and used to keep the poor and powerless in a servile state.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, to prevent the virtue of meekness from being confused with any of the above vices, it will be useful to amend the characterization of meekness offered in the previous section. The easiest modification would be to add the condition that M's calm and kindly response must be consistent with an accurate sense of his or her self-worth. This would, in effect, make humility in Bentham's sense a necessary condition for meekness. However, while adding such a condition might make M's actions optimally virtuous, I am not sure that it makes M's actions optimally meek. And it would exclude a number of agents and actions that I think manifest the virtue of meekness even though they do not have an accurate sense of their worth. Consider the following three individuals. A is a gainfully employed Adlerian with a very positive sense of his or her self-worth.<sup>54</sup> B is a Buddhist who thinks that the self as traditionally conceived is an illusion and that A's notions of self-worth are correspondingly misguided. C is an old-school Calvinist who thinks that the self is depraved, that any goodness the self has is supplied by and should be attributed to God, and that the only things for which the self can take credit are its

53. The valorization of courage and self-discipline has long been recognized as a useful tool for motivating young men to sacrifice their lives to the imperial ambitions of the fatherland and its ruling elites. Pamela Horn and Patrick Dunae show that even virtues like benevolence and justice could be used to foster an enthusiasm for the British Empire among working- and middle-class boys that would lead many of them to willingly and courageously risk their lives in support of military campaigns (that were neither just nor benevolent) designed to increase the wealth and dominance of the already rich and powerful. See Patrick Dunae, "Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870–1914," *Victorian Studies* 24 (1980): 105–21; and Pamela Horn, "English Elementary Education and the Growth of the Imperial Ideal: 1880–1914," in "Benefits Bestowed?" *Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 39–55.

54. The allusion is to Alfred Adler's happy shoemaker. See *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*, ed. Heinz Ansbacher and Rowena Ansbacher (New York: Basic, 1956), 131–32.



shortcomings. At least one of A, B, or C has an inaccurate sense of his or her self-worth. Nevertheless, A, B, and C are each capable of manifesting the virtue of meekness. Furthermore, an observer need not know whether M is an Adlerian, a Buddhist, or a Calvinist in order to recognize that he possesses the virtue of meekness. This indicates that the proposed amendment does not do the required work.

A more promising amendment begins by observing that the problem with the calm response of self-doubting, self-loathing, objectionably submissive persons is that, at some level, they accept the way they are being treated as appropriate even when it is not. Often a wrong act carries with it an implicit message to the effect that it is acceptable/appropriate/unobjectionable to treat the other person in this way. What distinguishes the virtuously meek person from the self-loathing submissive person is that the former rejects this implicit message while the latter accepts it. The meek person recognizes the transgressive nature of the wrongful act and believes that she should not have been treated in this fashion, whereas the self-loathing submissive person does not.

### III. MEEKNESS AND 'MORAL' ANGER

Let us return to the conversation you overheard in the supermarket. As should be clear from Sections I and II, if your neighbor is using 'meek' in the same way that Hume and his contemporaries did, then you should feel flattered. Given the wide scope of what might count as aggravating treatment, everyone can agree that it would be good to be the sort of person who was not easily provoked by many of the conditions that commonly light our fuse. There may be some disagreement about how benevolent we should be toward those we find aggravating, but even here most people will endorse manifesting at least some degree of benevolence toward at least some of those we find aggravating. Once meekness has been extricated from some of its historic entanglements, the core notion should strike most readers as relatively uncontroversial—or at least as uncontroversial as things get in contemporary discussions of ethics. The real issue will not be whether meekness is a virtue, but rather when it should be manifested. Most of the controversy will surround what is often called 'righteous' or 'moral' anger. It will concern whether the virtuous will manifest meekness even when confronted by significant moral transgressions or whether they will respond with 'moral' anger instead.

In book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously claims, "There is praise for someone who gets angry at the right things and with the right people, as well as in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time" and "people who do not get angry

at things that they ought to get angry at are thought to be foolish."<sup>55</sup> Those who endorse a position like Aristotle's might well argue that meekness has a more restricted scope than is suggested by a number of the examples discussed in Section I.<sup>56</sup> The virtue of meekness, on such a view, will involve responding in a calm and kindly fashion to aggravating treatment when that treatment is morally trivial, but in cases that we judge to involve wrongdoing, what is called for is 'moral' anger. The aim of the present section is to resist this reduction in scope and to argue, instead, for the value of manifesting meekness in response to what we judge to be moral failings as well.

First, what do we mean by 'moral' anger? Although there is some potential for accounts to vary as a result of being informed by different theories of the emotions or by taking different kinds of cases to be paradigmatic, there is a surprising amount of convergence among contemporary defenders of 'moral' anger regarding what they take to be constitutive of that emotion.<sup>57</sup> It involves judging that its object (*a*) has wrongfully harmed someone or something of value or (*b*) has failed to care about someone or something in the appropriate way.<sup>58</sup>

55. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), iv.5, 1125b–1126a.

