

ANGER AND SIMILAR DELUSIONS¹

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We are in the midst of a reassessment, in several disciplines, of long-standing assumptions about emotion. The most vigorous new work seems to be concentrating not so much on the cognitive aspect of many emotions, which is well-enough recognized by now, but the active, purposive and indeed strategic aspects; this work regards emotions as conduct—as maneuvers or ‘moves’ in largely institutionalized social interactions involving clusters of people at once. Thus patterns of emotion, like rhetorical phenomena, are culturally indigenous. Their use is governed by expectations implicit in the moral order of the society and period in which they are to be found, expectations that pertain to such matters as rights, status, and appropriateness. Among a given people, particular kinds of emotion arise, flourish, and then pass into extinction, and at every stage are subject to diffusion, export, and adaptation.²

In spite of increasing evidence for this ‘social constructionist’ view of emotion, its truth is far from obvious. On the contrary, in having an emotion—when, for example, we are ashamed, fearful, depressed, jealous, proud, or head over heels in love—what we think is going on with us is a far cry from anything that can be called conduct. We regard our emotion as a condition provoked or aroused in us—“You are making me angry”—or as a condition that has befallen us—“I think it’s her son’s rebelliousness that’s saddened her so profoundly.” The cases that interest me most are the kind exemplified by anger, for in being angry a person is making a judgment that the object of her anger (whatever or whomever it is she is angry with) and not she herself, is responsible for her anger. So if it is true that in being angry she is engaging in a form of conduct, it is a conduct in and by which she maintains that she is not doing so at all, but is passive. Angry people are systematically in error in their beliefs about how things are with them.

I am interested not solely in anger, but in all emotions that have this property: when we are experiencing the emotion, we are certain we are being caused to have it. For convenience I shall simply treat one of these emotions, anger, as exemplary. It should not be difficult for the reader to generalize my conclusions to other emotions possessing the required property, such as contempt, (psychological) irritation, hate, embarrassment, dread, jealousy, self-pity, and

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boredom, and many, but not all, instances of what we call indignation, anxiety, guilt, and indifference.

Now on the social constructionist view, systematically pursued or maintained conduct, including emotions, are embedded in complex social practices involving other people, whose responses are both anticipated and utilized. For this reason, the judgments in which particular avowals or expressions of emotion consist cannot be merely mistaken. Insofar as the social practices that embed them are concerned, they are maneuvers, stratagems, etc. The angry person's misunderstanding of herself is something she systematically sustains in a kind of morbid cooperation with others. It is not enough to say she is deceived. She is self-deceived: and, generally speaking, the others abet her self-deception.

How to account for the self-deception of angry people and people experiencing relevantly similar emotions is the problem of this paper. It is a problem worthy of attention because the standard kind of account makes reference to psychical acts or processes of which the person is not aware—acts or processes that Freud called unconscious. On this view, the stratagems or maneuvers in which self-deceiving conduct consists operate on a level or in a stratum unavailable to introspection: 'the unconscious'. There are two general difficulties with the notion of the unconscious. As is well known, it is internally inconsistent; I will talk about this difficulty in due course. But more to the point of this paper, as an explanation of social behavior, the unconscious is radically individualistic rather than social. (In Freud, the mentation that makes the expression of emotion an instance of conduct rather than a mechanical response is wholly internal; and the fact that this mentation is socially influenced does not make it less so.) Indeed, the inconsistency of the concept of the unconscious can be traced precisely to the individualism of it (though showing why this is so lies beyond this paper). The problem before us, then, is to account for the sort of self-deception in which anger and similar emotions consist without reference to internal, unconscious processes, but instead by reference to the corporate social episodes of which such emotions are a part.

To develop an account of this sort, I shall:

1. explore the self-deception that accompanies anger and similar emotions;
2. examine their 'strategic' aspects, by which they coordinate themselves with the strategies of others in patterned social episodes; and
3. explain how the agents engaged in these emotions deceive themselves as to the character of what they are doing, and

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construct this explanation without reference to unconscious stratagems or processes.

My position will be that we deceive ourselves by adopting a self-deceiving rhetoric of moral conscientiousness and excuse—the rhetoric includes our avowals of emotion—and, by this means, presenting ourselves as morally justified. Such self-presentation is contrary to what a straightforward outsider can plainly observe of what we are doing. We make ourselves out to be acting conscientiously, whereas others can tell that, rather than acting conscientiously, we are merely making ourselves out to be doing so, which is a dissembling rather than a conscientious thing to do.

Before undertaking the three tasks I have outlined, it will be useful if I speak a bit more precisely about the theses I will defend.

To say that anger possesses the property I mentioned above—that the angry person believes she is being caused to be angry—is to say that she believes herself to be responding to a threat provided wholly independent of her will. It is this threat she thinks is causing her to be angry. She believes herself a victim: whatever she is doing is undertaken only in her own defense. From an observer's point of view, we will want to grant that she may be wrong in this prototheory of the genesis of her anger (though this is something *she* cannot concede without thereby ceasing to be angry). One way to capture this more tentative view is to say the anger is *defensive*; we would mean by this that the agent believes it an effect of an independent provocation, and we would take no position on whether her belief is true.

The received doctrine that we are not responsible for being angry actually consists of two erroneous doctrines, very closely related to each other. One of these doctrines amounts to a semi-sympathetic interpretation of the agent's view of her own anger. This interpretation allows that the agent may be mistaken in her judgment that she is caused to be angry by circumstances beyond her control. Yet it assumes that the judgment is sincere and that she is responding straightforwardly to these circumstances as she (perhaps erroneously) sees them. This might be called the *doctrine of sincerity or straightforwardness*. The second doctrine follows from the first: though the angry judgment may be mistaken about *how* it is being caused, it is not also mistaken about *whether* it is caused, and this on account of its sincerity. At the very least, it is caused by the belief the angry person has (sincerely held, if false) about how it is being caused, or by the psychological state of having this belief, or by the onset of this belief. This doctrine, which is also a sympathetic interpretation of the sincerity doctrine, I shall call *the causal view of anger*.

Before sketching out my line of attack against these two doctrines, I want to indicate briefly the dependency of the causal view of anger

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upon a hard-edged distinction between judgment and feeling, or cognition and affect. (The untenability of this distinction in this context will become a point of issue later on.) This distinction is the means by which the causal view grants the corrigibility of the angry individual's view of her anger without altogether abandoning the idea that anger is caused. The self-explanatory character of anger is assigned to a judgment-component of the emotion—it is this judgment that is corrigible—which is accordingly separated from a feeling-component.

That this is necessary for the causal view is made clear by considering how the causalist would respond to the following objection: "Suppose that A, to this point angry at B, were to abandon her belief that B had done what (up to now) she has supposed has been angering her. If this happened, her anger would cease. This argues against the causal view and for the *identity* of anger and the judgment it involves. In a clear case of causality, if a person at first believed a safety razor caused the cut on her arm, and then changed her mind when she discovered fresh blood on the shower door, the cut would not disappear. But when there is this sort of change of mind about the cause of one's anger, the anger ceases. How then can anger be contingent upon anything external, as the angry person believes it is?" To this objection the advocate of the causal view would have to respond as follows: The fact that A's anger ceases if her judgment changes can be accounted for causally. The kind of causality her anger imputes is not a direct causality. Her judgment against B respecting whatever he is doing to anger her is separate from, and prior to, her angry feelings, and it is this judgment, not B's act itself, that directly causes the feeling. The production of the feeling is, as they say, cognitively mediated. In the event that the judgment is correct, the object might be said by some to be the cause A believes it is, by way of her perception and otherwise not, or the psychological state of making the judgment might be said to be the cause, or the onset of this state. In summary: the causal view of anger must account for the corrigibility of anger, and the way it can do this without abandoning the causality doctrine is by separating judgment from feeling and regarding the judgment, but not the feeling, as corrigible. A might say, "I was hurt. If you had said what I thought you said, you would have been responsible for what I've gone through. I can see now that it was all a tragic misunderstanding on my part."

This response to the objection leaves intact the core conviction of the angry individual—namely, that she is not responsible for her anger. That is why I said the causal view is semi-sympathetic to that conviction. We can now isolate precisely the irreducible core the causal view must maintain: the angry individual is not responsible for her angry *feelings*. She might under certain circumstances admit some responsibility for her judgment, e.g., "I'm sorry; I should have listened

It will turn out that the essentially social account I give of the self-deceptiveness of anger will constitute a full-blown account of self-deception that at once accommodates all the observable aspects of self-deceived conduct and is free of the well-known conceptual debilities that have afflicted previous theories.

to you more carefully.” But in no case will she admit responsibility for the feelings, since in her mind they are not the sort of thing that she *could* be responsible for. Respecting her feelings, she believes herself a pure patient. And in this belief she is not alone; the idea that we are not responsible for our defensive feelings is an almost unassailed dogma of our culture.

