



Martha Nussbaum:
Feeling, Fragility,
Flourishing

10. Anger







RACING
RESULTS-ENTRIES

Los Angeles Times

FINAL

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 1965

1,000 RIOT IN L.A.

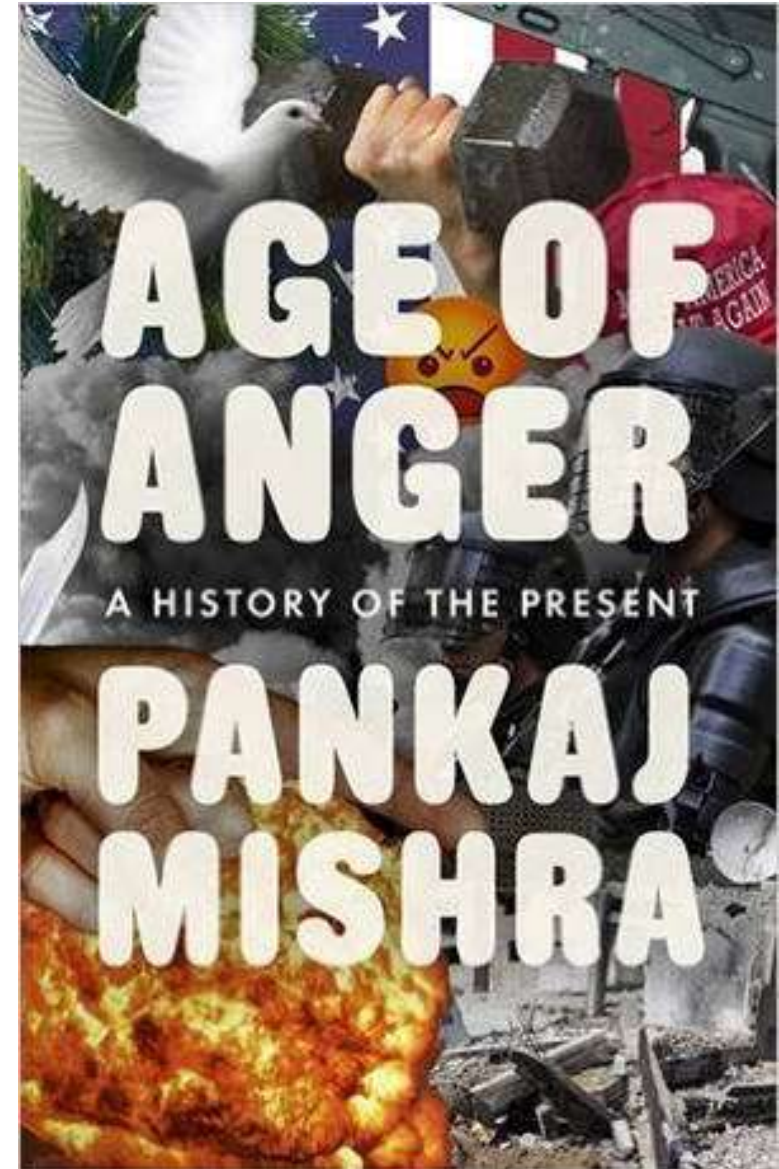
Police and Motorists Attacked

Routine Arrest of 3 Sparks Watts Melee; 8 Blocks Sealed Off

Los Angeles Times









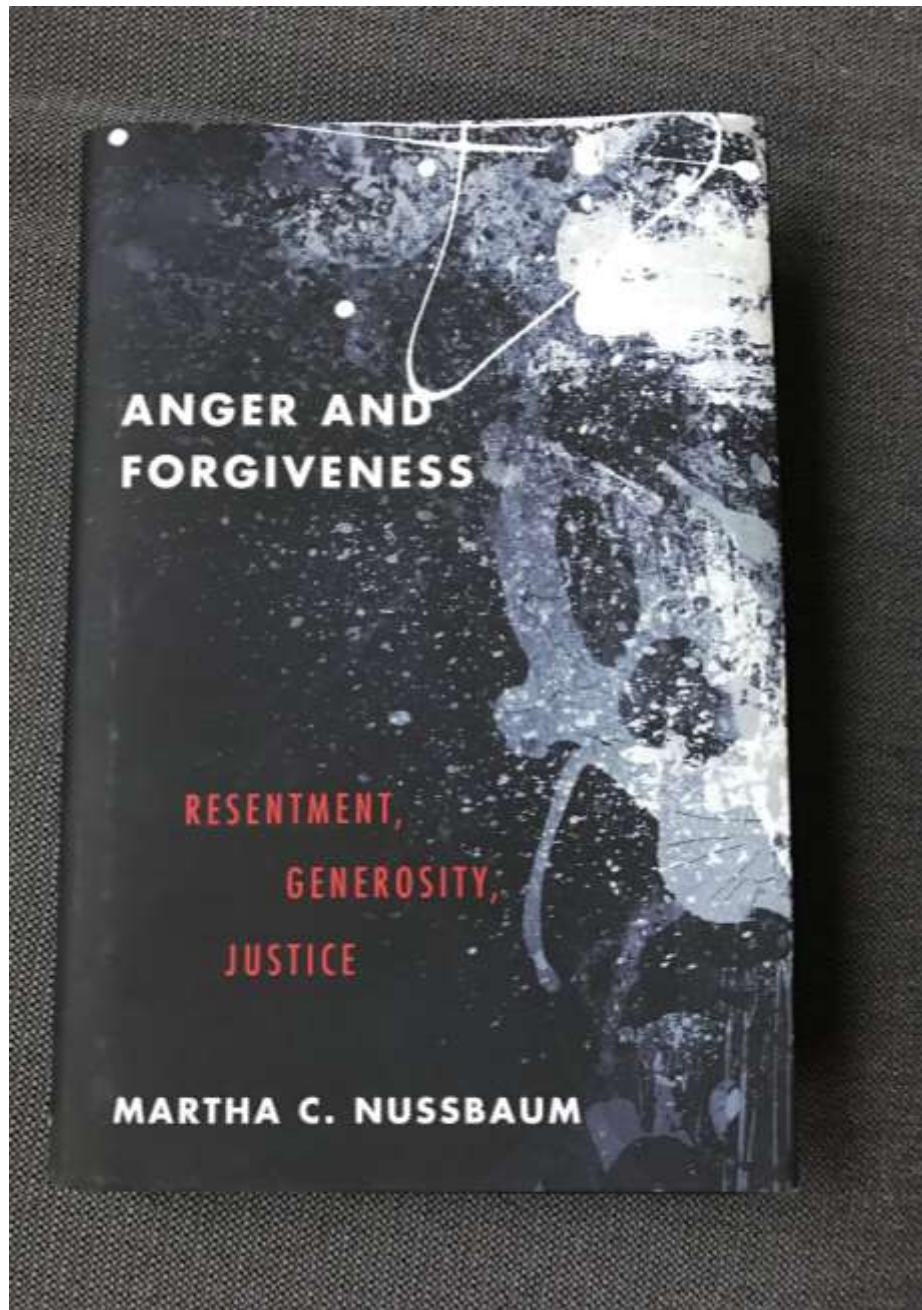


Dosso Dossi, Anger, 1515-6





Anger Commits Suicide (C12th),
at Sainte-Madeleine, Vezelay.



Anger – traditional accounts

- Joseph Butler: ‘No other principle, or passion, hath for its end the misery of our fellow creatures’.
- Ancient Greek, Roman and Christian traditions, as well as Buddhism and Hinduism (and much more) condemn anger
- Philosophically, it is weakly understood: Anger is often considered too abstractly as ‘reactive attitudes and feelings’ (Peter Strawson, 15) or among the ‘reactive emotions’.
- For Nussbaum, anger is about a desire for payback, which is ultimately harmful to our flourishing

‘There are two possibilities.

Either anger focuses on some significant injury, such as a murder or a rape, or it focuses only on the significance of the wrongful act for the victim’s relative status – as what Aristotle calls a “down-ranking”. In the first case, the idea of payback makes no sense (since inflicting pain on the offender does not remove or constructively address the victim’s injury.

