Hypatia (2025), **40**, 1–20
doi:10.1017/hyp.2024.57

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

The Bellwether of Oppression: Anger, Critique, and Resistance

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(Received 23 October 2022; revised 26 February 2023; accepted 15 March 2023; first published online 27 August 2024)

Abstract

Feminists have long argued that emotions have a rightful place in politics. Anger, specifically, is often said to play a crucial role in alerting people to oppression and motivating resistance. The task of this paper is to elaborate these claims and to outline a conception of the political value of anger. In doing so, I argue against the view that anger is valuable only if and because it expresses a sound moral judgment. Instead, we should see rage, in the first place, as simply a response to having one's practical aims in the world thwarted—there need be nothing moral or righteous about this feeling for it to have political potential. Second, unlike those who highlight anger's connection with love or claims for equal dignity, I emphasize its tendency towards aggression. With this non-moralized conception of anger in hand, we can see how rage reveals practical problems in a way that can spur on a dialectical process of political articulation and organized action. The resulting standpoint from which one can articulate and resist one's oppression based on one's rage is not inherent in the experience of anger—rather, it needs to be seen as a political achievement in itself.

1. A political emotion

It is, by now, a fairly widespread idea that anger has a rightful place in politics. Against persistent delegitimization of the rage of the oppressed in the public sphere, feminist and anti-racist theorists have long argued that anger can be fuel for emancipatory political movements. According to Carol Gilligan (1990, 290), it is "the political emotion par excellence—the bellwether of oppression, injustice, bad treatment; the clue that something is wrong in the relational surround." Elsewhere, Audre Lorde nicely sums up the idea that rage might have both motivational and epistemic value: "Anger is loaded with *information* and *energy*" (Lorde 2019, 121, emphasis mine). The task of this paper is to make sense of these claims and to outline a conception of the political value of anger. In doing so, I will argue against a tendency in recent work in political philosophy and moral psychology that tries to reclaim the value of anger for progressive politics by sanitizing it in various ways: by treating it as an expression of sound moral principles, or

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https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2024.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

love and solidarity for the oppressed. Apart from the fact that these sanitized understandings of anger are, on my view, phenomenologically inadequate, their major problem is that they treat progressive expressions of political rage as an inherent part of this emotion rather than seeing it for what it really is: a political achievement.

To put it in other words, much recent scholarship in philosophy of emotions that takes up these feminist arguments about anger tends to defend rage by assuming what needs to be explained: anger, they claim, is politically valuable simply *because* it alerts us to injustice and motivates resistance. This claim, as I will argue, is justified and a valid line of defence against racist right-wing talking points that equate passionate protest against injustice with "the rage of the mob" or a "swarm[of] hornets" (Tucker Carlson cited in Chiu 2020). Yet, a satisfying theory of anger ought to be able to explain *why* and *how* anger can lead to knowledge about oppression—and why it sometimes does not.

My answer to these question lies in a very non-ideal picture of anger that does not deny any of the "ugly" features associated with this emotion. Unlike those who see anger as a moral judgment, I see rage, in the first place, as simply a response to having one's practical aims in the world thwarted—there need be nothing moral or righteous about this feeling for it to have political potential. Second, unlike those who highlight anger's connection with love (Cherry 2018) or claims for equal dignity (Frye 1983, 84–94; Adkins 2020), I emphasize its tendency towards aggression. Precisely because I am careful not to bake any moral content into my conceptualization of anger, this account will enable us to explain how and why anger can *lead to* moral judgments. And through highlighting the aggressive nature of anger, it becomes clear why rage has potential to motivate radical, political action in a way that goes beyond mere calls for inclusion and integration into the existing order.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, I discuss two standard ways of defending anger against its critics: the recognition approach and the moral approach. I argue that these fail because they either construe anger too narrowly as a response to status-injuries, or presuppose that anger relies on a prior moral judgment. Section 3 then outlines my alternative, phenomenological view of anger. I highlight the role of certain affordances, namely the perception of the possibility to aggressively assert oneself against the structures of a world in which going along with business-as-usual has become intolerable. Sections 4 and 5 explain how this view can make sense of Lorde's claim that anger "is loaded with information and energy." With this non-moralized conception of anger in hand, we can see how feelings of rage reveal a practical problem which calls for both interpretation and action. The information and energy to resist injustice comes not directly from feeling fury but from the process of interpretation and practical problem-solving that anger ignites. The standpoint from which one can articulate and resist one's oppression based on one's rage is not inherent in the experience of anger—rather, it needs to be seen as a political achievement in itself.

Before continuing, it is worth briefly clarifying some of my terminology in this paper. I use the words "anger" and "rage" interchangeably—to the extent that there is any meaningful difference between these two concepts, I take it to be that rage is a more intensely felt form of anger. This would be a difference of degree, not of kind, and not one that is important for the arguments I make here. Further, I assume that terms like "resentment" and "indignation" designate subtypes of anger, rather than entirely different emotions. Some authors have used these terms to designate specifically "moral" versions of anger as differentiated from more "egoistic" or "primitive" forms (Rawls 1999, 427; Murphy and Hampton 1988, 54). To the extent that these authors

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accord such "moral" angers priority over the "primitive" forms, they too are targets of my critique of moralized accounts of anger: whatever the terminology, I disagree that what makes (some kinds of) anger politically interesting is their "moral" nature. I do not, however, have any problem with the categorization itself—as will become clear, defining indignation or resentment as subtypes of anger which do explicitly appeal to violations of moral norms is perfectly compatible with my account as long as we do not assume that these forms of anger are somehow more valuable or "political" than others.

2. Defending anger: recognition and moral judgment

Much of the literature on political anger today begins by defending rage against Martha Nussbaum's influential critique. On her account, anger is necessarily tied to a backward-looking wish for revenge as a way of restoring my dignity by down-ranking the other; it is a narcissistic investment in penalizing those who have offended me to restore a moral "cosmic balance" (Nussbaum 2016, 24). Nussbaum gets to this view by following Aristotle in conceptualizing anger as tied to "status-injuries".[1] Anger is a response to vulnerability in the face of our dependence on a secure place in the social world: when this security is threatened "[a]nger aims at restoring lost control and often achieves at least an illusion of it" (2016, 21). A "retaliatory strike-back" or compensatory "down-ranking" of the other is meant to "restore the balance of status, manliness, or whatever" (2016, 26). Anger, then, is an attempt to reassert our rightful place in the social hierarchy by putting others *in their place*. As a response to pain and injustice, Nussbaum argues, this is an entirely irrational emotion: striking back does nothing to heal the pain or prevent future injustice. On this view, anger is a futile attempt at achieving control and domination in the face of fragility and, "in a sane and not excessively anxious person," it is "soon dispelled by saner thoughts" (2016, 30–31).

