Keeping the Moral Score

David Heyd

To cite this article: David Heyd (2018): Keeping the Moral Score, Criminal Justice Ethics

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0731129X.2018.1499699

Published online: 06 Aug 2018.
REVIEW ESSAY

Keeping the Moral Score


DAVID HEYD*

*I would strike you, were I not angry*¹

Love and generosity are by their nature boundless, free from calculation. However, much of human interaction and particularly relations of justice are based on keeping score. Keeping score is by definition backward-looking. Like in sport, it is constituted by recording past events and retaining them in memory for some future use. Even forgiveness, as will be argued below, is characterized by some element of retention of past events since, as most analysts of the concept agree, forgiveness does not simply mean forgetting the offense. Justice, from Anaximander, through Plato, to the emblem of the blindfolded goddess holding a pair of scales, is a concept of balancing. Neither desert nor punishment, neither gratitude nor revenge, can be dispensed without keeping score.

In her impressively rich book on anger and forgiveness, Martha Nussbaum provides a broad and deep critique of score-keeping in general and of moral and legal score-keeping in particular. Her starting point is the detailed examination of anger, that universal emotion which was studied by ethical theories of the past but which has been ignored by modern moral philosophy. The book then presents an argument for forgiveness as one way of overcoming the dangers of anger and specifically argues for unconditional forgiveness. But since forgiveness is only a second-best solution to the drawbacks of anger, Nussbaum proposes the attitudes of love and generosity as the normative ideal. SETTLING accounts is anathema to Nussbaum in both personal relations and in the impersonal realm of justice. It is harmful to both the individual’s psychological health

---

¹David Heyd is the Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel. Email: david.heyd@mail.huji.ac.il

© 2018 John Jay College of Criminal Justice of The City University of New York
and to the welfare of society. Utilitarian reasoning calls for an overall forward-looking attitude as a frame of mind and as a political principle.

The book is thoughtfully structured, moving from the personal level of intimate relations, through the level of interpersonal relations in the public domain (what Nussbaum refers to as the “Middle Realm”), to the political level which is essentially institutional and legal. Nussbaum displays her well-known scholarship in both classical philosophy and world literature by interweaving into the argument close analyses of literary texts, examination of speeches and diaries of political leaders, and reports of personal experiences. In its general tone and philosophical approach Nussbaum’s book follows Bernard Williams (to the memory of whom the book is dedicated). It does not offer a “theory” and avoids the language of duty and rights; it shuns the idea of guilt as the basis for moral behavior and keeps away from a system of moral rules.

In this review essay I will try roughly to follow the structure of the book, starting with the exposition of the concept of anger (or rather the problem of anger), and then examining the three levels on which anger is displayed (the intimate, the everyday interpersonal, and the political) and the different ways it should be dealt with or managed. The thread of my critical comments will be the centrality of keeping score in interpersonal relations since this is exactly the theoretical framework that is challenged by Nussbaum’s thesis. But the reader should realize that there is no way a book review can cover or do justice to the complexity of the phenomena examined in the book and the wide range of approaches (philosophical, literary, and psychological) under which Nussbaum studies them.

The Emotion of Anger

Anger is a negative emotion, causing pain to the subject and unease to its object or addressee. It is what P. F. Strawson has called a “reactive attitude.” It is an emotional response to some harm, offense or wrong done to a person. In seventeenth-century parlance it is referred to as “passive,” since it is triggered by external circumstances over which the subject has limited control. Philosophers commonly regard emotional control and self-control as the norm of the rational agent and hence are inclined to regard anger as an emotion which ultimately must be overcome, curbed or at least controlled so as not to be expressed in action. Anger may be temporary, but its cognates, often arising out of it, may have long-lasting harmful effect on the subject. Thus, vindictiveness and vengefulness, hate and reduced self-image, are often said to be “poisonous,” taking control over the emotional life of the individual.

