

# Passionate Speech: On the Uses and Abuses of Anger in Public Debate

ALESSANDRA TANESINI

## Abstract

Anger dominates debates in the public sphere. In this article I argue that there are diverse forms of anger that merit different responses. My focus is especially on two types of anger that I label respectively *arrogant* and *resistant*. The first is the characteristic defensive response of those who unwarrantedly arrogate special privileges for themselves. The second is often a source of insight and a form of moral address. I detail some discursive manifestations of these two types of anger. I show that arrogant anger is responsible for attempts to intimidate and humiliate others with whom one disagrees. Whilst resistant anger can be intimidating, it is also essential in communicating moral demands.

Anger is, for better or worse, an important emotion in politics. Politicians often stoke it in the population when pursuing elections. But anger has also been described by leaders of social justice movements as an important tool in the fight against discrimination. Anger is often just below the surface in politics because it is a natural response to a perception that one (or those with whom one identifies) has been slighted. Hence, to the extent to which politics is concerned with justice, and the reduction of discrimination, it is concerned with phenomena that ordinarily elicit angry reactions. The focus of this paper is the use (and abuse) of anger in political debates and in politics more generally.

We begin to understand the functions of anger in political discourse, if we appreciate that anger is not a mere feeling, but that it is closely associated to moral judgment. In this paper I think of anger as the genus comprising a variety of emotional syndromes, that is clusters of thoughts, feelings, and dispositions to behave. These include anger as a reactive attitude of blaming someone for what they have done; but also rage which is a non-communicative form of anger. My interest here lies primarily in the communicative functions served by the expression of anger.

I argue that this focus on communicative functions gives us a principled way of distinguishing different kinds of anger and of making some progress toward understanding when angry words and actions are morally justified and when instead we should strive to avoid

them. In particular, I discuss two kinds of anger: arrogant and resistant. The first is a defensive form of status anger which is often intended to diminish or push down its targets. The second is a kind of anger that functions as a moral address in the shape of a demand. I treat these two species of anger as akin to speech acts that differ in what they are trying to achieve (perlocutionary aims) and in the kind of act they are (illocutionary force).

This paper consists of five sections. In the first I briefly argue that anger is inevitable in politics and that, furthermore, there are reasons against seeking to suppress its expression in every instance. Since there are also cases when the expression of anger seems bad in itself as well as leading to bad outcomes, we need to develop some criteria for when it is appropriate to use anger in politics. In the rest of the paper I make some progress toward this aim by distinguishing two kinds of anger on the basis of their different communicative functions. In the second section I offer an initial analysis of anger as a genus. I focus on three dimensions of this family of emotions: epistemic, communicative, and motivational. I analyse anger as a type of appraisal, a form of address, and a kind of energy that triggers and sustains action. In the third section I identify the distinctive characteristics of arrogant anger showing that it is a subordinating speech act that functions by humiliating or intimidating its targets. I argue that arrogantly angry speech acts are generally not apt but also not morally justified. In the fourth section I focus on resistant anger as the making of a demand for redress whose perlocutionary aim is the acknowledgment of a wrong and a commitment to do something about it. Resistant anger, provided that it is fitting because it is a response to a genuine wrong, is in many circumstances pro tanto justified since it is the vehicle for making moral claims that could not otherwise be made or at least heard. This leaves us with the problem that its expression, for which there might be some justification could nonetheless be counterproductive. I tackle this problem in the final section where I advocate acceptance of discomfort as a way of discerning arrogant from resistant angry reactions in other people.

## **1. Anger: A Political Emotion**

Anger has often been a weapon in the toolbox of politicians and social leaders. For example, in the UK the successful Leave campaign leading to the referendum over exiting the EU relied on stoking in parts of the British population fear and anger directed at migrants as well as pride in the history of Empire. It is often said that

Remain failed because its campaign relied on facts, while Leave won because it managed to stir strong negative emotions. More recently, anger is the predominant sentiment animating the protests of social movements, like Black Lives Matter, against police brutality. Anger directed at entrenched injustice has been a dominant emotional colour of Afro-American lives for hundreds of years. James Baldwin conveys its all-consuming power when he writes in 'Notes of a Native Son' that '[t]here is not a Negro alive who does not have this rage in his blood—one has the choice, merely, of living with it consciously or surrendering to it. As for me, this fever has recurred in me, and does, and will until the day I die' (1998, p. 70).

These examples are not unique. It is sometimes argued that anger is essential to all politics that seeks to foment an us versus them mentality. Hence, anger would be pivotal to all two party systems but also to all oppositional radical social movements (Ost, 2004). Anger would thus be prevalent when the citizenry is divided or polarised, and when some sections of the population are systematically subjected to grave injustices.

Political disagreements that are marked by anger often exhibit distinctive characteristics. They are passionate and fiery. But they are also described as uncivil. Advocates of each side are not afraid to verbally insult, mock, humiliate and show contempt for one another. These behaviours were as prevalent during religious disputes in early modern Europe as they are today (Bejan, 2017). In order to avoid a descent into violence or even war, philosophers and political theorists in the seventeenth century and today advocate toleration and civility (Locke, 2003; Walzer, 1997).

