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Political and Antipolitical Anger: The Challenge of Keeping One's Anger at Structural Injustice Properly Political

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Political and Antipolitical Anger: The Challenge of Keeping One's Anger at Structural Injustice Properly Political

Jessica Vargas González

Abstract

The analysis of anger's role in politics needs to overcome the oversimplified views of anger as positive or negative. Instead, a more useful normative question is one that asks how we should distinguish between forms of anger that are appropriate or properly political, and those that are dangerous and impermissible, or antipolitical. By drawing on a conflict-theory framework that makes a normative distinction between agonistic and antagonistic conflicts, I argue that properly political anger should meet two criteria: fittingness and boundedness. Anger can sometimes be a fitting response to our unjust world. However, fittingness is not enough; it also matters how anger is channeled or acted upon in the public realm. Moreover, this paper contends that anger at structural injustice may relatively easily go wrong, as mistargeted or boundless anger. In light of these challenges, I argue that introducing a goal-frustration type of anger (as distinct from blaming anger) can prevent construing anger too narrowly, as always involving moral blame, and that one can learn (to some extent) to regulate one's anger. At the same time, I acknowledge that the uptake that anger receives plays an essential role in creating an environment that favors (or disfavors) that anger at structural injustice remains bounded.

Keywords: anger, politics, agonism, goal-frustration anger, structural injustice, cognitive and social biases

1. Introduction

Anger is an emotional response to perceived wrongdoing (Frye 1983; Solomon 2007; Nussbaum 2016; Cherry 2021; Stockdale 2021). It tracks what we perceive as harm or slight wrongly inflicted on us (or those who matter to us). Anger's role in political life is highly contested.

> According to its fans, anger is a refined detector of injustice and uniquely effective at getting oppressors to yield their evil ways. . . . Opponents of anger say that anger is undisciplined and sloppy. It is

> "greedy for revenge," the unprincipled servant of a rapacious ego, and a miserable detector of the truth. (Flanagan 2018, vii)

Instead of asking whether anger should or should not play any role in politics, this paper suggests that a more useful normative question is one that asks how we should distinguish between forms of anger that are appropriate or properly political, and those that are dangerous and impermissible, or antipolitical. I argue that appropriate anger in politics should meet two criteria: *fittingness* and *boundedness*. I share with recent defenders of anger's role in politics (Srinivasan 2018; Cherry 2021) the conviction that anger can sometimes be a fitting or apt response to our unjust world. I contribute to this discussion by providing a detailed analysis of the criterion of fittingness for a complex emotion like anger and by introducing a goal-frustration type of anger that allows for anger that is not intrinsically retributive. Additionally, I argue that fittingness is not enough to consider anger to be appropriate in political life; it also matters how anger is channeled or acted upon in the public realm. My analysis draws on a conflict-theory framework that makes a normative distinction between agonistic conflicts and antagonistic conflicts.[1]

I argue that understanding how anger may go wrong in politics requires acknowledging certain features of our nonideal political realities, as well as features of our nonideal selves (such as cognitive and social biases). I specifically contend that anger as a response to structural injustice faces challenges to remaining properly political. By building on Iris M. Young's analysis in *Responsibility for Justice*, I argue that blaming anger faces a *targeting problem.* Structural injustice makes it difficult (and sometimes even impossible) to single out who is to blame. As a result, blaming anger is prone to be mistargeted and, therefore, to become unfitting. Second, anger at structural injustice faces the *risk of boundlessness.* This is the risk that the great and sustained wrongly inflicted harm caused by structural injustice may lead to awesome levels of anger that can be channeled or discharged in politically dangerous ways. Despite these dangers, I defend the claim that anger is a politically relevant emotion. Anger at structural injustice can *potentially* play a properly political role, but it is not guaranteed. The problem lies in the fact that a nonideal world (characterized by multiple structural injustices) creates the conditions for a tremendous amount of justified anger; however, that anger can become normatively problematic due to the combination of some of the features of the wrongs caused by structural injustices with some of our too-human features.

I propose addressing the targeting problem by building on the distinction introduced by David Shoemaker (2018, 73) between "goal-frustration anger" and

[1] I focus here exclusively on anger, but I have developed elsewhere a similar analysis of fear as a political and antipolitical emotion; see Vargas González (forthcoming).

"blaming anger." Goal-frustration anger allows for anger that is not intrinsically retributive; it is a more forward-looking type of anger that focuses on overcoming the source of blockage rather than blaming. It is relevant for analyzing anger in politics because structural injustices present us with politically relevant wrongdoings for which it is often unclear who is to blame. Introducing a goal-frustration type of anger allows us not to construe anger too narrowly, as always involving moral blame. Moreover, it helps us articulate how anger that does not focus on blame can still be relevant to normative political reasoning. I believe it also provides a helpful category to make sense of many current expressions of anger in political life, in which people are frequently angry at unjust social structures (such as racist or sexist ones) without necessarily assigning blame to anyone.[2] Concerning the risk of boundlessness, I argue that we can learn (to some extent) to manage or channel our anger appropriately. At the same time, I acknowledge that the uptake that anger receives plays an essential role in creating an environment that favors (or disfavors) that anger at structural injustice remains bounded.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2, I argue that a normative assessment of anger in politics (and of emotions, more generally) requires a conflict-theory framework. I specifically build on Hannah Arendt's normative conception of politics as agonistic to argue that anger can sometimes be antipolitical and, at other times, properly political. I offer two specific criteria for assessing when anger can be considered appropriate in political life. In section 3, I argue that even anger that justifiably emerges as a response to structural injustice faces challenges to meeting the criteria of fittingness and boundedness. In section 4, I argue that the targeting problem that blaming anger at structural injustice faces can be best addressed by introducing a goal-frustration type of anger. Finally, in response to the risk of boundlessness faced by all anger at structural injustice, I argue that one can learn (to some extent) to regulate one's anger. Its social and malleable nature is important because anger can be channeled differently toward action in the public realm, depending on what the social norms and expectations are.

