

A Defense of the Moral Praiseworthiness of Anger

By

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Abstract

In this paper, I challenge criticisms concerning the moral use of anger in recent debates. Recently criticisms have emerged claiming that anger either always carries with it an irrational desire or that anger causes one to habituate negative character traits. I challenge the conception of anger which leads to these objections by appealing to our common notions and intuitions concerning the emotion. I then provide an account of anger as a desire to overcome impediments to our general well-being with a focus on human dignity. I argue that my account of anger does not fall victim to these criticism and conclude that the emotion of anger properly constrained can be used in a morally praiseworthy manner.

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. Traditional Anger
2. Challenging the Traditional Conception of Anger as Presented in Recent Philosophical Debates
 1. Amoral Targets of Anger
 2. Educational Anger
 3. Anger at Injustice
3. Impediment Anger
 1. Amoral and Character Impediments
 2. Appraisal Impediments
 3. Recognition Impediments
4. The Moral Praiseworthiness of Anger
5. Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that the emotion of anger is necessary to properly navigate the moral landscape in everyday interactions and thus can be a morally praiseworthy emotion. I will challenge both Stoic and Buddhist critics of anger who claim that anger is irrational and causes one to habituate immoral character traits. I will present my argument in opposition to recent work in the philosophy of moral emotions and in particular against Martha Nussbaum's account in her 2015 book, *Anger and Forgiveness*¹.

I argue that the Traditional Account of anger, as articulated by Martha Nussbaum fails to account for anger towards amoral obstacles, anger's role in education, and perhaps most importantly, for the way we use anger to address injustice. Nussbaum argues that anger is irrational and cannot be used in a morally praiseworthy manner. However, this is true only if her account of anger is correct. I will provide an account of anger as a desire to overcome various kinds of impediments to our well-being; which I argue can make sense of anger's use in these areas. By the end of this paper I hope to show that anger is not only a morally permissible, but even a praiseworthy way of addressing tangible harms; such as those found in response to cases of serious harm. This will provide an argument against the Stoic criticism of anger as irrational.

In response to Buddhist critics of anger, I hold that anger does not necessarily cause one to habituate negative character traits. In the background of my view is the idea that a fully human moral agent would, in some important sense, be capable of anger and that it is morally appropriate to become angry in some contexts. An inability to feel a morally appropriate

¹ Nussbaum, Martha C. *Anger and Forgiveness Resentment, Generosity, and Justice*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

emotional response, like anger, in some situations, would count as a morally blameworthy character defect.

Section 1: Traditional Anger

In this paper, the ‘Traditional Account’ of anger will refer to the account of anger given by Nussbaum in Chapter 2 of her book, *Anger and Forgiveness*, which she adopts from her reading of Aristotle’s traditional definition in the *rhetoric*: “a desire accompanied by pain for an imagined retribution on account of an imagined slighting inflicted by people who have no legitimate reason to slight oneself or one’s own” (Rhetoric 1378a31-33)². Nussbaum holds that anger involves a “double movement, from pain inflicted to striking back” (pg. 21). Essentially, anger is a responsive emotion that seeks to address some perceived present bad to obtain a perceived future good. To understand and interpret Aristotle’s account, Nussbaum attempts to define the two key concepts: Retribution and slighting/injury.

Nussbaum defines retribution as “...a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender, in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense.” This could range from wishing for the relationship of an ex to go badly, to wishing for jail time for one’s offender (23). By using the word ‘payback’ in her definition, Nussbaum is appealing to the idea of paying back a debt: Referring to debt’s ability to be assuaged by the debtor paying what is owed. Nussbaum argues that the Traditional Account treats the harm involved in ‘slighting’ as one that can be assuaged through punishment. Retribution’s ability to address harms will depend on the account of slighting/injury that we adopt. To define ‘slighting’, Nussbaum analyzes the case of rape (23). She argues that there are two ways we can view the

² Rhetoric, 1378a31-33, Cited in Nussbaum 2015

harms involved; either as the tangible physical, psychological, and emotional harms (29) or as a down-ranking of societal status (28).

Nussbaum is certainly correct that there is a strong historical connection between the idea of anger at injustice and a desire for the other to suffer. Nussbaum argues that there is an aesthetic pleasure tied to this idea of revenge; that we enjoy stories where the villain gets what's coming to them (25). I have no doubt that she is correct about this. Take for instance our love for the story of Helen of Troy in the *Iliad*, or the enjoyment of Edmund Dante in *The Count of Monte Cristo* at the thought of his revenge when he says: "How did I escape? With difficulty. How did I plan this moment? With pleasure." However, is this historic connection enough for us to accept that the desire found in Traditional Account of anger is found in every expression and feeling of anger?

Nussbaum holds that this desire for retribution is irrational in most cases of anger. In anger against amoral objects, such as broken computers, it wrongly attributes intentions to said objects. In educational anger a desire for revenge is irrational as the goal of education is to better other individuals. The irrationality of anger in cases of justice requires a more complicated explanation that I will get to shortly. For now, It is enough to say that for Nussbaum anger against injustice is either Lex Talionis based revenged or it is a mislabeling of tangible harms as societal downranking; Both of which are irrational.

Nussbaum's challenge to the Traditional Account is a modern version of the Stoic criticism of anger. Seneca held that anger is not an essential part of human nature (rationality)

and thus we can make ourselves to live without it. (De Ira 1,5)³. For Seneca humans are naturally rational, and rationality, being self-discipline, exists in opposition to the passions which are uncontrolled reactions to situations (De Ira 1,7). Nussbaum, continuing this tradition, suggest that anger is a desire for a goal which is fundamentally irrational. Her solution to this problem is to move to what she calls Transition Anger which is akin to the Buddhist Kuruna (Compassion). Thus, she aligns her view with the Buddhist criticisms of anger. The traditional Buddhist criticism is that anger forms bad character traits and we can avoid these traits by adopting the emotion of compassion as a way of addressing the same concerns as anger. I hold that these objections only work if we adopt the Traditional Account of anger as the true account of the emotion. However, there are many cases where our anger does not seem irrational, which cannot be accounted for by the Traditional Account.

