

2025

Whose Anger Matters? Methodological Mistakes in the Philosophy of Emotion

Katherine Gasdaglis

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

katie.gasdaglis@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Gasdaglis, Katherine. 2025. "Whose Anger Matters? Methodological Mistakes in the Philosophy of Emotion." *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 11 (1). Article 4.

Whose Anger Matters? Methodological Mistakes in the Philosophy of Emotion

Katherine Gasdaglis

Abstract

Anger-eliminativism, the view that we should, as much as possible, reduce the role anger plays in our moral lives and theories, fails in ways predictable of anti-intersectional methodologies. In failing to adopt intersectionality as a maxim of inquiry, anger-eliminativism ignores, dismisses, and misrepresents the angers of those who have clear and pressing moral reason to be angry—namely, those who face oppression. It is also problematically *a priori* at various levels of inquiry, insensitive to counterexamples, and begs the question of anger’s moral justification. An adequate intersectional methodology, which begins from centering anti-oppression anger, reveals significant first-order lessons about the nature and normativity of anger. One is that we can make good sense of the normative relation of “basic desert,” even though anti-oppression anger is not retributive. Centering anti-oppression anger reveals further insights about our responses to anger, including important roles for agency and moral character in the ways we face and take up anger. There is, moreover, an ethics to being wrong that must be factored into our theories of emotions like anger.

Keywords: anger, oppression, retributive, eliminativism, intersectionality, methodology, maxim, desert, anti-oppression

There has been a recent swell of important work on the moral, political, and epistemic significance of our darker emotions, including anger (Thomason 2023; Alessandri, 2023; Cherry 2021; Congdon 2018). There has also been recent work defending anger-eliminativism, the view that we should, as much as possible, minimize or eliminate the role anger plays in our moral lives and theories. Anger-eliminativism has been defended on various grounds, including that anger leads to irrational violence, is counterproductive (Nussbaum 2016, 228; cf. Silva 2021), is morally indefensible in a causally determined world (Pereboom 2021), and is “incoherent,” or “makes no sense,” insofar as it fails to undo any wrongdoing suffered or restore any morally valuable thing lost (Nussbaum 2016, 15).

I have two aims here. The first (section 1) is to articulate and synthesize several significant methodological problems internal to the dominant forms of theorizing adopted by anger-eliminativism. Specifically, I argue that anger-eliminativism fails in ways predictable of anti-intersectional methodologies, including theoretically marginalizing oppressed experiences and utilizing whitewashed thought experiments. In failing to adopt intersectionality as a maxim of inquiry (Gasdaglis and Madva 2020), anger-eliminativists ignore, dismiss, or misrepresent the angers of those who have clear and pressing moral reason to be angry—namely, those who face oppression. Moreover, in doing so, these methods are problematically *a priori* at various levels of inquiry, are insensitive to counterexamples, cherry-pick cases, and beg the question of anger’s moral justification.

My second aim (section 2) is to highlight certain specific lessons about anger to be learned from an adequate intersectional methodology, which begins from centering anti-oppression anger. I argue that we can make good sense of the normative relation of “basic desert” in the context of anti-oppression anger, even though anti-oppression anger is not retributive. I also argue that centering anti-oppression anger reveals significant insights about our responses to anger, including the moral aptness of self-reactive emotions like remorse and important roles for agency and moral character in the experience of facing and taking up anger.

Henceforward, I use the term “anti-oppression anger” to refer to a range of angers that respond to various, often intersecting, dimensions of oppression, including white supremacy, patriarchy, class exploitation, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, among others. Anti-oppression angers call for recognition of wrongdoing, aim at social repair or change, and are not essentially (necessarily) vengeful.¹ Anti-oppression anger includes being angry *at* and *about* the oppressive operations of social structures in which certain groups benefit and other groups are exploited or disadvantaged—that is, being angry about the way the social world is.² It also includes interpersonal angers *at* certain groups or particular individuals *for* participating in, reinforcing, or unjustly benefitting from ongoing oppressive social processes. Hence, in these cases, it involves viewing the agency of the target of

¹ Anti-oppression anger can be, or may become, destructive, especially when it is met with callous disregard (Silva 2021). My claim here is that it is often not vengeful, or isn’t vengeful necessarily.

² That is, it involves representing the wrong in question *as* an instance of oppression or *as* a broader social pattern of group- or identity-based injustice. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this point.

anger—whether individual or group—as situated within broader causal-historical social processes.³

1. Methodology Matters

My argument takes up and builds on other insightful work on the challenges of defining anger and assessing its moral value. For example, Alice MacLachlan argues that “moralistic” defenses of *resentment* (a species of anger) define it in a way that centers only certain specific cases of moral anger, generating a purely technical concept that is woefully extensionally inadequate. In defining resentment as a “first-personal analogue to moral indignation,” moralistic accounts of this kind of anger exclude significant cases of political resentment (MacLachlan 2010, 423). An extensionally adequate account, MacLachlan (2010, 424) argues, must accommodate resentments of “violations and threats that (1) are not necessarily self-pertaining; (2) may not be expressible as individual, discrete injuries; and (3) cannot always be construed as moral threats in the sense of rights violations.”⁴ By way of illustration, I

³ I mean to remain neutral on certain central questions in the metaphysics of emotion, including questions of individuation. While any metaphysics of anger must respect the diversity of anger experiences, I expect pragmatism in the philosophy and psychology of emotion is likely the best approach. I am not committed to a metaphysics that assumes that anti-oppression anger is a single, unified subtype of anger, or a subtype different in kind from other species of anger. Rather, I take anti-oppression anger to be a family of angers that share at least one property; namely, they take oppression, in one or some of its various dimensions and forms, as an object.

⁴ It is beyond this paper’s scope to defend a particular view of the relations between resentment and other forms of anger. Again, I think pragmatism in the metaphysics of emotion is likely the best approach (see note 3). But I agree that many resentments are more first-personal in character than other angers, although I think the first-personal perspective can be expanded to include the collective perspective of the social groups to which one belongs (à la Stockdale 2013). I also agree with MacLachlan that, generally, moralistic accounts do not adequately capture all experiences of resentment and that any plausible metaphysics of this emotion must be responsive to the plurality of experiences. Moreover, what I call anti-oppression anger includes experiences where the line between first-personal and third-personal angers is blurry, insofar as the emotional agent may be angry *at an individual* about the ways her actions manifest, replicate, and contribute to broader oppressive social patterns. The emotional agent, in these cases, can be simultaneously angry at an individual for wronging her and for the way the social world is more generally (see section 2.1). I also think that resentment can sometimes be genuinely irrational, unreasonable, or inapt, as is the case when incels resent women for refusing to provide the sexual

find it natural to say that *I resent* that women philosophers face an inhospitable, exclusionary climate at certain prestigious universities, despite the fact that these are not harms done to me personally, given where I work. And, even if they were, the harms of a chilly climate (arguably) do not rise to the level of rights violations. Thus, moralistic definitions end up mistakenly casting certain political resentments at real injustices as unreasonable or as not resentment at all.

While MacLachlan critiques the moralistic definitions advanced by certain *defenders* of anger, Myisha Cherry targets the definitions of certain *anger-eliminativists*. Seneca and Santideva, she argues, paint anger with overly “broad strokes,” leading to a reductive mischaracterization of anger as always uncontrollable and dangerous (Cherry 2021, 11). Drawing on the work of Audre Lorde, Cherry advocates distinguishing political angers along four axes, including their (a) targets—that is, *at whom* the anger is directed; (b) aims—what the anger is meant to accomplish; (c) perspectives—the “attitude or way of thinking that leads to the anger” (Cherry 2021, 14); and (d) action-tendencies—what emotional agents are likely to do with their anger. What Cherry calls “Lordean rage” (5) is a variety of antiracist political anger that aims at social change and is informed by the “intersectional perspective,” according to which no one is free until we are all free (24).

