

# Valuing Anger

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At a pivotal moment in the movie *La-La Land*, the heroine Mia Dolan receives the news that a casting director has seen her one-woman show and wants her to audition for a major film. She is a would-be actress who has been biding her time as a barista. Mia has by this moment had her hopes up countless times, and always walked out rejected and disappointed – she might as well be a PhD trying to make it in academia. In fact, she has just decided to give up, and has moved back in with her parents in Boulder City when her boyfriend Seb drives down to tell her of the invitation. Demoralized, Mia informs Seb that she is not going to audition. She's just not cut out for it, and there's always someone younger and prettier who will get the role. She's going to give up the childish childhood dream. At this moment, Seb could show compassion and comfort Mia. But instead he gets angry with her. She is genuinely good at acting, and she's selling herself short by giving up. She deserves the shot she's getting, and she is wrong to throw it away.

Seb's anger, I submit, is the right response in the situation. It shows that Mia matters to him. It shows that he cares, more than compassion would, or the kind of cool advice he might just as well give to a stranger in a similar situation who happened to be seated next to him in a plane. What is more, Seb's susceptibility to anger in such situations is a part of *valuing* Mia and their relationship, or so I will argue in this paper. Some ways of valuing things involve perceptions of insistent agent-relative or agent-neutral reasons for action and attitude. I claim that susceptibility to some forms of anger is constitutive of properly appreciating such reasons and essential to holding others to normative expectations. Further, I argue that persons, including ourselves, and some personal relationships are *properly valued*

in a way that involves normative expectations, and thus susceptibility to anger. It follows that the right kind of anger has value that is independent of its possible epistemic and motivational benefits. This opens up an underappreciated line of response to critics of anger, from Seneca and Buddha to Owen Flanagan and Derk Pereboom. If we eliminate anger, we fail to properly appreciate and may even lose personal relationships that depend on love and mutual caring, and moral relationships that depend on respect and mutual accountability. This doesn't mean, of course, that anger is always a good thing – on the contrary, thinking about anger's role in proper valuing also helps see when it's unwarranted and harmful.

## **1. Anger, Valuing, and Normative Expectations**

My argument in this paper does not presuppose a detailed theory of anger or emotion in general, but I will outline a general picture. I will assume that emotions at least typically have many elements, including a phenomenal feel, intentional content, a motivational tendency, and associated physiological responses. (I set aside deservedly unpopular pure cognitivist and non-cognitivist views, which regard either the phenomenal and motivational or intentional aspects of emotions as inessential.)

It is important to bear in mind that anger comes in many different forms. Elsewhere, I talk about the ‘anger family’ of emotions, which includes what I call core anger, resentment, indignation, and rage, among others. I lack the space for a proper argument here, but here’s a rough picture. At the root of an anger is an affect program that is already present in small children and animals of many other species. It physiologically and psychologically prepares us for aggression towards someone who frustrates our goals or threatens to do so. It motivates us to return pain for pain. But as our mind-reading and rule-following capacities develop, our emotional responses become more refined. We don’t get angry with a dentist for causing pain to us, or a librarian who reminds us to return a book we’d like to keep. Our response to

someone who steps on our toes because they're pushed by another is not the same as our response to the person who does it on purpose. Mature anger in its different forms involves the thought that somebody intentionally or negligently failed to do what they were supposed to do, or did what they weren't supposed to do. (Let me emphasize that adults, too, are prone to immature anger as well – you might get angry with someone who turns you down for a date, even while realizing they're perfectly within their rights to do so.)

In the terms I will use, the thought that defines mature anger is that the target is responsible for *violating a normative expectation*, where a normative expectation is a standard to which we hold others (or ourselves). Only some normative expectations are specifically moral in nature, though the salience of moral expectations probably explains in part why so many philosophers and psychologists have been tempted to moralize anger. We can perfectly intelligibly get angry with people who are incompetent (and hence fail to do what they're supposed to do) without thinking that they're morally at fault. What I'll argue below is that many normative expectations are grounded in *valuing*. For example, part of what it is to value a historical home is thinking that it shouldn't be torn, and thus normatively expecting people to refrain from doing so.