Section 2: Challenging the Traditional Conception of Anger as Presented in Recent Philosophical Debates

2.1: Amoral Targets of Anger

Amoral targets are targets independent of moral consideration which impede our ability to accomplish our goals. When we experience anger in our everyday lives, it seems that our anger is commonly directed towards targets which are independent of moral consideration. For example, we get angry at our computers if they run slowly or fail to save a file, we get angry at

³ Seneca, Lucius. "On Anger." *Moral Essays*, Translated by John Basore, vol. 1, 1928. *Sophia Project*, www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/seneca_anger.pdf.

our cars when they do not start in the morning, we get angry if there is ice on our car windows when we need to leave for work; and so on. What can the Traditional Account of anger say about such cases?

The Traditional Account paints anger as a desire for suffering on part of the target who has wronged us. Such a desire directed towards an inanimate object makes no sense insofar as it is not the type of thing which can be made to suffer. Nussbaum argues that when we get angry at tools we are irrationally treating them as agents with a function towards us they are refusing to fulfill (19). On the Traditional Account, anger in these cases is not distinct from anger towards moral agents. We are simply acting irrationally when we get angry towards our cars. One thing to note about Nussbaum's suggestion is that seeing my car as something with a function for me it is refusing to fulfill does not require me to believe it is the type of thing that can suffer. Instead, only that it is the type of thing which has intentions. Obviously, such a belief is still rationally ungrounded. However, it is worth noting that even if Nussbaum is correct this is not evidence that my anger towards it is a desire for suffering on its part.

What is the desire I have towards my car in such cases? It seems to be that my desire is for my car to do its job. My desire does not require assigning intentionality to my car. In cases of anger towards other moral agents there is a close association of anger and blameworthiness (Quigley and Tedeschi, 1996)⁴. When we become angry towards an agent it also seems we assign blame to the agent. Nussbaum notes that in cases where we realize the target of our anger

⁴ Quigley, Brian M., and James T. Tedeschi. "Mediating Effects of Blame Attributions on Feelings of Anger." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 22, no. 12, 1996, pp. 1280–1288.

is not blameworthy our anger is often assuaged (18). Does anger always require that we assign wrongdoing or blameworthiness to the source of our anger?

Recently, David Shoemaker (2018)⁵ has defended the position that there are two distinct types of anger: “One type of anger moves us to overcome or eliminate the source of some blockage. The other moves us to confront or retaliate against someone”. I disagree with Shoemaker’s view that these are two different types of anger at play. However, I believe he is right to say that there are two distinct roles being played by anger.

Anger aimed at eliminating the source of a blockage does not necessarily entail that I believe the blockage to be the product of some type of wrongdoing. Take for instance when we get angry, not at objects like my car, but at situations. For example, when we find ice on our car windows in the morning, preventing us from getting to work. Unlike tools, we do not assume nature has a functional role that it performs relative to our needs. It is unreasonable to assume that, in every case of anger concerned with natural obstacles, we have such an elaborate irrational belief. A more reasonable explanation would be that we simply get angry at obstacles to our goals and that our desire in such cases is not retribution but to overcome the obstacle we face.

However, even in the cases of ice on our windows Nussbaum may be able to argue that we are making a mistake; what she calls the narcissistic error (29). The narcissistic error is caused when we have such unreasonable view of our own self-worth that we think anything we perceive as ‘bad’ is an insult intentionally committed upon us. Might we be doing that in the

⁵ Shoemaker, David, et al. “You Oughta Know.” *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018.

‘ice’ case? If we were to adopt the account of vices given by Evagrius Ponticus, it may be argued that anger at the ice is a matter of pride. Ponticus argued that pride often leads us to anger at the divine because of a naïve view about our own worth (Harmless and Fitzgerald, 2001: Skem 40-56)⁶.

From this naïve position of worth, the ice is viewed as God’s or the universe’s failure to live up to its duties or responsibilities regarding us. However, this is quite a perverse form of pride. Obviously, a perverse sense of worth might cause us to desire retribution in cases where such desires are irrational (e.g. wanting God to suffer because we dislike the snow). However, to assert that we are doing this every time we get angry about obstacles in our path requires empirical evidence that Nussbaum has yet to supply. Therefore, we have reason to think that a proper account of anger will be able to make sense of anger in this obstacle overcoming role.

2.2: Educational Anger

Education anger is concerned with actions and character traits which are detrimental to our ability to pursue a flourishing life. If we are dishonest or simply judged as being so, we might limit our options in life. Anger’s role in such cases is either to educate others or to challenge ourselves to do better in the future. One example of such cases is if I start going to the gym with the goal of bench pressing 225 lbs in 20 months. Near the end of this time, if I am unable to lift this amount, I might become angry at myself. Especially if I believe that my ability to bench this amount was impeded by my own laziness.

⁶ Harmless, William, and Raymond R. Fitzgerald. “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus.” *Theological Studies*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2001, pp. 498–529.

There are many historical accounts which detail anger's use in cases of education. Evagrius Ponticus and Augustine held that anger could be used as an educational tool (Gillette, 2010)⁷. Jesus displayed anger in the temple as a way of showing discontent towards and/or educating the money lenders (Matthew 5:38)⁸. Similarly, Buddha used anger to chastise a follower who willfully misinterpreted him (Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta)⁹. In anger's educational role it seems that we perceive ourselves or others as having some 'bad' character trait or having performed some wrong action. Insofar as we care about the others, and/or ourselves, we have reason to desire that they no longer perform such actions or have bad character traits. Anger in education is aimed at well-being rather than retribution or suffering. Therefore, the Traditional Account seems ill-suited to handle such cases.

Seneca provides a criticism of anger in educational with the story of how Plato disciplined his slaves (De Ira 3, 12). Plato refused to enact punishment himself because in his anger he believed that he might punish the man more than was necessary. Instead he asked another to enforce the punishment so that the slave might learn but not be harmed more than necessary. A similar story can be found in the works of Augustine in a letter he wrote to a Mother Felicitas who was having a dispute with some of the sisters at her convent (Gillette, 2010). Mother Felicitas corrected some of the sisters angrily. Augustine admitted that while anger may accomplish the task; she must be careful not to react too strongly in anger. However, she should not apologize for the claims made lest her position be undermined. The criticism of

⁷ Gillette, Gertrude. *Four Faces of Anger: Seneca, Evagrius Ponticus, Cassian, and Augustine*. University Press of America, 2010

⁸ *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁹ Ñāṇamoli, and Bodhi. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: a Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications, in Association with the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 2015.

anger at play here is the idea that even if it can perform an educational role, it tends to do so in a manner that is potentially immoral.