2. Political and Antipolitical Anger: An Arendtian Agonistic Framework to Normatively Assess the Role of Emotions in Politics

A conception of anger as negative cannot account for the *fittingness* or *aptness* of certain forms of anger. Moreover, the view according to which anger should be avoided, whatever the circumstances, because it can be "counterproductive" (based on its consequences) is an example of the conflation

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[2] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify how introducing a goal-frustration type of anger enriches our current debates about anger in politics.

problem discussed by D'Arms and Jacobson (2000a, 2000b).[3] Srinivasan has argued for the aptness of anger as a response to injustices.

> There is more to anger, normatively speaking, than its effects. For any instance of counterproductive anger we might still ask: is it the fitting response to the way the world is? Is the anger, however unproductive, nonetheless apt? (Srinivasan 2018, 126)

Additionally, a conception of anger as negative leaves out the way that anger can have positive or desirable consequences. As others have argued, anger can have epistemic value by helping us recognize and denounce wrongdoing—sometimes even harms wrongly inflicted that have until now been regarded as normal or acceptable (Jaggar 1989; Lugones 1995; Bell 2009; Stockdale 2021). As Tessman (2005, 124) argues, the worst scenario may be that in which victims *normalize* the harm; that is, when victims are not even able to experience anger. Anger may help members of oppressed groups to resist the internalization of oppression (Leboeuf 2018). Moreover, anger can play an important communicative role (Shoemaker 2018, 74; Aumann and Cogley 2019, 48; Stockdale 2021, 104–7) and serve to change what is considered acceptable in public life; it can also provide a strong source of motivation for action that is oriented toward addressing the injustices that matter to us. Finally, anger can work as a deterrent and discourage new aggressions.

Hence, a normative assessment of anger in politics needs to be more nuanced; it should address the fact that anger can sometimes be appropriate or properly political, and at other times impermissible or antipolitical. As Myisha Cherry (2021, 12) argues, distinctions between *types of anger* in politics are required. I propose using a conflict-theory framework to examine the role of anger (and of emotions, more generally) in politics. My account draws specifically on Hannah Arendt's agonistic conception of politics. Unlike consensual approaches, Arendt's agonism captures political life's competitive and cooperative dimension. It recognizes that politics is inherently conflictual and that politics neither depends on nor aims at reaching an overlapping consensus. However, following Arendt (1970), I claim that there is a normative opposition between politics and violence. The use of violence as a means to achieving desired ends is normatively problematic because, as Arendt warns, once violence is introduced, one only knows how it starts but never knows how it ends. In other words, violence introduces an "all-pervading unpredictability,"

[3] As D'Arms and Jacobson (2000a, 66) explain, "There is a crucial distinction between the question of whether some emotion is the right way to feel, and whether that feeling gets it right. It is remarkable how often philosophers conflate these questions."

in which the danger lies precisely in the fact that the violent means may overwhelm the ends (Arendt 1970, 5). Resorting to violence to resolve political controversies can initiate vicious circles of retaliation that threaten the whole possibility of living together in polities. Arendt's views on violence acknowledge that violence might be necessary in extreme situations to achieve liberation (for instance, to fight colonialism, authoritarian governments, etc.); however, violence is never sufficient to create a political space of freedom (Arendt 1970).[4]

I use Arendt's opposition between politics and violence to normatively distinguish between two types of conflict: *agonistic* and *antagonistic conflict*.[5] Agonism implies a relationship with opponents who are regarded as *adversaries*. This is the proper political relation that characterizes people who hold opposing views regarding the common good but share a commitment to deal in nonviolent ways with insurmountable differences. On the other hand, antagonistic conflict implies a relationship among political opponents who are regarded as *enemies*. Antagonism is characterized by the intrusion (or even prominence) of violence in political life. This distinction among types of conflicts is not only descriptive but normative. Arendt's agonistic conception of politics implies that political life is only properly constituted by political contestation. Therefore, appeals to violence and the use of force that make conflicts become antagonistic entail an abandonment of the proper realm of politics.

My assessment of anger in politics builds on this normative distinction between agonistic and antagonistic conflict. Using the term "political" in a normative rather than a descriptive sense, we can say that an emotion is not properly political simply because it has the nation, political leaders, or praiseworthy goals as its object. Emotions in politics are *antipolitical* if they foster antagonism—that is, if they contribute to seeing and treating political opponents as enemies who should be confronted by any means available (including violence). Antipolitical emotions are politically dangerous because they threaten the possibility of finding nonviolent solutions to political disagreements. My agonistic framework acknowledges that in-group and out-group dynamics constitute politics in the sense that politics involves an

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[4] In this paper, I do not address the issue of when resorting to violence as a means of liberation might be justified. This is a difficult question that exceeds the scope of the present work. Instead, following Arendt, I am interested in arguing that preserving an agonistic political realm requires restraints regarding the use of violent means to pursue political goals.

[5] I borrow from Chantal Mouffe (2005, 2013) the explicit distinction between agonistic and antagonistic conflict. Arendt does not use these terms; however, I argue that the distinction can be reconstructed in Arendt's thought based on the normative opposition between politics and violence (Arendt 1970).

"us vs. them" structure that is acceptable as long as it takes the form of adversarial contestation. What is unacceptable is when the "us vs. them" dynamics take an antagonistic form; those situations involve what I consider to be an antipolitical mobilization of emotions.

