

Anger and its desires

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The copyright line for this article was changed on 20 February 2021 after original online publication.

[Correction added on July 15, 2021 after first online publication: The author's name has been changed in this current version.]

Abstract

The orthodox view of anger takes desires for revenge or retribution to be central to the emotion. In this paper, I develop an empirically informed challenge to the retributive view of anger. In so doing, I argue that a distinct desire is central to anger: a desire for recognition. Desires for recognition aim at the targets of anger acknowledging the wrong they have committed, as opposed to aiming for their suffering. In light of the centrality of this desire for recognition, I argue that the retributive view of anger should be abandoned. I consider and dismiss two types of moves that can be made on the part of a proponent of the orthodox view in response to my argument. I propose that a pluralist view, which allows for both retribution and recognition in anger, is to be preferred.

1 | INTRODUCTION

When someone suddenly cuts you off in traffic, you curse as you swerve to avoid a crash and honk your horn repeatedly in anger at the offender's careless driving. When you find out a loved one has deeply betrayed you, you yell and lash out at them. If the betrayal marks the end of the relationship, you may hope the offender endures personal hardship in the future, even if you do not wish to have anything to do with inflicting this pain, you may want them to "get what they deserve". When you find out a corporation has been dumping toxic waste in the local river, you may boycott the company, and take steps to tarnish their reputation, and perhaps that of its owners. If you are struggling to make ends meet, you may curse both the labour system and those who benefit from it, you may at times wish ill upon those with more comfortable lives than you.

These are all relatively commonplace cases of anger. A desire for retribution seems to be a common thread that unites them. Retribution involves the infliction of, what is felt to be, deserved punishment (Christensen, 2016; Nussbaum, 2015, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012). The orthodox view on anger takes the emotion to be, at its core,

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vengeful. The Bride in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, much like the heroes of many classic epics, having been wronged, is fuelled by anger to right the wrongs she has suffered. These heroes typically leave a trail of bodies and blood on their quest. The more commonplace examples of anger in the above paragraph may not involve outright violence, but they still seem to involve a desire for the suffering of the offender in some way. In cursing one tends to offend the cursed, in yelling and honking one punishes the target of one's anger. Similarly, with defaming and boycotting an institution, one lowers their status and may hurt their profit margins, while anger at unjust systems can lead to retributive actions against representatives of such systems as well as those who tend to benefit from them. This paper aims to challenge the orthodox view that anger is characterized by a strong link to the desire for revenge, payback, or retribution – three terms that I follow others (Cogley, 2014; Leboeuf, 2017; Nussbaum, 2015, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012; Srinivasan, 2018) in using interchangeably.

I begin by characterizing the orthodox view on anger, I then proceed to challenge it by appeal to a range of empirical as well as conceptual considerations. In doing so I lend support to the view that anger bears a close link to an underappreciated desire, a desire for recognition. I hope to make plausible the claim that the desire for recognition, that is, the desire for an offending party to acknowledge the wrong that has been committed, is central to anger, and that the desire for retribution has been unduly put center-stage in thinking about the emotion. A pluralist view of anger's relation to desire will emerge as preferable to the orthodox view as a result.

Note that this paper's project is primarily descriptive. I am concerned with what anger is, rather than with what it should be, what anger's moral status might be, or with specifying potential conditions on anger being morally justified. Much philosophical work on anger has focused on questions of the latter sort, often without disambiguating descriptive claims from normative ones nor submitting assumptions on the former to much scrutiny. In this paper, I counter this trend. My focus is on what anger is and I challenge the orthodox answer to this descriptive question.

A few clarifications are in order regarding what I take the target of this descriptive project to be. I will follow a number of conventions in the philosophy of emotion literature regarding what I mean by anger. As with most contemporary philosophical discussions of the emotions, I focus on occurrent states of anger that have distinctive phenomenology, rather than dispositional states. Similarly, I focus on cases of anger that have intentional objects. It is common, in the philosophy of emotion, to distinguish between the formal and particular objects of emotions.¹ Formal objects are typically construed as evaluative properties that emotions of the same type attribute their particular objects, danger for fear and offence for anger, for example.² All instances of anger share a formal object, as this is partly what individuates the emotion type.³ Anger's particular objects are objects that anger is felt towards. I will be assuming that anger, like most emotions, admits of a variety of particular objects, which include individuals, groups, and institutions. I use the terms "object" and "target" interchangeably to refer to the entity anger is felt towards. I remain neutral on specific questions regarding anger's intentional content, including whether and how it, and emotions in general, represent evaluative properties.⁴

In line with much philosophical writing on anger (Aristotle, 2004; Bell, 2009; Cogley, 2014; Nussbaum, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012; Srinivasan, 2018) I take the term "anger" to encompass a range of related affective phenomena, such as rage, resentment, and indignation. In line with common thinking, I take anger to be typically triggered by offences, injustices, or other disruptions to one's goals that one perceives as unfair. The only portion of traditional thinking on anger that I aim to challenge is the emotion's retributive nature. This traditional view of anger's nature is often cashed out in terms of anger's strong relation to one desire, a desire for retribution or payback. It is one that I think does not survive scrutiny.

2 | THE ORTHODOXY ON ANGER

The orthodox view of anger can be traced to ancient Greek philosophy, in particular the writings of Aristotle. The view is evident still in the later Roman writings of Seneca, anger's most famous critic, who, despite seeking to refute Aristotle's claim that some cases of anger can be virtuous, shared Aristotle's retributive construal of the emotion.⁵

For Seneca (2010), anger “consists entirely in aroused assault. Raging with an inhuman desire to inflict pain” (1.1). Anger is “hungry for a vengeance that will bring down the avenger too” (1.1). While for Aristotle anger is “a desire accompanied by pain for conspicuous revenge caused by a perceived slight” (*Rhet.* 1378a31–33).

This retributive conception of anger is thought to have had a profound effect on Christian, as well as Buddhist, thought, both of which typically caution against anger for its link to vindictive thoughts and actions (Freedman, 1998; Śāntideva, 1997). This, plausibly, partly explains the pervasiveness of the retributive view in our folk psychology. Retributive conceptions of anger are alive in contemporary philosophy too. Pettigrove (2012), for example, takes anger to “involve the desire to lash out at its object or to see that object hurt” (358) and Deonna and Teroni (2012) take anger to involve “feeling the body’s readiness to act so as to retaliate” (81). For Nussbaum “anger involves, *conceptually*, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense” (2015, p. 46 emphasis my own). In a similar vein, Ben-Ze’ev (2000) writes that “the urge to attack is *essential* to anger, even if it is expressed in a nonstandard aggressive act” (384 emphasis my own).⁶ Most recently, Callard (2020) takes anger untied to vengeance to be a “fiction” (10).

I take the retributive construal of anger to be the orthodox view on the emotion, and use the labels “retributive”, “traditional” and “orthodox view” interchangeably. Indeed, Nussbaum calls the retributive view the “traditional” view of anger (2015, p. 41). The retributive construal of anger is more often assumed, many times implicitly, than defended, and is therefore rarely spelt out. The view is clearest in those who stipulate such a desire to be *constitutive* of anger, but is also evident in any view of anger that singles out a strong link to a desire for retribution.⁷ I take views of the latter sort to at least endorse a *causal* commitment that anger prototypically triggers desires of this sort. On a causal reading, desires for retribution are not actual parts of anger, but are nonetheless the primary causal effect of the emotion. The orthodox view on anger can therefore come in the stronger, constitutive, or the weaker, causal, form.

Nussbaum (2015, p. 46), Ben-Ze’ev (2000) and Callard (2020) make explicit that they take the punitive aim of anger to be constitutive of the emotion, rather than being merely causally related to it. The desire for the perpetrator’s suffering becomes a conceptual, or essential, part of anger for them. Similarly, in Aristotle, a constitutive view is endorsed as anger is equated to the desire for revenge, accompanied by pain.⁸ In Tappolet (2016), a causal commitment seems clear, for she takes specific desires to be “regular causal effect(s)” of emotions, rather than “essential ingredients or parts of emotions” (66), and characterizes anger as bearing such a causal relation to desires for “revenge or punishment” (72).⁹ In other cases, however, such as in Pettigrove (2012), it will be ambiguous whether the author endorses the constitutive or the causal claim regarding anger’s retributive nature. This need not concern us, as my argument threatens both stronger and weaker claims. I think a commitment to at least the weaker causal claim to be widespread in our scholarly, as well as every day, conception of anger. I will refer to both views under the label “orthodox” or “retributive” view of anger, as they both link anger strongly to one desire, a desire for retribution. The main aim of this paper is to challenge this view.

