

## A Kantian Account of Aesthetically Sublime Rage

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Abstract: Building on Kant's text, I develop and defend an account of a specific kind of anger, which Kant calls "aesthetically sublime rage". Unlike other kinds of anger, aesthetically sublime rage does not play a motivational function for the subject throughout the time she is feeling rage. Because of this, aesthetically sublime rage escapes the problems that anger has when it motivates one to act. Despite not playing such a direct motivational function, aesthetically sublime rage can have an indirect motivational role that is future-directed. As such, it can help the subject achieve and realize moral ends in the future, when the rage subsides and proper reflection is more likely to be achieved. Indeed, the experience of aesthetically sublime rage a) can help the subject realize that she cares about pursuing moral progress; b) can spark in her critical inquiry about what such progress should entail; c) can prepare her to value something against her self-centered interest.

Keywords: Kant; aesthetically sublime rage; aptness and value of anger; motivational anger; apathy.

There is a significant tradition of scholars, especially (though not exclusively) within the field of feminist philosophy, who have argued for the aptness and value of anger in contexts of oppression.<sup>1</sup> Usually, and for many unsurprisingly, Kant does not make the list. Even within Kant

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<sup>1</sup> Some of them are Audre Lorde (1997); Marilyn Frye (1983); Macalester Bell (2009); Alison Jaggar (2014); Amia Srinivasan (2017); Myisha Cherry (2021); Sukaina Hirji (2022).

scholarship it seems to be assumed that Kant has nothing to say about anger other than it is an obstacle to proper reflection and we have a duty to govern it (namely, the duty of apathy).<sup>2</sup> In this paper, however, I develop and defend an account of a specific kind of anger, which I call “aesthetically sublime rage”, that is rooted in Kant’s text, specifically in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. In putting forth this account, my goal is to argue that this kind of anger has a distinctive social and political function in contexts of oppression, and assess its appropriateness as a response to injustice.

The role that aesthetically sublime rage plays in context of injustice, I argue, is not a motivational one. Unlike other kinds of anger that have been discussed in the scholarly literature, aesthetically sublime rage does not help the subject achieve any end throughout the time she is feeling rage. Within Kant’s framework, this means that this anger is a kind of “inactive delight” (MS 6:212), as Kant puts it, that does not produce a desire to bring about an object or state of affairs.<sup>3</sup> However, aesthetically sublime rage can have an indirect motivational role that is future-

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<sup>2</sup> Kant scholars often devote their efforts to provide accounts of how, according to Kant, affects – of which anger is taken to be a paradigmatic example – impede rational agency and which implications this has for the duty of apathy. Some of these scholars are Patrick Frierson (2014); Paul Formosa (2011); and Jens Timmermann (2022). Scholars like Henry Allison (2001) and Lara Denis (2000) have noticed in passing that Kant thinks of anger as aesthetically sublime, but have neglected to draw the implications of such a characterization. Robert Clewis (2009) has recently drawn some implications of Kant’s characterization of certain affects as aesthetically sublime, but his focus has been mostly on enthusiasm.

<sup>3</sup> Kant holds that a combination of feeling and desire – which together constitute an “incentive”

directed. As such, it can help the subject achieve and realize moral ends in the future, when the rage subsides and proper reflection is more likely to be achieved. The experience of aesthetically sublime rage can do so by helping the subject realize that she cares about pursuing moral progress, by sparking in her critical inquiry about what such progress should entail, and by preparing her to value something against her self-centered interest. An important part of the story of why aesthetically sublime rage can do so is that it is a response to and limited by moral ideas, and this is why Kant calls it “sublime”.

Before I develop my account, it is important to make some preliminary and methodological remarks. First, while my starting point is Kant’s text and his claim in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* that rage can be “aesthetically sublime”, my main aim is not to provide a historical

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(KpV 5:72) – is necessary but not sufficient for (non-moral) action. Indeed, in Kant’s view, an incentive can determine the will to an action only insofar as it has been incorporated by the individual into a maxim (Rel 6:23–4). This thesis – which has been dubbed by Henry Allison (1990) the “Incorporation Thesis” – makes it clear that Kant rejects empiricist belief/desire causal models of action like Davidson’s (1980), according to which action is caused by a desire combined with a belief about what would effectively produce the desired object or state of affairs. This empiricist model has also been labeled, for instance by Scarantino and Nielsen (2015), the “Basic Humean Model”. See also Goldie (2000). According to Kant, however, we are never *caused* to act (except perhaps in pathological cases, where agency is severely impaired); rather, in performing a certain action we let an incentive move us to act by a free act of willing – i.e., by incorporating it into our maxim. For a defense of Kant’s Incorporation Thesis in light of contemporary accounts of desire and action, see Schapiro (2011).

inquiry on what views Kant held. I will give an account of aesthetically sublime rage that fits both the text and some important Kantian commitments; but I will not be concerned with the question of whether Kant would have developed and applied such an account in the way I suggest we should do (indeed, chances are that Kant’s problematic views on race and gender, for instance, might have prevented him from fully endorsing my arguments)<sup>4</sup>. Rather, I will approach Kant’s text from a perspective of a normative reorientation and, by putting it into dialogue with scholars who defend uses of anger in the fight against injustice, I will ask which resources it has to offer.<sup>5</sup>

Second, my interest in developing an account of aesthetically sublime rage fits well with Myisha Cherry’s suggestion to look at anger in its varieties and complexities, rather than trying to paint it in “broad strokes” as it has often (though not always) been characterized.<sup>6</sup> There is not

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<sup>4</sup> For a critical analysis of such views, see Helga Varden (2017); Pauline Kleingeld (2022); Huaping Lu-Adler (2023).

<sup>5</sup> I am in agreement here with Huaping Lu-Adler’s suggestion that Kantian scholars take a perspective of normative reorientation when it comes to addressing racial injustice. In *Kant, Race and Racism*, Lu-Adler writes that “Kantian scholars and Kantians owe it to ongoing antiracist struggles to explore potentially useful Kantian tools to address it” (Lu-Adler, 2023:336). When we pursue such a project, Lu-Adler claims, “we may have to critique, amend, creatively appropriate, or radically transform some of Kant’s ideas and methodologies” (Lu-Adler, 2023:336).