On the motivational side, I distinguish between two kinds of element in anger and emotions in general. What I call the *motivational content* of an emotion is the kind of desire it essentially involves. In the case of anger, the basic motivation is bringing about some negative consequence for the target – something unwanted, unpleasant, or harmful (even if not necessarily all things considered bad). Without such a desire, the emotion isn't a form of anger. Yet the desired negative consequence can vary with the form of anger at issue, and the relationship between the subject and the target. And the kind of behavior that results, if any, will depend on the subject's other motives. If you love the person you're angry with, you might do no more than say some harsh words (which may nevertheless suffice to cause pain

and hurt), as in the *La-La Land* scenario, or hold your peace altogether after an internal struggle.

Importantly, emotions also have an *aim* that is implicit in their pattern of persistence, change, and disappearance. The behavior that they motivate will in normal circumstances tend to promote that aim. So, for example, the aim of fear is something like self-preservation – it motivates us to flee danger, which will normally serve to keep us safe. In the case of mature anger, we can distinguish between two types of aim, forward-looking and backward-looking, depending on whether the subject perceives the violation of expectations to be ongoing or past. Forward-looking mature anger aims, in my view, to *force the target to conform to the normative expectation they're violating* (as the subject sees it). If your fancy new TV has a shaky picture, but it starts to work perfectly once you angrily bang it, your anger tends to go away pretty fast. And when Mia in *La-La Land* decides to face the challenge of the audition, Seb's sharpness vanishes.

When it comes to second-personal forms of anger such as resentment and indignation, which address a demand to the target, they tend to go away or diminish in force only when the target acknowledges the legitimacy of the demand and makes amends. As Stephen Darwall (2006) says, they aim at getting the target to hold herself accountable, to feel guilt or shame as a result of acknowledging the legitimacy of our protest. Backward-looking mature anger, in turn, aims to *lower the relative status of the target in response to their having violated a normative expectation*. That's why it is satisfied when the target is punished or brought low because of being caught, and why it's hard to forgive someone who fails to repent and thus disavow the sense of entitlement that made them think it's okay to abuse us.

*Valuing*

Let's turn to valuing next. What kind of attitude is it? The two simplest suggestions are that valuing consists either of *believing* that something is good or valuable, or *desiring* to promote or protect or perhaps acquire what one values. Yet, as many have observed, each of these options faces significant hurdles. Very briefly, believing valuable seems to have the wrong scope (we can believe something is valuable without ourselves valuing it), lack proportionality (I don't think my children are more valuable than those of others, but I value them more), and possibly lack the right connection to motivation.<sup>1</sup> Nor does desiring suffice for valuing, because we can have both first-order and higher-order desires for something without valuing it, and value things it doesn't make sense to desire, like the time we got to spend with our grandmother.

What else could valuing be? Many philosophers have observed that when we value something, we are disposed to have a variety of *emotional responses* to it, as well as related desires and dispositions to attend to events pertaining to it. Let's use the term *caring* for the kind of complex and persistent disposition that has as its constituents such things as "joy and satisfaction when the object of one's care is flourishing and frustration over its misfortunes; pride in the successes of the object of care and disappointment over its failures; the desire to help ensure those successes and to help avoid the failures; fear when the object of care is in danger and relief when it escapes unharmed", as Agnieszka Jaworska (2007, 560) says. Bennett Helm (2001) emphasizes that there is a kind of unity to these responses in terms of tone and temporality – for example, if you care about X, joy that results from X doing well 'commits' you to sadness in the counterfactual situation in which X does badly instead. (I'll return to this below.) Further, as Elizabeth Anderson notes, there are many ways of caring or valuing, and exactly which emotions are involved depends on the nature of the object (1993,

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Anderson 1993 and Scheffler 2010.

4–5). The emotions that we might be vulnerable to when valuing a person will be different from those involved in valuing the beauty of mathematics.

Does caring, understood as above, suffice for valuing? I doubt it. It seems we could care about something without valuing it, as when we find ourselves caring too much about something that we don't think *merits* it (Seidman 2009). Plausibly, what needs to be added to caring is regarding it to be warranted. So when we value something, we see ourselves (and perhaps others) as having a *reason* to care (Scheffler 2010a). Different modes and objects of valuing involve perceptions of different kinds of reasons for different attitudes and for different subjects.

