Review of Myisha Cherry's 'The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle' Oxford University Press. for Mind

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Cherry builds the case for rage that boomed in Audre Lorde's verse and prose. As perhaps Lorde's most accomplished intellectual heir, 'The Case for Rage' delivers a systematic vindication of anger's essential role in anti-racist struggle, where moral and productive anti-racist anger is named 'Lordean rage' after the poet, activist and teacher. The book is incredibly timely, offering the thorough investigation of political anger called for following the extensive uptake of the Black Lives Matter movement during the pandemic. The pandemic has, I think, made this book particularly timely for two reasons. First, for starkly revealing (again) which lives are on the front lines, and which are least valued, and secondly, for shutting down most of the distractions that could occupy the time and minds of potential allies. With the world (especially of the privileged) at a standstill, those gripped by profound outrage at the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were starved for ways to divert or subdue their anger. Many anguished at what to do about or with their rage. Cherry provides the answer. By combining philosophical rigor with accessible prose Cherry appeals to both 'academic and activist, the philosopher and citizen', delivering a methodical treatment of anger that is apt to change not just how we *think* about the emotion but what we *do* with it.

The book has two main parts. The first (chapters 1-3), is primarily theoretical, providing an account of anger, its normativity and defence against classic critiques. The second (chapters 4-6), is more applied, teaching us how best to put anger to use. Although not explicitly structured as such, 'The Case for Rage' can be read largely as a response to Nussbaum's (2016) 'Anger and Forgiveness', in which anger is condemned, even in cases of racial injustice. Rooted in the tradition of feminist philosophers that have argued for the intrinsic and instrumental value of anger in fighting oppression (Bell, 2009; Frye, 1983; hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1997), 'The Case for Rage' goes further than much existing work. First, by providing an analytic book-length treatment of the subject and second, by focusing specifically on the case of racial injustice, investigating the nature and role of anger in a context-specific manner that is bound to yield more faithful, as well as more fruitful, results.

Cherry begins by convincingly arguing that most work on anger paints it too broadly by characterizing the emotion as destructive and retributive. For Cherry this is far too simplistic and we should be careful to make out different varieties of anger. 'Anger' is used in a wide sense to encompass the full range of anger-related terms including indignation, resentment and rage (the latter term is used interchangeably with anger throughout). Cherry proposes to distinguish 5 (non-exhaustive but key) varieties of anger that arise in the context of racial injustice. These anger varieties differ along 4 dimensions: Target (the emotion's object); Action Tendency (typical behavioural manifestations); Aim (the agent's aim when in anger) and Perspective (the way of thinking from which anger arises). Four types of problematic anger are introduced: 1. *Rogue rage*. A response to injustice that targets and blames almost everyone somewhat indiscriminately. It aims to cause harm and its action tendencies are punitive and often violent. The perspective that informs this type of anger is nihilistic as no hope or aim for change is envisioned (ex: a young white man who, feeling angry and marginalized, joins a violent gang likely experiences Rogue rage). 2. *Wipe rage* blames racial 'others' for injustices (ex: unemployed white Americans who believe Mexicans are taking their jobs), and aims to eliminate them through a variety of actions (from immigration policies to hate crimes). Wipe rage is informed by a zero-sum-game attitude, where there must be winners and losers, and they want to ensure they/their group is at the

top. 3. *Ressentiment rage* targets dominant racial groups, often all members of this group indiscriminately, in response to injustice. This type of rage aims for revenge but includes an element of envy, desiring the power of those it is directed at (ex: the colonized who seeks revenge while coveting the colonizer's power). Its action tendencies include behaviour preoccupied with exacting revenge (literal or symbolic) as well a tendency to be defensive. The perspective of Ressentiment rage is one that takes the dominant group as the 'point of reference', defining themselves in relation, and acting in reaction, to them. 4. *Narcissistic rage* targets 'those who target me' individually. Unpreoccupied with others, its aim is justice for me alone, motivating behaviour that assert one's place within a particular hierarchy. This type of rage is informed by a perspective of exceptionalism and superiority, setting oneself apart from others.