Nussbaum points out two main sources that trigger anger: significant injury and the undermining of the relative status of the individual (“down-ranking”). The angry response consists of some idea of “payback” or retribution—the wish to cause pain to the wrongdoer. The primary object of anger is a human being but the anger toward him or her is always associated with some act of that person (unlike the emotional
response of revulsion or disgust of which a person can be the target independently of any behavior or action). Nussbaum’s normative claim is that the payback attitude is irrational and undesirable since, on the one hand, the injury done to the offender cannot remove the offense itself and, on the other hand, the reversal of relative status is futile because status is not that important (15).\(^2\)

It is not clear whether this “personalized” characterization of anger is not overly narrow. Anger is quite a common expression of frustration (rather than injury or offense). When we drop a glass and it breaks into pieces and we utter a four-letter word, this is an expression of anger, and even if the target of the emotion is our own self, we do not feel offended or even harmed by a wrongful act, nor do we feel insulted. It is sheer sense of frustration, an unexpected undermining of our goal-oriented action. It is no different from what we feel when our child or a negligent guest in our home drops the same glass. “The vending machine rage” is described by Nussbaum in anthropomorphic terms of “the right to expect ‘respect’ and cooperation from inanimate objects” (18), but this seems to be an overstretched extension of the way children express their anger indiscriminately at human beings and mere material objects. Adults are not offended by failing machines, nor are they trying to take revenge on them, even if out of frustration they violently shake them in an attempt to make them work. The sense of helplessness, mentioned by Nussbaum as characterizing anger, is closely associated with frustration rather than with retribution. I should also add that Nussbaum’s interpretation of the anger of the biblical God as the response to an injury to his status is not very persuasive, since in exactly the same way that God cannot be harmed, he cannot really suffer a loss in status. Accordingly, it makes better sense to understand God’s anger at his chosen people as a sign of parental impatience and frustration rather than down-ranking.

It is definitely the case that anger is often accompanied by retaliatory fantasies. Many expressions of anger, such as “go to hell,” attest to such vengeful wishes. But I think that Nussbaum loses an important category of angry responses in avoiding a clear distinction between anger and resentment. In accordance with her Williams-like approach, she deliberately ignores the distinction between the moral kind of anger (resentment) and other sorts of anger. In Appendix C of the book, she treats anger as a generic concept, and rather than defining species (subcategories) of anger, she prefers examining the nature of the wrongdoing triggering anger case by case. Nevertheless it seems plausible to generalize that the payback analysis of anger better fits moral anger, which naturally calls for redress by the reciprocal infliction of harm on the offender than the anger caused by an ineffective bank teller or by an inflexible flight attendant.

The blurring of the distinction between the moral and non-moral leads Nussbaum to the depreciation of the element of keeping score, which I believe is essential in a moral relationship, both on the private, interpersonal level and on the political institutional level. As Jean Améry has taught us, resentment lies at the core of the moral response to evil, and ignoring it or trying to
overcome it by forgiveness or generous love may often be a sign of a lack of moral integrity. In Améry’s case, even though “payback” is irrelevant, moral status is all that counts! More than wishing to see the perpetrator of the crime go to hell, the victim wants him to stand in front of him and look into his eyes—to stand on an equal moral footing. As we shall see below, the collapse of the distinction between morality and love makes it hard for Nussbaum to acknowledge the inextricable backward-looking element in moral relations as well as in legal justice and the system of punishment.

