

A Defense of Angry Blame

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Philosophy

August 31, 2019

Nashville, Tennessee

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To Nancy Williams, who helped me discover a love for philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the support of many friends—both inside and outside of the academy—it would have been very hard to write this dissertation. Accordingly, it seems fitting to thank these individuals first. Shannon Fyfe, Eric Ritter, and Sarah Gorman—all members of my graduate cohort—were among the first friends that I made at Vanderbilt University, and our comradery was essential to my growth as an academic and a philosopher. Sarah, in particular, has kept me grounded with her generosity, kindness, and willingness to listen. She remains my most steadfast supporter, and I feel very lucky to have her friendship. Alyssa Lowery has been an invaluable interlocutor in my writing life, and I’m grateful to her for lending me a sense of perspective—on philosophical issues and on life more generally. Hannah Noori, although she lived in Austin during the actual drafting of this dissertation, helped me get through the first three years of my PhD program with her wonderful sense of humor, optimism, and fresh insight on philosophical issues that I am still thinking about to this day. I am thankful to Meredith Cox for being there for me during the hardest parts of graduate school and the dissertation writing process—she made it possible for me to keep going even when things felt impossible. In the final stretch of the dissertation, Lauren Barter—one of the most caring human beings on this planet—helped me make it to the finish line by being her usual supportive self and just hanging out with me (e.g., eating takeout and watching *Vanderpump Rules*).

Although they could not be here on a daily basis, my immediate family—my parents, Nancy and Mike, and my sister, Jenny—have played a formative role in my development as a philosopher. My earliest philosophical discussions were with them, and they taught me to approach life with a critical eye. At the dinner table, my parents modeled argumentation for me and encouraged me to take ownership of my own views. These early skills and experiences

prepared me for a lifelong love of learning (and arguing). I am thankful for their love and support over the twenty years of school that brought me to this final product.

My partner, Maxcy, deserves her own paragraph. For many PhD candidates, if not most, completing the dissertation is a psychologically demanding process. I was able to get through it thanks, in no small part, to Maxcy. When I did not believe in myself or my abilities, she did—her unwavering support, kind reassurance, and relentless confidence in me has helped me keep a positive attitude about the dissertation and academia in general. While a dissertation is made up of many hours of solid work, it's the product of time off as well—time spent with loved ones to rest and unwind. Three years' worth of writing equates to many vacations, many afternoons spent at the park and playing pool, and a lot of nights on the couch binge-watching documentaries. Although it's easy to lose sight of it, these times are precious and I am grateful to spend them with Maxcy (and Taylor, Mia, and Betsy).

Last but not least, I am grateful to my advisor Rob Talisse, who was instrumental in helping me shape my initial rough ideas into their final form. Without his generous guidance and support, I certainly could not have written this dissertation.

PREFACE

In one sense, the phenomenon at the center of my dissertation needs no introduction: who among us has not felt the sting of resentment, the heat of rage, or a lingering grudge that we can't seem to shake? Anger is an experience that most of us are intimately familiar with—and yet it's still unclear what we ought to make of it, morally speaking. Philosophers are, of course, divided on the issue. Depending on who you ask, you may get radically different pictures of anger. On the Stoic view, anger is dangerous and destructive—"a short madness."¹ However, we might think, following Audre Lorde, that anger can be salutary and constructive: "a powerful source of energy serving progress and change."² For every critique of anger, there is a response which asserts the opposite: it's a virtue, not a vice; it's a posture of engagement, not one of antagonism; it's an expression of respect for the target, not a dehumanization of her—and so on.³ The debate seems far from settled.

Still, in fairness to anger's critics, it seems that anger has decisive drawbacks. For one thing, it often involves a surrender of cognitive control. Glen Pettigrove points to anger's tendency to alter agents' judgments regarding: their perceptions of others' role in wrongs, their estimation of their own abilities, and the risks of rectificatory courses of action, among other things.⁴ Problematically, it often focuses on punishing the target rather than working toward a resolution.⁵ For these reasons and others, some philosophers think that anger is morally undesirable and we ought to get rid of it. Seneca, for instance, advises that we ought to resist

¹ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.2.1-4.

² Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 280.

³ For a nice overview of these debates, see Shoemaker, "You Oughta Know," 67-75.

⁴ Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," 361-363.

⁵ Lerner, Goldberg, and Tetlock, "Sober Second Thought: The Effects of Accountability, Anger, and Authoritarianism on Attributions of Responsibility."

anger wherever possible—and restrain it in cases where it’s not.⁶ Rather than advocating for its elimination, other critics recommend alternatives to anger. Glen Pettigrove champions meekness,⁷ while Martha Nussbaum recommends a shift to what she calls “transition anger”—a forward-looking disposition which focuses not on the moral injury, but on how it can be prevented in the future.⁸

However, it’s hard to imagine living in the world as these critics imagine it: can we really do away with anger? One is reminded of P.F. Strawson’s insight in his foundational essay “Freedom and Resentment”—perhaps our tendency to feel resentment or indignation at moral injury is simply “a fact of human society,” one that neither calls for nor permits external justification.⁹ As a bare psychological fact, our anger at moral injury may be ineliminable.¹⁰ In the wake of such a possibility, the question is: Does anger have moral value? And if so, what is it? Ultimately, if anger can be shown to have positive value, then that may go some way towards redeeming it as a justifiable expression in our blaming repertoire.

In my view, anger can be a morally justified response to moral injury. More than that, it is uniquely valuable: if we got rid of it, we’d be losing something. Before I say more to fill in the details of my position and the arguments of the dissertation, it is worth taking a moment to clarify the phenomenon in question. “Anger” picks out a broad category of experiences and expression—all of which involve a heightened physiological response, which produces its characteristic feeling of “heat.” We feel anger in a variety of contexts for a variety of reasons.

⁶ Seneca, *On Anger*, 11.18.1.

⁷ Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger.”

⁸ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 6.

⁹ Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 25.

¹⁰ To be clear, I do not intend for anger’s ineliminability to count as a decisive reason in its favor; even if it is an unavoidable feature of human life, that does not make it morally justified. However, I do think that the possibility that it is ineliminable requires us to grapple with its normative ramifications.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is useful to make a rough distinction between *goal-frustration anger* and *angry blame*.¹¹ While goal-frustration anger takes as its objects certain obstacles to a desired end (e.g. when the lock on one's door is broken and it won't open easily), angry blame takes as its object *moral injury*, attributing responsibility for the injury to a specific target (which may be a person, institution, or larger collective). I avoid the term "wrongdoing" to sidestep a debate about whether or not anger responds strictly to the deontic status of actions, wanting instead to capture the broader range of phenomena which we typically call angry blame. I may be angry at other actors for a variety of harms or suffering which they have brought me, without judging that they have, strictly speaking, done anything wrong (e.g., the parking attendant who insists on ticketing me as I walk up to my car, just two minutes after the meter has expired).

In this dissertation, I will make the case for angry blame. Specifically, my goal is to show that manifestations of angry blame can be morally justifiable, contrary to what anger's critics have claimed. I focus on philosophical analyses of resentment, a mode of angry blame in which the agent feels anger on behalf of herself in response to moral injury. The argument proceeds by examining a particular species of angry blame—what I call *authority-focused resentment*. While resentment can often exhibit a problematic investment in one's ego or social standing, I argue that in many cases the resenter is insulted by the target's apparent failure to recognize her authority—thus undermining her standing as a moral equal. In these specific cases, angry blame is an apt and valuable response to moral injury: it invokes and performs the angry agent's authority, thus allowing her to remind the target of the proper normative relation in which they

¹¹ I follow David Shoemaker in drawing a distinction between goal-frustration anger and angry blame. See Shoemaker, "You Oughta Know."

stand. Insofar as anger brings irreplaceable value to our accountability practices, it is worth keeping in our moral repertoire. Although anger does have positive moral value, it is important to recognize that it is not equally accessible to all. Ultimately, it proves to be a risky communication strategy for certain groups. In the final chapter, I will articulate a distinct moral harm which oppressed agents face in the expression of their anger.

The chapter breakdown of the dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 1, I consider three objections to angry blame. Looking at each one in turn, I claim that these critiques do not decisively rule out anger as a response to moral injury—thus clearing the way for the larger project of redeeming anger. In the process, I highlight a few positive features of angry blame which give us reason to be open to its usefulness in our moral lives. Rather than being irrational, punitive, and narcissistic, anger is often focused on worthwhile moral projects—that is, communicating with the offender and seeking her recognition of the wrong, the offender, or the norms in play.

In Chapter 2, I shift to the phenomenon of resentment. The chapter looks at two existing views of the normative content of resentment, with the ultimate aim of carving out a new species of resentment to be defended as a valuable sort of angry blame. I start the chapter by defining the phenomenon of resentment. As an insulted response to offenders' disregard, resentment tracks belittlements of a kind. Critics of resentment agree that the resenter finds these belittlements threatening, but they offer different theories of the normative content of the threat. On Martha Nussbaum's honor-based view, the resenter interprets the insulting injury as a demotion of sorts, leading her to fear a loss of social rank. On Jean Hampton's worth-based view, the resenter understands the injury as a claim about her worth, one which threatens her self-esteem.

After introducing these views, I argue that they are not sufficient to capture the kinds of concerns that are at the heart of many instances of resentment. The major problem with the honor-based view (at least, as Nussbaum presents it) is that, at best, it does not give us the tools to conceptualize resentment as a response to dignitary injury. At worst, in cases of severe wrongdoing and injustice, it looks to transmute resenter's substantive fears into mere narcissism. While worth-based views are more promising insofar as they identify substantive moral content in the experience of resentment, they present the phenomenon in a way that is conceptually incoherent, thus threatening to make resentment ill-founded. Moreover, these views seem ill-suited to capture the politically-motivated concerns of oppressed groups, who have good reason to avoid framing their resentment in terms of the affirmation of worth. I conclude the chapter by introducing authority-focused resentment. On my view, many instances of resentment reflect a concern—not with worth or rank—but with others' recognition of our standing as equals. Part of what it means to be an equal is to be a person to whom others are accountable—and to be seen as such.

In Chapter 3, I go on to offer an account of authority-focused resentment with the larger aim of showing its virtues as a mode of angry blame. I argue that anger, as it appears in the phenomenon of authority-focused resentment, is morally justifiable insofar as: 1) it functions as a particularly *apt* moral response; and 2) it offers *unique value* in our blaming repertoire, especially in cases in which we find our equal standing threatened. If I'm successful, I will have shown—by way of analyzing a particular species of resentment—that angry blame should not be dismissed wholesale in favor of other blaming alternatives.

For all the virtues of anger, it is not equally accessible to all. In Chapter 4, I identify a distinct kind of harm that happens to oppressed agents when their anger fails to receive uptake.

While feminist accounts of anger's dismissal have tended to focus on its epistemic dimensions, I shift to consider the damage to oppressed subjects' moral agency. I argue that what is going on in the dismissal of marginalized agents' anger is not merely the loss of knowledge or the dismissal of testimony. Instead, we need a different paradigm to conceptualize the dismissal and its harms. If we understand angry blame as an invocation or an assertion of authority, then its dismissal is a refusal to comply and to *recognize* our authority as subjects—thus threatening our larger standing as equals in our relations with others.

Despite its ugly reputation, angry blame should remain in our moral repertoire. While it is not justifiable in every case, I use the phenomenon of authority-focused resentment to highlight a mode of angry blame that can do valuable moral work. Furthermore, I argue that anger is apt and particularly valuable in the face of moral injuries which threaten our relative standing as authorities and moral equals. If I'm correct, then we do not have cause to dismiss angry blame as its critics would have us do—and milder blaming alternatives (e.g. hurt, shock, disappointment) are not sufficient.¹²

¹² Derk Pereboom argues for such alternatives in *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*.

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CHAPTER 1

ADDRESSING ANGER'S CRITICS

If we turn to the literary and philosophical canons for a picture of anger, the results are not pretty. In Dante's *Inferno*, the River Styx—located in the fifth circle of Hell—is filled with “the souls of those that anger overcame.”¹³ Although once human, the damned souls that float in the river are now far from it. Naked, snarling, and senseless, they spend eternity trying to tear each other limb from limb. As Dante's protagonist travels further down the river, he encounters a former politician—Filippo—whose fate is to be torn apart by the wrathful souls: “‘Get Filippo Argenti!’ they all cried. And at those shouts the Florentine, gone mad, turned on himself and bit his body fiercely.”¹⁴ Using allegory, Dante posits anger as a kind of madness—one that can lead us to turn against each other or self-destruct.

Echoing Dante's comparison of anger to insanity, the Stoic philosopher Seneca calls anger “a short madness.” Seneca draws an explicit comparison between the symptoms of madness and the appearance of anger, offering a vivid portrait of anger's presentation:

As madmen exhibit specific symptoms—a bold and threatening expression, a knitted brow, a fierce set of the features, a quickened step, restless hands, a changed complexion, frequent, very forceful sighing—so do angry people show the same symptoms: their eyes blaze and flicker, their faces flush deeply as the blood surges up from the depths of the heart, their lips quiver and their teeth grind, their hair bristles and stands on end, their breathing is forced and ragged, their joints crack as they're wrenched, they groan and bellow, their speech is inarticulate and halting, they repeatedly clap their hands together and stamp the ground, their entire bodies are aroused as they “act out anger's massive menace,” they have the repellent and terrifying features of people who are deformed and bloated—it would be hard to say whether the vice is more abhorrent or disfiguring.¹⁵

¹³ Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto VII, line 116.

¹⁴ Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto VIII, lines 61-63.

¹⁵ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.2.1-4.

In Seneca's description, angry madmen are characterized by a lack of self-control and rationality. Instead of speaking in a clear manner, they groan and bellow; when they do speak, they are scarcely intelligible. With restless hands and twisting joints, they appear to have lost control of their bodies. They walk in a hurried manner and move erratically, with a strange and sinister energy about them that appears in their blazing eyes and reddened complexion. With a "fierce," and "threatening" countenance, they seem primed for violence or conflict.

These historical characterizations of anger are severe, but they are consistent with popular depictions of anger. In cartoons, anger is depicted in ways that are very similar to Seneca's description from thousands of years ago: an image of a bright red figure, with steam coming out of his ears and a scowl on his face, immediately comes to mind. Colloquially, we describe anger with expressions like "seeing red," "going crazy," "freaking out," "going off the deep end," "coming unhinged," "flying off the handle," "going postal," "losing my mind," etc. These sayings point to a shared conception of anger as the loss of control and rationality—a surrendering of the very capacities that make us human (or so the story goes). It is revealing, perhaps, that we sometimes describe angry people as "going apeshit."

Scientific perspectives of anger indicate that historical and popular understandings of the emotion are not too far off. Anger certainly involves a break with typical neuro-functioning.¹⁶ When anger strikes in the brain, the amygdala assumes control over the prefrontal cortex. Consequently, the agent's decision-making abilities suffer along with the brain's other upper cognitive functions. Neurotransmitter chemicals—catecholamines, adrenaline, and noradrenaline—release a burst of energy and cause both heart rate and blood pressure to rise.

¹⁶ Litvak, "Fuel in the Fire: How Anger Impacts Judgment and Decision-Making"; Herrero et al., "What Happens When We Get Angry? Hormonal, cardiovascular, and asymmetrical brain responses."

These physiological changes in the brain and the body prime the agent for conflict, inciting the distinct symptoms of anger: feelings of shakiness, a racing heart, sweaty palms, and a burst of energy. These changes are responsible for the familiar signs of anger that Seneca describes, as well: the agent's reddened complexion, heavy breathing, and "highly-strung" body.

On the face of it, anger renders agents irrational, erratic and "out-of-control"—perhaps even dangerously so. Philosophers might, then, have cause to be suspicious of it—and historically, that has been the case. The Stoics saw anger as morally problematic because it indulges in passions that threaten our rational agency. On the Stoic view, reason must rule our decision-making and we must practice very careful control of the emotions, lest they carry us away.¹⁷ Seneca compares the emotional agent to one who throws herself over a precipice with no hope of stopping the fall: "once the mind has submitted to anger, love, and the other passions, it's not allowed to check its onrush: its own weight and the downward-tending nature of vices must—must—carry it along and drive it down to the depths."¹⁸ While the emotions' influence is to be avoided generally, anger is a particularly dangerous emotion:

[Anger] doesn't just trouble our minds, in the manner of other vices; it leads them astray and drives them on when they lack self-control and are eager even for an evil in which all will share. It rages not only against the targets it's marked out, but against whatever gets in its way.¹⁹

Here, Seneca points to the way that anger tends to migrate from its original object to whatever perceived obstacle it encounters, growing in scope and severity.

In less dramatic terms, other philosophers express concern about anger's effect on our rational capacities and the dangers that it can pose to our moral sense. Joseph Butler and Adam

¹⁷ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.7.4; Epictetus, *The Handbook*, Fragment 20.

¹⁸ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.7.4.

¹⁹ Seneca, *On Anger*, 3.1.3.

Smith comment on the flawed perspective of the angry, proposing the institution of a benevolent spectator to correct angry agents' lapses in judgment.²⁰ More recently, philosophers have critiqued anger by calling attention to its ability to distort our thinking, drawing on empirical research that has identified patterns of faulty judgment in angry people. For instance, Glen Pettigrove points to the way that anger both alters people's judgments about what is happening around them (they perceive more hostile stimuli) and causes them to see themselves as exceptional, more capable or insightful, and less biased than others.²¹

If these critiques of anger assume any weight, then it looks like anger is dangerous and morally undesirable. As a departure from rationality and control, it has the potential to do great harm—both to others and to ourselves. If anti-anger views are correct, then the emotion looks to be deficient on a number of counts: it cedes our agency to other parties, it corrupts our epistemic capacities, and it threatens to eat us from the inside out. We might wonder, then, whether an emotion that carries all of these risks is morally appropriate. At the least, perhaps we should strive to manage our anger better—at the most, perhaps we should eradicate it altogether. Although it is hard to imagine getting rid of something so fundamental in our moral lives, some of anger's boldest critics have recommended the latter. Ultimately, I will argue that these strong views are misguided; but first, we ought to look closer at the charge that anger is irrational and therefore beyond redemption.

²⁰ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 30; Butler, "Sermon VIII," 91.

²¹ Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," 363.

The First Critique of Anger—Irrationality

Admittedly, anger's behavioral tendencies, presentation, and physiology are consistent with traditional and cultural depictions of anger as wild and out of control. Anger can certainly involve a departure from reason or indicate its impairment, as the above empirical evidence suggests.²² However, that's not to say that anger is a *wholly* irrational phenomenon, despite historical and popular depictions. On cognitivist views, emotions are more than just bursts of ill-directed feeling. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum claims that the feeling of anger entails a complex set of beliefs, including the belief that "some damage has occurred to me or to something or someone close to me; that the damage is not trivial but significant; that it was done by someone; probably, that it was done willingly."²³ Far from being an arbitrary and wholly irrational response, anger expresses an agent's assessment of the world. Such a picture of anger is consistent with the standard philosophical account of anger, shared by philosophers in both "pro" and "anti" camps: at minimum, anger involves the judgment that another has wrongfully harmed us or something that we care about. Although it may look out-of-control and erratic, anger remains tethered to our judgments, however tenuously at times.

There is a question, however, about the precise cognitive content of anger; that is, whether or not anger requires a judgment of wrongdoing. If I'm playing soccer and a member of the other team shoves me from behind, I may feel anger—full force—and turn on her to confront her for the foul. In that split second, it's not clear that I've reached any full and robust judgment of wrongdoing. However, it does seem that I experience what we might call the emotional *syndrome* of anger. On one view, popular in the scientific literature, anger is best understood as a

²² For a nice empirical overview of the ways in which anger can negatively affect judgment, see Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," 361-65.

²³ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 29.

syndrome—a collection of physiological responses and action tendencies that characterize various agential states.²⁴ To feel anger, the thought goes, we need not have any “sharp” or clear cognitive judgments about the others’ wrongdoing. Adopting such a view allows us to attribute anger to agents whose judgments are nascent or nonexistent—including babies who, of course, don’t have any refined views about wrongdoing done to them by others.

I am not interested in resolving the conceptual question of how we ought to understand anger; it’s questionable whether or not there is an “essence” of anger that we can point to, as its modes and presentations vary. However, what I will do is follow in David Shoemaker’s footsteps and focus on the phenomenon of *angry blame* in my analysis.²⁵ I adopt the term “angry blame” to mark a distinction between various kinds of anger, so that I can isolate specific phenomena for analysis.

To see the distinction I have in mind, take a moment and imagine the variety of things that can incite our anger in any given day: an uncooperative Coke machine, a long line at the DMV when we have somewhere to be, or an account login that won’t take our password. The intensity of the feelings that agents often experience in these and similar situations can vary from mildly annoyed to enraged, and their anger may present in different ways. However, what all of these experiences have in common is the blocking of a goal or an outcome that the agent desires—in other words, the agent is experiencing what we might call *goal-frustration anger*.²⁶

²⁴ Philosophers David Shoemaker and Antti Kauppinen have taken this empirical approach and put it to use in their philosophical analyses. See Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger”; Shoemaker, “You Oughta Know: Defending Angry Blame.” For an empirical account of emotions as syndromes, see Averill, “A Constructivist View of Emotion.”

²⁵ Shoemaker, “You Oughta Know: Defending Angry Blame,” 74.

²⁶ When it comes to the real-life psychology of agents, the distinction between goal-frustration anger and angry blame can be blurry. We may feel frustrated with another agent when they block our path to a desired goal—while at the same time taking their action personally and holding them accountable. However, it is analytically useful to distinguish these two kinds of anger because I am only concerned

Angry blame, in contrast, has a different layer of cognitive content—it involves the judgment that another culpable agent has shown us disregard, accompanied by a distinct syndrome of feelings, motivations, action tendencies, and so on. What does it mean to show others disregard? Initially, we might be tempted to understand it in terms of wrongdoing. Indeed, many definitions of anger include a judgment of wrongdoing as a necessary component.²⁷ However, it seems like an account of disregard which makes wrongdoing a necessary component leaves out a whole host of phenomena that could seemingly constitute angry blame. To use an example offered by David Shoemaker, imagine that you're about to take an exam.²⁸ You reach inside your bag to grab a pencil and realize that you left all of your pencils in your other bag. Looking over, you see that I have a lot of pencils. You ask me for one, but I refuse to hand one over. You might think, strictly speaking, that I've done nothing wrong—the pencil is mine to give away as I wish. However, it would be understandable if you were angry and blamed me nonetheless, taking my behavior to reveal something objectionable about my attitude towards you.

To accommodate the intuition here, I understand disregard in a broader sense. A judgment of disregard, as the core of angry blame, marks the violation of the angry agent's expectation that other parties will comply with shared norms and requirements vis-à-vis themselves, other agents, or objects of concern. The expectations in question need not be moral or reasonable—in fact, they often aren't (although we would surely want to say that instances of morally *legitimate* resentment have the right kind of expectations in view). While angry blame—in its broadest

with the latter kind—with anger that is “personal” in a way that upsetting interactions with a Coke machine can never be.

²⁷ D'Arms and Jacobson, “The Significance of Recalcitrant Emotions (Or, Anti-Quasijudgmentalism),” 143; Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 17.

²⁸ Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*, 95.

sense—registers others’ insulting violation of these expectations, its presentation is diverse. We can feel angry blame on behalf of ourselves (resentment), on behalf of others and the rules (indignation), or even at ourselves.

My goal in this dissertation is to redeem what is perhaps the most morally suspect form of angry blame: that is, resentment. Of all the different forms of angry blame, philosophers seem to be the most suspicious of the anger that we feel on behalf of ourselves. In his foundational essay “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson draws a telling distinction between resentment and indignation:

Thus one who experiences the vicarious analogue of resentment is said to be indignant or disapproving, or morally indignant or disapproving. What we have here is, as it were, resentment on behalf of another, where one’s own interest and dignity are not involved; and it is this impersonal or vicarious character of the attitude, added to its others, which entitles it to the qualification “moral”. Both my description of, and my name for, these attitudes are, in one important respect, a little misleading. It is not that these attitudes are essentially vicarious – one can feel indignation on one’s own account – but that they are essentially capable of being vicarious.²⁹

Indignation—the properly “moral” form of angry blame—is void of a concern with one’s own interest and dignity. While Strawson leaves conceptual room for principled moral anger on behalf of oneself—which, in the taxonomy that I’m using, would qualify as resentment—it is telling that he distinguishes between indignation and resentment as personal vs. impersonal (and therefore amoral vs. moral forms of angry blame). One might wonder if, perhaps, our attachment to our own dignity and interest corrupts the moral integrity of our blame—if it makes things “personal” in a way that precludes the moral.

Indeed, perhaps critics are right to be suspicious of resentment—as we’ll see in Chapter 2, it can have questionable investments. On one prominent view, advanced by Martha

²⁹ Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 15.

Nussbaum, anger is often narcissistic—that is, the angry person cares not so much that a wrong has been done, but that the wrong in question has down-ranked her.³⁰ Nussbaum’s view reflects a longstanding tendency in the literature to understand anger as obsessed with rank.³¹ While certain kinds of resentment can certainly be unsavory, I will attempt to carve out a new sort of focus for resentment, one that is appropriately moral. By defending a particular species of angry blame, my ultimate aim is to show that we cannot dismiss angry blame wholesale. If I’m successful, I will have shown that anger is not an altogether morally undesirable response to moral injury. I will say more about resentment in Chapters 2 and 3, but in the remaining two sections, I will turn to the second and third major critiques of anger. My goal is to show that these are not tenable, and that anger is still on the table, morally speaking. In the process, I will clarify my own desiderata for an account of moral anger.

This chapter began with a portrait of anger as an irrational, out-of-control response, one that threatens to carry us away—or, less dramatically, threatens the integrity of our moral judgment in responding to others’ trespasses. However, on closer inspection, we can see that anger is often a rational response to events in the world, one that tracks entities and events in the world and depicts them in a certain light—whether we understand its evaluations in terms of wrongdoing, disregard, or some other value claim.³² While anger does appear to threaten our

³⁰ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 10.

³¹ Nussbaum points to Jean Hampton’s account of resentment as a predecessor of her view; while Hampton does talk about the “insult” that characterizes resentment in terms of rank, as we’ll see in Chapter 2, she ultimately frames the insulting challenge to one’s rank in terms of value or worth. See Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 45.

³² As I’ve noted, many accounts of anger understand its central judgment to be one of wrongdoing or a failure of regard. However, others have argued that anger makes value claims about certain objects in the world—be they relationships, persons, or things. Antti Kauppinen, for instance, has argued that anger is a mode of valuing that construes certain objects as generating normative expectations (in other words, as generating what he calls “insistent reasons,” which commit us to refraining from harming objects of value or otherwise incurring obligations vis-à-vis said objects). See Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger,” 35.

cognitive control and moral judgment, in most cases it does not involve a departure from reality altogether.