<sup>6</sup> Cherry writes that “often when we talk about anger, we paint it in broad strokes. That is to say, we generalize about anger as though it is one thing [...] It has no nuance, no upside. This

just one type of anger but many, and aesthetically sublime rage is one of them. Acknowledging this is important for having more nuanced conversations about anger and its aptness, as well as making room for the consideration that not all people have the disposition to experience the same emotions in response to the same circumstances. Relatedly, I do not aim to defend the view that aesthetically sublime rage is the kind of rage that is most appropriate to have. Rather, it is a kind of rage that subjects might find themselves having, and we can make sense of and evaluate this phenomenon through a philosophical perspective.

Third, I aim to contribute to the tradition of philosophers who have argued for the value and aptness of anger by pointing out a problem that I see in the scholarly literature about anger. The problem is the following: while some scholars have focused on the permissibility of feeling angry and engaging in some behavioral expression of one's anger (e.g., by angry facial expression, raising one's tone, etc.),<sup>7</sup> less work has been done in carefully evaluating the

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generalized, one-dimensional, broad-strokes depiction of anger was first painted by ancient thinkers and is perpetuated by contemporary psychologists and philosophers. It has a long history. And it continues to be just as prevalent today as it was in years past" (Cherry, 2021:11).

<sup>7</sup> To see how scholars have focused on the former, take Amia Srinivasan's influential paper, "The Aptness of Anger". Srinivasan first considers critics of anger targeting not "anger as such, but common expressions of anger, like shouting, hyperbolic rhetoric or aggressive facial expression" (Srinivasan, 2018:136). To see that Srinivasan's focus in considering this critique is on the behavioral expression of anger rather than on the agent's reasons for acting, see also her claim that "anger, along with the other basic emotions, appears to possess manifestation and recognition conditions that are stable across human cultures, and that are shared in common with

permissibility of feeling angry and being motivated by one's anger to act. One of the aims of this paper is to shift the focus of scholars' attention onto the latter.

It is important to notice that, while the permissibility of feeling angry and engaging in some behavioral expression of one's anger is generally discussed and rebutted in the context of defending the aptness and value of anger against what scholars call the "counterproductivity critique", my concerns regarding being motivated by one's anger to act are not about such a critique. The counterproductivity critique argues that anger should be avoided because of its counterproductive consequences. For instance, in circumstances of political injustice, it is argued that anger tends to alienate would-be allies, aggravate conflict, and ultimately undermine the pursuit of just outcomes. For these reasons, authors like Pettigrove (2012) and Nussbaum (2016) recommend to abandon anger, and rather embrace other – supposedly more productive – emotions such as, respectively, meekness and civic love. In contrast to these authors, my concerns regarding being motivated by one's anger to act are about one's intentions and reasons for acting.

What is the problem with feeling angry and being motivated by such anger to act? There are several considerations to be made here. But in order to get clear on such considerations — and their normative strength — it is important to get clear about how one can be motivated to act by

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many mammals—for example, grimacing, raised voice, and aggressive staring" (Srinivasan, 2018:137). Srinivasan then replies to this criticism by arguing that anger's stereotypical expression is at least partly constitutive of anger, even though the constitutive connections between anger and behavior can rest on the particulars of cultural training and of individual personality.

one's anger.<sup>8</sup> I take it that this can be understood in at least two ways. The first is when, in acting in a certain way, the agent takes her anger to be her reason for acting. The worry with this is twofold. First, in taking one's anger to be one's reason for acting, one could be giving inappropriate importance to "the dear self"<sup>9</sup>. Responding to an injustice just because it made you mad, rather than because of the injustice that it is, seems the wrong kind of reason for acting, at least in some cases. This is because it does signal that the agent's concern and focus is herself, rather than being other-directed. Second, when one takes one's anger to be one's reason for acting, one's reason for acting seems to be problematically contingent on what one happens to

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<sup>8</sup> By pointing out the problems with feeling angry and being motivated by such anger to act, I don't aim to deny that anger's fittingness can provide agents with reasons for acting. David Plunkett (2021) has recently provided an account that aims to establish the connection between apt anger and reasons for action, and has argued that such reasons are non-consequentialist in character. By Plunkett's own admission, however, "this doesn't settle how *many* such reasons there are, let alone anything about how relatively *weighty* these reasons are" (Plunkett, 2021:125). In fact, Plunkett recognizes that "some people [...] mistakenly let reasons generated by anger outweigh other, more important reasons in guiding their actions" (Plunkett, 2021:125). So, while there might be reasons of fit for being motivated by one's anger to act, these reasons need to be evaluated in light of the reasons against doing so. Importantly, reasons against being motivated by one's anger to act need not be consequentialist in character. In fact, the ones to which I point in this paper are not.

<sup>9</sup>This is Kant's expression. Kant writes that "if we look closer at our thoughts and aspirations, we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always salient" (GMS 4:407).

feel. One might respond to a certain injustice with anger on a certain occasion; but one could respond to the same kind of injustice with indifference on another occasion. The point is that we should want one's reasons for acting not to be contingent on what one happens to feel, given that what one happens to feel may vary.

The second way in which anger can motivate one to act is when anger plays an indirect motivational role such that, at the time of the action, one's anger directs one's attention to certain reasons for acting rather than others. The worry here is that anger can direct – and often does – the agent's attention to the wrong kind of reasons for acting. Of course, anger can direct the agent's attention to the right kind of reasons for acting as well; but it does not do so reliably. So, the worry here is that anger, when it is the only epistemic compass that the agent uses to access reasons for acting, does not provide a reliable enough ground for accessing reasons for acting that are of the right kind.<sup>10</sup>

If we take these as genuine worries, then we might want to be careful in assessing the appropriateness of those kinds of anger that play a motivational function in the agent's decision to act. Moreover, if we take these as genuine worries, then we might want to consider whether there are kinds of anger that do not play a motivational function in the agent's decision to act, but that can still play a positive role in how she conducts her life, as well as in the fight against

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<sup>10</sup> I think we should leave room for the consideration that one could, with lots of efforts and training, cultivate one's anger so that it could serve as a more reliable right-kinds-of-reasons compass. An account of how to understand this process of cultivation seem to be missing in the literature, but I hope it can be developed.



injustice. Aesthetically sublime rage, I will argue, is a kind of anger that allows us to do so. I will fully evaluate the appropriateness of aesthetically sublime rage in Section 3, but for now the claim I want to make is that, if there are instances in which it is appropriate to feel anger without being motivated by one's anger to act, then aesthetically sublime rage is a fitting attitude to have.

