Chapter 4

The Errors and Limitations of Our "Anger-Evaluating" Ways

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Consider the following two cases.

Case 1: Activists from New York City are angry. They are angry because they have been discriminated against and mistreated because of their race. Their calls for attention have not gotten them a proper response from political leaders. Therefore, they march on the streets, wave their signs, and demand—in anger—that things change. A person tuning in from Smallville witnesses their anger on television. In response, the Smallville resident *disapproves* of the individual activists' anger. The resident responds, "She has no real reason to be angry. Come on, he is just too darn angry! Besides, this anger is not going to change anything. It will only turn people off. They should use another approach."

Case 2: Activists from Smallville are angry. They are angry because of the high unemployment rates in their state and the closing of several industries in their towns. They have felt ignored by political leaders. Therefore, they decide to march on the streets, waving their signs in support of a candidate whom they believe will address their concerns. The same person from Case 1 tunes in and witnesses their anger on television. In response, the Smallville resident *approves* of the individual activists' anger. The resident responds, "That's right, he has a right to be angry. Maybe this time, folks will listen. I feel for her. People need to understand where they are coming from."

How might we account for this difference in anger judgments? What might we say about the person who has a pattern of judging anger in this way? What evaluative errors, if any, is the Smallville resident committing in these cases?

And what might we learn about anger and ourselves as a result of interrogating these questions?

In this chapter I will give an account of how our judgments of anger often play out in instances like the earlier cases. While contemporary philosophers of emotion have provided us with check box guides like "fittingness" and "size" for evaluating anger, I will argue that these guides do not by themselves help us escape the tendency to mark or unmark the boxes selectively, inconsistently, and erroneously. If anger—particularly anger in a political context—can provide information and spark positive change *or* political destruction, then we have moral reasons to evaluate it properly. But can we? And what are the limitations and errors we often face when evaluating anger?

I will begin by laying out the ways in which we evaluate emotions and the moral and epistemic errors we attribute to the angry agent in judgments of disapproval. Then I attempt to answer the question: How do we judge political anger improperly? An improper evaluation, in my view, does not take into account relevant information that is needed to evaluate the anger. An overly generous, uninformed, biased, or selfish process of evaluation produces an improper evaluation. We see this occur when we *immediately* evaluate anger. I will also identify two social discursive practices of improper evaluation as well as the moral and epistemic errors committed when anger evaluators participate in these practices.

EVALUATING EMOTIONS

I will first argue that in the aforementioned cases, the Smallville resident is engaged in an evaluation of anger. Whether it is a proper or improper evaluation is an issue that I will take up later. When an anger evaluation occurs, the evaluator engages in a process of determining if the angry agent has committed or omitted certain epistemic and moral errors.[1] The evaluator does this when she judges that the anger is or is not *intelligible*, *appropriate*, or *proportionate*.

"Anger" is an umbrella term for a range of emotions, including rage, irritation, and indignation. Anger does not always depend on the judgment that a moral offense has occurred. I can be upset that it has rained. My classmate can irritate me by the questions he asks. In these examples, the causes of my anger are not moral wrongs. Moral anger, on the other hand, is "irritation that occurs when a moral norm has been violated, especially a norm pertaining to harm" (Prinz 2010: 535). The anger in Cases 1 and 2 is an example of moral anger. Angry agents in Case 1 are angry at discrimination. Angry agents in Case 2 are angry at economic neglect.

Moral anger plays a role in negative evaluation. When angry we evaluate that something has gone wrong. In contrast, when joyful we evaluate that something has gone wonderfully well. Moral anger is also an emotion of blame, is other-directed, and is associated with change or punishment (Lorde 1997; Prinz 2010). When morally angry at wrongdoers, we blame them for their role in the transgression. The targets of our anger are others. On the other hand, the target of our guilt is not our classmates but ourselves. Because moral anger is associated with change, we may also desire to pursue justice when morally angry. In Cases 1 and 2, angry agents desire that things change or that those in political power pay attention to their needs.

