BOOK REVIEWS

Cherry, Myisha. *The Case for Rage: Why Anger Is Essential to Anti-racist Struggle.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 224. $19.95 (cloth).

Myisha Cherry's *The Case for Rage* addresses the normative status of anger in the context of the pursuit of racial justice. Her central claim is that a certain species of anger that she calls "Lordean rage" (named after the feminist scholar and poet Audre Lorde) is not only reasonable but also essential for combating racism and securing justice for everyone. Her argument proceeds in three steps. First, she argues that critics of anger fail to distinguish among different types and that some forms of the emotion, such as Lordean rage, are not vulnerable to traditional critiques (chap. 1). Second, Cherry argues that Lordean rage is a "fitting" response to racial injustice (chap. 2). Third, she explains how Lordean rage can be used as an effective tool in the fight for racial justice as a means of communication (chap. 2), as a source of motivation (chap. 3), and as a mode of direct resistance through subversion of unjust racial rules (chap. 4).

One of Cherry's stated aims is for the book to be accessible to a wide audience that includes not just academics but anyone with an interest in racial justice and the role that anger should play in its pursuit. On this score, Cherry succeeds with flying colors. The writing is exceptionally clear, and the book is full of real-life examples and pop culture references that make it highly engaging and a pleasure to read. Philosophers hoping to make an impact beyond the ivory tower (which should be a widely shared goal) would do well to emulate Cherry's approach.

While *The Case for Rage* is an engaging and thought-provoking work, the defense of anger is underwhelming. One major shortcoming concerns the analysis of the target emotion. Cherry's strategy for elucidating Lordean rage is to distinguish it from other species of anger such as "rogue rage" (nihilistic anger at everyone and everything) and "narcissistic rage" (anger directed exclusively at those who harm oneself, without concern for harm to others). To distinguish among these anger types, Cherry focuses on their respective targets, action tendencies, aims, and perspectives. The targets of Lordean rage are "those who are complicit in and perpetrators of racial injustice" (23). The action tendency of Lordean rage is to "absorb and use it for energy" in service to its aim, which is to bring about a "change in racist beliefs, expectations, policies, and behaviors that shape and support white supremacy" (24). The perspective that informs Lordean rage is inclusive in the sense that its concern is to gain freedom and justice not merely for oneself or one's identity group but rather for all victims of oppression (24–25).

While this discussion makes it clear that Lordean rage is different from and preferable to nihilistic and self-centered forms of anger, we also need to consider

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whether Lordean rage is preferable to responses to injustice that do not involve anger at all. And to do that, we need an account of the features that distinguish anger (in all its varieties) from other emotions and attitudes one might have in response to wrongdoing. Based on the account we are given, Lordean rage is a state in which one is highly motivated to fight for justice from an inclusive perspective. But what exactly makes this a state of anger? We can certainly imagine someone being motivated to fight for justice from an inclusive perspective without feeling anything deserving of labels like "anger" or "rage." Indeed, historical figures such as Gandhi and Mandela pursued racial justice with vigor and inclusivity while expressing a commitment to avoiding anger. Cherry's account doesn't make it clear how we can distinguish the emotional responses of such individuals from Lordean rage. If Lordean rage is so broad a phenomenon as to be attributable to the avowedly nonangry approaches of Gandhi and Mandela, then it cannot plausibly be considered a species of anger.

These problems could have been avoided if Cherry had offered some details about the phenomenology of anger and a fuller account of the noncognitive attitudes of which it partly consists. Cherry's explanation for omitting discussion of what anger feels like is that doing so would not help to distinguish Lordean rage from other types of anger (26). While this seems right, the problem is that we are not provided with an explanation of what makes Lordean rage a species of anger in the first place. One feature of anger that seems especially useful for distinguishing it from other emotions experienced in response to wrongdoing is a feeling of animosity or hostility toward the wrongdoer. While anger involves more than such feelings, to say that an individual who doesn't experience any such feelings toward a wrongdoer is in a state of anger (let alone "rage") is to strain the concept beyond recognition. If Cherry's aim is to vindicate a form of anger, she needs to directly address this feature of the emotion which has seemed especially troubling to many anger skeptics.

Some of Cherry's remarks later in the book indicate an awareness of concerns about animosity. Without saying whether animosity is a standard feature of Lordean rage, she suggests that the emotion can be compatible with goodwill toward the transgressor because expressing it is a way of saying that we care enough about the person's moral well-being to offer angry criticisms (91). But what makes such criticisms angry? One can express condemnation of another person's actions that signals concern for their moral well-being without being angry. The best explanation for the difference between angry and nonangry moral criticisms is that nonangry moral criticisms don't involve hostility toward the wrongdoer (see Tyler Paytas, "Aptness Isn't Enough: Why We Ought to Abandon Anger," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* [forthcoming]).