One way in which proponents of rage have responded to this view is by accepting the basic description of anger as a reaction to personal slights but pointing out that, in the case of oppressed and marginalized subjects, such "status-injuries" reveal real injustices. Although most of Nussbaum's examples involve the anger of women, rhetorically she constantly evokes the figure of the angry, fragile man with a bruised ego to make her points. Feminist theorists and others have contended that if we take seriously the rage of oppressed subjects, painting the need to assert one's rightful place as narcissistic looks tenuous (Leboeuf 2018; Adkins 2020; Cherry 2018). Rather than a less-than-zero-sum game of mutual down-ranking, perceived injuries of status inherent in anger could lead to valid claims for equal and mutual recognition. In a context of oppression, feelings of being "down-ranked" and slighted may be evidence of genuine injustice, rather than simply injured pride. The need to reassert one's own status becomes instead a way of "reclaiming boundaries of selfhood … after violation" (Adkins 2020, 196). The wish to "down-rank" the other in retaliation reflects a need to "bring[] the wrongdoer from a position of superiority—from which the wrongdoing occurs—to a position of equality" (Cherry 2018, 160). "[S]ometimes in the context of oppression," Amia Srinivasan (2016) writes, "one's sense of self-worth can only be secured by loosening the grip of another's."

These approaches—call them "recognition theories of anger"—provide a neat explanation for why anger can disclose injustice. While not every status-injury will be the result of injustice, we have a *prima facie* reason to ask ourselves whether a particular angry voice might be revealing some hitherto unnoticed normative deficit in the

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recognition order. Indeed, Axel Honneth's critical social theory explicitly makes experiences of misrecognition the basis of social critique and notes that emotions like shame and anger disclose this misrecognition and motivate social struggles for recognition (Honneth 1995, 138). However, the problem is that, as a general account of anger, recognition theories are too narrow. While it is certainly true that anger sometimes reveals misrecognition, it seems strange to deny that it could also reveal a whole host of other injustices, including material oppression, exploitation, colonization, etc. As I have argued elsewhere (Friedrich 2022a), reducing anger against social structures to symptoms of a psychic injury of misrecognition depoliticizes and dismisses the claims made by the outraged.

The logical response to this problem seems to be to say that anger can be a response to any kind of injustice: we can simply reject Nussbaum's characterization of anger as tied to status-injury. With Spelman (1989, 266), we could conceptualize anger as arising when I perceive that someone has "done something not just that I wish he hadn't done, but something I think he should not have done, because it was bad, or wrong, or unfair, or uncalled for, or harmful to me or to others." This description can be expanded to include not just individual wrongdoing, but also anger at unjust or immoral institutions and structures. The point is that anger on this view does not arise from mere incommodity but only from things that are "bad, or wrong, or unfair, or uncalled for, or harmful."

With this moral view of anger, we can better make sense of the intuition that people can express rightful rage against all sorts of injustices. We can avoid the depoliticizing tendency of the recognition framework by accepting that these injustices can go beyond misrecognition and include exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, imperialism, violence, etc.[2] Myisha Cherry follows this strategy in her defence of anger's value to anti-racist politics by distinguishing specifically anti-racist anger from "narcissistic rage" (hooks 1995, 29), ressentiment, or violent white backlash. "Lordean rage," Cherry's term for transformative anti-racist anger, "registers racial injustice [and] recognizes and advertises justice's worth" (Cherry 2021, 52). When motivated by sound moral principles, like opposition to racism, "[a]nger makes us attentive to wrongdoing and motivates us to pursue justice" (2021, 31). Thus, rage is valuable for progressive political movements because it is what John Rawls (1999, 427) calls a "moral feeling" in that it "presuppose[s] an explanation by reference to an acceptance of the principles of right and justice" (to be sure, Rawls himself denies this status to anger, reserving it for indignation and resentment).

Of course, in many cases, this approach is an important way of defending specific instances of anger: people's rage often *does* respond to and alert us to injustice, racism, sexism, exploitation, etc. And when, for example, anti-racist protesters are accused of being "too angry", this is exactly the line of defence that we need: let us not ask whether people should or should not be angry in public but let us ask about the injustices that made people angry in the first place (Srinivasan 2018). Yet, there are deep problems with this approach. As Alice MacLachlan (2010, 423) has persuasively argued, if we take anger seriously when and because it expresses sound moral judgments, we risk "overlooking or covering over the ethical significance of resentments without overtly moral content."[3] By assuming that anger's value comes from making moral claims, it becomes easy to dismiss forms of rage that do not seem to clearly express such claims. Forms of anger that are more inchoate, inarticulate, or perhaps "misdirected" (Emerick and Yap 2023) fall out of the picture—if, like MacLachlan (2010, 437), we want to leave open the possibility that these "'unreasonable' resentments may contain morally

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significant messages of protest, even if those messages cannot yet express moral content," we need a different account of what makes anger a politically valuable emotion.

On a more theoretical level, we can express the worry as follows: by placing anger downstream from moral principles it sacrifices the central idea that anger can *reveal* something about what is wrong with the social world. The recognition theory provided a psychological mechanism whereby angry reactions can be seen as "symptoms on the basis of which one can come to realize that one is being illegitimately denied social recognition" (Honneth 1995, 136). If instead it is a reaction to the violation of prior moral principles, anger might be necessary in order to fully *appreciate* the moral facts (Srinivasan 2018, 141) and might draw *attention* to wrongdoing (Cherry 2021, 31), but it tells us nothing new.

To be clear, many people who hold moral theories of anger do not think rage needs to rely on explicitly held normative principles or judgments. It is possible to take a view of anger as an "evaluative attitude" that "presents its object as involving a moral violation" without thereby implying that the subject *believes* that there has been a moral violation or holds any explicit normative principles that justify the emotion (Srinivasan 2018, 129). Nevertheless, the view still "presupposes a certain [implicit] norm the fulfillment of, or deviation from which underlies the emotional evaluation" (Ben-Zeev 1987, 396). In other words, on the moral theory, whatever anger may tell us about the normative deficits of the social world is parasitic on prior moral norms—whether explicitly or implicitly held ones.[4] Of course, I do not want to deny that anger frequently does arise when our explicitly held normative principles are violated (as we shall see below, my phenomenological account of anger can accommodate such forms of anger). Nor do I want to deny that anger at violations of normative principles is politically interesting.[5] It is simply my claim that these are not the types of anger which reveal anything new about injustices. If we take seriously only those angers that conform to our own prior theory of justice, clearly nothing is gained. On the other hand, if we uncritically accept whatever principles are implicit in expressions of indignation, the most anger can contribute to social criticism is to serve as a starting point for a Michael Walzer style "internal critique" "understood as a continuation and extension of ordinary, everyday complaints by persons who share a common understanding of morality" (Stahl 2013, 12; see Walzer 1987).

