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"It is Humanising to Resist It with Rage": Getting Angry at Social Injustices as a Subjective and Political Reassessment of Oneself

Ella Butel-Gans; Independent researcher, France; alleletub@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Recent philosophical contributions have underlined the epistemic value of anger experienced at social injustice (Romano 2018; Srinivasan 2018; Cherry 2021). These publications participate in opposing and refuting the traditional philosophical argument according to which anger would be an obstacle to the elaboration of any rational thinking or set of claims concerning political life, in which social injustice occupies a central role.

The victims of social injustice are constantly denied respect, recognition, and apology, as well as any form of epistemic or political participation that would threaten the *status quo* of their oppression. In this regard, the experience of self-respect, the acquisition of further knowledge about one's social situation, and the expression of one's political demands of respect are essential features of resistance to oppression. They are *humanising* experiences, in the sense that they restore one's essential dignity, abilities, and rights as a subject.

Therefore, in line with the contemporary efforts to question the potential role of emotions in one's opposition to injustice, this paper argues that the experience of anger at social injustice is humanising, as it enacts a subjective and political reassessment of oneself as entitled to respect, capable of appropriate emotions, and legitimate in opposing present and future wrongs.

Keywords: anger, social injustice, self-respect, epistemic feelings, oppression

1. Introduction

Recent philosophical contributions have underlined the epistemic value of the emotion of anger experienced at injustices of a political nature.[1] Among them, Benedetta Romano (2018) has exposed the role of emotions' evaluative knowledge in one's political sensibility and commitment; Amia Srinivasan (2018) has detailed the aptness of anger in responding to injustice and the distinctive value of feeling angry at injustices compared to grasping them in a mere rational way; and Myisha Cherry (2021) has advocated for the essential role of rage in the anti-racist struggle and underlined its epistemic potential. These publications participate in opposing and refuting the widespread political idea and traditional philosophical argument according to which anger would

[1] among other advocates of anger's epistemic political gains, see hooks (1995) and Lorde (1997).

be an obstacle to the elaboration of any rational thinking or set of claims concerning political life, in which social injustice occupies a central role.

Typically, the philosophical literature which supports the value of emotions in political matters addresses the latter through the lens of social injustice. Broadly speaking, social injustice is a system of injustices which is based on constructed hierarchies elaborated within constructed social characteristics (such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, origin, etc.). Social injustice targets the social groups and individuals who bear non-dominant social characteristics (such as Black women, trans men, immigrants from the Global South in a Western country, etc.) in both retributive and recognitional ways (Fraser 2005). In this paper and elsewhere, such injustice is also referred to as *systemic*, to emphasise its hegemony and heterogeneity. Indeed, unlike incidental, "bad luck" forms of injustice which can also occur in social relations, social injustice interferes with the victims' subjectivities, opportunities, and relations, in every aspect of their lives.[2]

One of the essential features of social injustice is that it is always hidden under the label of "natural," "normal," or "incidental," and is therefore not discussed, recognised, or acted on. Its manifestation in interpersonal wrong, endemic violence, or epistemic exclusion is either masked as unfortunate or minimised as unproblematic. Furthermore, the victims of social injustice are constantly denied respect, recognition, and apology, as well as any form of epistemic or political participation that would threaten the *status quo* of their oppression. They are thus structurally deprived of essential components of what makes one a *subject* in relation to others: capacity for self-respect, entitlement to respect, recognition, reparation, and equal access to collective discussion about one's experience and conception of justice and injustice. Consequently, the experience of self-respect, the acquisition of further knowledge about one's social situation, and the expression of one's political demands of respect are essential features of resistance to oppression. I coin such experiences as *humanising*, in the sense that they restore one's essential dignity, abilities, and rights as a subject.[3] They can also be conceived of as necessary conditions for engaging in an active and efficient struggle against social injustice. Indeed, it is only when one truly believes in and assesses one's humanity through one's entitlement to expression, equality, and respect, that one can fully engage in political action.[4]

Therefore, in line with the contemporary efforts to continue questioning the potential role of emotions in epistemic and political participation, and in one's opposition to injustice, this paper argues that the experience of anger at social injustice is humanising, as it enacts a subjective and political reassessment of oneself as entitled to respect, capable of appropriate emotions in regard to one's social situation, and legitimate in opposing present and future wrongs. I thereby wish to contribute to the ongoing reflection on the epistemic value of political angers by examining the distinctive, humanising potentials of feeling anger at social injustice, and by arguing that such humanising abilities are essentially political.

To do so, I will first explore the ability anger bears to relocate oneself in the present of the wrong and to (re) assess one's domain of respect. I will begin by summarising the usual argument of anger's counterproductivity, and will propose an alternative framing of what is considered productive in the realm of social injustice (2.1). I will then explain how exposure to social injustice itself makes it difficult for victims of such wrongs to feel

2. The "bad luck" expression is borrowed to Miranda Fricker's typology of injustices (2007).

3. The word "humanising," throughout this paper, is to be understood as referring to what shapes, restores, or affirms one's existence as a *subject.* I do not mean, by using this term, to draw a natural or essential opposition between humans and non-human beings or to suggest that the latter would be unentitled to respect, recognition, repair, nor some sort of political participation.

4. If, when speaking of the political value of anger, one primarily has in mind anger which emerges from one's own experience of injustice, rather than from witnessing injustice being inflicted upon others, I believe feeling angry at a social injustice that one doesn't suffer from, but only witnesses, can also bear subjective and epistemic values that are similar to the ones I will explore in this paper.

angry at their experience (2.2). From there, I will proceed to an analysis of anger's reconnecting ability (2.3) and examine the (re)assessment of one's entitlement to respect that is entailed by the emotion (2.4). This will lead me to explore, in the subsequent section, one's affective understanding of one's own position within an oppressive social world. Following three analytical steps, I will demonstrate how the epistemic dimension of experiencing anger is both a cause and an effect of the politicisation of one's life (3.1). I will proceed by arguing that anger further reassesses oneself in the social world by making one aware and in control of one's ability to judge wrongdoers and their actions (3.2). Finally, I will expose how the very expectation of one's expression of anger completes the apprehension of oneself in relation to others and enables one to envision the disruptive potential of one's emotions (3.3).