In any case, when it comes to anger's cognitive profile, we might plausibly think that the risks it poses are counterbalanced by its potential rewards: anger can reveal facts or features about the world that we might have overlooked, were it not for its signaling properties. As Alison Jaggar points out in her account of outlaw emotions, unexpected or seemingly inappropriate feelings of anger may precede our conscious recognition of oppression or injustice.³³ The possible epistemic benefits of anger do not fully exonerate it, but they at least offer a mitigating reason to keep anger on the table as a morally viable response to injustice or individuals' bad behavior. It turns out that we don't have cause, then, to dismiss anger as an irrational or altogether epistemically unreliable emotional response to moral failure.

The Second Critique of Anger—Narcissism

Recall the portrait of anger that I offered at the outset of the chapter—an excerpt from Dante's *Inferno*. Anger, the thought goes, is a transcendence of our humanity—and not in a good way. However, all is not as it seems. When we consider anger within a social context, it starts to look less like a demon emotion—an abandonment of our humanity, à la Dante—and more like something that is distinctly *human*. Aristotle is among the first philosophers to tell the story of anger as one of social preoccupation. On his view, humans are fundamentally social creatures who are sensitive to their social standing-vis-à-vis others. Anger is a reaction to perceived slights, which can take the form of minor or major infractions that involve the offender's

³³ While Jaggar was among the first to bring these insights about anger to the fore, other feminist theorists have subsequently pointed to the “signaling” properties of anger. See Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 167; Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” 110; Howes and Hundleby, “The Epistemology of Anger in Argumentation.”

“actively entertained opinion of something as obviously of no importance.”³⁴ As insults to our honor, slights—whether they are directed at us or at others—can threaten a down-ranking of a sort. Aristotle is not the only philosopher to take this approach; historical and contemporary philosophers connect anger to concerns about one’s place in the existing social order.³⁵

Martha Nussbaum is one such philosopher. In her recent work *Anger and Forgiveness*, Nussbaum draws on Aristotle to offer a critique of what she calls “status anger.”³⁶ On Nussbaum’s view, we live in a society—the U.S.—that is not too far removed from the honor societies of Aristotle’s day. To illustrate status anger, Nussbaum draws on examples of various slights that we often experience in everyday life. In one such example, a fellow traveler offers Nussbaum unsolicited “help” by lifting her suitcase to put it in the overhead luggage bin; she is insulted by both his presumptuousness and his insistence despite her protestations.³⁷ On Nussbaum’s view, our moral lives are rife with these kinds of insults. We often encounter them in what Nussbaum calls “The Middle Realm”—a domain of life in which we must deal with others who are not close to us (e.g. coworkers, business partners, acquaintances, etc).

Nussbaum calls these everyday slights and insults “status injuries” and our characteristic angry response to them “status anger.” Nussbaum understands status anger in negative terms, comparing it to a narcissistic status obsession:

Anger is not always, but very often, about status-injury. And status-injury has a narcissistic flavor: rather than focusing on the wrongfulness of the act as such, a focus that might lead to concern for wrongful acts of the same type more generally, the status-angry person

³⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1378b.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1378b-1380a; Butler, "Sermon IX," 98; Walker, *Moral Repair*, 26; Hampton, *Mercy and Forgiveness*, 45-47.

³⁶ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 149.

focuses obsessively on herself and her standing vis-à-vis others.³⁸

On this view, anger is normatively undesirable because it involves indulging in a problematic status obsession. Nussbaum thinks that it is not a coincidence that status anger dominates in the United States; it is consistent with U.S. American values of mobility, status, and achievement.³⁹

Before we take a closer look at status anger, it's worth discussing a second, exceptionally strong commitment of Nussbaum's: on her view, anger is conceptually tied to payback. In other words, anger necessarily includes "the idea that it would be a good thing if the wrongdoer suffered some bad consequences."⁴⁰ Payback takes the form of one of two routes, both of which are normatively undesirable. The first payback route involves what Nussbaum calls "magical thinking."⁴¹ Essentially, the agent's payback wish is motivated by the delusion that order is somehow restored when the offender suffers punishment. The fantasy is irrational because the damage of wrongdoing cannot be undone. The "magical thinking" kind of anger is therefore normatively problematic. The second route of payback—called "the road of status"—is more relevant for our purposes.⁴² Unlike the magical thinking route, the road of status is rational insofar as it does some good: by striking back to put the other "down", the angry agent is actually able to recover her own rank. Such a route is, of course, normatively problematic for a different reason: it indulges in a narcissistic focus on relative status vis-à-vis others, something that Nussbaum thinks we ought to condemn in our status-obsessed Western culture.

³⁸ Ibid, 21.

³⁹ Ibid, 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid, 24.

⁴² Ibid, 5–6.

What makes anger so pernicious, on Nussbaum's account, is its tendency to make wrongdoing or injury all about the victim's threatened status. Strikingly, however, Nussbaum thinks that even anger on behalf of others—what I've been calling indignation—can have a narcissistic sort of quality. To make the case, she asks us to imagine a scenario in which a woman named Rebecca is raped. Rebecca's friend, Angela, interprets the rape as a down-ranking of sorts. In Nussbaum's words:

Angela believes that O's [the offender's] bad act is not only a wrongful act that seriously damaged someone dear to her, but also an insult or denigration of her. She thinks something like, "This guy thinks that he can insult my friend's dignity with impunity, and, insofar as he thinks this, he thinks that he can push me around—that I'll just sit by while my friend is insulted. So he diminishes me and insults my self-respect." Here the connection between pain and retaliation is made through the Aristotelian idea that the eudaimonistic ego-damage O has inflicted is a kind of humiliation or down-ranking. No matter how implausible it is to read O's act as a down-ranking of Angela (given that O doesn't know Angela, or even Rebecca), Angela sees O's harm to her friend as an ego-wound that lessens Angela's status. She therefore thinks that lowering O through pain and even humiliation will right the balance.⁴³

On Nussbaum's view, what is unfortunate about the Angela case is that the moral wrongness of the action is overshadowed by Angela's ego obsession. Rather than constructively addressing the situation, Angela seeks payback for damage done to her relative rank.

Nussbaum's account has some explanatory power: to be sure, many cases of anger fit the profile of status anger. However, it's worth questioning what other types of anger exist before casting anger aside as altogether morally inappropriate. To see the other types of anger that exist, we can look at Nussbaum's own example from a different angle. We'll start with the way that Nussbaum conceptualizes the injury in the above example. Interestingly, Nussbaum takes up the injury from Angela's perspective, rather than Rebecca's, to make a point about status anger. I

⁴³ Ibid, 25.

submit that Nussbaum's choice to use Angela to make her case (and not Rebecca) is not a coincidence. Treating the injury as a "status injury" for Rebecca would clearly be reductive and problematic. For Rebecca, the injury is not a violation of rank. Rape constitutes what Nussbaum would call a *dignitary* injury.⁴⁴

The problem is that it's not clear whether Nussbaum's taxonomy of anger leaves any conceptual room for justified moral anger at dignitary injuries. Angela's anger seems to track what Nussbaum would call a "dignitary injury"—yet Angela's anger is described in terms of status anger:

[Angela] thinks something like, "This guy thinks that he can insult my friend's dignity with impunity, and, insofar as he thinks this, he thinks that he can push me around—that I'll just sit by while my friend is insulted. So he diminishes me and insults my self-respect."⁴⁵

In the example, Angela's anger appears to *necessarily* take the form of status anger. However, we can imagine otherwise. It is plausible that we might feel anger on another's behalf without seeing their suffering as a reflection of our rank, and without being concerned with our relative status vis-a-vis the offender. As for the possibility that Rebecca herself might feel moral anger on her own behalf—and what that anger would look like—it remains unexplored. It seems that Rebecca's anger would necessarily fall into the category of either magical thinking or status anger on Nussbaum's account, without any other types of anger to give us the conceptual resources to make sense of her response. In any case, if we were to understand it in terms of status anger, such a categorization would be problematically reductive; it seems inappropriate to describe moral outrage in terms of narcissism.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of dignitary injuries, see Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

In her discussion of status anger, Nussbaum's selection of examples (e.g. the entitled, presumably white, male gym-goer)⁴⁶ does a lot of work to present anger as a problematic, status-obsessed phenomenon. And the cases she provides are indeed recognizable to many of us—who hasn't dealt with a self-important jerk now and then? In such cases, it seems clear that we want to say anger is morally inappropriate. However, Nussbaum has not yet thoroughly critiqued the harder cases: namely, the cases where the angry person suffers indignity and experiences moral anger. Nussbaum says very little about why anger is not warranted in these severe cases. Indeed, she says very little about the position of people who are faced with severe injustice—aside from claiming that anger is not strictly necessary to resist injustice and recommending the law as the sole appropriate option. Because she has been thoroughly taken to task for these failures by other critics, I will not get into that here.⁴⁷ However, suffice it to say that we need an account of anger that recognizes what sorts of status investments may exist for agents in conditions of severe injustice and wrongdoing—and an account of why anger might be morally appropriate in these cases. I will offer a brief account in Section 1.4 that will do that work. For now, I'll move on to the third critique.

The Third Critique of Anger—Revenge

Even if Nussbaum's charge of narcissism can be handled to the reader's satisfaction, we might wonder whether there is something to her underlying critique of anger as morally

⁴⁶ Nussbaum aptly notes the connection between anger and privilege when she describes her interactions at the gym: "At the same time, in my experience it is people with an overweening sense of their own privilege who seem particularly prone to angry displays. In my gym, I will avoid mildly asking another member if I can work in on a piece of equipment, fearing an explosion, to the extent that I observe that this person is privileged, youngish, and male." Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 40.

⁴⁷ See McBride, "Anger and Approbation"; Srinivasan, "Would Politics Be Better Off Without Anger?"

inappropriate insofar as it reflects a desire for payback. If Nussbaum is correct about anger's link to payback, then we might have to rethink anger, even in more severe cases where it looks like dignity is at stake. It's worth noting that Nussbaum is not the only philosopher to take issue with anger's connection to revenge. Historically, many philosophers have expressed concerns about it—both the Stoics and Aristotle incorporate the desire to take revenge into their definition of anger.⁴⁸ The former thinks that retaliatory anger ought to be extinguished from our moral lives; the latter is more optimistic, but still sees anger as a desire for revenge that must be carefully controlled.⁴⁹

While it may seem strong to understand anger as *conceptually* involving revenge, these philosophers are in great company: the urge to strike back is so prevalent in instances of anger that social scientists have counted it as a necessary component of anger. Psychologist (and philosopher) Aaron Ben-Ze'ev says explicitly: "The urge to attack is essential to anger, even if it is expressed in a nonstandard aggressive act. In anger we want to personally punish the other person who is seen as deserving of punishment."⁵⁰ If scientists and philosophers are right to identify the desire for payback as an essential feature of anger, then anger starts to look morally undesirable. Should we make room in our blaming repertoire for an emotion that is driven by the desire to punish others?

Of course, we might wonder if the desire to punish is itself morally objectionable. However, even assuming that such a feature of anger would indeed be morally objectionable, it's not clear that the critique stands. We might wonder if, in fact, anger *has* the "strike back" quality

⁴⁸ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.3.3b; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1373a.

⁴⁹ Seneca, *On Anger* 2.18.1; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.5, 1126a1.

⁵⁰ See Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, 384; for a conception which includes "the desire to retaliate against the offender," see Oakley, *Morality and the Emotions*, 15; see also West, "Anger and the Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation"; Hurka, *Vice, Virtue, And Value*, 93.

in question. One line of response to the revenge critique is to challenge the claim that anger *always* aims at payback. Many contemporary philosophers take issue with the idea that we ought to understand anger as a response that seeks suffering.⁵¹ To challenge it, they offer examples to the contrary. Nicolas Bommarito has a series of nice examples that make clear the sorts of cases in which we are angry at others, yet do not desire to make them suffer:

Consider a few everyday cases of anger: Alex gets angry with her father for constantly interrupting her while she is speaking. Tina is angry with her husband for driving too fast and not carefully enough. Seth is angry with his childhood friend Julie for staying with her abusive boyfriend. We naturally apply the term *anger* to these cases, but they do not involve any desire to harm, punish, or exact revenge. This does not mean that *no* desire is present; it is just not a desire for *harm* or *revenge*.⁵²

If Bommarito and others are to be believed, then it looks like there is a mode of anger that has different aims than revenge. The question is: if anger's aim is not to make others suffer, then what is it?

Looking at the literature on angry blame provides one answer—on one view, angry blame has recognitive aims; and on these accounts, the vengeful elements of anger can work in the service of these virtuous aims. In his seminal text *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith notes that the vengeful elements of anger serve a particular moral purpose:

... The chief purpose of resentment is not merely to make our enemy feel pain in his turn, but to make him aware that he is feeling pain because of his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, and to make him feel that the person he injured didn't deserve to be treated in that manner... To bring him back to a better sense of what is due to other people, to make him aware of what he owes us and of the wrong that he has done to us, is often the main purpose of our revenge, which is always incomplete when it can't

⁵¹ Pamela Hieronymi makes the point succinctly: "I can resent what you've done without wanting you to suffer for it. I may rather want you to apologize. The anger need not take the form of a desire to harm the wrongdoer." Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," 548.

⁵² Bommarito, "Virtuous and Vicious Anger," 5. See Wolf, "Blame, Italian Style," 334; and Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," 7 for other examples.

accomplish this.⁵³

On Smith's view, our angry blame is not merely a wish for the other to suffer—but a desire for them to *recognize* the violated norms in question and our special status as moral agents. Smith's view of resentment is consistent with accounts of anger which see it as an attempt to get others to recognize and respond to the rules in play. The basic thought here is that anger has cognitive aims: it desires the target's recognition of the rules, or the worth of the resenter, or the pain of the wrong, and so on. Although it's far from clear precisely *what* anger wants the target to recognize, the literature offers a number of candidates.⁵⁴ If these views are correct, then it looks like anger may have moral value after all—or at least, it's not decidedly out of the running.

That's all well and good, you might think: but does it matter if anger has salutary aims if it has nasty ones as well? The nasty aspects of anger might still give us pause. Defenders of anger, however, have an answer: they can temper the retaliatory aspects of anger by reframing these aims in cognitive terms. David Shoemaker asks us to imagine a case in which we're angry, but we have the opportunity to inflict payback on the offender—the only catch is that the offender will not have any context for the payback. The punishment will have to be done anonymously and with no reference to the initial offense. Shoemaker's intuition is that in such a case, most of us would likely be unsatisfied.⁵⁵ When we are angry, we desire that the other *know* that they have

⁵³ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 54.

⁵⁴ Accounts of the sort of recognition that anger is after vary; Jean Hampton and Pamela Hieronymi posit that angry blame can seek recognition of the wrong and our worth. Margaret Urban Walker proposes that resentment seeks acknowledgment of the moral norms in play and the entitlement of the resenter to protection. Other candidates include recognition of the wrong and ensuing remorse or guilt; respect for oneself or others (Kauppinen); and the list goes on. In any given interaction, there may be many things at stake for the blamer. ⁵⁴ Hieronymi, "Articulating An Uncompromising Forgiveness," 547; Hampton, "Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred," 44; Walker, *Moral Repair*, 19; Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame?," 167; Wolf, "Blame, Italian Style," 338; Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*, 107-110; Kauppinen, "Valuing Anger."

⁵⁵ Shoemaker, "You Oughta Know: Defending Angry Blame," 73.

done wrong to us: our anger is not simply a desire to see the other suffer. Rather, in the words of Shoemaker, “whatever retaliation occurs is typically just meant to *serve* the communicative aim in a dramatic fashion.”⁵⁶ In the context of moral violation, anger seeks to make others aware of “what is due to other people.” In other words, anger’s fundamental aim is communicative, and whatever other aims it might have—including retaliatory ones—are ancillary.

Shoemaker’s insight is backed up by data which indicates that anger’s most common action tendency is not to make the other suffer, but to communicate. To be clear, anger does involve *confrontation*—but it frequently favors verbal rebuke over violence aimed at harm. One study found that when subjects reported feeling angry, many (82 percent) reported an impulse to verbal aggression, while far fewer (40 percent) reported an impulse to physical aggression. The desire to harm another was less common than the desire to talk things over, either with the instigator (in 59 percent of episodes) or with a neutral third party (in 52 percent of episodes).⁵⁷

If Shoemaker’s view is correct, then we can interpret anger’s payback mechanisms differently: in many cases, *the desire to see others suffer is not the ultimate aim of anger, but one vehicle for securing the target’s larger recognition*. Even in cases where anger has less explicitly noble aims, it’s not clear that we can throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater; that is, it’s at least *plausible* that we can understand anger’s unsavory retaliatory aims in terms of a desire for recognition or respect. Even its ugliest aims seem far from irrational or purely mean-spirited—rather, we want targets to suffer so that they can recognize morally salient facts about our status or the value of the things that we care about. To be sure, it’s still questionable whether these retaliatory aspects of anger can be fully redeemed, morally speaking—but they are at least

⁵⁶ Shoemaker, “You Oughta Know: Defending Angry Blame,” 74.

⁵⁷ Averill, “Studies on Anger and Aggression,” 1148.

not void of moral content.

Anger's Recognitive and Communicative Aims

In looking closer at the revenge critique, we've seen evidence for thinking that angry blame has broadly recognitive and communicative aims: that is, that it wants to communicate with the target in an attempt to get him or her to recognize something of importance. Highlighting these features of angry blame allows us to look at it from a different perspective—and in the process, to reject the central objections to anger that were examined at the outset of this chapter (namely, the narcissism critique and the revenge critique). A Strawsonian account of angry blame can reveal the ways in which earlier critiques are misguided, and offer a different picture of angry blame—thus rendering it less morally objectionable.

P.F. Strawson's account of the reactive attitudes serves as a useful starting point for framing the normative content of interpersonal angry blame. Strawson begins with the insight that—for whatever reason—others' regard matters to us:

We should think of the many different kinds of relationship which we can have with other people – as sharers of a common interest; as members of the same family; as colleagues; as friends; as lovers; as chance parties to an enormous range of transactions and encounters. Then we should think, in each of these connections in turn, and in others, of the kind of importance we attach to the attitudes and intentions towards us of those who stand in these relationships to us, and of the kinds of *reactive* attitudes and feelings to which we ourselves are prone. In general, we demand some degree of goodwill or regard on the part of those who stand in these relationships to us, though the forms we require it to take vary widely in different connections.⁵⁸

Strawson notes that there is a plethora of stories that we can tell about why other agents' regard matters; we might appeal to theories of respect, love, or esteem. However that gets settled, our

⁵⁸ Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 6.

blame is fundamentally about others' actions and attitudes toward us—and the underlying regard (or lack thereof) revealed by these actions and attitudes. On Strawson's view, our angry blame is an ineliminable response to these failures of regard, regardless of larger metaphysical questions about agents' responsibility.

We can use a Strawsonian account to re-examine angry blame—specifically, resentment—in a different light; it offers a different way of understanding angry blame's apparent obsession with status (in Nussbaum's words: our “standing vis-à-vis others”), which I addressed in Section 1.2.⁵⁹ We can start with Strawson's insight that the quality of others' regard matters to us. I posit that others' regard is important to us because we want to stand in relations of *reciprocity*. In T.M. Scanlon's terms, we want to stand in a moral relationship of “mutual concern.”⁶⁰ If others do not exhibit the proper regard for us, then we have cause to believe that our relationship with them is impaired. For Scanlon, blame itself is simply the registering of that impairment—it need not entail any charged affective response. However, it stands that—as a species of blame—resentment has an underlying concern with where we stand vis-à-vis other people: if the other party does not demonstrate due regard, then it seems that we're occupying an asymmetrical (and corrupt) moral relation.

Existing accounts of resentment articulate the kind of asymmetrical, corrupt moral relation that I have in mind here in terms of a threat to our person. In the words of Margaret Urban Walker: “The threat prompting resentment, made fully explicit, is of *license with impunity*. The transgression announces a possibility that is at least annoying, often alarming, or even fearsome, a possibility that might persist unless something forecloses it.”⁶¹ Pamela

⁵⁹ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 21.

⁶⁰ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

⁶¹ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 128.

Hieronymi, as well, understands resentment as a kind of protest in the face of threatening wrongdoing: “a past wrong against you, standing in your history without apology, atonement, retribution...or anything else that might recognize it as a *wrong*, makes a claim. It says, in effect, that you can be treated this way, and that such treatment is acceptable.”⁶² Of course, it’s not *always* the case that wrongdoing is threatening—but it often is, in part because the other party does not issue the appropriate checks on their actions vis-à-vis us. These threatening failures mark an asymmetrical relation in which others do not grant us the level of regard that we grant them; the relation is not reciprocal, but compromised.

If these accounts are correct, then resentment often emerges in threatening scenarios in which we experience a kind of vulnerability—one that goes deeper than mere rank or social position. In light of the asymmetrical moral relation which often characterizes wrongdoing, we might re-examine anger’s apparent obsession with recovering status—a focus that Nussbaum has interpreted as a problematic, narcissistic sort of enterprise. I propose that we can understand resentment, in many cases, as a preoccupation with our relative standing as equals.

While Nussbaum uses the term “relative standing” to refer to rank (the terms are somewhat interchangeable in her account), I will use it differently. On my usage of the term, relative standing is not just our *rank* vis-a-vis others, but our relative ability to successfully issue claims on others’ behavior vis-à-vis us; it’s indexed not to our social position and its prestige (or lack thereof), but to our agency within the relationship.⁶³ The ideal sort of relative standing is “standing as an equal.” To have standing as an equal within a relationship is to be a person who *matters* to the other party, such that the other party grants them adequate regard—that is, it is to

⁶² Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” 546.

⁶³ Although prestige can surely be a factor in our relative standing.

be someone whose interests, ends, and projects have normative import for the other party in their actions and decisions. In many cases, angry blame is aimed at securing others' recognition that we are equals (among, perhaps, other things).

We are now in a position to see that resentment need not exhibit morally objectionable status concerns. If we understand resentment as aiming at a status of equality, constituted by others' regard, then it does not necessarily have the "one up" nature that Nussbaum has ascribed to it. Instead of trying to strike back in an attempt to recover rank, the angry person is trying to rank *at all* in the eyes of the other party. Understanding anger in these terms is consistent with a broader literature that understands anger as linked to self-respect.⁶⁴ Robin Dillon's account of recognition respect is relevant here:

Recognition respect for oneself as a person involves recognizing and valuing oneself as a being with dignity, appreciating the moral constraints to which the dignity of persons gives rise, and living in light of this normative self-understanding... The repertoire for living thus includes having a conception of certain treatment by others as one's due as a person and other treatment as degrading or beneath the dignity of persons, desiring to be treated appropriately by others, and resenting mistreatment. For resentment is standardly defined as anger felt on being wronged in a way that affronts one's dignity. Those who understand themselves to be morally entitled as persons to certain treatment are disposed to resent what they regard as indignities; thus, in a morally imperfect world, the liability to resentment is an integral feature of recognition self-respect.⁶⁵

On strong accounts, self-respect *requires* the propensity to feel anger on behalf of oneself—at least some of the time. Whether or not that's true, angry blame is a response that registers others' failure to grant us equal standing and asserts that very standing for ourselves. Such a response is

⁶⁴ Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment," 16.

⁶⁵ Dillon, "Self-Respect," 229–30.

best characterized as equalizing—if angry blame does strike back to bring the offender down, it’s often so that the victim can be brought onto equal footing with the offender.⁶⁶

Outlining resentment’s recognitive aims as ones of regard allows us to see it in a different light—as a respect-oriented response instead of a narcissistic one. On these grounds, a defense of resentment is possible (and forthcoming in Chapters 2 and 3). I will now turn, briefly, to angry blame’s communicative aims, sketching an account of its “call-and-response structure” and gesturing toward its positive moral content. Returning to the Strawsonian view, we can understand angry blame as a kind of moral address that presses a demand for regard when the target appears to have lapsed in their goodwill towards us (in the case of resentment) or others (in the case of indignation). As such, it is what Stephen Darwall calls “an implicit RSVP.”⁶⁷ While responsibility theorists differ about what kind of communicative “act” is being proffered—an entreaty, an invitation, a demand, etc—it is a matter of relative agreement that angry blame is seeking uptake, of some kind, from the target. Like all communicative acts, anger is only satisfied when the message “gets through”—and one receives the desired response.

To see anger’s concern with uptake, consider what happens when anger is ignored or disavowed: it often intensifies. Although you can undoubtedly think of examples from your own life, we might imagine the following scenario: you’re a kid whose property is taken by another kid in the neighborhood—call him Tom. You appeal to Tom’s father to mediate, hoping that he

⁶⁶ Samuel Reis-Dennis has made a version of this point: “... even when [angry agents] wish for wrongdoers to lower themselves by offering an apology, the goal is not quite for the abasement to “compensate” for the wrongdoing, nor is it to provide an enjoyable spectacle. Rather, we hope offenders will apologize and ask for forgiveness because in doing so they demonstrate their commitment to the relationship and its (violated) governing norms. Status-leveling apologies, either through lowering, raising, or both, allow wrongdoer and wronged to proceed on equal moral footing—they offer an assurance that the miscreant does not see himself as “above the law.” Reis-Dennis, “On the Hook: Responsibility in Real Life,” 26.

⁶⁷ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 145.

will recognize the wrong and right it. He says to you, “Sure, just say ‘please’ to Tom.” In response, you are rightfully angry. We can analyze the content of anger here in many different ways: it could be a brute response to powerlessness, the registering of unfairness, and so on. However, the frustration in question is *dialectical*—that is, in feeling an angry response at Tom’s father, you are looking for a kind of response from him (or from other parties, perhaps). You want him to acknowledge that you’re correct and to hold Tom accountable. In short, you want him to recognize morally salient features of the situation (however those are cashed out) and act accordingly. The mediator’s dismissal of your claim is as upsetting as the original wrongdoing itself—if not more so. Similarly, think about how it feels when you feel you’ve been unjustly wronged and another person says to “calm down”—in instances like these, the frustration of anger’s communicative act only causes anger to redouble.

Foregrounding angry blame’s communicative and recognitive aims allows us to see the ways in which the critiques of revenge, explored in 2.3, are misguided. To frame blame as a punitive, payback-oriented emotion is to see it as a unilateral mode of engagement. Instead, we might see it as one that reaches out to the other with a desire for moral closure. Susan Wolf’s defense of angry blame is relevant here:

...although angry emotions and attitudes do seem to me to be conceptually tied to a disposition to punish, and therefore with a willingness to make the object of blame suffer *in a particular way*, it would be a serious mistake to identify this with a general withdrawal of goodwill. Even in the midst of my daughter’s repeated raids of my closet, there was never a moment when I wanted harm to come to her, or when I was indifferent to her well-being. If I wanted her to suffer, it was in a specific way, with a special kind of significance: I may have wanted her to experience the painful feelings of guilt and remorse. I never wanted her to break her leg, or even scratch her knee.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Wolf, “Blame, Italian Style,” 338.

