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Good Anger and the Benefits of Dis-ease: Critical Images of the Body in "The Parson's Tale"

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ABSTRACT

Though coming at the end of the book, the Parson's discussion of *ira*, both its good and bad manifestations, is vital for understanding Chaucer's many depictions of angry characters and enraging situations earlier in *The Canterbury Tales*. But while the Parson devotes only a few lines to *goode ire*, his complex view of anger is illuminated by themes which run throughout his sermon: his negative view of the body and his idea that disease is both a necessary and positive state which makes possible the individual's and the community's progress toward the good. This essay traces the vocabulary and images of health and disease in the Parson's closing sermon in order to examine how his ideas of disease, unease, and pain underpin his view of positive anger and its central role in the life of spiritually healthy individuals and communities. Applying the Parson's concepts to the cases of the Pardoner and of the Clerk's Griselda, I argue that both cases can be read as Chaucer's meditation on the negative and positive role that anger plays in the physical and spiritual health of individuals as well as of communities and of fellowships.

KEYWORDS: *ira* (anger), disease and health in the Middle Ages, images of the body, "The Parson's Tale," the Pardoner, "The Clerk's Tale" (Griselda)

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In medieval iconography, anger is often personified as a body wounding itself.[1] The sermon tradition features many *exempla* highlighting the violent, negative consequences of anger for the body, mind, and soul of the angry individual, as well as for the well-being of those who are either the intentional targets or the unintended casualties of such wrath. Yet, like Aristotle, Aquinas, and Dante before him, Chaucer's Parson struggles in his sermon with anger because, unlike the other sins, *ira* does not define the excess of a good (as lust is the excess of love); anger alone, he says, has two "maneres" and so can be either good or bad (538).[2] In acknowledging the positive dimension of wrath, the Parson reflects the Augustinian and Thomist anti-Stoic/anti-Senecan view of anger which preceded him,[3] even as the bulk of his discussion of anger lays out negative examples and negative consequences of anger. The Parson's portrayal of anger is largely negative, but is also part of a broader consideration of sin as disease—and of dis-ease, in its non-medical context, as a necessary state for penitence. This complex treatment of anger and of disease in "The Parson's Tale" indicates that Chaucer was, like Seneca, concerned with the danger posed by anger, especially to the body politic by angry Canterbury pilgrims and angry characters in pilgrim tales who weaken and debilitate their communities and fellowship;[4] but he was also aware, like Aquinas and Gregory, of the positive anger that underpins divine (and human) justice, and fascinated by characters (like Griselda) whose total lack of anger raises

[1] Medieval iconography of anger was influenced by Prudentius' image in *Psychomachia* of Anger's suicide. Many images of Anger are of a woman tearing hair and clothes, such as Giotto's fourteenth-century frieze in Padua. For a discussion of anger and this image in the "Melibee," see Griffith, "Anger with God and Man."

[2] All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*. Numbers in parentheses indicate line numbers in Chaucer's works, not page numbers. This is also true of the references to "The Parson's Tale," even though it is a prose work. *The Riverside Chaucer* follows this standard practice in Chaucer studies. Each line of Chaucer's poetry has a line number, and each sentence in his prose has a number as well.

[3] See Aquinas' refutation of the Stoic/Senecan argument that anger is always a sin and is reserved for God alone (*On*, q. 12, art. 1, s.c. 4 and resp. ad obj. 14); also his citation of Gregory the Great's distinction between *ira per zelum* (righteous anger "through zeal") and *ira per vitium* (wicked anger "through sin") (*ST* 2a2ae, q. 158, art. 1, resp. ad. obj. 2; q. 158, art. 2, resp.; and *On*, q. 12, art. 1, s.c. 3). For the Church fathers' sermons on God's anger, see sermons v, viii.8, xxxii, and xl.8 by Augustine (*Sermons on Selected New Testament Lessons* in volume 6 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* first series); and homilies xvi.8 and lxviii by Chrysostom (Volume 10 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* first series).

[4] The subject of anger arises in individual tales and pilgrim quarrels (the Friar's and Summoner's tales and the Friar-Summoner quarrel, for example). On angry pilgrim relations, see Tupper. On pilgrim rivalry, particularly in terms of class, see Georgianna. A useful survey of anger in the tales is Mann, "Anger." See also Shaw's works on wrath and on spiritual homicide. For essays on anger and society in the Middle Ages, see the collection edited by Rosenwein.

questions about their sanity as well as their potential saintliness. Focusing on the language of health, disease, and the body in "The Parson's Tale," this essay examines the intersection of the physical and the metaphysical dimensions of medieval anger; and, in particular, explores the degree to which anger was understood to be at once detrimental to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the individual, and yet also essential for a just and thriving society.

In section I, I survey the Parson's use of vocabulary related to health and disease. Section II examines how his discussion of sin is influenced by literal and metaphoric references to the body; section III then focuses specifically on anger and the body. In section IV, having established that the Parson is dismissive of healthy bodies, I argue that disease (or dis-ease, what he terms *mysese*), both physical and mental, is necessary in his conception of the pursuit of a good, healthy spiritual life; and that this need explains in part his understanding of good anger. In light of the Parson's understanding of the value and necessity of dis-ease and of anger, in section V I examine the cases of the Pardoner and of the Clerk's Griselda, arguing that both can be read as Chaucer's meditation on the positive and negative role that anger plays in the physical and spiritual health of individuals, as well as of communities and of fellowships.

I. The vocabulary of health and disease in "The Parson's Tale"

A vocabulary related to health and sickness runs throughout Chaucer, perhaps not surprisingly given the range of characters and situations that appear in his work.[5] But the specific occurrences of the words and the contexts in which they appear are often worth examining. In particular, the Parson's use of these words is telling. His "tale"[6] is a sermon about penitence and his focus more on the soul than the body. Nonetheless, he does make use of vocabulary and images related to the body, both healthy and unhealthy, including: *disese*,

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[5] For other discussions of health and disease in Chaucer, see Gallacher.