56. See, e.g., Alison Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 129–55, at 150; Elizabeth Spelman, "Anger and Insubordination," in Garry and Pearsall, *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, 263–74, at 263; Walter Berns, "The Morality of Anger," in *Punishment and the Death Penalty: The Current Debate*, ed. Robert Baird and Stuart Rosenbaum (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1995), 151–60, at 152; Peter French, *The Virtues of Vengeance* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 94; Jeffrey Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38; Peter Lyman, "The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (2004): 133–47, at 140; Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120; and Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 170.

57. It is worth noting that the word Aristotle chose to designate those who are virtuous with respect to "anger," namely, *πραός*, is the same word that appears in Matt. 5:5, which in the King James Version was translated "Blessed are the meek." It is also worth noting that what we mean by "anger" differs in significant ways from what Aristotle meant by the word that is translated as "anger" (namely, *οργή*) in the passage cited above. For two somewhat conflicting discussions of the differences, see Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 10; and Stephen Leighton, "Aristotle's Account of Anger: Narcissism and Illusions of Self-Sufficiency," *Ratio* 15 (2002): 23–45.

58. See Marilyn Frye, "A Note on Anger," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1983), 84–94, at 85; Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 143; Spelman, "Anger and Insubordination," 266; Paul Hughes, "Moral Anger, Forgiving, and Condoning," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 25 (1995): 103–18, at 104; Brian Quigley and James Tedeschi, "Mediating Effects of Blame Attributions on Feelings of Anger," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 22 (1996): 1280–88; Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical*

It involves some level of felt hostility or antipathy toward its object. And it involves the desire to lash out at its object or to see that object hurt.<sup>59</sup>

Those who defend 'moral' anger as the right or virtuous response to wrongdoing commonly claim that anger is good for one or more of the following reasons. (1) The *epistemic claim*: anger has epistemic value. It can "enable us to perceive the world differently than we would from its portrayal in conventional descriptions," Alison Jaggar argues. It "may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are."<sup>60</sup> (2) The *evaluative claim*: if we care about X—if we take X to have value—then we will become angry when we judge that X is unjustly harmed, threatened, or disvalued by another morally responsible agent.<sup>61</sup> Under ordinary circumstances,

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*Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38; French, *Virtues of Vengeance*, 95; Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, "Are Envy, Anger, and Resentment Moral Emotions?" *Philosophical Explorations* 5 (2002): 148–54, at 152; Robert Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 88; Robert Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 204; Jennifer Lerner and Larissa Tiedens, "Portrait of the Angry Decision Maker: How Appraisal Tendencies Shape Anger's Influence on Cognition," *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 19 (2006): 115–37, at 117; Agneta Fischer and Ira Roseman, "Beat Them or Ban Them: The Characteristics and Social Functions of Anger and Contempt," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93 (2007): 103–15, at 104; Michael Rota, "The Moral Status of Anger: Thomas Aquinas and John Cassian," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007): 395–418, at 406; and Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 167.

59. See Gabrielle Taylor, "Justifying the Emotions," *Mind* 84 (1975): 390–402, at 394–95; Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (1984; repr., London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 78; French, *Virtues of Vengeance*, 97–98; Ben-Ze'ev, "Envy, Anger, and Resentment," 152; Roberts, *Emotions*, 204; Fischer and Roseman, "Beat Them or Ban Them," 103; Rota, "Moral Status of Anger," 406; Lerner and Tiedens, "Portrait," 118; Maia Young, Larissa Tiedens, Heajung Jung, and Ming-Hong Tsai, "Mad Enough to See the Other Side: Anger and the Search for Disconfirming Information," *Cognition and Emotion* 25 (2011): 10–21, at 12; Cendri Hutcherson and James Gross, "The Moral Emotions: A Social-Functionalist Account of Anger, Disgust, and Contempt," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2011): 1–18.

60. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 145. Similarly, Carol Gilligan, "Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls and Women," in *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations*, ed. Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 12–47, at 38; Uma Narayan, "Working Together across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice," *Hypatia* 3 (1988): 31–47, at 39; Marguerite La Caze, "Envy and Resentment," *Philosophical Explorations* 1 (2001): 31–45, at 39 and 44; Michalinos Zembylas, "Mobilizing Anger for Social Justice: The Politicization of the Emotions in Education," *Teaching Education* 18 (2007): 15–28, at 21; Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 168; and Alice MacLachlan, "Unreasonable Resentments," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41 (2010): 422–41, at 435–36.