If anger plays a role in negative evaluation then when we criticize or praise someone's anger, we are evaluating an evaluation (Prinz 2010: 5). We evaluate anger according to its intelligibility, appropriateness, and proportionality.[2]

When determining if a case of moral anger is intelligible, we ask, "What is its object?" Moral anger is intelligible if it has an object. It is unintelligible if it does not. For example, moral anger is intelligible if an agent is angry *about* something. It will be unintelligible if when asked "What are you angry about?" the person replies, "At nothing."[3]

When determining if the anger is appropriate or fitting, we want to know if the anger fits the world or if it fails to fit the world (Goldie 2000: 200). This is an epistemic concern. We want to know if the object of the anger (the violation of moral norms) actually exists. Did racial discrimination actually occur? Evaluating a case of moral anger as inappropriate is evaluating that an *epistemic error* has occurred. We judge that angry agents have gotten the world wrong. Discrimination did not in fact happen. Economic injustice did not in fact occur. In judging the moral anger as inappropriate, we may also judge that angry agents have made a *moral error*. If I am angry only with one party when I know both parties are to blame, then by not being angry with both I have made a moral error—for being angry with one party is unfair (Roberts 2010: 565).

Moral anger can also be proportionate or disproportionate. It is proportionate if it is the sort or level of angry response that is required. In Aristotle's sense, it is about being angry to the right degree. We may judge that a person's raging response to a raindrop on his or her forehead is disproportionate anger. The raindrop—which is bound to disappear as soon as one recognizes it—does not warrant such a strong response. We may conclude that a person's intense anger at a hit-and-run driver is proportionate given the gravity of the wrongdoing and the harm.

When we evaluate the anger of others, we may also judge that a *character error* has occurred. When we think about a person with good character, we look at not only what he or she does in the world but also his or her emotional

life. We judge a person with good character to have certain dispositions to have emotions (e.g., to have compassion at another's suffering), to overcome or master some emotions (e.g., anger that reaches "the mean"), and to not have emotions of certain types (e.g., envy) (Roberts 2010). Therefore, when we evaluate a person's moral anger, we are also evaluating his or her character. When judging moral anger as disproportionate, we may take the angry agent to be the kind of person who cannot control his or her anger. In judging moral anger as proportionate, we may judge the angry as being the sort of person who is angry at the right time and to the right degree.

In evaluating moral anger, we could also judge that the angry agent has made a *strategy error*. If moral anger has a particular utility in that it can encourage cooperation, fairness, and adherence to certain norms, then if I know the goals of the angry agent and I am familiar with how to achieve them, I may judge that the anger will be constructive or destructive to such goals. In Case 1, the Smallville resident suggests that the anger will not change anything, while in Case 2, the resident suggests that the anger will lead people to listen. In Case 1 the evaluator judges that a strategy error occurred. However, the evaluator does not judge that it occurred in Case 2. Anger is, rather, a good strategy according to the evaluator.

If these are our standards for evaluating emotions, why is it often difficult to evaluate anger properly? I am of the view that when patterns of asymmetrical anger judgments between "our" group and distant others occur, they uniquely reveal that the difficulty is not necessarily due to the particular anger in those cases but rather to other determinants. What these determinants are is what I aim to explore in what follows. In the next two sections I consider several possibilities: the anger difficulty, the sympathy gap, anger policing, and gaslighting.

THE "ANGER DIFFICULTY"

I will first describe the problem with evaluating anger as opposed to other emotions. I will argue that anger is *distinctively* difficult to *immediately* approve or disapprove. I am persuaded by Adam Smith's account of sympathy; therefore, in what follows I describe his account of how sympathy influences the sentiments of approbation and disapprobation.

How do we come to approve or disapprove of emotions? It is through what Smith refers to as "sympathy." We imagine what it would be like if we were them. Why are we able to sympathize with and therefore approve of the grief or joy of others for example? Smith thinks it is because "the very appearances of grief and joy . . . suggest to us the general ideal of some good or bad fortune" (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.I.7: 11). When we see the happiness of

another, we imagine the cause of the happiness and it can likewise "inspire us with some degree of the like emotions." We begin to imagine that something great has happened. We imagine what it will be like to experience the same cause and we too become happy. If we witness someone grieving, we too can become sorrowful. This is because both joy and sorrow suggest a cause: good or bad fortunes.[4]

Although Smith describes this sympathy at this point as imperfect because of the vague idea of the person's fortunes or misfortunes, the spectator has sympathy for the happy or sorrowful person and therefore approves of the emotion. Not all passions, however, are transfused antecedent to any specific knowledge of what excited it. Some passions require the spectator to be familiar with the occasion that brought the passion about before any sympathy and thus approval can occur. Anger is such a passion.