The question for a political theory of anger, then, is the following: is there a way of explaining how anger discloses new information about social injustice without reducing rage to a symptom of wounded social status? I will suggest that by grounding our theory in the phenomenology of anger we can do just that.

3. The phenomenology of anger

A key claim, made by feminists and critical theorists, is that critique arises not from abstract moral principles but from social experiences of oppression (see McNay 2022; Friedrich 2022b). My suggestion is that if we want to understand how exactly such social experiences lead to critique, we need to understand the phenomenological structure of those experiences (a full defence of this methodological assumption is beyond this paper—but for general discussion of the value of phenomenological inquiry for feminism and critique, see Al-Saji 2017; Guenther 2020; Oksala 2023).

From a phenomenological point of view both the recognition approach and the moral view of anger appear immediately suspicious. It seems rather obvious that our immediate *experience* of anger often does not conform to either view. Berkowitz

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(1989, 64), for example, summarizes some psychological evidence against the claim that "the perception of a deliberate and controllable misdeed is necessary for anger and aggression to arise," arguing instead that people can be "angered [even] by reasonable and socially justified frustrations." Haven't we all gotten angry at a completely innocent person who happens to stand in our way when we are in a hurry, or even become enraged at our computer for not working? Many theorists treat such experiences of anger as somehow derivative or defective versions of "proper" or "mature" anger which is moral in nature: if we get angry at inanimate objects it must mean that we are implicitly, and sillily, holding them to moral standards. This is why, upon reflection, we usually quickly dismiss such anger as a foolish and mistaken reaction. Yet, phenomenology cautions us against dismissing the experience itself so quickly. As Merleau-Ponty (2004, 64) puts it, it "is only afterwards, when I reflect on what anger is [that I] remark that it involves a certain (negative) evaluation of another person." If I "turn back to the real experience of anger," however, "I am forced to acknowledge that this anger does not lie beyond my body, directing it from without, but rather that in some inexplicable sense it is bound up with my body." If we see anger as an embodied way of perceiving the world, it is unclear why rage at inanimate objects or faultless bystanders should be any less "real" than morally righteous anger.

Consider, the example of "vending machine rage". In her discussion of this phenomenon, Nussbaum (2016, 18–19) simply treats these cases as derivative of moral judgment anger: she assumes that we get angry at vending machines only when we anthropomorphize them and "expect 'respect' and cooperation from the inanimate objects." She thus dismisses it as a version of anger that is derivative of "real"—that is, moral—anger. But, as MacLachlan (2010, 435) puts it, "claiming—well, if you resent it, you must see it as a moral injury of some kind—simply begs the question." Kauppinen (2018, 32) takes a slightly different route, seeing children's "aggression toward someone who frustrates our goals" as an embryonic version of what will later turn into fully developed "mature" anger that always "involves the thought that somebody intentionally or negligently failed to do what they were supposed to do." But, again, this developmental teleology seems highly question-begging—phenomenologically, I would venture, vending machine rage or the "immature" anger of children is a fairly good expression of the basic structure of anger.

I suggest that we reverse Kauppinen's model of "childish" and "mature" anger and empty it of its rather moralizing overtones: aggression arising from the frustration of my practical aims is what is basic to the experience of anger, and "righteous" anger is anger that has been "cognitively sharpened" through the lens of moral reasoning (D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, 137). When a vending machine does not dispense the item that I chose and paid for, my expectations for how to go about dealing with the external world have been thwarted. Sartre's (2014, 39) description of emotions as arising "[w]hen the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world" seems apt here (albeit at a very trivial level).[6] My anger is the perception that I can no longer go on interacting with this vending machine in my habitual way and, instead, in my rage, new possibilities for action appear: I can kick and shake the machine until the product falls out. Anger is a "specific manner of apprehending the world" (Sartre 2014, 35) where certain *affordances* become part of my perception of the environment. (The concept of affordances, that is, perceived possibilities for action, will be important in section 5, and will be explained further there.) Thus, vending machine rage, in its phenomenological structure, is a paradigm example of anger as I would like to describe it: a

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perception that the objective structures of the world block opportunities for seamless, habitual action, but instead invite an aggressive reaction that may remove obstacles and restore my ability to go about my life as normal. What defines anger on this view is neither a judgment, nor an "evaluative attitude"—it is the way I perceive my subjective possibilities for action in my environment.

Note that the first part of this description, the loss of opportunities for normal action, is something shared by negative emotions in general. What make anger *anger* are the new affordances that typically accompany the angry person's perception of the world. I want to argue that the distinguishing feature of anger is that it involves a perception that one can change the world through aggression. I define "aggression" here rather capaciously as behavior that aims to forcefully assert one's will. Whereas some definitions restrict aggression to behavior intended to harm other people (Allen and Anderson 2017), I think aggressive behavior can target objects as well as social structures—the defining feature is the use of force against obstacles, be they people, objects, or structures. Further, the force involved need not be physical—aggression can take the form of rude speech, yelling, or other communicative gestures, like staring someone down.[7] And finally, it is important to stress that anger does not always result in aggression. It is defined by *affordances* for aggressive action: the key element is the *perception* that one can forcefully assert one's will against the structures of the world. Despite these caveats, this is a controversial claim and one that must be carefully explained and defended.

Many defenders of anger's value have, for good reasons, wanted to deny that there is any essential connection between anger and aggression or violence. This is understandable, especially in the context of anti-racist anger, because racist stereotypes of Black people as aggressive and violent are so often used not only to dismiss legitimate protest, but also to justify violence against Black people (Burgess 2017; Threadcraft 2014, 737ff.). In response, those wanting to rehabilitate rage have tried to make it look nicer by claiming that it need not involve any wish for violence but can simply be an expression of the dignity of those who have been wronged (Adkins 2020). Cornel West (1994, 122) makes such a move when describing Malcolm X's rage as an expression of "his great love for black people"; a rage that was "not directed first and foremost at white America" but rather a way for black people to "affirm themselves as human beings" (see also Cherry 2018). I agree with bell hooks' (1995, 13) criticism that such attempts "to explain that rage away, to temper it" are problematic. The temptation to downplay anger's destructive and violent tendencies is understandable; yet the sanitizing of rage stops us from fully understanding where its political potential comes from and may serve to delegitimize or depoliticize expressions of anger that do not seem to fit the rosy description. There is no question that anger can be a way of expressing one's dignity and that it can be, and often is, rooted in a great love for those who are wronged. Yet, if we deflect from the aggressive side of rage, we miss what makes this emotion special, what differentiates anger from sadness, disappointment, or a host of other emotions that one can feel in the face of oppression.

