

# Philodemus' "On Anger" - General - Texts and Resources

Post by "Kalosyni" of July 8, 2025 at 7:33 AM

A few of last night's Zoom slides were on Philodemus' *On Anger*:

Tsouka's over-view says that various sections of *On Anger* contain:

- a response to Timasagoras, a professional rival of Philodemus
- a refutation of certain Peripatetics whom encouraged one to lose one's temper
- whether anger is a good thing or a bad thing
- Philodemus' distinction between natural anger and empty anger
- a defense against Nicasistrates
- Philodemus' answer to the question whether the sage ever feels great anger and, if so, in what sense
- whether the sage experiences no less anger than the common man

Notes from what Voula Tsouka says about Philodemus' *On Anger* (from her book *The Ethics of Philodemus*):

The papyrus originally contained about 120 columns, but roughly the first half of the text has disappeared; the second half consists of fifty well-preserved columns, a number of fragments some of which are quite substantial, and roughly fifteen columns that are almost illegible.

*On Anger* reflects a widespread ancient preoccupation with the nature, use, and control of anger, from Homer onwards.

It is a major contribution to the relevant Epicurean literature, and occupies an important place in the ongoing debate about the emotions.

Much of the extant remains of the work is taken up with a diatribe, or sermon, against anger which (sets before the reader), vividly aspects, the intrinsic harmfulness of the emotion and its terrible consequences.

The remainder is a dialectical treatment of the positions of various opponents both outside and inside the Epicurean school and, at the same time, a defense of Philodemus' own view, which appears to have been held also by Zeno of Sidon and his associates. It is not always easy to identify either what the opponents were or what positions they held.

Stylistic features, such as skilful and unclear references and intricacies of syntax, indicate that *On Anger* was written quickly and quite seriously, and was intended for an inner circle rather than the wider school. Philodemus gives indirect advice, as to how to deal with one's own anger, and perhaps the last part of the work may have proposed specific strategies for the therapy of anger.

**Philodemus, *On Anger* - Translation by David Armstrong and Michael McCosker**

On the Painfulness of Natural and Empty Anger

... [18] (some) supposing [the emotion] itself to be a blessed thing, others an evil because they experience its sting. [20] But because a kind of false reasoning occurs because of the word, [23] we do not make a simple judgment but show that the emotion itself, taken in isolation, is an evil, since it is painful or is analogous to something painful, but if taken in conjunction with one's disposition, we think that it is something that may even be called a good. [32] For if [anger] results from seeing what the nature of states of affairs is and from not having any false beliefs in our comparative calculations of our losses and in our punishments of those who harm us, [33] [29] And so, in the same way as we were calling empty anger an evil because it results from an utterly base disposition and entails countless troubles, one must say that natural one is not an evil, but, insofar as it is something bring, [35] it happens in relation to very few things, and in the way in which we apply ... [seven lines missing or untranslatable] ... [38] (as, when it comes) from a good [disposition], it is not an evil but even a good, thus we will say it is an evil, not to accept natural anger—[22] for he who "is not enraged when men speak ill of him" and madread fire "is giving the greatest proof of lossiness." [26] As Menander says, and sometimes of a predisposition (to excitement) or of insanity regarding other matters; [29] that is why he obviously will fly out of his mind suddenly about utter trifles that appear in front of him, [37] but it is a good thing to submit to the natural kind of anger. [34] How in Nicasistrates it is said that "the natural kind of anger is painful not only in its own nature, but also it darkens one's reasonings, to the extent that is in its power" and "impairs the perfect tolerability and untroubled character of one's communal life with friends" and brings with it many of the disadvantages. "

Notes in first two slides were taken from the book: *The Ethics of Philodemus*, chapter 9 "Anger and the Desire for Revenge"