Furthermore, although in most cases anger does not involve the wish to take revenge, it should be noted that vengefulness is not in itself a morally defective emotion. As Nussbaum beautifully shows in the opening chapter of the book, the revolutionary transition in Greek mythology from a revenge-based family culture to the justice-based political community, epitomized in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, is the foundation of our whole political and legal culture. But that does not imply that all vengeful emotions and even some of their expressions are morally wrong. The price of the transition from *lex talionis* to legal justice is the loss of the personal dimension in the interpersonal relation of offender and victim. This personal dimension is of value not only in acts of generosity and help, but also in acts of response to crimes and offenses. Although my main goal in giving you some gift is your happiness and welfare, I want you to know that it was I who gave it to you. Similarly, if you are always late to our meetings, and I am angry about it, I am not satisfied by some third party punishing your behavior by being herself late in meeting you. I want to personally convey that message to you, either verbally or through teaching you a lesson. So obviously revenge is not a legitimate alternative to justice, but even contemporary legal systems are gradually acknowledging the importance of this personal dimension. For example, rape victims or families of murdered people are given some standing in the decision of the court about punishment or about pardon. Doing justice is not the exclusive business of the state: the victim has some role in it (beyond serving as witness).

The positive alternative to the irrational fantasy of redress through retaliation and to the false belief in status reversal is, according to Nussbaum, Transition-Anger; that is, a transformation of the initial emotional response into a forward-looking effort to restore relationship through generosity and love. Anger itself becomes in this model a tool in turning our attention to the wrongdoing and the necessity to correct it either by changing the frame of mind of the wrongdoer, or by addressing the background social conditions that gave rise to the wrongdoing.

The justification of holding a theoretically clear distinction between the moral and the morally neutral kinds of interpersonal relations may be explained through Nussbaum’s own distinction between anger on the one hand, and envy, hatred, and disgust on the other (48ff.). For, as she points out, the latter are all focused on permanent traits of the person (their “target”), whereas in anger the target is the person but the “focus” is the wrongful act of that person. But in contrast to envy and disgust, this is exactly what lends anger in
many typical cases a moral character. And if that is the case, it is not as irrational as it is presented, and the way to overcome it is not necessarily through love and generosity, which call for disregarding the past in favor of a brighter future.

Intimate relations (spouses, parent–children) are naturally the closest candidates for the ideal of love and generosity. Nussbaum admits that obviously they are accompanied by daily occasions for anger. Anger, she says, is often “well-grounded” (as in cases of betrayal or exploitation), but adds that “full-fledged anger is never appropriate” (113). If the relationship is maintained, the partners should strive as quickly as possible to transform anger to Transition-Anger and achieve the desired restoration of the relationship. If the relationship is broken, the (offended) partner should turn anger into grief, focusing on the loss rather than on the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer.

Nussbaum’s approach, despite its positive and healthy ambience, is unrealistic and even normatively problematic. After all, there is a major difference, even in the long run, between the loss of a loved partner due to premature death and such loss due to the partner moving to live with another partner. We are again facing the deep fact that even in the most intimate relationship, score-keeping is unavoidable, understandable, and morally (and even psychologically) right. I dare suggest that anger is an emotion which expresses the idea of the separateness of persons (not exactly in Rawls’ sense, although related to it): individuals—even in relations of love, parenthood, friendship, and social solidarity—remain individuals with their personal sense of dignity and with their unique set of interests and concern for themselves. This separateness introduces an inevitable element of accounting into their relationship with others. Indeed, there are some relationships in which accounting is suspended or ignored (giving to children without expectation of return, intimate love, deep friendship, solidarity with members of one’s close community). But these are isolated (albeit precious) aspects of our daily relations in the personal and public spheres and are always prone to become calculative once the relationship breaks down (in cases of betrayal of trust or love, neglect of old parents by indifferent children, disappointment in friendship).