Importantly, once we get rid of the moral view of anger, tying it to aggression need not lead us back to Nussbaum's view of anger as a retributive emotion. Take Sartre's (1969, 163) quip that "the man who is angry sees on the face of his opponent the objective quality of asking for a punch in the nose." In the experience of anger, the wish to act aggressively arises not as a moral ought, but as a practical possibility to achieve one's aims—it arises as an *affordance* of the object of one's rage. In an essay called "Killing rage", bell hooks (1995, 11) describes the intense anger she felt at a white

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man sitting next to her on a plane for his casual racist behavior: "I felt a 'killing rage'. I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse." At no point does hooks describe this feeling as a moral judgment: she does not believe that the man *deserves* to be murdered or *ought* to be maimed. She knows that lashing out violently against individual white people is both futile and wrong, yet she does not want to deny "the intensity of that desire" and insists that we can learn something by listening to it (1995, 19; see also her essay "Beyond Black rage" in 1995, 21–30).

What is essential to anger is a perception that the obstacles in my way can be removed through aggressive action; that I can assert myself and force the world to give in to my demand that it change. As previously mentioned, anger need not actually lead to aggressive behavior. Often—perhaps most of the time—we suppress the urge to act out when we feel indignant. The point is that anger involves a wish to assert oneself against a world in which one can no longer go on as normal. As Céline Leboeuf (2018, 23) puts it, rage has an "expansive character" in that the angry subject experiences "a physical surge to act," to break free of the constraints of the social world. Here, Leboeuf refers to Fanon's (1986, 112) famous description of encountering the "white man's eyes" as a boy on a train identifies him with a racial epithet:

> I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. … I identified my enemies and I made a scene. A grand slam. (Fanon 1986, 109, 114)

In response to a "white world [that] barred me from all participation," Fanon (1986, 114), in his rage, aggressively asserts himself, makes demands on the world, and identifies the enemies standing in his way.

Compare this with a feeling like disappointment. Disappointment, like anger, involves a clash between expectations and reality, but it would have made a big difference had Fanon or hooks, in the examples cited, simply felt disappointment towards the white people they encountered. Amia Srinivasan (2018, 128) argues that this difference comes from the fact that anger expresses a *moral* judgment, "a violation of how things *ought* to be," whereas disappointment simply expresses that things are not "how one *wishes* things were" (emphasis original).[8] But it is hard to see where the justification for this claim could possibly come from apart from pure stipulation. I certainly have felt disappointed in people who did things that I consider moral violations; on the other hand, I frequently feel anger when things simply do not go my way. Looking at the phenomenology of these two emotions, the relevant distinction appears to lie in the kinds of opportunities for action that become available in experiences of disappointment and anger. Whereas disappointment includes a certain resignation to the facts, anger is the feeling that some urgent action needs to be taken to set things straight. Parents are disappointed in their children when they do wrong, but punishment nevertheless does not appear as a viable course of action (anyone who grew up with "not-angry-just-disappointed" parents can attest to the fact that this disappointment does express a strong moral judgment!).[9] What differentiates anger from disappointment is an intense desire to burst free from normal social constraints[10] and assert oneself against a world that needs to change. Now.

What I want to claim is that anger involves perceiving the world as metaphorically "asking for a punch in the nose." This is a phenomenological account that does not ground anger exclusively in experiences of misrecognition, nor in already-moral experiences of simply *seeing the world as unjust*. Rather, anger arises, in the first

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place, because "[a]ll ways are barred and nevertheless we must act" (Sartre 2014, 39). As the next section aims to show, by thus emptying our conceptualization of anger of moral content we will be able to show how judgments about political injustice *can*, but need not, arise from these experiences. Carol Gilligan's term "the bellwether of oppression" is apt because feelings of anger, qua perception of obstacles to our practical engagement with the world, can signal that *something* is wrong before this something comes to be conceptualized as a political problem at all.

An additional feature of the phenomenological account is that it can also explain why moral theories of anger look so plausible. First of all, anger *sometimes* does respond to violations of moral norms. The "obstacle" to my practical aims that triggers anger need not be a physical object, and practical aims can themselves include moral content. If my aim is to live in a just world, and I see what I judge to be an injustice, this will likely make me angry (if, that is, I also perceive the appropriate affordances for aggressive action).[11] Likewise, Walker (2006, ch. 4) defines resentment as a type of anger that arises in response to threats to the norms governing our common life. The difference between my account and a moral account of anger is that I do not see the judgment or the perception of injustice as constitutive of the anger; rather, it is the fact that this injustice stands in the way of my aim of living in a just world or a world governed by certain norms (this also makes sense of the fact that some people see and recognize injustice without feeling anger because they may not feel strongly about making the world just).

What is more, even when one's anger is not initially rooted in a moral judgment, we often reinterpret it as moral after the fact. As Merleau-Ponty (2004, 64) points out, once we reflect on anger, it seems to us that it "involves a certain (negative) evaluation of another person." As social beings, we are often called upon to explain and justify such emotions to others, and we learn to make sense of our own feelings in normative terms—a process which D'Arms and Jacobsen (2003, 137) term "cognitive sharpening." This is why it often seems to us, after the fact, that "irrational" anger at vending machines or innocent bystanders must have involved some implicit or subconscious moral judgment.[12] Yet, while this capacity to reflect on our feelings and interpret them in moral terms certainly colours the emotional experience itself (there is no such a thing as "pure," unmediated experience), it is by no means constitutive of anger (which is why toddlers and animals can also experience rage). There is, no doubt, a distinct phenomenological quality to anger that has been filtered through moral judgment: this is what people often refer to as "indignation" or "resentment." However, indignation or resentment, thus defined, cannot reveal any new knowledge about injustice; they are the *result* of having already achieved this knowledge.

The problem is that if we only take anger seriously if and once it has been interpreted and articulated as a moral claim, not only do we fail to notice the significance of this process of articulation, but we also risk overlooking a wide range of "pre-political" experiences of suffering which could disclose injustice despite not (yet) having found articulation in a moral register (MacLachlan 2010). A theory that explains anger's political value needs to account for, rather than assume, this process of articulation—this is what the following section will attempt.

