The Efficacy of Anger: Recognition and Retribution

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Abstract: Anger is often an appropriate reaction to harms and injustices, but is it a beneficial one? Martha Nussbaum (2015; 2016) has argued that, although useful in initially recruiting agents for action, anger is typically ineffective and often counterproductive to securing the political aims of the oppressed. Nussbaum argues that to be effective at enacting social change, groups and individuals alike, must move quickly out of states of anger. Feminist theorists, on the other hand, have for long highlighted the efficacy of anger, as well as its moral and epistemic value, in fighting against the oppressive status quo (Frye, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Narayan, 1988). It might be thought, therefore, that for political action to be effective, a continued state of anger is preferable. I present a novel, empirically informed, defense against Nussbaum's attack on anger's efficacy in political action. Nussbaum adheres to a traditional view on the nature of anger, which holds that anger constitutively involves a desire for retribution. The view that anger is ineffective falls out of this and is dominant in the literature, as well our everyday lives. Informed by work in social psychology, I argue that anger is far more effective than Nussbaum allows. This will give us cause to reconsider the traditional view of anger's nature that Nussbaum endorses. In doing so, I highlight anger's aim for recognition, rather than retribution, as key. I also uncover conditions that favour anger's political efficacy, as well as reasons for why the traditional view of anger has been so pervasive.

Keywords: anger, recognition, retribution, oppression

1. Introduction

Injustices call for outrage. Nelson Mandela (1994: 257), for example, famously wrote:

> I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities and a thousand unremembered moments produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people.

That anger is a powerful motivator of political action is ubiquitously acknowledged (Adams, 1986; Jasper, 2014). Granting anger an initial motivational role leaves open the question of whether oppressed groups will be most effective at securing significant change by sustaining and promoting anger at their targets, or, alternatively, by moving quickly out of states of anger. Nussbaum (2015; 2016) has launched a contemporary attack on anger, arguing that, beyond its initial motivational role, anger is ineffective, and more than often counterproductive, in fights for social justice.[1] Nussbaum therefore recommends against anger in such political struggles. I follow Nussbaum (2015; 2016) in using 'anger' to refer to a range of related affective phenomena, including outrage,

indignation and resentment. By anger I will mean occurrent cases of phenomenologically salient negatively valanced states that involve evaluations, or appraisals, of a triggering situation as wrongful. Like many emotions, anger is thought to have both a cognitive component, that represents the world as being a certain way, and a conative component, that disposes agents for action (Deonna and Teroni, 2012; Cogley, 2014). Nussbaum's recent attack targets feminist philosophers, as well as many political activists, who hail anger as amongst, if not the most, politically important emotion (Frye, 1983; Narayan, 1988; hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1997; Lugones, 2003; Bell, 2005; Srinivasan, 2018). Lorde (1997: 280), for example, writes that "every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" Anger is thought to create and sustain a sense of moral obligation and justice that propels political progress (Jaspers, 2014).

In this chapter I develop an empirically informed critique of Nussbaum's position. We will see that empirical work provides support in favour of anger's political efficacy. I begin by outlining Nussbaum's commitments and highlighting two empirical claims amongst them (sec. 2). I then proceed to challenge these claims by bringing recent work in social psychology to bear on them (sec. 3). Doing so will call into question the ancient conception of anger that Nussbaum, and many contemporary philosophers, endorse (sec. 4). I end by offering a pluralist conception of anger that should be preferred (sec. 5). My alternative view makes desires for recognition central to anger, and allows the full efficacy of anger to emerge.

2. Nussbaum on Anger

Nussbaum (2015; 2016) endorses an ancient construal of anger as constitutively involving a desire for retribution.[2] Aristotle characterizes anger as "a desire accompanied by pain for perceived revenge caused by a perceived slight" (*Rhet.* 1378a31-33).[3] Anger ceases when the offender "pays back for the offense; for revenge stops anger" (*NE* 1126a21-22). The desire for the perpetrator's suffering is a conceptual part of anger on such a view, as anger is defined as a desire for returning pain (*DA* 403a31). This retributive view of anger is widespread in contemporary philosophy (see Pettigrove, 2012 and Ben-Ze'ev, 2000: 384), indeed Nussbaum (2015: 4) calls it the "traditional" view of anger. Nussbaum's thought is not that anger always involves a desire for violent revenge or to personally

harm the offender, rather, "anger involves, conceptually, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense" (Nussbaum, 2015: 46). For example, when angry at a friend's betrayal, one may wish for the traitor's life to go badly, yet not wish to have anything to do with making this the case.[4] Nussbaum's view on anger involves the following nature claim:

nature claim: Anger constitutively involves a desire for payback or retribution.[5]

Given its nature, Nussbaum takes anger to be either irrational or immoral. It is irrational in the sense that inflicting pain upon a perpetrator when in anger will not literally undo the wrong one has suffered. An agent who believes the contrary is guilty of "magical thinking" and irrationality (2015: 47-48). The only way to avoid irrationality is to construe the payback as capable of restoring one's status following a slight. Anger is on such a reading concerned with status-ranking, where "a retaliatory strike back is thought to restore the balance of status" (2015: 48). The problem with status-focused anger, for Nussbaum (2015), is that it is immoral as it involves a "narcissistic error" (51), an obsessive focus on one's standing relative to others (45). There is, however, one domain in which Nussbaum (2015: 50) grants that slights do lower one's status, and that to be preoccupied with such status injuries is not immoral.

> Discrimination, for example, on grounds of race or gender, is often conceived as an injury that really does consist in down-ranking, and there is truth to this, just in this special sense: discrimination involves a denial of a special status of equal dignity, and this status has intrinsic value.