Two interlocking theses

A major difficulty with the causal view is that, as an interpretation of anger’s defensiveness, it is incompatible with an interpretation of that defensiveness implicit in common usage. In other words, there are socially observable properties of angry conduct in the absence of which we would never ascribe anger, yet which are inexplicable if the causal view were true, and anger were straightforwardly defensive. The interpretation that alone can explain these properties, rival to the causal view, is that anger is *resistant*, or in other words, motivated by ulterior considerations respecting others rather than straightforwardly caused. On this interpretation, the angry person’s view that her anger is an effect of causes is not sincere; it is a *self-deception*. The straightforwardness doctrine is false. I will show how, in anger, we systematically distort both our understanding of the anger itself and what it is ‘about’. The emotions of which anger is representative are so common in almost everyone’s life that, because of them, most of us most of the time systematically misunderstand both ourselves and others.

This *thesis of self-deception* implies that the angry individual is not simply wrong about what, beyond her control, is responsible for her anger, but about whether *anything* beyond her control is responsible for it. This means that the causal view also is false. My denial of the causal view is an affirmation of the agent’s responsibility for her anger; I’ll call it the *thesis of agency*. This agency thesis does not, so far as I can see, reciprocally entail the thesis of self-deception. As the argument of this paper is for the resistance, i.e., the self-deception, of anger, which is the stronger of the two theses, the argument will if successful hit both of my targets, and otherwise neither.

What is at stake in trying to establish the self-deception thesis, and by means of this the responsibility thesis, is the interpretation of anger’s defensiveness. In showing that the defensiveness consists in resistance, which is a public and social act rather than a private one, I shall keep a constant eye upon the self-deception literature. For it will turn out that the essentially social account I give of the self-deceptiveness of anger will constitute a full-blown account of self-deception that at once accommodates all the observable aspects of self-deceived conduct and is free of the well-known conceptual debilities that have afflicted previous theories.

THE CAUSAL VIEW OF ANGER

Accusation and victimhood

The judgment/feeling dichotomy, required if the causal view is to account for the corrigibility of anger, breaks down when the attempt is made systematically to understand anger in terms of it.

There are two mutually entailing aspects of anger's defensiveness. The first is its accusatory quality. To an angry individual her anger seems to be the effect, in her, of someone else's conduct. "I resent her for saying I'm not qualified for the job." "Of course I'm bitter. He up and dies without leaving me enough to pay the mortgage." In her view, another person(s) is maliciously (or inconsiderately) and unfairly transgressing her rights or abusing her interest or violating her dignity, and the result is her self-protective, accusing emotion. She sees this other person as dealing unfairly (a question of rights) with her to her disadvantage (a question of interests), and therefore as morally responsible for the emotion.

Suppose that one individual heretofore angry at another were suddenly to concede that the other is not responsible for her anger. This concession would constitute a giving up of that anger. Were we not prepared to respond to the concession in this manner, we would be using the term 'anger' in an uncommon sense.³ For example, imagine that we realize we have profoundly misunderstood the intentions of someone we have been angry with—someone, for instance, who has failed to keep an appointment after we have gone to great inconvenience to meet him. As we wait, increasingly upset, we re-examine our relationship to him. It begins to bother us, perhaps as it never has before, that so much in the past can be seen, on reflection, to manifest his disrespect for us, our time, and our feelings. It bothers us also that we have been so naive as to overlook this repeated thoughtlessness. We are confident that he could have come on time had he wanted to enough, had it been among his priorities, had he not been selfish or insensitive. Then we receive a report that he has been in an accident. Suddenly what was mounting anger ends, and in its place we feel chagrin for having transgressed against a friend by unjustifiably bringing a charge against him in our hearts, which is to say, by unjustifiably becoming angry at him. We are chagrined because the unjustifiability of the angry charge renders it, in our own eyes, a transgression. Coupled with the chagrin is a sense of relief that we refrained from acting overtly on the anger while it lasted. Though anger has given way to chagrin and relief, it is still as true as it was a few moments before that we have been inconvenienced. The only thing that has changed is our belief, essential to the anger while it lasted, that the other party has transgressed against us and is therefore responsible for what we have been suffering.⁴

Indissociably connected with this accusing quality is a sense in the angry person of being passive, victimized, and helpless. She feels she is a pure patient in the face of forces she cannot control. In the angry person's mind the accused can control some of these, if he but will:

What one person thinks is his perception of another's offensive conduct can be NOTHING OTHER THAN the first's taking offense. There is no perception of offensiveness that is not also a taking of offense.

and that is precisely why she feels his victim. She does not believe merely that she is acting under duress or coercion. She believes she is not acting at all, but is passive. She not only bears no responsibility for her anger, she *could* bear none, however emotionally strong, resilient, or self-controlled she might be. It is the very nature of this kind of emotion, as she understands it while having it, that she could not be responsible for it. At the same time, she does not necessarily think the other is the sole cause of her anger. She can freely admit that her own temperament and her history with him are factors that render her vulnerable to him. But she does believe his conduct to be an intrusion into prevailing and otherwise tranquil conditions, and therefore can be blamed for her agitation. The key here is that, as far as she is concerned, the causes and conditions she would identify for her anger are beyond her present control.

The accusation in an angry attitude is directed toward something beyond the attitude itself, whereas the sense of victimhood correlative to that accusation is self-conscious. In anger there is always a sense of being a victim with respect to rights or interests that are felt to be violated; in some cases this takes the form of self-pity. The accusation and the sense of being victimized are correlative because seeing another as provoking oneself is to feel provoked. Taken as a unit, this accusing/victimized attitude—this belief that the anger is a defense—is what we might call ‘the angry view of anger’. The angry person incessantly puts forward an explanation of her anger by imputing responsibility for it elsewhere. She is essentially self-conscious, which is to say, self-regarding about whatever losses of rights, privileges, or interests she feels she is suffering. She feels she is not the sort of person who deserves being treated in this way.

Illustration of anger's self-conscious, self-explanatory character

Notice in the following completely banal episode, in which two people are angry at each other, how this quality is progressively revealed as each party feels increasingly challenged about the legitimacy of his or her position.

Brent: It's ten minutes to eight, Alison, and ...

Alison: I know, don't tell me, I haven't even showered yet. Obviously this is one party you want to go to or you wouldn't care about being late.

Brent: Since we're seeing my friends, you're not going to hurry, is that it?

Our taking-offense does not depend upon the other's offensiveness; it is (our perception of) his offensiveness. Our anger does not depend upon the other's malice (or callousness); it is (our perception of) his malice insofar as that malice has any power to anger us.

Alison: Have I been standing around? After I got home from work I fed Sarah and got her ready for bed and you've only taken care of yourself.

Brent: If you really cared you could have been ready on time.

Alison: Look, Mister, I've been working most of the day and then cleaned up the kitchen and got a babysitter just so we could go.

Brent: You think you're the only one who works around here. I come home early three days a week so you can take classes after you get off work, and I passed up a good promotion because you didn't want to live in Placerville, and all you can think of is how much you do and how little I do.

Alison: You let me off duty for a few hours and you think you've made a big sacrifice. You're off duty just about all the time! What's the matter? Does it cut into your freedom when I get to go out for an hour?

Brent: So it's all my fault, is it? I'm always the one who causes our problems.

Alison: Everything I said was true.

Brent: If you're convinced I'm so selfish, how can you stand me? Why don't you just leave?

Alison: Here we go. The Great Victim rides again.

Brent: To hear you tell it, I'm always the one who's in the wrong.

Alison: I never said that. Remember, you were the one who blamed me first.

Brent: I don't even feel like going to the party any more.

Alison: I can't believe it. You need help. You're really sick.

Variant anger styles

A subcultural designation for the style of this exchange between Alison and Brent might be "American assertive". In other cultures, classes, or subcultures, the style of offense-taking might well be different from theirs. In some such groups, for example, anger is typically even more volatile and sometimes, though not in all cases, less calculated and sinister and/or less durable (e.g., Tikopians, youthful Nuer males, Neapolitans). On the other end of a particular dimension, there are cultures and classes within cultures in which open altercation would be unthinkable or uncouth; in these, the accusation

If it were true, as the causal view maintains, that anger is a sincere and straightforward self-explanatory judgment to the effect that it is a defense against threat, the behaviour of angry people would be strikingly different from what it is.

of another tends more pronouncedly to be a matter of making clear one's own victimized status. Some varied examples of this are ritualized clamor (Australian aborigines), accusing the object of one's anger of bewitching one (Tiv, Nyakyusa, Azande), histrionic suicide (Trobriander), and chilly silence (upper class British). In some cultures the offender is treated with an intensified 'respectfulness' expressed by an increased formality of vocabulary and intonation (Korean). These matters are extensively treated in the literature of social and psychological anthropology.

What is common to these diverse cases is that the angry individual's offended status, and thereby his accusation, is unmistakably communicated by means of conventional and sometimes even ritual conduct that in its own way is just as defensive and, yes, self-assertive as the emotions of Brent and Alison during their falling-out.⁵ To point out this commonality is to make no anthropological claim about the emotions characteristic of any peoples. Strictly speaking, it would be irrelevant to my thesis if it happened that some, many, or even all known cultures lacked the defensive emotions I have defined. (Among the Nez Perce multiple families lived in the same house for generations without trouble, and it is said that the 24 Tasadays had in their language no word for anger or anything resembling it.) My interest is only in showing why any emotions possessing the accusing, self-victimizing properties I have specified cannot but be self-deceptions, whether and wherever these emotions happen to be manifest. In this paper I shall track the example of Brent and Alison through, with the proviso that a culturally different sort of accusing and self-victimizing emotion could have been chosen to illustrate my points.