Elsewhere, Cherry writes, "[Lordean rage] does not aim for payback or ill-will but change and justice" (88). But even if Lordean rage doesn't aim for ill will, presumably Cherry will want to allow that it is compatible with experiencing feelings of ill will. Not only is it unclear how an emotion that is completely devoid of such feelings could qualify as rage, but the general spirit of Cherry's project also suggests a desire to defend feelings of hostility (within certain constraints) toward perpetrators of racial injustice. But if this is indeed her aim, she needs to openly defend these features rather than sweep them under the rug.

The second component of Cherry's defense of Lordean rage is the claim that anger can be a "fitting'" response to wrongdoing. While the idea that emotions can be vindicated by virtue of their being fitting has gained traction among philosophers of late, it's not easy to get a handle on exactly what fittingness involves. According to Cherry, "To say an emotion is fitting is to say that it makes sense to feel it toward a particular kind of thing" (36). She doesn't provide any further analysis of the idea of "making sense," perhaps because she takes it to be a fundamental concept that cannot be explained in more basic terms. The discussion does suggest that fitting emotions have a certain normative merit that nonfitting emotions lack. The key question, then, is whether we have good reasons for believing that anger can be "fitting" or "make sense" in a manner conveying this normative merit.

The evidence for this claim comes in the form of examples of wrongdoing and claims about how we would expect the agents in the examples to feel. Whereas we are unsurprised when people respond to wrongdoing with anger, we would be perplexed if they responded with a quite different emotion such as happiness: "We might expect Maria to be angry that her dog was mistreated by someone she trusted. We have these expectations because we think that a fitting emotional response to cruelty is anger, not happiness" (36). It's not obvious that the reason we expect Maria to be angry is that we think anger is fitting in the normatively laden sense Cherry has in mind. An alternative explanation for our expectations about Maria is that anger is by far the most common reaction to such circumstances. Given the prevalence of anger in human beings, even Seneca and the Buddha would expect Maria to be angry. But this is a statistical claim, not a normative one, and it doesn't suggest that they would think her anger "fits" or "makes sense" in any sense other than being easily predictable. But even if most people would judge that Maria's anger is fitting in Cherry's sense, we would still need to ask whether they are right to do so. We know that anger is the typical response to wrongdoing, but why should we think that it ever has any intrinsic normative merit?

One way to answer this question is to appeal to instances where anger involves an accurate perception of wrongdoing. Indeed, some philosophers use the term "fitting" to refer specifically to emotions that comprise accurate appraisals. Within Cherry's framework, accuracy of appraisal falls under a separate category called "correctness." A token of Lordean rage is correct in this sense when the target of the emotion really did contribute to racial injustice. While accuracy of appraisal seems like something that can confer positive normative status on an emotion, it doesn't always do as much work as one might initially think. To borrow one of Cherry's examples, although envy often involves an accurate perception of another person possessing something desirable that one lacks, it is still objectionable and something to be avoided (37). Even if my envy includes the true judgment that my colleague's promotion is a genuine good that I covet for myself, I ought to be happy for her rather than envious. And note that the grounds for rejecting envy are not merely about consequences. Envy reflects an orientation toward others that seems intrinsically bad, accuracy notwithstanding. Anger skeptics will argue that the same holds in the case of "correct" Lordean rage. Of course, if Lordean rage were the only means of accurately perceiving racial injustice, this epistemic benefit would go a long way toward vindicating the emotion. But we are fully capable of recognizing injustice without relying on anger.

Perhaps the epistemic value of anger consists in something deeper. Drawing on the work of Amia Srinivasan ("The Aptness of Anger," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 [2018]: 123–44), Cherry suggests that Lordean rage is a way of appreciating injustice which has value that would be missing in a nonangry recognition that injustice has occurred (52–53). This can seem plausible in the case of someone who accurately perceives an injustice without having concern for the victims or a desire to rectify the situation. But what about the nonangry individual who is deeply concerned with, and highly motivated to pursue, justice? If someone feels strong sympathy for the victims and a deep love of justice that motivates positive action, it is hard to see what intrinsic value could possibly be added by anger. Nonetheless, Cherry makes the puzzling remark that we can all agree that something of value is missing in such a nonangry response even if we cannot make sense of what this might be (53).