Wolf's comments here echo the view discussed above—the idea that in expressing our angry blame, we're not desiring the other's suffering but communicating with them in the hope that they will respond in a way that renders themselves accountable to us. Rather than being punitive and unilateral, in many cases angry blame is dialectical: it exhibits a call-and-response structure that desires—in one form or another—the other's accountability, which might take the form of recognizing the rules or our own equal standing (depending on the context). Ultimately, the recognitive concerns of angry blame can make it a productive practice and not just a destructive one which aims at the target's suffering. A different picture of angry blame is available in the literature on relational and conversational models of blame—on these accounts, our deployment of anger and other negative reactive attitudes is just the beginning of a larger process of understanding and repair.⁶⁹

At this point, I've said enough to indicate that there may be a different way of understanding angry blame and what it's up to. There are a few lingering questions, however. While I've made the case that anger can have moral value, it's not yet clear how *resentment*—a particular form of angry blame—is praiseworthy. We may still have worries that it reflects an unsavory ego investment; that insofar as it's "personal," it cannot be moral. In Chapter Two, I will look closer at the normative content of resentment, considering different candidates from the literature for capturing its focus. Ultimately, I'll draw on existing accounts to identify a strain of

⁶⁹ The family of views here mentioned focuses on blame, not as a discrete judgment at time *t*, but as a larger process of exchange. McKenna's "conversational" model of blame posits the process of holding accountable as an exchange analogous to an unfolding conversation—the expression of resentment is not punitive, but a communication of expectations and demands which seek a response. In a similar vein, Victoria McGeer suggests that reactive attitudes are not discrete entities; they are embedded in dynamic trajectories of reactional exchange. The deployment of reactive attitudes is the beginning of an exchange in which the initial attitudes take shape and change in response to the target's attitudes. These "scaffolding" reactive attitudes are the framework for the participants' moral agency. McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*, 143–44; McGeer, "Co-Reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community."

resentment that I call “authority-focused resentment.” While we may be suspicious of narcissistic resentment, I will ultimately make the case that authority-focused resentment is both fitting and valuable—that it has a valuable role to play in our moral lives. If I’m successful, then I’ll have defended anger as a response to moral failures in at least some cases.

CHAPTER 2

THREE KINDS OF RESENTMENT

The way that we talk about resentment in the vernacular is perhaps revealing: to refer to those who get angry on behalf of themselves, we often use phrases like “He really took that apersonally.” The notion of “getting personal” is common enough to earn the title of “trope” in film, literature, and television.⁷⁰ (The canon includes such fine films as: *Jaws: The Revenge*, *Avengers: Endgame*, and even *Godzilla*.) The philosophical literature on resentment defines it in terms of the personal as well. P.F. Strawson categorizes resentment as a “personal” reactive attitude in comparison to its moral and impersonal cousin, indignation.⁷¹ In her oft-cited work on resentment and forgiveness, Jean Hampton defines resentment as “personally defensive protest.”⁷² For all its ubiquity, it’s not really clear what it means to take things personally. We might, however, draw a lesson from the literature on resentment. On many accounts, resentment is fundamentally a response of pained insult at another’s belittlement of our person—something that often drives us to strike back or seek revenge (although not always, as we saw in Chapter 1). The question is, how are we to understand its normative contents?

In Chapter Two, I will examine existing accounts of the normative content of resentment, with an eye toward carving out a unique kind of resentment—authority-focused resentment. In Chapter Three, I will go on to explore and defend the phenomenon of authority-focused resentment in greater detail. Once we see that resentment often tracks moral failures which indicate an underlying asymmetrical moral relationship, I will be in a position to argue that its

⁷⁰ “It’s Personal,” TVTropes, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ItsPersonal>, accessed March 23, 2019.

⁷¹ Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 15.

⁷² Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 56.

angry “core” in these cases is both an apt response and a morally valuable one at that. Thus, we ought to keep anger in our moral repertoire. The blaming alternatives on offer from anti-anger proponents—meekness, shock, hurt, etc—are simply not appropriate or useful as responses to injuries or moral failures which signal an erosion of our standing as equals.

Taking a Strawsonian approach, I begin the chapter by outlining the phenomenon in question, defining resentment as a response to others’ belittling disregard. I then consider two sorts of views which seek to articulate the normative content of resentment. The first family of views—what I call “honor views”—frames resentment as a narcissistic response concerned with threats to one’s honor or rank. Proponents of the view include, most recently, Martha Nussbaum. On these views, the “belittlement” in question represents a threat to the resenter’s relative social rank. I argue that insofar as the honor view converts indignities into superficial status injuries, it provides an insufficient framework for capturing the elements of wrongdoing which can rightfully trigger our resentment.

The second family of views—what I call “worth views”—see resentment as a response to others’ belittling claims about our worth as persons. While Jean Hampton does reference resentment’s concern with rank, she often invokes *value* or *worth* as a central concern of the resenter.⁷³ While worth views are in the right ballpark insofar as they can conceptualize resentment as a response to substantive belittlements (i.e. dignitary injuries), I argue that they’re problematic or ill-fitting for at least two reasons. First, these views fail to capture the sort of status demotion at hand, insofar as they frame the belittlement in terms of “dignity” or

⁷³ In her seminal work with Jeffrie Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, Hampton will often invoke value and rank together in her discussion of resentment, as when she writes: “Resentment is an emotion which reflects [the resenter’s] judgment that the harmful treatment they experienced should not have been intentionally inflicted on them by their assailants insofar as it is *not* appropriate given their value and rank.” Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 54-55.

inalienable worth—a thing that, strictly speaking, can't be revoked. A larger problem is that it's unclear whether we ought to tie resentment to worth at all; simply put, that may be giving the offender too much.

In Section 2.4, I'll suggest that understanding resentment as a response to authority violations escapes these difficulties. Understanding resentment in these terms has the virtue of taking the belittlement of moral injury seriously; it also allows us to explain what, precisely, is under threat in cases of moral injury if it's not our worth. A full analysis of authority-focused resentment is forthcoming in Chapter 3.

Resentment and Disregard

As noted in Chapter 1, I will follow the existing resentment/indignation distinction in the moral responsibility literature. On these views—paradigmatically, P.F. Strawson's—resentment is a feeling of anger that is felt on behalf of oneself. Indignation, on the other hand, is felt in response to damage inflicted upon valued principles, objects, norms, or other persons. While the distinction between resentment and indignation is far from clear-cut, it is a useful starting point for describing the phenomenon that motivates my inquiry. While we often feel angry on behalf of other people or things in the world, I am interested in a kind of anger that we can feel only on behalf of ourselves. What are its exact contents?

At first glance, it seems we could identify the cognitive content of resentment as a judgment of wrongdoing or moral failure on the part of the agent.⁷⁴ However, there are plenty of

⁷⁴ D'Arms and Jacobson understand resentment as a “cognitively sharpened” emotion whose constitutive thought is “one has...been...wronged.” Many philosophical definitions of anger invoke the notion of wrong as well, including Nussbaum's—following Aristotle, she defines anger as a response to something “wrongly or inappropriately done.” Rather than invoking the notion of wrongdoing, much of the literature on moral responsibility understands resentment as a response to agents' violation of moral “demands” or

instances of resentment that don't involve wrongdoing. Imagine, for instance, that you forgot to pack your lunch on an especially busy day at work when you do not have time to run out for it. Unfortunately, you have a date in the lunchroom with a colleague—call him Bill. As it happens, Bill brought way more food than he needs for lunch and that's fully apparent when you sit down at a lunch meeting. However, rather than offering you some of his food when you mention that you forgot yours, he sits in front of you and proceeds to eat the whole thing—all while you're sitting there, visibly hungry. You start to feel resentful of—or perhaps hangry at—Bill, even though you have no claim to his food. He isn't morally wronging you, but you still feel the sting of resentment.

Now, we might be tempted to say that what's motivating your resentment here is a violated normative expectation of some kind: namely, the expectation that we share food with others when they're in need and we have more than enough for ourselves. While I acknowledge as much, it seems like what is relevant here is not only the violation of a moral norm or rule per se, but a failure of regard for *you*. In the words of David Shoemaker: “When I get angry at you, I am lodging some sort of complaint or demand...not on behalf of morality, but on behalf of *me*.”⁷⁵ Resentment thus involves the judgment that another has demonstrated insufficient or poor regard for *us*, either through wrongdoing or through the violation of other kinds of shared expectations. Resentment is a blaming response that attributes poor regard to another in response

“expectations.” R. Jay Wallace holds such a view: “Resentment requires the belief that someone else has violated a demand to which I hold them.” Stephen Darwall writes: “We resent what we take to be violations against ourselves or those with whom we identify. If you resent someone’s treading on your foot...you feel as if he has violated a valid claim or demand.” D’Arms and Jacobson, “The Significance of Recalcitrant Emotions,” 143; Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 17; Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 245; Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 6.

⁷⁵ Shoemaker, “You Oughta Know,” 93.

to violated expectations (even if there is, strictly speaking, no wrongdoing at hand)—and it cares about what these violated expectations mean for the target’s view of us.

Beyond the mere judgment that another has shown insufficient regard for us, resentment may include (or be accompanied by) a variety of judgments, including: that the other is culpable, that he or she harbors an objectionable attitude that is threatening, and so on and so forth.”⁷⁶ However, for our purposes, the defining judgment of resentment is that the offender has somehow shown disregard for the resenter. The offender shows disregard by failing to sufficiently attend to the resenter’s interests, ends, or projects. In doing so, he indicates that the victim is normatively insignificant—in other words, that she does not matter.

However, there is still more to add to our account of resentment: it involves more than the mere judgment that another has shown disregard for our ends, interests, and projects—for us. To see this, imagine the following sort of case: I’m baking a pie in preparation for a dinner party that I’m very nervous about. After I put the pie in the oven, I realize that I forgot to buy wine for the meal. Rushing out the door, I ask my roommate to take the pie out of the oven in about 45 minutes or so, since I will not be back in time. Unfortunately, she forgets and the pie burns. I come home to discover that the pie, which I worked very hard on, is not salvageable and now I have no dessert to serve at our dinner party. In such a case, I may feel frustrated. I may judge that my roommate has shown disregard for my interests—that is, that she didn’t properly look out for me—but that isn’t necessarily the source of my anger. Instead, it’s conceivable that I may feel more frustrated about the setback than I am about her failure. Despite trying so hard to get everything to come together, I now have a new problem to deal with. In such a case, my anger reflects my underlying anxiety more than a sense of personal offense.

⁷⁶ Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” 530.

In such a case, I would be experiencing what I identified in Chapter One as *goal-frustration* anger. I am angry because I've encountered an obstacle to some goal that I care about (namely, having a successful dinner party). Alternatively, we could think about my anger in terms of damage to a thing I care about (e.g. the pie). There are many different ways to understand my anger here. However, the point is that even though another agent is involved and I may feel some degree of irritation towards her (judging her at fault), what I am experiencing is frustration with the situation, *not* resentment at her person. We often get frustrated with people, just as we get frustrated with Coke machines, with bad weather, and in many different situations in which our expectations are not met. On Aristotle's definition, anger is often intensified or brought on by the violation of our expectations—on the part of others, and/or on the part of things in the world.⁷⁷ Insofar as they register these disappointments, cases of *goal-frustration* or *expectation-frustration* anger are less interesting—we aren't "taking it personally."

To revisit the pie mishap through a somewhat different lens: I could easily imagine feeling resentful towards my roommate. I might feel that she did not take my normative expectations sufficiently seriously, and that such an oversight does not bode well for our relationship (especially if it is not the first time that she has failed to come through for me). In such a case, the object of my anger is my roommate's lack of regard for me; its focus is not so much a specific violated moral expectation as it is her objectionable attitude towards me. In such a case, I am experiencing a specific kind of *angry blame*—namely, resentment.

However, recall what I stated at the outset: there has to be more content to the phenomenon of resentment than just the violated expectation that another will take our ends,

⁷⁷ Aristotle writes: "...we are angered if we happen to be expecting a contrary result: for a quite unexpected evil is specially painful, just as the quite unexpected fulfillment of our wishes is specially pleasant." Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1379a.

interests, and projects seriously. Martha Nussbaum's encounter with a fellow passenger on an airplane serves as a helpful example here.⁷⁸ In the example, Nussbaum lifts her suitcase to put it in an overhead compartment, only to be interrupted by a German surgeon who is eager to help. Despite her protestations, he takes her suitcase and shoves it into the airplane's overhead compartment—much to her annoyance. In the example, the surgeon shows apparent consideration for Nussbaum's interests, yet Nussbaum is still angry at him. Strangely enough, in some cases, one's attempts to take a person's ends or interests seriously can actually *generate* resentment of a kind. It looks like we have to draw on more than violated expectations vis-à-vis our interests/ends/projects to explain certain kinds of angry responses. What motivates anger in these cases?

One possibility, inherited from Aristotle and others, is to understand resentment as an insulted response to belittlements or slights. We're not just frustrated or annoyed with others when they block our goals or violate a general expectation that they consider our interests: rather, what we resent is often the belittlement implied by their actions. We are *insulted* by their lack of regard and its implicit claim about us. Indeed, Nussbaum says to the surgeon: "I do not spend hours lifting weights in the gym each day only to be insulted, and I bet I could overhead-press more weight than [you] could."⁷⁹ While there is a violated expectation at hand here (touching and moving others' things without asking), the surgeon's view of her is at least as insulting as the violation itself, if not more so: he thinks she's a weak woman when she is just as capable of heavy lifting as he is.

⁷⁸ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 149.

Although many accounts of resentment understand it in terms of violated norms, expectations, and entitlements—in some cases of a distinctly moral kind—it’s worth emphasizing that resentment often cares just as much about our belittlement as it does the rules. That is, we should keep in view the fact that others’ estimation of us can be just as insulting as their failure to interact with us in accordance with shared norms and expectations. In many cases, resentment’s concerns extend beyond what we feel we are properly *owed* on moral grounds; although we can certainly feel insulted when others do not give us our due, that is not the only route to resentment. To see as much, we need only think about the kind of resentment that attends instances of personal rejection.

Imagine, for example, that my colleague Maureen invites all of my friends to a party except for me. I may be annoyed that my colleague Maureen didn’t invite me, but it does not seem like my resentment is articulable in terms of what I am *owed* or entitled. That is, I don’t want Maureen to invite me merely because I think that she ought to consider my ends, interests, and projects (thus granting them weight in her deliberations); or because she somehow owes me an invite because it is something that *anyone* could expect from her. That would be the wrong sort of reason for her to invite me. Rather, I am insulted because she thinks that I am not cool enough to attend the party. I take Maureen’s rejection to indicate something about my status, relative to others: in Maureen’s eyes, I am not likeable or admirable enough to be invited—or I’m otherwise irrelevant.⁸⁰ Resentment is sensitive to these interpersonal slights insofar as they position us vis-à-vis others, and not just because our expectations were violated. In Section 2.3, we will discuss a flavor of resentment that is sensitive to the kinds of belittlements that signal our

⁸⁰ Of course, one could feel other things in such an instance—disappointment, perhaps embarrassment, etc; it’s just conceivable that someone could be annoyed about failing to receive an invite.

status demotion; for now, suffice it to note that resentment's focus is broader than wrongdoing and includes insults of many varieties and in many different domains.

One last thing to note is that the offender's insulting disregard may be active—a form of ill will or disrespect for our person; or it may take the form of negligence or indifference.⁸¹ While it can certainly be insulting when another person goes out of their way to make us feel low, it can be just as offensive to not register at all. Aristotle seems to have the latter in mind when he comments on how upset people often get when others cannot remember their names: “Forgetfulness is also productive of anger, such as that of names, trivial as it is. For forgetfulness too is thought to be an indication of disregard. For the forgetfulness arises through lack of concern, and lack of concern is a species of disregard.”⁸² Resentment's evaluation of disregard, then, can cover a wide range of phenomena—ranging from active ill will to negligent disregard.

While resentment is constituted by the insulted judgment of disregard, the nature of the insult is not yet clear. What, precisely, is insulting or offensive about failures of disregard? At least two major possibilities are presented in the literature. On honor views, the insult in question is a kind of down-ranking: the offender's disregard effectively demotes us vis-à-vis the offender, triggering her offense. The propositional content of resentment on these views might be something like: “He thinks he's better than me.” On the worth view, the offender's failure of regard represents an insulting claim about our worth or value. The resenter may think something along the lines of: “I was like gum on the bottom of her shoe,” or “I meant nothing to her.”

⁸¹ Strawson recognized these major two types of objectionable disregard; the reactive attitudes reflect a demand for “the absence of the manifestation of active ill will or indifferent disregard.” Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 15.

⁸² Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1379b.

I will turn to these views in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, respectively. However, before doing so, I want to briefly address a few concerns that the reader might have about undertaking a defense of resentment (a project which will form the bulk of my efforts in Chapter Three). Given the unsavory “personal” nature of resentment, critics may have a few worries about its plausibility as an appropriate response to moral failures or wrongdoing; its element of insult or personal offense can threaten to undermine its moral desirability in a few different ways. While these concerns deserve more attention than I can give here, I will address them briefly.

First, one might think that the experience of resentment threatens to makes others’ bad treatment of us “personal” in a way that may perhaps compromise our judgment. Like other emotions (e.g. grief), resentment can “overtake us” and cause us to focus obsessively on the crime in question, channeling our actions into the hasty pursuit of misguided projects like revenge.⁸³ However, while that’s certainly true, it doesn’t seem that resentment is wholly outside of our control. In at least some cases, we can plausibly say that it’s still subject to critical evaluation. We may think to ourselves: “Is my resentment really reasonable?” and conclude that it’s not—as when we wake up from a dream, mad at our partner for something that they did not actually do, only to shake off our resentment as the day goes on.⁸⁴ Insofar as we can exercise control over our judgments, we need not be swept away. While the capacity to self-reflect is not a be-all end-all defense, I merely wish to challenge the premise that taking things “personally” always and totally corrupts our judgment and self-control.

⁸³ Critics of anger comment on the way in which it can have “tunnel vision”—an obsessive focus on the object and a desire to confront the upsetting situation. Litvak et al, “Fuel in the Fire,” 291.

⁸⁴ Although I’ve never personally experienced this, it’s a common enough phenomenon that I’ve heard about it from others.

However, there's a second way in which it can go wrong. We may think that resentment's basic orientation is morally faulty insofar as it cares more about a superficial concern—where the resenter stands vis-à-vis others—than about righting wrongs or preventing them in the future (the things that we *ought* to care about). That is, we may think that Martha Nussbaum's critique of what she calls "status anger" is apt in cases of resentment. In Section 2.2, I will look more closely at Nussbaum's critique of resentment—ultimately, I think it's limited in its portrayal of resentment, and that there are other modes of resentment that reveal it to be less obviously morally doomed. While it does seem true that resentment can go wrong if it is obsessed with status and rank, I will ultimately argue that in some cases resentment can look differently and in these cases, it has a valuable moral role to play.

There is still another final way in which resentment can go wrong. To state the obvious, not all of the expectations which generate resentment are properly moral. And in these cases, we may surely have cause to be suspicious of resentment. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of male entitlement and its accompanying violence (in the most severe cases): it's a product of certain misogynistic expectations, e.g. access to women.⁸⁵ The inevitable violation of these expectations is a recipe for narcissistic resentment in the misogynist male. Consider Elliot Rodger's manifesto, published after his shooting spree on a college campus in Santa Barbara. Rodger's rage is thought to be motivated by continuous rejection from women (in his manifesto, he writes: "Women's rejection of me is a declaration of war, and if it's war they want, then war they shall have"). Rodger's sense of rejection extended to his friends as well. Upon being ditched by a newly popular friend one night, he flies into a rage:

⁸⁵ In her account of misogyny, Kate Manne writes about the role of expectations and norms in the generation of privileged agents' resentment, which functions as an instrument of the patriarchy. Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, 58–61. For a discussion of Elliot Rodger and misogyny, see 34–48.

As I spent more time with them that night, I noticed that Addison's new status amongst the popular Malibu crowd had changed his attitude. It made him very cocky and arrogant. He treated ME like a loser the whole time. Later that night, he ditched me and Philip to go to a party with some girls that he knew from Malibu. I was seething with rage...After putting up with Addison's insulting behavior, this was too much. I became so upset that I tried my first cigarette.⁸⁶

I do not wish to defend resentment in those cases in which the resenter's expectations have gone awry. And while misogynistic expectations clearly fall beyond the realm of the acceptable, there is a larger conversation to be had about what kinds of expectations are acceptable. I will not discuss that here, but insofar as there will be at least *some* cases in which our resentment is grounded in appropriate shared norms, I take it that I can proceed.

To wrap up: what is integral to the experience of resentment is the element of *insult* that we feel when another has shown disregard. As we'll see shortly, there are a variety of reasons we can find others' disregard insulting—perhaps it issues a degrading claim about our moral worth, or somehow downranks us vis-à-vis the offender. In many cases, others' insulting disregard—their refusal or negligence to take our ends, interests, and projects into consideration—will coincide with violated moral norms and expectations. In these latter cases, resentment looks to be doing moral work. I will discuss that more in Section 2.4 and Chapter 3, but for now I will just reiterate: on my view, resentment is both the cognitive assessment that another has failed to show us due regard (either by violating our interests and shared expectations, or by otherwise belittling us) *and* the affective response of anger; it's an experience of insult/offense at another's belittlement of us—however we cash that out.

⁸⁶ Rodger, "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger," 64.

Honor Views

The relevant question for our purposes now is: what is the exact nature of the demotion which triggers resentment? Before we can make any normative claims about resentment, we have to get our descriptive account of the phenomenon right. To say that resentment tracks an insulting demotion of a kind is not yet clear enough. There are many different ways in which we can experience the insult of a demotion—as many as there are situations in which we can experience others’ condescension or disregard. Does resentment track threats to our rank? Insulting claims about our worth? Or perhaps something more treacherous?

Before we get into it, a note on the “insult” aspect of resentment: while we often form judgments that another has disregarded us, what is distinct about resentment is the affective registering of such treatment—the “sting” or “heat” of anger. The feeling of personal offense which is particular to resentment is generated in part by the resenter’s worldview and expectations. However, our affective response reflects not only that cognitive content (e.g. beliefs, expectations), but also a *status* concern of a kind—it is that status, in which we’re invested, that makes the judgment that another has somehow disregarded us threatening. We feel insulted in cases in which we perceive that another has “belittled” us along some dimension: worth, rank, etc. In other words, insult is the registering of another’s relative assertion of superiority (or declaration of our inferiority): it has to do with either an interagential comparison or a larger global scheme of rank/worth.

Competing accounts of resentment have different articulations of the resenter’s experience of the insult of moral injury: Martha Nussbaum understands it in terms of down-rankings (threats to honor),⁸⁷ while Jean Hampton understands the resenter’s experience as a

⁸⁷ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 17.

threatening attack on his worth.⁸⁸ Ultimately, I will argue that neither of these quite capture what is at stake in many cases of resentment. There is a kind of resentment—evident in phrases like: “Who does he think he is?”; “He thinks he can push me around;” etc—that is not concerned with our rank or about another’s estimation of our worth, but about whether or not the offender thinks he is *accountable* to us—a fundamentally different sort of concern. In Chapter 3, I will go on to say more about that particular focus of resentment. But first, I will turn to two accounts of resentment’s normative content—honor views and worth views.

On the honor view, resentment registers another’s belittlement of us along some relative domain of *esteem*—whether that of ability, wealth, coolness, skill, beauty, and so on. Aristotle remarks upon the many domains in which people can experience a belittlement which might provoke resentment:

For men think it right that they should be revered by those inferior to them by birth, by power and by virtue and in general by whatever it is in which they much excel; for instance, with money, the rich have this attitude to the poor, and in speaking the rhetorician has it to the men who cannot speak, and the ruler to the ruled, and the man fit to rule to the man fit to be ruled.⁸⁹

On honor views, the belittlement in question can come about in any domain in which the resenter feels superior and expects others’ acknowledgment of her superiority. However, it should be clarified that the kind of belittlements with which we are concerned are often more substantial than, say, the questioning of one’s skill at a given sport or the refusal to properly revere a noble. That is, insults often constitute failures to acknowledge our *moral* standing and not just our “coolness”—they may “take us down a notch” in a way that threatens our substantive status as

⁸⁸ Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 54-55.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1378b-1379a.

moral equals. In modern times, we might recognize the wide range of belittlements to include failures of *respect*, although ancient accounts do not have that kind of vocabulary.

In any case, the important point is that, in the eyes of the resenter, the belittlement threatens to damage her honor and reduce her rank.⁹⁰ Honor-focused resentment, then, is a response to another's insulting demotion of rank; its ultimate aim is ego recovery via the restoration of rank—which is often inflicted through the mechanism of payback (in Nussbaum's words: "bringing the injurer low").⁹¹ In what follows, I will present and consider Martha Nussbaum's contemporary account of honor-focused resentment. Ultimately, I argue that while resentment may be concerned with social rank in some cases, the honor view has shortcomings as a framework for understanding the normative elements of particular cases of resentment.

First, a quick overview of Nussbaum's normative stance on anger. Recall from Chapter 1 that part of what motivates Nussbaum's moral critique of anger is its frequent concern with status: "Anger is not always, but very often, about status-injury. And status-injury has a narcissistic flavor: rather than focusing on the wrongfulness of the act as such, a focus that might lead to concern for wrongful acts of the same type more generally, the status-angry person focuses obsessively on herself and her standing vis-à-vis others."⁹² If anger is not obsessed with status, then it engages in a kind of magical thinking: the resenter imagines that striking back at the offender will somehow restore the cosmic balance in the world. These unsavory elements of anger make it ill-advised. Instead, Nussbaum thinks, we ought to evacuate our anger as quickly as possible and head towards what she calls "transition anger"—a forward-looking perspective that, rather than ruminating on status loss or engaging in a kind of magical retributive thinking,

⁹⁰ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 28.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 21.

⁹² *Ibid*, 36.

asks: “What can be done so that a wrongdoing like X never happens again?”⁹³ In her account, Nussbaum is concerned to address anger more generally, but I am focusing on cases of resentment in particular (which are still vulnerable to her overall critique of anger).

Now, we can turn to the motivating question for the chapter: how are we to understand the insulting demotion which inspires resentment? On Nussbaum’s view, resentment is concerned primarily with demotions of one’s social rank. Nussbaum’s understanding of resentment makes sense in light of her Aristotelian honor-based approach. For Aristotle, anger is the registering of *slights*—actions which communicate “the opinion of someone or something as of little or no importance.”⁹⁴ As mentioned above, these slights can occur in a lot of different domains. To feel resentment, one must desire recognition of her superiority in some realm of esteem, whether it’s wealth, birth, ability, etc. To be denied the proper esteem in these various categories is to endure an insulting threat to one’s social position, rank, or reputation.