[6] In his introduction to "The Parson's Tale," while ultimately concluding that Chaucer is the probable author, Siegfried Wenzel notes that: "Stylistically, the tale is frequently uninspiring and awkward, with faulty or incorrect transitions . . . and blatant errors" and that the "inorganic, mechanical, and crude" handling of the source material might suggest that someone other than Chaucer was the author (956). I find that, issues of style aside, the content of the Parson's sermon—particularly, as I discuss below, his comments on anger—serve not as a conclusion but as a point of return back into the earlier tales. The Parson's view is never necessarily Chaucer's, but his tract on sin and penitence is central to examining Chaucer's ethics. On the importance and function of "The Parson's Tale" as the final tale in *The Canterbury Tales*, see Gross.

ese, *phisik*, *sik*, *siknesse*, *humours*, *Galien*, *mysese*, *remedie*, *medicine*, *hele* (n.), *helen* (v.), and *maladye*.

His understanding and use of the concepts of *ese*, *disese*, and (one of his favorite words) *mysese* are most relevant to the role of anger in a healthy community. But first, let me note the potential significance of the Parson's use of some of those other, more specifically medical, terms. He does not talk much about medical doctors (not using the word *leche*, and using *doctour* to refer to theologians rather than medical doctors). *Medicine* is used generally in the sense of aid (470), or metaphorically (for example, love as medicine for *envye* [531]). Generally, *syk* is a contrast to *hoole*, as in the marriage vow phrase "in sickness and in health" or in the difference between ordinary healthy people and "the sick" who need comfort when they are ill in bed or hospital (961, 376). But in contrast to this basic distinction is 1078, which describes the body as by nature sick, an interesting passage that illustrates the Parson's view of what sickness and health mean more broadly in the fallen world, a point I will return to later. Health (*hele*) is a good and a gift from God (153, 452). Acknowledging the role of the humours (826, 913) and pointing out on occasion how the sins can be bad for the body,[7] the Parson cautions against focusing too much on the health of the body (831), and usually notes how the body is bad for the soul in that it creates the potential for sin. In his sole reference to Galen, the Parson does not dispute Galen's knowledge of the body or Galen's suggestion that abstinence is a good remedy for gluttony, but still invokes Augustine (831) to remind us that the primary purpose of abstinence is to save the soul, not the body.

Most striking is that, unlike the Pardoner, the Parson avoids the word *cure* as well as *warishen* (to cure). He prefers the word *remedye* when giving advice to the penitent on how to deal with sin, and his description of each sin is followed by a section titled *remedium contra* ("remedie agayns"). In Chaucer, *cure* can mean either "cure" or "care." When the Parson does use *cure*, the context is one of care, concern, or interest (781). The one time he uses *warishen*, he is talking about a cure in the sense of a "cure-all," a permanent healing of a specific wound (998). This sense of "cure-all," of a final solution to a problem, is usually how the words *cure* and *warishen* are used in Chaucer: frequently in

[7] At 826 the Parson is discussing gluttony, and the negative effect overeating has on the body: "whan, thurgh the grete habundaunce of his mete, the humours in his body been distempred" (826). At 913 the Parson discusses a cause of erotic dreams: "Somtyme of langwissynge of body, for the humours been to ranke and to habundaunt in the body of man" (913).

the Melibee[8] and notably in the Pardoner's tale where the Pardoner offers his pardon as a spiritual cure-all (906) and uses the phrase "loss of honeste cure" to mean loss of self-respect, of care for self (557). By contrast, the Parson's preferred term, *remedye*, carries the sense of temporary relief, of a strategy to be employed in an ongoing and never ending struggle. The distinction is present in modern idiomatic English, too: a cold remedy versus a cure for the common cold. For the Parson, sin is not like a wound which can be healed, closed, or gradually disappeared; the soul is not like the body, the wounds and diseases of which can be cured in this ultimate sense.

The body itself is the cause of this perpetual state of conflict. From Adam "fleshly descended be we alle, and engendred of vile and corrupt mateere" (333). The soul once "put in oure body, right anon is contract original synne" (334). It is this inherent corruption of the body, which cannot be healed in the fallen world, that makes it impossible for the individual to escape temptation: to the individual "the flessh [is] disobeisaunt" (338); therefore "it is impossible but he be tempted somtime and moeved in his flessh to synne. / And this . . . may nat faille as longe as he lyveth" (339-40). Paul's contemptuous view of the body (342, 344) informs much of the Parson's negative portrayal of the body in his tale. The Parson is not especially interested in medicine and health because the body, by its very nature, is sick and cannot be healed. The penitential process by which the individual repairs his sinful soul—this process which is the focus of his sermon—must be "continueel" (305) and life-long precisely because the body cannot be repaired and healed of its essential corruption.

II. The sins and the body

The Parson notes the way in which sins have a negative effect on the body. But, at the same time, the Parson's discussion underscores his view that not only is the body not good for the soul, but that bodily health is not always a good.

Of the seven deadly sins, sloth, gluttony, and lust are the most closely associated with the body: the lazy body, the hungry body, the lustful body. A sin negatively affects the body and is manifest there: sloth is evidenced by

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[8] For *warish*, see "Melibee" 982, 1015, 1017, 1277, 1286, 1290. Also "The Franklin's Tale" 856, 1138, 1162; and *Book of the Duchess* 1104. For *cure* meaning "cure," not "care," see: "Melibee" 1017, 1282; also *Parliament of Fowls* 128 and *Boece*, book 1, prose 1, 71.

"sloggy slombrynge, which maketh a man be hevy and dul in body and in soule" (706); gluttony by drunkenness which disrupts the rational faculties (822) and memory (827), and by overeating which unbalances the humours (826); and lust, pursuing "flesshly delit" (904), by the obvious sexual arousal and impulse to have sex (862), coming after "lookynge" (853), "touchynge" (854), and "kissynge" (856).

Hot passion is ultimately desiccating, a potential source of life (as it can result in procreation) that simultaneously destroys the body (847-49). Sloth and gluttony also have negative effects on the body (685). Though it ruins the strong arms and hard sinews needed by good laborers, making a man's body feeble and soft (690), sloth (ironically) "werketh to" the death of both body and soul (726). Gluttony's overeating unbalances the humors and dis-tempers the body (826).

Like lust, sloth and gluttony are characterized by physical excess and waste. Each is a threat to work and productive labor, a central principle of the good in the Parson's ethical system: gluttony results in sitting too long at a meal, wasting time (835); lust wastes the "catel" and "substance" of a man, wasting the chance for lawful procreation (848) in useless/wasteful dreams (913); sloth, a "roten-herted" sin (689), generally interferes with (all kinds of) work, "for he loveth no bisynesse at al" (684). These three sins of the body are particularly dangerous to the individual, negatively affecting the physical health of the body and wasting the soul's potential for good and spiritually healthy work.

