Angry Forever

There are two problems with anger: it is morally corrupting, and it is completely correct.

Agnes Callard

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Contents

Suppose that you are angry on Tuesday because I stole from you on Monday. Suppose that on Wednesday I return what I stole; I compensate you for any disadvantage occasioned by your not having had it for two days; I offer additional gifts to show my good will; I apologize for my theft as a moment of weakness; and, finally, I promise never to do it again. Suppose, in addition, that you believe my apology is sincere and that I will keep my promise.

Could it be rational for you to be just as angry on Thursday as you were on Tuesday? Moreover, could it be rational for you to conceive of a plan to steal from me in turn? And what if you don't stop at one theft: could it be rational for you to go on to steal from me again, and again, and again?

Though your initial anger at me might have been reasonable, we tend to view a policy of unending disproportionate revenge as paradigmatically irrational. Eventually we should move on, we are told, or let it go, or transmute our desire for revenge into a healthier or more respectable feeling. This idea has given rise to a debate among academic philosophers about the value of anger. Should we valorize it in terms of the righteous indignation of that initial response? Or should we vilify it in terms of the grudge-bearing vengeance of the unending one?

I am going to explain how that debate goes, but I am not going to try to resolve it. Instead, I am going to peel it away to reveal a secret that lies behind it: we have been debating the wrong issue. The real debate concerns the three questions about anger and rationality in my second paragraph, which are not rhetorical, and to which the answer might well be: yes, yes, and yes.

First, the academic debate. In one corner, we have those who think that we would have a morally better world if we could eradicate anger entirely. This tradition has its roots in ancient Stoicism and Buddhism. The first-century Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca wrote that anger is a form of madness; he authored a whole treatise—*De Ira*, the title of this volume—about how to manage its ill effects. The eighth-century Indian philosopher and monk Śāntideva enjoined those wishing to travel the road of enlightenment to eliminate even the smallest seeds of anger, on the grounds that the full-blown emotion can only cause harm.

In the contemporary world, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum draws on Seneca and the Stoic tradition to argue that anger is an intrinsically mistaken attitude, since it is infected with a backward-looking "payback wish" that is vengeful and destructive. The correct response to any setback or injustice, in her view, is forward-looking: preventing similar events from occurring in the future. In a similar vein, Owen Flanagan, who draws on both Śāntideva's Buddhism and a Confucian-inflected metaphysics, sees anger as an intrinsically hostile attitude, one that falsely presupposes a self-centered metaphysics of individuals who possess "intentions to be cruel, and to do harm or evil."

In the other corner of the debate stand those who conceive of anger—up to a point—as an essential and valuable part of one's moral repertoire: anger is what sensitizes us to injustice and motivates us to uphold justice. By being angry with me on Tuesday, the day after I stole, you create the system and demand the terms under which I must acquiesce and "make things right" on Wednesday.

This pro-anger position has its roots in Aristotle's view that the (well-trained) passions are what allow the "eye of the soul" to perceive moral value, and finds its fullest expression in the British moral sentimentalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Earl of Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith all held that our feelings are precisely what sensitize us to moral considerations.

Later, Peter Strawson's watershed paper "Freedom and Resentment" (1960) injected new life into the pro-anger cause by making emotions the fundamental mechanism of moral accountability. Strawson develops Smith's insight that our status as moral creatures rests on the fact that we care—at an emotional level—what we think of one another. Strawson understands negative emotions in the anger family as paradigmatic expressions of moral assessment. Anger treats its target as someone capable of recognizing that she has done wrong and is to be contrasted with the indifference or calculating carefulness by which we might react to someone we see no hope of reintegrating into the moral community.

Strawson's continued influence is visible in the work of contemporary philosophers such as R. Jay Wallace, Jesse Prinz, Allan Gibbard, Pamela Hieronymi, and Jean Hampton. Though differing in their conclusions and many of the steps along the way, all begin from the sentimentalist assumption that emotions lie at the bottom of our practices of holding one another morally responsible. Emotions are how we humans do morality.

But are these two camps—the Stoics versus the sentimentalists—really diametrically opposed? Each must respond to the data that motivate the other, and when they do so, they make some surprising moves toward reconciliation.

Consider the data of the anti-anger side. There are at least two big drawbacks of anger, they note: first, the tendency to cling to one's anger, bearing a grudge deaf to any reasonable voice of reconciliation, apology, or restitution; second, the tendency to exact (often disproportionate) revenge. The fans of anger carve these phenomena off as pathologies, not essentially associated with anger. They use special words such as "indignation" and "resentment" to refer to anger purified of such impulses. Purified anger, they say, protests wrongdoing but is free of vengeful impulses and is immediately responsive to reasons to give up one's anger. (In this technical terminology, "resentment" is typically used to mark protesting on one's own behalf, whereas "indignation" is for protesting on behalf of another.) This move—carve away the dark side—is remarkably similar to the move the enemies of anger make when confronted with what we might call the "moral side" of anger.

Both Flanagan and Nussbaum, for instance, acknowledge that one who fails to react to grievous wrongdoing runs the risk of acquiescing in evil. They grant the importance

of a moral sensibility that would lead a person to object to being treated with disrespect, but they hold that such a response is possible without anger proper. Flanagan uses the word "righteous indignation" to cover "judgment that such-and-such state of affairs is grievously wrong, the wrong ought to be righted, and a powerful emotional disposition to want to participate in righting the wrong without being angry." Nussbaum speaks of "transition anger," which is not so much anger as "quasi-anger": "the entire content of one's emotion is, 'How outrageous! Something must be done about this.'"

Notice what has happened: what started out as a battle over anger ends with everyone agreeing to avoid using that word. Instead, both sides prefer to segregate the "moral side" of anger (Tuesday's anger, which takes the form of rational and justified protest at injustice) from the "dark side" (Thursday's anger, which takes the form of irrational grudges and unjustifiable vengeance). It does not matter whether we follow the Strawsonians and call this moral side "indignation/resentment," or whether we use Nussbaum and Flanagan's terminology of "transition anger" or "righteous indignation."

Now, when philosophers fail to disagree about any question of substance, you know someone is hiding something. In this case, I believe the pseudo-war has distracted us—and the combatants themselves—from the contentiousness of an assumption being made on all sides. Everyone assumes that we can retain the moral side of anger while distancing ourselves from paradigmatically irrational phenomena such as grudges and vengeance. But what if this is not the case? What if we humans do morality by way of vengeful grudges?

It is a fact of life that human beings have a direct emotional vulnerability to how we are treated, so when you wrong someone, you inflict on them the distinctive pain of unjust treatment. This moral sensibility on their part is included in the very meaning of what it is to "wrong someone": part of why wronging people is unjust is that they notice it.

It is also a fact of life that people tend to draw grudge-bearing and vengeful conclusions from premises involving genuinely moral facts about injustice and wrongdoing. I believe that we should not be too quick to pathologize this inference or dismiss it as a psychological tic. I will offer two arguments—the Argument for Grudges and the Argument for Revenge—that link those premises to those conclusions, suggesting that the reasoning in question is, in fact, valid. If we can't purify morality, we can't purify anger.

Let's go back to our original example. Is it rational for you to remain angry with me on Thursday, after all my hard work to restore justice? Both neo-Stoics such as Nussbaum and neo-sentimentalists such as Strawson would say no.

They would say that you ought to take into account how the wrongdoing that prompted your anger has been addressed, via restitution, compensation, apology, and

a promise. I have made amends for my wrongdoing in every possible way; if you continue to be as angry as you were, it must be, they would argue, because you are being irrationally insensitive to those amends.

The tendency to cling to anger through apologies and recompense, for years sometimes and to the detriment of all parties concerned, is routinely dismissed as irrational. It is often supposed, specifically, that not "letting go" of one's anger must indicate a perverse pleasure in that anger. (Thus, poet Robert Burns in 1790: "Whare sits our sulky sullen dame / Gathering her brows like gathering storm / Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.")

But this idea ignores the fact that there are reasons to remain angry. And the reasons are not hard to find: they are the same reasons as the reasons to get angry in the first place. Apologies, restitution, and all the rest do nothing to cancel or alter the fact that I stole, nor the fact that I ought not to have stolen. Those facts were your reasons to be angry. Since they are not changed by my forms of redress—apology, compensation, what have you—then you still have, after the deployment of these amends, the very same reasons to be angry. Anger, after all, is not a desire to fix something but a way of grasping the fact that it is broken. You are angry about something that is now in the past, and there is nothing to be done about that. What I did will always diverge from what I ought to have done, no matter what I do *next*.

There are, of course, many nonrational ways your anger might come to an end: you could die, develop amnesia, or it could just fizzle out over time. Suppose one day, out of nowhere, you simply decide to set your anger aside, and you succeed. We might judge that decision to be in some sense "rational"—who wants to go through their whole life angry?—but not in the sense that your reason for anger has been addressed. It hasn't been, and it won't ever be. Once you have a reason to be angry, you have a reason to be angry forever. This is the Argument for Grudges.

Now for the Argument for Revenge. Your desire for revenge, like your holding a permanent grudge, is typically taken to be irrational and unjustified. But this conclusion is typically a product of the assumption that revenge aims to solve the problem of anger, once and for all, by balancing out or undoing the wrong done. Once we let go of this assumption that anger can be undone—you have a reason to be angry forever, after all—it is not hard to produce an argument in favor of revenge. We should not find this possibility surprising; it would be strange if one of the oldest and most universal human practices did not have a rationalizing explanation. The Argument for Revenge is simply that revenge is how we hold one another morally responsible.

When I steal from you, you see me as responsible for a serious gap between the way the world is and the way it ought to be; there is a perspectival opposition between us. You see my action as morally unacceptable, and you experience that unacceptability as a pain, a harm. But I, who did it, evidently saw it as a perfectly fine thing to do, having judged the action to be a good thing for me.

Assuming that I understood that what I was taking was yours, and that I was not acting under some kind of duress—ignorance and compulsion are mitigating factors—

my theft indicates that I see the world in value-terms opposed to yours. Your "bad" is my "good." If you are to hold me accountable for this, instead of letting me off the hook, you will make this (accidental, adventitious) opposition a principle and rule for our interactions.