What is this desire for retribution? Proponents of the retributive view of anger have not said much on what conception of desire they employ. I therefore make use of a thin and intuitive notion of desire throughout. I take desires to dispose one to act in ways that aim to achieve the desire’s aim, and take desires to be typically satisfied when the actual state of affairs in the world matches the desire’s aim.¹⁰ The orthodox view of anger, in stipulating a desire for retribution as the key conative component of the emotion, holds that retribution is anger’s central goal or aim. It is clear that the desire for retribution is a desire for the offending party to *suffer for* what they have done. There are two main components to the desire for retribution then, first that some form of pain be inflicted upon the target of anger and secondly that this pain be envisioned, or count as, payback for the harm suffered by the offended party. The centrality of pain is clear in Aristotle, for example, as the angry person is one that desires to inflict pain (*Rhet.* 1382a8),¹¹ and in contemporary theories that see anger as involving a desire to lash out, retaliate, or wish for things to go badly for the target of anger, the emotion aims at some form of pain or suffering (Nussbaum, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012).

Crucially, this suffering is felt by the offended party to be *deserved*, and is intended as payback for the harm committed against them (Nussbaum, 2015). One might think that it is part of one’s desire for retribution, in anger, to

be the author or orchestrator of retribution. This seems like the most paradigmatic way of understanding anger's desire for retribution. Aristotle's view stands in line with this, as for revenge to be enacted the offender must know by whose hand, as well as for what reason, he suffers (1380b22-25). Nussbaum (2015, p. 46), on the other hand, takes the desire, in anger, "for things to go badly somehow" for the offender to include cases where one is not at all causally related to the suffering of the offender. There is a desire, on these accounts, for a form of fateful harm to fall on one's offender. This could involve a desire for the offender to suffer an offense of the same type as the one they have caused the angry party – an eye for an eye, but it need not. At its most permissive, the claim is that in anger we wish for the offender to suffer, even if in the distant future, and even if in a form that might be unrelated, causally or conceptually, to the wrong committed against the offended party. The retributive view then, takes the angry person to want the offender to suffer, as a way of paying back for the harm they have caused. Depending on how the details are filled out, this may or may not involve as a component the requirement that the offended party themselves be causally related to the suffering of the offending party, and/or that the suffering be similar in kind to the offence suffered by the angry party. What is common among these possible views is the desire for the suffering of the targets of one's anger.¹²

The orthodox view of anger seems to fit well with much of our phenomenological and empirical evidence. When angry, we often feel compelled to lash out at others, and thoughts of getting back at the target of one's anger can be all-consuming. We often vow, in anger, not to let an offender "get away" with some action or omission. The retributive view also fits the dynamics of when anger tends to subside. Anger is strongest, typically, before one gets a chance to lash out at or punish one's offender. Once payback or punishment has been enacted, anger may not be immediately extinguished but it begins to wane and often feels less intense. This is presumably because anger's desire for retribution has been satisfied.

The way that subjects tend to respond to being the target of anger also stands in line with the retributive view. Being the target of another's anger is not enjoyable, it is often threatening and unpleasant, and typically will lead to defensive behaviour or retaliation. Pettigrove (2012) writes that anger is guilty of "triggering a defensive response" in its targets (367). Similarly, Nussbaum (2016) holds that in the best-case scenario anger "breed(s) mistrust" (233) and "increases the anxiety and self-defensiveness" in its targets (230), while in the worst case it can perpetuate an "endless cycle of blood vengeance" (1) by provoking its targets to retaliate, escalating the conflict. On the retributive view, expressions of anger plausibly communicate desires for retribution, to make their target suffer. This is likely to inspire animosity in those that are the targets of anger, as well as potential retaliation (see Luz Silva, forthcoming).

Empirical work seems to support the orthodox view as well. Angry subjects have been observed to be more willing to punish negligent and harmful behaviour than non-angry subjects (Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999; Small & Lerner, 2008). In one study, for example, participants made to feel angry chose to provide less public assistance to welfare recipients than those induced to feel sad (Small & Lerner, 2008). In another study, only participants that had watched a video where a clear act of wrongdoing went unpunished behaved punitively towards subsequent unrelated anger-inducing vignettes. Participants exposed to a video where the wrongdoer received punishment for a clear act of wrongdoing did not show punitive behavioural tendencies in response to subsequent anger-inducing vignettes (Goldberg et al., 1999). This has been taken as support for the view that anger involves a desire to punish, as punitive tendencies diminished for participants primed with a vignette where this desire was satisfied, that is, where a wrongdoer was punished (Ask & Pina, 2011).

Furthermore, anger has been consistently associated with approach, as opposed to avoidance behaviour, which stands in line with anger involving punitive or attack-oriented behavioural tendencies. Neural activation has been taken to support this as experiences of anger are correlated with left frontal hemispheric activation characteristic of approach behaviour (Harmon-Jones, 2003). The retributive view of anger seems also to fit with an evolutionary story where anger was selected due to the adaptiveness of acting retributively in response to harms and threats. Indeed, such a commitment is made explicit by some proponents of the retributive view, Nussbaum, for example, writes that anger's retributive function "derives, very likely, from its evolutionary role as a 'fight-or-flight' mechanism" (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 55). This makes the orthodox view appealing for its plausible capacity to preserve continuity between human and non-human anger.

The pervasiveness of the retributive view seems justified. It matches our phenomenological, behavioural, and experimental evidence regarding anger. No wonder it's popular, the view seems to get the nature of anger right. I want to distinguish four specific reasons for holding the retributive view of anger that have just been canvassed. These reasons seem to be at least implicitly at play among adherents of the orthodox view. These reasons can be classed as either behavioural or phenomenological considerations. They are:

Behavioural:

- a. Anger motivates punitive behaviour
- b. Anger causes defensiveness or retaliation in its targets

Phenomenological:

- c. Anger involves a felt desire for retribution
- d. Anger subsides when retribution has been achieved

The first pair pertain to anger behaviour, (a) to the actions of angry agents, and (b) to the actions of the targets of anger. The second pair of considerations pertain to anger phenomenology, (c) to how we feel when angry, (d) to when we feel anger to subside. Although these considerations, if true, do not exclude other desires being at play in anger, if (a)–(d) are true of anger, this stands as strong combined evidence in support of the retributive view. We will see, however, that (a)–(d) do not survive scrutiny. The argument proceeds as follows. I will begin by challenging the first two, behavioural, reasons for holding a retributive view of anger. We will see that empirical evidence does not provide much support for the retributive view (Section 3.1). Indeed, the evidence actually suggests that a distinct desire may be at play in anger. I characterize this distinct desire as a desire for recognition. After doing so I argue that desires for recognition are supported by a number of features of the phenomenology of anger (Section 3.2). This puts pressure on claims (c) and (d). In Section 4, I consider and dismiss a number of moves the retributive theorist can make in light of my argument before concluding, in Section 5, that the retributive view should be abandoned in favour of a pluralist view.

3 | THE ORTHODOX VIEW CHALLENGED

Reasons (a) and (b) for holding the retributive view of anger are in effect empirical claims regarding anger, against which evidence can be brought to bear. While (a) predicts that anger behaviour is punitive, (b) predicts that targets of anger respond defensively, and often retaliate, against those who display anger towards them. I will consider these predictions in turn, and we will see that recent empirical work stands in tension with both. Note that no piece of empirical evidence is brought forth as direct evidence against the orthodox view. None of the empirical work investigates what, if any, “desire” is central to anger. The role the empirical work plays in a challenge to the orthodox view is indirect and suggestive. By highlighting a range of evidence across the behavioural sciences that sits poorly with the orthodox view I aim to cast doubt on the view's adequacy and make room for a pluralist view of anger to emerge as preferable.

3.1 | Empirical evidence

We saw above that a correlation between anger and punitive action tendencies has been observed in the experimental literature. This has been observed when anger is directed at individuals, as well as when the emotion is directed at groups or institutions (Goldberg et al., 1999; Small & Lerner, 2008). In what follows I rely on empirical work that

investigates anger directed at a similar range of objects. This will serve to identify regularities in anger behaviour across distinct object types. A first point to note is that some have observed the correlation between anger and punitive actions to only be present in otherwise aggressive individuals (Tiedens, 2001). Crucially, however, as we will see, there is mounting evidence that anger robustly motivates *non-punitive* actions.¹³ That this be the case stands in tension with reason (a) for holding the orthodox view of anger as linked to retribution. For if anger robustly correlates with actions that are not punitive, we have reason to question the behavioural evidence available in support of the retributive view.

