

ON NOT BEING “WORTH IT”

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This paper is about the common thought that anger is “not worth it” because of the bad effects that it has on the angry person. It contends that this common thought is sometimes deeply puzzling, because although it looks to be a thought about anger’s unfittingness, it is hard to see what such bad effects have to do with fittingness. The paper gives an account of the elusive connection between bad effects and fit. In brief, it argues that the thought that anger is “not worth it” has to do with the sense of “importance” that the anger manifests. That anger portrays its object as more important than it actually is shows it to be unfitting, but also shows why seemingly instrumental considerations like bad effects bear on fittingness, insofar as they bear on importance. The paper then shows how this account illuminates a kind of emotional dilemma often faced by oppressed people and closes with a brief discussion of some broader implications.

1. Introduction

I’m standing in line at the grocery store, waiting to check out. It’s the express lane, and I have a microwave burrito and a jug of milk. I’m following the rules. But I notice that the person in front of me has brought their whole week’s shopping to the line and is checking out as though that were a completely acceptable thing to do, even though there’s a giant sign at the register: “10 Items or Fewer.” I feel rage start to bubble up inside of me. I hate people who do things like this. But I catch myself. I think: “This just isn’t worth getting angry about.” I calm down and go back to thinking about my lunch.

This paper is about the thought: “This just isn’t worth getting angry about.” It’s a common thought. I have it all the time, in situations like the one just described. I’m sure that you’ve had it too. But, on reflection, it’s a difficult thought to make sense of. I take it that when I think this thought, I’m thinking about a reason not to get angry. The fact that it isn’t worth it is a reason not to get

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angry. What sort of reason is it? “Well,” I might think to myself, “you can’t just go around getting angry all the time about jerks. You’d be miserable.” That’s a common thought too, and it looks like it expresses an instrumental or prudential reason not to be angry. The reason not to be angry at petty jerks is that it would have bad consequences for me: I’d be miserable.

But that is not quite right. That I would bear considerable costs from being angry may very well be a reason not to be angry and perhaps a good one. But it doesn’t bear on the fittingness of anger. It might simply be that the world is so messed up that fitting anger is indeed very costly. My thought that anger isn’t worth it, though, seems to me to be about fittingness. The fact that anger wouldn’t be worth it shows that it isn’t fitting. And my responses seem to manifest this fact. If you told me you’d give me a million bucks if I ceased to be angry, that seems like a pretty good deal to me. But I couldn’t cease to be angry simply on that basis, and even if I could, it would need to be by some external process, alien to my emotions themselves—perhaps the trick of some future technology. Of course, attempting to get our emotions in line with our considered judgments is often like herding cats. But sometimes our emotions are entirely responsive to judgments about their fittingness, in a way that seems completely natural—that is, in a way that our emotions are not usually responsive to judgments about instrumental or prudential reasons. And this appears to me to be exactly what is happening when I notice that I’m getting angry, think “It’s not worth it,” and then calm down.

OK, then, let’s say my thought is about a reason that it is not fitting to be angry. In what sense is anger’s not being “worth it” a reason that anger would not be fitting? Here we flounder. There is an obvious way in which anger is quite fitting: the jerk ahead of me in line has wronged me—and everyone else who follows the rules!—and anger is a fitting response to wrongdoing. If we try to elaborate on “worth it,” however, we’re back where we started, with a metaphor that invites unpacking in instrumental terms and with some obvious considerations—like the misery of being angry—that are natural to construe in those terms. But instrumental or prudential considerations are standardly *opposed* to reasons of fittingness. That it would be instrumentally good to have some attitude or emotion is often taken as a paradigm example of *the wrong kind of reason*—a consideration that counts in favor of the attitude or emotion, but not in what is intuitively taken to be the right sort of way.¹ Further, this distinction is

1. The distinction between the wrong and right kinds of reasons began in a specific context—in the context of the “wrong kind of reasons” problem for fitting attitudes accounts of value. But, although the distinction and the correct way to draw it is fraught, it has since been recognized by many as a distinction of more general import in philosophy. For key examples here, see Hieronymi (2005) and Schroeder (2010). Most of the paper can be read entirely independently of one’s assessment of the current debates about the distinction, as I will move quickly to connect the distinction to the notion of “fit” as introduced in D’Arms and Jacobson (2000), and most of what I say will be put in terms of reasons of fit, understood as the right kind of reasons for anger and other emotions.

quite obvious in the case of anger itself. Again, if you told me you'd give me a million bucks not to be angry, that counts against anger in the sense that it shows not being angry to be beneficial for me. But it's the *wrong* sort of reason not to be angry, because it doesn't show my anger to be unfitting in the way that, say, the fact that I had not really been wronged would.

So, we've got a puzzle: an ordinary thought about anger seems to be about its fittingness, but it is not clear how this could be. What I'll call my *motivating question* is this: how could the fact that anger is costly to its subject be a reason that it is unfitting? The task of this paper is to give a non-skeptical answer to this question—to explain "not worth it" thoughts about anger in a way that illuminates their connection with fittingness. The example of wrongdoing I began with may seem trivial—easy to recognize because it is commonplace, but perhaps barely more than a breach of etiquette. But the phenomena I have in view are far from trivial; they include the kinds of anger that we must come to terms with in our intimate relationships and the kinds of anger that color the emotional lives of many oppressed people. And my conclusions are not narrow; they include upshots for how best to understand distinctively human notions of importance and appropriate concern, the difference between the right kinds of reasons for belief and for emotion, and the sorts of dilemmas faced by oppressed people. My official topic is anger, but if I am right in what I say here, my account applies to the emotions generally. In the end, anger is a vivid test case for how "not worth it" thoughts can be understood wherever they show up.²

But I begin with the distinction between the right and wrong kind of reasons, because I find this a particularly natural place to get traction on the phenomenon I hope to articulate *and* because I think that the paper supports some general lessons for discussions of the right and wrong kind of reasons. See §6.

2. In the paper, I will use "'not worth it' thoughts" as an umbrella term. It is not my aim to argue that every time that we think that anger isn't worth it—or think about it in broadly prudential or instrumental terms—we are tacitly thinking about reasons of fit. For instance, the thought that anger isn't worth it because a millionaire has promised me cash not to get angry is clearly about a prudential reason not to get angry. Rather, my contention is that there is a class of thoughts which look prudential at first blush—which are often expressed by employing concepts like "worth it" or "cost"—but which are actually about reasons of fit. These are "'not worth it' thoughts" in my sense. In particular, real-life cases it may be disputed whether the thoughts expressed using concepts like "worth it" and "cost" are "'not worth it' thoughts" in my sense. If my account here is convincing, this will be a dispute about whether the diagnosis I provide in this paper plausibly captures the phenomenon at issue in a particular case.

I want to make an important clarification about two different locutions I use in this paper. First, sometimes I write about instances of wrongdoing as not worth getting angry about. Other times, I write about anger not being worth it. This may look to lump together two different kinds of "worth it." The first is about the wrongdoing being worth the anger. The second is about the anger itself being worth its costs. I don't intend my position to ride on an ambiguity or to lump two distinct phenomena together. The reason is this: ultimately in this paper I will argue that the costs of the anger—and crucially *not* the costs of the wrongdoing—are sometimes reasons it is not fitting. If this is true, thoughts about the cost of anger may sometimes be thoughts about reasons

I hope to convince you of all this in the following way: In §2, I introduce in more detail some basic ideas about fittingness in general, and the fittingness of anger in particular, which will frame the rest of my argument. I also highlight the way in which the existing literature on anger is not helpful for understanding “not worth it” thoughts. In §§3 and 4, I set up and develop an answer to my motivating question. There are, in fact, two distinct difficulties in understanding how the costliness of anger could be a reason that it is unfitting highlighted in the preceding paragraphs: (a) the right kinds of reasons for anger are standardly taken to be facts about the object—the wrongdoing—and not the subject of the state. But the costliness of anger is a fact about its effects on the subject. Thinking about costs of anger, then, may look like it involves an illicit turn to the subject. In addition, (b) conceptualizing the way anger affects one in terms of costs looks paradigmatically prudential or instrumental. In §3, I address problem (a), arguing that not all turns to the subject are illicit, in light of the way we access the content of anger and the way that anger often portrays wrongdoing in relation to its subject. In §4, I use the ideas developed in §3 to address problem (b) and provide a complete answer to my motivating question. In brief, I argue that the thought that anger is “not worth it” has to do with the sense of “importance” that the anger manifests. That anger portrays its object as more important than it actually is shows it to be unfitting, but also—I argue—shows why seemingly instrumental considerations bear on fittingness, insofar as they bear on importance.³

of fit. Thinking that wrongdoing is not worth the anger will be this kind of thought when it is natural to explain why the wrongdoing isn’t worth it by appeal to the costs of being angry. (I.e., wrongdoing isn’t worth the anger, because it isn’t worth its costs.) It seems to me that thinking about the wrongdoing quasi-economically with “worth,” rather than concepts like “fit” or “merit,” often signals that this is happening. Second, the thought that the anger isn’t worth it will be about the same phenomenon if the reason anger isn’t worth it is that its costs are too high, and the reason the costs matter is because the wrongdoing isn’t worth them. Both of these thoughts will be thoughts that the anger is not merited because the offense is in some way too minimal to merit the sort of anger in question, as my discussion of fittingness in the next section will show. This is just the puzzle of the paper, in slightly different terms: why would the costs of anger, which are not after all facts about the wrongdoing, show that the wrongdoing is too minimal to get angry about? Finally, thoughts about “costs” may be thoughts about the costs of *wrongdoing*—the thought that some action isn’t so wrong after all, because it doesn’t have the sort of negative effects it seemed to on first glance. But these are not the kind of not worth it thoughts I’m interested in, and they are not puzzling if we think, as most do, that the wrongness of an action is, at least in part, at least sometimes, a function of its bad consequences. I’m grateful to an anonymous referee and the area editor for pushing me to clarify these points.

3. One might be skeptical from the start whether the strategy I’ll pursue, sketched here, is well motivated. Aiming to show that not worth it thoughts are about fittingness assumes that my thinking in the grocery store is about the fittingness of anger. It is this assumption that gives rise to a puzzle. One might reject this assumption. One might think that there is no puzzle. Our thinking does not look to be about fit. It is straightforwardly prudential. I’ve said that it doesn’t seem to me that my thinking is merely prudential, but I haven’t given any more substantial argument against this diagnosis of the case and I’m not going to say much about this possibility in the remainder of

In developing this answer to my motivating question, I consider a number of examples that show how my account applies beyond the confines of the grocery store. Moreover, §5 is devoted to a particularly important kind of case illuminated by my account: the anger of the oppressed. Ironically, the case suggests itself as an objection to my entire approach. The anger of the oppressed is often *extremely* costly to the oppressed. But surely that does not show it to be unfit-

the paper. I want, then, to make a few remarks on this alternative way of diagnosing the case and why a discussion of it does not play a prominent role in the paper.