2. Anger's Reconnecting Ability and the Appreciation of Oneself as Worthy of Respect

To initiate this section on anger's potential to restore one's self-respect, I will explain the most common critique of expressions of anger at social injustice. This will allow me to introduce the topic of the oppressed's self-respect as a blind spot in the way that political angers are usually framed and addressed.

2.1 Beyond the Question of Counterproductivity: Questioning Anger's "Psychic Possibilities"

The main argument against the expression of anger at social injustice is that the emotion would be counterproductive to the aims pursued by the subject who displays it.

Amia Srinivasan (2018), in questioning the aptness of anger in responding to social injustice, casts this argument as the "counterproductivity critique." She examines its tenets in the works of Martha Nussbaum, whose reflections encompass the most common features of both traditional and contemporary critiques of political anger. I will not go into a detailed account of the counterproductivity critique of anger, as it is not of direct interest for my present reflection, but I will outline its main features. Most philosophers and other individuals who dismiss anger's political legitimacy rely on the emotion's alleged counterproductivity, and formulate a political warning to angry activists for social justice: their anger will undermine their struggle instead of benefitting it. The argument is that anger bears essential traits, or core ideas—such as the desire for payback and a focus on downgrading the wrongdoer's social status—which make the emotion ineffective regarding the injustice it denounces, and even counterproductive in the struggle for justice. Because such intentions, entailed in the emotion's very nature, are both inapt to correct the harm inflicted and normatively flawed, anger is necessarily counterproductive in situations of injustice. Anger is not only cast as irrational, but also as severely damaging to the struggle for justice: Nussbaum (2016) explains that, in the political realm, expressing anger is likely to dissuade potential allies from joining the cause, to be the occasion for repressive policies aiming to shut down people's rage, and to enforce stereotypes surrounding minorities and activism.

Regardless of whether anger's expression is indeed counterproductive or not, there is a further question in what Martha Nussbaum, as well as the other critics of anger's political potential, consider to be valuable in the opposition to injustice.[5] In other terms, it seems that the value of one's political expression is calculated

[5] I sympathise with Srinivasan's remark on how to convincingly evaluate whether anger has or has not been politically productive in a restricted sense: "The question of whether, on the whole, anger has been politically productive or counterproductive in the long struggle against oppression is an empirical question, and one that cannot be settled from the philosopher's armchair. Certainly it cannot be settled by a handful of historical cases that are all too easily treated as liberal fairy tales about the power of civility" ("Would Politics Be Better Off Without Anger?" *The Nation*, November 30, 2016, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/a-righteous-fury/).

based on the effects that this expression will have on the overall unjust configuration of the world. Yet, one could argue that one's contestation of injustice can be politically valuable at the prior level of one's ability to express oneself, to voice one's emotions, to think of oneself as a political subject and to act accordingly. In other words, experiencing the ability to identify and express oneself as a full, legitimate political subject can be considered enough to make such experience politically constructive. Let's imagine that one's anger at an instance of injustice was met with further disrespect, hostility, and/or repression, but was nevertheless the occasion for one to experience one's own political voice for the first time. Would it still be considered counterproductive? How about if one's expressed anger, regardless of the sanction it would be met with, had resonated with a witness who would thereby foster a new sensitivity to similar instances of social injustice? To challenge the common, widespread opposition to anger, there is no need to go through the everlasting debate of whether disruptive modes of expression are destructive or productive forms of political participation. Instead, one could shift the focus and ask: what do we consider to be politically productive? Does the value of political protest depend solely on the effective realisation of the tangible, material, or legal advances that this protest demands? Aren't the transgression of affective injustice (Srinivasan 2018) and challenges to epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) already political themselves?

Arguing against the counterproductivity argument, Amia Srinivasan formulates an objection which I consider to be a good starting point for reflecting on the humanising potential entailed in the experience of one's anger. She writes that "it is perhaps similarly naïve to think anger contains no salutary psychic possibilities for someone whose self-conception has been shaped by degradation and hatred" (2018, 126). Srinivasan interestingly establishes a connection between the perception that the oppressed have of themselves, which has been shaped by dominant narratives of being worthless and voiceless—and what the emotion of anger may generate in one's psyche. In other words, Srinivasan seems to argue here that feeling anger counterbalances the deprecation instilled in the oppressed, through which they see and consider themselves to a certain extent. This suggests that anger could play a role in healing self-hatred, simply by providing the person who feels it with a sense of their own worth that challenges and contradicts how they have learned to think of themself. Similarly, while bell hooks argues for the uses of Black rage in the struggle against racism, she affirms that "racial hatred is real. And it is humanising to be able to resist it with militant rage" (1995, 17). hooks' reflections already draw a connection between oppression, its influence on one's self-perception, and the humanising ability of anger to replace hatred with some sort of self-respect. In the following paragraphs, I will show the ways in which anger, when experienced at social injustice and from a situation of oppression, bears several distinctive and politically valuable humanising abilities.

2.2 On the Obstacles to Feeling Angry in Situations of Oppression

However, before further investigating the humanising abilities entailed by feeling anger at social injustice, I should emphasise the inherent difficulty of feeling angry at social, systemic injustice.

To do so, I will rely on Naomi Scheman's (1993) paper, and particularly on the case of Alice, the fictive character she elaborates on to exemplify her thesis. Alice is an American woman in the '80s; she is a mother, lives in a normal heterosexual marriage, and fulfils what society expects from her given her gender. Alice might feel frustrated about staying at home while her husband is working; she might feel tired of taking care of everyone and everything with no reward or recognition. Even as Alice believes she owns everything she needs to make her happy and fulfilled, she still experiences constant dissatisfaction with her life. She feels guilty for feeling unhappy while her situation is all of what a woman of her age could expect; she usually blames her period, believes her husband when he says she's moody, and constantly overcomes her negative emotions without

properly identifying them or considering their value. The ability of Alice, and of any victim of social injustice, to *express* and even to *feel* anger at her situation prior to any politicisation is largely inhibited by the very nature of social injustice. On the one hand, if we conceive that her situation would eventually lead her to feel angry, it is easy to imagine she would probably *resist* her anger because gendered feeling rules (Hochschild 1979) taught her, throughout her life, that she should not be angry. As Scheman writes, indeed, the ability to identify and name one's emotions is "less an individual achievement than a social recognised right, and, as such, people with social power tend to have more of it" (28). Expecting her anger to be mocked, blamed, or simply ignored, Alice would also likely *repress* the expression of her emotion. This is, in essence, what Amia Srinivasan coins as affective injustice: "victims of injustice often face a conflict between getting aptly angry at injustice, and bettering (or at least not worsening) their situations" (2018, 131). Thus, the political and unjust nature of what she experiences would likely remain unaddressed due to the affective injustice which prevents Alice, along with other women, from freely experiencing and expressing anger and its claims.