Nussbaum follows Aristotle in thinking that the notion of honor provides a fertile way to understand the ubiquity of modern anger. On her view, it is somewhat self-congratulatory to think that we’ve left behind petty concerns with our status, especially given the obsessive attention paid by Americans to competitive ranking in terms of wealth and other domains of esteem.⁹⁵ Status anger is the byproduct of a general and widespread status-anxiety:

Many societies do encourage people to think of all injuries as essentially about them and their own relative ranking. Life involves perpetual status-anxiety, and more or less everything that happens either raises one’s own rank or lowers it. Aristotle’s society, as he depicts it, was to a large extent like this, and he was very critical of this tendency, on the grounds that obsessive focus on honor impedes the pursuit of intrinsic goods...the tendency to see everything that happens as about oneself or one’s own rank seems very narcissistic, and ill-suited to a society in which reciprocity and justice are important

⁹³ Ibid, 37.

⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2, 1378b.

⁹⁵ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 20.

values.’⁹⁶

Like Aristotle, Nussbaum’s notion of status-anxiety includes an obsessive focus on soliciting and maintaining others’ *esteem* in certain dimensions; we are sensitive to any comments or behaviors which may suggest we are lacking in some department or other. In many cases, others may not even intend to insult us. However, to the extent that they do, their apparent estimation of us effects (or threatens) a *down-ranking*; and it is that demotion of rank which triggers our resentment.

One might be tempted to think that status concerns, on the honor view, are merely concerns about others’ ranking of us within a given domain (e.g. ability, attractiveness, wealth). For instance, if another person calls me ugly, that could inspire my resentment insofar as the belittlement reveals that I am not as attractive as I thought I was. By insulting me in this way, the offender is calling into question my sense of myself as an attractive person, something I may take great pride in. However, the down-ranking which Nussbaum has in mind goes beyond the refusal to grant one esteem along a particular dimension. The relevant demotion is not *just* our status within a discrete domain: e.g. as a comparatively “ugly” or “pretty” person, vis-à-vis others. Rather, the resenter fixates on the damage to her *overall* social rank vis-à-vis other people. Roughly put, our “rank” or “standing” (Nussbaum uses the terms somewhat interchangeably) is a relative position that the resenter occupies in relation to other individuals—especially the one(s) who issued the insult.

While the belittlements are frequently attacks on the resenter via some domain of social esteem, they need not be. Resentment’s purview extends beyond belittlements in the realms of honor and esteem. On Nussbaum view, the status-anxious agent sees *all* insults or injuries—even

⁹⁶ Ibid, 28.

severe and wrongful ones which pose threats to her dignity—as a sort of rank demotion.

Consider Nussbaum's example of Angela, a woman who experiences status anger when her friend is raped:

Angela is pained, etc. She believes that O's bad act is not only a wrongful act that seriously damaged someone dear to her, but also an insult or denigration of her. She thinks something like, "This guy thinks that he can insult my friend's dignity with impunity, and, insofar as he thinks this, he thinks that he can push me around—that I'll just sit by while my friend is insulted. So he diminishes me and insults my self-respect." Here the connection between pain and retaliation is made through the Aristotelian idea that the eudaimonistic ego-damage O has inflicted is a kind of humiliation or down-ranking. No matter how implausible it is to read O's act as a down-ranking of Angela (given that O doesn't know Angela, or even Rebecca), Angela sees O's harm to her friend as an ego-wound that lessens Angela's status. She therefore thinks that lowering O through pain and even humiliation will right the balance.⁹⁷

Before we go on to analyze the example, two things are worth noting here. First, Nussbaum chooses an example in which someone is angry on behalf of someone else (using the distinction I set up at the beginning, Angela technically experiences what we might call indignation); so it's not, strictly speaking, *resentment*. However, Angela's anger is still self-involved insofar as it makes the offender's wrongdoing about *her*. She is angry at the offender on behalf of both Angela and herself. Second, and more importantly, Angela's sense of diminishment is not attached to a relative domain of esteem: the insulting down-ranking is not indexed to wealth, ability, beauty, or some other feature of her person which affects her general social rank. Rather, Angela feels diminished or insulted in a different way: the offender "thinks he can push [her] around."

Nussbaum's honor-based analysis of anger and its status concerns cannot articulate the content of Angela's resentment here. On Nussbaum's honor-based view, resentment's status

⁹⁷ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 25.

concern is about maintaining a certain rank such that we are not thought to be inferior to others. What Angela is concerned with here, though, seems to be importantly different: the focus of her resentment is not merely a demotion in global rank vis-à-vis the offender (and a resultant loss of honor), but a local relation in which she is vulnerable to him: she doesn't want to be "pushed around" by him. To be down-ranked, in part, is to occupy a position of relative disempowerment at the hands of another. To say that Angela's resentment focuses on his diminution of her social rank and its implications for her honor is to address only part of the picture: she is insulted, as well, by his elevation of himself *above* her. From her perspective, he thinks that he can do things to her (and others) with impunity. That is, she doesn't care about her rank *per se*, but about the kind of power it affords her.

The difficulty is that Angela seems to be pointing to a kind of problematic relation between her and the offender, one that Nussbaum's honor-based analysis can't capture. Such an analysis would interpret her resentment strictly in terms of a desire for an external sort of position or status. Rather, what she wants is to be treated appropriately within a certain specific relation: she is lowered vis-à-vis the offender, not in some grand scheme, but in a dangerously asymmetrical relationship. The problem, in short, is that the honor-based approach to resentment's status concern transmutes the agent's concern with a corrupt interpersonal dynamic into a superficial sort of concern about one's honor.

Nussbaum might not see a problem with the fact that her theory articulates the phenomenon at hand in such a way; rather than distorting it, she would likely argue that it *reflects the reality* of a phenomenon that is unfortunately endemic to Western cultures. On her view, it's a major problem that status-angry people frequently make the move from serious

injury to status injury, in many cases failing to grasp the depth and nature of the wrong done.⁹⁸

While that's all well and good, the problem is that not every sort of resentment has a narcissistic profile. As I argued in Chapter 1, we should make conceptual space for a kind of resentment that does *not* have ego-concerns built into it; while Nussbaum would not necessarily dismiss the idea outright, there seems to be little indication that she has thought about the concerns of resentment in terms other than as a self-involved obsession with rank.

What if, for instance, we wanted to talk about resentment in response to severe forms of wrongdoing or injustice? Say we take the position of Angela's friend (Rebecca) instead of Angela's. Notice that Nussbaum uses Angela's positionality as a third party to paint a picture of how absurd and out of control status anger can be. That may be a strategic choice for more reasons than one; if she were to suggest that *Rebecca's* anger at being raped was a narcissistic response—one that indulges thoughts about honor and rank—it would be offensive because it fails to reference the deep wrongfulness of the rape. Nussbaum's account of anger would start to look unattractive: we might think that there is something off about any moral theory which can't recognize the legitimacy of sufferers' angry responses.

In response, perhaps Nussbaum would double-down on the idea that such an angry response on the part of Rebecca (and other survivors) would be narcissistic—while still affirming that the rape itself is deeply wrong and a violation of her dignity. What makes status anger such a tragedy, she thinks, is that it *doesn't* adequately address the wrongness of wrongdoing.⁹⁹ To avoid saying anything unseemly, she could point out that a commitment to

⁹⁸ Nussbaum writes: "Still, the tendency to see everything that happens as about oneself and one's own rank seems very narcissistic, and ill-suited to a society in which reciprocity and justice are important values. It loses the sense that actions have intrinsic moral worth: that rape is bad because of the suffering it inflicts, and not because of the way it humiliates the friends of the victim." Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 28.

⁹⁹ Nussbaum writes: "Still, the tendency to see everything that happens as about oneself and one's own

anger's narcissism and a belief in agents' dignity can stand together: the narcissistic quality of our status anger does not negate the independent wrong of the harm that's been done to us.

The problem with that kind of response is that it would threaten to foreclose the possibility that our resentful responses to wrongdoings are often evaluative and intentional—that our anger can track things in the world that are in fact wrong. Recall that on Nussbaum's own cognitivist view, emotions represent objects in the world as having certain properties.¹⁰⁰ To fear something is to see it as scary—to be angry is to see a thing as wrong or somehow threatening an object or person that we care about. If we take seriously the idea that anger can represent the world as it really is (at least, in cases where anger is fitting and appropriate), then Nussbaum's theory of anger limited and insufficient. That is, it would be strange to think that anger necessarily short-circuits into navel-gazing narcissism—but that is all that Nussbaum's theory allows us to say, given the paucity of conceptual categories that she offers to identify the normative content of our anger. If our response to indignities is always or often, tragically, mere narcissism, then that would suggest that our anger is not actually epistemically engaged—but rather a solipsistic pain of sorts.¹⁰¹ On the “status anger” view, victims' and survivors' affective responses become self-involved reactive responses rather than world-regarding evaluations which link up with wrongs or indignities that are happening in the world.

rank seems very narcissistic, and ill-suited to a society in which reciprocity and justice are important values. It loses the sense that actions have intrinsic moral worth: that rape is bad because of the suffering it inflicts, and not because of the way it humiliates the friends of the victim.” Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 19.

¹⁰¹ In fairness to Nussbaum, she doesn't say that anger is *always* obsessed with status. However, she does think it is “often” about that—the alternative is mere “magical thinking.” Neither category of anger is sufficient to analyze the situation at hand, in any case.

I do not want to misrepresent Nussbaum's view: to be clear, she does not think that *every* case of anger is a case of status anger. In some cases, anger can be an instance of magical thinking. However, my basic point is that without offering us a *different* way of discussing anger's status concerns—one that is tracking indignities—her theory risks overlooking or misinterpreting a lot of phenomena. While many cases of resentment may reflect a narcissistic status concern, there are surely other different ways of understanding resentment's status preoccupation. If we only use Nussbaum's account to process the normative content in resentment, then we're left with sizeable gaps: are wrongdoings insulting only in virtue of their damage to our honor? Are agents really processing the insult strictly in terms of honor? Traditionally, moral philosophers have developed other ways of articulating the sorts of demoting and insulting messages issued by wrongdoing (e.g. threats to dignity)—is it a stretch to think that resentful agents themselves may be sensitive to these demotions as well, understanding them in terms other than damage or threats to honor? What we need is an alternative way to think about the “insult” of others' disregard. In the next section, I will consider a more promising candidate: worth-based views.

Worth Views

On worth views, resentment tracks a demotion which is framed in terms of value. Proponents of worth views understand resentment as a response to moral injuries which issue an insulting message about the worth or value of the victim.¹⁰² On these views, resentment reaffirms

¹⁰² Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness”; Boxill, “Self-Respect and Protest”; Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment”; Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred.”

the worth or value of the resenter. I will focus on Jean Hampton's account, which is most explicit about the resenter's concern with value and the moral injury's demotion of her worth:

What is it that really bothers us about being wronged? It is not simply that wrongdoings threaten or produce physical or psychological damage, or damage to our careers, interests, or families. However much we may sorrow over our bad fortune, when the same damage is threatened or produced by natural forces or by accidents, we do not experience that special anger that comes from having been *insulted*. When someone wrongs another, she does not regard her victim as the sort of person who is valuable enough to require better treatment. Whereas nature cannot treat us in accord with our moral value, we believe other human beings are able and required to do so. Hence when they do not, we are insulted in the sense that we believe they have ignored the high standing that value gives us.¹⁰³

If we understand wrongdoing or other forms of disregard as making a kind of propositional claim about our worth, then the belittlement which triggers insult can be understood not in terms of a social ranking or position, but as an inherent value assessment of our worth as human beings. The insulting belittlement, in the eyes of the resenter, is simply another's view that we are not *worth* better treatment.

On Hampton's account, there are two ways that one can experience the belittlement or degradation which provokes anger on behalf of oneself: one can feel either *demeaned* or *diminished*. These different kinds of degradation form the basis of indignation and resentment, respectively. One feels demeaned in cases in which a wrongdoers' actions are disrespectful of her worth—or in other words, the wrongdoer fails to treat the victim in accordance with her objective value.¹⁰⁴ In feeling demeaned, one grasps one's own worth and feels rightful anger at another's failure to recognize it. Such a response is considered, on Hampton's account, to be one

¹⁰³ Hampton, "Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred," 44.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 45.

of indignation.¹⁰⁵ However, if the victim already suffers from a compromised sense of self-worth and/or she takes the action to somehow reduce her worth, then she may feel *diminished*.¹⁰⁶ One can feel diminished in one of two ways: either one does not have a positive sense of self-worth to begin with, or one takes another person's action to somehow *rob* him of his value: that is, he thinks that the action actually changes his value along some relative or subjective dimension.

The agent's sense of self-worth dictates whether or not she will experience indignation or resentment. As a reaction to being demeaned, indignation simply protests the act of degradation—it is not a “personally defensive” reaction.¹⁰⁷ For example, a mother may feel that her child demeans her by lying to her—a wrong action and an insult of a sort—but she does not feel personally *attacked* by the child's failure because she does not take it to reveal anything about her worth. In contrast, the person who feels diminishment—a person whose self-worth is at stake—feels a reaction of what Hampton calls “personal defense.” In that case, the person is experiencing resentment. The experience of resentment is “not only a protest against the demeaning treatment but *a defense against the action's attack on one's self-esteem*.”¹⁰⁸ Whereas indignant victims only experience being demeaned, resentful victims are both demeaned and diminished.

On Hampton's account, resentment involves 1) the victim's belief (to some degree) that the wrongdoer has made a mistake about their value, and 2) the *fear* that the wrongdoer is

¹⁰⁵ While “indignation” typically refers to anger on behalf of others or the rules, on Hampton's account it is possible to be indignant on behalf of oneself: it is a reaction to being demeaned.

¹⁰⁶ Hampton notes that one can be diminished in two ways: either one does not have a positive sense of self-worth to begin with, or one takes another person's action to somehow *rob* them of their value: that is, they think the action actually changes their value along some relative/subjective dimension.

¹⁰⁷ It's not clear that indignation, as Hampton describes it, is actually *anger*—rather, it's something like the recognition that another has acted out of turn, with the desire that it be corrected through protest; at least as she describes it in *Mercy and Forgiveness*, it seems to lack heat.

¹⁰⁸ Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 56.

somehow right to think that his status is already low enough to permit the bad treatment, or that his worth can actually be lowered and that it is permissible for the wrongdoer to lower it via bad treatment. In short, the insulting treatment “has raised a doubt about their value and rank.”¹⁰⁹ Notice here that Hampton uses the language of “rank” in addition to worth—and in fact, her account is cited decades later by Nussbaum, who explicitly compares her account to Hampton’s (except in her account, Nussbaum focuses on the concept of rank).¹¹⁰ For the purposes of my argument, I’d like to focus on the concept of worth. Can we understand the insulting nature of belittlement, which resentment tracks, in terms of wrongdoers’ propositions about our worth?

In many cases, it does seem like the resenter is responding to imagined claims about her worth, taking offense at the other person’s view of her. Take the case of Elliot Rodger: his rage at others’ slights and rejection certainly reflects a concern with his worth or value. In his manifesto, he writes:

I had never been a violent person in nature, but after building up so much hatred over the years, I realized that I wouldn’t hesitate to kill or even torture my hated enemies if I was given the opportunity. I spent the next five days in my room, trying to forget about the horrific experiences I had to go through. But even in my room, I couldn’t escape from being reminded of my worthlessness.¹¹¹

On one reading of Rodger, he exhibits a classic case of rank-obsessed resentment. Rodger’s anger is in part a product of his desire for social rank or status—over and over, he laments not being popular and having a girlfriend (the social markers of achievement or success in his world).¹¹² And so from one angle, the honor-based conception of resentment seems to capture the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 57.

¹¹⁰ Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 26.

¹¹¹ Elliot Rodger, “My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger,” 87.

¹¹² Rodger’s obsession with status is apparent in several passages of his manifesto, including one in which he tries to convince his mother to marry “up” so that he can gain access to wealth and a higher status: “I still continued to pester her to [marry], and she still stubbornly refused. I will always resent my mother for

normative content of his rage—others’ mistreatment of him is a “down-ranking” of sorts that is felt, all the more intensely, because of his larger social aspirations.

However, it seems clear that the concern of Rodger’s resentment is not just social *rank*, but what he takes others’ treatment of him to reveal about his worth: on his own account, he is tortured by a sense of worthlessness. Rodger’s resentment is complex and illustrates a variety of concerns, as articulated by different theories of resentment. Following Nussbaum, we might say that at times it exhibits a *focus* on rank or standing vis-à-vis others; however, its underlying motivation is a larger anxiety about value (and not strictly speaking about social standing or rank, as a straight-forward “status anger” analysis would appear to suggest). Rodger’s mistake is to think that getting the kind of status recognition which he desires will somehow prove his worth to others, rather than already having confidence in his own worth.

While Hampton is ambivalent about the value of resentment because it is a self-defeating strategy for securing affirmation of one’s worth,¹¹³ others see resentment’s concern with worth in more positive terms.¹¹⁴ On Pamela Hieronymi’s view, for instance, wrongdoers (or other perpetrators of moral injury) author a kind of threatening claim with their bad behavior. If gone uncorrected, the wrongdoing says, in essence, that the victim can be treated poorly and that such treatment is acceptable.¹¹⁵ In doing so, it poses a threat to the victim and her worth. On a view like Hieronymi’s, the belittlement in question is not so much a perceived *reduction* in worth, but rather another’s failure to appropriately acknowledge one’s worth (much like Hampton’s

refusing to do this. If not for her sake, she should have done it for mine. Joining a family of great wealth would have truly saved my life. I would have a high enough status to attract beautiful girlfriends and live above all of my enemies. All of my horrific troubles would have been eased instantly. It is very selfish of my mother to not consider this.” Elliot Rodger “My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger,” 150.

¹¹³ Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 63.

¹¹⁴ Shoemaker, *You Oughta Know*, 82; Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger,” 38.

¹¹⁵ Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” 546.

definition of indignation). Insofar as resentment protests such a belittlement, it can be a salutary exercise in anger. In Hieronymi's words: "Anger sometimes marks a positive moral achievement—perhaps the overcoming of cynicism, the recognition of the moral significance of the offender, or the affirmation of one's own worth."¹¹⁶ It's worth emphasizing that Hieronymi does not understand resentment as fundamentally a crisis of *self*-worth, as Hampton does; rather, on her view, it simply strives to challenge the wrongdoer's failure to recognize the resenter's worth.

The worth-based analysis of resentment does seem to apply in many cases. However, it doesn't necessarily *have* to be the case that resentment is always responding to belittling claims about our worth. In Section 2.3, I will articulate alternative possibilities for understanding the sorts of status concerns which inform the insult of others' disregard. Before we get there, however, I'll first address a few hurdles for worth-based views.

One initial difficulty—at least, with Hampton's analysis—is that it is unclear how a person can believe that the wrongdoer has made a mistake about their value and yet simultaneously fear, on some level, that the wrongdoer is right to treat her in the way that he does. It would seem that, if we feel the sting of insult in response to wrongdoing, we *already* have a sense of our own self-worth. We do not accept the treatment as something that we somehow deserve—rather, we feel insulted by it. How, then, can we fear that the wrongdoer may be correct? In response, a person who is sympathetic to Hampton could say: Perhaps resentment is simply based on an *irrational* fear—one "knows" that the wrongdoer has made a mistake about their worth, but still fears that they are incorrect about their own worth. Such a response is certainly psychologically possible: we're often the victims of irrational fears, and those who

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 554.

experience resentment are perhaps no different. Resenters' degree of certainty about their own status is apparently compromised. In such a case, the belittlement in question could be understood by the confused resenter as a reduction of her worth.

While that's all well and good, a different and deeper sort of problem exists for views which posit worth as the resenter's chief concern. These accounts seem to presuppose an inherent value in the agent—after all, that is the property that has somehow come under threat by the offender's disregard. However, if we subscribe to some *inherent* concept of worth—say, dignity—then it follows that our value cannot actually be reduced through others' treatment of us. Dignity is not the sort of thing that can be taken away from us if it is truly an inherent value—a worth that we have in virtue of being human.¹¹⁷ Any defensive reaction at all, it seems, is simply misguided: resenters are deluded to think that their value *can* be reduced by another's treatment of them, when in fact it cannot. Rationally speaking, we ought to instead recognize that another's assessment of our worth is entirely inconsequential. To quote Jerome Neu, on the proper perspective that one might take as a self-respecting person: “Nietzsche's superior man, like Aristotle's grandly proud one, could not take the sting of a lowly insect personally. To feel insulted by a boor or a buffoon might involve taking them more seriously than anyone, any sensible person, should.”¹¹⁸ More colloquially, we might think of the saying: “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

In response, the resenter may still insist that her concerns are appropriate. Recasting the defense of resentment, one could say that we feel anger when others simply fail to *recognize* our

¹¹⁷ I do not intend to imply that only humans have dignity, or that humanity is the only feature which may give a being dignity.

¹¹⁸ Neu, *Sticks and Stones*, 15–16.

value—or to put it more strongly, in Hampton’s terms, when they “challenge” our value.¹¹⁹ In so doing, wrongdoers may pose a threat to our worth. However, if it doesn’t make any sense to say that dignity can be *negated* by another’s wrongdoing, then it surely does not make much sense to say that it can be *threatened*. If we truly subscribe to a theory of inherent and inalienable dignity, then how could a wrongdoing on the part of a mere human remove that value? We can’t face the threat of having something removed if it’s not the sort of thing that can be removed.

Conceptually, it makes little sense to say our dignity can be removed, or even threatened; it’s simply not the sort of thing that can face either fate.

The problem for Hampton’s view is as follows. First, it seems clear that if we subscribe to egalitarian theories of worth, then others’ failures to recognize our value seem irrelevant: we still *have* the value, regardless. Thus, resentment is irrational insofar as it believes that others can actually take away our worth. Righteous indignation, while thought to be morally appropriate in a way that its cousin resentment is not, is vulnerable to a similar problem. Although we may conceptualize the demotion of value as a *threat* or a “challenge” to our worth, it still seems incoherent to say that our value, itself, is under siege by another. If neither of these responses is entirely rational because our worth is inalienable, then it starts to look like our resentment is misguided—or to put it less generously, that resinters are deluded. Perhaps we ought to “turn the other cheek”—to recognize that the others’ misdeeds cannot (and should not) affect us so personally.

We might think, though, that such a response is unsatisfying—that some status demotion or belittlement is being threatened when others treat us wrongly or poorly. Samuel Reis-Dennis puts it this way:

¹¹⁹ Hampton, “Forgiveness, Resentment, and Hatred,” 59.

As much as we may not want to admit it, the actions of others *can* diminish us. We can be disrespected and socially lowered. In a certain mood, it is easy to say that we ought not care about our social standing, that we should render ourselves invulnerable to the contempt and status-related disrespect of others by reminding ourselves of our intrinsic worth, moral status, and inalienable dignity... In practice, however, there are times when our dignity really *is* at risk, when we are genuinely “dissed.”¹²⁰

Here, Reis-Dennis mentions a risk to the resenter’s dignity. As I’ve said, it seems conceptually incoherent to talk about our dignity being threatened. However, I think that his general point is largely correct. There is a way in which others’ mistreatment really *can* belittle us. It’s not by way of failing to recognize our value, *per se*, but by failing to respect the kind of normative status that we have in virtue of our value.

That is, we might experience the wrongdoing as insulting insofar as the wrongdoer fails to recognize us—not just as *worthy* people—but as people who are *owed* something (a decisively different concept, which may be conceptually connected to our worth but is not synonymous with it). While our worth cannot be taken away, what can be taken away (or in flux) is other agents’ respect for us: their recognition that, *in virtue of our value* (or some other feature of ourselves), we are owed a certain deference. The insulting belittlement in question is not worth-based or honor-based but instead registers another’s refusal to regulate their behavior in certain ways; in doing so, they signal to the resenter that they do not see him as a person who deserves respect. He is therefore “lowered”—not in social rank, but in relative authority (which is admittedly a rank of a sort). Importantly, our ensuing sense of insult at such a demotion isn’t simply about retaining our social standing—but maintaining the sort of *influence* that such a position affords. More on that in Section 2.4.

¹²⁰ Reis-Dennis, “On the Hook: Responsibility in Real Life,” 24.

Before moving on to Section 2.4, one last quick thought. Understanding resentment strictly in terms of others' recognition of our worth might give us pause for a different reason. If we center the social and political struggles of oppressed groups, then it becomes problematic to frame their resentment in terms of a desire for others' recognition of their worth.¹²¹ Kelly Oliver raises a problem with specific theories of recognition that is applicable here:

[On these theories,] marginalized groups struggle for recognition from dominant groups or institutions, groups or institutions that establish the criteria for being recognized and control its conferral. This notion of recognition makes oppressed peoples beholden to their oppressors for recognition, even if that recognition affords them political rights and improved social standing.¹²²

While it is perhaps unavoidable that oppressed groups will have to solicit recognition from their oppressors (of some kind), to seek others' recognition of their worth is not necessarily desirable from the point of view of the oppressed because it grants too much power to their oppressors.

Drawing on Bernard Boxill, Matthew Talbert argues that blame may instead take the form of a Du Boisian protest that aims at "demonstrating and affirming the protester's *own* sense of self-worth."¹²³ Importantly, "such protest is communicative, but the communication is meant largely for the protestor and his fellow sufferers; to the degree that it communicates with the oppressor, it is not an invitation to dialogue so much as a defiant declaration."¹²⁴

An ideal account of political resistance would reserve space for expressions of recognition (including resentment) that are not solicitations of others' recognition of groups'

¹²¹ Although I am invoking groups, I set aside the difficult question of collective resentment here. For an account of collective resentment, see Stockdale, "Collective Resentment."

¹²² Oliver, "Witnessing, Recognition, and Response Ethics," 477.

¹²³ Talbert, "Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest," 106. Italics mine.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 106.

worth, especially if Talbert and Boxill are correct that self-respect involves having faith in one's worth. Consequently, we need a different way of talking about the insulting threats which motivate social groups' political resentment, one that takes moral injury seriously and captures the threat of wrongdoing—all without engaging in a struggle for recognition which is at odds with one's own self-worth. In Section 2.4, I will propose a new focus for resentment which better captures its normative content in certain cases.

A New Focus

If we are going to redeem angry blame, we need to point to manifestations of it that have moral value. Nussbaum's account of status anger (more narrowly, status anger on behalf of oneself) offers us a pretty ugly picture of angry blame—on her view, narcissistic angry blame does not have much to recommend it, morally speaking. Fortunately, as we've seen, Nussbaum's portrait of angry blame is not the only contender. Other kinds of angry blame do have positive moral content—on worth-based accounts of resentment, we may feel anger when others treat us in ways that do not sync up with our sense of what we're worth. While worth-based views do advance a morally salutary picture of angry blame, it would be ideal to get a fuller picture of the different kinds of *moral* angry blame on offer. I will conclude this chapter by identifying a species of resentment which allows us to capture the gravity of moral injury (and one that avoids conceptual incoherence and the compromising of oppressed agents' integrity, two difficulties faced by worth-based views).

