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Is Moral Anger Justified? A Functionalist Defense Of Feeling And Expressing Moral Anger

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IS MORAL ANGER JUSTIFIED? A FUNCTIONALIST DEFENSE OF FEELING

AND EXPRESSING MORAL ANGER

by

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ABSTRACT

Derk Pereboom argues that since we are not ultimately morally responsible for our
thoughts and actions, it is irrational and unfair to feel and express moral anger towards agents for
their wrongdoings. Furthermore, he argues, moral anger is not practically beneficial, typically
causing more harm than good. Thus, he proposes that we replace moral anger with moral
sadness, or disappointment in response to agents' wrongdoings. I offer a functional account of
moral anger to argue that moral anger has important intrapersonal and interpersonal functions
that cannot be served by moral sadness. I show that when we feel and express moral anger in the
right contexts, it a) promotes long-term wellbeing, b) benefits relationships, and c) is the best
way to change agents' future behavior. I conclude by discussing implications of my functional
account for Pereboom's claim that moral anger is rational and fair only if we are ultimately
morally responsible.

INDEX WORDS: Moral anger, Anger, Moral sadness, Disappointment, Sadness, Moral
        responsibility, Social-functionalism, Derk Pereboom

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to two people for their remarkable compassion and strength: my grandmother, Mehrunnisa Bhojani, and my mother, Farzana Sahi. I also dedicate it to my partner for his patience with me, and the topic of this thesis.

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1   INTRODUCTION

Derk Pereboom defines moral anger as a type of anger that we feel in response to agents when they wrong us, or someone else, to hold them accountable for their wrongdoing (2009, 172). When we express moral anger, he claims, we do so to retributively punish, or get even with, the agent for their wrongdoing (2013, 128). For example, when an agent steals my car, I feel moral anger towards the agent for wronging me, and when I express moral anger with the agent, I do so to punish him by making him feel bad for wronging me. In contrast, I may feel non-moral anger, like frustration, when a fallen tree crushes my car, but I would not hold the tree accountable for wronging me, or express anger with the tree to make it feel bad for wronging me (Pereboom 2009, 172). Given this definition of moral anger, Pereboom argues that the feeling and expression of moral anger are justified only when i) agents are ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings and ii) moral anger is practically beneficial to the self and others (2009, 171). When moral anger is not justified in these ways, he proposes that we try our best to eliminate it from our emotional experiences and social interactions (2013, 152).

First, Pereboom argues that agents are never ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings, because they are not the ultimate sources of their thoughts and actions. In other words, since factors external to agents' control, such as past events, psychological predispositions, and circumstantial luck, likely determine their thoughts and actions, they are not ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings (Pereboom 2013, 1). If agents are not ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings, then it is *irrational* to feel moral anger towards them, in the same way that it is irrational for us to feel morally angry towards a fallen tree for crushing our car. Furthermore, if agents are not ultimately morally responsible for their

wrongdoings, then it is *unfair* to express moral anger with them to make them feel bad for their wrongdoings.

Second, Pereboom argues that moral anger is *not practically beneficial*, because in most cases it causes more harm than good to the self and others: (a) moral anger disrupts peace of mind and thus decreases individuals' overall wellbeing (2013, 175); (b) it tends to prevent reconciliation and damage interpersonal relationships (2009, 172); and (c) it is usually ineffective in changing agents' future behaviors (2009, 173). He claims that, all things considered, moral anger is "suboptimal" relative to another emotion we can feel and express with each other in response to wrongdoings: moral sadness, or disappointment accompanied by sadness for the agent (2009, 171).

In Pereboom's view, whereas emotions like moral anger and guilt are focused on retribution, or getting even for past events, emotions like moral sadness and regret are "forward-looking" because they are focused on facilitating positive future outcomes, such as reconciliation and reforming an agent's behavior (2013, 135). Since moral sadness does not entail retribution and focuses on positive future outcomes, he argues that it does not require agents to be ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings and is more likely than moral anger to practically benefit the self and others. Consequentially, he proposes that we "disavow" moral anger, and instead foster moral sadness in response to agents' wrongdoings (2013, 181). While he acknowledges that we cannot entirely prevent ourselves from feeling moral anger in response to wrongdoings, he argues that we can regulate our feelings of moral anger and limit its experience and expression over time (2013, 182).

In this thesis, I argue that moral anger serves indispensable social functions that cannot be served by moral sadness, such that universally replacing moral anger with moral sadness

would be practically harmful to the self and others. I adopt a functionalist view of emotions under which moral anger produces distinct adaptive responses to the perception of injustice in one's environment (Haidt 2003). Building on a multi-level analysis of the functions of emotions (Keltner & Haidt 1999), I describe the intrapersonal function of moral anger in terms of how it informs and prepares individuals to adaptively respond to injustice, and the interpersonal function of moral anger in terms of how it facilitates productive social interactions and influences agents' future behavior.

Moral sadness is an appropriate response to agents' wrongdoings when the agent fails to meet an individual's positive expectations, and the agent sympathizes with the individual she wronged (Lelieveld, Dijk, Beest, & Kleef 2013). However, moral anger is a more appropriate response when we must actively confront some form of injustice, particularly when we do not have any positive expectations from the agent or the agent does not sympathize with us, for example in cases where the wrongdoer benefits from oppressing others. Thus, whether moral anger or moral sadness will be more practically useful to feel and express critically depends on which emotion is more appropriate given the circumstances surrounding the agent's action and the relationship between the individual and the agent. When we feel and express moral anger in the right contexts, it a) promotes the long-term wellbeing of individuals, b) communicates invaluable information about an individual's beliefs and intentions, ultimately benefitting interpersonal relationships, and c) is the most effective way to change agents' future behavior.