In a key study on collective action, for example, German university students were surveyed regarding a real-life situation where the state had mandated an increase in tuition fees. Participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with statements that varied in anger intensity, statements like: “I am irritated by tuition rises”, “I am furious about tuition rise”. Students were also asked to indicate how likely they would be to participate in different actions against the tuition fee rise. The action options were grouped into three types; (1) “Constructive actions” such as flyer dissemination, petition signing and demonstrations, (2) “Destructive actions” such as arson attacks on university buildings or private property and (3) “Intermediate type” actions that disturb events where tuition-rise advocates appear, such as blocking university buildings or public roads (Tausch et al., 2011). A retributive view of anger would plausibly predict the anger condition to be positively correlated with type 2 actions, as these are straightforwardly aggressive actions, that are either misdirected or aim to make the university, or individuals responsible for the tuition rise, suffer. Similarly, the retributive view would likely predict anger to motivate type 3, intermediate type, actions where the advocates of this proposal are inconvenienced, and their daily life hindered. Such actions still cause the targets of anger some suffering, at least annoyance, and plausibly serve to punish them. On the contrary, however, increased levels of anger were found to be positively related to engaging in only type 1 actions, that is, constructive actions. These actions were aimed at changing the tuition fee policy, rather than at punishing those who implemented it. Anger was therefore not found to motivate actions that involved enacting payback or punishment in any straightforward sense.

Similar results have been observed in a range of experimental set-ups (Tausch et al., 2011; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). For example, similar results were found in studies involving Muslim Indian minority communities in conflict with the Hindu majority. The Muslim community is one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country in terms of education, income, employment and political representation (Basant, 2007). The self-reported levels of anger among the Muslim community in the riot-prone city of Aligarh, were found to be unrelated to any support for punitive actions against the dominant majority (Tausch et al., 2011). This suggests that the results of the study conducted on students plausibly extend to real-world situations of entrenched historical conflict. Other studies have found anger in situations of group conflict, such as Israel–Palestine, to be significantly related to both punitive actions, *as well as* constructive non-punitive actions, against the out-group (Halperin, 2008). Evidence of this sort still speaks against behavioural consideration (a) as there is a lack of evidence that anger correlates preferentially with punitive behaviour *over* non-punitive behaviour.

In the psychology literature, acceptance of anger's behavioural pluripotency, that is, that anger is significantly related to different types of actions, is widespread (Spring, Cameron, & Cikara, 2018). The question becomes not *whether* anger triggers punitive or non-punitive actions but, rather, *when* and *why* anger displays its different motivational effects. Experimental work suggests that key factors *moderate* the effects of anger. In psychology, moderators are crucial to determining when certain effects hold. They are typically contextual variables that influence which effects are observed. Contextual moderators are likely crucial to determining whether anger will motivate punitive actions or not.

The Tausch et al. (2011) study on students responding to tuition rises, for example, found destructive type 2 actions to be favoured when the group had low confidence in their ability to change their predicament. This suggests that taking a situation to be unchangeable may be a key factor in motivating punitive behaviour. Indeed, there is wide ranging evidence that punitive actions are favoured in situations where change is unlikely. This might be because the out-group is unresponsive to attempts to change the situation (Bandura, 2000). Indeed, some have

called this the “nothing to lose” phenomenon (Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006) as the harmed group has little to lose in responding to a wrong aggressively, seeing as their situation is unlikely to change by any other means. The perceived changeability of the out-group, therefore, seems to be a key moderator of anger behaviour. This suggests that whether anger is linked to a desire for retribution may be heavily dependent on how changeable the out-group is perceived to be.

I have canvassed a range of studies in the fields of collective action and inter-group conflict that have failed to establish a significant relation between anger and the motivation of punitive actions. Indeed, in complete opposition to this prediction, anger was often observed to significantly motivate non-punitive actions. A similar trend is observable in studies that focus on individual as opposed to group settings. A canonical study by Averill (1983), for example, found a higher percentage of “non-aggressive” than “aggressive” action tendencies in people experiencing anger. In line with this, others have observed that interpersonal anger motivates both “pro-social”, as well as aggressive behaviours (Fehr, Baldwin, Collins, Patterson, & Benditt, 1999). This suggests that anger’s behavioural pluripotency is widespread in the literature on interpersonal anger as well. This in turn suggests that desires for retribution are not as typical of anger as the orthodox view assumes, much less constitutive of the emotion’s nature. Indeed, moderators are likely to play a key role in determining whether anger involves punitive desires or not. Much as in cases of inter-group conflict, the ability of the target of anger to *change* may be key to determining whether anger motivates constructive behaviour or payback oriented behaviour in interpersonal settings. A study on adolescent responses to bullying, for example, found implicit beliefs about bullies to predict desires for revenge (Yeager, Trzesniewski, Tirri, Nokelainen, & Dweck, 2011). Greater desire for vengeance was observed in participants that believed the bully’s character traits were fixed. The reverse was found for participants that believed in the malleability of the bully’s character. The perceived changeability of the target of anger seems to be among the relevant factors that play a role in determining whether anger is retributive or not. This evidence suggests that in both intergroup as well as interpersonal cases of anger robust links between anger and non-punitive actions are at play, and that moderators play a key role in determining anger behaviour.

Let us turn to the second behavioural point raised in favour of the retributive construal of anger. Point (b) predicts disengagement or retaliation from targets of anger.¹⁴ The retributive view of anger would predict that those that are targeted by anger respond defensively, antagonistically or retributively against those angry at them, indeed we saw in section two that contemporary retributive theorists explicitly take this to be the case (Nussbaum, 2015, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012). This is because, on the orthodox view of anger, communications of the emotion plausibly involve communications of desires to punish their targets. Empirical research provides mounting evidence against this, however, as communications of anger have been shown to correlate with increased support for constructive actions tendencies on behalf of the targets of anger.

One experiment, for example, probed the effect of anger communication on the responses of Americans to Syrian-American relations. In the experiment, Americans read a brief text describing a Syrian leader’s speech regarding United States–Syria relations. In the “anger condition”, the text described how a key Syrian leader gave an enraged speech that was aggressive towards the United States. In a “hope condition”, the text described the leader’s hopeful view on the resolution of the conflict. And finally, in the neutral condition, non-emotional factual information was relayed in the text about the Syrian leader’s speech. American subjects were then asked to register their support for conciliatory policies, such as continuing exports of food and medicine to Syria, and accepting Syria’s request for United States to fund humanitarian projects in Syria (Tagar, Federico, & Halperin, 2011).

The retributive view of anger would presumably predict Americans to become antagonized by, and respond retributively to, displays and communications of anger. The retributive view would, therefore, predict support for conciliatory policies to be lowest in the anger condition. The view would arguably expect increased support for conciliatory policies in the neutral and hope conditions as participants would be more willing to support conciliatory actions towards a nation that is not hostile against their own.

Contrary to these predictions, however, the study found support for conciliatory policies to be highest in the anger condition. Support for conciliatory policies was not only higher in the anger condition as compared to the

control condition, but the anger condition even saw significantly higher levels of support for conciliatory policies than were observed in the hope condition. This study suggests that anger communication, even when aggressive, can recruit support, as opposed to inspiring defensiveness and retaliation. Mounting evidence supports the main finding of this study, as anger communication has been observed to increase dominant group support for conciliatory policies in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict, US race-relations, and cases of xenophobia (de Vos, van Zomeren, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2013; Shuman, Halperin, & Reifen Tagar, 2018).

The retributive view of anger would plausibly predict that anger's observed effects are mediated by it communicating a threat to its targets. Indeed, Nussbaum notes that in so far as anger can act as an effective deterrent to keep others from infringing upon one's rights, it does so by inspiring fear (2015, p. 55). Interested in exploring this common hypothesis, de Vos et al. (2013) conducted a study to investigate the mechanism by which anger causes the observed results. Contrary to that predicted by the retributive view however, empathy, as opposed to fear, was found to be a key mediator of anger's effects. Increased levels of empathy were observed in the dominant group following anger communication from an oppressed group (de Vos et al., 2013). Mediators, in psychology, are variables that speak to how or why certain effects occur. In this case, empathy is a mediator because it can be seen as an intermediary step that explains the effect of anger on out-group support for constructive actions. Indeed, empathy for the oppressed group was actually significantly higher in the anger condition than in the control condition where the unfairness of the situation was communicated unemotionally. This suggests that anger communication is often an effective way of recruiting the empathy of dominant group members that are the target of the anger, and that this in turn mediates their increased support for conciliatory policies.

Instead of asking whether anger causes retaliation or support, a main line of empirical research aims to uncover the conditions under which anger has these different effects on its targets. In a follow-up study, de Vos, van Zomeren, Gordijn, and Postmes (2016) found the appropriateness of the anger to moderate its positive, empathy inducing, effects. In other words, anger communication increased empathy in the dominant group when the dominant group saw the harmed group's anger as a justified response to the situation at hand. This highlights a key moderator that helps determine when anger communication is likely to invoke support, as opposed to retaliation, in its targets.