To briefly recap the chapter's argument: thus far, I have considered two ways of understanding the normative content of resentment—honor-based and worth-based conceptions—finding them both lacking for various reasons. While wrongdoing or disregard

does issue a belittlement or insult of a sort, it need not be cashed out in terms of demotions in rank or claims about one's worth. Rather, the insult may be understood in terms of the offender's failure to recognize a certain status that we have as moral equals: we might say, following respect-based approaches, that the source of our insult is another's disrespect for our person. But disrespect itself is not refined enough to capture the sense of "belittlement" which triggers resentment's characteristic feeling of insult; others can disrespect us—fail to see us as moral equals, fail to count us into their deliberations—without thereby insulting us and triggering the heated feelings of "personal defense" which uniquely constitute resentment. In order to get clearer on the phenomenon of resentment, we have to get more specific about what, exactly, *rankles* or *insults* us about others' disrespect (a reaction that only happens in some cases of disrespect and not others).

I'll begin by returning to the insight at the start of the chapter. While many theories of resentment understand it as a judgment of wrongdoing, there is an additional level of the phenomenon of resentment which requires analysis: that is, resenter's insulted reaction to offenders' disregard. On my view, many instances of resentment are an affective reaction to another's insulting belittlement of us. From the resenter's point of view, the other has indicated disregard—not just for the rules or standards of conduct, but for their very person. In the words of Pamela Hieronymi:

I don't resent you because you failed to achieve some standard of human excellence or failed to live up to the norms internal to willing. Rather, I resent you because your action or attitude communicated disrespect or disregard for me...I am more concerned with myself, or with the relation in which we stand, or with your concern for me, or with how I figure into your world, than I am concerned with your performance...the significance of moral failure, I suggest, is to be found in the importance of standing in certain sort of

relationships with others: call them relationships of mutual regard.¹²⁵

When we speak of being demoted or belittled, we are not referring strictly to damage to our social rank, ego, or even our worth. Rather, resentment is concerned with our relative position within a specific *relationship*. Ideally, our relationships with others will be roughly mutual or reciprocal; however, when others violate our shared expectations, they appear to signal that we are no longer occupying a position of rough equality. We have thus been *demoted*. The resenter's conceptualization of such a demotion may rely on concepts like worth or rank in many cases, but the demotion itself is one of relative authority—to be disregarded is to be *dismissed*, as though one does not have claims on the offender.

Many expressions of resentment implicitly reference our expectation that, in virtue of our person, we are owed certain treatment—a kind of regard that others have unjustly denied us. For instance, think of the various common phrases that we associate with agents' expressions of anger: "Hey, I'm walkin' here," "It's like I don't matter," "I'm of no account," or "I felt invisible." These phrases suggest that, on the resenter's view, her very existence introduces or generates certain normative expectations for those around her. However, it appears that the offender does not appreciate these expectations, and therefore he does not appreciate *her*—she is irrelevant, nonexistent. The dismissal of her person is insulting—the offender belittles her by failing to incorporate the fact of her personhood into his deliberation or actions. The resenter is not taken to be, in the words of Rawls, a "self-authenticating source of valid claims."¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Hieronymi, "The Force and Fairness of Blame," 124.

¹²⁶ Invoking Rawls' language, Kauppinen has commented on anger as a mode of valuing which calls on others to recognize agents as sources of reasons to act in certain ways and not in others. See Kauppinen, "Valuing Anger," 37. For the original source of the quote, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 72.

The relevant insult here is an authority demotion of a sort, more than a mere reduction in rank or worth: the victim fails to appear on the offender's radar as a person who rightfully places constraints and obligations on the offender. The insulting demotion, in the eyes of the resenter, is the loss of standing within a specific relation as an authority who can place certain legitimate claims on the offender (in accordance with shared expectations and requirements). Put in a slightly different way, the insulting demotion is a loss of influence that the resenter ought to have; it involves damage to the resenter's agency more than her social rank or value. The resenter is insulted by another's apparent seizure of power, evident in phrases like: "Who does he think he is?" Or, to use the words of Nussbaum in her example of Angela: "He thinks he can push me around." Disregard communicates to the resenter that she is not only unworthy, but that she can be dismissed, ignored, or refused—things that jar with her sense of herself as an authority who can place claims on others.

If we understand anger as an authority-focused reactive response, then the aims of anger look decidedly different. Nussbaum's honor-based account understands anger as a vengeful reaction to wrongdoing—one that seeks to bring the other offender "low" to compensate for the victim's own loss in status. On worth views, the aims of resentment might be something like the recovery of self-worth, or another's appreciation of our worth. However, on the picture I have presented, resentment's aim looks to be others' recognition of our status as authorities—it is a reminder that we have a special moral status which obligates others to treat us in specific ways. Others' recognition of our authority in their actions and deliberation partly constitutes our standing as moral equals.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORITY-FOCUSED RESENTMENT

In Chapter 2, I examined two theories of resentment and found both insufficient for capturing reseners' concerns in cases of moral injury. Now, in Chapter 3, I will provide a larger picture of what is at stake in many cases of resentment. We can start by thinking about the moral content of resentment. When others disregard us, whether through active ill will or negligence, they fail to recognize our status as moral equals who are owed compliance with shared norms; or to put it differently, as beings who have claims on them in the form of constraints and obligations. Insofar as offenders flout these expectations, they disrespect our person. More than that, offenders may signal with their bad behavior that they do not view themselves as *accountable* to us—that is, they question or dismiss our authority as fellow persons to demand things of them. It is here that authority-focused resentment enters into the picture.

Jane Fonda's character in *Grace & Frankie* offers a good example of the kind of insulted anger which I call authority-focused resentment. In one episode, a sales clerk at the grocery store ignores the eponymous characters' requests for cigarettes because he's distracted by a younger customer, thus prompting Grace to yell at him:

Hello! Hello! Hello! What kind of animal treats people like this? Do you not see me? Do I not exist? You think it's all right to ignore us? Just because she's got grey hair? What? And I don't look like her? This poor woman needs a pack of cigarettes and she doesn't have a lot of time left!¹²⁷

Here, Grace is not so much concerned about her social rank or worth, but with the clerk's failure to recognize her person—along with her own ends or interests—as salient. She takes herself to be an equal—and as such, deserving of moral consideration; her existence, ends, and interests

¹²⁷ *Grace and Frankie*, "The Dinner," Season 1, Episode 3. Directed by Bryan Gordon. Written by Nancy Fichman and Jennifer Hoppe. Aired May 8, 2015, on Netflix.

ought to be recognized by others. The clerk's failure to recognize that status and the entitlements that come with it is insulting to her. In other words, she is insulted by the clerk's failure to recognize her *standing as an equal*.¹²⁸

While the clerk's dismissal of her status as a moral equal incites Grace's anger, her resentment has an extra layer of normative content. That is, she is not just insulted by his failure to recognize her as a being worthy of moral consideration, but by his willful dismissal of her authority: "You think it's alright to *ignore* us?" The clerk's disregard indicates an underlying attitude of threatening resistance or indifference toward her; not only does he fail to treat her as a person who can expect him to fulfill certain expectations, but in so doing he fails to recognize her authority as a person who can make claims on him. Ultimately, such a failure indicates that Grace's larger moral status is compromised: problematically, she does not have equal standing within the relationship.¹²⁹

In what follows, I will offer a picture of authority-focused resentment as a response to failures of regard which indicate not only a compromised authority, but a larger threat to the resenter's equal standing. By looking closely at the normative content of authority-focused resentment as a particular species of angry blame, we are able to see why its angry core is a morally redeemable response to moral injury. The angry core of authority-focused resentment turns out to be both appropriate and justifiable insofar as: 1) it functions as a particularly *apt*

¹²⁸ I use the terms "equal standing" and "standing as an equal" interchangeably throughout the chapter. To avoid any confusion, I here note that these terms refer to a position that we occupy when others treat us in accordance with shared moral norms in a moral relationship. By "equal standing," I do not mean to invoke certain egalitarian commitments (e.g. where "equal standing" may refer to identical treatment, an equal distribution of resources, etc.).

¹²⁹ While he does not use the concept of equal standing, David Shoemaker defines anger's desire for acknowledgment in terms of agents' desire that others recognize their interests and their position as moral equals. Angry blame tracks "insufficient acknowledgment [which] effectively involves viewing the victim as a moral *lesser*, as someone whose interests are just not that important. This creates a moral imbalance, a shift away from genuine moral equality." Shoemaker, "You Oughta Know," 81-82.

moral response; and 2) it offers *unique value* in our blaming repertoire—especially in cases in which we find our equal standing threatened. If I’m successful, I will have shown—by way of analyzing a particular species of resentment—that angry blame should not be cast aside in favor of other blaming alternatives.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, I take up an issue that has been raised in the literature: while many moral responsibility theorists believe that resentment somehow involves demands, it’s not exactly clear what these demands are demands *for*. On my broadly Strawsonian view, resentment is linked to a basic demand for or expectation of regard. That is, resentment presses an expectation that the target will appropriately incorporate our interests, ends, or projects into their deliberations. Insofar as resentment presses a demand for regard, its goal is recognition of our equal standing. To have equal standing within a relationship is to be a person who *matters* to the other party—whose ends, interests, and projects have normative import for them in their actions and decisions. In tracking offenders’ disregard, moral resentment tracks others’ apparent dismissals of the resenter’s position as a moral equal—that’s what makes it “personal.”

In Section 3.2, I offer an account of what I call *authority-focused* resentment. As noted in previous chapters, resenders often articulate the insulting message of moral wrongdoing or failure in various terms—as insulting to their worth, or to their prestige or rank. Existing philosophical accounts have centered these articulations in their analyses, but have overlooked a distinct species of resentment. In many cases, resentment tracks the insulting insinuation—communicated by others’ dismissal of the standing moral requirements vis-à-vis us—that the other does not in fact think that they’re *accountable* to us. Think here of the common phrase:

“He thinks he can walk all over me.” In these cases, resentment is an insulted response that doesn’t center on others’ value or rank estimations of us, but on others’ *dismissal* of us.

Resentment, then, turns out to be a demand for others’ moral consideration in cases where our interests, ends, and projects have been overlooked or flouted—but more than that, it’s often an assertion of our *authority* as an equal to demand otherwise. As a response to the insulting insinuation that we do not have to be contended with, resentment responds by pressing a demand for moral consideration. In doing so, it asserts our full standing as a being who is not only owed consideration, but can expect others to *see* us as such: as a person to whom they are accountable in their actions and decisions. In short, authority-focused resentment responds to the offender’s moral failure by reminding her that she is, in fact, accountable to the victim—and the performance of anger makes that hard to avoid.

After illustrating resentment’s general concern with equal standing—and its focus, in some manifestations, on the dismissal of the resenter’s authority—we will be in a position to see how anger can be an apt and uniquely valuable response to moral injury. In the final section, I sketch an account of authority-focused resentment and the value of its angry core in cases in which we have cause to believe that our equal standing is compromised. I argue that anger is especially apt insofar as it expresses a “must” thought in a way that blaming alternatives cannot. More than that, anger both invokes and performs the angry agent’s authority, thus allowing her to remind the target of the relation in which they both stand. If the target refuses to comply with normative expectations, then anger signals a willingness to escalate; a threat may obtain in cases where an appeal to one’s own authority cannot.

If I’m correct that anger—as it appears in cases of authority-focused resentment—is especially apt and adds unique value to our blaming repertoire, then I have gone some way

toward proving the thesis of my dissertation: that angry blame can be morally justifiable and should not be eliminated from our moral practices, despite the objections of the critics whose views were canvassed in Chapter 1.

Resentment, Demands, and Equal Standing

In a 1994 interview, Tupac was asked to explain the increasing intensity of rap music (or in the interviewer's words: the "No hope, I don't give a fuck" attitude that represents a significant departure from hip-hop's earlier "Grandmaster Flash" days). Tupac's response is a revealing metaphor:

"If I know that in this hotel room they have food every day, and I'm knocking on the door every day to eat and they open the door, let me see the party, let me see them throwing salami all over; I mean, just throwing food around [and] they're telling me there's no food. Every day, I'm standing outside trying to sing my way in: "We are hungry, please let us in. We are hungry, please let us in." After about a week that song is gonna change to, "We hungry, we need some food." After two, three weeks, it's like, "Give me the food or I'm breaking down the door." After a year you're just like, "I'm picking the lock, coming through the door blasting!" It's like, you hungry, you reached your level. We asked ten years ago. We was asking with the Panthers. We was asking with the Civil Rights Movement. We was asking. Those people that asked are dead and in jail. So now what do you think we're gonna do? Ask?...And we shouldn't be angry? The raps that I'm rapping to my community shouldn't be filled with rage?...They shouldn't be filled with the same atrocities that they gave to me?"¹³⁰

Here, Tupac draws a clear distinction between earlier civil rights movements and his position in the 1990s as an artist and activist concerned with injustice. Earlier in the movement, leaders were

¹³⁰ Tupac, interview by Abbie Kearse, MTV News, March 9, 1994. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMXzLhbWtmk>.

asking for equal rights—but with the passage of time, their asks have shifted into demands: “After two, three weeks, it’s like ‘Give me the food or I’m breaking down the door.’”¹³¹

It’s no accident that Tupac uses the concept of demands to explain and justify his anger. The literature on reactive attitudes—paradigmatically: resentment, indignation, and guilt—makes rich use of demands as an explanatory concept for sketching the normative content of our affective blaming responses. The link between reactive attitudes and demands is initially introduced by P.F. Strawson in his seminal essay “Freedom and Resentment”: reactive attitudes “rest on” or “reflect” a demand for good will or regard.¹³² In response to Strawson, Gary Watson characterizes the negative reactive attitudes as a form of moral address that issues demands—one that must be intelligible to the recipient in order for him to be considered morally responsible.¹³³ More recently, Stephen Darwall has argued that to feel or express negative reactive attitudes is to 1) “implicitly demand” that another meet an expectation or obligation of some kind; and 2) in demanding, to assume that one has the second-personal authority to so demand.¹³⁴ (On Darwall’s view, there is a non-problematic circularity between the concepts of demands, authority, accountability, second-personhood, etc.)

I take as my starting point the plausibility of the premise that resentment is somehow connected with demands: that is, that when we address others with our reactive attitudes—including resentment—we are pressing a demand of a sort. We are addressing an expectation that the other person has flouted, whether that expectation is of a specific kind (a norm or standing moral requirement), or a more general expectation for basic regard (*à la* Strawson). To use

¹³¹ Alternatively, we might characterize Tupac’s words here as a *threat* as much as a demand; I will address the significance of such a dual reading in Section 3.3.

¹³² Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 15.

¹³³ Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil,” 127.

¹³⁴ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 17.

Darwall's example: when you step on my foot and I feel resentment, I take it that you have violated a normative expectation—you should not have stepped on my foot (at least, not without good reason or extenuating circumstances; in Strawson's terms: an excuse or exemption).¹³⁵ More than that, in feeling resentment towards you, I hold you to the violated expectation. That is, I believe that you are obliged to comply with the standing moral requirement that we not step on others' feet without good reason; and as a form of moral address, my resentment references that requirement.

Of course, a lot more needs to be said about the connection between resentment and demands to defend it against potential problems. First of all, it's unclear exactly how resentment itself can be taken to address a demand.¹³⁶ Are emotions the sorts of things that can perform the activity of demanding? Wouldn't we do better to say (more precisely) that *resenters* demand, not that resentment demands? Secondly, it's unclear what to make of reactive attitudes that remain unexpressed. How can a reactive attitude that is unexpressed be a speech act?¹³⁷ Perhaps that is why Gary Watson has said that negative reactive attitudes are "incipiently communicative" and Darwall calls them "quasi" speech acts; the basic thought is that even if they're not quite full-blown acts of communication, they have the potential to be, or they somehow gesture toward a demand that may not be fully articulated.¹³⁸ Macnamara attributes to the reactive attitudes a

¹³⁵ Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*, 7-10.

¹³⁶ Coleen Macnamara acknowledges as much in her discussion of the negative reactive attitudes and demands: "to be sure, the fact that resentment, indignation, and disapprobation are responses to, involve a construal of, or are warranted by a particular demand qua moral requirement does not *entail* that they themselves issue a demand, let alone a demand with the same content." Macnamara, "Taking Demands out of Blame," 151.

¹³⁷ "While it certainly seems right to characterize *expressions* of resentment, indignation, and disapprobation as speech acts, the same cannot be said of *unexpressed* resentment, indignation, and disapprobation. It is difficult to see how an emotion that remains buried in one's heart can be appropriately characterized as a speech act." Ibid, 151.

¹³⁸ Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil," 127. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 145.

communicative function, even if they are not always explicit forms of expression (e.g. an invitation is still an invitation, even if it's never sent—similarly, resentment still presses a demand of a sort, even if it's never explicitly expressed).¹³⁹ In what follows, I take it that the mere reference to a demand or expectation (of some kind, yet to be determined) is sufficient to get my account off the ground.

If resentment issues or references a demand, we might wonder: What, precisely, is the content of the demand? What is it a demand for? As Coleen Macnamara points out, it's not really clear what the content of resentment's demand is.¹⁴⁰ On one plausible interpretation of Darwall and others, Macnamara construes resentment's demand as a demand for compliance with standing moral requirements (SMR). When R. Jay Wallace claims that the reactive attitudes (resentment among them) "issue demands," he is claiming that they reference shared requirements or expectations (Wallace uses the terms "moral demand," "moral obligation," "moral requirement," and "moral expectation" somewhat interchangeably).¹⁴¹ Stephen Darwall can be similarly interpreted: in virtue of an agent's second personal authority, she holds the target responsible for complying with shared moral norms and requirements.¹⁴²

While compelling and certainly part of the picture, the SMR view of resentment isn't sufficient for understanding the normative content of resentment. In many cases, resentment must be pressing a different sort of expectation than mere compliance with the standing moral requirements. If compliance with standing moral requirements is all that the resenter is after, then

¹³⁹ Macnamara, "Reactive Attitudes as Communicative Entities," 565.

¹⁴⁰ Macnamara, "Taking Demands Out of Blame," 142.

¹⁴¹ To be clear, Wallace's view is not merely that the "demands" of resentment are standing moral requirements; he thinks, as well, that reactive attitudes "demand" in the sense that they involve taking up a certain psychological stance—a mode of moral address—toward others, one that presses expectations. See Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 11.

¹⁴² Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 144.

the target's mere compliance with SMR would be enough to dissolve resentment. However, that's not always the case: if you step on my foot and I yell at you to get off—and you comply with the standing moral requirements, removing your foot and ceasing the behavior—then I will be far from satisfied, still feeling that we have unfinished business. I take myself to have cause to resent you for the action, despite the fact that you've complied with an expectation to adhere to standing moral requirements; and in expressing resentment toward you, I am still pressing an expectation of some kind.

To adequately complete our picture of resentment and its expectations or demands, our analysis needs to work at the level of relationships between agents. That is, the demand has to reference, in some way, the offender's objectionable attitude toward our person. On one common view offered by moral responsibility theorists—paradigmatically, P.F. Strawson—resentment tracks the offender's objectionable attitude toward our person within the parameters of our relationship with them. Our relationships are structured by certain expectations or demands (what we might call the standing moral requirements); these expectations form the basis of a more basic demand for good will or *regard* for our person from other agents. In the words of Strawson:

The personal reactive attitudes rest on, or reflect, an expectation of, and demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of good will or regard on the part of other human beings toward ourselves; or at least on the expectation of, and demand for, an absence of the manifestation of active ill will or indifferent disregard.¹⁴³

On Strawson's view, it is not the standing moral requirements or other standards of moral goodness that are at stake for the resenter, but the quality of the other's will toward her as demonstrated in his attitudes and actions. In the words of Pamela Hieronymi: "I am more

¹⁴³ Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 15.

concerned with myself, *or with the relation in which we stand*, or with your concern for me, or with how I figure into your world, than I am concerned with your performance, as such—with how you fared against a standard of moral excellence or rectitude or goodness.”¹⁴⁴ Strawson’s core insight that agents’ *regard* (or lack thereof) motivates resentment has been taken up by Hieronymi and others to bring into view the importance of others’ attitudes toward us and what they mean for the integrity of the blamer/blamed relationship.¹⁴⁵

To see the appeal of these views and the perspective they offer, consider again the foot example. Let’s say that, after seeing me get so angry about your stepping on my foot, you decide it’s really in your own best interest not to do so in the future; rather than a person to respect, I become a set of potential consequences to avoid. Utilitarian rationales for blame come to mind here: the basic thought is that in our accountability practices, we ought to use the stick and not the carrot in our interactions with others in order to procure the desired outcomes of compliance. In many cases that sort of approach works, but it seems like that’s not the only thing that we are seeking when we express our blame to others. If you recoil from my blame and change your tune because I’m like bad weather whose wrath is best avoided, it’s unlikely that I’ll be entirely satisfied. I may find that state of affairs not *entirely* objectionable—at least you’ll be leaving me alone going forward—but I’ll still feel that you’ve missed the point of my moral address. That is, I want you to recognize me as a person who is properly *owed* certain kinds of compliance with our shared norms and expectations; and your intentions and attitudes toward me should reflect that recognition. We might say that what I really want is assurance of my *equal standing* within

¹⁴⁴ Hieronymi: “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” 124.

¹⁴⁵ See T.M. Scanlon for an account of blame which center on blamer’s evaluation of wrongdoing as evidence of a relational impairment. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*.

our relationship—that you view me as an equal who matters, to whom certain kinds of treatment are owed.

We are now in a position to return to the original question with which my inquiry began: what is resentment’s demand? On a Strawsonian view, resentment presses a demand or expectation for regard. It is unclear though, from Strawson’s initial account in “Freedom and Resentment,” exactly how to understand the demand. Strawson’s characterization of regard is hard to pin down; at times, he writes of such varied phenomena as actions, attitudes, good will, and intentions.¹⁴⁶ I propose that we understand the expectation of basic regard as, essentially, an expectation that other agents will grant us moral consideration—that is, that they will give our person appropriate normative weight in their decisions. What that amounts to is an expectation that other parties will integrate the resenter’s interests, ends, and projects into their deliberations. Instances of disregard—whether they be cases of active ill will or indifferent neglect—are cases in which another fails to attend to the resenter’s interests, ends, or projects; more than that, in doing so, the offender signals his poor estimation of the resenter—in his view, she simply doesn’t matter. In such an instance, the resenter may have cause to believe that her equal standing has been threatened—that the other does not in fact view her as a normatively significant equal.

Think again about the case with which I opened the chapter, wherein Jane Fonda says to the clerk: “Do you not see me? Do I not exist?” Fonda’s sense that she is not “seen” is a result of the clerk’s failure to acknowledge her as a being *at all*—that is, he fails to acknowledge her very existence. In the case, Fonda’s resentment reflects an underlying expectation that he will see her person (as well as her interests, ends, and projects) as significant. When he does not treat her

¹⁴⁶ Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 5.

accordingly, she takes it as an insult. In expressing resentment, however, she presses a demand that he honor her expectation—that he grant her the kind of acknowledgment or consideration that she deserves: “You think it’s alright to ignore us? Just because she’s got grey hair?” Similarly, when the pedestrian in NYC says to the taxi cab driver, “Hey, I’m walkin’ here!” he is pressing a demand for the other to acknowledge or recognize his existence and the moral consideration it entails. The called-for recognition is constitutive of equal standing—that is, of occupying a position as an equal who *matters* to others.

It is worth pausing to stipulate how I understand “standing,” differentiating my usage of the term from its usage in the literature. Typically, “standing” is used to describe a variety of statuses that one can have as a moral agent. We might speak, then, of “moral standing”—one’s special status as a being worthy of moral consideration; or “standing to blame”—a position one occupies when she satisfies the fittingness conditions of blame. In my account, equal standing is a position that one occupies when she enjoys others’ moral consideration vis-à-vis her ends, interests, and projects. “Equal standing” is a success term, not a metaphysical status that each person has. As a socially-constituted kind of positionality, equal standing is subject to others’ recognition. Ideally, agents occupy relations in which their interests are mutually honored—relations of relative equality. Samuel Scheffler’s ideal of an egalitarian relationship is helpful here:

If you and I have an egalitarian relationship, then I have a standing disposition to treat your strong interests as playing just as significant a role as mine in constraining our decisions and influencing what we will do. And you have a reciprocal disposition with regard to my interests. In addition, both of us normally act on these dispositions.¹⁴⁷

To acquire equal standing is to successfully occupy a position of equality and reciprocity. Moral

¹⁴⁷ Scheffler, “The Practice of Equality,” 25.

responsibility theorists often reference the ideal of reciprocity or mutuality as a guiding ideal (see Scanlon's notion of the moral relationship).¹⁴⁸ In that tradition, I take resenters to be concerned with their positions in relationships vis-à-vis others. To desire equal standing is to desire a reciprocal relationship in which others think about our ends, interests, and projects, as we strive to think about theirs. Put in a slightly different way: to have equal standing is to be a person who exerts proper normative influence in a reciprocal relationship, in compliance with the shared norms and expectations that structure it.

In the accounts explored in Chapter 2, resentment is posited as a sort of anxiety about our worth or rank. I now propose that resentment is often concerned, rather, with our equal standing. Of course, we may have such standing in *virtue* of others' recognition of our worth or our special rank in society (and thus we may have cause to care about the latter), but to have equal standing is analytically distinct from either of these features of our person. Rather, to have equal standing is to occupy a certain position—one that is supported by others' recognition of our normative import in their practical reasoning. Others' disregard—their objectionable attitudes, actions, and intentions—matters to resenters insofar as such treatment signals their compromised position or standing within the relationship. To have equal standing is not merely, however, to register as normatively significant within a roughly reciprocal relationship; to be seen as a full equal requires the recognition of certain *facts* about us—among them, that we are beings to whom others are accountable. In Section 3.2, I will go on to introduce a new focus for resentment: in many cases, it seeks others' recognition of our *authority* in the larger pursuit of equal standing.

¹⁴⁸ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

To be clear, I am not arguing that in every case of resentment, the resenter is demanding that others acknowledge the normative import of their person in light of a lurking standing anxiety. Rather, the nature of the relationship in question is likely going to play a role in the resenter's sense of the offender's attunement. Relationships of basic trust may not lend themselves to fearful resentment. If parties in the relationship are roughly on par, then each person may often feel anger on behalf of themselves, about a situation involving the other person—but not feel that the offender's failure to comply with expectations necessarily reveals anything deep about the target's view of them. Instead, we can imagine that many domestic disputes are marked by mere *frustration*—anger at another's failure to take on the same values, priorities, or what have you. Anger can surface in contexts of mere disagreement, without any psychic concerns about status or standing. But again, the family of views that I am engaging with take as their starting point fears about the subject's relative positionality (e.g. Nussbaum, Hampton)—and I think we ought to address the status concerns that often underpin resentment. In the next section I aim to clarify a new focus for resentment, with the ultimate goal of showing the value of its angry core.