At the intrapersonal level, moral anger *informs* the individual that an agent has done something unjust, and *prepares* the individual to confront the agent (Keltner & Haidt 1999, 509). Meanwhile, moral sadness informs the individual that an agent has failed to live up to certain positive expectations, and prepares the individual to disengage from those expectations (Dijk &

Zeelenberg 2002, 323). While moral anger, like moral sadness, disrupts peace of mind and feels unpleasant in the short-term, it ultimately protects us from present and future harm and promotes individuals' long-term wellbeing.

At the interpersonal level, moral anger *communicates* disapproval of the agent's actions, the readiness to confront the agent for his actions (Haidt 2003, 856), and the potential for escalation that could damage the relationship (Lelieveld et al. 2013, 607). While moral sadness can also communicate disapproval of the agent's actions, it communicates the readiness to disengage rather than confront (Lieleveld et al. 2013, 607), and the potential for social withdrawal from the agent (Dijk & Zeelenberg 2002, 323). Drawing on studies of negotiation and cooperation, I show that moral anger communicates an individual's limits, or the point beyond which they are not willing to negotiate (Dijk, Kleef, Steinel and Beest 2008, 600), and is often more sensitive to reparations from the wrongdoer than moral sadness (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 733). Thus, while the expression of moral anger runs the risk of damaging relationships, it also provides the agent with the opportunity to make reparations before the relationship is beyond repair.

Finally, building on the interpersonal function of moral anger, I argue that in certain contexts, moral anger is the most effective way to *incentivize* agents to change their social behavior. Since moral anger usually causes agents to feel fear, and can lead to escalation or social rejection, it tends to deter agents from wronging others, and encourages them to change their offensive behavior (Keltner & Haidt 2001). While moral sadness can also incentivize agents to change their social behavior, research indicates that moral sadness typically serves this function only if the agent sympathizes with the individual and feels guilty for their wrongdoing. When agents do not feel guilty, they are more likely to exploit the individual in response to

moral sadness, rather than change their behavior (Lieleveld et al. 2013, 615). Thus, both moral anger and moral sadness can affect agents' behavior by making them feel bad for their wrongdoings, and whether moral anger or moral sadness will be more effective in changing an agent's behavior depends largely on context.

Both moral anger and moral sadness respond to agents' wrongdoings and serve essential intrapersonal and interpersonal functions. However, moral anger uniquely prepares an individual to confront injustice, ultimately protecting individuals from harm, benefitting relationships, and incentivizing agents to change their harmful behavior. Importantly, these functions are all forward-looking since they relate to future safety and stability, future cooperation, and an agent's future behavior (Pereboom 2013, 135). Thus, I conclude by suggesting that my functional account of moral anger not only demonstrates the indispensible practical benefits of moral anger, but also undermines Pereboom's view that moral anger is not forward-looking, and thereby only justified if we are ultimately morally responsible. We likely are not ultimately morally responsible for our thoughts and actions, but I argue that such responsibility is not required to justify feeling and expressing moral anger. When moral anger is an appropriate response to an agent's wrongdoing given the circumstances surrounding the agent's action and the relationship between the individual and the agent, moral anger is justified to feel and express.

2   PEREBOOM'S PROBLEM WITH MORAL ANGER

Pereboom argues that in order to be ultimately morally responsible for our wrongdoings, we must be the ultimate sources of our thoughts and actions. If factors external to our control, such as past events, psychological predispositions, or circumstantial luck, determine our thoughts and actions, then we are not their ultimate sources (2013, 1). He argues that modern science, including research in physics and psychology, provide evidence that factors external to our control most likely determine our thoughts and actions:

> If we as substances had the power to cause decisions without being causally determined to cause them – we would have this type of free will. But although our being undetermined agent-causes has not been ruled out as a coherent possibility, it is not credible given our best physical theories. (2013, 3)

Since it is highly unlikely that we are the ultimate sources of our thoughts and actions, he argues that we are not justified in holding agents ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings.

According to Pereboom, when we experience and express emotions like moral anger and guilt in response to agents' wrongdoings, we hold agents ultimately morally responsible for their thoughts and actions, so we should try our best to eliminate them from our emotional experiences and social interactions (2009, 178). Moral anger consists of resentment, or anger targeted at an agent because she wronged me, and indignation, or anger targeted at an agent because she wronged someone else (Strawson 1962; Pereboom 2009, 172),[1] whereas guilt involves anger with oneself because I wronged someone else (Pereboom 2013, 186). Importantly, Pereboom

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[1] P.F. Strawson originally defined the terms resentment and indignation as "reactive attitudes" that respond to agents' wrongdoings in his essay "Freedom and Resentment" (1962). Strawson argued that resentment and indignation do not rely on the belief that agents are ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings, and instead rely on the extent to which we perceive an agent's thoughts and actions to demonstrate ill will (or indifference) towards others (190). Pereboom adopts Strawson's terminology to argue that agents only demonstrate genuine ill will (or indifference) towards others when they are the ultimate sources of their thoughts and actions (2013, 8).

takes moral anger and guilt to presuppose the justifiability of "basic desert," or giving the agent *what she deserves* for knowingly committing a wrongdoing:

> For an agent to be morally responsible for an action is for it to be hers in such a way that she would deserve blame if she understood it was morally wrong… given her sensitivity to its moral status, and not by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations (2009, 170).

Basic desert involves retributive punishment, or punishing an agent for their wrongdoing with the aim of getting even with the agent, or harming them because they caused harm. Pereboom contrasts retributive punishment with forward-looking forms of punishment that only punish agents with the aim of deterring the agent or other agents from future wrongdoings, for example by isolating the agent from others (2013, 169). Under his view, the expression of moral anger to an agent is *itself* a form of retributive punishment insofar as it intends to make the agent feel bad for their wrongdoing (2013, 134). Thus, he claims moral anger is "backward-looking" insofar as it focuses on retribution for past actions, rather than positive future outcomes such as reforming the agent or deterring future harm (2013, 135).

