

The Aptness of Anger

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Be angry, but sin not. Ephesians 4:26

ABSTRACT: A long philosophical and political tradition holds that victims of injustice ought not get angry because doing so would be *counterproductive*. But this tradition neglects the possibility that anger might be counterproductive and yet *apt*. What ought a victim of injustice do when her anger would worsen her situation but nonetheless be a fitting response to the state of the world? Here reasons of prudence and reasons of aptness come apart, generating, I argue, a substantive normative conflict. Two things, I suggest, follow. First, the counterproductivity critic faces the burden of explaining why, in such conflicts, prudential considerations trump considerations of aptness; until this burden is met, there is no obvious inference to be made from the counterproductivity of one's anger to an all-things-considered prohibition on one's getting angry. Second, it's plausible that such conflicts – where victims of oppression must choose between getting aptly angry or acting prudentially – themselves constitute a form of unrecognised injustice, what I call *affective* injustice. I conclude by discussing the prospects for alleviating affective injustice in the political sphere, and offering a diagnosis of our reluctance to make room, in our politics, for anger.

1. The counterproductivity critique

In 1965, the Cambridge Union held a debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, Jr on the motion 'The American dream has been achieved at the expense of the American Negro'. Baldwin's essay *The Fire Next Time* had been published two years earlier; Buckley had been editor-in-chief of the conservative magazine *National Review*, which he founded, for the past decade. Both men were at the height of their fame, the most important public intellectuals, respectively, in the American civil rights movement and the American conservative movement.

Baldwin took the floor first, and began in a quiet, recalcitrant tone: 'I find myself not for the first time in the position of a kind of Jeremiah'.¹ He was to deliver bad news, but as history rather than prophecy. Instead of revealing the future he came to

¹ All quotations from The Riverbends Channel 2012.

disclose the unrecognised truth about the material preconditions of the American dream:

I am stating very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: that *I* picked the cotton, and *I* carried to market, and *I* built the railroads, under someone else's whip, for *nothing* . . . for *nothing*. The southern oligarchy which has until today so much power in Washington...was created by my labour and my sweat, and the violation of my women and the murder of my children. This, in the land of the free and the home of the brave. And no one can challenge that statement. It is a matter of historical record.

Buckley responded not with disagreement, but with a pragmatic challenge:

What in fact shall we do about it? What shall we in America try to do...to eliminate those psychic humiliations which I join Mr Baldwin in believing are the very worst aspects of this discrimination?...I agree with you that we have a dastardly situation, but I'm asking you not to make politics as the crow flies...[Negroes] have done a great deal to focus on the fact of white discrimination against Negroes. They have done a great deal to agitate a moral concern. But where in fact do they go now?

Politics 'as the crow flies'² is a politics that insists on what should have been rather than what is, a politics that refuses to turn its gaze from past atrocity. It is also a politics, as Baldwin made clear, of uninterrupted anger. In its place Buckley exhorts a pragmatic politics, a politics that turns its gaze from the failures of the past in order to achieve the next-best outcome in the future. Whatever its ugly history, Buckley went on to argue, the American dream was now the best hope for the American Negro. Where better to improve his lot than in the United States, the 'most mobile society in the world'? What other dream to which to aspire than the American one? A bitter insistence on past injustice would only result in foolish self-destruction. Negroes must avoid 'the kind of cynicism, the kind of despair, the kind of iconoclasm' represented by Baldwin. For in the end, Negro anger would be met, Buckley warned, with white violence:

If it does finally come to a confrontation, a radical confrontation...then we will fight the issue, not only in the Cambridge Union, but we will fight it...on beaches and on hills and on mountains and on landing grounds.

² A phrase Buckley borrows from Oakeshott.

Tolerance might be extended to Negroes, but not to their anger. Fiery prophecy must give way to cool pragmatism.

Buckley's insistence that black anger is wrong because counterproductive for black people themselves places him in a long intellectual tradition. While Aristotle and his followers held that moderate anger was a mark of manly virtue,³ the Stoics argued for the total elimination of anger on the grounds that it inevitably produces more evil than good. Thus Seneca described anger as

the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions ... The other emotions have in them some element of peace and calm, while this one is wholly violent and has its being in an onrush of resentment, raging with a most inhuman lust for weapons, blood, and punishment, giving no thought to itself if only it can hurt another, hurling itself upon the very point of dagger, and eager for revenge *though it may drag down the avenger along with it*⁴

The early Christian theologian John Cassian counselled that we 'ought never...be angry at all, whether for good or bad reasons', for anger threatens to darken the 'main light of our heart' with 'shadows'.⁵ More recently, Glen Pettigrove has argued that anger is to be avoided for its tendency to contaminate our capacity for epistemic rationality.⁶ And Pettigrove and Martha Nussbaum both argue that anger should be avoided even in circumstances of political injustice because it alienates would-be allies, aggravates conflict and ultimately undermines the pursuit of just outcomes.⁷ In the place of political anger, Pettigrove recommends the virtue of meekness, while Nussbaum suggests a spirit of civic love.

This 'counterproductivity critique' of anger also takes concrete, politicised form, as in the debate between Baldwin and Buckley. Martin Luther King wrote of Malcolm X that in 'articulating the despair of the Negro without offering any positive, creative alternative' he has "done himself and our people a great disservice' for '[f]iery, demagogic oratory in the black ghettos can reap nothing but grief'.⁸ The American journalist Jonathan Chait defended President Obama's reluctance to get publicly angry about white racism on the grounds that Obama was employing the 'sensible practice' of encouraging black people to 'concentrate on the things they can control' rather than 'lash[ing] out'.⁹ The recent riots in Ferguson, Missouri in

³ While the ancient Greeks disagreed about whether (free) men should ever get angry, there was nonetheless a consensus that in women (and slaves) anger was impermissible. For discussion see Harris 2002 and Burnyeat 2002.

⁴ Seneca 1928, I.1, emphasis added.

⁵ Cassian 1894, 8:12.

⁶ Pettigrove 2012; Nussbaum 2016.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ King 1998, chp. 25.

⁹ Chait 2014.

response to the Grand Jury's failure to indict an officer for murdering an unarmed black teenager again prompted calls for reasonableness and calm from many liberal sympathisers. Writing on Israel's Operation Protective Edge, in which Israel killed around 1500 civilians in the blockaded Gaza Strip, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof exhorted Palestinians to abandon the anger that 'has accomplished nothing but increasing the misery of the Palestinian people'; if only Palestinians would adopt to model of Gandhi, he argued, the result would 'reverberate around the world and Palestinians would achieve statehood and freedom'.^{10,11} Women have long been told that feminist progress would be swifter if only they would be less shrill about it. LGBT activists are reminded by their allies that progress takes time, and that stridency gets in the way. The counterproductivity of one's anger is often seen as dispositive reason not to be angry, whatever the circumstances. Often such counsel is issued in a spirit, as it with Buckley, of at least putative sympathy for the victims of injustice.

