

Indignation and Hatred

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that indignation and hatred are essentially different on the grounds that hatred is by its nature dehumanizing while indignation essentially involves the recognition of the humanity of its object. I will examine two challenges to my thesis. The first challenge to maintaining an essential difference between hatred and indignation is concerned with how hatred is often masked in a veneer of apparent indignation. The second challenge is to explain how hatred can grow out of unaddressed indignation and yet remain a distinct emotion.

Indignation and hatred are essentially different types of emotion. They differ essentially in that hatred is by its nature dehumanizing while indignation, by its nature, involves the recognition of the humanity of its object. Nevertheless, hatred and indignation are intimately related and I aim investigate some aspects of how they are related in explicating their essential difference. One common connection between hatred and indignation is concerned with how hatred is often masked in a veneer of apparent indignation. We will also look into how hatred can grow out of unaddressed indignation and yet remain a distinct emotion.

The Essential Difference

Indignation is a moral emotion. Quite literally, to feel indignant is to feel that one's dignity has been compromised, that one has been disrespected or treated unjustly in some significant way. Indignation often manifests in anger. But unlike anger that stems from jealousy or mere

frustration, anger as an expression of indignation is, or is regarded by the person who suffers indignation, as anger that is justified on moral grounds. In speaking of an emotion as justified, I am presuming a certain view of the nature of emotions as going beyond mere passions, entirely disconnected from the intellect. Rather, I will take at least some emotions, most notably moral emotions to involve intelligence, judgment and imagination in integral ways. According views about the nature of the emotions are recently developed in substantial detail by Martha Nussbaum^[1] and Richard Wollheim.^[2] The imagination is involved in indignation, not necessarily in the sense of fabrication and fiction, but in the sense of seeing as. A person suffering indignation sees themselves as being in a certain kind of morally damaged state relative to some potentially morally culpable entity that is the object of indignation.^[3] A moral judgment is presumed in such seeing as. As indignation involves a moral judgment it must also be understood as theory laden and fallible. Thus we understand indignation as the emotional response to an actual or *merely perceived* affront to ones dignity.

The expression of indignation in anger can be understood as a reflection of self- respect that conveys a demand for respect. When a person is treated in a way that is seen as significantly at odds with her sense of her own dignity, indignant anger is a means of reasserting her dignity in the face of treatment seen as a violation of it. Understanding indignant anger as a demand for respect presupposes the humanity or personhood of its object. It makes little sense to demand respect of demons, for instance. Demons are to be feared, but not to be demanded of. So, indignation is not demonization. This points out the essential difference between indignation and hatred. Indignation presupposes the humanity of its object. My indignation towards another is only appropriately regarded as indignation to the degree that I see that being as capable of

treating me justly and therefore as potentially culpable for failing to do so. So indignation, by its very nature, is not dehumanizing or demonizing.

Hatred, on the other hand, is a destructive emotion. Hatred of another involves willing the partial or complete destruction of another via the frustration of their ends. Hatred is opposed to love in just the way. Aristotle defines love as adopting the good of another as a final end of ones own.^[4] Contrary to love, hatred can be understood as adopting what is bad for another, the frustration of some or all of their ends, as a final end of ones own. For hatred to be present, it matters that what is bad for another be adopted as a final end. The executioner who wields his axe with gusto merely in the hope of winning favor with his superiors need not hate his victims. In understanding hatred as willing the partial or complete destruction of another, we can see hatred as essentially dehumanizing.

The demonization of another is hateful in the Aristotelian sense just discussed. Demonization of another involves seeing them as fit for partial or complete destruction. Demonization can also be seen as opposed to love on a more Christian conception. Christian love involves the exercise of charity in one's conception of others. Charitable understanding of another involves seeing the other as human and therefore reflecting the good nature of the divine. Demonization, on the other hand, involves seeing the other in the least charitable light available.