Pereboom argues that because agents are not ultimately morally responsible for their thoughts and actions, it is *irrational* to feel moral anger towards them, in the same way that it is irrational for us to feel morally angry towards a fallen tree for crushing our car. Furthermore, since agents are not ultimately morally responsible for their thoughts and actions, they do not deserve retributive punishment for their wrongdoings: it is *unfair* to express moral anger towards agents for their wrongdoings to make them feel bad.

In response to such criticisms about moral anger, many philosophers and psychologists argue that even if moral anger were irrational and unfair, it would still be justified from a

pragmatic perspective. For example, Saul Smilanksy (2000) argues that while we are not ultimately morally responsible, we need the illusion of responsibility to maintain self-worth and a meaningful life, and Shaun Nichols (2007) argues that even if it were possible to eliminate moral anger, we shouldn't because we need to express moral anger towards agents to deter harmful behavior. Pereboom defends his view from such objections by arguing that moral anger is not only irrational and unfair, but also unjustified from a pragmatic perspective. According to Pereboom, moral anger typically causes more harm than good to the self and others, and can be replaced by an emotion that is rational, fair, and more practically beneficial: moral sadness, or disappointment accompanied by sadness for the agent.

In this section, I expand on Pereboom's pragmatic argument against moral anger, and in favor of moral sadness. In section 2.1, I elaborate on Pereboom's definition of moral sadness and how he proposes that we replace the experience of moral anger with the experience of moral sadness. In section 2.2, I discuss his claim that moral anger is bad for the self insofar as it disrupts peace of mind (2013, 175), and compare this claim to his justification for feeling what he calls fury, a type of non-moral anger. In section 2.3, I discuss his claim that moral anger prevents reconciliation and damages interpersonal relationships (2009, 172), and why he takes moral sadness to be a preferable alternative to moral anger in this regard. In section 2.4, I discuss his claim that moral anger is usually ineffective compared to moral sadness in changing agents' future behaviors (2009, 173). After laying out Pereboom's argument, I turn in section 3 to offer objections to each of these claims against the practical benefits of moral anger. I argue that moral anger is the most practically beneficial response to an agent's wrongdoing when we must actively confront the agent. In such cases, moral sadness would be an inappropriate response, and would likely fail to benefit the self and others.

2.1 Moral Sadness and the Regulation of Moral Anger

Pereboom claims that since moral anger holds agents ultimately morally responsible for their wrongdoings, we should try our best to eliminate moral anger in response to agents' wrongdoings. In place of moral anger, he claims we should feel "hurt or shocked or disappointed" about the agent's wrongdoing, and feel "moral sadness or sorrow and concern" for the agent (2013, 180). I summarize this set of emotional responses as moral sadness, or disappointment accompanied by sadness for the agent. Below, I clarify the relationship between disappointment and sadness, and explain how he advises that we replace moral anger with moral sadness.

Feeling hurt, shocked, and disappointed in the psychological literature has been tied to both sadness and anger, depending on whether the individual believes a certain goal can still be attained or not. If the individual believes they can still attain a goal, these feelings are more likely to be accompanied by anger, whereas if the individual has given up on a goal, these feelings are accompanied by sadness (Levine 1996). Since Pereboom contrasts moral anger to feeling hurt, shocked, and disappointed by the agent's actions, and suggests that we should also feel sadness for the agent, he is likely referring exclusively to forms of disappointment that are accompanied by sadness. Disappointment in response to someone's actions is typically accompanied by the appraisal, or evaluation, that the person failed to meet some positive expectations (Van Dijk & Van Harreveld 2008), and sadness is typically accompanied by the appraisal that something harmful has occurred that is out of my control. Thus, moral sadness entails disappointment about the agent's wrongdoing because they failed to live up to positive expectations, and sadness for the agent because the harm they caused was ultimately out of their control. For example, I would feel non-moral sadness when I lose a competition, or my mother

falls deeply ill, but I would feel moral sadness when a schizophrenic harms an innocent person, or a 5-year old child bullies her classmate.

In the case of the schizophrenic or the child, moral sadness may be a natural response because we do not generally hold people accountable for their wrongdoings when they lack the capacity to understand and control their actions. However, when people have the capacity to rationally deliberate about their actions and exercise self-control (Fischer & Ravizza 1998), we tend to treat them as agents who are accountable for the harm they cause. Thus, if I learn that I lost a competition because my opponent rigged it, or my mother became ill because government officials neglected to treat the drinking water in her town, then my natural response would be moral anger, not moral sadness. In cases like these, Pereboom claims that some degree of moral anger is inevitable, endorsing Seth Shabo's claim that sometimes feeling and expressing moral anger is "only human" (2012, 107). However, he argues that by reminding ourselves that agents are not *ultimately* morally responsible for their wrongdoings, and recognizing that moral anger is irrational and unfair to feel and express with agents, we can limit the feeling and expression of moral anger over time (2013, 182):

> Free will skeptics can expect that some degree of local and immediate resentment and indignation is unavoidable. But in the long term, we might well be able to take measures that would moderate or eliminate resentment and indignation, and in particular their overt expressions, and given a belief in free will skepticism, we would then do so for the sake of morality and rationality. (2013, 152)

Much like firemen become accustomed to down-regulating their fear in response to a burning building because they value saving lives, Pereboom argues we can become accustomed to down-

regulating our moral anger in response to agents' wrongdoings because we value rationality and fairness.

Importantly, Pereboom claims that "feigned" moral sadness is manipulative, and fails to secure the practical benefits of replacing moral anger with moral sadness (Pereboom 2009, 173). Thus, he proposes that rather than suppressing moral anger and pretending to feel differently than we do, we should foster genuine moral sadness in response to agents' wrongdoings. While he does not provide an account of how such emotion regulation could take place, he seems to be invoking the concept of reappraisal.