When we see an angry person, his anger is more likely to make us look at him in fear or disgust. We tend to instead sympathize with the fear of the person with whom he is angry than with the angry man. This is because we "plainly see what is the situation of those with whom he is angry, and to what violence they may be exposed to" (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.I.8: 11). Here we see the situation (the angry man) that has brought his fear about and are thus able to sympathize with the fearful person. In order for us to sympathize with the angry man, we must become acquainted with his provocation. The appearance of his anger does not suggests to us the general idea that good or bad fortunes have befallen him. People are often angry for no reason or for reasons that do not always warrant anger. Witnessing the angry man does not inform us of the cause of his anger. Absent of this information, we cannot "bring his case home to ourselves, nor conceive anything like the passions which it excites" (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.I.7: 11).

Smith notes that when passions of another person are in "perfect concord" with the sympathetic emotions of my own, I judge it as just, proper, and suitable to the object. When they are not in perfect concord with my sympathetic emotions, I judge the passions as unjust, improper, and unsuitable. If I cannot feel the emotion another feels (to some degree), I cannot avoid disapproving of that person's sentiments. If I sympathize with Hakeem's sorrow (e.g., I know that his mother has just died), I will also approve of his sorrow and judge it proper. If I cannot sympathize with Ivy's joy (e.g., perhaps I know that the cause of her joy is the death of another), I will disapprove of her joy and judge it improper.

When we *immediately* disapprove of the anger of another, this disapproval is such because we do not have an "I know" that puts the anger in context. The cause of the anger is not available to us, or given the cause, we cannot imagine that we too would be angry if we were the angry agent. We are unable to sympathize as a result. What we cannot sympathize with, we disapprove of.

This disapproval is based on the anger's dissonance with our own sentiments. To approve or disapprove of people's anger is to assert an agreement or disagreement of our own sentiments with theirs. Smith writes:

> To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinions of others is acknowledged, by every body, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own. But this is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of others. (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.3.2: 17)

We are not prone to sympathize with anger *before* we are informed of its cause. Smith continues.

> When we blame in another man the excesses of love, of grief, of resentment, we not only consider the ruinous effects which they tend to produce, but the little occasion which was given for them . . . we say . . . his misfortune is not so dreadful, his provocation is not so extraordinary, as to justify so violent a passion. We should have indulged, we say; perhaps, have approved of the violence of his emotion, had the cause been in any respect proportioned to it. (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.3.8: 18)

Another reason why we may immediately disapprove of anger more than other emotions like fear is its immediate effects. The effects of resentment are often mischief. Because the immediate effects are disagreeable, "even when they are most justly provoked, there is still something about them which disgusts us" (Smith 1976, TMS I.ii.3.5: 36). Anger is difficult to *immediately* approve of, unlike other emotions, because its cause is unknown and its effects can be harmful. But note that the source of the puzzle of Case 1 and Case 2 is not that both cases of anger were immediately disapproved of but rather only Case 1 was. How might the anger difficulty speak to this asymmetry?

The anger difficulty demonstrates that we cannot judge all cases of anger *immediately* in the proper way. Information that is needed is often not available and cannot be adequately assumed in "immediate" cases. For example, political anger often has a proximate cause (e.g., death of Tamir Rice) and historical causes (e.g., history of police violence). If an evaluator is not familiar with either of these causes or is familiar with just one of them, she may not immediately approve of the political anger.

The difficulty also shows that the effects of anger, in general, can put a stain on a particular expression of anger. For example, if anger is believed to make people "fly off the handle" and enact violence, then an evaluator may use these effects to judge particular cases of anger. I also think that if we

believe "we know" how certain groups will respond (effects) we may be more willing to approve or disapprove of their anger—even if it is only predictive. For example, if we have confidence that an angry person will not take his or her anger and use it to commit violent crimes, we may approve of the anger. However, if we believe a person will take his or her anger and use it to hurt others, we may disapprove of it. Nevertheless, this belief is often informed by overconfidence in our ability to predict behavior, and in some cases, it is informed by certain stereotypes of people and groups. Both are unreliable and have harmful implications. A proper evaluation will entail evaluating the anger in the context of actual effects.