On the other hand, even prior to repressing anger, Alice might *not get angry* at all. Why would she, when everything she is and does is in line with what she *should* be and *should* do to be happy? In this text, Scheman questions Alice's ability to get angry at the gendered contingencies which determine and shape her life. To make the point clearer, one could wonder: would Alice even be able to feel angry at, for instance, her husband's constant and insistent demands for sex? Analysing the status of such an experience—considered here as a typical instance of social injustice—in Alice's life, amounts to outlining the main features of social injustice and grasping its induced perversity. The experience is *recurrent*—the same scenario being reproduced frequently. It is also *common*—some of Alice's friends having told her they were experiencing the same thing. It is even *banal*—with advertisements and TV shows normalising the representation of a docile wife who is either happy or indifferent about her sexuality. These three dimensions of the experience actively inhibit its framing, by anyone, as an instance of injustice. During Alice's lifetime, sexual duty to one's husband has always been, is, and will always be presented and thought of as a given. Never (or never loudly enough for it to become common knowledge) has this dynamic been framed as the unjust product of a binary, gendered vision and division of sexual roles within heterosexual marriages. Yet it could have been otherwise: Alice, her friends, and female characters from the pop culture of the time would have good reasons to experience anger at such a situation and to refuse giving up their desire for the sake of the heterosexual norm. But if the experience is *hard to grasp as an instance of injustice*, and *thus to hard feel angry about*, it is precisely because it is presented as a necessity, like any social norm. Indeed, social injustice is maintained unaddressed through an associated system of *hermeneutic injustice* (Fricker 2007).[6] This system is structured around the alleged normality of injustice, the structural rejection of criticism of the norms and systems of power, and the inhibition of individual and collective reflexivity. It prevents victims of oppression from understanding the political nature of what they endure. Thus, it makes it even harder to believe and to feel that anger is a possible and legitimate response to such experiences. In brief, in a society where members of socially oppressed groups learn that they must silently accept injustice and violence as the normal state of the world, it is simply difficult for them to feel angry about what they endure.

6. There is hermeneutical injustice whenever someone lacks the words, concepts, tools, to understand an aspect of their experience, and when such lack is not only imputable to the subject's weak interpretive ability but to a collective deficit of conceptual knowledge regarding this very social experience. History abounds with examples of hermeneutical injustice, such as the inability of women to understand the ongoing remarks and jokes they endured at work as *sexual harassment* due to the absence of such a category in both legal and social vocabulary before its conceptualisation in the 1980s (Fricker 2007, ch. 7).

This section has proven one's experience of anger, as well as its identification as such, to be largely inhibited by the very systems of oppression which impoverish and weaken the emotional range and expressions of the oppressed. Yet in this paper I investigate the humanising potential of feeling angry at social injustice because I acknowledge, along with many contemporary philosophers, that anger can still find its way into a subject's experience of oppression.[7] I will therefore proceed by examining what anger produces, epistemically and subjectively, when experienced at a social injustice.

2.3 "It Revived Within Me a Sense of My Own Manhood": Anger's Reconnecting Ability

The sections above showed that a central feature of social, systemic injustice is that it negates one of the main components of the oppressed person's humanhood—their subjectivity—and that such negation strongly relies on an ongoing alienation from their emotional responses to wrongs (Cherry 2021; hooks 1995; Scheman 1993). Therefore, enduring injustice often means being estranged from one's emotional life and struggling with the experience of certain emotions considered excessive, ridiculous, or violent. Suffering oppression, as seen in the first section, also has consequences for one's self-esteem and confidence: the perceptions of oneself as unworthy of respect, justice, and unconstrained emotional expression are interiorised over time, and limit one's possible responses to injustice.

It is thus striking to note that first-person testimonies of social injustice often highlight that the experience of anger bears what I call a *reconnecting ability*. In other words, it seems that anger has the potential to make one aware of one's affectivity while one, in situations of oppression, is expected to passively and uncritically endure any sort of wrong. Amia Srinivasan addresses this matter: she blames Nussbaum for not taking into consideration the numerous works which demonstrate the psychic value of anger for victims of injustice, nor quoting anyone who has argued in favour of the empowering dimension of anger. Nussbaum indeed raises the question of anger's effects on one's self-esteem, yet she affirms that "following the lead of anger and its promise of self-respect is usually counterproductive" (2016, 107) and that "anger looks like a childish and weak response, not an expression of self-respect" (119). For Nussbaum, because rational beings are expected to contain their negative emotions, or to favour forgiveness over rage, displaying anger at injustice amounts to a failure in one's self-respect. Yet on the contrary, many philosophers have shown anger to be an actualisation and an affirmation of self-respect.

The *reconnecting ability* firstly refers to anger's potential to revive one's sense of one's own presence and affectivity. Céline Leboeuf explores this dimension in her phenomenological study of anger as a political emotion. Relying on texts by Fanon and Yancy, through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's concept of focal disappearance, Leboeuf argues that anger at racism counters the internalisation of the dominant white gaze which alienates Black people from their embodiment and subjectivity. She explains that both testimonies of the emergence and expression of anger at racism testify to the emotion's ability to "wrest [both subjects] from the disorientation and incapacitation that the white gaze provokes" (2017, 52). This is so because anger is described as a grounding emotion, which provides subjects with an embodied sense of their worth and of the seriousness of the wrong, thereby turning them *present* to the situation and *aware* of the injustice. When one feels anger, indeed, one responds to the present situation in a direct emotional way—the sudden, overwhelming nature of the emotion makes it hard to ignore. One suddenly feels agitated, the heartbeat accelerates, the body gets tense and the temperature rises, all of which forces the subject to experience how the situation affects them.

7. I leave unaddressed in this paper the question of how anger can indeed be experienced in situations of oppression. Yet in the following section, a paragraph will develop on one possible means by which one can learn to identify anger as such, or even to feel it: the collective sharing of common experiences, in an environment where unconstrained emotional expression is guaranteed.

