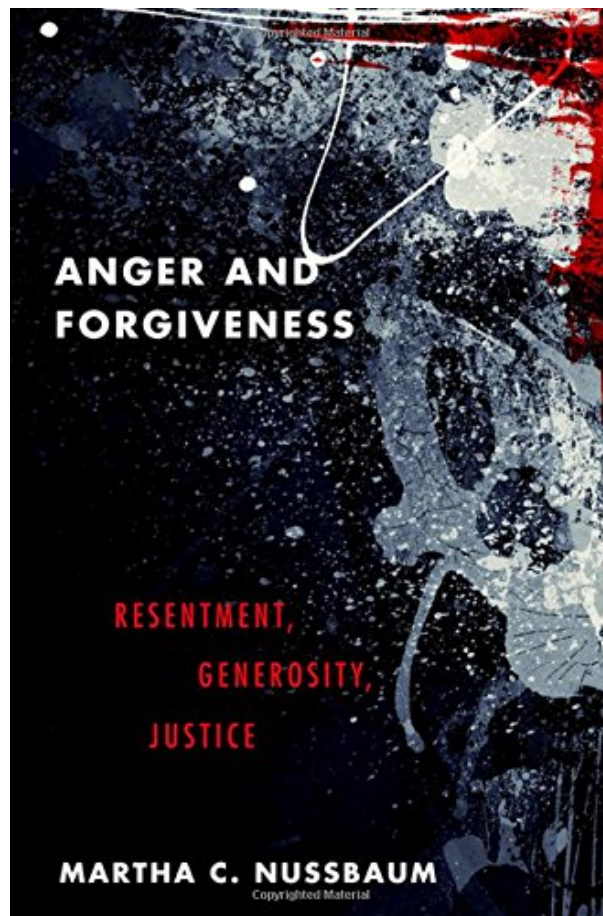
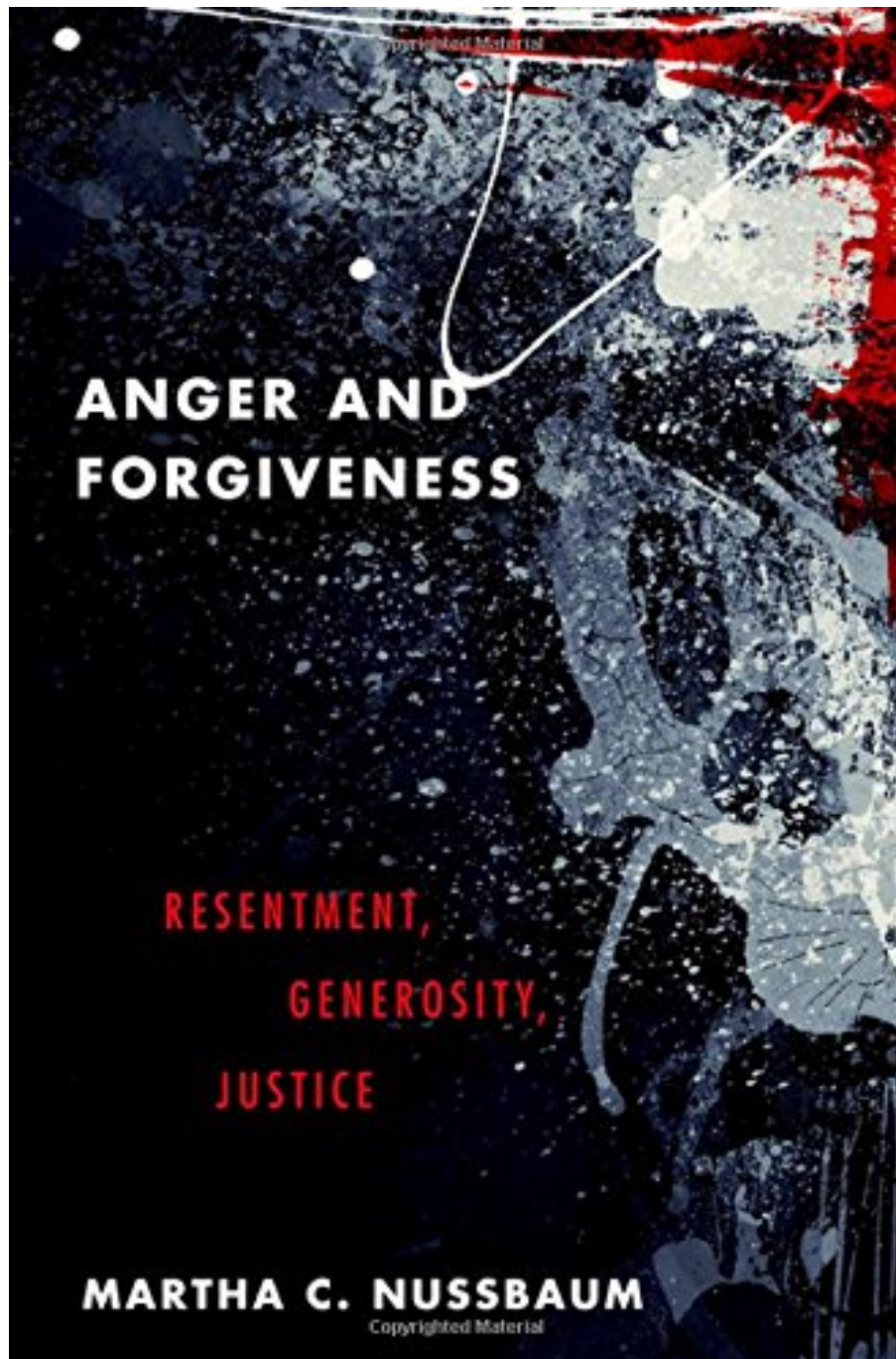