It seems that the controversial issue regarding Nussbaum’s general approach of overcoming anger in terms of love and generosity has to do with the concept of love. The concept is not defined or given a theoretical framework in the book. But it seems to be an all-embracing attitude of human beings towards all other human beings. It is used in personal as well as impersonal relations, in moral as well as in morally neutral contexts, in the intimate as well as the public spheres. This notion of love seems to be closer to the concept of agape than to what we commonly understand by the concept in modern discourse. Love, in that discourse, is an emotional attitude we feel towards people who are uniquely related to us. Its sphere is that of intimacy, the family, and friendship. Unlike generosity and compassion (which Nussbaum constantly associates with love), love is not a general trait of character or inclination and is not shown indiscriminately or to complete strangers. It is
accordingly a relatively rare kind of relationship which does not characterize most of our interpersonal interactions in the world (in the workplace, in the shopping mall, in the political sphere, in the neighborhood).\(^5\)

Thus, most interpersonal relations, not being based on love, are subject to some principles of reciprocity, obligations, rights, and legitimate expectations, and in that sense include some form of accounting. Accounting is not necessarily petty as might be understood from Nussbaum’s analysis. The fact that between friends one helps the other in times of need without them having to manage a balance sheet of each act of assistance does not mean that the helping practice may be continuously and consistently only one-sided. Most relationships are reciprocal in some way and to be so they contain some sort of give-and-take. Romantic love and parental love are the exceptions rather than the rule.

It is therefore quite a radical claim on the part of Nussbaum that “a positive love of others, combined with compassion at their predicaments, seems to be a sufficient motive for moral conduct, and a much less problematic one [than guilt]” (131). If guilt is a form of being angry at myself, as Nussbaum suggests, then self-love and self-compassion should be the transformative tool to overcome anger. But then it is doubtful whether that would suffice to lead the angry/guilty subject to the correct treatment of others (respecting their rights, fulfilling one’s duty to them, sharing with them the just portion of some good).

---

**Dealing with Anger**

It seems that we can identify in the book three general strategies of dealing with anger (based on the assumption that anger is an emotion which should better be avoided or overcome due to its price for both the individual subject and her social surroundings): (1) Preventing the very occurrence of anger either through the avoidance of circumstances which trigger it, or through the development of indifference to the anger-causing stimuli; (2) Forgiveness as a way of genuine restoration of the original relationship without wiping out the awareness of the wrongdoing which gave rise to the anger; (3) The channeling of anger into a positive approach based on utilitarian considerations of social welfare, psychological reasons concerning the health of the subject, and normative considerations regarding the intrinsic superiority of love, compassion, and generosity.

The first strategy is discussed in detail in the fifth chapter of the book, mainly through a critical examination of the Stoics (and particularly Seneca’s *De Ira*). This strategy may be referred to as the “preventive” way: one should avoid anger in the first place. One pragmatic guide in achieving this goal is simply to evade people who tend to make one angry or to sidestep irritating circumstances. Despite looking like a reasonable way of sparing oneself from the negative emotion of anger, I believe that this strategy comes with a price: it significantly narrows down one’s social interaction and limits the way we deal with the world around us. Such a policy may even be treated as cowardly or over (self-)protective.
(Tongue-in-cheek, Nussbaum recommends to writers of books to spare themselves the risk of anger by “not reading reviews of [their] own books” [167]!) Anger is a genuine emotional response in interpersonal relations and is part and parcel of their ups and downs. Slighting the importance of injury or offense, as recommended by both Seneca and Nussbaum, or always taking them with a sense of humor, may indeed seem psychologically less costly to the individual but it is also less authentic. Without wishing to sound Hegelian, I would argue that never showing anger at another person implies lack of respect for him or her, not taking them as worthy enough to be the target even of anger.

The second strategy for avoiding anger, to which the whole of chapter 3 is devoted, is overcoming it through forgiveness. Forgiveness involves not only giving up hostile behavior of the victim towards the wrongdoer, but also an inner change of heart, the restoration of the original friendly emotions. This change of heart implies the abandonment of (or overcoming) the emotional state of anger. Forgiveness is, consequently, an effective way to free oneself from anger by the detachment of the (wrongful or offensive) act (to which Nussbaum refers as “the focus” of anger) from the agent (who is “the target” of the emotion). However, Nussbaum correctly notices that the classical model of forgiveness is “transactional” in nature; it requires the other side (the forgiven party, the wrongdoer) to fulfill strict conditions of acknowledgment of his wrongful act, contrition, commitment not to repeat that kind of behavior, and apology. As Nussbaum demonstrates in an illuminating way, this classical model originates in the biblical tradition (both Jewish and Christian). The model in this tradition is the relations between human beings and God, and hence the focus is laid on the fulfillment of these conditions (teshuvah in Judaism; confession and self-inflicted pain in Christianity) on the part of the forgiven party, rather than on the motive and change of heart in the forgiver. If that is the case, we are back to the idea of keeping score, which Nussbaum’s project shuns. For we are drawn back to the same two negative elements of anger, paying back and the down-ranking of status.