Anger therefore bears an ability to make someone present to themselves again, despite the possible alienation induced by being repeatedly wronged in both one's body and subjectivity.

Anger also reconnects the person to their humanhood by making them aware of how they are affected by their environment—one is no longer an object of unjust gazes, contacts, and remarks, but becomes a subject who is able to feel such instances of injustice and to feel them as wrong. Acknowledging anger is part of a larger subjective process that everyone can go through, which consists of identifying one's emotions and learning how to express them, despite feeling rules and the expected rejection of one's emotions by others. If this process is not in itself of a political nature, it becomes so when addressing the virtues of anger in situations of social injustice in particular. Indeed, while physical and emotional alienation are essential components of racial oppression, Leboeuf concludes that such potential to reconnect a subject not only to their embodiment and affectivity, but also to the value and legitimacy of these experiences, is deeply humanising and intrinsically political.

Indeed, beyond this embodied relocation that the experience of anger allows, the emotion can also reconnect with a deeper level within oneself, by providing one with a sense of self-worth. Relying on both Audre Lorde and the writer and former slave Frederick Douglass, Macalester Bell (2009) shows that, throughout history, anger often helped oppressed subjects gain awareness of their own worth, while altogether reframing their experiences as unjust. She quotes Douglass, who recalls the emergence of his anger at his enslaved condition in these terms: "It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free" (1997, 79; quoted in Bell 2009). This quote points to the idea that anger, being the embodied experience of having been wronged, altogether consists of the embodied awareness of one's entitlement to being treated right.

In one's feeling of anger, one recognises oneself as a subject whose worth has been dismissed by the very wrong to which one's anger responds. Anger is therefore an emotion which can reconnect one not only with one's embodiment, but also with one's subjectivity, and which therefore counters the physical and psychic alienation induced by systems of oppression. These two aspects of anger's reconnecting ability constitute one of the emotion's humanising potentials, and bear an essential political nature. Indeed, anger is here shown to help one become aware of one's embodiment, of one's present situation, and of the injustice one has experienced. As such, anger opposes the dehumanising project of oppression, which relies on the oppressed's physical alienation in situations of heightened injustice or violence, on their confusion regarding their emotions, and on their inability to think and name injustice as such. In an embodied and straightforward way, anger can provide one with a new comprehension of oneself and of the wrong, which does not rely on words or concepts but is nonetheless real and effective. Not only is the experience of one's anger in a situation of oppression humanising, as it allows one to become consistent with oneself and to embrace one's affective presence, but such humanising potential is also already politically significant, as victims of social injustice are constantly estranged from their sensations and emotions and therefore left unable to identify and denounce injustices.

This section has detailed the first humanising potential of feeling angry at social injustice: anger bears a reconnecting ability which overcomes the physical and emotional alienation usually induced by enduring social injustice. Such reconnecting ability can lead a person to experience themself as an affective subject, in a situation where their subjectivity and embodiment are typically being neglected by others. Feeling angry therefore enables one to resist at least one aspect of social injustice: the affective and physical alienation of the oppressed.

2.4 Getting Angry as Affirming One's Domain of Respect

The reconnecting ability of anger is a first aspect of its humanising, political value—it occurs affectively, at the level of a given instantiation of social injustice, and allows the subject, through the experience of their physical and affective presence, to wrest themself from the alienation induced by oppression. The question I would like to raise now is how such reconnecting ability may lead to further, broader understanding and affirmation of oneself as entitled to respect, beyond the mere *feeling* that one is worth such respect.

How anger enhances self-respect is the core topic of Marilyn Frye's "Note on Anger" (1983). For Frye, anger arises as a response to an offence and implies the identification of the one who is thought to be responsible for such offence. The emergence of anger therefore relies on the gap between one's expectation of how one should be treated and the reality of how one *is* being treated. When a subject is treated in a way that fails to meet their expectations, they become angry and hold the agents of the mistreatment accountable for not having met the standards of treatment they thought themself to deserve. From this framework, Frye concludes that anger is appropriate whenever what one expects, but does not experience, is *respect*. Not only is anger legitimate when it entails a claim for respect, but also, any anger that is legitimate is a claim of one's domain of respect. I should explain what Frye has in mind here: for the philosopher, appropriate angers (those which arise from an experience of disrespect) consist of the acknowledgment, affirmation, and demand for the respect of one's domain, i.e., one's limits, possessions, rights, and abilities. In being angry, identifying this anger and expressing it, one becomes aware of what should have been respected but has been neglected. This idea recalls Myisha Cherry's case for the positive epistemic load of anger (see Cherry 2021, ch. 2): just as anger appreciates justice in its absence, it also appreciates one's worth and right to respect whenever this right is being negated.[8]

Anger therefore appears to be a straightforward clarification of one's sense of oneself as a subject who deserves respect and justice. How is that so? If Frye is implying that anger at disrespect essentially contains an acknowledgement of self-respect and a claim for respect, she does not further develop *why* the emotion bears such potential. In my view, anger's potential to enhance self-respect is precisely to be found in the emotion's reconnecting ability, which was examined in the previous section. Indeed, the fact that anger, when felt at an instance of injustice, relocates oneself in the interaction, revives one's sense of embodiment, and reactivates one's affectivity, conditions one's apprehension of oneself as worthy of respect. It is through one's grasping oneself as present, embodied, and affected, that one comes to experience and acknowledge both one's subjectivity and the consequent demand for respect that it entails. Anger not only *arises* from the lack of respect, but it also *makes that lack of respect perceptible* to the person who experiences it. One's anger clarifies one's being as a subject; such subjectivity is threatened by the experience of injustice; one's anger is therefore altogether an expression of one's self-respect and a demand for one's subjectivity to be respected.