But, she goes on to say that "the idea that denials of equal dignity can be rectified by bringing the injurer low is a false lure" (2015: 51). Nussbaum seems to think that anger is an inadequate way to promote positive social change for two reasons: inefficacy and immorality. On the latter she writes that "reversing positions through payback does not create equality. It just substitutes one inequality for another" (2015: 51). Here much more could be said. Surely lowering the rank of those in power need not involve the reversal of positions within a hierarchy, but merely equalizing them. It is unclear why such an aim would make the status-lowering strategy morally problematic. I will leave these issues to one side. My focus will be on the claim of inefficacy. Nussbaum argues that "non-anger

and a generous disposition are far more useful" than anger to revolutionary justice (2016: 228). Nussbaum doesn't just make comparative claims regarding anger's efficacy however, she also argues, largely counterfactually, that leaders of successful social movements, such as Martin Luther King and Mandela, were effective precisely because they did not act on their anger.[6] Nussbaum takes anger to be particularly ineffective in the fight for social justice. This claim can be summarized as follows:

inefficacy claim: Anger is typically ineffective at fighting social injustice.

This claim is by no means limited to Nussbaum (2015: 2016). Seneca (1928) famously paints anger as "the most hideous and frenzied of all emotions" which gives "no thought to itself if only it can hurt another" and is "eager for revenge though it may drag down the avenger along with it" (I.1). Casting anger as counterproductive has a long history (see Srinivasan, 2018), and is common in everyday life, where we are often advised to avoid anger on account of it being futile, and potentially counterproductive, in situations that trigger the emotion.[7] More recently, Pettigrove (2012) has argued that anger is particularly ineffective in struggles for social justice, and claims meekness is preferable. What are the specific reasons for holding the *inefficacy claim*? The answer becomes clear when we pay closer attention to the *nature claim*. First, as anger is constitutively aimed at payback, retributive rather than conciliatory actions are predicted of those in anger. Retributory actions are both morally problematic for Nussbaum, and risk being counterproductive (Nussbaum, 2016: 1). They are morally problematic, because they involve harming, or at least seeking to harm, their objects. They are counterproductive because in so doing, they may harm the angry agent themselves, often by triggering disengagement or retaliation in their targets, which leads to the further entrenchment of conflict (Nussbaum, 2015; 2016).

When enraged African-Americans flooded the streets of Chicago following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968 for example, 125 fires were set, 210 buildings were damaged and numerous stores were looted. In response to the riot, over 10,000 police and 5000 soldiers were brought in. Many African-Americans were killed, injured or incarcerated, the city of Chicago suffered a food shortage, and the areas destroyed by rioters were knocked down, many remaining to this day undeveloped. Racial segregation intensified in the aftermath of the riot (Risen, 2009). Besides committing

harms against Chicagoans in general, these actions arguably left the city's African-American community itself worse off. This seems to lend support to Nussbaum's view that anger often makes things worse for the angry agent, as it is "incompatible with forward-looking pragmatism" (2016: 230–233).

There is, however, clear room to argue for the efficacy, and even justification, of destructive actions in fights for social justice. Indeed, the Chicago riots are thought to have played a crucial role in paving the way for important victories for the civil rights movement (Risen, 2009). The efficacy or ethics of aggressive revolutionary tactics is however not the focus of this chapter. In so far as Nussbaum envisions anger being effective, she sees it as morally condemnable for harming others (2015: 51). Nussbaum would therefore not deny that anger can be effective, but rather deny that anger can be effective while remaining morally unproblematic. Anger's efficacy therefore seems inexorably tied to its immorality on her account. This is the narrower claim of inefficacy I will be concerned with. There are two, in my eyes both fruitful, main strategies against this stance: to argue for the morality of some retributive actions, or to argue that anger's ties to retribution are far weaker than Nussbaum allows. I pursue the latter strategy here. We will see that effective, morally unproblematic, anger is far more robust than Nussbaum's account allows.

The first reason for holding the *inefficacy claim* then is that in aiming for retribution, angry subjects act destructively, which we might think is unlikely to improve the angry party's standing, and can indeed worsen their situation by antagonizing the targets of anger and provoking retaliation. Independently of the specific actions taken, commitment to the *nature claim* gives reason to think that mere displays, or communications, of anger risk setting back goals for positive social change. This highlights a second, related, reason anger is taken to be ineffective in struggles for revolutionary justice: that communicating anger, for those committed to the *nature claim*, involves communicating the desire for retribution, and this is likely to inspire animosity in the targeted group. Nussbaum (2016) says that anger "breed(s) mistrust" (233) and increases "anxiety and self-defensiveness" in its targets (230). Similarly, Pettigrove (2012) writes that anger communication is typically counterproductive due to "triggering a defensive response" in its targets that prevents them from appreciating the causes of anger (367). In a best-case scenario, the communication of anger is unlikely to breed openness to cooperation in its targets. In a worst-case scenario anger risks perpetuating

an "endless cycle of blood vengeance" by escalating conflicts (Nussbaum, 2016: 1). There might be other reasons for endorsing the *inefficacy claim*, but I will focus on the two just outlined. The first is a reason that pertains primarily to the actions of those in anger, while the second is a reason that pertains to the responses of the targets of anger. The two reasons can be summarized as follows:

> In-group Reason: Anger motivates retributive actions on the part of those angry.
> Out-group Reason: Anger antagonizes those at whom it is directed.