For example, suppose that you value the Great Barrier Reef. You perhaps have some desire to experience it in person, you'll be glad to hear it is flourishing, and very sad to hear it is dying. Importantly, you are firmly against courses of action you believe will significantly harm it, and in favor of protecting it. If you are like me, you think that the features of the Great Barrier Reef give everyone what I'll call a *discretionary reason* to be susceptible to positive and negative feelings towards it. Other people would be warranted in valuing it in these ways, but not *required* to do so, given that we can't value everything valuable. But I also take the same features of the reef to provide *everyone* an *insistent* or requiring or peremptory reason to be against destroying it, if they're in a position to affect it.<sup>2</sup> This is non-discretionary. Given the way in which I value the Great Barrier Reef, I take it that people making decisions that could harm it should take such consequences into account and give them proper weight in deliberating about the matter, whether or not they value it in other ways.

The crucial consequence of this account of valuing is that *perceptions of insistent reasons give rise to normative expectations*. If you take Peter to have non-discretionary,

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<sup>2</sup> I'll use the terminology of Kolodny 2003.

insistent reason to refrain from dumping toxic waste in the ocean, you thereby normatively expect him to refrain from doing so. Again, normative expectations aren't predictions about what people will do – sadly, many people whose actions affect it seem to be indifferent to the Great Barrier Reef.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I expect people to conform to my normative expectations in the sense that I'm disposed to hold them *accountable* for failing to act accordingly, and possibly for failing to adopt the right attitude, provided that they are in a position to recognize and respond to the reasons. Holding others accountable may involve cognitive and behavioral aspects. But on the emotional side, it involves feeling some form of anger towards the agent who is taken to be responsible for failing to meet the expectation. Otherwise, the expectation in question isn't a normative one – it might be that you *want* someone to do something, or think that it would be *good* if they did something. Neither of these thoughts necessitates anger if they don't do it – you might be sad or disappointed instead. But holding someone accountable for doing something is in the first instance a matter of having a reactive attitude from the anger family towards them, as Peter Strawson (1962) famously emphasized. We might say that mature anger is the way of appreciating an insistent practical reason for what it is (cf. Kauppinen 2015a). (I'll discuss some challenges to this below.)

Another way to put this point is to say that when you value something in a way that involves thinking treating it in harmful ways is not a matter of discretion, you not only care about the valued object, but you also care about whether other agents (and indeed yourself) care about it. And this kind of *caring about caring* is constituted by a disposition to feel suitable second-personal emotions such as resentment or indignation.

## 2. Valuing Persons: Respect, Self-Respect, and Anger

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<sup>3</sup> See 'The Great Barrier Reef: A Catastrophe Laid Bare', *The Guardian*, June 6, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/07/the-great-barrier-reef-a-catastrophe-laid-bare>).

So far, I've argued that valuing things in certain ways gives rise to normative expectations, and those expectations are manifest in susceptibility to anger and the behavior it motivates. This is the first part of my defense of anger. The next step is arguing that valuing certain things in a way that involves anger is *appropriate* or fitting. Since there are many kinds of valued object and many modes of valuing, the case for this must be made piecemeal. In this section, I'll argue that persons are properly valued in this way.

We can value other people in many different guises. I may value someone *as a butcher* and *as a person*. It is the latter that is of particular interest here. The familiar Kantian answer, which I take to be along the right lines, is that we value someone as a person when we *respect* her. The kind of respect at issue here is what Darwall termed ‘recognition respect’, or “a disposition to weigh appropriately in one’s deliberation some feature of the thing in question and to act accordingly” (1977, 38), as distinct from a positive appraisal or esteem. Recognition respect contrasts most conspicuously (though not exclusively) with using as a mere means, to use Kantian terms again.

What does recognition respect for persons consist in? As Darwall emphasizes, an important aspect of it is deliberative. But there are many ways of taking something into account in deliberation, not all of which manifest respect. Let's say that what's distinctive of persons is that they're capable of more or less competently responding to some considerations as reasons and making up their own mind in response to them. Respect as a mode of valuing as a person will then, minimally, involve treating the fact that doing something would harm another's ability to recognize or respond to reasons as a strong reason against it. It's clearly disrespectful to lie, manipulate, or ignore someone's arguments when they know what they're talking about.