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## Review

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Anger is not just ubiquitous, it is also popular. Many people think it is impossible to care sufficiently for justice without anger at injustice. Many believe that it is impossible for individuals to vindicate their own self-respect or to move beyond an injury without anger. To not feel anger in those cases would be considered suspect. Is this how we should think about anger, or is anger above all a disease, deforming both the personal and the political?

In this wide-ranging book, Martha C. Nussbaum, one of our leading public intellectuals, argues that anger is conceptually confused and normatively pernicious. It assumes that the suffering of the wrongdoer restores the thing that was damaged, and it betrays an all-too-lively interest in relative status and humiliation. Studying anger in intimate relationships, casual daily interactions, the workplace, the criminal justice system, and movements for social transformation, Nussbaum shows that anger's core ideas are both infantile and harmful.

Is forgiveness the best way of transcending anger? Nussbaum examines different conceptions of this much-sentimentalized notion, both in the Jewish and Christian traditions and in secular morality. Some forms of forgiveness are ethically promising, she claims, but others are subtle allies of retribution: those that exact a performance of contrition and abasement as a condition of waiving angry feelings. In general, she argues, a spirit of generosity (combined, in some cases, with a reliance on impartial welfare-oriented legal institutions) is the best way to respond to injury. Applied to the personal and the political realms, Nussbaum's profoundly insightful and erudite view of anger and forgiveness puts both in a startling new light.

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Poetic, just, wise

By David C

Nussbaum is a scholar I have admired for many years, from my first reading of *Fragility of Goodness* (1986), to *Poetic Justice* (1996) and *Political Emotions* (2013). In *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016), she adds to her ongoing scholarship on justice with the same clear, level-headed, literary approach that first captured my attention. Dedicating the current work to her teacher, Bernard Williams, suggests a certain humility and confidence that make reading her words feel like a gift lovingly given.