Each reason is in effect an empirical claim against which recent experimental work can be brought to bear. Before I turn to doing so, I would like to note the one exception Nussbaum (2015; 2016) makes, the one case in which she takes anger to be an effective and moral way of promoting social change: cases of what she calls "transition-anger". Nussbaum characterizes transition-anger as anger that is not retributive, and which focuses on "brotherhood", "justice", "reconciliation and shared effort" instead, typically motivating constructive actions (2015: 53-54). This is the type of anger Nussbaum takes Martin Luther King to experience and express in his speeches (54). Nussbaum isn't clear on whether transition-anger is a distinct species of anger on her view: "is Transition-Anger a species of anger? I really don't care how we answer this question" (2015: 54), what is clear is that she takes it to be a "borderline case" that is "rare and exceptional" and only present in individuals with superior "self-discipline" (54). In sum, Nussbaum's view on anger takes it to be typically ineffective in struggles for social justice. The only room made for the permissible efficacy of an emotion akin to anger, is the special case of transition-anger that is exceedingly rare and hard to cultivate.

To the question 'should the oppressed avoid anger?' Nussbaum responds in the affirmative.[8] Nussbaum's targets are feminist philosophers who have issued powerful responses to the above question in the negative (Frye, 1983; Narayan, 1988; hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1997; Lugones, 2003; Bell, 2005; Srinivasan, 2018). The oppressed should not avoid anger, on their view, for a number of reasons. These include anger's psychological, epistemic, as well as practical, utility in resisting oppression.[9] Here I am concerned with the practical. Feminist philosophers are opposed to the *inefficacy claim*, as they take anger to be crucial in motivating politically beneficial action. Lorde (1997: 280) claims that anger

> can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlying our lives.

Those who have argued for the political value of anger have rarely engaged in a head on denial of the *inefficacy claim* however.[10] This is likely in part because such a task is largely an empirical one (see Lepoutre 2018: 3; Srinivasan 2018: 127). By attending to relevant empirical work, my challenge to the *inefficacy claim* takes steps towards filling this gap in support of those who have hailed anger as paramount for political change.

3. The Efficacy of Anger

We saw that there are two reasons in support of the *inefficacy claim*. The In-group Reason and the Out-group Reason, both of which are in fact empirical claims that generate empirical predictions. The former predicts retributive behaviour of angry subjects, while the latter predicts targets of anger to respond defensively, and often retaliate, against those who display anger towards them. A look at relevant empirical work will give us cause to question both reasons for the *inefficacy claim*. I deal with them in turn.

3.1 The In-group Reason

Anger is seen as a crucial motivator of collective political action (Spring et al., 2018). The field of collective action research takes there to be two main pathways by which collective action is motivated: the anger pathway, and the instrumental reasoning pathway (van Zomeren et al., 2012; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). The anger pathway involves the experience of group anger being triggered by a situation of unfair in-group disadvantage, while the instrumental reasoning pathway involves reasoning about how effective one's group will be at changing the unjust situation.[11] The anger pathway is driven by appraising situations as unfair, while the instrumental reasoning pathway is driven by evaluating the amount of social support for action one expects. The latter involves reasoning about how successful the group is likely to be at ensuring change through collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2012).[12]

Given the In-group Reason for holding the *inefficacy claim*, a supporter of this claim would plausibly expect the actions typical of each of these pathways to differ.

Nussbaum would likely expect the instrumental reasoning pathway of collective action alone to motivate morally unproblematic actions in the pursuit of justice. Retributive collective actions, on the other hand, would be expected of the anger pathway. Experimental work on collective action seriously challenges these predictions however.

In a key study, German university students were surveyed regarding a real-life situation where the state had mandated an increase in tuition fees. Students were asked to indicate how likely they would be to participate in different actions against the tuition rise. The action options were grouped into three types; a) 'constructive actions' such as flyer dissemination, petition signing and demonstrations, b) 'destructive actions' such as arson attacks on university buildings or private property and c) 'intermediate type' actions that disturb events where tuition-rise advocates appear, such as blocking university buildings or public roads (Tausch et al., 2011). Adherents of the *inefficacy claim* would plausibly predict the anger pathway to mainly motivate actions of type b), destructive actions, perhaps as well as intermediate type c) actions, while predicting instrumental reasoning to be the main pathway for motivating actions of type a), constructive actions. On the contrary, however, both anger and instrumental reasoning were found to be positively related to engaging in type a) actions, i.e. constructive actions. Indeed, anger was found to be inversely correlated to destructive actions, being *most strongly* correlated with constructive actions. Crucially, anger was not found to significantly motivate actions that involved enacting payback in any straightforward sense (destructive or intermediate types of actions), as anger motivated actions to change the tuition fee policy, rather than harm those who implemented it.

Similar results were found outside of laboratory settings in studies involving Muslim Indian minority communities in conflict with the Hindu majority (van Zomeren et al., 2004; Tausch et al., 2011). The Muslim community is one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country in terms of education, income, employment and political representation (Basant 2007). The self-reported levels of anger amongst the Muslim community in the riot-prone city of Aligarh, were found to be unrelated to any support for violent actions against the dominant majority. This suggests that the results of the study conducted on students may extend to real world situations of historical conflict. Other studies have found anger in situations of group conflict, such as Israel-Palestine, to promote both destructive actions, as well as constructive actions, against the out-group (Halperin 2008). This evidence still speaks against the first reason for holding

the inefficacy claim, as anger is not shown to motivate destructive actions over constructive ones.