In the psychological literature on emotions, reappraisal is an emotion regulation strategy that changes how one feels in response to an emotional stimulus by reinterpreting the meaning of the stimulus (Gross 1998). For example, an agent stealing my car would typically elicit an appraisal that the agent did something unjust to me, or something for which he had "no justification or right" (Haidt 2003, 856), and I would likely feel moral anger towards the agent for wronging me. Pereboom suggests that by reinterpreting the theft as an action ultimately caused by factors beyond the agent's control, such as financial pressures, we can change how we feel in response to the agent. By reappraising the agent's wrongdoing in this way, he claims that we can sympathize with the agent and our moral anger can change into moral sadness. In what follows, I detail Pereboom's argument that moral anger is never more practically beneficial than moral sadness, and why we should always down-regulate our moral anger in response to agents' wrongdoings.

2.2 Moral Anger is Bad for the Self

While there is some variability in how we experience and express moral anger, it is typically accompanied by a feeling of emotional pain in response to the agent's wrongdoing,

motivation to retaliate against the agent (Haidt 2003, 856), and bodily changes including increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and increased adrenaline and noradrenaline (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990). These physiological, subjective, and behavioral changes are hedonically unpleasant and have the capacity to lead us to engage in reckless or violent behaviors.

Pereboom argues that since moral anger feels bad and has the capacity to lead us to engage in harmful behaviors, we would be better off without ever experiencing it. In support of this claim, Pereboom references Stoicism, an Ancient Greek tradition that sought to show that most emotions are irrational and prevent one from being happy. Pereboom adopts aspects of Stoicism, including the notion that accepting that we are not the ultimate sources of our thoughts and actions could lead us to accept "the course our lives take" and produce tranquility in response to hardship (2013, 175). He also references philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who claimed that emotions like moral anger increase turbulence and decrease serenity in one's emotional life (2013, 175). In contrast to moral anger, Pereboom argues that moral sadness feels calmer and is thereby less disruptive to peace of mind (2013, 175). Furthermore, he argues, since moral sadness entails some degree of sadness *for* the wrongdoer, it facilitates sympathetic communication with the wrongdoer (2013, 180) rather than condemnation (2009, 172).

Overall, Pereboom claims that we would be both happier and better able to address social challenges if we eliminated moral anger. In Pereboom's view, while most human anger is moral anger (2009, 172), there are forms of non-moral anger, like fury, that are practically useful and necessary to address certain social challenges. Fury is anger that we would feel in response to a threat that has to be "violently neutralized," or that requires physical self-defense (2013, 147). Fury, for Pereboom, is a form of non-moral anger since it responds to a physical threat, rather

than the perception of wrongdoing by an agent. Since the aim of fury is to defend rather than

punish, he claims it does not rely on ultimate moral responsibility (2013, 147). Thus, if you

encountered a violent bear, or a murderer, fury would be justified in order to defend yourself,

and would be practically necessary to help you and those around you.

In most cases of moral wrongdoing, he argues, we do not need to physically defend

ourselves, or others, and in those cases it is best for us to down-regulate our moral anger and

foster moral sadness in its place (2013, 147). Thus, while forms of non-moral anger have

important practical functions in the context of self-defense, moral anger is practically harmful to

the self and decreases one's overall wellbeing. In section 2.3, I shift the focus from the

detrimental effects of feeling moral anger at the individual level to the effects of expressing

moral anger in interpersonal contexts. Ultimately, he argues, moral anger damages interpersonal

relationships, which causes harm to both the self and others.

2.3   Moral Anger is Bad for Relationships

Despite the aggressive nature of moral anger, many philosophers and psychologists argue

that moral anger is necessary to communicate blame, and that such communication is an

essential component of interpersonal relationships (Strawson 1962). Pereboom rejects this

notion, arguing that moral anger is more likely to damage relationships than benefit them:

> [Moral anger] often fails to contribute to the well being of those to whom it is
>
> directed. Frequently it is intended to cause physical or emotional pain, and can
>
> give rise to destructive resistance instead of reconciliation. As a result, it has the
>
> potential to damage or destroy relationships. (2013, 180)

Anger has been associated with the motivation to insult, attack, or humiliate the target of one's

anger, and we often take pleasure in the expectation or act of revenge (Haidt 2003, 856;

Pereboom 2009, 172). Such harsh retaliatory behaviors have the potential to cause irreparable damage to a relationship, or provoke retaliation from the agent that would lead to further conflict rather than reconciliation.

Meanwhile, he argues, genuine moral sadness allows us to communicate disapproval in interpersonal relationships without aggression and intimidation (2009, 173). Since it is less likely to provoke retaliation, and entails sympathy with the wrongdoer, he argues it is more likely to change the agent's behavior, ultimately benefitting relationships. In section 2.4, I build on Pereboom's argument that moral anger damages interpersonal relationships by expanding on his claim that anger is not as effective as moral sadness in changing an agent's behavior.

2.4   Moral Anger Does Not Effectively Change Agents' Behavior

Philosophers and psychologists agree that because moral anger promotes aggressive behavior, it is a costly strategy for addressing social challenges (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 720; Nichols 2007, 417), and risks backfiring when trying to change an agent's behavior (Wubber, Cremer, Dijk 2011, 495). Pereboom argues that while moral anger can encourage agents to reform, it is a "blunt instrument" that primarily succeeds in changing agents' behavior through fear of punishment (2009, 176). He references studies on animal training to argue that while fear can motivate change, a better way to secure change in an agent's behavior is positive reinforcement:

> A key point frequently emphasized is that expressions of anger and punitive responses very often have deleterious effects by comparison with non-punitive alternatives. Punishment causes fear and those who are submit to threat of punish will behave less creatively… threat of punishment produces much more stress than positive training methods. (2009, 177)

Pereboom uses such studies to argue that, at the very least, we do not need moral anger to change an agent's behavior, and that nicer ways of correcting each other's moral wrongdoings could produce agents that are motivated by "moral values" rather than the "self-interested consideration of avoiding anger and punishment" (2009, 176). Such agents, he claims, would have stronger motivation to refrain from harming others, and would do so happily, thus improving the quality of relationships.