Anger, she argues, includes not just awareness of a serious wrong but also a desire that the wrongdoer suffer. This can happen two ways, either by payback or by lowering the wrongdoer's status. Both payback and down-ranking are problematic because they focus backward. Nussbaum argues for the forward-looking emotion she calls Transition, which is future-directed toward action that is less concerned with payback or down-ranking and instead inspires or motivates one to pursue a greater good.

Forgiveness is the subtheme, often distorted into a transaction that does not pursue a greater good but instead reinforces the imbalance that makes anger so problematic to begin with. The Christian tradition is rife with theological perspectives rooted in a transactional understanding of anger and forgiveness, justified by appeals to the anger of God or proverbial admonitions to be slow to anger, not rash. Penance and contrition have their place. But the forward-facing, unconditional forgiveness that waives anger is better. Better still is unconditional love and generosity. Nussbaum examines transactional forgiveness in personal, social, and political realms and concludes that the transactional path is not the one that leads in the end toward generosity, justice, and truth.

Nussbaum's caution about anger's efficacy to bring about justice stands in contrast against much that is written about anger in the therapeutic realm. Family systems analysts examine the triangular functioning of anger in maintaining unjust equilibrium in interpersonal relationships. Anger may serve a helpful function in differentiating the non-anxious presence who then can break generational patterns of neglect or abuse. Narrative therapies find anger helpful in rewriting a patient's story and grant control/authorship of his or her life. While anger may be misdirected, explosive, suppressed, or otherwise harmful, it can as well get our attention like a fever does, indicating that something is wrong that needs to be made right. Anger, as pastoral counselor Andrew Lester points out [*Anger: Discovering your Spiritual Ally* (2007)], can help us detect and uncover our idols, hidden guilt and shame, and thus clear the path so we can imagine our future stories with hope. Nussbaum would agree at least that anger "may serve as a signal that something is amiss." As a wake-up call, even as a deterrent, it serves a function. but fails to motivate unless it moves beyond the transactional and motivates us toward the common good.

Her claim is in fact as radical as she says: "that in a sane and not excessively anxious and status focused person, anger's idea of retribution or payback is a brief dream or cloud, soon dispelled by saner thoughts of personal and social welfare." Well-grounded anger puts itself out of business in its healthier form, becoming "compassionate hope." This is the Transition that moves beyond payback to pursue justice.

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Extremely disappointing - Nussbaum has wandered far from scholarship and nuanced moral and political reasoning

By Philosopher

This does not match Nussbaum's record in terms of scholarship or argumentation.

As was the case for disgust and shame in "Hiding from Humanity", Nussbaum targets anger for possessing unredeemable elements, suggesting that core elements of anger have outlived any evolutionary utility.

Nussbaum identifies two unredeemable elements within anger - the idea that anger is either about desiring “payback” which fixates on the suffering of the presumed perpetrator, or "the road of status" to which she ascribes at least calculative rationality (which she will also argue is mistaken). As an alternative, she proposes her own partial replacement for anger: “Transitional Anger”, which is not subject to the criticisms that Nussbaum reserves for ordinary anger.

Nussbaum's scholarship of Aristotle, her primary source for her contention that anger is about payback or status, is superficial, interested, and narrow, extremely disappointing and in tension with her previous stellar work. It does not hold up.

Despite the book’s fundamentally parsimonious message, Nussbaum includes winding and circuitous rhetorical paths, like a philosophical labyrinth, constantly hedging with a mass of careful but often abstract qualifiers. Sometimes this suggests the work of a philosopher and expert legal thinker more intent on forestalling objectors than in pursuing valid objections or exploring implications of a fundamental commitment. Nussbaum singles out accidental features of anger (the narrowly-interpreted “payback” and “down-ranking” hypotheses) and “refutes” them analytically and abstractly, avoiding the type of real-life examples and nuanced moral reasoning that we have grown accustomed to expect from her work in the past. Her scholarship (at least in the case of Aristotle, King, and Mandela) is hasty, superficial, and in the case of the latter two, more exploitative than expository.

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Five Stars

By Jyotirmoy Bose

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