Since hatred is by its nature dehumanizing and indignation is not dehumanizing, hatred and indignation are essentially different. If this analysis is on the right track, then indignation can not be hatred. But defending the essential difference between the two requires meeting some challenges. For indignation and hatred seem intimately related in a couple of respects. First, it is often hard to tell the difference between the two. This is partly explained by the fact that both frequently manifest in anger. But in addition to this, it seems that genuine hatred is often masked

in veneer of indignation. A racist hatred of Hispanics, for instance, might be cloaked in apparent indignation towards undocumented workers for their failure to respect immigration policy.

Defending the essential difference between indignation and hatred requires explaining how the indignation like veneer that frequently masks hatred is not genuine indignation. Second, indignation, when it goes unaddressed, can sour and develop into hatred. Maintaining the essential difference between indignation and hatred requires some account of processes whereby we can identify a genuine shift from one emotion to an emotion of an essentially different type. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to answering these two challenges to the essential difference between hatred and indignation.

Hatred in the Veneer of False Indignation

It does seem possible that the racist who harbors hatred for Hispanics can also be indignant towards Hispanic undocumented workers for their law breaking behavior. Folks who are angry about illegal immigration could fall into at least one of three categories. First is the person who bears no ill will towards people of Hispanic origin but harbors indignation for law breakers in general. Second is the person who both harbors racist hatred and indignation towards lawbreakers. And third is the person harbors racist hatred and merely rationalizes this hatred in terms of apparent indignation towards lawbreakers. An indicator of membership in the third category might be the absence of similar indignation towards citizens who break the law in employing undocumented workers. Of course, people who fall in the latter two categories are likely to claim membership in the first and while this claim may be sincere, it may also be a piece of moral self-deception. But our concern here is not with ascribing people with negative

sentiments towards undocumented workers to one or another of these three categories. Rather it is just to account for the possibility of membership in one or another of the later two categories.

We can account for possible membership in the third category, where hatred is wrapped in a veneer of apparent indignation, by simply denying that such apparent indignation is genuine indignation. Such false indignation is a self-deceptive emotion. It differs from genuine indignation in that it is not grounded in principled moral belief but rather grounded in uncritical arbitrary moral opinion cultivated solely for the purposes of making one's hatred palatable to one's self and socially acceptable.

Accounting for the possibility of membership in the second category, where hatred is held in conjunction with genuine indignation, is somewhat more challenging. I have argued that indignation and hatred are different types of emotion. But it does not follow that it is impossible for a person to harbor both hatred and indignation towards the same object. Allowing for the possibility of being both hateful and indignant towards the same person or people only requires allowing that people can exhibit a certain kind of emotional incoherence. But there is no problem here even if this emotional incoherence involves an incoherence of belief. People can and frequently are incoherent in their beliefs and attitudes.

When a person experiences both indignation and hatred of another, they occupy emotional states that involve logically incompatible judgments concerning the shared objects of indignation and hatred. Incoherently combining indignation and hatred thus indicates a failure of critical self-awareness. But a more critically self-aware person can also experience both indignation and hatred for another in a way that does not involve logical incoherence. One may be irresolute, torn between indignation and hatred. Consider the case of a previously charitable and loving person who has suffered an extreme indignity, say something on the order of rape. This person may be

torn between regarding the rapist as another person to held morally accountable for his actions and regarding the rapist as a mere dangerous beast that ought to be destroyed. The rape victim's virtue has been violated in a much more literal sense than popular associations of virtue with sexual chastity. The victim's irresolution between indignation and hatred may represent a crisis of character. Her previous habit of charitable mutual respect towards fellow human beings is significantly challenged and thwarted.