Some have cited studies that show anger to motivate punitive and aggressive actions (see Pettigrove 2012 for example). Nussbaum and supporters of her view would likely try to explain away the constructive effects of anger I just surveyed as exceptions to this trend. A few points on this. First, the experimental evidence relied upon to support the *inefficacy claim* is almost exclusively from studies done on individuals or in interpersonal settings (Pettigrove 2012: 362; Spring et al., 2018), therefore we should be skeptical of how they translate to the inter-group, and often systemic, dynamics we are concerned with. Furthermore, below we will see that there is ample evidence of anger being constructive in interpersonal settings as well, which those arguing against anger's efficacy have long neglected. Most importantly however, I have not denied that anger can trigger destructive actions, the point is that constructive anger-triggered actions might be far more common than those who condemn anger grant, and indeed constructive effects might be just as typical, or even paradigmatic, of anger.

How do we account for the variance in anger's motivational tendencies? This is the question that guides much empirical work. The experimental work suggests that key factors *moderate* the effects of anger. In psychology, moderators are crucial to determining when certain effects hold. Moderators are typically contextual variables that influence which effects are observed. Contextual moderators are likely crucial to determining when anger will motivate constructive or destructive actions. The Tausch et al. (2011) study for example, found destructive type b) actions to be favored when the group had low confidence in their ability to change their predicament. This suggests that taking a situation to be unchangeable may be a key factor in motivating destructive behavior. Indeed, there is wide ranging evidence that punitive actions are favoured in situations where change is unlikely. This is often because the out-group is unresponsive to attempts to change the situation (Bandura, 2000). Indeed, some have called this the 'nothing to lose' phenomenon (Scheepers et al., 2006) as the low status group has little to lose in responding to injustice aggressively, seeing as their situation is unlikely to change by any other means. The perceived changeability of the out-group in relation to an anger triggering situation, then, seems to be a key moderator of anger behaviour. This suggests that whether the In-group Reason holds or not is heavily dependent on how changeable, or receptive to change, the outgroup is perceived to be.

In sum, we have seen the In-group Reason for holding the *inefficacy claim* to be challenged by recent empirical work. Contrary to the prediction that anger motivates destructive, or retributive, collective actions, a range of studies in the field of collective action have failed to establish a significant relation between anger and the motivation of such actions. Indeed, in complete opposition to this prediction, anger was observed to significantly motivate constructive actions instead. Even when anger was observed to correlate with destructive actions, it was also observed to correlate significantly with constructive actions. The key notion of moderators has been introduced, and I have highlighted a moderator that is likely to play a central role in determining when anger motivates constructive actions.

3.2 The Out-group Reason

Proponents of the *inefficacy claim* take the communication of anger to be ineffective in struggles for social justice largely because communications of anger will only serve to antagonize the dominant group. An antagonized group is one that is likely to retaliate against one's in-group, or at least avoid this group, and will therefore be unwilling to work towards rectifying injustice. Psychological research on intergroup conflict provides mounting evidence against this, however, as communications of anger have been shown to correlate with increased support for constructive and conciliatory action tendencies on behalf of dominant groups.

One experiment, for example, probed the effect of anger communication on the responses of Americans to Syrian-American relations. In the experiment, Americans watched a short video clip about Syrian-American relations after reading a brief text. In the 'anger condition', the text described how a key Syrian leader gave an enraged speech that was aggressive towards the US. In a 'hope condition', the text described the leader's hopeful view on the resolution of the conflict. And finally, in the neutral condition, non-emotional factual information was relayed in the text about the Syrian leader's speech. American subjects were then asked to register their support for conciliatory policies, such as continuing exports of food and medicine to Syria, and accepting Syria's request for the US to fund humanitarian projects in Syria (Tagar et al., 2011).

The Out-group Reason for holding the *inefficacy claim* would plausibly predict Americans to become antagonized by, and respond retributively to, displays and communications of anger. Nussbaum's view would, therefore, predict support for

conciliatory policies to be lowest in the anger condition. The view would plausibly expect increased support for conciliatory policies in the neutral control condition because participants would be able to think clearly about the conflict at hand, and not be negatively biased by anger. The view would additionally either expect similarly increased support for conciliatory policies in the hope condition as well, or it would predict support for conciliatory policies to be highest in the hope condition, as a positive outlook is being conveyed.

Contrary to these predictions, the study found support for conciliatory policies to be highest in the anger condition. Support for conciliatory policies was not only higher in the anger condition compared to the control condition, but the anger condition even saw significantly higher levels of support for conciliatory policies than were observed in the hope condition. This starkly opposes the predictions we would expect of the *inefficacy claim*, and suggests that anger communication has an important role to play in inter-group conflict resolution. Mounting evidence supports the main finding of this study, as anger communication has been observed to increase dominant group support for conciliatory policies in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, US race-relations (Shuman et al., 2018), and cases of xenophobia (de Vos et al., 2013). The Out-group Reason for holding the *inefficacy claim* is therefore challenged by evidence that the communication of anger from a disadvantaged group often actually increases dominant group support for conciliatory policies.

In one of the above-mentioned studies, focused on xenophobia, researchers investigated how the communication of anger plays such beneficial roles in inter-group conflict. One might think that perhaps it is fear of the enraged group that causes the increase in support for conciliatory policies on behalf of the dominant group. Indeed, Nussbaum notes that in so far as anger can act as an effective deterrent to keep others from infringing upon one's rights, it does so by inspiring fear which is "not likely to lead to a future of stability or peace" (2015: 55). Contrary to this, however, increased levels of empathy were observed in the dominant group following anger communication from an oppressed group (de Vos et al., 2013). Indeed, empathy for the oppressed group was actually *highest* in the anger communication condition. This suggests that anger communication is a potentially optimal way of recruiting the empathy of dominant group members that are the target of anger, and that this in turn mediates their increase in support

for conciliatory policies.[13] This suggests that empathy for, rather than fear of, the oppressed group may be causing the positive effects of anger observed in other studies.