The contrast of defensive emotions and other kinds

It is worth noting also that although the expressions of anger between Alison and Brent are defensive, this is not true of everything we would be willing to call anger. It is possible, for example, that Jesus' castigation of the money-changers in the temple was not an accusation to the effect that those he drove before him were responsible for how he felt toward them. It is possible, in other words, that his attitude was more other-concerned, or perhaps even concerned for a principle, than self-concerned. It is possible, in other words, that it was more like love or integrity than hostility, even though appropriately called 'anger'. I do not know whether this usage would be metaphorical or extended. One can chastise or reprimand—and be properly said to be angry—without feeling a victim.

These remarks suggest that to talk of accusing emotions like anger is to classify emotions in a manner different from their classification in the natural languages with which I am familiar. There may be

The behaviour of the angry person resists the demise of its provocation; it refuses to let its provocation die... The causal view cannot tell us why the angry person resists letting go of the threat she believes the other presents. In other words, it cannot explain why what she calls a threat is, for her, an offense, a provocation.

emotions that impute causality but not malice or inconsiderateness to their objects, e.g., arousals such as instinctive fear of immediate physical threat. Such an arousal is not what I have been calling a defensive emotion. It seems certain also that some emotions impute no external causality at all, e.g., love, grief, and joy. The lover who insists, "I can't help loving you," or "You made me love you," is an infrequent and, I think, marginal case. To love art, a child, one's companion of many years, gardening, or silence, it is not necessary, definitely not usual, and perhaps even abnormal to insist by one's attitude that what one loves is making one love it. Defensive emotions, then, are but one kind of emotion, instances of which are distributed among the various groupings of emotions that we commonly make.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CAUSAL VIEW

Inapplicability of the judgment/feeling distinction

The judgment/feeling dichotomy, required if the causal view is to account for the corrigibility of anger, breaks down when the attempt is made systematically to understand anger in terms of it. We have seen already that the judgment embedded in anger is not simply about the anger-object, but about the angry individual himself. What A is doing that is relevant to his being angry is seen by B not simply as conduct wholly external, but as conduct *just insofar as it affects him*. An unselfconscious judgment, or even an earnest assertion, *entirely* about another would be independent of anger and therefore not be the sort of accusation that anger makes. The accusation that is anger, on the other hand, being explicitly or implicitly self-referential ("Alison, you are being unfair to me"), *cannot* be independent of the experience of anger. If the content of that judgment is that one is being psychologically or emotionally violated, it cannot be a sincerely made judgment without being also a feeling or experience of being violated (which the angry person takes himself to be). (This means that anger of the kind we are studying is not concerned wholly with another's deviation from a principle, but with violation of personal rights—of rights that constitute him the kind of person one is. The offense is experienced as a deep violation of what one is as a person.) Thus, what B thinks is his perception of A's offensive conduct can be *nothing other than* B's taking offense. There is no perception of offensiveness that is not also a taking of offense.

Someone might object that the perception and the feeling might be separate yet always concomitant. I consider this objection a concession that there are no good grounds, beyond a need to defend the causal view, for dividing anger into two components, a cognitive one and an affective one, judgment and feeling. These are abstractions drawn for some localized purpose from a total conduct in a total social situation

If the causal view were sound, one would expect the protestations each makes of his or her own innocence to be considered by the other. Why not consider this possible way out of a miserable situation? The causal view provides no answer to this question.

engaging the organism totally, and in the present context are profoundly misleading.

So agentively speaking, B's anger is not what the causal view of his anger implies it is, namely, a complex reaction consisting of several sequential moments, including an evaluative judgment and a subsequent affective arousal. It is not first a perception of offensiveness followed by a taking of offense. It is, instead, one thing, a totality, a being-offended-at-a-perceived-offense. Our taking-offense does not depend upon the other's offensiveness; it is (our perception of) his offensiveness. Our anger does not depend upon the other's malice (or callousness); it is (our perception of) his malice insofar as that malice has any power to anger us. Our anger-judgments concern both our adversaries and ourselves at once; it is not merely that we are blameless *because* they are blameworthy, but we are blameless in their blameworthiness. Our exoneration is their culpability. In anger, accusation equals self-justification.

In passing we should note that from this point of view we can readily understand the perhaps infrequent but undeniable cases in which we perceive that another's angry act is maliciously intended toward us, and yet we are not reciprocally angry but compassionate. A compassionate perception of malice is not a taking of offense, and *as perception* differs from one that is. Malice can be perceived, offensiveness against one's person cannot. This is because offensiveness is inextricably connected with the perceiver's sense of being violated in his personal rights, which sense involves a self-justifying appeal by the perceiver to a system of moral principles, principles with which he might or might not be concerned on this particular occasion. It is more accurate, therefore, to speak of taking offense than of being offended. At the same time, it is possible for one person, A, without taking personal offense, to perceive another, B, to be violating—i.e., offending against—the system of principles that constitutes him a person. For A to perceive this is not for her to see B offending or violating her personally, but instead undermining himself. One cannot be disenfranchised from the moral order by another, but only by oneself; hence, perceiving another in this way can be an accurate judgment, whereas taking offense cannot. Such cases tend to be ignored by people who hold the causal view of anger, and when they don't ignore them they tend in an *ad hoc* manner to adduce factors such as traits, dispositions, and moods in order to account for them causally.

In a causal view, reciprocal anger is impossible

Unexamined, the casual view may seem to accord with our intuitions well enough but in fact has counterintuitive implications. In this section I shall give examples of such implications.

The persistence of anger in the face of the perceived preposterousness of anger's provocation is a matter so curious that contemplation of it ought to throw almost all previous theorizing about defensive/resistant emotions into confusion.

Angry people assume that the individual(s) they are angry at can be reciprocally angry at them. But insofar as they are angry, they do not and cannot really believe this. In his anger at A, B believes that A is to be blamed—is morally responsible for—his anger, and therefore that A could desist from her offensive attitude toward him if she wished. This makes that attitude different in kind from his anger, since he is certain that, given the provocation, he can't desist. If he were to suppose otherwise—if he were to concede that she is angry in the same sense in which he is angry—he would be conceding that she is exactly as free of responsibility for her anger as he believes he is for his, and therefore that she is not malicious and not morally responsible for his anger. This concession would constitute a giving up of his anger. In his anger he can't believe she is angry in the same sense in which he is angry.

Someone might say B could believe himself mistaken in his judgment against A: but though it is true that he might be mistaken, if he *believed* himself mistaken he would no longer be angry. He can allow that (he is mistaken and) she is really angry only if he is not angry. This is another of the counterintuitive implications. (An angry person might say that the individual at whom he is angry is reciprocally angry at him. "Boy, is she ever angry at me!" But this does not mean that he believes she is angry in the same sense in which he is, i.e., justified in being angry. It means that she is accusing, not that she is legitimately self-protective.) It might also be objected that in being angry B can allow that A is angry *if* he is willing also to allow that she is mistaken in her judgment that *he* is maliciously feigning anger. But though he might well allow that she is mistaken, he would in doing so be conceding that she is not responsible for her anger, and this concession would be tantamount to his not being angry.

So under no circumstance can B or any other person consistently believe that two people can be angry with each other if he is one of these people: as far as he is concerned, the other person, the anger-object, can be angry only if he himself is not angry. And if he allows that she, the anger-object, *is* angry, he must believe her mistaken in her judgment about him and hence not be angry with her. Nor can anyone holding the causal view of anger consistently believe that any two people can be angry with each other unless he believes that each is mistaken about the other: If A is really angry then, if B is angry, A is mistaken about B, and the same is true of B.

It only compounds my case to realize that part of what B finds offensive may be his sense that A is capable of holding this very view about him: that he can't be angry because she is. Or, even further, that A may be holding that *he* has this view and is excusing himself by means of it, saying in his heart that *she* can't be angry because *he* is. There is no end to this kind of self-consciousness—or, I should say,

A search for a causal explanation of the angry person's resistance inevitably leads to the postulation of unconscious processes.

this consciousness of 'what we must be doing together'—and no end to the even higher-level offendedness it can induce in the other.⁶ The offensiveness of these anticipations of the other's metaperspective on the situation consists, I think, in a sense that it is a deep violation of one's own rights of autonomy and privacy. This goes some way toward explaining why in altercation with intimates we can feel outraged and indeed ravaged to the core of what we are.

Anger's resistance

The problems concerning the reciprocity of anger seem minor when compared with the inability of the causal view to account for the aspect of anger which I will call its *resistance*. Resistance is an accompaniment of being angry that cannot be reconciled with the causal interpretation of the angry person's defensiveness. It is a rival interpretation of that defensiveness. I want to mention three different, closely related descriptions of the angry person's resistance. These will at first seem unrelated to the familiar, highly individualistic notion of resistance. There is a relationship, however, and I will point it out in the next section.