Note that I’ve sketched a case that I take to contrast with my grocery store case, the case of a millionaire offering me a lot of money not to be angry. I take it that the fact that I could get a lot of money is a good reason not to be angry, but also a paradigm case of a merely prudential reason not to be angry and a reason that is the wrong kind of reason not to be angry. In other words, being angry may “not be worth it” when the millionaire makes their offer, in the sense that I would really benefit from getting a lot of money, but this fact clearly has nothing to do with whether my anger is fitting. And it seems to me that I cannot simply calm down by thinking about the fact that being angry costs me a lot of money, but rather only by some form of externally manipulating my emotion. In the grocery store case, however, it seems to me that I can calm down simply by reflecting on the fact that being angry costs me in terms of misery. Further, this difference between the cases is something that is shared with paradigm cases of recognizing one’s anger to be unfitting. (I may not always calm down by recognizing that I am overreacting, but I *can* calm down on that basis and doing so is a mark of emotional rationality.)

These observations may motivate weaker or stronger conclusions, depending on background assumptions. The weaker conclusion is just this: sometimes thoughts about the costs of anger appear to function in ways that are very different from how they function in paradigm cases of recognizing prudential reasons not to be angry—ways that look akin to the way thoughts about anger’s lack of fit function. It would be interesting to understand why this is. And the functional similarity to thoughts about fit suggests a working hypothesis: that my not worth it thoughts in the grocery store case are in fact thoughts about fit. One might also hold the following background assumption: I can never directly calm down simply by considering merely prudential reasons not to be angry. That is: in all cases, prudential reasons not to be angry function as they do in the millionaire case; I can only ever respond to prudential reasons not to be angry by externally manipulating my anger. And I can only calm down directly on the basis of recognizing that my anger is unfitting. If this background assumption is true, then the fact that I can calm down directly in the grocery store case does more than merely suggest an interesting working hypothesis. It entails that my thoughts must be thoughts about fit.

I can see the attractions of this background assumption. But it is very controversial, and it is not needed to motivate the puzzle of my paper or to accept the conclusions I come to. If the controversial assumption is true, then we *must* find some way to understand my thoughts in the grocery store case as being about fit. But even if it is possible that such thoughts were merely prudential, it seems to me that the differences highlighted by contrasting the grocery store and millionaire cases makes it worth investigating the possibility that they are not. I try to make good on this possibility. This paper does not aim to convince the reader, then, that a prudential reading of the grocery store case is *impossible*. Rather, it aims to show how that reading is *not unavoidable*. If the reader’s attraction to a prudential reading of the case was its seeming unavoidable, then this paper undermines that basis for a prudential reading. Further, if the account I give of the connection between the emotions, importance, and costs is correct, it is hard to see why the form of reasoning I describe wouldn’t crop up all over the place, even if one prefers a prudential explanation in any given particular case. I’m grateful to two referees for pushing me to make the motivations for and assumptions of my explanatory strategy explicit.

ting. To suggest otherwise is to fail egregiously in doing justice to the gravity of their oppression. I argue, however, that not only does my account not imply that the costly anger of the oppressed is unfitting, but it also helps us to articulate a familiar but overlooked emotional dilemma—a dilemma I call “absurd anger”—which is bound up with oppression. Finally, in §6, I conclude by very briefly discussing a few other, broader implications of the account of “not worth it” thoughts developed in this paper.

2. Fitting Anger: The Basics

2.1. *Fittingness*

I want to begin with the idea of “fit.” In their influential article “The Moralistic Fallacy,” Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000) note that emotions can be assessed rationally along several different dimensions—for their instrumental value, for their moral quality, and for their all-things-considered advisability. But, following the observation that emotions are quasi-judgmental and quasi-perceptual in character, D’Arms and Jacobson contend that emotions can also be evaluated for a specific notion of “fit”—for whether or not they accurately present the world as having certain evaluative properties, on analogy with the way a belief can be evaluated for whether or not it represents the world as it actually is.⁴

To see what D’Arms and Jacobson have in mind, consider their example of envy. According to D’Arms and Jacobson’s admittedly rough-and-ready gloss, envy portrays its object as having the property of being enviable—that is, it presents “a rival as having a desirable possession which you do not, and it presents this circumstance in a specific negative light” (2000: 73). Envy can lack “fit,” then, by getting these aspects of its object wrong. And, aspects of fit can be usefully categorized along two dimensions, which they call “shape” and “size.” Envy can be unfitting because it has the wrong shape. In this case, it would ascribe to its object features that it does not in fact have—for instance, if it portrays a rival as having a desirable possession which they do not in fact have. Envy can also be

4. See D’Arms and Jacobson (2000: 69–75). In this paper, I am interested in D’Arms and Jacobson’s notion of “fit” insofar as I am interested in pursuing the conclusion that “not worth it” thoughts are about considerations that show anger to involve misconstruing the world in a certain way, not about considerations that show it simply to be against the agent’s interests to be consumed by anger. I do not mean to be endorsing D’Arms and Jacobson’s stronger and more controversial view that moral considerations cannot as such show an emotion to lack fit—a view with which I tend to disagree. This disagreement is beyond the scope of this paper to defend, although some of my conclusions may suggest a strategy for doing so.

unfitting because it has the wrong size. In this case, it would portray its object’s properties as different from their actual magnitudes—for instance, portraying the rival’s possession as more desirable than it actually is.⁵

2.2. *Fitting Anger*

That anger’s object is not as it portrays it to be is a reason that anger is unfitting. On D’Arms and Jacobson’s account, an emotion will be unfitting if it portrays its object to have an inaccurate size or shape. To answer my motivating question, then, we want to fill out the general size and shape of anger in a way that illuminates how “not worth it” thoughts could show anger to be unfitting. How, then, are the size and shape of anger typically filled out?

A basic assumption about the shape of anger is widely shared: anger properly targets wrongdoing.⁶ Anger is a fitting response to wrongdoing. A reason that my anger at my best friend Greg, say, is fitting then is the fact that Greg wronged me. A reason that my anger at Greg is not fitting is the fact that Greg did not wrong me. The assumption that anger’s proper object is wrongdoing can be found in Aristotle (1378a–1378b), and it is widely assumed in contemporary work. So, Amia Srinivasan writes:

What makes anger intelligible as anger, and distinct from mere disappointment, is that anger presents its object as involving a *moral violation*: not just a violation of how one *wishes* things were, but a violation of how things *ought* to be. (2018: 128)

Macalester Bell articulates what she takes to be a morally important species of anger as what “we experience when we judge that we have been blocked or constrained by being *wronged* by another” (2009: 167). Glen Pettigrove notes that anger is standardly understood to involve judging that its object “(a) has wrongfully harmed someone or something of value or (b) has failed to care about someone or something in the appropriate way. It involves some level of felt hostility

5. See D’Arms and Jacobson (2000: 73–74).

6. Many philosophers, including some discussed in this paper, assume that anger is essentially a “moral” emotion—that it only aptly targets wrongdoing. Other philosophers, including some discussed in this paper, allow that “non-moral” anger is possible. This is not a problem for my purposes: I’m interested in a question of fit having to do with kinds of anger that *do* portray their object as wrong, whether or not all anger does this. My paper should be read as having this restriction.

or antipathy toward its object” (2012: 357–58). And, on Agnes Callard’s picture, anger is a kind of caring about norm violations.⁷

What about size? It seems obvious that anger has a size—we can overreact in our anger even when the object of our anger is in fact wrong. We overreact by portraying the wrong as in some way “bigger” than it actually is. Work on anger tends not to discuss size, perhaps because it is taken as obvious that the object portrayed by its shape—the wrong—comes in degrees which is what size will naturally track.⁸

Beyond the consensus that anger targets wrongdoing, with the implicit assumption that wrongdoing comes in degrees, there is little agreement about the nature and distinctive features of anger. A general taxonomy emerges in the literature, with accounts falling into the following categories: (1) epistemic, (2) evaluative, (3) communicative, (4) motivational, and (5) primitive.⁹ On (1), anger involves special insight into wrongdoing. On (2), anger is a constitutive part of some evaluative practice we are engaged in. On (3), anger is a way of transmitting moral messages about wrongdoing. On (4), anger is a way of moving agents to remedy wrongdoing. And on (5), anger is good simply as a virtuous response to wrongdoing.

I introduce this taxonomy only to set it aside, because it highlights the fact that the existing literature is not of much help in answering my motivating question. This is for two reasons. First, some of these accounts, in elaborating the way that anger paradigmatically functions, appear to be interested in a value that has little to do with fittingness. (E.g., anger may be valuable because it motivates agents to rectify injustice but having this motivational power does not as such show an instance of anger to be fitting.) Such accounts are not helpful, because I’m trying to understand the hunch that “not worth it” thoughts are about reasons of fittingness.

Second, some of these accounts *do* look to be in a position to say something interesting about the shape and size of anger. Anger might, for instance, portray wrongdoing as having the property of calling out for a special kind of communicative response embodied in the episode of anger itself. Nevertheless, none of these accounts—at least as they stand—give us insight into why the costs of anger to *me* would show it to be unfitting. To address my motivating question, then, I propose to leave the literature aside and to tackle size and shape head on.

7. See Callard (2017) and Callard (2020).

8. Srinivasan briefly mentions that apt anger will be proportionate to the wrongdoing. See Srinivasan (2018: 130).

9. Labels (1)–(4) come from Pettigrove (2012: 358–59). Bell (2009: 168–69) also notes a very similar taxonomy, introducing the style of account I label as (5). For an account of anger targeting racism that treats all of these dimensions as well as considering fit, see Cherry (2021).

3. Problem (a): The Inward Turn

Unfortunately, though, a head-on approach to size and shape may appear to be a non-starter. Fittingness, as characterized in the previous section, is about the object of anger, not about the emotion’s subject. This thought is familiar too from discussions which take the right kind of reasons for an attitude or emotion to be “object-given” reasons.¹⁰ Attempting to understand “not worth it” thoughts as being about reasons of fit may seem doomed, then, because they commit the cardinal sin of changing the subject to the *subject*—of making things about costs to *me* rather than the matter of wrongdoing at hand. This is problem (a) that I highlighted in the introduction.

