

Why do we get angry? Anger is a reaction rooted in evolutionary survival tactics used to defend the self from immediate danger.<sup>1</sup> Despite being regarded as a primitive instinct,<sup>2</sup> anger has remained in our society and serves an important purpose in our social lives. It functions as a direct response to social threats, while working with other feelings like moral contempt to form complex social interactions.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its frequency, anger is historically regarded as the antithesis of reason. Due to the dismissal of rage, sentiments influenced by anger are often rejected in discourse. This rejection can be traced back to Ancient Greece where Socrates argued that negative emotional reactions demonstrate a lack of wisdom.<sup>4</sup> While expressing anger can seem negative, releasing frustration is cathartic and often quickly resolves tensions.<sup>5</sup> Anger combines with emotions of contempt and indignation, allowing it to become a tool in complex social interaction.<sup>6</sup>

Recently, feminist and anti-racist scholars have reexamined anger. Audre Lorde argued that “Anger, used, does not destroy. Hatred does.”<sup>7</sup> She explained that fear of anger inhibits learning<sup>8</sup> and instead promoted using women’s, particularly Black women’s, “arsenal of anger” against the oppressions which caused that rage.<sup>9</sup> Race and gender impact who is allowed to express anger and the acceptable forms of expression. These unequal impacts are visible in the receptions of former President Barack Obama, who maintained composure to avoid the stereotype of the “angry black man,” and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was labelled as shrill and irrational when she expressed emotion.<sup>10</sup> The double standard is particularly obvious when compared with the perception of former President Donald Trump,

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<sup>1</sup> Hutcherson, Cendri A., and James J. Gross. “The Moral Emotions: A Social-Functionalist Account of Anger, Disgust, and Contempt.” *Journal of personality and social psychology* 100, no. 4 (2011): 720.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Duhigg, “The Real Roots of American Rage: The untold story of how anger became the dominant emotion in our politics and personal lives—and what we can do about it,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, January-February 2019, 64, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/01/charles-duhigg-american-anger/576424/>.

<sup>3</sup> Hutcherson, “The Moral Emotions,” 720-721.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, “Apology,” in *Five Dialogues*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Duhigg, “The Real Roots of American Rage,” 65.

<sup>6</sup> Hutcherson, “The Moral Emotions,” 721.

<sup>7</sup> Audre Lorde, “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Audre Lord (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007), 152.

<sup>8</sup> Audre Lorde, “Uses of Anger,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 25, no. ½ (1997): 278.

<sup>9</sup> Lorde, “Uses of Anger.” 280.

<sup>10</sup> Duhigg, “The Real Roots of American Rage,” 71.

whose anger was his greatest campaigning tool.<sup>11</sup> Activists and scholars are now reexamining the role of anger, considering its potential as a productive tool for change.<sup>12</sup> Rather than dismissing marginalized groups' anger outright, it is critical to acknowledge its value in the fight for justice.

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<sup>11</sup> Duhigg, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Cherry, Myisha. "Political Anger." *Philosophy Compass* 17, no. 2 (2022): 7-8.