Revenge allows you to turn the principle of my action into a rule for your conduct toward me: you make my bad your good. This is the opposite of trying to undo or reverse my action. You hold me accountable by holding onto my theft, refusing to forget it, turning its one-off opposition between our interests into a rule to which I am now subject. You do not let me "live it down," instead you force my own thinking down my throat. Seeing me as accountable for what I have done means treating my action as a principle governing our interactions. Angry people sometimes describe their vengeance as "teaching someone a lesson," and this is quite literally true: you make my wronging of you into a general principle and then "educate" me by imposing it on me.

Educating me in this way is not easy on you: making my evil your good has psychological costs, among them the fact that you divert yourself away from what would otherwise be good for you. You must remodel your psychological landscape into one devoted to regulating mine. This explains the uncanny intimacy of anger: though you can't stand to be near me, it is also true that no one could be closer to you than me. I have infiltrated the patterns of your thought; I have my fingers on your heartstrings; I have even been put in charge of your sense perception: you see traces of me everywhere you look. You complain about me to anyone who will listen, and when no one will listen you shout at a mental effigy of me. I've colonized your fantasy life. Holding me responsible involves an embrace, albeit an adversarial one. Anger feels exactly as you would expect, if it were true that my moral accountability was a matter of your seeing what's good for you in terms of what's bad for me.

Again, as with grudges, the point is not that, all things considered, one should take revenge. One may take other factors besides anger into account in governing one's behavior. But insofar as one acts from anger, one pursues what is good for oneself by doing what is bad for another. This is perfectly rational, justified, and intelligible. Polemarchus, in Plato's *Republic*, expressed the hostile logic of anger: justice gives benefits to friends and harms to enemies.

These two arguments—the Argument for Grudges and the Argument for Revenge—suggest it is not so easy to separate the idea that anger is a moral sense from the thought that we should hold on to grudges, or to embrace anger as a mechanism of moral accountability without endorsing vengeance.

I do not claim that these arguments make an open-and-shut case; objections are certainly possible, and a full defense of the validity of these forms of reasoning would be a big project. My aim here has merely been to show that there is a case to be made for the conclusion that grudges and vengeance are perfectly rational—and that such a case is not an overly complicated one. The arguments I have offered are simple and intuitive, qualities that make their neglect in the philosophical debates—in the

form of the unquestioned assumption, on both sides, that grudges and vengeance are irrational—all the more striking.

Striking, but not inexplicable. For if we put the two arguments together, the result is that someone who is angry never has a reason to sever the link between the other's evil and her own good. Perhaps the simple explanation for the neglect of these arguments is that we do not want to acknowledge the possibility that morally righteous anger provides rational grounds for limitless violence.

While it may seem, then, that the Stoics and sentimentalists are radically opposed, they share more than meets the eye. In particular, they share confidence—misplaced, I think—in a certain project of conceptual analysis. This project aims to identify a purified form of moral response, one incorporating all of the virtues and none of the vices of anger. I am not the first to argue that such a project is quixotic. Some version of my point can be found in a number of thinkers who approach questions of morality from a more historical and anthropological angle. Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and René Girard have all argued that the darkest sides of anger—vengeance, bloodlust, and limitless violence—are baked into the very idea of morality.

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) traces our present approach to morality to a turn away from a prehistorical ethic based on nobility and strength. The crucial sentiment guiding the new morality is ressentiment—a form of anger—felt by those previously oppressed and enslaved. What emerges is a "slave morality [that] from the outset says 'No' to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself '; and this 'No' is its creative deed." The negative or reactive morality we have ended up with foregrounds the concepts of guilt, conscience, promises, and duty. Nietzsche says these concepts are "soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time. And might one not add that, fundamentally, this world has never since lost a certain odor of blood and torture?"

Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), a work of religious anthropology, discusses the role of human and animal sacrifice in the curbing of violence. Girard begins from the observation that every form of human community is threatened by one basic problem: once one act of violence happens, it threatens to set off a chain reaction of limitless retaliatory violence. According to Girard, what drives this chain reaction is nothing other than the moral horror at violence: "The obligation never to shed blood cannot be distinguished from the obligation to exact vengeance on those who shed it . . . it is precisely because they detest violence that men make a duty of vengeance." Girard's book contends that phenomena as widely varied as ancient scapegoating, Greek tragedy, and the sexual norms governing the nuclear family are all attempts to respond to this basic problem of the containment of violence.

Finally, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) analyzes the shift from punishment by public torture and execution to punishment by imprisonment. Foucault's

thesis is that although these reforms were couched in the eighteenth-century language of human rights, their aim was to turn punishment into a focused attack on the prisoner's human rights: "From being an art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights." Foucault then builds outward from the prison and argues that we can see the values of our society inscribed in the methodology of forcible restraint that characterizes such social artifacts as schools, examinations, timetables, and professional careers. The way we value freedom, autonomy, self-determination, and human rights is by taking those things away from people at every turn.

All three of these thinkers remain hugely influential despite having had the empirical details of their argumentation called into question by scholars from a variety of fields. I want to suggest that one reason for their enduring and even cult-like appeal is that they make a compelling and deep philosophical point that floats free of the particular historical-anthropological terms in which it is couched. What do these views have in common, after all? Nietzsche says we have built our whole morality out of resentful bloodlust; Girard says that violence and the opposition to violence are one; Foucault says that punishment is crime. The common denominator is the observation that human morality has a tendency to turn in on itself. Being a good person means, at times, being willing to do bad things.

I have offered reasons for thinking that the "dark side of morality" these three thinkers see mirrored in various social institutions derives ultimately from the logic of moral responsiveness: the morally correct way to respond to immorality is to do things—cling to anger, exact vengeance—that are in some way immoral.

If we abandon the anthropological distance and admit that we are the humans we are describing, grappling with this insight should produce nothing short of a crisis. We cannot climb outside of our own moral theory in order to assess it as bankrupt or broken; we must rely on it for the very terms of assessment. Of the three, Nietzsche comes the closest to facing this crisis, though even he often hides behind the suggestion that words such as "health" and "strength" offer him some kind of alternative footing. But who wants a society that is healthier or stronger unless those words are meant in a moralized sense—which is to say, a sense already shrouded by the darkness of our morality system? There is no magic trick that lets us climb outside our own normative skin.

Anger implicates all of us in moral corruption, then. Well, *almost* all of us. There is a certain Stoic so extreme that his position is represented by neither Nussbaum nor Flanagan, nor any modern thinker I know of. This Extreme Stoic sees emotions as having *no* role in morality; in order to achieve this complete emotional detachment, he places no value on anything the world can remove from himself, including his children, his life, and his freedom from physical torture. Extreme Stoics take inspiration from Socrates, who claimed that a good man could not be harmed, and who correspondingly

denied that the Athenians were harming him when they put him to death for crimes he did not commit. Socrates died anger-free.

Most of us are neither willing nor able to achieve the kind of detachment that this immunity from wrath requires. When people commit injustice against us, we feel it: our blood boils. At that point, we have to decide how much we want to fight to quell our anger, how much effort we are going to put into repressing and suppressing that upswell of rage. The answer is rarely none. While we do not want to let our anger get away from us and drive us to its logical, eternally vengeful conclusion, if we quash it with too heavy a hand, we lose self-respect and, more generally, our moral footing. Inhibiting any and all anger in the face of genuine wrongdoing is acquiescing in evil. So, we are regularly faced with the complicated question of how much anger to permit ourselves under a given set of circumstances.

But notice that, if the arguments I have offered here are correct, this question is equivalent to asking: How much immorality should we permit ourselves? The realistic project of inhibiting anger must be distinguished from the idle fantasy of purifying it. We can use a word such as "indignation" or "transition anger" to postulate a feeling that righteously protests wrongdoing without any hint of eternality or vengeance—but the item to which that word refers is a philosopher's fiction. The multiplication of kinds and flavors and species and names for anger is designed to distract us from the crisis at the heart of anger, which is that affective response to injustice clings to the taste of blood.

I believe that, when faced with injustice, we should sometimes get somewhat angry. Such anger is not "pure" and entails submitting oneself to (some degree of) moral corruption, but the alternative, acquiescence, is often even worse. The point I want to emphasize, however, is this: just because the moral corruption of anger is our best option doesn't mean it is not corruption.

The consequences of acknowledging this point are sobering: victims of injustice are not as innocent as we would like to believe. Either these victims are morally compromised by the vengeful and grudge-bearing character of their anger, or they are morally compromised by acquiescence. Long-term oppression of a group of people amounts to long-term moral damage to that group. When it comes to racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, classism, religious discrimination, anti-neurodiversity, elitism of any stripe, this argument entails that the oppressors have made the oppressed morally worse people. Of course, oppressing people is also bad for your soul, but we do not need to be reminded of *that*; we are accustomed to the thought that wronging others makes you a bad person. My point is: so does being wronged, even if to a lesser degree.

I moved to the United States from Hungary when I was five years old, but I still spent my childhood summers there, at Lake Balaton. Across the street from my grandparents' house there was a resort popular among East Germans. I could not enter the resort area—it was surrounded by a fence—but one summer, when I was around ten years old, I befriended a girl around my age who was vacationing there. We had no common

language, but we communicated by way of a marching game: we played soldiers and invented a complicated militaristic dance to which we would add moves day by day. We marched side by side, separated by the fence—until the day I was caught by my grandmother.

My grandmother was a concentration camp survivor, so she was horrified by what she saw: her granddaughter, marching with one of Them. I tried to explain that we were only playing a game, but to her it was clear: I was collaborating with the enemy. I argued that her prejudice against the German girl was no different from the Germans' prejudice against us. My protest only made her angrier, and I was forbidden from ever approaching the girl again.

But how innocent was my game, really? All four of my grandparents, in fact, had survived concentration camps; all of them lost almost everyone they knew in the Holocaust. My grandmother denied that the Holocaust was the greatest tragedy of her life, giving that honor to the fact that her first child, my uncle, was born with cerebral palsy. But she even blamed that on the Nazis, perhaps not without reason: there are many stories of birth injury in the first generation of children born to women who had suffered malnutrition and other forms of abuse in concentration camps. (My other grandmother's first baby was stillborn.)

My parents decided to leave Hungary when the synagogue on our block was blown up. (After that, the Jews in the area went to my grandmother's house to pray, secretly.) When we arrived in New York City, my parents pulled me out of public school after I was beaten up for wearing a necklace with a Star of David. They could not afford private school, but Orthodox Jewish elementary schools were willing to accept my sister and me for free, as charity cases. Why? Because the Holocaust, of course—which, at those schools, was its own subject, alongside English, math, and science. Before high school, I hardly wrote a poem or short story that was *not* in some way about the Holocaust.