61. See Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," 146; Spelman, "Anger and Insubordination," 266; Frye, "A Note on Anger," 87; Midgley, *Wickedness*, 81–82; Berns, "Morality of Anger," 152–53; Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*

it is claimed, if we do not feel anger when X appears to have been harmed, then one can infer that we do not believe either (a) X is really important, or (b) X has been or is about to be unjustly harmed, or (c) the cause of the harm is a morally responsible agent. Given this fact about our cognitive and emotional constitution, if valuing X is good, then anger in the relevant circumstances is good. (3) The *communicative claim*: anger communicates important moral messages.<sup>62</sup> As just noted, it indicates who or what we think is important. It can also communicate to transgressors that we think they are capable of acting in a more appropriate fashion. Finally, (4) the *motivational claim*: anger can motivate us to act in ways that defend what we care about from harm and that lead to change.<sup>63</sup>

It is not my intention to argue that there are no cases in which a virtuous person might respond with anger to vice or wrongdoing. Further, with the exception of 2, I do not wish to deny any of the above claims: anger can be informative, it can communicate important messages, and it can motivate action in defense of valuable things (persons, ideals). What I do wish to deny, in what follows, is that these claims give us a reason to limit virtuous meekness to cases with morally trivial sources of aggravation. To do so, I shall argue that the meek can also recognize wrongdoing, care about those who are wronged, communicate their opposition to such actions, and act to defend things of value. Thus, even if anger is one way of doing these things, there are other ways of doing them that are available to the meek. However, even if the anger advocate grants this point, she still might think there is a presumption in favor of doing these things the angry way. So the final stage of the argument will be to highlight some of the comparative advantages of doing them without anger.

The exemplars discussed in the opening section provide us with good reasons for thinking the connection between 'moral' anger and the judgment that someone or something we value has been unjustly

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(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 96; La Caze, "Envy and Resentment," 39; French, *Virtues of Vengeance*, 94–95; Margaret Urban Walker, "Resentment and Assurance," in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*, ed. Cheshire Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145–60, at 146; Murphy, *Getting Even*, 19; Lyman, "Domestication of Anger," 133 and 138; Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 30; Zembylas, "Mobilizing Anger," 18 and 23; Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 168 and 177.

62. Frye, "A Note on Anger," 86–87; Lyman, "Domestication of Anger," 133; Walker, "Resentment and Assurance," 146; Zembylas, "Mobilizing Anger," 16 and 24; and Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 168.

63. Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, viii.95 and viii.99; Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 95; Narayan, "Working Together," 46–47; Berns, "Morality of Anger," 154 and 159; French, *Virtues of Vengeance*, 96; La Caze, "Envy and Resentment," 39; Murphy, *Getting Even*, 19; Lyman, "Domestication of Anger," 133 and 137; Walker, "Resentment and Assurance," 146; Zembylas, "Mobilizing Anger," 16; and Bell, "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," 168.

harm is not as tight as the epistemic and evaluative claims suppose. The absence of 'moral' anger in the Dalai Lama, for instance, gives one no reason to believe that he does not care about the Tibetan people or that he does not believe that they have been unjustly harmed by the Chinese government.<sup>64</sup> Hostile affects and the desire to lash out, which are partly constitutive of 'moral' anger, need not accompany the judgment that A has wrongfully harmed or failed adequately to care about B. Regarding the communicative claim, although anger can communicate, there are plenty of other ways to convey the same message. We are not, for example, in doubt about whether Gandhi thought British officials were capable of acting in a more appropriate fashion. His opposition was communicated clearly and unambiguously. Finally, most of the exemplars mentioned in Section I are remembered not only for their meekness but also for having resisted wrongdoing on a grand scale. Of course, it wasn't merely their meekness that enabled Lincoln, Gandhi, King, and Mandela to prevail: abolishing slavery and restoring the Union, restoring Indian sovereignty, extending civil rights to African Americans, and ending apartheid were not one-person, one-virtue jobs. But that is not the claim being advanced. Rather, the point is simply that the character trait of meekness does not prevent its possessor from actively resisting wrongdoers and defending what is of value.

So, at least in relation to the good qualities (or functions) that anger advocates commonly highlight in support of feeling 'moral' anger in response to wrongdoing, it is clear that the meek can also possess those qualities (or perform those functions) without anger even when confronted by significant wrongdoing. Thus, there is not a decisive case for restricting the scope of the virtue of meekness to morally trivial causes of aggravation. Nevertheless, one might still insist that there is a presumptive case in favor of 'moral' anger over meekness, on the grounds that 'moral' anger does a better job of performing the above-mentioned functions or manifesting the above-mentioned qualities.

Let us start with the epistemic claim. If 'moral' anger were epistemically advantaged and a meek response to others' moral failings were epistemically disadvantaged, then this would speak in favor of 'moral' anger and against meekness in such cases—at least for those

64. Victor Chan offers a remarkable window into this aspect of the Dalai Lama's character in the Dalai Lama and Victor Chan, *The Wisdom of Forgiveness: Intimate Conversations and Journeys* (Sydney: Hodder, 2004).

who take the virtues to involve moral insight or moral knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Do we have reason to think that the 'morally' angry are epistemically advantaged vis-à-vis the meek? On the contrary, I shall argue that the 'morally' angry are epistemically disadvantaged and that meekness corrects for a number of the epistemic errors to which the 'morally' angry are prone.