First: if it were true, as the causal view maintains, that anger is a sincere and straightforward self-explanatory judgment (whether correct or mistaken) to the effect that it is a defense against threat, the behavior of angry people would be strikingly different from what it is. A threatened person tries to flee from or to terminate the threat. But characteristically an angry person does not behave in either of these ways. Instead he seems to cling to the threat, to make use of it, even to provoke it—sometimes, for example, by picking a fight out of the blue, by obsessively brooding over his wounded condition, by overstating his case in a manner that aggravates the other party, or by fueling up the quarrel if the other shows signs of letting it die. He may demand satisfaction but typically won't be satisfied. If the other leaves or even dies, he will, if he remains angry, tenaciously carry his grievance with him in his imagination.

- A I can't take this carping, snivelling attitude of yours any more.
- B Well then, leave. No one's forcing you to stay.
- A You think this marriage is holding you back in your career, don't you?
- B I never said that.
- A But you think it, don't you? Don't you?
- B Talking with you doesn't do any good. Let's just forget the whole thing, OK?

Not merely anger but self-deception in general is standardly conceived to be unconsciously motivated. This unconsciously motivated or "dynamic" self-deception is a problematic conception... It creates as many conceptual problems as it is designed to avoid, problems that render it completely unacceptable.

A Oh, so you're not going to talk it out, huh? What's wrong? Afraid of the truth?

If A were merely defensive and not resistant (whether or not an external threat actually existed), she would not insist upon an interpretation of B's conduct that is unfavorable to her.

The behavior of the angry person resists the demise of its provocation; it refuses to let its provocation die. In a non-psychoanalytic sense this can also be called its obsessiveness or compulsivity. Though from A's point of view she is merely defending herself against an external threat, whose victim she feels, from another perspective we can see that she is resistant to the loss of that threat, i.e., obsessive about keeping it alive.

B Forget it, will you?

A Why should I forget it?

B Just get off my back.

A How would you feel if I accused you of wrecking my career?

The causal view cannot tell us why A resists letting go of the threat she believes B presents. In other words, it cannot explain why what she calls a threat is, for her, an offense, a provocation. As we have seen, the threat itself or even the perception of threat, whether accurate or not, does not explain this. This is because in the causal order the threat is unconnected with the system of rights to which she may or may not be making a self-justifying appeal at the moment. The offense, the provocation, as I have already pointed out, is an event in the moral order, not the causal one.

The second way to describe anger's resistance is as follows. The focus of debate between angry people, either spoken or silent, is almost always upon one issue: Whose accusation is right? We might suppose that this issue could take one of two forms: (a) whether one or the other actually did, or meant to do, what one is accused of doing, and (b) whether one's doing it (or meaning to do it) was sufficient to anger one's accuser. But it cannot take the second form; from the angry person's point of view there can be no debate about the sufficiency of the provocation to provoke. Once it is seen as a provocation, the issue for him is settled.

B What I said was no cause to fly into a rage and attack me.

Here then is the challenge: to account for resistance without recourse to unconscious processes—without recourse, that is to say, to a motivation for resistance that is separate from the resistance.

A I suppose you'd like it if I said that to you.

It is settled because, as we see here in the case of A, she actually has her angry feelings. If B is acting as she thinks he is, then in her mind there is no possibility that he is not causing her to feel offended—because she is offended, and *at him*. The only question for debate is whether one or the other did what he or she is accused of doing, i.e., whether the accusing judgment is true or false.

But in spite of this fact, seldom is either of them willing seriously to consider the possibility of being mistaken in this judgment. Instead, this possibility is systematically resisted. If the causal view were sound, one would expect the protestations each makes of his or her own innocence to be considered by the other. Why not consider this possible way out of a miserable situation? The causal view provides no answer to this question. Indeed, except in infrequent cases, these protestations only infuriate the other more.

A Look, I haven't said a single thing that's unfair to you.

B Oh no, you're never in the wrong, are you? You're even too good to live with.

This is but another version of anger's resistance to its own dissolution. On the causal view of anger, there is no accounting for this—no reason why the angry person would not be relieved to discover his anger-judgment mistaken.

Here is the third description of anger's resistance. We have seen that, so long as B is angry, he cannot understand A to be genuinely angry. Instead he is sure that her accusations of him, and her protestations of doing her best to control herself in the face of his onslaught, are fraudulent. She cannot really have the anger-feelings she says she has. She is cynically using him; she is feigning. This assessment is in fact an aspect of his angry accusation of her. And for her part she senses this accusation, and insofar as she does she feels accused of feigning.⁷ But she is in an unassailable position to know that she has her anger-feelings and is not merely pretending. Hence, since she knows her feelings are real, the charge that B makes against her, that she is not legitimately self-protective, that she is to some extent feigning, is preposterous. Yet she does not treat this charge as preposterous. She does not laugh at B's accusations or ignore them or even toss them off lightly, as one would the charges of a lunatic or a child. On the contrary, she is obsessive about the need to defend herself against them. She cannot let anything just drop, no matter how inaccurate or absurd. Indeed, it seems that the more outrageous his suggestions are concerning what she is trying to do to him, the more

Agentively, an angry attitude is an act, embedded in a social pattern of interactions, that takes itself not to be the act that it is.

outraged she feels. She will say: “I can’t let him get away with that” or “He’s attacking my integrity,” when what he’s saying ought not to matter if it really were preposterous. She might say: “But others might believe him,” but she could just as well carry on like this if they were alone together on an island. The persistence of anger in the face of the perceived preposterousness of anger’s provocation is a matter so curious that contemplation of it ought to throw almost all previous theorizing about defensive/resistant emotions into confusion. It is the aspect of anger that is least compatible with the individualistically oriented causal view.

THE AGENTIVE VIEW OF ANGER

We have seen that the viewpoint from which the resistance of anger can be recognized and its self-deceptive character entertained—I call it the agentive view—is one that rejects the idea that the angry person is sincere in her defensiveness. It is a viewpoint from which the agent is seen to be ‘up to’ something else entirely—something that the agent herself is unable to discover. Agentively speaking, anger is self-deception. It should be clear that I do not mean by this that defensive emotions might be instrumentalities by which people deceive themselves, as when one cannot think clearly because of being “too emotional”, e.g., infatuated or upset. I mean that these emotions might themselves be self-deceptions.

Before setting forth the agentive view, I want briefly to indicate, as promised, the relationship between the description of the angry person’s resistance I have already given and the standard, individualistic, essentially clinical account of resistance. This clinical account is fraught with conceptual problems so great that it has created widespread skepticism in the past about the very notions of resistance and self-deception. Showing that the agentive view is free of these problems is a crucial part of my argument.

By the standard account, the causal view of anger fails not because it makes a causal judgment concerning its own genesis (which, as we shall see, is the agentive explanation of its failure), but because the causal judgment it makes is false. This account leads straight to the position that the resistant emotion-judgments we are talking about are unconsciously motivated. To see this, observe what happens when we try, as the standard account does, to give a causal alternative to the angry person’s self-explanation in order to account for resistance. Since the threat the angry person perceives won’t explain her nurturing response to it, there must be some other motivating belief that will explain it. What is this belief? It must be (a) a belief (or at least a suspicion) that the facts are not as favorable to her as she insists, and (b) a belief she is not sensible of having—a hidden agenda underlying

As long as one's anger continues, one cannot see that abandonment would divest the anger-object of its angering power.

her conduct, if you will. Such a belief she must be holding in a special cognitive status or on a special cognitive level to which she has no acknowledgeable access. It is commonplace now to characterize this state of affairs by saying she is motivated unconsciously. Thus we see how a search for a causal explanation of the angry person's resistance inevitably leads to the postulation of unconscious processes.

To add to this appearance of unconscious motivation, the angry individual resists too forcibly any suggestion that her case may not be airtight or that she seems to be contributing to her misery herself. When she manifests such resistance, it appears to observers that somebody has gotten uncomfortably close to the truth—that her preoccupation with the threat she says she is under is really her effort to ascribe responsibility elsewhere for what she is doing, a responsibility she unconsciously knows or suspects is hers. For if she did not in some peculiar manner or on some “level” know or suspect it, we want to ask, why would she ever resist a probe that got too near?

Not merely anger but self-deception in general is standardly conceived to be unconsciously motivated. This unconsciously motivated or ‘dynamic’ self-deception is a problematic conception. According to this conception: An individual brings it about that she actively disbelieves something that she otherwise knows (believes, suspects) is true. A condition for her bringing this about is that she knows (believes, suspects) it to be true. Without this knowledge she would have no occasion for deceiving herself. (Presumably her motivation is the painful or embarrassing nature of the truth she thus knows.) So she must believe in one sense what she makes herself disbelieve in another. It was to avoid this obvious contradiction that Freud devised and a long line of successors endorsed the notion of unconscious processes: it is consciously that the self-deceiver comes to disbelieve what she believes unconsciously. But this move creates as many conceptual problems as it is designed to avoid, problems that render it completely unacceptable.