Anti-anti-Semitism was so much the theme of my childhood that it is simply impossible to believe I accidentally fell into playing soldiers with a German girl. I wasn't innocent. But my grandmother wasn't innocent, either: she was full of anger. Innocence was not a possibility.

Nietzsche, Foucault, and Girard contributed to a strand of cultural criticism often invoked in support of attitudes of cynicism, misanthropy, and pessimism about the human condition. They are seen as radicals. In my view, however, all three are to be faulted for their timidity. It is striking the degree to which each writer held himself at a safe anthropological distance from the dark side of morality he so accurately described. If they had stepped inside their own theories, they would have immediately drawn the simple, devastating conclusion that it is impossible for humans—you and me and the

three of them included—to respond rightly to being treated wrongly. We can't be good in a bad world.

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Responses

Choosing Violence by Paul Bloom

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In the sixth season of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, Lancel Lannister demands that Cersei appear before the High Sparrow. She refuses. When a soldier steps forward to take her by force, her enormous bodyguard, the Mountain, intervenes. "Order your man to step aside," Lancel says, "or there will be violence." There is a long beat. At last Cersei responds, softly, "I choose violence."

Agnes Callard chooses violence as well. She defends the value of "vengeance, bloodlust, and limitless violence." For her, this is what morality is all about. Violence is the cost we pay for goodness.

I think she is right; indeed, hers is the received view in evolutionary approaches to the mind. No serious scholar sees anger as a glitch or an accident. Like every other complex cognitive system, it evolved through natural selection and serves a biological function: it motivates us to defend the interests both of ourselves and of those we care for. Any social creature that wasn't inclined to strike back at threats or acts of harm would be, in a word, a chump—open to exploitation and cruelty, a loser at survival and reproduction. There is now abundant evidence that punitive impulses are universal in humans, present in young children, and bred in the bone.

This is part of what makes human society possible. Humans are unusual among primates: hundreds of people who have never met can share a ride on an airplane for several hours, say, emerging with all their fingers and toes still attached. As the primatologist Sarah Hrdy points out, the outcome would be very different for a planeload of unacquainted chimps. It is likely that the difference stems from our capacity and inclination for retaliation. We control our violent impulses because we know that others won't let us get away with them. Ironically, then, what might make our species more social than even our closest evolutionary relatives is that we are more easily pissed off.

Callard is thus on the right track when she speculates, "What if we humans do morality by way of vengeful grudges?" She comes to her conclusion not by way of evolution or game theory, of course, but rather through philosophical reflection and a close reading of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Girard. But this is a pleasing convergence: when people arrive at the same idea from different directions, there is good reason to believe that the idea is right.

So far so good. I am puzzled by another feature of Callard's argument, though: her repeated claim that being angry isn't *just* natural, or universal, or essential to morality—more than that, she says it is *rational*. It is not that I disagree; I don't understand what she means.

When we talk about rationality, we often refer to reasoning: drawing conclusions in accordance with the laws of logic. If you think that Socrates is a man and all men are mortal, then it is rational to believe that Socrates is mortal. Sometimes we also talk about not just beliefs but actions as being rational, when they are properly suited to one's goals. If it is raining outside and you don't want to get wet, it is rational to carry an umbrella. But I am not sure how any of this extends to feelings. If my partner flirts with someone, is it rational for me to get jealous? Is it rational to be cheered by a sunny day, disgusted at certain sex acts, bored at a faculty meeting, bitter at the success of an enemy? It doesn't seem that normal standards of rationality apply here.

Now, if by "rational," Callard means "working as these systems have evolved to work," then there is no problem. But some of Callard's examples aren't consistent with this interpretation. She suggests that anger is a way of grasping that something has gone wrong in the past and reasons that, since the past doesn't change, it follows that, "Once you have a reason to be angry, you have a reason to be angry forever." But anger isn't *just* an acknowledgment of a state of affairs; it is also, as Callard herself emphasizes, a motivational state, connected to a desire for vengeance. So, yes, it is rational for me to appreciate that even a tiny wrong never goes away, but this isn't the same as saying that it is rational for me to want to enact vengeance for it many years later. It probably isn't.

More generally, it is not clear how Callard's analysis bears on the question of whether the role anger plays in morality can change over time. It could be that anger was once necessary for the emergence of morality but is obsolete now. After all, a child who learns to count using her fingers will turn into an adult who can count just fine with her hands in her pockets. Or, more plausibly, it could be that some amount of anger is needed for morality to continue to work, but this amount is less, perhaps much less, than we have now.

This last claim is an empirical one, and we have quite a lot of data that bear on it. With the exception of those with severe brain damage, every normal human feels anger. But there is plenty of variation, across individuals as well as societies, in how it is experienced and expressed. Do the easily angered lead better lives than those who are quick to forgive? Do angry people make the best romantic partners? Are cultures of honor, in which male violence against transgressors is a core moral value, the best societies to live in? I think the answer to all of these questions is no, and I wonder whether Callard agrees.

"Emotions are how we humans do morality," Callard tells us, and this is true—but emotions are not *the only way* we do morality. There are those who meditate to reduce their anger; there are those who think retributive punishment is rooted in a metaphysical confusion; there are Stoics and Buddhists and utilitarians. Callard

is perhaps right that our judgments are inevitably "shrouded by the darkness of our morality system." But, still, we can argue about morality, revise and defend and extend and challenge our initial prejudices. This too is how humans do morality. After all, what else are we up to right now?

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The Kingdom of Damage by Elizabeth Bruenig

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When my husband was in law school, he used to relate to me everything he was learning as a kind of memory exercise. I would typically pose a few naive questions. One evening he raised the matter of torts, and the ways a liable wrongdoer might redress the harm they've done. Almost always, I noticed, the restitution was monetary, even where the harm hadn't been. "Why money?" I asked, not expecting much more than the idea that money is a universal solvent. Instead my husband dashed off a theory I've been considering since. As far as the law is concerned, when you harm someone, a piece of property is created—their damage, so to speak—and you, the wrongdoer, must buy it from the victim to satisfy (or at least exhaust) their claim against you.

Though I may have intuited it before, I had never quite realized so distinctly that harms can't actually be redressed. Whatever you lose when someone hurts you, you lose for good; whatever they supply to make amends can never return you to your prior state of having never been hurt. For the law, this is a problem—because, as Agnes Callard points out, it means that the wronged have an eternal warrant for vengeance, and pose a permanent threat to peace. The imaginary property dreamed into being by tort law provides a remedy by way of metaphor. Once you surrender your damage for recompense, you have no further claim to it. So it goes with property.

But the metaphor was illuminating in other ways, too. In some sense, our damage is our own kingdom: an interior place of pain and outrage but also moral clarity, where we know that, in being angry over having been wronged, we are in the right. This picture adds a dose of concreteness to our talk of "dwelling on" aggrievement. Not only are people logically entitled to interminable anger over harm done—they have compelling emotional and moral reasons to hang onto a grudge.

This is a problem for us humans. We're pathologically inclined to hurt one another, but also inherently in need of society. The infinite prosecution of grievances is arguably justifiable, but it is also certainly apocalyptic. We cannot all be like Michael Kohlhaas—protagonist of the eponymous, early nineteenth-century novella by the German novelist Heinrich von Kleist—pressing our rightful claims to vengeance and recompense until

our demands dissolve all the bonds around us, eventually destroying us. The righteousness of Kohlhaas is a form of justice society cannot withstand.

Law may have its makeshift remedy to this conundrum in its figurative property sales, but what of morality? Callard argues that the wronged have no rational reason to forgo their anger, and by this I gather she means that there is no obvious benefit to the aggrieved in releasing their contempt. Surrendering their damage, so to speak, doesn't remedy what was done to them; neither does it ensure that such a thing won't happen again, nor does it impart useful moral lessons for the wrongdoer. Worse, it doesn't even generally feel good.

What Callard has identified is the fact that forgiveness is unfair and painful. Much is made of the healing power of forgiveness, but in my experience, this therapeutic promise falls somewhere between being overstated and totally empty. Forgiving someone for hurting you is excruciating, because it requires you to follow an unjust wrong with a personal sacrifice. And yet: forgiveness is also good, and it may be a necessary ingredient for peace as we know it.

Whatever else forgiveness is or entails, it certainly requires giving up further claims to punitive action against a wrongdoer. It does not require that the wronged party seek no redress, only that the redress be limited. Neither does it require that the wronged party give up all traces of anger toward the wrongdoer, only that the anger cease to be acted on, and perhaps fade over time. Anger as a sentiment can remain, but forgiveness as a moral discipline transforms that anger into a less socially corrosive substance.

This isn't to say that societies *must* advise forgiveness if they mean to remain intact. As classicist David Konstan observes in his book *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (2010), Greek and Roman cultures of antiquity got along all right without forgiveness as we understand it. In their worlds, Konstan writes, "the appeasement of anger and the relinquishing of revenge were . . . perceived as resting on the restoration of the dignity of the injured party, whether through compensation or gestures of deference, or else by way of discounting the offense on the grounds that it was in some sense involuntary or unintentional."

We still retain this tendency to avoid the sting of forgiveness by retroactively obliterating the bad act itself—that is, by explaining why the initial wrong isn't something one can be justifiably angry about because it was somehow unintentional. Yet we're also less comfortable than the Greeks or Romans were with compulsory displays of deference—say, public self-abasement, as in begging and pleading for pardon, prostrating oneself, or pledging service to one's erstwhile victim.

Konstan argues that our contemporary version of forgiveness is a Christian-infused outgrowth of the Enlightenment, specifically the Kantian exhortation to treat all people as ends, not means. That maxim envisions a baseline moral equality that the Greeks and Romans rejected. Indeed, it appears that societies can survive sans forgiveness, but not the sort of society we want to have. In a putatively liberal-democratic order, we would prefer that our peace not be based upon enforcing a rigid social hierarchy; we must allow wrongdoers to reclaim a moral status equal to that of their victims,

somehow, in order for an egalitarian polity to have any hope of enduring. Otherwise, the thoroughly inegalitarian futures Callard warns of might ensue. While oppressors might be morally degraded by their decision to oppress, so, too, would the oppressed, by their entanglement in limitless vengeance.