A third major component of Cherry's defense of Lordean rage is an appeal to its instrumental value as a means of communication and a source of motivation. The communicative value of anger has been well rehearsed in the literature, and there is no denying that an angry outburst can be an effective means of signaling to wrongdoers that their conduct is unacceptable while also expressing concern and respect for the victims. The more interesting element of Cherry's argument is her discussion of the motivational benefits of anger. Drawing on empirical research, Cherry provides a novel and insightful account of how anger can provide eagerness, optimism, and self-belief, which are all especially important in a context where the fight against injustice might initially appear hopeless (67–72). But while these motivational benefits are not insignificant, they are hardly decisive. To see why, consider Seneca's reply to the suggestion that anger can be useful because it puts more fight in people: "By that reasoning, so is drunkenness too; for it makes men forward and bold, and many have been better at the sword because they were the worse for drink. By the same reasoning you must also say that lunacy and madness are essential to strength, since frenzy often makes men more powerful" (Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928], 1:141; credit to Massimo Pigliucci for this reference).

The fact that drunkenness can bring some of the same benefits as anger illustrates the general point that the instrumental case for an emotion is incomplete without careful consideration of the associated risks, as well as alternative options. The risks associated with anger are not trivial. Anger is among the emotions that most easily overwhelm us, and its distorting effects on judgment are well documented. One of the more recognizable examples of cognitive bias caused by anger is selective thinking (i.e., paying attention only to a subset of the relevant facts). When anger arises, we are motivated to find reasons to justify it to ourselves and others. We thus narrowly focus on the perceived transgression and resulting harm rather than taking a broad view of the situation and the person who has wronged us. Other, less obvious examples of anger's pernicious effects on thinking include heuristic processing (i.e., relying on stereotypes), uncharitable construal (e.g., attributing malicious intent in ambiguous situations), outgroup prejudice, and hasty decision-making (for an overview of the research on these effects, see Paul M. Litvak et al., "Fuel in the Fire: How Anger Impacts Judgment and Decision-Making," in *International Handbook of Anger*, ed. M. Potegal, G. Stemmler, and C. Spielberger

[New York: Springer, 2010], 287–310). These distorting features of anger contribute to its most problematic effects, which are the countless instances of violence and cycles of revenge that leave utter devastation in their wake.

Cherry devotes her penultimate chapter to strategies for mitigating the risks associated with anger. Regarding the problem of violence, she claims that it can be avoided by our learning to acknowledge and express our anger rather than repressing it (150). It is certainly true that repressing one's anger is a poor long-term strategy. But a strategy of relying on anger and hoping to control it as it arises seems equally reckless. Anger is an emotion that by its very nature is difficult to harness precisely because of the distorting effects on cognition outlined above. This is why the advice of anger skeptics, from the ancient Buddhists and Stoics to contemporary philosophers (e.g., William B. Irvine, Martha Nussbaum) and psychologists (e.g., Donald Robertson), is not to repress anger but rather to cultivate oneself such that it is less likely to arise in the first place.

Of course, the goal of jettisoning anger wouldn't be reasonable if success in this endeavor meant becoming the sort of person who is either blind to injustice or insufficiently motivated to correct it. If the choice were between being susceptible to anger and thereby motivated to fight for justice and being immune to anger and thereby indifferent to injustice, a strong case could be made for preserving our capacity for anger. But this is a false dichotomy. Anger is not the only affect-laden mode of responding to injustice and wrongdoing. A nonangry individual can still experience sympathetic concern for victims and a desire to help them recover. She can also feel a deep love of justice that spurs her to action in its pursuit, including vigorous condemnations of those who perpetrate injustice and expressions of solidarity with victims. There's little reason to believe that someone who has cultivated such attitudes will be less motivated to fight for justice than the individual who relies on anger.

The person fueled by positive emotions is in a better position than the person fueled by anger in at least three respects. First, she avoids the amplification of cognitive biases associated with anger which so easily lead to uncharitable interpretations and misattributions of wrongdoing. Second, she is less likely to rashly pursue strategies that will do more harm than good, including acts of violent revenge. Third, she can more easily see the perpetrator of injustice as a fellow human being who deserves a baseline level of respect and an opportunity for redemption rather than as a sworn enemy to be eliminated.

Cherry argues that Lordean rage is less vulnerable to the aforementioned risks than other types of anger because it involves an inclusive perspective seeking justice for all rather than a narcissistic focus on oneself or a nihilistic resentment toward the whole world. But if Lordean rage is a genuine species of anger, then the risks are unavoidable. Given that the benefits of anger are attainable via other emotions and attitudes that are less likely to lead us down a path of hatred, violence, and destruction, we are better off avoiding anger to the best of our ability.

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