The treatment these problems require is too extensive to undertake here. But we can indicate here that one of the troubles with the notion of the unconscious is that it separates the resistant emotion from its motivation. Given the separation, the resistant individual must be thought to be reflecting, in an inner, and insulated dialogue upon what she is doing, and in addition denying or belying it by her responsibility-evading anger. Her self-conscious judgment that she is being victimized is preceded by and is in response to another, unconscious self-conscious judgment she is anxious to belie. So it is the doctrine of the separation of resistance and its motivation that lies at the heart of the ‘monodramatic’⁸ character of the causal view of anger.

The angry person regards his anger-feeling not merely as not his responsibility, but rather as not the sort of thing which COULD be his responsibility.

This separation of resistant act from its motivation, though apparently an epitome of common sense, is simply unsupportable where anger is concerned. For it is but an alternate means of making the distinction, mentioned earlier, between judgment and arousal. Earlier we considered this distinction in regard to the accusatory aspect of anger, and saw that we have reason not to think of that aspect as affect-independent. Now, when the issue is resistance, we are considering the distinction in regard to a supposed self-reflective assessment, and will shortly see that here too we have reason to think this assessment an affect-independent judgment.

Here then is the challenge: to account for resistance without recourse to unconscious processes—without recourse, that is to say, to a motivation for resistance that is separate from the resistance. Whatever it is the angry individual resists, it must be found in her accessible (conscious) experience of the social world she finds herself in. (No trait, pattern, or disposition explanation will do when the task is to explain motivated resistance.)

This sort of motivation for resistance is already implicit in the agentive view of anger. Agentively, an angry attitude is an act, embedded in a social pattern of interactions, that takes itself not to be the act that it is; what the angrily resistant person takes herself to be is straightforward, which is to say, one who is *not* resistantly taking herself to be straightforward, for that is a resistant and unstraightforward thing to do. Fundamentally, it is her act of self-misconstruing that she is misconstruing. It is not something independent of that act that she is misconstruing; it is not something that could possibly be an object of reflection. Whatever self-monitoring might be going on is a systematic misconstrual of the self-monitoring that is going on. There is no room, therefore, for a self-reflective act of judgment to intervene between what she is doing and her act of belying what she is doing. Instead, what she resists admission of, by what she is doing, is precisely the same act as her resistance. Here, in the agentive view, is the suggestion of a motivation for getting or staying angry—a motivation for self-deception—that is not separate from the act of self-deception itself. In other words, it is a motivation that is not separate from the act that resists admitting this self-same motivation (which resistance takes the form of insisting that it is being provoked).

Search for a metaphor of defensive emotion as action

Before developing this account of self-deception, it will be helpful to have, for the cognitive aspect of anger, a metaphor that does a better job than *judgment* of capturing the self-consciousness or self-referentiality, as well as the purposiveness, of that emotion. One candidate is *self-assertion*. Because it is inextricable from the feelings

Hence, in maintaining this view of his innocence and passivity in regard to his anger, he PRESUPPOSES that he either (1) has the anger-feeling and is innocent and passive or (2) is not passive and does not have any anger-feeling at all, but is instead feigning his anger with an intent that can only be cynical and malicious.

of anger, what has been called the judgment-component might better be thought of as an act—an expression or avowal—that is *itself* resistant to admitting what it may apprehend, albeit self-deceivingly about itself. The resistance can be thought to consist in the contrariwise assertion made by the judgment: “Self-assertion” seems a fitting name for such an act.

We can go further. If anger is a kind of self-assertion, it is not necessarily a linguistic kind of assertion. It is more an assertiveness that may receive no verbal formulation at all, either spoken or silent. Much of the quarrel between Alison and Brent could have been, and no doubt was, carried on by means of offended looks, pouting, or morbid feelings. I do not think it bizarre to say that the self-assertion—the avowal of self-justification—involved is the emotion itself and its behavioral expression. There is nothing about either cognition or conduct that coerces us to think that either judgments or assertions need be explicitly formulated. They need not have a particular “logical form” in order to refer to or represent states of affairs. P. Sraffa is said to have broken the hold upon Wittgenstein of the picture theory of propositional meaning by a contemptuous gesture of the hand familiar to Neapolitans; “What is the logical form of that?” he asked.⁹ We roll our eyes, purse our lips, fidget, wince, sigh, etc., and in so doing express our views—and other people get the message—even when there is no separate inner formulation of those views. The unarticulated informational content of such behavior is what the current study of paralanguage in psychology is all about.

Yet, in spite of the advantages of self-assertion as a metaphor for the kind of thing anger is, someone might say: “If anger is self-assertion, it must depend upon straightforward perceptions of the situation in which it is attempted, including an apprehension of itself. Even a self-assertion whose nature the asserter cannot appreciate while carrying it out (which is the kind of self-assertion that anger would be) is a representation of itself.” In answer to this objection, I can only say that the fact that the metaphor of self-assertion doesn’t forestall this ‘representational’ or ‘reportorial’ interpretation is enough to send us looking for a better metaphor. What might it be?

To answer this question, consider this. Anger seems less an attempt to represent or even insist upon one’s being a particular kind of person coping with circumstances and more an attempt (albeit an inherently futile one) to be—to establish, make, or constitute oneself—that way. Anger seems a sort of *self-constitution*. It and the other defensive emotions we are studying are, to use Sartre’s phrase, “magical transformations” of oneself and one’s world.

But to this idea of self-constitution there are objections that must be met. The most serious objection for my purposes is that if, *per impossibile*, anger were conduct undertaken deliberately, it would be a

The agentive possibility, that he is responsible and yet has the feeling, is not a possibility as far as the angry person is concerned, since the feeling is not, in his view, the sort of thing he could be responsible for.

cynical misrepresentation, could not take itself seriously, and therefore could not be anger. Further, when we act we may deliberate about doing so, may forbear from doing so, etc., but these things are not possible with anger. Since for these reasons it appears that anger cannot be action, it must instead be precisely what it takes itself to be, namely, not action at all, but passion.

We must be cautious about objections like this, which during my earliest thoughts about this subject would have seemed to me damning. For this is an objection that arises within the causal view of anger. But outside of that view and *within* the agentive view, the story is otherwise. In anger, a person perceives herself and her circumstance in a particular manner—“under a certain description”, as they say. This is not the accurate, agentive description that is available to others. She has intentions and motives, to be sure, but these pertain to the situation as she sees it. She might deliberate, she might forbear, but only in respect of *her* understanding of things. Hence she is not scheming about how she will assert or constitute herself as angry, make herself justified, provoke others to provoke her, or otherwise misrepresent herself. She is instead concerned about how to cope with provocation, whether to restrain herself, how much more she can take, why she has to be the object of such calumny, etc. It does not follow from this that she is not doing what we can agentively perceive her to be doing: it does not follow that *her* understanding is correct. Otherwise, she would understand perfectly what she was doing and her self-deception would be impossible. (We must be careful to avoid question-begging.) So her trying to cope with and defend herself in a situation angrily perceived simply is doing what from a straightforward observer’s point of view (which is a point of view she cannot have) can be seen as strategically and systematically making herself angry, victimized, justified, etc. In the end, all we learn from the objection is what we already know, that the agentive view of anger cannot be reconciled with the experience of anger.¹⁰

Assuming, then, that we have made legitimate our conception of anger as self-conscious action, we can say agentively that anger is defensive not in virtue of anything external, but in virtue of itself. The imputed anger-cause has powers to provoke anger if and only if it is perceived angrily. And now that we are able to say this much, we are in a position to formulate the fundamental question for this paper. What does this defensiveness consist in? How does her imputation of causality to an object explain the angry person’s obsessive resistance to the demise of her anger, or in other words, her compulsivity in maintaining it?

DEFENSIVENESS, RESISTANCE AND OBSESSION

Agentively speaking, both alternatives in the disjunction he presupposes (sincere or feigning) are false... His self-deception is in this sense the falsification of the world, rather than simply the falsification of a situation within the world. That is, what is false is not just what he asserts about himself and his situation, but what he presupposes by that assertion.

We seek reconciliation of anger's defensiveness with anger's resistance. To do so, we must account for the appearance the angry person gives of resisting admission of unconscious motives, but must do this without countenancing the existence of such motives. To explain why such a person is resistant and nurtures rather than flees his provocation, it is insufficient to say that making himself a victim is simultaneously making another his victimizer. This answer fails to tell us why he would not simply let the anger die and thereby divest the anger-object of its angering power. It fails, in other words, to account for resistance.

There have been accounts that abandon the phenomenon of resistance; mine would be such an account if I were to stop at the insight that anger is an assertion of an emotional kind that asserts itself to be something that is, in fact, otherwise than what it is. On the strength of this insight I could have said that the angry person deceives himself about what he is doing by doing it in the sense that he eclipses for himself the truth about his act (and the situation relative to his act) in performing that act.¹¹ But in the absence of any other account of resistance, his only motivation for resisting would have to be the nature of what he deceived himself about, and of this (according to the view we are discussing) he has no inkling.

Another solution is only a little less unsatisfactory. It is this: Being angry means believing that one's provocation bears in upon one independently of one's own will or control. Given this perspective, "letting one's anger die" can only mean relinquishing one's defensive feelings and intentions and thereby leaving oneself defenseless against the provocation which, in this perspective, would retain its power to offend. As long as one's anger continues, one cannot see that abandonment would divest the anger-object of its angering power.