Nussbaum provides a possible alternative to the use of anger in such cases. Arguing that an appearance of anger can accomplish the same goal without the risk. She gives an account of the case of Jesus in the temple. She argues that the Utku Eskimo provide a beneficial way of thinking about Jesus' actions (43). The Utku seem to hold that Jesus' actions in the temple were a performance to educate "without any emotion in the anger area". She argues that such displays are "a possibility that is open to those who want to deter without risking going down the wrong path". She comments on this further to point out the usefulness of performative anger even when actual anger is not present.

"One Saturday my hair Stylist... reached up for the shampoo, opening a ill-organized cabinet out of which various bottles fell... I was startled but not really hurt or upset. But I thought it was useful to signal to others the significance of this event, since someone else could be seriously hurt in the future. So, I gave a display of polite outrage..." (150)

Here Nussbaum shows that the performance of anger can be used as a tool for correction even if anger is not present. In Jesus' case He is attempting to address the corruption that has invaded the temple, His Father's house. Given this unique connection to the temple, it is not unreasonable to assume that Jesus was feeling genuine anger in this scenario. However, Nussbaum's point that a performance of anger could accomplish the same goal is correct and worth addressing. If she is correct then we might be able to avoid Seneca's concerns, but we are no longer talking about anger.

There is good empirical evidence to suggest that, even from the age of infancy, we naturally react and change our behavior in response to the emotion cues of others (Klennert et al., 1983, Tronick, 1989)¹⁰. We use the emotional cues of others to make predictions about the types of behavior they are likely to engage in towards us. Someone trying to defend the Traditional Account might argue that in cases of education we are not actually angry. Instead we put on the performance of anger, perhaps subconsciously, to provide a threatening pose. However, if we do not see the need to defend the Traditional Account, then it seems reasonable to say we are angry in these cases. Perhaps it is a threat of violence on our part that changes the behavior in others. Perhaps in many cases the others simply realize they have made us upset and because they care of our opinion of them are willing to alter their behavior. Either way it is not clear that anger in education desires suffering and this is a problem for the traditional account; even if Seneca's criticism holds.

How can we make sense of Anger in the case of education? Perhaps we might adopt Shoemaker's view that there are two types of anger and claim that anger in education is a case of obstacle overcoming anger. We see 'educational' flaws as obstacles on our way to accomplishing further goals and anger plays a role in motivating us to overcome these obstacles. However, a problem arises in the case of education as it involves an assignment of blame. On Shoemaker's account, Goal-frustrating anger does not involve an assessment of another's blameworthiness. Blaming Anger assigns blame but Shoemaker argues that its main goal to communicate our

¹⁰ Klennert, Mary, et al. "EMOTIONS AS BEHAVIOR REGULATORS: SOCIAL REFERENCING IN INFANCY." *Emotions in Early Development*, Academic Press, 1983, pp. 57–86.

Tronick, Edward Z. "Emotions and Emotional Communication in Infants." *American Psychologist*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1989, pp. 112–119.

anger towards those who have wronged us. I find this account of blaming anger quite appealing, however it is not clear this is what is happening in the educational case of anger.

The goal in the educational expression of anger is not solely to express that we are angry, but to stop the negative behavior. Perhaps the expression of anger is a step towards this goal, but certainly we would find the expression of our anger meaningless if it did not accomplish what we desired. Also, in education, it need not be the case that the other has wronged me or anyone. For this reason, I doubt that Shoemaker is correct about there being two types of anger and I assume there is a single underlying account which can make sense of this overlap.

2.3: Anger at Injustice

I have already mentioned that Nussbaum claims there are two traditional ways to view the harms involved in acts of injustice. Either as the tangible physical, psychological, and emotional harms (29) or as a down-ranking of societal status (28). She calls these two options the Road of Payback and the Road of Status. It is these two accounts which form the main criticism of anger's ability to address injustice.

The Road of Status treats injuries, not as the tangible damage done to individuals, but as down-rankings to their social status (28). Nussbaum attributes her account of the Road of Status to Jean Hampton (1988)¹¹. On Hampton's account, the worry involved in harm on the part of the victim is that the offense caused to them displays the victim's weakness. By putting down the one who offended them, they prove them lesser/weaker and restore their relative social status (26). The problem with the status account is that it treats all harms, tangible or not, as they relate

¹¹ Murphy, Jeffrie G., and Jean Hampton. *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

to one's self-esteem. To elaborate on the problem with the status account she focused on the case of rape.

On the Status account, the harm of rape is that it places the victim's status arbitrarily lower than the attackers. By punishing or humiliating the attacker, the victims of rape assert themselves to hold the higher relative position. Nussbaum is correct that a relegation of all harms to down-rankings is irrational. The harms involved in rape are not harms of down-ranking, at least not entirely, and lowering the others social status does not assuage them. Rape often involves physical harms, which are ill conceived in terms of down-ranking; to lose an eye is not to lose 'face' in society. Secondly, rape involves psychological and emotional trauma which may involve harms to one's self-esteem, but also involves fears concerning one's safety and impairs one's ability to function properly in society. Such harms go beyond mere damages to self-confidence.

The Road of Payback views slighting as a tangible harm which it attempts to assuage via punishment. Nussbaum questions why any intelligent person would take this seriously as a way of addressing tangible injuries, such as physical harm (24). Certainly, we cannot think that punishing the other person restores what is damaged in cases of tangible injury. If I lose my eye, neither taking the eye of my offender or putting them in jail will restore my own. It is on this understanding of harm where the role of aesthetic pleasure comes into play. According to Nussbaum, Payback makes sense only if we adopt a questionable metaphysical account of punishment where justice requires a 'balancing of cosmic scales'. Punishment on this view is simply an irrational way of addressing the types of harms at play. It will simply not be the case that my pleasure at revenge plays any role in addressing the tangible harms we face in real world cases of injustice.