Similar results are found in interpersonal, as opposed to inter-group, contexts. Instead of antagonizing the targets of anger and provoking retaliatory behaviour on their behalf, the communication of anger has been observed to trigger increased social support in close relationships (Yoo, Clark, Lemay, Salovey, & Monin, 2011), as well as increasing personal gains in interpersonal financial negotiations (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007). The latter study pinpointed the appropriateness of anger as a key determinant of anger's beneficial effects in interpersonal negotiations. The constructive effects of anger were highest when anger was seen as justified, as the offender compensated the low status party in these cases. Indeed, they found that when the angry individual was unjustified in his anger, the offender penalized the angry individual most harshly (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007). This points to the crucial role of the perceived appropriateness of anger in moderating whether the anger is well received or not.¹⁵

This experimental evidence suggests that the traditional view of anger is at best an oversimplification, and at worst a misconstrual of anger. Anger seems to robustly motivate behaviour that is not aimed at the suffering of its targets. The evidence points to anger involving a distinct desire, one that does not dispose one to act in particularly retributive ways, and one that, when anger is communicated, often inspires aid and support, as opposed to defensiveness or retaliation. I take the desire in question to be a desire for recognition, that is, a desire for the targets of anger to recognize that they have committed a wrong.¹⁶

The desire for recognition is a desire for an epistemic change in the target of one's anger, and perhaps for the communication of this change. The empirical work fits well with such a desire being central to anger, for in aiming for recognition one is more likely to pursue actions aimed at alerting the target of anger about their wrongdoing, namely those actions that have been characterized in the empirical work as “constructive” “non-aggressive” or “pro-social”. Recognition can be sought by aggressive means as well, making it difficult to read desires off discrete behaviours alone. I will supply further support for the centrality of a desire for recognition in anger in what follows, but for

now it is relevant to note that the reactions observed of those who are the targets of anger fit well with such a desire being at play as well. The empirical work is consistent with even aggressive expressions of anger communicating desires for having a wrong acknowledged as a genuine wrong. The observed relevance of the appropriateness of anger in moderating the responses of the targets of anger stands in line with this as only cases of anger that were considered justified by their targets were met with empathy and support. Of course, many complex factors will influence how an individual, or group, responds to being the target of anger, but the empirical work stands in line with the common occurrence in our personal lives of anger often being met with understanding, support and apology. The empirical work suggests that the targets of anger may be responding to desires for recognition as opposed to retribution.

Before I characterize this desire for recognition further, let me make a few remarks on the last pieces of empirical evidence that have been raised in support of the orthodox view. One piece of evidence levied in support of anger involving punitive action tendencies was that anger has been associated with approach behaviour (Harmon-Jones, 2003). Approach behaviour need not be retributive, however, as most positive emotions are characterized by approach behaviour as well. Indeed, the brain area in which activity has been correlated with approach behaviour, in anger, was left frontal hemispheric activation, which shows very similar activation patterns during experiences of happiness (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Approach behaviour just means not retracting away from the triggering situation, and is therefore consistent with anger being related to a range of desires, including a desire for recognition.

The final piece of evidence involved evolutionary considerations. The retributive view of anger seems to fit well with an evolutionary story of the adaptive value of the emotion in generating attack behaviour in response to threats and injury. An initial caveat here is that it is entirely possible that anger phenomena in the animal kingdom are far more complex than a punitive construal would allow. The data on animals might be biased towards an aggressive construal of anger given that this is its most salient behavioural manifestation. It is quite likely that anger's behavioural manifestations in animals are far subtler than assumed. There is, for example, evidence that anger behaviour in non-human animals, in particular towards conspecifics, involves an elaborate process of mutual signalling aimed at averting physical altercations (Bluhm, 2006). It is therefore possible that animal anger has recognitional aims as well.

Even if attack behaviour were the most robust manifestation of animal anger, this would not necessarily support a retributive construal of human anger. Such a story assumes that the final goal of punitive actions is to inflict pain. This might be true in an outright fight between individuals or groups, but there is ample evidence of punishment aiding learning, and behaviour reinforcement in the animal kingdom (de Waal, 1992), such that the epistemic effects of being the target of punitive actions are hard to divorce from the aims of animal anger. It is plausible that the goal of many of the punitive actions carried out by angry non-human animals is recognitional, rather than suffering itself. If this is so, then non-human anger is entirely in line with an aim for recognition in human anger. Even if this turned out not to be the case, however, the continuity of affective phenomena would not be threatened by the anger of non-human animals having a distinct goal to that of human anger. Traits that share a common ancestor can have distinct functions in different species. Evolutionary considerations then do not speak clearly in favour of the retributive view.

3.2 | Phenomenological evidence

I have argued that the orthodox view of anger is indirectly challenged by a range of recent empirical work. The empirical work fits well with a desire for recognition being central to anger. The empirical work is consistent with at least three distinct accounts of anger: (1) Anger constitutively aims for recognition, where punitive actions and aims are instrumental towards achieving the goal of recognition.¹⁷ (2) Anger prototypically aims for recognition, while aiming for retribution in atypical cases, such as when the angry agent has “nothing to lose” or has exhausted all other options. (3) Anger involves strong causal links to (at least) two desires, one for retribution and one for recognition,

where neither is privileged and contextual factors moderate between which desire is at play in a given circumstance, or whether both are.¹⁸ All of these options involve a rejection of the orthodox retributive view of anger. In all three cases, anger is not strongly tied to a unique desire for retribution. The first option is a constitutive view of anger that differs from the orthodox view in replacing desires for retribution with desires for recognition. Option two can be seen as analogous to what I called the causal orthodox view, again replacing retributive desires for recognition ones. The third option is pluralist as it does not privilege one desire over the other, and it does not exclude the relevance of further desires in anger.

It is not possible to thoroughly examine each of these three options here, so I will instead focus on the main reasons why the third, pluralist, option should be favoured. First, it does not postulate a constitutive link between anger and any desire. This will be an attractive feature to anyone who, like myself, is sympathetic towards theories of emotion that do not postulate constitutive links between emotions and desires in general (see Döring, 2003; Tappolet, 2016). Second, it seems to be the option most consistent with our empirical and phenomenological evidence, for although the evidence is also compatible with the other two options, more would need to be said to motivate either of the two other alternatives. Third, it seems to me a positive feature of a view that it does not rule out the potential relevance of a third relevant desire. I will say more on this, briefly, in my concluding paragraphs. Nor does this option rule out the possibility that multiple desires can be simultaneously at play. Lastly, a pluralist view is most equipped to accommodate the intuitions and evidence that favour the competing orthodox view. This makes the burden placed on one who would seek to deny the pluralist view greater than it would be if a constitutive or causal recognitional view (options 1 or 2) were endorsed. Below I consider two types of move a defender of the orthodox view can make against my contention that the retributive view should be abandoned, but first I want to highlight further reasons for the centrality of a desire for recognition in anger. I turn now to the two phenomenological considerations hailed in support of the orthodox view of anger.

Consideration (c) holds that anger involves felt desires for retribution. Not all token instances of anger involve feeling vengeful however. That this be so is not a big challenge to the retributive view of anger, for the view does not need to be committed to a phenomenology that matches the desire they hold to be central to anger. That is, on the thin notion of desire we have been working with, the desire for retribution need not be felt, it need only dispose one to act in certain ways and terminate under conditions in which the desire has been satisfied. That being said, the retributive theorist would likely take anger phenomenology to more than often involve felt desires for states of affair that, on their view, constitute at least subtle forms of retribution. I think there is good reason to construe the phenomenology of anger as often involving felt desires for recognition, as opposed to retribution. If this is so, then we might think this stands in support of a construal of anger as linked to desires for recognition. For the retributive theorist would have to give us an explanation as to why our phenomenology systematically favours the existence of a distinct desire in anger.

Often, in anger, we wish the target would acknowledge the gravity of what they have done. In the first instance, we might wish for a justification of the harm we have suffered, such as to potentially excuse it (I missed our dinner plans because I was ill, not because I do not care), but if none can be given, we wish for accountability, where the offender judges their own act, or omission, as wrong. We do not aim to harm the offender, in a literal or symbolic way, we want them to share our evaluation of the harm as unacceptable.