This agonistic framework differs specifically from how Martha Nussbaum (2013) approaches a normative assessment of emotions in politics, as developed in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. At the center of my disagreement with Nussbaum lies a different understanding of politics and the role of conflict in political life. Like John Rawls, Nussbaum endorses a consensual conception of politics, according to which, despite the plurality of comprehensive views present in contemporary liberal societies, it is *hoped* that citizens reach an overlapping consensus regarding central political values. In *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum argues:

> In the type of liberal society that aspires to justice and equal opportunity for all, there are two tasks for the political cultivation of emotion. One is to engender and sustain strong commitment to worthy projects that require effort and sacrifice. . . . Most people tend toward narrowness of sympathy. They can easily become immured in narcissistic projects and forget about the needs of those outside their narrow circle. . . .
> The other related task for the cultivation of public emotion is to keep at bay forces that lurk in all societies and, ultimately, in all of us: tendencies to protect the fragile self by denigrating and subordinating others. (Nussbaum 2013, 3)

Nussbaum's assessment of emotions in political life presupposes her consensual conception of politics. On the one hand, emotions are classified as positive if they bring citizens (closer) together and help sustain their commitments to worthy common projects and shared political values or ideals. Accordingly, compassion is generally praised as positive because it is a powerful emotion that can move us to act in altruistic ways by bringing us imaginatively closer to the suffering of others. On the other hand, emotions that create separations and divisions are classified as negative in politics; these are the emotions that can potentially derail citizens from pursuing valuable common goals. According to this account, an emotion like anger is basically a negative or dangerous emotion. It follows that positive emotions should be fostered and cultivated while negative emotions should be avoided in political life as much as possible. Likewise, my analysis differs from Nussbaum's (2016, 23) more specific assessment of anger in *Anger and Forgiveness,* where she claims that anger is intrinsically normatively problematic because it involves, *conceptually,* a retributive dimension.

Unlike Nussbaum's, my agonistic approach entails that the same emotion can be engaged in politics in either constructive or dangerous ways. Applied to anger, this means that there are forms of anger that should be nurtured or cultivated and other forms that are impermissible. Like others, I reject Nussbaum's claim that anger conceptually involves a "desire for payback" (McBride 2018, 1; Cherry 2021, 4; Stockdale 2021, 108–9). My discussion of goal-frustration anger in section 4 underscores that not all forms of anger are retributive. Moreover, I argue that the retributive dimension of anger (when it exists) is not politically problematic in itself; what matters *politically* is how that retribution is enacted and whether anger is rightly targeted.

I propose two criteria to distinguish between forms of anger that are appropriate or properly political, and those that are dangerous and impermissible, or antipolitical. On my view, appropriate anger in politics must be *fitting* and *bounded*. I use the criterion of "fittingness" offered by D'Arms and Jacobson:

> Emotions present things to us as having certain evaluative features. When we ask whether an emotion is fitting, . . . we are asking about the correctness of these presentations. The relevant considerations, then, are just those that count as evidence for the evaluations an emotion presents to us. (2000a, 72)

Anger as a response to perceived wrongdoing is a complex emotion because it often involves various interrelated appraisals. First, there is an appraisal that harm has been wrongly inflicted on us (or those who matter to us). Second, anger of the blaming type involves an appraisal of who wronged us—the person(s) who become our anger's target (Solomon 2007, 24; Nussbaum 2016, 17). Moreover, blaming anger involves an attribution of intent. This entails that if we mistakenly attribute intent when harm was accidental, then no one has wronged us. According to the criterion of fittingness, anger is unfitting, first of all, if something is presented as a wrong when it is not. Additionally, blaming anger is unfitting if it is mistargeted (i.e., if we misdirect our anger toward someone who did not cause us unjustified harm). In addition to the correctness of the evaluative presentations (considerations of *shape*), the criterion of fittingness involves the dimension of *size* (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a). This second dimension of the fittingness criterion entails that all anger is also unfitting if it is disproportionate. This happens when our appraisal of the wrong is over or underestimated.

> One can criticize an emotion with regard to its *size* and its *shape*. An emotional episode presents its object as having certain evaluative

> features; it is unfitting on grounds of shape when its object lacks those features. . . .
>
> An emotion can also be criticized for its size. While such criticism typically implies that it has the right shape, one can nevertheless urge that an emotional response is unfitting because it is an overreaction. (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a, 73–74)

Second, I offer the criterion of boundedness. This criterion states that even fitting anger should be kept within proper bounds or limits regarding how it is channeled toward action in the public realm. The boundedness criterion applies to all forms of anger in political life, including the two types discussed in this paper: blaming anger and goal-frustration anger.[6] On my view, anger becomes inappropriate in politics or antipolitical if it is *unfitting* and/or *boundless*; meeting the fittingness criterion is not sufficient for an emotion to be considered properly political. An emotion becomes politically boundless if it is used to justify the view that all means are allowed in the political contest (including violence and force). This second criterion refers not to the intensity of the emotion but to how the emotion is channeled toward action. It is concerned with the *consequences* of how our emotions are expressed or acted upon in the public realm. It is important to note that proportionality (which relates to the size or intensity of the emotion) and boundlessness (how the emotion is channeled toward action) are not the same, but they can be connected. Very intense anger that is proportional to the wrong may (or may not) become boundless. However, a disproportionate (in the sense of excessive) angry response would tend to become boundless. This implies that the difference between political and antipolitical forms of anger is not merely a matter of intensity; boundless anger may (or may not) be fitting in terms of proportionality. Moreover, very intense anger may be a proportionate response to the unjust world we live in; however, even then, intense, fitting anger should remain bounded.[7]

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[6] It also applies to the *performance of anger* in the public realm, even when the emotion is absent. That is, the boundedness condition is not necessarily tied to even having the emotion but to expressions typically associated with anger. As I argue later, by building on Arendt’s discussion of the “darkness of the heart,” motivations are never transparent in public life. Therefore, it might be difficult to distinguish from a third-person perspective between anger proper and a performance of anger. In addition, an unbounded performance of anger in public life can have consequences just as undesirable. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for asking me to make this clarification.

[7] My two criteria imply that mistargeted anger expressed in the public realm and upon which we act is antipolitical, even if it remains bounded (that is, even if it does not

This second criterion for assessing emotions in politics builds on Arendt's theory of action and her normative conception of politics as agonistic.[8] Arendt's agonism prevents us from seeing politics as being on a *continuum* with war (i.e., as unrestricted struggle). Accordingly, it is central to my view that agonistic democratic politics requires restraints in how emotions that concern our living together are expressed or channeled publicly; unrestrained or boundless emotions (even if fitting) are themselves dangerous.