MacLachlan and Cherry defend definitional approaches to anger that respect the diversity of anger experiences (see also Hieronymi 2019; Silva 2021) and demonstrate certain political and conceptual consequences of defining the concept too narrowly. This paper builds on their efforts by identifying and explaining several further epistemically and politically significant ways in which dominant forms of theorizing the moral emotions go importantly wrong, failures that stem, I argue, from a deep, background intersectional failure in methodology. While I point to the errors of anger-eliminativism as a case study, the types of methodological failures I articulate here are not specific to the philosophy of anger, nor are they specific to investigating the emotions in general; rather, they are errors quite common to dominant forms of philosophical investigation. As it turns out, methodology very much matters when it comes to understanding the moral emotions and their place in our lives and theories.

1.1. A Plurality of Angers

Anger-eliminativist Martha Nussbaum argues that a desire for payback is internal to the concept of anger as such. Because it conceptually involves a payback wish, she argues, anger is “practically incoherent,” insofar as inflicting harm as compensation for wrongdoing does nothing to restore the morally valuable thing lost,

services to which they *mistakenly believe* they are entitled. However, a full theory of resentment must say something about irrational cases as well.

unless the thing lost is mere relative social status, a good about which, she claims, we would do ethically better to care less (Nussbaum 2016, 5).⁵

While anger is essentially vengeful on Nussbaum's account, she allows a single exception, which she calls "transition anger." Transition anger is a momentary outrage at some morally problematic state of affairs from which the emotional agent immediately transitions into an action done from a spirit of generosity (Nussbaum 2016, 6, 36). But it is not clear whether transition anger really counts as anger for Nussbaum. She writes, "Is Transition-Anger a species of anger? I really don't care how we answer this question. Such special borderline cases are rarely handled well by conceptual analysis" (36).

Similarly, Derk Pereboom argues that anger entails the belief that the target of anger "basically deserves" to face the punishing emotion. Basic desert is the idea, roughly, that when agents face rewards or punishment for their good- or evil-doing, they really, in a deep sense, deserve what's coming to them. Yet no subject basically deserves to suffer our wrath, he argues, if factors beyond their control causally determine their agency (e.g., Pereboom 2021, chaps. 1–2; 1995, 37–40). According to Pereboom's earlier view, anger is always retributive. "For normal, adult human beings," he writes of his earlier position, "resentment and indignation **always** presuppose that their targets deserve—more specifically, *basically* deserve . . . to be recipients of expressions of these reactive attitudes" (Pereboom 2021, 2; bold emphasis added). Pereboom's recent position is more measured. He writes,

I don't reject out of hand the claim that one might direct anger toward a wrongdoer to forcefully communicate to him that he has done wrong, without presupposing that he deserves the pain or harm involved in being a recipient [of] its expression. Still, here the resulting emotion seems like feigned anger to me. My sense is that genuine moral anger at least typically comes with a desert presupposition. (Pereboom 2021, 2)

⁵ For Nussbaum, inflicting pain as retribution in the form of anger makes no sense, but retribution that aims to injure the relative social status of the target of anger as compensation for having had one's own social standing negatively impacted by the wrongdoing or slight *is* coherent (2016, 15–16). Yet, she argues, it is "narcissistic" to be social-status-obsessed (28–30), and the equal *moral* status we all have as human beings can never be lowered. While she acknowledges that the moral value of human beings isn't equally respected by the community under cases of "discrimination" (28–29), she argues that anger is counterproductive in social movements (Nussbaum 2016, 228; cf. Silva 2021). Yet it is clearly not narcissistic to care about relative social standing under conditions of oppression; but this is debate for another time.

Here Pereboom claims that “genuine” anger is “typically” vengeful. He allows for the possibility of nonretributive communicative forms of anger but persists in his skepticism of their authenticity.

For the eliminativist, anger aims at payback, often disturbs us rationally, is easily displaced, punishes others, and regularly leads to violence. For Pereboom, vengeful anger is the only kind that matters to answering the question of whether anger is compatible with the causal structure of the world. For Nussbaum, vengeful anger is just what we mean by anger or conceive anger to be. Neither of these eliminativists are open to the possibility that the anger typical of their own experience—as white academics employed by elite institutions—is not the only real anger. Nor are they open to the possibility that theirs might not be the paradigm case of moral anger.

Yet, as Cherry and MacLachlan argue, there are very likely a plurality of angers, and some of them are nonvengeful and forward-looking. Moreover, drawing on recent empirical literature, Laura Silva shows that, in the context of progressive social movements, anger often motivates constructive collective action rather than destructive action (Silva 2021, 36–39; see also Tausch et al. 2011; van Zomeren et al. 2004). The empirical literature, she notes, supports the view that two distinct desires may be internal to anger, while certain key contextual moderators determine which desire is operative in a given case (Silva 2021, 39; see also Tausch et al. 2011; Scheepers et al. 2006; Bandura 2000). The two desires internal to anger are a desire to inflict harm as payback (as in anger dominantly understood) and a desire for recognition—that is, a desire to cause “epistemic changes” in the target (Silva 2021, 45–47). Which of these desires is operative in a given case depends in part on the perceived “changeability of the targets of anger” (48). She writes,

When the targets of anger are seen as capable of change, anger tends to involve desires for recognition. Desires for recognition typically trigger actions that are primarily communicative, and which make clear the reasons for anger. This allows the targets of anger to share in the appraisal of a relevant situation as unjust. (Silva 2021, 48)

This desire for recognition is a desire that the moral significance of an individual, group, or state of the world be acknowledged and given proper uptake.⁶ It is a desire that a wrong be appreciated and properly addressed by the target or community. By

⁶ For the view that anger *in general* aims at social reassurance about the status of norms, see Margaret Urban Walker (2006, chap. 4). Cf. Lugones (1995, 210–13), whose account of second-order anger involves anger *across* “worlds of sense” that are constituted in part by the various norms *resisted* by the anger.

contrast, when hope is lost, and the targets of anger are perceived as unchangeable, dismissive, and morally callous, the desire for payback activates. So, while it is true that anger sometimes aims for vengeance, leads to violence, and makes us irrational, it is also true that anger sometimes aims for social change and motivates progressive political action.

Similarly, in her analysis of antiracist, antisexist anger across lines of social difference, Audre Lorde writes,

Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change. . . . We have been raised to view any difference other than sex as a reason for destruction, and for Black women and white women to face each other's angers without denial or immobility or silence . . . implies peers meeting upon a common basis to examine difference, and to alter those distortions which history has created around our difference. For it is those distortions which separate us. And we must ask: Who profits from all this? (Lorde 2020, 120)

For Lorde, antiracist, antisexist anger is primarily a prosocial emotion. This anger is an opportunity to engage one another authentically and to build solidarity across lines of social difference. She implores women to face each other's anger without defensiveness, silence, or guilt, which she sees as narcissistic obstacles to change. For Lorde, antiracist, antisexist anger of the kind she feels toward white women who marginalize or exploit her in feminist spaces is also a form of grief. In feeling anger of this kind, she laments the loss of connection between peers, connections that are disrupted by social distortions that inhibit our ability to fully see and appreciate each other as human beings, and that continually reinforce white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Lorde's anger is a call for recognition and reciprocal understanding. It expresses the desires to be acknowledged, understood, and connected. This anger does not aim at vengeance. Hence, given the evidence that angers take a plurality of aims, anger pluralism is very likely true, and anger is not always vengeful.

1.2. Intersectionality as a Maxim of Inquiry

MacLachlan and Cherry identify several definitional inadequacies of moralistic and early anger-eliminativist accounts of anger, respectively, including, first, that these definitions fail to include the plurality of intersectional experiences of anger—namely, the anger-experiences of those who identify with multiple marginalized groups (MacLachlan 2010, 431); and, second, that a certain kind of anger, Lordean rage, is felt *from* a background liberating intersectional *perspective* (Cherry 2021, 5, 28). I argue that anger-eliminativism's intersectional failures run even deeper, to the methodology itself. It is not just that anger-eliminativism misses a certain range of

cases of anger (although it does), and not just that certain angers are intersectional in the perspective that informs them (although they are), but also that the way the philosophical inquiry is done—that is, the structure of the reasoning that leads to these inadequate definitions—is problematically anti-intersectional.