The counterproductivity critique has its opposing twin in a political tradition, one largely rooted in Black and feminist thought, that challenges the presupposition that anger is only a weapon for self-harm. In 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', Audre Lorde writes:

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change...[A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification¹²

Marilyn Frye, Uma Narayan, and Alison Jaggar all argue that anger can be epistemically productive, yielding knowledge of previously unrecognised injustice.¹³ Lisa Tessman argues that while an oppressed person's anger cannot be virtuous in the Aristotelian sense – lacking the moderation required for flourishing – it can nonetheless be virtuous in the more consequentialist sense of facilitating the flourishing of others.^{14,15} This counter-tradition is welcome because it reminds us that the counterproductivity critique often turns on questionable empirical assumptions. It is historically naïve to think that white America would have been willing to embrace King's vision of a unified, post-racial nation, if not for the threat of

¹⁰ Kristof 2014.

¹¹ I am not committed to the claim that King, Chait or Kristof in fact endorse the counterproductivity critique of anger; I am simply committed to the view that this is a plausible reading of what they're saying. King and Chait might be making a claim about the efficacy of anger as a political strategy. The question of whether anger (and violence) is effective as a political strategy is important, but is not my question here.

¹² Lorde 1981/1984.

¹³ Frye 1983; Narayan 1988; Jaggar 1989.

¹⁴ Tessman 2005.

¹⁵ For further defence of anger, see also Swaine 1996 and Wenning 2009.

Malcolm X's angry defiance. It is perhaps similarly naïve to think anger contains no salutary psychic possibilities for someone whose self-conception has been shaped by degradation and hatred.¹⁶

That said, this debate tends to obscure something significant about anger. There is more to anger, normatively speaking, than its effects. Even if anger is counterproductive we can still ask: is it the fitting response to the way the world is? Is it, in other words, *apt*? Macalaster Bell and Agnes Callard defend anger as a sometimes fitting response to an unjust world.¹⁷ But on the whole, defenders of anger, because of their dialectical opposition to the counterproductivity critique, have focussed on the benefits of anger. By contrast I want to grant the counterproductivity critic's empirical supposition that anger generally makes things worse, in order to focus on occasions where anger would be counterproductive but nonetheless apt.¹⁸ On such occasions, reasons of prudence and reasons of aptness come apart, generating a substantive normative conflict. Two things follow. First, the counterproductivity critic faces the burden of explaining why, in such conflicts, reasons of prudence trump reasons of aptness; until this burden is met, there is no obvious inference to be made from the counterproductivity of one's anger to an all-things-considered prohibition on one's getting angry.¹⁹ Second, I will argue that such conflicts – where victims of oppression must choose between getting aptly angry and acting prudentially – themselves constitute a form of unrecognised injustice, what I call *affective* injustice.

I proceed as follows. In §2 I argue that weighing anger for aptness is a familiar mode of evaluation, and then offer an account of what is required for anger to be apt. In §3 I describe the nature of the normative conflict presented by occasions for apt counterproductive anger: an invidious choice between making the world as it should be and affectively appreciating the world as it is. I go on to explain why this presents the counterproductivity critique with a challenge, and introduce the notion of affective injustice. In §4 I explain why the counterproductivity critic cannot sidestep my challenge by arguing that his real target is not anger (apt or not) but its stereotypical expressions. In §5 I conclude by discussing the prospects for

¹⁶ Frederick Douglass wrote of the moment when he resisted the attack of a slave-breaker: 'It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery' (Douglass 1997, 79; quoted in Bell 2009).

¹⁷ Bell 2009; Callard forthcoming.

¹⁸ Tessman's defence of anger emphasises the ways in which anger can harm the oppressed, focussing on cases in which such harmful anger has a net positive benefit to others (Tessman 2005). By contrast I am concerned with cases in which the oppressed person's anger neither benefits themselves nor others.

¹⁹ Some might be concerned that, since our emotions aren't under our direct voluntary control, it doesn't make sense to talk about whether we ought to get angry. I don't myself share this worry, since I find it natural enough to talk about what we ought to believe. But much of what I have to say extends to the question of whether we ought to try to eradicate our capacity to get angry, which is a voluntary action.

alleviating affective injustice by dissolving the false dichotomy between reason and anger.

2. Anger's aptness

There is a striking difference between how anger is discussed in political contexts and how we talk about anger in more mundane situations. In ordinary conversation, we can and do talk about whether anger, independently of its effects, is the *apt* response to how things are; whether how things are provides one *reason* to be angry; whether one's anger is a *fitting* response to how things are. We talk, I want to say, as if anger exists within the space of *intrinsic reasons*, as opposed to merely instrumental reasons. Suppose you are my friend, and I ask you what reason you have for being angry with me. You respond: 'because you were late again!' I say: 'well, you shouldn't be. I *told* you I was going to be late'. The subject of our conversation is whether your anger about my lateness really is fitting, whether my lateness constitutes genuine intrinsic reason for your anger.

In ordinary conversation, we can and do mark a distinction between intrinsic and instrumental reasons for getting angry. If you are someone who takes pleasure in getting angry²⁰ I might say to you 'I know it makes you feel good to get angry, but you really have no reason to be'. Here I contrast your instrumental reason for getting angry – it gives you pleasure – and your (lack of) intrinsic reason for getting angry. It is also striking that in ordinary, everyday situations, a shift of focus from intrinsic to instrumental justification for anger often comes across as a non sequitur (at best) and morally obtuse (at worst). If an unfaithful lover says in response to your anger: 'you shouldn't get angry because it's just going to make me cheat more', you have just been given additional reason for anger. For two wrongs have now been done: first, the initial betrayal of your trust, and second, the subsequent refusal to treat your anger at that betrayal as existing within the space of intrinsic reasons.

The proponents of the counterproductivity critique run the risk of the second sort of wrong, the one committed by the unfaithful lover. It is a wrong that has something in common – in structure, if not intent – with the most straightforwardly oppressive ways of speaking about anger. The misogynist dismisses a woman's anger by calling her shrill or strident; the racist dismisses the black person's anger by calling him a thug or an animal. These are not mere insults. These are rhetorical strategies that shift the explanatory context for the subject's anger from the space of reasons to the space of causes. The misogynist or racist *explains away* the woman or black person's anger as a product of inferior character: she is only angry because she's a shrill bitch; he's only angry because he's a thug. He interprets the question 'why is this person angry?' as a request for a causal explanation rather than a justificatory one. Thus he

²⁰ Achilles in the *Iliad* says that anger is 'sweeter than dripping streams of honey' (Homer 1990, 18.128).

obscures the possibility that the woman or black person's anger is apt. The counterproductivity critique achieves a similar effect, shifting us from the space of intrinsic reason to the space of instrumental reason, thereby obscuring the possibility that the anger is apt.