In a follow-up study, de Vos et al. (2016) found the appropriateness of the anger to moderate its positive effects. In other words, anger communication increased empathy in the dominant group when the dominant group saw the oppressed group's anger as a justified response to the situation at hand. This highlights a key moderator that helps determine when anger communication is likely to cause the out-group to respond empathetically and support constructive policies.

In sum, we first saw that empirical work supports a vital role for anger in motivating constructive collective action. In addition to this, studies also showed the communication of anger on behalf of those oppressed to trigger dominant group support for constructive and conciliatory actions. Both reasons for holding the *inefficacy claim* are therefore challenged by recent empirical work.

Against any charge of having cherry picked the experimental work I rely upon, it is crucial to note that the trend in the experimental literatures I invoke have long departed from debates over whether anger is constructive or not in collective action and inter-group disputes. Instead, they focus on trying to uncover key moderators that determine *when* anger is destructive or constructive, so as to better understand and aid conflicts. The underlying commitment to anger's motivational pluripotency is clear and widespread (Spring et al., 2018). This should be reflected in contemporary philosophical treatments of anger, and the relevance of particular moderators attended to. The above considerations suggest that we should drop the *inefficacy claim*, at least regarding anger's role in inter-group conflict resolution. If we do so, what does this mean for the *nature claim*? I turn to this question now.

4. Anger's Objects

The question that arises once we take Nussbaum's *inefficacy claim* to be misguided, or, at the very least, overly simplistic, is whether we should do away with the traditional retributive view of anger's nature altogether. We seem to have two choices here. Either we stick with the traditional *nature claim*, and take anger's oft constructive role in fighting for justice to be an exception to anger's typically retributive nature, in which case an explanation must be given for why anger behaves uncharacteristically in the social

justice case; or, we take anger's constructive role in social justice to be evidence of something important about anger's nature. What exactly this might be must be cashed out, but any account of this sort will involve a rejection, or at the very least a modification, of the *nature claim*. I argue that we should pursue an option of the second, rather than the first, type. After this, I sketch a positive proposal of the second type.

One option open to anyone wishing to secure a fundamental role for anger in the fight against social injustice, is to do so by distancing anger in these cases from cases of everyday anger. Doing so involves casting anger's constructive role in fighting social injustice as a special, or deviant, case that departs from anger's nature. Interpersonal anger, i.e. anger felt for one person by another, is taken to be the paradigmatic case of everyday anger, where one's reasons for anger relate to interpersonal betrayals or harms. In line with the *nature claim*, everyday interpersonal anger is, on Nussbaum's (2015; 2016) view, ineffective at bringing about interpersonal resolutions as well. By constitutively involving an aim for payback, everyday interpersonal anger may prompt retributive behavior that escalates the dispute, proving counterproductive for the angry party. Everyday anger typically has an individual to blame and enact payback over. Anger in the case of social injustice, however, might be less destructive because payback cannot be exacted against a particular person easily. This is, perhaps, because there is often no adequate individual to blame in those scenarios where anger is felt towards groups, institutions or systems, and hence payback is perhaps a less immediate concern than real change.[14]

Rosen (in progress) and Swaine (1996) have made independent cases for the constructive role of anger in struggles for social justice that hinge on anger being, in these cases, atypical for its lack of a clear agent(s) to blame. That is, as the object of anger is not typically an individual in such cases, payback cannot be straightforwardly exacted. Such a view maintains a commitment to the *nature claim*, as anger is still by nature punitive. Cases of constructive everyday anger are seen as outliers, and the constructive role granted of anger in promoting social justice is taken to hinge on a sort of fluke in the natural functioning of anger; that anger is not able to live out its natural function of procuring payback or retribution.

An immediate problem with such a view is that it endorses an implausibly dire picture of everyday anger. The view takes a version of the *inefficacy claim* to apply to paradigmatic cases of anger, whereby anger is ineffective and often counterproductive at

resolving interpersonal conflict for reasons analogous to the In-group and Out-group reasons in the case of social justice. This doesn't sit well with empirical evidence, as experimental work challenges the predictions that interpersonal anger typically motivates destructive behaviour, or that it tends to antagonize its recipient. Briefly, with regards to the types of action interpersonal anger motivates, a canonical study by Averill (1983) found a higher percentage of non-aggressive than aggressive action tendencies in people experiencing anger. Although there is robust evidence that, on economic distribution paradigms, angered individuals on average respond more punitively to unfair economic distributions than to fair economic distributions, recent work has observed that angered individuals still choose behaviours that are economically cooperative in response to unfair economic distributions (Klimecki et al., 2018). This suggests that anger may not typically motivate retributive actions towards the individuals it is directed at. Which actions anger motivates is likely to be more a question of context than object. Indeed, much like the social justice case, the ability of the target of anger to change may be key to determining whether interpersonal anger motivates constructive behaviour or payback oriented behaviour. A study on adolescent responses to bullying for example, found implicit beliefs about bullies to predict desires for revenge (Yeager et al., 2011). Greater desire for revenge was observed in participants who believed that the bully had fixed character traits. The reverse was found for participants that believed that the bully's character was changeable. By highlighting the changeability of the target of anger as a moderator affecting desires for revenge, the interpersonal case seems to bear striking similarities to the social justice case.