The methods employed by anger-eliminativists aim to distill the plurality of anger experiences to a single, pure, or primary experience. These methods reflect a broader tendency in philosophy (and in science) to grasp toward unified explanation, even at the expense of respecting the diversity of phenomena. Immanuel Kant noticed this methodological tendency in philosophical theorizing in the eighteenth century. For Kant, philosophers sometimes pursue the principle of “homogeneity”—the methodological maxim to seek unity in apparent diversity—too single-mindedly, to the exclusion of the principle of “specification,” the maxim to seek difference or deviation in apparent unity. Conversely, philosophers also sometimes pursue specification to the exclusion of homogeneity and fail to recognize similarities across groups, categories, or other lines of difference (Kant 1998, A642/B671–A668/B696). Although these maxims of inquiry, according to Kant, are internal to and necessary for the advancement of science, insofar as they implicitly guide our reasoning in how we seek out and organize new information, concepts, and theories, philosophers and scientists are led astray when we pursue one to the exclusion of the other.

A hundred years later, and independent of Kant, feminists of Color documented similar types of methodological errors in dominant theories of social reality and in the ways our social practices and institutions generate new concepts, discourses, classifications, norms, and laws. When Sojourner Truth (1995) exclaimed “Ain’t I a woman?” to the 1851 women’s assembly in Akron, Ohio, she was testifying to the ways dominantly framed debates about the rights of women—which foregrounded the “feminine weakness” stereotypical of white women—excluded the experiences of Black women whose bodies, labor, and strength were brutally exploited. One thing intersectional theory and its earlier prototypes implicitly reveal—but that Kant (unsurprisingly) missed—is that the tendencies toward misapplication of the maxims of homogeneity and specification in the social sphere and the consequent obliviousness to real social and political differences or significant intragroup similarities often serve the interests of powerful groups, or those relatively dominant within a group, while ignoring or disappearing the interests of those who live at the margins. Intersectionality, which teaches us to notice difference within apparent sameness and to seek unity in apparent difference, with the aim of resisting injustice or oppression, is a maxim we should adopt to correct and resist the misapplication of the more general maxims of reason (Gasdaglis and Madva 2020).

The intersectional failures of dominant methods show up in many forms and at many levels of inquiry. Generalizing to all experiences from one’s own limited, relatively dominant experience, problematically universalizing from a limited (often

cherry-picked) sample of cases, or explaining away or dismissing the experiences of others are common ways an overly enthusiastic pursuit of homogeneity can serve the interests of power.

The philosophy of emotions succumbs to these tendencies. For example, Agnes Callard, who is not an anger-eliminativist but holds that anger is one way that human moral practices inescapably involve our doing *immoral* things, expresses cynicism toward theories of anger that cast it as forward-looking and communicative. She writes of (what she calls) the “problem-solving” account of anger that it “presents angry people as educators and normative crusaders, taking a stand against injustice in order to make the world a more perfect realization of some normative order” (Callard 2018, 125). Incredulous that anger could primarily be concerned with combating injustice, she continues:

I find this to be an overly sanguine picture of an emotion whose manifestations are not only often but characteristically destructive and cruel. To take just one example, consider the fact that when we are angry at someone we love, we are liable to say insulting things we don’t mean in order to hurt them. Anger begets more anger as often as it begets apology. (Callard 2018, 125)

Here Callard appeals to her own experience of (arguably irrational) anger in the context of close personal relationships as a counterexample to the possibility that anger can be theorized as forward-looking, constructive, and communicative. Drawing on her own experience, she implies that because “we” are liable to insult and try to hurt those we love when we are angry at them, anger in general does not primarily aim at combating injustice.

Such an inference is intelligible only under a number of anti-intersectional methodological presuppositions. First, if we assume from the outset that, to theorize anger, we must articulate the necessary (or necessary and sufficient) conditions on the “one real” anger, then our inquiry is anti-intersectional in its *aim*. Intersectionality, taken as a methodological maxim, is empirically open to the possibility that, for a given empirical question (whether social, psychological, economic, etc.), there could turn out to be a general unified explanation or answer, but if it is assumed from the outset that there should, or can, *be only one answer*, lest the inquiry has failed, then the inquiry is anti-intersectional in its presuppositions. It is not at all unusual for the complexity and diversity of the world, especially the social world, to resist stubborn efforts at theoretical unification or reduction.

Second, if Callard assumes she can generalize from quite limited cases of anger—even of genuine, apt, or justified anger—to all angers, for all groups, in all contexts, because her assumption is that angers are fundamentally all of the kind with

which she is most familiar, then she has failed intersectionally in her empirical reasoning—that is, in making statistical generalizations that serve her own interests. Third, if Callard assumes from the outset that her own limited, relatively privileged experience of anger in interpersonal contexts truly (aptly, or correctly) represents the one, universal anger, then she fails to consider that her social position may negatively epistemically impact *her own phenomenology* of anger, and, hence, she also fails to consider the potential limits of her own epistemic reliability. Finally, fourth, in feeling entitled to *dismiss* the lived emotional experiences, relevant social science, expert testimonies, and theories of those otherwise situated, she succumbs to dogmatism and fails to be sensitive to counterevidence.

In general, prioritizing homogeneity to the exclusion of specificity, as Callard does, is problematically *a priori* in certain crucial moments of inquiry that demand a healthy measure of empiricism. In failing to be sensitive to the relevant, divergent empirical evidence about anger, in failing to factor in the ways her social position might affect her own phenomenological reliability, and in aiming at unity too single-mindedly in her generalizations, Callard’s reasoning is also problematically *a priori*. Similarly, the eliminativisms of Nussbaum and Pereboom pursue homogeneity to the exclusion of specification in ways typical of dominant, anti-intersectional strategies of marginalization. Just as there are a diversity of social experiences, there are a plurality of real angers; and communicative forms of anti-oppression anger are not “feigned anger” (Pereboom 2021, 2).

1.3. Consequences of Anti-Intersectional Methods

Anti-intersectional methods that fail to recognize difference in apparent sameness or sameness in apparent difference are very often guilty of theoretical erasure. Erasure of anti-oppression anger occurs whenever scholars treat cases of anger—like the forward-looking angers of progressive social movements or the angers of prominent civil rights leaders—as *if they are not anger*, by, for instance, reclassifying them as something else. Pereboom, for example, speculates that the angers of Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass were not anger at all but examples of what he calls the “measured aggressive stance,” which he would have us cultivate instead of anger (see Pereboom 2021, 47–48, 75).⁷ Nussbaum (2016, 8, 31–32) points to Martin Luther King Jr.’s anger as an example of “transition anger,” which, as noted above, may not even count as genuine anger for her (36). Nussbaum and Pereboom thus also fail to recognize sameness in (what strikes them as) apparent

⁷ See Cherry (2021, chaps. 3–4) for an explanation of the ways social positioning constrains emotional expression. For discussion of Douglass’s anger, see Bell (2009, 166–67) and Cherry (2021, 77–78); for a defense of the claim that King felt anger, see Cherry (2021, 86–91).

difference. Moreover, not “caring” whether the angers of others count as genuine anger also threatens erasure (Nussbaum 2016, 36).

Additionally, in erasing the anger experiences of those who face oppression, these methods fail to reckon with clear counterexamples and, hence, beg questions about the nature and moral justification of anger. Nussbaum, for example, claims that a payback wish is “conceptually” internal to anger and subsequently argues that anger practically (and morally) “makes no sense,” while simultaneously allowing for the single exception of “transition anger”—that is, a momentary moral outrage. Yet exceptions to conceptual claims in philosophy often function as counterexamples, rather than as mere borderline cases to be sidelined. Minimally, something significant must be said as to why clear *prima facie* counterexamples do not in fact qualify as counterexamples. Moreover, the claim that conceptual analysis is not equipped to handle such cases (Nussbaum 2016, 36) may indicate a failure in the conceptual analysis.

Finally, in failing to take intersectionality as a methodological maxim, eliminativists are also guilty of theoretical marginalization.⁸ Pereboom (2021, 2), for example, doesn’t strictly rule out the possibility of nonretributive forms of anger, but his argument against the justification of anger in a causally determined world is premised on the claim that anger is “typically” retributive. The notion of “typicality” is ambiguous, and it is unclear which sense Pereboom has in mind. Typicality in a thin sense can mean “common” or “frequent,” while typicality in a thick sense can mean “paradigmatic.” Methodologically, casting the experiences of those who face oppression as either relatively uncommon or in some way exceptional are ways of paying lip service to some measure of diversity in the phenomena while simultaneously dismissing its theoretical significance. This methodological error is made plain once we see that anti-oppression anger should not be considered atypical in either sense.