The Traditional Account of anger as a desire to respond to injustice through suffering is not completely irrational. There are cases of pure social status harms that can be addressed via retribution. Perhaps this is what Aristotle had in mind with his definition and by attempting to address the case of rape by the same means we are making a mistake. If someone calls me a liar, then I might desire for them to suffer. This is not irrational if the suffering has something to do with the claim they have made about me. If my accuser is held higher in social esteem than I, proving them a liar may harm them much more than their claims could ever harm me. However, causing them this harm is a rational way to respond to the harm that they caused me. It is not clear to me why Nussbaum does not separate these cases and treat them as different uses of anger. There is no need to assert that because anger deals with both status and payback our account must merge one into the other. Nor, that traditionally we have.

I argue that the reason that anger is irrational in the Traditional Account is because it assumes anger has the same goal in all cases. It is unreasonable to assume that anger would seek the same outcome in cases A, B, and C; when these cases are focused on vastly different harms. However, we cannot ignore the cases where the Traditional Account is appropriate. What we need is an account of anger that makes sense of anger's ability to play all these roles; especially in addressing tangible harms.

Section 3: Impediment Anger

In order to understand anger's role in addressing injustice, I propose an alternative account of anger based upon anger's ability to motivate us to overcome obstacles: Call this

Impediment Anger. Impediment Anger is a desire to overcome impediments to our general well-being and goals and the well-being and goals of those we care about.

I argue there are four fundamental types of impediments.

1. Amoral impediments
2. Character Impediments
3. Appraisal Impediments
4. Recognition Impediments

3.1: Amoral and Character Impediments

Amoral impediments are the impediments caused by amoral obstacles. We get angry at ice on our car windows because it is an impediment to our ability to pursue further goals. It is rational for us to take active steps to overcome such obstacles. One might argue that in these cases what we experience is not anger; granted the close association between anger and blame. However, it seems like we do get angry in such cases. When we get angry at ice on our windshields the body is priming itself to deal with an impediment to our ability to go about our day. Anger's role in prompting action can be seen by the fact that anger causes various physical changes allowing us to react more quickly in response to obstacles (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990)¹². In these cases, the obstacle is largely an obstacle to our immediate goals. However, depending on the nature of these goals such obstacles may be an impediment to our

¹² Levenson, Robert W., et al. "Voluntary Facial Action Generates Emotion-Specific Autonomic Nervous System Activity." *Psychophysiology*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1990, pp. 363–384.

general well-being. My account of Impediment Anger is to take this role of anger and extend it to other cases.

Character Impediments concern anger's role in education. If in all cases anger is a desire to overcome impediments, then we can make sense of its role in education. In cases of education we recognize that one has impeded their own ability to succeed and live a flourishing life into the future. Or at the very least that their actions are not productive to their own immediate goals. Anger in these cases provides motivation for us or others to overcome these impediments. However, even as a desire to overcome an impediment we might still fall victim to Seneca's concern.

One way of looking at Plato's reluctance to punish his slave is to say that anger is inefficient as an educational tool. We might worry that anger causes us to act against others above and beyond what is necessary in an educational setting. However, it is not clear why we should say that Plato asking another to perform the task of discipline is not also acting out of anger. To take an action out of anger is not to be non-pragmatic in trying to accomplish our goals. There is reason to believe that if we act too aggressively in our anger we will cause additional impediment to those we are trying to educate. However, this does not imply that we are no longer angry if we relegate the task to a more suited party.

Understanding anger in this way may help us make sense of cases which fall between these two types of impediments. Two examples are when we get angry at young children and accidents. Nussbaum's approach is to label these cases as irrational because young children are not moral agents and accidents are unintentional thus they cannot be rationally assigned blame (18). An interesting thing to note about Nussbaum's denial of rationality, due to the lack of

intention on the part of the target, implies that there are cases where such anger is rational. Is it true that in every instance where we are angry because of children or accidents we are irrationally assigning blame?

A child acting up in a store is an impediment to our ability to shop. Losing a leg in an accident is an impediment to one's mobility. It is certainly the case that we might treat the actors in this case as full moral agents and thus act immorally towards them. However, we might also be angry at the situation they have caused and not the actors themselves. If we are careful to distinguish between cause and blameworthiness, it is unclear that our anger in such cases is morally problematic. If we value the goals we are trying to accomplish, then our expressions of anger in these cases are displays of frustration: Communications of our frustration to ourselves or others. Such communications are morally neutral; assuming we do not act towards the cause in these cases as we would full moral agents.

If we desire to make sense of our anger in these cases, we cannot rely on the Traditional Account. We get angry in many circumstances where it does not seem we are desiring revenge. If Nussbaum is going to argue that our anger in these cases is irrational, then she needs to provide more evidence that we are desiring revenge in these cases. I hold that our desire is to overcome the impediments that our preventing us from accomplishing our goals. This account makes better sense of the issues at play in said cases.

3.2: Appraisal Impediments

Appraisal and Recognition Impediments are based on Stephen Darwall's (1997) account of respect. Darwall argued that there are two fundamental types of respect: Recognition and

Appraisal. Recognition Respect is respect for persons as such: An assumption of general, basic human dignity which requires others to “take seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons in deliberating what to do”. On the other hand, Appraisal respect does not carry with it any necessary actions which must be taken towards an individual. It is instead recognition of an individual’s status in society, or recognition of their character.

Appraisal Impediments are impediments caused when one fails to recognize or intentionally lowers another’s social status. I have already addressed these cases briefly in my discussion of injustice. I argue that the best way to explain the role of retribution in these cases is as a tool for overcoming impediments.

Imagine I am wrongly labeled a liar. This false accusation has the potential to be an impediment towards attainment of my social goals. In such cases, we do not merely desire the other to suffer. Instead we desire to not be labeled a liar. Causing the other to suffer can be a tool for that purpose. If he suffers because I prove him the liar then my primary goal has been accomplished, his suffering is a secondary effect of my primary goal of overcoming the appraisal impediment to the achievement of my social goals. Imagine that my accuser gets into a minor wreck damaging the car he cares deeply about. This would cause him suffering but would do nothing to assuage the harms done to me. The desire for him to suffer because of his reduced social status in the former case is rational as it is a by-product of proving myself to be an honest man. Addressing social status harms through retribution only make sense if the reason to cause suffering somehow addresses the harms caused.