Boundless anger is dangerous because people use it to justify violence. Anger becomes *antipolitical* (even if fitting) if it contributes to seeing "others," opponents, or those who wronged us as *enemies* who should be destroyed or confronted by *any* means available (including violence and force). By doing so, antipolitical anger contributes to transforming the political realm into an antagonistic one. Unlike Nussbaum, I do not consider anger impermissible based solely on its (possible) retributive dimension. Instead, I argue that what is normatively relevant in *politics* is how the retributive motivation is enacted (not the motivation itself). On my view, fitting anger that seeks punishment through institutions remains properly political, even if it is not performed out of purely forward-looking motivations. By contrast, fitting anger in which the victims seek to punish or determine what is just themselves is antipolitical according to the boundlessness criterion. Intense fitting anger that remains normatively restrained in how it is expressed and acted upon remains properly political. There can be various sources of constraint. A moral commitment to pacifism can be a possible source (as in the case of the civil rights movement); a commitment to democracy can be a source as well. However, there can also be

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entail physical violence). Public mistargeted anger wrongs the people who are being incorrectly held accountable for the harm or injustice, and it can further undermine the political realm and foster antagonism by leading to justifiable responses (for instance, of anger and indignation) from those who have been wrongly blamed. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to consider the nuances involved in the case of anger in the public domain that is mistargeted but remains bounded.

[8] Arendt's theory of action stresses how action in the realm of human affairs is characterized by its unpredictability and irreversibility. As Arendt (1998, 190) explains, whenever we act, our action "acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions[;] reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others." In other words, every action may lead to new actions upon which the initial actor has no control, and which are, nonetheless, irreversible. I build on Arendt's phenomenological analysis of action to argue that the preservation of an agonistic polity requires a boundedness criterion, regarding how our emotions are expressed and acted upon in the public realm, precisely because we can never control the processes we set in motion whenever we act among other acting beings.

strategic constraints such as an awareness that "if we were to use violence, they'd decimate us." Even if there are no strategic constraints, there are always normative ones. [9]

My approach shares with recent normative assessments of anger the idea that appropriate anger must be, first of all, fitting anger (Srinivasan 2018; Cherry 2021; Stockdale 2021). However, my account does not allow for *partially fitting* anger. Unlike them, I do not consider that "fitting anger can be either mixed or fully correct" (Cherry 2021, 39) in the sense that it may correctly track an injustice but incorrectly attribute it to the wrong people.[10] Instead, I contend that anger (and, specifically, blaming anger) is not fitting at all unless appraisals of wrongdoing and the target of our anger are both correct. But, as I shall discuss in section 3, this is particularly challenging in the case of structural injustice because of the systemic nature of the wrong; in those cases, even justified anger may quite easily be mistargeted and, therefore, become unfitting.

Likewise, my account shares with Cherry's assessment of anger that fittingness is not enough to consider anger appropriate in the political realm. We both care about how anger is used or channeled toward action. In *The Case for Rage*, she writes:

> So what are the conditions for (fitting) Lordean rage to be appropriate?
> Lordean rage can be morally appropriate when it respects the humanity of the wrongdoer and aims to create a better world rather than tear the wrongdoer down in the name of virtue signaling, for example. In other words, if you are feeling rage against injustice and you aim that rage in a way that is productive and in good faith, rather

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[9] My view acknowledges that institutions (understood as essential mediations in political life) may also be systemically biased or unjust and, therefore, in need of transformation. However, it stresses the role of collective action, including the public expression of anger, as means to push for change and address those injustices in institutional ways. I am not addressing here more extreme situations in which the whole institutional system is broken or unjust (as in the case of totalitarian systems) and revolution might be justified.

[10] Cherry's (2021, 36) analysis in *The Case for Rage* focuses on Lordean rage as a fitting response to racial injustice. Cherry (2021, 38) recognizes that Lordean rage may sometimes get wrong whether a particular event is a case of racism, or it may incorrectly assign responsibility regarding who caused the wrong. However, Cherry (2021, 39) argues that Lordean rage is *more likely* to make correct appraisals and be fitting "because we live in a racist world." Similarly, Srinivasan (2018, 130n33) claims that "one can be aptly angry without always perfectly targeting and proportioning one's anger."

> than just making a provocative statement to portray yourself in a certain light—righteous, fearless, politically active, and so on—that rage is morally appropriate. (Cherry 2021, 37)

However, Cherry's account emphasizes motivations, while my boundedness criterion focuses on actions and the consequences of anger in the public realm. My analysis follows Arendt's discussion of the "darkness of the heart" (2006, 86–87), where she argues that actions are what *appear* in the public space while motivations are never transparent to others (and sometimes not even to ourselves).[11] Moreover, my account acknowledges that a concern for not only how we *appear* before others but also (and in relation to it) how we see ourselves is among the stronger human motivational forces (Batson 2016). On my view, reputational concerns and virtue-signaling behaviors do not necessarily make the action or the emotion *politically* inappropriate (even if they are not morally praiseworthy).

My account acknowledges that *appearance* (i.e., the image that relevant others have of us) is central to political life. Processes of social change involve people taking others' behaviors as signals of what others are doing and as signals of what others believe should be done. More precisely, collective processes of norm change involve changes in what most other people approve or disapprove of (normative expectations) and in what we expect most other people will do (empirical expectations) (Bicchieri 2017, 128). People may join and contribute to norm change at different speeds because we have different thresholds for our willingness to bear social costs; that is, different people will require different levels of social support.[12] Virtue-signaling practices are certainly unreliable. They pose dangers and possibilities for agonistic polities.[13] However, it is my view that the risks of socially motivated behavior in politics are unavoidable. The expectation that people will adopt the right norms for the right (i.e., principled) reasons remains too aspirational. It does not adequately account for the complexity of human motivation. Moreover, it does not reflect an understanding of how positive social change actually occurs in our nonideal realities. For a normative analysis of anger in politics, this entails that anger (and the performance of anger) that is fitting and bounded remains appropriate or properly political, even if it is not performed out of purely principled motivations (such as wanting "to create a better world").