Imagine that you are angry at your best friend for not being there for you throughout your divorce. When you needed their support the most, your friend decided to go on a spontaneous 3-month long holiday abroad. Your anger at your friend would be justified, but it is unlikely that you would wish to make them suffer. You would not want to make your friend suffer physically, or hope for things to go badly for them in the future. Nor would you seek to ensure their social exclusion, or defame their character. Your anger's goal does not seem to be that your friend suffer, but rather, that they understand what they have done. In so far as retributive actions might be taken against your friend, they seem to have the aim of making them understand that they have committed a wrong rather than having the final aim of making them suffer as payback. Any aim for retribution would therefore seem instrumental in relation to the desire for recognition. My point is not that one never feels

vindictive anger towards loved ones, indeed this might be common, my point is that we should be cautious to attribute such vindictiveness to anger's nature.

I think desires for recognition extend beyond cases where one has an underlying interest in the wellbeing of the target of one's anger, as is the case in friendship example above. Indeed, most everyday cases of anger can be seen as aimed at recognition. When you honk at the man who cut you off in traffic, your desire, in anger, may be to alert the driver to having committed an infraction, as opposed to making them suffer for it. The same goes for protesting against the company that is dumping toxic waste, or in heated arguments with a lover that has betrayed you. In all such cases, your anger plausibly aims for an epistemic change in the offender such that they come to recognize their wrongdoing. Your anger need not aim for their suffering. The assumption that anger involves felt desires for retribution is challenged by many cases of anger being best described as involving felt desires for the target of anger to understand, acknowledge, or apologize for the wrongness of their actions.

Turning to consideration (d) regarding the conditions under which anger subsides, it seems that taking a desire for recognition to be central to anger allows more plausible predictions to be made of when anger subsides. Imagine the following: the object of your anger is subjected to a sequence of increasingly intense inflictions of physical and/or emotional pain. You are not the one to administer the suffering, and they have no idea why they are being subjected to this torture. Some retributive views of anger would plausibly predict that your anger would subside under conditions where the target of your anger is in enough physical or emotional pain (Nussbaum, 2015, 2016). Is this really a good prediction of the conditions under which anger subsides in psychologically typical humans? It seems unlikely that suffering itself is among the necessary or sufficient satisfaction conditions of a desire central to anger. It seems that it is important that, at least in typical cases of anger, the offender understand their suffering to be causally related to a harm they have committed against another.

Indeed, there is experimental work in line with this. In social psychology, there are competing views on whether the goal of revenge is suffering, such that comparative amounts of pain are equalled between offended and offender (Frijda, 1994), or understanding, such that the offender comes to understand the wrong they have committed. These have been called the "comparative suffering" and the "understanding" hypotheses of revenge, respectively (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009). The former hypothesis favours the retributive view, as the suffering is intended as payback, while the latter stands in line with anger having epistemic aims. The understanding hypothesis has received most empirical support (Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011). Studies have shown that seeing the offender suffer from "fateful harm", that is, harm conceptually and causally unrelated to the harm they caused, did not lead to a reduction in anger, or to an increase in satisfaction, on behalf of the offended party. Satisfaction was only observed when the offender expressed understanding of why retribution was being sought against him (Gollwitzer et al., 2011). These results were corroborated in further studies (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009). This supports the view that revenge is only satisfying when accompanied by epistemic change. Therefore, even when revenge is sought, it is the epistemic changes in the harmed agent that drive satisfaction, as opposed to suffering itself.¹⁹

In the example of anger at your friend, your friend's suffering will not satisfy your anger. This is because your anger at your friend does not involve a desire for payback but rather for recognition. Your anger's desire for recognition will be satisfied by your friend's genuine acknowledgement of the wrong they have committed against you. This will involve your friend sharing your appraisal of their actions, or omissions, towards you as unfair. Such a genuine acknowledgement often manifests itself in a sincere apology.

Apology can be seen as a main satisfaction condition for anger's desire for recognition.²⁰ The apology must, of course, be sincere. It must reflect the genuine epistemic state of the offending party. Apology reflects the offending party's evaluative stance towards one's reasons for anger. What apology seems to do, is signal to the aggrieved party that the offence should not have occurred, that they know that it was wrong, and that they will at least try to avoid committing such an offence again. That anger often terminates when a genuine apology is issued should be taken as evidence for the prevalence of the desire in anger for recognition. Genuine apologies give one reason to revise one's

anger, not because the wrongs that triggered it have been excused or erased, but because one's desire for the wrong to be recognized as a wrong has been satisfied.²¹

Below I will consider a response on behalf of the orthodox view whereby if genuine apology involves negative emotions, such as regret or guilt, then it can be construed as a form of retribution. For now, I would like to note that sometimes anger meets its end even when an apology from an offender is not given. In situations that might be called cases of "vicarious apology", members of one's community recognize the wrong that has been committed against you. These agents need not issue explicit apologies, although they often do. When anger is met with the understanding of your community, it often mildens, precisely because the wrong committed against oneself has been acknowledged. One's status as an individual that should not be treated in the ways that triggered anger is recognized by others, and the wrong one has suffered is acknowledged as a genuine wrong by others. That anger is affected by the acknowledgement of others gives us reason to think it often involves an aim for recognition, for we often express our anger to members of our community from whom we do not seek any type of retribution. If anger's aim were retributive it would be immune to vicarious apology, for in cases of vicarious apology there is no suffering desired upon those recognizing the anger as justified.

I have cast doubt on considerations (a)–(d), which stood in support of the retributive view of anger. Empirical as well as phenomenological evidence strongly suggests that a desire for recognition is central to anger. The types of actions triggered in angry agents, as well as in those that are the targets of anger, are consistent with there being a close link between anger and such a desire. The actions taken by angry agents often have recognition of the harm done, as opposed to the punishment of the wrongdoer, as their aim. Similarly, targets of anger often respond with empathy or support, as opposed to avoidance or retaliation. If anger communicated desires for payback or retribution, it would be less likely to inspire empathy and support in its targets. We often crave, in anger, to have our pain acknowledged and amends sought. Apologies often cause anger to cease, and even the understanding of friends being "on one's side" can help ease the brunt of an offence. Indeed, in so far as retribution satisfies the angry agent, it seems to do so typically only when relevant epistemic changes accompany it. Given the above, I think the retributive view of anger should be abandoned.

A proponent of the retributive view could make two main moves in response to my argument. I consider each below before concluding that in light of my response to these moves, and the evidence discussed so far, the retributive view should indeed be abandoned.

4 | RESPONSES

An initial move that could be made by the orthodox theorist would be to motivate a dismissal of the empirical work relied upon, based on methodological concerns. Skepticism could be cast on whether the empirical work cited actually targets anger, for example. Such a move would need to specify reasons for dismissing some pieces of experimental work and not others, however. For it is assumed, and often made explicit (as seen in Section 2), that the orthodox view has sound empirical support in its favour. The orthodox theorist would therefore need to explain, in a manner that is not ad hoc, how empirical work that seems to speak against their view is methodologically flawed, while empirical work that stands in line with it is not. Given the range of experimental work that I have relied upon, this is unlikely to be a promising move. Even if such an account were provided by the orthodox theorist, however, they would still have to reckon with the phenomenological considerations raised above. It is open to the orthodox theorist to simply deny the phenomenological considerations I brought forth, but I think it is more promising for them to instead argue that none of what has been raised above undermines their view. As opposed to undermining the existence of some recognitional aspect of anger, the responses on the part of the orthodox theorist that I consider below take a different direction. They all grant, to some extent, that I have highlighted a relevant feature of anger phenomena and respond by defending the orthodox view in light of this. I take there to be two main types of move that could be made in this direction.

4.1 | Atypicality moves

A proponent of the retributive view could grant that some cases of anger involve a desire for recognition, as opposed to retribution, but downplay the prevalence of such cases and explain them away as non-standard or atypical.²² Note that this move would rule out the constitutive reading of the retributive view, as the move would allow cases of anger that do not aim for retribution, which are ruled out on the constitutive view. This move would therefore involve a commitment to the causal claim that anger prototypically involves desires for retribution with the added provision of a story to explain away cases of anger aimed at recognition as atypical. The explanation would have to be one that sat well with the empirical and phenomenological considerations I have highlighted however. Such a strategy will likely run into trouble, as the evidence suggests that desires for recognition in anger are likely far too prevalent to make support for the atypicality claim feasible. I discuss two attempts at strategies of this sort that could be pursued by the orthodox theorist.