In the same spirit, there is a long philosophical tradition recommending the regulation or even suppression of anger. Whilst Aristotle thought that anger – in the right measure and against the right target – was virtuous, the Stoics and Seneca wrote at length about the havoc caused by this emotion (Aristotle, 2007; Seneca, 2010). More recently, Nussbaum (2016a; 2016b) and Pettigrove (2012) have argued that we should not give in to anger but seek to cultivate meekness and forgiveness. Pettigrove and Tanaka (2014), for instance, cite empirical evidence showing that anger clouds moral judgment. It promotes a defensive attitude that leads one to perceive as slights or wrongs conduct that is morally acceptable. Anger is also responsible for loss of self-control and for morally unjustifiable aggressive behaviour. For these reasons they conclude that anger is everything considered harmful and therefore best avoided.

In addition, Nussbaum argues that anger is even irrational or self-stultifying because it motivates a desire for revenge that must fail to

right the wrong that elicited it. For example, if I am angry with you because you killed my brother, what I really want is that my brother is still alive. However, if, because I am angry, I lash out and kill your brother in revenge, I fail to satisfy my want. My actions do not bring my brother back (Nussbaum, 2016a).

In direct contrast to this viewpoint, there is a long standing tradition of thought that is prevalent especially in the Afro-American tradition about the rightfulness of anger and its expression. Hence, Lorde (1996) praises trained anger for its ability to give one clarity of vision. Lugones (2003) describes some forms of anger as resistant. This kind of anger is in her opinion important to give one the courage to stand up against oppression, to build coalitions with other disempowered individuals, and to develop a sophisticated understanding of one's own condition. Anger reverberates in the speeches of Malcolm X but it also makes an appearance in addresses by Martin Luther King. Anger, so understood, is necessary if one is to retain dignity and self-respect in the face of systemic oppression (Cherry, 2019).<sup>1</sup>

While these two viewpoints on anger make diametrically opposed recommendations, they also both appear to be at least partially correct. Anger is on some occasions ill-fitting and morally unjustified. On other occasions it is instead a useful and necessary means in the pursuit of justice. In this paper I aim to make some progress toward formulating a principled distinction between these two types of case by way of isolating characteristics of two varieties of anger: arrogant anger and resistant anger.

## **2. What is Anger**

Anger is an emotional syndrome that partly overlaps with rage, moral indignation, resentment and hard feelings. All of these have at times been called 'anger'. In what follows, I do not try to demarcate anger from these other emotions. Instead, I treat anger as a genus of which all of these emotions are species. Each is a syndrome; that is, it is a complex cluster of thoughts, feelings, desires, and behavioural dispositions which are usually but not necessarily associated. I restrict my attention here to so-called agential forms of anger. This is the kind of anger that is directed at other agents, rather than at things or creatures that do not have the capacities required to function as members of the moral community.

<sup>1</sup> Non-Western traditions also tend to be ambivalent about the value of anger. On Buddhism see McRae (2017).

Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* defines anger as a response to a perceived intentional slight inflicted on oneself or those close to one that is accompanied by a desire to get even (2007, 1378a, 30–33). Aristotle's definition is best suited to a special kind of anger that Nussbaum (2016a) has aptly labelled 'status anger'. It would be a response to a perception that another agent has slighted one by behaving in ways that do not befit one's social status. Hence, anger would be the response to being treated as occupying a lower social rank than one takes oneself to have. In addition, anger would trigger a revenge response that purports to re-establish social status by lowering the rank of the offender.

Aristotle's definition is too narrow in at least two dimensions. First, anger does not always concern social status. Second, it is not always associated with desires for revenge. For example, it is not uncommon for people to be angry with their friends when these have been inconsiderate. This anger often has nothing to do with social status. It might concern instead a breach of trust or the friend's unwillingness to sacrifice something for our benefit. It is also frequently associated with a demand of an apology, rather than a desire for revenge.

This initial characterisation of anger as a response to a perceived slight shows that anger, like some other emotions such as guilt, has both a focus and a target. The focus is the slight that triggers the angry response. The target is the person at whom the angry response is directed. In the case of anger this is the person responsible for the slight. In this regard anger differs from contempt, which is a related negative emotion. The latter is a global emotion since its focus is the agent that it targets, rather than, as is the case with anger, a specific feature or property of a person (Bell, 2013). This is why a person can be angry with another for something she did whilst also appreciating other aspects of the same person. When someone holds another in contempt, she cannot see anything admirable in the person she thinks is beyond the pale.

There are at least three dimensions to anger: epistemic, communicative and motivational. The first concerns anger as a kind of moral appraisal. The second pertains to anger as a form of moral address. The third applies to anger as a motivational force. I briefly explain each of these three aspects of anger in the remainder of this section.

Anger, like other emotions, is an evaluation. The person who is angry at the policeman who has stopped and handcuffed her without apparent cause evaluates the action of the enforcement agent to be wrongful. Hence, anger is a way of classifying behaviour as failing to meet moral standards and showing lack of good will (Shoemaker, 2015). Since it is an evaluation, anger is subject to the

epistemic standard of propriety of correctness. Regardless of whether getting angry is the right thing to do in a given situation, anger can be accurate or not. It is accurate, apt or fitting when it presents as anger-some actions that in actuality merit an angry response (D'Arms and Jacobsen, 2000). Thus, to be fitting or apt anger must focus on real slights. In addition, it must also be proportionate to the severity of the slight. Anger that is excessive or insufficient ill-fits the slight that it targets. These considerations support the view that anger can be an epistemically rational response. That is, one can supply evidence for the shape and size of one's anger that shows it to be an accurate presentation of how things are in the world.