This is not, I think, the right lesson to draw from my discussion of fittingness. In this section, I’m going to discuss two different ways in which facts about the subject of anger may be reasons that bear on the fittingness of anger. First, I want to argue that facts about the effects of an attitude on a subject may give the subject reason to think that the attitude has an unfitting content. This is especially important in the first-personal case, given the distinctive kind of access we have to the content of our own attitudes. Furthermore, this is particularly significant with emotions like anger, which have pronounced phenomenologies that allow for access to their content in a way that is unavailable for belief. Second, I want to argue that the properties portrayed by anger are very plausibly relational, such that anger can be unfitting by incorrectly portraying the subject’s relation to the wrongdoing. Neither of these points provides a ready-made answer to my motivating question. But together they motivate my move to the topic of “importance” and enable my treatment of problem (b) in §4.

3.1. Effects of Attitudes as Showing Unfitting Content

Inspired by a recent session of the board game *Pax Pamir*, I decide to do some research on the history of Afghanistan. After some reading, I want to do a deeper dive on some major southern battles in 1837. I find myself somewhat absent-mindedly wandering through the stacks at the library—still the best way to get the lay of the land—focusing in on titles of books that are about Kandahar. Suddenly I come to my senses. “You know those battles took place in Herat!” I think.

10. A distinction between object-given and state-give reasons is attributed to Derek Parfit; see Parfit (2001). This distinction is often assumed to map onto the distinction between the right and wrong kind of reasons. That assumption has been the subject of serious criticism. See, for instance, Schroeder (2012). I frame my discussion in these terms, then, both because many philosophers do worry that reasons which are not object-given are the wrong kinds of reasons and because doing so allows me to introduce material crucial to addressing problem (b).

“You got them confused when you read that first history, but you cleared up the confusion months ago!”

What is going on here? In short: I have a recalcitrant belief. On reflection, I would tell you that the battles I’m interested in happened in Herat. But once upon a time I was confused and thought they happened in Kandahar. And in some important sense, I haven’t been able fully to rid myself of that mistaken belief. How do I know this? Well, the belief continues to have effects—motivating me to do things like search for books on Kandahar unless I’m really paying attention to what I’m up to.

Notice: these effects on action are evidence that I hold the belief. Beliefs play a role in motivating action, and my action seems best explained by a belief that represents certain battles as having happened in Kandahar. And insofar as I know that the battles took place in Herat, these effects are evidence that I have a belief that is false—that is, unfitting. These effects on action are not facts about the content of my belief, nor about features of the world represented incorrectly by the belief, but they are indirect evidence that I hold a belief which is false.

The effects of beliefs on action are an especially important source of evidence that we have recalcitrant, unfitting beliefs in the first-person case because of the special relationship we have to the content of our own beliefs. A third party can, as it were, look directly at the content of our beliefs. My friend Greg can ask me where I think the battles took place, and if I say “Herat,” he can compare my representation to the world and figure out if my belief is fitting or not. This is not my relationship to the content of my own beliefs, however, at least in paradigm cases. Following Gareth Evans and Richard Moran, I’ll assume that our knowledge of our own beliefs is *transparent* to the world.¹¹ I know what I believe about where these battles took place not by interrogating my beliefs, as Greg would, but by interrogating the world—reflecting on history and not my mental representations of history. Reflecting in the moment, it is difficult to see when our beliefs lack fit, because our access to the content of our beliefs and to the world we might compare them with doesn’t pull apart. I can’t see that my own beliefs lack fit by directly “looking” at their content, because I assess both their content and the world by looking at the world. Finding out that my beliefs lack fit, then, often goes by way of indirect evidence of the effects of my beliefs, manifested in action.

Of course, given that our paradigmatic means of rational control over our beliefs is reflection, recognizing that we have recalcitrant, false beliefs made

11. See Moran (2002) and Evans (1982). As with almost anything in philosophy, this account of our privileged access to our beliefs is not uncontroversial. I employ it here not simply because I am sympathetic to it, but because I think that it helps to highlight some very important symmetries and asymmetries between belief and emotions like anger. However, I think that these symmetries and asymmetries, once grasped, are phenomena that are theory-independent and need to be addressed—and could be addressed—by different theories of our access to our own mental states.

manifest in our actions is often simply a source of frustration that we can do little about. I’ve already changed my mind, in reflection, about the facts of history. In the library, I discover that there is a rational breakdown that is beyond my control. I certainly can’t simply rid myself of the recalcitrant belief on the basis of noticing that it exists through indirect evidence. Reflection has already failed to do its job.

Things are a bit different, though, with emotions like anger. In assuming that anger can be evaluated for fit, we’ve been assuming that it shares certain features with beliefs or judgments: it portrays the world as being a certain way. With Talbot Brewer, I think that emotions like anger also partially share in the transparency of beliefs in virtue of their quasi-judgmental nature.¹² I know that I am angry not simply by focusing inward on how I am feeling, but outward—trying to figure out what my feelings are *about*. But, at the same time, the emotions are not simply reducible to judgments. D’Arms and Jacobson stress this by noting that the way one portrays the world in emotion and judgment can pull apart (2000: 67). Further, although emotions are not brute feelings like pain, they share features with brute feelings just as they do with beliefs: they have distinctive and pronounced phenomenologies. Representing wrongdoing in rage feels a distinctive way. This fact—that emotions like anger share features of both beliefs and brute feelings—makes our self-knowledge of and ability to reflect on them importantly different.

To make this difference, and its importance for my argument, clear, I want to begin with a rich passage from Brewer:

If I am bothered by something my lover has done and want to determine what my incipient feeling is, I do not direct my attention inwards at the feeling itself (whatever that would mean); I look outwards at my lover’s doings with an eye to seeing more clearly what is troubling about them. As I do this, my feeling might congeal into a vivid sense of having been wronged (i.e. resentment) or a vivid concern that the attention of a lover is straying (i.e. jealousy), or it might coalesce into some other emotion—e.g. fear of abandonment, or forlornness, or distress at not being fully understood. What gives more determinate shape to the emotion is not my arrival at a *judgment* concerning how things are. I might not end up making any such judgment. What gives more determinate shape to my emotion is the reshaping of how things appear to me that occurs when I attend carefully to the question how things are. It is through this sort of active and concerted attention to what is not myself, then, that I perform the work of self-elaboration. (2011: 287)

12. See Brewer (2011).

Brewer is interested in defending the idea that we in fact fix the contents of our emotions by a kind of transparent reflection; the emotions are transparent precisely because reflecting on their objects is what gives them an object. I don't want to commit to a thesis this strong. What I do want to note is another, related fact that is highlighted in this passage. Trying to know how I feel involves reflecting on the world, to see what my feeling could possibly be about. But the case is different from belief. I know what I believe simply by reflecting on the world. I don't know how I feel simply by reflecting on the world. If that were the case, I could know that I am not angry simply by reflecting on the world and concluding that there is nothing to be angry about.

As Brewer points out, in reflecting on our emotions, we try to figure out what they are about. But we are not just trying to figure out what the world is like. We have some grip, independent of reflection on the world, on how we are portraying the world in anger: how we feel. Being in a state of anger has certain recognizable occurrent effects on us. But these effects are importantly different from the downstream effects of belief on action; they are not merely indirect evidence that we have a state with a certain content. As D'Arms and Jacobson note, the emotions portray evaluative features in the world of a certain shape and size. We have a rich vocabulary for describing different sorts of anger: indignation, outrage, irritation, exasperation, bitterness, ire, malice, hostility, annoyance, and so on. For each of these kinds of anger, we could attempt to spell out the shape and size of the wrongdoing they portray. For some—say annoyance and outrage—a key difference will be between the size of the wrongs portrayed; annoyance is fitting for small slights and outrage fitting for major lapses. But these different kinds of anger differ too in their felt effects—in ways that are deeply connected to how they portray the world. Being annoyed involves much less intense feelings than being outraged does. Brewer's description of reflection on the emotions registers this. If we regard our feelings as more than brute feelings, we will take the intensity of our feelings as part of or intimately connected to their portrayal of the world, in much the way that our ordinary anger vocabulary suggests. If I am caught up in a rage, I will know from the severity of the effects that my anger is portraying something as very significantly wrong.

Here's the upshot: if I feel rage bubbling up inside myself, I know that I am portraying something as seriously wrong based on the way that I feel—on the effects of being in a state of rage. If I reflect on the world and can find nothing seriously wrong, I can recognize that my rage is not fitting. And if I am rational—as with belief, rational reflection has its limits—I will calm down. My anger portrays the world, just like belief. But unlike the case of belief, I have an independent grip on my anger's content: how I feel. I can compare portrayal in feeling and portrayal in judgment and recognize that the feeling is not fitting. And this makes an inward turn, a turn towards the felt effects of anger, perfectly licit,

insofar as the point of the inward turn is comparison between portrayal in anger and the world.

This is, I think, a familiar way of recognizing that we are overreacting, especially in anger: we cannot make sense of the world being the way our angry feelings say it must, at least if we are to regard them as quasi-judgmental rather than simply brute. And we can also give a diagnosis of a certain version of my grocery store case. I feel rage bubbling up in myself. I may not have a very precise grip on how my feelings are portraying the world, given that felt effects and portrayals are different in kind; this I take it is what Brewer is after, when he stresses the way in which the emotions are refined and made more determinate through a kind of transparent reflection. But I do know something about the kind of situations in which the rage I’m feeling would be fitting—if I walked out into the parking lot and found that someone had slashed my tires, for instance. I reflect on the situation in the grocery store, and I notice that there’s nothing remotely so bad about jerks breaking checkout rules. So, I conclude that my anger is unfitting, and I calm down.

This is, I think, a plausible diagnosis of a recognizable range of “grocery store cases,” one that makes sense of why I might calm down on the basis of facts about the effects of my anger. But this was not the grocery store case that I imagined. My case had an additional element: conceptualization of the effects of my anger in terms of their costs. I don’t just think that I am overreacting because the effects of rage mean that I must be portraying a serious wrong where there is none. I think that I must be overreacting because the effects of rage are bad for me—they are making me miserable. And, even with all that I’ve argued in this section, such thoughts still look prudential. This is problem (b) highlighted in the introduction, and it still needs to be addressed.

3.2. *Important Relations*

First, though, there’s another crucial way in which the subject may be relevant to the fittingness of anger—if the subject’s relation to the wrongdoing in part determines the size and perhaps shape of fitting anger. Anger portrays wrongdoing of a certain size and shape. Anger also portrays wrongdoing as *important*, in some intuitive sense.¹³ These claims may seem to amount to the same thing: murder is more important than littering, and fitting anger will capture this difference; capturing this difference is what it amounts to for the anger to capture the importance of wrongdoing. In light of the previous subsection’s argument,

13. As Samuel Scheffler puts it: “To be emotionally vulnerable to X is for X to have a certain kind of importance in one’s life” (2011: 31).

we can put the point by noting that I might reflect on my angry feelings and the importance of wrongdoing they target and conclude that my anger is unfitting because it portrays the wrongdoing as more important than it really is—which is just to say that my anger inaccurately inflates the wrongdoing’s size and perhaps shape.