To begin, anti-oppression anger is not so unusual or uncommon, a fact that is easy to see for anyone who acknowledges the long, genocidal history of Western patriarchal colonialism. Those who face the most violent and pervasive forms of systemic injustice always have pressing and personal reason to feel angry (or resentful⁹) so they may feel angry quite often. They may feel angry so often that they have to work to feel less angry, so their lives, health, and well-being are not overwhelmed by the harmful effects of chronic negative emotion (Cherry 2021, 50).

⁸ On some interpretations of intersectionality, intersectionality is primarily a thesis about the marginalization of Black women or women of Color (see, e.g., Alexander-Floyd 2012).

⁹ See also Stockdale (2013), who calls this first-personal kind of anti-oppression anger “collective resentment.”

Anti-oppression anger is not atypical, even in the thin sense of infrequent, if groups who face oppression may feel it so often. Moreover, all competent moral agents, even those who are relatively dominantly situated, who care about the dignity and well-being of their fellow human beings, also have reason to feel third-personal anger. Even if at some ideal point in the future we managed collectively to right persisting social inequities, lingering resentments about the horrors of the past would still be justified. In fact, our global histories of slavery, genocide, and class exploitation may be real, lived reasons to be angry forever, or at least for a very long time (cf. Callard 2018).

Additionally, as a statistical matter, most people will, at some point in their lives, face some dimension of oppression. Even cis, straight, presently nondisabled white men might be economically exploited, or suffer ageism and ableism at other points in their lives, for example, when they are very young or old. While oppressions vary widely and intersectionally, many of us know what it's like to feel used and exploited within unjust social structures and angry at the people who benefit from them. And even those who never suffer any measure of oppression may also feel moral anger at the oppressions faced by their fellow human beings. Given the systemic nature and pervasiveness of oppression, it seems like anti-oppression anger may be the norm rather than the exception.

So, anger at oppression is not unusual or uncommon. Nor, I argue, should it be treated as exceptional or nonparadigmatic. While questions of what's most "common" may be wholly empirical,¹⁰ questions of what's "paradigmatic" are not. Claims that a case is paradigmatic are stronger and imply that *this case* is "the case we should be talking about" or "is worth our attention." Distinguishing the paradigmatic case to be theoretically centered from the "exceptional" case to be marginalized may be theoretically useful for certain purposes and may rely on reasons related to training, expertise, contextual factors, or the aims of the inquiry.¹¹ For certain inquiries, centering a numerical-minority "atypical" case or experience as paradigmatic may better promote the inquiry and better track the truth. For example, in a given environment, environmental factors might lead to certain pervasive negative health outcomes in a population (e.g., asthma, PTSD, or insomnia), but the typicality, or high frequency, of these health outcomes isn't sufficient reason for treating them as "normal" or "healthy" even if the population has never known any other way things could be. Thus, the putatively most common case should not always

¹⁰ Claims of typicality are made in reference to a particular class. Normative considerations may factor into deciding which class is the appropriate reference for a given generalization. Hence even claims of typicality may not be wholly empirical. That is a topic for another time.

¹¹ What counts as paradigmatic may also be driven, irrationally, by oppressive biases.

be viewed as paradigmatic. A choice must be made to center a case and treat it as paradigmatic.

1.4. Whose Anger Matters?

Because anger experiences vary widely and deciding which anger counts as “typical” requires deliberation and choice, we are left with a pressing methodological question: whose anger matters? If we’re ultimately concerned with the moral aptness or justification conditions of anger—whether, for example, as Pereboom wonders, anger can be justified in a causally determined world—which angers should our inquiries center?

Generally, the decision to prioritize certain cases over others should depend in part on the aims of the inquiry. If, as philosophers, we’re interested, broadly, in the metaphysics of the emotions, we should begin by being theoretically sensitive to the plurality of anger experiences and anger expressions. If we’re interested in *misplaced anger*, or how anger goes wrong, we might center misogynistic anger or the angers born of white fragility. If we are interested in the moral justification conditions of anger—as Nussbaum and Pereboom claim to be—we should center cases of anger where there are clear and serious injustices that would *prima facie* merit this emotional response. Ongoing systematic attacks on your humanity and the humanity of the groups to which you belong *prima facie* merit anger as a moral response, if anything does. So, for an eliminativist, to argue against the moral permissibility of anger requires directly arguing against the aptness and justification of anger in these cases.

Whatever the inquiry, as anger-eliminativism demonstrates, default dominant tendencies pose persisting threats of theoretical erasure and marginalization to oppressed groups. Hence, given these threats, I suggest that, minimally, as a heuristic, and, potentially, as the default maxim for inquiry into the emotions in general, we should center the emotions of oppressed groups, including anti-oppression angers. Of course, in centering anti-oppression angers, the inquiry must also be intersectional, because, for example, the antipatriarchal resentments of working-class Black women may be importantly different from the antipatriarchal resentments of middle-class white women, though both angers may take, as their primary objects, attitudes, actions, or institutions structured by white-supremacist patriarchy.

In addition to combatting dominant theoretical tendencies to erase the experiences of marginalized groups, there are further epistemic reasons to treat anti-oppression angers as paradigmatic. Feminist philosophers have long argued that the experiences of those who face systematic oppression should be privileged epistemically when it comes to noticing, naming, and theorizing the harms and injustices they suffer (Collins 1997, 1998, 2000; Jaggar 1999, 2004; Fricker 1999). Roughly, groups that face oppression on a regular basis are likely to have, collectively

speaking, a clearer grasp than dominant groups on what these phenomena are, how they work, and how they harm.¹² Regularly fearing for our rights, well-being, family, community, or lives makes us alert to the details of a social world that often functions to threaten, exclude, and exploit us, so some measure of epistemic deference is called for. Minimally, the discourses, knowledges, and experts of oppressed communities should be given significant epistemic weight.

Moreover, groups whose anger is a response to ongoing, systematic attacks on their humanity often, as a matter of survival, learn to live in and through their angers. They may learn to cultivate (Cherry 2021, chap. 6), focus (Lorde 2020), and utilize (hooks 1996) their angers in ways that assist in their resistance efforts, as a feature of what Macalester Bell (2009, 165) calls “virtue under grossly non-ideal conditions” of oppression and of what Alex Madva (2019, 91) calls “structure-facing virtue.” Audre Lorde offers the following example:

Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say *symphony* rather than *cacophony* because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive. And part of my anger is always libation for my fallen sisters. (Lorde 2020, 120)

Lorde explains how even persisting and repeating states of anger are justified responses to a social world that has shown her, since birth, ongoing hatred and contempt. This hatred, Lorde explains, expresses the dominant perspective’s desire for her destruction or dominant wish that she had never existed at all. Feeling anger in response to racist and sexist hatred is morally rational and reflects the respect you must continue to show yourself when the social world refuses to afford it to you. Developing recalcitrant self-respect under these grossly nonideal conditions and then learning to orchestrate your angers, skillfully and in the service of resistance, is, if anything is, the cultivation of virtue. Hence, not only are oppressed groups in a better position epistemically to conceptualize the moral harms they face, they are in a better position to know what it means to respond virtuously under these conditions.

¹² Note that claims of epistemic deference must be made in reference to groups, communities, or experts, not to given token members of social groups, simply by virtue of group membership (see Saul 2003, chap. 9; Davis 2016).

There is a further methodological benefit to treating anti-oppression anger as paradigmatic moral anger—namely, that it reveals that the typical conditions within which we experience moral emotions just are “grossly non-ideal conditions” of oppression (Bell 2009, 165). Yet there is a tendency in moral theorizing to abstract away from these conditions and the ways they influence our interpersonal dynamics, as a way of isolating moral variables for the sake of pinpointing our moral intuitions. But by abstracting away from these social and political conditions, we abstract away from the actual world and consequently generate moral notions and theories that have little to do with the reasons we actually treat each other and ourselves the way we do, thus generating the extensional inadequacies MacLachlan (2010) and Cherry (2021) are concerned about.