It is important to note that while one's domain of respect could be thought to mainly concern one's physical and psychological integrity, Frye writes that a person's "attention, her confidence, her sense of well-being, her freedom to speak her mind, her access to knowledge and skills, are all matters within her domain" (87). This passage is interesting, because it points to the various ways in which one can suffer from a social injustice: one can be wronged in one's self-esteem, social abilities, health, freedom of speech, epistemic agency, and so on. Thus, one can feel anger at, for instance, doubting oneself, being told to stay silent, or being deprived from

8. "Lordean rage is a way of appreciating racial justice in the sense of recognizing its worth. Just as anger registers injustice, it also expresses that there is a better choice, a better alternative. Apt Lordean rage appreciates racial justice by recognizing it when it is not there. . . . In being angry at that which we want to overthrow (injustice), rage points to something that is worth having" (2021) (53).

gaining and sharing knowledge. In each case, the very fact of feeling angry strengthens one's awareness of one's domain of respect. As Frye phrases it,

> To get angry is to claim implicitly that one is a certain sort of being, a being which can (and in this case does) stand in a certain relation and position *à propos* the being one is angry at. One claims that one is in certain ways and dimensions *respectable.* (90)

This leads me to mention here the existence and importance of typical cases in which the reconnecting ability of anger is partly or fully inhibited. If one's ability to recognise and feel anger at injustice enables the clarification of one's affectivity and unconditional right to respect, then the lack of (proper identification of) anger at injustice can be understood as a sign of one's serious alienation. Indeed, if one is not able to be angry when inflicted an injustice, it means one does not consider oneself to be worth the respect and justice which such injustice deprives one of. I have argued in the second section that situations of oppression precisely complicate one's ability to feel angry at injustices: the oppression might be internalised to a degree where the very feeling of anger at instances of injustice is inhibited. In this first context, one experiences social injustice through ongoing alienation from one's physical and affective sensitivity to wrongs. One can also experience anger but decide, even unconsciously, not to trust the emotion's legitimacy, nor to give it any credit or uptake. One therefore overlooks the claims for (self-)respect entailed in the emotion, and silences anger instead of embracing it. In this second case, habituation to feeling rules and affective silencing leads one to fail to experience anger's subjective claims. The emotion might reconnect oneself to one's bodily and affective presence when experiencing an instance of injustice, but such reconnection is restricted and does not culminate in the recognition of oneself as entitled to respect.

A third obstacle I see to anger's reconnecting potential, and to its subsequent reassessment of oneself as worthy of respect, is one's inability to properly understand the status and value of such reconnection. Indeed, if one has been habituated into believing that anger is evil and violent, or that emotions are necessarily irrational and misleading, then one could experience one's own anger as dangerous, explosive, or delusional. Therefore, the reconnecting potential of anger would be cancelled by one's previous beliefs regarding the emotion: when experienced, the anger would be grasped as a further confirmation of one's weak rationality, over-sensitivity, and propensity for excessive reactions. This third example makes it clear that reconnection to one's body, affectivity, and self-respect is a *potential* that anger bears, rather than a necessary trait of the emotion that would be displayed any time a person experiences anger at social injustice. The actualisation of such reconnecting ability therefore carries the prerequisites that the subject feels angry at injustice; that they are connected and attentive to such emotion when it arises; and that they trust its legitimacy and acknowledge its claims for respect. Under such conditions, feeling angry can rescue one from the passive endurance of the unjust situation: the emotion allows one, on the one hand, to grasp oneself as a subject while the wrongdoer participates in one's dehumanisation, and on the other, to reassess one's domain of respect while the injustice functions as a negation of one's rights and dignity.

In sum, this section has exposed that anger is, under certain conditions, able to reconnect the person who experiences it to their embodied and affective existence and unconditional value, while social injustice continues to threaten or negate the affectivity and subjectivity of the oppressed.

3. Three Moments of Anger's Role in Reassessing One's Social Situation

Anger bears the potential to restore one's own sense of being a subject through one's embodied and affective experience of social injustice; this reconnection may lead one to grasp one's legitimate right to respect as a subject. This humanising potential of anger also transcends one's present situation: being reconnected to one's subjectivity and to the actuality of the wrong endured paves the way for a critical understanding of oneself, of others, and of one's experience as essentially tied to social injustice. Anger in situations of oppression is not only an affective experience, but also an epistemic one: the emotion may lead subjects to acknowledge and act upon the political dimension of their situation. This ability, which this section will explore, falls under the humanising potentials of anger as understood in this paper. Indeed, one's critical understanding of one's social existence, and one's partaking in the definition and denunciation of such social relations of power, are essentially humanising, as they enforce one's self-confidence, epistemic agency, and political participation. These abilities strengthen one's subjective and collective sense of humanhood by consolidating one's chance to live a respected and just life despite injustices, and by enhancing one's capacity to interact with others and to make them understand one's emotions and experiences.

In this section, I therefore wish to insist on the epistemic aspect of anger's potential in reassessing oneself as a subject. What I will question here is how anger allows one to grasp one's situation in the social world, and in which ways such understanding is politically valuable. Specifically, I will argue that getting angry helps one to assess one's equal entitlement to justice against and despite social injustice, and to gain further knowledge about the political dimension of one's emotions by acknowledging how other people consider and respond to one's anger. This section will be organised into three moments, which correspond to analytical distinctions rather than to the actual temporality of anger's identification and expression. Indeed, anger's identification and expression often occur simultaneously and generate simultaneous epistemic, subjective, and political appraisals.

3.1 Feeling Angry as "Changing the Nature of One's Situation"

The experience of getting angry at an injustice allows for a reassessment of oneself as socially situated, which occurs in three analytical steps—the first is the political understanding of one's experience, which is sometimes entailed in feeling angry at social injustice.

To illustrate this aspect, and to thereby present one central way for a victim of injustice to *start either feeling angry, or understand one's past emotions as anger*, I continue to rely on Scheman, who goes on imagining that her fictive character Alice happens to participate in a consciousness-raising group organised by and for women.[9] Listening to their anger and witnessing their ability to identify this emotion, to name and endorse it freely and without guilt, Alice not only meets people with whom she shares experiences and a social position. She also strikingly discovers that some women react to such shared experiences with an anger that they consider legitimate. While she used to silence her own emotion and believe she should not be angry, Alice begins to understand that anger emerges from situations which other women find equally revolting despite having repeatedly been told that they were normal, acceptable, or even desirable. With the help of others, and in

[9] In the 1970s consciousness-raising groups emerged, in which women gathered to share their experiences of domination. In addition to the therapeutic effect of speaking out and recounting traumatic events, these consciousness-raising groups were and still are important analytical tools for recognising the structural dimension of gender inequalities and sexual violence. In 1979, two nurses in psychology wrote an article in which they encouraged their peers to rally to the feminist cause and movement; the paper provides a clear explanation of the purposes and value of consciousness-raising groups and highlights the importance of anger in such gatherings, arguing that "anger is an important, necessary, and productive aspect of a CR group" (Randolph and Ross-Valliere 1979).

the framework of the consciousness-raising group which functions as an alternative realm of interpretation of emotions, Alice redefines certain emotions that she has experienced and still experiences as anger, and reconsiders her social situation as unjust.

