Ressentiment : an anatomy

Aeschbach, Sébastien

RESSENTIMENT – AN ANATOMY

Sebastian Aeschbach

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Université de Genève

Directeur de thèse:

Professeur Kevin Mulligan, Università Della Svizzera italiana, Université de Genève

Président du Jury:

Professeur Fabrice Teroni, Université de Genève

Jury:

Professeur Julien Deonna, Université de Genève

Dr. Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Professor Peter Poellner, University of Warwick

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ABBREVIATIONS

MAX SCHELER

RAM: *Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* [1915]: Ressentiment, translated by COVER, Lewis B. & HOLDHEIM, William W. (2010), Marquette University Press, Milwaukee.

FORM: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* [1916]: Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values, translated by FRINGS, Manfred S. (1973), Northwestern University Press, Evanston.

ISK: *Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis* [1912]: The Idols of Self-knowledge, translated by LACHTERMAN, David R. (1992) in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston.

SYMP: *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühle und von Liebe und Hass* [1913]: The Nature of Sympathy, translated by HEATH, Peter, Archon Books, New York, 1970.

GW: *Gesammelte Werke*, in 15 Bänden, hrsg. von SCHELER, Maria and FRINGS, Manfred S., Francke Verlag, Bern und Bouvier Verlag, Bonn, 1954-1998.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

BGE: *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [1886]: Beyong Good and Evil, translated by NORMAN, Judith and edited by HORSTMANN, Rolf-Peter, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002

A: *Der Antihrist* [1888]: The Antichrist, translated by HOLLINGDALE, R. J., Penguin Book, London, 1991.

GM: *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [1887]: *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by DIETHE, Carole and edited by ANSELL-PEARSON, Keith,Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994

EH: *Ecce Homo: Wie man wird, was man ist* [1888]: Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is, translated by HOLLINGDALE, R. J., Penguin Book, London, 1992.

NB: *Nachlass. Frühjahr 1888*: Writings from the Late Notebooks, translated by STURGE, Kate, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

HAH: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* [1878]: Human, All Too Human, translated by FABER, Marion; LEHMAN, Stephen, Penguin Book, London, 1994.

WPP: *Der Wille zur Macht* [1901]: The Will to Power, translated by HOLLINGDALE, R. J. and KAUFMANN, Walter, Random House, New York, 1968.

KSA: *Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, de Gruyter, München und New York, 1980.

JOSEPH BUTLER

Sermons: *Fifteen Sermons* [1726-1792], G. Bell & Sons, London.

EMMANUEL KANT

MS: *Metaphysik der Sitten* [1797]: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by GREGOR, Mary and TIMMERMANN, Jens, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.

ADAM SMITH

TMS: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], Penguin Books, London, 2010.

THOMAS REID

EAP: *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* [1788], Edingburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2010.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ressentiment has long enjoyed a prominent position in the humanities. Hunger, thirst, sex and the drive for power as well as self-interest and amour-propre have always been taken seriously by sociologists, historians and literary critics. But the mechanism of *ressentiment* – referred to as such or not – is perhaps the only complex affective phenomenon to have attracted so much interest for so long. Taine, Tocqueville, Furet, and Greenfeld have used and described similar mechanisms in their analyses of revolutions and nationalism. Weber, Sombart, Scheler, Schoeck, and Ranulf use the concept of *ressentiment* in their sociological enquiries into capitalism, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the birth of criminal law. Literary critics have also employed the concept, notably Bernstein, Jameson, and Bloom, who depicts a tendency to reject the cannons of literature as an outcome of *ressentiment*. The Belgian writer and socialist de Man has diagnosed *ressentiment* in the form of the socialist's repressed envy of the bourgeois lifestyle. The most detailed analyses of the phenomenon are however the work of two philosophers, Nietzsche and Scheler, and of the sociologist and philosopher of rational choice theory, Elster.