But sometimes there are more moving parts. Sometimes anger will only be fitting if there is some relationship of special importance to the subject of anger connecting them to the wrongdoing. To see this, consider the following example: Rage at my best friend Greg’s betrayal would be ordinary; rage at Brutus’s betrayal of Caesar would be, at best, strange. This is to say: my rage at my friend’s betrayal would be fitting, where my rage at Brutus’s betrayal of Caesar would not be, absent some very special story. What makes for this difference in fit? It is not the importance of betrayal considered in abstraction from the subject’s relationship to the betrayal. The moral importance of the two betrayals is identical, and perhaps this importance might be captured by some sort of anger from anyone. But the importance to me of my friendship with Greg increases the importance of his betrayal in a way that can be portrayed by my rage but not by the rage of others. That I have no such relationship with Brutus is what makes my rage at his betrayal of Caesar seem to lack fit.¹⁴ And if rage at Brutus’s betrayal were fitting, there would need, again, to be a special story—that is, some sort of relationship that is important to me that links me with the betrayal. (Maybe I’m descended from Caesar, and I’m really into family history?) Absent some such connection, my rage at Brutus’s betrayal seems unfitting in virtue of manifesting a warped kind of concern with betrayal, a kind of twisted emotional overinvestment. As Samuel Scheffler puts it, I would seem to have entered the psychological territory of the stalker or groupie.¹⁵

In light of these points, perhaps we should say that anger portrays wrongdoing not simply as important, but important *to* the subject. To say that wrongdoing is—or at least *should be*—important to everyone is to say that the importance of the general moral relationship or moral laws that bind all agents makes

14. There is *another* really obvious relation between me and the wrongdoing: *I* am being wronged by Greg, whereas *I* am not being wronged by Brutus. I am more important to myself than Caesar is to me, and this undoubtedly makes a difference to my anger’s size and shape. The importance of this relation—of myself to myself—is relevant to many of the examples in the paper, particularly in §5, but I leave this to the side. This is not because it causes trouble for my account. On the contrary, I think that my account can illuminate aspects of the rationality of self-concern and how that concern intersects in complex and difficult ways with appropriate concern for others in the context of relationships which are important to us because they are *ours*, and yet require another person to be important to us on their own terms. I hope to pursue this line of thought, drawing on the resources developed here. But the resources need to be developed first, and to do so clearly, I need to set “self-importance” aside.

15. See Scheffler (2011: 37).

wrongdoing important to them in a way that can be portrayed in some kind of fitting anger. Relationships or connections of particular importance to the subject will alter the way that wrongdoing is important to them, making different kinds and degrees of anger fitting. Trying to capture the point in these terms risks making anger look self-interested in a way that makes it subject to familiar criticisms of any philosophical position that doesn't portray morality as purely other-directed without remainder. But whether we think of anger as portraying wrongdoing as important *to* the subject or as portraying wrongdoing as simply important, but in a way that is fittingly portrayed in different sorts of anger depending on the subject's relationship to the wrongdoing, the general point still holds: whether some instance of anger is fitting may depend—and often does depend—on how the subject is related to the wrongdoing beyond the minimal moral relations that connect us all.

The upshot of this point is that not only is an inward turn towards one's feelings in reflecting on the fittingness of anger licit, but it is also licit to reflect on facts about oneself—about one's connection to the wrongdoing and the importance to one of that connection—in assessing the fittingness of anger. Recognizing that wrongdoing is not important in the sense that it would not make anger from just anyone fitting does not settle whether my own anger is fitting, because my anger may very well still be fitting if there's some relationship between me and the wrongdoing that alters its importance. This is to say that my anger will be fitting if it correctly portrays the importance of wrongdoing, and the importance of wrongdoing may depend not just on its intrinsic features, but on my connection to the wrongdoing and that connection's importance to me. The fact that I have no connection to the wrongdoing that is important to me can be a reason that my anger is unfitting if my anger seems to portray the wrongdoing as important in a way that it could only be in virtue of some important connection to me. So, reflection on myself may be perfectly licit if what I am reflecting on is whether I have the kind of important connection required to make the wrongdoing as important as my anger seems to portray it as being.

And, again, I think that this gives a plausible diagnosis of why reflection on myself is not out of place in some close relatives to my grocery store case. In assessing my anger for fit, I will be comparing the way that my feelings seem to portray the wrongdoing to my judgments not just about the moral importance of wrongdoing for every member of the moral community, but also my judgments about the way that relationships of particular importance to me alter the importance of wrongdoing and my judgments about whether there are any such relationships that connect me to the wrongdoing. I recognize that rage is not a fitting response to mere violations of grocery store rules. It's out of step with my judgments about the moral importance of these violations. But I can also see that

I have no relationship of special importance to the wrongdoing—no particular love of grocery stores, no special connection to the jerk—which could alter the importance of their jerky behavior in a way that would make my rage fitting. I think that my rage manifests an inappropriate kind of concern with such behavior. And so, I calm down.

In summary, in this section I have argued that we can reflect on our feelings of anger in order to compare them with our judgments about the nature of wrongdoing in question and assess them for fit. And the relevant judgments about wrongdoing are judgments about a kind of importance that often depends on connections to the wrongdoing that are important to us, such that it is relevant to reflect on whether any relationships that could alter the importance of wrongdoing obtain. This addresses problem (a), but it does not address problem (b). We should still be puzzled, asking: why would the costs of anger to me show that the way I'm feeling portrays wrongdoing as important in a way that does not align with my judgments of importance? In the next section, I'm going to address (b) by arguing that there is a connection between judgments of importance in the intuitive sense at issue, judgments about appropriate concern, and judgments about costs.

4. Problem (b): Importance, Concern, and Costs

If what I've argued is correct, when we're comparing our anger to our judgments about the importance of wrongdoing, several different sorts of judgments of importance are in play: judgments about how important the wrongdoing is absent any important connection, judgments about how different important connections to the wrongdoing might alter its importance, and judgments about whether we in fact have any such important connection to the wrongdoing. But what is this notion of importance? What is it for a connection to wrongdoing to be important such that it would alter the importance of wrongdoing? To get traction on this intuitive idea of "importance," I want to start with a rich passage from Thomas Nagel's essay, "The Absurd":

We take ourselves seriously whether we lead serious lives or not and whether we are concerned primarily with fame, pleasure, virtues, luxury, triumph, beauty, justice, knowledge, salvation, or mere survival. If we take other people seriously and devote ourselves to them, that only multiplies the problem. Human life is full of effort, plans, calculation, success and failure: we *pursue* our lives, with varying degrees of sloth and energy. (1979: 14)

Nagel speaks here of “seriousness,” but I take the phenomenon he is interested in to be the same as what I am calling “importance.” Nagel is concerned to argue that we *cannot* help but take our lives seriously in a crucial sense: in living our lives, we decide where and on what to expend our energy, time, and effort. We cannot help but live our own lives—expending time, energy, and effort somewhere—and where we decide to direct our finite resources makes it the case that we take certain things more seriously than others and some things not seriously at all.

Nagel’s point might seem to trade on an equivocation between a perfectly familiar notion of seriousness and a quasi-technical, philosophical concept. Surely a completely disaffected and aimless person might fail to take their life seriously, in any ordinary sense of “seriously.” And surely such a person might claim that they regarded nothing in or about their life as really important and speak truly, on any ordinary interpretation of “important.” Nevertheless, I cite this passage from Nagel, because it suggests four points: (1) importance is a relative notion; (2) judgments of importance are connected to judgments about appropriate concern in action; (3) judgments that something is particularly important *to me* are connected to judgments about how its role in my life makes special concern in action appropriate; and (4) judgments of importance play a distinctive role in human practical reasoning in light of the fact that our powers to act are finite. I’ll take these points in turn.

First, (1) importance is a relative notion. It is hard to make sense of the notion of importance *simpliciter*—to understand what it would mean to think that, for example, fame was important, if one were not also committed to judgments that, say, it was more important than virtue. Different good or valuable things give us different reasons for action, and when we think about these goods or values in terms of their importance, we are thinking about how the reasons that they give us compare.¹⁶ This point comes out in Nagel’s examples. The person who thinks that fame is important takes themselves to have stronger reasons to pursue fame than other things that they take to be less important.

Second, (2) judgments of importance are connected to judgments about appropriate concern in action. This point is closely related to the first. Reasons for action are reasons for what action inevitably involves—“effort, plans, calculation,” etc. And, directing what I’ll call our “agential resources” in action towards some object is part of manifesting what philosophers have variously

16. In what follows, I will talk about good or valuable things as generating or providing reasons. I do not mean to be committed to any particular account of the relationship between goodness or value and reasons. Moreover, I take everything that I say here to be compatible with T. M. Scanlon’s “buck-passing” account of value. (See Scanlon 1998: ch. 2.) My thinking here is as indebted to Scanlon as it is to Samuel Scheffler and Stephen Darwall. (See footnote 17.)

called valuing, care, or (as I'll generically call it) concern for the object in action.¹⁷ The judgment that one thing is more important than another is connected to judgments about the way that the reasons for action they generate compare, which amount to judgments about how the kinds of concern appropriate for the different objects are different. Judging that fame is more important than virtue, then, is connected to judgments that the kind of concern that it is appropriate to have for fame is more demanding or weighty than the kind of concern it is appropriate to have for virtue.

Third, (3) judgments that something is particularly important *to me* are connected to judgments about how its role in my life makes special concern appropriate. All thinking about the importance of valuable things seems relative in the sense that it involves positioning the valuable things in relation to one another and comparing the reasons they generate. But some thinking about importance is more thoroughly relative than that. Sometimes, we justify various pursuits not just in light of judgments of importance that we take to apply to everyone, but judgments about their specific importance to us. I'll speak of these as judgments that employ a notion of "importance to me" or "importance to us." So, for example, I think that my friendship with Greg is important, and that it is also specifically important to me. In unpacking my judgment that the friendship is important, I would talk about how whatever is good about friendship generates certain reasons for everyone—that there is a kind of appropriate concern for everyone to have towards friendship, wherever it shows up.