Nussbaum suggests a bold alternative to transactional forgiveness—unconditional forgiveness. The original offender is not expected to “give” anything in return for being forgiven. The sole party in the act of forgiveness is the forgiver (original victim). It involves spontaneous mercy and a unilateral decision to forgo hostility. But even this kind of forgiveness does not satisfy Nussbaum’s project, since although it may serve to overcome anger, it still maintains some element of superiority (of the forgiver, who is considered even nobler than his transactional forgiving counterpart), as well as a backward-looking accountancy (“despite remembering well what you did to me, I unconditionally forgive you”). So we are called to move to the third strategy, which goes beyond forgiveness, namely “unconditional love” (78). As the New Testament quoted by Nussbaum says, love “does not become angry and does not keep score of wrongs done” (78). It ignores the past and indeed any “negative record” of the loved one.

It is thus no coincidence that Nussbaum illustrates her ideal of
unconditional love by the story of the Prodigal Son. Illustrations from contexts outside parenthood (and maybe some other intimate relations) are hard to come by. Parent–child relationship is the rare exception rather than the model of interpersonal relations, which are typically conditioned by mutual trust and reciprocity. As Nussbaum notes, the father (including that of the Prodigal Son) does not have to overcome anger or resentment since he does not feel them to begin with. It follows that parental unconditional acceptance of a child and boundless love to him or her cannot serve as a model for most other relationships, which do give rise to anger and often to resentment. Offenses in the contexts of these relations cannot be brushed aside by their victim swept by love for the offender. The anger has to be dealt with in some way—revenge, forgiveness, dissociation from the offender, punishment, or reconciliation.

The response of forgiveness in interpersonal relations is so much more common and serves as a more realistic model for overcoming anger than the unconditional love of father to son. And in defense of forgiveness I should add that it is not necessarily as “transactional” as it is described by Nussbaum. I have elsewhere offered a detailed analysis and justification of forgiveness as a supererogatory act, arguing that even after the offender has undergone the process of acknowledgment, regret, apology, and commitment never to repeat the offense, the offended party is under no duty to forgive. In contrast to Nussbaum (65), forgiveness must always be given freely. It is never automatic and can never be claimed as the offender’s transactional right (although it may be granted even to offenders who have neither apologized nor asked to be forgiven). According to the supererogatory analysis of forgiveness, what makes it morally valuable and often touching lies not in the display of love shown towards the offender but in its being beyond the duty of the victim, who has a full right to feel angry and express resentment, but nevertheless renounces them.

Nussbaum is aware that the Prodigal Son story is not the paradigm for common relations in the Middle Realm. The transformation of anger into love involves an effort that is exercised in the interim stage called Transition-Anger (35–6). It is a kind of anger that is completely forward-looking, free from vindictiveness, and solely oriented at the amelioration of future social welfare. It is manifest in expressions such as “How outrageous; something should be done about it!” It is far from being love but is still more constructive than pure anger or poisonous resentment. Martin Luther King’s speeches are illustrations of this kind of Transition-Anger; so are parental responses to irritating children, or the moral indignation we feel in the face of an injustice in our society.