To take just one example, consider Bernard Williams’s (1981, 26–27) well-known discussion of Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Williams points to the agent-regret Anna eventually feels, when her choice to pursue a romantic affair ultimately leads to her ruin, as an example of (or even evidence for) his claim that luck plays an important role in our assessments of the rationality of certain moral decisions. He argues that Anna’s regret tracks the fact that sometimes the rationality, or justifiability, of certain decisions depends on factors beyond our control, including whether things “work out” the way we’d hoped. Roughly, for Williams, because things happen not to work out for Anna—she is betrayed, publicly humiliated, and socially ostracized—she comes to view her choice as the wrong one, and her regret tracks the wrongness of this choice. Yet, had things simply gone differently, her choice would not have been the wrong one.

Bracketing the question whether luck is important to theorizing moral rationality, Williams’s reflections on Anna’s case abstract away from her precarious social position as a married woman in the noble class of the nineteenth-century feudal Russian society Tolstoy imagines her to inhabit, thus missing the ways it influences (or would influence) the structure and rationality of her decision-making and the consequent moral justification of the resulting emotions she feels. Constrained as Anna is by her position within the specific society she inhabits, Anna feels regret when she is morally entitled to feel antipatriarchal anger. As news of her affair spreads, she is fully ejected from the community to which she belongs, governed as it is by the pretense of Christian Orthodox norms, while her younger male companion continues to navigate it freely (as does her philandering brother). The resulting material and psychological devastation Anna suffers cannot reasonably be analyzed independently of the constraints she faces. So, our assessments of the normativity of the choices she makes, as well as the emotions she feels upon things going badly, cannot be made independent of the social and political constraints Anna was operating under. In abstracting from Anna’s social position, Williams’s assessment of the rationality of her

moral decision-making leads him to posit a role for moral luck that arguably should be played by structural injustice (see also Manne 2016).

Williams's analysis of the subsequent regret Anna feels, as well as Anna's feeling regret rather than anger as a response to the way she is cast out, are ultimately both *ideological*, in the sense that they reflect and reinforce existing oppressions. It is intelligible why Anna might feel a purely prudential kind of regret insofar as she might feel that she made especially risky choices given the world she inhabits. But we should not treat this response as a paradigm case of *apt regret*, as Williams does, because Anna is not herself responsible for the devastation she faces. She is arguably responsible for breaking a promise to her husband, but the catastrophe she faces upon the discovery of her affair is the result of the unjust social structure she is constrained by. Morally speaking, Anna is entitled to feel anger at her community for tightly policing her sexuality and unjustly expelling her, as well as anger at those close to her for betraying her and reinforcing oppressive social norms. To the extent that Anna feels agent-regret for the terribleness of the way things turned out, she has internalized the patriarchal ideology of her community.

Hence, we should center anti-oppression emotions in our moral theorizing, because they are alive to the social conditions that influence the way we actually treat and feel about each other. Given that the conditions of the actual world are grossly nonideal conditions of oppression, and under the assumption that we are interested in whether and when our actual lived experiences of anger are justified or not, we should take the grossly nonideal conditions of oppression as the relevant conditions for theorizing the normativity of anger in the actual world. Anti-oppression anger, which is a moral-emotional response that occurs under real social conditions in the actual world, should be our starting point.

1.5. Further Anti-Intersectional Methods: Whitewashing Thought Experiments

Philosophers sometimes ignore the grossly nonideal conditions of the actual world when they draw on thought experiments or vignettes that are meant to be purely "interpersonal," capturing mere emotional responses between individuals stripped bare of social power relations. Pereboom's cases, for example, are steeped in clear but unanalyzed power relations. These cases include, for example, a parent's anger at their child (Pereboom 2021, 41–42, 44), a teacher's anger at their student (42, 44), or the anger of a professor, "Chloe," at her colleagues (43–44). While the first two of these involve obvious power asymmetries that inevitably affect our intuitions about the justification of expressing moral anger, consider the case of the professor's anger at her colleagues, which is putatively anger between symmetrically, or equally, socially situated moral agents.

In this case, Chloe is angry at two of her colleagues for inappropriately and covertly pressing their agendas in the department, including improperly advancing

their preferred job candidate. While Pereboom is right that there may be good reasons for Chloe not to express moral anger at her colleagues, our intuitions about the nature of her reasons vary when we explore the social situatedness of the characters featured in the thought experiment. We wonder whether Chloe is tenured, tenure-track, or adjunct, and whether she is otherwise dominantly situated along other social axes of race, gender, class, religion, and ability. If she is an otherwise dominantly situated cis white woman, prudence may require that she consider the ways her anger may be perceived as “shrill” or emotionally “hysterical.” If she is not otherwise dominantly situated—perhaps she is Black and lesbian—prudence may require that she factor in that her anger may be perceived as “hostile” or “dangerous.” In either case she risks confirming negative stereotypes about her social group. Chloe would also be justified in considering the risks that biased uptake of her anger poses to her professional reputation, career, and livelihood. However, attention to these social details teaches us that the justifying reasons in question are, at least in part, prudential, related to Chloe’s *survival* in her field, rather than wholly and distinctively moral (though they might be both prudential and moral). In fact, if Chloe’s prudential reasons in this case conflict with her apt moral anger at her colleagues, she also suffers what Amia Srinivasan (2018, 127) calls an “affective injustice.”

Thus, our intuitions about whether and on what grounds Chloe would do better not to express her anger are influenced by our awareness of her and her colleagues’ social situatedness. Suppose we modify the case to eliminate social differences altogether, such that everyone involved is equally dominantly situated: no one’s jobs are on the line, and no one is subject to asymmetrical biases that could damage their professional reputations. If they are all tenured, full-professor-rank, straight, wealthy, nondisabled, cis, white men, I’m no longer sure the intuition stands that a professor’s expressing moral anger at the shady dealings of *his* colleagues would be in any sense unwise or unjustified. If the intuition somehow still stands (for some)—if, say, you have a background commitment that “that’s just not how colleagues should treat one another, no matter what,”—we have nevertheless discovered something methodologically important about the reasoning involved in thinking through thought experiments of this kind. To elicit this purely “individual” or “interpersonal” moral intuition, we must socially and politically “whitewash” the case along every dimension of privilege. Either we must do this explicitly or, in being silent about the social categories to which these characters belong, allow the reader’s biases to fill in the gaps for us.¹³

¹³ Work in experimental philosophy supports the claim that social biases affect our intuitions in response to thought experiments in moral philosophy (see, e.g., Ditto, Pizarro, and Tannenbaum 2009; Uhlmann et al. 2009). A more robust experimental-philosophical approach to these cases would explore how systematically manipulating

The general lesson to take away is that once we're conscious of the way the social details matter to our intuitions about the justification of moral anger, it's difficult to pretend "for the sake of argument" that they don't matter and to persist in an armchair methodology that cherry-picks ostensibly depoliticized, whitewashed cases. Beginning with real social-world cases of anger and attending to the reasons why so many people are so furious is more theoretically responsible.

2. Lessons to Be Learned

In this section I articulate several first-order lessons about anger, its normativity, and our responses to it to be learned from centering anti-oppression anger.

2.1. Angry about the Way the World Is in You

Sometimes we get angry *at* the oppressive structures of the institutions we inhabit, and this anti-oppression anger can be impersonal in both its target and its object. We get angry at the political structures that make radical change nearly impossible, at the dysfunction of underfunded public welfare and educational systems our society existentially depends on, and at both the norms and material rewards that incentivize us and those around us to persist in replicating the status quo.

But sometimes anti-oppression anger feels very personal. We feel angry *at others* when we see them conform to or enforce oppressive social norms. We feel angry at ourselves when we feel those incentives incentivizing us, in our decision making. We see those who have some measure of power making specific choices that will predictably—sometimes even deliberately—maintain or worsen the oppressive, dysfunctional structures we live in. In these cases, anti-oppression anger can be simultaneously interpersonal and third-personal. In anti-oppression anger, I can seethe with anger *at you* for the way your actions contribute to the way things are for me, my group, or other groups. Simultaneously, I am angry *at the structure of the social world* for the way it manifests in and is reinforced by you and your actions. In feeling anti-oppression anger, I am angry at you *and* at the world *for* the way the world is in you.