Authority-Focused Resentment

In many cases, the resenter's recognitive aims may reference the offender's failure to adequately take into account one's rank or worth. However, my goal (as you'll recall from the introduction of the dissertation) is to take a closer look at the *moral* dimensions of resentment. In Section 3.1, I claimed that resentment can have valuable recognitive aims. In some cases, it looks like the resenter is looking for acknowledgment that she *matters*—in other words, that her person has normative significance and her interests, ends, and projects are owed consideration by others.

When others violate that expectation, they call into question her standing as an equal. In the kinds of cases with which I'm concerned, resentment is an insulted response that tracks these failures of regard and the threats they pose for the agent's equal standing.

In this section, I'll say more about a key ingredient of equal standing—namely, our capacity to make moral demands of others and receive uptake. Part of what it means to have equal standing—to occupy the right sort of desired relation with others—is to *effectively exercise our authority* as equal agents. But in certain cases of wrongdoing and moral failure, it looks like our normative influence as authorities has been dismissed or compromised: the wrongdoer does not view us as a person to whom they're accountable (or so it seems). Authority-focused resentment is a response to these sorts of apparent denials. In Section 3.3, I will go on to use my account of authority-focused resentment to bring into relief the value of anger. As a kind of anger which tracks others' denial of our equal standing, authority-focused resentment is both apt and offers unique advantages that other blaming alternatives do not. Thus, authority-focused resentment offers us a way to defend the modest thesis that angry blame can be morally justified.

To start, we can return to the above examples. In the Fonda and taxi driver examples, to properly consider another person is first and foremost to acknowledge their bare existence—to see them as a person *at all*. (In these cases, neither Fonda's nor the driver's existence seems to register—and thus any richer recognition of their status as moral beings is already precluded.) But more than expecting others' mere recognition of our person full stop, the standing-anxious resenter expects the target to see her as a person who has a certain moral status or standing—as a person who *matters*, whose ends, interests, and projects are worthy of consideration. However, more needs to be said about how to understand what it means to matter in the relevant sense: there are a variety of ways that one can be normatively significant to others.

To see this, let's return once more to the foot case. You step on my foot. Irritated, I ask you not to step on my foot again. You comply because you recognize that I'm the kind of being whose foot you shouldn't step on. You think to yourself: "Well, because it wouldn't be good for her, and she's the kind of being whose interest I ought to consider (not unlike some animals), I ought not to step on her foot again; her suffering is morally relevant." We might imagine that you accept the rationale that we ought never to step on people's feet in light of their dignity as members of the human species; to violate such a rule would be to deny their moral worth. Just as in previous treatments of the foot example, that sort of reasoning wouldn't be satisfying for the resenter—and for the reasons that Stephen Darwall articulates in *The Second Person Standpoint*: What I really want from you is not merely your following the rules for the sake of the rules—or merely considering my interests out of respect for an agent-neutral sort of reason, like a moral principle; or even out of acknowledgment of my status as a person—but compliance out of respect for my second-personal authority to demand moral consideration from you.

On Darwall's view, my reaction of resentment presupposes that I do in fact have the authority to demand compliance from you; preexisting accountability and authority relations structure our relationship and make coherent the moral community's general practices of blaming and holding accountable. Negative reactive attitudes are an exercise of authority that calls on others to meet the standards/obligations of the moral community:

[Reactive attitudes] invariably involve "an expectation of, and demand for" certain conduct from one another. Reactive attitudes invariably concern what someone can be held to, so they invariably suppose the authority to hold someone responsible and make demands of him. Reactive attitudes therefore presuppose the authority to demand and hold one another responsible for compliance with moral obligations (which just are the standards to which we can warrantedly hold each other as members of the moral

community).¹⁴⁹

Here, it looks like Darwall subscribes to something like the SMR view: reactive attitudes hold others responsible for “compliance with moral obligations.” However, recall that on the understanding of resentment that I’ve been working with thus far, negative reactive attitudes reference not just the standing moral requirements (as Darwall appears to suggest here), but a general demand for moral consideration. Insofar as resentment presses a demand for moral consideration of our person, it seeks a larger recognition of our equal standing as beings that matter. Before returning to the notion of authority and its role in my account of resentment, I must first say a little more about issues of equal standing—cases in which we fail to matter or exert appropriate normative influence on the other party.

In my analysis of resentment and equal standing, I want to foreground repeated violations or systemic moral failures. In these situations, it’s unclear that the offending parties grant equal standing to the resenter—she may have cause to wonder whether she exerts the appropriate normative influence in the relationship.

Imagine, for example, that I repeatedly ask my new roommate to take out the trash per our agreement that we will each contribute equally to that particular duty. The first time I remind her, I might not think much of it—I’m pretty forgiving, after all; maybe she’s been busy with work and other obligations. The second, third, or fourth time, I’ll start to get doubtful. In such a case, the sort of resentment that I have in mind here is not worth-based or rank-based. That is, I’m not inclined to think that she doesn’t respect my worth as a *person*—it’s not her value assignment that irks me. In fact, it would be sort of odd if I took her dismissal to mean that she thinks I’m worthless. Nor is my resentment motivated by an apparent affront to my honor.

¹⁴⁹ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 17.

Rather, I care about her patterns of action and decision-making vis-à-vis me—what’s troubling to me is that my interests, ends, and projects do not seem to *matter* to her at all; they’re not normatively significant enough to enter into her decision-making. At best, that’s because she is merely negligent; she is failing to think about me and how her failures put me out. At worst, it’s because she thinks she doesn’t owe me anything (or that I’m not the kind of being to which things can be owed).

As we discussed in Chapter 2, resentment takes moral failures and draws conclusions about how the offender sees our person. However, none of the paradigms that we explored seems to be able to capture fully what’s happening here. As I said above, it would be weird to say that my roommate doesn’t respect my worth or my honor in the scenario. Rather, it seems that my roommate doesn’t recognize and incorporate my *claims* on her. In a case where that happens repeatedly, I may start to get very annoyed with her. “Who does she think she is?” I might wonder. “Why should I always be the one who has to go out into the freezing cold and take the garbage out?” Of course, we might say that she’s failing to recognize the rules in play; and that would surely be correct. However, I propose that we add yet another layer to the sort of recognitive failure at stake here. After I’ve repeatedly asked her and she’s repeatedly ignored my requests, I might have a different sort of worry than whether or not she finds me valuable as a person. I might start to think that my roommate does not seem to think that she is *accountable* to me—after all, none of my requests are getting uptake. There is a special kind of insult involved here—and it’s a dismissal of sorts. When resenters say things like “Who does he think he is?” “He thinks he can walk all over me,” and “It’s like I’m of no account,” etc, they are tracking the offender’s *failure to think that he’s accountable to them* (or perhaps anyone, for that matter—in the most severe cases).

In cases like these—cases of wrongdoing in which trust has significantly eroded—the resenter may have a sense that they occupy less than full and equal standing insofar as they are not exerting the expected normative influence. We’re now in a position to see the final ingredient of full and equal standing. Often, resenters are not offended merely because an expectation for due consideration has been violated (although that is surely part of it). Rather, the insult of moral failure is often articulated by resenters in terms of the offender’s failures to recognize their authority (e.g. “It’s like I’m of no account”). In cases of what I call *authority-focused resentment*, the insult is one of dismissal as much as any claims about worth; the resenter is concerned about the offender’s failure to recognize her authority as a person to whom he is accountable. Offenders bypass that status when they flout the rules “with impunity” or “without stint.”

When people speak about “not mattering”—e.g. “It’s like I don’t exist”—they don’t merely have in mind the others’ failure to consider their status as a person who is owed certain kinds of consideration, as we may be obligated in special cases to take into account the interest of animals. Rather, they are invoking a normative power that they take themselves to have in virtue of their status as moral beings. Another’s willful disregard of the moral rules and norms vis-à-vis us is often insulting to us because it implies that we don’t have to be contended with—we’re simply irrelevant. In other words, it’s like we don’t exist (“Hello! Hello! Hello!...Do you not see me? Do I not exist?”). When Jane Fonda says: “You think it’s alright to ignore us?” she is faulting the clerk for thinking that he is not accountable to her; the content of her resentment is something like a correction or a reminder: “You are accountable to me!”

To have equal standing, then, is not just to be normatively significant in a roughly reciprocal relationship, but to be “taken seriously” as a being who generates non-optional claims

on others. Authority-focused resentment tracks cases in which offenders do not appear to take us—or more precisely, our claims on them—seriously. In cases of repeated wrongdoing wherein the offender demonstrates an objectionable attitude, we especially have cause to doubt that our authority is effective. That is, disregard—the failure to consider us and our end, interests, or projects—can, in some cases, signal or reveal an underlying dismissal of our authority. In these cases, it looks like we do not have equal standing insofar as we do not exert the right kind of influence within a properly mutual relationship. While we may be prone (at least, initially) to respect the offender’s claims on us, they do not respect our claims on *them*. We occupy a position of compromised standing insofar as the other does not adopt the right attitude toward us; rather than exerting the normative power that we ought to have, the offender sees himself as above our claims—and hence, as above *us*. Ultimately, it is that anxiety or fear (and not fears about our honor or worth) that underpins authority-focused resentment.

The notion of authority-focused resentment has some explanatory power. By invoking authority, we can fully articulate the sort of “imbalance” that defenders of anger have invoked in their response to Nussbaum and other anti-anger proponents. In a critique of Nussbaum (an objection that I happen to share), Reis-Dennis challenges Nussbaum’s claim that “righting the balance” of relative rank is misguided. Echoing Jeffrie Murphy,¹⁵⁰ Reis Dennis writes:

“As much as we may want to admit it, the actions of others *can* diminish us. We can be disrespected and socially lowered...Of course there is a sense in which we all have moral worth no matter how others slight us, but we are not wrong to take steps to ensure that our *de facto* status is equal to others’ in our communities and that we are seen as genuine peers.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ On Murphy’s view, wrongdoing attempts to degrade and insult the victim; like other commentators, Murphy trades in the language of “high” and “low.” Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” 27.

¹⁵¹ Reis-Dennis, “On the Hook: Responsibility in Real Life,” 24.

Kauppinen and David Shoemaker make similar points, centering the importance of anger as a means of correcting status imbalances.¹⁵² In these accounts, what is unclear is the nature of the “imbalance” that anger registers and corrects. The way it’s written about by defenders of anger, it seems that the imbalance is a *power* imbalance of sorts—and not just a discrepancy in social rank or relative position. Defenders of anger, however, do not go into detail about the conceptual make-up of the “relative” social standing “or “*de facto* social status” that we ought to correct in order to be considered “genuine peers” or “on equal footing” with offenders.

On my view, it seems that equal standing has to have a component of authority; that is, to have equal moral standing is to be in a position wherein others consider themselves to be accountable to us (and others), and to be in relations in which we exercise appropriate normative influence or power. Existing defenses of anger flirt with the articulation of anger’s status concerns in terms of authority, but stop just short. Kauppinen’s account is one such example:

...mature forward-looking anger seeks to compel fulfilment of a normative expectation, which may be a perfectly legitimate aspiration. And there is nothing irrational or narcissistic about aiming to lower the status of those who have set themselves above others. Status is essentially relational and relative: for you to have higher status in the relevant sense is for you to be in a position to press your demands on others without reciprocity. There’s no other way to get even except change your standing relative to others.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Kauppinen writes: “Backward-directed anger, in turn, aims at lowering the status of the offender, and correspondingly restoring that of the victim. As I already suggested above, if an offender is allowed to get away with impunity, this amounts to treating the victim as being of lesser worth, since *de facto* status supervenes on dispositions to respond to acts that harm the subject... Since self-respect involves regarding oneself as having an equal status, it is no wonder it is partially constituted by susceptibility to an emotion whose aim is to restore status.” Similarly, Shoemaker identifies the “insufficient acknowledgment” which prompts angry blame as “viewing the victim as a moral *lesser*, as someone whose interests are not important. This creates a moral imbalance, a tilt away from genuine equality.” Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger,” 39. Shoemaker, “You Oughta Know,” 82.

¹⁵³ Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger,” 44.

What it means to “press your demands on others without reciprocity”—to be high while others are low—is essentially to enjoy a position of unchecked power. Such power is constituted by, essentially, a disregard for the authority of the resenter and society at large. The trespass is not just claiming a higher status for oneself, but more precisely, it is claiming that one is not *accountable* to others—that one does not have to consider others or structure one’s decision-making in recognition of their claims. What’s more, as Kauppinen points out, our concern with others’ objectionable attitudes is not merely a narcissistic concern. We’re not merely concerned with our status—or even our worth—but with our *agency vis-à-vis* others. Authority-focused resentment offers us the conceptual tools to capture that sort of concern.

In the first two sections of the chapter, I’ve laid out the normative content of resentment. Resentment reflects or rests upon a demand for moral consideration of our ends, interests, and projects—which amounts to recognition of our person as normatively significant. If others so recognize us, then one basic condition of having equal standing is met. However, to achieve truly *equal* standing is to be normatively significant in a particular way—that is, to achieve others’ full recognition of one’s authority. Identifying a particular species of resentment that I call “authority-focused resentment,” I argue that in the wake of certain moral failures (often of the systemic or repeated variety), resenters are concerned with whether or not the target respects their *authority*—in other words, with whether or not the offender takes himself to be accountable to the resenter. Authority-focused resentment “takes personally” others’ flouting of the rules and understands disregard as a disavowal of the resenter’s authority—an insulting dismissal that is different in kind than the sorts already articulated by existing accounts of resentment.

We are now in a position to look at authority-focused resentment as a valuable and justifiable form of angry blame. In the next section, I will show how the normative content of authority-focused resentment makes it especially valuable in responding to perceived threats to our standing. At the same time, I hope to show what is distinct and uniquely valuable about anger as a blaming response. Essentially, I'll claim that anger—by issuing demands—constitutes an appeal to our authority as agents who can demand. Other proposed alternatives to angry blame—expressing hurt, shock, disappointment, etc—are surely morally appropriate, and in some cases, can be viable options. However, these responses do not have the same normative mechanisms or issue the same appeals as anger does. While hurt, shock, and disappointment do reference moral norms of a sort, they appeal to the target's concern or esteem for us within the relation; as such, they lack the power to do the specific sorts of work that anger can do—especially in cases where the resenter's standing is at stake (i.e. damaged relationships).

The Value of Anger

To start, recall the anti-anger views which I addressed in Chapter 1. Derk Pereboom has claimed that we can feasibly do away with anger as a response to moral failure and wrongdoing.¹⁵⁴ Pereboom makes the case that—due to the metaphysically (and therefore morally) questionable practice of holding others responsible using punitive measures—we might appeal to blaming alternatives like hurt, shock, and disappointment in our interactions with offenders. While that's all well and good, I will suggest that we may not want to dismiss anger so fast. In this section, I will use authority-focused resentment as an exemplar to argue that in

¹⁵⁴ Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, 146.

certain cases, angry blame is a uniquely valuable blaming response that we ought to keep in our moral repertoire—especially in cases of corrupt moral relations.

Before getting into a discussion of the value of anger, I want to highlight a basic background commitment that will ultimately allow us to see anger's value. Following moral repair perspectives of blame, I want to think about blame as a process that aims at the restoration of the mutuality/reciprocity of a relationship. On accounts like Margret Urban Walker's, for instance, resentment's ultimate aim is reassurance of another's recognition of the norms in play or our normative status.¹⁵⁵ On a repair view, blame and accountability practices are essentially concerned with the maintenance of relationships; with their functionality and the management of vulnerability for each party. Blame is a practice, not simply of keeping tallies in a ledger about the quality of another's character, or noting the rules that have been violated—but of seeking to repair relationships between people.

Different accounts in the literature posit the ways in which blame can do repair work. On Miranda Fricker's account of proleptic blame, for instance, blame is about aligning *understanding* between agents; we blame others with the aim of bringing the target to understand their wrong and to bring our respective perspectives and commitments into alignment.¹⁵⁶ On Angela Smith's account, blame is a protest of others' objectionable attitudes and the disregard they've shown, with the aim of securing uptake which will ultimately bring the party or others to respond to the behavior.¹⁵⁷ Scanlon takes blame to be the registering of the impairment of a relationship, although he does not understand blame as fundamentally communicative or repair-

¹⁵⁵ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation," 173.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "Moral Blame and Moral Protest."

oriented.¹⁵⁸ From these accounts emerges a picture of blame as a phenomenon that is fundamentally concerned with relationship maintenance—and perhaps termination, where appropriate.

Although I have been treating blame as a relatively unified phenomenon thus far, it is a very diverse one that includes a variety of styles of engagement—some cooler, and some not so much. On one view, these diverse modes of blame constitute a sort of repertoire that we have access to in our dealings with others.¹⁵⁹ The respective merits of these different blaming responses can be evaluated, I propose, by thinking about what they offer different agents in individual situations and scenarios. In looking at the question of whether or not certain styles of blame are desirable or appropriate, we might keep in mind the variety of sorts of work that have to be done to keep relationships functioning well. Depending on the context and the nature of the relationship in question, certain kinds of blaming practices will be more optimal and effective than others.¹⁶⁰ Although particular agents are not always strategic with their blame, we can still trace the sort of appeals that each blaming response makes—and in certain situations, anger is particularly apt and has decisive benefits.

In Section 3.1, I suggested that resentment often tracks threats to our equal standing within a relation. That is, as refusals to acknowledge our ends, interests, and projects—and, the resenter feels, her very *person*—failures of regard indicate that the offender does not see us in the proper light. In less severe cases, the resenter has cause to believe that the offender has perhaps temporarily overlooked her standing as an equal who is owed certain kinds of

¹⁵⁸ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*.

¹⁵⁹ Tsai, “Respect and the Efficacy of Blame.”

¹⁶⁰ See George Tsai, “Respect and the Efficacy of Blame” for a discussion of blame’s efficacy and the different moral-psychological attitudes that effectively sustain it.

consideration. Such an oversight on the part of the offender can happen for a variety of reasons; perhaps the offender has a lot on her mind, is distracted or otherwise improperly attuned to the normative significance of the resenter and her own ends. Perhaps, temporarily, the offender has chosen to prioritize her own concerns to the detriment of the resenter and the larger relationship. In these sorts of cases, we might say that offenders *overlook* or fail to prioritize their accountability to the resenter—they are not appropriately attuned to the interests, needs, and projects of the resenter and so insult her through their negligence. In these cases, the integrity of the relation itself isn't corrupt, *per se*, but threatened.

In cases where the integrity of the relation is threatened, anger can be a useful and appropriate reminder, one that brings the central shared commitments of the relationship into view. In pressing demands for moral consideration, angry blame is able to make a different sort of appeal than other blaming responses. Pereboom draws upon hurt, shock, and disappointment as alternatives to blame,¹⁶¹ but these expressions are limited insofar as they do not express the desired normative content. At best, these blaming responses express the *wish* or *desire* that someone had acted differently; not the idea that they are *required* to act differently. As Antti Kauppinen points out, anger captures a kind of “must thought”—it calls on others to comply with standing moral requirements and expectations. When we express our anger to others, we call on them to attend to obligatory commitments.¹⁶² Consequently, we might say that anger is the most normatively appropriate way to engage with others about violated expectations—we aren't *asking* them to change their behavior going forward, or merely *wishing* that they would do us a kindness. Instead, when we express our anger we are conveying to the target that their

¹⁶¹ Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, 146.

¹⁶² Kauppinen, “Valuing Anger,” 41.

compliance with our demands is not optional—and they ought to organize their own life in a way that demonstrates sufficient respect for these expectations and for us. Consequently, anger is an especially fitting and appropriate response to certain instances of wrongdoing.

In still other cases, we may have cause to worry specifically about our *authority* in relationships; that is, we may worry that another not only neglects their duties vis-à-vis us, but that they do not take us quite as seriously as they should. These are the cases that I discussed in Section 3.2—instances that provoke what I call authority-focused resentment. In these sorts of cases, anger can serve as a reminder of our *authority* to demand things of others. If my partner repeatedly fails to do the dishes, my anger expresses not only the normative significance of her failure in an apt fashion (e.g. that she did not do something that she should have), but it reminds her that *I* expect better of her and that I am willing to hold her to account for her failures. In doing so, I position myself as an authority to whom she is accountable (despite the troublesome trend in her behavior which may indicate that she views me as someone whose needs she can ignore or dismiss). My anger serves as a reminder to her that my person creates reasons for her to do things in accordance with our agreed-upon house rules—reasons that ought to carry a special weight despite the busyness, laziness, or whatever other competing factors may conspire to make her negligent.

Anger, then, can play a useful role in our exchanges with others insofar as it is an apt expression of demands and it allows us to remind others—in an especially dramatic way—that we expect compliance with those demands as people to whom things are owed. However, we might have a worry about anger's functionality in especially severe situations—cases in which repeated moral failings make it clear that the relationship is corrupt or considerably impaired in some regard. If, for instance, I have to repeatedly ask my new roommate to take out the trash—or

if my co-worker repeatedly interrupts me when I am speaking, even though I have kindly expressed to him that it is frustrating—then it starts to look like the other person may not recognize my authority in the first place. In other words, I am not recognized as an equal who is owed any consideration to begin with.

The kinds of corrupt relationships that I have in mind here will tend not to be intimate ones; generally, we trust our loved ones to see us as parties who are owed things (and, we would hope, have a goodwill towards us that stems from something more than mere moral obligation). In these cases, anger may serve as a useful reminder that we are people whose interests should be considered. However, in cases where we do not know the other party (or where our relationship is dysfunctional or has deteriorated, as in failing romantic relationships or friendships), we are prone to question whether or not the person really thinks that they are accountable to us; that is, we may wonder whether or not they truly see us as authorities. What are our blaming options in these situations?

As strategies for blame, anti-anger alternatives suffer in these latter cases—situations in which it is not clear that the offender sufficiently respects our authority such that we have equal standing to begin with. The issue with these strategies becomes clear when we recognize that Pereboom's anger alternatives rely on relations of somewhat mutual or reciprocal goodwill. To express sadness or disappointment is to be in a position where the other person cares about your opinion of them in such a way that it gives them a reason to re-think their responsibility; or that, at minimum, they see you as a person to whom they owe certain obligations. Many blamers are simply not in a position to exert that kind of influence: why should the hostile stranger on the train care about my estimation of his person?

In cases where goodwill is lacking, these milder blaming responses will be ineffectual at best. At worst, they risk sending the wrong sort of signal: namely, that we will put up with future transgressions without withdrawing our goodwill or delivering significant consequences. In some cases (although certainly not all cases), we might reasonably think that another's disregard should be met with an angry response which condemns their inappropriate actions and attitudes. Not only is such a response apt, but it can be effective: that is, we may think that there is something to the thought that anger is valuable as a sanctioning mechanism. Zac Cogley points to the negatively-valenced blaming emotions as having a useful sanctioning function insofar as they affect the behavior of others by imposing costs (or possible costs): anger inspires its target to deliberate about her options and strongly consider "acting right."¹⁶³ While we may question whether sanctioning is morally appropriate all things considered, the point is that anger does offer one effective way to impose social costs and get uptake. Alternative methods of blaming, meanwhile, may simply be ineffective at getting others to take our claims on board—they don't give the target much cause to take us seriously if he does not already.

Not only can anger be defended on consequentialist grounds, but it looks like a particularly apt expression in cases in which our authority has been challenged. Recall that in Section 3.2, I gestured to Stephen Darwall's view that negative reactive attitudes presuppose that we have the authority to make demands of others.¹⁶⁴ However, negative reactive attitudes do more than merely *presuppose* our authority; they invoke it. Recall that resentment references and presses certain expectations—whether you take the view that they reference standing moral

¹⁶³ Cogley, "The Three-Fold Significance of the Blaming Emotions," 205.

¹⁶⁴ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 17.

requirements or a more general expectation for consideration of our person. Either way, in the very making of the demand, the resenter *invokes* her authority to so demand.

If someone steals my parking spot and I confront them and ask them why they're being a jerk, then in addressing the spot-stealer, I am exercising or performing the authority that I take myself to have. More than that, my performance clues the target into my expectations: it's a culturally scripted performance that others recognize as a claim on them.¹⁶⁵ Anger is a mode of expression that claims a certain position for the expresser and communicates to others that she will expect compliance with the violated expectations going forward. Only anger allows us to clearly position ourselves as a figure to whom others will be accountable in their actions—one way or another. Anger thus provides 1) an appropriate expressive mode for responding to others' failure to take us sufficiently seriously; and 2) by invoking our authority through a culturally scripted performance, anger is a useful shorthand for signaling our normative position to others. Consequently, the expression of anger is a useful strategy for restoring our standing as equals: it makes clear that others are normatively required to attend to our interests in virtue of our special status. When others neglect (willfully or otherwise) their obligations, it can play a useful role in enforcing and maintaining the expectations of the relationship—thus maintaining the integrity of the relationship itself.

Despite these virtues, there is still a problem. The defender of angry blame faces a redux of the problem that we initially discussed above: if the offender does not respect me enough to respond to “milder” forms of blame, it's not exactly clear why more aggressive forms of blame will do the job. The fundamental problem is that the offender does not see me as a

¹⁶⁵ See Sorial, “The Expression of Anger in the Public Sphere” for a discussion of the way that anger can serve as a valuable performance which directs others to appreciate or acknowledge moral claims.

person to whom he's accountable, a person to whom he owes certain kinds of moral consideration which ought to structure his practical deliberations. In many cases, relations have broken down or are compromised (e.g. cases of abusive or turbulent relationships) such that targets feel that they are not accountable to the resenter—that they can ignore him or do what they will.

In these cases, the normative content of anger, while appropriate to the situation (it's a demand and not an ask; it expresses our normative position), does not guarantee the sort of desired uptake at which authority-focused resentment aims—that is, it's not going to get the offender to remember or recognize that they are accountable to the resenter (and to structure their deliberations accordingly). However, it may do something second-best: it will get them to at least comply insofar as they are scared of the consequences; there is a kind of subpar authority that we can emit with our anger, wherein we can keep others in check through threats.¹⁶⁶ Anger offers a means of communicating to others that they will have to contend with us, one way or another—even if, strictly speaking, they do not view us as authorities who they have to be accountable to in a deeper second-personal sense.¹⁶⁷

The Tupac interview, presented at the outset of this chapter, provides a useful example here. If resenters press demands for consideration which go unaddressed, then they have cause to believe that the target is unwilling to comply with the normative expectations in play. At such a point, the resenter may determine that the milder forms of accountability are not useful: “We

¹⁶⁶ See Reis-Dennis for a discussion of anger and its connection to threats. Reis-Dennis, “On the Hook: Responsibility in Real Life,” 35.