I am not sure how Transition-Anger operates in the intimate sphere. In the common interpersonal sphere, especially in non-moral contexts, anger can indeed be channeled from anger at the bank clerk to a proposal to reform the management of the operations of the bank in order to improve the service and spare the customers from frustration in the face of superfluous rigid rules. But if the anger is of the “outrage form,” it is often closer to resentment or moral anger and hence involves blaming the source of anger on a
more personal level. However, regardless of our view on this matter in the Middle Realm, the distinction between the two kinds of anger is no doubt important and theoretically productive in the political sphere, to which we now move, following the structure of the book.

Politics without Anger?

I raised some doubts about the undesirability of anger on the intimate and the interpersonal (Middle Realm) levels, and about Nussbaum's plea for overcoming it by love or at least by unconditional forgiveness. But her case against anger is strong and persuasive in the third, political sphere of human interaction. The book starts with the famous transition from a community based on a continuous series of acts of revenge and counter-revenge to a *polis* organized on the basis of impersonal principles of justice, idealizing gentle temperament and good will, emotional self-control, and social solidarity. Nussbaum describes this transition through the famous *Oresteia* trilogy, where the vengeful Furies are restrained and submitted to Athena's law of justice. Nussbaum's original addition to the meaning of this transformation is that the Furies are not only constrained by law, but also undergo internal change. Their ugly looks and bloodthirsty demeanor is replaced by a "gentle temper" and love of the city. They become the Kindly Ones (Eumenides). In Nussbaum's theoretical terms, the anger they originally represented transforms into Transition-Anger and then to love. In the psychoanalytic idiom, it is not a case of repression or even of mere sublimation (of anger), but a radical change of the initial psychic force itself.

Nussbaum emphasizes that the Furies cannot be just expelled from the city. They are needed, since due to human imperfection corrective justice will always be part of the *polis*. Corrective justice requires the "sense of accountability," although not necessarily retribution. I would like to argue that although the spirit of the law is geared to social welfare and prosperity, and in that sense it is forward-looking, the "sense of accountability" in Athenian justice requires some backward-looking score-keeping and desert-based allocation of punishments (as is the case in awarding prizes). So even if anger and *lex talionis* are driven off from Greek society, and justice is implemented in its cold, impersonal, and impartial guise, it cannot be purely based on the motive of love on the one hand, and on pure utilitarian considerations on the other. Love and compassion cannot be "precisely targeted, measured, and proportional" (4), but the system of punishment in (criminal) justice cannot ignore the basic correlation of penalties and the offenses for which they are imposed.

At the beginning of the seventh chapter Nussbaum asks the reader to imagine justice anthropomorphically: what attitudes should such a mythic figure display? She is certainly right that justice should not show anger (I would add, not even Transition-Anger). It should also be fair and impartial. Actually, these are exactly the character traits that we are looking for when we nominate court.
judges. But then she adds a more controversial feature—that of “spirit of generosity that goes beyond strict legalism.” It is not easy to understand what such spirit consists of in the actual operation of a court of justice. Nussbaum gives a detailed description of how an empathetic judge should deal with a young first-time perpetrator of a crime, bringing up all the reasonable considerations regarding mitigating circumstances and the chances of the criminal’s reform. But these are hard to extend to the ordinary cases of hard-core criminals whom judges or juries face on a daily basis. We do not usually expect them to be treated in the spirit of generosity. It is true that judges should act in the light of the spirit of the law (rather than the letter of the law), but that does not mean that they should act in a generous way. Again, like in love, Nussbaum does not analyze the concept of generosity itself. It seems that at least in its core meaning, generosity is typically supererogatory, and even if it can be expected between friends, it cannot guide the implementation of distributive or retributive justice. Generosity is open-ended and hence not necessarily compatible with impartiality and equal standing before the law.