Scheman explains that while we are usually taught to question the legitimacy of our emotions, consciousness-raising groups encourage focusing, instead, on the contingency of one's social situation and of the consequent way one is being treated and considered by society and its members. She writes that "one's discovery of anger can often occur not from focusing on one's feelings but from a political redescription of one's situation" (1993, 25). This quote is crucial, as it emphasises the role of political knowledge in the identification of one's anger. Scheman later writes, on this matter, that "substantive political considerations are prior to the correct identification, even to the identity, of the emotions" (33). For Scheman, the way one conceives of one's own emotions does not lie in the emotions' alleged natural and essential features, but rather in the historical and social context in which such emotions emerge and are apprehended and labelled by others. Therefore, the meaning of anger has not only changed over time, but can also change for oneself, throughout one's life. It is through the political understanding of her situation that Alice is able to cast her emotion as anger and to assess the legitimacy and value of such a reaction, while she used to repress it. It seems that it is only by being enabled to analyse the content of one's life in a political way that one can grasp one's past emotions as anger, thereby reconsidering the nature and meaning of one's social situation and previous experiences. Within this framework, Scheman's argument is that secondary instances of socialisation like consciousness-raising groups provide occasions for oppressed people to reassess their lives in a different, political way, and to therefore identify their negative emotions as legitimate responses to social injustice.[10]

I believe Scheman's thesis helps us to grasp what is at stake when one is able to identify anger as such. Indeed, Alice's alienation from her emotions and her constant denial of their legitimacy make it impossible for her to grasp, alone, the political value of her anger. Yet, as soon as she meets other women whose emotions are being identified, named, and expressed, Alice is enabled to reconsider her own experiences of injustice, and her feelings at such experiences, in light of the similar experiences related by her peers. In other words, whenever one finally knows that what one has been feeling is anger, then one begins to understand oneself as a political subject, and one's emotions as politically relevant. Such epistemic inputs deeply change the nature of one's relation to injustice, to anger, and to the experience of oppression. Alice no longer blames herself for being unsatisfied at a life she endures rather than fully chooses, nor does she feel guilty for having desires and limits of her own regarding sexuality. Her anger, and the anger of other women, play a part in enabling her to understand that her identity as a woman in a patriarchal society exposes her to instances of injustice that she is not responsible for. Consequently, anger recognised as such allows an understanding of oneself and of the wrongs endured as socially situated, and therefore leads one to envision one's relations, experiences, and choices in light of the oppression which conditions and determines one to a certain extent.

Scheman interestingly suggests that while political knowledge often precedes and enables the experience of anger, it is also inversely in *the experience of anger as anger* that a person redefines themself and their emotions in a political way. She writes that "to see some state of affairs count as oppression or exploitation, or that one's own feelings count as dissatisfaction or anger is already to change the nature of that situation or those feelings" (29). I take this nuance to be crucial: we can believe that prior political understanding participates in and facilitates the evolution of one's conception and experience of certain emotions while also conceiving

10. Scheman's present reflection could be the starting point of an entire development on the power of the community to help in identifying and expressing one's emotions in a political way.

of the possibility for such evolution to happen without politicisation, and even for it to further enhance and allow politicisation in some ways. What I argue here, based on Scheman's somewhat ambiguous account of the causal relationship between politicisation and anger, is, on the one hand, that the former is not a necessary condition for the latter. One can get angry at an injustice without possessing the epistemic resources that would facilitate making sense of such an experience as unjust. I also consider, on the other hand, that identifying anger can have a retroactive effect on one's epistemic sophistication regarding injustices and regarding one's situation as an affective and political subject. Whether it is by a straightforward subjective understanding of one's emotions as anger, or by a collective project of sharing experiences and identifying how they affect us, acknowledging that anger is one's possible and legitimate emotional reaction to social injustice enables one to grasp one's experience as unjust and as an instance of oppression. It therefore leads one to understand to a certain extent that one's life and experiences are socially situated, and largely depend on the contingent, yet systemic injustice which weighs upon the existences of the oppressed. In this first sense, feeling angry at an injustice confers a political dimension to one's experience; it also, as I am about to argue, positions one as a legitimate participant in the opposition to social injustice.

3.2 Getting Angry or "to Make Myself Their Judge"

This last idea of anger as triggering a sense of one's political legitimacy is what I consider to be a second phase in the understanding of oneself as a socially situated subject.

Indeed, after having understood that one's emotions emerge from one's social situation as oppressed and from the correlative wrongs that one endures, one is enabled to consider oneself as possessing knowledge about social injustice, and therefore as legitimate in denouncing it. More precisely, this renewed sense of epistemic agency is acquired as one feels anger and identifies it as such. Elizabeth Spelman (1989) in particular argues for this idea: for her, being angry at someone for the offence they inflicted upon one means allowing oneself to *judge* them, to hold them accountable for what they did and thereby not only to assess oneself as equally entitled to respect, but also to reclaim such respect. She writes that "to be angry at him [the wrongdoer] is to make myself, at least on this occasion, his judge—to have, and to express, a standard against which I assess his conduct" (266). The argument is no longer about anger as allowing self-respect, but about anger as an occasion for taking one's own beliefs seriously and assessing their value in a political way. Indeed, Spelman argues that being angry at social injustice is already an act of insubordination insofar as it means judging the wrongdoer and therefore taking oneself seriously in one's ability to judge a wrong and to reclaim the respect of one's domain and values. (Here again, the epistemic potential of anger is conditioned: one must already believe in one's own capacity to judge the behaviours of others for anger to enhance one's further epistemic agency.) Spelman explains the ongoing attempts to reject and inhibit the oppressed's angers in light of the emotion's epistemic and subjective potential to turn oneself into a legitimate opponent to offences, and assessor of values. She argues that the oppressed's emotions are perceived as a threat, for they signal that the subject believes in the accuracy of their judgement of others, "even of those who are said to be their superiors" (267). She explains,

> The capacity to be angry just doesn't fit in as part of a personality profile designed by dominant people for those they see and wish to maintain as subordinate to them. For it would mean both that the subordinates would have standards of conduct applicable to the dominants, and express and apply those standards; and that dominants would thereby be subject to the judgments of those they've deemed to be beneath them. (267)

It is in this specific way that anger elicits a relocation of oneself on the social and moral scene: from the understanding of their position of oppression, victims of injustice oppose the order to stay where they are and lift themselves up to be on equal terms with those who expect them not to stand up. Furthermore, judging a social oppression allows the oppressed to rise above the dominants by asserting moral standards that the latter are unwilling or unable to respect and meet.