Similarly, as opposed to antagonizing the object of anger and promoting retaliatory behavior on their behalf, the communication of anger has been observed to trigger increased social support in close relationships (Yoo et al., 2011), as well as increase personal gains in interpersonal financial negotiations (Van Kleef and Côté, 2007). The latter study pinpointed the appropriateness of anger as a key determinant of anger's beneficial effects in interpersonal negotiations. The constructive effects of anger were highest when the anger was seen as justified, as the offender compensated the low status party in these cases. This points to the crucial role of the appropriateness of anger in moderating whether the anger is well received or not. This again suggests that interpersonal anger is far closer to anger in the social justice case; as appropriateness similarly acts as a moderator over anger's beneficial effects.

We are left with little reason to think that anger in interpersonal contexts is more retributive than anger in social injustice cases. The studies above suggest interpersonal anger plays robust beneficial roles and that anger's effects are moderated by analogous factors seen to be key in the social justice case: the appropriateness of anger and the changeability of the object of anger. Given that interpersonal anger is the paradigmatic case of having a clear target object to blame and enact retribution over, the constructive role of anger in these cases suggests that the constructive effects observed of anger in cases of social injustice does not hinge on lacking straightforward targets. In light of this, the move to sideline social justice cases of anger as atypical seems unpromising, and therefore commitment to the *nature claim* is hard to maintain.

5. Anger's Desires

I argue for an alternative view; one that secures anger a constructive role in the fight against social injustice, in line with, rather than despite, its nature. This will be a sketch, but one that I think more promising than the other options on the table. We have seen that we have much reason to reject a traditional view, such as Nussbaum's (2015; 2016), that takes anger to be constitutively tied to payback or retribution. We therefore have reason to rethink the *nature claim*. I take the empirical work discussed so far to suggest that the *nature claim* is unlikely to be true of anger. Specifically, I take it to fit well with a view whereby two distinct desires are central to anger: a desire for retribution and a desire for recognition. I take there to be certain moderators that are key to determining which desire is at play in a given case of anger.

Although the empirical work above can only provide indirect and suggestive evidence for which desires are at play in anger, the phenomenology of anger favours the existence of two distinct desires. Imagine your friend Mark manages somehow to steal your inheritance. You would surely want to make him suffer for committing this wrong against you. You may make him suffer by cutting him out of your social circle, suing him, defaming his character, or threatening him with physical violence. Your anger would be aimed at Mark's punishment. Let's suppose now that you fail to act on your anger. This could occur for a range of reasons, perhaps there was high social pressure not to act, or perhaps you merely lacked the opportunity. The desire to make Mark suffer is still central to your anger in such cases. Indeed, you are likely to hope for things to go badly

for Mark, and become happy upon hearing about his own hardship, even if this news comes years later and is entirely unrelated to you. Your desire for suffering is satisfied in hearing this news, and you see his pain as deserved.

Now imagine you are angry at your mother for not being there for you throughout your divorce. When you needed her support the most, your mother decided to go on a spontaneous three-month long holiday abroad. Your anger at your mother would be entirely justified, but it is unlikely that you would wish to ensure her social exclusion, or defame her character. Nor would you want to make her suffer physically, or hope for things to go badly for her in the future. Your anger's goal does not seem to be that your mother suffer, but rather, to make her understand what she has done. Whereas Mark's suffering satisfied your anger's desire for payback, your mother's suffering will not satisfy your anger in this case. This is because your anger at your mother does not involve a desire for payback but rather for recognition. Your anger's desire for recognition will be satisfied by your mother's genuine acknowledgement of the wrong she has committed against you. This will involve your mother sharing your appraisal of her actions towards you as unjust. This case of anger involves a desire for recognition as it aims for an epistemic change in the offender.[15]

I think anger aimed at recognition is a common phenomenon in our daily lives, and not at all restricted to cases where the emotion is felt towards a family member or close friend. Many cases where retributive actions are pursued may actually aim for epistemic changes rather than suffering. Indeed, that anger aims for something akin to recognition, as opposed to retribution, has long been noted (Smith, 1976; Strawson, 1962; Darwall, 2013; Srinivasan, 2018), yet the dominance of the traditional retributive view of anger has not waned. I take retributive and recognitional aims to both be typical of anger. This amounts to a pluralist account of the emotion.[16] Desires for retribution attempt to bend others to one's will, while the desires for recognition attempt to have the agent's moral appraisals shared by the targets of anger. Each desire involves associated satisfaction conditions, suffering and understanding respectively. I take Nussbaum to equate anger to what I have characterized as anger that aims for retribution, while at best underestimating, and at worst outright denying, the existence of anger aimed at recognition.

A pluralist account of anger can deliver on the phenomenological variability of our anger experience, as well as more readily make sense of the experimental evidence

regarding anger's role in collective action and intergroup conflict. These studies showed the In-group and Out-group reasons for the *Inefficacy Claim* not to hold for many cases of anger. These are ones which desires for recognition help make sense of. Anger was observed to motivate actions such as protesting, petitioning, and lobbying, which are communicative actions that typically aim for recognition rather than punishment. In terms of the Out-group Reason, I contend that the dominant group can understand anger as either an appraisal of injustice looking to be shared, or as a wish for payback. Dominant groups are more likely to empathize with the angry group when they perceive anger as involving desires for recognition, making them more likely to support conciliatory policies towards them. When anger is perceived as a desire for retribution the dominant group will be more likely to pursue retaliatory actions against the oppressed group, or withdraw from any engagement with them as anger is perceived as a threat. Although action types don't line up neatly with distinct desires (we can seek recognition through aggressive actions, for example) the role of appropriateness in moderating anger's efficacy in struggles for social justice suggests that epistemic aims of anger are central.[17] Even aggressive anger-triggered actions may be met with empathy when anger is seen as appropriate, as in such cases the targeted group shares the appraisal of those in anger.

