

Chapter 10

Anger, Virtue, and Oppression

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Abstract In recent feminist moral psychology, anger has been defended as an appropriate response to sexist oppression. Most of these defenses of anger stress the instrumental value of discrete episodes or bouts of anger. In light of these defenses of anger, I take up the question of how one might defend what I call a *virtue of appropriate anger* under grossly non-ideal circumstances. I argue that defending a virtue of appropriate anger under grossly non-ideal circumstances is not at all straightforward. I consider one recent and promising defense of the virtue of appropriate anger (the Eventual Flourishing Account) and argue that this account conflicts with our considered judgments about when the character trait of appropriate anger is a virtue. Moreover, I argue that the Eventual Flourishing Account does not provide a fully adequate characterization of the kind of anger partially constitutive of the virtue of appropriate anger. I sketch an alternative justification of the virtue of appropriate anger (the Appropriate Attitude Account) that stresses this trait's non-instrumental value. I close by arguing that the Appropriate Attitude Account offers a better understanding and justification of the virtue of appropriate anger than the Eventual Flourishing Account.

Keywords Anger · Feminist · Moral psychology · Virtues · Virtue theory

In recent years, several feminist philosophers have defended anger as a morally and politically appropriate response to sexist oppression. In this paper, I will explore how philosophical discussions of the value of anger might be enriched by bringing virtue theory to bear on our evaluation of the role of anger in the moral life. In what follows, I will take on the question of how one might defend a *virtue* of appropriate anger. More specifically, I'm interested in how one could defend a virtue of appropriate anger in the grossly non-ideal conditions that characterize life under oppression. In these contexts, the task of justifying a virtue of appropriate anger is

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not at all straightforward, and part of what I aim to do in this paper is argue that a coherent justification of this virtue ought to be sensitive to the social circumstances in which it arises.

I'd like to begin this exploration of the virtue of appropriate anger under conditions of oppression by considering a portrait of Frederick Douglass.

10.1 Douglass' Anger: 'Majestic in His Wrath'

In the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago there is a daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass that seems revelatory of at least one aspect of his character.¹ What is most arresting about the image is the expression on Douglass' face: his countenance smolders with tightly controlled anger. Douglass quite deliberately presents himself as a strong, stern, and angry man. As I interpret it, the portrait has not captured a fleeting emotional state, but something more enduring about Douglass' character. The fact that this is a daguerreotype is significant: given the long exposures required by this process, those who sat for these portraits could exercise a level of control over their representation that would be impossible in a painted portrait or in the short exposures of many of today's photographs. So when we look into the eyes of the young, incandescently angry Douglass, it is not unreasonable to infer that we have before us an accurate representation of one aspect of Douglass' character, or at least one aspect of how he wished to be regarded.

Douglass' anger is often remarked upon and often with approval. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton describes the first time she saw Douglass speak as follows: 'He stood there like an African Prince, majestic in his wrath.'² Born into slavery and rented out to Edward Covey (a well-known 'slave-breaker') when he was 16, Douglass escaped slavery at the age of 20 and became a leader of the abolitionist movement and an accomplished orator. As Douglass saw it, the turning point of his life came when he found himself giving into his anger and resisting one of Covey's vicious attacks on him. Douglass describes the aftereffect of his resistance to Covey as follows:

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me. From this time I was never again what might be called fairly whipped, though I remained a slave four years afterwards. I had several fights, but was never whipped. (Douglass 1997, 79)

This passage describes a pivotal moment in which Douglass stood up to Covey and, through physical resistance, made his anger felt. While Douglass expressed his

anger through violent resistance, what I'm most interested in is Douglass' anger itself.³ Douglass describes the aftermath of his angry resistance to Covey in such glowing terms that it is easy to cheer on his anger as a praiseworthy response to his oppression and cruel treatment. In fact, many people would be inclined to describe Douglass' disposition to respond with anger towards the ills of America and the wickedness of Covey as *virtuous*; I take it this is what Stanton means when she describes Douglass as 'majestic in his wrath.' But what does it mean for one's anger to be virtuous? And what sorts of considerations can we appeal to in defending a virtue of anger under circumstances of oppression?

Let me begin by saying a bit about the nature of anger and the particular kind of anger I'm interested in here. Developmental psychologists have found that the most effective way to elicit anger in infants is through physical interference; this is most commonly accomplished by pinning down the infants' arms, rendering them unable to move freely (Ekman 2003, 110). This suggests that, most generally, anger is a negative response to being *blocked* or *constrained* in some way.⁴ In what follows, I will be focusing on the kind of anger we experience when we judge that we have been blocked or constrained by being *wronged* by another. This subspecies of anger is often termed 'resentment.'⁵ I'll retain, for the most part, the term 'anger' rather than 'resentment' in what follows since this is the term used by the two philosophers I'll spend the most time discussing. But despite using the terms 'anger' and 'resentment' interchangeably, I will always have my sights focused on the subspecies of anger that is directed towards *a person* in response to an apparent *wrong done*.

Virtue ethicists disagree about the moral status of anger. While some have argued that there is a virtue associated with anger, there is also a long tradition of describing those prone to anger as vicious. Wrath is, of course, included on the list of the Seven Deadly Sins, and several contemporary theorists have argued that a settled disposition to at least some forms of anger is a serious moral flaw, not a virtue.⁶ All will agree that *some* patterns of anger are vicious; the difficult question to answer is whether or not some patterns of anger are virtuous. Before we consider whether there is a virtue associated with anger, what can be said in defense of the emotion itself? In particular, what can be said about the value of anger in grossly non-ideal circumstances? In answering this question, it will be helpful to consider recent work in feminist moral psychology. Let's turn now to a brief overview of recent feminist defenses of the value of anger under circumstances of oppression.