Though positive reinforcement may be more effective than punishment in the context of animal training or other forms of instruction (Pereboom 2013 147), philosophers and psychologists often reject the notion that moral sadness can substitute for moral anger when we need to confront an agent for their wrongdoing in the context of adult human relationships, or in cases of social injustice. For example, Nichols, citing psychologist Richard Lazarus, argues that moral sadness typically leads us to withdraw into ourselves rather than confront the wrongdoer and demand that they change their behavior (2007 420).

Pereboom counters such criticisms by arguing that so long as moral sadness is accompanied by a *resolve*, or commitment, to fairness and justice, then we can be morally sad and motivated to act in ways that change an agent's behavior. In support of this claim, Pereboom gives two examples. In the context of adult human relationships, he claims that "a strongly worded threat" could suffice in changing an agent's behavior, and that moral sadness with resolve is enough to motivate us to provide such a threat (2009, 174). In the context of social injustice, Pereboom cites the success of historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) in resisting injustice without the use of moral anger (2013, 149). Thus, in adult relationships, and in cases of social injustice, Pereboom claims that moral sadness with

resolve would be more effective in changing agents' behavior than moral anger. I will return to discuss these specific examples in greater detail in my objections in section 3.3.

In sum, Pereboom argues that because moral sadness can fulfill all of the beneficial functions of moral anger, such as communicating blame and deterring bad behavior, we do not *need* moral anger. Furthermore, he argues that moral sadness ultimately yields *better* results for the self and others than moral anger, in so far as it is not turbulent, aggressive, intimidating, and "blunt" like moral anger. Thus, he argues, fostering moral sadness in response to agents' wrongdoings will substantially benefit the self and others, and prevent the harmful intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of moral anger.

In section 3, I provide a functional comparison of moral anger and moral sadness to reject each of Pereboom's claims against the practical benefits of feeling and expressing moral anger in response to agents' wrongdoings. In doing so, I argue that moral anger is more appropriate than moral sadness when we need to actively confront injustice, and that in such cases, feeling and expressing moral sadness would be less practically beneficial than moral anger. Ultimately, I argue that the intrapersonal and interpersonal functions of moral anger are forward-looking in so far as they aim to facilitate positive future outcomes. Thus, when moral anger is appropriate given the circumstances surrounding the agent's actions and the relationship between the individual and the agent, moral anger is justified.

3   A FUNCTIONAL ACCOUNT OF MORAL ANGER

Prior to the 1990s, many emotion theorists described emotions as intrapersonally and interpersonally maladaptive in so far as they can disrupt peace of mind (Skinner 1948, 92) and interfere with reason and rationality in social contexts (Keltner & Gross 1999, 468). This view of emotions coheres with philosophical views like Pereboom's that posit emotions, especially negative emotions like anger, against rational deliberation and moral behavior. Recently, however, most emotion theorists have adopted a functional perspective of emotions under which emotions are adaptive responses to social and physical problems in our environments (Keltner & Gross 1999, 468). This theoretical shift was inspired by a growing body of work demonstrating the crucial role that emotions play in structuring relationships and guiding social interactions, as well as increasing interdisciplinary work demonstrating how emotional experiences interact with and guide sociocultural norms (Keltner & Haidt 1999, 506).

A functional view of emotions posits that emotions are the "intelligent interface" between environmental input, such as a social challenge, and adaptive output, such as a particular behavior or set of behaviors (Scherer 1994, 127). Theorists differ with respect to whether they define emotions and their functions in terms of evolution (Ekman 1992) or social construction (Barrett & Campos 1987), but they generally agree that the functions of emotions can be inferred by attending to the specific causes and consequences of emotions in our current environment (Keltner & Gross 1999, 470).

Given that moral anger is typically caused by "a negative event for which another person is held responsible" (Smith & Ellsworth 1985), motivates approach-related behavior,[2] such as

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[2] Moral anger has been associated with both approach and avoidance behaviors, but in both cases it is associated with high-energy expenditure (Averill 1982). Approach behaviors include confronting the agent, and avoidance behaviors include going out of your way to avoid the agent. Researchers thus generally characterize the

verbal or physical threat, and enables high-energy expenditure to defend the individual from an offensive act (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 733), researchers characterize the function of moral anger as the reparation of injustice (Solomon 1990). Moral sadness is also typically caused by a negative event for which someone is responsible (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg 2002), but unlike moral anger it is crucially tied to unfulfilled positive expectations (Van Dijk & Van Harreveld 2008). For example, an insult by a stranger is likely to elicit moral anger, whereas an insult by a close friend is likely to elicit moral sadness since I had positive expectations that my friend would not wrong me in this way. Moral sadness typically motivates avoidance behavior, such as withdrawal from the situation, and involves the feeling of helplessness and a desire to "do nothing" (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg 2002, 325). Thus, researchers characterize the function of moral sadness as an appeal for support (Ellsworth & Smith 1988), or a request for help (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead 2006).

In this section, I provide a functional comparison of moral anger and moral sadness to argue that moral anger is sometimes the most appropriate response considering the circumstances surrounding the agent's actions and the relationship between the individual and the agent. In such cases, moral anger is the most practically beneficial emotion to feel and express. In section 3.1, I compare the intrapersonal functions of moral anger and moral sadness in terms of how they inform and prepare an individual to respond to an agent's wrongdoing. In section 3.2, I compare the interpersonal functions of moral anger and moral sadness in terms of what they communicate about an individual's beliefs and intentions. In section 3.3, I build on the interpersonal functions of moral anger and moral sadness to discuss how they change other peoples' behavior. I argue

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avoidance behaviors associated with moral anger as active, compared to the passive avoidance behaviors associated with sadness (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 733).

that both moral anger and moral sadness serve important intrapersonal and interpersonal functions, but that these functions are not interchangeable.

3.1   The Intrapersonal Functions of Moral Anger and Moral Sadness

In evaluating the intrapersonal function of emotions, researchers focus on the physiological changes, subjective feelings, and behavioral motivations associated with specific emotions. Pereboom argues that since the physiological changes, subjective feelings, and behavioral motivations associated with moral anger are unpleasant and aggressive, they disrupt peace of mind and decrease overall wellbeing. By fostering moral sadness in response to an agent's wrongdoing, he claims we can remain calm and collected in the face of injustice, and thus maintain our peace of mind.

However, research indicates that moral sadness is not always better for agents to feel in response to an agents' wrongdoing. First, moral sadness also disrupts peace of mind, since it informs individuals that their positive expectations have not been met. This realization is hedonically unpleasant, and has the potential to be even more disturbing than moral anger. For example, feeling morally sad in response to an insult by a close friend often involves feeling not just offended, but also betrayed, which can feel worse than feeling morally angry in response to an insult by a stranger. Furthermore, moral sadness tends to last longer than moral anger (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 730), so it seems more likely to negatively impact individuals' long-term wellbeing.

Second, moral sadness does not adaptively prepare us to respond to an agents' wrongdoing when we need to actively confront the agent. For example, if someone makes a highly racist remark towards me, and this action makes me morally sad, my moral sadness will prepare me to withdraw from rather than confront the agent. Whereas moral sadness is associated

with feeling powerless (Lieleveld et al. 2013, 605), moral anger is associated with feeling powerful (Roseman, Antonious, & Jose 1996) so it can help overcome feeling afraid or discouraged as the target of injustice. Thus, if I become morally angry in response to the agent's remark, I will be more capable of actively defending myself, for example by approaching the agent to communicate that I am not willing to tolerate such comments.

Research indicates that moral anger tends to motivate an active response until the injustice has been remedied, such that it diminishes if the agent apologizes or tries to make amends (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 732). While getting morally angry feels unpleasant and motivates aggression, my act of aggression may protect me in the long run from future acts of racism by the agent or other agents. Though Pereboom is right that cases of moral wrongdoing often do not require physical retaliation, or "violent neutralization," it practically benefits us to be prepared to defend ourselves in both moral and non-moral situations. Thus, moral anger, like fury, allows us to defend ourselves in a way that benefits us in both immediate and enduring ways.

Pereboom claims that with resolve we would maintain the motivation to approach an agent and confront injustice, but if I am experiencing moral sadness, my resolve has to work against the physiological, subjective, and behavioral effects of moral sadness. While it is possible for individuals to be morally sad and resolved to confront injustice, research suggests that individuals must overcome their sadness and become angry, or feel a combination of both emotions in order to be motivated to confront someone (Levine 1996). For example, researchers have argued that when confrontation is unavoidable, getting angry is the most emotionally intelligent response, despite its unpleasant valence, since it best prepares individuals to navigate those situations (Ford & Tamir 2012). Hence, while moral anger, like moral sadness, incurs

short-term costs to happiness, these emotions can benefit us in the attainment of our goals, protect us from present and future harm, and thereby support our ability to attain lasting peace of mind and wellbeing. In section 3.2, I discuss how the communication of moral anger can promote reconciliation and benefit relationships. This interpersonal function of moral anger further supports the individual's overall wellbeing, benefiting us at both the individual and dyadic level.

3.2   The Interpersonal Functions of Moral Anger and Moral Sadness

At the interpersonal level of the function of emotions, researchers explore how emotional expressions convey information about peoples' emotions, beliefs, and intentions (Keltner & Haidt 1999, 511). Emotional expressions are relatively involuntary, and therefore provide a fairly reliable source of information about the individuals' mental states and how they are likely to behave (Wubben et al. 2011, 490). Such information can in turn guide our emotions and behaviors towards them. For example, emotional expressions can evoke complementary or reciprocal emotional responses in others, such as fear in response to moral anger (Keltner & Haidt 1999, 511), guilt in response to moral sadness (Lelieveld et al. 2013, 606), or empathy (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991). Thus, emotional communication rapidly coordinates social interactions and can promote understanding between individuals.

Pereboom argues that since the expression of moral anger is aggressive and intimidating, and aims to inflict emotional pain on the agent, it is likely to lead agents to retaliate rather than understand how their actions offended the individual. Such retaliation could lead to escalation, rather than resolution, and therefore has the potential to seriously damage interpersonal relationships. Since moral sadness is calmer and entails sympathy with the agent, it promotes understanding and allows people to convey their dissatisfaction without offending the agent.

Thus, Pereboom argues that moral sadness is a better way to communicate disapproval with the aim of maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Research confirms that the expression of moral anger has the potential to escalate an argument (Van Dijk, Van Kleef, Stienel, & Van Beest 2008), and that such expressions are generally costly and risky (Hutcherson & Gross 2011). However, moral anger is also proactive, motivating high-energy expenditure to overcome an obstacle (Hutcherson & Gross 2011, 733). Meanwhile, moral sadness is accompanied by passive behaviors and persisting judgments that can lead an individual to give up on a relationship rather than seek to repair it. Thus, while moral anger runs the risk of being too confrontational, moral sadness runs the risk of not being confrontational enough and failing to clearly express how an agent can change their behavior to benefit the relationship.