In the second, it makes all too much sense – payback may successfully effect a reversal of positions – but only because the values involved are distorted: relative status should not be so important.’

Nussbaum’s goal – accepting that anger is central to political justice campaigns, but finding a way to transition from anger to constructive thinking about a future good.



Giovanni Battista Tiepolo
The Rage of Achilles, 1757

Eudaimonism

- First, anger is considered as something *eudaimonistic*
- Anger involves appraisals ‘from the point of the view of the agent, and register the agent’s own view of what matters for life, rather than some detached or impersonal table of values’. Our circle of concern
- *Huh? Does how we commonly conceive anger reflect this? Is it so cognitive?*
- Notice that bodily changes and physical states are quickly dismissed as inconstant – is this satisfactory?

Aristotle's account

‘a desire accompanied by pain for an imagined retribution on account of an imagined slighting inflicted by people who have no legitimate reason to slight oneself or one’s own’ (*Rhetoric*)

It involves five elements – this is reminiscent of compassion too:

1. Slighting, or down-ranking (*oligoria*)
2. Of the self or people close to the self
3. Wrongfully or inappropriately done (*me prosekonton*)
4. Accompanied by pain
5. Involving a desire for retribution

Aristotle's account

This could be more simplified to:

1. The belief that I, or someone in my 'circle of concern', have been injured or wronged (including being 'down-ranked' in terms of status)
2. A painful feeling accompanying this belief
3. A desire for the perpetrator of this wrong to suffer as punishment or 'payback'



David Vinckboons,
Country Pub Brawl,
c17th

The double-movement

- For Aristotle, it can involve pleasure and pain. Pleasure in the prospect of retribution, but pain, both felt and in its focus on harming a specific target.
- How does it compare to grief? That also involves pain, but has not target, and focuses on a loss
- Anger implies causal thinking, and some sense of right and wrong.
- A double-movement, from pain to striking back. Fixating on both a past injury and future revenge.

Status injury

- Is it always necessary for someone to be slighted?
- Not always – we may be angry about causes or principles that don't necessarily involve a sense of slighting to our selves, or when someone we care about is harmed.
- We can be concerned about ourselves and others without this preoccupation with honour and status.
- 'we are prone to anger to the extent that we feel insecure or lacking control with respect to the aspect of our goals that has been assailed – and to the extent that we expect or desire control. Anger aims at restoring lost control and often achieves at least an illusion of it.' (21).



But is it all about harm?

‘Anger involves, conceptually, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender, in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense. They get what they deserve’.

‘It is pretty impressive that so many first-rate thinkers ... should agree on this’

... we could say the same about the immortality of the soul, or free will, or dualism – it doesn’t make it valid.



Titian, "The Healing of
the Wrathful Son" (1511)

Angela and Rebecca

How should we react when someone we care about is wronged?

1. She spends time with Rebecca, supports her with therapy, rehabilitation, motivated by grief/compassion – focusing on the loss and pain caused to her friend, not payback.
2. The same as above, but this time also focusing on the wrongfulness of the act. She feels an additional distinct pain at the violation itself – which causes her to want to do something. In this case, she sets up a rape survivor support group, she campaigns, and so on. She focuses on Rebecca and other women like her.
3. As in 1 and 2, but now, she also seeks to make the offender suffer – she wants to compensate for her own pain by causing him pain. (24)

Magical thinking

- But why would inflicting pain on the offender assuage or cancel her own pain? It doesn't work like that
- Anger is irrational and counterproductive, a kind of 'magical thinking' that clouds the judgement and harms one subject to it
- Michael Jordon: 'Why? That wouldn't bring him back.'
- The problem ultimately is that to see things in this balanced way requires a deep internal and external sense of security which is difficult and elusive.
- In precarious times, fear about a drop in status or about losing what we have can cause us to lash out...



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Fear of decline drives voters to the radical right when inequality increases



*Income inequality and radical right voting have both increased in the past decades, but are the two phenomena linked? **Sarah Engler** and **David Weisstanner** write that rising inequality signals to voters higher up in the income and status hierarchy the threat of a 'steep' social decline. When inequality increases, these voters then turn to radical right parties who offer to defend existing social boundaries.*

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‘anger’s idea of retribution or payback is a brief dream or cloud, soon dispelled by saner thoughts of personal and social welfare.