10.2 Recent Feminist Defenses of the Value of Anger

Within recent feminist moral psychology, there has been a great deal written about the moral status of anger and other so-called 'negative emotions' under conditions of oppression.⁷ As these philosophers see it, negative emotions, such as anger, have distinct and important roles to play in responding to oppression. In this literature, anger is defended on a number of grounds. Nevertheless, I think we can isolate four main types of feminist arguments in defense of anger that are found in the literature.

First, some have argued that responding with anger is a basic and central way for women to *protest* sexist and oppressive norms and constraints; as a form of protest, anger is an important part of resisting sexist oppression. Responding with anger is a way of responding to an instance of bad treatment as a *wrong done* as opposed to simply a misfortune. This type of protest or insubordination may help women retain their self-respect. To docilely submit to being wronged without a trace of anger is usually a sign that the agent in question fails to recognize her own value or importance. Such an agent is often described as lacking self-respect. To respond with anger to anger-meriting situations or actions signals that the individual in question has at least a modicum of self-respect. Thus, anger is seen as a form of protest or insubordination that helps women to express and retain their self-respect.

Second, some feminists defend negative emotions such as anger by arguing that these emotions provide us with a unique way of gaining knowledge about the world. Some feminists emphasize what we might term the *direct epistemic value* of the negative emotions, while others emphasize the *indirect epistemic value* of these emotions.

Feminists who stress the *direct* epistemic value of anger and other negative emotions argue that, by experiencing certain emotions as the result of being oppressed, women possess a distinct kind of knowledge. Specifically, the negative emotions are thought to provide the oppressed with a distinct form of knowledge about their oppression that those who lack these emotions do not have access to. For example, Uma Narayan (1988) argues that members of oppressed groups may possess a kind of epistemic privilege as compared to those who are not oppressed. Narayan suggests that one very important component of this epistemic privilege is the knowledge 'constituted by and confirmed by the emotional responses of the oppressed to their oppression.' (39)⁸

Those who stress the *indirect* epistemic value of the negative emotions argue that by paying attention to how their emotions are received by others, women can indirectly gain insight into their standing in the moral community. Marilyn Frye (1983), for example, has argued that we can learn much about women's status in this society by paying attention to the restricted range of circumstances in which women's anger is intelligible *as anger* to others. Since women's anger is typically given uptake (i.e., taken seriously as anger) in a restricted range of circumstances, paying attention to how women's anger is received by others can provide knowledge about women's status in the moral community. In Frye's words, 'anger can be an instrument of cartography' which allows women to map out others' conceptions of their status (94).

Third, some argue that anger is important insofar as it is a way of bearing witness to women's oppression. According to these defenses, anger can be a moral achievement insofar as it tracks an important moral truth; the world is filled with injustice, wrongdoing, and oppression. One way for the oppressed to bear witness to these facts is by responding to these wrongs with anger.

Finally, some feminists argue that anger is morally and politically valuable insofar as it can help motivate social change. Audre Lorde (1984) writes, '[A]nger

between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth. My response to racism is anger' (131). Insofar as anger can motivate social progress, it is defended as an important achievement.

To sum up, feminist philosophers have argued that anger is a mode of protest that can help maintain agents' self-respect, that anger has at least two important epistemological roles to play in correct moral perception, that it allows us to bear witness to injustice, and that it can directly motivate social change. As should be clear, these defenses of anger stress its instrumental value. Anger is defended as a valuable tool to develop in response to oppression because it can help bring about certain ends—either full recognition of one's oppression, self-respect, or social change.

10.3 Appropriate Anger as a Virtue of Character

Many of the recent defenses of anger concentrate on articulating the value of discrete, temporally bounded, episodes or bouts of anger.⁹ But while an episode of anger may be of short duration, anger can also be experienced as an enduring motivational state or aspect of a person's character. Given the various defenses of anger as a response to oppression just discussed, it might seem appropriate for resisters of oppression to consider the aptness and value of developing a *character trait* of appropriate anger.

What does it mean to evince a character trait of appropriate anger? Someone with this character trait would be disposed to respond with anger when anger is called for. Someone with this character trait would use her practical reason to determine which situations merit anger and which ones do not. Presumably, such a person would not only respond with anger to wrongs done to her but she would encourage others to do so as well; she would raise her children to recognize insults and teach them when anger would be an appropriate response to a specific injustice, and so on.

Focusing on the character trait of appropriate anger is important, for we might misunderstand both the value and the potential dangers associated with certain patterns of anger if we restrict ourselves to theorizing about discrete episodes of anger. Anger, qua enduring motivational state, seems to have the potential both to ameliorate and corrupt one's character. While it is easy to praise the *episode* of anger that led Douglass to resist Covey, it is not clear what we should think of the still-present anger on the brow of the 29 year-old Douglass. In what follows, I'll explore the question of what conditions, if any, could justify the claim that a character trait of appropriate anger is virtuous. My goal is not to defend the virtue of appropriate anger so much as to explore the features of a coherent justification of this apparent virtue. Ideally, a justification of the virtue of appropriate anger will preserve the dimensions of the value of anger highlighted by the feminist defenses of anger discussed in the previous section. However, as I shall argue in what follows, a coherent justification of the virtue of appropriate anger cannot appeal simply to the instrumental value of anger stressed by many feminist defenders of anger.