What does the idea of "importance to me" add? This idea seems to be at the heart of the passage from Nagel. Nagel seems interested in making the claim that we can't help finding certain things to be particularly important to us, because we can't help making choices about where we direct our agential resources. But Nagel seems to run two ideas together in the passage above in a potentially problematic way. On the one hand, Nagel seems to suggest that people *make* things important to them by directing their agential resources in pursuit of them. On the other hand, we often justify our pursuits of various things by citing the fact that they are important to us. These two ideas illuminate what citing "importance to me" adds by way of justification: in citing "importance to me," I'm appealing not simply to the reasons generated by the valuable thing itself, but to reasons generated by my past engagement with the valuable thing—my history of past concern. Or, in more concrete terms, when I judge, for example,

17. For a classic treatment of "valuing," see Scheffler (2011). For an important treatment of care, see Darwall (2002). In this section, I try to remain neutral between different accounts that attempt to articulate the shape of rational investment in value, using the terms "concern" and "importance" at a fairly intuitive level. But my account is extremely indebted to Scheffler's work, and what I say here should, I think, be read as offering friendly amendments and developments to Scheffler's theory. See also footnote 22.

that the importance to me of my friendship with Greg justifies my spending time with him this evening, I’m appealing not just to what is good about friendship in general—wherever it appears—but to the actual connection that I have to Greg through a history of past concern in an instance of friendship.

Nagel might seem to conclude from the fact that we can’t avoid acting and the fact that a history of acting can make available an “important to me” justification for further action that we cannot help but end up with such justifications, regardless of where we directed our agential resources in the past. That seems to me to be too quick. Sisyphus chooses to push the boulder up the hill. But boulder pushing isn’t important to him and having done it doesn’t make it so. What else was he supposed to do? But, although the direction of our agential resources towards certain pursuits doesn’t always make them important to us, sometimes it does. Sometimes the fact that we’ve engaged in a pursuit gives that pursuit a role in our lives which can justify present and future direction of agential resources towards that pursuit. In these cases, importance to us can serve as a justification—past concern can give a pursuit a role in our lives that makes it “important to us” in a familiar sense that justifies ongoing special concern.

To make this claim clear and as plausible as possible, I want to illustrate it with two examples. First, consider a hobby—my hobby. I like to play and think about historical board games. I was initially attracted to these games—and not towards other more or less equally valuable pursuits—because of features of playing and thinking about the games. They allowed me the pleasures of abstract thinking, of learning about history, of appreciating different ways of modeling the dynamics behind historical events, and of viewing historical situations from an actor’s point of view. These attractive features gave me reasons to engage with these games—to spend time, energy, and effort looking for new games, reading reviews, and tinkering with rules on my own. This history of concern made historical board games *important to me* in the following way: I now have a connection with these games, developed through devoting time, energy, and effort playing them, that gives me new reasons to continue to devote further time, effort, and energy on them.

Sometimes, of course, one’s past engagement with a hobby gives one reasons that are no different from the kind that initially attracted one to the hobby. My past of playing these games means I’ve developed the skills to appreciate the good features of these games with ease and at a depth that makes continuing the hobby more attractive than starting a new one. And sometimes, of course, taking past engagement as a reason for future engagement is irrational—sunk cost fallacy and all. But such reasoning is not always irrational, nor is it always based on the thought that past engagement makes current engagement more fruitful or enjoyable than the alternatives. Through past engagement, I’ve made this hobby *my* hobby—part of who I am or a part of my life. I can think that the role the

hobby has come to play in my life through past engagement gives me reason to continue engaging even as more attractive alternatives present themselves, because I'm a *historical gamer*. I can think that it would fail to do something like honor to the hobby—fail to respect its importance to me—if, for example, I fail to read and think about a current scandal rocking the hobby, even though doing so is not particularly rewarding or edifying.

This might seem to inflate ridiculously the significance of hobbies. But consider a second example, closer to the heart of the issues at stake in this paper: loving relationships. Niko Kolodny has argued both that relationships are partially constituted by love and that such relationships are reasons for love. And Kolodny thinks that love is a kind of concern that, in part, involves taking there to be special reasons to engage with the beloved and act on their behalf. In my terms, love in part involves taking the role that your relationship with the beloved plays in your life to be important—to be such that it justifies directing your agential resources towards the beloved and not other people. This might seem circular if the relationship is at once constituted by love and a reason for love. But the circularity is only apparent and can be resolved by distinguishing the reasons for beginning a relationship from the distinct reasons that an existing loving relationship generates—in much the way that I distinguished the reasons for taking up a hobby and the distinct justificatory role that something's being *my* hobby can play. Our reasons to begin a relationship stem from the value of engaging in joint activities with another person and the attractive qualities of the other person. A history of engagement can then go on to constitute not simply a relationship, but one that is important to those in it; the relationship provides a justification for continued direction of agential resources towards the beloved.¹⁸

And here it is perhaps clearer than it is with hobbies that the role of a relationship in one's life plays a distinct justificatory role. Of course, we often "get more" from spending time with people who know us than we do from spending time with complete strangers. But it is not a sunk cost fallacy to think that my past with my best friend Greg gives me reasons to hang out with him, even when Greg is irritable and I have more pleasant alternatives. My justification for spending time with Greg is that he is my best friend—the importance of the role that our relationship plays in my life. To choose otherwise would be disrespectful to Greg, a failure to register the importance of that relationship.

In summary, a history of concern can make things *important to us* in a familiar sense—it can grant the object of past engagement a role in our lives that generates new reasons for continued concern. When we make judgments about the relative importance of various things to us, we'll be making judgments about how those roles justify different sorts of concern involving different investments

18. See Kolodny (2003).

of agential resources—relative to one another, and relative to other valuable things we think are important but with which we have no historical connection that gives them a role in our lives. We don’t, of course, accept all “important to us” claims as genuine justifications; past engagement does not justify anything and everything. Nagel’s fame-seeker might claim that stardom is really important to them, citing their history of past obsession—not simply to render their current behavior intelligible, but to justify it. We should remain justly skeptical. This is just to say that people can be mistaken about the reasons that a history of engagement generates, just as they can be mistaken about the reasons that values generate more broadly.

But sometimes “important to me” judgments do serve as genuine justifications and understanding when and why they do leads me to the fourth and final point that I want to draw out from Nagel’s passage above: (4) judgments of importance play a distinctive role in human practical reasoning in light of the fact that our powers to act are finite. Nagel was interested in arguing that the human condition—being forced to act—makes “seriousness” unavoidable. A nearby claim seems true: the human condition involves choosing where to direct our finite agential resources, and this shows up in the kind of justificatory role judgments of importance play.

To see this, consider how our situation is different from that of gods with infinite agential resources. As a quick gloss on “infinite agential resources,” I just mean that as I’m imagining them, these gods have infinite life spans; no limits on their powers for action; no limits to the amount of energy and time that they can devote to planning and calculating, etc.; and they can do everything that they want all at the same time.¹⁹ Just like us, these gods find a world with a multitude of valuable things in it: other agents, art, knowledge, relationships, hobbies, careers, etc. Like us, they might think about how these valuable things relate to one another in terms of importance. They might think that art is more important than a career, in the sense that the value of art makes a more substantial kind of concern appropriate—generates reasons for more effort, plans, and calculation—than the value of a career.

But in having infinite agential resources, these gods are *not* like us in one crucial regard: in acting, they do not incur *costs*. To see this point and its importance, consider the contrast between the task of thinking about how to live well as it presents itself to these gods and as it presents itself to finite creatures like us. Thinking about how to live well is, at the very least, thinking about how to respond correctly to all of the reasons for action generated by all of the valuable things that there are. For the gods, it looks like this task amounts simply to try-

19. Perhaps these gods are not even conceivable, but that would simply bolster the argument I am making here.

ing to figure out what all these different reasons are. But for us, the task is different—and harder—because we are finite. We lack the capacity to respond to all of the reasons for action generated by all the valuable things. For us, reasons for action can pull in different directions, and thinking about how to live well involves figuring out what to do when that happens. Figuring out how to correctly respond to all the reasons for action requires figuring out how to compare them in some way when they pull in different directions.

In light of the account so far in this section, we can put this point in terms of appropriate concern. For the gods, the appropriate kind of concern for different objects of value is just whatever efforts are required to respond to all the reasons for action generated by those objects. Reasoning about appropriate concern is little different from reasoning about what reasons for action there are. But for us, manifesting concern in action for one thing inevitably comes at the cost of manifesting concern in action for another. So, for us reasoning about the appropriate sorts of concern for different objects of value requires reasoning about what sorts of tradeoffs we can make while still being appropriately concerned—reasoning, that is, about the *costs* that one can incur to the ability to be concerned with something of value while nevertheless still counting as appropriately concerned.

The claim that I just made is abstract, but it can easily be made concrete—and in fact *is* made concrete in familiar debates about reasonable partiality and the demandingness of morality. We all come to philosophy with a sense of how to live well, sensitive to the fact that we are finite, which involves a sense of how appropriate concerns for different valuable things fit together in the shape of a human life. Our sense is often simply inherited uncritically from our social world. A certain picture of how appropriate concerns for different things fit together in a human life appears as the starting point for these debates: we are required to have a certain moral concern for other humans generally, but we are also allowed to have special concern for our friends and families, and for personal projects like careers and hobbies. We might have the sense, for example, that appropriate concern for a friendship is manifested by helping a friend move, even at the expense of being able to promote aggregate human wellbeing. If we think this, we are implicitly committed to thinking that, given our inability to respond to everything of value, appropriate concern for a friend and appropriate concern for human beings generally fit together in the following way: when our ability to be concerned with a friend in helping them move comes into conflict with our ability to be concerned with humans generally by promoting aggregate wellbeing, we can still be appropriately concerned with human beings generally while incurring costs to our ability to manifest that concern in this instance. We might even think something stronger: that appropriate concern for a friend *requires* incurring these costs to general moral concern; if we thought we had a choice, we'd not be appropriately concerned with our friends.

Commonsense views of how appropriate concerns for different things fit together in a human life are not immune from criticism. We often think that we can pursue our hobbies at the cost of pursuing loftier moral goals without ceasing to be appropriately morally concerned. But this kind of thinking has come in for moral criticism: to think that this sort of tradeoff is acceptable is to fail to be appropriately concerned with humans generally. It manifests a morally warped and selfish sense of the value of human beings and the value of trivial pursuits. This is one way of endorsing the idea that morality is much more demanding than commonsense suggests, which amounts to the claim that the way that appropriate concerns for different things fit together in a human life is quite different than is often assumed.²⁰ On the other hand, certain conceptions of morality have been criticized for being overly demanding, for failing to make room for “reasonable partiality.” Thinking that being appropriately concerned with human beings meant always incurring costs to one’s ability to manifest concern for things one enjoys like hobbies presents an inhuman picture of what it is to be appropriately concerned with oneself and the kinds of intrinsically valuable pursuits that make life worth living.²¹

But, although the claim I’m making is intuitively illustrated in terms of familiar debates about the demandingness of morality and reasonable partiality, it is much more general. Being concerned with one thing comes at the cost of being concerned with another, given that we are finite in our ability to act, and so coming to terms with how to be appropriately concerned with different valuable things requires figuring out the kinds of costs that can be appropriately incurred when conflicts occur. If the roles of things like friendship and hobbies in our lives make a different kind of concern—special concern—appropriate, this will be because these roles render justifiable incurring costs to our ability to be concerned with other things—like pursuing impartial moral goals—while *still* counting as appropriately concerned with those other things, costs which would not be justified absent such roles. Settling disputes about appropriate concern will, of course, also require settling disputes between different views about the values that such concern is responsive to, but such disputes must take place against the background fact of our finitude.