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[11] Furthermore, motivations are themselves altered by public light (Arendt 2006, 86).
[12] Sunstein's (2019) analysis of the #MeToo Movement as a revolutionary cascade shows how virtue-signaling practices can contribute to changing unjust social norms.
[13] For a critical stance regarding virtue signaling, see Tosi and Warmke (2016). For a defense, see Levy (2021).

3. The Challenges Faced by Anger at Structural Injustice

There are specific challenges to keeping one's anger at structural injustice properly political. First, I argue that blaming anger faces a *targeting problem* that arises from the difficulty examined by Iris M. Young (2011)—namely, that structural injustices make it hard (and sometimes even impossible) to identify who is to blame for the sustained, wrongly inflicted harm they represent. Moreover, the sustained and cumulative harm that structural injustices cause may lead to an "awesome level of anger" (Tessman 2005, 121) that makes it more difficult for the victims of structural injustice to draw the subtle distinctions required for proper blaming. All this entails that blaming anger at structural injustice may be especially prone to being mistargeted, and mistargeted anger is unfitting even if it is aroused by real and significant unjustified harm. Additionally, this "awesome level of anger" associated with the cumulative and sustained nature of the injustice may also imply a *risk of boundlessness*; that is, the risk of justified anger channeled or discharged in politically dangerous ways.

Mistargeted anger is anger that wrongly blames individuals or collectives as responsible for some wrongdoing or injustice. As Tessman (2005, 122) claims, "Anger that fails in its targeting is not to be praised." Mistargeted anger is not useful for resisting oppression or injustices. It is also dangerous because it may contribute to vicious circles of blaming in political life (to the extent that mistargeted agents are wronged, and they may respond with anger in return). In other words, mistargeted anger may contribute to an antagonistic turn of the political realm. But mistargeted anger is not a marginal phenomenon in political life; rather, the problem is that a nonideal world (characterized by multiple and overlapping structural injustices) may easily lead to significant amounts of mistargeted anger.

In *Responsibility for Justice*, Young writes:

> How shall agents . . . think about our responsibility in relation to structural injustice? The question harbors some puzzles and dilemmas. On the one hand . . . the very judgment that there is injustice implies some kind of responsibility. To judge a circumstance unjust implies that we understand it at least partly as humanly caused, and entails the claim that something should be done to rectify it. On the other hand, when the injustice is structural, there is no clear culprit to blame and therefore no agent clearly liable for rectification. (Young 2011, 95)

If the central point of blaming is "singling out," the problem is that "singling out" is precisely what becomes difficult or elusive under conditions of structural injustice (Young 2011, 76).[14]

But how does this targeting problem relate to the specific type of wrongly inflicted harm that structural injustices cause? And how should we understand this harm? First, structural injustices are harmful because they inhibit the development of people's capacities; that is, they constitute significant obstacles to flourishing (Young 1988, 271). As a result, victims of structural injustice can legitimately experience anger at the fact that structural conditions work against them and impede (or make more difficult) the realization of their life projects. Furthermore, structural injustices cause a sustained (or long-term) unjustifiable harm: having to live anticipating the possibility of harm. Even if the worst fears never materialize (or if the person succeeds in having an accomplished life), there remains the unjustifiable harm that comes from experiencing extreme vulnerability and uncertainty (often merely by belonging to certain minority groups). In other words, to suffer structural injustice is to constantly fear specific harms that members of dominant groups do not fear. And to live anticipating the possibility of harm to you, or to those who matter most to you, is to experience a form of harm in itself.

Claiming that assigning responsibility is "puzzling" when it comes to structural injustices does not entail that we cannot sometimes identify individuals or collectivities who contribute to or directly engage in discriminatory (racist, misogynist, xenophobic, etc.) acts associated with structural injustices. However, even in those situations, the specific harm caused by the wrongdoer(s) overlaps with the larger experience of structural injustice that the victim suffers; and trying to separate one harm from the other might be an impossible task. The entanglement of harms makes it difficult to determine what might be an appropriate or proportionate angry response to the harm caused by this specific wrongdoer. This is a targeting problem because the wrongdoer may become the visible target of unjustifiable harm that extends beyond the specific actions for which they may be held accountable. At the same time, other wrongdoers may not be held accountable at all, even for their specific actions. As Cherry (2021, 39) explains in relation to the racism experienced by African Americans in the United States, "Instances of racism—whether they be actions, statements, or policies—. . . are systemic and thus frequent. They are part of the air we breathe and are deeply embedded in the world through which we move." Targeting all instances of such a pervasive form of wrongdoing may not only be an extremely difficult task; it may also be even an undesirable one from the perspective

[14] MacLachlan (2010) points out how we may experience anger at unfair circumstances, events, or practices, even if no individual wrongdoer(s) can be identified as responsible for them.

of the victim, given the enormous amount of anger that the person should bear. As Cherry explains:

> Even though a particular incident often prompts an expression of emotion, emotions are often responses to a pattern of events over time. You react to individual instances sometimes, but other times, the very accumulation of the emotion takes a toll of its own, and you feel annoyed or fed up by the frequent events that cause you to feel the same, bad way again and again. (Cherry 2021, 39)

Moreover, Cherry (2021, 37) argues that even rage at racism (which she calls Lordean rage) "can be inappropriate when it consumes one's life, causing a person to neglect matters that are also important to them." Hence, the first challenge that blaming anger faces for correctly targeting anger caused by structural injustices arises from the cumulative and pervasive nature of the harm. This makes it difficult to identify the adequate targets of our anger and, even if specific agents can be singled out, to determine to what extent they should be held responsible.