A compelling example of anger as the expression of moral and political judgement of the oppressor by the oppressed is the 2020 César Awards final ceremony. When Roman Polanski received the Best Director award, despite having been convicted by a US court of unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor, and accused by several other women of sexual violence, the French actress Adèle Haenel stood up, shouted "Shame!" ("La honte"), gave the middle finger, and left the ceremony. A few months earlier, she had publicly testified in an exclusive Mediapart interview to the sexual assaults and harassment that the French director Christophe Ruggia had inflicted on her for years when she was a minor, during and after her time acting in his film. Her effort to tell others what she had been through despite shame and guilt, and to make it a political case of power abuse over young people, especially women, in the film industry, amounted to nothing in front of the consecration of an alleged multi-recidivist rapist director by the whole cinema community. Adèle Haenel left the room out of anger, thereby affirming that victims of abuse expected respect, trust, and reparation, and would not silently endure the ongoing contempt for their words and their demands for sexual violence to cease. The fact that she stood up when everyone stayed silent; that she called the situation shameful while Polanski was honoured as a director that should make France proud; that she used her middle finger, thereby signifying her rage at the entire assembly and industry which remained silent or complicit; and that she left the room, turn this event into an exemplary illustration of the ability of anger to lift the oppressed above the unsatisfying double standards of recognition and retribution held by the oppressors. Haenel's anger *animated* her, literally set her in motion when she was expected not to move; it gave her, during the César Awards and in front of Mediapart's cameras, the strength and legitimacy to judge instances of injustice, to name them, and to refuse to endure them in silence.

I take this example to be a good illustration of the philosophical necessity to broaden the scope of what we consider to be productive in the context of social injustice. Indeed, we can wonder: would such an event be considered counterproductive by Nussbaum or other advocates of the counterproductivity argument? Certainly, Haenel's behaviour did not undo the harm allegedly caused by Polanski's acts, nor did it lead the Academy to take the award away from him. One could further argue that she behaved as the stereotypical angry feminist, incapable of containing her emotions, choosing emotional outburst over rational argumentation. As such, one could say that Haenel's reaction was counterproductive, as it enforced stereotypes surrounding women's emotions or the feminist struggle. I would object that the latter argument reinforces affective injustice: advising the victims of social injustice to privilege silence over disruptive emotions amounts to taking the constraining, restrictive feeling rules as necessities rather than as constructed, unjust emotional norms that should be overcome and challenged. As for the former argument, regarding the ineffectiveness of Haenel's acts in constructing justice for victims of sexual abuses, I argue that her behaviour was still productive: by expressing her rage and choosing to leave, she performed a moment of epistemic and political agency that produced images, discussions, reflections. More importantly, her anger presumably led her to subjectively experience her ability to denounce and refuse the injustice at stake, and the legitimacy of doing so. Whether or not Haenel's act ultimately affected sexual violence against minors in the film industry, or the legal advances on the matter, are unsolvable questions which exceed the philosophical frame. Yet one should recognise that her behaviour was productive at another level, as it participated in the subjective and intersubjective assessment of the victim's capacity to refuse to stay silent in the face of injustice.

The following day, the French feminist novelist Virginie Despentes signed an article entitled "We Stand Up and We Leave" ("On se lève et on se casse"[11]). She denounced the violence of the decision to give Polanski the award, and contrasted it with the strength of Haenel's act, which "moves forward with her back straight, her neck stiff with anger and her shoulders open." For Despentes, Haenel's behaviour goes further than the César Awards: it paves the way for resisting oppression and the ongoing violence of a system which is built on "so much silence, so much submission, so much willingness to serve." Despentes' text, much like, I believe, most of her writing, is driven by anger; hers, Haenel's, every other oppressed person's or ally's anger, are established as the means to reject the laws of silence and submission of the patriarchy. What she describes is precisely the ability Haenel had, through the expression of her anger, to refuse such rules and to affirm the unconditional superiority of justice over violence. She compares her to a "recidivist employee, who can't bring herself to smile when she's splashed in public, who can't bring herself to applaud the spectacle of her own humiliation." This event, completed by Despentes' analysis, illustrates the second analytical moment of the political reassessment of oneself entailed in the experience of anger: the emotion enhances one's unconstrained epistemic political agency in refusing instances of injustice, shedding light on their violence and judging those who perpetuate, deny, or accommodate their existence. Indeed, through Haenel's act and through Despentes' words, what clearly appears is the epistemic and agentive power of anger that Spelman described: the power to affirm one's and others' subjectivities when they are being neglected; the power to identify and judge social injustice and those responsible for it; the power to take oneself seriously and to rise from a position of submission and silence to acts and speech of insubordination and refusal.[12]

3.3 Anger's Apprehension or Appreciation as Evidence of One's Social Position

Lastly, in what I consider to be a third analytical moment of the political reassessment of oneself that anger enables, I will argue that the emotion allows one to grasp one's own social position in the very way one and other people apprehend one's anger.

One can express one's anger, think about what reactions its expression would generate, or simply examine the reasons that would lead one to repress it. In any of these cases, I argue that the subject learns something new about how others conceive of one and one's emotions, about the extent to which others' gazes influence one's own, as well as about one's emotional autonomy and expression. On this matter, Frye presents anger as containing an epistemic value, in allowing one to grasp who one is for others. For her, anger is comparable to philosopher J. L. Austin's concept of a speech act; she writes that "being angry at someone is somewhat like a speech act in that it has a certain conventional force whereby it sets people up in a certain sort of orientation to each other; and like a speech act, it cannot 'come off' if it does not get uptake" (88). Just like a speech act, anger functions as a self-contained expression which demands an uptake (acknowledgment of the injustice, apologies, reparation, for instance). In Austin's typology, the speech act is considered non-played when the demand it entails is left unanswered and is not met with any satisfactory uptake. Frye affirms that anger can similarly be non-played whenever its expression does not result in the expected uptake. Yet, the very absence of such uptake is still epistemically relevant: the reactions that people have towards one's anger indicate what sort of relations they are ready to enact, how they conceive of the person's claims, and whether they are ready to acknowledge and act upon them. Frye argues that "the patterns of claims someone can and cannot countenance, of the acts one can and cannot give uptake to, is a partial map of one's world view. It reveals

11. "Césars: «Désormais on se lève et on se casse», par Virginie Despentes," *Libération*, 1 March, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/03/01/cesars-desormais-on-se-leve-et-on-se-barre_1780212/. The quotations that follow are my translations.