So anger (if we understand it to involve, internally, a wish for retributive suffering) quickly puts itself out of business, in that even the residual focus on punishing the offender is soon seen as part of a set of projects for improving both offenders and society – and the emotion that has this goal is not so easy to see as anger.

It looks more like compassionate hope’ (pp. 30-31).

Transition

- Equal human dignity
- Put anger out of business – avoid the roads of payback, or narcissistic focus on status, and turn to ‘forward-looking thoughts of welfare’
- ‘It focuses on social welfare from the start. Saying, “Something should be done about this,” it commits itself to a search for strategies’.
- Example: parents focused on a child’s welfare
- ‘If, however, the entire content of the person’s anger is “This is outrageous, and how shall things be improved?” or “This is outrageous, and we must commit ourselves to doing things differently,” then the anger is indeed Transition-Anger.’ (37)



Over to you

- What does Nussbaum mean by transition, and Transition-Anger?
- To what extent does it overcome all the problems of anger already outlined?
- Are you satisfied by the account?



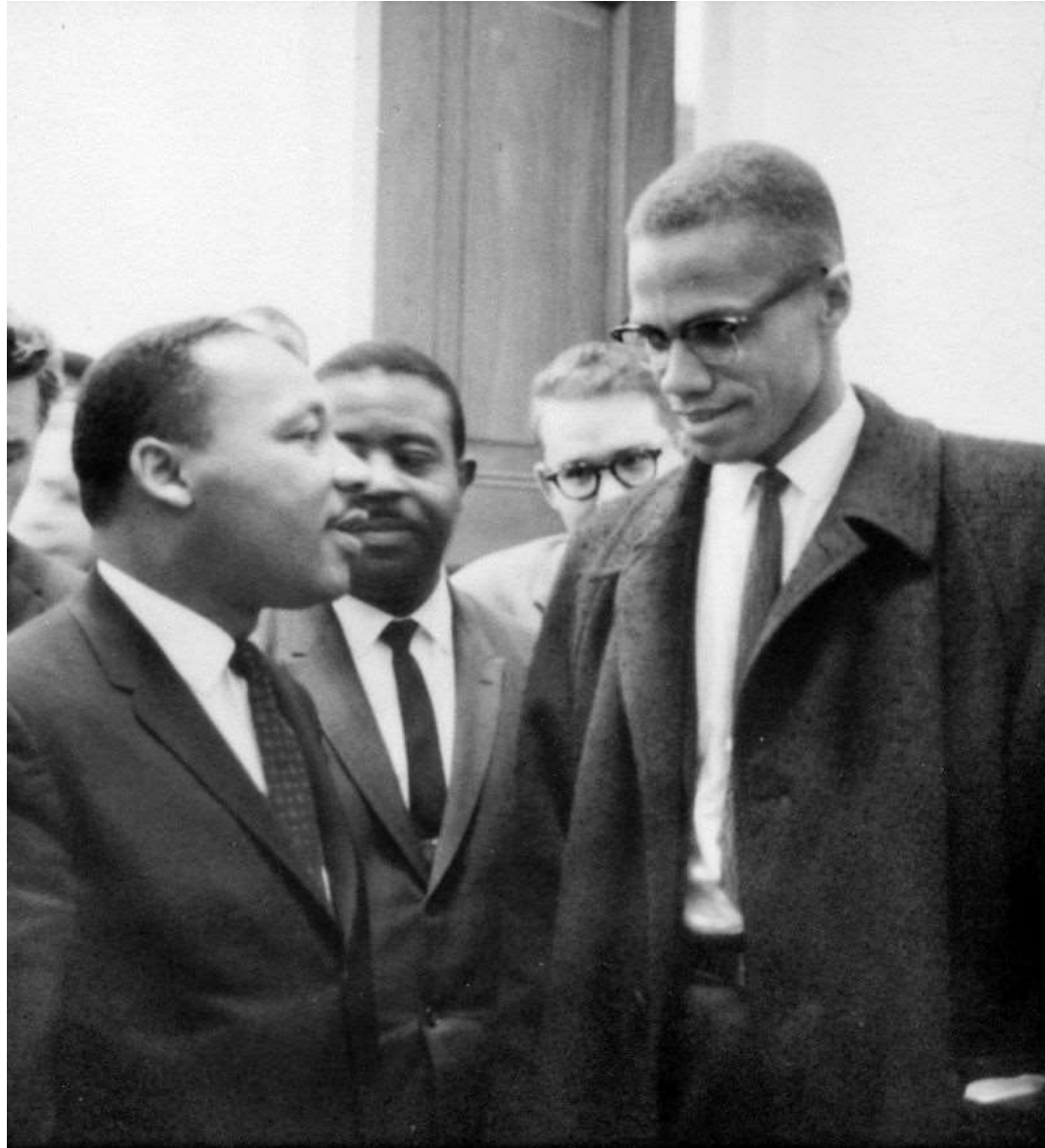




Dr King, “I have a dream”

- Begins with the wrongful injury of racism, that a century after the Emancipation Proclamation, ‘the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination’.
- But, instead of unleashing anger on white Americans or calling for days of rage, he moves to transition.
- It’s like defaulting on a cheque – ‘America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds’.
- Moral debt has not been repaid, and, if we think of the distinction between guilt and shame last week, then the focus is on the act, not the people.
- ‘we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred ... Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.’







Heroic Apostles of Anger

- Think of the debate between Dr King and Malcolm X...
- The example of the cowboy who nearly dies, and then entirely swallows his rage, recognising that the wrongdoer has a young family, as an example of where someone is 'stronger than his anger, and that is what makes him a truly heroic man'.
- *How satisfactory is this?*
- It requires a belief that one can achieve positive effects social reform, or access to politicians or media, or that one knows how to go about this. Riots often involve those who don't have such belief or know-how.



Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872):