10.3.1 Aristotle and Anger

Perhaps the best place to begin thinking about the virtue of appropriate anger is by considering Aristotle's discussion of the emotion. Aristotle was one of the first philosophers to offer a defense of the role of anger in the moral life and his views on the nature and importance of anger are still highly influential. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines anger as follows:

Anger may be defined as a desire accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends. If this is a proper definition of anger, it must always be felt towards some particular individual, e.g., Cleon, and not man in general. It must be felt because the other has done or intended to do something to him or one of his friends. It must always be attended by a certain pleasure—that which arises from the expectation of revenge. For it is pleasant to think that you will attain what you aim at, and nobody aims at what he thinks he cannot attain. (1984b, 1378a–1378b)

For Aristotle, anger is a complex response to a perceived slight or failure of respect.¹⁰ Experiencing anger is painful, yet it is also accompanied by a certain pleasurable desire for revenge or, more generally, rectification.¹¹

Aristotle recognizes that most people occasionally respond with anger to anger-provoking situations. Simply *feeling* anger is neither virtuous nor vicious on Aristotle's account, what matters is *how* we experience anger. Most generally, moral virtues are excellences of character in some domain, e.g., courage is an excellence of character in the domain of encountering fearsome situations. Similarly, Aristotle suggests that there is an excellence of character associated with experiencing and managing one's anger in the domain of responding to slights.¹² So how should a virtuous person feel anger? Aristotle describes what he terms the virtue of 'good temper' or what I've been calling 'appropriate anger' as follows:

Good temper is a mean with respect to anger; the middle state being unnamed, and the extremes almost without a name as well, we place good temper in the middle position, though it inclines toward the deficiency, which is without a name. The excess might be called a sort of irascibility. For the passion is anger while its causes are many and diverse. The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, as long as he ought, is praised. This will be the good-tempered man, then, since good temper is praised. For the good-tempered man tends to be unperturbed and not to be led by passion, but to be angry in the manner, at the things, and for the length of time, that reason dictates; but he is thought to err rather in the direction of deficiency; for the good-tempered man is not revengeful, but rather tends to forgive. The deficiency, whether it is a sort of inirascibility or whatever it is, is blamed. For those who are not angry at the things they should be are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the right way, at the right time, or with the right persons; for such a man is thought not to feel things nor to be pained by them, and, since he does not get angry, he is thought unlikely to defend himself; and to endure being insulted and to put up with insults to one's friends is slavish. (1984a, 1125b–1126a)

It is important to emphasize that the person who manifests this virtue will be 'good tempered' in the sense of tending towards inirascibility as opposed to irascibility; there is nothing in Aristotle's description of this virtue to rule out the possibility that the good tempered person would respond with great anger to a great slight.

For Aristotle, the person who manifests the character trait of good temper or appropriate anger will neither be too quick to anger, nor too slow to anger. Instead, the person who hits the target will, in the relevant domain, direct her anger toward the right person, at the right time, for the right length of time, and so on. In the passage just cited, Aristotle describes the person who fails to feel anger when it is warranted as foolish and slavish insofar as he is willing to let insults stand without offering any resistance to him; the irascible person is, on the other hand, hot-tempered, out of control, and difficult to live with. So within the domain of responding appropriately to slights, we should strive to manifest the virtue of appropriate anger.

Given the description offered so far, the Aristotelian framework appears to offer us a promising way to begin thinking about the character trait of appropriate anger. The person who manifests the virtue of appropriate anger is praised for responding proportionately to serious slights. In a just society, this character trait would contribute to the agent's flourishing. In these circumstances, appropriate anger would serve as a kind of tool which could be used to respond to and rectify occasional slights. But when we turn to cases of anger in grossly non-ideal circumstances, it is difficult to see how Aristotle's framework can help us understand the virtue of appropriate anger.

Under conditions of oppression, for example, appropriate anger is a trait that can easily, and systematically, become disconnected from the flourishing of the person who manifests this virtue in a way that is difficult to countenance on a theory which posits any connection between virtue and flourishing.¹³ The problem is that under conditions of oppression, manifesting the virtue of appropriate anger threatens to systematically lead the bearer of this trait *away from* flourishing rather than *towards* it. Since Aristotle acknowledges that the mean is not the same for everyone but is relative to us he could claim that the proper medial state of anger for someone living under oppression will be different from someone living under non-oppressive circumstances. But what I don't think Aristotle anticipated or appreciated is that the virtue of appropriate anger under conditions of oppression itself interferes with the flourishing of the bearer of this trait.

Why would this be? Habitually responding with anger only to those serious slights that would be foolish or slavish to ignore could well contribute to an individual's flourishing if one lived in an environment where these occasions for appropriate anger were relatively rare. But in grossly non-ideal circumstances (such as the racial conditions of the United States in Douglass' time), the occasions for appropriate anger will be ever-present. Douglass made it clear in his speeches that he, even as a free man, felt slighted every day by the existence of slavery in the south. On top of this, he regularly endured the large and small insults and humiliations associated with being a member of a stigmatized group. In response to these slights and injustices, Douglass was disposed to respond with anger. As Douglass' case makes clear, hitting the target of appropriate anger under conditions of oppression may well require those who manifest this virtue to be in a near constant state of rage.¹⁴ While the person who evinces the virtue of appropriate anger under these circumstances may not always be filled with wrath, such a person will be constantly preoccupied

by thoughts of wrongdoing and will have an ever-present desire for rectification. This state will be accompanied by both pain at the slight or injustice and pleasure at the anticipated rectification.

Not only will the oppressed face many occasions that merit their anger, they often lack wide community support or adequate responsiveness to their anger. In a recent discussion of the value of resentment, Margaret Walker (2006, 136) emphasizes that anger both expresses a sense of being wronged and also involves a call to others within the wider community for recognition of the slight and reparative response. To the extent that the oppressed lack this assurance and reparative activity from the wider community, their anger will lack proper uptake. Thus, as the oppressed continue to respond (quite appropriately) to their situation with anger, they will likely experience greater and greater alienation from the wider community and their anger will remain, in some sense, incomplete.