With all of this in mind, I turn to building an account of aesthetically sublime rage, starting from Kant's text. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant writes that "every affect of the courageous sort (that is, which arouses the consciousness of our powers to overcome any resistance) is aesthetically sublime, e.g., anger [*Zorn*], even despair (the enraged, not the despondent kind)" (KU 5:272). In this passage, Kant tells us that anger – as well as other affects like despair – can be aesthetically sublime.

Something to notice is that "*Zorn*" is translated with "anger"; however, I prefer the term "rage". Translating "*Zorn*" with "anger" in this context might tempt us to think that Kant has in mind something like cool-headed moral disapprobation. But this is not the case: Kant clearly indicates that *Zorn* is an affect, and he treats affects as belonging to a special category of feeling. In the *Anthropology*, Kant discusses this category of feeling at length and provides the following definition of affect: "The feeling of pleasure or displeasure in the subject's present state that does not let him rise to reflection (the representation by means of reason as to whether he should give himself up to it or refuse it) is affect" (Anth 7:251). Affects are feelings of pleasure or displeasure that are obstacles to reflection. By reflection, Kant means the agent's deliberation as to whether she should give herself up to the affect or refuse it. So, affects are not like any other feelings: they are feelings that are capable of disrupting deliberation. And despite Kant writes that "it is not the intensity of a certain feeling that constitutes the affective state, but the lack of reflection" (Anth 7:154), a characteristic of affect – though not a constitutive one – is that they

are impetuous, intense, and often short-lived feelings. So, translating “*Zorn*” with “anger” might let us lose sight of the fact that Kant is talking about an intense, sudden feeling that we struggle to keep in check and that has the power to disrupt, albeit shortly, our deliberative capacities. From now on, then, I will be referring to this affect as *rage*.

Now, what does Kant’s claim that rage can be aesthetically sublime amount to? I will claim that that this is the rage one feels in response to a certain event (e.g., being subject to or witnessing an injustice), when a) a free play between imagination and a moral idea (e.g., justice) takes place in one’s mind; and b) the rage has a purely aesthetic, not motivational function. We will need to break down the sublimity of this kind of rage (*a*) and its aesthetic character (*b*). These are respectively the tasks of Section 1 and Section 2. In Section 3, I will assess the appropriateness of aesthetically sublime rage as a response to injustice.

### 1. The Sublimity of Aesthetic Rage

Let us start with the sublimity of aesthetic rage. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant characterizes the sublime as a “stretching [*Anspannung*] of the powers through ideas” (KU 5:272). This stretching is the result of a free play between our faculties, namely imagination and reason, whereby reason presents the imagination with an idea, the imagination runs free trying to meet reason’s idea and is expanded – “stretched” – by the possibilities on which it reflects. The idea at stake is an idea or reason. In the experience of aesthetically sublime affects such as rage or enthusiasm, Kant makes it clear that the idea of reason at stake is a *moral* idea. He writes, for instance, that enthusiasm is “the idea of the good with affect” (KU 5:272). He also claims that “even that which we call sublime in nature outside us or even within ourselves (e.g., certain affects) is represented only as a power of the mind to soar above certain obstacles of sensibility

by means of moral principles” (KU 5:271, emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> I take this passage to mean that rage is sublime only if it is a response to moral ideas and it is constrained by such ideas.

Kantians are most familiar with ideas of reason in the context of the Transcendental Dialectic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant introduces the three transcendental ideas: the soul, the world-whole and God (KrV A335/B392). But, as scholars like Rohlf (2010:202-3) have pointed out, there are many ideas that function in similar ways, including moral-political ideas such that of a just constitution (KrV A316–17/B372–4) or the idea of a republic (KrV A316/B373). Typically, justice is not on the list of examples, but several passages about justice throughout Kant’s text suggest that it should be.<sup>12</sup> Justice is an idea of the good, though the way in which we can spell out such an idea may vary. This is because ideas of reasons are ideas “which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate” (KU 5:351). Since justice as an idea of reason is indeterminate, we can build different conceptions of it depending on, for instance, how we think of the purpose and practical implications of such

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<sup>11</sup> Clewis argues that one of the implications of this claim is that “mental states that are not morally based [...] such as dejected chagrin, antisocial misanthropy, or mental delusion (*Wahnwitz*), cannot elicit a feeling of the sublime” (Clewis 2009:90).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, in his *Lectures on Ethics* Kant refers to justice as an idea and writes that “our idea of justice requires that the moral worth of the action be recognized” (VE 27:552). In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant refers to justice as a “transcendent principle” (MS 6:490). For a critical analysis, see Thomason (2021).

idea.<sup>13</sup> This is an important point, since it bears on the kind of work that is required for distinguishing between apt and inapt rage (more on this later).

Let us go back to the free play between imagination and reason when a state of affairs elicits aesthetically sublime rage. Here, the subject is in a complex cognitive state in which her imagination does not fully grasp the indeterminate idea of reason at stake, and at the same time succeeds in gesturing towards that idea through its very limitation. This activity of the imagination produces both pain and pleasure. Kant is clear that any experience of the sublime involves both pain and pleasure, and a brief explanation of the pain and pleasure involved in two main categories of sublime Kant conceives – the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime – can be helpful for explaining the phenomenological features of aesthetically sublime rage.<sup>14</sup> Kant analyses the subject’s experience in the mathematically sublime as consisting in the following process. In an encounter with, say, a vast, towering mountain range, the subject strives to take in the entire “object”, but cannot. She experiences pain at the recognition of her cognitive

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<sup>13</sup> This is one of the reasons why Kant holds that the expectation that others will agree with our judgments that something is sublime is legitimate, though weaker than that involved in judgments regarding the beautiful (KU 5:265–6).

<sup>14</sup> Generally, scholars take Kant to conceive of two main categories of the sublime, namely the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime. See, for instance, Sandra Shapshay (2012) and Melissa Merritt (2012). But, as Clewis and a few other scholars have noticed, Kant’s remarks about aesthetically sublime affects suggest that he conceived of a third category. Allison calls this “a new form of the sublime (pertaining to mental states)” (Allison, 2001:306), and Clewis calls this third category the “moral sublime” (Clewis, 2009:84).

limitations when faced with such a limitless, vast thing. In cases of the dynamically sublime, the pain derives from being subject to fearsome phenomena, such as a raging storm at sea, which reveal her existential frailty. But these recognitions of the subject's respectively cognitive and existential limitations in turn awaken "a feeling of a supersensible faculty" (KU 5:250) within us, that is, the faculty of reason. This felt recognition counters the initial, painful feeling of human limitation with a feeling of pleasure in our rational capacities.