Ressentiment is primarily an ordinary phenomenon, famously depicted in the fable of the fox who takes the sweet grapes to be sour because he cannot reach them. It is at work in the envious man who denigrates the achievement of his friend or devalues the possessions of his neighbour. It characterises the student who fails to understand the difficult topics of logic and thus comes to take rhetoric to be more important than logic or the passionate progressive who believes the rich are evil because he envies their wealth. It is also illustrated by the less common, but still important, example of the priests in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, who suffer from their weakness in comparison to the rulers, but turn their incapacity into virtues. It seems we often tend to attribute the vice of *ressentiment* to persons unable to live up to the demands of power and social prestige and who reactively endorse other, more accessible, values, or to the friend who sees himself as a moral hero compared to his richer, more talented, or simply luckier friends whom he thinks are immoral or evil. It is also associated with expressions of shallowness, Pharisaism, Tartufferie; we consider it to be a symptom of *ressentiment* that some adopt an attitude of self-righteous moral proselytism in order to feel better about themselves, propping up a feeling of moral superiority about the way of life or the good they have chosen.

A central aim of this essay is to provide an account of *ressentiment* which will be of use to literary critics, sociologists, historian, psychologists, and philosophers. But is this concept of any philosophical relevance? Historically, philosophers have attributed an important role to this phenomenon in their explanations of ideologies or other common evaluation patterns

(and their origins). Nietzsche considers it to be at the very root of our Western morality. What we evaluate today as right or wrong, good or evil, is the outcome of our *ressentiment* or the *ressentiment* of our ancestors. Scheler and many of his contemporaries consider *ressentiment* to be the origin of many, fashionable, ideologies and the main trait of the then rising figure of the bourgeois. On Scheler's view more particularly, humanitarianism, relativism, and the ethics of capitalism involve a set of claims and evaluations that individuals come to hold in the specific way which falls under the concept of *ressentiment*. Then of course, there is the natural interest some thinkers have always manifested for unveiling the true motivations behind our moral practices. Apart from Nietzsche and Scheler, one may mention Hume, the French moralists (de la Rochefoucauld, la Bruyère), Freud, Elster and more recently social psychologists and moral intuitionists (Haidt, Greene) as contributors to this vast program.

The analysis of *ressentiment* stands at the intersection of different branches of philosophy. It first raises many interesting challenges in the philosophy of mind. The way a variety of affective categories – feelings, desires, emotions, sentiments – may be related and organised in a united whole touches on the philosophy of emotions. Our ordinary usage of emotional terms is sometimes lax, and we tend to make many reductions. It is therefore worthwhile to determine the exact mental category *ressentiment* belongs to, how different it is from its neighbours, resentment, indignation, envy, anger and revenge, how it involves feelings of inferiority, of impotence, self-regarding attitudes (self-esteem, self-respect), how it rests on the reliving and repression of emotions, and how it relates to general character traits such as self-righteousness. *Ressentiment* may also account for a possible, and important, relation between hostile and moral emotions. Second, ever since Nietzsche employed and discussed the concept of *ressentiment* in the *Genealogy*, the phenomenon has been taken to touch on ethics as it has a strong relation to ethical disvalue. More generally, it involves many axiological categories, a point to which we shall return often in what follows. *Ressentiment*, we shall argue, is best understood as a psychological mechanism that manipulates evaluations in a certain way with the goal of feeling better about oneself. Its analysis makes it necessary to employ the important distinction between non-conceptual and conceptual attitudes in our experience of values, as well as in our inner perception of emotions and feelings. *Ressentiment* illustrates how moral judgements may be based on our relation to non-moral values, an insight we owe to Scheler. Third, apart from the philosophy of value, *ressentiment* also remains a case-study for the philosophy of rationality. Elster for example focuses on the phenomenon's practical and epistemic rationality. But most importantly, *ressentiment* implies a form of self-deception, one however that does not fit the standard accounts of doxastic self-deception as it does not necessarily involve contradictory beliefs. Finally, the analysis of *ressentiment* also touches on disciplines outside philosophy. Scheler's aim for example is to

provide a sociology of *ressentiment*, which entails a different kind of claim, namely causal explanations.