4. Listening to rage

As I pointed out above, recognition theories of anger have one advantage over moral accounts: namely, that by rooting anger in a phenomenology of misrecognition they can explain its disclosive function. The phenomenological account I have provided

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does not reduce rage to expressions of misrecognition (though misrecognition is still one possible source of anger) but retains the ability to explain why a feeling like anger can *reveal* something about the wrongs of the world—or so I shall argue. However, as will become clear, on this account, the connection between anger and normative judgments about the world becomes somewhat more complicated than on the moral or recognition views. If anger always already expresses either a claim for recognition or a moral claim about injustice, the connection is simple: all we need to do is to assess whether the claims in question are, in fact, justifiable. If anger, on the other hand, is simply an expression of having one's opportunities for action blocked, more steps are needed to connect this experience to social critique: we will need a sociological account of anger. Coming to see one's anger *as* a political claim is, I will argue, a political achievement. *Contra* theories which see anger as always-already a moral claim, I will highlight the political and hermeneutic work that goes into constructing social and political interpretations of everyday rage.

bell hooks (1995, 21), in her essay "Beyond Black rage," discusses the case of a "disturbed black man" who, in rage, shot and killed several white people on a train in New York. While condemning the man's behavior, she criticizes the mainstream media for their unwillingness to take seriously the institutionalized racism that "drove him mad." As hooks (1995, 25) puts it, it is possible to "recognize that it is ethically and morally wrong to kill folks even as we can also sympathize with mental illness that is either engendered or exacerbated by life in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." Leaving aside the (potentially problematic) connection between mental illness and anger,[13] what I want to emphasize is that hooks shifts our attention from questions like "Is this rage justified or appropriate or apt?" to the question "What are the social conditions which produce this anger?" In other words, she suggests what we might call a "sociogenic" approach to anger, meaning one that "links the subjective harms that racisms inflict upon individual subjects back up to the objective structures of domination, exploitation, and violence that such racisms attempt to naturalize" (Bufkin 2020, 110).

Paradoxically, I will contend, it is precisely such a shift away from the cognitive content of the emotion and toward the objective social conditions that will help us understand how anger provides information about the wrongness of the world. This shift, it has to be emphasized, does not require that we see anger as the result of mental illness; it simply requires connecting subjective feelings to objective social processes. On this approach, the experience of anger does not reveal social injustice until it is interpreted through the lens of a social theory. This means that the normative information we can get simply from experiencing anger is less than what many other theories assume: feeling angry does not, in itself, reveal injustice or misrecognition; all it reveals is a certain frustration of our practical engagement with the world. This information cannot, standing on its own, provide a normative critique—but it prepares the ground for critique.

Anger signals: things cannot go on this way. Something must change. Yet this something need not be the social world. If anger arises from the frustration of one's expectations, then, as Cherry notes, not only are we likely to "see high degrees of anger among people who face significant levels of harm and disrespect, we are also likely to find high degrees of anger among people with significant levels of entitlement" (Cherry 2021, 113; see also Jaeggi 2022, esp. 512). Sometimes anger reveals not injustice but the loss of unfair privileges or power. What anger reveals, then, is a *problem*: it reveals a gap between my embodied habitus and the social structures I must act within and says that something—either I or the world—must change. This problem turns into social critique only once mediated by a sociogenic explanation of the emotion.

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Here, some aspects of what I mean by this need for mediation by sociogenic explanation need to be carefully specified. It might seem as if I am requiring a social critique *in addition to* the experience of anger, and thereby simply reducing anger to a *symptom* of injustice which the social theorist then interprets and explains.[14] However, seeing sociogenic explanation as something needed "in addition to" the feeling itself would be misleading. No emotion ever comes to us unmediated: we are always already interpreting the meaning of our own feelings. It is not a question of adding an interpretation to the brute fact of anger but of choosing between several different ways of interpreting an experience that we can never access in any unmediated form. Furthermore, it is important to note that the sociogenic explanation does not need to come from a social theorist—in fact, I am primarily concerned with how angry people come to explain their own emotions sociogenically.

One might worry that by explaining anger in terms of its causes, rather than the judgments it embodies, this approach takes away epistemic agency from the angry and oppressed. Srinivasan (2018, 128) expresses this concern about

> rhetorical strategies that shift the explanatory context for the subject's anger from the space of reasons to the space of causes. The misogynist or racist explains away the woman's or black person's anger as a product of inferior character, treating the question "why is this person angry?" as a request for a causal explanation rather than a justificatory one.[15]

hooks' connection between rage and mental illness only serves to highlight this worry: are we treating people's anger as a pathological symptom to be diagnosed by the social theorist, rather than an expression of people's *understanding* of their own oppression?

This worry, I believe, evaporates once we distinguish between what it means to listen to *rage* and to listen to the *enraged*. The idea that our rage can tell us something is about the epistemological function of experiences of anger; the claim that we should listen to people who are angry is about those people's epistemic reliability. Insofar as the latter claim is that we should listen to angry people not *despite of* but, at least partly, *because of* their rage, this clearly relies on the former claim about the epistemological function of anger. Thus, I am not suggesting that we replace angry people's own understanding of their oppression with causal explanations provided by social theorists. Rather, the aim of this paper is to bolster the claim that we have reason to listen to those who are enraged by giving an account of how people come to such understandings of their oppression in the first place by interpreting ("listening to") their own anger.

To articulate claims about political injustice based on feelings that might initially be inchoate and vague, one precisely needs recourse to explanations which appeal to the social-structural *causes* of this anger. hooks' essay "Killing rage" illustrates this well. The entire piece is centered around her efforts to make sense of the seemingly excessive rage she felt towards a man's casual complicity in racism. She does not ask herself whether her feelings were proportionate to that particular incident, but rather considers the series of racist incidents throughout the day, and ultimately throughout her life, that culminated in such strong affect. The rage was what motivated her "to take pen in hand and write in the heat of the moment," but only by going beyond the particular incident and considering the social-structural causes that let this anger accumulate does she "take that rage and move it beyond fruitless scapegoating," "linking it instead to a passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible" (hooks 1995, 20).

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There is not necessarily any contradiction between explaining anger "in the space of causes" and understanding it as an intelligible response to one's social circumstances. Here, we would do well to take inspiration from feminist Marxist standpoint theory which emphasizes precisely how political knowledge is arrived at through an understanding of "the structural determinants of [women's] experiences" (Hartsock 1987, 174). Because subjectivity itself, as feminist Marxists have long pointed out, is an integral part of social reproduction, negative emotions do not represent evaluations of the social world by a transcendental subject standing outside of it, but contradictions immanent to the reproduction of the social order (see Gotby 2023). Anger is "the bellwether of oppression" in the sense that it reveals contradictions inherent to societal structures, which call for analysis and critique of the social structures that give rise to the contradiction. This analysis is what I mean by sociogenic explanation, which, to be clear, need *not* involve a highly sophisticated and elaborated theory of racist, patriarchal capitalism—but some minimal social theory is necessary.