I take the moderators highlighted to be important for three main reasons. First, they highlight a key contextual feature, the changeability of the targets of anger, which moderates over which desire – retribution or recognition – is likely to be at play in a token case of anger. Second, the moderators inform the conditions under which anger is effective in struggles for social justice. 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. We saw that perceiving anger as appropriate led the targets of anger to in turn support conciliatory actions towards angry groups. When these conditions are in place then, anger is effective in fights against social injustice, without incurring questions of morality. Lastly, the moderators shed light on why the traditional view of anger has been so prevalent. I turn to this now.

Recall that the empirical work suggested that retributive actions are more prevalent when the target of anger is seen as unchangeable, and that the targets of anger are more likely to retaliate against angry groups when anger is perceived as inappropriate.

This is actually an apt description of the state of affairs in societies structured by oppression. Power imbalances can structure which instances of anger are seen as appropriate, such that the status quo is perpetuated and injustices left unaddressed. This means that the anger of the oppressed will more easily be dismissed as inappropriate due to dominant ideology (Frye, 1983; Spelman, 1989). Relatedly, the angry are less likely to take their targets to be changeable in real life cases of entrenched social injustice, given their lived history of struggle, and will therefore be more likely to act retributively. The empirical work surveyed then seems to suggest that anger is least effective under conditions of severe social injustice, where moderators that favour retributive actions on behalf of the angry group, as well as against them, are deeply engrained features of that society. Does this mean that Nussbaum, and others who endorse the *inefficacy claim*, get things right regarding anger under conditions of oppression? No, we have reason to think that, despite moderators that favour *inefficacy claim* being more prevalent under conditions of social injustice, anger is still an extremely effective way of constructively fighting against social injustice.

For example, although under conditions of social injustice the dominant group might tend to dismiss the anger of the oppressed as inappropriate, there are many cases of dominant group members becoming allies of oppressed groups under conditions of severe oppression (see Brown 2002, for example). From the studies surveyed in section 3 above, we have reason to think that anger is one of the most effective ways of recruiting allies, as anger was seen to recruit more support from out-group members than neutral communications of wrongdoing (Tagar et al., 2011). Furthermore, studies have shown that having even just one individual member of an out-group share the in-group's anger, results in the in-group seeing the out-group as potential allies. This in turn correlates with in-group support for non-retrubitive actions towards the outgroup (see McDonald et al., 2017). This highlights the crucial effect of recruiting allies under conditions of social injustice. Recruiting even one single member of the outgroup seems to impact the perceived changeability of the out-group immensely, and increased changeability was one of the moderators highlighted that favoured anger's constructive effects. This suggests that even amidst widespread dismissal of the anger of the oppressed, securing even a few out-group allies is not only possible, but perhaps most effectively achieved through displays of anger. Individual allies can be sensitive to the epistemic value of in-group anger, and this can lead to changes in the key moderators that favour anger's

efficacy. This suggests that anger has a robustly effective and constructive role to play in struggles against social injustice.

What seems plausible, is that anger is most retributive in 'nothing to lose' scenarios, where attempts at recruiting allies have proved futile, and one's anger has been systematically dismissed as inappropriate. 'Nothing to lose' situations will be ones where the two moderators indicated in the empirical literature – perceptions of appropriateness and perceptions of liability to change – are most clearly operative. This sheds some light on why the traditional view of anger has been so prevalent. It is plausible that anger will have commonly manifested itself as retributive in unjust societal arrangements, where the two moderators highlighted would have been entrenched. This may have led to retribution being viewed as part of anger's nature. It would have been in the interest of those in power to dismiss anger as inappropriate and to perpetuate the view that anger is intrinsically retributive. When anger is perceived as inappropriate, retaliatory actions are sought on behalf of the targets of anger against angry groups. This would further entrench perceptions of the targets of anger as having fixed and uncompromising characters. This, in effect, would 'prove' the traditional retributive construal of anger correct, much to the benefit of those with a vested interest in maintaining the prevailing status quo. Once anger's retributive tendencies are understood as dependent on specific features of the very injustices it seeks to combat, rather than understood as constitutive of anger's nature, the recognitional aims of the emotion can emerge, allowing its efficacy to be uncovered as well as bolstered. A view of anger committed to the *nature claim* and *inefficacy claim*, then, is guilty of reading into the very nature of anger, what on my account are contingent features of anger in specific contexts, particularly 'nothing to lose' scenarios. In so far as Nussbaum captures retributive forms of anger successfully then, she does so by obscuring the social dynamics on which, according to my account, they depend.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that Nussbaum's attack on the political efficacy of anger does not survive empirical scrutiny. Doing so led me to recommend against the traditional construal of anger as constitutively retributive, in favour of a pluralistic account where anger's robust ties to a distinct desire, a desire for recognition, is made central. Is anger that aims for recognition the same as Nussbaum's transition-anger? If it is, then Nussbaum is pushed

not only to count transition-anger as a bonified form of anger, but to grant that non-retributive anger is far more common than her account allows. Anger has emerged as an effective, and morally unproblematic, means of confronting social injustices. The oppressed should not avoid anger. As the traditional retributive view of anger loses hold, the full efficacy and meaning of anger will continue to emerge.