‘most of our emotions ‘are so closely connected with their expression, that they hardly exist if the body remains passive’, adding that a man may hate someone else but ‘until his bodily frame is affected he cannot be said to be enraged’

William James, “What is an emotion?”(1884):

‘Can one fancy the state of rage and picture no ebullition of it in the chest, no flushing of the face, no dilatation of the nostrils, no clenching of the teeth, no impulse to vigorous action, but in their stead limp muscles, calm breathing, and a placid face? The present writer, for one, certainly cannot.’

Indignation and injustice

- Two people are angry about the rich not paying enough tax. One person, P focuses just on social justice, the other, Q wants the rich to suffer as payback on top...
- 'Unfortunately, real political actors, including voters, are rarely as pure as P.'
- Three instrumental uses of anger:
 1. **Signal** that something's amiss
 2. **Motivation** to challenge injustice
 3. **Deterrent** that deters others from infringing our rights



Charles-André van Loo,
Jason and Medea (1759)

Gender and scripts

- ‘the crying of a baby labeled female is typically interpreted as fear, while the crying of a baby labeled male is typically interpreted as assertive anger’ (44)
- Anger as something feminised in ancient Greece – *why?*
- Deeper helplessness, of needing to control a situation we cannot
- Anger should be redefined as something childish, weak, substituted for a transition towards future welfare, interdependence, reciprocity
- The judicious spectator
- Gentleness and sympathetic understanding...



Lasting questions

- What is the account of Transition and Transition-Anger?
- Are you satisfied by it?
- Is anger always a contaminant, something that can harm or undo us...
- Or a drive that should be expressed, released, even channelled – but not in such a way that it loses its drive to protest injustice...



Next week... *Fear*

- I've changed the penultimate week's content from the schedule
- Instead of looking at public education, we will turn to the account of fear in Nussbaum's 2018 *The Monarchy of Fear*
- Please read Chapter 2. Please also think about different approaches to the power and problem of the emotion of fear, something weighing on all of us at the moment...
- We will discuss this live, if you are free, on Monday at 1pm – link will be emailed. Or take part in the Forum
- Questions and thoughts to Dan.Taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk