

Fitting Diminishment of Anger: A Permissivist Account*

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Abstract

There has been recent discussion of a puzzle posed by emotions that are backward looking. Though our emotions commonly diminish over time, how can they diminish fittingly if they are an accurate appraisal of an event that is situated in the past? Agnes Callard (2017) has offered a solution by providing an account of anger in which anger is both backwards looking and resolvable, yet her account depends upon contrition to explain anger's fitting diminishment. My aim is to explain how anger can fittingly diminish even when there is lack of contrition. I propose a permissivism about fittingness by showing that both anger and compassion are fitting responses to blameworthy behaviour. I argue that anger is rendered fitting because it accurately appraises the behaviour, whereas compassion becomes fitting as a valuational response to what the behaviour reveals about the lived experience of the offender. I then respond to some worries my account raises, and I clarify details of my account to show that it is not unrealistic to the way some of our anger actually does diminish. I end with a proposal that our anger can fittingly diminish through the act of forgiveness when compassion is not a forthcoming affective response.

1. Introduction

Right now I am angry. I am angry because my new neighbours are blaring their music. They do this often, at any point of the day, even in the early morning and late evening. However, my anger is not an instance of blame, for it has more to do with the fact that I lack control over the level of stimulation in my home than with their lack of respect. And if my neighbours were to move out tomorrow my anger would cease, just as it started. For I would, again, be in control of the level of stimulation in my home.

However, if I were to knock on the neighbours' door and ask them to turn their music down, and they were to scream expletives at me and slam the door in my face, my anger would be directed at their treatment towards me. My anger would then not quickly diminish if they were to move away tomorrow, even though I would have regained control over the level of stimulation in my home. But my anger would diminish, eventually.

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Supposing my anger to be a fitting¹ response to this hypothetical moral violation against me, could it be fitting for my anger to diminish? That is, if the reason that anger is fitting – in this hypothetical scenario – is that I have been treated poorly by my neighbours, and if the fact of my mistreatment remains unchanged, could my anger nevertheless fittingly diminish?

In this paper I argue that anger can fittingly diminish, and my method is to analyse both my actual anger at my neighbours and the anger I would have in the hypothetical scenario proposed above in order to motivate an account that is realistic to one way human anger actually does, in some instances, diminish. But first I will give some preliminary explanation of the puzzle I aim to address.

2. The Puzzle and Some Background

There has been recent discussion of a problem posed by emotions that are backward looking. Such emotions – anger and grief are two examples – are responses to events that are situated in the past. The problem is that while these emotions commonly diminish over time, the original reason that rendered the emotion fitting remains. It seems no reason can address the original reason that rendered the emotion fitting.

Dan Moller (2007) and Berislav Marušić (2018) have addressed the problem this poses when one grieves the loss of a loved one. Both Moller and Marušić point out that the reason for the grief – the reason that bears on its fittingness – is that the loved one has died, rather than, for example, that grieving is a healthy initial response to the death of a loved one, even if the grief process is a healthy and natural way to handle such a loss. So the only thing that could address this reason for the grief is the supernatural resurrection of the loved one. And unfortunately, this is not a common occurrence. So, though it may be prudent for grief to eventually diminish,

¹ To say an emotion is fitting is to say it is appropriate in a certain way. But it is helpful to use the language of fittingness because sometimes what *seems* an appropriate reason to have or not have an emotion is not actually a right kind of reason to have or not have that emotion. For example, there may be moral or prudential reasons to not be envious, but moral or prudential reasons do not bear on whether or not the object of one's envy is enviable (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000). An emotion is fitting when it accurately represents the evaluative properties of its object – e.g., anger is fitting to what is blameworthy, shame to what is shameful, amusement to what is humorous, *etc.* (*ibid.*). Oded Na'aman also discusses the usefulness of using the language of fittingness (Na'aman, 2020, p. 2418).

since this is good for the griever's mental well-being, this prudential reason, though rational, does not address the reason that rendered grief fitting.

In the case of anger, if the reason that renders the anger fitting is, for example, that someone has committed a cruel act against another, the puzzle is that it seems nothing can address this reason for the anger since nothing can undo the fact that the cruel act was performed. For, even if there is remorse on the part of the one who has been cruel, if the anger is not, in the first instance, directed towards a lack of contrition, then contrition does not address the reason for one's anger. In the next section I give a brief explanation of satisfaction-accounts of anger, how such accounts address the problem, and the reason Agnes Callard (2017) gives for why such accounts fail to capture the reason for anger. In section 4, I give a brief summation of Callard's (2017) account of anger and her solution to the problem (for her account contains insights that have influenced my own account), and I explain two concerns I have with her account. Then in sections 5 through 9, I lay out my own account of anger and its fitting diminishment.

3. Satisfaction-Seeking Accounts

Some philosophers understand anger to be a satisfaction-seeking emotion. Under such accounts of anger, though the anger is about an event that is situated in the past, the anger is responding to an imbalance of justice and/or proper respect that the event has caused or that it signifies. And anger aims to restore that balance. Therefore, anger can diminish fittingly because the anger can be satisfied through addressing the imbalance. Martha Nussbaum (2015), Samuel Reis-Dennis (2019), and Laura Silva (2022) are three philosophers who understand anger in this way. Nussbaum and Reis-Dennis argue that anger is often a response to a perceived down-ranking of one's status, and that its aim is to restore one's status through retribution,² while Silva challenges this retributive

² Nussbaum finds such anger to be normatively problematic. She identifies a particular type of anger that she argues to be ideal, for its aim is 'justice and brotherhood' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 53). She calls this type of anger 'Transition-Anger'. And she explains that it 'does not focus on status; nor does it want, even briefly, the suffering of the offender as a type of payback for the injury [...]. It focuses on future welfare from the start' (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 54).

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view of anger, suggesting, instead, that anger is primarily aimed at recognition.

While I think that satisfaction-seeking accounts of anger are right about desires we have when we are angry – particularly Silva's view that we desire recognition – I think Callard is right to point out that when an angered individual desires revenge against slights, it is 'because he or she has suffered a slight and is, in the first place, angered by the slight. His or her desire for revenge isn't identical to his or her anger; it is explained by his or her anger' (Callard, 2017, p. 126). Callard insists that anger cannot be satisfied since 'anger does not, in the first instance, seem to be a response to the fact that some wrong action hasn't yet been avenged, apologized for, or disavowed, or that it may recur in the future. Rather, it seems to be a way of concerning oneself with the (unchangeable) fact that some wrong was done' (Callard, 2017, p. 126).

4. Callard's Solution

Callard offers a solution to the puzzle with an account of anger in which anger is both backwards looking and resolvable.³ Callard does not characterize the reason for anger as simply a norm violation. The reason for one's anger is, specifically, an act of betrayal (Callard, 2017, p. 123). This is important because she posits anger to be a care response that is directed at someone's betrayal of a co-valuational relationship we share with them, and her account is grounded on identifying anger as an emotion that stems from our 'valuational vulnerability' (Callard, 2017, p. 126).

Callard argues that because we care about good things that are valuable to us, we care when those good things are harmed. And when a good relationship we value is harmed as a result of a norm violation, we can no longer value properly that good thing we once valued. We are, instead, relegated to caring about the norm violation. So, if you are angry with me – assuming your anger to be fitting – it is because I harmed that good thing we valued together, our co-valuational relationship. And since you cannot properly value our relationship on your own, you are relegated to caring about my norm violation; anger is the only care response open to you. And since you cannot return to valuing our relationship on your own because you cannot value it alone, you are dependent upon me to care about the harm I have done if you are to return to valuing our relationship

³ Callard does not use the language of fittingness.

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properly, for we can only value our relationship if we both value it together.

Herein lies Callard's reasoning for why anger cannot be satisfied. Though you are dependent upon me in order to return to properly valuing our relationship, you cannot anticipate my return to co-valuation. That is, you cannot seek out an anticipated response from me, such as an apology, for 'if I say ["Ok, I'm sorry, now are you satisfied?"] it's likely that you won't be. If I am saying what I think you want to hear, it won't be what you want to hear. You don't want to be satisfied' (Callard, 2017, pp. 132–3).

Yet, though your anger cannot be satisfied, it can be addressed if I am contrite over what I have done. For, when I come to you contrite, '[i]f I am sincere, then my expression of contrition springs from the same place as your anger: value. This is why my contrition puts me in a position to reach out my hand in a suggestion of renewed co-valuation' (Callard, 2017, p. 133). That is, though your anger at the harm I inflicted on that good thing we valued together was, before my contrition, the only care response open to you, because I now show that I care, as you care, about the harm that has been done to that good thing we valued together, anger is no longer the only form of caring open to you.

While I find Callard's account to be insightful, there are two concerns I have with it. First, her account does not address instances of anger when the harm is done by someone whose relationship is not the primary concern. If my sister suffers violence at the hands of a stranger, I care that my sister has been harmed primarily because I value my sister, not because I am concerned with the harm done to my relationship with the offender as a fellow moral agent. Further, I do not need to be restored to a co-valuational relationship with the offender in order to be able to properly value my sister.

My second concern is that Callard's account depends upon contrition and a return to co-valuation to explain what makes the diminishment of anger fitting. In this paper I seek to explain what permits the fitting diminishment of anger regardless of whether there is contrition on the part of the individual who has done wrong.

Despite these two concerns, my account is influenced by Callard's.⁴ In both her account and my own we are angry when

⁴ Na'aman (2020) also finds Callard's account to be insightful, and he proposes his own account that complements hers. But he argues that her account of anger is satisfaction-seeking. He points out that, under Callard's account, the fact that constitutes the fitting reason for anger is the status of the co-valuational relationship, not the act of betrayal in the

something we value is harmed, and this anger is rooted in both our dependence upon the cooperation of others and the vulnerability we feel when that dependence becomes threatening. Further, in each of our accounts, in order for anger to fittingly diminish there must be a correlated feeling between the angered individual and the perpetrator. In Callard's account, the correlated feeling is a concern for the harm that has been done to the good thing once valued, and the feeling is shared between the two though it reveals itself through contrition on the part of the perpetrator. In my account, a response from the perpetrator is not necessary; all that is necessary is that the angered individual be responsive to a postulated correlated feeling, and the feeling need not be shared between the two. This will be made clear as my account progresses.

5. Identifying an Instance of Blaming Anger

Recall the two instances of anger discussed at the start of this paper, my actual anger, and my anger in the hypothetical scenario. The anger in my actual situation is not an instance of blame, for it is not a response to a perceived moral violation. But there is something to my anger that is more than what David Shoemaker (2018) has described as goal frustration. Shoemaker argues that there are two kinds of anger, 'one a type of response to goal frustration – when one is prevented from doing or getting what one wants – and the other a type of response to slights, insults, wrongdoing, and so on' (Shoemaker, 2018, p. 73). The latter is blaming anger, in the diminishment of which we are interested in this paper. So, under Shoemaker's account, my current anger could be construed as an instance of the former kind of anger – I am angry because my desire of having a peaceful home environment is being thwarted by my neighbours' loud music.

first instance, or the contrition that follows. And if our anger can fittingly diminish through contrition – restoring the status of the co-valuational relationship – then it can be satisfied, even if we cannot bring about our anger's fitting diminishment on our own.

Na'aman proposes what he calls 'the process view'. Under the process view, the fittingness of an attitude can change when there is a 'change in the background conditions for the fitting reason' (Na'aman, 2020, p. 2427). I am not convinced that the fittingness of anger can change, however, so my aim is to explain how anger can fittingly diminish without a change in the background conditions that make anger fitting.

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Though my actual anger is not an instance of blame, there is something to it beyond mere goal frustration. And it is important to be clear about why it is not merely goal frustration. For though my actual anger is not directed at a moral violation, it is a response to my neighbours' agency, as I will soon explain, so it has a feature that is essential for anger that does constitute blame. And elucidating what this feature is, isolated from blaming anger, will serve in our elucidation of the diminishment of anger when the anger *is* directed at a moral violation.

To understand why my anger is a response to my neighbours' agency, it will be helpful to consider the following scenario. If the loud noise were coming from leaf blowers that are operated by my apartment's maintenance crew, I might be angry, but my anger would be triggered merely by goal frustration. It would not be a response to the maintenance crew's agency because I understand that the maintenance crew are simply doing their job, and that they have no more control over the requirements of the job than I do. So, in a sense, I would understand both the maintenance crew and myself to lack control, together: that is, we both lack the relevant control, that is, control over the job requirements.

But right now the loud noise that is coming from my neighbours *is* within their control – they make the choice over how loud they play their music – and this is why I am angry. My neighbours have agential control over whether or not they blare their music, and so they have agential control over the stimulation in my home, whereas I do not. And this leaves me feeling vulnerable to the fact that I depend on them to not misuse their agential freedom in such a way that something I value – having a peaceful home environment – is harmed. So what makes my actual anger more than merely goal frustration is that it stems from the vulnerability I feel when something I value is harmed, when the harm is not a result of a shared powerlessness.

Yet, though my anger is a result of my neighbours' control over the level of stimulation in my home, the reason my anger is not a response to a perceived moral violation is because I do not feel that my vulnerability is exposed to my neighbours, even though I feel vulnerable due to their active control over the level of stimulation in my environment. This is because I know nothing about my new neighbours' characters, motives, or struggles. For all I know they may be kind people who are oblivious to the fact that their music is annoying to others or to the fact that the walls are not completely soundproof. Or they may have some mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, and the music may be their own way of trying to control

their anxiety or depression. And while such possibilities would not seem realistic to everyone who finds themselves in a situation like mine, they are plausible to me.

In the hypothetical scenario, however, the reason for my anger would be the overt disdain my neighbours show towards my exposed vulnerability. And it is this latter anger that we will be analysing as an instance of anger that constitutes blame.⁵ So, the instance of anger under discussion – the one that is an instance of blame – is a response to harm that is done to something that I value when the harm does not result from a shared lack of control, and when my revealed vulnerability is treated with disdain.

Therefore, in this proposed instance of anger, anger is not merely a response to the fact that my neighbour has violated a moral norm. My anger is responding to two factors: 1) the fact that the harm that is being done to the thing I value is not a result of shared powerlessness, and 2) the fact that my neighbours do not respond appropriately to my sharing with them my reliance on them to not harm the thing I value. And along with these two factors that my anger is responding to, my anger reflects the enhanced vulnerability I feel about my powerlessness in the face of these facts.

6. Fitting Blaming Anger

Before moving forward, it is important to explicate the nature of this enhanced vulnerability and to identify its relationship to our sense of moral obligation. As humans, our awareness of our dependence on one another to adhere to moral obligations is an essential component of human relationships. For, though we are aware of the consequences of such dependence due to our vulnerability to the agency of others, we also understand that such interdependency enables us to have the depth of interpersonal love and connection we enjoy. For we do not simply depend on each other to adhere to moral

⁵ This is not to suggest that overt disdain is required for blaming anger, but that, in this instance, for *me* it would take overt disdain for my anger to be blaming anger. But if, in my actual scenario, I were to assume that my neighbours were treating me with impudence, then I would take them to have some awareness of my vulnerability – my need for them to cooperate such that my value of having a peaceful home is not harmed. And so I would, in some sense, understand them to be aware that I am reliant on them, and thus I would take them to be responding inappropriately to this reliance. So my anger would be an instance of blame, as well.

obligations for duty's sake, we depend upon others to do so because their doing so signals to us that we are valuable to them. And it is this valuing of one another that is essential for relationships.

This is why if we sense that one is treating us charitably only because it makes them feel like a good person, or because they feel an obligation to do so, we may feel used, or burdensome. And while there are times when we prefer that others treat us with due respect because they feel obligated to do so, for example, if the alternative, such as physical harm, is less desirable to us, we would still prefer that others refrain from harming us because they value us – rather than because they feel they are obligated not to harm us.

Therefore the interdependency we share with one another is valuable to us, for we need some level of dependency upon one another if we are to show others that we care about them and value them, and if others are to show us that they care about us and value us. So I suggest that blaming anger is fitting only if, along with being an accurate appraisal of blameworthiness, it reflects appropriate valuation of both the wronged and the wrongdoer, along with appropriate valuation of the interdependency they share as moral agents. That is, anger that is fitting is anger that discloses proper valuation for the interdependency the angered individual shares with the offender, and thus for the offender, themselves, as an autonomous member of the moral community. So fitting anger is an affirmation of both the perpetrator's moral autonomy and their moral responsibility.

An example of blaming anger that is *unfitting*, even if directed at someone who has wronged the angered individual, is anger that reflects a disproportionate valuation of one's own personal dignity, for the anger responds to the denial of entitlement that the act discloses. An explicit example of such anger is a racist person who becomes outraged when treated poorly by an individual whose ethnicity they think inferior – the outrage is not likely to be a result of valuing the interdependency they share with the offender.

What I now propose, and elucidate in the next section, is that anger diminishes fittingly if it diminishes as a result of appropriate valuation of both the wronged and the wrongdoer, along with appropriate valuation of the interdependency they share as moral agents. And I will show that such valuation reveals itself through one's response to what the immoral behaviour reveals about the lived experience of the offender – that the offender's behaviour likely betrays vulnerability about their own powerlessness to protect what they value. And, as will be explained, this diminishment is made possible through compassion – the compassion being some form of a care response for the offender.

7. Fitting Diminishment of Anger

We will now discuss the fitting diminishment of my anger in the hypothetical scenario. A helpful way to analyse what might permit the fitting diminishment of my anger is to begin by assuming myself to be a person who values all others *and their lived experience* just as much I value myself and my own lived experience. If we assume this, I will be an individual who is responsive to right reasons for my anger to diminish. If I were such a person – henceforth referred to as RR (Right-Reason Responder) – then, in the hypothetical scenario, though my anger might linger due to a heightened sense of powerlessness and vulnerability, it would eventually occur to me that their insulting behaviour towards me is likely itself a sign of their own powerlessness and vulnerability.

For, supposing my neighbours to be genuine members of the moral community, their behaviour signals to me they may lack some kind of control in their own life to protect something they value. It may be that they have faced many injustices, throughout their life, such that they've never truly felt they were safe to depend on others. This may be what leads them to behave towards me in the way they do, for it could be a coping mechanism they have developed to feel a sense of control in their own lives.

Or, it may be the case that they have inappropriately proportioned values. For example, they may value their own freedom, or shallow pleasures, more than they value the dignity of others, and therefore my request makes them feel vulnerable, for its validity is a threat to the things they value. In either of these possible scenarios they have inadvertently exposed their own vulnerability to me by their very moral violation. For, those who have a healthy sense of control in their lives do not need to assert dominance over others, and those who have appropriately proportioned values are not threatened by the valid needs of others.

So, because I (as RR) realize they lack control to such a degree that they turn to immoral behaviour as an attempt to gain control, or as an attempt to protect their own disproportionate values, I begin to have compassion for them, or I become concerned for them, humbled by the awareness that I, too, have treated others with disrespect due to my own disproportionate values. And with these contemplations comes the diminishment of my anger, for I would be aware that they, too, feel a heightened vulnerability to their own powerlessness.

It could be pointed out that the neighbours in the hypothetical scenario do have control to protect what they value, for their very moral violation is what gives them control. However, the behaviour

is an attempt for control but it does not give them control over whatever it is that they ultimately seek. For example, if the behaviour is an attempt to assert dominance, they may be responding to a nagging insecurity or wound that does not resolve or heal through such behaviour, even though the behaviour may provide some relief in the moment.

So RR's awareness of the neighbours' powerlessness and vulnerability, along with the fact that she values their experiences as much as she values her own, transitions her focus from herself and her own vulnerability to them and their vulnerability. The transition from anger to concern is due to her valuing them and their experiences, for in valuing them and their experiences she naturally responds with compassion when she considers the difficulties they may have faced that have influenced their behaviour, or she may naturally respond with concern because she understands that their unkind behaviour will have, and likely has had, negative consequences for the quality of their life. This does not mean she feels they deserve to have, or even that she wants them to have, a satisfactory life regardless of their treatment of others, only that she cares about the trajectory of their life and hopes they will change, becoming kind towards others, for this is a necessary feature of a good life.