Clearly, those whose rage motivates them to critique and protest racism, sexism, and capitalism already *do* have an understanding of the oppressive structures that have produced their anger—but this understanding is a political *achievement*, rather than an inherent feature of anger. When we assume that feelings like anger somehow automatically reveal oppression we are, in fact, erasing the hermeneutical work that goes into being able to interpret one's rage as a political claim. Take the famous example of how feminist consciousness raising allowed women to understand their aversion towards individual men's unwelcome advances as instances of institutionalized sexual harassment.[16] The idea that anger itself provides us with knowledge about injustice, while appealing, can easily lead us into a caricature of standpoint epistemology: the oppressed simply always know best and it is through their emotions that they know their own oppression. This would ignore the central insight of theorists, like Nancy Hartsock (1987, 162), who insist that a standpoint is "achieved rather than obvious"; it "represents an achievement both of science (analysis) and of political struggle on the basis of which this analysis can be conducted." Like a standpoint, then, righteous anger against oppression represents an achievement: the emotion itself is the starting point, not the end point, of this achievement.

5. Anger and action

The epistemological role of anger is one that is, by and large, shared with other negative emotions insofar as they reveal practical obstacles to action which can be given a sociogenic explanation. What distinguishes anger from other negative feelings, as pointed out above, is mainly the tendency towards assertive, aggressive action, and this is also where anger differs from many other feelings in terms of its potential for motivating political resistance. It is very commonplace to point out that anger sometimes motivates people to join social movements, to protest injustice, or even to take up armed resistance (Jasper 2006, 2014). One part of the explanation is that anger, as I have argued, reveals certain affordances—that is, possibilities for action—or, as some psychological theories describe it, anger is associated with "approach motivation" (Harmon-Jones 2003), that is, "a propensity to move toward an object rather than away from it" (Cherry 2021, 67). As Fanon's phenomenological description of anger above revealed, feeling rage leads to a sensation of bursting with energy, of not letting oneself be constrained any longer. If anger were simply an evaluative judgment, there would be no way of explaining

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why rage moves us in ways that dispassionate arguments do not—but anger's association with aggression makes it clear why it can be such a strong motivator for decisive action.

The question, however, is why and how anger can lead to specifically *political* action. It is sometimes argued that feeling anger under conditions of oppression is in itself already an act of political resistance. Cherry (2021, 115), for instance, writes that merely experiencing rage in the face of racism is a form of resistance because "[i]f domination also includes the psychological sphere, resisting it in one's own mind is … a radical act." Cherry can make such claims, however, only because she is talking about a specific type of anger, Lordean rage, that is already assumed to be informed by a specifically political, emancipatory perspective. Thus, just like moral views of anger cannot account for how "righteous" anger is an epistemological *achievement*, understanding anti-racist rage as always-already a type of resistance ignores that this rage is an *outcome* of political work. Cherry (2021, 89) herself quotes Martin Luther King's comment that he saw his work "as a way to transmute the inchoate rage of the ghetto into a constructive and creative channel." This should not, I believe, be interpreted as simply giving a productive political outlet to already politically virtuous anti-racist anger. Rather, political organizing often transforms the anger itself by transforming the affordances available to people—note King's reference to "*inchoate*" anger, a rage that has not (yet) found its proper object, a rage that is, in fact, not yet part of anti-racist politics. Anger does inherently motivate action but, in order to motivate *political* action, people first need to recognize the obstacles they face as political obstacles that can potentially be overcome through collective action.

What accounts for anger's motivational function is the way certain affordances become available through the experience of rage. Affordances are subjectively perceived possibilities for action in the world, and the affordances available to me rely on my perception of the external world as well as myself. In Gibson's (2015, 119) classical formulation, an affordance "refers to both the environment and the [subject and] implies the complementarity of the [subject] and the environment." In the experience of anger, I experience my environment as no longer supporting my normal, habitual way of interacting with it; instead, I perceive myself as having the power to break with the social constraints of my environment by aggressively bending the world to my will. Yet the precise affordances for aggressive action that become available through the experience of rage still depend on the environment and my place in it. Trivially, if my hands and feet are bound, my anger may find an outlet in screaming and verbal threats; if I am physically unconstrained and have a baseball bat in my hand, physical violence is much more likely to become an option. Social constraints function analogously: everything else being equal, angry men will be more likely than angry women to see physical violence as a way forward because men, more than women, are socialized into seeing violence as a socially acceptable response to frustration. What all this goes to show is that the affordances that become available in anger depend both on the physical and social environment, as well as the subject and their place in this environment.

On my account, anger is constituted by the perception of affordances for aggressive action—that is, anger always reveals *some* possibilities for action. But it should be clear enough that these action possibilities are not necessarily or automatically emancipatory: sometimes, in anger, we simply lash out. We ought to ask, then, what is required for political action to be among the possibilities for action that appear in the experience of anger. The first step, of course, is to perceive the obstacles in one's way as a political problem—this is precisely what I dealt with above as the epistemological aspect of

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anger. In addition to this, however, political resistance needs to be perceived as a viable response to this oppression. As Honneth (1995, 139) puts it, "only if the means of articulation of a social movement are available can the experience of disrespect become a source of motivation for acts of political resistance." This is not automatically the case whenever people see themselves as victims of injustice.

bell hooks' work is, once again, helpful for understanding this. On one hand, there are the already discussed "pathological" expressions of black rage in random acts of violence (note that hooks calls the *expression* pathological; she insists that the rage itself is "an appropriate response to injustice"; 1995, 26). On the other hand, however, she also discusses the "narcissistic rage" of privileged black elites who are enraged by the fact that, despite "acquiescing to white power," "they are not exempt from racist assault" (1995, 27). Narcissistic rage, to be sure, *is* caused by real injustice; black elites *do* face real racism, and their anger may well rely on a good understanding of the structural racism and white supremacy that holds them back. What hooks takes issue with is that people who feel narcissistic anger do not channel their rage into militant resistance against the collective oppression of all black people: "they are not interested in fundamentally challenging and changing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. They simply want equal access to privilege within the existing structure" (1995, 29). The difference between "narcissistic rage" and what hooks terms "militant rage" can be explained in terms of affordances. Part of the explanation for the nature of elite anger is that privileged people have options available to them which the less privileged do not: narcissistic rage requires that sharing in the spoils of capitalist patriarchy seems like an achievable option. On the other hand, however, elites may lack certain possibilities that are available to other classes. Particularly, privileged black people are more likely to move in spaces that are dominated by whites and people who have vested interests in maintaining the status quo. This makes it harder to see organized, collective resistance as a viable expression of one's rage. The latter requires that one is surrounded by people who share one's anger and who can be mobilized for collective political action—something that is lacking in elite-dominated spaces.