5. *Lordean Rage*, Cherry's focus, differs from these 4 problematic types of political anger greatly. It is a response to racism that targets those who perpetuate or are complicit in racial injustice through their actions, attitudes and presumptions. Its aim it to change beliefs, expectations, policies and behaviours that support white supremacy through actions that absorb and 'metabolize' anger for this purpose. Lordean Rage is informed by an inclusive perspective that seeks justice for all, rather than for just myself or my particular group. This type of anger is not rare or exceptional, Cherry argues, it is a common occurrence that is not merely the purview of the super virtuous. Neither is it the purview of the racially oppressed alone, any and everyone can experience Lordean rage. This anger variety isn't just acceptable but essential for anti-racist struggle, as the rest of the book seeks to establish.

After sketching these different types of political anger, and granting that there will be mixed and borderline cases, Cherry moves, in chapter two, to discuss the normativity of anger. She distinguishes three distinct axes of normative assessment: correctness, appropriateness and fittingness. Correctness has to do with representational accuracy, whether the world really is as the emotion represents it. Fittingness, on the other hand, I take to be akin to justification, rage is fitting if it makes sense for the agent to feel anger, if they have reason or evidence of wrongdoing. Appropriateness is meant in the moral sense; an emotion can be correct and fitting yet inappropriate (ex: laughing at a genuinely funny joke would be inappropriate if you are at a funeral). For Cherry, Lordean rage is the only appropriate form of anger. It is also more likely to be correct than the other four types of anger for reasons I will tackle below. Crucially, Cherry does not think the intensity of Lordean rage should matter for its normative assessment. This is because, given the pervasive nature of racism, putative overreactions are explained by the buildup of countless encounters with racism, while putative underreactions are explained by the subject's need to regulate their anger in the face of constant reasons for rage.

In Chapter three Cherry tackles three important questions raised by anger's undeniable motivational force. First, what is it about anger in particular that makes it so motivational? Relying on empirical research Cherry characterizes anger as linked to high levels of eagerness to act as well as to optimism regarding potential outcomes and high levels of self-belief, where the agent feels 'powerful and capable' (p.69). These features combine to make anger extremely motivational even in cases like racial struggle, where progress hard to secure. The second and third questions tackled ask whether, granted its motivational role, anger is in the end actually counterproductive to the aim of justice, and relatedly, whether other emotions might be better suited to the pursuit of justice. These might be called the 'counterproductivity critique' (Srinivasan, 2018) and 'comparative critique' of anger respectively. Cherry counters both. On the former she highlights that it is plausibly not anger itself but its message that threatens its targets, and that defensive or otherwise counterproductive responses to anger are the responsibility of anger's targets rather than angry agents themselves. Part of the book's project is to build emotional capacities that will

help agents respond adequately to being the target of anger (such as differentiating different types of anger and learning to assess them against different axes).

In response to the comparative critique, Cherry highlights that positive emotions, such as love, are not only often counterproductive to the aims of justice (think of excessive nationalistic love for example), but they are not incompatible with anger. Indeed, some anger varieties, namely Lordean rage, may arguably express agape love by expressing concern for the moral well-being of all, including oppressors.

With these defenses against common critiques of anger on the table, the second part of the book explores in more detail how anger is essential to the fight for racial justice, using the theoretical work developed in the first half as its guiding framework. Chapter four outlines how racism can be fought not only through large organized political action but also through the often overlooked breaking of racial rules. Racial rules are propagated implicitly and explicitly through social and institutional norms, media and the law, they include feeling rules, which dictate who should feel which emotions and when, as well as cognitive and behavioural rules regarding what to believe and how to conduct oneself (p.94). Even without acting on one's anger, Lordean rage, in being felt and expressed, can break important racial rules. For example, the racial rule that 'Thou shall not have a right to white male anger' is generated by anger being a gendered as well as a racialized emotion. Anger will be considered more rational and acceptable of men as it fits with the male gender stereotypes of strength and aggressiveness while clashing with female gender stereotypes associated with care, humility and compassion. Similarly, it will be considered less rational of groups occupying inferior positions on racial hierarchies because they do not 'have enough value to warrant respect' (107). Lordean rage challenges this rule by asserting the value of all lives, by demanding respect and refusing to repress or replace one's emotion for another.