It is important to stress that the main problem of appropriate anger under non-ideal conditions is *not* that this anger misses the mark or directs itself toward inappropriate objects. While it may be true that anger under oppression has some tendency to miss its mark, this is not the problem that I am interested in here.¹⁵ For, as I see it, what is most problematic about appropriate anger under oppression is that even when it *does* hit its mark, it has a tendency to compromise its bearer's flourishing. Clearly the oppressed person who evinces the character trait of appropriate anger will lack happiness according to many conventional understandings of happiness. That is, given the pain of anger, she will clearly be deprived of a life filled with nothing but wholly pleasurable experiences. This, of course, is not at all problematic for Aristotle who recognized that the *good life* is not simply a matter of enjoying a series of pleasurable experiences. Aristotle acknowledged that some excellences, e.g., friendship and courage, make the virtuous person vulnerable to all sorts of pain.¹⁶ But it might be argued that the virtue of appropriate anger under circumstances of oppression would make the truly good life, and not just the conventionally good life, impossible. For, as we have seen, under these circumstances, the oppressed have reason to be in a *constant state of anger*. I will not attempt to provide an account of human flourishing here, but no matter how we understand flourishing, it seems pretty clear that one cannot be said to flourish if one is in a constant, or near-constant, state of rage.¹⁷ The reason why the person in a constant state of rage cannot be said to flourish has less to do with the pain associated with anger than it does with the way in which anger focuses one's attention on the object of one's anger. In Dante's *Purgatory*, the angry dwell in thick smoke suggestive of how anger has the potential to cloud one's moral vision making accurate moral perception difficult if not impossible.¹⁸ The person who is in (or takes herself to have reason to be in) a constant state of rage will find it difficult to focus her attention on others due to her preoccupation with the slight or injustice which gave rise to her anger. Such an individual will find it tough to open herself up to others, making friendship rare if not impossible. Someone in this state of constant anger will focus her attention on harms and the desire for rectification and find it difficult to be generous with others. In addition, such a person will probably find it hard to trust others and will be reticent to forgive those who have harmed her. In short, it is difficult

to see how someone filled with ever-present rage could be said to really flourish or enjoy the truly good life. If the virtues are partially constitutive of one's flourishing, then it is not clear how appropriate anger could be a virtue under circumstances of oppression.

In her recent book, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, Lisa Tessman argues that we can use a neo-Aristotelian eudaimonistic theory to justify virtues—like appropriate anger—which are systematically disconnected from their bearer's flourishing. Tessman is the only philosopher that I know of who has offered a well-developed account of the virtue of appropriate anger in non-ideal circumstances, and in the following section I will consider the merits of her account.

10.3.2 Tessman's Account of the Virtue of Appropriate Anger

For Tessman, appropriate anger under oppression is what she terms a *burdened virtue*. Burdened virtues are 'virtues that have the unusual feature of being disjoined from their bearer's own flourishing' (Tessman, 2005, 4). If there are virtues that are disconnected from their bearer's flourishing, how do we decide which traits count as virtues? Tessman offers a four-fold classification of traits that, in some sense, qualify as virtues. While some traits are partially constitutive of flourishing, the virtue of appropriate anger under grossly non-ideal circumstances is not. Instead, this trait counts as a token of what Tessman calls a 'v₃ trait':

Trait v₃: is chosen because it is judged to be the best trait to cultivate in the circumstances, even though it is not conducive to or constitutive of anyone's flourishing at present; it does, however, tend to enable its bearer to perform actions with the aim of eventually making flourishing lives more possible overall (for the bearer of trait and/or for others). (165)

As Tessman characterizes it, appropriate anger is a virtue under oppression because of its potential to transform the world so that flourishing for at least some will be possible even if this means that the trait precludes its bearer from flourishing. Thus, on Tessman's account, v₃ traits, such as appropriate anger, are instrumentally valuable insofar as they are means to the end of flourishing. While the trait of appropriate anger is disconnected from the agent's own flourishing under conditions of oppression, it may nevertheless count as a virtue if it leads to the *eventual* flourishing of its bearer or of others within the moral community. Let's call this characterization of the virtue of appropriate anger under oppression the *Eventual Flourishing Account*. As should be clear, the Eventual Flourishing Account is exclusively *forward-looking*. That is, what makes appropriate anger a virtue is its tendency to bring about the future good of flourishing, either for the agent herself or for others within the moral community.

What should we think of the Eventual Flourishing Account? While I think Tessman's discussion of the burdened virtues is rich and rewarding, I don't think The Eventual Flourishing Account gives the best account of the nature and justification of the virtue of appropriate anger under non-ideal conditions. Tessman's reliance on a broadly eudaimonistic framework gives us a clear understanding of

the *costs* of oppression (and responding appropriately to oppression) in terms of the corruption of the selves who must endure its hardships. But I don't think the Eventual Flourishing Account properly justifies the trait of appropriate anger.¹⁹

According to the Eventual Flourishing Account, the trait of appropriate anger is choiceworthy under circumstances of oppression insofar as it will lead to the eventual flourishing of its bearer or others within the moral community. Against this claim, I'd like to suggest that the justification of the virtue of appropriate anger should be completely disconnected from considerations of future flourishing. To see why, let's begin by considering Douglass' anger: is Douglass' character trait of appropriate anger a virtue? According to the Eventual Flourishing Account, the answer to this question will depend on whether Douglass' anger brings about his own or others' eventual flourishing. But this seems to conflict with our intuitions about possible worlds in which Douglass' anger does or does not lead to his flourishing or the eventual flourishing of others. Suppose Douglass died in slavery and his character trait of appropriate anger never brought about his own flourishing or the flourishing of anyone else. In such circumstances, would we really want to say that his character would be no more virtuous than the character of someone who meekly accepted slights hurled against him and acquiesced to gross mistreatment without a hint of anger or malice? While we might have reason not to judge such an inirascible person too harshly, it seems clear to me that Douglass' character that manifested the trait of appropriate anger is more praiseworthy than the character of someone who manifested the trait of meek acceptance of serious slights.