Pride, envy, and avarice are less obviously fleshly sins, but the Parson notes some connections to the body, some literal, some metaphoric. Avarice, for example, is likened to the hunger of wolves (775). Sometimes avarice, especially in the case of simony (turning the spiritual into the physical), is motivated by a desire to help blood relatives, one's own flesh, as it were: "Flesshly freendes . . . as by kyndrede" (784-85); or by a "wikked flesshly affeccioun that they han unto the persone" (786).

When discussing envy, the Parson, following Augustine, defines it generally as "sorwe of oother mennes wele, and joye of othere mennes harm," slightly broader than Aristotle's "sorwe of oother mannes prosperitee" (484). A man's "wele" or "harm" could include the wellness or illness of his body. But the Parson is not specific and does not, for example, discuss envy of another's beauty. Aside from the physical damage an envious man may do to the object of his envy—poisoning and slaying his animals (514) or otherwise doing

damage to them or to his body (520)—envy seems one of the least physical and fleshly of the sins. For that reason, the end of his discussion is especially interesting, because there he employs a rare metaphorical use of "medicine": "Certes thanne is love the medicine that casteth out the venym of Envye fro mannes herte" (531). This makes envy the only sin which he describes figuratively as a physical or medical disease, a fever in need of medicine. That may be because, as the Parson notes, envy is unlike other sins: it has no "delit in itself" (in and of itself); only in anguish and sorrow (490). This implies that the envious man is always unhappy, restless, dis-eased, like someone with an unending physical ache, a cold they just cannot shake. Perhaps for the Parson, this spiritual state is similar to that physical state in which the humors are out of whack and the body is sick, making illness a good figure for this particular sin.[9]

As for pride, the Parson criticizes at length offensive displays of bodies and of clothes that embody the sin of pride. Condemning "outrageous array of clothyng" (412), the Parson, for whom moderation is almost always a virtue, objects to unnecessary excess ("superfluitee") as well as insufficient covering or "inordinat scantnesse," quoting Gregory's phrase (414). As in the case of lust, sloth, and gluttony, waste—in terms of wasted material, wasted labor and time—characterizes some of the worst aspects of sinful pride: cloth, which could be given to the poor, is "wasted" as it trails in the mud (419). The body and the clothes become nearly inseparable, both images of waste and of sickness: a long section (422-31) laments how such clothes (tight and/or revealing) expose the body in negative ways (422-24), to the point of seeming "lik the maladie of hernia" (423); how the mixed colors (red, white, black) tightly wrapping private areas give the impression of (sexual) disease (425-27); how clothes that, presumably designed to attract positive attention to individuals proud of their body, reveal "buttokes" which are "horrible for to see" because they are a reminder of how foul bodies "purgen hir stynkynge ordure" (428-29). We should not take pride in the goods of a healthy body: "the moore that the body is hool, the moore be we in peril to falle" (458). One reason the well-born should not be too proud of their birth (of their "gentrie" [461]) is because such accidents of birth do not change the fundamental nature of the

[9] Envy produces a negative state of dissatisfaction and unease. But, as discussed below, the Parson also values states of productive unease.

corrupt body which defines the earthly existence of all individuals (458-60): "alle we been of o nature, roten and corrupt, bothe riche and povre" (461).

The premise here is that, by nature, the body is not good for the soul, and thus health in the abstract in not necessarily a good:

> Now as for to speken of goodes of nature, God woot that somtyme we han hem in nature as muche to oure damage as to oure profit. / As for to speken of heele of body, certes it passeth ful lightly and eek it is ful ofte enchesoun of the siknesse of oure soule. For, God woot, the flessh is a ful greet enemy to the soule, and therfore, the moore that the body is hool, the moore be we in peril to falle. / Eke for to pride hym in his strengthe of body, it is an heigh folye. For certes, the flessh coveiteth agayn the spirit, and ay the moore strong that the flessh is, the sorier may the soule be. / And over al this, strengthe of body and worldly hardynesse causeth ful ofte many a man to peril and meschaunce. (457-60)

For the Parson, healthy bodies are not only a less important good than healthy souls but often contribute to the sickness of soul: the "heele of body" is "ful ofte enchesoun [cause/reason/occasion] of the siknesse of our soule" (458). Only after the penitent's honest contrition leads him to heaven will the body and soul be reconciled, for only in heaven will the corrupt body be redeemed and be as pure as the contrite soul (1076-80): "ther as the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne . . ." (1078). Such a state is purchased by suffering and unease in this world: "the plentee of joye [achieved] by hunger and thurst, and the reste [achieved] by travaille" (1080).

III. Anger and the body

Like the other sins, anger can lead to sickness of the body. It also puts the bodies of others in jeopardy. But as in the Parson's discussion of other sins, in the sermon on anger we see further evidence of how the Parson de-emphasizes the value of healthy bodies.

Where envy is figured as a disease, anger is repeatedly associated with a fire (546-48, 551, 554). Behind this metaphor is perhaps the idea that anger is

connected to blood and to heat in the theory of the humors.[10] Further, heated, agitated blood in the heart affects the capacity for reason and moderate action: "the herte of man, by eschawfynge and moevynge of his blood, wexeth so trouble that he is out of all juggement of resoun" (537). Important here is that such anger, influenced by the body, is prior to reason and, as such, is a venial sin (541-42). The deadly sin with which the Parson is more concerned is an anger, such as that which seeks vengeance, that lasts beyond the involuntary response of the body and has the consent of reason (543).

Yet elsewhere the Parson suggests that anger robs the individual of his capacity for reason: "It bynymeth from man his wit and his resoun, and al his debonaire lif espiritueel that sholde kepen his soule" (560). This suggests that, in a state of anger, all that is left is the body, or the body without a rational soul, an animal state. Such dehumanizing anger, which persists over time, is presumably different from the venial case of anger, which the Parson calls "sodeyn Ire or hastif Ire" (541) and which is implied to be not only involuntary but momentary. The individual, by not controlling anger, is giving himself up to it, allowing it to take away reason—in effect, giving consent—permitting the de-evolution to an animal state.