THE SYMPATHY GAP

Not only is anger difficult to immediately sympathize with and thus approve, but we are also limited in *whose* anger we can immediately sympathize with. According to Smith, our sympathies are usually extended to those within our immediate families, a little less to friends and neighbors, less to those in other cities, and very weakly for all of humanity. Smith writes that we are first recommended to our own care. After ourselves comes our immediate family—those we live with.

Smith notes that we are more likely to sympathize with them for several reasons. He writes, "[Everyman] knows better how every thing is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. It approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself" (Smith 1976, TMS VI.iii.1.2: 219). We do not sympathize more with our immediate family than others because of biology but rather because we are more habituated to sympathize with them. Smith adds:

> The earliest friendships, the friendships which are naturally contracted when the heart is most susceptible of that feeling, are those among brothers and sisters. Their good agreement, while they remain in the same family, is necessary for its tranquility and happiness. They are capable of giving more pleasure or pain to one another than to the greater part of other people. Their situation renders their mutual sympathy of the utmost importance to their common happiness; and, by the wisdom of nature, the same situation, by obliging them to accommodate to one another, renders that sympathy more habitual, and thereby more lively, more distinct, and more determinate. (Smith 1976, TMS VI.ii.1.4: 219–220)

The sympathy between these brothers and sisters does not exist because they share the same DNA but because they live very close to each other. Smith

thinks that this kind of sympathy would not exist between siblings who are estranged or between those we have never met. He writes that other biological relationships such as those between us and our nieces and nephews would also have a weaker sympathy. This is because "their mutual sympathy is less necessary, so it is less habitual, and therefore proportionally weaker."

Evolutionary biology and modern psychology support Smith's claim that our sympathies are usually extended to those within our immediate families and those who are close to us than those who are distant. Humans developed in small groups and developed close bonds within them. They relied on each other against the threat of outsiders. Psychology tells us that humans need strong family bonds because of the security and self-respect these bonds provide. Humans also need close bonds outside of families in order to gain confidence and a stronger sense of identity. There are also moral advantages to sympathy within concentric circles. We are able to help those who are close to us. We are also able to know how to help them because of our familiarity with them. Close bonds within small groups also allow us to receive moral correction from others that is more nuanced and suited to who we are. The corrections are more informed and are backed by concern for our interests.[5]

This sympathy gap explains why we are more prone to immediately sympathize and thus approve of the political anger of those close to us than with the anger of distant others. However, sympathy within our concentric circles can lead us to the asymmetrical judgment in Cases 1 and 2. The Smallville resident is able to immediately sympathize and therefore approve of the anger of his fellow residents because they are within his "circle." The resident lives and works around the Smallville protestors; therefore, it may be easier to imagine what it would be like if he were them. However, he is not able to sympathize with the anger of diverse New Yorkers. He is not aware of, is not familiar with, or cannot relate to their struggles that brought about the anger. Moreover, the struggles of a group of New Yorkers do not appear to have a direct effect on both the Smallville resident and the New Yorkers' common and mutual happiness. As a result, he is unable to immediately sympathize with their anger although he is able to immediately sympathize with Smallville residents.

My emphasis in these last two sections has been on the immediate evaluation of anger and how anger, in general, and distance (physical, affective, and cultural), in particular, can affect our anger evaluations. This is not an endorsement of speedy anger evaluation. Because our political fellows do not typically experience one episode of anger but several and because we are not morally obligated to evaluate anger as soon as it is displayed, we are not required to produce proper evaluations of anger immediately. A proper anger evaluation will require time. In the next two sections I will lay out how we

often erroneously shortcut this process or do it insincerely—even when given the time to do so—through two practices: anger policing and gaslighting.

ANGER POLICING

What accounts for why we disapprove of anger in Case 1 but then approve of anger in Case 2? After reading the previous section, one might think the answer is that the angry agents in Case 1 did not pass the sympathy test while angry agents in Case 2 did. However, I think this is not all that is happening nor is it all that can happen when evaluating anger. I will argue that the disapproval of anger in Case 1—even after one gets more time to evaluate—may be due to moral and epistemic errors of the evaluator. Although these errors may not be intentional, they are often made in ways that affect the evaluator's ability to properly judge anger.