Typically, we feel and express both moral anger and moral sadness in our relationships, depending on the particular context surrounding the agent's action and how close we feel to the agent. For example, when a friend breaks a promise to help us with something, we are likely to feel and express moral sadness since we are disappointed that they did not help us, but still sympathize with them and understand that circumstances out of their control could have led them to break their promise. However, when the friend repeatedly breaks promises like this, we are likely to feel and express moral anger because they are neglecting to change their behavior, even when they know it harms us. Studies investigating the communication of anger in negotiations show that when a negotiator gets angry, it signals that they have reached their limits and will not accept a lower offer, alerting the other negotiators of potential conflict escalation if they do not compromise (Lieleveld et al. 2013, 607). Thus, when we express moral anger in our relationships, it can signal that we have reached our limits in terms of tolerating a particular

behavior, and provide agents with a salient reminder to change their behavior before it harms the relationship.

Furthermore, research suggests that moral anger is often more focused on temporary situations, and more easily diminishes following attempts by the agent to make reparations (Hutcherson & Gross 2013, 733). Thus, moral anger seems to be closely tied to the function of repairing and even improving relationships through active communication and immediate resolutions. Ultimately, the specific context surrounding an action and the kind of relationship people are engaged in will determine whether moral anger or moral sadness will be more communicatively effective, and whether it will benefit or damage a relationship. In section 3.3, I build on the communicative role of moral anger and moral sadness to consider how it changes agents' behaviors, at both the dyadic and the societal level.

3.3   Changing Agents' Behavior with Moral Anger and Moral Sadness

Expressions of moral anger and moral sadness can change an agent's harmful behavior by triggering complimentary or reciprocal emotional reactions in the agent. As the target of moral anger, people tend to feel fear, which is unpleasant. To avoid feeling fear, people often avoid the harmful behaviors that cause people to be morally angry. Pereboom argues that since moral anger only changes an agent's behavior through fear of punishment, moral sadness is a better emotion to express when trying to change an agent's behavior because moral sadness would encourage agents to change their behavior by appealing to an agent's "moral values." In other words, Pereboom argues that moral anger only changes an agent's behavior by making the agent feel unpleasant, whereas moral sadness succeeds in changing an agent's behavior by inspiring the agent to morally reflect on her behavior.

However, both moral anger and moral sadness can influence an agent's future behavior by making them feel bad for their wrongdoings. As the target of moral sadness, people tend to feel guilt, which some research suggests is more unpleasant than feeling fear (Hutcherson & Gross 2013, 729). To avoid feeling guilty, people often avoid the harmful behaviors that can cause people to be morally sad. Additionally, both moral anger and moral sadness can inspire an agent to reflect on their actions, and can thereby change an agent's behavior by appealing to their morality. Emotional expressions provide information to agents that can be used as feedback to make inferences about one's past behaviors, and motivate one to correct one's future behavior (Van Kleef 2009). For example, when an individual expresses moral anger with an agent for breaking a promise, the expression of anger can lead the agent to reflect on whether his behavior was morally wrong. When we infer that someone's anger towards us is appropriate because our action was wrong, this inference can motivate us to apologize and avoid the harmful behavior in the future (Van Kleef 2009). Thus, expressions of moral anger and moral sadness can change an agent's behavior by triggering emotional reactions, inferential processes, or both.

Research also suggests that in the absence of guilt, the expression of moral sadness does not usually lead agents to improve their behavior, and can even make their behavior worse. The expression of moral sadness generally communicates weakness and a need for support. Thus, when an agent feels compassion for or affiliation with the individual she wronged, she is likely to feel guilty in response to moral sadness (Baumeister, Reis, & Delespaul 1995), and feel motivated to change her behavior. However, when agents perceive the individual as weak and do not feel guilty, they are more likely to exploit the individual (Lelieveld et al. 2013, 615). In such cases, moral sadness is counterproductive, and rather than correcting the agent's behavior, it can potentially encourage the agent to behave in more harmful ways. Furthermore, in Pereboom's

view, guilt is never justified because, like moral anger, it treats agents as if they were ultimately responsible for their thoughts and actions. If moral sadness is only effective in changing an agent's behavior when it makes agents feel guilty, and guilt is unjustified, then we should not be justified in feeling and expressing moral sadness towards agents to change their behaviors.

To return to Pereboom's specific examples from section 2.4 of how we can justifiably change an agent's behavior, he claims that in the context of interpersonal relationships, we could respond to agents' wrongdoings with moral sadness and provide a strongly worded threat to encourage them to change their behavior. However, threats, which typically accompany moral anger, change an agent's behavior by causing them to feel fear. Since Pereboom explicitly argues against using aggression and intimidation to change an agent's behavior, as well as feeling and expressing guilt for one's wrongdoings, it is unclear how exactly we can justifiably use moral sadness to influence an agent's behavior.

Pereboom also claims that figures like Gandhi and MLK show that we can resist oppression without the use of moral anger. However, both Gandhi and MLK discussed the essential role that moral anger plays in social revolution. While Gandhi advocated for non-violence and maintaining control over one's moral anger, he also discussed how moral anger provides the fuel to fight against injustice. He said:

> Use your anger for good. Anger to people is like gas to the automobile – it fuels you to move forward and get to a better place. Without it we would not be motivated to rise to a challenge. It is an energy that compels us to define what is just and unjust. (Gandhi 2017)

In other words, moral anger is *the source* of resolve against injustice. Gandhi recommended that we should closely regulate our moral anger so that it does not manifest in violence or blind fury,

but instead manifests in the motivation to tackle the causes of injustice. This view importantly differs from Pereboom's in so far as it does not argue that we would be better off if we did not feel moral anger altogether.[3]

Meanwhile, MLK argued that we need a range of emotional behaviors to resist oppression. He advocated for passive aggressive behaviors, such as boycotting the bus system, as a form of retaliation against injustice, and also defended more active forms of aggression in response to injustice:

> But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? ...It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity. (King III & King 2005)

MLK argued that while metaphorically quiet expressions of moral anger, such as peaceful protests, are useful in signaling dissatisfaction and the potential for escalation, loud and more