12. We could also understand Adèle Haenel's recent choice to desert the cinema industry as an act of denunciation of the latter's complacency towards sexual abusers. This choice falls under the scope of what I consider to be conversions of anger: it consists of a political, reflected, dissident act, which stems from the repeated experience of angers expressed and left unanswered.

something of one's understanding of the essential natures and relations of things" (90). Let us imagine that Scheman's character Alice, after her consciousness-raising group sessions, gets openly angry at her husband as he initiates sex without asking for her consent. Let's assume the husband responds by asking her to calm down, arguing that she must be crazy to suddenly react this way, and blaming the consciousness-raising group for giving her silly ideas of rebellion. He does not acknowledge that he has wronged her, nor does he apologise. Thus, Alice's anger might be the occasion for her to understand what her husband considers to be wrong, the extent to which he is open to criticism, and the way he perceives her emotions and women's anger in general. Frye would argue that the husband's response to Alice's anger makes her grasp his conception of her domain of respect and, I would add, of her emotional autonomy. Her expression of anger is therefore an instrument for mapping implicit and unspoken aspects of his relation to her which influence the way he perceives her and responds to her claims.

Frye's thesis is also relevant at the mere level of the *identification* of anger, prior to its potential expression. Indeed, it seems to me that when in a position of oppression, the identification of one's own anger at a social injustice often comes with the intuitive intention to negate, minimise, or repress it. Those very inner movements, which sometimes effectively inhibit the expression of anger, are still interesting sources of self-knowledge for the person who is ready to question their causes and their political meanings. Indeed, we could also assume that Alice does not object to her husband even if a sudden feeling of anger and an urge to protest arise when he starts touching her. It is not because she is now able to identify such a reaction as anger, and to acknowledge the political reasons which make such anger legitimate, that Alice will decide to get openly angry and to refuse her husband's behaviour. Her expectations about her husband's denial of her protest, his mocking of her emotional reaction—in short, his inability to give her anger proper uptake and to acknowledge the wrong he is responsible for—are legitimate reasons for her not to display her anger.

If feeling anger does not necessarily imply expressing anger, then we must question which motives would lead one to repress one's anger. As I explained in the beginning of the paper, such a decision often stems from being accustomed to, and constrained by, affective injustice which teaches members of oppressed social groups that their emotions will be welcomed with mockery at best, and violent repression at worst. Such affective injustice, as well as additional feeling rules, are interiorised, coercing one into containing and suppressing one's own emotions. In the choice of refusing to express one's anger based on the expectation of seeing one's emotion dismissed and being denied a proper uptake, a person who suffers from a social injustice still learns something about who they are for others. One indeed learns, in an embodied and subjective way, the extent to which one's emotions are inhibited and considered forbidden. Therefore, it is not only in the effective reaction of others that one's anger teaches one about one's social position. Rather, in the very expectation of this reaction, anger conveys knowledge about how social injustice is fuelled by further, affective injustice which restricts one's ability to express oneself, one's claim for self-respect, and one's epistemic and political agency. Ultimately, either in expressing one's anger *even if* one is expected to stay silent, or in repressing one's anger *because* one is expected to stay silent, one still learns about the disruptive nature of one's emotional reactions, expressions, and autonomy. One additionally learns about the actual threat that one's anger represents to the *status quo* of social injustice. Finally, one affectively experiences that one's position of oppression can foster the ongoing and active refusal of such injustice, a refusal that is felt, stirred up, shared, and expressed in the wake of, and echoing, other angers.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have analysed anger's epistemic political potential to oppose social injustice by developing and affirming self-respect, autonomous and legitimate affectivity, and political subjectivity. Anger can disrupt the usual alienation, repression, and silence induced by social injustice. Thereby, anger is already productive in the broader sense of being politically relevant and efficient, insofar as it challenges oppression through one's reassessment of oneself in a political way.

Indeed, when one succeeds in overcoming the obstacles of its identification, anger has been proven to bear the potential to convey precious knowledge of an affective, straightforward kind. Such knowledge concerns one's worth as a subject, one's derived legitimacy in feeling angry at having been wronged, and the gap between what is inflicted upon one and one's right to respect, justice, and political agency. The epistemic value of anger thereby culminates in the oppressed person's reassessment of themself as an affective being, social agent, and political subject. In feeling anger at social injustice, and in grasping the correlative affective injustice which often results from anger's expression, one can experience further confidence in one's own value as a political subject entitled to fair treatment, to negative emotions and their unconstrained expression, and to the claim for recognition and reparation.

While social injustice alienates the oppressed from their physical, emotional, epistemic, and political capacities, and aims to render them confused, silent, and insecure in the face of such injustices, anger has been shown in this paper to restore one's self-esteem, emotional autonomy, and political agency. This paper has thereby demonstrated anger's ability to humanise the oppressed, despite, and in the context of, social injustice which functions as a system of dehumanisation. In doing so, it has complemented the existing accounts of the epistemic and political value of anger in contexts of social injustice by encompassing their main feature in the larger frame of the emotion's political potential to restore the humanity of the oppressed.

While this paper has focused on the first-person, subjective potential of experiencing anger at social injustice, the fact that anger can be humanising for the oppressed sheds light on the intersubjective dimension of the emotion. Indeed, the affective and epistemic experience entailed in anger is not only central for one's political growth and potential agency, but also for the collective aspect of resistant struggle. Grasping oneself and others as partaking in a dynamic of oppression paves the way for understanding that such oppression exceeds individuals and must therefore be addressed in a collective way. It is thus left for another paper to investigate how anger builds bridges between subjective and collective experiences of feeling, understanding, and opposing injustices.

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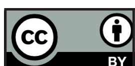

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