This answer tells why angry individuals would be unlikely simply to abandon their anger or let it die. But it does not tell us at all why they characteristically resist opportunities to let it die, e.g., when the object of their anger shows signs of withdrawing from the field of battle. We still need to know what there is about anger or its provocation that explains the phenomenon of resistance, and that does not, in explaining it, invoke unconscious processes.

We shall see that the answer is provided by the very property of anger that the causal view cannot account for. The threat A presents B cannot but be preposterous in B's eyes (I spoke earlier of another reason for his outrage, namely, that he feels violated in his person). Angry at him, A contends that he is maliciously or inconsiderately causing her anger and hence is not really angry at all, but feigning

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anger. But for his part, he knows directly that he *actually* has his anger-feelings and is therefore not merely pretending. So her anger at him, which he reads as an accusation that he is feigning, has got to be preposterous in his eyes.¹² Surprisingly, it will turn out that the very absurdity (in his eyes) of the charges against him is the property that makes these charges indispensable to his anger. Their absurdity is an aspect of his sense of outrage. It is this that simultaneously presents him with what he sees as an external provocation *and* justifies the position he is taking (i.e., convinces him that his anger is genuine). Nor, as we shall see, is it necessary or even relevant that A is leveling these charges: anger is a self-troubling activity in which one cannot fail to feel both assailed and justified by such preposterous charges, irrespective of what the anger-object is actually doing.

I take it that the strength of the argument I shall offer resides partly in its explicit Wittgensteinian recognition that anger is essentially avowal, which is to say a kind of conduct, rather than an inner experience of which angry expressions are some kind of report. To think it an experience, as B does, is to assess one's expressions on the basis of their accuracy, i.e., their truth: hence, in his own eyes, B has got to be right in the argument because he *really is* angry. But as Harré has pointed out repeatedly, the correct assessment of social acts is not in terms of truth but rather of sincerity. B is unjustified not because he is giving false reports of his inner state, a charge he knows to be preposterous, but because in the avowing conduct that is his anger (which includes his continuous monitoring of that conduct) he is insincere, dissembling.

In order to make my case, I shall offer a series of observations, each of which provides only an aspect of the total account of these matters. At the conclusion of this section it should be clear why I say that the very preposterousness of the charge, in B's eyes, is what makes it essential to his self-justification.

Anger's presupposition

Recall that B regards his anger-feeling not merely as not his responsibility, but rather as not the sort of thing which *could* be his responsibility. Given his view of it in having it, it is not the sort of thing he could produce in himself by taking thought, exerting his will, etc. Hence, in maintaining this view of his innocence and passivity in regard to his anger, he *presupposes* that he either (1) has the anger-feeling and is innocent and passive or (2) is not passive and does not have any anger-feeling at all, but is instead feigning his anger with an intent that can only be cynical and malicious. In other words, he presupposes that if he is not right about the cause of his anger-feeling—if he rather than A is responsible for it—then he hasn't got that feeling. But if he has got the feeling, then (in the absence of a

The issue in the angry person's mind is—Who is culpable here, the other person or I? Whereas the real issue is—Is the issue what the angry person thinks it is? If he were not angry, would culpability be the issue? The answer is, No. That the issue in his mind is guilt and innocence is a function of his anger: a self-deception.

mistake on his part, which, as we have seen, is a possibility he would in his anger reject) she is causing it. The agentive possibility, that he is responsible and yet has the feeling, is not a possibility as far as he is concerned, since the feeling is not, in his view, the sort of thing he could be responsible for.

A falsified world

Agentively speaking, both alternatives in the disjunction he presupposes (sincere or feigning) are false. Thus it is that anger brings into being not simply the interpretation of itself that it asserts to be the case and that is false, but a complement of alternative interpretations of itself which are both false. It is this 'horizon' of possibilities taken together—it is the entire *outlook* in which the agent, B in this case, is either to be justified because innocent or condemned because malicious—that is the content of the angry person's self-deception. His self-deception is in this sense the falsification of the world, rather than simply the falsification of a situation within the world. That is, what is false is not just what he asserts about himself and his situation, but what he presupposes by that assertion.

Since as far as he can tell this outlook exhausts the possibilities, he cannot consider the agentive truth (which is that he is the author of his anger) without giving it a false interpretation. On his interpretation this truth can only mean that he is not really angry at all, but cynically pretending, whereas the agentive interpretation of this truth implies no such thing. His exhaustive horizon of false possibilities stands over against the truth about himself, which is not included in this horizon. The truth lies beyond the array of possibilities he can conceive. Correlative to this excluded truth about himself—B in this case—is the excluded truth about the anger-object, A, who for B must be either malicious or at least callous (if B is justified), or else caused to be angry by a malice of B's own (if B is not justified). In fact, A, the anger-object, is neither of these. The issue in B's mind is: Who is culpable here, A or I? Whereas the real issue is: Is the issue what B thinks it is? If he were not angry, would culpability be the issue? The answer is, No. That the issue in his mind is guilt and innocence is a function of his anger: a self-deception. The supposed cause for this effect does not exist apart from the effect itself. B will not be free from self-deception until this ceases to be the issue: until he is no longer angry: until he can perceive malice, if it is there, without perceiving offense.

Self-constitution as denial

Now the self-condemning alternative to his anger-judgment about himself and his anger-object is for B not merely an abstract or

The angry person will not be free from self-deception until this ceases to be the issue—until he is no longer angry, until he can perceive malice, if it is there, without perceiving offense.

unsuspected possibility. That is, in constituting himself A's victim he does not merely constitute a spectrum of alternative possible interpretations of his apparent anger, only one of which is his concern. On the contrary, constituting himself a victim is constituting himself as *not* being a victimizer. One cannot maintain mere innocence, mere justifiability, mere sincerity, or, more obviously yet, mere freedom from responsibility. To undertake such self-assertiveness presumes that a question is being raised. A self-forgetful individual can be what he is, e.g., sincere or innocent, without regard to what he is not. But asserting or constituting oneself sincere or innocent by one's anger can only be in respect of some presumed (or presumed pending) charge. One can maintain one's innocence only by raising the issue of whether one is guilty (or acknowledging that issue if it has already been raised); one can maintain one's sincerity only by raising (or acknowledging) the issue of feigning, one's justification, the issue of culpability, etc. It is as if one asserted the favorable alternative by denying the unfavorable alternative—as if anger were a non-verbal way of saying: "I am *not* the kind of person who could be morally responsible for this."

The general point I am making is a central and poorly appreciated cornerstone of Sartre's conception of bad faith: self-constitution is actualizing one particular possibility over against others in a spectrum of possibilities all raised together by the act of self-constitution itself. The particular form of self-justification we call anger is a denial of being the sort of person who is insincere or malicious. Negation mediates the self-approval implicit in anger. One is not merely sincere, but sincere-as-opposed-to-feigning, etc. To be angry one must, in Sartre's words, become "a Not upon the face of the earth".

The indignation in anger

Let us move one step further. It might be thought that B's insistence upon his victimhood and his consequent innocence involves a denial of his culpability only in the sense of entailing it conceptually, so that all I've said could be true without B's actually being sensible of the condemnatory interpretation of his conduct that he denies. But in fact this interpretation is one he feels the urgent need to deny, as if he were in the dock. The substance, as it were, of his accusations of A and his indignation in response to her accusations of him is his effort to exonerate himself in respect of whatever it is she is blaming him for, and this cannot but take the form of an active denial of his culpability in this very respect. A is defaulting on the psychological contract he and she have together, not he; she, and not he, is the agency behind his wounded responses and her purportedly wounded ones. So B raises *in his own mind* the troublesome possibility he denies in the very act of denying it. His maintenance of his innocence and her guilt is equally a

A self-forgetful individual can be what he is, e.g., sincere or innocent, without regard to what he is not. But asserting or constituting oneself sincere or innocent by one's anger can only be in respect of some presumed charge. One can maintain one's innocence only by raising the issue of whether one is guilty.

denial of his own guilt and of her innocence. His is a *self-troubling act*. This point is crucial for establishing that what B is defensive about and resistant to admitting—what seems to motivate his over-elaborate protestations of innocence—is not pre-existent to or even independent of his denial of it, but an aspect of that denial.

So B is engaged in defending himself against the most intimidatingly personal kinds of charges completely apart from whether A, his anger-object, is actually leveling any of them against him, or even knows of his existence. In itself, anger is a kind of paranoia; just in virtue of being angry an individual conjures all the adversaries he must have in order, in his own eyes, to be angry justifiably, which is the only way one *can* be angry. His insecurity, then, his wrestling with self-doubt and guilt, his struggle to overcome a perpetual sense of unworthiness—all these are not less agitated, concerned, or energetic than his anger itself, because they *are* his anger. The sense of being violated as a person, in regard to one's rights, is equally nurturing of the violation: a kind of self-induced social disequilibrium. A judgment always implicit in one's anger, and as central as any other, is, "I am not wrong about myself." This judgment is implicit in such exclamations as: "Look, I mean what I say!" "I'm not just kidding." "Why do you think I've been sobbing for the past week?" "Don't think you're going to get away with this!"

It is in this way, then, that the agentive view accounts for his defensiveness. The angry person feels an urgency to defend himself against a possibility that (contrary to his belief) does not arise independently of his anger. There is a necessary connection between his denial of the possibility that he is a fraud and the urgency he feels to deny it. His self-deception does not consist in *directly* rendering the truth about his action inaccessible (by an internal act such as repression, for example), but in his creation of a possibility he feels a need to resist, which possibility, together with his asserted victimhood, excludes the truth.

Apart from this necessity, there are other reasons why B will tend to be defensive. For example, he will tend to construe any circumstantial evidence that is discrepant with his story as an attack upon his integrity. Obviously, if A is reciprocally angry at B, he will understand her anger—her self-defense against him—as an attempted condemnation of him; we have seen that this is because of the presupposition of his anger. But he will construe discrepant evidence in this way even if she *isn't* angry and therefore is not an accomplice to his anger. Since she *cannot* cause his anger-feelings in the way he supposes—they are constituted by him—she is necessarily innocent of his accusation against her. She is innocent not in virtue of anything she is or isn't doing, but in virtue of the nature of his anger itself. She is innocent in virtue of what *he* is doing. But this is an extraordinary sort

So the angry person raises IN HIS OWN MIND the troublesome possibility he denies in the very act of denying it. His maintenance of his innocence and another's guilt is equally a denial of his own guilt and of the other's innocence. His is a self-troubling act.

of innocence he cannot possibly comprehend, precisely because he cannot (as long as he is angry) comprehend his anger as his activity. It is an innocence that consists in her being *neither guilty nor innocent* (in his sense of 'innocent'); that is, it consists in her being incapable of producing his anger because that anger is not the sort of thing external events can cause. But to him this extraordinary innocence—"incapable of producing it in virtue of the kind of thing it is"—can only be misunderstood by him as the more ordinary innocence—"capable of producing it without actually having produced it". Thus any evidence that his accusation is not fully founded, any suggestion that A might be innocent in the first, extraordinary sense, will unavoidably be perceived by him to be evidence of his innocence in *his* sense—the ordinary sense—and *therefore* as an accusation of feigning, an attack upon his integrity, etc. All discrepancies or dissonance between his story and the circumstances threaten to condemn him, whether or not anyone means them to—and certainly whether or not they in fact do, for they do not!

We can learn something about the pressure to condemn himself that an angry person like Brent defends himself against by noting that sometimes, maneuvering within the horizon of his self-deceived world, an individual will pre-empt this pressure by denouncing or even berating himself. We take Brent as our example because, as the preceding bits of dialogue show, he is the one most prone to self-flagellation.

- B It's too painful to be dragged through all this again.
- A Here we go again. You pick a fight and then accuse me of hurting your feelings.
- B Look, I know you think you could have married a more successful person.
- A If you start on a pity party again, I'm going to walk right out of here.
- B I shouldn't have picked the fight. I don't know what's the matter with me.
- A I can't stand you being such a wimp.
- B When I get mad at you I guess it's because I think you can do everything and I can't do anything.
- A I'm going to take my shower, Brent...
- B I wasn't really mad. I don't know why I do it. I guess I just resent not getting ahead in my job as fast as you are.

This point is crucial for establishing that what the angry person is defensive about and resistant to admitting—what seems to motivate his over-elaborate protestations of innocence—is not pre-existent to or even independent of his denials of it, but an aspect of that denial.

This self-deprecating “turning-inward” of the anger has its own self-righteous satisfactions. When he needs to, Brent can say: “At least I’m being honest with myself now.” If he makes the ploy that he rather than Alison is morally inferior, his excuse for his moral shortfall is just as effective as any superiority ploy might be.

The constant possibility of this self-humiliation tells us something about the indignation of someone like Brent when he is not condemning himself. He is, he believes, suffering at A’s hands—yet in spite of this, as we just saw in the discussion of innocence, he feels a claim is being constantly made against him on her behalf. He feels what he construes to be a ‘moral’ summons or demand to recognize and acknowledge this claim. He is experiencing a pressure, counter to his claims on behalf of himself, to abandon those claims in the name of honesty. From his perspective, this would require him to make no consideration for himself in virtue of his suffering (which he is sure is real), but to give every consideration to A, whose conduct is wounding and angering him. It is no wonder that “duty” for him is onerous. It calls upon him to relinquish his rights of protection and redress, to humiliate himself by conceding the claim presented on A’s behalf that she is innocent. If made, this concession would be humiliating because, from his point of view, it would not be made in virtue of her conduct, i.e., because her present conduct entitles her to it (remember, he feels she is wounding him). It would have to be made *in spite* of her present conduct—in spite of the fact that she is wounding him. This means the concession would be made in virtue of something besides her conduct—for example, A’s person, her rights or status, her inheritance, perhaps even her sovereignty, any of which implies his inferiority in regard to this something and his exclusion from full participation in the system of rights that constitutes him the person that he is. This pressure B feels to demean himself contributes both to what seems to him the irresistible provocation of these demands—“How can I not be upset when she humiliates me like this?”—and to the justifiability of refusing these demands. “They require too much. They are outrageous. Only a fool would grovel at her feet the way she wants me to.” (A similar story can of course be told of A’s indignation.) Anger is indignant; it contains the seeds, at least, of paranoia, and also of self-hate. (This is true even, or perhaps especially, of those who angrily wield great power.) A possible next step for either party in *any* exchange of angry accusations is always something of this sort: “Oh yes, I’m always the one who is in the wrong, aren’t I? (Quivering chin.) I know I’m not the sort of person who’s good enough for you. I just wish you wouldn’t rub it in, that’s all.”

It is in this way, then, that the agentive view accounts for his defensiveness. The angry person feels an urgency to defend himself against a possibility that (contrary to his belief) does not arise independently of his anger.

The neutralization of all conceivable opposition

The absurdity of the felt attack brings us to the question: Why isn't the attack scoffed at or ignored? Why is self-condemnation the only perceived option? The answer is, it is the very preposterousness of the perceived claims against the angry individual that in his eyes establishes him as authentically angry, innocent of fraud, and justified. He raises the self-condemning possibilities in a preposterous form, and it is this that creates his conviction that he is right. He is obsessed with the evidence against him because it is his justification, and yet contemptuous of it because it is absurd; it justifies him precisely because it is absurd. (I.A. Richards said: "Contempt is a well-known defensive reaction.") The only conceivable opposition to the self-justifying claims the angry person makes is thus neutralized. We might say: the angry person nurtures this evidence against him by denying it, and precisely in order to be able to deny it. What other evidence could one cite for one's own sincerity and innocence than that the alternatives are preposterous? No other evidence could conceivably count. *We see that, without taking thought, even unconsciously, but because that is the only way he can see the situation, the angry person indignantly considers the possibility of his fraudulence—he perceives it as a demand that he condemn and demean himself—and in the same stroke discredits it, because in view of his suffering it is preposterous.*

On this account, no unconscious psychological process is involved in resistance. All the features of anger I have described are simply aspects of angry conduct responsive to others in a pattern of altercation expressed in a rhetoric of accusation and excuse. What is resisted is not a truth harbored in a consciously inaccessible psychical region, but the obverse of the act of resistance itself—a possibility raised only by denying it. We have not explained anger causally; instead, we have understood it as an act carried out as a component of an interactive pattern, anticipating and construing the responses of others.

SELF-DECEPTION

Bad faith

In my critique of the causal view of anger I said that characteristically a person who is angry concerns herself with whether the object of her anger actually did what he is being accused of. She is exercised to deny that she is mistaken about the accused. Yet her point of view allows that there is a possibility that she is mistaken, and that if she is, there is no cause for anger. Why then is she resistant to the possibility of liquidating her anger by entertaining the possibility of a mistake? How does the agency view account for this?

We see that, without taking thought, even unconsciously, but because that is the only way he can see the situation, the angry person indignantly considers the possibility of his fraudulence and in the same stroke discredits it, because in view of his suffering it is preposterous.

The answer seems to be that from the angry person's viewpoint it is unlikely that any evidence against her position could suggest a *mere* mistakenness in judgment. If B had been trying to say something different from what A thought he was saying—something quite innocent—and if he had presented his case to her, she would have perceived his protestations as asking her to discredit her feelings and to denounce herself (unless of course she had abandoned her anger, or was in the very moment abandoning it). We have already seen why. What to us may look like an honest suggestion that she has judged mistakenly is to her the suggestion that she is the kind of person who would treat him perversely. I am not saying she cannot admit to being mistaken, but only that she will be giving up her anger if she does; hence, if she isn't giving up her anger we can understand why she isn't openly considering the possibility of being mistaken, and (as is our common experience) pointing out her mistakes isn't likely to dissuade her.

B I didn't mean to attack you when I brought up the shower. I wanted to help. When I came home, I was feeling romantic and kindly toward you. That's the truth, Alison.

A Oh, so I'm the one who picked the fight!

B (Controlled voice.) No, I didn't mean that. I only meant that I wasn't trying to make you feel bad.