There is an open question as to why we should care about social slights if they are not damaging enough to be tangible harms. I argue that the reason to care about the harms in

Appraisal Impediments is that if they are not addressed they may become Recognition Impediments; which are impediments to one's overall well-being. For now, it is enough to say that even Nussbaum acknowledges that we can make sense of anger's role in addressing Appraisal Impediments. I argue the reason this makes sense is because anger overall is a desire to overcome impediments, not a desire for suffering. Aristotle's account of anger in *Nicomachean Ethics*¹³ (NE) gives us another way to think about why we should address these slights.

The deficiency, whether it is a sort of 'inirascibility' or whatever it is, is blamed. For those who are not angry at the things they should be angry at are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the right way, at the right time, or with the right persons; for such a man is thought not to feel things nor to be pained by them, and, since he does not get angry, he is thought unlikely to defend himself; and to endure being insulted and put up with insult to one's friends is slavish. (NE. 4.5)

For Aristotle anger is not always retaliatory but is instead about displaying that one has a certain type of moral character. That one is the kind of person who will defend themselves and those around them. This account only works if anger is not solely a desire for revenge: It is striking that Nussbaum does not discuss the account from *Nicomachean Ethics*, but instead focuses only on the relatively underdeveloped definition of anger given in the *Rhetoric*.

Anger in this way is a desire to overcome impediments which if one does not overcome, or attempt to, they present themselves as slavish. To be slavish is to be a person who cannot function fully as an agent in their interpersonal interactions.

3.3: Recognition Impediments

¹³ "The Internet Classics Archive | Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle." Translated by W D Ross, *The Internet Classics Archive*, classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.4.iv.html.

Recognition Impediments are caused by an inability or unwillingness to recognize the personhood of others. Such impediments are best explained through an example. In her paper, *Anger as a Political Emotion*, Celine Leboeuf analyzes anger's use as a response to be subjected to what she calls the 'white gaze'. Essentially this is the recognition by a non-white American that they are being judged or assumed lesser based purely on the color of their skin. She paints anger as a reasonable response used to assert one's personhood in such situations.

In short, the black man's anger endows him with an acuity that he had lost when he first entered the white world. No longer "disorient" and "unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world," The black man seeks to "assert [himself] as a BLACK MAN. (Leboeuf, 2017; 24)¹⁴

In Leboeuf's account of the African American man he is experiencing a Recognition Impediment. He feels disoriented because he is unable to act like himself within the 'white world'. To reassert his personhood, he gets angry and confronts the other. It is not hard to imagine an individual in this case saying: 'I could care less how you feel, I simply want you to recognize me for the person I am'. The story Leboeuf analyzes ends with the man claiming:

"Her face covered in shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I realized two things at once: I had identified the enemy and created a scandal. Overjoyed. We could now have some fun." (Fanon, 2008)¹⁵

In the expression that we can now have fun, the man shows that the impediment has been overcome and why he desired to overcome it. He is not trying to address the problems of racism to promote the greater good. Instead he is dismayed by the impediment this woman puts on him merely because of the color of his skin: An impediment that prevents him from acting as himself. His desire to overcome the impediment is a desire to assert his personhood and thus be able to

¹⁴ Leboeuf, Celine. "Anger as a Political Emotion." *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, pp. 15–29.

¹⁵ Fanon, Frantz "Black Skin, White Mask." New York: Grove Press, 2008.

enter a lasting future relationship. One may argue that he secretly desired the woman to suffer but such arguments ring hollow. The joy expressed by his reaction is not a joy at her suffering but at his overcoming of the impediment to his basic human dignity.

Recognition Impediments are impediments to one's basic human dignity. While a detailed account of dignity is beyond the scope of this paper, we can rely, for our purposes here on Nussbaum's (2006)¹⁶ account of human dignity. Her account treats human dignity as something intrinsic to all human beings; something that cannot be removed. However, it details ways that we might fail to recognize this status and thus cause harm or impediment. Nussbaum argues that imprisoning an innocent person harms them not because it removes dignity, but because it "deprives the person of the opportunity to exercise his or her good capacities"; such capacities being necessary to live a flourishing life. Recognition Impediments are caused when through one's actions they take away the ability to lead a flourishing life. Leboeuf's 'black man' faces an inability to exercise his good capacities because he is being unfairly judged/scrutinized. By causing the woman to feel shame he gets her to recognize what she has ignored; his human dignity. In this way the African American man is using anger in the same way as Aristotle purposed in NE. He is using it to show that he is a person who demands certain treatment and will not have his own goals undermined via the actions of others.

In Labeouf's case, there is an impediment based in what options the African American man sees as viable when he is being judged. However, it might be argued that no real injury has occurred in this case because, unlike the case of rape, there is no tangible harm we can easily

¹⁶ Nussbaum, Martha. "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements." *PCBE: Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics*, bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/chapter14.html.

distinguish. However, I propose that we see tangible harms in cases such as rape as part of a Recognition Impediment. Such an account was defended by Jefferie Murphy:

One reason we so deeply resent moral injuries done to us is not simply that they hurt us in some tangible or sensible way; it is because such injuries are also messages – symbolic communications... Intentional wrongdoing insults us and attempts to degrade us – and thus involves a kind of injury that is not merely tangible and sensible. It is moral injury, and we care about such injuries. (Murphy & Hampton, 1988; 25)

An account like this was also defended by Nussbaum herself:

...we still believe that rape is a violation of a woman's dignity. Why? Rape violates the bodily, mental, and emotional life of a woman, affecting all her opportunities for development and functioning. Rape, we might say, does not remove or even damage dignity, but it violates it, being a type of treatment that inhibits the characteristic functioning of the dignified human being. (Nussbaum, 2006; online)

In *Anger and Forgiveness*, Nussbaum comments on trying to develop an account of retribution based in human dignity as though it is a non-starter: “Rape can be seen, plausibly, as a dignitary injury, not as just an injury to bodily integrity... However, notice that equal dignity belongs to all, and is not a relative or competitive matter (27).” Dignity is unlike social status in that it cannot be removed. However, here, Nussbaum does not address the fact that it can be ignored, and that ignoring dignity causes harm. Dignity is not the type of thing we can restore, but we can address reasonably the harms in cases of Recognition Impediment and anger may play a role in this.