Anger is no mere rating of an action as a slight. It is also a blame response and a way of holding the perpetrator accountable (Shoemaker, 2015). This idea is often expressed by noting that anger, like resentment and indignation, is a reactive attitude (Strawson, 2008). It is a response that is morally appropriate only when it is directed toward other moral agents. It is a responsibility response that consists in calling people to accounts by blaming them. There are various theories about the nature of blaming responses since these have been construed as akin to a punishment or a sanction (Smart, 1961), or a form of moral protest (Smith, 2013). Yet, another Strawsonian approach takes blame to serve a communicative function (Macnamara, 2015).<sup>2</sup> So understood, anger would be a form of moral address. One way of fleshing out this thought is that anger, but also other related emotional attitudes like resentment, are quasi speech acts because they are demands (Darwall, 2006, pp. 3, 120).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, these reactive attitudes are orders and as such they presuppose that the speakers have the authority to impose obligations onto the addressees. Darwall thinks of these prescriptions as second-personal because, if felicitous, they are instituted merely on the basis of the speakers' authority to impose new burdens on the addressees.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that all anger is expressed. The point is that communication is what anger is for regardless as to whether in each particular instance it succeeds in communicating (Macnamara, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Macnamara (2013) argues that blame is a kind of moral address which does not take the form of a demand because we can blame people without taking ourselves to have the authority required to make a demand. I found her examples unconvincing but I lack the space to address the issue here.

<sup>4</sup> Obligations that are instituted by promises are also second personal. If I promise to you that I will come for dinner. I acquire a new responsibility toward you specifically and solely in virtue of my ability and willingness to acquire it.

This model of reactive attitudes as blaming responses that implicitly make demands on the targets of the attitudes provides a highly plausible account of the function of angry speech. Anger, unlike contempt, is an approach emotion since it moves the angry person to engage with the targets of anger rather than to avoid or shun them. Anger usually finds a verbal expression. Even when anger results in violence, it is rarely silent. Angry people usually shout or hurl abuses. These features of anger indicate that angry people want to make themselves heard. In short, anger is an attempt at communication of some sort.

It is also plausible to claim that the communication takes the form of a moral address. To see this consider what it takes for anger to be quelled. Sometimes anger stops, not because the angry person is exhausted or resigned, but because the reasons one had to be angry no longer hold. We can make sense of this idea if anger is not primarily an appraisal of a past wrong, but a form of address such as a request or a demand which stops once it has been satisfied. If anger is a mere appraisal of the existence of a past slight, if that evaluation is fitting, there is nothing after the event that can change its propriety. Thus, there would be no reason not to be angry forever (cf., Callard, 2017).<sup>5</sup> However, if anger is a form of moral address, once that address has received the response it sought, the addressee has a reason to stop being angry.<sup>6</sup>

In my view the address has the illocutionary force of an order, the issuing of a demand. That is, angry verbal or silent conduct is an exercitive quasi speech act that consists in an exercise of power to institute new obligations, prohibitions or permissions (Austin, 1976). The demand made in expressing anger is that the target of the angry response endorses the content presented in the angry expression, and thereby acknowledges a fault. This content is the moral evaluation of the situation as angersome. An example might help to clarify these points. Imagine a Black Lives Matter protester reacts angrily at being hit by a policeman with a baton. The protester's anger is a moral appraisal of the situation which is experienced as an assault by the policemen. The anger presents this assault as being wrong and responds to it by blaming the policeman. That is,

<sup>5</sup> In reality the matter is more complex as indicated by the ingenious solution proposed in Na'aman (2019).

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that not all kinds of anger are a form of moral address. Rage, for instance, is often uncommunicative. It can for example be used to scare people away (Malatino, 2019). I return to this point in section 4 below.

the protester in being angry presents or makes manifest the following content: Your (the policeman's) hitting me with a baton has wronged me. This is the locutionary content of the angry response. Its illocutionary force is a demand that the addressee acknowledges his fault by coming to share the viewpoint of the speaker and that the addressee does so at least partly because the speaker demands it. That is, the protester orders that the policeman endorses the content: My hitting you with a baton has wronged you. This order is only fully successful when the policeman endorses that content in part as a recognition of the authority of the protester to issue this demand, which is to say, to subordinate the addressee's will to his own.<sup>7</sup>

I hasten to add that mere acknowledgement of the fault in the form of a sincere expression of guilt is usually insufficient to satisfy the person who is angry. The phenomenon of so-called white guilt is a case in point. Liberal white guilt does not cause anger to stop. Instead, it reinforces it. One of the reasons for this reaction is that the white person who reacts with guilt to white privilege is more concerned with her own moral standing than with social injustice. Her focus is on seeking forgiveness for herself rather than ending the oppression that provoked black people's anger. Hence, the white person has not come to share the angry person's moral appraisal of the situation because she perceives the damage done to her moral standing by the wrong she has committed to be more pressing than addressing the wrong itself. Thus, what the angry person seeks is a genuine acknowledgment of a fault. Feeling guilty is not sufficient and may not even be necessary. Instead, often an active engagement with a process of repair is required (Walker, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