Chapters five and six provide practical guidance for putting anger to use. Chapter five is directed at would be allies and designed to 'help allies guard against using their Lordean rage in ways that reify the very racist system to which the anger is responding' (120). Cherry highlights four ways in which allies can fail: Taking the same feelings to equate to the same experience; Assuming that white anger matters more; Moral anger grandstanding; White Saviorism. The chapter provides guidelines for how to effectively avoid these pitfalls as an ally, including decentering oneself, one's anger and one's moral standing so as not to saturate platforms or detract from and derail the true aim of Lordean rage: change. In her final substantive chapter Cherry provides practical guidelines for anger management. She begins by critiquing popular anger management techniques as essentially techniques for suppressing, eliminating and subduing anger. Cherry's goal is to provide genuine anger management techniques, that is ones that do not aim to erase anger in the short-term but to keep Lordean rage 'appropriate, motivational, productive and resistant' (140) such that it can have positive long-term effects. Cherry's alternative anger management techniques include expression in the place of repression; finding allies to create communities of solidarity that can help assess anger's normativity; designating short-term goals so as to break-up the gargantuan task of structural change into small achievable parts and lastly: resisting external claims that anger is counterproductive, immoral or irrational.

I am very sympathetic to Cherry's project and optimistic about its achievements. I do not take the problems I will raise for the book to threaten its central tenants. Questions can be raised regarding the ontological status as well as the manner of individuating the anger varieties Cherry proposes (should we individuate emotion varieties by their intentional objects?) and, relatedly, whether Lordean rage might hold similar political value beyond the case of racial injustice (this seems plausible). I cannot take up these interesting issues here and have chosen to focus on two sets of concerns to which I now turn.

Fittingness, Correctness and Appropriateness.

Although in Chapter two Cherry helpfully distinguishes three distinct axes of normative assessment, in a manner accessible to a general audience, it is not clear exactly how they apply to the varieties of anger she introduces. This generates a number of theoretical questions and potential tensions that impact the practical import of these distinctions for Cherry's project.

1. Is Lordean rage more likely to be correct than other anger varieties?

Cherry thinks so. An initial question arises regarding what exactly is under comparison in this claim. One point that might help is to note that Cherry takes representations of the targets of anger to contribute to their correctness conditions: She takes it to be the case that Lordean rage can be 'fully correct' while Rogue and Wipe rage can only be correct in a mixed sense on account of blaming the wrong targets for injustices (indiscriminate agents and scapegoats respectively) (p.39). Although many anger varieties might represent injustice correctly then, they are incapable of being 'fully correct' due to blaming the wrong targets. We might think that Lordean rage is more likely to be correct than other anger varieties because it does not by stipulation blame the wrong targets. But if we are concerned with 'full correctness', then the claim that Lordean rage is 'more likely' to be correct than other types (such as Rogue or Wipe rage) seems misplaced as these forms of anger cannot be fully correct by stipulation. I assume, therefore, that what is being compared is the likelihood of correctness of those aspects of anger varieties that are capable of being correct in the first place (otherwise the possibility of comparison does not arise). What is being compared then seems to be the representation of racial injustice alone, as separate from the targets blamed (indeed this seems to be made explicit on p.39). The claim then seems to be that Lordean rage is more likely to correctly represent racial injustice than other anger varieties. Cherry takes this to be the case for two reasons: first, because Lordean rage most adequately reflects the frequency (and hence pervasiveness) of racism, and secondly, because it faces significant obstacles to uptake (pp.39-48).

On frequency, Cherry writes that 'frequency can improve one's epistemic viewpoint' (41). When considering whether an occurrence counts as a racist offence, having a larger sample size will help discern whether the features of a given occurrence match the criteria for racism. In so far as other varieties of anger also represent racial injustice however, it seems that frequency of offence would have as much bearing on the representational accuracy of Lordean rage as these other types of anger. One way out of this worry would be to hold that only Lordean rage correctly represents racial injustice. I return to this possibility and the problems it faces below.