It has long been observed that anger can adversely affect judgment.<sup>66</sup> Philosophers have frequently attributed these effects to the excessive intensity of the anger commonly experienced immediately after a person has suffered an unjustified harm. To correct for these effects, they have often appealed either to the judgment of the victim at a later time—after the heat of passion has had an opportunity to pass—or to the vantage of a bystander, each of which is thought to offer a more reliable perspective.<sup>67</sup> The response of one's later self or of the bystander has, for many, provided the benchmark for 'moral' anger. However, recent psychological research on anger suggests that even in cases of later-selves and bystanders, 'moral' anger often adversely affects judgment.

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increase in interest among experimental psychologists in the effects of anger on judgment. Experiments typically elicit anger in one of the following ways: subjects are asked (1) to recall an occasion on which they felt anger, (2) to read a fictional scenario and imaginatively identify with the main character, who has been subjected to undeserved suffering, (3) to read a newspaper article that describes a wrong that one agent has

65. See, e.g., John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, ed. Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 149–79; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19–24; Michael Brady, "The Value of the Virtues," *Philosophical Studies* 125 (2005): 85–113; Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16–17; and Glen Pettigrove, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?" *Journal of Ethics* 15 (2011): 191–207. If one reads Hume as Annette Baier, Elizabeth Radcliffe, Paul Russell, and others do, then Hume will also be among those concerned about this issue. See Baier, "The Contemplation of Character," in *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 174–97; Radcliffe, "Moral Internalism and Moral Cognitivism in Hume's Metaethics," *Synthese* 152 (2006): 353–70; Russell, "Moral Sense and Virtue in Hume's Ethics," in *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism in Contemporary Ethics*, ed. Timothy Chappell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158–70.

66. Seneca, e.g., says, "Unlike other failings, anger does not disturb the mind so much as take it by force; harrying it on out of control and eager even for universal disaster, it rages not just at its objects but at anything that it meets on its way. . . . Anger is a departure from sanity" ("On Anger," in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John Cooper and J. F. Procope [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], bk. iii.1).

67. See Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, vii.95; and Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 160–61.

perpetrated against another, or (4) to view a video clip in which one person is wronged by another. Occasionally, anger will be provoked by (5) the experimenter behaving badly toward the subject, for example, by acting in a rude or insulting fashion toward the experimental subject.<sup>68</sup> (Note that the anger provoked by method 5 is the 'moral' anger of a victim, that elicited by method 1 is a victim's 'moral' anger at a later time, and the anger generated by methods 2, 3, and 4 are instances of a bystander's 'moral' anger. All five methods have produced comparable results.) Subjects are then asked to engage in reasoning about a wide range of issues, and the results suggest that even a very modest degree of anger, such as can be generated in a lab setting, has a marked influence on our reasoning even when we are reasoning about cases that are completely unrelated to what provoked our anger.

Anger influences people's assessment of risk. In a series of studies, Lerner and Keltner found that, when angry, people assess risks to be lower than they do in a neutral emotional state. This tendency applies both to assessments of risk within a general population and to assessments of the likelihood that they, individually, will suffer harm. So, for example, when asked to estimate the number of deaths in the United States caused each year by floods, tornadoes, fires, strokes, heart attacks, cancer, street crime, and the like, angry subjects produced lower numbers than sad or neutral subjects.<sup>69</sup> When asked to compare their chances of getting divorced within a few years of marriage or of contracting a sexually transmitted disease to those of their peers, angry subjects estimated their chances to be much lower than did neutral subjects. And when asked to assess the likelihood of obtaining a job with a good salary, having their work recognized with an award, owning their own home, or having a gifted child, they estimated their own chances of success to be higher than their peers.<sup>70</sup>

68. In a few studies, anger has been elicited (6) by having subjects adopt an angry facial pose and hold it for a period of time. For example, Keltner and associates instructed subjects to "(a) pull their eye-brows down, (b) raise their upper eyelids, (c) move their lower lip up and press their lips together, and (d) clench their hands and teeth." The results were comparable to those generated by methods 1 and 2. However, since method 6 does not generate an instance of what we have described above as 'moral' anger, I shall leave it aside in the discussion that follows. See Dacher Keltner, Phoebe Ellsworth, and Kari Edwards, "Beyond Simple Pessimism: Effects of Sadness and Anger on Social Perception," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64 (1993): 740–52, at 748.

69. Jennifer Lerner and Dacher Keltner, "Beyond Valence: Toward a Model of Emotion-Specific Influences on Judgment and Choice," *Cognition and Emotion* 14 (2000): 473–93.