I have explained above that fittingness is the norm of propriety of anger as a moral appraisal. Anger is apt or fitting only if the locutionary content of the angry expression is true.<sup>9</sup> Thus, its aptness is an epistemic reason to be angry. However, even when anger is fitting there might be reasons of another kind not to be angry. For example, being angry might be the morally wrong thing to do in

<sup>7</sup> In this regard anger is different from some other emotions like fear. Fear is also communicative in the sense that it usually elicits an uptake since witnessing another person's fear often causes one to become afraid. The communicative structure of anger is different since its uptake involves a recognition of the intentions of the angry person. This is why it is appropriate to think of anger as a quasi speech act.

<sup>8</sup> This is why as Cherry (2019) observes anger is compatible with love.

<sup>9</sup> As noted above, it also needs to be proportional to the seriousness of the slight or wrong.



the circumstances. It might be prudentially wrong or risky. Thus, there are also practical reasons to be or not be angry. Several critics of anger focus on this latter kind of reason to recommend that one refrains from anger. They note for example that anger is often met with anger. Hence, expressions of anger even when the anger is apt might prove politically counterproductive.<sup>10</sup>

This distinction between two kinds of reasons (epistemic and practical) to be angry is crucial to ascertain angry contributions to debate that are justified from those that constitute an abuse. I address these points in sections three and four below. For now, I restrict myself to two observations. First, anger that is not apt is never all things considered justified. Anger is not fitting when it presents as a slight something that is not a slight. It is also not apt if it is not proportional to the seriousness of the slight. This second requirement of aptness raises some delicate questions about the nature of the slighting conduct since this might have negligible consequences but have acquired a profound symbolic meaning. Thus, the person who reacts with extreme anger to a small aggression or insult might exhibit a fitting response because the size of the wrong inflicted is not determined by the gravity of the consequences of the conduct.

Second, one must tread carefully when reasoning that one should not be angry because one's anger is likely to be counterproductive. Considerations of political expediency are important and they might in some circumstances legitimately determine one's conduct. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that often apt anger backfires only because those who are responsible for, or complicit with, injustices are not prepared to acknowledge their role in wrongdoing. Unless this unwillingness to face injustice is tackled, it is hard to see how progress can be made in addressing systemic social injustice. Hence, even when one can predict that apt anger is going to be counterproductive in the short term, there might be a reason to express it nonetheless in order to shift the burden of emotional distress on those responsible for wrongdoing (Archer and Mills, 2019).

I have detailed the epistemic and communicative dimensions of anger. I now briefly turn to its motivating force. The fact that anger can help in the fight against injustice by making one fearless and perseverant is a recurring theme in the discussion of anger found in the writings of people of colour. Both Lorde (1996) and

<sup>10</sup> This conflict between different kinds of reasons is especially prevalent when one is subjected to systemic oppression. Srinivasan (2018) argues that having to manage it is a further unfair burden imposed on those who are subordinated.

Lugones (2003) remark that anger gives one courage to protest despite the risk of being subject to brutality, insults or in some cases incarceration. They also note that it gives one the strength to continue the fight for justice even when the prospects of success are limited. These motivational qualities of anger are, however, a double-edge sword. Continuous anger, expressed or suppressed, is damaging to mental and physical health. This is why Tesson (2005) has identified an angry disposition as a character trait that is helpful for those who engage in liberatory struggles, whilst also being a burden because of the toll it exacts on their mental and physical well-being.

In this section I have described expressions of anger as communicative acts that have the force of a demand that its targets share the moral outlook of the angry person and thus acknowledge the fault to which the anger would be an apt response. In the next section I turn to one species of anger that is often manifested in conduct designed to intimidate and humiliate people in order to diminish their social status. This anger is expressed in exercitives that seek to subordinate other people. I call it: arrogant anger.

### **3. Arrogant anger**

There is a kind of anger that is characteristic of some social groups whose economic prospects and social standing are gradually diminishing. In the US and the UK this is the anger characteristic of white working class males whose working conditions have worsened and whose social standing as superior to people of colour and women of all races is being progressively eroded. There is no doubt that these people are being harmed and are genuinely suffering as a result. They struggle to make ends meet because of increasing levels of social inequality. However, these individuals have also incorporated a social identity that makes their sense of self-worth dependent on being superior to members of some other groups.<sup>11</sup>

This thought is perceptively captured by Baldwin when he writes that one of the reasons why black people are treated so cruelly in the United States is because social life is marked by a desire to ascend rung by rung in social and economic status. This conception of aspiration requires that some group functions as a marker of the lowest

<sup>11</sup> Of course, this situation ultimately benefits those whose inherited wealth and status protects them from the risk of falling down the social ladder.

rank below which one may not fall without experiencing chaos and loss of self-esteem. In this context, 'the Negro tells us where the bottom is: *because he is there*, and *where* he is, beneath us, we know where the limits are and how far we must not fall. We must not fall beneath him' (Baldwin, 1998, pp. 218–19). It is this fear that is at the root of some white male anger that manifests itself as a form of aggrieved entitlement that is directed at women of all races and at people of colour. Particularly, those white men whose dignity is being harmed by extreme inequality struggle to preserve self-esteem by making sure that as they descend the rungs of society they keep themselves above some others whom in their eyes mark the places that must remain below them.<sup>12</sup>