One suggestion, present in the literature, is that only anger aimed at institutions involve desires for recognition, as opposed to retribution (Rosen, n.d., in progress; Swaine, 1996). The thought is that, as such cases of anger do not involve a clear agent to whom blame can be attributed, retribution cannot be straightforwardly sought, and hence recognition is sought instead. On such an account, anger prototypically aims for retribution, and it is only through a lack of ability to play out this desire, that anger aims for recognition instead. This story fits poorly with evidence for the prevalence of recognitional aims in anger directed at individuals canvassed above. We saw that anger in interpersonal, as well as inter-group and institution-directed settings, was sensitive to the same types of moderators. This suggests that whether anger aims for retribution, or recognition, is likely more dependent on contextual moderators – such as appropriateness and perceived changeability of its targets – than on the nature of the object of anger. Phenomenological considerations also speak against this move as they suggest that desires for recognition are a genuine feature of many common occurrences of anger, particularly in interpersonal settings where retribution can be straightforwardly sought. Desires for recognition therefore do not seem to depend on an inability to aim for retribution in token instances of anger.

A related move would be to grant that there are two types of anger: one that aims for recognition and one that aims for retribution. The atypicality of the former would be secured by the assumption that desires for retribution are in some sense, likely evolutionarily, more basic than desires for recognition. Anger that aims for recognition would be seen as “higher-level”, while retributive anger would be seen as the “lower-level” type of anger. In so far as this move grants ‘basic’ and ‘higher’ types of anger the label “anger” though it amounts to a denial of the orthodox view. If anger aimed at recognition is granted as a robust type of anger, then the causal, as well as constitutive, reading of the orthodox claim is abandoned. To save the orthodox view, “higher-level” anger, that aims for recognition, would have to either be less common than “basic” anger, which empirical and phenomenological considerations sit poorly with, or be less worthy of the label of “anger”. Establishing the latter is far easier said than done however, as views of emotion that draw strong distinctions between basic and non-basic types have been severely critiqued and largely abandoned (Bluhm, 2006; Charland, 2002; Scarantino & Griffiths, 2011). Furthermore, we have seen that evolutionary considerations do not speak straightforwardly in favour of a retributive construal of anger, which means that these considerations are unlikely to support retributive anger being the most “basic” type of the emotion.²³

4.2 | Assimilationist moves

I take it that the most attractive move for a proponent of the retributive view is to incorporate much of the evidence and arguments I have put forward in favour of recognition being a central desire in anger, but argue that recognition is a form of, or component of, retribution. This move is favoured by parsimony – why postulate two distinct desires in connection with anger when one will do the same explanatory work? There are two main assimilationist moves. The first claims that recognition is in some sense retributive, and the second grants that retribution involves epistemic changes as a necessary component. I discuss these in turn.

Let us return to apology. Apology could be analysed as an act that makes the apologizer indebted to the person apologized to, or that lowers the moral status of the apologizer relative to the individual at whom the apology is directed. These accounts would fit well with an orthodox view of anger, as apology would in effect count as a form of payback for the harm committed, where the apologizer is symbolically, if not actually, harmed. Such accounts of apology are not common or popular however (see Helmreich, 2015). Even if one is sceptical of this status-lowering reading of apology, as I think we should be, the agent issuing the apology, if genuine, typically suffers in their acknowledgement of having wronged another. The mere epistemic shift to acknowledging that one has committed a wrong is arguably a painful experience and may trigger further negative emotions such as regret, remorse and even anger at oneself. There is, therefore, arguably some suffering involved in apology that fits with anger's aims being retributive in those cases that I have highlighted as evidence for anger's recognitional aims. The thought then is that even when anger seems to aim for recognition, it really aims for retribution, as sincere recognition of wrongdoing involves suffering and hence punishment.

Such a move runs into problems. Retribution is typically defined as deserved punishment. If the phenomenological and empirical evidence suggests a view of anger whereby it often does not aim to punish its targets for harms done, but rather to get them to acknowledge them, the presumed fact that their target's acknowledgement involves suffering does not imply that anger has a punitive aim. This is because the existence of suffering is not sufficient to infer a desire for it, if it were then if I desired that you love me, and love necessarily involved pain, this would count as me desiring to punish you. For the suffering involved to be retributive, it must be *desired* and not merely linked to some other state of affairs that is desired. This is the case even if the link between recognition and emotional pain turns out to be constitutive in the case of genuine apology. Desiring something does not commit you to desiring all properties of that which you desire. We, therefore, have reason to think that even if recognition often involves suffering, this is not sufficient for a desire for recognition to be subsumed under a desire for retribution. To make this move work, a proponent of the orthodox view would have to either endorse and defend an unpopular status-lowering view of apology or provide an argument for emotional suffering being constitutive of apology. In addition to this, the orthodox theorist would have to establish that some form of suffering is constitutive of all forms of acknowledgement of wrongdoing beyond apology. Finally, the orthodox theorist would have to answer why, in the case of anger, desires for P imply desires for all (presumably constitutive) properties of P.²⁴

The second assimilationist move claims that anger's desire for retribution involves an epistemic element.²⁵ Retribution, on such a move, does not just involve the infliction of pain, but includes as a component that the suffering party understand why they are suffering. In so far as we think non-punitive recognition is among the satisfaction conditions of a desire central to anger, including an epistemic component in our conception of retribution does nothing to account for cases of anger that we construe as having non-punitive aims. I argued that the experimental work, standard accounts of apology, and a number of phenomenological considerations, support anger being robustly related to a non-punitive desire. Including an epistemic element into our account of retribution cannot account for such cases, for our conception of retribution necessarily includes a punitive element. What would be needed for this move to work would be, in addition to including epistemic changes as central components in one's account of retribution, to claim that all cases where anger seems to have non-punitive aims, are actually cases of anger having punitive aims. This would involve stretching the meaning of "retribution" to include any and all conditions under which anger tends to subside, as symbolic or metaphorical forms of punishing its targets. Actions triggered by anger, such as leaving a negative, but entirely polite, review on Yelp, or calling a friend who has offended you to talk things out, would on such a move count as actions that aim to punish their targets. This strategy would, I think, stretch the meaning of "retribution" beyond its common use, and indeed beyond its explanatory use. An added worry with such a move is that the epistemic element the retributive theorist proposes to incorporate into their view would fall short of the aim central to the desire for recognition. The aim of the desire for recognition is that the offender comes to judge that they committed a wrong, while the epistemic element incorporated into the retributive view was that the offender merely understands why they are being punished. There is a clear gap between these epistemic elements, such that including the latter in one's view of anger will not straightforwardly deliver on accommodating considerations that favoured the former.

5 | CONCLUSION

I have cast doubt on four intuitive reasons that spoke in favour of the orthodox understanding of anger. I have not argued that retribution is excluded from anger's aims, rather, I have endeavoured to bring forth desires for recognition as robust and genuine desires central to anger. I have highlighted the main moves an orthodox theorist could make in response to this claim, and advised against them. These reasons do not block the possibility of an orthodox rebuttal, but they suggest that a pluralist view of anger is worth serious consideration.

A pluralist view of anger's desires does justice to the emotional phenomenon in question, and can accommodate the role of contextual factors that moderate the variability of anger phenomena.²⁶ The pluralist view fits far better with the empirical and phenomenological considerations I have brought forth than does the orthodox view, and it does so without denying the reality of retributive anger. The pluralist view is likely to allow a wider range of anger phenomena to come into philosophical attention. Self-directed anger has, for example, long escaped philosophical attention. Such cases are likely to be more readily accounted for by the pluralist, as opposed to the orthodox, account of anger as experimental work suggests that self-directed anger may be paradigmatically directed at recognitional, as opposed to retributive, aims (see Ellsworth & Tong, 2006).

Lastly, a pluralist view allows further desires to be involved in anger as well. A desire I have not discussed here is a desire for rectification – that a harm terminate or be undone (a stolen object redelivered, the cessation of an abuse). If your bike is stolen and the thief sincerely apologizes to you, but does not return the bike, nor pays you an approximate amount of money, your anger is unlikely to subside. Perhaps if your bike is returned, and a genuine apology delivered, you will still want the bike thief to be punished. A pluralist view makes room for such scenarios without subsuming recognitional or rectifying aims as forms of retribution. It allows us to identify which desires are at play in specific cases, and whether and when some are instrumental to the achievement of others. An orthodox view not only denies that anger with purely recognitional goals is possible (on a constitutive retributive view) or a robust phenomenon (on a causal retributive reading), but obscures the possible existence of further desires that may be (sometimes simultaneously) at play in anger. It is true that the pluralist view does not deliver a simple answer to the question of what desires are relevant to anger, however, I think that this is a virtue of the view, rather than a failure. Delivering further on this claim is a task for future work that develops, and assesses, a detailed pluralist account.