The second argument for why Lordean rage is more likely to be correct is that it faces significant obstacles or resistance to uptake (i.e. it will be dismissed or fail to be understood). It is not clear to me why Lordean rage would face more significant obstacles to uptake than some of the other forms of anger nor exactly how this presumed fact bears on its representational accuracy. That Lordean rage would face more obstacles to uptake than Narcissistic rage seems right, as Narcissistic rage isn't really about racial injustice and makes things personal, demanding only very narrow retribution/rectification. A similar story might be told of Wipe rage, as a white supremacist society would likely be less resistant to this type of rage given that it condemns particular racial groups that the reigning order already places lower than whites on the racial hierarchy. For Ressentiment and Rogue rage however considerable resistance seems foreseeable. We are not given reasons to think that Lordean rage is met with more resistance than these anger varieties, and indeed one might think higher

resistance to them would be expected given their vindictive aims and wider scope targets. It also isn't entirely clear how issues of resistance to uptake bear on the representational correctness of emotions. The thought seems to be that the significant obstacles to uptake place an evidential burden on the enraged such that they must frequently revisit their evidence. However, we might insist that having or lacking an evidential burden doesn't directly impact representational accuracy itself, although it may well impact something distinct: our confidence in the correctness of our representations. This raises the concern that, as we can only aim for correctness via the evidence at our disposal, the distinction between correctness and fittingness may collapse from the first-personal perspective that is Cherry's focus. Granted that it is important to be able to point to evidence we take to be misleading as incorrect, in practice evidential burdens are unlikely to counter confirmation bias. If, as I have suggested, some problematic varieties of anger are likely to face significant, if not the most, resistance to uptake, the high evidential burden imposed on Ressentiment and Rogue ragers may lead them to become steadfast in their anger, ever more convinced of its correctness.

I find Cherry's final strategy for defending the correctness of Lordean anger the most convincing: 'the only thing left is to point to the facts' (p46). Pointing to the facts (including statistics on the reality and pervasiveness of racial injustice) however does not settle the worries I have raised in this section. If Rogue, Wipe and Ressentiment anger can be correct in representing racial injustice, then 'the facts' bear on their correctness as much as they bear on the correctness of Lordean rage.

A clear route out of all these problems would be to take Lordean rage to be the only anger variety that correctly represents racial injustice. The thought would presumably be that the other forms of anger fail to represent racism as adequately systemic and pervasive. In a sense I think Cherry might agree with this view (indeed it is one way of reading her), however endorsing this view would call for a revision of the normativity of her anger varieties. First, this would mean that only Lordean rage can be correct, even in a minimal sense of representing racial injustice (that is, leaving aside issues of the targets of blame). An alternative way of pushing the same view would be to hold that part of correctly representing injustice is to make correct types of blame attribution such that the very injustice being responded to is represented differently depending on what types of target are blamed. In either case, of the anger varieties that Cherry's taxonomy took to target racial injustice, only Lordean rage would emerge as capable of correctly representing injustice. This may be an undesirable outcome in that it risks denying that the other anger varieties are ways of (correctly) responding to systemic racism at all. Such a move would also leave a number of further issues unsettled.

2. What about Ressentiment Rage?

The move to deny that other anger varieties correctly represent racial injustice seems particularly undesirable when it comes to Ressentiment rage. This anger variety seems to adequately represent the systemic nature of racial injustice, construed independently to the targets blamed. Ressentiment might even be correct when its targets are included in its correctness conditions. Ressentiment rage fails to be 'fully correct' on Cherry's view presumably because it blames the wrong targets (all members of a dominant group). It isn't entirely clear to me that these targets are necessarily incorrect (for example, entire groups might unjustly benefit from privileges). Unfortunately, Ressentiment rage is not given much treatment in the book so it is unclear where Cherry would stand on this. This lack of treatment generates a related question regarding Ressentiment rage's status along another axis of normative evaluation: the moral axis. Lordean rage is presented as the only morally unproblematic variety of anger, but one could question why moral Ressentiment rage is

excluded here. For Ressentiment to be morally justified it would have to be morally permissible to blame an entire dominant racial group (ex: for benefitting from historical injustice), and revenge, including violence, would have to at times be morally justified. Neither seem entirely implausible to me and Cherry herself is clear that she believes there to be permissible cases of violence (p. 152). So the reader, and the activist, might understandably wonder why Ressentiment rage is never correct nor morally justified.