Notice how our finitude makes us different from the gods with regard to the role that judgments of importance play in our practical reasoning. Insofar as we invoke our judgments of importance to justify action, and insofar as they are connected to judgments about appropriate concern, our judgments of something’s importance play the role of justifying certain costs to our ability to be concerned with other things. Judgments about the importance of particular

20. For a classic defense of demanding morality, see Kagan (1989).

21. For a standard overview of debates about partiality, see Keller (2013).

things *to us* play the role of justifying costs to our ability to be concerned with other things that would not be justified absent the important connection. We can reason about what sorts of actions the particular importance of something to us justifies by considering what sorts of costs to other forms of concern its role in our lives justifies. The gods' judgments of importance work nothing like this, because they do not incur costs. It might in fact be strange to describe the gods as having things that are particularly important to them in the way that things are particularly important to us, because our sense of things being particularly important is tightly connected to the sense that costs are justified that would not be otherwise, but the gods do not incur costs at all.

What does all of this have to do with anger? We started this section with the thought that anger portrays wrongdoing's importance, and that the importance of wrongdoing often depends on important connections to the wrongdoing. I've developed an account of what this intuitive notion of importance amounts to, an account which stresses the connection between judgments of importance and judgments about the costs involved in appropriate concern. And I've developed this account at length because it will enable me now to address problem (b) and provide an answer to my motivating question.

To begin, I first want to pull together the various claims that I've made so far and show how they illuminate a kind of "not worth it" thought that applies to action. Suppose that I find myself, day in and day out, fighting with random people on social media about politics, trying to correct their moral errors. This behavior is really taking a toll—I'm neglecting my friends, my family, my hobbies, my work, and my sanity by spending all this time on the internet. One day, I break. I think to myself, "This just isn't worth it. Random people who are wrong on the internet don't deserve all my time." I decide to quit social media.

My account of importance in this section allows us to give a particular diagnosis of how my reasoning might be functioning here. These strangers on the internet are doing something wrong in promulgating toxic political views. But how important is their wrongdoing? Asking this question amounts to asking: what is the appropriate sort of concern to manifest in responding to their wrongdoing? Since I am finite, the kind of concern that is appropriate to manifest in response to this wrongdoing imposes costs on my ability to manifest concern for other things, like my friends, family, and hobbies. If all the time that I'm spending on the internet responding to strangers manifests appropriate concern for their wrongdoing, then this has implications for the shape of appropriate concern for my friends, family, and hobbies. If this were appropriate concern, it would imply, for example, that I could be appropriately concerned with my best friend Greg while neglecting to spend any time with him, because I'm spending all my time fighting on the internet. And this implication seems absurd. This is just not a plausible conception of appropriate concern for a friend. That the con-

cern I am manifesting in fighting on the internet involves incurring such costs shows that it must be an inappropriate form of concern, because accepting these costs is not consistent with being appropriately concerned with, among other things, my friendships.

When I think that my behavior on the internet is not worth it because of its costs, then, I am thinking about a reason that the concern my behavior manifests is inappropriate. The reason that it is inappropriate is that incurring its costs implies inappropriate forms of concern for other things in my life. Perhaps appropriate concern for a friend would involve incurring such costs, but certainly not appropriate concern for any and every random person who happens to have noxious political views. Notice, finally, that when I am thinking about costs here, it does not seem that I am thinking about a reason that is merely prudential. If the concern that I’m manifesting on the internet were appropriate, this would imply that a kind of concern for friendship is appropriate that looks warped in a way that is natural to describe as *disrespectful* to my friend. I disrespect my friend if I neglect them whenever a random stranger needs correction on the internet. If I thought that this were an appropriate form of concern for a friend, I would have a disrespectful conception of the appropriate kind of concern due a friend. And this is what I recognize in thinking about costs.

Now, I want to argue that we can reason to the conclusion that anger is unfitting on the basis of costs in much the way that I’ve just argued that we can reason to the conclusion that a kind of concern in action is inappropriate on the basis of costs.

The first step in this argument is to observe that appropriate concern is manifested not simply in action, but in emotions like anger. This point has been stressed in important work by Samuel Scheffler.²² I’ve also already noted this

22. See Scheffler (2011). I actually think that my entire account of “importance” here can be understood as a version of Scheffler’s account of “valuing”—an account that has greatly influenced my thinking and with which I have great affinity—with some friendly amendments. Directly engaging Scheffler here has the following difficulty: if Scheffler is trying to elucidate an ordinary notion of importance—and I think he is—his account can be read as being insufficient in ways analogous to those I point out when discussing Nagel. Scheffler takes valuing to involve a belief, taking there to be special reasons, emotional dispositions, and the disposition to regard these emotions as merited. But—sparing the reader some details—without appeal to the way that past engagement creates a role in a life that justifies future engagement and gives distinctive content to the emotions, I think that Scheffler captures only a thin notion of importance, and not the way in which something’s being *important to us* plays a distinctive role in our practical reasoning. Scheffler in fact gestures towards something along these lines, referencing the need for “role in a life” to explain different degrees of valuing. And when his account of valuing is deployed to analyze particular phenomena—e.g., in Scheffler (2010), Callard (2017), Kolodny (2003), Wallace (2013)—particular objects like projects and relationships fill in the gap, playing the “role in a life.” This is why I take my discussion of importance here to amount to an account along Scheffler’s lines with friendly amendments, and I take the concept of “role in a life” from him—simply making explicit its significance in a way that Scheffler does not. I begin, then, with Nagel and an ordi-

fact in discussing the example that motivated my treatment of importance in this section; my anger at Brutus's betrayal seems to get the importance of the betrayal wrong—seems unfitting—because it manifests an inappropriate or warped sort of concern with the betrayal. Judgments about the importance of friendship will be connected to judgments about the kind of concern in action in response to wrongdoing that the role of friendship in a life merits, and this difference will be portrayed as well in different kinds of anger which are themselves manifestations of concern. And we can reason to the conclusion that the anger is unfitting because it manifests a kind of concern that is inappropriate absent some important connection—like friendship—linking me and the betrayal.

The second step in this argument is to notice that anger itself imposes costs. Just as we have finite resources for action, we have finite emotional resources. To see the relevance of this fact for assessing fit, however, we need to be careful. As Scheffler has noted, there are limits on our capacities for emotional vulnerability (2011: 31). Given that fact, becoming emotionally vulnerable to Greg in the way that is appropriate for friendship, for example, may come at the cost of being able to begin friendships with others, because I am limited in the number of people to whom I can become appropriately emotionally vulnerable. Our emotional limits, in this case, impose costs on rational action, but it is not clear these sorts of costs have anything to do with the fittingness of, for example, a particular state of anger. They are costs incurred by engaging in actions that will lead to the development of dispositions to anger that will be manifested in particular states.

I think Scheffler's observation is correct, but I introduce it to distinguish it from a different way in which being angry involves incurring costs. It is not just dispositions but the felt effects of anger, of the kind that I discussed in §3, that impose costs on us. I'll gloss what I mean by "finite emotional resources" with some paradigmatic examples. Consider: feelings of rage characteristically block out any other emotions we might be able to feel. Being in a rage is detrimental to our own peace of mind. Being in a rage can distract us from helping others or sap our motivation to do anything constructive at all. It is not that these are costs in the sense that choosing to be enraged is ipso facto choosing to accept costs to one's peace of mind, etc. We don't choose to be enraged at all, at least not in any straightforward sense. Rather, rage's effects impose costs in the more general sense of excluding alternatives. A species of cost shows up with regard to action. Because we are finite, choosing one option excludes others. But feeling one emotion, or a certain degree of one emotion, excludes possibilities as well, albeit not by choice. Because we are emotionally finite, the effects of being enraged

nary notion of importance not out of any fundamental disagreement with Scheffler about how to conceptualize the terrain, but rather because doing so allows me to get to the heart of what is at stake in this paper without bogging things down in Scheffler exegesis and inside-baseball disputes about "valuing."

exclude peace of mind. Being enraged excludes feeling overjoyed for someone. And the costs, although not incurred by choice, interact with choice and the costs we incur there. Being enraged excludes making a clearheaded decision in a few moments about the best way to teach my class.

Putting these two steps together shows how reasoning about the costs of anger can be reasoning about its fittingness, and not simply reasoning about its instrumental or prudential value. An instance of anger will be fitting only if it manifests appropriate concern. And, because anger imposes costs, it is connected to other kinds of concern in much the way action is. If an instance of anger is fitting, then the costs that it imposes on our ability to manifest other sorts of concern will be merited. But just as we can conclude that some view about appropriate concern in action is warped because of what it implies about other appropriate forms of concern, we can reason that the kind of concern expressed in anger is inappropriate, because of what it implies about other appropriate forms of concern. And, since an instance of anger’s manifesting inappropriate concern entails that it is unfitting, this amounts to concluding that the anger is unfitting. The costs to other forms of concern show that the anger must be misportraying the importance of its object.

The easiest way to see this is, I think, to consider how things would be different if we were not emotionally finite. Imagine this time a demigod. The demigod is like us in that they have limited time, attention, and energy to invest in action. But they are unlike us in having unlimited capacities to be affected emotionally. For the demigod, importance will play a justificatory role in practical reasoning towards action just like ours. But the demigods would have very different emotional lives from ours. They can experience all emotions at once. Rage does not block joy or make them miserable or sap their concentration.

This difference looks like it will show up in the way that “importance to them” justifies responding to wrongdoing in action and in anger. Since a demigod has limited resources for action, it can be particularly important to them that a friend wronged them, in the sense that the role of that friendship in their life can justify accepting certain costs to respond to that wrongdoing that would not be justified absent the friendship. But with unlimited emotional capacities, such a creature *could* become enraged at everyone’s betrayal by their friend. What grounds, then, would there be for thinking that it is unfitting for the demigods to become enraged by every betrayal? Why shouldn’t we think that it is perfectly fitting for a demigod to be enraged, for instance, by Brutus’s betrayal of Caesar?