Moreover, it is possible that in these conditions, considerations of future flourishing would likely justify *inirascibility* as a more choiceworthy character trait than appropriate anger. Suppose Douglas responded to Covey's treatment with calm acceptance and allowed himself to be mercilessly beaten. Perhaps Douglass decided that cultivating a placid state of mind would be more likely lead to his own flourishing than cultivating the virtue of appropriate anger. Now suppose that after ruthlessly beating Douglass, Covey has a change of heart. He sees Douglass' bloody body before him and realizes the error of his ways. He frees his slaves, joins the abolitionist movement, and contributes to the eventual freeing of the slaves, which in turn makes flourishing lives newly possible for all those formerly enslaved. While we might applaud Covey's change of heart, does this give us any reason to praise Douglass' inirascibility? While it was Douglass' inirascibility that created the conditions for Covey's change of heart, it seems wrong to praise this character trait. As we've seen, Aristotle considers inirascibility a vice—such inirascible people create the conditions that allow tyrants to rule unchecked. More importantly, this trait is indicative of and helps to entrench diminished self-respect. Considering this case suggests, I think, that whether a trait leads to the eventual flourishing of its bearer or others is not always relevant to determining whether or not the trait in question is a virtue.

Perhaps the problems with this picture can be more easily appreciated if we consider a possible world in which Douglass' anger *would* count as a burdened virtue according to the Eventual Flourishing Account. Suppose Douglass was never loaned out to Covey and instead spent his days working for the relatively gentle and kind Caldwell. In this imaginary world, Caldwell never beats Douglass and encourages

him to further his education, going so far as to lend Douglass books from his personal library. Despite this kind treatment, Caldwell remains Douglass' master and Douglass quite appropriately resents Caldwell for this and makes this resentment felt. Caldwell takes Douglass' resentment to heart, and ends up freeing Douglass and joining the abolitionist movement helping to bring about the end of slavery and making flourishing lives more possible for those formerly enslaved. In this world, is Douglass' character trait of appropriate anger a virtue? According to the Eventual Flourishing Account, the answer would be 'yes.' For Douglass' character trait of appropriate anger brought about the conditions that made possible the eventual flourishing of Douglass and others. But this is an odd result indeed. For Covey was certainly a more resentment-worthy master than Caldwell, yet, on this account, Douglass' character trait of appropriate *anger would* not be considered a virtue in the world where he worked for Covey, and it *would* be considered a virtue in the world where he worked for the much less resentment-worthy Caldwell. This result seems to get things exactly wrong.

Not only does this account seem to be at odds with our intuitions about when the character trait of appropriate anger should count as a virtue and when it should not, but also it seems to offer an incomplete account of the nature of resentment itself.²⁰ Resentment is usually conceived of as an assessment of and a negative response to vice or ill will. But according to the Eventual Flourishing Account, the resentment partially constitutive of the character trait of appropriate anger has been completely severed from its role of assessing and responding negatively to vice and ill will. Resentment that is completely severed from assessment of or response to vice or ill will ceases to be resentment in any recognizable sense.

To see this, imagine Douglass were to ask *why* he should develop the character trait of appropriate anger rather than give in to, say, his natural tendency towards meekness. A proponent of the Eventual Flourishing Account would say that this character trait might lead to Douglass' eventual flourishing or the flourishing of others within the moral community. But suppose Douglass were to ask why, in some particular instance, he should resent Covey. In this case, we would reject considerations of eventual flourishing as reasons that could possibly warrant his attitude. Whether or not Douglass' resentment would be warranted would not turn on whether or not this resentment would be desirable or would bring about a certain state of affairs. Instead, Douglass' resentment would be warranted if Covey really had wronged Douglass and unwarranted if he had not. Appealing to the desirability of Douglass' anger in an attempt to justify it would be to give *the wrong kind of reason* in support of it.²¹ If appealing to considerations of desirability cannot warrant a particular token of resentment, how can the character trait of appropriate anger be justified by appealing to *its* desirability? Something seems to have gone wrong here. In response to Douglass's question—'why should I develop the character trait of appropriate anger?'—I think we'd be forced to give the wrong kind of reason on this account. Thus, it seems to me that the Eventual Flourishing Account not only conflicts with our intuitions concerning *when* the character trait of appropriate anger is a virtue, but it also fails to comport with our considered judgments concerning the *nature of resentment itself*.

Given these considerations, I think we ought to abandon the attempt to explain and justify the virtue of appropriate anger under oppression by appealing to any future state of flourishing and thereby give up on the Eventual Flourishing Account of the virtue of appropriate anger. Does this mean that we should completely give up the task of trying to justify the virtue of appropriate anger under non-ideal conditions? I think not. There are, it seems to me, better and worse character traits to have under circumstances of oppression, and I reject the idea that we should give up theorizing about virtue in general, or the virtue of appropriate anger in particular, under non-ideal circumstances. Perhaps there is a way for an Aristotelian theory to make sense of the virtue of appropriate anger in a way that avoids the problems I've discussed above.²² However, I suspect that a justification of the virtue of appropriate anger under these circumstances is only coherent if we adopt a rather different kind of virtue theory.

10.4 Appropriate Anger as Non-instrumentally Valuable

As I discussed in the first part of this paper, there is a sizable literature on the value and importance of discrete episodes of anger within recent feminist moral psychology. For the most part, theorists who argue for the value of anger claim that anger has a certain instrumental value, e.g., it is seen as valuable as a means of protesting, as a way of motivating positive change, and so on. Tessman follows in the footsteps of these theorists insofar as she claims that the character trait of appropriate anger only counts as a virtue if it helps to bring about the flourishing of its bearer or others within the moral community. The specific objections I've raised against the Eventual Flourishing Account will apply more generally to any justification of the virtue of appropriate anger that justifies the virtue by appealing to its desirable consequences. While I think it is important to emphasize anger's often-unrecognized instrumental value, the tendency to understand the value of anger *solely* in terms of its instrumental value and connection to human flourishing is a mistake. In this final section, I would like to gesture towards another way of justifying the virtue of appropriate anger.

There is an old ethical tradition that counsels us to love the good and hate the evil. For example, *Romans* 12:9 reads:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

In recent years, both Robert Adams (2006) and Thomas Hurka (2003) have suggested that the virtuous person is one who loves the good and hates the evil (or as Adams puts it, the virtuous agent will 'be for the good and against the evil'). On this approach, virtue is a kind of excellence in being for (or loving) the good and being against (or hating) the evil.²³ Let's call this the Appropriate Attitude Account. While I cannot fully defend the Appropriate Attitude Account here, I think something like this conception of virtue underlies many of our considered judgments about which traits of character count as virtuous and vicious.

What does this conception of virtue have to do with the proper justification for the virtue of appropriate anger in non-ideal circumstances? As I see it, appropriate anger is a mode of hating or being against evil. If humiliation and pain are evil, then on the view I've sketched, the virtuous person will be disposed to hate humiliation and pain. Douglass' cruel slave master Covey enjoyed inflicting pain on others and this is why we judge him to be malicious and cruel. If malice and cruelty are themselves evil, the virtuous person will respond to these vices with some form of hatred. If we understand anger as a kind of hatred or con-attitude, then anger would be a *prima-facie* apt response to these vices. On this picture, what makes the character trait of appropriate anger a virtue is not its instrumental value in bringing about a state of eventual flourishing. Rather, the idea is that loving the good and hating the evil is *itself* non-instrumentally valuable.

Interestingly, Hurka seems to come to the opposite conclusion about the moral value of anger. In *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, Hurka describes anger as a vice:

There are more specific other-regarding pure vices. One is anger, at least when it involves, as intense anger can, a desire to strike out at another in or in some way cause her pain. Such anger is a specific form of malice, distinguished both by its cause—a belief that the other has mistreated one—and by its high intensity and short duration. (93)

As Hurka sees it, hating and attempting to control one's anger exemplifies the virtue of self-control, and he goes on to claim that a higher-level desire to control one's anger is intrinsically good (111–112). So, for Hurka, hating one's anger is a virtue.

Hurka is right to suggest that in some cases (e.g., when one's anger is excessive or directed toward the wrong object), hating one's anger may be a way of standing against the bad. However, it does not follow that in all cases hating one's anger is a virtue according to the Appropriate Attitude Account. Anger itself may sometimes serve as a mode of being against the bad or hating evil. As recent feminist defenses emphasize, anger is a way of standing against slights and injustices. It seems unproblematic to claim that *appropriate anger* is a particular way of hating evil or being against the bad.²⁴ However, it is far more difficult to adduce evidence in support of the claim that anger is a *form of excellence* in being against the bad. Douglass' anger will certainly strike many readers as a kind of excellence in being against the bad; it is, after all, the seeming excellence of this trait that leads some to describe Douglass as 'majestic' in his wrath. But is there anything more one could say about why appropriate anger is a form of excellence of being against the bad?

Clearly there is a multiplicity of attitudes that could reasonably be construed as ways of being against the bad: one could hate it, be disgusted by it, be saddened by it, be disappointed in it, be contemptuous of it, etc. I want to suggest that part of what makes appropriate anger *an excellent response* in the domain of slights is that it is an especially fitting and appropriately expressive response in this domain. While other negative emotions such as disappointment or sadness, might also have a role to play in our emotional attachment to our moral standards and principles, in the domain of slights and disrespect, anger does the best job of: (1) *fitting* the failure; and (2) *expressing* the victim's integrity, respect for the object of her anger, and commitment to the moral standards in question.²⁵

To see this, consider the following case. Suppose Douglass never came to feel anger toward Covey, but only responded to him with disappointment. Disappointment is a feeling of dissatisfaction when our expectations are not realized. Disappointment is a con-attitude, however, as everyone knows, we can experience disappointment when even very trivial expectations are not met. While disappointment may be a fitting response to others' failure to meet certain basic standards, and it maybe a way of standing against the failure in question, anger is an especially apt response in these circumstances. For anger does a better job of responding to the slight and expressing the agent's respect for herself and her value as well as for the insulter and her status as a person, no matter how morally deranged. Were Douglass to only feel disappointment towards Covey and never anger at his cruel treatment, then Douglass could not be said to exemplify excellence in standing against evil. I do not mean to imply that responding with anger is the *only* appropriate way to stand against evil or moral badness in this domain.²⁶ Instead, I mean to argue that anger is one especially important way of standing against the bad in this particular domain. While there may be other ways of standing against badness in this area of life, responding with anger is a more excellent response than responding with just disappointment.

As should be clear, the Appropriate Attitude Account is perfectly compatible with the recent feminist defenses of discrete episodes of anger. If we accept that the trait of appropriate anger is a virtue because it is a form of excellence in being against the bad, this in no way interferes with or poses a problem for recent feminist defenses of anger. For appropriate anger understood as a mode of being against the bad may well have instrumental value: a stable disposition of this kind can help maintain the self-respect of victims of oppression, it can provide the oppressed with knowledge that the non-oppressed lack, it can allow the oppressed to bear witness to injustice, and it can directly motivate social change. But in addition, such a stance is a non-instrumentally valuable insofar as it is a mode of standing against evil.

While there are, no doubt, many unanswered questions that remain concerning the Appropriate Attitude Account, my aim here is not to give a full articulation or defense of this account, but to contrast it to the Eventual Flourishing Account. As I think should be clear, these frameworks justify the virtue of appropriate anger in two very different ways. The character trait of appropriate anger will count as a virtue on the Eventual Flourishing Account insofar as it will eventually lead to the flourishing of the bearer of the trait or others in the moral community, while the character trait of appropriate anger counts as a virtue on the Appropriate Attitude Account because it is a non-instrumentally valuable way of being against evil.

Why should we prefer the Appropriate Attitude Account to the Eventual Flourishing Account? The Appropriate Attitude Account can give a coherent justification of the virtue of appropriate anger and it avoids the problems that plague the Eventual Flourishing Account. Assuming that our hatred of evil should be proportional to its badness,²⁷ we can explain why Douglass has reason to be angrier at Covey in comparison to Caldwell. Since Caldwell was a less wicked slave master than Covey, Douglass would have reason to respond to Covey with greater anger. The Appropriate Attitude Account can also explain why it is that a character trait of habitual

inirascibility that just happens to lead to flourishing should not be praised. As we have seen, on the Appropriate Attitude Account, what makes a trait a virtue is not its connection to some state of flourishing but that it is a form of excellence in being for the good or against the evil. The type of inirascibility in question would not count as this kind of excellence.

Most importantly, this way of thinking about the virtue of the appropriate anger does not threaten to offer a distorted picture of the nature of resentment itself. On the Eventual Flourishing Account, the reasons an agent has for manifesting a particular trait (i.e., that it will lead to her or others' eventual flourishing), cannot be the reasons she has for experiencing anger on some particular occasion. But the Appropriate Attitude Account faces no such difficulty. Should Douglass ask why he should develop the character trait of appropriate anger we can respond that this character trait is a way of being against evil. On the Appropriate Attitude Account, the kinds of reasons that we would appeal to justify a particular instance of anger will be the same sort of reasons we appeal to in justifying the virtue of appropriate anger. Thus, on this conception of the virtue, there is no disconnection between the sorts of considerations that justify the virtue of appropriate anger and the sorts of considerations that justify a particular instance or token of anger.

At this point, a defender of the Eventual Flourishing Account might object that the Appropriate Attitude Account faces its own serious difficulties. It might be argued that one attractive feature of the Eventual Flourishing Account is that it articulates an ideal of virtue with real *limits* placed on the role of anger in the virtuous life under oppression. In cases where the trait of appropriate anger would benefit neither the bearer of the trait nor others in the community, it ceases to be a virtue. But on the Appropriate Attitude Account, there is no such limit. Since I've argued that, under grossly non-ideal conditions, there often is no connection between the virtue of appropriate anger and its bearer's flourishing, this may seem like an extremely unattractive conception of virtue.

In response, I'll begin by stressing a rather obvious point: I am concerned with ideals of virtue rather than standards of behavior. That is, I am interested in how one might go about justifying an ideal of excellence, rather than an obligation or duty. It seems that anyone who would object to the Appropriate Attitude Account in this way does not fully acknowledge the importance of this distinction. Even if the Appropriate Attitude Account placed no limit on the role of anger in the virtuous life, it is not at all clear why this would be a problematic ideal of virtue. If one were to accept the Appropriate Attitude Account of the virtue of appropriate anger, it does not follow that one accepts that we have a moral duty to be angry all the time; instead, the Appropriate Attitude Account articulates an ideal of virtue to which we may aspire.

Moreover, the Appropriate Attitude Account does place limits on the role of anger in the virtuous life. This account is premised on the idea that the virtuous person is someone who loves the good and hates the evil. I have stressed the important role of hating evil since I have argued that this is central to a proper understanding of how to justify the virtue of appropriate anger. But we should not forget that on the Appropriate Attitude Account the virtuous person is someone who hates the evil

and loves the good. If one's anger prevented one from loving the good, then one would not be a fully virtuous person on this account. Being able to love the good is not the same as flourishing. One might be able to love the good yet be incapable of entering into friendships, for example. However, acknowledging that the virtuous person will love the good and hate the evil does place *some* limit on the role of anger in the virtuous life. For Douglass' anger to be virtuous, it must not reach a point where he finds it impossible to love the good. In short, although the Eventual Flourishing Account does limit the role of anger in the life of virtue, this does not give us reason to prefer it to the Appropriate Anger Account for the later also has room for limits on the role of anger in the life of virtue.

10.5 Conclusion

I have argued that a neo-Aristotelian framework may not provide the best framework for justifying the virtue of appropriate anger under conditions of oppression. I have not so much been concerned with *defending* the virtue of appropriate anger, as with exploring the best framework for thinking about this question.²⁸ I have argued that a neo-Aristotelian account in general, and the Eventual Flourishing Account in particular, do not provide the soundest theoretical architecture for thinking about the virtue of appropriate anger under circumstances of oppression.

I began this paper by reflecting upon what I take to be an iconic portrait of Frederick Douglass. If Douglass did manifest the virtue of appropriate anger, this is a trait that merits praise. I have argued that it is misguided to think that the praiseworthiness of this trait depends solely upon whether or not it brings about Douglass' flourishing or the flourishing of others in the moral community. Nonetheless, eudaimonistic theory can help us understand why our emotional responses to Douglass' portrait may be somewhat ambivalent: there is *a cost* associated with being the victim of oppression and there is, at least sometimes, an additional price to pay for responding virtuously to oppressive circumstances. Although Douglass' character trait of appropriate anger is praiseworthy, his portrait is a reminder that under non-ideal circumstances, virtue can come encumbered with its own attendant costs.

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Notes

1. See http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/photo/highlight_item.php?acc=1996.433 for an image of the portrait and a brief discussion of the daguerreotype process.
2. Quoted in William L. Andrews and William S. McFeeling (1997, 130). Also quoted in James A. Colaiaco (2006, 6).