Homicide, as a consequence of anger, is discussed in terms of both spiritual homicide (565-70) and bodily homicide (571-79), creating a rhetorical parallel between literal bodies being harmed and the spirit as a body which (figuratively speaking) can be harmed or murdered in a similar way. In the section on cursing, the spirit is again figured as a body: blasphemous swearing is imagined as the dismemberment of Christ's own body (591).

Three other passing references to the body are worth noting. First, while discussing sinners who get angry when asked to confess their sin, the Parson observes that such a sinner will "answeren hokerly and angrily" and try to avoid responsibility by attributing sin to the "unstedefastnesse of his flessh" (584). This points to the sinner's misunderstanding of the connection between body, mind, and sin. At the beginning of his discussion of anger, the Parson himself acknowledges how heated blood and unbalanced humors can cause anger—but for the Parson, this is still sin, albeit a venial one, and the individual is required to confess all his sins, however small (371, 585). Moreover, as his description of anger suggests, most sins related to anger are not of this hasty and sudden

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[10] Citing Aristotle, the Parson notes that *ire* is "the fervant blood of man yquyked in his herte" (536). See "The General Prologue" 419 for the Physician's knowledge of the humours.

kind. Therefore, even if anger begins with the body, the rational mind is responsible for managing that anger, and so the body cannot be used as an excuse for sin (not for the sins of anger, any more than for the sins of lust or of gluttony).

Second, while discussing the sin of chiding and reproach, the Parson warns against reproving someone for an illness of the body: specifically not calling him names derived from "som harm of peyne [physical impairment] that he hath on his body, as 'mesel,' 'croked harlot' . . ." (624): "Now if he repreve hym by harm of peyne, thanne [he] turneth the repreve to Jhesu Crist, for peyne is sent by the rightwys sonde [*righteous dispensation*] of God, and by his suffrance, be it meselrie [*leprosy*], or mayhem [*injury*], or maladie" (625).[11] The Parson's point here seems to be that the individual should not be reproaching another individual for things that are more properly the province of God. More generally, the point that bodily illness or disfigurement are the punishments for sin handed down by God is a reminder that, for the Parson, the body (whether healthy or ill) is not a central concern or at least much less a concern than the rational soul. Bodily health and illness is largely in God's hands; the state of the individual's soul is in the individual's.

Finally, the Parson urges us not to be angry when we experience bodily pain and illness, but to follow the example of Christ, who suffered great physical pain with patience (666). This line is yet another passing reminder that, for the Parson, the body, whether healthy or ill, is only of minor interest and value, presumably because, in contrast to the soul, the body is only temporary and is significant only insofar as it lasts in this brief, mortal world.

IV. Conclusions about the Parson's use of medical vocabulary and references to the body: the value of disease

In general, we can see from his word choice in the passages noted above that the Parson is familiar with the discourse of medicine, with the theory of the humours and ideas of how the body affects behavior and feelings, and with the way in which the sickness of the body can be a metaphor for the sickness of the soul. Nonetheless he downplays that metaphor because he sees the body as fundamentally corrupt and, therefore, not only a threat to the soul, but also of

[11] The words in brackets are modern English glosses of Chaucer's Middle English words. Glosses can be found at the bottom of the page in the *Riverside Chaucer* (308).

much less interest than the soul. He thinks of the soul less as sick or subject to disease (in the medical sense) than as engaged in an ongoing struggle with the body and its temptations to sin. Penitence is not really about healing sickness or curing disease. Nor is the Parson's penitential system of "remedies" about getting healthy. Rather, penitence is part of a life-long path of constant vigilance, and therefore serves as a temporary remedy rather than a permanent cure.

The Parson's interest in disease is non-medical because, for him, *disese* has a broader meaning than the modern sense of disease as "bodily illness." When referring specifically to bodily illness, the Parson uses the terms *siknesse* (341, 607, 625) and *maladye* (625), common terms throughout Chaucer.[12] But *disese* is used more generally for any uncomfortable condition, physical, mental, or spiritual (609). Such use is standard for Chaucer.[13] The Parson actually prefers the term *mysese* (177, 186, 192, 806), which does not appear frequently in other Chaucer texts.[14] In particular *mysese* is a term associated with hell, "the lond of mysese" (177, 186), though the specific "myseses" experienced in hell are possible in earthly life: hell takes the unpleasant states of human existence and intensifies them, rendering them unremitting and eternal, to the exclusion of any potential *ese* (192, 194, 196, 199). In addition to the discomforts of the body, such as hunger and nakedness, damned souls experience the *mysese* of the soul, the distressing loneliness which comes from being profoundly isolated from God and from human friends: "And forther over, hir myseyse shal been in defaute of freendes" (199).[15]

As for *ese* itself, the Parson does not present it as a simple opposite to *mysese*, as pleasure is to pain or comfort is to discomfort. Though perhaps counter-intuitive from the modern perspective, the Parson's conception is that a state of ease can itself be a negative:

> sparynge . . . restreyneth the delicaat ese to sitte longe at his mete and softely. (835)

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[12] See, for example, "The General Prologue" 419; "The Parson's Tale" 423; "The Reeve's Tale" 3993; "The Miller's Tale" 3416; "Melibee" 1017.

[13] See, for example, "The Franklin's Tale" 1314; "The Man of Law's Tale" 616; "Melibee" 1545 and 1716; "The Prologue to the Nun's Priest's Tale" 2771; "The Prologue to The Manciple's Tale" 97.

[14] See *Boece*: "myseses and grevances out of nombre" (Book I, prose 4, 66).

[15] On hell in the *Canterbury Tales*, see Spencer. For images of hell in specific tales, see Pace (on "The Monk's Tale"); Clark and Wasserman (on "The Man of Law's Tale"); and Simmons-O'Neill (on "The Merchant's Tale"). On images of hell in medieval culture, see Kolve 41-42; and Owst 336-43.