Herein lies a crucial point: whether anger motivates people to take *political* action depends, in large part, on whether or not the social context is one that makes collective, organized resistance seem viable. To take a fairly obvious example, atomized gig workers may feel anger at the exploitation they face, and they may have an excellent theoretical understanding of that exploitation, yet they may not channel their anger into political action because their isolation from other workers prevents them from organizing politically. As empirical research shows, anger among gig workers is associated with political mobilization and support for unions only when combined with greater communication among workers (Wood et al. 2023). Crucially, I am not simply making the obvious claim that people do not take political action based on their anger where the conditions necessary for such political action are missing. I am making the stronger claim that the presence or absence of these conditions transforms the experience of anger itself. On a phenomenological understanding of anger, seeing "the objective quality of asking for a punch in the nose" on my opponent's face is an inherent part of my emotion—if my hands are bound, or if I have a baseball bat in my hand, this will change the quality of my experience to a certain extent. In the same way, opportunities for collective, political action change the experience of anger at oppression or exploitation.

A worry might arise here that I have all but severed the connection between anger and political resistance. Anger, I am saying, does not inherently motivate us to resist injustice: sure, it provides some motivation for action, but which actions we take

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ultimately depends on other factors. To some extent I *do* want to weaken the connection between anger and resistance—it is all too obviously true that not all angry people become political activists. And simply stipulating that there are certain types of anger, like Lordean rage, that lead to political action while other types do not is to beg the question: what makes progressive activism an available outlet to some angry people, while not to others? All this being said, I do want to insist that the connection between anger and political action is more than incidental. This is because the way in which feeling rage is connected to a wish to break free from social (or physical) constraints gives it a radical, disruptive potential.

Let me elaborate. In section 3, I described the feeling of anger as the feeling of being "fixed" by the strictures of the world, of no longer being able to continue one's habitual form of action and instead wanting to aggressively break free of the usual social constraints in order to put the world in its place. Other negative emotions, like despair, involve the same feeling of no longer being able to go along with things as they are, but, whereas the characteristic response of despair is withdrawal from the world, rage is associated with assertive action. Thus, anger involves a tendency to disrupt the status quo; it is politically useful partly because it motivates us to break free from the habitual reproduction of existing social structures. In the words of María Lugones (1995, 12), rage "recognizes this world's walls. It pushes against them rather than making claims within them." There is a reason that agonistic thinkers, like Jacques Rancière (1999), associate the political itself with a ruptural moment that evades the "police order" (Rancière's term for the "normal" procedures of political decision-making in parliaments, courts, etc., which, for him, amount to nothing more than the administration of an existing order). Yet, we do not need to buy into Rancière's ontological understanding of "the political" in order to see the value of disrupting social structures. In fact, focusing on affective experiences like anger is one way of giving sociological determinacy to the otherwise "socially weightless" notion of rupture (McNay 2014, ch. 4).

Whereas agonists usually struggle to explain where the disruption of politics-as-usual comes from—sometimes referring to vague notions of "the passions" as a driving force (Mouffe 2002)—a sociologically grounded account of emotion shows us that the motivation to disrupt embodied, habitual structures of action comes not from a mysterious, extra-social place of radical agency but from contradictions within the social order itself. The experience of anger is the subjective disclosure of the inadequacy of the usual procedures for resolving problems and it tends to reveal possibilities for action that radically disrupt politics-as-usual (hence anger's association with incivility[17]). It is paramount, however, to keep in mind that it is not disruption for disruption's sake which makes anger politically valuable. The tendency towards disruptive action becomes valuable when it is combined with a theoretical understanding of the structures that cause one's anger (as argued above) and especially when channeled into collective, organized political activity.[18]

So far, I have discussed the epistemological and the motivational functions of anger under separate headings—but this is simply a convenient way of structuring the discussion. In reality, these two functions are highly intertwined, and, in the vein of the Marxist tradition, I do not subscribe to any strict separation between theory and praxis. In fact, I hope that my account of anger highlights exactly how inseparable knowledge and action are. The experience of anger reveals a practical problem, an inability to go along with the normal course of things, that calls for both interpretation and action at the same time—and the interpretation of the problem stands in a dialectical relationship

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with the practical possibilities for solving it. It is obvious that one's interpretation of anger conditions the kinds of actions that will seem like viable paths forward—I need to see the cause as political before I can see the solution as political. But this is also, less obviously, true the other way around. For a cognitivist, anger is simply a judgment that something is wrong, and action follows in a separate second step; but I have argued that we should see affordances for action as an inherent part of the experience of anger. This means that the practical opportunities for action that we perceive condition the way we feel rage and therefore also the way we interpret our anger. Again, to take a simple case, the possibility of unionizing with my co-workers shapes the anger that I feel about my working conditions: by making available certain courses of action, it also makes certain interpretations of my anger more salient. If collective, organized action is not on the horizon of possibility, I am much more likely to perceive my own discontent as a reaction to specific circumstances, bad customers, or unfair bosses, rather than a fundamentally exploitative economic structure. The political *articulation* of anger is not separate from the political *organization* of anger.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that we can best make sense of anger's political function by understanding it in phenomenological terms. Rather than a judgment about the world, anger is a specific way of perceiving my relation to my environment. It arises, I have argued, as a response to having one's practical aims thwarted: my habitual engagement with the world is somehow blocked but instead affordances for aggressively asserting myself against the obstacles in my way appear. This account, I believe, is phenomenologically much more adequate than existing accounts of anger: it captures the fact that we are often enraged by things that are neither instances of misrecognition nor of moral wrongs, but simply something that stands in the way of our practical aims. More importantly for present purposes, however, this account can explain anger's political and epistemological value in non-circular terms. Many philosophers argue that anger is politically valuable *because* it expresses claims about injustice—but if we want to make sense of this claim, it will not do to simply bake our conclusion into the definition of anger (or "resentment" or "Lordean rage" or whatever subtype of anger one might prefer). Defining anger as a response to injustice, and then claiming that it therefore alerts us to injustice is circular. However, if we understand anger as simply a response to practical obstacles, we can see how this initial emotional reaction can be the spur for a process that ultimately leads to new knowledge about what is wrong with the world.

When we treat feminist and anti-racist anger as always-already a form of critique or resistance, then, we miss the real significance of anger for political knowledge and action—and we elide the important political work of interpretation and organization that goes into politicizing rage. When angry people get together to interpret their feelings collectively and organize actions based on it, we can see this as a collective process of practical problem-solving. Herein lies the political function of anger: it subjectively reveals a problem that calls for interpretation and practical solutions in a way that has the potential to spur on this dialectical process of political articulation and organized action. If anger is the "political emotion par excellence" (Gilligan 1990, 290), it is because its expansive and assertive tendencies might uniquely motivate us to break free of normal social constraints and question the status quo.

Looking at the world around us, it is clear enough that anger fuels plenty of dissatisfaction with the status quo—but also that this rage is far from always channeled in a

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progressive direction. The account of anger presented here reminds us that any emancipatory expressions of anger, like any political standpoint, ought to be thought of as "an achievement of both analysis and political struggle occurring in a particular historical space" (Hartsock 1987, 174). The interesting question to ask about widespread unhappiness and indignation, then, is not whether people are right or wrong to be angry, whose anger is apt and whose is not. What we should ask is how we might create the social conditions that enable people to channel their anger into emancipatory struggle, rather than reactionary politics. What is needed, to speak with bell hooks (1995, 30) once more, is for "rage against the status quo to assume the form of strategic resistance."