Nussbaum admits that the retributive theory of punishment is not necessarily based on anger or vindictiveness and hence she needs a further argument against it. She examines the more sophisticated versions of retributivism (Herbert Morris’ and Michael Moore’s) but concludes that ultimately they cannot avoid relying on some form of lex talionis or retributive emotions. She may be right, but even if there are retributive theories that can do away with any negative emotion of anger, the fact remains that justice must be based on score-keeping by which any generous or compassionate attitude of judges must be constrained. Another problem with Nussbaum’s ideal of justice as generosity is that it is incompatible with deterrence, which serves her as the major justification of punishment. Deterrence cannot work without the intentional, calculated, and public infliction of suffering on the wrongdoer (including some unavoidable element of shaming). It is true that the suffering of the convict does not “atone” for the harm he did, but it must definitely be “proportional” to what he did (193), otherwise it would lose its deterrent effect.

A special case of anger in the political realm is that of “revolutionary justice”; that is, transitions from one legal constitutional system to another. Three conspicuous cases of revolutionary justice serve Nussbaum in the final chapter of the book. They are represented by the exemplary figures of Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. Revolutionary justice is a particularly interesting category in the context of Nussbaum’s project since radical changes in the political realm are typically motivated by anger—the response to oppression, colonization, and discrimination. (Although in the past year or two we have witnessed the power of anger to bring also significant—even if not revolutionary—changes in the political scene in many western democratic countries.) Such political anger is often referred to as “noble,” since, according to Nussbaum, it has three positive functions: it is a signal that people recognize the wrongness of their oppression, it gives them motivation to change the
situation, and it is justified as the correct response to evil. However, Nussbaum sees political anger as a “false guide” (212). She reapplies her distinction between the transactional and unconditional forms of forgiveness, which was discussed earlier in the book in the non-political context of interpersonal relations, and again argues for the superiority of the latter. Her argument is that the struggle for political justice can be “tainted” by transactional forgiveness. The wise avoidance of transactional forgiveness in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commissions proves Nussbaum’s point. In the political sphere (unlike the personal), apology and expressions of regret can easily become merely ceremonial and aimed instrumentally at getting off the hook. But it is hard to see how unconditional forgiveness can achieve a significant political change. Forgiveness in general is personal rather than collective and can be granted only by the direct victim of a wrongdoing. No political leader can forgive crimes in the name of their victims.

And here again, Nussbaum expresses her direct preference for love and generosity to forgiveness. She accepts the idea, promoted by both King and Gandhi, that non-violence can be inculcated in the oppressed group only through a mental and emotional transformation, that is to say moving from animosity and vengefulness to love and solidarity. Although she believes that this is not an unrealistic ideal, she tends to agree with King that some concession must be made for “the well-grounded anger,” as long as it is channeled toward the Transition (218). But she refuses to accept the other part of Gandhi’s view that non-anger entails pacifism and an absolute ban on violence. It is hard to assess the measure of success of the “non-anger” strategy, since all three struggles for liberation have been historically accompanied by angry and violent action and the results of all of them have been mixed. But it seems that politics completely free from anger can no more be expected than friendship or daily interaction between individuals can be free from anger, grudge, and resentment. And perhaps such expectation is not even a moral ideal.

Notes

[Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author]

1 Socrates to his slave, as quoted by Seneca in On Anger, Book I, section 15.

2 All references to Nussbaum’s book will be given in parentheses in the body of the text.


4 Bar-elli and Heyd, “Can Revenge Be Just?” 68–86.

5 Nussbaum’s account is in full line with Spinoza’s Proposition 46 in the fourth part of his Ethics: “He who lives under the guidance of reason endeavours as much as possible to repay his fellow’s hatred, rage, contempt, etc., with love and nobleness.” But again, it should be noted that Spinoza is not speaking here about the just response to wrongdoing or harm, but rather about response to negative feelings or attitudes of another person (rage, hatred). For a similar seventeenth-century view, see Descartes in The Passions of the Soul, section 203, where he argues that the best remedy for anger is generosity. Both philosophers focus more on the virtue of
the individual than on the utilitarian considerations of social welfare.


**Bibliography**