> Another remedie agayns Leccherie is specially to withdrawen swiche thynges as yeve occasion to thilke vileynye, as ese, etynge, and drynkynge. (951)

Presumably the Parson is talking about an excess of ease, though he does not seem to have a particular word for that. Both gluttony and lechery (the sins under discussion in the two examples above) are associated with excess pleasure of the body, so perhaps we are to understand his references to ease in that context of excess. But still, his tepid valuation of ease is a reminder that, even though he uses the *mysese* of hell to discourage sin, the goal of human life is neither simply to avoid *mysese* nor to seek and achieve *ese*.[16]

Indeed, if *ese* itself is a negative and can lead to sin, that is a way of saying that *disese* is in fact a positive and can keep one from sin. Life, for the Parson, is not supposed to be easy, full of ease, or even necessarily healthy. The fallen world is not a healthy world. Disease (in the sense of physical illness) is a punishment from God (625). Physical pain is a reminder of Christ's own painful sacrifice (666). While one positive consequence of penance is that the sinner can avoid the eternal *mysese* of hell, penance itself is not easy and does not establish a state of ease in this world. Quite the opposite, penance is an ongoing struggle, requiring an uncomfortable look into the worst aspects of one's own nature. Contrition, the root of the penitential tree (113), is precisely sorrow ("ful sharp and poynaunt in herte" [130]) for one's sinful nature. The health of the soul therefore *depends on* the individual feeling mis-ease.

The penitential remedies generally involve private internal debate rather than external physical action on the part of the individual or another person. Doctors of theology, confessional priests, and other pastoral figures presumably have a role in helping the spirit, but penitence itself is largely a private endeavor. It requires an internal analysis which speaks out and articulates sin because, while a priestly confessor is a conduit to God, public confession is useless if the confession is not genuine and complete. As much as the Parson disapproves of stories and tales, he emphasizes the need to speak, to tell one's sins to oneself. In modern terms, he is an advocate of self-help and self-healing. His guide to penitence offers only strategy; like the medical doctor who prescribes rest and better diet to a patient, the actual work of healing is done almost exclusively by the individual patient.

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16 For the use of *ese* and *disese* in Julian of Norwich, see Gillespie.

Yet despite the private nature of individual penitence, the Parson underscores that the spiritual health of the individual is closely connected to the health and well-being of the larger human community, which also falls under the purview of his pastoral care. In the next section, I examine how the Parson's concept of anger reveals his concern for the collective spiritual health and well-being of a fellowship.

V. Anger (good and bad) and fellowship

Avarice, we noted, is the one sin explicitly figured as a disease. Why are the others not? Like (physical/medical) disease, avarice has no other value and is, morally speaking, one-dimensional. By contrast, the others are not without potential value and therefore not simple diseases to be cured. Instead, they must be mastered and the sinful elements separated from the good aspects. The relation between *goode ire* and *badde ire* is a prime example and, in terms of thinking about healthy fellowships, one of the most important. While penance is a personal undertaking, in which an individual confronts his own sins and attempts to remedy them in order to save his own soul, the Parson reveals a concern for how the individual affects the community and how anger, in particular, is a threat to that community.

Hell is, in addition to a state of mis-ease for the individual, an absence of fellowship: "but there is no frend, / for neither God ne no creature shal been freend to hem, and everich of hem shal haten oother with deedly hate" (199-200). Anger is a threat to the potential fellowship possible on earth, bringing "discord, thurgh which a man forsaketh his olde freend that he hath loved ful longe; / and thanne cometh werre and every manere of wrong that man dooth to his neighebor" (562-63). Any sin could potentially disrupt fellowship, of course, but anger in particular seems to threaten community. The other sins generate anger, and anger itself generates even more anger: "this cursed synne anoyeth bothe to the man hymself and eek to his neighebor. For soothly, almoost al the harm that any man dooth to his neighebor comth of wratthe" (557). The fire of anger consumes not just the individual, but those around him, creating social divisions ranging from the falling out of friends to the literal, physical, dismemberment of a community which homicide brings (562-64). Manslaughter, whether "bodily" or "spiritual" (565), divides individuals, from

each other and from God. Chiding and reproving in particular are disruptive because they create more anger in the community (628) and divide friends as well as husbands and wives (631). Discord is especially offensive because Christ died to bring "concord" to the world (642-43): "for God loveth bettre that freendshipe be amonges folk" (643). In his earlier discussion of envy, the Parson notes its relation to anger (509) and then gives a long account of the social consequences of envy and anger, in the form of bitterness (510-14), which unravel a community of fellows:

> Thanne comth discord that unbyndeth alle manere of freendshipe. Thanne comth scornynge. . . . Thanne comth accusynge. . . . (511-12)
>
> Thanne comth malignitee, thurgh which a man anoyeth his neighebor prively, if he may; / and if he noght may, algate his wikked wil ne shal nat wante, as for to brennen his hous pryvely, or empoysone or sleen his beestes, and semblable thynges. (513-14)

In the section on remedies for envy, the Parson discusses the commandment, "[l]ove thy neighebor as thyselve" (517); as he will in the section on remedies for anger, the Parson eschews hate (523) and urges restraint when one is wronged by an enemy, verbally or physically (525). Human nature pushes us towards friends and the formation of fellowships: "nature dryveth us to loven oure freendes" (526). But enemies need our love more than our friends, and so we should help those with the greatest need, as Christ did when he died for his enemies (526).

Remedies for anger are similar, but require mastery of the body as well, an application of mind over body. Reason is a counter to the physical passion of anger and the excess of blood coursing through the body.[17] In a simple thought experiment, the Parson illustrates the power of mind over body and the value of empathetic shifts in perspective: in the story of the angry philosopher and the

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[17] See 670, where to be "amoeved" means that the soul / body is "moved" (with a passion) and must be countered (by patience, the remedy for anger). See also 655: "Debonairetee withdraweth and refreyneth the styrynges and the moevynges of mannes corage in his herte, in swich manere that they ne skippe nat out by angre ne by ire."

misbehaved child, the child tells the philosopher that he should punish himself for losing his patience; the philosopher thinks about this, sees himself from the child's perspective, and agrees (670-73).