Ressentiment by any account is a complex affective phenomenon; it has many different parts and aspects and comes in different variants. Many authors have described only a part of it, and most refer to the phenomenon with different expressions. There is hence the philosophical problem to determine with precision what sort of expression should be used and clarify the many linguistic ambiguities around this concept. But there is also the philosophical problem of finding out what sort of phenomenon it is, what parts and structure it has. The aim of this thesis is to develop an exhaustive analysis of this phenomenon and thus to clarify the concept. In order to do so, there are several important distinctions to be made from the very beginning as they will determine the structure our argument.

The structure of the thesis is determined by important preliminary distinctions we shall now briefly introduce. Some say, for example, that *ressentiment* is morally objectionable. This is a different sort of claim from the assertion that it is caused by wealth inequalities; both provide very important facts, if true, but the claims are of two different types. The former claim is *normative* and assesses the moral status of this emotion; the latter is *empirical* since the claim proposes a relation of psychological causality. In the first part, our approach will be phenomenological, that is, neither normative nor causal. In Chapter 2, we will provide definitions of some of *ressentiment*'s neighbours, namely resentment, indignation, anger and hatred. This clarificatory step is crucial as *ressentiment* regularly gets confused with resentment. Chapter 3 will focus on *ressentiment*. Avoiding normative and causal questions, we shall then examine "how it feels" to be a man of *ressentiment,* and provide a thorough description of this psychological mechanism, of its relation to emotions such as envy, revenge or hatred, and of its relation feelings of inferiority or impotence.[1] Claims of this ilk are typically *conceptual*. In the second part of Chapter 3, we will develop a detailed account of the impact this sentiment has on axiological judgements. This is the most salient characteristic according to both Nietzsche and Scheler, the two most important philosophers of *ressentiment*, and we should therefore carefully assess their arguments. Two kinds of *ressentiment* will be distinguished based on the difference between judgement-alterations that are value-devaluations and those which are merely object-devaluations. These forms will be called *strong* and *weak ressentiment*, respectively. We aim eventually to find an operational and systematic account of *ressentiment* that allows us to explain all its diverse and multifaceted manifestations. In Chapter 4, we shall determine the nature of *ressentiment*'s characteristic self-deception. More particularly, we will confront standard accounts of self-decep-

[1] Mulligan *in* Jacquette, 2004, p. 67

tion with the particular case of *ressentiment*. We will argue it involves a lack of self-knowledge and an illusion of inner perception where the individual fails to acknowledge his emotions and feelings and their values. In Chapter 5, we will investigate the reasons why *ressentiment*, and sometimes even its cousin, resentment, are the object of our moral opprobrium. This part of the inquiry addresses the normative dimension of the phenomenon but only to the extent that *ressentiment* bears some value in the same way in which other states of mind are usually considered good or bad. Finally, in Chapter 6, we shall confront our theory with the many sociological appeals to this psychological mechanism. The latter come in two kinds: either the occurrence of *ressentiment* is explained by reference to features of social structure, that is, without any recourse to subjective categories such as feelings or emotions, or the phenomenon and its nature are taken for granted and used to explain non-psychological facts and social events such as revolutions,[2] nationalism,[3] or ideologies such as Nazism.[4] Both types of claim are, of course, empirical, and as such they illustrate the possible extension of *ressentiment*.

In what follows we will again and again come up against very general questions in the philosophy of emotions, the philosophy of mind, phenomenology, the philosophy of value, rationality, and normativity. This thesis is not of course the place to provide answers to such general questions. The strategy adopted in what follows is to introduce these general questions if and when necessary in the course of the thesis and to indicate the answers presupposed. Often these answers are to be found in the writings of the early phenomenologists, sometimes they are to be found in contemporary philosophy of mind and value theory. Sometimes but not always an answer given by early phenomenology is also given by some philosophers in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. Thus Husserl's distinction between the proper and the improper or formal object of an emotion is sometimes defended in contemporary philosophy.[5] A phenomenology of the mind, especially in the Brentanian tradition, aims at building a taxonomy of the fundamental categories of the mind.[6] The latter are to be discovered through inner perception, memory of past experiences and observation of other people's experiences.[7] Although we embrace most methodological tenets of this philosophical school, we should make clear from the very beginning that we cannot here try to build a systematic typology of the different modes of consciousness.