I have argued in the beginning of this chapter that evaluations of anger are also judgments that angry agents have or have not made moral and epistemic errors. However, angry agents are not the only ones who commit these errors. Anger evaluators can also make them. In what follows, I will lay out the variety of ways these errors are made in response to political anger. I argue that anger evaluators make these errors through the discursive social practices of anger policing and gaslighting. This is not to deny that other practices or less subtle or innocent mistakes are not at work. However, given limited space here, I will focus only on these two.

Although the person who polices anger is making judgments of appropriateness and proportionality, I will show that he or she is doing it improperly. The anger policing evaluator does it improperly by making the very presence of anger a reason for disapproval, insincerely dictating the terms of the discussion with the goal of ignoring the wrongdoing, and being only concerned with his or her own feelings and thus is unwilling to sympathize.

First, when an evaluator polices anger, instead of judging if the particular instance of anger is intelligible, appropriate, or proportionate based on information, the very presence of the anger gives the evaluator reason to judge it with disapproval. By anger policing, he or she fails to give evaluative attention to the cause. However, knowing the cause is important for evaluating if the anger is appropriate. In addition, rather than the cause, it is the very presence of the anger—no matter its degree—that makes it disproportionate for the evaluator.

In response, anger evaluators then attempt to get the angry agent to change his or her angry emotional response by suggesting that it is the only means by which he or she will be heard. This is a moral mistake in that the

evaluator—instead of respecting the expression of another—aims to get the angry agent to express his or her discontent only on the evaluator's terms. Anger policing (and tone policing in general) is therefore also performed when an anger evaluator dictates the terms to which people should be heard. A person who polices the anger of others dictates the ways the politically angry talk about their experiences. Audre Lorde provides an example of anger policing when she writes:

> I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, "Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you." But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change? (Lorde 1997: 278)

Here the anger evaluator is dictating the terms of the engagement. The evaluator suggests that unless the anger disappears, the evaluator cannot hear the message. However, this is often insincere. The evaluator, in policing anger, does not want to hear the moral argument. Rather, the evaluator dismisses the cause of the anger altogether. However, the evaluator needs the cause in order to evaluate if the anger is intelligible, appropriate, or proportionate. Anger policing is often used to derail or deflect away from the injustice or oppression (the cause) that the angry agent desires to bring attention to. As Lorde claims, it is not the anger itself that keeps one from hearing. It is the message within the anger. The anger serves as an excuse to dismiss it.

Third, a person who polices the anger of others is also often insensitive to the experiences of others. This is a character error. What is important for the person who participates in policing is not what angry agents *say* but how the evaluator feels about *how* the angry agent says it (Poland 2016: 46–47). The policing evaluators prioritize style over the substance of the moral grievance. Evaluators who police anger are concerned with how the anger makes them feel more than the feelings and experiences of those who believe they have good reason to be angry.

Perhaps in Case 1, the evaluator in witnessing the anger of the individual activists felt uncomfortable, perhaps even afraid in response to the anger. In addition, an anger policing evaluator may not approve of the anger because it makes him or her feel guilty about his or her complicity in privilege, or it may shatter his or her idea of the world, thereby making him or her feel unsafe or insecure. Therefore, in anger policing, anger is not only always inappropriate but also always disproportionate. Anger, for the evaluator, is always felt and thus evaluated as too intense, too much, and too loud that it blocks the evaluator from hearing anything the angry has to say.

We ought not to confuse this concern for how it makes the evaluator feel with sympathizing. In Smithian sympathy, we imagine what it would be like

if we were them. If we can sympathize (or feel like passion), then we approve of the sentiment. However, this "feeling" is different from the feeling of the evaluator who polices anger. The evaluator who polices anger wants to feel better and is not interested in placing himself or herself in the shoes of others in order to feel what angry agents feel so that he or she can understand the anger and thus approve or disapprove of it. On the contrary, the evaluator who polices anger is not willing to sympathize. He or she aims only to eliminate not properly evaluate the anger.

I do not want to imply that any criticism of anger is an act of policing. Just because an evaluator has disapproved of anger does not mean that he or she has policed the anger. The critic becomes an anger policing evaluator only when he or she judges the anger to be unintelligible, inappropriate, and disproportionate because it is anger, dictates the terms to which the angry can be heard, and prioritizes his or her own feelings of discomfort of witnessing the anger over the feelings of angry agents experiencing the cause of the anger. Also being doubtful of anger's place in morality and in the political sphere may make one an anger skeptic, but it does not make one an anger policing evaluator. The critic must engage in specific acts in order to be said to participate in the practice.