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[3]   This characterization of anger as a motivating force coheres with Martha Nussbaum's recent description of "transition-anger," or anger that involves protesting wrongdoings without aiming to harm wrongdoers (Nussbaum 2017). Nussbaum, like Pereboom, argues firmly against the practical benefits of feeling and expressing moral anger, claiming that it manifests in harmful retributive behaviors that "poison" democracy (2017, 4). However, in referencing figures like Gandhi and MLK, she concedes that moral anger is practically beneficial in *motivating* individuals to action against injustice (2017, 17). Thus, while her view generally posits an overly strong relationship between moral anger and retributive behavior, she claims that transition-anger is forward-looking in that "it gets to work finding solutions rather than dwelling on the infliction of retrospective pain," and that such anger is useful and justified (2017, 4).

active expressions of moral anger are also necessary when we need to disrupt the status quo and demand change. In such cases, moral anger is essential to protect oneself, to improve relationships, and to change agent's behavior. Ultimately, moral sadness serves important functions in response to agent's wrongdoings, but it is misguided and potentially dangerous to suggest that we should *always* replace moral sadness with moral anger. Such a replacement, if it were humanly possible, would yield harmful consequences for the targets of injustice, and ultimately lead to a decline in our relationships and wellbeing.

Given this functional account of moral anger and moral sadness, I conclude that Pereboom is wrong in claiming that the feeling and expression of moral sadness are always more practically beneficial than moral anger. In the appropriate contexts, moral anger protects individuals from harm, benefits relationships, and incentivizes agents to change their harmful behavior. In other words, moral anger promotes future safety and stability, and encourages future cooperation and good behavior. These functions are forward-looking by Pereboom's definition, since they focus on improving future conditions rather than merely getting even with agents for past actions (2013, 135). In section 4, I argue that since the functions of moral anger, like moral sadness, are forward-looking, moral anger does not require ultimate moral responsibility, and is justified in the appropriate contexts.

4 IS MORAL ANGER JUSTIFIED?

Pereboom argues that moral anger is by definition backward-looking since it holds agents accountable for their wrongdoings with the aim of getting even with them for the harm that they caused. In other words, Pereboom characterizes the function of moral anger in terms of retribution, and retribution is only justified if we are ultimately morally responsible for our wrongdoings. Meanwhile, he argues that moral sadness is forward-looking because it expresses disapproval of the agent's wrongdoings with the aim of reconciling with the agent or helping them change their future actions. In this view, the function of moral sadness is to facilitate positive future outcomes following an agent's wrongdoing. Thus, moral sadness is rational because it does not treat agents as if they are ultimately morally responsible, and it is fair because it does not retributively punish agents by making them feel bad for their wrongdoings.

A functional account of moral anger and moral sadness, however, undermines Pereboom's claim that only moral sadness is forward-looking. The function of moral anger is not retribution itself, but rather the reparation of injustice. Whereas moral sadness makes a plea for reparations by instilling guilt, moral anger demands reparations by communicating a readiness to defend. Thus, both moral anger and moral sadness cause agents to feel bad for their wrongdoings *in order to* facilitate positive future outcomes. Given their forward-looking aims, neither moral anger nor moral sadness, according to Pereboom's own criteria, would require *ultimate* moral responsibility. He says:

> Accordingly, it is an agent's responsiveness to reasons (cf. Fischer and Ravizza 1998), together with the fact that we have a moral interest in our protection, his moral formation, and our reconciliation with him that explains why he is an appropriate recipient of blame in this forward-looking sense…. The forward-

looking sort of moral responsibility I advocate is also compatible with agents being causally determined in their actions by factors beyond their control. (2013, 135-136)

Based on the empirical evidence I have provided, I argue that since moral anger, like moral sadness, has forward-looking aims, it does not require agents to be the ultimate sources of their wrongdoings. Thus, I reject Pereboom's definition of moral anger as an emotion that we feel and express with the primary purpose of retributively punishing wrongdoers. While a lack of ultimate moral responsibility may threaten the justifiability of retributive behaviors and social practices that focus narrowly on making wrongdoers suffer, it does not affect the justifiability of feeling and expressing moral anger in the appropriate contexts.

If my functional account is correct, and moral anger does not require ultimate moral responsibility, then Pereboom is wrong that moral anger is never justified because it is irrational, unfair, and not practically beneficial. On the contrary, moral anger is rational to feel and fair to express. Furthermore, it is practically beneficial to feel and express when we need to actively confront an unjust agent, particularly when we do not have positive expectations from them and they do not sympathize with us. In such cases, down-regulating moral anger and fostering moral sadness in its place would likely fail to benefit us, and could potentially even harm us by signaling weakness to our oppressors or preparing us to withdraw from necessary confrontation. Hence, when moral anger is appropriate given the circumstances surrounding the agent's actions and the relationship between the individual and the agent, moral anger is justified.

5   CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I offered a functional account of moral anger and moral sadness to argue that while both emotions can produce adaptive responses to agents' wrongdoings, moral anger is a more appropriate response to agents' wrongdoings in cases where we must actively confront an agent. In such cases, moral anger is more practically beneficial than moral sadness in facilitating positive future outcomes: it protects the self and others from present and future harm; it promotes open communication and reparations that can benefit relationships; and it incentivizes agents to improve their future behavior. Thus, contrary to Pereboom's claims, universally replacing moral anger with moral sadness would be pragmatically harmful.

Furthermore, I argued that a functional account of moral anger undermines Pereboom's view that moral anger is irrational and unfair because it requires ultimate moral responsibility. If we are not the ultimate sources of our thoughts and actions, then Pereboom may be correct that many of our common retributive behaviors and social practices that focus solely on making wrongdoers suffer are not justified. However, on my account the function of moral anger is not, as Pereboom claims, retribution itself, but rather the reparation of injustice. Since moral anger has forward-looking aims like moral sadness, it does not require ultimate moral responsibility, and is both rational and fair in response to agents' wrongdoings. Thus, when it is an appropriate response to an agent's wrongdoing, moral anger is justified.

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