Forgiveness thus seems to be a crucial component of maintaining our preferred social order. But that doesn't mean it is a therapeutic or self-serving one. In its capacity to halt an otherwise endless campaign of vengeance, forgiveness echoes René Girard's definition of sacrifice in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972): an expression of limited violence which, when discharged, puts an end to the acceleration and reciprocation of violence. Unlike human, animal, or even token sacrifices, forgiveness requires only the destruction of that sacred property—one's own damage, the interior realm of righteous pain, that wellspring of anger.

It is a mistake to frame forgiveness as something one does for oneself, as pop psychologists and wellness coaches often do. A forgiver might experience some benefits in the act of forgiveness, but it is just as likely that they will experience a secondary wave of pain. After all, they, the innocent, are being asked to sacrifice for some higher good: peace or egalitarian order, in the modern formulation, God in a more archaic version. And yet this strange custom—contrary to an individualist, ruthlessly rights-oriented point of view as it is—may well be the thin membrane separating our (aspirational) way of life from more violent, less egalitarian forms. And thus we may all be obligated to practice it.

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Anger and the Politics of the Oppressed by Desmond Jagmohan

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While anger is a complex emotion that has both cognitive and visceral properties, philosophers have long argued that there are morally right and morally wrong ways for us to express our anger. As Agnes Callard outlines, most philosophers view anger as a moral response to injustice while a smaller camp, stemming from the Stoic tradition, consider the emotion a wellspring for spite. Martha Nussbaum, for example, worries that anger often leads to narcissism and vindictiveness—behavior bent on "payback." Malpractice and divorce litigation are among her favorite examples of such moral conceits: a retributive attitude that revives neither life nor love.

Though Nussbaum says a lot about anger in private life, she seems primarily interested in its place in politics, especially in contexts of persecution. In *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), she concedes that anger can be a valuable political emotion: when

the oppressed get angry, it signals that they recognize the wrong done to them. Anger can also motivate protests of such wrongs. Still, in response to retaliatory rage, Nussbaum argues for transitional anger, a mental pivot away from seeking payback to "more productive forward-looking thoughts, asking what can actually be done to increase either personal or social welfare."

Nussbaum thus focuses on how anger shapes social action rather than on angry feelings. She concentrates, for example, on conditions that were ripe for retaliatory anger—colonization, Jim Crow, and apartheid—but in which an oppressive regime fell to a politics that transcended anger and resentment. For Nussbaum, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela paved a revolutionary path when they expressed and mobilized anger the morally right way. But, as Callard warns, this is part of a larger attempt to isolate anger's admirable qualities from its "darker side." Callard says we should face the fact that the morally correct response to oppression may require us to act immorally. I agree.

Still, I fear that both Nussbaum and Callard offer quite narrow views of the moral life of the oppressed. Nussbaum holds up noble saints while Callard naturalizes violence when she points to René Girard. I agree with Callard when she says victims can be morally *compromised* by the anger they feel in response to their oppression or by their acquiescence to such conditions. But I part ways with her when she says enduring oppression leaves victims morally *damaged*. It is difficult for me to imagine the black men and women who faced down Bull Connor and his henchmen at the Edmund Pettus Bridge as morally diminished; it is also difficult for me to imagine the black men and women who did not march that day as ethically broken. But it is not difficult for me to imagine racist and moderate whites that sustained that world as morally shattered souls. We seem to ask a lot more of the oppressed than we do of oppressors.

An implicit but foundational assumption is that people owe it to their self-respect to get angry in the face of oppression and to express their anger to others. That is to say failing to protest injustice vitiates self-respect. Nussbaum, to her credit, questions this view. Callard, on the other hand, insists of anger that "if we quash it with too heavy a hand, we lose self-respect and, more generally, our moral footing." In the realm of politics, appearances are what really matter. Normative judgments about a person's self-respect are almost always based on how he or she appears before us.

For many, silence in the face of injustice reveals a morally damaged character. This assumption prevails in discussions of protest against racial injustice. Thomas Hill, Jr., and Bernard Boxill, for example, argue that self-respect requires protesting the wrong done to you and communicating to the public your resistance to the moral injury you suffer. A favorite example of Hill's is the *servile slave*. His deference and fawning conveys to others that he accepts the idea that blacks are inferior, that he thinks they are owed less than whites, and makes visible his damaged self-respect. For Boxill, it therefore follows that protest is a prima facie duty; expressing anger at your subjugation affirms your dignity, even when it does not reform society or aggravates your condition. These judgments assume the servile slave is not a prudent calculator,

that his compliance discloses his true feelings. Tommie Shelby amends this view when he says self-respect requires resistance, but it does not oblige a subjugated person to protest—that is, to make public her anger. Concealing her resistance can preserve her self-respect.

To better understand the difficulty in accurately judging the visible behavior of those living under oppression, let us consider two scenes from Frederick Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). The first passage is rather famous. Those who view self-respect as requiring protest frequently point to Douglass's fight with the slave-breaker Covey. The "battle with Mr. Covey," wrote Douglass, "was the turning point in my '*life as a slave*' It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a *free man*. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity." Douglass's fury at slavery inspired his revolt, which proved morally restorative but politically ineffectual. His moral resurrection did not change his status as a slave. He remained the property of another.

Later in the narrative, Douglass said his master, Hugh Auld, permitted him to work as a caulker in the shipyards so long as he gave all of his earnings to Auld. Though pivotal to Douglass's emancipation, this second scene attracts far less commentary. "I could see no reason," Douglass railed, "why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my honest toil into the purse of any man. The thought itself vexed me." His master's robbery was akin to Covey's brutality. But if he openly resisted, his master would sell him into the Deep South, thus making escape impossible. Escaping slavery required that he remain on Maryland's eastern shore so he could work and siphon some of his wages. So, Douglass submitted to his master's wishes.

But the taking of his earnings "kept the nature and character of slavery constantly" before him, assuring that his deceit never slipped into self-deception. That is to say, Douglass donned a mask of compliance to conceal his seditious intentions:

It is a blessed thing that the tyrant may not always know the thoughts and purposes of his victim. Master Hugh little knew what my plans were My object, therefore, in working steadily, was to remove suspicion, and in this I succeeded admirably. He probably thought I was never better satisfied with my condition, than at the very time I was planning my escape.

Imagine, for a moment, you witnessed the first scene without knowing Douglass's inner thoughts or motives. You would likely conclude that he revolted because he abhorred the injustice of slavery, and though he remained a slave he salvaged his self-respect. Now imagine witnessing the second scene without Douglass's account of his motives. All you see is a slave laboring and, without a trace of anger or resentment, handing over his wages to his master. You would probably conclude that Douglass is Hill's *servile slave*, someone whose acquiescence to oppression vitiates his self-respect.

The point is that those who are most oppressed have the most compelling reasons to be angry. They also have the most compelling reasons to never express their anger publicly. In the Jim Crow South, a slip of the tongue or a misplaced glance could

get you killed. Often it was cunning, not confrontation, that made possible effective resistance. We should therefore avoid making strong normative judgments about people who seem to succumb to their domination. We have no way of knowing whether the lack of anger an undocumented immigrant expresses when cooking our food, cleaning our home, and sustaining our entire economy is sincere or a strategic response to her exploitation and oppression. The absence of resentment and rage in her words and deeds says nothing about her self-respect.

Despite Nussbaum's reservations, it is rational for an undocumented worker to be angry and vengeful at a society that exploits her labor while denying her basic rights and protections. But the risk of further persecution might submerge her outrage beneath compliant smiles. She likely reasons that our uncertainty about her sense of self-respect is not worth her doing something that lands her and her children in cages. Maybe we should strive harder to think with the oppressed rather than to think for them. Doing so will require us to offer more than impossible models of political morality or veiled nihilism.

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The Social Life of Anger by Daryl Cameron & Victoria Spring

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Agnes Callard deconstructs arguments about the "dark side" of anger as a social emotion. While she agrees with critics that anger can motivate grudge-holding and punishment, she shifts the conversation by suggesting these are moral features of anger, not bugs. Some philosophers suggest anger's perseverance and link to vengeance mean anger should be dismissed as a moral guide, unless it can be somehow "purified." Callard suggests this may not be possible, or even morally desirable.

We agree with much of Callard's argument, which echoes ongoing debates in psychology about the dark sides of emotions such as outrage. Outrage—anger at moral transgressions—has been criticized for seeming to foster viral mob behavior online. Yet as Callard notes, anger can provide useful information about the world. Many scholars in affective science would agree that emotions can be rational guides. Indeed, we have argued against the tendency to vilify emotions such as outrage and empathy, because such interpretations overlook important social functions of these emotions. Focusing on anger's "impurities" may be the wrong approach. Instead, we might ask, why do people choose to engage with their anger or not?

Callard's first point is about grudges. Anger is thought to be problematic because it motivates unending grudges, even after attempts to repair the relationship, but Callard

questions whether this is irrational: "once you have a reason to be angry, you have a reason to be angry forever." She acknowledges that one might decide to "set one's anger aside"—a process that may occur through emotion regulation. Anger can be a rational response to the environment while still allowing that someone's perspective on the reason for the anger, and their judgment of how important that transgression is to the relationship, might change.

Indeed, research on emotion regulation finds that people can change their emotions by altering how they think about the world. New information might change how people think about transgressions and perpetrators, which can in turn reduce anger. It may or may not be rational to update a prior belief about the world, and this will likely vary by context. This shifts the conversation from whether anger has invariable consequences to why and how people choose to engage with their emotions in different ways. People vary in their motives to regulate their feelings, anger included. There are many ways to deal with anger; people could choose to maintain it, amplify it, or diminish it, and whether these are rational strategies depends on a person's goals, which may or may not include the goal of acknowledging the original harm done by the perpetrator.

Sustaining anger indefinitely may carry its own costs. Anger, like any emotion, might be exhausting to experience. Others have brought up the prospect of "outrage fatigue," or the dilution of anger by experiencing it for too long. This feels particularly relevant to the argument put forth by Callard. If one is entitled to feel anger infinitely, does that put one at greater risk for outrage fatigue and therefore make one more likely to let anger dissipate or fail to exert moral action? If an actor's anger becomes fatiguing, and they fail to assert a demand for justice, do they feel immoral for allowing the transgression to go unpunished? And does anger even become tiring at all? To us, these are fascinating psychological questions that warrant more study.