A second major challenge ensues from the fact that victims and oppressors may interlock because systemic oppression or injustice has, in Young's (1988) words, many "faces." This point is also made by Tessman (2005, 122): "The fact that oppressions interlock makes it difficult to even identify and isolate a proper target for politically resistant anger; many people are both the agents and the victims of oppression." The targeting problem arises from the fact that "group differences cross individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different aspects" (Young 1988, 276). That is, individuals may be victims of structural injustice in one sense and contribute to reproducing systemic forms of oppression in another sense. In the presence of crossed identities, what allegiances people create, and with which in-groups they identify, becomes crucial. So, for instance, white people who have become marginal in the sense discussed by Young (1988, 280)—that is, "people the system of labor markets cannot or will not employ"—and who face long-term unemployment and the social marginalization that results from being "expelled from useful participation in social life" (Young 1988, 281) may identify as *white* (rather than marginal or poor) and use that privileged dimension of their identity to target other groups, especially more vulnerable ones (such as immigrants). Hence, people who have become unable to exercise their capacities in some socially valued way and who have been deprived of important sources of self-respect may, in turn, become aggressors against other groups; specifically, the most vulnerable may become the "available target" of their anger (Tessman 2005, 122).

Anger in those situations is inappropriate because it is mistargeted and essentially a pain-passing type of anger.[15]

I am interested in highlighting how aspects of our nonideal selves interact with the nonideal realities we live in and contribute to making mistargeted anger a collective and significant phenomenon in politics rather than a marginal one. So, for instance, comprehending why blaming anger as a response to structural injustices may be prone to being mistargeted requires engaging with the potential human tendency to turn a self-regarding sense of failure (or shame) into aggression toward others, and specifically, into a desire to stigmatize and humiliate. This is the tendency discussed by Nussbaum (2004) as "narcissistic rage." The central idea is that a self-regarding, painful emotion that involves a sense of failure, incompleteness, or diminished worth can lead to a desire to diminish or humiliate others as a means of elevating oneself (Nussbaum 2004, 184). As Nussbaum (2004, 209–10) explains: "The self, aware of its inadequacy, seeks to blame someone for this condition. . . . This shame-driven rage often constructs its own object." Applied to an analysis of anger under conditions of structural injustice, Nussbaum's "narcissistic rage" contributes to our understanding of how individuals who experience a sense of personal failure—as the result, for instance, of marginalization—may engage in a sort of pain-passing anger that is potentially undiscerning about who becomes the target. Groups or individuals are not targeted because they caused harm. Instead, their denigration becomes a way of dealing with one's sense of failure.

But anger can also be misdirected in another way. As Tessman (2005, 121–22) discusses, under conditions of systemic oppression, anger can be directed at those who are like one. That is, anger can be misdirected at one's in-group in situations where the standards of oppression have been internalized. This is a form of self-hate that "comes from growing up as a member of socially despised groups." (Tessman 2005, 121) Tessman quotes Audre Lorde's autobiographical description regarding how she often misdirected her anger at other black women.

> Lorde reports both that her anger is constant and potent . . . and that "how to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it" is a pressing question because despite her knowledge that "other Black women are

[15] There are occasions in which whom we consider responsible for wronging us (our blame target) is not who becomes the target of our anger. This happens, for instance, if I blame the bank for messing up my account but get angry with the teller. In a situation like this, the teller becomes the "available target" of my misdirected anger. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out how blame and anger may sometimes differ in their targets. Later, in section 4, I discuss goal-frustration anger as an example of anger without blame.

> not the root cause nor the source of that pool of anger," the anger does "unleash itself most tellingly against another Black woman at the least excuse." (Tessman 2005, 121; quoting Lorde 1984, 145)

As discussed above, anger and fear may be connected because a heightened fear (such as the one experienced by members of minority or discriminated groups) constitutes a form of harm that can build into (protracted) anger or bitterness.[16] In *The Monarchy of Fear,* Nussbaum (2018, 84) examines this connection when she describes anger as the "offspring of fear." However, the two emotions are also connected in that it is often easier to feel and express anger than deal with (or acknowledge) one's fear and vulnerability; as Tessman (2005, 121) points out, citing Lorde (1984): "It is easier to be angry than to be hurt." This too-human feature dangerously interacts with a nonideal world in which multiple forms of structural injustice create a heightened sense of vulnerability for too many.

Additionally, correctly targeting anger at structural injustice is challenging because the disadvantages and injustices that some people suffer are often not the result of some intentional or tyrannical power that aims to keep them down (Young 1988, 275). Injustices are rather the result of something more subtle. Oppressed groups often have a correlated *privileged group* rather than an oppressing group (Young 1988, 276). This frequently implies that individuals who contribute to maintaining and reproducing structural injustice do not see themselves as agents of oppression; their actions are not *intended* to harm, put others down, or create unjust outcomes (Young 2011, 99–100). Privileged individuals who contribute unintentionally or unknowingly to perpetuate structural injustices may become the target of victims' anger. However, because privileged individuals fail to acknowledge their contribution to systemic injustice, they may not even understand where the anger comes from. As a result, they can even see themselves as victims of unjustified anger; after all, they have *not intended* to cause any harm. They may also respond with anger or indignation at the blaming. The targeting challenge faced by blaming anger is more complex because it involves not only the cumulative nature of the harm discussed above but also the problem of intentionality. On the one hand, anger is unfitting if victims mistakenly attribute intent to harm. On the other hand, privileged individuals are at least responsible for not understanding their position of privilege better. Although they may cause harm unintentionally, such harm is not accidental. It has to do with structural conditions that can be understood. Hence, there is the epistemic demand that they should have known better.

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[16] Stockdale (2021, 142) speaks of bitterness to refer to a "hopeless anger" that may emerge when injustices remain unaddressed.

Finally, structural injustice can lead to an escalation of anger in the public realm not only because privileged individuals may consider that they have been unjustly blamed. The escalation may also be provoked by the fact that fighting against structural injustice (if successful) implies that some people lose; therefore, groups and individuals who see their privileges at risk are likely to respond with anger and fear. But again, their resistance to social change does not need to be motivated by intentional hatred of oppressed groups. Instead, their resistance can be presented as "self-protection" and motivated by "self-love" (that is, love of one's in-group).[17] Individuals or groups who fear losing privileges due to advances in social justice experience what Nussbaum calls "status injury." Although they are not wronged, their anger can be understood as responding to the "harm" entailed by losing relative status. And even for Nussbaum (2016, 5), who generally regards desires for payback as irrational, anger as a response to status injuries makes perfect sense.