¹⁶⁷ Importantly, anger is not a universally threatening performance; depending on one's social identity, anger can even be perceived as cute or comical. However, it does seem that anger can, most of the time, signal a willingness to escalate or “be difficult.” Such messaging is not available with blaming alternatives.

hungry, we need some food” is not working. In order to get the target to take moral demands on board, the resenter may have to resort to different tactics. As a particularly unpleasant emotion, anger communicates to the target a willingness to escalate matters—to impose costs. Anger says something along the lines of: “Give me the food, or I’m breaking down the door.”

My goal in this dissertation is to show that anger is a morally justifiable response to wrongdoing, in part because of its aptness and the value that it brings to our blaming repertoire. It might seem that the aspects of anger which I’ve identified—namely, its connection to threats and sanctions—undermine that thesis. In short, we may fear that these features of anger counter the idea of respect for agents. While I do not have the space to entertain the question fully here, I would submit that in the sorts of severe cases which provoke a resenter’s sense that she is not an equal, that the other does not see her as accountable, relations of mutual respect often do not obtain. If that is indeed the situation, then it’s hard to argue that the angry person owes the target a respect that she has not received from him.

While I have tried to highlight the virtues of anger, I am not arguing that it is always the best policy. Meekness, in some cases, may be the better route.¹⁶⁸ However, my goal has been to show that anger is a morally justifiable response in some cases. In situations where the resenter has cause to doubt the integrity of the target’s regard for her (whether because of a lapse or a more sinister attitude), I have argued that anger is an especially fitting and appropriate response in comparison to blaming alternatives: it presses a demand (not an ask), it asserts our authority when it has been overlooked, and—in severe cases in which another dismisses our authority—it delivers the message that we will have to be contended with, one way or another.

¹⁶⁸ See Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger” for a defense of the virtue of meekness.

However, even if what I have said in the chapter is satisfactory, there is a larger problem. While I have identified a case in which anger is valuable, it is not a resource that all persons have equal access to. *Precisely in the cases wherein people need it most*—cases in which we need to make ourselves visible as authorities to others and express our demands in the wake of moral violations—it is off the table. I am thinking here of incidents in which, due to their particular social identity, agents' anger is illegible as such: it's hysteria, craziness, or whining. Or perhaps privileged agents do read anger as the pressing of a demand but think it is off-base, unreasonable, or misguided; in these cases, far from exerting their status as authorities to whom others are accountable—as beings with equal standing—anger does the opposite. In Chapter 4, I will turn to the phenomenon of anger's dismissal in conditions of oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR

UPTAKE DIFFICULTIES FOR ANGER IN NON-IDEAL CONDITIONS

In September of 2018, Serena Williams played Naomi Osaka at the U.S. Open. The match made headlines: “Serena Williams burns down the house as Naomi Osaka’s brilliance is forgotten,” “Serena Williams unleashes furious rant at umpire as she loses US Open,” etc.¹⁶⁹ The extensive media coverage of the match reflects the striking nature of the case: while male tennis players regularly shout down the refs after questionable plays, Serena Williams did not enjoy the same liberty at the U.S. Open. It all started when she attempted to challenge the ref on his call that she was receiving illicit coaching on the court. After trying to question the call in a neutral manner, she took offense at his insinuation that she would cheat—in her words: “I would rather lose than cheat.”¹⁷⁰ From there, things escalated and she got increasingly angry, calling him a thief. In response, the ref doubled down on his position and issued her a penalty for verbal abuse—a call that lost her the game, and ultimately perhaps the match against Osaka.

While there is a lot to unpack here, the initial incident is just the tip of the iceberg. Subsequent twitter storms and media coverage reveal a deeper problem with the way that black women’s anger is treated: Williams was taken to task for being “#unhinged,” crazy, hysterical, and so on.¹⁷¹ The charge is familiar to all women, especially women of color. In the words of Britney Cooper: “Angry Black Women get dismissed all the time. We are told that we are irrational, crazy, out of touch, entitled, disruptive, and not team players. The story goes that Angry Black Women scare babies, old people and grown men. This is absurd. And it is a lie.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Graham, “Serena Williams Burns the House down as Naomi Osaka’s Brilliance Is Forgotten”; Briggs, “Serena Williams Unleashes Furious Rant at Umpire as She Loses US Open 2018 Final to Naomi Osaka.”

¹⁷⁰ Daily Mail, “Full Transcript: Serena Williams’ Entire Outburst in US Open Final.”

¹⁷¹ Gomez, “Players and Fans See Sexism in Serena Williams’s Treatment at U.S. Open.”

¹⁷² Cooper, “Black Women Are Not ‘Sassy’—We’re Angry.”

Nevertheless, it is a lie that has gained significant traction, in both the popular imagination and in public discourse. When women—especially black or Latinx women—express their anger about injustice or wrongdoing, it is often dismissed.

There is a question here about how to understand the nature of such a dismissal. Historically, feminist philosophers have understood the dismissal at hand in epistemic terms. On their view, the problem is that women’s anger is not treated as a claim about the world; rather, it is taken up as unintelligible ranting and raving—a sign that the angry person is out of control, beyond the pale, or “out of touch” with reality. The charge of “hysteria” best exemplifies the kind of epistemic dismissal that is operative here. Recently, upon protesting the Kavanaugh hearings, feminist activists were deemed “hysterical” by Ben Sasse, a conservative politician sitting on the Senate Judiciary Committee.¹⁷³ Sasse’s charge is nothing new: the term “hysterical” first became politicized in the 1890’s, when suffragists were fighting for equal rights. And politicians aren’t the only ones to weaponize charges of hysteria in an effort to control and oppress women: recent evidence indicates that revered author Charles Dickens tried to have his own wife institutionalized for “excitability” so that he could pursue an affair with another woman.¹⁷⁴

With good reason, then, the feminist literature on women’s anger has typically focused on the epistemic dimensions of anger’s dismissal. Thus, they frame the problem of uptake in epistemic terms, articulating the kind of harm at hand in two general ways. First, as the history of the deployment of the term “hysterical” makes clear, they point out that women’s anger is typically not interpreted as making claims about the world—their expression of anger is just

¹⁷³ Rankin, “Ben Sasse, Women Aren’t Being Hysterical. They’re Begging the Government Not to Kill Them.”

¹⁷⁴ Bennett, “‘Barking Mad’: How Dickens Led to Our Modern Gaslighting Men.”

noise—or if the angry person is interpreted as making a claim, then it is “off base” or “out of touch.” Consequently, women’s epistemic claims do not receive uptake. Second, insofar as women’s anger has propositional content, they are wronged as *knowers*. Alison Bailey is the most recent theorist to frame anger’s dismissal in terms of an epistemic injustice:

Silencing [anger] is disrespectful precisely because it communicates to the speaker that her testimony is not worth hearing, that she is incapable of making accurate judgements about how she has been wronged, or that the emotional injuries she sustains during a testimonial exchange are unworthy of consideration. The audience’s failure to give the speaker’s testimony and anger uptake illustrates a failure to respect the speaker as a credible knower; and, like all discredited knowers, she is denied the right to social participation.¹⁷⁵

Bailey is joined by other feminist philosophers in exploring the epistemic harms of anger’s dismissal, including Myisha Cherry, Rachel McKinnon, and Amia Srinivasan, to name just a few.¹⁷⁶

Epistemic accounts can be put to use to analyze cases in which women’s anger fails to receive uptake; and they do so rather well. Returning to the Serena Williams case, it’s clear that an epistemic problem of a sort is happening. After the match, Williams contests the ref’s final call, saying: “Do you know how many men do things that are much worse than that?...There are men out here that do a lot worse and because I’m a woman you’re going to take this away from me. That is not right.”¹⁷⁷ Williams is highlighting an unfairness in the world; to the extent that her angry testimony does not receive uptake, her evaluation has been dismissed. More than that,

¹⁷⁵ Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” 94.

¹⁷⁶ Cherry, “The Errors and Limitations of Our ‘Anger-Evaluating’ Ways”; McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice”; Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger.”

¹⁷⁷ Daily Mail, “Full Transcript: Serena Williams’ Entire Outburst at U.S. Open.”

we might say that she has been wronged as a knower.¹⁷⁸ Williams' anger disqualifies her as a credible subject—as a person who is able to identify wrongs.

While that straightforward analysis is satisfying in many ways, it doesn't quite seem to capture everything that is going on in the Williams case. That is, while Serena Williams is certainly making claims about the world, that is only part of what she is doing. She is trying, as well, to hold others accountable. We might aptly characterize her expressions of anger as an instance of angry blame. Williams is not only asserting that a wrong has occurred, but holding the referee responsible for it. Repeatedly, she demands an apology from him: "Say it, say you're sorry... Then don't talk to me, don't talk to me. How dare you insinuate I was cheating? You stole a point from me. You're a thief too."¹⁷⁹ What remains to be seen is how to understand the sort of breakdown that is happening here—not in epistemic terms, but in moral ones.

In this chapter, I will identify a distinct kind of moral harm that happens to oppressed agents in the expression of their anger. I argue that what is going on in the dismissal of marginalized agents' anger is not merely the dismissal of testimony. Instead, we need a different paradigm to conceptualize the dismissal and its harms. If we understand angry blame as an invocation or an assertion of authority, then its dismissal is a refusal to comply and to *recognize* our authority as subjects—thus threatening our standing as equals in our relations with others, and our ability to participate in relations of reciprocal regard. When the ref responds to Williams' anger by doubling-down on the penalty, he is not just dismissing her as a knower, but failing to acknowledge her as a person with the standing to hold him accountable; and that's a uniquely different and damaging sort of response. And ultimately, what is at stake is not only her

¹⁷⁸ Of course, her testimony does receive uptake in certain circles, as famous women tennis players echo her complaints; however, we can still meaningfully say that she has suffered an injustice of a sort.

¹⁷⁹ Daily Mail, "Full Transcript: Serena Williams' Entire Outburst at the U.S. Open."

evaluation of the world as unfair in some regard, but her ability to *do* things with her anger—to make and press demands that will receive the proper uptake.

Understanding anger as an expression of authority has the benefit of allowing us to allocate responsibility to targets. If the failure of the target is a strictly epistemic one, then it looks harder to make the case that he or she is culpable. While I'm sympathetic to arguments about the culpability of willful or motivated ignorance, it's still up for debate whether or not those who fail to acknowledge others' anger are responsible for their failures of perception; but if we see anger as the leveraging of a demand that is actively resisted because one simply does not want to be told what to do, then we have more grounds to point to failures on the part of the target to acknowledge the bindingness of these demands—a culpable resistance to the angry demander.

Expressions of Angry Blame as Imperatives

On the cognitivist view of anger, our angry responses are not just noise; they are evaluations that track states of affairs in the world: in other words, I am always angry *about* something—an event that I perceive to be wrong or unfair. However, our angry responses are more than just evaluations: in moral philosophy, many propose that our angry reactions *do* things—that is, that they are speech acts of a sort. If we are to understand expressions of blaming anger as speech acts, it remains to be seen how to characterize them. Darwall calls them “implicit RSVP's,” indicating that they seek a response of some sort.¹⁸⁰ Still, it's not clear how we ought to think about any given expression of angry blame. Is it an invitation? An entreaty? A recognitive?

¹⁸⁰ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 145.

On the view that we looked at in Chapter 3, expressions of resentment or indignation rest on or reflect demands or expectations. That is, the angry agent seeks compliance with shared rules, norms, or standards—what theorists of responsibility have called standing moral requirements (SMR). Of course, that is not *all* that the resenter might expect. In many cases, we care about more than whether or not the target complies with SMR. We care, as well, about the entrenched relations in which we stand with others: that is, whether or not they view us as equals deserving of regard in a roughly reciprocal relation. So in cases of resentment that reflect underlying concerns with our standing, resenters are demanding *regard* for their person and not just compliance with the rules or norms which structure their relations. For now, though, I will work with the idea that, among other things, blaming anger’s object is compliance with SMR: when we express resentment or indignation, we are, among much else, referencing a demand that another comply with shared expectations.

However, expressions of anger do more than merely reference demands or expectations. Theorists of moral responsibility have explicitly framed resentment and other reactive attitudes as speech acts of a kind—in expressing their anger, agents themselves are engaged in the act of demanding compliance with shared expectations.¹⁸¹ Following these theorists, I will suggest that we can use speech act theory as a resource to understand the normative content of expressions of anger. Traditional speech act theories categorize different utterances or expressions in terms of the action they perform: commissives commit a speaker to some future action (as when I promise to pick you up from the airport), declaratives effect a change of affairs (as when I declare a couple man and wife), and so on.¹⁸² Different theories divide up the various classes of speech

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 52.

¹⁸² Here, I use Searle’s 1975 taxonomy as representative of traditional speech act theories. See Searle, “A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts.”

acts in different ways. I will follow Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance in categorizing speech acts according to their discursive normative functions.¹⁸³

Using Kukla and Lance’s taxonomy, we can categorize certain forms of angry address as *imperatives*. Imperatives are speech acts that are “entitled by specific facts about a speaker’s normative position and relationship to the target of the imperative, and they serve to make a demand upon the specific person or persons at whom they are targeted.”¹⁸⁴ Imperatives include a wide range of acts—imploring, apologizing, inviting, reproaching, etc. Expressions of anger qualify as imperatives insofar as they issue demands to comply with standing moral requirements. If you cut me off in traffic and I flip you the middle finger, I am referencing a specific demand or expectation that I take us to reasonably share. However, I am doing more than that—I am holding you to that expectation as well; and it is that holding—the pressing of the demand—that makes my expression of anger an imperative. In the words of Coleen Macnamara: “if I intentionally stomp on your foot, and you feel resentment and express resentment to me, your expression is not only a response to, involves a construal of, and is warranted by my violation of the demand ‘Do not intentionally stomp on other people’s feet.’ It also, crucially, *issues* this demand.”¹⁸⁵

Speech acts have success conditions, and imperatives are no exception—they require the target’s uptake in the form of an adequate or appropriate response. Moral philosophers have made extensive reference to the “call-and-response” structure of reactive attitudes: as a form of moral address, they seek a reply of sorts.¹⁸⁶ Depending on how we understand the nature of the

¹⁸³ Kukla and Lance, *‘Yo’ and ‘Lo!’: The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons*.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸⁵ Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ & ‘Thank You,’” 901.

¹⁸⁶ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 135; Watson, “Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of Moral Community”; Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*; McKenna, “The Limits of Evil and the

call in question, its “success” conditions will look differently. On Angela Smith’s account, for instance, to hold another responsible is to “call upon the agent to explain or justify her rational activity in some area, and to acknowledge her fault if such a justification cannot be provided.”¹⁸⁷ On such a view, expressions of angry blame are successful—in other words, they secure sufficient uptake—when the target accounts for her actions or acknowledges her fault. On other accounts, sufficient uptake requires demonstrating remorse: David Shoemaker holds such a view, claiming that an expression of one’s negative reactive attitude is an “emotional address, urging the wrongdoer to feel what I feel as a result of his wrongdoing and then subsequently to feel the guilt or remorse...which I expect to motivate him to cease his wrongdoing.”¹⁸⁸

While these views face hurdles, I won’t address them here. Rather, I want to keep in view my own claims about angry blame as I give an account of angry blame’s success conditions. Recall that, on the view I’m working with, expressions of angry blame are attempts to hold the target to the standard moral requirements (again, while it’s not the *only* thing that resentment does, it is instructive to think about the demands of angry blame in these terms). If we understand speech acts as having functional “aims”—as attempting to “do” things vis-à-vis the target—then the internal aim of anger’s demand is *compliance* with the norms and expectations at stake. If I flip the bird at you when you cut me off (or even if I don’t), my angry blame directs you to comply with the norm that you stay in your lane.

Of course, you may respond in any number of ways. You might shrug me off and proceed to change lanes whenever and however you like—even if that means pissing off other drivers on the road. You may wave back apologetically, signaling that you didn’t see me there and meant

Role of Moral Address: A Defense of Strawsonian Compatibilism.”

¹⁸⁷ Smith, “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,” 381.

¹⁸⁸ Shoemaker, “Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of Moral Community,” 91.

no harm—going on to be more careful in the future along I-40. While a variety of responses are possible in response to my anger, not just any response will do from the perspective of negative reactive attitudes and their function. As Colleen Macnamara points out:

While the expressed reactive attitudes seek a response from their target, not just any response—or even any intelligible response—will do. If I issue a demand and the target responds with ‘You’re not the boss of me!’, then the demand has certainly received a reply, and an intelligible one at that; but it has not received the specific kind of response at which demands internally aim. Demands internally aim not at defiance, but at compliance...A demand is fully successful as the kind of thing it is only if its target does as directed because she was so directed.¹⁸⁹

Successful uptake would involve something like the latter example above. Insofar as you recognize that you’ve violated the norm and corrected your behavior to comply with the expectations, you’ve complied with my demand.¹⁹⁰ In cases in which you rebuff my demand or ignore it, my demand fails to receive sufficient uptake. While failures of uptake can happen for a lot of different reasons—many of which involve a lack of regard on the part of the target—I am most concerned with looking at cases in which agents’ demands fail to lodge with the target because of their compromised normative status. In Section 4.2, I will turn to specific cases in which oppressed agents’ demands fail to receive sufficient uptake.

Discursive Injustice

I haven’t yet said much about the specific position of marginalized agents. However, as we saw in the introduction, not all agents have equal access to anger as a resource. Compare, for

¹⁸⁹ Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ and ‘Thank You,’” 897.

¹⁹⁰ Of course, you may *conform* to my demand without *complying*. That is, I may tell you to stop bothering me—and you may quit because you recognize that I will snap at you if you continue to annoy me. In such a case, you’ve *conformed* to the demand out of fear, but you haven’t, strictly speaking, *complied* with my demand; at which point, we might say the demand was “partially successful,” at least on Macnamara’s account. See Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ and ‘Thank You,’” 897.

instance, the different rhetorical choices on display at the 2018 Senate Judiciary Committee meeting on Brett Kavanaugh's nomination. Notably, Christine Blasey Ford did not express anger once; in fact, she goes out of her way to be accommodating and apologetic. Kavanaugh, on the other hand, made full use of his anger in response to her allegations—as did those who defended him. Perhaps the angriest of his defenders was Senator Lindsey Graham in his accusatory address to the Democrats on the committee:

If you wanted a FBI investigation, you could have come to us. What you want to do is destroy this guy's life, hold this seat open and hope you win in 2020...I would never do to them what you've done to this guy. This is the most unethical sham since I've been in politics. And if you really wanted to know the truth, you sure as hell wouldn't have done what you've done to this guy...Boy, you all want power. God, I hope you never get it. I hope the American people can see through this sham.¹⁹¹

Here, Graham uses anger to hold his fellow Democrat committee members accountable for what he believes to be a deep injustice. The performance earned him the approval of conservatives across the nation, on both mainstream and social media. Sarah Huckabee Sanders took to Twitter to write: “@LindseyGrahamSC has more decency and courage than every Democrat member of the committee combined. God bless him.”¹⁹² Brett Kavanaugh earned similar accolades for his angry performance. Donald Trump Jr. tweeted: “I love Kavanaugh’s tone. It’s nice to see a conservative man fight for his honor and his family against a 35 year old claim with ZERO evidence and lots of holes that amounts to nothing more than a political hit job by the Dems. Others in the GOP should take notice!”¹⁹³ These tweets reflect the way that anger, if spoken by

¹⁹¹ Lovegrove, “SC Conservatives Say Lindsey Graham Rebuilt Reputation in Kavanaugh Hearing.”

¹⁹² Sarah Huckabee Sanders (@PressSec), “@LindseyGrahamSC has more decency and courage than every Democrat member of the committee combined. God bless him,” Twitter, September 27, 2018, 11:55 p.m., <https://twitter.com/PressSec/status/1045416744519708672>.

¹⁹³ Donald Trump Jr (@DonaldTrumpJr), “I love Kavanaugh’s tone. It’s nice to see a conservative man fight for his honor and his family against a 35 year old claim with ZERO evidence and lots of holes that amounts to nothing more than a political hit job by the Dems. Others in the GOP should take notice!”

the right people and delivered to the right audience, can be interpreted as a show of strength and character.

We might find it odd that the very person who has the most cause to be angry does not express her anger—Christina Blasey Ford is nothing but calm and cooperative at the hearing. Before taking a break, she checks in with the committee, asking: “Does that work for you as well? I’m used to being collegial.”¹⁹⁴ The Internet, of course, was not surprised at her demeanor. Tweets and countless think pieces weighed in on the controversy, noting the injustice of women having to make others comfortable, even in brutal situations. The double standards in effect at the Kavanaugh hearing reflect a broader phenomenon that is well-known and well-documented: Kamala Harris is “hysterical” while her opponent is described as having “vinegar and fire in his belly.”¹⁹⁵ Hillary Clinton is “too angry to be elected president,”¹⁹⁶ while opposing candidate Bernie Sanders shows “passion” and “authenticity.”¹⁹⁷ Angry women are attempting to be heard—making claims, issuing moral demands, doing a variety of things—yet their anger is distorted (in a variety of different ways, as we’ll soon see).

What is happening in these cases? Clearly, the speaker’s identity is playing a role in the way that targets interpret them, as their white male counterparts experience no difficulty in securing uptake for their anger. Rebecca Kukla’s notion of a *discursive injustice* offers one way of making sense of the phenomenon—of explaining what exactly is going wrong for these angry speakers. Kukla defines “discursive injustice” in the following way:

Twitter, September 27, 2008, 1:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/DonaldJTrumpJr/status/1045406618287050752>.

¹⁹⁴ Washington Post, “Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript.”

¹⁹⁵ Garber, “All the Angry Ladies.”

¹⁹⁶ Ken Mehlman, chair of the Republican National Committee during the 2008 election, leveraged this charge at Clinton. See Nagourney, “Calling Senator Clinton ‘angry,’ G.O.P. chairman goes on the attack.”

¹⁹⁷ Kasperowicz, “Obama Gives Sanders an edge over Clinton on ‘authenticity.’”

When members of disadvantaged groups face a systematic inability to produce certain kinds of speech acts that they ought, but for their social identity, to be able to produce—and in particular when their attempts result in their actually producing a different kind of speech act that further weakens or problematizes their social position—then we can say that they suffer a *discursive injustice*.¹⁹⁸

Kukla is interested not just in the phenomenon of illocutionary silencing—discussed in a classic paper by Rae Langton¹⁹⁹—but in the cases in which speech acts, in virtue of their uptake, become *different* speech acts than they otherwise would be. On Kukla’s account, the uptake that a speech act receives defines the speech act that it becomes.

I may intend, for instance, to *order* my employee (as his female boss) to comply with safety requirements at our workplace. However, in expressing my command, I could find that my speech act has become something else entirely in virtue of the uptake it receives—my employee may view it as a request and treat it accordingly. In such a case, he is not being straightforwardly sexist—but rather, the failure of my speech act happens within a larger context, reflecting existing discursive conventions that inform his (in)ability to grant the desired uptake. The skills that workers have mastered which govern conversation with women in the workplace simply don’t include conventions for recognizing them as issuing orders and responding accordingly. So I may have the entitlement to perform the speech act (that is, the authority); I may appeal to the conventionally appropriate words, tones, and gestures to enact it in the appropriate context; and yet—because of my gender—my performance may not receive uptake as an order.

Kukla’s account offers a way of describing what is going on in cases in which women’s speech acts are distorted; in many cases, they are not simply being silenced—but their speech acts cannot “do” the things that they intend. For example, women’s orders—which are intended

¹⁹⁸ Kukla, “Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice,” 441.

¹⁹⁹ Langton, “Speech Acts, and Unspeakable Acts.”

to confer obligations on the target and seek uptake in the form of compliance—often become *requests*, which leave the target free to grant or refuse. The target thinks that he is doing the speaker a favor rather than acting on an order. Similarly, women’s assertions—speech acts which attempt to make objective claims about the world—are rendered into expressives. Thus, a woman’s claim that her superior was inappropriate with her becomes merely an *expression* of her discomfort instead of an evaluable claim that calls for agreement, disagreement, challenge, and so forth. Similarly, as we’ll see in the next section, women’s assertions about the world are rendered into complaints, hysteria, whining, and the like. In Section 4.4, I will identify a particular kind of discursive injustice suffered by oppressed angry blamers, one which constitutes a distinct moral harm. However, for now, I will focus on epistemic accounts of anger’s dismissal with the aim of setting up a comparative backdrop for the forthcoming analysis.

Anger Through an Epistemic Lens

Kukla’s notion of discursive injustice can be used to analyze the sorts of epistemic harms that oppressed agents often face: that is, their expressions of anger are intended to make a claim about the world, but are taken up as something else entirely. In many cases, their claims are interpreted as whining, complaining, or pleading for special treatment—e.g. when proponents of “Black Lives Matter” are accused of being entitled. The charge that feminists have been “whining” enjoys a long history in popular and public discourse, and is still evident in our current political moment. Googling Hillary Clinton’s book (which serves as a kind of autopsy for her failed presidential campaign—in it, she indicts others and takes responsibility herself) serves

up countless op-eds accusing her of whining: “Isn’t there someone who can convince this accomplished, inspiring, barrier-breaking superwoman to stop whining about 2016?”²⁰⁰

In other cases, the speaker’s claim receives a response that is perhaps worse: the speaker is charged with being shrill or hysterical. In these severe cases, the speaker is not even identified as making a claim or “doing” anything at all—in some ways, the charge of whining is preferable. Examples of the charge of hysteria abound. When protesters showed up at the Senate Judiciary Committee meetings on Kavanaugh to protest his nomination, Ben Sasse levelled an all-too-familiar charge at them:

People are going to pretend that Americans have no historical memory, and supposedly there haven’t been screaming protesters saying “Women are going to die” at every hearing for decades...So the fact that the hysteria has nothing to do with you means that we should ask where that hysteria is coming from. The hysteria around Supreme Court confirmation hearings is coming from the fact that we have a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the Supreme Court in American life now.²⁰¹

Sasse’s charge of hysteria echoes other descriptors of prominent women—Kamala Harris was labeled hysterical in her assertive questioning of Attorney General Jeff Sessions at a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.²⁰² Serena Williams, in the wake of the U.S. Open, was called crazy and hysterical, to the point where Billie Jean King stepped in to defend her, pointing out that: “When a woman is emotional, she’s ‘hysterical’ and she’s penalized for it. When a man does the same, he’s ‘outspoken’ and there are no repercussions.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Cottle, “Hillary Clinton’s Finger-Pointing Show Will Cost the Democrats.”

²⁰¹ Rankin, “Ben Sasse, Women Aren’t Being Hysterical. They’re Begging the Government Not to Kill Them.”