When is someone's anger apt? Consider the difference between anger and another similarly negative emotion: disappointment. What makes anger intelligible as anger, and distinct from mere disappointment, is that anger presents its object as involving a *moral violation*: not just a violation of how one *wishes* things were, but a violation of how things *ought* to be.²¹ When I say that I am disappointed that you betrayed me, I imply that I wish you hadn't; when I say, by contrast, that I'm angry that you betrayed me, I imply that you shouldn't have. (This isn't to say that if I'm angry that you betrayed me, I must believe that you ought not have betrayed me; I am concerned here with the normative evaluation expressed by my emotion, which might well come apart from my normative beliefs about the situation.)²² Since anger presents its object as involving a moral violation, one's anger that *p* is apt only if *p* constitutes a genuine moral violation. If I am angry that you didn't come to the party but your not coming to the party constitutes no moral violation, then my anger is hardly fitting.²³

What of the common claim – made for example by Nussbaum²⁴ – that anger necessarily involves a desire to make the offending party suffer, and/or the belief that the offending party should suffer?²⁵ Nussbaum, like many other contemporary philosophers, inherits this claim from the ancients; both Aristotle and the Stoics agreed that anger constitutively involved a desire for revenge, and ancient stories (most obviously the *Iliad*) suggest that the satisfaction of the revenge impulse did answer anger's conative call.²⁶ In turn Nussbaum uses this claim to support the conclusion that anger is never apt, for either it involves the false belief that revenge will undo the original harm, or the morally suspect desire to 'downrank' the offender. But the nature of anger – how we experience it, what it calls on us to do – plausibly shifts with historical and political circumstance. Myles Burnyeat argues that the erosion of the honour code under the influence of Christianity has made

²¹ Perhaps anger presents its object as involving a *normative* violation, not necessarily a *moral* violation. Many of us do get angry at non-moral normative violations, e.g. violations of epistemic rationality.

²² Thus I am denying cognitivism about anger, the view that anger is, or at least partially composed of, a judgment. One can think that anger is an evaluative attitude without thinking that anger is a judgment. See e.g. Deonna and Teroni 2012.

²³ What if I mistakenly but justifiably believed that your not coming to the party was a moral violation? I'm inclined to say that my anger would be excused but inapt. If I learned that you in fact had made no promise to come to the party, I would hardly insist that my previous anger about your non-attendance was fitting.

²⁴ Nussbaum 2016.

²⁵ Nussbaum, unlike me, is a cognitivist about anger. See fn. 22

²⁶ Though for an argument that Aristotle thought that anger involved a desire not for revenge but rather a desire for *punishment* – specifically, that the wrongdoer suffer the same kind of pain he inflicted, in order to satisfy both retributive and reformative aims – see Christensen 2016.

common a form of anger that involves no desire for revenge, a possibility unthinkable to ancient commentators.²⁷ Indeed it seems to me that anger without the desire for revenge is something many of us know well.²⁸ Suppose my friend betrays me, and I am angry with her. I might want revenge. But might I not want – have we not all wanted – the friend to recognise the pain she has caused me, the wrong she has done me? It might be that this sort of recognition itself involves suffering. If so then in a sense I want my friend to suffer. But I don't want her to suffer willy-nilly; my anger hardly calls out for her to break her leg, or fall ill. Rather I want her to experience that suffering that comes precisely from taking part in my own. If this is a possible mode of anger – and I think it is not just possible but common – then Nussbaum and others are wrong to claim that anger necessarily involves the desire for revenge. For the desire for recognition is not the same as a desire for revenge. Thus the most powerful case that anger is never apt – that it involves a revenge-impulse that is itself always inapt – should, I think, be rejected.

That my anger must be directed at a genuine normative violation is a necessary but insufficient condition for my anger to be apt. What else might be required? I don't intend to offer a complete analysis of apt anger – and I don't need to for my purposes – but let me offer a few brief observations. I have said that for S's anger that *p* to be apt it must be that *p* involves a genuine moral violation. But it must also be the case that *p* constitutes what Grice called a 'personal' reason for S²⁹ – that is, a reason that can serve as *her* reason for being angry: a reason, plausibly, that S *knows*.³⁰ If I don't know that you betrayed me, but you have, then there would exist *a* reason for me to be angry, but I wouldn't *have* a reason to be angry.³¹ In addition, S's anger must also be properly *motivated* by that possessed reason, and *proportional* to that reason. Suppose I know that you lied to me, but that my anger is formed on some other basis: I simply get angry at everything you do. Or suppose I find out that you lied to me about liking a meal I cooked, and I am thereafter engulfed by a wild and lifelong fury. In neither case does my anger seem apt; for in the first, my anger is not properly motivated by the reason I possess, and in the latter my anger is disproportionate to my reason.³²

²⁷ Burnyeat 1996, 2002.

²⁸ For a different argument that anger does not necessarily involve the revenge-impulse – though anger sometimes *explains* the revenge-impulse – see Callard forthcoming.

²⁹ Grice 2001, ch. 3.

³⁰ For an argument that reason-possession requires knowledge see Hawthorne and Magidor forthcoming.

³¹ This doesn't mean that we are always in a position to know what our reasons for being angry are. Sometimes we lack the insight to know what our anger is really about; knowing *p* is distinct from knowing that one is angry that *p*.

³² Tessman suggests that the anger of oppressed people is often mis-directed and invariably excessive. If so, then oppressed people's anger is very rarely apt (Tessman 2005). But Tessman is working within a virtue theoretic framework that places high demands on what it would take for anger to be virtuous, citing Aristotle's dictum that the virtuous person must get angry 'at the right things and with the right people, and further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought'. As I see it, the demands of aptness are rather lower, akin to the demands of knowledge; just as one can know all

What about a further requirement that one's anger be about something to which one has an appropriate personal connection? Would it be apt for me today to get angry, say, that women were burned as witches in early modern Europe? Some will be inclined to include some sort of proximity condition on anger's aptness, and there is nothing in my argument that requires me to rule this out. (Indeed since my focus here is on whether victims of injustice ought to get angry, I am largely setting aside cases where 'uninvolved' third parties get aptly but counterproductively angry.) But let me just say that the thought that we can only be aptly angry about things that are sufficiently close to us in space and time, or to which we have some specific personal connection, can shade into an unsavoury moral parochialism. Indeed, even the claim that one has additional reason to be angry, or reason to be angrier, when it is a member of one's own community that has been harmed depends for its plausibility on how we fill in the facts. I am intuitively drawn to the thought that black Americans have a special, additional reason to be angry when a young black person is gunned down in the street; here it seems only appropriate to cry out: *another one of our children has died!* But I am not inclined to think that middle class white men have a special, additional reason to be angry when another middle class white man suffers a harm. Here it does not seem appropriate to cry out: *one of mine!* Not all forms of solidarity are equally just, and not all forms of emotional partiality of equal moral standing. Bernard Williams memorably argued that the man who is faced with the choice of saving his drowning wife or a stranger is not only justified in saving his wife, but should do so with no thought more sophisticated than 'that's my wife!' Any additional, justifying thought – 'that's my wife and in such situations it's permissible to save one's wife' – would be, according to Williams, 'one thought too many'.³³ That might well be. But the white man who cries out in anger 'one of mine!' seems to have the wrong thought altogether.