One worry a pluralist view will have to address is the risk of delivering a disjointed account of anger, that is, the pluralist view will need to provide an account of what makes anger a unified phenomenon. I think there are promising directions available to secure such unity while maintaining pluralism regarding the emotion's desires. First, note that any theorist that does not take desires to be constitutive of emotions will be unlikely to make appeals to desires to secure the unity of emotional phenomena (e.g., Tappolet, 2016). It is the phenomenology and/or formal objects of emotions that are typically thought to individuate emotion types on such views. The phenomenology of instances of anger that are linked to distinct desires are likely to bear significant similarities. Likewise, the scenarios that typically trigger anger are, to a large extent, shared: anger is typically triggered by offences or situations that are perceived as unfair, whether it is aimed at recognition or retribution. This suggests that regardless of the desire associated to a given instance of anger, the same formal object, or evaluative property, might be attributed to its objects (see footnote 2). Furthermore, the empirical work surveyed gives us at least a potential starting point for the development of a systematic way of differentiating when anger involves a particular type of desire. The same scenarios were found to trigger anger, but moderators, that is, contextual features, seem influential in determining what types of aims angry agents are motivated to pursue. On a pluralist view that postulates causal links between anger and its desires then, there seem to be promising ways to ensure unity.²⁷

Finally, the normative features and consequences of a pluralist view of anger remain to be investigated. Whether and when anger and its desires might be fitting is left to be determined, as is whether and when anger and its desires might be morally justified.²⁸ It is relevant to note that one prominent line of argument grounds condemnations of anger in its retributive nature. On Nussbaum's (2015, 2016) view, for example, anger is morally condemnable for its constitutive link to the desire for retribution. A separate position, held by Callard (2020), holds that anger, and even

violent vengeance, can be morally justified, but maintains that the emotion is forever tainted by its link to retribution, even when it is called for and expressed non-aggressively. A crucial assumption on such accounts is that non-retributive anger is in the best case extremely hard to cultivate (Nussbaum, 2015), or in the worst case “a philosopher’s fiction” (Callard, 2020). The emerging pluralist view puts pressure on this assumption, for it suggests that non-retributive anger is not only possible, but prevalent. If, as I have argued, recognition is a central desire in anger, then arguments for anger’s immorality that hinge on its presumed retributive nature seem unlikely to succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Margaret Hampson for discussion and feedback, as well as Bence Nanay and his research group at the Center for Philosophical Psychology, University of Antwerp, and the Thumos Research Group at the University of Geneva. I would also like to thank Susan James and Michael Brady for prompting me to consider responses open to the orthodox view.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ On the formal objects of emotions see Kenny (1963) and Teroni (2007).
- ² Although the formal object of anger is typically taken to be “offence” (Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 81) or “slights” (Scarantino & de Sousa, 2018), a broad understanding of these terms is typically employed in order to account for everyday cases of anger. Someone cutting you off on the free-way may not strike you as a personal offence but may still make you angry because such an action is an offence in the norm-violation sense. The formal object of anger is therefore this broad sense of “offence” that includes wrongs and unfair actions or states of affair, whether or not the angry individual is personally insulted.
- ³ The formal objects of emotions are typically also thought to supply the correctness conditions of emotions, such that anger is said to be appropriate or justified when its formal object is instantiated in or by the particular object anger is felt towards, that is, anger is appropriate when an offence has occurred (De Sousa, 1987; Deonna & Teroni, 2012; Greenspan, 1988; Tappolet, 2016). It is important to note that assessments of appropriateness often equivocate over at least two distinct types of normative assessment (D’Arms & Jacobson, 2000). An emotion can be appropriate in the sense just mentioned, in that it is accurate or fitting, with respect to an evaluative state of affairs, but the very same emotion can be inappropriate in a moral sense (e.g., it might be inappropriate to laugh at a funeral, even though your friend’s whispered comment was funny). Here, I am concerned with appropriateness in the fittingness, or correctness, sense. Emotions are appropriate in this sense when they represent an evaluative state of affairs in a manner that matches how things really stand in the world.
- ⁴ Most philosophers of emotion take emotions to have evaluative content of some sort, be it conceptual content for judgment theorists (Nussbaum, 2004; Solomon, 2003) or non-conceptual content for perceptual theorists (Döring, 2007; Tappolet, 2016). Deonna and Teroni (2012)’s Attitudinal theory of emotion is an exception, as they think the evaluative component of emotions features in the type of attitudes they are, rather than their representational content. On this account emotions still have an evaluative component which features in one’s phenomenology albeit in a non-representational manner (it has however been doubted that the Attitudinal view manages to deliver on this claim, see Rossi and Tappolet (2019). If it does not, then the view is one that also postulates evaluative content of emotions).
- ⁵ Although Seneca’s *De Ira* is a dialogue aimed at refuting Aristotle’s view that anger can be virtuous, Seneca explicitly acknowledges that the conception of anger he endorses shares much with Aristotle’s (1.3.3). The two, therefore, share their descriptive account of what anger is while endorsing different claims regarding anger’s moral status.
- ⁶ We should of course be cautious to distinguish specific motor tendencies from desires. The former involves specific action profiles, such as freezing or ducking, which can be related to the same desire: for safety for example. But these action profiles are clearly not necessarily tied to the goal of safety. They can be performed as means towards attaining a variety of aims. Desires, on the other hand typically set aims, and do not specify fine-grained action types necessary to attain them beyond the level of specificity that a given action is of the sort that would help attain the relevant goal. That being said, “attack” action tendencies have gone hand in hand with retributive conceptions of anger, as they are involved in retaliation and causing harm. These action tendencies could aim only instrumentally for harm, having recognition as final aims (a possibility that will be discussed), but without making this explicit, it is safe to take reference to these types

of action tendencies, in anger, to be within the purview of the orthodox view, where enacting payback is seen as anger's central aim.

- ⁷ In psychology too, revenge or punishment is often taken to be a definitional component of anger (see Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004; Frijda, 1994).
- ⁸ For a thorough exploration of Aristotle on anger see Christensen (2016).
- ⁹ Tappolet (2016, p. 72) includes apology as a possible aim as well, but this seems to be proposed as a less typical aim of anger, fitting well with a causal orthodox view that privileges retribution.
- ¹⁰ Detailed accounts of this desire are not provided by proponents of the orthodox view, which makes assuming a thin and intuitive account (see Schroeder, 2017) called for. That emotions in general are related to conative attitudes is a widespread contention in the philosophy of emotion literature, where “desire”, “pro-attitude” and “conative” component are often used interchangeably. My target is any view of anger that characterizes it as primarily linked to a conative attitude that aims for retribution.
- ¹¹ This is also clear in the *De Anima*, where anger is defined as a desire for returning pain (DA 403a31), and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where anger ceases when the offender “pays back for the offense; for revenge stops anger” (NE 1126a21-22).
- ¹² Adherence to a retributive view of anger's nature can be associated with distinct claims regarding anger's moral status, as well as distinct normative claims regarding whether anger should be avoided. Note that I am here concerned with the moral status of the emotion itself, not that of actions triggered by the emotion. For Seneca (*De Ira*; 2010) and Nussbaum (2015), for example, anger's link to the desire for retribution rules out cases of morally justified anger. These thinkers urge us to avoid anger for this reason, as does Pettigrove (2012). For Aristotle, on the other hand, anger is often the virtuous way of responding to injustice, despite its constitutive link to retribution. An Aristotelian account of anger therefore does not recommend against the emotion. This has made Aristotle influential on views that hail anger as the moral and righteous response to oppression (Bell, 2009; Srinivasan, 2018). More recently, Callard (2020) takes anger to have a mixed moral status, anger can be morally justified, as injustices call for outrage, but it is never wholly righteous, due to its tie to retribution. Anger, on this view, is not recommended against, but is also never morally pure. Anger is, for all these thinkers save Aristotle, intrinsically immoral in some sense. As seen by Callard's position, however, intrinsic immorality need not be held in tandem with normative claims recommending against anger, as the emotion can still be taken to be called for. I do not engage with existing accounts of anger's moral status here. My target is the descriptive account of anger as retributive that underlies all these views. It is, however, likely that if the orthodox view of anger's nature is to be revised, then pessimism regarding anger's moral status will need to be rethought. I come back to this in my conclusion.
- ¹³ Which actions count as punitive or non-punitive is not set in stone. The empirical work employs an intuitive understanding of the distinction, where actions that do not straightforwardly aim to harm the targets of anger are considered non-punitive. We will see (Section 4) that expanding the class of actions that count as punitive is an attractive move the orthodox theorist can pursue in response to my argument, but it is one that I think fails.
- ¹⁴ Although a retributive view need not be committed to this, we saw that contemporary proponents are (see Nussbaum, 2015, 2016; Pettigrove, 2012).
- ¹⁵ The experimental work does not delve into notions of appropriateness, and merely claims that “perceived appropriateness” is a key factor in determining how targets of anger respond to angry agents. It is therefore ambiguous whether “perceived appropriateness” involves appropriateness in the fittingness sense or in the moral sense (see footnote 3). Note however that, as anger's formal object is typically taken to be the morally relevant evaluative property “offence”, reasons that make anger fitting in the accuracy sense, count also as pro tanto reasons for anger's appropriateness in the moral sense. When there are reasons for anger to be fitting there is also (at least some) reason for anger to be morally appropriate. The reverse is not true, such that we cannot infer from the moral or prudential appropriateness of anger that there are also some fittingness reasons for anger at play. The actual experimental set-ups however did not include any conditions where anger could be construed as being morally or prudentially appropriate but not also fitting in the accuracy sense. All instances where appropriateness was observed to be a key moderator were ones where anger was also fitting. It is not implausible then to assume that sensitivity to anger's fittingness is playing a role. As my project in this paper is descriptive, I will assume for now that the appropriateness moderator highlighted in the empirical work involves whether an offence has occurred in the accuracy sense. It remains an open possibility that the relevant moderator is the moral sense of appropriateness however, and future work on the normative features of a pluralist view should investigate the prospects and relevance of a “perceived moral-appropriateness” moderator. Thank you to an anonymous referee for prompting me to consider this.
- ¹⁶ Anger's link to something similar to what I call a desire for recognition has been mentioned in Smith (1976), Strawson (1962), Darwall (2013), Cogley (2014) and Srinivasan (2018). Despite featuring in the work of philosophers working