What makes anger different from envy is that, while envy seems to have no positive value for the Parson, anger has a positive and essential function in human affairs and communities.[18] *Goode ire* is not just a moderate amount of anger—it is a different kind or "manere" (538) of anger altogether.[19] It has a different cause, object, and function:

> The goode Ire is by jalousie of goodnesse, thurgh which a man is wrooth with wikkednesse and agayns wikkednesse; and therfore seith a wys man that Ire is bet than pley. / This Ire is with debonairetee, and it is wrooth withouten bitternesse; nat wrooth agayns the man, but wrooth with the mysdede of the man, as seith the prophete David, "*Irascimini et nolite peccare*." (539-40)

The Parson devotes only these two sentences to good anger. The concept is crucial, though, to the larger context of the sermon on penance. God's anger with sin is a prime reason for the individual to be concerned about sin and penance.[20] Our relationship with God is shaped by anger, in terms both of His anger with us and of the anger (toward sin) which we share with Him.[21] The hot seed of grace both brings man closer to God and causes one to hate sin: "This hete draweth the herte of a man to God and dooth hym haten his synne" (121). The yoking here of closeness and hatred is striking, establishing that hating what God hates is a requirement of the relationship. Presumably this is true of human fellowships as well. Hatred of sin forms a community of the good. Antagonistic relationships between enemies involve hatred of each other;

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[18] Envy is almost always bad (488-90), but *jalousie*, a more general term for "desire to possess," can be good if the *jalousie* is directed toward goodness, as in the quote below about good anger which "is by jalousie of goodnesse" (539).

[19] *Anger*, *wrath*, and even *hatred* are thus neutral terms for the Parson. The confusing terminology of g*ood ire* and *bad ire* goes back to Aristotle, who noted that anger did not have a binary opposite (unlike love/lust or avarice/generosity). See Aristotle 4.5, 1125b27-1126b10; and, for the distinction between *ira per zelum* and *ira per vitium*, Gregory 5.45.82-83.

[20] On God's wrath, see 110 and 132.

[21] See 306-07: "and of this [contricioun] comth hate of synne, that destroyeth synne, bothe in himself and eek in oother folk at his power. / For which seith David: 'Ye that loven God, hateth wikkednesse.' For trusteth wel, to love God is for to love that he loveth, and hate that he hateth."

but non-antagonistic relationships (between friends, between man and God) also need some form of hate because shared beliefs (including beliefs about what is not good, about what we hate) are essential to such relationships. Anger shared plays a vital role in this formation of social, spiritual, and personal bonds.

When is anger better than play (539)? How can an angry individual separate the sin from the sinner (540)? How can one be angry and not sin, as David commands (540)? The Parson offers no further specific advice about this. As with the other sins, ultimately the penitent is left to care for the health of his soul. In this case, having provided the penitent with the basic distinction between good and bad anger, the Parson leaves the penitent to reflect on the distinction and to be responsible for the rational management of his own anger. At this point, the Parson's sermon fails to be an end or a final decisive thought neatly concluding the *Canterbury Tales*, and becomes a point of re-entry back into the preceding tales. Whatever the Parson character may think about the tales, Chaucer, by including the sermon as just one of many, compels us to see the Parson's tale in relation to the others. For the Parson, a healthy soul is a penitent soul, always reflecting on past actions. In the same way, Chaucer, as a teller of complex stories, also encourages reflection and analysis.

Two examples from the preceding tales illustrate the complexity and the challenge of the Parson's concept of good anger.[22] Both the Pardoner and the Clerk's Walter, presenting threats to community and fellowship, raise questions about the extent to which anger is both necessary and healthy for both individuals and communities.[23]

In the case of the Pardoner, we have a character who is very much the opposite of the Parson: in place of the hard continual work of penance as a

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[22] The Parson's views on divine anger and *goode ire* were challenged by other medieval schools of thought. On Seneca's critique of anger, see Anderson 160-73; and, on *clementia* (in opposition to *severitas*) as a principle of Stoic justice, Nolan 264-66. For the influence of Seneca on Chaucer, see Burnley 17; and of Boethian conceptions of mercy, Lawler 102-08. While I agree that Chaucer's work as a whole suggests a sympathy with the Boethian and Senecan warnings against anger, I would suggest here that Chaucer, like the Parson, was drawn to patience but fascinated by anger and willing to consider its necessity.

[23] Eruptions of anger occur throughout Chaucer's work. For essays on anger in "The Knight's Tale," "The Friar's Tale," and "The Tale of Melibee," see Griffith ("Anger and Community"; "The *Friar's Tale* and Divine Justice"; and "Anger with God and Man"). But here, in light of the Parson's discussion of anger and disease, the cases of the Pardoner and of Griselda are particularly apt: because the Pardoner, as noted above, with his narcissistic emphasis on "cure" of self (557), is the clerical opposite of the Parson; and Griselda, with her seeming incapacity for anger and dis-ease, is a challenge to the Parson's understanding of spiritual and psychological health.

remedy for sin, he offers quick and fake cures (906); he rejects the notion that labor has value (444-45) and celebrates his many sins, articulating them, but without regret. The Host would seem more than justified in becoming angry (946-55). But the consequence of that anger is a near collapse of the entire fellowship; had the Knight not intervened in this quarrel (960), it is possible the tale-telling game, and perhaps the pilgrimage itself, would have ended when the Host said, "I wol no lenger pleye" (958) and the Pardoner withdrew into furious silence (956-57).

Chaucer gives the peacemaking role to the Knight and no lines to the Parson. Could a character such as the Parson play peacemaker in this situation? The Knight's solution—to have the Host and the Pardoner exchange a polite kiss—is a politic solution that allows the game and the pilgrimage to move forward, but it does not address the actual feelings of the quarrelsome pair or attend to their spiritual state. The Parson's sermon implies a much deeper analysis of the situation would be required to fully remedy the situation. As much as the Parson emphasizes the value of fellowship, which the Knight superficially preserves, the Host and the Pardoner hardly seem to be true fellows and fail to resolve their anger issues. Chaucer leaves it to us to reflect further: would someone like the Parson be right in focusing on line 539 of his sermon, reminding us that sometimes play and peace are not appropriate? Sometimes it is necessary (and better) to be angry. Or should we focus more on line 540 and rebuke the Host for failing to become angry without himself sinning? If the Host fails to separate the sin from the sinner, what would that kind of just anger actually look like? God will presumably exile the Pardoner from the good community of heaven, but should the Pardoner be exiled from the human community by his fellow fallen humans? What place should such an individual have within the community? The Parson's sermon offers no direction on this, other than to suggest that God will ultimately decide the Pardoner's fate; until that happens, since there is always a chance for the Pardoner to become penitent, even if he rejects that chance, then punishment of the Pardoner may not be a human concern. But what is clear, and what does concern the individuals around the Pardoner, is that his sins are something to be angry about. In the Parson's view, to become good and ultimately to become part of God's

good fellowship involves recognizing and then hating sin in oneself and in others.[24]