3. Apt counterproductive anger

Whether anger is an apt or fitting response to the world does not turn on the consequences, good or bad, of that anger. Apt anger can be counterproductive, making the angry person worse off, and indeed exacerbating the very situation at which she is angry. This is especially true for victims of systematic injustice, whose apt anger can often invite further violence and oppression, for both herself and others. Thus victims of injustice often face a conflict between getting aptly angry at injustice, and bettering (or at least not worsening) their situations. Just what sort of conflict is this?

sorts of things without being a perfect reasoner, one can be aptly angry without always perfectly targeting and proportioning one's anger.

³³ Williams 1981, p. 18.

Prudence recommends against counterproductive anger, for such anger by definition is not in the self-interest of the oppressed person.³⁴ But there is perhaps more counting against counterproductive anger than just prudence. Insofar as one has a moral duty to care for oneself – a duty of which many are justifiably sceptical – then there might be *moral* reasons not to get counterproductively angry. And getting aptly angry might lead to a failure to act on an other-directed moral duty, where getting angry will harm those to whom one has a duty of beneficence or care; this might most obviously occur in cases where one is a victim of an injustice that broadly affects members of one’s family or community.³⁵ So apt counterproductive anger isn’t just prudentially irrational, but might also in some cases be morally objectionable.³⁶

What speaks in favour of apt counterproductive anger? What sort of value does an apt response have? I want to suggest that getting angry is a means of affectively registering or *appreciating* the injustice of the world, most analogous perhaps to our capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Just as appreciating the beautiful or the sublime has a value distinct from the value of knowing that something is beautiful or sublime, there is a value to appreciating the injustice of the world through one’s apt anger – a value that is distinct from that of simply *knowing* that the world is unjust. Imagine a person who does everything, as it were, by the ethical book – forming all the correct moral beliefs and acting in accordance with all her moral duties – but who is left entirely cold by injustice, feeling nothing in response to those moral wrongs of which she is perfectly aware. I don’t want to say that such a person has done anything wrong, but I do think it’s natural to say that there is something missing in her; that it would be better, *ceteris paribus*, if she were capable of feeling anger towards the injustice she knows to exist. Of course the sceptic about apt anger’s intrinsic value would argue that all that really matters is how one responds in action, not affect, to injustice; anger is at best *instrumentally* valuable for its role in getting us to act as we should. Since our hypothetical person acts impeccably without the aid of apt affect, she lacks nothing – and our intuition to the contrary is just an expression of our fetish (the sceptic might say) for emotion. A similar argument can be run against the intrinsic value of apt aesthetic responses: our capacity to appreciate the beautiful or the sublime, the sceptic might argue, is only

³⁴ I’m not assuming that anger doesn’t have any positive psychic pay-off – that there is no pleasure, for example, to be taken in anger (cf. n. 20.) Rather, I’m supposing that whatever its positive pay-off, anger leaves the agent all-things-considered worse off than she would otherwise be.

³⁵ Liberals might further argue that, in some cases, getting angry violates duties of civility one owes to one’s fellow citizens. I am not myself sympathetic to the thought that there exist such duties – or, rather, I am not sympathetic to the thought that getting aptly angry at injustice is incompatible with whatever duties of civility one has. But nothing I say precludes the sympathetic liberal from characterising these conflicts as, in part, conflicts between civic duties not to get angry and the fittingness of one’s would-be anger. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this point.

³⁶ Thus I was somewhat quick in suggesting that Buckley’s argument against black anger was merely ‘pragmatic’. For the sake of ease I continue to talk about anger’s counterproductivity in terms of merely ‘prudential’ reasons for not angry, though it should be noted that in many of the cases I am interested in, more than mere prudential reason speaks against getting angry. This deepens the sort of conflicts I am interested in.

instrumentally valuable for its role in getting us to act as we should (i.e. protecting what is aesthetically valuable). But such scepticism should be rejected as just that: a scepticism that can be broadly expanded to include anything that we intuit of intrinsic value.³⁷ The sceptic is wrong to say that all we really care about is correct action, and not apt affect – and he offers us no compelling reason to think that this is all we *should* care about.

That said, apt anger is not merely analogous to aesthetic appreciation, not merely a form of appreciating the disvalue of an unjust situation or an immoral act. Anger is also a form of communication, a way of publicly marking and bearing witness to disvalue, calling for the shared negative appreciation of others.³⁸ That we can sometimes stew silently in our anger does not make this any less true. Consider Job's anger, nursed over seven days and seven nights of silence, only to erupt in a demand that a judge find him innocent of crimes against God. Of course anger does not always succeed in this call; sometimes our anger calls for public recognition but is met with dismissal or retrenchment. And sometimes it might well be that our best chance of doing good in the world is to rid ourselves of our anger as best we can: to stop appreciating and marking the world's awfulness in order to be able to do something about it. Perhaps, all things considered, this is sometimes a sacrifice worth making. But the point is that it is a sacrifice, one that lies at the heart of the conflict represented by apt counterproductive anger. On one hand, victims of injustice must choose between making the world as it should be, and on the other appreciating and marking the world as it is. This conflict is not merely psychically painful; it is a genuine *normative* conflict, a conflict involving competing and significant goods that often feel incomparable.

This first-personal conflict faced by the victim of systematic injustice has a second-personal counterpart. As I've said, proponents of the counterproductivity critique, like Buckley, often position themselves as well-meaning allies. They are concerned, they say, with the interests of those treated unjustly. But there is something morally insensitive in their rallying cry: 'don't get angry, it only makes things worse!' It suggests that the moral violation is not so bad, just a practical problem to be solved, rather than a wrongdoing to which its victim must bear witness. It suggests that the primary locus of responsibility for fixing the problem lies with the victim rather than the perpetrator. Indeed it risks obscuring the fact that this advice is *good* advice only because of unjust social arrangements in which the speaker himself is often complicit. In this it shares something in common with the advice delivered by men to women and girls about how to avoid getting raped (abstaining from alcohol, revealing clothing and late nights out). The problem isn't that such advice rests on false empirical premises, or that there isn't a genuine prudential reason for girls and

³⁷ Including epistemic goods like truth, justification and knowledge.