This brings us to Callard's second point about revenge. She suggests that when someone has wronged you, it changes your fundamental relationship with that person. One of the more compelling features of this argument is the idea that being wronged carries psychological costs for the self; it forces you to "remodel your psychological landscape" to focus on managing the other person. In our own work, we have examined emotions such as outrage and empathy from a motivated emotion regulation perspective—understanding how people relate to their emotions in different ways depending on the perceived costs and benefits of these emotions. The cost of remodeling a moral relationship has been less well studied, particularly for decisions about maintaining or reducing anger. According to one theory of moral judgment, much of morality is about regulating relationships, deciding what kind of relationship model you have with another person and whether they've violated its implicit norms. We agree with Callard that moral transgressions may alter the relationship model you have with someone, and that this could introduce its own costs; however, we suggest that more work be done to understand how people might choose to flexibly apply different relationship models to deal with transgressors.

We also agree with Callard that it is important not to overlook the functions of anger. By treating moralistic punishment as a key feature of anger, not a problem, Callard's argument is consistent with a body of research on the role of anger in motivating moralizing behaviors (e.g., costly punishment) and collective action (e.g., volunteering or protesting). Even if people disagree about the right types of punishment or the right ways to vote, there may be more consensus in the notion that it is important for people to want to maintain moral order and express civic voice. The link between outrage (and, by extension, anger) and collective action might be important to consider, particularly for groups at a structural disadvantage. Callard rightly notes that anger could be disruptive and that attempts to delegitimize anger could even undermine its moral function.

Indeed, Callard addresses the disproportionate impact that oppression—and anger experienced over oppression—has on minoritized group members. "Victims of injustice," she writes, "are not as innocent as we would like to believe. Either these victims are morally compromised by the vengeful and grudge-bearing character of their anger, or they are morally compromised by acquiescence." We appreciate Callard's argument here. An additional consideration that we have previously discussed in the context of outrage concerns which groups are *allowed* to experience anger. Although members of minority groups are justified in being angry about their oppression, members of the majority group sometimes vilify them for that anger—as if the mere experience of anger is fundamentally immoral and violent.

The choice presented by Callard at the end of her essay is an important one. Do you mute your anger and risk seeming to acquiescence to the transgression, or do you respond with anger and risk engaging in behaviors that might be problematic in their own right? These choices may become especially complex when others challenge whether you are allowed to express anger in the first place. To move the debate forward, we suggest there be more scientific study and ethical discussion about the motivations, beliefs, and values that inform how people act on their anger.

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More Important Things by Myisha Cherry

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In the spring of 1961, Princeton University historian Eric Goldman hosted James Baldwin, C. Eric Lincoln, George Schuyler, and Malcolm X on an episode of NBC's public affairs show *The Open Mind*. Although the topic was civil rights more generally,

the panelists focused on the Nation of Islam. As Nicholas Buccola's new book *The Fire Upon Us* (2019) highlights, Goldman appeared to frustrate and exasperate Baldwin, as he sought "to find out . . . whether the Muslim movement does hate me or not, and whether it proposes to use force to satisfy that hatred." While he expressed some criticism of the Nation of Islam's approach to resistance, Baldwin thought these were the wrong questions.

Instead, Baldwin asked whether whites were ready to face up to "the crimes for which they are responsible." Rather than evaluating black folks' emotions and attitudes, Baldwin believed it was more important to examine the context that gave birth to them. He continued this same line of reasoning throughout his writings. When civil rights activist Medgar Evers was assassinated, for example, Baldwin was not interested in examining the evils in the heart of the killer; instead, in *Nothing Personal* (1964), Baldwin asked how the United States had, as Buccola puts it, "created a virulent atmosphere of hatred."

The same Baldwinian criticism might be leveled at the inquiry underlying the debate about anger and rationality. Consider this way of formulating the questions Callard begins with:

After becoming a victim of racial discrimination, could it be rational for you to be just as angry on Thursday as you were on Tuesday, for my denying you a job on Monday based on your race? Moreover, could it be rational for you to conceive of a plan to ensure that I lose my job? And what if you don't stop at me losing my current job: could it be rational for you to go on to make sure that I never work for a public service organization again?

These are interesting philosophical questions, but are they the *most important* ones? Should they come at the expense of asking other questions, like: Are whites willing to own up to the fact that they have created an environment in which racial minorities are discriminated against? Baldwin would probably say no—these questions should not be sidelined.

This is not to say that certain questions about the logical structure of the ethics of anger cannot be asked. Nonetheless, if we start and end there—as if they are the most important—we fail to ask more relevant ones, ones that address *causes* instead of mere *symptoms*. And it is the relevant questions that help us resist the alluring tendency to promote racial mythologies, to pathologize and victim-blame, and to allow the racial sources of anger remain hidden and go unchallenged.

Some philosophers who follow this Baldwinian reasoning hail from the feminist tradition. Their method of inquiry focuses on an analysis of the social context from which anger arises, although they do not omit questions concerning the rationality of anger. Making sense of the context was, perhaps, the most important step to correcting or curing the social problem—for how could one come up with effective tools to combat injustice without a proper diagnosis of the injustice in the first place?

For example, poet and essayist Audre Lorde proudly claimed anger as an appropriate response to racism: "We operate in the teeth of a system for whom racism and

sexism are primary, established, and necessary props of profit." And to those who thought her anger was too harsh, Lorde responded, "is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the message that her life may change?" The work of Marilyn Frye offers another example. Rather than just defend the rationality of anger of black women to others, Frye also gives an account of what limits a white man's capacity to comprehend and give uptake to a black woman's anger.

After these philosophers raise the relevant questions, they undergo a project to reclaim anger—an emotion they believe could combat the racist and sexist context that gave rise to it. Macalester Bell, for example, writes that while we tend to center anger's instrumental uses, anger at racial injustice also has intrinsic value: it shows a love for virtue and hatred for vice. Alison Jagger claims that in a capitalist, white-supremacist, and patriarchal society, minorities will be expected to express emotions such as joy rather than blameworthy, "outlaw" emotions such as anger that transgress affective norms. And Amia Srinivasan argues that even if anger at racial injustice is counterproductive, it is still appropriate.

Are these anger reclaimers—like the Stoic and Aristotelian camps—guilty of what Callard calls the desire to "segregate 'the moral side' of anger . . . from the 'dark side'"? I do not think they are. For example, while Lisa Tessman admits that "unrelenting anger or rage . . . may help the politically resistant self-pursue liberatory aims," she adds that this may come at the price of "being corrosive to the self " and having to "maintain painful, corrosive, extremely taxing, or self-sacrificial character traits." A particular kind of anger at racial injustice is necessary in anti-racist struggle—I refer to it as *Lordean rage*—but that does not mean anger cannot go wrong. Even though its target, action tendency, and aims are quite different from those of more destructive kinds of anger (e.g., narcissistic and white rage), Lordean rage is not by definition virtuous. These examples show that it is possible to defend anger by highlighting both its moral and dark side.

Callard concludes that "victims of injustice are not as innocent as we would like to believe." But, again, I do not think innocence is the right thing to be concerned with here. Neither do I think that those outraged at racial injustice are as concerned with innocence as some might think.

First, members of the dominant group are often thought to be innocent in their anger, but racial minorities are not. For example, Baldwin's Cambridge debate foe, William Buckley, had empathy and compassion for the rage of racist white southerners, but described Baldwin as a "tormented Negro writer . . . who celebrates his bitterness against the white community."

Second, we miss the point of anger at racial injustice if we think innocence has a certain moral and political weight. Being angry at injustice is about coming to grips with our past and our future. The anger is used to ensure we pursue and prevent racial injustice, express the value of victims of oppression, challenge a racialized system, and demand a better way. This anger is not about innocence, nor does its success depend on it.

As Buccola notes, the virtues that Baldwin considered essential to freedom include charity, intelligence, resilience, and spiritual force. Innocence does not make the cut. I concede that those who are angry at racial injustice are both corrupt and wounded. I am not surprised by this, though. Instead I am grateful that there exist corrupt and wounded folk who are willing to use their anger at racial injustice to make the world better—not in the absence of these traits, but in spite of them.

This gives me *less* reason to think that judging their rationality is such an important endeavor. And it gives me *more* reason to think that I am not worthy to rub accusations of non-innocence in their faces on Tuesday, Thursday, or any day of the week.

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How Anger Goes Wrong by Jesse Prinz

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Anger has gotten a bad rap. It is condemned by the world's religions and in many philosophical traditions; we'd be better off ridding ourselves of rage, they say, and condemning fury to the flames. Agnes Callard has, heroically, come to anger's defense, presenting it as a necessary evil in an imperfect world. She goes further, suggesting that it is rational to crave revenge, and she rejects efforts to distinguish toxic anger from righteous indignation. Yet her embrace of this embattled emotion may go too far. We have much to learn by reflecting on what anger is good for and where it may err.

Critiques of anger abound. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Krishna describes anger as among our greatest enemies, which can lead only to delusion and despair. Buddhism counts anger as one of the three mental poisons, or *kleshas*; in Tibetan depictions of the Wheel of Life, anger is personified as a snake at the very center of the wheel, which, along with a bird (attachment) and a pig (ignorance), causes the unenlightened masses to remain trapped in a cycle of endless rebirth. The seminal Confucian philosopher, Xunzi, warns that rage will cause one to perish, and he says that we should learn to punish crime without anger. Zhuangzi, one of Taoism's greatest luminaries, advises each of us to drift through life like an empty boat, to avoid incurring anyone's rage. The Hebrew Bible depicts God as wrathful but cautions against human anger. Psalm 37, for example, urges that we forgo rage toward evildoers and trust the Lord to mete out justice. Christianity places emphasis on love and mercy, and the Holy Quran repeatedly refers to Allah as forgiving and forbearing.

Like Callard, I find such injunctions unsettling, in part because they can be used as a form of social control. Hinduism discourages anger while also encouraging the underclasses to accept their lot—what seems like a recipe for complacency. Ashoka the Great promoted the spread of Buddhism only after authorizing violent conquests, in a

move that might cynically be interpreted as an attempt to pacify vengeful sentiments among the vanquished. Taoist injunctions against anger sometimes imply that we should be silent in the face of injustice, and Nietzsche argues that Christian love conceals a deep hatred of life-affirming values and makes virtues of weakness and mindless obedience.