But respect also has an even more deeply second-personal aspect, as Darwall emphasizes in his later work: when we respect another, we treat her as having an authority to

make certain claims on us and hold us accountable for meeting them, and are prepared to hold them accountable in turn. So, first, it is not just that we treat them as capable of recognizing independent reasons, but as *sources* of potential reasons for us. We refrain from doing certain things *for their sake*. And second, doing so involves us in relations of accountability. As Darwall puts it, according authority to each other consists in acknowledging “each other’s standing to demand, remonstrate, resist, charge, blame, resent, feel indignant, excuse, forgive, and so on.” (2006, 141)

For example, suppose that I catch you in the act of trying to deceive me for financial gain. One possible response is to treat you as a nuisance to be managed, like a clever raccoon who has broken into my shed. But taking such an objective attitude, in Strawson’s (1962) terms, is not consistent with respecting you. Respect requires instead that I’m willing to hold you accountable, circumstances permitting. If we continue to interact, I must show my anger and resentment, and make it clear I expect you to cease and desist (this is forward-looking anger) and repent if you are to be forgiven (this is backward-looking anger, which in this case is satisfied by you lowering your own inflated status). In doing so, I show that I have faith in your ability to recognize and respond to the rational authority of my will. Suppose, on the other hand, that I am the deceiver caught in the act. I have treated you with disrespect, but I can still show respect for you by accepting that your anger at me is warranted. I’ll not only give you back the money (which I might do for purely self-interested reasons), but feel guilty and show that by seeking to make amends and resolving never to avail myself of like opportunities. If, on the other hand, I ignore your angry protest and proceed as if nothing had happened, or treat your anger as a symptom of something that’s wrong with you, or even suggest that psychological studies show you would be better off without anger, I continue to disrespect you.

Further, when we value someone as a person, we see her as *commanding* respect. It is not as if we just happen to respect them, so that we might as well opt out. Instead, we regard her as a “self-originating source of valid claims”, as Rawls (1980, 546) puts it. So if we recognition-respect someone as a person, we perceive *everyone* to have an insistent reason to hold the same attitude toward them. This is to say that we have normative expectations regarding the attitudes and behavior of *third parties*. These expectations, again, are not just dispositions to act or deliberate in a certain way. Appreciating the reasons someone’s moral status gives to third parties entails resentment or indignation when they are abused. It would hardly be respectful towards the civilians of Aleppo to be chummy with Putin and Assad after their merciless bombing raids. Whether and how angry we get with those who fail to respect persons depends, to be sure, on our relationship to the injured person and the perpetrator – our attentional and emotional resources, again, are finite. But there are some circumstances in which we must get angry if we genuinely respect and appreciate someone as a source of insistent reasons for others.

Finally, is it *proper* to value people in this way just because they are persons – do persons really command our respect in this sense? This is a deep normative question, but it is not particularly controversial, at least within the Western ethical tradition. Because we owe respect to persons, normative expectations grounded in respect are justified. Other things being equal, we are right to be angry with those who violate them, and express our mature anger in ways that are apt to get people to live up to the expectations, or restore the equal status of those who have been degraded. The live disputes concern just *why* persons are properly valued in this way, and the related issue of where to draw the borders of meriting respect – whether small children, fetuses, or animals, for example, have full moral status. I’ll take no stand on these issues here. For my concerns, it suffices that there are at least some individuals who are properly valued only in a way that involves anger in some circumstances.

### *Self-Respect*

I'm going to argue next that self-respect, too, entails normative expectations towards others, and consequently susceptibility to anger.

Like other people, we are more or less rational agents, more or less capable of recognizing and responding to considerations that favor doing things. Like them, we have a unique record of having done so in the past, and plans to pursue further goals we regard as worthwhile. We don't just merit the respect of others, but also of ourselves. Self-respect is an appropriate response to our own value. But what exactly does it amount to? I'll follow Robin Dillon's analysis, according to which "Recognition respect for oneself as a person involves living in light of an understanding of oneself as having intrinsic worth and moral status just in virtue of being a person, and of the moral constraints that personhood entails." (2001, 66) Dillon (1997) takes this to have several dimensions. First, it involves recognizing one's own moral worth and importance, and consequently equal standing with others. This means regarding certain kinds of treatment by others as being due to oneself – roughly, the normative expectation that others will not treat me in ways that they couldn't justify to me as free and equal, to use Rawlsian language. A self-respecting person isn't docile or servile, and will not accept degrading treatment without protest. Second, self-respect requires appreciating oneself as an agent capable of autonomy, and developing and exercising one's autonomy when feasible. And third, a self-respecting agent won't allow others to define their aims and ideals, and is thus in one sense authentic. For the latter kind of reasons, if you respect yourself, you won't sell out – roughly, trade something you believe to be of higher type of value for something of a lower type of value – and will be offended if someone offers you such a deal.