What about the experience of aesthetically sublime rage? When someone is subjected to a political injustice (e.g., racial discrimination), I would suggest that the pain she experiences derives from the felt recognition that she is facing what Kant calls a "resistance", an obstacle that prevents her from fully realizing justice in the social reality in which she is positioned. However, such a recognition awakens in the subject the consciousness of being capable of facing this resistance with her "*animi strenui*", i.e., her vigorous spirit or strength of mind. This consciousness yields to a subsequent pleasure and, in Kant's view, it is analogous to, albeit not identical with, the consciousness of being free to act as the moral law commands, regardless of any obstacles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Kant's famous "gallows example". In the Second Critique, Kant describes a man who is asked to lie under the threat to be hung by the gallows. Kant asserts that, through his becoming conscious of the moral law, this man "must admit without hesitation" that it would be possible for him to do as the moral law commands and tell the truth, no matter the cost. "He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him"

The actual process of engaging the subject's cognitive faculties need not be explicit to her; this is because, according to Kant, the experience of the sublime is based on feeling, not discursive thought. But Kant holds that this experience brings a certain conceptual clarity to the subject through which it is possible for her to reach a judgment of sublimity, that is, to judge that her rage is sublime.<sup>16</sup> Judgments about aesthetically sublime rage, just like judgments about other forms of sublimity, are grounded in something that, according to Kant, we are already justified in presupposing in everyone, namely the predisposition to moral feeling. Kant writes that a judgment about the sublime "has its foundation in human nature, and indeed in that which can be required of everyone and demanded of him along with healthy understanding, namely the predisposition [*Anlage*] to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to that which is moral" (KU

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(KpV 5:30). For a detailed account of the similarities and differences between the sublime and respect for the moral law, see, for instance, Clewis (2009:131-33).

<sup>16</sup> Here, I don't mean to argue that all instances of aesthetically sublime rage are necessarily followed by a judgment of sublimity; my point is merely that they can be. A similar consideration has been made by Clewis in his discussion of aesthetically sublime enthusiasm. Clewis writes that "not all feelings of aesthetic enthusiasm, even if they count as feelings of the sublime, lead to aesthetic judgments of the sublime, which seem to have a propositional structure" (Clewis, 2009:20). The relation between the feeling of the sublime and judgments of sublimity is a complex and debated topic in Kant scholarship, and I cannot account for it here. For a critical analysis, see Guyer (1979); Deligiorgi (2018).

5:265).<sup>17</sup> In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes that, as a “subjective condition of receptiveness to the concept of duty” (MS 6:399), the predisposition to moral feeling is what makes it possible for human beings to be affected by the concept of duty. This means that this predisposition makes it possible for human beings to become aware of the moral law in any specific instance. In this way, aesthetically sublime rage is grounded in the possibility of becoming aware of the moral law.

However, aesthetically sublime rage does not depend on the experience of moral feeling itself, just on the capacity to have such a feeling. This is key for understanding the difference between the experience of sublime rage and the experience of being affected by the moral law. Simply put, the experience of being affected by the moral law concerns the determination of the will, unlike the experience of aesthetically sublime rage. We will look into this feature of sublime rage – i.e., its *aesthetic* character – in the next section, where we will also see how aesthetically sublime rage can nonetheless be significant for morality. For now, it is important to notice that aesthetically sublime rage, albeit grounded in the predisposition to moral feeling, is

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<sup>17</sup> The language of requirement and demand is somewhat out of place with regard to moral feeling. This is because Kant denies that there could be an obligation to acquire such a feeling given that it is a precondition of having obligations in the first place (MS 6:399). Nevertheless, this does not really affect Kant’s main argument in this section of the *Analytic of the Sublime*, which is that we must presuppose moral feeling in everyone, and since judgments of sublimity have their foundation in a predisposition to this feeling, it is legitimate to attribute necessity to such judgments. He writes that moral feeling “is the ground for the necessity of the assent of the judgment of other people concerning the sublime to our own” (KU 5:265).

phenomenologically distinct from respect for the moral law precisely because it is not the feeling of an agent involved in moral deliberation and decision.

Accordingly, it is important to notice that judgments about sublime rage are *aesthetic* rather than practical, precisely because they do not bear on the determination of the subject's will, which underscores the point that the feeling of sublime rage is merely analogous to, but not identical with, the feeling of respect for the moral law. Practical or moral judgments, according to Kant, are judgments that we ought or ought not to act in a certain way. Judgments about sublime rage, instead, are judgments about what the subject is feeling, and how such a feeling represents something that is central to morality (i.e., the subject's consciousness of being capable of facing any resistance with her strength of mind), albeit not relevant to the present determination of her will.

An important consideration is that, according to Kant, rage is sublime only when it accords with the morally right. This is clear from Kant's remark in *The Conflict of The Faculties* that sublime affects like esthetically sublime rage or enthusiasm move "only towards what is ideal and, indeed, to what is purely moral, such as the concept of right, and cannot be grafted onto self-interest" (SF 7:86). This tells us that one's rage is sublime only if it is a response to one's *correct* appreciation of both the moral idea at stake and what state of affairs constitutes an obstacle for the realization of that idea. In this way, when one's rage is sublime, one's rage is also apt: the rage is the felt recognition of something that truly is an injustice.<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of the subject, this felt recognition amounts to an aesthetic appreciation, and not necessarily to an

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<sup>18</sup> Here, I am endorsing Srinivasan's account of apt anger, according to which "one's anger that *p* is apt only if *p* constitutes a genuine moral violation" (Srinivasan, 2018:129).



explicit moral evaluation (though it can certainly be accompanied by an explicit moral evaluation).

Let us look at how this feature of sublime rage bears on the question of how to tell, from a third-personal perspective, apt anger from inapt anger by considering some examples. The rage that a white supremacist might feel in response to what they believe is an injustice (e.g., that a black man becomes the President) could not qualify as sublime, even though this person might believe that their rage is grounded on the idea of justice and that the state of affairs that elicits their rage constitutes an obstacle for the realization of such idea. This person's rage could not qualify as sublime because they are clearly making a wrongful use of the idea of justice by believing that justice must be achieved for a dominant social group at the expenses of another. So far so good. Things may get quite tricky, though, if we take in consideration Kant's characterization of ideas of reasons as indeterminate. Notice that this is not to be taken as a skeptical claim: Kant clearly thinks that we can make the right use of these ideas, and that rage can be aesthetically sublime when we do so. Rather, the relevant implication of the claim that justice is an indeterminate idea of reason is that it can be difficult to distinguish between anger that is sublime and thus apt, and anger that is not sublime and thus inapt. Importantly, distinguishing between these requires, among other considerations, that we engage in a careful evaluation of which conception of justice underlies and informs the anger at stake.