Behind these worries lies the recognition that anger can be an instrument of liberation. It can stir those who have been oppressed to rise up against injustice. It can motivate rebellions against tyranny and fights for civil rights. We've seen anger put to powerful use in the Me Too movement, and it is a rallying call that brings people to the polls and to the streets.

Anger has subtler benefits as well. For example, the contemporary philosopher Céline Leboeuf observes that anger can mitigate the withering effects of racism. The white gaze can lead people of color to feel unwelcome, incompetent, criminalized, sexualized, dehumanized, or otherwise degraded. Anger, Leboeuf argues, can restore a sense dignity. It can also play a therapeutic role, as when we delight in stories of vengeance.

In fact, anger is even more than a rallying cry and symbolic balm. It may also be a necessary component of morality. According to the "sentimentalist" tradition in moral philosophy, morality is not a feature of the objective world, to be discovered like scientific facts, but rather a product of human preferences. Like deliciousness and beauty, it is not inherent in things out there, but rather in how these things impact us. A world without anger is a world where nothing is wrong. Without it, we would be like asteroids colliding indifferently in space. Indignation distinguishes assault from mere impact. We cannot relinquish anger without losing our moral sense.

From all this it does not follow, however, that all anger is good. Here we must turn back to Callard's complaint against those who try to distinguish bad anger from righteous indignation. She sees this as a hopeless cause, noting that anger's dark side—the thirst for retribution—is an inevitable part of the package. I too think we should not turn off the urge to get even; anger so inoculated would be impotent. Still, I think we can identify untoward forms of anger, just as we can distinguish healthy hunger from gluttony. Let me catalog some of the ways anger can go wrong.

First, it can be misdirected. Psychologists warn against the "fundamental attribution error," blaming an individual for actions that may owe more to circumstance. This happens when we blame drug and property crimes entirely on individuals, for example, without also seeing structural causes that may be somewhat exonerating.

Second, anger can be misattributed. Some people turn their self-dissatisfaction outward, and others bring workplace frustrations home, lashing out at the near and dear.

Third, anger can also spread too widely, as in Callard's example of harboring a grudge against all Germans; this may be instrumental when national values remain

corrupt, but at a certain point, it becomes vital to distinguish those who work to combat bigotry and those who wax nostalgic for armbands and brownshirts.

Fourth, anger can be abusive. Consider the spouse who overreacts to minor mishaps with unpredictable fits of rage, or the tyrant who violently silences dissent. Anger is an instrument of both liberation and oppression.

Fifth, anger can reflect an undue sense of entitlement. Some people think they deserve special treatment and get bent out of shape when their expectations are not met. It is often said that men are more anger-prone than women, and this is a double injustice, since warranted female ire is suppressed, while frivolous male tantrums are indulged.

Sixth, anger can be self-destructive. Those who stew in rage may feel consumed by it. This does not mean that we should simply acquiesce to bad circumstances. But anger needs to find constructive outlets; the flames of rage scorch the torch when they cannot be used to ward off what ails us.

Seventh, just as pent-up rage is deleterious, harm can come from unleashing anger without restraint. It can trigger cycles of revenge. If restraint is exercised, the angry party can claim the moral high ground ("I gave you less than you deserved"), and that may reduce the likelihood of retaliation.

Such restraint brings us to a final issue: control. In moments of fury, we are not the best deliberators, and that fact, ironically, is an impediment to doing what anger demands of us.

In these and other ways, we can distinguish forms of anger that are better and worse. Callard might counter that the better forms still qualify as ordinary anger, albeit properly directed and proportionately applied. She wants mainly to reject those who posit a pristine species of anger, honorifically named "indignation," that is purged of its usual pugnaciousness. But to insist that anger has one form is overly reductive. Emotions are not mere instincts, hardwired in unchanging forms into our reptilian brains. They can also be retuned by cultural learning. In Malay, there are different words for brooding anger (*marah*) and frenzied rage (*amuk*). In the past, anger was more linked to violence than it is today, and that violence took culturally specific forms (such as dueling). These days anger might instead motivate legal action or "calling someone out" on social media.

In the end, then, Callard is right that we need anger, but we should not conceive of it as an untamable beast within. We can find forms that are most conducive to its varied vocations. Anger has a history, and it also has a future, which we can play an active role in shaping.

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Accountability Without Vengeance by Rachel Achs

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Agnes Callard is right that a retaliatory instinct is often rationally bound up with the way we hold each other morally accountable. But before we join her in bemoaning the impossibility of retaining innocence as a victim of injustice, it is worth scrutinizing the rationale that ties moral responsibility and retribution together. According to the "Argument for Revenge," retaliating against wrongdoers is a way of "teaching someone a lesson." But is it always the *only* way, or the best?

It seems to me that it depends—on what lesson we wish to teach, what the transgressor already knows, and what sort of admonishment might succeed in getting *this particular individual* to learn from my reciprocal anger.

Consider some examples. One lesson we might wish to impart on a wrongdoer is not to harm again in the same way. If you steal from me on Monday, I might hope to teach you not to do so again on Tuesday, nor, indeed, to steal from me ever again. Alternatively or additionally, we might hope that the offender comes to understand the wrongness of what she has done: to learn either *that* her behavior was wrong, *what it means* for her behavior to have been wrong, *which aspects* of her behavior made it wrong, and so on. I might wish for you to know, for example, that it is considered disrespectful to flout property rights, or to learn some of the ways that your theft inconvenienced me.

Yet it is far from clear that the best way to teach *all* these lessons, in *every* case, is by retaliating against the transgressor. Surely there are instances when alternative methods would be superior? For instance, perhaps in some scenarios a simple request would suffice to prevent the harm from being repeated—and have the added benefit of being much less likely to backfire. Nor will causing a wrongdoer to suffer help her to understand the wrongness of what she has done more deeply in those cases where she *already* possesses this sort of understanding.

One might defend retaliation against these charges by saying it is essential to convey to a wrongdoer how it felt to be a victim of what she did. Vengeance, on this line of thought, is always required to teach her *that*.

But this is either a lesson that can't be taught, or one for which retribution is likewise often unnecessary. If what we wish is for a wrongdoer to know *exactly how it felt* to experience what she did to us, then we are probably setting ourselves up for disappointment. After all, even retaliating against you with an eye for an eye won't make you feel what it was like to have the experience of being wronged *as me*. If, on the other hand, what we hope for is not complete immersion into our own psyches, but rather just that the people who wrong us come to develop some empathy with us as victims, then, again, retribution may sometimes be a useful tool, but it certainly won't always be a necessary one. In many cases the people who hurt us are people who have been hurt in the past themselves, and they are fully capable of putting themselves in

our shoes by reflecting on their own past experiences. Retaliating *may* prompt this sort of reflection, but it may also just as well incite defensiveness.

I don't deny, then, that moral education might *sometimes* best be served by unleashing retaliatory anger on a wrongdoer. But it seems undeniable that there are plenty of instances in which alternative strategies would serve equally well, if not better, to achieve this end.

This analysis makes trouble for Callard's larger conclusion. If vengeance is really only fruitful in a subset of cases, it seems wrong to conclude that there is reason for revenge to be *the* way that humans hold one another responsible. At most, it looks like we can say that there is reason for revenge to be *a* way that *some* people ca *sometimes* hold others responsible. This could hardly be described as a situation in which it is impossible for victims of injustice to avoid getting their hands dirty.

There is a way out of this problem, though, because there is a different way to argue that retaliation is the right response to being wronged. Rather than contending that there is something *intrinsic* to vengeance that makes it especially edifying in any and all cases, we might instead begin with the observation that many humans, as a matter of convention, take revenge to be an appropriate response to wrongdoing. The reason for retaliation would then be the same one that people usually have to enact conventional norms: that conventions have communicative power. Just as one might communicate respect by adhering to certain norms of etiquette, or communicate one's thoughts by using linguistic conventions, so too does retaliating against those who have offended us communicate something—in this case, that we recognize we have been wronged.

If this is right, then anyone who is wronged does have *some* reason to retaliate. Avenging oneself is how a person can communicate that she perceives what has been done to her is a *wrongdoing*. Note that the communicative and educational justifications for vengeance are not necessarily incompatible. Insofar as it is important that this perception of wrongdoing be communicated to the perpetrator, we might still see the justification for vengeance as rooted in the value of educating wrongdoers. But whether or not the wrongdoer really listens to me in a particular instance, or really learns her lesson, may be of minimal importance. Instead, it might matter more to us to convey our perception of how we have been treated to other members of our community, or even just to mark it for ourselves.

Where does this leave us, then, with the question of innocence in the face of injustice? Is it possible, after all, to practice moral accountability without vengeance?

On the one hand, if the norm for responding to wrongdoing *is* to retaliate, then responding to an objectionable event in some other way isn't going to as successfully register that event as a wrong. For example, I take it that a powerful reason for discontent with German denazification after World War II was precisely that the absence or

lightness of sentencing in many cases was inadequate to communicate the horrific nature of Nazi crimes. (This sort of pressure toward conservatism—reasons not to depart from or try to reform what we already do—arises in any norm-governed communicative context. Deviating from a convention, the worry goes, will fail to have the same communicative effect.)

On the other hand, it would seem that we have reason to be more optimistic than Callard is about the prospects of accountability becoming less vengeful. If the main justification for holding people responsible via retribution resides in the communicative power of conventions, then we can expect there to be plenty of instances in which the benefits of developing more humane ways of holding people responsible outweigh whatever value there is in retribution. A conservative might still worry, and rightly so, that violating the convention to retaliate may introduce communicative confusion: if we muddy the semiotic waters by transgressing communicative norms, we may fail to signal what we intend to get across. But absolute clarity doesn't always have to be our *top* priority—precisely because the limitations on what we can convey using reformed practices need only be temporary, since the fact that retribution holds so much communicative power stems merely from convention. Once new communicative conventions catch on, they may work just as well, or even better than, the old ones.

The upshot is that, while there is some reason that the affective response to injustice clings to the taste of blood, it doesn't have to cling quite so tightly.

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What's Past Is Prologue by Barbara Herman

April 17, 2020

I can see the point in Agnes Callard's observation that being the victim of wrongdoing is often worse for us than the harm done. The question is, even so, why not get over it? Callard thinks that even though the wrong recedes into the past, and even if there has been a sincere effort to make amends, we still have reason to be angry and to want revenge (whether or not we act on that desire). But why should the wrong in the past be eternally present *and* potent?