It is evident that it is not enough for self-respect to *believe* that you are of equal worth, or capable of independent agency. You might, after all, have such beliefs while feeling ashamed or worse for pressing your claims on others or for making your own choices, or not pressing them at all. Nor do they rule out being disposed to seek affirmation by compromising your integrity or to submit to the ends of others. As always, your appreciation of yourself as a source of reasons for others (and yourself) is also manifest in the way that you feel. To make this more concrete, consider a dystopian scenario in which a bigoted newly elected president orders a ban on travel from certain countries even for legal permanent residents, consequently preventing Harmless Immigrant Aisha from making a journey to meet her mother one last time before she dies. This might make Aisha sad, much as a volcanic eruption preventing her journey would. But insofar as she regards herself as everyone's equal, she will take issue with such harmful, blatantly unjustified discrimination. And her taking issue involves anger, perhaps anger of many sorts: resentment on her own behalf, indignation on behalf of everyone else and the cause of justice itself, and possibly even rage, insofar as she feels powerless to change things. Aisha's resentment and indignation will motivate her to seek effective avenues to protest and resist, even if shutting up and licking her wounds would serve her interests better. My claim is that the absence of such reactions would show a deficiency of self-respect.

To be sure, in adverse and unjust conditions, self-respect may have a steep price. But then again, so does lack of self-respect. And sometimes the cost arises from a collective action problem: although everyone acting together could overthrow the oppressors, the first person to rise up faces their full might, so each has a strong incentive to stay put. Somewhat paradoxically, however, if anger that stems from self-respect leads enough of the oppressed to act regardless of what harm may come to them, the façade of the regime may collapse and no one will come to any harm.

The brief analysis of anger I started with makes good sense of why it must be part of the package of self-respecting emotions. Self-respect entails pressing our claims on others, and feeling entitled to do so. Forward-directed mature anger has precisely this aim, and some of its forms, such as indignation, plausibly have as part of their intentional content the thought that one is entitled to force the target to conform to the expectations they are violating. That's why we talk about *righteous* anger. Backward-directed anger, in turn, aims at lowering the status of the offender, and correspondingly restoring that of the victim. As I already suggested above, if an offender is allowed to get away with impunity, this amounts to treating the victim as being of lesser worth, since de facto status supervenes on dispositions to respond to acts that harm the subject – the king has a higher status than the rest only when failing to kneel before him (but not others), for example, is met with swift retaliation (see Kauppinen 2015b). Since self-respect involves regarding oneself as having an equal status, it is no wonder it is partially constituted by susceptibility to an emotion whose aim is to restore status. Other emotions won't suffice for affectively appreciating one's equal status in the face of attempted degradation, because they don't involve thoughts of justified self-defense.

Philosophers have observed the link between self-respect and anger before. For example, Dillon notes that “liability to resent is an integral feature of recognition self-respect” (Dillon 1997, 230), and Jeffrie Murphy says that “the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is self-respect”, and that “proper self-respect is essentially tied to the passion of resentment” (Murphy and Hampton 1989, 16). He observes that “a failure to resent moral injuries done to me is a failure to care about the moral value incarnate in my own person” (18), so that someone who fails to resent wrongdoers or forgives too readily is guilty of a kind of vice. Forgiveness, of course, has its place, but it is only consistent with self-respect if the wrongdoer meets certain conditions, such as repentance or character change. The present account is, I believe, compatible with Murphy's view. But it goes beyond it in explaining, via

the connection between valuing and anger, why self-respect entails a disposition to be angry when the normative expectations inherent in it are violated.

### **3. Valuing Relationships**

In addition to persons, we can also value our *relationships* to others, and relatedly others *as* participants in those relationships, as friends or lovers, for example. I'm now going to argue that this kind of valuing, too, involves being susceptible to anger, and indeed that many kinds of relationship are in part constituted by such emotional vulnerability.

What is it to be in an interpersonal relationship? Clearly, it doesn't suffice that some relation obtains between two or more people – I'm shorter than Barack Obama, but that doesn't mean we have a personal relationship. Somehow, the relation has to be *personal* to each party – it has to in some way define who they are. Part of the story is that relationships are *historical*. In this sense, people have a relationship if there is an ongoing, temporally extended pattern of attitudes and actions between them (Kolodny 2003, 148). I'll reserve the term 'personal relationship', however, to those relationships that the participants see as constituting part of their identity. Familial relationships typically meet this criterion, while my relationship with the waiter at the café where I often work doesn't. This kind of relationship, however, (sadly) need not involve caring about one another. You might find yourself stuck in a personal relationship with an uncaring mother, for example.