I call this kind of anger 'arrogant' because it displays the characteristics of *superbia* understood as the tendency to 'do others down' in order to elevate oneself (Alighieri, 1994, Purg., XVII vv 115–117). Arrogance so conceived would be characteristic of those individuals whose sense of self-worth is at least partially dependent on thinking of themselves as superior to other social groups which one ranks as inferior. In describing this kind of anger as arrogant, I do not wish to imply that all those who occasionally exhibit this emotion are best thought of as being arrogant people. It is without doubt possible to behave in arrogant ways in some circumstances and toward some people even when the label arrogant is not an apt description of one's character. That said, people who are arrogant jerks often exhibit precisely this kind of arrogant entitled behaviour (James, 2014).

Given this initial characterisation, arrogant anger is best classified as a kind of status anger. This is anger that is a response to a perceived slight about one's social rank and is designed to reassert that status. Aristotle's original definition of anger cited above seems to have been formulated with precisely this kind of anger in mind. Status anger is a natural response to conduct that does not befit what one is entitled to given one's social standing. For instance, a woman

<sup>12</sup> For this reason I partly disagree with Kimmel's (2013) account of working class male rage as being misdirected toward minorities and women rather than corporations. White male blue collar anger is misdirected in the sense that corporations are the cause of the economic deprivation that is the main root of this rage. But it is also a kind of anger that is designed to assert one's social superiority. As such it is directed at the right targets, even though the anger itself is not fitting. I hasten to add that this anger is often stoked and manipulated by powerful groups whose interests are best served by fomenting discord among under privileged social groups.

who is asked by a participant to a meeting that she is about to chair that she make him a cup of coffee might feel both angry and resentful at the treatment. The anger is a reaction to the perception that one is treated as staff whose role is to service the meeting rather than to chair it. A characteristic feature of status anger is that it is often manifested in actions that are designed to re-establish one's social position by lowering the rank of the perceived offender. Thus, the chairwoman might decide to serve this participant coffee in front of other attendees before declaring the meeting open in order to embarrass the person who has simply presumed that she was the note taker. This behaviour is clearly designed to extract revenge by putting the prejudiced individual in his place.<sup>13</sup>

Examples such as this one illustrate two important features of status anger. Firstly, this form of anger can be fitting. It is often exhibited by subordinated individuals who assert their entitlements by putting down people who, through their conduct, have unfairly ranked them as inferior. Secondly, this kind of anger can be an effective response. To see why, one must first note that social ranking is often partly determined by the way in which people treat each other. In the absence of a formally sanctioned hierarchy, the group leader is simply the person that others treat as a leader and who behaves accordingly. In addition, even when a leader has been pre-selected this person's ability to occupy the role is severely curtailed when other members of the group do not recognise his or her authority. Status anger is a response to a perceived slight that ranks one as occupying a lower social position than one thinks one merits. As such the conduct that elicited the anger always at least threatens to actually reduce one's status. The angry response can effectively counteract the perceived slight because it can diminish the social rank of the person whose actions provoked the anger. In this manner, status anger has the power to correct for the perceived wrong that elicited it.

Arrogant anger is a kind of status anger that pertains to individuals who regularly exhibit anger directed toward members of some other social group partly because of their group membership and designed to rank them as inferior as a means of preserving the angry person's alleged social superiority.<sup>14</sup> The account of anger as a quasi-speech act elaborated above helps to supply a fuller characterisation of the structure of arrogant anger. The locutionary contents of these expression of anger are that the targets of the anger have slighted the angry

<sup>13</sup> The notion of status anger is discussed by Nussbaum (2016).

<sup>14</sup> I only have in mind social groups of people who share some identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation.

person. The target might be an individual, a collective or a whole social group. What is crucial is that the target's behaviour is interpreted as being a slight because of the angry person's perception of the targeted social group. For example, a plain clothed white policeman might experience a black woman's refusal to leave her car not as an expression of fear but as uppity or confrontational. He perceives her behaviour as a slight because he construes it as a challenge to his authority as a representative of law enforcement. The same policeman might instead generally interpret the same kind of refusal as expression of fear when it is expressed by an older clearly affluent white woman. Similarly, he might accept a refusal phrased as a demand that he makes himself known when it is issued by a self-assured white male driver wearing a sharp suit. The policeman's angry response is an example of arrogant anger if it is characteristic of his treatment of black women in general, and if he typically reacts in different ways in response to the same or similar behaviour when exhibited by white women or expensively dressed white men.

The illocutionary force of arrogantly angry responses is twofold. They are 'verdictives' similar to the verdict issued by juries because they are presented as being based on matters of fact. As such, angry responses implicitly rank members of the target's social group as inferior to the group of the arrogantly angry individual. This is because the angry response implicitly classifies the behaviour which elicits it as improper due to the social status of the target. The policeman of the example is not offended by the white man's request that he shows his police ID, because the policeman implicitly thinks of the other as an equal rather than as an inferior whose behaviour needs to be deferential. By responding angrily to the same demand if issued by a black woman, the policeman judges her to be ranked as inferior to him.