3. Is Lordean rage always fitting?

It isn't entirely clear whether Lordean rage is always fitting. Perhaps a more detailed account of how Cherry construes evidence would settle this, and other, worries, but currently it seems that if racism is as systemic and pervasive as we know it to be, then it is possible that Lordean rage turns out to always be fitting. Under white supremacy there will always be evidence of racial injustice available and in so far as we think misleading evidence can justify (incorrect) cases of anger, Lordean rage will be justified whenever the agent possesses apparent evidence of racial injustice: which is arguably always given its pervasiveness. The potential worry on a practical level is that agents or groups occupied with assessing their rage are permitted to invariably judge it to be justified/fitting.

Counterproductivity & the Received Retributive View of Anger

In chapter three Cherry skillfully works to dismantle anger's bad reputation with respect to its alleged counterproductivity, highlighting that factors independent to anger, including failures on the part of the targets of anger, rather than anger itself, are responsible for any potential counterproductivity. These efforts to exculpate anger are in my eyes well placed, but they do not speak directly against the counterproductivity critique, that is they do not establish that anger is actually productive. By way of positive defense of anger's productivity Cherry argues that anger can be very persuasive, and indeed some of the most effective black rights advocates used anger extremely well to this effect. While I agree with these claims, it might strike the reader as surprising that the author does not delve into empirical work that might speak directly against the counterproductivity and comparative critiques of anger. Indeed, these critiques are, as the author acknowledges, empirical ones, yet Cherry chooses to speak 'from the armchair' (p.77) on them, despite at other times in the book going beyond the armchair (relying on work from other disciplines including psychology, neuroscience, sociology and legal studies). Especially as the book is aimed at a wider audience, I think delving into the empirical literature could have helped make the third chapter stronger. This is because there is much evidence that speaks directly against both critiques of anger.

To mention a few, studies have shown that targets of anger often respond with support and understanding, as opposed to responding defensively or in a retaliatory manner (de Vos et al., 2013). Similarly, instead of feeling fear, targets of anger have been observed to experience empathy towards angry groups (de Vos et al., 2016). These results have been observed across a wide range of experimental settings: involving interpersonal cases of anger as well as inter-group cases where there is a history of entrenched conflict or oppression (Shuman et al., 2018). Studies also highlight anger as more effective at garnering support compared to neutral unemotional communications as well as communications that express positive emotions such as hope (Tagar et al., 2011). The counterproductivity and comparative critiques of anger are, then, unlikely to withstand empirical scrutiny (Silva, 2021c).

The empirical work also helps illustrate how Lordean rage may combat another layer of racial injustice that goes unmentioned in the book. The empirical work highlights that context is key to determining how anger unfolds. Two key contextual moderators are:

whether the angry party perceives their targets as willing to change and whether the targets of anger perceive the anger of wronged groups to be justified. Angry agents have been found to behave retributively and aggressively typically only when other options have been exhausted and they perceive themselves to be in 'nothing to lose' scenarios characterized by targets that are unwilling to change and who do not give anger uptake (van Zomeren et al., 2004). Severely oppressive societies seem to have much in common with 'nothing to lose scenarios': targets of anger will not be disposed to see the anger of the oppressed as justified (indeed historical data depicts groups at the lower end of social hierarchies as either incapable of anger, as they have no honour in need of defense, or violent and animalistic in their rage (Freedman, 1998)) nor will oppressed groups perceive their oppressors as willing to change. Oppressive conditions then may in effect turn anger hostile, as these conditions correlate with retributive aggressive anger. I have argued that the received view of anger is not only guilty of being too general and unspecific but of perpetuating the injustices to which it responds (Silva, 2021a, 2021b). It is plausible that the received retributive view of anger became mainstream not just because oppressive conditions have historically been widespread, making violent anger more prominent, but also because it is in the interest of those who wish to maintain the status quo that anger be seen as inherently vindictive and violent, so that widespread dismissal of anger is promoted, and the status quo remains unchanged. By characterizing and promoting Lordean rage, Cherry fights racial injustice in this additional way in my eyes, that is by countering the received retributive view of anger which has itself plausibly been molded by racist and sexist forces.

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