3. Although the kind of anger I am concerned with in this paper is partially constituted by a desire for revenge or rectification, one can clearly be angry in this sense without *acting* on this desire.
4. This idea of anger being a response to being blocked or opposed can also be seen in Aristotle's account of the causes of anger: 'Whether, then, another man opposes him either directly in any way, as by preventing him from drinking when he is thirsty, or indirectly; whether someone works against him, or fails to work with him, or otherwise vexes him while he is in this mood, he is equally angry in all these cases' (1984b, 1379a).
5. It should be noted that we sometimes use the term 'resentment' to refer to a longstanding attitude of a distinct kind. As Ekman (2003) describes it, some forms of anger 'may *fester*, in which case it is never out of mind. The person is preoccupied with the offense ruminating excessively about it' (113). This kind of resentment is clearly akin to Nietzsche's *ressentiment*. In this paper, I am interested in exploring how one would go about defending a virtue of anger or resentment in response to injustice, not a virtue of *ressentiment*. In other words, I am interested in the kind of anger we experience when we have been wronged by another person (i.e., resentment) and not the impotent and festering rage of Nietzsche's *ressentiment*.
6. See, for example, Gabriel Taylor (2006) and Robert Thurman (2005).
7. The following summary of the feminist literature on the value of anger is borrowed from Bell (2005). I also discuss this material in Bell (2006).
8. There are many feminist theorists who discuss the epistemic privilege of the oppressed. I cite Narayan here because she does an especially nice job of showing how this epistemic privilege is connected to the liability to certain emotions.
9. Lynne McFall's partial defense of bitterness is an important exception to this general trend. But while bitterness is, by definition, a stable and enduring motivational state, McFall does not emphasize this in her partial defense of bitterness. See McFall (1991).
10. In equating slighting with failing to respect, I am putting a rather contemporary gloss on Aristotle's notion of slighting. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes what he means by slighting as follows: 'Now slighting is the actively entertained opinion of something as obviously of no importance. We think bad things, as well as good ones, have serious importance; and we think the same of anything that tends to produce such things, while those which have little or no such tendency we consider unimportant' (1378b). My goal is not to offer a scholarly reconstruction of Aristotle's ideas, but to show how his account of anger is relevant to contemporary debates about the value of anger under oppression. Thus, while I may well be taking liberties with the text by equating slighting with failing to properly respect, I am doing so quite consciously with a particular purpose in mind.
11. This definition of anger raises many questions. Does anger always involve the expectation of *revenge*? Is it possible to experience anger towards groups of people or is Aristotle correct to insist that anger is always directed at individuals? What exactly is anger aiming at? In this paper, I am less interested in Aristotle's own account of the nature and value of anger, and more interested in the contemporary discussions of the virtue of anger which have been inspired by Aristotle's account. Because of this, I will not give Aristotle's own views the very careful attention they deserve. For detailed discussions of Aristotle's account of virtuous anger see Leighton (2002). See also, Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman (1996, Chapter 10).
12. My understandings of how we ought to individuate the virtues may diverge from Aristotle's account. Since my primary aim is to engage with some of the contemporary literature on the virtue of appropriate anger, I will not here offer a careful précis of Aristotle's account of how we ought to individuate the virtues.
13. For more on this general point see Tessman (2005). In this book, Tessman offers an analysis of precisely these virtues, i.e., virtues that are disconnected from the agent's own flourishing. I will discuss Tessman's neo-Aristotelian account of the virtue of appropriate anger under oppression in what follows.
14. Tessman (2005, 123) makes a similar point.

15. See Tessman (2005, 120–122) for a discussion of how anger might have a tendency to be misdirected under oppression. Cornel West (1994) is also concerned about this possibility. See his essay ‘Malcolm X and Black Rage.’
16. For more on this point, see Martha Nussbaum (2001, Chapter 11).
17. Some might disagree with me on this point. Perhaps there is a way of interpreting the good life or flourishing so that even in grossly non-ideal circumstances, the agent who manifested the trait of appropriate anger could be said to flourish. However, as I have indicated above, I find it difficult to imagine how any conception of the good life or human flourishing could count as good life one that was filled with ever-present rage.
18. Gabrielle Taylor (2006, 84) makes this point.
19. Some of what I say against Tessman’s view in what follows is quite similar to a line of criticism that Rae Langton (2001) develops. My views here are also influenced by Strawson (1974).
20. Langton raises a similar worry against consequentialist virtue theory in ‘The Virtues of Resentment.’ While Tessman is not offering a consequentialist account of virtue, her analysis of v_3 traits renders her account vulnerable to this worry.
21. As many philosophers have noted, there are different sorts of considerations that count in favor of a given attitude. A consideration can count in favor of an attitude, such as resentment, in (at least) two distinct ways: it can show that the attitude is *warranted* or it can show that the attitude is *good*, e.g., pleasurable, useful, desirable, etc. To appeal to the latter sort of consideration is to provide *the wrong kind of reason to justify* an attitude such as resentment. For a recent discussion of what has become known as ‘the wrong kind of reason problem’ see Darwall (2006, 15–16, 65–67).
22. As I will argue in what follows, I think any cogent defense of the virtue of appropriate anger under conditions of oppression must recognize that this trait is non-instrumentally valuable. Interestingly, in his discussion of virtuous actions, Aristotle claims that virtuous actions must be done for their own sakes: ‘The agent must also be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character’ (1984a, 1105a). This is not a feature of Aristotle’s thought that Tessman emphasizes.
23. I am intentionally combining the views of Hurka and Adams here in order to contrast their accounts of virtue with neo-Aristotelian accounts of virtue. Since my aim here is not to give a careful exegesis of the view of Hurka and Adams, I will ignore many of the very important theoretical differences between them in what follows. For a good discussion of the important differences between these two theorists, see Adams (2006, Chapter 2).
24. Since I am concerned here with appropriate anger, I will not take up the question of whether inappropriate anger can ever be a virtue.
25. It may be objected that the way I have put this point is contentious. I seem to be assuming that only the principle victim of some injustice can manifest the virtue of appropriate anger. But surely someone who evinces the virtue of appropriate anger may well come to feel anger on someone else’s behalf. I do not wish to deny that the virtuous agent may come to feel anger on someone else’s behalf. In such cases, the anger would not be expressing the victim’s integrity so much as expressing the victim’s value as a co-member of the moral community.
26. In some circumstances, I think it would be appropriate to respond to oppressors with contempt. For my defense of contempt as a response to oppression, please see Bell (2005).
27. Adams expresses some worries about proportionality constraints, but I will bracket his concerns for my purposes here. For more on the differences concerning Hurka and Adams on proportionality constraints, see Adams (2006, Chapter 2).
28. A full *defense* of this virtue would require taking on several issues that I have not discussed due to the limited scope of this paper. There is a long history of philosophical objections to anger. The Stoics, for example, might agree that we ought to ‘be against the bad’ in the sense of *judging* bad things to be bad, yet deny that this must involve the experience of anger or other negative emotions. A full defense of the virtue of appropriate anger would need to respond to these and other challenges to the claim that there is a virtue of appropriate anger.

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