³⁸ It might, as I suggested in the previous section, also call for other things, e.g. that the wrongdoer is held accountable for his actions or that the wrongdoer share in one's suffering. But I think that anger by its nature calls for others to share in its negative appreciation of injustice.

women to avoid situations in which they might get raped. The problem with such advice – and the reason why it is condemned by feminists as rape apologism – is that it suggests that the moral responsibility for minimising rape lies with girls and women. It moreover obscures the fact that this advice is *good* advice only because men do in fact rape; the ubiquity of rape is treated as a fixed fact, rather than a contingency for which men bear moral responsibility. Similarly, the counterproductivity critique treats the counterproductivity of anger as a fixed fact, rather than as a largely contingent feature of social reality.³⁹ The advice to abstain from drinking or not to get angry can sometimes be sincerely defended as ‘encouraging people to focus on what they have control over’, as a merely pragmatic or prudential counsel. But that defence fails to understand how the insistence on people’s pragmatic interests – not to be raped, or not to be dismissed from the public sphere – can itself be oppressive, an obfuscation of the fundamental injustice at work. Indeed it is this strategy of obfuscation that Buckley (one imagines inadvertently) betrays in his debate with Baldwin, when he reveals that the counterproductivity of black anger is caused not by some fixed political fact but by the wilful violence of white Americans.

And yet, there is also something morally troubling about the opposing rallying cry: ‘nurse your anger!’ In this we hear a lack of care for the suffering agent herself; we might detect a threat that she will be instrumentalised for a political cause. Neither of these slogans is morally right on its own, and yet both contain some truth. We want to say both at once, and yet that will be to offer practically incoherent advice. As experienced by the sympathetic bystander, this second-personal conflict does not carry with it the psychic sting of the first-personal conflict. But imagine its subject to be the parent of a child who is facing an occasion for apt counterproductive anger – say the parent of a young black girl who is regularly sexually harassed at school.⁴⁰ How does the parent advise his or her child? Here the conflict is raised acutely, with all the sting (perhaps more) of the first-personal conflict.

I have suggested that occasions for apt counterproductive anger present victims of injustice (and sometimes those who care for those victims) with substantive and psychically costly normative conflicts. I want to draw out two lessons from this. First, those who argue that one ought not get angry whenever it would be counterproductive to do so face an argumentative burden. They must explain why it is that in cases where one’s anger would be counterproductive yet apt, prudential

³⁹ To the extent that anger’s counterproductivity is determined by anger’s deleterious effects on epistemic rationality, then the counterproductivity of anger does indeed seem to be (given the laws of human psychology) fixed. But I take it that a large part of what makes anger counterproductive (when it is counterproductive) are the contingent ways that we respond to the anger of oppressed people.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the disproportionate amount of sexual harassment (and gendered violence more generally) that targets black girls in American schools, see Tonnesen 2013.

considerations must overwhelm aptness considerations.⁴¹ It is not at all obvious, in these kinds of cases, that the normative demands to better one's unjust situation beat out the normative demands to appreciate the badness of one's situation. We are owed an account of why, in such cases, prudential considerations trump all else – and specifically trump what I have argued is the intrinsic value of apt anger. Until we are given such an account, we are right to be suspicious that the counterproductivity critique – as in the case of Buckley's response to Baldwin – is often an attempt at social control masquerading as concern.

The second lesson is this. During a radio interview in 1961, Baldwin was asked about comments he had made in a review of the poems of Langston Hughes. He said:

[T]o be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time...[T]he first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you...You have to decide that you can't spend the rest of your life cursing out everybody that gets in your way. As a writer, you have to decide that what is really important is not that the people you write about are Negroes, but that they are people, and that the suffering of any person is really universal. If you can reach this level, if you can create a person and make other people feel what this person feels, then it seems to me that you've gone much further, not only artistically, but socially...I talked about Langston not being the first poet to find these responsibilities all but irreconcilable. And he won't be the last, because it demands a great deal of stepping out of a social situation in order to deal with⁴²

Baldwin thought that both he and Hughes best served the world 'not only artistically, but socially' through the sort of writing that transcended raw anger and achieved a hard-won universality. Not only art but justice demanded that Baldwin and Hughes set aside their justified daily rage. In this way Baldwin accepted the empirical presupposition at the heart of Buckley's counterproductivity critique – that black anger didn't best serve the interests of black people. But unlike Buckley, Baldwin knew all too well that this generated a profound conflict. Indeed Baldwin here is speaking, I want to suggest, of two kinds of injustice. First is the daily oppression of being a black person in the US – impoverishment, ghettoisation, threat of physical attack, political and social marginalisation, psychic degradation. And second is what I want to call *affective* injustice: the injustice of having to negotiate between one's apt emotional response to the injustice of one's situation and one's desire to better one's situation – a conflict of responsibilities that are 'all but

⁴¹ There is a straightforward case to be made from the perspective of the counterproductivity critic if getting aptly but counterproductively angry would violate a categorical moral duty either to oneself or another. But if there are simply moral and prudential *reasons* not to get angry, and 'aptness' reasons *to* get angry, I take it that this burden must still be met.

⁴² Baldwin et al 1961/1962, p. 81.

irreconcilable'.^{43,44} Affective injustice, I take Baldwin to be suggesting, partly constitutes the injustice of the black situation.

Affective injustice is a second-order injustice that is parasitic on first-order injustice, a sort of psychic tax that is often levied on victims of oppression. But it is not only a *psychic* tax. Like more familiar kinds of injustice, the wrongness of affective injustice does not lie primarily in the fact that it makes its victims feel bad; its wrongness lies rather in the fact that it forces people, through no fault of their own, into profoundly difficult normative conflicts – an invidious choice between self-preservation and justified rage.⁴⁵ Insofar as we have basic human entitlements to both self-preservation and full emotional lives – lives that allow us to exercise our capacity to aptly respond to the world – affective injustice represents a violation of our basic humanity. Of course, first-order injustice need not be accompanied by affective injustice. It's possible that getting aptly angry about some first-order injustice would actually improve one's situation. But that's likelier to be true for someone whose anger isn't generally seen as sufficient reason to dismiss her from the public sphere – likelier, that is, for the sort of person who isn't already stereotyped as rageful, violent or shrill. If this is right – if affective injustice is a genuine phenomenon, one that disproportionately affects those who are already disproportionately affected by more familiar forms of injustice – then our political arrangements are festering with much unrecognised injustice. Things are even worse than we generally take them to be. This is the ugly truth that those who would dismiss anger on the grounds of its counterproductivity obscure, inadvertently or purposefully.