Many things happen that affect us and cause strong emotions. I discover wood rot in the window of my house and I am upset, even angry. I arrange to get the window fixed, and the feelings recede. A better paint job can make me think it was all to the good. It would make no sense to find that past event eternally upsetting even though, in a sense, the wood rot, as past, is eternally present. Why does Callard think the example of theft is different? The eternal reason for anger can't just be about the eternal present of the past. It must be that *a wrong* was done and apology is inefficacious in mitigating that.

Why might that be? Perhaps it is that the wrong done casts us as a victim. We can passively acquiesce to the bad treatment or wait for the wrongdoer to alter our narrative through apology and redress. Anger, by contrast, reclaims our agency—though at a price. It is a dark thing; surely unwelcome. Recasting it as indignation or righteous resistance doesn't change that. Whether we act on anger or not, it alters us, makes us worse—not who we would have been except for the wrongdoer's insult.

Suppose we agree that the issue is about regaining agency. Accepting an apology, though perhaps morally called for, doesn't put me back in my life's driver seat. Still, there are options. We could regard the apology as a first step and not a last one: an acknowledgment by the wrongdoer that how the future goes for us is now up to me. Things have to change, I say. There is work to be done. If we do the work, the wrong done remains where it was, but its teeth have been pulled. There's something to remember (and maybe never forget), but its narrative place in our lives has altered. The past that's in the present is different.

It is possible that whatever happened cannot be absorbed between us going forward. Perhaps it was too awful. But it isn't awfulness that Callard is pointing to: it's just the eternal past wrong in the present. Would Callard embrace the same logic for shame? Am I eternally bound to my own errors? (It is true that I can still activate the distress I felt when I was accused of and embarrassed by a clumsy act at age six, even though I know now that it was something we got over. It seems bizarre to me, not at all appropriate, maybe something to bring to my therapist, that I remain vulnerable to the memory of that past event.)

There is also a point in moral metaphysics here. Callard seems to think moral causality simply tracks natural causality. The moral event just is the natural event. But is that so? If we ask "When does an action or event end?" or "Which effects of an action belong to it?" the two causal orders can give different answers. My agential causality is morally salient even if absent my action the same effect would have occurred by other causes. I think that one of the tasks of morality—its duties, obligations, and responsive practices—is to supply a proprietary overlay on natural causality. There's reason to think that moral requirement functions as a kind of safe harbor. The untoward effects of morally required actions are not imputable to agents (given due care), whereas untoward effects of wrongful actions are imputable (because the agent on her own authority, not morality, has determined what is to be done).

Once we recognize the possible independence of moral from natural causality, backward moral effects are possible (it's no harder than coming to see a past event as a first step in an ongoing process). Moral causality can't change the material event—the thing was stolen on Monday—but we have public vehicles of redress that can negate the change in possession, mark the absence of permission, and block the perpetrator's authority over my narrative. I am not any longer a victim. It is now up to me whether to count your apology as a step forward. In standing with others, I have been given new powers.

So why might I still be angry? Set aside grown-up anger— indignation and the rest—and go back to where anger first appears. It is hard to imagine anyone angrier than a frustrated infant. Hungry; wet; hurting. Abandoned and alone. Panicked. Then saved: cosseted and returned to peace and love. The child learns to trust, but the body memory that the world can be lost remains. And so the anger. In the Monday theft, the moral injury is a reminder. I am (again) not self-sufficient. I am (again) vulnerable—always and fundamentally. The old anger returns. Infant anger is not directed at an episode: it is the infant in the moment. Regressive anger repeats the experience; it is timeless, a failure of the world. Reason to panic. The infant bites; it isn't punishment or revenge; she would consume the errant (m)other to become whole once again. This doesn't set a template for reasonable anger.

Is this a less plausible just-so story than Callard's? I can't see why it would be.

And what of Nietzschean ressentiment? Is it supporting evidence for Callard's idea of an anger-and-revenge-centric morality. What Nietzsche uncovers is the fear of the oppressed victim turned outward and into anger by priests who gain power by inverting the natural order of things, calling it morality. The believers learn to be oppressors too—of themselves. They could stay in this posture, waiting for someone or something to redeem them. We needn't dispute this history. Must it be true of us? We could instead together enact a less reactive moral order, one in which we add to our powers a "normative skin" that registers and sublimates the old anger, offering in its bloody stead a place in a social world that preserves dignity. We are injured; *we* pick us up; it is our story now; no reason to panic.

At the end, Callard wants us to see that "we can't be good in a bad world"—that it is impossible to respond rightly to being treated wrongly because, if we were honest, we'd admit that we want blood.

We want to turn the principle of wrongful action that victimized us on our victimizer. And two wrongs don't make a right.

There is truth in the observation that a bad world can make good action feel out of reach. What are we to do when kindness becomes an exploitable vulnerability or when our trust is consistently betrayed? In a bad world we feel passive, powerless, victims. Who wouldn't be angry? On Callard's picture, in teaching me eternal anger, the bad world owns me. It forever gives me reason to respond in kind. But why accept that? Surely *we* can build something that gets us past the eternal return of anger. My reason not to trust a past wrongdoer is not a reason to give up on trust.

Morality may have a dark history in primal anger and guilt that is hard to shed. But it is possible that the role of the dark side is to make vivid our wholeness in attachment to others, to give us confidence that a wrong done to us is not the end of the world. We are not alone. This is a hopeful view, not a timid one.

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Against Moral Purity by Oded Na'aman

April 17, 2020

Start at the end: "We can't be good in a bad world." Agnes Callard's main claim is that the right moral response to injustice is a kind of anger that involves committing wrongs, sometimes very serious wrongs. Only in a world very different from our own, where people don't do bad things, could we avoid such "moral corruption." This conclusion is particularly surprising because, while taking herself to be arguing *against* a purified notion of morality, Callard seems to posit a moral standard none of us can hope to meet. How did Callard end up doubling down on moral purity?

To answer this question, we need to go back and follow the argument. Callard starts off by arguing that an apparent philosophical controversy about anger conceals a shared fantasy. Some philosophers believe the world would be better without anger, while others believe a certain form of anger is part of an appropriate moral response to wrongdoing. In fact, Callard argues, both camps reject two crucial characteristics of anger, namely, the tendency to bear a grudge despite the wrongdoer's attempts at restitution and the tendency to exact revenge. Philosophers have been striving to purify anger from these nasty tendencies by describing them as pathological and unreasonable. But Callard insists these philosophers' aim is unrealistic and their verdict is oblivious to the valid reasoning that supports the grudge-bearing and vengeful tendencies of anger.

Callard therefore offers arguments to the conclusion that bearing grudges and exacting revenge are rational and justified. First, she argues that since the wrong that is the reason for anger cannot be undone no matter what compensation is offered or how profusely and sincerely the wrongdoer apologizes, the reason for anger will remain. This conclusion justifies clinging to one's anger despite attempts at restitution. Second, Callard argues that revenge is how we hold each other responsible for wrongdoing: the wrong done to us is made into a general principle that is imposed on the wrongdoer. We teach the wrongdoer a lesson, she says, by making his bad our good. The first argument suggests that the moral sensibility of anger is a grudge-bearing sensibility, and the second suggests that anger is a mechanism for moral accountability through vengeance. We cannot cleanse anger from these tendencies without eliminating its primary moral functions.

Callard does not take the two arguments to be decisive, but she maintains they are simple, intuitive, and compelling. How could so many good philosophers fail to recognize them? The reason these arguments have been overlooked, Callard says, is that "we do not want to acknowledge the possibility that morally righteous anger provides rational grounds for limitless violence."

I think Callard is right that we resist the idea that limitless violence is rational and moral, but I also think we have good reason to resist it: it is outrageous. Given the implausibility of the conclusion, the arguments that lead to it better be decisive or else we should doubt the arguments' validity (that the conclusions follow from the premises) or soundness (that the premises are true). I will come back to this point because I believe Callard's argument for bearing grudges is not valid and her argument for revenge is not sound. But before I say more about these arguments, I want to continue tracing Callard's line of thought in order to explain how she ends up with a morally purified view of morality.

Callard says the arguments she presents lead to the conclusion that "the morally correct way to respond to immorality is to do things—cling to anger, exact vengeance—that are in some way immoral." What does Callard mean by this? If grudge-bearing, vengeful anger is a morally appropriate response, then in what sense is it immoral? And if anger is immoral then in what sense is it morally righteous? Callard has an answer: "just because the moral corruption of anger is our best option doesn't mean it is not corruption." Given the fact of wrongdoing, some amount of grudge-bearing, vengeful anger is our best moral option. But our best moral option still involves moral corruption ("violence," "bloodlust"), so moral goodness in response to wrongdoing is impossible for us and, consequently, we can't be morally good in this bad world.

I believe this purified view of morality is misguided. Saying that a good person must be a person who never encounters moral wrongdoing is like saying that a healthy person must be a person who never falls ill. Such a healthy, good person could not live among us humans. We—human beings—develop physical and moral resilience by encountering disease and wrongdoing, not by avoiding them. For us, being healthy involves managing our physical vulnerability well and being good involves managing our moral vulnerability well. And, just as a healthy response to sickness can defeat the disease without amplifying or spreading it, a moral response to wrongdoing can address the wrong without replicating it. Human health is conditioned on the inevitability of disease; human goodness is conditioned on the inevitability of wrongdoing.

To be sure, Callard is right that grudge-bearing, vengeful anger is morally corrupt, but I believe she is wrong that it is a morally correct response to wrongdoing. In fact, we are often very angry indeed (and for good reason) without being inclined to bear grudges or exact revenge. Consider again the argument for bearing grudges. The wrong that is the reason for anger will never be undone, Callard says, so the reason for anger remains forever. But the wrong and its status as a reason for anger are two different things. While the wrong will remain, it might cease to *be* a reason for anger. The significance of past events can change in light of subsequent occurrences: my friend has apologized for betraying my trust, she sincerely regrets it, and we talked it over, so her betrayal might no longer be a reason for anger on my part. The betrayal remains the same, and just as wrong as it was, but its moral significance changes in light of the way it was addressed. So, from the fact that the wrong remains forever, it doesn't

follow that the reason for anger remains forever. The argument for bearing grudges is not valid.