There are multiple ways we can explain anger’s ability to address these impediments. First is that we might use anger to demand certain actions be taken against the offenders in these cases. In the case of rape, the victims loved one’s have every reason to demand that the victim be given the best support possible in overcoming their suffering. The victim has a right to demand

that medical or psychological treatment is paid by the offender. There is a demand we might make on the offender to pay for 'emotional' distress on the victim; which may be additional funds to help with any other unforeseen consequences of the act. Ultimately, for some, the harm in rape may be overcome with time, but there are costs which are accrued that must be addressed. We can see punishment, motivated by anger, as a way of helping to address these harms which does not fall victim to the retributive mistake. There is nothing to be fully assuaged in cases of Recognition Impediments: However, there are harms caused by ignoring one's dignity which must be addressed, and some forms of punishment can do this.

I am certainly not suggesting that all harms can be addressed through the transfer of funds or that punishment should consist solely of fines. There are good reasons to punish criminals above and beyond the ways already mentioned. We put criminals in prison to keep them from causing future harm, we punish in order to reform offenders, we see strict punishment as a way of deterring other bad actors, etc. I am not denying the role these forms of punishment play in society. It may also help the victim of a crime or their family to know that the offender is in jail. The security provided by this knowledge is likely invaluable.

I argue that the best way to interpret anger's role in addressing these harms requires an appeal to David Shoemaker's account of blaming anger. Shoemaker argues that in such anger we are not trying to make the other suffer but "to communicate the anger". Shoemaker asks us to imagine a case where an offense has been committed to your child and out of revenge you post a compromising photo of the offender. The offender is not aware that you posted the photo but believes that it is a malfunction of his phone. Are we satisfied in such cases? Imagine instead that you do not cause such suffering but simply yell at the offender or punch him in the face. These latter actions more clearly express the fact we are angry at the individual. I agree with

Shoemaker that a message is being sent in these cases, but why are we trying to send this message in the first place? Claiming that all we want to do is express anger ignores certain moral considerations, but there also seems to be very little reason to do this unless it is accomplishing some other goal.

Antti Kauppinen¹⁷ argues that the recognition of respect towards a person requires us to hold others to the same standard regarding their actions towards the recognized individual; punishment expresses our commitment to this standard. Insofar as we care for others and ourselves as person', anger is necessary to express our disapproval towards the offender and affection towards the victim. This says nothing as to what the punishment should be, but merely that anger and desire for the offender to suffer in some way recognizes the personhood of those who have been wronged. Because of this we can say that a way anger helps overcome Recognition Impediments is to actively reaffirm to the victim their personhood.

In Labeouf's case the man seems to be sending the message that he is a person and as such the woman has a moral duty to recognize his dignity; his ability to exercise good capacities. In the rape case we might say that the message sent is something akin to the following: You the offender have ignored the dignity of your victim. As such you have some responsibility to ensure that the victim can overcome this harm. Just expressing our anger is a pointless act if we do not think it will accomplish the goal of overcoming impediments. I agree with Shoemaker that the role of our anger in these cases is expression of our frustration or displeasure at the impediments we face. In fact, this might be the role that anger plays in all four types of impediments.

¹⁷ Kauppinen, Antti. "Valuing Anger." *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, pp. 31–47.

However, this role has no value unless it can accomplish a further task of helping us overcome said impediments.

By adopting the Aristotelian account in *Nicomachean Ethics* in addition to Shoemaker's and Kauppinen's accounts, we get an answer concerning what anger can accomplish in these cases. Anger provides a way of displaying one's values; if we do not get angry we act slavishly in a way that displays our own failure to uphold what we claim to value.

In addressing cases of injustice, I have argued that in anger we are sending the message that we value dignity in ourselves and others and we will not stand for others disrespecting this value. However, this is not enough we must also use these displays of anger to help those who have been impaired overcome these impediments to the highest extent possible. Anger used for these purposes is a rational way of addressing injustice and in some cases is praiseworthy.

Section 4: The Moral Praiseworthiness of Anger

At this point I think there is a reasonable question to be asked as to why we should adopt my view of Impediment Anger. If the most that Anger can accomplish in these cases is a display of our value for human dignity and an overcoming of certain impediments, certainly we could do this without anger. Nussbaum offers her own alternative to the Traditional Account of anger:

Transition Anger.

Transition Anger is anger that plays a motivating role in promoting the greater good (36). Anger, according to Nussbaum, can lead us to adopt an outraged stance towards immoral action. Coupled with the belief that "something should be done about this..." For example, Martin

Luther King and Malcom X focused their anger towards creating a more just future for African Americans. Transition Anger does not suffer from Nussbaum's criticism because it lacks the desire for 'payback' which plagues the Traditional Account. A similar account can be found in Tantric Buddhism. The Tantric account of anger is that it can be used as a type of energy one harnesses to take future actions towards the good (McRae, 2018)¹⁸. Transition Anger can address the harms of rape by adopting a general focus on promoting the greater good of everyone involved. It desires that the victim of rape overcome the harms as much as possible and even that the offender goes on to live a good life.

Nussbaum herself questions whether Transition Anger is actually a form of anger but dismisses the problem as unimportant (36). Nussbaum is looking for an emotion which can address injustice without desiring retribution; whether this emotion fails to be anger is not relevant to her goal. However, whether the emotion counts as anger is essential to answering the question I raised at the beginning of this paper: Is anger a morally praiseworthy response to injustice? If Transition Anger is not anger, then Nussbaum's answer to my question remains 'no'.