In the final section of this paper, §5, I discuss the prospects for alleviating affective injustice by dissolving the false but widely held opposition between anger and

⁴³ In the kind of cases I am primarily interested in, anger is counterproductive because of contingent, unjust social arrangements – namely, because the anger of victims of systematic injustice is treated as sufficient reason to further ignore, marginalise or oppress them. But of course anger might be counterproductive not because of any underlying injustice; for example, it might be counterproductive for a victim of racism to get angry because doing so would make his blood pressure rise dangerously. I am inclined to count the latter sort of case as also a case of affective injustice: not only is he a victim of racism, he must also face an invidious choice between getting justifiably angry and keeping himself alive. That said, I am open to the thought that the category of affective injustice should be narrowed, such that affective injustice only arises when one's apt emotional response to injustice would be counterproductive as a result of an underlying injustice in how one's emotional responses are treated – most obviously, through negative prejudicial stereotypes.

⁴⁴ I mean affective injustice to be a genus of which occasions for apt counterproductive anger represent one species. One could also suffer affective injustice by being presented with an occasion for apt but counterproductive sadness, hopelessness, despair, etc. (perhaps where the counterproductivity of those affective attitudes is the product of an underlying injustice; see fn. 43). The notion of affective injustice bears many similarities to Miranda Fricker's notion of *epistemic injustice* (Fricker 2007), the injustice that occurs when one is epistemically harmed (e.g. by being deprived of hermeneutical resources for understanding one's oppressed position, or being treated as an unreliable testifier) as a result of underlying social injustices (i.e. negative prejudicial stereotypes).

⁴⁵ I don't wish to take a view on whether such conflicts rise to the level of normative *dilemmas*, where an agent is forced to do something she categorically ought not do.

reason. But first I turn, in the next section, to an objection to my argument so far: namely, that my argument has conflated anger as such with its stereotypical expressions.

4. Refining the counterproductivity critique

I have argued that occasions for apt but counterproductive anger present victims of injustice with substantive normative conflicts, conflicts that themselves plausibly constitute a form of second-order injustice. This puts pressure on the counterproductivity critic to explain just why we should accept his inference from the counterproductivity of one's anger to an all-things-considered prohibition on one's getting angry. One can imagine the counterproductivity critic responding as follows: 'My target isn't anger as such, but common *expressions* of anger, like shouting, hyperbolic rhetoric or aggressive facial expressions. When I say that one ought not get angry even when encountering injustice, what I really mean is: one ought not *act* angry in politics. One's *being* angry isn't counterproductive; only one's *acting* angry is. For all I've said, *being* angry might be perfectly permissible on some occasions, precisely because (as you say) it is sometimes apt. Thus I don't face the explanatory burden with which you charge me.'

Many counterproductivity critics wouldn't be willing to endorse this line of response. In particular, the Stoics and their contemporary followers like Nussbaum draw a strong, constitutive connection between anger and its stereotypical expression. But are they right to do so? On what we might call a *pure disjunctivist* view of anger, there is no significant connection between anger and its expression; anger is a mere feeling, and that feeling must be sharply distinguished from whatever behaviour contingently accompanies it. If the pure disjunctivist view is right, then the refined version of the counterproductivity critique must be taken very seriously indeed. For it will be perfectly coherent to say that victims of injustice ought not behave in stereotypically angry ways, but that they are permitted – indeed perhaps even encouraged or required – to feel angry. The Stoics then will be wrong to chastise anger as such; their proper target will turn out to be stereotypical but non-constitutive behavioural expressions of anger. Moreover, if the pure disjunctivist view is right, then the conflict I want to discuss – the conflict between instrumental and intrinsic reasons for getting angry – will turn out to be a chimera. For it will turn out that I have conflated reasons for being angry with reasons for acting angrily.

We should, however, reject pure disjunctivism about anger. Empirical psychologists typically endorse what we might call *strong functionalism* about anger, the view that anger – as well as the other (putatively) basic, universal emotions of happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, disgust – is at least partly constituted by its stereotypical expression. This is because anger, along with the other basic emotions, appear to

possess manifestation and recognition conditions that are stable across human cultures, and that are shared in common with many mammals – e.g. grimacing, raised voice, aggressive staring.⁴⁶ On the standard view within empirical psychology, basic emotions like anger are ‘affect programmes’, universal modes of complex, unconscious behaviour that have deep evolutionary roots. Such apparent universality constitutes strong reason to think that anger’s stereotypical expression is at least partly constitutive of anger, and thus that pure disjunctivism ought to be rejected.

But if we reject pure disjunctivism, what are we to make of cases in which people seem to get angry without exhibiting stereotypical angry behaviour? Must we conclude that those who are culturally trained not to display patterns of angry arousal are incapable of getting angry?⁴⁷ Or, to take a more specific case, must we accept that Gandhi’s spiritual exercises left him devoid of anger, rather than radically re-shaping the behavioural manifestations of his anger?⁴⁸ Strong functionalism will require us to accept both these conclusions. I take this to be a counterintuitive cost. Where does this leave us? I want to suggest that a more moderate functionalism allows us to reject pure disjunctivism while leaving room for the possibility that anger’s natural expression can be altered significantly by cultural training. According to the sort of moderate functionalism I have in mind, the behavioural expressions that partly constitute a given individual’s anger depends on that individual’s cultural training. Some forms of cultural training leave the natural affect programme behaviours associated with a basic emotion more or less untouched. Other forms of cultural training (or spiritual re-training) might suppress these behaviours to the extent that what it is for the enculturated individual to be angry itself changes. For someone raised in a culture that teaches children never to raise their voices or grimace when angry, it is possible to be angry without exhibiting those behaviours. But for someone not raised in such a culture, raising one’s voice and grimacing in part constitutes one’s getting angry. To tell the latter sort of person that she is allowed to ‘feel angry’ but just isn’t allowed to raise her voice or grimace is like saying that one can take a pound of flesh but no jot of blood. It might be metaphysically possible for *someone* to do so, but it isn’t possible for the person in question to do so. It is of course metaphysically possible for the person in question to *become* the sort of person who can do so – precisely by engaging in radical affective retraining. But the proponent of the refined counterproductivity critique claims to be saying that the angry person is permitted to feel angry (here, now), not that the angry person is permitted to feel angry once she undergoes affective retraining.

⁴⁶ Ekman 1972, 1989; DeLancey 2001; Griffiths 1997; cf. Darwin 1896.

⁴⁷ On cultural variation in emotions and their expression, see e.g. Markus and Kitayama 1991; Butler et al 2007; Friedlmeier et al 2011.