70. Jennifer Lerner and Dacher Keltner, "Fear, Anger, and Risk," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81 (2001): 146–59. As Neil Weinstein has shown, there is a general tendency for people to have an inflated sense of their own future prospects ("Unrealistic

Anger alters people's judgments regarding what is happening around them. When angry, people are more likely to see what they take to be hostile stimuli than they are to notice features of their environment they do not take to be hostile.<sup>71</sup> They are less likely to see the ways in which the meaning of an event, action, or utterance might be ambiguous and thus reasonably subject to more than one interpretation.<sup>72</sup> They are more likely to interpret unpleasant events as being due to the actions or intentions of responsible agents (as opposed to causes that are not agent related).<sup>73</sup> They are more likely to believe objectionable actions stem from lasting dispositional traits than from temporary or accidental qualities.<sup>74</sup> They are "slower to associate positive traits than negative traits with members of an out-group."<sup>75</sup> And they are less likely to trust others.<sup>76</sup>

When angry, people tend to see themselves as exceptional, more capable and insightful, and less biased than others.<sup>77</sup> Contrary to this self-perception, however, Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer found that, when confronted by mixed evidence, angry subjects were more likely (than sad or neutral subjects) to judge an accused party to be guilty if his name was Juan Garcia than if it was John Garner.<sup>78</sup> Angry subjects are also more inclined (than sad or neutral subjects) to judge an argument persuasive if it purports to come from an "expert source."<sup>79</sup> In other words, angry subjects appear to give more weight to stereotypes than do sad or neutral subjects.

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Optimism about Future Life Events," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 [1980]: 806–20). Anger appears to increase this tendency.

71. On the plus side, in some circumstances, this tendency may work against the effects of confirmation bias. See Young et al., "Mad Enough," 16.

72. The effect is even more pronounced if the person who is angry is also habitually aggressive. Larissa Tiedens, "The Effect of Anger on the Hostile Inferences of Aggressive and Nonaggressive People: Specific Emotions, Cognitive Processing, and Chronic Accessibility," *Motivation and Emotion* 25 (2001): 233–51.

73. Keltner, Ellsworth, and Edwards, "Beyond Simple Pessimism," 745.

74. *Ibid.*, 751.

75. Lerner and Tiedens, "Portrait," 121.

76. Jennifer Dunn and Maurice Schweitzer, "Feeling and Believing: The Influence of Emotion on Trust," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88 (2005): 736–48. See also Galen Bodenhausen, Lori Sheppard, and Geoffrey Kramer, "Negative Affect and Social Judgment: The Differential Impact of Anger and Sadness," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 24 (1994): 45–62, at 56–57.

77. Lerner and Tiedens, "Portrait," 124.

78. Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer, "Negative Affect," 50–51.

79. *Ibid.*, 55. Wesley Moons and Diane Mackie have recently argued that the persuasive influence of "expert" sources on the angry is not as damning as Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer initially suggest (Moons and Mackie, "Thinking Straight While Seeing Red: The Influence of Anger on Information Processing," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33 [2007]: 706–20, at 714–15). Their findings may reduce the charges, but they are still a long way from exonerating the angry reasoner on this point.



Anger also influences judgments regarding which moral projects are worth undertaking. David DeSteno and his associates found that angry subjects responded more favorably (than sad or neutral subjects) to a proposed tax increase that was justified on the grounds that it would help the state catch and punish more criminals. They responded less favorably (both as compared to sad or neutral subjects and as compared to their own responses to punitive projects) to a tax increase that was justified on the grounds that it would help pay for more emergency vehicles to serve the general public, medical clinics for special-needs infants, and heating subsidies for senior citizens who were at risk of freezing to death in the winter because they could not afford to heat their homes.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Small and Lerner found that angry individuals were significantly less supportive of welfare measures than people in a sad or neutral emotional condition.<sup>81</sup> And Gault and Sabini found that, when angry, people were more supportive of punitive measures for persons they judged responsible for inflicting undeserved harm than of welfare-enhancing measures for persons who had suffered undeserved harm.<sup>82</sup>

What these studies show is that 'moral' anger can have an adverse effect on an agent's judgment across a wide range of morally relevant domains. Not only is the person who is angry about something at work more likely to come home and kick the cat, but, these studies suggest, he or she is more likely to believe the cat deserves it. So even if 'moral' anger has the epistemic merits that advocates have claimed on its behalf, these are accompanied by enough epistemic liabilities to temper whatever enthusiasm we might have felt for it. Nevertheless, the defender of 'moral' anger might still attempt to salvage the epistemic case for anger. So far, she might observe, the judgment-skewing effects of anger have concerned cases where anger about one thing (transgression X) alters a person's judgment about something else (situation Y). Admittedly, this is an unfortunate side effect of 'moral' anger. But, the anger advocate might insist, with respect to transgression X itself, 'moral' anger is epistemically advantaged.

However, even with respect to judgments regarding transgression X, we have reason to doubt the epistemic credentials of 'moral' anger. First, anger is a defensive response system that works on "the smoke

80. David DeSteno, Richard Petty, Derek Rucker, Duane Wegener, and Julia Braverman, "Discrete Emotions and Persuasion: The Role of Emotion-Induced Expectancies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86 (2004): 43–56.