We might try to answer these questions by appeal to the kinds of considerations we gave in our case—that such rage looks like it manifests the psychology of a groupie or stalker, as Scheffler put it, given that the demigods have no important connection to the wrongdoing. But why should we think that their rage manifests this sort of inappropriate concern? Why not think that their rage

is quite fitting, because it portrays Brutus's betrayal of Caesar in light of how important it is *to Caesar*? If we think that rage is unfitting in my case, it is because the importance of Caesar's friendship with Brutus to Caesar doesn't make the betrayal important to me in the way it does for Caesar, because the role of friendship in Caesar's life justifies certain responses on Caesar's part that it wouldn't on my part. We seem to think that this applies both to action and to emotions like anger. But why think that friendship functions for the demigods as it does for us?

One of the core reasons for thinking that it functions as it does for us is our finitude—both emotional and agential. As Scheffler puts it: "I cannot value the friendship in the same way that the participants can; it cannot play the same role in my emotional life and practical deliberations" (2011: 37). Perhaps we still have reason to think that rage from the demigods would manifest a warped kind of concern with a relationship to which they have no important connection. But we cannot appeal to their emotional finitude. We can, however, appeal to emotional finitude in our case. In virtue of our emotional finitude, particular instances of anger have implications for the shape of appropriate concern for other things, in a way that they do not for the demigods. And this makes the costs of anger relevant for assessing its fit in a way that they would not be for the demigods.

Consider, again, *my* being enraged by Brutus's betrayal of Caesar. If I did find myself enraged at this betrayal, I would think something had gone awry—that my rage was a manifestation of concern that bordered on obsession with Brutus's and Caesar's friendship. But I would not deny that Caesar could experience fitting rage. This is because I think, at least implicitly, the important role friendship plays in a life makes betrayals important in a way that that is fittingly portrayed in rage by the betrayed friend, but not others. Why think this? Well, consider what I would need to think in order to think that my rage at Brutus's betrayal of Caesar was fitting. I would need to think that my anger portrayed the importance of the betrayal accurately. That is, I would need to take the anger's portrayal to match my judgments about the importance of the wrongdoing and the importance to me of my connection with the wrongdoing. But if I'm not mistaken and am aware that I have no particularly important connection to the wrongdoing, I will have to think that simply being connected to Brutus and Caesar by very thin moral bonds makes betrayal as important as my rage portrays it. Thinking this amounts to thinking that these very thin ties make betrayals of friendship important such that no different kind of concern is appropriate from a friend than it is from anyone.

This seems like a warped conception of the relative importance of friendship and basic moral relations in a human life, and not simply because it is inhumanly demanding. Consider the costs that such rage would impose on my ability to manifest other forms of concern. To think that rage is fitting in response to

any betrayal amounts to thinking that my connection to other human beings is important in a way that makes it appropriate to endure the misery of rage any time I hear about or encounter an instance of betrayal. It means that my attention is appropriately diverted away from things that are particularly important to me—like friends and personal projects—and absorbed by betrayals any time I hear about or encounter them. It means that it is appropriate to be motivationally impaired in the way characteristic of rage whenever I hear about or encounter a betrayal. To think that my rage is fitting, then, is to think that these and other costs are merited by the importance of betrayal simply in light of the importance of a very minimal connection. And this seems to involve a warped conception of the kind of concern that is made appropriate by mere moral connections, because it involves thinking that the appropriate kind of concern for my own self and for the things that are personally important to me is such that they allow for incurring these costs. As with action, the shape of other forms of appropriate concern implied by the assumption that my anger is fitting may plausibly seem to be disrespectful. It is disrespectful to my friends to get distracted from their concerns and be emotionally unavailable simply because a random betrayal happened somewhere on earth. If I thought that this were the form of concern appropriate for friends, I would have a disrespectful conception of appropriate concern for friends. Such anger may seem not merely prudentially unwise, but in fact disrespectful of my own worth, or at least not properly attuned to my own value. If my anger were fitting, it would mean that the appropriate kind of concern for my own emotional wellbeing involves feeling miserable whenever a random betrayal happens anywhere on earth, and this seems like a masochistic conception of appropriate self-concern.

My reasoning may be mistaken here, just as it may be in the case of action. I may get appropriate concern wrong. I may think that the costs that rage places on my ability to manifest other forms of concern implies a warped conception of appropriate concern for other things when in fact it does not. For instance, I think that it is a bad bit of reasoning to conclude from the fact that my rage at being oppressed is costly to me that it is not fitting. The costs of the anger of the oppressed need not reflect an inappropriate kind of self-concern, but rather simply the gravity of injustice in a world hostile to human flourishing. (I'll discuss this sort of case—and its particular difficulties—in more depth in the next section.) And this sort of reasoning can be hijacked by various social pathologies. The transactional ethos of late capitalism might lead me to think mistakenly that the costs that fitting rage imposes on my ability to get ahead in the workplace show that it is unfitting, because I've absorbed a pathological conception of the kind of concern that is appropriate for getting ahead. But these are particular mistakes in reasoning about costs, not grounds for thinking that such reasoning is illicit. And it is hard to see how such reasoning could be illicit generally, given

that we need to make sense of how to fit appropriate concern for different things into a single, finite life, concern that shows up in emotions like anger as much as it shows up in action.²³

This, at last, gives us what I take to be the response to problem (b), the full answer to my motivating question, and a proper diagnosis of the grocery store case. In the grocery store, I find a miserable rage bubbling up inside of me. But I stop and reflect. I notice that for my misery to be fitting, I'd need to think that I had some connection to the jerk's behavior that made it so important as to be fittingly portrayed by the kind of anger that involves such misery. And I think, this just cannot be true. I have no special connection to the jerk or to grocery stores. If my rage were fitting, jerky behavior would be so important that it would merit misery wherever and whenever it occurred. And such a conception of the importance of my connection to jerks (or maybe grocery stores?) seems warped—it involves thinking that the appropriate kind of concern for jerky behavior in the grocery store imposes costs on my concern for my own mental wellbeing and ability to attend to other things I care about. And these are warped conceptions of appropriate concern for myself and the other things I care about. So, I think, my anger must be off. I calm down.²⁴ And my thought that my rage is “not worth it” is not the thought that it is prudentially or instrumentally inadvisable, but rather that its costs to my ability to manifest concern for other things show it to be inappropriate and so unfitting.

23. Although I lack the space to defend this claim at length here, I think that it is quite plausible that in many cases, if an agent is fully rational or (if this amounts to something different) virtuous, the costs of both action and emotions like anger will be “silenced” in their reflection. That is to say: oftentimes it does not even occur to us that actions or emotions impose costs on our ability to manifest other kinds of concern, and this seems quite right. Something might seem off if we had to think about the costs. Part of being fully practically rational, I think, involves a mature sense of the way that the different shapes of appropriate concern fit together, and often the need to reason in terms of costs is a symptom of a failure to fully internalize these norms. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pushing me on this point.

24. There is an interesting wrinkle for my account due to the fact that there can be both “insistent” and “noninsistent” reasons for emotions like anger. Insistent reasons for some attitude are reasons that make having the attitude rational and lacking the attitude irrational; noninsistent reasons are reasons that make having the attitude rational but do not make lacking the attitude irrational. (This distinction is analogous to the distinction between a requirement and a permission, usually applied to action.) This distinction, originally due to Shelly Kagan, has been applied to emotions involved in love by Niko Kolodny. Kolodny argues that loving relationships provide insistent reasons for love, including the emotions involved in love. See Kolodny (2003: 163). If there can be insistent and noninsistent reasons for anger, it looks like this can and will show up in anger's portrayal. That is, anger may portray wrongdoing as important such that it *requires* anger as a response. Or it may portray wrongdoing as important only in *permitting* anger as a response. It is plausible that these differences show up in the costs that anger imposes on other forms of concern and that reasoning about costs may sometimes be reasoning to the conclusion that one's anger is unfitting because it portrays wrongdoing as requiring a response where a response is permitted but not required.

To close this section, I want to make a final point. In the grocery store case, I think that my anger is not worth it because jerks don't play a role in my life that makes fitting anger in response to basic rule-breaking worth being miserable. And I think that they *don't* play this role because they *couldn't*. Any conception of the importance of jerks that entailed that it was fitting to be miserable over such behavior seems like a completely warped view of importance. But sometimes anger may seem to be "not worth it" in a slightly different way—the costs of the anger may reveal to us that we have in fact given something a role in our lives that merits the costs of our anger, but that we *shouldn't* have. I want to illustrate this difference with two examples.

First, take my hobby of playing historical board games and a non-moral analogue of anger: frustration. Imagine that I am burning myself out one night, reading difficult rulebooks and becoming increasingly frustrated with my inability to parse some dense text. But I catch myself and think: "This is not worth it. It's not worth it to feel so miserable about a mere hobby!" Here, I might be reacting in exactly the same way as in the grocery store case. I think that my frustration portrays my failure to parse the rulebook as important in light of the importance to me of my hobby. But I think that it would be a warped conception of the importance of a mere hobby that it should make failures at parsing rulebooks important in a way that merits incurring the misery of my frustration. I'm just overreacting.

But there is also another possibility. The thought that my frustration is not worth it might express the revelation not that the frustration is unfitting, given the role games do play in my life, but rather that it is not worth giving games a role in my life that makes miserable frustration an appropriate cost of the failure to understand rules—and that is exactly what I have done! Without fully realizing it, I've given these historical games a role in my life that is, perhaps, so central to my identity that it *does* make my failures regarding them important enough for extreme frustration. If I can change the role of a hobby in my life just by fiat, then perhaps I can just calm down. But more likely, I can't. My frustration is a problem not because it is unfitting, but precisely because it *is*. I should avoid obsessively reading rulebooks not because I know I'm prone to overreacting in frustration, but because I recognize that my frustration at reading them is an all too appropriate manifestation of the warped role that these games play in my life—and I can only change that role if I stop doing things like obsessively reading rulebooks.

Second, consider a relationship. Imagine that a colleague in my office, Ralph, forgets my birthday. This makes me really angry. I spend most of the day stewing in a rage. But at the end of the day, exhausted in my misery, I think, "This isn't worth it—it isn't worth being miserable simply because Ralph is so self-centered." Again, my thinking here might be identical to the grocery store case. I reflect on

my relationship with Ralph and realize that we are simply co-workers. And I think that it is a completely warped conception of the importance of the co-worker relationship to think that fitting anger in response to a forgotten birthday is the kind that involves the costs of being miserable. I recognize that I am overreacting.

But maybe I *am* closer friends than that with Ralph. My thought that it is not worth being miserable simply because Ralph is so self-centered may, then, be the thought not that the costs of my anger show it to be unfitting, but rather that the very fact that such costly anger *is* fitting shows that I am in a bad relationship—a relationship that is not worth it, at least not in its current form. And whatever is the case with hobbies, it doesn't seem that we can change the role of a relationship in our lives by fiat. Here I cannot simply calm down; what I need to do is to talk to Ralph and possibly end our relationship.