Acknowledgments. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Centre for Ethics at the University of Antwerp and at the Oxford Work in Progress in Political Theory (OWIPT) Workshop—I thank audiences at both events for helpful discussion. I am also grateful to a number of people who read various versions of this paper and gave extremely useful feedback: Theo Hickfang, James Wells, Clover Reshad, Paula Keller, Lois McNay, Jeanne Morefield, Amia Srinivasan, and three anonymous reviewers for *Hypatia*. A very special thanks to Alice MacLachlan and all the participants in the anger reading group at York University in Winter 2023 for helping me shape the ideas in this paper and for reading and discussing an early draft.

Notes

1 At one point, Nussbaum (2016, 21, 26–27) writes that "[a]nger is *not always*, but very often, about status-injury" (my emphasis). However, in her subsequent elaboration it becomes clear that she sees anger as irrational precisely because it always involves acting *as if* an offense was a status-injury even if it was not. Thus, while she does not state this explicitly, Nussbaum's account clearly relies on the assumption that, phenomenologically, anger is *always* a reaction to a perceived status-injury.

2 These are Iris Marion Young's (1990, ch. 2) "five faces of oppression."

3 While MacLachlan discusses "resentment," her arguments apply equally to anger. Some authors, like Rawls, may prefer to reserve the term "resentment" for anger that has explicit moral content—on such a definition, MacLachlan's claim that there are non-moralized forms of resentment would simply be false by definition, but her larger point that we ought to pay attention to forms of anger that are not (yet) articulated as moral claims would be no less valid.

4 Some versions of moral theories of anger which hold that it is an evaluative attitude only implicitly relying on norms may, in fact, be compatible with much of my account of anger's epistemological and political function in sections 4 and 5. It is possible that my non-cognitive representation of an object as morally wrong spurs the process of interpretation and articulation of anger that I describe in those sections. However, while it may be compatible with an explanation of anger's epistemological function it does not in itself provide one: we cannot say that anger reveals injustice *because* it relies on implicit norms without re-encountering the circularity of accounts that see anger as an explicit moral judgment. Those approaches, then, would be in need of a separate account of anger's epistemological function. In any case, as will become clear in the following section, I find accounts of anger as an evaluative attitude wanting from a phenomenological point of view.

5 See Margaret Walker's (2006, ch. 4) account of resentment, defined by her as a type of anger specifically responding to threats to accepted norms.

6 Sartre intends this as a description of *all* emotions—I would like to limit it to *negative* emotions only.

7 Philosophical discussions, for instance, are frequently described as "aggressive." For interesting discussion of this, including its gendered dimensions, see Moulton (1983) and MacLachlan (2021).

8 A similar distinction is drawn by Adrienne Martin (2014, 126ff.) who sees anger and disappointment as responses to the thwarting of normative *expectations* and normative *hope*, respectively.

9 Martin (2014, 129) believes that "disappointed" parents withhold anger because they do not see their children as fully competent moral agents and therefore not as apt targets for moral judgment. While this may well be a reason to try to hide one's resentment, however, this explanation does not track the phenomenology of anger and disappointment. After all, it is perfectly possible to feel angry at toddlers who

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clearly are not full moral agents, whereas disappointment is compatible with attributing full moral agency to the culprit: for example, I find it easy to imagine parents being disappointed in their adult child who commits a grave moral wrong. Here, anger may not arise precisely because their child is *too* autonomous, and hence an angry, punishing reaction does not appear as an affordance.

10 It is true, of course, that anger does not always challenge existing social norms: when the powerful get angry at the powerless, this is usually a way of reinforcing existing social norms and hierarchies against perceived threats. Nevertheless, I would claim that even in such cases, anger is a break with the normal constraints of polite and civil behavior. Of course, in a white supremacist patriarchal society, white men's anger, for example, tends to be more acceptable than the anger of women of color. This simply shows that the cost of breaking with the constraints of civility is significantly higher for some than for others. At the same time, this view can explain why certain forms of assertive behavior are often interpreted as angry when performed by some while not when performed by others: women's assertiveness is often seen as a deviation from social expectations and therefore understood as an expression of anger, whereas men's assertiveness is simply expected and normal. I thank James Wells for pressing me on this point.

11 This fact can also make sense of bystander anger which is obviously not the result of having one's immediate practical aims thwarted. Another explanation of bystander anger could be that we sometimes feel anger vicariously by empathizing with others. I find it likely that some instances of bystander anger are best captured by the one explanation and some by the other. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising the question of bystanders' anger.

12 In this regard, see Merleau-Ponty's (2002, 39–40) discussion of the difference between perception and judgment.

13 Connecting anger to mental illness is problematic insofar as it pathologizes an emotion that may very much be a rational, or at least intelligible, response to circumstances of oppression. Arguably, this problem does not arise for hooks because she does not understand mental distress on the level of individual pathology, but as a response to social conditions. See her essay "Healing our wounds" (hooks 1995, 133–45).

14 I thank Clover Reshad for pointing this out to me.

15 I do not mean to imply that Srinivasan is against any form of causal explanation of anger—I simply quote her to address the potential concern that my appeal to causal explanation could be problematic in the same way as the types of causal explanation she criticizes.

16 See, for instance, Miranda Fricker's (2007, 147ff.) discussion of feminist consciousness raising as a way of overcoming hermeneutical injustice.

17 As Berenstain (2020, 331) argues, "calls for civility … in response to expressions of anger, particularly those aimed at the structures of oppression that birthed them, … form part of an epistemology of domination whose function is to structurally gaslight oppressed and marginalized groups aiming to fight back against the pervasive violence they experience."

18 For anger to lead to political knowledge and resistance, it is not strictly required that it take on a "collective" or "organized" aspect. It is certainly possible to come to a political understanding of one's anger on one's own—and acts of resistance can be carried out by singular individuals. Nevertheless, as feminist theorists of standpoint epistemology and consciousness-raising have consistently emphasized, it is usually through the discovery that one's misery is not contingent and individual, but structurally determined and collectively shared, that one comes to interpret one's own problems as political. This may involve literally coming together in a group to collectively discuss shared experiences, but the "collective" aspect can also simply mean reading accounts of others' experiences or availing oneself of shared hermeneutic resources produced through a history of political struggle.

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Cite this article: Friedrich J. 2025. The Bellwether of Oppression: Anger, Critique, and Resistance. *Hypatia* **40,** 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2024.57

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2024.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press