To further illustrate this point, take the case of somebody who is strongly committed to the view that justice requires only that a sufficient distribution of material goods between the members of a certain society is achieved. And imagine that this distribution is achieved in the society in which he lives but, while all women in this society have access to a sufficient amount of material goods, it is still the case that they are discriminated in the workplace (e.g., by being

paid and promoted less than their men colleagues). This person might be furious that, in such society, women complain about their oppression and their complaints are sometimes given uptake. Should we take this anger to be sublime? I don't think we should characterize this anger as sublime, but providing a justification of why this is the case requires a careful analysis of the use of the idea of justice that the person at stake is making, and a careful explanation of why thinking about justice in that way is not appropriate.

Though my point – that in order to tell apt anger from inapt anger we should be looking at the conception of justice underlying that anger – might sound quite obvious, it seems to be only implicit in the literature about anger. For instance, Myisha Cherry argues that “properly evaluating anger takes time, and it takes information” (Cherry, 2017:64) such as, among other factors, the anger's aim, target, causes and effects. Even when we have all of this information, Cherry claims that “we often rush the evaluation or dismiss the information due to our biases, overconfidence, and selfish motives through anger policing and gaslighting” (Cherry, 2017:64). A Kantian approach to distinguishing between apt anger and inapt anger would not dismiss the importance of this contextual information; but it would also regard it as normatively dependent on justice as an ideal, and how this ideal can be constructed.

## 2. The Aesthetic Character of Sublime Rage

In the previous section, I have focused on the sublimity of aesthetically sublime rage, and argued that aesthetic rage is sublime when it is a response to a moral idea, given that one correctly appreciates this moral idea and correctly identifies what state of affairs constitutes an obstacle for the realization of this moral idea. In this section, I will focus on the aesthetic character of sublime rage, and zoom in its significance. To be clear on the relation between these

two features of aesthetically sublime rage, it is worth pointing out that, on Kant's account, sublime rage is always aesthetic; however, aesthetic rage is not always sublime.<sup>19</sup> In what follows, I will focus on aesthetic rage that is also sublime, and explain the significance of its aesthetic character in relation to its sublimity.

To say that sublime rage is aesthetic is to say that it does not play a motivational function for the subject throughout the time the subject is feeling rage. Aesthetically sublime rage, then, does not motivate the agent to achieve any end throughout the time the subject is feeling rage. I have been arguing that, when anger plays a motivational function (either directly or indirectly) by prompting the agent to achieve an end throughout the time the subject is feeling anger, it might be considered morally problematic: if it is taken by the agent to be her reason for acting, then it is at risk to be just the wrong reason for acting; if it is taken by the agent to be a compass that points her to some reasons for acting, it is unreliable in pointing to the reasons for acting that are of the right kind. Aesthetically sublime rage, however, escapes these problems, since it does not motivate one to achieve any end, at least at the time in which one feels such rage (more on this later).

That this is the case is clear by Kant's characterization of aesthetic feeling. For Kant, feeling is the capacity for having pleasure or displeasure in a representation, as he writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. "The capacity for having pleasure or displeasure in a representation is

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<sup>19</sup> Affective feelings of anger other than sublime rage that paralyze the subject so that she is not motivated to realize a certain end when she is under the sway of such feelings, for instance, may count as aesthetic. However, insofar as they are not constrained by moral ideas, they are not sublime.

called feeling” (MS 6:211). He then goes on distinguishing between “pleasure which is necessarily connected with desire [to bring about an object or state of affairs]”, which “can be called practical pleasure” and “pleasure which is not necessarily connected with desire”, which “can be called merely contemplative, or *inactive delight*” (MS 6:212). Contemplative pleasure, then, is pleasure that is not followed by a desire to bring about an object or state of affairs and so it “is not at bottom a pleasure in the existence of an object of a representation but it attached only to the representation itself” (MS 6:212).<sup>20</sup>

Since aesthetically sublime rage does not motivate one to achieve any end throughout the time the subject is feeling rage, it is better understood as a state of an *observer* rather than of an *agent*. Nonetheless, this should not let us think that someone feeling aesthetically sublime rage is someone who is passive, cold, detached or disengaged from the events that they are witnessing or being subjected to. As we have seen, the subject’s mental faculties are actively engaged and attuned to the object or state of affairs that elicits the rage, and they display a certain responsiveness to such object or state of affairs. Moreover, while aesthetically sublime rage does not motivate one to achieve any present-directed end, it can be regarded as having an indirect motivational role that is future-directed. As such, it can help us achieve and realize some ends in the future, when the rage subsides and proper reflection is more likely to be achieved.

This is importantly different from the case in which rage plays an indirect motivational role in one’s agency, such that, at the time of the action, one’s anger directs one’s attention to

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<sup>20</sup> We have seen that the experience of the sublime entails both pleasure and a feeling of pain.

The pain is also contemplative, and we can think of it as pain which is not followed by an aversion to bring about an object or state of affairs.

certain reasons for acting rather than others. The latter would be a situation in which anger urges the agent to achieve an end *on the spot*. Because of this, one would be likely to use anger as an epistemic compass improperly: one would be likely to not properly reflect on which reasons there are for acting (especially the reasons that anger tends to obscure), and end up acting for reasons that are of the wrong kind. Esthetically sublime rage, by contrast, does not urge the subject into acting on the spot; rather, it directs the subject's attention to various considerations, as well as circumstances, that, once reflected upon over time, might help her achieve certain ends – moral ends – in the future.

There are several ways in which aesthetically sublime rage can have the future-oriented role of helping the subject achieve moral ends. First, feeling aesthetically sublime rage reveals that we deeply care about moral ideas. As such, it can help us keep a sustained focus on such ideas, even after the experience of aesthetically sublime rage comes to an end. Second, experiencing aesthetically sublime rage can function as a morally encouraging sign. Someone feeling this kind of rage in reply to injustice might further reflect on what justice requires, how this idea contributes to human moral progress, and what needs to be done to pursue such progress. Notice also that, as an affective response to a moral idea, aesthetically sublime rage can put us in the special position to recognize instances in which that idea has been realized or not realized. It can do this by sparking critical inquiry concerning whether the object or state of affairs that has elicited the rage constitutes a realization or a departure from that idea. The experience of aesthetically sublime rage is a morally encouraging sign, then, because it can contribute to the agent's overarching commitment to pursue moral progress, as well as sparking critical inquiry about what such progress should entail. Moreover, if sublime rage reveals that we

deeply care about moral ideas and moral progress, then it might still indirectly motivate us to achieve the future-oriented end of moral perfection or self-improvement.