In this way anti-oppression anger is more attuned to the nature of agency and the way it participates in and is shaped by the causal-historical and social forces that constitute its context. By centering it, we find that anti-oppression anger reveals further lessons about the normativity of anger.

the social identities and power relations of characters in these vignettes shapes participants' moral, rational, and pragmatic intuitions.

2.2. Desert without Punishment

For anger-eliminativists, the “real” anger, or the anger that really matters morally and philosophically, is retributive, or punitive, whether explosive or simmering in its expression. Retributivists about anger hold that anger’s moral permissibility turns on whether it can be directly justified as a punishment for the wrongdoing to which it is an emotional response. The normative relation at stake for the retributivist is “basic desert”—whether the targets of anger, wrongdoers, basically (i.e., directly, intrinsically) deserve whatever painful feelings they experience in facing the angers of those they have wronged.

There is, however, much to be learned about the normative relations that obtain among wrongdoing, the aptness of anger as a response to wrongdoing, the basic desert of the target to face this anger, and the aptness of the target’s consequent self-reactive attitudes, like remorse, from centering anti-oppression anger.

While anti-oppression anger is not uniquely nonretributive, its aims for recognition and change are nonaccidentally related to its attunement to the social nature of individual agency. Anti-oppression angers demand that the target or community *recognize and actively take responsibility* for the systematic harms they’ve inflicted on the emotional agent and their group. Taking responsibility means doing whatever is required to restore, or, in many cases, establish for the first time, individual and community appreciation of the emotional agent’s equal moral status.¹⁴ The forward-lookingness of the aims of anti-oppression anger follows from the emotional agent’s awareness that the wrong of oppression is systemic, historical, and social. Simply getting revenge against an individual or group for their actions would do little to change the social world in the way anti-oppression anger demands and, hence, would seriously miss the point.

Nevertheless, there is a natural sense in which wrongdoers who participate in oppressive social practices *deserve*, in the “basic” sense of direct justification, to face the angers of those they have wronged, despite the fact that these angers do not aim to punish. The demands for recognition and change internal to anti-oppression anger normatively correspond to the basic desert of the wrongdoer to hear them. The demands that the target or community recognize and act to repair the injustices suffered by the emotional agent and their group are *directly justified* by the past and ongoing wrongs done by the target. The target, conversely, basically deserves to face expressions of these demands. *Angry* expressions of a demand for recognition reflect

¹⁴ Community “appreciation” of the equal moral status of our fellows will involve psychological and epistemic changes (e.g., “consciousness raising”) but will likely also require material “appreciation” (e.g., redistribution of resources and opportunities) as well as the restructuring of institutions.

the value the emotional agent places on their own dignity and dignity of their fellows. It is because the target has participated in oppressive social practices that it is appropriate that they be made aware of the wrong they've participated in and deserve to be called to work for change. Hence, *deserving* to be faced with the *anger* of the person or group whose oppression you've participated in should not be conflated with owing a *debt of psychic pain* as a form of moral compensation.

2.3. Objection: Isn't Inflicting Pain a Punishment?

Yet, the retributivist might object, isn't the psychological fact that anger expressions causally contribute to painful feelings in the target reason enough to call it a punishment?¹⁵ I argue that it is not, for two reasons. First, feeling pain in the form of remorse is morally appropriate even without (or, arguably, only without) constituting a form of punishment or self-punishment. Second, the agency of the target of anger is involved in whether anger is properly taken up and responded to, or merely defensively suffered. I elaborate these two reasons in turn.

2.3.1 Painful Self-Reactive Attitudes without Punishment

First, feeling pain in the form of self-reactive attitudes like remorse (regret, or, arguably, shame) in recognizing that you have participated in the oppression of others may be morally appropriate, even virtuous, if it does not morph into a form of narcissistic self-punishment. Given the moral value you extend (and should extend) to your fellow human beings, feeling pangs of remorse in recognizing that you have failed them morally is both natural and appropriate. This sorrow, however, is morally apt to the extent that it is a backward-looking emotional way of *continually representing or affectively grasping* the moral value of the persons or group you have harmed, or the duties or commitments to others you have transgressed (Gasdaglis 2021). It is because of your commitment to your fellow human beings and the value you extend to them—which are felt through moral emotions like respect, care, or love—that participating in institutions, attitudes, and actions that oppress them feels painful, and appropriately so. Thus, this pain can be entirely appropriate, as the affective aspect of your representation of their dignity—their basic moral value—despite the fact that *no one is morally compensated by your pain*. So, causally contributing to this kind of psychic pain is not morally or conceptually equivalent to enacting retribution or vengeance.

Hence, facing the moral anger of others may lead to morally apt painful experiences of remorse; but this remorse becomes *inapt* if, through self-centeredness, it morphs into a form of narcissistic self-punishment. As Lorde (2020,

¹⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to pursue this objection further.

120) tells us, wallowing in self-reactive pain and turning it into a ritual of silence or isolation problematically centers the moral imperfection or moral ego of the wrongdoer and is often a way of avoiding all the real work of reparation it is incumbent upon the wrongdoer to do.

2.3.2. Agency in How We Take Up Anger

Second, targets of anger have agency in how they receive and respond to anger expressions. Their agency is causally involved in how they face anger, including the degree to which they experience another's anger as painful. They may succeed in properly listening to and taking up the moral anger of others, or they may simply impulsively and defensively *react*. When you face others' moral anger, you may initially feel a threat to your identity as a "good person," and this threat-feeling, left implicit and unchecked, may lead to defensiveness (Emerick 2016, 6; Chugh 2018, 1–20; Ivy 2017). Feeling like your identity as a good person is being threatened isn't a pleasant experience, but you can cultivate the disposition to *pause*, notice your own inner reactivity, recenter your perspective on those whom you've wronged, and properly receive their anger. With training, you can become thoughtful in the way you experience, take up, and respond to the anger of others.¹⁶ Moreover, if you know that you are a relatively dominantly situated individual and are being called out for oppressive behavior, remind yourself that there are moral and epistemic requirements that you consider the possibility that your interlocutor might know more than you do about oppression, even as it manifests in your actions, whatever you think you intended. Learning to properly listen to and receive the emotions of others can be empowering, just as being honest with oneself after periods of self-deception can be a relief. Authentically taking up the angers of others enables us to grow and progress morally. It is the disposition to knee-jerk defensiveness that exacerbates psychic pain.

Being causally involved in bringing about the psychic pain-experience of another (whether defensive anger, remorse, shame, etc.) is not equivalent to punishing them, especially if the pain in question depends on the defensive interpretations of the target, which are shaped through their character and agency. This point is underscored by the fact that it's possible, depending on your situation and character, to feel psychic pain even in facing the *joyful* expressions of others—that is, whatever the aims of the emotion or the emotional agent. If, for example, an acquaintance joyfully announces some accomplishment or life achievement, and you

¹⁶ For an introduction to cognitive behavioral therapy, see Dryden and Branch (2012). For evidence of the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions in disrupting defensive reactions, see Gottman and Gottman (2018) and Robbins, Alexander, and Turner (2000). For tips on how to be less defensive now, see Hendriksen (2018).

emotionally respond with knee-jerk envy, Nietzschean *ressentiment*, or low self-esteem, the expression of joy is causally involved in bringing about your painful psychic experience. Yet, because the agency and character of the envious agent are so clearly responsible for bringing about the pain in question, the expression of joy is also very clearly not a punishment. The cliché that “there’s no better revenge than living well” is premised on the ubiquity of this kind of (often vicious) envious reaction.

The envious agent, if also childish or narcissistic, may even misinterpret the success or joy of the other *as a punishment of themselves*. “Why me?!” they might think in hearing of the success of another, even when that success has nothing to do with them. When it comes to facing the anger of those you have wronged, your agency and character are similarly involved. It is not unusual for wrongdoers who face anti-oppression anger to *misinterpret* it as a punishment of them—to read it as an illicit attempt to *inflict* pain in the form of guilt, or to injure or harm the target in the form of shaming them—even when it is not about that. But, just as envy can make the accomplishments of another “all about” the envious agent, recasting the anger of someone you have wronged as a punishment *of you* decenters their experience and the ways you have wronged them. Similarly, Pamela Hieronymi, in her awesomely titled “I’ll Bet You Think This Blame Is about You,” argues that traditional accounts of blame wrongfully highlight the experiences of the blame-ee (the target of blame) to the exclusion of the blame-er (Hieronymi 2019, 84–85). Blame and blaming, she argues, are not primarily “about” the blame-ee (84). Rather they are about the wrong suffered by the blame-er and thus should not be modeled as punishments suffered by the wrongdoer.