In contrast, for what Kolodny calls 'attitude-dependent' relationships, *mutual concern* is necessary (in addition to an ongoing historical pattern). On this view, Jules and Jim are friends if and only if they have a certain pattern of concern for each other, for their relationship, and indeed for this pattern itself – they care about caring for each other and the relationship. Kolodny emphasizes that this mutual concern is primary to the joint activities it is apt to give rise to, although such activities will typically reinforce the concern. I'm inclined

to think that interpersonal relationships don't exist at all unless they affect the parties' actions, although some circumstances, such as forced separation, may mean that the difference a relationship makes in practice isn't proportional to its centrality to the subject's perspective.

What is to *value* a personal relationship, then? It is, no doubt, in part to care for it, that is, to be emotionally vulnerable to its fortunes in the various ways I've already discussed. It is also to care for the other party in the relationship – Jules can't value his friendship with Jim unless he also values Jim as a friend. But it is also to take there to be (non-instrumental) *reason* to care for the relationship and the other party, and to appreciate the reason. More specifically, we must regard the relationship as a *source* of reasons to care and act in the interest of the other party (Scheffler 2010b) – roughly, in virtue of my relationship to my daughter, her sadness is a reason for me to feel sympathy and comfort her, while some unknown child's sadness either isn't a reason for me, or is a weaker one.

How does valuing a personal relationship as such differ from respect, which also involves seeing another (or oneself) as a source of second-personal reasons? In the case of a personal relationship, the perceived reason is an *agent-relative* one, while the reasons grounded in respect are agent-neutral ones that everyone has. This is the kind of thing we express when we say things like “As Jim's friend, I feel I must speak up for him”. As this example shows, valuing relationships as such involves a kind of ‘must’ thought – in other words, some of the agent-relative reasons we perceive are *insistent*. This is no accident, since it is part of what makes it a relationship personal to us that we see it as generating obligations that are bound up with who we are and consequently not easily shaken. It would take a full-blown theory of friendship and love, say, to articulate exactly which perceptions are essential to such relationships. I think it is very plausible that any such theory will include self-directed normative expectations to pay special attention to cared-for person, to give more weight to their wishes and interests than to those of strangers, and to refrain from doing things that

would undermine the relationship. We hold ourselves to such expectations when we feel self-directed anger or its close relation, guilt.

But valuing someone as a friend or lover also involves other-directed expectations, which brings in susceptibility to other-directed anger. First, because the relationship is supposed to be a mutual one, we expect our friends to pay attention to us and not to let us down either. Jules is unlikely to be upset by a random stranger who drives past when he's struggling to fix a broken tire in his bike, but if Jim does the same, Jules will expect a good explanation. We also regard friends as having non-discretionary reason to refrain from hurting the relationship.

Second, personal relationships heighten our attention to third-party acts that affect our friends or lovers or our relationship with them. This is one place where the distinction between believing valuable and valuing is manifest. I might believe that everyone is entitled to pursue their dreams as long they don't prevent others from pursuing theirs. But I can't and won't concern myself emotionally with interference in the pursuits of strangers, unless some special circumstance forces my attention to them (as when I personally witness a crime). With friends, it's different. Part of what makes them my friends is precisely that I pay attention to how they fare and am willing to hold others to account if they stand in my friends' way. Jules can't be the passionate advocate of every Parisian, but if Jean makes cruel fun of Jim, Jules will be motivated to confront him. As in the story I started with, this extend to our friends themselves, perhaps particularly acutely: Seb gets angry with Mia when she stands in the way of realizing her own dreams.

Are we justified in valuing our friends and relationships in this way? I believe the burden of proof here is very much on the critic here. After all, it is plausible that at least attitude-dependent personal relationships do not even exist without being valued along the

lines I've sketched. Given their importance to making our lives worth living, I think we can safely assume that they are genuinely valuable, insofar as anything is valuable (Lord 2016).

#### **4. The Indispensability of Anger**

So far, I've argued that valuing other people and our relationships to them, as well as valuing ourselves in the mode of self-respect, grounds normative expectations that are manifest by the anger we feel when they are violated. When what we value is genuinely valuable, these normative expectations are appropriate and anger fitting. As I suggested in the introduction, these claims are denied by (at least some) Stoics, Neo-Stoics, Buddhists, and Daoists, who think that we should eradicate anger, insofar as possible, or at least let go of it as quickly as we can. Sometimes such criticisms acknowledge the link between valuing and anger, but maintain, as some Stoics do, that anger involves false value judgments – thinking that things are important when they're not. Since this is a dubious assumption when it comes to the value of persons and personal relationships, I'll leave such criticisms aside and focus on the important challenge that acknowledges we are right to value such things emotionally, but can and should do so without anger.