I agree with Nussbaum (2016, 5) that responding to status injuries by humiliating or lowering the status of others to elevate oneself is normatively problematic. However, a distinction between "status injuries" seems to be called for. On the one hand, status injuries of privileged individuals or groups who do not receive the (superior) treatment they expect can be considered a banal form of anger (normatively problematic). On the other hand, status injuries experienced by oppressed groups or individuals (even in the form of microaggressions) are not to be considered banal forms of anger. In these cases, it is equality that is being neglected. Moreover, I intend to highlight that even anger caused by status injuries of those who are privileged can lead to dynamics in which the anger of different groups clashes. My intention is not to equalize the anger of the oppressed and the privileged. Instead, I want to call attention to the fact that even the justified anger of the oppressed is likely to be met by anger on the side of the privileged; and that the privileged resistance does not need to be motivated by overt hatred or "radical evil." It can be a more banal form of evil, the sort of harm caused by being too fixated on one's perspective and interests (or those of one's in-group)

One of the reasons why anger may relatively easily go wrong is because anger works as an in-group emotion. We do not judge everyone's anger equally; there are asymmetries in how we assess other people's anger. As Cherry (2018, 55–56) explains:

> We are . . . limited in *whose* anger we can immediately sympathize with. . . .

[17] For a discussion of racism in the United States as a form of self-love (i.e., as an attempt to keep the elevated status of oneself and one's in-group), see Grant J. Silva (2019).

> . . . We are more prone to immediately sympathize and thus approve of the political anger of those close to us than with the anger of distant others.

We tend to approve, and even support or praise, in-group members' anger as appropriate or acceptable, while at the same time, we tend to disregard out-group members' anger as unacceptable. This asymmetry in our judgments of other people's anger constitutes a case of in-group bias. As Cherry (2018, 56) explains, we tend to judge other people's anger differently based on how easily we can imaginatively represent their positions. The less we know about the causes of their anger, or the harder it is for us to relate to their situation, the more prone we are to judge their anger as "unjustified," "disproportionate," or even as "counterproductive"—and, thus, the more easily we may engage in practices such as "gaslighting" or "anger policing," which tend to be in-group biased. Moreover, our natural tendency to judge others' anger differently can be reinforced and exacerbated by in-group dynamics, such as the group polarization phenomenon shows (Sunstein 1999). Applied to anger, this phenomenon entails that anger (or the lack thereof) tends to become more extreme as we discuss it mostly with like-minded people. It implies that our *awareness of wrongdoing* and the *intensity of our anger* are highly dependent on the people with whom we talk and interact. And as we speak only with like-minded people, we tend naturally to radicalize. This tendency to radicalize poses dangers to political life. It fosters the risk of boundless anger. Likewise, it furthers the risk of becoming emotionally and imaginatively "shielded" from others' (or out-group) perspectives; that is, we risk becoming unresponsive to the injustices experienced by out-group members.

The claim that mistargeted anger is normatively problematic is widely accepted. For instance, Nussbaum (2018, 80) considers it one of anger's obvious errors that the emotion goes wrong if it is based on wrong beliefs regarding who caused one's harm. However, the phenomenon of mistargeted anger in politics is more complex. There are multiple ways in which targeting blaming anger correctly under conditions of structural injustice is challenging. The problem is that even justified anger aroused by structural injustices may relatively easily be mistargeted and, therefore, become unfitting. Notwithstanding, I contend that anger is an important emotion in the unjust world we live in. Silencing or suppressing anger is not without a cost. It may contribute to the perpetuation of unjust conditions that cause significant harm. But any endorsement of anger should be cautious. On my view, anger at structural injustice is only appropriate or properly political if it is not unfitting and/or boundless.

4. Addressing the Challenges: Goal-Frustration Anger and Anger's Social Dimension

Because blaming anger in our nonideal world is prone to being mistargeted, it could be argued that it is generally "safer" not to mobilize anger in the political realm. In this section, I argue that the targeting problem can be addressed by distinguishing between blaming anger and "goal-frustration anger." Goal-frustration anger may not only be fitting as a response to structural injustices, but it can play an important political role if it remains bounded and committed to an agonistic conception of politics.

In "You Oughta Know: Defending Angry Blame," Shoemaker (2018, 72) argues that two types of anger need to be distinguished based on "what anger really responds to" and what the action tendencies of anger are. This distinction is relevant because, since Aristotle, anger's classical definition has stressed its retributive dimension. However, Shoemaker's distinction between "goal-frustration anger" and blaming anger shows that not all angry responses need to be targeted. That is, anger does not need to be construed as *always* involving moral blame. Moreover, goal-frustration anger helps to point out that nonblaming anger might still be relevant to normative political reasoning.[18] Goal-frustration anger is anger that can be experienced when we are prevented from getting what we want but that does not necessarily involve a response to slights or offenses (Shoemaker 2018, 72). It can apply to situations in which there are no agents to blame for the reversal of plans, as when we get angry because bad weather or a traffic jam prevent us from being on time for an important meeting. But goal-frustration anger can also be caused by other people's actions. The relevant point is that introducing the concept of goal-frustration anger allows for a type of anger that does not necessarily involve a desire for retribution or vindication. As Shoemaker explains, goal-frustration and blaming anger also differ in their action tendencies. The first one moves us to overcome the source of the blockage; the other moves us to confront or retaliate (Shoemaker 2018, 73). Of course, both types of anger may also converge, as in those situations in which we experience goal-frustration *and* we hold some people responsible for the negative impact on our well-being.