The case of Walter and Griselda in "The Clerk's Tale" presents a particular challenge to this idea that anger is essential to a healthy soul and a healthy fellowship. If we read the tale allegorically, where Walter is a figure of God and Griselda of mankind in general, then Griselda's lack of anger perhaps signifies the need of human beings to accept that they will be tested by a mysterious God. Or, alternatively, if Walter is representative of mankind and Griselda a divine figure, then Griselda's patience could be an image of Christ's patient suffering, discussed by the Parson (666).[25] But neither reading illustrates the Parson's concept of a God at once merciful and angry. Though the Parson suggests that the penitent recall the patient suffering of Christ in an attempt to remedy the penitent's own anger, the Parson also notes Christ's anger with sin (642), not just God's. So even if we read Walter as the God and severe Father of the Old Testament and Griselda as the merciful patient Son of the New Testament, the imagery still does not fit the Parson's view of God and Christ both having the capacity for anger and mercy.

In a more straightforward reading, in which Walter and Griselda are just an ordinary human couple, we are confronted with an abusive husband and an abused wife who not only has no power to stop him, but also no ability to articulate feelings of outrage. (Or who herself is so lukewarm that she actually feels no anger or outrage when her children are taken). From a modern point of view, both the relationship (the marriage) and Griselda's behavior seem unhealthy, psychologically and emotionally (and perhaps even physically) speaking. The Parson, as we noted, might not be particularly interested in Griselda's mental and physical health. But Griselda's complete lack of anger is incompatible with the Parson's understanding of spiritual health. In some ways, she is too at ease to be one of the Parson's penitents, for whom discomfort and mis-ease are necessary for penance to be successful. Patience is not an absence of anger, in the Parson's view; it is a remedy to manage anger. While Christ suffered patiently, he also felt anger; but Griselda seems to have no feeling at

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[24] For other readings of this scene, see Jungman, who reads the quarrel between Harry and the Pardoner as an illustration of Paul's argument (about false teaching and conflict) in 1 Timothy 6 (279-80); and Kamowski, who sees the Host's anger as a crisis of faith brought on by the Pardoner's false relics (5-6). I suggest here that the Parson's concept of good and bad anger highlights the complexity of this scene and its importance for appreciating Chaucer's interest in problems of anger.

[25] For allegorical readings of "The Clerk's Tale," see Krieger; Yager; Utley; and Condren.

all. If she is not feeling anything, then she is not really suffering; and if she has stoically mastered anger to the point of having no anger whatsoever, then she lacks the capacity for good anger which, again, is essential to the Parson's moral philosophy.

Walter lacks the capacity for self-criticism and self-directed anger necessary for penitence, never questioning or apologizing for his testing of Griselda. But even Walter, who desires such submission from Griselda, begins to wonder if there is something wrong with Griselda when she not only obeys him in order to pass the tests, but does so without any anger at all. He says that if he did not know already that she loved her children, then he might think that it was for some kind of malice or cruelty of heart that she suffered his tests with so little emotion (687-93). In particular, he is struck by her "sad visage" (687), an expression repeatedly used to describe Griselda's countenance (552, 602), one that suggests not deep sadness, but seriousness and a lack of emotion. When, at the end of Walter's reflection, the narrator again states that Walter "knew" Griselda loved the children (694-95)—as if to assure us this is in fact true—we might wonder how Walter or we can be sure of that.

When the girl is taken, Griselda does kiss her goodbye (550-52); when the boy is taken, she does ask the guard to bury the boy so that he will not be eaten by animals (679-83); and when she is reunited with the children at the end, she does weep and then faint with pleasure. Thus her affection, her fear, and her joy are all indications that she does care for the children, and signs that she is not frigid or incapable of emotion generally.

But her lack of anger (good or bad) is mystifying. Even her fear for her children (expressed twice, at 679-83 and again at 1093-96) is striking, evidence of an unhealthy interest in the body: she is concerned about what will happen to their bodies after death, but not about their murder. When the boy is taken, she tells Walter, "Naught greveth me at al, / Though that my doughter and my sone be slayn" (647-48). In another example of, from the Parson's point of view, an inordinate valuation of ease, her interest in her own "sikerness" (well-being) and health is nonexistent, as her only care is for Walter's "ese," a state for which she is willing to die (664). But how can she not be outraged by the death of her children? Anger indicates the limit of our tolerance, of what we are willing to accept being done to us or taken from us, and so defines the scope of what matters to us and what we value. Griselda's lack of concern for her own well-being indicates a radical lack of pride (or, in the modern view, of self or

ego). From the point of view of modern psychology and of feminism, the extent to which this is positive is debatable, though presumably the Parson would see her lack of pride as a mark of a good soul. But her lack of response to the children's murder points to an inability to mark the limits of justice and injustice, to be angry with sin, as the Parson would say. The Parson's concept of the good requires an understanding of and, indeed, hatred of evil. Even if Griselda is powerless to stop Walter, anger would be both a natural and moral response to his violations.

Perhaps she feels angry on the inside (and as she, unlike Walter, is given no interior monologue or provided with a description of her unspoken feelings by the narrator, we have no way of knowing). But since anger was thought to manifest first in the body, leaving visible signs, it seems reasonable to judge her from her physical reaction: she really does not feel any anger. And in not doing so, she seems not to be a figure representative of the Parson's view of the emotionally and spiritually healthy individual.[26]

How the people of Walter and Griselda's country respond to what Walter does to Griselda also illustrates the importance of just anger for individuals and communities. Griselda is loved by the people (412-13), not just for her beauty, but for the ease and comfort she brings the community. While she may be unable to manage her own anger in a healthy way, she has a mysterious knack for easing other people's wrath and peacefully settling disputes. Inverting the Parson's description of hell as a place of discord, friendless-ness, and dis-ease, Griselda's community is a kind of paradise:

> The commune profit koude she redresse.
> Ther nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
> In al that land that she ne koude apese,
> And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese. (431-34)
>
> If gentil men or othere of hire contree
> Were wrothe, she wolde bryngen hem aton;
> . . . .