I argue that Transition Anger is more akin to the characterizations of the emotion of Karuna (compassion) in the Buddhist tradition. On the Buddhist account it is our view of the self as distinct from others and requiring the address of insult that leads us to anger (Tangpa, 2006)¹⁹. The goal of compassion is to shift from focus on one's own well-being towards the well-being of

¹⁸ McRae, Emily. "Anger and the Oppressed." *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, pp. 105–121.

¹⁹ Tangpa, Geshe. *Eight Verses for Training the Mind: an Oral Teaching*. Translated by Sonam Rinchen and Ruth Sonam, Snow Lion Publications, 2006.

others (Huebner, 2017)²⁰. Nussbaum describes Transition Anger in a very similar manner: “So anger (if we understand it to involve, internally, a wish for retributive suffering) quickly puts itself out of business, in that even the residual focus on punishing the offender is soon seen as part of a set of projects for improving both offenders and society... It looks more like compassionate hope (31). Transition Anger is not concerned with overcoming impediments, but instead concerned with stopping such harms from happening in the future. Given anger’s supposed propensity towards irrationality or violence, why should we not give up our anger and adopt this emotion of compassion?”

Nussbaum’s overall argument against anger can be framed as the following: The Stoics were correct in their analysis of anger as irrational, therefore we ought to adopt the Buddhist alternative. This opens my account up to another set of objections which parallel the concern of Plato disciplining his slave. If there is a viable alternative to anger which does not risk going to the extreme in cases of punishment, but still accomplishes the same task, should we not strive to adopt this account. To show what is misguided in this objection, I will focus on the real-world case of Brock Turner²¹

What does it say about us as individuals if we do not get angry towards certain cases of injustice? Turner was caught sexual assaulting his victim behind a dumpster at a party. If I am correct and anger is a desire to overcome impediments to ourselves or ones we care for, then to not display anger may be a failure to recognize the harm committed to the victim or a failure to

²⁰ Huebner, Bryce. “Anger and Patience.” *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, pp. 89–104.

²¹ Miller, Michael E. “A Steep Price to Pay for 20 Minutes of Action.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 6 June 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/06/a-steep-price-to-pay-for-20-minutes-of-action-dad-defends-stanford-sex-offender/?utm_term=.14eec91b215c.

recognize and care for the victim's personhood. However, we can address the impediments caused in rape through compassion. Compassion motivates punishment solely in order to help victims overcome the harms committed to them and it would thus seem appropriate to use compassion to accomplish the same ends as anger. Why then should we risk anger and the possibility of giving into the desire for irrational retribution?

It has been argued that anger, if not addressed, risks turning into hatred towards the offender (Gillette, 2010; Hampton & Murphy, 1982). Hatred is no longer recognizable as a desire to overcome impediments but instead it is a hostility towards the offender above and beyond what is necessary to address the harms committed. The reason for this is that anger when ignored feeds upon itself using the imagination. Not only do we see offenders as immoral we fixate on the harms they caused us and imagine them to be worse than they are. Let's apply this to the case of Brock Turner. There is no doubt that Turner, being caught in the act, was guilty of the crime of sexual assault. What punishment would be too much punishment in his case? Might we go to the extreme and recommend the death penalty? Perhaps this is too harsh; maybe chemical castration is enough? A person who finds themselves in a state of hatred might find themselves having such thoughts. Why does this hatred, this desire for retribution, occur in conjunction with anger in the first place?

I argue that this hatred occurs because anger starts from the position of fully recognizing Turner's human dignity; that Turner has the ability and right to exercise his good capacities. In our anger towards Turner we treat him as a full moral agent who committed a wrong act and must make amends; demonstrated by the close association of anger and the assertion of blameworthiness (Quigley and Tedeschi, 1996). This may cause us to see Turner as worse and worse until we feel that amends have been made, but this is just an unfortunate effect of us

expecting Turner to treat others with respect; despite the fact he may refuse to do so. Once an offender like Turner takes the steps to make amends our anger is often assuaged and does not affect our future analysis of his actions (Goldberg, Lerner, and Tetlock, 1999)²². To properly view the moral landscape that surrounds Turner's case, we must be willing to see him as an agent, to get angry, and to respect the fact that he is also person with dignity. This gives Turner the chance to make amends but also risks turning him into a monster in our minds. I argue there is a fine balance at play in cases like these. What happens, for example if we go too far in the opposite direction and embrace the attitude of compassion, or transition anger towards Turner?

Compassion or Transition Anger is not focused on respecting personhood. Instead it is focused on addressing the underlying causes that lead to the impediment. As such, I argue that compassion cannot properly respect Turner's personhood. Compassion treats him as a victim of environment, fate, or bad luck. Turner for whatever reasons, many outside of his control, is the type of person capable of performing heinous actions. Through compassion we assume that there were underlying factors at play in his choices; the question is where do these underlying factors end? Compassion can address this concern by making the following claim: Prior circumstances, emotional states, mental states, etc. surrounding our actions influence and limit the choices that make themselves appear viable to us. In this way Brock did make a choice and could have chosen differently, but he did not fully understand the wrongness of his actions.

I chose to focus on Turner's case because of a letter his father, Dan Turner, sent to the Judge presiding over his son's trial:

²² Goldberg, Julie H., et al. "Rage and Reason: the Psychology of the Intuitive Prosecutor." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 56, 1999, pp. 781–795.

“What we didn’t realize was the extent to which Brock was struggling being so far from home... When Brock was home during the Christmas break, he broke down and told us how much he was struggling to fit in socially. “In hindsight, it’s clear that Brock was desperately trying to fit in at Stanford and fell into the culture of alcohol consumption and partying,” Dan Turner concluded. “This culture was modeled by many of the upperclassmen on the swim team and played a role in the events of Jan 17th and 18th 2015.”

Dan Turner’s letter expresses a denial of his son’s moral agency. It is not his son’s fault that he committed this crime. Instead it is the fault of the circumstances: a reference to the idea that there but for the grace of God go we. It is difficult not to sympathize with a father asking for mercy in the case of his son. However, the attitude or position that a parent takes towards their child’s wrong-doing, compared to the public, may involve infantilization to an extent. However, just as we would not want an angry man to be a judge; we would not want a father to judge his own son. A father of the accused cannot judge his own son because his partiality blinds him to the larger moral picture. I argue that Dan Turner’s letter is an example of the concern of hatred turned in the opposite direction; a view that infantilizes others to the point that they no longer have any moral agency. Compassion without anger tends to move in this direction also.