I contend that goal-frustration anger that justifiably—and fittingly—emerges as a response to systemic injustices is properly political as long as it is not boundless and/or mistargeted. It can serve an essential communicative function in political life: making visible and denouncing structural forms of harm that should no longer be considered "acceptable" or "normal" (such as racism or sexism). By doing so, goal-

[18] Goal-frustration anger is similar, in this respect, to Hirji's concept of "outrage anger." As she explains, "outrage anger" does not focus on the offending party. It is instead a kind of anger "directed at the state of affairs in which a violation is not fully intelligible to the dominant moral community" (Hirji 2022, 1).

frustration anger can work as an "outlaw emotion" (Jaggar 1989); that is, it may contribute to subverting and changing "feeling rules" as well as prevailing norms and values that tend to serve the interests of privileged groups (Jaggar 1989, 165).[19] Here it is important to understand that anger is shaped in multiple ways by social norms and the values governing our societies or groups. The appraisals involved in our angry responses (such as "You wronged me!" or "You wronged him/her/them!") change over time and across societies and groups (Flanagan 2018, xiii). And the ways we consider appropriate to express our anger in the public realm also make part of feeling rules that are socially taught and enforced. As Flanagan explains:

> There are age, gender, status, role, and occupation norms that govern permissions for who can be angry, why, how much, to what effect, as well as permissions and norms governing acceptable responses to anger. (Flanagan 2018, xii)

This social dimension of anger shows that anger is (to some extent) malleable. Of course, we cannot will ourselves to feel it in a specific situation, but we can cultivate, nurture, or discourage specific forms of anger in ourselves. The traditional image according to which anger is an explosive emotion that pushes us around or overcomes us is not accurate. It only favors an assessment of anger as negative. And if there are certainly political dangers that emerge from the nonideal beings we are, some of our too-human features also offer potentialities for political life. Specifically, social and reputational mechanisms can favor either the spread and normalization of antipolitical forms of anger (unfitting and/or boundless) or the change of the current (racialized and gendered) norms that regulate who gets to be publicly angry, as well as contribute to setting constraints regarding what might be politically acceptable ways of expressing anger. Anger itself does not tell us what to do. Anger can be channeled differently toward action in the public realm depending on what the social norms and expectations are. This entails that our anger can (to some extent) be trained and shaped. This, of course, is not easy and never perfect. Moreover, as Arendt (1998, 188) warns us, we should be wary of "the utopian hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other 'material.'" In other words, claiming that anger is malleable does not ignore the limits on how we may be able to shape ourselves emotionally; there are dangers associated with some forms of anger that can never be eliminated. Anger's social and malleable nature only entails that there is no necessary connection between anger and violence.

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[19] Cherry (2021, 94) defines feeling rules as "certain social conventions or rules [that] exist about what emotions we should feel in a certain context."

In light of anger's social and malleable nature, I contend that goal-frustration anger that fittingly responds to structural injustice and that remains bounded in its expressions is a properly political form of anger. This anger does not focus on blaming or payback (which, as I have discussed, are problematic in the case of structural injustices); it is instead a more forward-looking type of anger concerned with mobilizing collective action that aims to change what is harmful and unjust in the present.

Responding to structural injustice with properly political anger is a demanding task; however, I believe the dangers are not enough reason for calling for the suppression of anger in the political realm. Suppressing anger has a cost. Moreover, as Srinivasan (2018) claims, it entails an *affective injustice* when anger is fitting. Like Cherry (2021) argues in relation to the antiracist struggle, anger can play an important role in the fight against structural injustices. But even then, a commitment to politics as agonistic is required; that is, anger should be prevented from fostering antagonistic conflicts. However, the burden of caring for and preserving an agonistic polity should not be seen as falling only on the oppressed or those whose anger is a fitting response to the injustices they suffer. It is crucial, in this respect, to understand that anger (like other emotions) is always, to some extent, co-constructed by expressers and receivers (Frye 1983; Campbell 1994). Therefore, the task of keeping fitting anger expressed or channeled in properly political ways also depends on the uptake of (or given to) the demands made by that anger. That is, anger's addressees also play an important role in creating a social environment in which anger at structural injustices remains properly political. And anger (even if fitting) that is systematically dismissed may risk turning antipolitical.[20]

5. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of anger's role in politics must overcome the oversimplified views of anger as positive or negative. Instead, I have proposed the criteria of fittingness and boundedness to distinguish between properly political and antipolitical forms of anger. Nonetheless, even a *normative* assessment of anger needs to understand the complexities that emerge from the fact that we are nonideal beings (with cognitive and social biases) interacting in nonideal realities characterized by multiple (and sometimes overlapping) structural injustices.

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[20] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to respond to the potential objection that putting on the oppressed the burden of channeling their anger in properly political ways, without considering the role of anger's addressees regarding the uptake given to those angry demands, could be another form of the normative conflict that Srinivasan (2018) refers to as "affective injustice."

I have specifically argued that anger at structural injustices, if it is to remain political, must not be mistargeted and/or become boundless. This is challenging, considering (1) the difficulties of singling out who is responsible for systemic wrongs and (2) the significant amount of anger (possibly) aroused by sustained, cumulative, and pervasive forms of wrongly inflicted harm. Properly political anger as a response to structural injustices requires constraints (or some form of emotional regulation) to avoid channeling our emotions in impermissible ways that foster antagonistic conflicts. However, the task of caring for or preserving an agonistic political realm should not fall only on the oppressed. My view entails that we should be willing to grant anger a larger role in political life than the one that a negative conception, such as Nussbaum's, endorses. Anger may sometimes be not only fitting but an appropriate response to injustice. Therefore, we should avoid engaging in practices (like anger policing or gaslighting) that undermine others' anger and presuppose an understanding of anger as "negative" or "uncivilized." Instead, we should be willing to listen better to angry complaints; most importantly, we should acknowledge that not everyone's anger is equally listened to in the public realm. As I have argued, anger can play a fundamental role in subverting or changing what is considered acceptable or normal.

Anger in politics (despite its dangers) reveals that we care about our living together. Thus, anger must not be neglected. Rather, anger needs to be imaginatively channeled toward mobilizing collective action that aims at changing what is currently harmful and unjust, but doing so in a politically responsible way that acknowledges that not all means are valid. I have argued that political anger, as a response to structural injustice, should be less concerned with the backward-looking task of blaming (which is often problematic) and focus more on collectively pursuing change that seeks to end oppression and protect freedom. In brief, the leap from anger to political action (mediated or channeled by the imagination) demands, in Arendt's words, not to "despair of politics."

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