²⁰² Riotta, “Jeff Sessions Knocked ‘Hysteria’ out of Kamala Harris, Former Trump Advisor Says.”

²⁰³ Billie Jean King (@BillieJeanKing), “When a woman is emotional, she’s ‘hysterical’ and she’s penalized for it. When a man does the same, he’s ‘outspoken’ and there are no repercussions,” Twitter, September 8, 2018, 7:21 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BillieJeanKing/status/1038613218296569856>.

Charges of “hysteria” are a kind of injustice that may be more akin to silencing insofar as the cognitive or propositional content is evacuated altogether. The charge of irrationality—being “beyond the pale”—treats the claims of angry women as nonsense. In the words of Marilyn Frye, to reject women’s angry claims is to reject them “not simply as arguably false or unjustified, but as claims so wildly and obviously off the mark as to confound response. It rejects them as claims only someone in an abnormal state—hysterical or mad—could make.”²⁰⁴ Dismissals of women’s anger which invoke hysteria, then, appear to have decidedly epistemic implications: women are effectively unable to make knowledge claims. While whiners or complainers can at least be seen as gesturing at something in the world—and making too big a deal out of it, or as being somehow entitled in their speech—“crazy” women are not even doing that much. The dismissal of their testimony is so total that it pushes them from a liminal position into the realm of the irrational.

It’s easy to see how epistemic accounts are useful in analyzing the testimony of angry women. First, epistemic accounts can both identify and explain the sort of wrong that is happening to women. The wrong or harm is women’s inability to make claims. Not only that, but insofar as women are denied credibility, they are wronged as knowers. In a piece that frames anger uptake problems in terms of epistemic injustice, Alison Bailey highlights the way that women’s credibility can suffer from uptake problems and gendered expectations: “Anger is a response to injury; but, for subordinated knowers, it is treated as something to be managed. In general tone management weakens epistemic credibility by targeting, isolating, and attempting to manage the affective content (the speaker’s *manner* of speaking) and the epistemic content (the

²⁰⁴ Frye, *Politics of Reality*, 89.

message) in testimony.”²⁰⁵ Rachel McKinnon’s account of the “epistemic injustice circle of hell” speaks to the ways in which oppressed agents’ anger can position them further outside the realm of credibility.²⁰⁶ While epistemic accounts are articulating a harm of sorts, it does not exhaust the kinds of damage done to angry subjects’ agency. Shortly, I will say more about other kinds of harms which the dismissal of angry blame, in particular, poses to oppressed subjects’ agency.

Second, epistemic accounts of anger are attractive insofar as they offer an explanation of what, exactly, is going awry in interactions between angry oppressed agents and their interlocutors. In her seminal essay on anger, Marilyn Frye attributes anger’s lack of uptake to the concepts and cognitive tools at man’s disposal: “A man’s concept of Woman and Man, and his understanding of what sorts of relations and connections are possible between beings of these sorts, to a great extent determine the range of his capacity to comprehend [women’s] claims, and hence of his capacity to give uptake to woman’s anger.”²⁰⁷ Over time, women have worked to expand the category of things that we can be angry about—including threats to others, whether they be our children or fellow adult humans. However, that extension (although hard-won) still reflects a constraining stereotype that only allows privileged agents to recognize women as “nurturers”—people who can be angry on behalf of others but not on behalf of themselves. Frye’s claim here echoes Kukla’s comments on the ways that normative positions or relations are

²⁰⁵ Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” 4.

²⁰⁶ McKinnon describes the epistemic injustice circle of hell as follows: “[The epistemic injustice circle of hell] happens when something such as emotion is treated as a reason to discount a speaker’s testimony, whereby a normal response to this testimonial injustice is to become *more* emotional (e.g., angry, frustrated, etc.). But this further emotionality is treated as a *further* reason to discount the speaker’s testimony. And so on: it’s a positive feedback loop...In more extreme cases, it leads to writing off the victim as unworthy of any credibility at claims of harassment or harm.” McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice,” 169.

²⁰⁷ Frye, *Politics of Reality*, 90.

structured by discursive resources—and Alison Bailey’s claim that anger’s uptake problems can be traced to “hermeneutical sink holes.”²⁰⁸

Epistemic accounts provide clarity, on one level, about what is going wrong in many of these cases in which oppressed agents are unable to secure uptake for their anger: the problem is an epistemic one, wherein the hearer is epistemically disadvantaged (which is not to say that he or she is not complicit) and the speaker suffers an epistemic deficit of sorts—one that results in weakened credibility and less traction for her angry claims. The analysis captures the way that anger’s distortion can weaken women’s agency along one dimension; but we might consider that women do more things with their anger than make claims about the world. Expressions of anger can “do” a lot of things—one of which, in contexts of angry blame, is issuing demands. While epistemic accounts can frame the damage to women’s agency along one dimension, it seems that more might be said about angry women’s attempt to *press demands*.²⁰⁹ Angry blame introduces a whole different set of phenomena to examine.

To see what I’m after, consider that our expressions of anger can vary in different contexts. Imagine, for instance, a disagreement between a working husband and his homemaker wife about money (Case A). The wife is concerned that the couple has spent too much money on a new pool for the backyard, given the many financial responsibilities that the family has to juggle. She may feel passionately about the matter, arguing that they ought to cut back on other expenses—and getting increasingly angry as her concerns appear to get no uptake from him. The husband, for his part, may not take her views seriously—thinking that she is, perhaps, misguided

²⁰⁸ Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” 14.

²⁰⁹ I’m not trying to suggest that it’s an either/or thing—women are surely doing *both* when we express anger about the world: we take ourselves to be both revealing an injustice *and* holding others accountable for it.

about how finances work. He might see her anger as somewhat nonsensical or misguided—or perhaps he thinks that she is simply out of control. His response might be something along the lines of: “Calm down! You’re getting very agitated. There’s no reason that we can’t afford the pool—what you’re saying is nonsense.”

In a similar but contrasting scenario (Case B), imagine that, when faced with an unexpected expense, the housewife *blames* the husband for the mismanagement of money: she thinks that he shouldn’t have spent a significant amount of their savings on a golf weekend with “the boys.” She blames him for not having enough to spend on home repairs, seeing his miscalculation as a cause of much stress for their family. We can imagine his response would be considerably stronger than in the former case, in which she takes herself to be getting upset about their mutual decision about how to spend their finances. Rather than saying something like “Calm down,” his reaction might be something more along the lines of: “Who are *you* to tell me how to spend my money?” In a case involving angry blame, he might even *resent* her for “getting a tone” with him. When angry blame is introduced, the dynamic shifts.

Epistemic accounts can only diagnose part of what is going wrong in cases of angry blame. That is, they can offer partial explanations of what has gone wrong—lacking hermeneutical resources, etc—but it looks like the dominant hearer’s failures may be of a fundamentally different kind. That is, the resistance of the husband in Case B is *motivated* in a particular way that it is not in Case A. To be clear, I am not saying that ignorance or gaps in knowledge can’t be motivated, but rather that the husband is responding to a different sort of “move” in Case B. The wife is not just asserting that something is the case, but rather she is *demanding* that he accept responsibility for a failure; and her issuing of demands and her claims

to authority are precisely what rattles him—she is overstepping her bounds as a wife (“Who are *you* to tell me how to spend my money?”).

Now surely, in many cases, epistemic dimensions play a role. We often resist others’ angry blame, for example, if their demands seem incongruent or don’t line up with the world as we understand it. Thus, people who seek affirmative action are acting “entitled” in the eyes of, say, members of the Tea Party—they are overreaching because they are not, in fact, *that* badly off (or if they are, it’s of their own doing); perhaps they simply want special treatment. To be clear, I don’t want to indicate that the difficulties of securing uptake for oppressed agents do not have epistemic dimensions; rather, I want to point to a different framework for capturing the specific normative burdens that angry blamers are attempting to harness—the things that they are attempting to *do* with their expressions of anger.

Angry blame introduces different sorts of material for analysis. First, it introduces normative burdens on the target of a specific kind—that is, as a demand, it generates obligations for the hearer to comply with the standing moral requirements. Thus, a different dimension of speakers’ agency is at stake: namely, their ability to initiate and receive uptake for moral *claims*. Second, it looks like the kind of resistance that angry speakers encounter is not the result *merely* of the dominant hearer’s lack of available tools (even if that may play a role in some cases)—it is rather their motivated resistance to being told what to do. In the cases that I will be most interested in, women’s demands are not illegible, but are *recognized* as demands—and that is precisely what triggers the kind of defensive response which refuses to grant sufficient uptake to women’s anger. So we’re not looking at cases wherein women’s anger is “nonsense”—the raving of a “lunatic”—but rather, cases in which her expressions of righteous anger make her a “bitch” or a “nag.” The damage to women’s agency in these cases is of a different kind—and while it

may be exacerbated by hermeneutical gaps, it is fundamentally a refusal to acknowledge her authority.

Anger and Authority

In the last section, we discussed cases in which angry agents' anger is either read as something it's not (complaints, expressions of entitlement, etc) or it is unintelligible altogether. Now, I want to shift and examine the cases in which our anger is recognized for what it *is*. Serena Williams' experience at the U.S. Open, which I introduced at the outset, provides a nice example of what I have in mind here. What is striking about the Williams' case is the discrepancy between her punishment and the consequences faced by white, male tennis players. The latter have said far worse things and received very little punishment or none at all: in 1991, Jimmy Connors unleashed a tirade at the umpire, repeatedly calling him an "abortion" and a "bum"; in 2016, Andy Murray kicked a ball towards an umpire's head. Neither received any penalty. Of the men who have been fined for worse infractions in the history of tennis, very few have received the \$17,000 fine that the United States Tennis Association charged Williams.²¹⁰

Why is it that white male tennis players can do so much worse with very little penalty? What caused the ref to, perhaps, act differently in the case of Williams than he otherwise would? One possibility lies in the way that women's—especially black women's—angry blame is received. In the interaction, Williams is repeatedly pressing the ref to acknowledge that she has not cheated—that he has transgressed in his treatment of her. "Say it," she commands; "Say you're sorry...How dare you insinuate I was cheating?"²¹¹ Her expressions of anger are not just

²¹⁰ Hahn, "The Biggest Male On-Court Meltdowns in Tennis History."

²¹¹ Daily Mail, "Full Transcript: Serena Williams' entire outburst in US Open final."

highlighting a wrong that has occurred, but commanding the ref to do the right thing. In response to his refusal, she calls him a thief. Not only are her expressions of anger structured grammatically as imperatives (“Apologize!”), but her anger itself presses or makes reference to an underlying demand that she be treated with fairness. Following the analysis I offered in Section 4.1, we might understand her expression of angry blame as a speech act with the aim of compliance: in expressing her anger, she holds him to shared norms and expectations.

Unfortunately, we do not know the ref’s side of the story as a full transcript of the exchange is not available. We can only imagine what he was thinking, and there are several plausible stories that we could tell. I want to propose just one. In expressing their anger, women frequently trigger a particular kind of response. Consider, for example, a female boss who angrily lectures her employees on preventable mistakes that have cost the company considerable revenue. If she is not careful, even the mildest display of anger will earn her the title of “bitch” (and in many cases, much less than that is required). Such a label is importantly different than “crazy” or “hysterical”—for it implies that the angry speaker has somehow *transgressed*. Her angry tone signals an overreach, an entitlement, or—in Williams’ case—an “abuse.” These reactions identify the angry speaker as a person who is acting above her station: she is “out of line” in talking the way that she does. Her expression of anger triggers a counter-response of resentment for her own perceived norm violation.²¹²

Part of what is going on in these cases, I argue, is that the targets are tracking the angry speaker's implicit (and in some cases, explicit) demand. That is, rather than interpreting women’s anger as “hysterical” or somehow beyond the pale—such that the demand is rendered

²¹² Kate Manne’s analysis of misogyny reveals the way that normative expectations can function to keep women “in place”—thus restricting their range of expression; women’s expressions of anger are punished in the interest of enforcing larger oppressive norms. See Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* for a discussion of the ways that women’s moral expressive agency is hampered by the system of misogyny.

nonsensical—the target recognizes what the speaker is trying to do. Furthermore, it’s *precisely* the demand which spawns their counter-resentment; the content of their resentful response might be described as something like: “If she thinks she’s going to tell *me* what to do, then she’s got another thing coming.”²¹³ Or: “Who does she think she is?” The assertion of anger is perceived as a kind of hierarchical violation: the angry speaker has overstepped in issuing demands. In cases of reactionary counter-resentment, the demands are not so much transmuted into something else, or rendered nonsense, but the invocation of authority itself—and the demands that it invokes—fails to receive uptake insofar as it is actively *resisted*. The phenomenon in question, then, needs to be analyzed in terms of compromised authority.

Returning to our discussion of angry blame as demands in Section 4.1, we’re now in a position to analyze uptake problems in cases of angry blame. Recall that angry blame is not just referencing an existing moral expectation, but itself makes a demand—Williams’ anger is holding the ref to account for his transgression. In order for Williams’ anger to gain success—to be felicitous—it must receive uptake from the target. And, as Macnamara pointed out, not just any kind of response will do.²¹⁴ Williams’ anger clearly does not receive the desired uptake; the ref does not comply with her demands, and her anger is left to spiral in on itself, as its claims are disavowed. Over the course of the interaction, her anger intensifies, as the demand is left hanging and unresolved. That is, in the scenario as I’ve imagined it, the ref does not take the demand “on board.” Consequently, he dismisses the demand and fails to respect the authority of the demander.

²¹³ Of course, there is probably an accompanying judgment that the speaker is not *reasonable* in her response—which indicates certain background epistemic content; see Cherry, “The Errors and Limitations of Our ‘Anger-Evaluating’ Ways” for a discussion of privileged agents’ evaluation of anger vis-à-vis reasonableness.

²¹⁴ Macnamara, “‘Screw You!’ and ‘Thank You.’” 897.

In my view, a distinct kind of moral injury has occurred. At the very least, a discursive injustice has occurred: the speaker cannot employ conventions to effectively do what she tries to do. Lacking a context or script in which black women's anger is taken as legitimate and a signal of transgression, the ref does not interpret Williams' demands for what they are: instead, they are transmuted into punishment or abuse. On a less generous reading of the ref's behavior, the demands are recognized for what they are—and resisted. In the latter case, Williams is resented for presuming to tell the ref what to do, especially when he has been designated as an expert judge with the power to, quite literally, call the shots. In either case, her expressive moral agency is limited and Williams has an authority problem.

The problem here is particularly intractable: doubling down on her anger and insisting that the target meet her demand will not help. Rachel McKinnon's epistemic circle of hell is useful to elucidate the difficulty I have in mind:

...one pattern that I notice is what I often refer to as the “epistemic injustice circle (of hell).” This happens when something such as emotion is treated as a reason to discount a speaker's testimony, whereby a normal response to this testimonial injustice is to become *more* emotional (e.g., angry, frustrated, etc.). But this further emotionality is treated as a *further* reason to discount the speaker's testimony. And so on: it's a positive feedback loop.²¹⁵

McKinnon is invoking the epistemic circle of hell to describe a particular kind of testimonial injustice. However, a version of the “epistemic injustice circle of hell” exists in the moral domain, too. Not only are anger and its demands denied uptake in cases where their speakers are read as “abusive” or “entitled,” but pressing the demand with the aim of getting respect for oneself or the SMR only further undermines one's legitimacy and moral authority. In seeking to make herself legible as an authority or a moral equal, the speaker simply pushes herself beyond

²¹⁵ McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice,” 4.

the pale. That is, the speech act does the precise opposite of the end for which it's intended, in part because of the angry agent's social identity. Adapting McKinnon's phrase, we might call it "the angry blame circle of hell."

In the angry blame circle of hell, oppressed angry blamers thus face a kind of bind: in order to invoke their authority and get it off the ground, they may try to appeal to the conventional means identified by Strawsonian accounts (expressing anger, deploying moral demands)—but those very means are not effective unless the speaker *already* occupies a position of relative authority: that is, a status wherein the other already recognizes her as the kind of being who can rightfully hold others accountable. Often, for reasons related to her identity, the angry speaker cannot appeal to the expressive practices which may direct the target to acknowledge or appreciate the wrong. Even if she does attempt to express her anger, the results are uncertain: the deployment of anger will always be a risky communication strategy.

These failures of angry blame represent a significant threat to blamers' moral agency. One key dimension of moral agency is the ability to make demands of others; to have one's demands for compliance acknowledged as legitimate. In cases in which oppressed agents' demands fail to receive uptake—for whatever reason—they suffer an inability to "do" things with their anger. While Jimmy Connors is able to shout a ref down for placing a bad call—pressing him to comply with expectations, demanding that the ref show due regard for his person—Williams is not able to express anger to achieve the same end. Significantly, her agency suffers in a way that her white male counterparts' agency does not. Expressions of angry blame offer a way of making our demands salient to others—of directing them to attend to wrongs, whether of active ill will or neglect. As even critics of anger have pointed out, anger is a

particularly effective way of “signaling” the depths of wrongs or harms to others.²¹⁶ Insofar as women do not have access to anger as a tool of expression, their own agency in getting uptake for demands is compromised.

While failing to attain leverage for one’s demands compromises our agency—our ability to direct others—the harm goes deeper than that. When our demands fail to receive compliance, then we have cause to worry about our authority as fellow equals. Recall that when we press an expectation with our angry blame, we are lodging a demand with the expectation that the target will comply; and in pressing demands, we take ourselves to be authorities who can uphold the rules in question. When a jerk cuts me off in traffic and I react with anger, I am referencing the norms in play: that we give others on the road plenty of space, that we maneuver with our blinkers on, that we drive safely, etc. But when I express anger at a violator, I’m doing more than *referencing* or *gesturing* to the rules in question. I am calling on the person who cut me off to *follow* the norms that we all abide by. In calling for such compliance, I take myself to be an agent who has the authority to do so; I am an equal in the community, and as such an enforcer of sorts. I am doing more than merely noting that someone has done something “wrong”—in holding another accountable, I am calling on them to acknowledge both the bindingness of the norm and my own status within the community.

When another person fails to recognize my authority, we might say that my authority itself has been threatened or compromised. In the words of Stephen Darwall:

If the private fails to heed the sergeant’s orders, he doesn’t simply act contrary to a reason that sheds favorable light; he violates the order and so disrespects the sergeant and her authority. If your foot-treader fails to respond to your demand, he fails also to meet

²¹⁶ In her critique of anger, Martha Nussbaum admits that anger “may serve as a *signal* that something is amiss. This signal can be of two sorts: it can be a signal to the person herself, who might have been unaware of her value commitments and their fragility; and it can be a signal to the world, a kind of exclamation point that draws attention to a violation.” Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 37.

your legitimate expectation and so disrespects your standing to make the claim and, therefore, you. Even in a case where one has no genuine claim except to make a request or a plea, if someone to whom one addresses the request refuses even to give one a hearing, this too is a kind of disrespect.²¹⁷

Here, Darwall uses the term “standing” rather than “authority” to delineate the sort of offense that has occurred. That is because, for the most part, Darwall treats authority as a feature of all persons; it’s something that most moral agents take themselves to have—a special normative status that can be explained and justified using the concept of second-personal reasons and its connection to accountability and other concepts. However, my analysis of angry blame points to a problem. Strictly speaking, all moral agents may have authority; however, our ability to exercise it—to lodge certain demands and complaints—is a capacity that is subject to others’ recognition. While all agents may be said to have authority, only some agents achieve what we might call *de facto* authority.²¹⁸

In some cases, the willful dismissal of oppressed agents’ anger is a dismissal of their larger status as beings to whom others are accountable. The harms in play are greater than our inability to do things with our anger. Rather, when oppressed agents’ anger is not heard, or when it is dismissed or distorted, then those who express their anger doubt their *de facto* standing as genuine equals who have the authority to call on others to account. That is, they start to doubt that persons or institutions feel any accountability toward them; they feel that the relevant parties do not recognize them as persons or groups to whom one can be accountable. My proposal makes good sense of the feelings of powerlessness typically associated with anger, feelings which lead oppressed agents to say that they feel “invisible”—or to experience what Martin

²¹⁷ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 60.

²¹⁸ I am aware that there is a larger literature that understands the usage of this term differently; however, I use “‘de facto’ authority” for lack of a better word here.

Luther King calls “feelings of nobodiness.”²¹⁹ These feelings, in part, reflect a sense that we are not only degraded in value, but that we fail to manifest as beings to whom things are owed—beings who, in virtue of our bare existence, generate claims on others. Ultimately, we cannot exist in relationships of mutual regard and reciprocity if others do not see us as agents to whom they’re accountable; as agents who are not only *worthy* of regard, but who are owed regard.

If I’m correct that resistance to anger is often willful, then privileged targets can be blamed for their failures to concede to angry oppressed agents. Although I cannot go into great detail here, in light of such culpability, it stands that privileged agents would assume a special responsibility to critically reflect on their own reactions to oppressed agents’ anger—not just on whether or not the content of the anger is accurate, but on whether the source of their resistance is a defensive unwillingness to concede to the implicit demands of the speaker. Ultimately, the goal ought to be to neutralize the risks and harms that oppressed agents face in holding others accountable.

In Chapter 4, I’ve sought to delineate a distinct set of harms that can happen to angry blamers in conditions in which their anger fails to secure uptake. The capacity to issue demands—to “do things” with our anger—is key to our moral agency: without access to anger as an accountability tool, we lose the ability to interact with others in useful ways. If oppressed agents cannot achieve practical authority, then they are not able to use their anger to regulate their relationships with others. Regrettably, in some cases, anger’s expression is a risk that is best avoided, as it only serves to further undermine their standing.

²¹⁹ King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

CONCLUSION

In the face of objections to the contrary, I have shown that angry blame can play a valuable role in our moral lives. In sketching an outline of authority-focused resentment, I have pointed to at least one type of anger which can do important moral work. More than that, in cases in which our equal standing has been compromised—the sort of cases which provoke authority-focused resentment—anger is an especially fitting response, compared to other anti-anger alternatives: uniquely, it conveys the apt thought that the target is *obligated* to us; it asserts and expresses our authority as agents who can demand things from transgressors; and it signals that the transgressor—in one way or another—will have to contend with the victim. Insofar as anger is apt and uniquely valuable, there is a strong case for viewing anger as a justifiable response to moral injury in cases where it serves an important moral function. Accordingly, we ought to preserve anger as part of our blaming repertoire and not take it off the table altogether, as its staunchest critics would suggest.

Despite these perks which recommend it, anger is risky for certain subjects: as we saw in Chapter 4, it is not an equally accessible resource. What we need going forward is a thorough accounting of the ways that oppressed agents' anger is constrained by their social location and the discursive practices that make their anger legible; more than that, we need to look at the structures that enable resistance to women's anger, pairing it with an evaluation of the individual responsibilities that privileged agents might take on. Very recently, Vanessa Carbonell has introduced the term "claimant injustice" to describe the ways that moral address is restricted by social constraints, effectively rendering oppressed agents into "second-class moral citizens." Carbonell offers a sketch of the kinds of mechanisms which disrupt moral address, explicitly drawing parallels to epistemic injustice. The account introduces the same sort of move that I was

planning to make in the literature.²²⁰ However, the account does not consider the kinds of personally-motivated resistance that I have discussed in Chapter 4; it focuses more on structural barriers to felicitous moral address (e.g. conceptual barriers, lack of shared factual knowledge, etc.). A shift in focus toward the substantive power dynamics which happen at the interpersonal level would be revealing. In the interest of expanding our understanding of the phenomena at the heart of claimant injustice, more may be said about the personal, reactive nature of privileged agents' resistance to angry blame.

Given all the difficulties surrounding anger's deployment, we might think that anger is not a viable practical strategy for those who need it the most—and that's surely correct in many cases. One of the striking problems that the dissertation notes (but does not engage with substantially) is the fact that anger—as a response which expresses our authority and aims at securing others' uptake of norms—requires *preexisting* authority of some kind in order to scaffold any amount of moral agency or uptake for the resenter. If the oppressed agent already occupies a liminal social position, then the expression of anger cannot do the very thing that it aims to do, the thing which I argue makes it a valuable response. How useful or valuable can angry blame be in these intractable sorts of situations?

My goal was to identify the normative contents of a specific kind of resentment—one that we see frequently in our daily lives and in popular culture. The night before writing this conclusion, I was struck by the performance of a character in *Fleabag*, who yells at her sister: “I knew I never should have brought you here. You just think you can do whatever you like: say whatever you like, steal whatever you like, kiss whoever you like.” When people experience anger—whether privileged or not—it reflects a sense of what we are owed and calls on the target

²²⁰ Carbonell, “Social Constraints On Moral Address.”

for overstepping their bounds. Whether or not our anger *succeeds* at what it sets out to do is a matter that may affect its practical value, but my initial goal—to indicate that anger can be redeemed, morally—is still intact. Angry blame is, I think, a frequently misunderstood emotion, one that has a bad reputation (as being narcissistic, self-involved, and so on). However, its expression often references a fundamental fear: that another does not see our person or our interests as cause to shape their own behavior and deliberations; in tracking that scary possibility, anger does real moral work.

And I would argue that's no less true in situations wherein marginalized agents express their anger. There is a lot of work focused on diagnosing the binds which oppressed angry agents face. Amia Srinivasan coined the term “affective injustice” to describe the impossible situation in which oppressed people often find themselves: one in which agents “must choose between getting aptly angry and acting prudentially.”²²¹ Similarly, drawing on the work of Kristie Dotson, Alison Bailey points to the way that marginalized subjects engage in what she calls “affective smothering”—a form of self-tone-policing that happens when the speaker recognizes that her audience lacks either the empathy or the affective competence to make sense of her anger as she experiences it.²²² While these accounts reveal the many ways that angry testimony or blame can be constrained, it does not negate the righteousness of agents' anger and its moral value—the fact that, in many cases, it constitutes “standing up for oneself” in the pursuit of equal standing.

For all the work that has been done, there is still more work to do. In future work, I want to look more explicitly at the power dimensions of blame. To exercise authority is in itself a kind of normative power, one that can be wielded in ways which either shore up existing relations of

²²¹ Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger,” 5.

²²² Bailey, “On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice,” 96.

domination or undo them. We often speak of “the blame game” as one means of shifting responsibility, of preserving one’s own social position and credibility—thus making ourselves impermeable to social and moral critique. Prominent figures in our political world make use of blame as one means of securing their own relative safety. Far from being merely an assertion of our authority to blame, a claim about what we’re owed, anger is an assertion of righteousness—and it is relevant who uses it, how, and to what end. A study of the ways that blame can work within power relations would serve us well in a moral literature which has tended to exclude the social and political workings of blame.

What I’ve said in these pages is just the beginning. My hope is that I have offered a compelling defense of at least one kind of angry blame, although it is by no means a comprehensive defense.

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