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Notes

[1] The notion of social justice I employ throughout is a thin one. I take social justice to be (non-exhaustively) concerned with generating fair patterns of rights, opportunities, and wealth in a society. Such a conception is intended to capture a fundamental notion of social justice without taking sides on particular theories or forms of justice. I take what I have to say about anger to be at least in principle applicable to whichever theory of justice one might favour.

[2] I make use of an intuitive notion of desire throughout. I take desires to: a) dispose one to act in ways that aim to achieve the desire's aim, and b) to be satisfied when the actual state of affairs in the world matches the desire's aim.

[3] This view is shared by Stoics such as anger's most famous critic Seneca (*On Anger*)

[4] This is actually a departure from the Aristotelian account of anger where for revenge to be enacted the offender must know by whose hand, as well as for what reason, he suffers (*Rhet* 1380b22-25).

[5] I follow Nussbaum (2015; 2016) in using the terms 'payback', 'retribution' and 'revenge' interchangeably.

[6] Adams (1986) and Cogley (2014) take this autobiographical evidence to establish the exact opposite: that anger-motivated action is extremely effective and prevalent amongst leaders of political movements.

[7] Lepoutre (2018) and Srinivasan (2018) discuss the 'counterproductivity objection' and the 'counterproductivity critique' against anger respectively. My target is the weaker claim regarding anger's inefficacy. In targeting the weaker claim, my argument challenges also the stronger claim regarding anger's counterproductivity.

[8] As does Pettigrove (2012).

[9] On anger's value in the psychology of the oppressed see Spelman (1989: 266), hooks (1995: 17), Fanon (2008: 94), Yancy (2008: 847) and Leboeuf (2017). A common theme is that in anger one rejects the self-image imposed by the oppressor, and affirms one's agency. On anger's epistemic value see Frye (1983), Friedman (1986), Jaggar (1989) and Bell (2009). Anger plays a number of epistemic roles. It allows direct apprehension of injustice (often constituting one's only means of apprehension), as well as indirect mapping of oppression through the observation of when and where one's anger is systematically dismissed (Frye, 1983). Additionally, collective scrutiny of shared anger plays roles in the generation of concepts that aid political progress. Independent to anger's psychological and epistemic effects, becoming angry when there is justifying reason to, is thought to itself be intrinsically valuable (see Srinivasan 2018).

[10] Lepoutre (2018) is a recent exception. His argument relies on historical examples of political speeches where mine is informed by recent work in psychology.

[11] In psychology, group-based anger is taken to be anger that is experienced by individuals "as a result of their identification with a group or social category" (Mackie et al., 2000). This understanding of collective or group-based emotions is distinct from, and likely agnostic about, the problem in philosophy of mind as to whether there are such things as ontologically collective emotions (see Krueger, 2015). I remain agnostic about such problems and follow the psychological construal of group-anger throughout.

[12] Anger and instrumental reasoning were measured by asking participants to rate how strongly they agreed with statements like: 'I am furious about tuition rises', 'I am irritated by tuition rises' in the case of anger, and for instrumental reasoning about group efficacy: 'I think that students can stop the introduction of tuition fees', 'I think students have already lost the fight against tuition fees'.

[13] Mediators, in psychology, are variables that speak to how or why certain effects occur. In this case, empathy is a mediator because it can be seen as an intermediary step that explains the effect of anger on outgroup support for constructive actions.

[14] Everyday interpersonal anger and anger in social justice cases do not come neatly apart. First, for the oppressed, anger at social injustice can be their 'everyday'. Additionally, although the objects of anger in cases of social injustice are often social objects, such as groups or institutions, anger at specific individuals,

for reasons pertaining to social injustice (such as sexism and racism) are common. For simplicity of treatment, and to mirror the experimental work, I treat interpersonal anger and anger in cases of social injustice as conceptually distinct. The relevant distinction seems to me not to pertain to whether the object of anger is an individual or not, but to whether the reasons for anger involve group-based harms or not. My point in this section is that anger at individuals, for reasons independent to group membership (what has been called paradigmatic or everyday anger), has much more in common with anger in social injustice cases, such that accounting for anger's differential effects in terms of its objects is not a promising move.

[15] Cogley (2014), Srinivasan (2018) and Lepoutre (2018) have recently discussed anger's recognitional or epistemic aims as well.

[16] This pluralist view is compatible with a number of specific accounts on which I remain agnostic here. For example, anger could be *constitutively* linked to desires for either recognition or retribution. Alternatively, anger could be causally linked to these desires. The latter option leaves open the possibility that anger also bears strong causal links to additional desires, as well as allowing the possibility that a token case of anger can involve both recognitional and retributive desires. I think the causal rather than constitutive account is more plausible but do not argue for it here.

[17] The thought that emotions are appropriate or reason-responsive is widespread in moral philosophy (Skorupski, 2010; Raz, 2011; Scanlon, 2014), feminist philosophy (Frye, 1983; Jaggar,1989; Lorde, 1997; Bell, 2009) and philosophy of emotion (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000; Deonna and Teroni, 2012; Tappolet, 2016). It is therefore common to think of emotions as amenable to normative assessment, such that some emotions are appropriate, or fitting, while others are not. Appropriate emotions are typically those whose objects in some way instantiate the evaluative property in question, fear is justified when the object of your fear is in fact dangerous or poses you a threat, for example. Prudential and moral considerations are thought to be relevant to the normative assessment of emotions as well (it might be inappropriate to laugh during an academic talk, even though your friend's whispered comment was funny), but these considerations are thought of as the 'wrong sort' of reasons in so far as we are concerned with whether the emotion gets things right about the world (see D'Arms and Jacobson 2000).