So, perhaps we – the (most likely) Western, educated readers of this paper – as a matter of fact get angry when the things that we rightly value are threatened or hurt, but is this really *necessary* for properly valuing them? Why couldn't we eliminate anger and just hold on to the nice bits of valuing? This challenge is raised, among others, by Owen Flanagan (2017) and Derk Pereboom (2006) in their recent work. Following David Wong (2006), Flanagan calls this alternative “detachment with resilience”. The idea is to be emotionally vulnerable to others, as required by caring attachment, but “in such a way that one is capable of responding to a loss without reverting to ‘bestial’ or infantile and incapacitating states” (2017, 201). So attitudes like love, sorrow, and forgiveness are in, but anger is out. Flanagan gives two kinds

of reasons for excluding anger in particular. The first has to do with its nature: it is “vengeful and spiteful”, “ugly and harmful”, and does not seek to “heal” (2017, 203). The second is that anger presupposes that the target is morally responsible in a way that Flanagan takes to be inconsistent with our embeddedness in the causal history of the universe.

This is an important challenge – why couldn’t we value something without being angry with those who seek to harm it? Well, first, I agree that there are *some* things that are properly valued without being disposed to anger. But I do claim that the value of the most precious things in our lives requires us to respond with anger in certain circumstances. Along these lines, Seth Shabo (2012) argues that to participate in intimate relationships, we have to ‘take it personally’ when the other does certain things – if our feelings don’t get hurt, we don’t really care. He then suggests that as a psychological matter of fact, “hurt feelings often beget resentment” (2012, 114). He explicitly presents this as a contingent matter. But I think there’s a stronger case to be made. One way to do so is to appeal to Helm’s (2001) notion that emotions involve commitment to further, congruent emotions in counterfactual situations insofar as they amount to construing their object as having value. This should be uncontroversial when it comes to what he calls *transitional commitments*, which govern the change of emotions over time (for example for fear to sadness, when something bad happens). More important for my purposes, however, are what he calls *tonal commitments*. As Helm puts it, “if one experiences a positive emotion in response to something good that has happened... then, other things being equal, one rationally ought to have experienced a negative emotion if instead what happened ... were something bad” (2001, 68).

Instead of ‘rational ought’, I prefer to say tonal commitments are *constitutive* of emotional evaluation – the existence of a coherent pattern is what makes one’s response one of caring or valuing. In any case, Helm himself observes that when fearing the destruction of a Ming vase amounts to construing it as important for one, one must be disposed to be angry

in the counterfactual situation in which someone callously breaks it (2001, 69). And there is, to be sure, a link to rationality: as Helm emphasizes, fear without the disposition to anger, relief, sadness, and other relevant emotions is an irrational response, because without susceptibility to such a broad pattern of emotions, one does not genuinely regard the target as worth caring about, and consequently manifests a kind of incoherence in fearing for it.

Similarly, gratitude for a kind act would be irrational, were one not disposed to be angry with a third party who punishes the kind person for her act.

To further support the claim that anger is involved in tonal commitments, let's recall the idea that anger is a way of caring about caring – holding others and ourselves to normative expectations. Other feelings offered as a substitute by critics, like sadness, do not in any way amount to appreciating that others have an insistent reason to act or refrain from acting in a certain way. If we remove anger from the picture, we're left without the 'must'-thoughts that are needed to properly value certain things and to stand in personal relationships. So it seems that we can't pry anger loose from the pattern of caring emotions: it is an integral, undetachable part of certain forms of warranted valuing. At least, the burden of proof is on the critic to show that we can adopt an emotional stance of valuing something in a way that involves normative expectations without being susceptible to emotions from the anger family.