It could be suggested that some acts of malice might not stem from a sense of vulnerability. However, if there are such acts, it is impossible to know when they occur, for we do not have full knowledge of the reasons that others behave as they do. Even if someone is angry at denials that their behaviour stems from a sense of vulnerability, the denial itself could betray vulnerability. RR's anger diminishes through what she postulates are the reasons for the neighbours' behaviour. And she is able to respond with compassion to the postulated reasons because she has vicarious understanding that vulnerability is often, if not always, the root of such behaviour. This point will be clarified in section 10, where I explain how RR is capable of vicarious understanding such that she is able to respond with compassion.

8. A Worry

A worry my account raises is that it seems to negate the fittingness of anger. For, if awareness of the powerlessness and vulnerability of the neighbours permits the diminishment of RR's anger, then it would seem that anger was not fitting to begin with. If wrongdoing is itself a sign of powerlessness and vulnerability, compassion, rather

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than anger, would seem to be the fitting response to wrongdoing. But I suggest that RR's awareness of this powerlessness and vulnerability brings about her compassion because a new emotion is open to her, not because the anger is no longer fitting. However, this means the upshot of my account is that my neighbours remain a fitting target of anger even though RR's anger has fittingly diminished. But I do not find this upshot to be a problem.

For, the powerlessness that makes the neighbours feel vulnerable in the hypothetical scenario is not powerlessness to do what it is right, it is a powerlessness to protect what they value. But they are still capable of doing what is morally required of them – the vulnerability they feel does not minimize their responsibility as moral agents. RR's anger diminishes because she is capable of acknowledging that she too has failed, at times, to be a good steward of this autonomy. And because she is aware of her own failures, she understands that feeling vulnerable and powerless are often, if not always, the reasons behind such failures. And this awareness is what makes the transition from anger to compassion possible. So, though anger is a fitting response to wrongdoing, it can fittingly diminish when the anger transitions to compassion. And humility is sometimes the means by which this transition is possible.

9. Permissivism about Fittingness

What I am proposing is a permissivism about fittingness. I have suggested that anger is not the only fitting response to blameworthy behaviour, compassion is also a fitting response. However, there is a difference between the fittingness of anger and the fittingness of compassion. Anger appraises the offender as blameworthy, whereas compassion does not have the same appraisal, so it is only anger that is rendered fitting by the behaviour. That is, anger is rendered fitting because it accurately appraises the behaviour, whereas compassion becomes fitting as a valuational response to what the behaviour reveals about the lived experience of the offender.

However, I do not mean to suggest, with my permissivist account, that anger and compassion cannot co-exist. In some cases, when the compassion does not immediately replace the anger, its presence facilitates the diminishment in the size of the anger until the anger is extinguished. And there may be cases in which one vacillates between the two emotions.

I also do not mean to suggest either of the following contradictory positions: that anger should always be the first affective response to

blameworthy behaviour, or that compassion as a first affective response to someone who is blameworthy, rather than anger, is always acceptable. Rather, what I suggest is that, as long as the first affective response – be it anger or compassion – reflects appropriate valuation for both the wronged and the wrongdoer, as well as proper valuation of their shared interdependency as moral agents, then it is an acceptable response.

10. Clarification of What Seems Too Saintly an Account

I have argued that compassion permits the diminishment of anger – the compassion being some form of a care response for the offender. However, though compassion is not an uncommon emotion, it is, for most of us, an uncommon response to the unrepentant, particularly when anger is responding to more egregious acts than what has been analysed here. RR is capable of such compassion because she is posited as a person who values all others and their lived experience just as much as she values herself and her own lived experience. But I have not been clear about what it means to value the experiences of others just as much as one's own, or how such valuing of others leads to compassion at the awareness of a perpetrator's powerlessness and vulnerability. I will now clarify these details of my account in order to show that our anger does, sometimes, diminish as it does for RR.