⁴⁸ On the complexities of Gandhi’s moral and political psychology – and for a case that Gandhi was driven by a radical intensity that is often overlooked – Faisal Devji’s *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (Devji 2012) cannot be too highly recommended.

Take an analogy. Suppose your natural singing voice is a soprano, and you've had no vocal training to allow you to sing in any other way. Someone tells you that you must not sing in a soprano voice. You protest that you've just been prohibited from singing. Your interlocutor balks at this suggestion, explaining that you are of course permitted to *sing*, just not to sing in a soprano voice. There is something at best confused and at worst disingenuous about this response. Singing in a soprano voice is the way you sing. It's true that with intense vocal training you might be able to sing in a different range. But that doesn't speak in favour of your interlocutor. For she is claiming not to have prohibited you from singing (here, now), whereas (at best) she is not prohibiting you from singing once you have undergone intensive vocal training. Similarly, the proponent of the refined counterproductivity critique cannot fairly claim that he permits the victim of injustice to feel angry (here, now). At best he permits the victim of injustice to feel angry once she has radically reconfigured what it is for her to get angry.

One might worry that this line of defence won't work to justify the use of angry political rhetoric employed by Baldwin or Malcolm X – the kind of angry expression that is often subject to the counterproductivity critique.⁴⁹ For honed, stinging rhetoric might not seem to be part of what it is for anyone, constitutively speaking, to get angry. But is that right? For figures like Baldwin and Malcolm X, but also Catharine MacKinnon and Angela Davis, getting angry just does seem to involve an enviably articulate verbal expression, a swift and often automatic conversion of sentiment into word. Indeed one might worry that the counterproductivity critic, in seeking to distinguish anger from its rhetorically sophisticated expression, risks mischaracterising figures like Baldwin, Malcolm X, MacKinnon and Davis as simply shrewd political agents, rather than genuine victims of the oppression they argue against.⁵⁰ Of course that such anger might be apt does not automatically yield the conclusion that the use of angry political rhetoric is always all-things-considered justified. But it does mean that when evaluating angry political rhetoric as a political strategy, it is not enough to think of it only in terms of its political efficacy. We must also think of it as an act in itself, an act that – when apt – registers and communicates the badness of injustice.⁵¹

In brief: the refined counterproductivity critique requires us to endorse pure disjunctivism about anger, which we ought to reject on independent, largely

⁴⁹ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this.

⁵⁰ In the Cambridge Union debate, Buckley says of Baldwin that his 'charges against America are not so much that our civilisation has failed him and his people', citing the fact that Baldwin, despite 'threaten[ing] America with the necessity for us to jettison our entire civilization' is 'treated from coast to coast of the United States with a kind of unctuous servitude which goes beyond anything that was ever expected from the most servile of Negro creatures by a southern family'. Buckley also, bizarrely, says that in writing *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin 'didn't...speak with the British accent that he used exclusively tonight'. The implication – that Baldwin is opportunistically feigning emotional identification with the plight of his fellow black Americans – is clear (and clearly false).

⁵¹ Thanks to Sophie Smith for discussion of this issue.

empirical grounds. But rejecting pure disjunctivism doesn't require us to accept a strong functionalism that precludes the possibility of significant variation in anger's expression; instead we should embrace a moderate functionalism according to which the constitutive connections between anger and behaviour can rest on particulars of cultural training, and indeed the particulars of individual personality. Once we endorse such a moderate functionalism, the refined counterproductivity critique loses its bite. We cannot distinguish sharply enough between anger and angry behaviour to vindicate the critic's claim only to be condemning the latter.

Before I proceed to the next (and final) section, a brief note on violence. In speaking about anger's stereotypical expressions I've deliberately not discussed violence. Though of course associated with anger, violence isn't thought to be part of anger's 'affect program'; indeed, from an evolutionary perspective the function of anger is to avoid costly violent interactions while securing the goods that might be afforded by such interactions. And in general most adult humans are capable of getting angry without becoming physically violent. (Consider how many supposedly 'violent' protests involve only physical damage to property, not other persons.) Yet I grant that some people might be such that for them getting angry just *is* (in part) getting violent. If so, then telling such people not to be violently angry is equivalent to telling them not to (here, now) be angry. I think we can and should accept this implication. If someone has been raised such that she cannot get angry without getting violent, then when we tell her that she cannot be violent we are also saying that she cannot get angry – at least not without radical affective retraining. But such a case is importantly different from the cases I've been examining. In the standard 'counterproductivity' case, anger is said to be all-things-considered prohibited because of its bad consequences. But when violence is wrong, it's presumably wrong not because of its bad consequences, but rather because it is categorically wrong, a violation of a moral prohibition against needless physical harm. So when an instance of anger constitutively involves violence, such anger would be all-things-considered prohibited not because of its bad consequences, but rather because it involves a violation of a basic moral prohibition. Thus a defence of the possibility of anger's aptness need not yield a defence of angry violence.

5. Alleviating affective injustice

The focus of this paper has been a type of conflict frequently faced by victims of injustice, conflicts that I've argued can themselves constitute a distinctive form of injustice. What should we do when faced with such conflicts? There is a standard philosophical way of hearing that question, and a standard philosophical way of answering it. We hear it as a question about what, in general, agents facing these conflicts ought to do, and we answer it by saying: these agents ought to do what they have all things considered reason to do, or what they practically ought to do, and so on. There are of course philosophers who resist the idea that there is a fact of

the matter about what we have ‘all things considered reason’ to do, or that there is some normatively supreme ‘practical’ ought that resolves such conflicts. This resistance is often motivated by phenomenological considerations: these conflicts just feel too hard, too irresolvable, for there to be such an easy way through. Indeed, talk of what we have ‘all things considered reason to do’ risks making the choice between apt anger and self-preservation sound no more fraught than the choice between going to the theatre or to the cinema; some might think it sits badly with Baldwin’s observation that such conflicts involve responsibilities that are ‘all but irreconcilable’. I don’t wish to take a stand on this question. Either way, we are left wanting to know what those who actually face such situations ought to do. This is the pressing political question. Heard as a request for political guidance, and not just a theoretical question about the metaphysics of normativity, it is hard to know how to respond – except to say that agents should be guided by both a concern for appreciating the world as it is, and making the world as it ought to be. But that is merely a pleasant way of re-describing a vexing problem.