To respect Turner’s personhood, we cannot excuse away the choices that Turner made. We must recognize that Turner may be a full moral agent aware of his actions who made the conscious choice to ignore another’s personhood. It is not clear to me that compassion can take this stance. That is not to say we should ignore the underlying causes, but to keep his personhood in mind. In order to understand the moral duty we might have in regards to Turner I appeal once again to the account of Dignity by Antti Kauppinen who argues:

“Respect requires that... I’m willing to hold you accountable, circumstances permitting. If we continue to interact, I must show my anger and resentment, and make it clear I expect you to cease and desist and repent if you are to be forgiven. In doing so, I show that I have faith in your ability to recognize and respond to the rational authority of my will.” (Kauppinen, 2018; 37)

He continues this train of thought by arguing that if we are the ones who commit the wrong and fail to acknowledge the other's anger we continue to disrespect them, to not recognize their will/autonomy.

Following Kauppinen's insight, I offer up a thought experiment. Imagine that I have been robbed by a friend, thus experiencing a Recognition Impediment. I choose not to confront my friend, but to simply end the friendship and no longer talk to them. Years later I still choose to avoid a relationship with the friend, if they try to contact me. It seems I have not given my friend a chance to make amends. By confronting my friend, and giving them the opportunity to feel shame, I would have respected their personhood and left open the option of a future relationship. Anger in this case is not only morally acceptable but I argue morally praiseworthy compared to the stance of Compassion. If Compassion cannot account for Turner's personhood, then we have reason to question whether it accurately represents what we should be concerned about in such cases. We commit an immoral act ourselves if we ignore Turner's dignity in the same way he ignored the dignity of others. By expressing anger, we give Turner the chance to change and by offering him this chance we may be doing something above and beyond the call of moral duty in most cases. For example, imagine that a random man on the street yells something racist at you. Do you have a responsibility to give him the chance to repent for this insult?

When a random person yells at you on the street we might argue that he intentionally chose to disregard your human dignity. It is not clear that sending a message to the offenders in these cases is useful. The reason we might find giving Turner the chance to repent praiseworthy is that he may not have been intentionally choosing to ignore his victim's dignity. In cases of racism the dismissal of another's personhood is evident. However, we can imagine that Turner was simply so self-centered that he did not consider the harms he might be doing to others. In

such cases giving Turner the chance to repent might be a praiseworthy way to confront the situation. To express to him that we respect his dignity but disrespect the choices that he made with it.

Turner might not repent for his crime, and if he does not, we might see him as a monster. However, by giving him the chance to repent we give him the chance to realize he made a bad choice, this act itself might be praiseworthy. The cases where it is appropriate to respond to in anger will once again become a pragmatic question. However, it does not seem irrational that in some cases we should grant the other a chance to make amends and treat them as full agents. Doing so displays our own commitment to the value of dignity.

In addition, we should also question the idea of ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ that seems to be a part of the emotion of compassion. The thought that the only reason I am not Turner is that I did not find myself in his circumstances. What does it say about our own character if we can sympathize with people like Turner? Certainly, there have been others in similar circumstances who did not cause the same harms.

There is a reasonable concern that our capacity to have sympathy for others depends on our ability to relate to them. Myisha Cherry argues an account like this in her paper ‘*The Errors and Limitations of our “Anger-Evaluating” ways*’. She imagines a white male who is a blue-collar worker in a small midwestern town. This man sees a news story about an urban African American man protesting racial discrimination. Unable to relate to the African American man’s anger, the white worker asserts that the man is too angry and that his anger will likely not accomplish the change he desires. The same white worker sees a story about other white workers in a midwestern town who are protesting being laid off. He understands what it is like to be a

white employee whose boss might treat him unjustly and therefore sees their anger as rational. Cherry's point with these examples is to highlight the fact that sympathizing with someone requires the ability to see ourselves in their shoes: That there are epistemic limitations on our ability to relate to others. The worry for me is that having only compassion towards Turner may require us to be able to see ourselves in his shoes. Anger may be an expression of a praiseworthy character in this case as it displays our lack of sympathy for Turner's choices.

Nussbaum's Transition Anger or Compassion are certainly praiseworthy emotions. They are both desires to produce a better future for everyone involved in cases of wrongful harm. However, these emotions cannot take the proper stance one should have concerning people like Turner. I also do not want to ignore the fact that anger can lead us to resentment. The proper stance to take likely lies somewhere between these two emotions. To properly view the moral landscape and to care for others as persons we must have anger. However, to not treat others as monsters we must be willing to understand why the options they chose seemed viable to them at the time. The overarching criticism I have of Nussbaum is that she attempts to form an anger which is not victim to moral flaws. Such an anger is a skewed way of viewing the moral landscape and does not respect human dignity. Anger is demonstrative of a praiseworthy and rational character when it is done pragmatically, with a focus on the future good, and attempts to respect the dignity of all involved. If we are lacking anger, then we are lacking the ability to act in this praiseworthy manner. We find ourselves as morally lacking in handling such cases.

Conclusion:

In this paper, I have argued that anger is not only rational, but in some cases is morally praiseworthy. I have done this by arguing that the Traditional Account cannot make sense of anger's role in many cases where we assume it is rational. Afterwards, I provided my own account of anger that can make sense of its role in addressing amoral targets, in education, and in addressing injustice. In doing so I have defended against the Stoic claims of irrationality and the Buddhist claims that anger promotes an immoral character.

The reason for anger's moral praiseworthiness is that it seeks the future good for people who face impediments in a way capable of respecting the basic dignity of all involved. I believe that if we get rid of anger, then we lose something crucial for navigating the moral framework. Maybe it is as Aristotle argued in *the Nichomachean Ethics* that we become somehow slavish and unable to respect ourselves or those we care for. Even more than that we find ourselves unable to respond to those who wrong us as agents. If we believe that personhood or dignity must be respected in everyone, then we must be willing to get angry. Value and anger go hand in hand when addressing impediments and we lose the ability to value dignity in ourselves and others when we lose anger.

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