[26] I am interested here in the psychology, physiology, and ethics of Griselda's anger. One might also consider the role that gender and class play in the Clerk's depiction of Walter (a high-ranking man) and Griselda (a lower-class girl). For recent gender and class approaches to anger in other works by Chaucer, see (on gendered anger) Harris; and also Turner; and (on the social status earned through a proper command of anger), Cels.

> That she from hevene sent was, as men wende,
> Peple to save and every wrong t'amende. (436-41)

Before Walter marries Griselda, the community is fearful (that if Walter should die without an heir a foreign power would come to reign over the people) and unhappy, so much so that the people directly ask Walter to find a wife. The people would have been happy with any wife for Walter, but Griselda eases not only their fear of the future but also seems to have a direct impact on the everyday health of their fellowship, easing the bitter quarrels and repairing the social discord that the Parson warned about. In terms of the community, Griselda helps the kingdom to be about as healthy as it can be, producing "reste and ese."

This is presumably the kind of ease that the Parson would approve of—the rest which comes after dis-ease, which comes from work. Griselda does not create permanent peace in the kingdom; rather she handles disruption as it erupts. She does not magically resolve the problems either; she works at creating a peaceful community, using her "wise and rype wordes" (438) and designing "juggementz of . . . greet equitee" (439). Both before and after her marriage, Griselda avoids excessive ease ("ydel ese" [217]) in the way the Parson suggests is necessary for a healthy soul. She is born into the poorer part of the kingdom where the people live simply, but happily and healthily, sustained by their hard work: "povre folk of that village . . . of hire labour tooke hir sustenance" (200-02); Griselda herself "knew wel labour but noon ydel ese" (217).[27]

Given that Griselda's one flaw may be her failure to become angry when a situation (such as Walter's tests) demands, why do the people who love her not react more strongly on her behalf? One corollary to the Parson's claim that we should be angry with the sin and not the sinner, is that we can (and should) be angry with sin even when it does not affect us personally, when we do not know the sinner or when the sinner is not committing sin against us directly. If Walter's treatment of Griselda is wrong, then not only Griselda but her people should be outraged. Perhaps the people are powerless to stop Walter, as is Griselda. But being angry and acting on the anger are two separate issues. For the Parson, the negative consequences of mishandling anger—vengeance, murder, social discord—do not diminish the nature of and need for just anger.

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[27] On labor in "The Clerk's Tale," see Yoon.

Setting aside what the people could do to help Griselda, their outrage at Walter should manifest.

For a time, it does. When news of Walter's treatment of Griselda and the children becomes public knowledge, the people hate him: they "hadde loved hym wel, [but] the sclaundre of his diffame / Made hem that they hym hatede therfore" (730-31). However, the people's expression of hate at 730 is qualified: the people are more concerned with the shame and scandal that Walter's treatment of Griselda has brought to the community as a whole than with the behavior itself or with the effect on Griselda. When the people do curse, they do not curse Walter or his sin, but more generally lament the vagaries of fortune: when Walter sends Griselda back to her father, the people weep and curse fortune (897-98); her father curses the day he was born (901-03). These reactions suggest less a just hatred of Walter's sin and of what he has done, than the irritation of self-pity and a concern for the consequences which Walter's behavior has for them. Moreover, this anger, misdirected or not, does not last long, diminishing its significance. When the people see Walter's new wife, they are taken with her and seem to forget all about Griselda and what Walter did to her, even to the point of admiring Walter and thinking he is wise to have changed wives (985-87). At that point the narrator interjects, quoting "sadde folk" (1002), more serious ("sadde") individuals critical of the "stormy peple" who are "unsad" (995) and who abandon Griselda for a delightful "noveltee" (1004). This rebuke of the ordinary people, who are no longer angry but now excited to see the new bride (simply because she is new), is a Parson-like rebuke of the people's failure to embrace good anger, which requires seriousness, a willingness to endure the dis-ease of anger at sinful behavior, and a resistance to the distractions of simple pleasures (like novel gossip and royal weddings).

Looking at the behavior of both Griselda and her people in light of the Parson's view of good and bad *ira*, I suggest we can read the Clerk's tale also as a commentary on anger.[28] Not only is Griselda's behavior impossible, it is not good, not healthy either physically or spiritually. The people's selfish unwillingness to be justly angry on her behalf is also dangerous, as it results in

[28] Mann argues for *pietas* as the ethical heart of Chaucer's work. The ideal characters whom Mann examines (Griselda, Prudence, Cecilia) rarely display anger (*Feminizing* 3). But I think that, while patience is a Chaucerian virtue and does sometimes work to counter *badde ire*, Chaucer's attitude toward anger is complex, as he engages with the problem of good anger (and considers its place as an ideal at the heart of his work and ethical thought) directly in the Parson's tale and, as I suggest in this essay, indirectly in the cases of the Pardoner and Griselda.

Walter's continued mistreatment of Griselda and his banishing her back to her father. Though the people seem not to see the threat to themselves, their peaceful community—where Griselda managed the discord and division—becomes imperiled in her absence. In the way that dystopian fiction illustrates the need for something (say, in a political dystopia, democracy) through a depiction of its absence, the fantasy of a Griselda without anger is a reminder of anger's necessity for the health of both an individual and a community.

The complex treatment of anger in the Parson's tale and the Clerk's tale reveals that, for the Parson specifically and for his creator Chaucer more generally, pleasure, happiness, and self-satisfaction are not absolute measures of the good life. The Parson is dismissive of health and healthy bodies because he sees the quest for ease, comfort, and satisfaction—bodily or spiritual—as a false pursuit. The human condition is not supposed to be easy, comfortable, or satisfying. Disease—that is, dis-ease—is not only a characteristic of the fallen world, but is also an essential part of the good life, because the good defines itself through struggle with evil. In the Parson's view, it is good to be dissatisfied, angry, or afraid because those distressing conditions remind the penitent of the fallen state of the world and of his own soul; such unease is a sign that the penitent is engaged seriously with the business of remedying sin and struggling to become a better soul, a process which begins with anger at one's own moral failings. The Parson's ideas may help us to think more deeply about our modern attitudes toward physical and psychological health, about the necessary and vital role anger plays in a healthy community, and about the extent to which we should be dissatisfied, uneasy, with the world as it is, with others, with ourselves.

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