on distinct topics, a defense of the centrality of this desire in anger, as well as an examination of how this claim relates to the orthodox view on anger has, so far, been lacking.

- ¹⁷ Instrumental desires, also called extrinsic desires, are desires for states of affairs as means to achieve other ends. These are contrasted with non-instrumental, or intrinsic, desires, which are desires for states of affairs that are desired for their own sake (see Schroeder, 2017).
- ¹⁸ A fourth view would be a constitutive version of option 3, where anger is characterized by constitutively involving desires for either recognition or retribution. This would exclude the possibility of additional desires being involved in anger, as well as (depending on how the view was cashed out), both desires being simultaneously at play.
- ¹⁹ Here, empirical work seems to stand in line with retributive aims being instrumental towards attaining recognition. Earlier, in Section 3.1, the empirical work suggested that retributive aims might be non-instrumental, or intrinsic, in nothing to lose scenarios. Taken together, these two suggestions seem to stand in tension with one another, for while the former suggests that retributive aims might always be instrumental, the latter, on the contrary, suggests that retribution is often itself a final aim in anger. There is no real tension here however. The empirical work is not sufficient to come down on whether retribution is always an instrumental desire or whether it can also, at times, be anger's final aim. It is preferable, I think, to allow both possibilities. As my view is explicitly a pluralist one, it allows anger to have distinct non-instrumental desires in different contexts. This pluralism allows anger also distinct instrumental desires in particular contexts, so it is not a problem for my view if anger at times aims for retribution only instrumentally, as a means to attain recognition, while at others aims non-instrumentally for retribution itself. Note that behavioural patterns will often be a reliable guide to which (instrumental and non-instrumental) desires are at play in anger, for the type of retribution sought is likely to be different in these scenarios. Aggressive, destructive, and even self-destructive, retribution will be more characteristic of cases where anger non-instrumentally aims for retribution, where making others suffer is anger's final aim, while milder, less destructive, forms of retribution will be characteristic of anger that merely aims for retribution in the service of the final aim of recognition. Thank you to an anonymous referee for prompting me to address this potential tension.
- ²⁰ Such a claim is compatible with different accounts of forgiveness, where forgiveness is construed as the termination or overcoming of anger. All such accounts share the view that apology is among the set of things that can cause anger to terminate (Callard, 2018; Hieronymi, 2001; Na'aman, 2019). My claim is only incompatible with accounts of apology that take apology to involve the lowering of the status of the apologizer, as such "status-lowering" could be construed as a form of retribution (Bovens, 2008). These are quite uncommon accounts of apology however (see Helmreich, 2015). On most accounts apology serves to communicate the acknowledgement of having committed a wrong (Hieronymi, 2001) and commitment to treating the offended party better (Hieronymi, 2001; Martin, 2010), and is often explicitly contrasted to retribution (Callard, 2018; Hieronymi, 2001; Na'aman, 2019).
- ²¹ Where these reasons for anger are the initial wrongs that caused the anger (Callard, 2018; Na'aman, 2019), or the fact that the offender could harm the offended again in the future (Hieronymi, 2001). On views of the latter sort, anger ceases when an apology is issued because the apology removes the current threat.
- ²² Here, I am concerned with a descriptive, empirical, sense of typicality. That is, I am concerned with whether anger that aims for recognition is common, rather than whether it should be common, or whether moral anger is to be identified with anger that aims for recognition. Thank you to an anonymous referee for prompting me to note this.
- ²³ Even if anger aimed at recognition is phylogenetically younger than retributive anger, it would be a mistake to assume that it emerges on the time scale of human learning from child-rearing. The types of conditions that would have made anger aimed at recognition adaptive are not a feature of modern society alone, and may have influenced the emotion several thousands of years ago (Sterelny, 2016). To count as more deserving of the label of "anger" only *the most* ancient form of anger seems not only arbitrary, and in need of justification, but worse – misguided, as this form of anger may be so ancient as to make it less explanatorily valuable when humans are the target species in question.
- ²⁴ An option available to the orthodox theorist here would be to take anger to aim instrumentally for retribution. If retribution is a necessary component of recognition, then an instrumental desire for retribution could be postulated of anger. To make such a view work however, a proponent of the orthodox view would need to deliver on the claim that retribution is indeed a necessary component of recognition, that is, involved in all cases of anger, in a manner that does not stretch the concept of "retribution" beyond reason or risk becoming ad hoc. Even if such a move could be made to work, however, it would result in a concessionary version of the orthodox view, for retribution would be relegated to an instrumental role, while the desire for recognition would be the final, intrinsic, desire in anger. Suffering would no longer be desired as pay-back, as the orthodox view is typically framed, but as a means to bring about epistemic changes. Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this option.
- ²⁵ As we saw in Aristotle but not in Nussbaum (2015, 2016).
- ²⁶ Note that the prevalence of moderators that favour retributive anger, in historical and current cases of systemic injustice, may at times obscure anger's recognitional aims. If injustices that trigger anger are often characterized by rigid

offenders that are unwilling to change, and to whom the anger of the oppressed seems inappropriate (Frye 1983; Campbell 1994), then anger will more often aim for retribution in these cases. Relatedly, an orthodox view is likely perpetuating of the very moderators whose presence favours retributive aims in anger, for if the orthodox view is dominant in folk psychology, the targets of anger will be less likely to view the emotion as making recognitional pleas, and more likely to dismiss anger as overreaction, or retaliate. This will in turn make the targets of anger seem unwilling to change.

²⁷ A few further options available to pursue so as to ensure the unity of anger on a pluralist view include: (1) Distinct desire types may individuate different types of anger, which are related to each other by virtue of being members of the anger “family”. (2) An overarching desire, that desires for retribution and recognition (and perhaps rectification) are instrumental towards attaining, may be postulated. In fear, for example, we might think desires to fight or flee are at play, yet that these desires are instrumental towards attaining the overarching desire of safety or protection. It might be worth exploring the prospects for an analogue to such an overarching desire in anger. Thank you to an anonymous referee for prompting me to consider the issue of the unity of anger.

²⁸ Note that it is an open question whether assessments of the fittingness of relevant desires bear on the fittingness of anger itself. Perhaps anger's only fittingness condition is the minimal condition I have assumed in this paper that anger is fitting when an offence has occurred (see footnote 3). Alternatively, desires strongly linked to anger may contribute to the fittingness of the emotion. Nussbaum (2015, 2016), for example, seems to find anger not only immoral but also unfitting due to its constitute link to retribution. There is no rational reason to desire retribution on her account, as retribution will not actually undo the harm the angry agent has suffered (2015, p. 47–48). (Nussbaum would be unlikely to deny the relevance of the sense of fittingness I have assumed throughout this piece, for there can be instances of anger that are mistaken not only in virtue of aiming for retribution but in virtue of being based on a false belief that an offence has occurred). Note as well that it is also an open question how the two norms of assessment, of fittingness and moral appropriateness, relate to one another in the case of anger. These questions should guide future work on the normative features and consequences of a pluralist view. Thank you to an anonymous referee for highlighting them.

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How to cite this article: Silva L. Anger and its desires. *Eur J Philos.* 2021;1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12628>