5. Dilemma

The anger of the oppressed is often very costly, precisely because the wrongs it responds to are very great. And, it has often been taken to be fitting, although costly, for precisely this reason. Amia Srinivasan notes a trend in which conservative commentators have argued against the anger of African Americans on the grounds that it simply makes their lives go poorly. As she rightly notes, understood as offering instrumental considerations not to be angry, these arguments do not show anger not to be fitting.²⁵ But some of these arguments might in fact be read as arguing that such anger is not fitting, because it just cannot be worth living in misery because of injustice. My account offers a diagnosis of the mistake involved here: the inference is a bad one, premised on the assumption that accurate portrayals of injustice cannot possibly be so costly.

Things get tricky, though, when we use my account to think about the way in which the oppressed may find their rage to be unfitting. It would be wrong to say that the anger of the oppressed is unfitting because so costly—that their anger must have inflated injustice's importance. In the abstract, my account is not committed to this error. It seems correct to think that very great wrongdoing *is* important for the wronged, even if the wrongdoer is someone to whom the wronged stands in no important relationship other than being human. Fitting anger may simply merit great costs. It would be common to suppose, then, that “not worth it” thoughts of my kind will not show up or at least not be rational amongst the oppressed; thoughts about anger's not being “worth it” will be about instrumental reasons not to be angry, or they will give expression to a kind of emotional deadening under the weight of oppression.

25. See Srinivasan (2018: 125–27).

However, this is not quite right. It seems to me that oppressed people *do* have the kind of "not worth it" thoughts I've been discussing. Imagine a colonial subject of an empire, filled with rage over their treatment by the viceroy. They reflect on the way that the rage is destroying them inside and think: this just isn't worth it. The viceroy isn't important to me. This seems to me to be the kind of "not worth it" thought that I've articulated. But, at the same time, the subject may feel that they *must* respond to the wrongdoing somehow. Their anger may dissipate to some extent, but not in the way that mine does in the grocery store. The situation feels like a bind: anger seems at once fitting and not fitting.

How could these two thoughts be true? The answer here lies, I think, not in attempting to resolve the tension between these two thoughts, but in admitting that it is a genuine dilemma that agents may face, a dilemma that my account has the resources to articulate. There is something natural in the thought that the anger of the oppressed has a paradoxical character: getting worked up into a rage seems to grant the oppressor the power to ruin one's life further; not getting worked up into a rage lets the oppressor off the hook. And the fact that oppressed groups can face something like emotional dilemmas has been remarked upon in the philosophical literature—by Amia Srinivasan on African American anger and by Talbot Brewer on the "emotional labor" of those working in the service industry. But they look for the source of emotional problems in the conflicts between instrumental reasons and reasons of fittingness for emotions, and so the examples that they hold up as exemplars have a different shape from the one that I'm pointing to.

For example, Srinivasan presents the case of James Baldwin, considering whether to express his anger over the unjust treatment of African Americans. Srinivasan holds that to fully embody his anger—to fully achieve the kind of appreciation she takes to be constitutive of anger—Baldwin must express it. But the expression of anger would also be counterproductive to the cause of Civil Rights. White Americans are frightened when African Americans express their rage, and so expressing his anger would make many in his audience less sympathetic to his cause. So, Baldwin's reasons cut in different directions. He has instrumental reasons not to express his anger. He has reasons of fittingness to express his anger—the fact that such anger, and its expression, is merited by injustice. According to Srinivasan, the choice situation that Baldwin faces is a manifestation of what she calls "affective injustice," in virtue of the causes of the dilemma he faces. The reason that his anger would be counterproductive is because of the attitudes of many Americans toward African American rage—attitudes which stem from the very thing that makes anger appropriate in the first place: an ideology which casts the anger of African Americans as frightening or illegitimate springs from and feeds off of the historical and enduring injustices perpetrated against African Americans. In light of this fact, Srinivasan argues

that the difficulty of the choice that Baldwin faces is in fact wrongful: Baldwin is wronged in having to make this choice, because the reasons that expression of anger is counterproductive stem from the very wrong that it targets.²⁶

In such cases, the agents may feel a kind of upsetting tension in reflecting on their emotions, and the tension stems from the fact that the instrumental reasons the agent has not to get angry stem from wrongful treatment. There is no thought that the emotion might not be fitting. But I think that we can just as easily imagine the kind of puzzling “not worth it” thoughts as cropping up in these sorts of cases, as a distinct phenomenon. We might imagine James Baldwin sitting across the stage from William F. Buckley during their debate, filling with rage at the smirk on Buckley’s face. He might think: “My rage isn’t worth it. Bill Buckley doesn’t deserve it.” This seems to me to invite interpretation in terms of fittingness: Bill Buckley isn’t the sort of person for whom this kind of anger is appropriate. But at the same time, Baldwin’s rage seems supremely fitting: Buckley’s smirk is infuriating. A tension remains, but it is not a tension between instrumental reasons and reasons of fittingness.

It seems to me, then, that there is an important kind of emotional dilemma or bind that is missed by Srinivasan and others, and which is not amenable to interpretation by an instrumental strategy. The kind of dilemma I’ve pointed to involves it seeming that anger is at once demanded and forbidden—that it is fitting and not fitting. And the recognition that it is not fitting primarily goes by way of costs—of the kind of misery that the anger generates in oneself.

To make this articulate, I want to introduce the following thought: sometimes regarding wrongdoing as having a certain kind of significance can feel demeaning to an agent, and rightly so. This becomes particularly salient if we think in terms of costs: being willing to accept certain great emotional costs as merited seems to manifest a lack of self-respect. This is especially so when the anger comes in response to a manifest lack of mutual recognition. Anger at failures of recognition frequently has a unique feature: the state of anger is one more manifestation of its own content. The wrongdoer will wrongfully fail to recognize the anger as what it is. The misery of anger will seem like the misery of participating in one’s own ongoing wrongdoing. It can’t be that the costs of one’s anger are merited, because accepting those costs amounts to a demeaning form of humiliation. There just is no way that rage can be fitting, because it seems to entail a completely degraded conception of appropriate self-concern.

Here is what I have in mind: return to Baldwin and Bill Buckley. Imagine Baldwin thinking that Buckley’s smugness isn’t worth making himself miserable over, although his smugness is, nevertheless, infuriating. This is a disorient-

26. See Srinivasan (2018: 131–36). See also Brewer (2011).

ing thought. There's something wrong with letting *Bill Buckley* make you miserable; but there's also something wrong with letting *Bill Buckley* off the hook. What makes this disorienting thought possible, and fundamentally correct, is the following: Buckley wrongs Baldwin by condescending to him. He fails to recognize his point of view or take it seriously. But for this very reason, Buckley will not recognize Baldwin's anger for what it is. He will not recognize the costs Baldwin incurs as being merited. As Srinivasan points out, Baldwin will come off to Buckley as just another angry African American. And it is natural and illuminating to explain what is particularly upsetting in experiencing this kind of anger by appeal to the special kind of misery it involves. It's the misery of being forced at gunpoint to dig your own grave. To get angry at Buckley's condescension in the recognition that the anger will be met with more condescension leads to the anger seeming not merely passively miserable, in the way the grief at a death can be passively miserable, but actively miserable: the misery of not merely reliving a traumatic experience, but reliving it by reenacting it. And if the anger seems like the response to a demand, then the metaphor of gunpoint is quite apt: the misery is the misery of being forced by your wrongdoer to reenact your own wrongdoing. Metaphors of power are apt here: one feels that in one's anger one is granting the wrongdoer power to compel one to participate in one's own wrongdoing.

It seems to me often quite rational to conclude that enduring this kind of misery is not worth it. It is not that this kind of misery is completely off the table. We endure it properly sometimes in relationships in which it we take it to be proper to have a substantial kind of special concern. A comparison with friendship is useful here: the thought that anger is costly because not recognized by the other is not at first a recognition that one has made a local mistake to invest so much in the relationship, but rather, perhaps, that the relationship needs to be abandoned. But in the general moral relationship, these things can pull apart. It can feel as if one would lack self-respect in enduring misery, in light of the fact that one doesn't care about any special relationship with the wrongdoer. Nevertheless, the wrong can seem so significant that it cries out for some emotional response. One's situation then seems "absurd" in the following way: one is damned either to demean oneself in getting angry or to fail to emotionally register the wrongdoing in the way that it seems to call for.

One may balk at this thought. Surely if anger is called for, there must be some fitting kind of anger available. Surely we can't be stuck being inappropriately concerned. But this assumption seems to me unmotivated, called into question by the familiarity of the phenomenon that I've just tried to illuminate. And there doesn't seem to be any reason to think that our emotional resources are so fine-grained as to allow us always to be in a position to find a fitting response

when one is called for. Our emotions are often inchoate and crude, presenting us with tools that are much duller than are needed. We refine them over time and with experience, finding ways of feeling subtle enough to meet the demands of particular situations. Perhaps the situation I've described admits of resolution by subtle reflection upon and honing of one's own anger. But until we find a way, we can be stuck in an absurd situation: to fail to be angry is to fail to take wrongdoing seriously enough, to fail to properly acknowledge its importance, to fail to manifest appropriate concern. To be angry is to fail to take our own self-worth seriously enough, to fail to have appropriate concern for ourselves, by investing too much importance in the wrongdoer.

6. Conclusion

I started this essay with a puzzle: how could “not worth it” thoughts be about reasons that anger was unfitting? How could the costs of anger show it to be anything other than prudentially or instrumentally bad? The argument for my answer took some twists and turns, addressing complexities—some familiar, some not—along the way, but in the end my answer to these questions is fairly straightforward: we can conclude that our anger is unfitting on the basis of costs because, as emotionally finite creatures, the costs of anger have implications for the shape of other sorts of appropriate concern. If we reject these implications, we can conclude that our anger is unfitting. My argument aimed to show why this straightforward answer is plausible, and it also allowed us to articulate a dilemma that agents can face regarding their anger. In concluding, I just want to briefly note three implications of my account. First, it is general enough that it will apply to different accounts of anger. If anger is essentially communicative, for instance, it will allow us to articulate how the costs of communication bear on fittingness. Second, the account also generalizes to other emotions. Although the subject of this paper has been anger, I have often argued at a more general level—about anger and emotions that are like it. Given the shape of my account, this should not be surprising; our emotional finitude is not narrowly confined to anger. Wherever “not worth it” thoughts about the emotions show up, my account should apply. Third, it can explain why “not worth it” thoughts only show up for some attitudes. I suspect, for example, that “not worth it” thoughts do not show up for beliefs, at least not in the way they do for both action and emotion. My account has the resources to illuminate this fact: whatever we think about how our finitude impacts the rationality of belief, it seems clear that the connection between truth and the costs of belief is quite different.

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