The key to understanding why RR's anger naturally diminishes in response to an awareness of the perpetrator's vulnerability is to understand what it is that makes it possible for RR to value the lived experience of all others as much as she values her own lived experience. I'll first point out that RR is not realistic. We can conceive of RR's affective responsiveness as an amalgamation of all empathetic responses possible, but no one has the capacity for all of these responses because no one has vicarious understanding of every possible lived experience that may have influenced the behaviour of each person who wrongs them. And, I suggest, we are less likely to value what we do not have intimate experiential knowledge of to the same degree that we value what we do have intimate experiential knowledge of.

To clarify the claim I have just made, we will consider, again, the difference between my anger in my actual situation and my anger in the hypothetical situation. But we will posit a hypothetical woman named Susie, in my stead. Susie responds similarly to the way I do in my actual situation, and she would respond similarly to the way I would in the hypothetical scenario, as well, but for

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reasons that are due to her own specific life experiences. In the actual situation, Susie's ability to understand the possibilities that she does, such that her feelings naturally respond to the reasoning, is due to the fact that she is capable of vicariously understanding why one's behaviour might seem disrespectful when it actually isn't, when there are no signs of viciousness. This is because Susie hypothesizes through the lens of a lived experience that is familiar to her own. She can understand, with intimate familiarity, that one's experiences could lead one to behave as the neighbours do without there being a lack of morally obligatory respect. And, to make the example relevant to the account under consideration, even if she understands the behaviour to be disrespectful – if she takes them to be making no effort towards managing their mental health in a healthier way, such that her own mental health isn't affected by their coping mechanism – her anger would likely diminish eventually, just as it would for RR.

However, Susie would have difficulty putting herself in the shoes of the neighbours in the hypothetical scenario because she is not prone to acting viciously as a way to maintain a sense of control. Further, Susie would be incapable of vicariously understanding why her neighbours might behave as they do in the hypothetical scenario partly *because* of her lived experience. For she grew up without the ability to protect herself from the hostility of her caregiver, and this has left her with a heightened feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability when she is treated with hostility. And not wanting others to experience the same vulnerability, it is particularly difficult for her to understand those who do.

Essentially, Susie is intimately acquainted with the experience of vulnerability that leads one to turn inward as a way of regaining a sense of control – such that they might become unaware of the needs of others, or be unable, or find it difficult, to respond to the needs of others – but she is not intimately acquainted with the experience of vulnerability that leads one to turn outward as a way of regaining a sense of control – such that they treat others with hostility.

Now consider Mary. Mary *is* intimately acquainted with the experience of vulnerability that leads one to turn outward as a way of regaining a sense of control, such that she treats others with hostility. For Mary had the adverse childhood experience of neglect, and feelings of abandonment led her to develop the coping mechanism of acting out as a way of forcing others to acknowledge her. And if Mary were facing the same situation as Susie (in the scenario that is like my actual situation), she would not be capable of extending the grace that Susie does, for Mary would feel that the neighbours do not see her as worthy of consideration, and this would trigger her

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vulnerability in a way that does not trigger Susie's. And it would not be *until* she experiences the neighbours' hostility that she would be able to have vicarious understanding of postulated possibilities for the behaviour such that her anger fittingly diminishes – even if her first reaction was to become hostile, herself.

The point of these examples is to make vivid the idea that we all experience situations in which compassion comes naturally through vicarious understanding, so we all have anger that naturally diminishes for fitting reasons when there is a lack of contrition. However, it is important to note that the examples I have used to explain how we respond to fitting reasons through vicarious understanding are instances in which the compassion is a result of past adverse experiences. Yet, though these examples serve to make the point salient, having had adverse experiences is not the only way we are able to have vicarious understanding of the lived experiences of others such that our anger fittingly diminishes. Many people are capable of responding with compassion specifically *because* they have grown up in a safe, loving, and nurturing home. They may have had experiences in which their parents have modelled compassion, concern, and humility towards them when they have behaved in unkind ways, and the parents may have modelled this compassion and humility towards others. And the child may grow up understanding that others have lived difficult experiences that have influenced their unkind behaviour, experiences that they, themselves, are lucky to not have had to endure.