Another way in which aesthetically sublime rage can have the future-oriented role of helping us achieve moral ends is the following: this rage can prepare us to value something against our self-centered interest. Feeling aesthetically sublime rage, as well as expressing such a rage, can put us in difficult positions: one can be oppressed, marginalized or silenced for doing so. As such, prudential considerations might count against feeling and expressing such a rage. However, feeling and expressing this rage despite its counterproductivity can help us prioritize other-directed concerns over self-directed prudential concerns. This tendency can have the upshot of bringing together people who are distant from each other in terms of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, citizenship status, as well as geographical position. Thus, the aesthetic experience of rage can help us bridge the gaps between different social groups and in particular can help us get on the side of oppressed groups. This unifying tendency, when reflected upon and cultivated over time, can support morality.

That aesthetically sublime rage has the feature of helping the subject achieve moral ends in the future in the ways that I have described also tells us that judgments about sublime rage, albeit being aesthetic rather than practical, stand in a certain relation to practical judgments. This relation is such that, when the subject judges her aesthetic rage to be sublime, her judgment can give rise to a process of reflection that facilitates her ability to reach practical judgments in the future.

Let me end this section by addressing a worry. Some scholars might be suspicious of the distinction that I have been drawing throughout the paper between anger as a motivational attitude and anger as an aesthetic attitude. They might wonder, for example, how we can know

that aesthetically sublime rage does not motivate us to achieve present-oriented goals, instead of only future-oriented ones. I want to address this worry by drawing a distinction. It is the following: motivational anger brings about action proper, whereas aesthetically sublime rage (often) brings about expressive behavior, but not action proper.<sup>21</sup> This distinction is meant to convey that, even if aesthetically sublime rage might influence us to do something on the spot, this should not be regarded as achieving a certain present-oriented end. For instance, one experiencing aesthetically sublime rage in response to injustice might express their rage by crying out loud or aggressively staring at the target of the rage, and these can be regarded as instances of expressive behavior – i.e., behavior that simply expresses how the agent feels, without any reference to a present desire to bring about an object or state of affairs. Of course, scholars might disagree on what exactly counts as action proper and what counts as expressive behavior, and it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between the two (e.g., in the case of a subject who stares aggressively at someone in anger with the clear intent of signaling her anger

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<sup>21</sup> When it comes to emotions bringing about expressive behavior – and expressive behavior only – Kant’s view might at least be compatible, if not relevantly similar, to emotionist models like the one presented by Hursthouse (1991) and Döring (2003), according to which the explanation of action caused by emotions does not require invoking belief and desire pairs. In particular, a Kantian explanation of someone frowning at the target of her rage – an example of mere expressive behavior, as opposed to action proper – might very well hold that the subject’s rage caused her to frown, without any reference to a desire/belief pair. This picture might be also compatible with holding that the subject’s rage had a representational content that did not provide an end for action but that nonetheless made her frown.

to others). But insofar as we can differentiate from simply frowning at the target of the rage – an aesthetic attitude – and reflectively choosing to take part to a protest upon feeling anger – a motivational attitude – (just to mention two instances at the opposite sides of the spectrum), there is a meaningful distinction to make, and I take it that Kant’s differentiation between anger as an aesthetic attitude and anger as a motivational one is supposed to convey this distinction.

### 3. When Is Aesthetically Sublime Rage Appropriate?

So far, I have provided an account of aesthetically sublime rage and I have claimed that this kind of rage is aesthetic because it does not motivate the subject to achieve any end on the spot; moreover, this rage is sublime because it is a response to and it is constrained by moral ideas. In this section, I turn to assessing the appropriateness of aesthetically sublime rage as a response to injustice. My aim is to figure out when this kind of rage is appropriate, and when it is inappropriate.

One might think that this is a somewhat odd aim. Kant’s claim that we have a duty to ensure that we are free of affects (MS 6:408; Anth 7:253) – which he calls “duty of apathy” – raises questions about whether, in Kant’s view, aesthetically sublime rage can be a morally permissible feeling at all. Indeed, in his discussion of apathy in the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant contrasts health in moral life with all sorts of affects, including those aroused by the thought of what is good (MS 6:409). Moreover, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* Kant writes that, while rage can be aesthetically sublime, “affectlessness (*apatheia*) in a mind that emphatically pursues its own inalterable principles is sublime, and indeed in a far superior way” (KU 5:272).

A correct understanding of why Kant takes apathy to be valuable, as well as of what he is claiming when he praises apathy as sublime, are key to understanding which implications these



claims have for the moral permissibility of aesthetically sublime rage. As a state of mind that is free of affects, apathy is valuable because it helps the agent with acting for the right kind of reasons: the apathetic agent does not experience affects and so she cannot substitute genuine moral resolve, which is based on respect for the moral law, with these affects. This tells us that the duty of apathy, in Kant's view, does not require one to get rid of aesthetically sublime rage because this kind of rage is not motivational: given that it pertains to how the agent feels, and not to the present determination of her will, it does not "tempt" the subject to act on the spot differently than from respect for the moral law.

Moreover, when Kant praises apathy as sublime, he is praising the Stoic sage. This is clear, for instance, in the *Anthropology* where Kant writes that "the principle of apathy, that is, that the wise man must at no time be in a state of affect, not even in that of sympathy with the woes of his best friend, is an entirely correct and sublime moral precept of the stoic school" (Anth 7:253).<sup>22</sup> As Lara Denis has pointed out, the Stoic sage embodies an ideal of rational self-control, and the sage's apathy is an illustration of the supremacy of practical reason over sensibility.

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<sup>22</sup> Another, quite infamous passage is the following: "It was a sublime way of thinking that the Stoic ascribed to his wise man when he had him say, 'I wish for a friend, not that he might help me in poverty, sickness, imprisonment, etc., but that I might stand by him and rescue a man.' But this same wise man, when he could not rescue his friend, said to himself, 'What is it to me?' In other words, he rejected compassion" (MS 6:457). I cannot discuss here the implications of this passage, which has been quite reasonably taken as at least *prima facie* puzzling by several scholars. For a critical analysis, see Baron (1995); Denis (2000).