2 Merton, 1996, p. 150.

3 Greenfield, 1994.

4 Schuman, 1936, p. 105.

5 Kenny, 1963; Teroni, 2007.

6 Mulligan *in* Jacquette, 2004; Brentano, 2014; Smith, 1994.

7 Eaton, 1930, p. 30.

2 WHAT IS RESENTMENT?

2.1 A definition of resentment (and indignation)

Any attempt to understand the concept of *ressentiment*, a French word both Nietzsche and Scheler use, will remain confusing as long as the meaning of its more popular cousin "resentment" is not clarified first. This chapter aims to give a working definition of resentment and to distinguish it from other affective phenomena such as anger, revenge, indignation, their relation to the value of justice (and the disvalue of injustice). Their connection to the phenomenon of *ressentiment* proper will be analysed and defined in the next chapter. Standard accounts generally build on the idea that resentment is an *affective response to a particular, intentional and harmful offence, in which the subject apprehends himself as the victim of an injustice*.[8] I would accordingly experience resentment if, for example, a court convicted me of a crime I did not commit; if, for religious reasons, I am excluded from my university; if a burglar gets away with destroying my car; if I am treated rudely by overzealous police officers; or if a rich aristocrat humiliates me at a cocktail party. Philosophers tend to agree with this definition, but several uses of the term reveal a more complex phenomenon. I will reconsider some different conceptions and argue 1) that resentment is a kind of anger which is aroused when one is wronged; 2) that it necessarily involves a desire for revenge; 3) that it has the injustice of an unremedied wrong as its formal object; 4) that it has persons and their action as its proper object; 5) that resentment differs from indignation insofar the latter responds to impersonal wrongs and the former to personal wrongs.

In the last section, I will briefly analyse some of the less common uses of the concept, provide further illustrations of the difference between indignation and resentment, and briefly discuss some important findings from experimental economics about resentment's characteristic triggers.

2.1.1 Anger and resentment

Resentment and anger are neighbours. But how does the former stand to the latter? In the following, we will argue that resentment is a kind of anger, but unlike *ordinary* anger, resentment is a checked and always bitter emotion, that triggers characteristic ruminations, brooding, the reliving of certain experiences and repetitions. Resentment endures as long as wrongs have not been righted, which is the reason why experiencing it necessarily comes with a *desire for revenge*. But before we outline all these properties in more detail, let us here look first at anger and its different variants, and contrast these with resentment.

[8] Darwall, 2006, p. 67.

Anger encompasses a large family of emotions. It occurs, for example, as rage, furore, outrage, or irritation. The Englishman is also said to be annoyed, peeved, pissed off, piqued, or incensed. Some of anger's forms are violent and explosive, such as wrath (*Entrüstung, colèr*e), some correspond to milder annoyances (*Ärger*), and some have a strong moral dimension, such as indignation (*Empörung*), which we will consider in Chapter 5. Common to all these varieties is a sense of dissatisfaction.[9] In ordinary speech, anger is mostly reserved for descriptions of our responses to thwarted expectations, plans and desires; it is the name we give to our response to annoyances[10] or frustrations.[11] We shall refer to it here as *ordinary anger*. Some other forms of anger seem to imply the belief or the perception that one has suffered some harm and ill-will. In fact, anger is often reduced to such responses to intentional harm.[12] And anger in that latter sense can also involve offences that are not directed at one's person. As Aristotle reminds us, this emotion "may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself *or towards what concerns one's friends*".[13] Apart from the fact that all these variants involve a form of dissatisfaction, they also tend, as Shand points out, "to accomplish their ends by some kind of aggressive behaviour".[14] Anger is hence characterised by a desire for retaliation, the nature of which changes according to the different variants of anger. Rage (*Wut*) and ordinary anger for example involve a desire to aggressively strike back at the triggering obstacle – human or not.[15] But resentment and indignation are accompanied by a desire for revenge or a desire to see the other punished by a third-party. Also, one can be angry at one's present self, but one cannot, as far as I can see, be resentful or indignant at oneself. When a storm jeopardises my hiking plans, I may be irritated and angry at myself for not having checked the meteorological forecast. My anger though is not directed at the storm itself. Bollnow goes as far as to claim that anger *qua* frustration (*Ärger*) is in fact always self-directed.[16] By contrast, anger *qua* indignation or resentment is always directed at some other person.