How Indignation can Malform into Hatred

When a demand for respect is not met, it can spoil. Indignation that goes unaddressed, or is perceived to be unaddressed, can become the roots of hatred. Such malformed indignation is intelligible. A person who is significantly wronged and whose demand for respect goes unaddressed may ultimately conclude that object of their indignation is not fully a human after all. The purported wrong-doer may come to appear to lack the rational capacities necessary to understand and repudiate their wrong doing. And the indignant party may then (though perhaps fallaciously) infer that the purported wrong-doer is not a full fledged moral agent and does not merit respect. Of course there are further steps beyond this to bearing ill will towards the purported wrong-doer. The product of this process may be hatred. Though it remains an open question whether understandable hatred is sometimes or ever a morally tenable emotion. In this section I will consider how hatred can develop from unaddressed indignation in further detail. We will also want to explore other perhaps more clearly morally tenable ways in which unaddressed indignation may be resolved. Giving an account of other morally tenable ways of resolving unaddressed indignation will constitute grounds for denying that unaddressed indignation can at any point be identified with hatred. Even if unaddressed indignation and

hatred can be suffered simultaneously, they must be distinct if we can plausibly deny any necessary connection between the two in the process by which indignation can lead to hatred.

Let us start by considering what it is for indignation to go unaddressed. We have characterized indignation as the emotional response to an actual or merely perceived violation of ones dignity. This suggests two ways in which indignation can be addressed. If the perceived injustice is a real injustice, then indignation can be addressed by the wrong-doer acknowledging and expressing remorse for the injustice. This way of addressing indignation opens a path for forgiveness and the restoration of the dignity of the indignant party.^[5]

When indignation is the product of a perceived but not actual injustice, it can in principle be addressed by explaining how the perceived injustice is not an actual injustice. When someone accidentally stomps on my foot, I may feel indignant. That indignation is successfully addressed when the stomper explains how the stomping occurred by accident; perhaps it could not have been avoided in the jostling of a crowd. Of course, in practice, successfully addressing indignation over a merely perceived injustice requires that the indignant party recognizes his own indignation as fallible. The dogmatically self-righteous person is liable to refuse to accept that their indignation has been addressed by a truthful explanation of the merely perceived but not actual injustice. In this sort of case I think we should say that the indignation has been addressed. Whether or not an episode of indignation is adequately addressed should not depend on the mere stubbornness of the indignant party. But indignation that is only perceived to be unaddressed is just as liable to develop into hatred as indignation that in fact goes unaddressed. So everything we will want to say about the process by which unaddressed indignation can develop into hatred applies equally to indignation that is only perceived to be unaddressed.

Here I will examine how unaddressed indignation can develop into hatred in terms of the more general theory of the emotions offered by Richard Wollheim. Wollheim offers a view of the emotions as real psychological dispositions (as opposed to mere Rylean tendencies). Emotions are real mental phenomena that are dispositional in the sense of producing characteristic manifestations in response to experience. Emotions manifest in attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. As dispositions of the mind emotions can best be understood in terms of their development in the life of a person. Wollheim's paradigm narrative of the development of an emotion begins with a desire. A standing desire grounded in self respect to be treated with respect can serve as the relevant desire in the case of indignation. Some fact or being is then perceived as satisfying or frustrating the desire. In the case of indignation, a person who is perceived to have violated one's dignity may be identified as frustrating one's desire to be treated respectfully. An attitude towards the perceived wrong-doer then takes root and persists. This attitude is the core of the emotion and it manifests itself in various mental states, dispositions and behaviors including, for instance, a judgment that one has been treated in a significantly disrespectful way, feeling of indignant anger, expressions of that anger in behavior. Further desires motivating actions may also be produced by the attitude at the core of an emotion. Wollheim emphasizes the contingent and varying nature of the connection between the attitude at the core of an emotion and desires that can motivate further action or be satisfied or frustrated thereby giving rise to further emotions. Never-the-less, in the case of some emotions, including indignation, there does appear to be a fairly reliable connection between the attitude at the core of the emotion and a desire to have one's dignity restored. Actions aimed at having one's indignation addressed may be motivated by a desire to have one's dignity restored in

conjunction with instrumental beliefs concerning how the alleged wrong-doer may be held to account or otherwise moved to address one's indignation.

