



Myisha Cherry: *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Antiracist Struggle*

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Emotions are central to human experience. They add depth and meaning to our lives, as well as help us to engage with and understand the world and others in it. As philosophers and feminist theorists have argued, even emotions like anger can be valuable in such ways. At the same time, however, anger has been characterised as morally problematic or counterproductive to the angry person's cause, even when it is a response to the entrenched racism highlighted by recent events like the murder of George Floyd in the United States of America. Rather than appreciating the challenges raised by antiracist anger, writes Myisha Cherry, 'some critics seem to think that what is most strange and alarming about this time is the angry reactions of antiracists, and not the racism itself' (2021, p. 2).

It is in this context that Cherry's book *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Antiracist Struggle* is situated. Focusing specifically on antiracist rage (Cherry uses 'rage' and 'anger' interchangeably), Cherry sets out to define and defend the value of what she calls 'Lordean rage', named after the Black feminist poet and activist, Audre Lorde. Lordean rage is anger in response to and directed at racism, aimed at bringing about social change. Crucially, it 'recognizes and advertises justice's worth' (p. 53). Central to Lordean rage is solidarity with others facing injustice, where both those who are directly affected by racism and, more generally, those committed to a just society can experience it. As Cherry distils Lorde's own words: 'I am not free while any [other] is unfree' (p. 24).

Cherry begins the book by carving out the space for Lordean rage by contrasting it to other more problematic types of political anger, which she calls rogue rage, wipe rage, resentment rage and narcissistic rage. These different types of political anger are distinguished, in Chapter 1, by how they vary across four dimensions: their targets, action tendencies, aims and perspectives. Narcissistic rage, for instance, is targeted at 'those who target me' (p. 21); it has the action tendency to express one's place within a social hierarchy, the aim to get justice *for me*, and the perspective of self-importance and ego-centric self-entitlement. In contrast, Lordean rage targets those who are complicit in and perpetrators of racism and injustice; it has the action tendency to 'absorb and use [the rage] for energy'

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(p. 24), the aim to bring about change, and the perspective that ‘I am not free while any [other] is unfree’.

Cherry argues in Chapter 2 that these features make Lordean rage more likely than the other types to be fitting, morally appropriate and representationally correct. For instance, Lordean rage can be morally appropriate ‘when it respects the humanity of the wrong-doer’ (p. 37), unlike resentment rage or wipe rage that aim, respectively, at revenge or eliminating scapegoats. And, because the perspective of Lordean rage requires recognising how racial injustices can be compounded and incessant for many people, it avoids the self-centring tendencies of narcissistic rage.

In Chapter 3, Cherry addresses two common criticisms of anger. Firstly, even while anger itself may be justified, angry behaviour is not. Secondly, other emotions, such as love, may be better suited for bringing about the aims of social change. While conceding that angry behaviour can be problematic, Cherry draws on empirical work on anger to argue that Lordean rage can nevertheless fuel positive action because the behaviour it motivates can be constructive. By contrasting Lordean rage with other types of rage – and finding the others wanting – Cherry further argues that Lordean rage is not incompatible with other emotions. In fact, through its commitment to justice it can be an expression of agape love, ‘a universal love that involves goodwill and respect’ (p. 91).

In the second part of the book, Cherry shifts towards an exploration of the contours of Lordean rage in practice. In Chapter 4, she addresses how Lordean rage can be an effective means of breaking racial rules. Not only does it advertise the value of justice, then, but it is itself a confrontation of specific forms that racial injustice can take. In Chapter 5, Cherry turns to the Lordean rage of allies, examining when and how it can go wrong. She emphasises that having the same feeling should not be interpreted as having the same experience, drawing attention to the limits of empathy and the importance of solidarity instead. Lastly, in Chapter 6, Cherry critically engages with how Lordean rage can be managed. Here, her focus is on ensuring that Lordean rage ‘remains appropriate, motivational, productive, and resistant’ (p. 140). For this purpose, traditional anger management techniques that focus on moderating the emotion away are inappropriate, and instead Cherry proposes techniques that are aimed at harnessing the power of Lordean rage to bring about positive change and generate solidarity with others.

The political anger in which Cherry is interested is not limited to the domains of the ivory tower. She notes at the outset that her target audience is diverse: ‘the academic and activist, the philosopher and citizen’ (p. 8). Indeed, from the philosophically rich defence of Lordean rage of Chapters 1 to 3 to the practical but more descriptive details of Chapters 4 to 6, the book progresses in a way that captures the multiple interests and knowledge that her readers will bring. Commendably, even the predominantly theoretical discussions, for instance of notions like fittingness and representational correctness, are accessible to a non-technical reader without watering down the content.

For a philosopher, though, the first part of the book is particularly rewarding. One might worry that Cherry’s narrow focus on political anger in response to racism and racial injustices – and specifically on ‘Lordean rage’ – risks framing the analysis in such a way that Lordean rage will be automatically justified. But this is not the case. As Cherry highlights, discussions of anger often treat it in ‘broad strokes’ (p. 11), as a generalised and one-dimensional emotion that is aimed only at destruction. Yet, we recognise that other emotions – love as the prime example – come in multiple, nuanced shades. By introducing different dimensions along which anger can differ and using the framework to assess merits and problems facing anger, Cherry forcefully demonstrates how anger too is a multifarious phenomenon.

Within this framework for thinking about anger, Cherry's narrow focus is justified and timely. She lays the groundwork for deepening conceptual engagement with our affective lives for the academic and philosopher, while providing a comprehensive and informed resource for the activist and citizen.

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