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9 Gordon, 1987, p. 53.

10 Helm *in* Salmela & Mayer, 2009, p. 16.

11 Gordon, 1987; Livet, 2002.

12 Solomon, 1993, p. 227. Solomon for example explains: "anger is basically a judgement that one has been wronged or offended" (Solomon, 2007, p. 18). See also: Ben Ze'ev, 2002, p. 154; Horberg et al., 2011.

13 Aristotle, 1378 a31–34. Emphasis added.

14 Shand, 1926, p. 250.

15 As Bollnow says: "Der Wütende stürzt sich auf seinen Gegner und schlägt – im wörtlichen und übertragenen Sinn – blind auf ihn ein. Man spricht treffend von einer blinden Wut. Die Wut is eine Art Raserei, die den Menschen erfasst und ihn in einen Rauschartigen Zustand versetzt, der ihn der klaren Besinnung weitgehend beraubt" (Bollnow, 2009, p. 72).

16 Bollnow, 2009, p. 69.

Resentment is a form of anger[17], too. It seems that we can always legitimately attribute the property of being angry to an individual harbouring resentment. Yet, the emotion can still be distinguished from mere rage as well as ordinary anger. Let us first examine this question from a phenomenological standpoint and try to distinguish ordinary anger from resentment. Brudholm suggests that the phenomenological qualities of resentment are in fact the same as those of ordinary anger.[18] But this latter claim is not quite right as we can in fact distinguish two kinds of experience. First, ordinary anger in this narrow sense is a short-lived episode, with thoroughly studied physiological symptoms (increased heart rate and blood pressure, a high level of adrenaline, etc.), typical facial expressions (aggression, a threatening attitude, etc.) and retaliatory action tendencies. Resentment is different. If it is a kind of anger, it is always experienced over a longer time scale: resentment is something that endures and where memory nurtures revenge fantasies in relation to a past offence. One may object that there is an insurmountable difficulty in trying to distinguish, phenomenologically, recurrent episodes of anger from enduring emotions such as resentment. However, their differences may derive from the way these enduring states or repeated episodes are experienced. For ordinary anger emerges in explosive bouts that rapidly diminish in intensity; resentment, once it occurs, takes more time to fade away. Anger may cause sudden bursts of rage and violence (as when one throws a tantrum)[19]; resentment is rather experienced as a controlled animosity – usually because the resenter finds himself unable to retaliate on the spot or simply vent his feelings. Someone in the grip of resentment often cannot be openly aggressive, which is why he carefully checks his impulses, concocts a plan and dreams of his future revenge. Resentment is a checked emotion, closer to a grudge than to the sudden affective discharge typical of ordinary anger.[20] In German, one distinguishes between *Wut* and *Zorn*. The former is blind, constitutes a barely controllable expression of displeasure and upset, and corresponds to rage – a *Wutausbruch* is an "outburst of rage". The latter refers to an intense emotion that remains contained and focused on the disvalue to me of a particular object or state of affairs.[21] Resentment (*Groll*) on the other hand is never by itself characterised by fits of anger, irrational actions, and violence; it is neither ordinary anger nor rage or

17 Griswold, 2007, p. 22; Walker, 2006, p. 110; Prinz & Nichols *in* Doris, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Aristotle. Reid seems to be indifferent between the two concepts, but eventually opts for "resentment", of which he distinguishes different kinds (Reid, 1815, p. 115).