81. Deborah Small and Jennifer Lerner, "Emotional Policy: Personal Sadness and Anger Shape Judgments about a Welfare Case," *Political Psychology* 29 (2008): 149–68.

82. Barbara Gault and John Sabini, "The Roles of Empathy, Anger, and Gender in Predicting Attitudes toward Punitive, Reparative, and Preventative Public Policies," *Cognition and Emotion* 14 (2000): 495–520.

detector principle." When responding to potential threats, it is naturally set to generate many more false alarms than true ones.<sup>83</sup> Second, anger works with a sort of feedback loop in which "the more anger one feels, the more one perceives others as responsible for a negative event; and the more one perceives others as responsible for a negative event, the more anger one feels."<sup>84</sup> As a result, at time  $t_3$  the angry person (A) is likely to be more confident in her belief that the other person (B) is blameworthy than she was earlier, at  $t_1$ , even though she has obtained no new evidence in the interval regarding B's actions, character, or motives. Third, persons who have become angry are generally less responsive to counterevidence, becoming less likely to revise their plans or reconsider their judgments even when presented with data that under other circumstances they would find compelling.<sup>85</sup> When these effects are combined with those noted above, the epistemic case would seem to speak against rather than for 'moral' anger.<sup>86</sup>

Read against the backdrop of the psychological research on anger and judgment, what might have seemed an epistemic liability of meekness can now be seen as a strength. In a sermon published in 1747, John Wesley highlights the epistemic value of meekness. Like Joseph Butler and a number of other eighteenth-century preachers, Wesley interprets Jesus's beatification of the meek in Matthew 5:5 in the light of instructions given in the following verses regarding loving one's enemies and not being angry.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, using 'love' to

83. Randolph Nesse suggests that defense systems like anger evolved to work on the smoke detector principle because, in the environment in which they originated, the costs associated with false alarms were much lower than the benefits of avoiding certain kinds of risks ("Natural Selection and the Regulation of Defenses: A Signal Detections Analysis of the Smoke Detector Principle," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 26 [2005]: 88–105). But, of course, there is no reason to think that this prehistoric cost-benefit ratio still holds for someone living in a contemporary, peaceful, moderately just, law-governed state.

84. Lerner and Tiedens, "Portrait," 118; Quigley and Tedeschi, "Mediating Effects," 1996.

85. Dolf Zillmann and Joanne Cantor, "Effect of Timing of Information about Mitigating Circumstances on Emotional Responses to Provocation and Retaliatory Behavior," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 12 (1976): 38–55; Ming-Hong Tsai and Maia Young, "Anger, Fear, and Escalation of Commitment," *Cognition and Emotion* 24 (2010): 962–73.

86. That is not to deny that we should pay attention to instances of anger in order to ascertain whether there are, on this or that occasion, good reasons for it.

87. These, in turn, he interprets in the light of Paul's famous discourse on love in I Corinthians 13. In his sermon on the latter, Wesley frequently uses the terms 'meek' and 'meekness' as a way of designating the character trait possessed by those who exemplify the kind of love of which Paul is speaking in his first letter to the Corinthians ("On Charity," in *Works of John Wesley*, 7:51–56). Butler, likewise, characterizes I Cor. 13:4–6 as a discourse on meekness (*Fifteen Sermons*, xii.148).

refer to the character trait possessed by the meek and merciful, he writes:

Love "believeth all things." It is always willing to think the best; to put the most favourable construction on everything. It is ever ready to believe whatever may tend to the advantage of anyone's character. . . . It is glad to excuse whatever is amiss; to condemn the offender as little as possible; and to make all the allowance for human weakness which can be done without betraying the truth. . . . And when it can no longer believe, then love "hopeth all things." Is any evil related of any man? Love hopes that the relation is not true, that the thing related was never done. Is it certain it was?—"But perhaps it was not done with such circumstances as are related; so that, allowing the fact, there is room to hope it was not so ill as it is represented." Was the action apparently undeniably evil? Love hopes the intention was not so. Is it clear the design was evil too?—"Yet might it not spring from the settled temper of the heart, but from some vehement temptation, which hurried the man beyond himself."<sup>88</sup>

Just as the meek are slow to anger, they are slow to condemn. They judge, whenever possible, "in Favour of the Offender."<sup>89</sup> The point is not that they turn a blind eye toward wrongdoing. They are as capable and as prepared as anyone else to judge that an act has caused an undeserved harm and is, in that sense, a wrong act. But in the absence of overwhelming evidence, they are unwilling to draw unfavorable conclusions about the agent's motives. This characteristic "freedom from mistrust, and disposition to believe well of our neighbour," Butler suggests, extends so far that the meek would "rather be deceived, than be suspicious."<sup>90</sup>

One might worry that such a disposition is at odds with epistemic virtue. But, in light of the preceding discussion of 'moral' anger, there is good reason to think the disposition Wesley and Butler describe will make the meek more, rather than less, accurate judges of blameworthiness. The person who is disposed to interpret the other's actions as charitably as he can (in the light of the evidence) and is slow to think ill of the other is less likely to fall prey to the inflated view of self and deflated view of other that so often accompanies anger.