Now consider the argument for revenge. Callard says that revenge is how we hold each other accountable, so it is essential to the accountability mechanism of anger. But even if revenge is *a* way to hold a person accountable, it does not seem to be the only way. Though Callard focuses on egregious wrongs, most of the mundane wrongs we encounter in the course of our daily lives do not prompt us to seek revenge. In fact, almost every meaningful relationship involves some instances of wrongdoing, which may even strengthen the relationship if they lead to a clarification of its essential norms, expectations, and boundaries. When I feel wronged by a family member, friend, or lover, I am not inclined "to make her bad my good," but I certainly want to hold her accountable, and I seek her recognition of the wrong she has done to me. Since revenge is not necessary for accountability, the argument for revenge is not sound.

Though we are not forced to accept Callard's "devastating conclusion"—that limitless violence is morally and rationally justified—Callard calls our attention to a deep and important fact: an appropriate response to wrongdoing may sometimes involve the intentional infliction of suffering on others. This should not lead us to lament the existence of wrongdoing in our world, but to recognize that suffering has a place in our moral ideals. You can't be good without experiencing some bad.

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Response to the Responses

The Wound Is Real by Agnes Callard

April 17, 2020

Paul Bloom asks, "Do angry people make the best romantic partners?" "Best" is a tricky word here, but speaking only for myself, I would not think that the "best" partner for me would be someone who never became angry or even someone who became angry less frequently than my husband does.

I am not perfect. Sometimes I am insufficiently loving, appreciative, or attentive; sometimes I do not try hard enough to overcome my faults; and sometimes I behave in ways that are outright disrespectful. Because he loves me, my husband doesn't just observe or notice my disrespect, he directly undergoes or experiences it. My disrespect hits him where it hurts, and his anger hits back, and hurts me. If he became less sensitized to how I act, or if I became less sensitive to his anger, I would not see that as an improvement in our relationship. Rather, I would think that we had come to matter less to one another.

One reason why we want romantic partners in the first place is that we need help to become the people we want to be—we are not, already, "best." When you have a deep connection with someone, their anger allows you to outsource some of your striving: your partner's anger is a mechanism of your aspiration. Daryl Cameron and Victoria Spring are right to note that making use of this mechanism has real psychological costs. Nonetheless, I want my husband to be willing to shoulder such costs on my behalf. I see his willingness to devote some of himself to regulating me—to dedicate a piece of his own psychological real estate to combating my faults and vices—as a measure of his love.

Of course this system can go haywire, as in cases of abuse. And, if activated too often, it is liable to generate a deadening hardness: the barrier between a high-conflict couple can become so thick that it can be pierced only by escalating to an extreme level of nastiness. But those are the failure cases, and they shouldn't distract us from the existence of success cases. In fact, as Jesse Prinz emphasizes, the very fact that there are characteristic ways for anger to go wrong suggests that there is something to the idea that it can go right.

So, I disagree with Bloom's conception of anger as a sickness, best eradicated, or—if that should prove impossible—lessened. Instead I join Oded Na'aman in thinking that anger is part of a healthy human life, though I also continue to maintain that there

is something unhealthy about even the healthiest—that is, most successful—cases of anger.

As an analogy, consider a fever. When you are feverish, you are not healthy, in that you cannot engage in your normal, productive functions. Something is wrong with you; your body is awry; fever is a form of sickness. But a fever is also a healthy immune response to the presence in your body of some kind of infection. If I lost my susceptibility for fever, that would be a sign that things had gone *very* wrong—it would be a way of getting sicker, not healthier. So, while it is clearly not "best" to be weak, feverish, sleepy, and incapacitated, it might nonetheless be the best option on the table. A fever is a healthy way of being sick. I have much the same view about anger—although here "health" becomes a metaphor, and it is best to speak more directly of whether anger is rational, or the degree to which it is a genuine response to moral reasons.

Bloom questions whether the language of reasons is even appropriate in this context—do people get angry "for reasons" and can someone be "rationally" angry? I would note that we do tend to speak in both of these ways. In fact anger is one of the contexts where we take "reasons-speak" to be not only warranted but required. Consider some perfectly ordinary scenarios where this demand *isn't* made. We usually take ourselves to have reasons for what we are doing, but sometimes when someone asks me, "Why are you tapping your fingers like that?" or "Why did you suddenly start running?" I face no strenuous objection if all I have to offer by way of a response is, "No particular reason." Likewise, I sometimes know why I feel sad, but at other times I just feel sad "for no reason." In stark contrast, no one considers it acceptable to feel angry at a person for no reason. We may not be able (or wish) to articulate the reason, but we feel called upon—compelled—to try. When it comes to practical reasons—theoretical reasons, such as those involved in syllogistic argumentation, are a different matter—I can think of no attitude more implicated in the practice of giving and receiving them than anger. This is why Rachel Achs is absolutely right to emphasize the "communicative" function of anger.

As a counterpoint to Bloom, who thinks that I make anger sound too rational, consider Na'aman's argument that anger is in fact more rational—or at any rate less grudging and vengeful—than I claim it to be. I argued that if we have a reason to be angry, that reason never goes away or changes. Na'aman claims, to the contrary, that subsequent events can change the significance of a past action in such a way as to eliminate a reason for being angry. His examples of such significance-changers are apology and regret, which make it the case that my reason for being angry—your betrayal—"was addressed." But he does not say how apology and regret address someone's anger over a betrayal. One can, I admit, imagine a funny case in which my anger is not aroused by your betrayal of me—I'm fine with you betraying me!—but simply by the fact that that betrayal has gone unregretted and unapologized for. Once you regret and apologize, you have indeed "addressed" my grievance, and I no longer have any reason to be angry with you. But usually what I'm angry about is not the

absence of measures to rectify a wrong but the presence of wrongdoing. And my claim was: because *that* doesn't change, *it* cannot be "addressed."

Barbara Herman argues along lines similar to Na'aman's when she proposes that there can be backward causation in the moral domain, and that this is "no more difficult to understand than coming to see a past event as a first step in an ongoing process." But consider an example of the latter: I see you laying bricks on the ground, thinking you are creating an artwork, and then later I realize you were laying the foundation of a house. I can say, "When I first assessed those bricks as an artwork, I was mistaken, because I didn't realize they were part of an ongoing process." The parallel is then: when I became angry at you for betraying me, I was mistaken, because I didn't realize that was part of an ongoing process that would end with you apologizing.

This doesn't seem right, and it suggests that backward moral causation is, indeed, much more difficult to understand than coming to see a past event as a first step in an ongoing process.

My point here is not quite the one Elizabeth Bruenig takes me to be making—that holding on to anger is in one's self-interest—but rather that holding on to anger is inscribed in the logic of anger. Bruenig herself gestures at this logic with her lovely description of anger's point of view as a "kingdom of damage." I am arguing that forgiveness has no location in that kingdom, even in cases where one might be selfishly benefitted by forgiving. It is not uncommon for someone to be unwilling to let go of anger even when the incentives for doing so are very great. She doesn't care about those rewards, or being happy, or the overall satisfaction of her preferences; she cares about one thing—the moral fact that, if I am right, continues to constitute a reason for her to be angry.

I do not deny that there might be some way to articulate what it might mean to change the (significance of the) moral facts, but I think that successfully doing so is much trickier than Herman or Na'aman present it to be. Those who would rescue forgiveness must face the eternal anger argument head on—and it is a formidable foe.

Still, I admit that it is one thing to claim that the reasons for anger are eternal, and another to insist that they underwrite vengeance. Na'aman contends that I overstate the role of vengeance in anger, particularly in the case of those we are closest to. But I would note that we are reluctant to describe practices we ourselves are involved in as "vengeance." For instance, consider criminal justice. We do not feel that the wrongdoer has been held accountable unless he suffers for what he has done. We make his bad our good, and that is vengeance, even if we prefer to call it "retributive punishment." Likewise, I would call it "vengeance" when you are fighting with your spouse and deliberately say things you know will hurt them; or when you "punish" them by leaving dirty dishes for them to do; or demand that they perform whatever tasks—cleaning the living room, dealing with the car registration—you know they

most hate. "Passive aggression" is one of the terms we use for small acts of vengeance that we prefer not to call "vengeance." I admit there is an approach to marital disputes that is entirely forward-looking, productive, and cheerful: "Can we do things differently in the future?" But note that such a Cheerfully Productive Spouse prescinds from the project of holding her spouse accountable—for that (backward-looking) project cannot, I maintain, be separated from wanting them to suffer in some way.

What is the force of acknowledging that our anger, even at its healthiest, is nonetheless still sick? If you can't be good in a bad world, then those whose anger is fully justified—the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and those who crusade angrily on their behalf—are tainted by moral imperfection. Desmond Jagmohan and Myisha Cherry are concerned that in pointing this out, my aim is to blame, judge, or censure such people, or to suggest that it would be "best"—to reprise Bloom's word—for them to be morally purer than they are.

In fact I agree with Cherry (herself echoing Amia Srinivasan) that "even if anger at racial injustice is counterproductive, it is still appropriate." And my emphasis on the connection between anger and holding accountable helps explain why this is true. As I see it, our concern with morality runs deeper than it being something we cheerfully hope to bring about: we are attached to it, and this attachment underwrites the importance of (backward-looking) considerations of accountability. Like Cherry, I believe this can be traced to the emotion of *love*.

One can't love a principle. When someone loves justice or equality, her love is, in the first instance, directed at the people—friends, associates, neighbors, fellow citizens, fellow humans—in whom those relations are, or should be, embodied. Love is a form of attachment, and therefore an avenue of vulnerability. Those who crusade for justice and equality by way of love open themselves up to being damaged and wounded in the face of injustice and inequality. Such people make a profound sacrifice, and we cannot be properly grateful to them for it without acknowledging that the wound—which takes the form of a fever of grudging vengeance—is real.

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Agnes Callard
Angry Forever
There are two problems with anger: it is morally corrupting, and it is completely correct.
April 16, 2020

<bostonreview.net/forum/agnes-callard-philosophy-anger>. With responses from Paul Bloom, Elizabeth Bruenig, Desmond Jagmohan, Daryl Cameron & Victoria Spring, Myisha Cherry, Jesse Prinz, Rachel Achs, Barbara Herman, Oded Na'aman. Plus, a response to the responses.