Let me suggest a different way of thinking about what we might do about such conflicts. The conflicts I’ve described are of the kind that particularly interested Hegel – that is, conflicts that are the result of our contingent social and political arrangements. For Hegel, the political utility of tragic spectatorship lies in tragedy’s ability to dramatise the conflicts to which such contingencies give rise; the canonical case is that of Antigone’s conflict between her filial and civic duties. Tragedy calls on us to achieve reconciliation: the re-arrangement of our political circumstances so that such conflicts no longer arise, or at least do not arise so often. In a Hegelian spirit, we can ask: what would need to change for there no longer to be occasions for apt counterproductive anger? Given what I’ve said about the relationship between such occasions and first-order injustice, two options present themselves. First, we could make it the case that there were no longer any occasions for *apt* anger – in other words, that there were no injustices. Such a moral utopia would certainly offer a resolution to affective injustice, but it’s not a resolution that offers much hope in the actual context of non-ideal politics. Alternatively, we could push the other lever at hand: not anger’s *aptness*, but anger’s *counterproductivity*. What would it take, then, to lessen the counterproductivity of anger?

Seneca wrote that anger is ‘closed to reason’, that the mind ‘if it plunges into anger...has no power to check its impetus; its very weight and the downward tendency of vice needs must hurry it on, and drive it to the bottom’.⁵² Rationality counsels against anger; anger corrupts rationality. Anger is presumed to be the enemy of reason, and the angry person presumed not to be a fit member of the rational political community. Insofar as we cleave to the liberal aspiration for a rational politics, it seems that anger has no place in the political sphere. An angry person then is not suitable for political community; she must be excluded until she

⁵² Seneca 1928, III.1.

has returned to her senses. Little wonder then that defenders of anger tend to be suspicious of the liberal enchantment with the idea of a rational politics. A rational politics has no room for anger, and so no room for one of the few weapons available to the oppressed. Thus the invocation of ‘rationality’ (like the invocation of ‘civility’) becomes an invocation of the status quo.

Insofar as a rational politics has no place for anger, I am tempted to think: so much the worse for rational politics. But we should query the premise. If anger is rationally evaluable – if it is something we do for reasons, good and bad – then it has at least a *prima facie* place in a rational politics. Opponents of anger, like the Stoics or Pettigrove, might respond that even if anger is sometimes in this sense rational, its downstream effects on epistemic rationality are so grave that it should be, in the final analysis, excluded from politics.⁵³ But this is an open, largely empirical question. As I have already mentioned, many philosophers argue that anger can be a source of moral and political knowledge; by reflecting on our anger, and the reactions of the powerful to our anger, we can come to know something about the existence and structure of previously unrecognised injustice. So while anger might have ill effects on our rationality, it can also have positive epistemic effects, and the ill must be weighed against the good. Moreover, if apt anger is itself a cognitive good, like true belief or knowledge – not a mere feeling, but (when apt) an *appreciation* of the facts – then, whatever its negative effects on rationality, its own intrinsic value must be totted up against them.⁵⁴ It also remains an open *normative* question whether we are ever obligated to sacrifice one cognitive good in the interest of acquiring others: whether we are obligated, for example, to sacrifice an instance of apt anger for an increased ability to evaluate the evidence neutrally. For it is not at all clear that we are obligated to maximise the value of our total cognitive economies.⁵⁵ Like the claim that the one should always be sacrificed for the many, epistemic consequentialism has a whiff of repugnance about it, a seeming failure to register the intrinsic, non-fungible value of some goods. It is not implausible to think that apt anger is such a good: that it is an intrinsically worthwhile thing not only to know but also to feel the ugly facts that structure our political reality. A rational politics, then, is not a politics without anger, and anger is not sufficient grounds for dismissing someone from the public sphere.

I said above that it’s not particularly helpful to say that we can alleviate affective injustice by removing first-order injustices. But perhaps it’s not much less naïve to

⁵³ Pettigrove describes several psychological studies that suggest ‘that ‘moral’ anger can have an adverse effect on an agent’s judgment across a wide range of morally relevant domains. Not only is the person who is angry about something at work more likely to come home and kick the cat, but, these studies suggest, he or she is more likely to believe the cat deserves it. So even if ‘moral’ anger has the epistemic merits that advocates have claimed on its behalf, these are accompanied by enough epistemic liabilities to temper whatever enthusiasm we might have felt for it’ (Pettigrove 2012, p. 364).

⁵⁴ In this anger need not be different than other cognitive goods, like belief.

⁵⁵ For discussions of maximising and consequentialist views of the cognitive sphere, see Berker 2013a and 2013b.

suggest, as I just have, that we should make anger less counterproductive by dissolving the false dichotomy between anger and reason. Presumably this dichotomy is sustained not because of a philosophical mistake, but because it is useful for the preservation of the status quo; since it is oppressed people who have greatest reason to be angry, excluding anger from the public sphere is an efficient rationalisation for excluding those who most threaten the reigning social order. There is a philosophical mistake here (or so I think), one that philosophers have no doubt helped to keep in place, and that perhaps philosophers can help to remedy. But the real mistake is an ethical one – except that ‘mistake’ makes it sound non-purposive, a mere accident or error. What I really mean to say is that we think and talk about political anger in the way we do because it serves those whom anger most stands to threaten, and that this is no mistake at all.

‘Rage’ (μῆνιν) is the first word of Western literature, and in the Western tradition, it is the spectre of the raging Achilles that has haunted the debate about anger’s normative status. The Aristotelian defenders of anger thought that a man who failed to get angry at slights was slavish; such a man would never be an adequate fighter, for anger is, in Cicero’s ironic phrase the ‘whetstone of courage’.⁵⁶ If there were no anger, there would be no Achilles: no men to risk their lives, defend honour and punish wrongdoing. The Stoics, anticipating a modern settlement in which legitimate violence is consolidated in the hands of the state rather than the hands of individual men, saw anger as destabilising and destructive. What was needed was reason without affect; the Stoical ideal was not a vengeful Achilles, but a cool-headed judge. But for the Aristotelians and Stoics alike, the question ‘ought one ever get angry?’ was implicitly understood to be about the powerful: free, wealthy men, with the capacity for unchecked violence. The question was whether such men should make themselves into a new kind of man, with the power of a civic ruler rather than a tribal warrior, but powerful nonetheless. It was simply taken for granted that women and slaves had no business getting angry; the debate about anger was never about them. Christianity told the same men that they should be neither judge nor warrior, but instead forgiving and meek. Here women and slaves might have been the model, but they were only models; it was through a free choice to wilfully transfigure oneself into a submissive lamb that Christianity offered its deepest power.

A recognition of anger’s aptness might seem to threaten a return to the petulant and vengeful Achilles, a backwards slide into a form of life in which justice is not the business of the state, but the personal lot of each man. We tell ourselves that we have set anger aside, that we no longer have any need of it. Invoking the spectre of the raging Achilles, we condemn anger. But in so doing we neglect, as we have always neglected, those who were never allowed to be angry, the slaves and women who have the power of neither the state nor the sword.

⁵⁶ Cicero 2002 4.43.

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