However, this “does not mean that the sage is beyond criticism or improvement” (Denis, 2000:62).

The strongest criticism that Kant directs to the Stoic sage can be found in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant writes that “[the Stoics] exaggerated the moral capacities of the human being, under the name of ‘sage,’ beyond all the limits of our knowledge of human beings” (KpV 5:126-7). According to Kant, the Stoic sage represents an extreme of rational control that exaggerates the moral capacities of human beings, especially when it comes to the extent to which they can get rid of the influence of sensibility. In Kant’s view, then, the Stoics have an unrealistic understanding of human nature.<sup>23</sup> These remarks let us conclude that, as Denis puts it, “although there is something admirable about the sage’s sublime traits, we should be suspicious of the package as a whole: he represents an ideal not suited to human beings” (Denis, 2000:61).

This tells us, I would argue, that although Kant regards apathy as more sublime than aesthetically sublime rage, apathy is sublime in a way that is not suited to imperfect rational beings like us, whereas aesthetically sublime rage is. To be clear, the claim is not that acting for the right kind of reasons is out of reach for beings like us, for Kant holds that we can and should act for the right kind of reasons. But trying to do so by being free from aesthetically sublime rage – or aspiring to be free from it – is not the way to go. This consideration fits well with the fact that, in texts other than the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant seems to suggest that affects stimulated

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<sup>23</sup> Part of this is because, in Kant’s view, they refused to recognize that personal happiness is “a special object of human desire” (KpV 5:126-7). Importantly, these remarks appear in a section of the Second Critique in which Kant puts forth his account of the highest good, and evaluates conceptions of the highest good held by Epicureans and Stoics.

by reason should not be prevented. Kant mentions astonishment at unexpected wisdom (Anth 7:261), genuine moral courage (Anth 7:257) and enthusiasm (Anth 7:269, KU 5:271), but aesthetically sublime rage fits the list as well.

We have seen that, despite the fact that Kant's remarks on apathy might seem to suggest otherwise, aesthetically sublime rage can be an appropriate feeling to have. I turn now to a second, albeit somewhat opposite worry. It is the following: If one accepts Kant's view that aesthetically sublime rage is always a response to moral ideas, then it might seem that aesthetically sublime rage is *always* appropriate. However, this is not the case, since it is not always appropriate to adopt an aesthetic attitude like aesthetically sublime rage instead of a motivational attitude. In circumstances in which duty would require one to perform a certain action on the spot, for instance, adopting an aesthetic attitude like aesthetically sublime rage and failing to act (either "from duty" or merely "in conformity with duty")<sup>24</sup> would be inappropriate.

Even motivational anger, if it motivates the agent to act "in conformity with duty" – i.e., performing the action that duty commands, albeit not for the right kind of reasons – might be more appropriate than aesthetically sublime rage in some circumstances. To see this, consider the following scenario. Julia is sitting at a bar enjoying her drink. Julia notices that the guy sitting

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<sup>24</sup> Kant draws this distinction, among other places, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (GMS 4:397-8). For my purposes here, it is sufficient to point out that, according to Kant, "acting from duty" means acting from the motive of duty. Acting from the motive of duty, in Kant's view, amounts to acting for the right kind of reasons. "Acting in conformity with duty," instead, amounts to performing the action that duty commands, albeit from a motive other than the motive of duty. This, in Kant's view, amounts to acting for the wrong kind of reasons.

close to her, Mark, is spiking the drink of his date, Maria. Julia feels furious. Maria is about to take a sip. If Julia's anger would motivate her to act on the spot so as to help Maria – by telling her, for example “Don't drink that – I saw Mark putting something in it!” – would it be inappropriate? No. This is a scenario in which, if Julia were to feel aesthetically sublime rage and not pursue the present-oriented end of helping Maria on the spot, Julia's inaction would constitute a moral failure. So, we can safely conclude that it would be *worse* for Julia to experience aesthetically sublime rage rather than motivational anger in this situation.

Of course, it would be *better* if Julia were to help Maria for the right kind of reasons – Kant calls this “acting from duty” – instead of being motivated to act by her anger, either directly or indirectly. But this consideration doesn't rule out that Julia would be praiseworthy for preventing a serious moral violation to happen, even if she would do so, for example, because of an inappropriate focus on her own “dear self”, or a desire of revenge. This example shows not only that aesthetically sublime rage can be inappropriate sometimes, but also that, even if we take seriously the problems that come with one's anger motivating one's action, it does not follow that aesthetically sublime rage, precisely because it is not motivational, is the *only* appropriate kind of anger subjects should feel.

Another worry about aesthetically sublime rage is that it might seem too “sanitized”. We have seen that this rage is felt by an observer, rather than by a proper agent, and we have seen that it does not motivate the subject to achieve any end on the spot. These features might lead some to think that aesthetically sublime rage does not bear any significance for fighting against injustice. In replying to this worry, it is worth remembering that simply experiencing anger, without following through on it with a specific action, can be itself a way of resisting oppression. Cherry acknowledges this point when she writes that “we might think that if we are angry at

racial injustice, we must always do something particular with our rage – like rebel or protest – for merely having rage is not enough [...] We should question this way of thinking, however, in order to appreciate the more varied ways [...] in which people can resist racial injustice, oppression, domination” (Cherry, 2021:93).

Several feminist scholars like Elizabeth Spelman and Barbara Applebaum have argued that simply feeling anger can be an act of resistance. The reason for this is that, these authors have argued, there is a connection between one feeling anger and one’s self-worth. When someone feels anger about the wrongness of subordination, the person’s anger has the capacity and the right to judge that another has acted unjustly. By feeling and expressing anger, Applebaum argues, “the angry person implies that one is in fact a person who has rights. Anger as an outlaw emotion, therefore, constitutes a claim of equality” (Applebaum, 2014:133). Take a woman expressing or simply feeling anger towards a man. Spelman argues that “to be angry at him is to make myself, at least on this occasion, his judge – to have, and to express, a standard against which I assess his conduct. If he is in other ways regarded as my superior, when I am angry at him I, at least on that occasion, am regarding him as no more and no less than my equal” (Spelman, 1989:266-67). So, we shouldn’t dismiss aesthetically sublime rage and regard it as unhelpful simply because it does not motivate the agent into doing something here and now; it is rather valuable as a form of resistance on its own.