Moreover, Lorde shows us how interpreting anger as a punishment, by reacting to it with self-punishment in the forms of excessive guilt or silence, is an additional mechanism of psychically and discursively disappearing those who face injustice. Retreating into feelings of guilt, humiliation, or shame in response to the demands of moral anger egoistically recenters the interaction on “how bad I am” — or, as is more common, defensively on “how bad I am *not*, because I didn’t mean it that way”—and decenters “what you’ve suffered” and “what we should do to make things right.” The quiet rumination and self-punishment of white women is useless to Lorde because it distracts from the pursuit of social change, which is the aim of her anti-oppression anger. She writes, “Guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness” (Lorde 2020, 121). Interpreting the anger of those you have wronged as a punishment of yourself is simply a manipulative strategy for avoiding taking responsibility for your wrongdoing. Hence, it wrongs the emotional agent yet again.

At the level of methodology and theory, in taking vengeful anger as paradigmatic, anger-eliminativists also make the error Lorde and Hieronymi caution against. In viewing anger as essentially or typically punitive, their accounts highlight the experiences of the targets of anger, the wrongdoers, rather than the experiences of those who have been wronged, the emotional agents. Moreover, treating anti-oppression anger as a form of painful punishment obscures the ways the target's own agency plays a significant role in how they experience and respond to the anger they face.

Lorde's view points to the urgent need for oppression-conscious moral education and therapy directed at the uptake of emotions, especially anger.¹⁷ She writes, "We cannot allow the fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty" (Lorde 2020, 120). Because our moral agency is involved in the ways we experience and respond to anger, if we simply impulsively react in defensive anger, failing to take responsibility for wrongs we've committed, then we wrong the emotional agent yet again (Jaggar 1989, 158–59).¹⁸

2.4. Objection: Emotions Are Nonvoluntary

But one might wonder, isn't anger, including defensive anger, a *reactive* attitude? Do we really have control over these high-stakes emotional moments? Following in the Strawsonian tradition, Pamela Hieronymi argues that reactive attitudes like resentment are "non-voluntary" (2019, 64–70; see also Strawson 1974). Nonvoluntary attitudes, for Hieronymi, are neither fully voluntary actions, which are subject to direct rational revision, nor wholly involuntary behaviors (like mere reflexes), which are beyond rational criticism. Nonvoluntary reactive attitudes constitute a third category and are more like beliefs, insofar as they are justified only in response to a certain narrow range of reasons specific to the circumstances of the reaction (Hieronymi 2019, 64–68; see also Solomon 1973; Nussbaum 1995). Resentment, for Hieronymi, responds to perceptions of wrongdoing or expressions of ill will much like revising a specific belief responds to a specific set of evidence. If reacting to expressions of anger with defensive anger is a nonvoluntary reactive attitude, to what extent can we mean to control it in the moment? Does casting anger

¹⁷ It is an empirical question how best to achieve the relevant kind of moral retraining, but the relevant burden and costs must fall to dominant groups.

¹⁸ See Frye (1983), Spelman (1989), and Cherry (2018) for more on the politics and ethics of our responses to anger. As they argue, social positioning influences the ways anger is taken up and assessed. Frye and Spelman note the ways gender factors into the reception of anger. Cherry notes the ways race influences our evaluations of anger.

as nonvoluntary occlude the role for agency in the ways we emotionally receive and respond to the emotional expressions of others? As a species of anger, defensive anger at the anger of others is a nonvoluntary reaction, so is it not subject to our direct rational revision?

2.5. Reply: An Ethics to Being Wrong

This worry is merely superficial. Anger, as a reactive attitude, on Hieronymi's Strawsonian view, is responsive to a narrow range of reasons related to whether you have been wronged. In the case of defensively meeting anger with anger, the kinds of reasons that should influence the way you take up the anger of others are relevant to the background determination of whether you have been wronged in being called out for wrongdoing—that is, in being the target of anger. Thus, the narrow range of reasons for or against meeting the anger of others with defensive anger should include, minimally, whether the anger you face is itself morally justified (see also Solomon 1973; Nussbaum 1995). Hence the reasons you have to pause, listen to, and understand the anger you are confronting are precisely the kinds of reasons to which your own emotional nonvoluntary reactive attitude should be responsive. If your defensive anger is not responsive to this range of reasons, it is irrational.

If what underlies your knee-jerk defensive anger at the moral anger of others is an implicit background belief that, as a “good person,” you can do no wrong, then it is your moral obligation to reckon with this false background belief. Part of being a competent moral agent is being able to recognize and take responsibility for your wrongdoing. If it turns out that an *unshakeable* belief in one's own moral perfection is part of a defensive agent's identity, then we may not be dealing with a competent moral agent at all.

Similar concerns arise for cases where what underlies an agent's defensive anger is an implicit assumption of superiority based on their social position. If feelings of entitlement based on your social position lead you to the delusional conclusion that you can do no wrong to those with less privilege or power, you may have quite a lot of emotional and cognitive retraining to do to approach competent moral agency. If you experience an automatic *how-dare-you* reaction to the moral anger of others that is premised on an implicit belief that you are entitled to deference due to your social group (whether based on gender, class, race, age, etc.), then it is also your urgent moral obligation to reckon with this deep moral confusion. If you *cannot*, then, again, you might not be a competent moral agent at all.

Hence, treating anger as a reactive attitude in Hieronymi's Strawsonian sense does not thereby cast it as problematically reactionary. If you feel the seeds of defensive anger sprouting in being angrily called out for wronging another, it is your moral obligation to listen openly, acknowledge your own moral finitude, and consider the live possibility that you may have done the wrong thing.

Lorde's call to white feminists not to shy away from her anger further highlights roles for agency and moral character in the way we generally respond to moral anger, both in emotion and action. Framing anger as paradigmatically punitive takes defensive, reactionary anger as the rule for moral anger and then rejects the rationality of anger on the whole. Anger-eliminativism thus holds fixed the social tendency toward defensiveness in facing the anger of others, which is a moral failure of uptake, and then calls on the wronged agent to revise their emotions and expressions of moral anger. This framework shifts the burden for managing a difficult moral-emotional situation onto the agent who has just been wronged. This burden-shifting is also a mechanism of oppression, where certain groups are consistently and constantly wronged and then unjustly tasked with educating and managing the emotions of those who subordinate them (Cherry 2021, 45; see also Berenstain 2016). While eliminativism is premised on the idea that we can grow and develop in the ways we process and respond to our own emotions (e.g., Pereboom 2021, 5–6), it (at best ironically, at worst conveniently) overlooks the role for agency in the way dominantly positioned individuals, who benefit from oppression, face the negative emotions of others. There is, in other words, an ethics to being wrong that must be factored into theorizing the moral emotions.

Concluding Remarks

I've argued that we should extend several intersectional and feminist insights about methodology to the philosophy of anger. But I believe these insights have broader potential for helping to resolve certain very old, very deep disputes in philosophy. Pereboom, for example, ultimately means to defend the incompatibility of anger with causal determinism. His project is continuous with his broader project of hard (or "al dente" [Pereboom 1995]) determinism. While I cannot do this topic justice here (but see Hieronymi 2022; Gasdaglis 2024), it is worth noting that the question of whether anti-oppression anger is compatible with determinism is a question about whether (what we should take to be) a paradigmatic moral practice is compatible with determinism. The methodological question "Whose moral practices matter?"—or "Whose are the paradigmatic moral practices?"—arises again for this old and deep metaethical debate.

Note also that anti-oppression anger involves being angry *at* individuals *for* participating in, reflecting, and reinforcing ongoing oppressive social patterns, so it involves viewing their agency as a network of causal processes wrapped up in broader causal-historical structures. Anti-oppression anger thus logically presupposes that the oppressive wrongdoing is in part caused by factors beyond the wrongdoer's control. The fact that anti-oppression anger as such entails viewing each other's agency in this way may point toward new reasons for embracing anger-compatibilism and new resources for reconceptualizing the free will debate more broadly (Gasdaglis 2024).