Does this mean, then, that if we properly value things, we are required to be vengeful and spiteful, and make unwarranted assumptions about moral responsibility, as Flanagan suggests? Here Flanagan's view resembles that of Seneca (2010), who holds that anger is a kind of vengeful madness that is characteristically counterproductive and self-destructive. Martha Nussbaum's (2016) recent claims that anger aims either at irrationally settling imaginary cosmic scores or narcissistically raising one's relative status are in the same mold. In my view, these criticisms targeting the inherent nature of anger fail to distinguish between its different forms, and misconstrue its aims. While there is indeed something akin to madness

involved in rage, which defiantly throws prudence to the wind to symbolically destroy that which holds one trapped in an intolerable situation, not all forms of anger are like that. Nor does anger necessarily seek vengeance for a wrong. Rather, as I've suggested, mature forward-looking anger seeks to compel fulfilment of a normative expectation, which may be a perfectly legitimate aspiration. And there is nothing irrational or narcissistic about aiming to lower the status of those who have set themselves above others. Status is essentially relational and relative: for you to have higher status in the relevant sense is for you to be in a position to press your demands on others without reciprocity. There's no other way to get even except change your standing relative to others.

The issue of moral responsibility, in turn, is too big to be resolved here, but I do want to highlight two important points. First, one concern is that anger eliminativists exaggerate the requirements of accountability. Evidently, compatibilists are not going to agree that holding a person accountable is only warranted if he or she is “a self-initiating agent, a *causa sui*, demigod who is a prime mover himself unmoved” (Flanagan 2017, 167). Many (but not all) empirical studies suggest that ordinary people tend to disagree with these arguably inflated assumptions, in particular when it comes to concrete scenarios of wrongdoing.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the critique of anger I'm now considering must thread a fine line, since it allows for reactive attitudes like love and gratitude while disallowing anger. If these positive reactive attitudes can be warranted, it must be on the basis of the quality of will of the target, not just on the basis their actions or their effects. If someone does you a good turn because she calculates it will benefit her, she doesn't deserve your gratitude. If you have pleasant interactions with someone who secretly fantasizes about Donald Trump when you make love, they don't deserve your love. To merit positive reactive attitudes, people must do the right

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<sup>4</sup> See Nahmias 2011.

things for the right reasons, and their actions must be up to them in a way that, say, their bone structure isn't. So if people are not responsible for how they respond to their circumstances, it seems that not only negative but also positive reactive attitudes will have to go. You might say you love ice cream or your cleaning robot, but insofar as you express something more than liking them a lot, your feelings are sadly misplaced, for they are not trying to make you happy because they non-instrumentally care about you. To be sure, revisionists like Pereboom suggest that "Perhaps one can even be thankful for the sun or the rain even if one does not believe that these elements are backed by morally responsible agency." (2006, 201) But it is no accident that people very often express such feelings by saying things like "Thank God it's raining!", whether they're religious or not. Insofar as we have something akin to gratitude, we also have something akin to anthropomorphizing nature. So such ersatz gratitude doesn't show that we could have reactive attitudes without responsible agency.

## **5. Conclusion**

I get why people want to get rid of anger. It's very unpleasant when others are angry with you, especially when you think you didn't do anything wrong – which is most of the time for most of us. For our own part, getting angry can lead us to doing foolish things that we later regret, and while it can be deeply satisfying to successfully bring down the unjust and the selfish, such joy is not always available, and the feelings of anger themselves are unsettling. And I, too, think that we are, as a matter of fact, too angry. We err on the side of excess more than on the side of deficiency. Thinking about anger's link with valuing helps explain that, too. We tend to value some things too much, such as our own convenience and our own projects. Sometimes we value things in the wrong way, thinking that everyone has a reason to care about the things we care about even when they don't, and consequently hold them to account when we shouldn't. And even when it is right to value something, such as our

personal space, in a way that involves normative expectations, our anger can be excessive because it is insensitive to either the magnitude of the value involved, the harm or threat to it, or the degree of the target's moral responsibility. And finally, even when we're angry to the right extent at the right people at the right time in the best Aristotelian fashion, the action tendency of anger is apt to get out of hand and lead to causing disproportionate or even indiscriminate harm.

Yet the price to pay for eliminating mature anger would be too steep, and not just because it sometimes moves us to do the right thing when self-interest would urge meek acceptance. To respond properly to the value of people (and possibly other creatures), friendship, and love, at least, it is not enough if we reason and act in the right way. Our ethical and more broadly evaluative stance towards each other is constituted to a significant extent by the way we are disposed to feel. Without caring for each other, and without caring about caring, personal and possibly moral relationships cannot even exist. If what I've argued is along the right lines, we can't extricate feelings of anger from proper appreciation of such genuine values. We must be passionately motivated to make people conform to legitimate normative expectations, and to bring down those who have made an exception of themselves in the belief they can get away with impunity. You know who I'm talking about.

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