Another related worry when trying to assess the appropriateness of aesthetically sublime rage is the following: one might take aesthetically sublime rage to be a kind of rage that only somebody who is not touched personally by injustice could feel. One might think this because aesthetically sublime rage might strike one, at least at first sight, as a detached kind of attitude. And one might think, quite reasonably, that if injustice concerns one personally (as it is the case

for members of oppressed social groups), then one could not or at least would not be likely to simply adopt the perspective of an observer in reply to such injustice as when one feels aesthetically sublime rage; one would be more likely to adopt the perspective of an active agent and do something from one's anger. Is aesthetically sublime rage the kind of rage that only somebody who is not touched personally by injustice could feel? No.

To see why this is the case, consider the following scenario: Malcolm is a black man witnessing – yet another – recorded instance of police brutality against another black man that goes viral on social media. He gets intensely angry. He is acutely aware of how this kind of oppression concerns him personally: as a black man, Malcolm knows that upon encountering the police, he is likely to be perceived as a threat and treated brutally. Moreover, he is acutely aware of the ever-recurring, pervasive, and structural facts of oppression. In light of this awareness, Malcolm despairs about what can be done to end racism and thinks “How is this still happening? What can be done? Nothing!” Indeed, he does nothing, until he calms down and the rage goes away. A few days later, he decides to attend a talk about black empowerment, reflects on the importance of black businesses to create solidarity and wealth within black communities, decides that from now on he will make an effort to buy black-owned, and starts thinking about how to encourage people to support these businesses.

Malcolm's anger fits the criteria of aesthetically sublime rage: the rage is in response to what Malcolm recognizes to be an injustice, and it is informed by Malcolm's complex understanding of what hinders racial justice. (This understanding, notice, is grounded at least in part in his first-personal perspective as a black man.) Moreover, Malcolm's rage does not motivate him to pursue a certain end on the spot; but it encourages him to pursue ameliorative ends later on, when rage subsides. Something to notice is that Malcolm's rage does not motivate

him to pursue any end on the spot because it is entangled with a certain kind of despair. This is the momentary despair that somebody who is subject or witness to what he understands to be structural, pervasive, ever-recurring injustices might feel. This understanding might momentarily let one despair about what can be done; alternatively, even if one has a sense of what can be done, one might despair about where to start to make things better. In both cases, one would be feeling aesthetically sublime rage and at the same time being paralyzed by what – at least on the spot – might (quite reasonably) seem like an insurmountable task.

The reason I brought up this scenario regarding Malcolm is to show that aesthetically sublime rage is not a kind of rage that only somebody who is not touched personally by injustice could feel. On the contrary, members of oppressed groups might be more prone to feel aesthetically sublime rage than out-members: the injustice concerns them more personally than out-members; and the sense that this is a cross-generational, ever ending struggle might be more acutely felt by members than by out-members (thus, members might be more prone to despairing about achieving justice than out-members).

Keeping in mind all of these considerations, I argue that aesthetically sublime rage is *appropriate* in cases in which the subject genuinely and non-culpably does not know what to do on the spot in reply to the injustice at stake. I argue that aesthetically sublime rage is *inappropriate* in cases in which the subject non-genuinely and culpably does not know what to do on the spot in reply to the injustice at stake. The notion of affected ignorance, discussed most notably by Michele Moody-Adams, is particularly relevant here. According to Moody-Adams, “affected ignorance is essentially a matter of choosing not to be informed of what we can and should know” (Moody-Adams, 1994:301); this is a complex phenomenon, and “in practice, affected ignorance takes several forms” (Moody-Adams, 1994:301) depending on the contexts in

which it takes place and the details of the practical situation in which one is. Differences in social rank, for instance, might be highly relevant for assessing whether one's aesthetically sublime rage is connected to genuine, non-culpable ignorance about how to reply to an injustice, or instead whether it is connected to affected ignorance.

To see this, consider the following scenario: In January 2023, a student was preparing to get off a public bus near the Indiana University Bloomington campus when another passenger struck her in the head with a knife. The attacker admitted that she targeted the student because the student was Chinese, adding that "it would be one less person to blow up our country". The University response to this hate crime was quite immediate, with the vice president of diversity, equity, and multicultural affairs at IU releasing a statement condemning the event and taking it as a reminder that "anti-Asian hate is real". But imagine the same administrator experiencing aesthetically sublime rage while thinking in despair "What can be done? I really don't know!", and indeed ending up doing nothing (not releasing a statement, not making sure that appropriate means be taken for campus security, etc.). Here, the administrator's ignorance would amount to affected ignorance simply in light of the consideration that they occupy a position of power within the relevant institution at stake. This power entails the responsibility to figure out, plan, and enforce ameliorative policies, and in light of such policies to be able to efficaciously reply to this kind of events. (Indeed, the very lack of such policies for administrators to adopt in such circumstances would itself signal that the institution does not take these circumstances seriously). If we compare the administrator's aesthetically sublime rage with Malcolm's, the latter seems quite appropriate, given that in the example I provided Malcolm is in no special position of responsibility and power.



I have been arguing that aesthetically sublime rage is appropriate in cases in which the subject is genuinely and non-culpably ignorant about how to address the injustice at stake, whereas it is inappropriate when the subject's ignorance amounts to affected ignorance. What about cases in which the subject feels an intense anger, knows what to do, but does not do it because of prudential considerations (e.g., it would be too costly for her own safety)? I am tempted to say that these are cases in which the subject is not experiencing aesthetically sublime rage. This is because there is a difference, I take it, between being motivated to act on the spot in a certain way and ending up not doing so because of one's considered judgment about the situation, and not being motivated to act on the spot at all. The former case is the case in which the subject would have acted from her anger as she wanted to, if the circumstances would have been different; the latter case is a case in which the agent, even if the circumstances were different, would still not be motivated to act on the spot by her anger at all.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have provided an account of aesthetically sublime rage, and I have claimed that this is a specific kind of anger that can be valuable in contexts of oppression. The experience of aesthetically sublime rage can help the subject realize that she cares about pursuing moral progress, and spark in her the critical inquiry relevant for answering the question of what such progress should entail. Importantly, it can also prepare her to value something against her self-centered interest. Moreover, I have argued that this kind of rage escapes the problems that anger has when it motivates the agent to act on the spot, either directly or indirectly.

But even though aesthetically sublime rage can be valuable, and it is appropriate when the subject genuinely and non-culpably does not know what to do on the spot in reply to the injustice at stake, it is inappropriate when her ignorance about what to do on the spot is culpable.

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