Anger policing also usually operates within a double standard. Note in Case 1 that the evaluator says, "Besides, this anger is not going to change anything. It will only turn people off," while in Case 2 the evaluator says, "Maybe this time, folks will listen." In policing anger, an evaluator's anger or their group's anger can be appropriate but other people's anger—because they are "the other"—is always suspicious, inappropriate, and should be replace with civility.

Unfortunately, anger policing produces a feedback loop (McKinnon 2017). Imagine you were told to calm down for being angry. It would only make you angrier. Implying that angry agents cannot be heard because of their anger only makes them angrier when they speak. June Jordan makes this point when she says, "If you make and keep my life horrible then, when I can tell the truth, it will be a horrible truth; it will not sound good or look good or, God willing, feel good for you either" (Jordan 1981: 180). Unfortunately, this may provide reason for a judgment of disproportionateness because *now* it really does appear that the anger is too much.

In particular cases of anger policing, the evaluator may seek to persuade the angry agent to accept calm and civility instead of anger as *the* standard for discourse. At times this suggestion may be warranted particularly if there is chaos and no one is being heard because of shouting or violence. However, I think people can be angry in a deliberative context and yet still be respectful and peaceful. My concern is not that calm and civility is being recommended as a solution to a disorganized and chaotic context. I am concerned with anger

policing evaluators using "calm and civility" to assert their power over others and as a way to silence others.

Joan W. Scott (2015) argues that the notion of civility has and is a word that defines and demarcates power differentials. Those in positions of power have always determined how civility is defined. As David Palumbo-Liu (2014) writes, "Civility is in the eye of the powerful." It is often people who are most vulnerable to and victimized by unjust and oppressive systems who are punished for speaking their angry truth and recommended to be civil when they express anger. Jordan continues:

> The people whose very existence is most endangered and, therefore, most in need of vigilantly truthful affirmation, these are the people—the poor and the children—who are punished most severely for departures from the civilities that grease oppression. (Jordan 1981: 180)

Defining civility is not only in the hands of those who are more powerfully positioned, but the line that separates civility from incivility is oftentimes arbitrarily moved until it becomes an unattainable standard for anyone to meet. This, therefore, makes it difficult for angry agents to ever be calm or civil enough for the policing evaluator. This contributes to the silencing of angry agents and their moral concerns.

> The dissident claims of minority groups go unheard in the public sphere when they are tagged as departures from the protocols of style and decorum—dismissed as evidence of irrationality and so placed outside the realm of what is taken to be reasoned deliberation. They are, by definition, uncivil, and thus beneath contempt. Once a certain space or style of argument is identified as civil, the implication is that dissenters from it are uncivilized. "Civility" becomes a synonym for orthodoxy; "incivility" designates unorthodox ideas or behavior. (Scott 2015)

Such silencing is a form of what Kristie Dotson (2011) refers to as "epistemic violence" in that it "attempts to eliminate knowledge" by making it the case that certain groups cannot be heard. Such ignorance can be harmful, for the angry agents' courage or agency has now been undermined. This is an epistemic error made by the anger evaluator.

The anger policing evaluator in determining such strict (and possibly insincere) rules of civil engagement sans anger also demarcates power differentials by making it the case that those with less power have to always come up to meet the evaluator's high standards of engagement instead of the anger evaluator coming down to meet angry agents where they are.

Given the aims and strategies of the anger policing evaluator, we have tools to differentiate the anger police from proper evaluators of anger. Any

criticism of anger does not make one guilty of being an anger policing evaluator. While Martin Luther King Jr., for example, may at times thought that one was making a strategy mistake with anger, he did not judge anger based on its presence alone, nor was he unwilling to sympathize with the anger of others or listen to angry blacks because they were in fact angry. He refused to silence the angry although he may have disagreed with anger as a political strategy. Anger policing is a practice made up of actions with specific aims. It is a practice that not only produces judgments of disapprobation but also reaches those judgments through a process of improper evaluation grounded in bias, ignorance, and selfishness.