Nothing described in the development of indignation involves any dehumanization of the perceived wrong-doer. But what happens when a desire to have one's indignation addressed gets frustrated. It is at this stage that hatred may develop. But if it does, it develops as a response to the frustration of a different desire than the desire that was the original source of indignation. Even if we take the desire to have one's indignation addressed to also be a manifestation of a more general desire to be treated with respect, the frustrated desire that is the source of hatred is distinct from any desire the frustration of which could have precipitated the indignation. For the desire to have that instance of indignation addressed could not have been present prior to the development of the indignation at issue.

While hatred is among the possible emotional responses to the frustration of one's desire to have one's indignation addressed, there are a number of other ways in which the frustration of this desire may be resolved. Hatred in this case stems, in part at least, from an inability to accept the frustration of the desire to have one's indignation addressed. But perhaps one can simply accept the frustration of this desire. This option should count as morally tenable to anyone who deems a life where their dignity is compromised in the specific manner at issue to be morally preferable to a life in which they harbor hatred themselves.

Vindication is another option for resolving unaddressed indignation. Here the person who has suffered an injustice demonstrates their worthiness of better treatment through further manifestations of their own humanity. Vindication in this sense is entirely different from vengeance. In the case of vengeance, a victim violates the dignity of his victimizer so as to bring

that person down to their own compromised level. Vindication is a fresh assertion of one's own value, not a devaluation of another.

Unaddressed indignation can also be transcended. This involves the victim of an injustice devaluing to insignificance the harm of the injustice suffered. Transcendence is, in essence, getting over it (minus the uncharitable judgment of brittleness commonly packaged with this as a popular bit of advice).

Finally, one may come to see the personhood and moral worth of one's victimizer as significantly degraded by their inability to address one's indignation and yet stop short of hatred. Not everything that falls short of full-fledged personhood is apt for destruction. One may simply come to see a being that has violated one's dignity as something less than a responsible moral agent, perhaps potentially hazardous, but neither good nor bad and merely to be carefully handled rather than destroyed.

Any of these and probably further attitudes yet may resolve the frustrated desire to have one's indignation addressed. Since unaddressed indignation does not necessarily lead to hatred, the two may be maintained as logically distinct. Further, given the intrinsic badness of hating, it is hard to see, in light of these alternatives, how hatred can be consistent with virtue. While indignation is compatible with virtue and even sometimes required by it, we can still maintain that harboring hatred is always detrimental to virtue. But let us bear in mind that it is virtue, not just action that is at issue here. Of course people are blameworthy and responsible for hateful actions. But to the degree that the emotion of hatred is something that can befall a person who suffers an extreme indignity, that person's virtue may be damaged without their being responsible or blameworthy for the emotion that impairs their virtue.

We should also note an ambiguity in talk of virtue in clarifying how hatred can impair virtue. We may speak of a person as being virtuous in the sense of being a morally admirable person or in the sense of having a character that is fit for a flourishing life. I think these two senses can be seen as distinct in considering how hatred can impair virtue. It might be harsh to deem the holocaust survivor a less good person in the sense of being morally admirable for his failure to overcome his hatred of the Nazis. To the contrary, we might even morally admire the holocaust survivor for bearing that burden of hatred with grace and dignity. But it is a burden none-the-less. And while carrying such a burden might make one stronger in some ways, it also makes it harder to run and dance. To the degree that one carries a burden of hatred as a result of suffering a grave injustice, that burden will be liable to impair one's functioning as a rational human being and so, to some degree, limit one's human flourishing.

^[1] Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

^[2] Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

^[3] Appropriate targets of indignation may include organizations, communities or institutions as well as persons. But for the sake of simplicity I will restrict my attention to persons as the objects of indignation.

^[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8.

^[5] Jeffrie G. Murphy, in *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) argues that forgiving a significant wrong in the absence of acknowledgment and remorse on the part of the wrongdoer undermines the self respect of the wronged party in that it amounts to accepting the denigrating assessment of the wronged party implicit in the action of the wrong doer.