A So I made it up, huh? Why would I make up such a thing? Do you think I wanted to ruin the whole evening with another ugly fight?

B No. I'm trying to say that what you thought I said to upset you, I didn't really say, so there's no need for us to be angry with each other.

A That's it! Just gloss it over. You come home and start talking about how late I am, after I've done all the work, and I'm supposed to say, "Oh thank you, my Lord, for pointing out my shortcomings to me." You expect me to believe you? You think I'd be upset if you hadn't come home making insinuations?

There can be no admission of mere mistakenness unless the angry attitude and conduct have been or are being abandoned.¹³

There is an intuitive insight in Sartre's work on bad faith for which we can now provide a conceptual explanation. He said bad faith is a determination in advance to be persuaded by inadequate evidence, to be unfulfilled by the evidence, to take as the normal ground for

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conviction a condition of being not quite convinced. In Sartre's work, there is no adequate accounting for this 'determination'. But the agency view provides an account. The existence of one's own anger-feeling (together with the logical obstacles to consider whether one might be mistaken) is enough in the angry person's mind to establish the culpability of the anger-object. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*. What objective evidence there may be, one way or the other, is inaccessible as such. Given one's experience of a feeling that can only seem the effect of offensive conduct, it is all but inconceivable that one could be wrong.

- B Ask Fred if I wasn't singing your praises when we were driving home.
- A So what if you were? It was probably to make him jealous or to try to make up for the bad things you've said about me.

In a sense, the evidence against the anger object is the anger itself. The angry individual is convinced *a priori* that the case against her *must* be deficient, and she contents herself with almost any supporting evidence, even though partial, inconclusive, speculative, or even imagined, that is validated by that conviction.

The appearance of unconscious processes

In the study of self-deception, the trick is to take the phenomenon of resistance seriously without invoking unconscious processes. This I have done in respect of certain self-deceptive emotions. The account I have given of these emotions does not appeal to unconscious processes, yet it shows why such processes appear to be taking place. From a point of view that construes anger-feelings on a 'passive reception' model, the resistance I have described—resistance to the demise of the provocation—cannot fail to be thought of as resistance to admitting an unconscious belief, motive, or intention. What gives rise to this appearance of the effects of an unconscious is a genuine resistance, but it is not a resistance to admission of such motives. It is instead something in the angry person's interaction with the object of her anger that she resists, namely, a moral claim against her, the ludicrousness of which is the core of her self-justification. The accompanying appearance of an unconscious motive for resisting this claim is an artifact of her anger (and of the sympathy of observers); it is not an internally held truth that her act eclipses. There is much indeed that the angry person does not know about herself or her situation, as we have seen, but this does not reside in an unconscious. It resides instead in an outlook publicly available to everyone besides

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her—an outlook that she does not and cannot enjoy because of being angry. Thus, the agentive view accounts for resistance—indeed, the sort of resistance whose motives cannot be acknowledged—without appealing to anything unconscious.

One way to state the problem with the classical conception of self-deception is this assumption, which as far as I know has not been called into question before: What the self-deceiver resists (e.g., the possibility of her own malice and fraudulence) is the very belief about which she deceives herself. On this assumption the *only* mode of self-deception available is *concealment* from herself—e.g., relegation of a belief-content to a “level” not available to consciousness. This is because the assumption entails that the belief about which she deceives herself is the same that she would openly believe were she not self-deceived. To suppose that beliefs are thus invariant through a range of psychological states, from straightforward attitudes to self-deceptions, is to assume that self-deception is a matter of the *status*, such as a ‘below awareness’ status, of a belief. On the agentive view, on the other hand, what she resists in her anger—the possibility of her own malice and fraudulence—is not what she is deceiving herself about. It is not what she would believe upon coming out of self-deception. It is an artifact of the anger itself, and it would not be a possibility—it would disappear—without the anger. Thus, what she denies in self-deception, like what she affirms, is not possible to deny (or affirm) apart from the self-deception. On the agentive view, her self-deception is not a matter of concealing a belief, but a matter, we might say, of believing perversely, and this in turn is a matter of participating insincerely in that ‘form of life’ in terms of which she has learned to maintain herself as a person.

So now we know that self-deception must be possible because we know that anger is possible (and also the other defensive/resistant emotions). But we’ve always known that self-deception is possible; what we’ve needed to know is, *how* is it possible? And now we are faced with the same question about anger. It is true that the classical contradiction in self-deception theory is gone, but this minimal answer is not enough. We want to ask, if the agentive account is sound, why would one ever adopt the ‘rhetoric’ of anger and similar delusory emotions? We can’t appeal to provocation to answer this question, since anger is the author of its own provocation. Why would self-justification be anger’s desperate concern if the issue of whether one is justified in the anger does not exist without the anger? The surprising answer to this question I have treated elsewhere¹⁴.

¹ Arthur King, Dennis Packard, Merlin Myers, Bernard Harrison, Eddy Zemach and Rom Harré have made suggestions that I have made use of in this paper, not necessarily as they might have wished. The influence of Harré, in the final draft, and of King are generally too pervasive to document specifically.

² A good synoptic discussion and introduction to the literature on these subjects is found in Rom Harré, *Personal Being* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). See especially J. Labini and M. Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

³ This is not the occasion to discuss the epistemological status of remarks such as these on the meaning of a word, but if it were it would address the difficulties of discovering, in any other way than I discovered it, what we mean by 'anger'. And how did I discover it? I discovered (learned) it by becoming a representative member of a community that uses this word, helped by myriad responses to my attempts from other such representatives, until I became one of those in whose verbal conduct, the responses of others to me, and the written and recorded traces of these interactions, that meaning is now repositied. In other words, I became participant in those social forms that Wittgenstein called 'language games', which are institutions of conduct mediated by speech. I would also address the difficulties inherent in establishing 'empirically' how others in this community use the word 'anger' independently of how I use it, when in order to do so I must presume agreement about the meaning of many other closely related words, whose meaning for us would not remain unaltered if we discovered that 'anger' means something different from what we thought.

⁴ It is possible to regard angry people as others operating on one 'meta' level or another, relative to those they are angry with. In the example, being justified in our treatment of another consists in our moral assessment of whether the other is justified in his response to us. Our response to him is mediated by our contemplation of his justification relative to the moral order that we have in common. Later, I shall return to the moral order that we have in common. Later, I shall return to these considerations.

⁵ Harré has pointed out to me that, in some cases, the conduct may be an 'amplification' of the offended status, as with the Australian aborigine and the Trobriander, and in other cases, like the increasing deference of the Korean, a 'minimization' of it. I put these qualifications in scare quotes because they themselves are part of the anger. They themselves are part of the anger. They are part of the self-justifying maneuver that is taking place. For example, the Korean's deference can be thought of as a move in a metagame, by which he can punish more effectively by displaying himself as morally superior to those at whom his anger is directed.

⁶ Harré pointed out to me the relevance of these considerations to the opportunities for and limits of reciprocity in angry interactions. For an account of these 'metagames' see R.D. Laing's Sartrean description of interactions as essentially political (especially *Knots*, New York: Vintage Books, 1972) and Harré's account of traps in *Social Being* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), especially pp. 212-13.

⁷ Later we are going to see that whether or not he is actually angry and accusing her in this manner-or indeed even knows of her existence-she feels accused simply in virtue of her anger.

⁸ Harré's term; see his *Social Being* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), Ch. 10.

⁹ Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 69.

¹⁰ There is an interesting question that would take us in a different direction from the one I have chosen for this paper. When operating within the casual view of anger, the issue before us was: Anger is a judgment that proffers an explanation of itself; can this explanation be true? Within the agentive view an analogous issue is: Anger is 'self-constituting'; it is an act that takes itself as not responsible for itself. Can this self-constitution succeed? Can the angry individual ever coincide with what in her anger she takes herself to be? The answer, I believe, is that the more she tries, the more incongruent with herself her self-image becomes. As long as human beings are angry, they are not, in spite of an existentialist cliché to the contrary, what they take themselves to be.

¹¹ For an account of this type, see Robert C. Solomon, "Emotions and Choice," *Review of Metaphysics*, 1973.

¹² There are not doubt other reasons why his anger, with its implicit charges, is absurd. For example, as Harré has pointed out to me, it undercuts the conditions of personhood and respect of personhood on which the relationship is constituted, and also, obviously, the possibility of the alteration they are having with one another. But this sort of absurdity is not blatantly held before in B's attention, like the (perceived) accusation that he is merely feigning.

¹³ It is precisely because our accusing emotions, such as contempt, hate, sadness, self-pity, and embarrassment, as well as anger, *are* avowals and not merely inwardly held experiences reported by expressions of emotion that our beliefs do not determine our feelings. Cognitive therapy to the contrary, the beliefs ingredient in these emotions change only with, and not prior to, the relevant changes of emotion. (It might be possible to test this claim empirically.) Notice too that however ill-founded or trivially motivated or irrational one's anger may seem to others-however easy it may appear to correct it with a little information-it is in one's own view a response to an affront or a wrong. There is no anger the angry individual does not experience as a passion for justice.

¹⁴ C. Terry Warner, "What We Are," *BYU Studies*, vol.26, no.1,1986, pp. 39-63.