References

- Alessandri, Marianna. 2023. *Night Vision: Seeing Ourselves through Dark Moods*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. 2012. "Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era." *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 1 (Spring): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2012.0003>.
- Bandura, Albert. 2000. "Exercise of Human Agency through Collective Efficacy." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 9 (3): 75–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00064>.
- Bell, Macalester. 2009. "Anger, Virtue, and Oppression." In *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal*, edited by Lisa Tessman, 165–83. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Berenstein, Nora. 2016. "Epistemic Exploitation." *Ergo* 3 (22). <https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0003.022>.
- Callard, Agnes. 2018. "The Reason to Be Angry Forever." In *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, edited by Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan, 123–38, London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Cherry, Myisha. 2018. "The Errors and Limitations of Our 'Anger-Evaluating' Ways." In *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, edited by Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan, 49–65. Moral Psychology of the Emotions. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- . 2021. *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chugh, Dolly. 2018. *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*. New York: Harper Business.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1997. "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Where's the Power?" *Signs* 22 (2): 375–81. <https://doi.org/10.1086/495162>.
- . 1998. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Psychology Press.
- Congdon, Matthew. 2018. "Creative Resentments: The Role of Emotions in Moral Change." *Philosophical Quarterly* 68 (273): 739–57. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqy011>.
- Davis, Emmalon. 2016. "Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice." *Hypatia* 31 (3): 485–501. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12251>.
- Ditto, Peter H., David A. Pizarro, and David Tannenbaum. 2009. "Motivated Moral Reasoning." In *Moral Judgment and Decision Making*, edited by Daniel M.

- Bartels, Christopher W., Bauman, Linda J., Skitka, and Douglas L. Medin, 307–38. *Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, vol. 50. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0079-7421\(08\)00410-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0079-7421(08)00410-6).
- Dryden, Windy, and Rhena Branch, eds. 2012. *The CBT Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Emerick, Barrett. 2016. “Love and Resistance: Moral Solidarity in the Face of Perceptual Failure.” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (2). <https://doi.org/10.5206/fpq/2016.2.1>.
- Fricker, Miranda. 1999. “Epistemic Oppression and Epistemic Privilege.” In *Civilization and Oppression*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume 25*: 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1999.10716836>.
- Frye, Marilyn. 1983. “A Note on Anger.” In *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 84–94. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.
- Gasdaglis, Katherine. 2021. “Moral Regret and Moral Feeling(s).” *Inquiry* 64 (4): 424–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1592701>.
- . 2024. “Towards an Oppression-Conscious Compatibilism.” Working paper.
- Gasdaglis, Katherine, and Alex Madva. 2020. “Intersectionality as a Regulative Ideal.” *Ergo* 6 (44). <https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0006.044>.
- Gottman, John M., and Julie Schwartz Gottman. 2018. *The Science of Couples and Family Therapy: Behind the Scenes at the “Love Lab.”* Illustrated edition. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hendriksen, Ellen. 2018. “How to Stop Getting Defensive.” *Psychology Today*, May 8. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-be-yourself/201805/how-stop-getting-defensive>.
- Hieronymi, Pamela. 2019. “I’ll Bet You Think This Blame Is about You.” In *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*. Vol. 5, *Themes from the Philosophy of Gary Watson*, edited by D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, 60–87. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198830238.003.0004>.
- . 2022. Review of *Wrongdoing and the Moral Emotions*, by Derk Pereboom. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, May 9. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/wrongdoing-and-the-moral-emotions/>.
- hooks, bell. 1996. “Killing Rage: Militant Resistance.” In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, 8–20. New York: Henry Holt.
- Ivy, Veronica [as Rachel McKinnon], dir. 2017. “Allies, Active Bystanders, and Gaslighting.” YouTube video, April 17, 1 hr., 13 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRW78oDGE3M>.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1989. “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology.” *Inquiry* 32 (2): 151–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201748908602185>.

- . 1999. "Socialist Feminism and the Standpoint of Women." In *Political Thought*, edited by Michael Rosen and Jonathan Wolff, 49–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. "Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women." In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra Harding, 55–66. New York: Routledge.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. <https://www.amazon.com/Critique-Reason-Cambridge-Works-Immanuel/dp/0521657296>.
- Lorde, Audre. 2020. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism." In *Sister Outsider*, 115–25. New York: Penguin Books.
- Lugones, María. 1995. "Hard-to-Handle Anger." In *Overcoming Racism and Sexism*, edited by Linda A. Bell and David Blumenfeld, 203–17. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- MacLachlan, Alice. 2010. "Unreasonable Resentments." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41 (4): 422–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2010.01508.x>.
- Madva, Alex. 2019. "The Inevitability of Aiming for Virtue." In *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice: Social and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Benjamin R. Sherman and Stacey Goguen, 85–100. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Manne, Kate. 2016. "Manne on Williams' 'Moral Luck.'" Cornell University College of Arts & Sciences website, March 28. <https://as.cornell.edu/news/manne-williams-moral-luck>.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 1995. "Emotions and Women's Capabilities." In *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, 360–95. Oxford: Clarendon Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198289642.003.0015>.
- . 2016. *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pereboom, Derk. 1995. "Determinism al Dente." *Noûs* 29 (1): 21–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2215725>.
- . 2021. *Wrongdoing and the Moral Emotions*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192846006.001.0001>.
- Robbins, Michael S., James F. Alexander, and Charles W. Turner. 2000. "Disrupting Defensive Family Interactions in Family Therapy with Delinquent Adolescents." *Journal of Family Psychology* 14 (4): 688–701. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.14.4.688>.

- Saul, Jennifer Mather. 2003. *Feminism: Issues & Arguments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/ushe/product/feminism-issues-and-arguments-9780199249473>.
- Scheepers, Daan, Russell Spears, Bertjan Doosje, and Antony S. R. Manstead. 2006. "Diversity in In-Group Bias: Structural Factors, Situational Features, and Social Functions." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (6): 944–60. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.6.944>.
- Silva, Laura Luz. 2021. "The Efficacy of Anger: Recognition and Retribution." In *The Politics of Emotional Shockwaves*, edited by Ana Falcato and Sara Graça da Silva, 27–55. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56021-8_2.
- Solomon, Robert C. 1973. "Emotions and Choice." *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1): 20–41.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1989. "Anger and Insubordination." In *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, 263–73. London: Routledge.
- Srinivasan, Amia. 2018. "The Aptness of Anger." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 (2): 123–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12130>.
- Stockdale, Katie. 2013. "Collective Resentment." *Social Theory and Practice* 39 (3): 501–21. <https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract201339327>.
- Strawson, Peter. 1974. "Freedom and Resentment." *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. London: Methuen.
- Tausch, Nicole, Julia C. Becker, Russell Spears, Oliver Christ, Rim Saab, Purnima Singh, and Roomana N. Siddiqui. 2011. "Explaining Radical Group Behavior: Developing Emotion and Efficacy Routes to Normative and Nonnormative Collective Action." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101 (1): 129–48. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022728>.
- Thomason, Krista K. 2023. *Dancing with the Devil: Why Bad Feelings Make Life Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tolstoy, Leo. (1878) 2006. *Anna Karenina*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Penguin Books.
- Truth, Sojourner. 1995. "Women's Rights." ["Ain't I a Woman?"] In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 36. New York: New Press.
- Uhlmann, Eric Luis, David A. Pizarro, David Tannenbaum, and Peter H. Ditto. 2009. "The Motivated Use of Moral Principles." *Judgment and Decision Making* 4 (6): 479–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1930297500004022>.
- van Zomeren, Martijn, Russell Spears, Agneta H. Fischer, and Colin Wayne Leach. 2004. "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is! Explaining Collective Action

Tendencies through Group-Based Anger and Group Efficacy.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87 (5): 649–64. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.5.649>.

Walker, Margaret Urban. 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Bernard. 1981. “Moral Luck.” In *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980*, 20–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139165860.003>.

KATHERINE GASDAGLIS is associate professor of philosophy at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Her central research areas include Kant, feminist philosophy, and the philosophy of emotion. She has published articles on Kant, intersectionality, identity, and moral regret.