Arrogantly angry responses are also exercises of power (exercitives) since they subordinate others by being demands that their targets implicitly acknowledge their inferior status. In being angry, the angry person demands that the target shares his appraisal of the situation. Thus, the target is ordered both to acknowledge the angry person's authority to give him orders, and to acknowledge the angry person's ranking of her (as the target of the anger) as inferior to him in virtue of some of her social identities. In this manner arrogant anger is a way of legitimising subordination.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the perlocutionary goal of arrogant anger is to reduce the status of its targets,

<sup>15</sup> For the idea that some speech acts subordinate by being verdictives and exercitives see (Langton, 1993).

something it achieves in several ways including by subordinating them.

This characterisation of arrogant anger presupposes that it is a kind of status anger that is normally not apt. It is not fitting because it appraises as a slight conduct that is not in reality morally bad. The behaviour only seems insulting from the perspective of someone who wrongly thinks that people belonging to his social group are more worthy than members of some other social groups and thus deserving of special entitlement. Given the plausible assumption that all human beings possess dignity in equal measure, what is appraised as a slight in arrogant anger is often no such thing. Rather it might be conduct that treats one as an equal rather than one's superior or behaviour that resists illegitimate arrogation of entitlements on the part of the arrogantly angry individual. Arrogant anger, however, is not unfitting because it is a kind of status anger. Some of the examples above show that status anger can be apt. Individuals occupy different roles in society. Some have positions of legitimate authority over others. As such they are entitled to expect behaviour that befits their status. Arrogant anger is different. It presupposes inequalities of status among social groups such as races or genders. It is not fitting because there are no differences in worth or dignity among human beings.

Arrogant anger is at the root of several behaviours that are frequently observed when people debate with others with whom they disagree on both factual and normative matters (Tanesini, 2018). What I have in mind here are expressions of intolerance to criticism. There are reasons to believe that those who are prone to arrogant anger are especially unreceptive to taking criticism seriously. I have argued elsewhere (2016) that when speakers use assertions to tell something to an audience, they undertake commitments including, typically, a commitment to answer proper criticisms should these arise. It is a characteristic feature of people who behave in superior ways that they arrogate for themselves the authority not to be answerable to others for their claims.

I have compared this attitude to an arrogation of the special authoritativeness that is said by Catholics to pertain to *ex-cathedra* pronouncements by the Pope. These are meant to be akin to verdicts since they are said to be based on the facts but are not open to challenge by dissenting human beings. If this is right, individuals prone to arrogant anger take their assertions to have a special authority that those made by members of some other social groups are said to lack. It is because they implicitly take themselves not to be open to being challenged in debates by those whom they rank as inferior, that

people who are prone to arrogant anger perceive these challenges as slights. These criticisms are interpreted as insults because they constitute failures to acknowledge the alleged entitlements arrogated by the speaker. This is why ordinary expressions of dissent elicit angry reactions in those who are prone to arrogant anger. These angry responses have usually one of two perlocutionary aims: humiliation and intimidation.

Manifestations of arrogant anger can humiliate their targets because as I indicated above this kind of anger is a subordinating speech act whose illocutionary force is to rank people as subordinate and to exercise authority to legitimise this ranking. In debates arrogantly angry interventions can lead to open mocking, eye rolling and expressions of incredulity at the stupidity of one's opponent in debate. They can also promote feigning a failure of understanding or adopting an attitude of condescension. Some of these behaviours are not themselves example of anger but they are among the aggressive consequences of an attitude of arrogantly angry intolerance of dissent.

Anger also often intimidates. This feature of anger is typically not a consequence of its communicative dimension. Anger as a syndrome frequently includes hot and aggressive feelings. These are especially dominant when anger is, like rage, uncommunicative. This kind of anger does not seek redress because instead it functions to push away its targets by threatening or scaring them. The intimidatory function of anger is not the sole preserve of arrogant anger, but it is often also present in the anger of members of subordinated groups, especially when they fear for their own physical integrity (Malatino, 2019). However, it is also an efficient weapon in the hands of those whose anger functions to push other people down so that they can emerge victorious. For example, intimidation, when successful, prompts other people to self-silence in order to avoid facing the wrath of the arrogant person. In this way, anger pre-empted the risk that one might be asked difficult questions when debating matters with opponents. In addition, intimidation also fosters in its targets a tendency to fake agreement to avoid the unpleasantness of aggression. As a result the claims made by those who exhibit a tendency to arrogant anger might seem to third parties to enjoy wider support than they in fact do. It is also possible that the appearance of agreement is taken as evidence of agreement by those who have a tendency to arrogant anger. In support of this hypothesis there is evidence that arrogant individuals tend to overestimate the extent to which others agree with their views (McGregor, Nail, Marigold and Kang, 2005).

The considerations raised in this section indicate that there are no good reasons to be arrogantly angry. Arrogant anger is a false appraisal of the situation. Therefore, it is a kind of epistemic mistake. In addition, it results in behaviours which, because they suppress criticism and disagreement, diminish access to information that would improve the epistemic quality of one's viewpoint. Arrogant anger is also manifested in morally reprehensible conduct such as acts of intimidation and humiliation. These are in most circumstances morally unacceptable. In short, there are both epistemic and moral reasons not to be angry, if one's anger is arrogant.