88. John Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount 2," in *Works of John Wesley*, 5:275.

89. Bundy, *Sermons*, 209. Seneca praises a like tendency in *On Anger*, ii.22.

90. Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, xii.148.

And the person who is not easily provoked will be less susceptible to anger's other judgment-skewing effects.<sup>91</sup>

Without yet considering the communicative and motivational claims, I think the epistemic advantages of meekness over even modest, later-self, or bystander anger at moral wrongdoing already generate a strong presumptive case in favor of a meek rather than an angry response to wrongdoing. So I shall devote considerably less time to discussing communication and the motivation to resist wrongdoers. However, in each of these areas as well, there are a number of things that speak in favor of meekness. Often the presence of anger interferes with the reception of its moral message by triggering a defensive response that prevents the person at whom it is directed from attending to the substantive moral claim that stands behind the anger. So one of the first things couples therapists teach their clients is how to communicate their objections to an act or a pattern of behavior in their partner without expressing anger, because it increases the likelihood that their message will be heard and understood. This suggests that the communicative function that anger's advocates have associated with it can not only be performed without 'moral' anger but can often be performed more effectively in its absence. The point is not that meekness by itself will perform the function of communicating one's moral objection. Rather, it is that being slow to anger will enable the meek agent to use some other tool—typically language—to communicate his or her moral objection more effectively. Of course, this is not to deny that getting the desired uptake on the part of those to

91. Someone might, in light of Wesley's use of the term 'love', worry that meekness would introduce its own judgment-skewing effect. There is, after all, a considerable literature on the biasing effects of love. However, the advocate of meekness need not be troubled by this worry. The word 'love' has a notoriously wide scope. What Wesley uses the word to designate is quite different from what is being studied in the literature on the biasing effects of love. The latter has focused on the experience of being "in love," and the most pronounced biasing effects are, unsurprisingly, to be found in the early stages of infatuation. Later stages of romantic love (sometimes called companionate love) do not have the same effects (see Garth Fletcher and Patrick Kerr, "Through the Eyes of Love: Reality and Illusion in Intimate Relationships," *Psychological Bulletin* 136 [2010]: 627–58 for a comprehensive literature review). By contrast, in recent studies conducted by Vladas Griskevicius and associates, those primed to feel "nurturant love" or "compassion"—"the feeling of love and concern for another's well-being, typified by one's emotions when seeing an infant, small child, or baby animal"—were much better at discriminating between strong and weak arguments than were persons in a neutral emotional state (Vladas Griskevicius, Michelle Shiota, and Samantha Neufeld, "Influence of Different Positive Emotions on Persuasion Processing: A Functional Evolutionary Approach," *Emotion* 10 [2010]: 190–206). When Wesley uses 'love', he is not referring to an affective state but, rather, to a trait of character. Insofar as that trait is commonly associated with any of the affective states that we commonly call 'love'—a point to which Wesley does not speak—they would, no doubt, be more like compassion than infatuation.

whom one is trying to communicate may sometimes be difficult for the person who manifests the virtue of meekness. But in this respect, meekness is in no worse a position than anger, whose moral message also frequently fails to get the desired uptake, as Marilyn Frye and others have aptly observed.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, let us consider the role of anger in motivating agents to resist wrongdoing and act in ways that lead to an improved social condition. The clearest and most straightforward case supporting anger's motivational benefits pertains to contexts of physical aggression. From an evolutionary perspective, it is not hard to imagine the potential adaptive advantages of the sudden adrenaline rush and corresponding suspension of risk aversion that are associated with anger in these sorts of contexts. However, even if anger was a useful tool for our prehistoric ancestors in contexts of (potential) physical aggression, it does not follow that it is our best tool for handling such cases. On the contrary, it is commonly noted by those with training in the martial arts that being slow to anger can improve one's ability to resist an aggressor. Consequently, in *A Book of Five Rings*—which is unlikely to be confused with the milquetoast manual—Miyamoto Musashi advises, “In strategy your spiritual bearing must not be any different from normal. Both in fighting and in everyday life you should be determined though calm.”<sup>93</sup> Given that it is not instinctive, learning how to resist wrongdoers in a way that is calm, kindly,<sup>94</sup> and effective may require training. But insofar as acting virtuously is commonly something we must learn and in which we must be trained, this does not, of itself, speak against meekness.