GASLIGHTING

Gaslighting is another practice that involves an improper evaluation of anger. "Gaslighting" is a term that originated from the 1944 movie *Gaslight* in which the protagonist tries to convince his wife that she is suffering from delusions and is thus insane. He does this with the aim of having her hospitalized so that he can take hold of her jewels. Gaslighting as a practice is a tool used to make a person doubt his or her perceptions *and* to not take himself or herself seriously as an interlocutor. Gaslighters do not just want the world to seem a certain way, but they want you to see it that way (Abramson 2014). Although there are different methods and techniques of gaslighting, examples of gaslighting as it involves anger include the following:

Gaslighting Case 1

An undergrad witnesses racist behavior from his teacher's assistant. Being quite angry with the TA, the student sets up a meeting with the TA to discuss the matter. The TA responds to the angry complaint by saying, "You are imagining that what I said was racist. My behavior wasn't that bad. If you were not a sensitive snow-flake who gets crazy ideas of racism from the media, we would not be having this conversation." He then says to the undergrad that he understands that being the only Arab American student in class may make him sensitive to issues of race but he assured the student, "You have nothing to really be angry or worried about. Everyone is not out to get you."

Gaslighting Case 2

Imagine that instead of the Smallville resident in Case 1 watching television, the evaluator has an actual encounter with an angry black protestor who is also a friend. In their private encounter, the black friend expresses anger at the constant police mistreatment of black women and finds it to be quite systematic. She is angry that it is not getting the attention it deserves and that officers are not

> being charged. The Smallville evaluator responds, "I don't think it is as systematic as you think and it is surely not worth all the emotional labor you are putting into it." He also says, "Why do you have such a victim mindset. White people are killed by the police too. Calm down. Don't be such an angry black woman."

The preceding gaslighting examples have a basic three-part structure. First, the angry agents are framed as overreacting or oversensitive and thus cannot be the source of genuine disagreement (Abramson 2014: 14). They "have nothing to be angry about." Regardless of what the student witnessed, the TA questions his memory. The Smallville resident is confident that things are not as systematic as the angry friend claims it is. Second, as a gaslighter, the Smallville resident tells the angry agent that this is how he sees her in the form of a command—e.g., "Don't be such an angry black woman." Third, the gaslighter also insists on the dismissive framework in the interactions when he notes, "Everyone is not out to get you!" (ibid.).

This three-part structure also has a goal. The gaslighter, intentionally or unintentionally, aims to get the person to not take himself or herself seriously, for the gaslighter will have the agent think that the anger stems from pathology or a weakness of emotionality rather than the facts of the matter. The evaluator is not interested in the cause or reason for the anger because if he paid attention to the reason he might find the anger intelligible or appropriate. However, a person who gaslights an angry agent aims to convince the agent that the anger is unwarranted because there is no object. The agent is always mistaken and always imagining the cause. Legitimate concerns are therefore illegitimate. The gaslighting evaluator denies—without any evidence—that a real reason exists for the anger; therefore, he discounts the anger as unreal (Cherry 2016). Gaslighting does not just undermine the anger, but it also undermines the negative evaluation the anger makes, thereby rendering the anger as always "uncalled for" or inappropriate.

If there is an object, the anger is still an overreaction because the wrongdoer is overgenerously assumed to not have meant it in the way the angry agent experienced it. The fault of the anger is *always* the angry agent and not something in the world. It is the student's sensitivity to racial matters that is the reason for why he is angry. It is the fact that the woman has a victim mindset and is a black woman that she is angry. Racial injustice and racist behavior are never "real enough" to be taken as reasons for anger. This leads to an ever-present negative evaluation of the anger.

For the gaslighting evaluator, the anger more often than not has a biological or cultural source (e.g., black people's anger is pathological, or women are just emotional). Thus, if gaslighting is successful, it can reinforce racial norms such as "people of color are too sensitive," "black women are angry," or "black people see race where it is not." It also relies on the internalization

of these racial norms.[6] If the gaslighting is successful, it can affect how black women, for example, see themselves—for they may soon take themselves to *just be* "an angry black woman" who should "get over it because it was not that serious to begin with."