Further, our imaginations, along with learning about the lived experiences of others through novels, movies, history, psychology, *etc.*, help us to have compassion for those who have treated us unkindly. I presume we are all familiar with the feeling of being overcome with compassion for someone whom we have been justifiably angry with, such that our anger at them diminishes, even though we lacked vicarious understanding of their lived experience by way of a similarity with our own.

It is also important to clarify that these are postulations of how people *might* respond with compassion. They are not criteria that, if met, entail one *will* respond with compassion; that is, they are experiences that serve to make compassion possible, not inevitable. And I do not mean to suggest that there are formulations of how each human will understand the experience of another, according to any particular lived experience of their own.

So, though the account I have offered seems, at first, too saintly to explain how human anger actually does diminish for many of us, on closer analysis we see that most of us are capable of having the

compassion that RR has, such that our anger diminishes fittingly. We just aren't capable of having such compassion in every instance in which we become angry.

11. Forgiveness

My aim for this paper was to analyse one instance of fitting blaming anger, and to explain how it can diminish fittingly when there is a lack of contrition. What I have shown is that compassion can permit the diminishment of anger, and that such diminishment is not unrealistic for at least some instances of our anger's diminishment. The lacuna to be filled, then, is to explain what can make the diminishment of anger fitting in the instances when compassion is not forthcoming. I will end with a proposal that forgiveness can fill the lacuna. My proposal that forgiveness fills the lacuna leaves room for a fuller account to be developed. Here I simply spell out the reason why I think a fuller analysis of forgiveness would be fruitful.

I suspect that through forgiveness we are able to authorize our anger to diminish such that the inevitable diminishment of our anger, however long it may take to diminish, is fitting. For, when we forgive others, the main reason we do so is that we acknowledge a shared moral fragility with the offender. And this reason – this shared moral fragility – is the same reason that we have for the kind of compassion that has been discussed in this paper. And this reason is the one that bears on the fittingness of our anger's diminishment.

This theme of a kind of shared human fragility, that is the reason to forgive, is an intuitive one, for it is present in various personal accounts of forgiveness, as well as philosophical accounts. According to Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, 'the reasons for forgiveness have their root not in what is noble and admirable about us, but in what is weak, pitiful and degraded' (Garrard and McNaughton, 2003, p. 13). For, they argue, human forgiveness is grounded on 'the sense of a common predicament which we all share, and which gives us reason to be concerned for each other' (Garrard and McNaughton, 2003, p. 10).

I suggest that, even if we are unaffected by the reasons for our anger to diminish at the moment we choose to forgive, our anger's eventual diminishment will be fitting if it diminishes for the reason we have authorized it to. However, a fuller account needs to be developed to explain how we can ensure that the trajectory of our anger's diminishment, when we choose to forgive, will genuinely be a response to the same reason for which we have forgiven the offender – some

acknowledgement of a shared fragility when an affective response of compassion is not forthcoming. I anticipate that, on deeper analysis, we will see that it is through ongoing cultivation of humility and compassion – becoming more like RR – that we will be capable of ensuring that our anger diminishes for the same reason that we make the choice to forgive.

12. Concluding Remarks

I have argued that compassion permits the fitting diminishment of anger. And I have proposed that when compassion is not a forthcoming affective response, our anger can fittingly diminish through forgiveness – though a fuller account of this proposal needs to be developed. However, while compassion and forgiveness may permit the diminishment of anger, it cannot be concluded, from the account I have offered, that compassion or forgiveness is obligatory. This is because, under my account, the perpetrator remains a fitting target of anger. This is a significant upshot of my account, for it means that forgiveness and/or compassion cannot be demanded from victims of egregious acts, oppression, childhood abuse, *etc.* However, though my intention has not been to argue that we are morally obligated to ensure that our anger diminishes fittingly, I do believe we are, to some degree, morally obligated to cultivate compassion and humility. And, I suggest, the more we cultivate compassion and humility, the more likely it will be that our anger diminishes fittingly.⁶

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