#### **4. Resistant anger**

There are also circumstances in which some people have plenty of reasons to be angry. When these reasons are present, it would seem that oftentimes anger is not merely permissible but desirable as an instrument in the fight for social justice and as a pre-requisite of self-respect. There is a well-established tradition, prevalent especially in Afro-American thought, that portrays anger along these lines both as a constant companion and as a tool in the struggle for liberation (Baldwin, 1998; Cherry, 2019; Lorde, 1996; Lugones, 2003). I borrow from Lugones (2003) the label 'resistant' to identify anger of this sort.

In what follows I detail some features of two kinds of resistant anger: communicative and non-communicative. It is, however, important to note first of all that anger does not come neatly packaged in distinct kinds. Some of the examples I provided above of arrogant anger included people who were also at the same time angry in other ways about different targets. The white collar worker who is angry at migrants because they take jobs that he thinks they should not be allowed to compete for is often also angry for different reasons with politicians who have little regard for his situation. Alternatively, a black person might direct some of her anger at another black person whom she sees as embodying the negative stereotypes attributed to racialised subjects. In short, people who suffer systematically from harm are angry often, and in different ways.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes their anger is arrogant and sometimes it is not.

Resistant anger is anger as a response to a perceived slight inflicted upon oneself or someone with whom one identifies because of

<sup>16</sup> On the risks of misdirected anger see also hooks (1995) as well as Lorde (1996).



membership in a stigmatised social group. Thus, resistant anger is anger in response to a perceived slight that is racist, misogynist, ageist, homophobic or so forth. So characterised, resistant anger is anger in response to a specific kind of slight that involves the ranking of some social group as inferior to others. There are thus different kinds of resistant anger. Some are examples of status anger. For instance, when a woman due to chair a meeting becomes angry when she is asked to serve the coffee, her anger is a response to a perceived slight that consists in the presumption that because she is a woman she cannot occupy the authoritative role of chair. But resistant anger need not concern diminutions of an individual's social status because of prejudice about that individual's social identity. The anger manifested by members of the Black Lives Matter movement is an example of resistant anger at racist injustice that is not particularly focused on matters of social status. Both these examples illustrate that resistant anger can be communicative.

Communicative anger, as explained in section two above, is a form of moral address. It is an exercitive speech act that demands of the targets of the anger that they share the angry person's moral appraisal of the circumstances and acknowledge that person's authority to issue this demand. Both arrogant and resistant anger are communicative as they constitute a form of engagement with the targets of the anger expecting them to acknowledge their fault and the other 'authoritativeness'. Because communicative anger is a form of moral address its presence is compatible with seeking to dialogue with those toward whom one's anger is addressed. This kind of anger when apt could, if appropriately received, be a stimulus to a process of addressing injustice and repairing damaged civic relationships.

Often, however, resistant anger is not communicative. Lugones (2003) identifies this kind of emotional response when she notes that sometimes those who are angry no longer care to be understood by, or communicate with, the targets of their anger. Rage is the best label for this emotion. It has found even fewer defenders than anger. Anger serves a purpose since it might succeed in moving those who are responsible for injustices to change their behaviours. Rage, since it fails to engage communicatively with them, would seem destined to be ineffective since it is usually completely unintelligible to those whose actions have caused it. Yet, as Lugones also points out, rage can be a source of information for those who witness it. Observing another's rage directed at a third party might alert one to the possibility that that person's emotion is a response to a grave harm. Hence, rage can indicate even when it does not communicate. As such, and especially when one can sympathise with the enraged

person, even rage can be a tool of coalition building and a means to deepen one's understanding of injustice.

This characterisation of resistant anger and rage shows that these can be apt or fitting moral appraisals. Fitting moral emotions are sources of insight since they are correct presentations of the moral features of situations. As such resistant anger and rage can be a source of knowledge. These emotions are epistemically valuable since without them one might not have attended to the morally relevant aspects of the situation and thus would not have been able to understand that, for instance, some person's action is morally problematic (Lepoutre, 2018). In addition, when the conceptual resources required to understand the nature of some slight or wrong are not widely shared, resistant anger can alert one that something is not quite right. In so far as anger functions as a warning it can instigate reflection and inquiry aimed at making sense of one's experiences. Hence, provided anger is apt, there are epistemic reasons to be angry.

There are also practical reasons, based on the motivational force of anger, to be resistantly angry. When injustice is systemic, widespread and entrenched, as racism and misogyny undoubtedly are, it takes a lot of courage and perseverance to continue struggling against these injustices. Whilst in principle it might be possible for a human being to have these character strengths without the impetus that anger provides, in reality for ordinary humans it is likely to be the case that burning anger at the sight of repeated injustice supplies the necessary motivational stimulus not to give up because of exhaustion and despair (Tessman, 2005). Doreen Lawrence, for example, noted how it was her anger directed at the killers, but also at the police, that kept her going in the fight to get justice for her murdered son.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, at least when anger is communicative, this emotion constitutes a way of claiming moral authority for oneself. That is, it is a way of asserting one's entitlement to make moral demands upon others. In so far as the ability to issue such demands is an essential component of human agency, resistant anger in the face of systemic injustice can be a way of asserting one's self-worth and thus a manifestation of self-respect. As such, apt resistant anger, at least, is intrinsically morally valuable (Srinivasan, 2018). For this reason also, there are good moral reasons to be resistantly angry.