What about when we move away from isolated instances of individual aggression and toward conditions of systematic oppression? Macalester Bell has argued that in these cases, the value of moral anger becomes especially salient, because anger can help motivate the

92. Even if the desired communication were more difficult to pull off for the meek, by itself that would not pose a problem, since ease has seldom been advanced as one of virtue's selling points. As Claudia Mills puts it, “No one ever promised us that combating evil would be a piece of cake” (“Goodness as Weapon,” *Journal of Philosophy* 92 [1995]: 485–99, at 490).

93. Miyamoto Musashi, *A Book of Five Rings*, trans. Victor Harris (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1974), 53. I am grateful to Craig MacDougall for first bringing this point to my attention.

94. Admittedly, the kindness condition is not one of Musashi's concerns. But I am not claiming that he is advocating the virtue described in Sec. I. I am merely claiming that he and the tradition he represents provide us with fairly compelling evidence that anger does not provide the most effective tool for resisting an aggressor. Indeed, the claim is somewhat stronger: anger can interfere with our ability to resist an aggressor.

oppressed to resist their oppressor.<sup>95</sup> And surely she is right that anger has often motivated those who have been subjected to systematic injustice to attempt to correct these injustices. Does this give us a reason to prefer 'moral' anger to meekness in these situations?

It is by no means obvious that the answer is yes. The motivational history of anger at oppression is much more checkered than it is sometimes represented as being. Often when anger cannot be directed at its proper object—for example, because the object is too powerful or too distant—it gets vented on some other object.<sup>96</sup> The handiest substitutes are typically found at home. It is, then, not surprising that the highest rates of child abuse and domestic violence occur within populations that are the victims of systematic injustice.<sup>97</sup> A similar story can be told about anger's role in the violence that members of oppressed groups inflict on each other—outside the home but still within the neighborhood, so to speak.<sup>98</sup> What these patterns illustrate is that the motivating force of anger in response to oppression, like other kinds of anger, often leads to something decidedly different from the rectification of injustice.

In short, anger—even the anger of bystanders and later-selves—is an unreliable mechanism. It may, at times, alert us to the presence of a moral problem in our vicinity, but given that it is prone to generating false alarms and, further, that while under its influence agents are less inclined to revise their beliefs, the information it conveys will need to be subjected to critical scrutiny and confirmed by means of some other belief-generating mechanism before it will be reasonable for us to trust it. Anger may, at times, communicate morally significant content to others, but, likewise, it may interfere with such communication because the form in which it is delivered draws their attention away from the substance of the message. Anger may, at times,

95. Bell returns to this thought repeatedly throughout "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression," but see, in particular, her marvelous discussion of Frederick Douglass on 166–67.

96. See Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 122.

97. See Alean Al-Krenawi, John Graham, and Mahmud Sewail, "Tomorrow's Players under Occupation: An Analysis of the Association of Political Violence with Psychological Functioning and Domestic Violence among Palestinian Youth," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 77 (2007): 427–33; and John Powell, "The Impact of Societal Systems on Black Male Violence," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma* 16 (2008): 311–29. Relatedly, William Oliver and Creasie Hairston have found that "displaced anger about being in prison" is a major contributing factor to domestic violence perpetrated by former prison inmates against their wives or girlfriends ("Intimate Partner Violence during the Transition from Prison to the Community: Perspectives of Incarcerated African American Men," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma* 16 [2008]: 258–76, at 269).

98. This is not to say that anger is the only factor that contributes to child abuse, domestic, or in-group violence among those who are oppressed. But it is clearly one of the contributing factors.

motivate people to resist injustice and oppression, but it may also motivate them to perpetrate injustices and oppress others. While a person's social position or relational history may make their anger warranted, that does not necessarily make it wise.

Rather than presenting a presumptive case against meekness, a close look at anger highlights the need for a virtue to correct it. Shaftesbury, Butler, Hutcheson, Hume, and their contemporaries called that virtue meekness. I have offered a number of reasons for thinking that it is a virtue we, too, should endorse. Nothing in what I have said precludes the possibility that there is another virtue that also pertains to anger. For all I have said, there may be a virtue like the one Bell calls "appropriate anger" that works in tandem with meekness or that provides a virtuous alternative to meekness (if one is a pluralist of a certain stripe). Neither have I specified *how slow* to anger the meek will be. Hume, for all his enthusiasm for meekness, certainly did not think that being meek precluded one from *ever* getting angry: "We are not," he says, "to imagine, that all the angry passions are vicious."<sup>99</sup> But whether he is right and, if so, which of them are not vicious, and under what circumstances, are questions for another occasion.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

"Blessed are the meek." In their discussions of meekness, Hume and his contemporaries draw our attention to a much neglected but remarkably important virtue. Admittedly, it is out of step with a segment of popular culture (ancient and contemporary) which is built around an enthusiasm for vengeance. But if, as Foot has suggested, the virtues stand at precisely those locations where untutored human nature is commonly inclined to get it wrong, this fact should not surprise us.<sup>100</sup> Rather, it suggests we have all the more reason to revive the virtue of meekness.

99. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.3.7.

100. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 8.