The gaslighter commits an epistemic error because he never gives serious consideration to the cause of the anger and instead dismisses it and takes it as a misreading by the angry agent. In turn, he destroys the possibility of disagreement by destroying the source of the disagreement. He is right after all because he (the TA) has not actually engaged in racist behavior, and for the Smallville resident, the police mistreatment is not systematic. He does this by convincing himself and the angry agent that the agent is just too sensitive to see what he sees or what he wants the angry agent to see. Because the angry agents are too sensitive to see it, their angry expressions should not be trusted.

However, the anger evaluator as gaslighter is committing the epistemic error of relying too heavily on his own beliefs and assumptions. He is taking no consideration of outside evidence, evidence he needs to conclude if the anger is appropriate or proportionate. This is also a character error. The evaluator lacks intellectual humility. He thinks he is the only source of knowledge or that he is *the* epistemic authority and aims to convince the angry agent that she cannot be because of who she is.

The gaslighting evaluator also lacks epistemic charity. The anger evaluator as gaslighter gives no credibility to the angry agent's testimony because according to the evaluator, she already has no credibility so she is just overreacting (Abramson 2014: 17). This lack of credibility is due to the angry agents' social position. Gaslighting is directed at women, people of color, and other minority groups because they are perceived to have no credibility by the fact that they are minorities or members of an oppressed group. The evaluator engages in testimonial injustice through gaslighting because the credibility of the Arab American student is lost due to this identity prejudice, not due to the facts of the matter. The "angry black person" by the fact that she is black is therefore not a knower. The evaluator concludes and wants the angry agent to also believe that "black people are always angry so they can't properly understand when real wrongdoing has actually occurred." This is why the angry agent concludes that the anger has pathological and biological origins rather than origins steeped in social facts.

As a result the anger evaluator as gaslighter has what Jose Medina refers to as epistemic vices which are "structural and systematic . . . [and] involve[s] attitudes deeply rooted in one's personality and cognitive functioning . . . they affect one's capacity to learn from others and from the facts" (Medina 2012: 31). These vices are what Medina refers to as continual epistemic neglect. They prevent one from learning what the experiences of others are. Without this knowledge, however, one cannot *properly* make anger evaluations.

CONSIDERATIONS

I have aimed to show that we properly evaluate anger according to its intelligibility, appropriateness, and proportionality. In order to do this properly, an anger evaluator must know the causes of the anger, the effects of the anger, relevant facts about the agent, and other information. While we often *immediately* approve or disapprove of anger through Smithian sympathy, there is no guarantee that we will properly evaluate anger given this procedure. We are able to sympathize more with those closer to us than those who are farther away. This is possible because the closeness of the relationship provides us with more epistemic resources needed to properly evaluate anger than the distant relationship. As a result, it is quite natural for us to *immediately* make more proper anger evaluations of those we know than those we do not know.

This is no reason to fret. We are not obligated to make immediate evaluations nor should we be in a hurry to do so. Properly evaluating anger takes time, and it takes information. Thinking we have acquired enough of both in order to properly evaluate political anger should always give us reason to doubt that we actually have. Even if we do have time and information, I have argued that we often rush the evaluation or dismiss the information due to our biases, overconfidence, and selfish motives through anger policing and gaslighting.

Therefore, I suggest that while approving and disapproving of anger is something we tend to do, perhaps we should put our focus elsewhere. When people are politically angry, perhaps the best we can do is listen to their angry complaint instead of thinking we can succeed in the position of judge. If we are anxious to play judge, perhaps the most competent judges we can be are evaluators of the *effects* of political anger (e.g., the angry person's actions) rather than evaluators of the anger. This is not to say that we should never evaluate anger. However, I hope I have demonstrated that we have justified reasons to doubt that we can be *proper* anger evaluators in all cases.

NOTES

1. Roberts uses the term "mistake" instead of "error." I prefer to use "error" because I think it captures both intentional and unintentional aspects of the act.

2. Peter Goldie has argued that how we evaluate moral anger based on its fittingness, intelligibility, and proportionality is a cultural matter. On his view, different cultures have different standards for measuring them.

3. This is not to suggest that there are instances where there can be an anger object but a person is unaware of it at a subconscious level.

4. We also bring a worldview, normative principles, morality, and so on with us in sympathizing.

5. Thanks to Sam Fleischacker for helping me to see the benefits of sympathy.
6. Abramson (2014: 3) focuses on sexist norms. Here I emphasize racial norms.

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