Resistant anger is an important tool to combat the destructive effects of arrogant anger on debates. Because resistant anger is an

<sup>17</sup> As reported by the Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/feb/14/race.world>

instrument by which to assert one's moral authority, it is a means to communicate that one will not cower in the face of speech acts designed to mock or humiliate one. In addition, because anger makes one fearless, it gives one the ability to assert one's position when confronted with acts of intimidation. Hence, resistant anger is especially helpful as a way of counteracting those abuses of power that characterise the deployment of arrogant anger in debates.

To summarise, there are plenty of reasons to be resistantly angry and even raging. Resistant anger is a source of knowledge that can be communicated in debate, if interlocutors are willing to listen. It is a way of exercising moral agency by asserting one's authority and issuing moral demands that others acknowledge their faults. It is a way of building coalitions and fortifying one's character in the face of attempts to intimidate and humiliate one. Yet, these are reasons to be resistantly angry that should weighed up against all other considerations. One may grant these reasons and claim that they count for naught since anger is always strategically counterproductive. Anger would achieve nothing because those targeted by anger always react to anger with anger. Thus, although both sides wish to communicate to the other by means of anger, neither is listening and so no progress is ever made.

### 5. How to respond to anger

The last section raised the possibility that regardless of the existence of epistemic and practical reasons to be on occasion angry, ultimately anger is counterproductive since it does not make one's opponents want to listen to one's grievance. For this reason, one might conclude that even if anger is understandable, it is best avoided when one is trying to debate one's political adversaries. However, whilst there is no doubt that oftentimes it is strategically prudent to suppress one's anger when debating, it is important to note that people can control their anger. Hence, the burden of control should be fairly distributed. Especially in those cases where their anger is apt, people should not also have to shoulder the responsibility for regulating their emotions (Archer and Mills, 2019; Liebow and Glazer, 2019).

I conclude this section with a couple of recommendations on how to relate to others' anger if one is to behave in a manner that promotes justice rather than exacerbates injustice.<sup>18</sup> It is tempting to be quick

<sup>18</sup> These techniques are essentially designed to avoid immediately responding with anger to others' anger.

to judge other people's anger, to recommend that if they have a just cause, they should put their points across calmly and politely. It is easier, one may add, to hear a message when this is explained in an even tone. Yet, even though it is sometimes appropriate to criticise others for their anger, one must remain alert to the possibility that one's attitude is one of tone policing that silences some who might have been wronged (Berenstain, 2019; Jamieson, Volinsky, Weitz and Kenski, 2018). Thus, long before DiAngelo (2011) labelled the phenomenon 'white fragility', Lorde (1996) notes, in response to a white woman who asks her to mute her anger so that her addressee can hear the message, that she appears to think that her tone is a bigger problem than the injustice she highlights in her message (Bailey, 2018). Tone policing, and the calls for civility that accompany it, have little to recommend for themselves.

Since it is really hard when faced with others' anger directed at oneself to ascertain immediately whether their anger is apt, arrogant or resistant, it is essential that we train ourselves to dwell in our discomfort, rather than lash out in defence (Applebaum, 2017). If one avoids responding quickly and defensively to anger with anger, one can create the space to reflect and listen so that to have a better chance to understand whether the anger is fitting. Broadly speaking two strategies recommend themselves for dealing with the distress caused by being the recipient of others' anger. The first is a technique known as self-affirmation which consists in affirming the self by reflecting on the values that one cares most deeply about (McQueen and Klein, 2006). Self-affirmation has been shown to reduce defensiveness (Sherman and Cohen, 2006). It is also thought to mitigate arrogant behaviour (Haddock and Gebauer, 2011). The technique could be deployed when one is about to enter a situation where one expects to experience distress in response to others' anger. This technique is also useful to mitigate arrogant anger because this kind of anger is a defensive response to protect self-esteem.

The second technique is emotional self-regulation. It consists in the adoption of techniques designed to reduce emotional responses by consciously regulating one's cognitive processing. It could involve shifting attention away from one's own feelings to those of the other person whose actions have triggered the emotion. One might try to reappraise the situation by putting the stimulus of the emotion in a broader perspective so as to understand the causes of the behaviour. Finally one might simply try to suppress showing one's emotional response to the distress one is experiencing (Archer and Mills, 2019). In this manner one can put oneself in a mindset where one refrains from responding immediately to other people's

anger in order to listen to what they are saying and to understand whether they have reasons to be angry.

To conclude, we should avoid adopting a blanket approach to anger. Some anger is best thought as arrogant. Anger of this kind is to be avoided because it is not fitting and is the likely cause of morally reprehensible debating behaviour. But anger can also be valuable when it is resistant. Anger of this second sort is an important source of knowledge and an important means to assert one's moral authority. Whilst it is true that even resistant anger is often met with anger and thus leads to a stalemate, the onus is on the targets of anger to be alert to the fact that the anger they face might be apt and justified. They can do this by regulating their emotions and by affirming the self through reflecting on the value of what they value.

Cardiff University  
[Tanesini@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Tanesini@cardiff.ac.uk)

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