18 Brudholm, 2008, p. 11.

19 As Bollnow rightly puts it: "Wut is nach aussen hin ausgebrochener Ärger" (Bollnow, 2009, p. 71).

20 Ben Ze'ev, 2002, p. 153; Darwall, 2010, p. 319.

21 Fries, 2003, p. 115. As Bollnow puts it: "Im Unterschied zur blinden Wut ist der Zorn immer, und zwar in ausgezeichnetem Masse sehend." (Bollnow, 2009, p. 75).

fury. Note however that rage (*Wut*) can be triggered by accumulated resentment.[22] Symmetrically, accumulated indignation (*Empörung*), Bollnow suggests, bursts out as wrath (*Zorn*).[23]

Contrary to many forms of anger, resentment presupposes an incapacity on the part of the subject to strike back on the spot and tends to endure as long as the perceived wrongdoer remains unpunished for his action. Not only is resentment more controlled compared to anger, it comes with a characteristic mental activity. The resenter broods and ruminates, and some suggest that these thoughts continue even once revenge has been taken.[24] Resentment in contrast to ordinary anger is bitter. It is typically sullen and smoulders like a low fire. Compared to rage or ordinary anger, resentment also appears to be cognitively richer and more complex; it is a "sophisticated" anger that endures as long as the desire for revenge remains unfulfilled.[25] The experience of resentment often turns into a self-reinforcing state of grudge-bearing and discontent which becomes more difficult to overcome and more all-consuming as time passes.[26] This characteristic is already suggested by the etymology of the word itself: in French, "re-sentir" literally means to "feel again". Resentment, in other words, translates into racing thoughts rather than a racing heart.

In light of this contrast, the formal object of ordinary anger may be some wrong or offence which has the particularity that it is either immediately redressed or provokes no thought of redress. Resentment on the other hand breeds an enduring desire for revenge directed at the person or group believed to have caused a wrong – a fact already stressed by Aristotle.[27] The memory of the triggering event certainly remains vivid which is why the emotion is associated with "un état d'animosité maintenu par le souvenir d'une offense dont on aspire à se venger."[28] But thoughts of a desired retribution become a focus too, one that grounds resentment's revengefulness. Westermarck specifies that revenge is the outcome of resentment when retaliation and the expression of anger need to be checked, when the "hostile reaction is more or less restrained by reason and calculation".[29] Evolutionary psychologists have recently claimed that the desire for revenge is a fundamental and hard-wired feature of human nature.[30] But some reject the view that a desire for revenge is an essential part of

22 Bullnow, 2009, pp. 72-74.

23 Bollnow, 2009, p. 77.

24 Smith, 2013, p. 90; Carlsmith et al., 2008, p. 1324.

25 Taylor, 2006, p. 86.

26 Some do believe that this is sometimes easy and recognise a lighter sort of resentment that does not leave any persistent marks, that is redressed and forgotten with an apology or with time (Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 91).

27 Barton, 1999, p. 65.

28 Foulquié, 1992, p. 662.

29 Westermarck, 1906, p. 22.

30 McCullough, 2008.

resentment at all. La Caze for example claims: "vengefulness involves the desire to hurt someone in retaliation for a perceived wrong, whereas resentment involves the acknowledgement that a wrong has occurred, without a clearly corresponding desire to punish."[31] Her account however provides too passive and intellectual a description of resentment, for it seems difficult to envisage a resenter who does not at least wish for the punishment of the wrongdoers. It might suffice that her desire for revenge be fulfilled by punishment of the offender by a third-party. In all previous examples of unfair treatments (me-being-mistreated, me-being-humiliated, me-being-burgled, etc.), the victim certainly believes that she has been wronged. But instead of exacting retribution personally, one may simply prefer the offender to be punished impersonally, by the judicial system for example. In general, successful revenge occurs – and resentment is ended – when wrongs are righted, for, as Smith remarks: "the righting of a wrong can merge most clearly with the powerful motive of revenge and its resulting gratifications".[32] The anticipation and experience of *Schadenfreude* are essential markers of the desire for revenge, and Smith claims that it is also manifested when the wrongdoer is punished by a third-party or when misfortune befalls him.[33] This strongly suggests that different types of events may satisfy the desire for revenge. More particularly, it seems we can distinguish three possible events or actions that end resentment and satisfy its associated desire for revenge, retaliation (personal revenge), third-party punishment (impersonal revenge), and misfortunes which overtake the wrongdoers.

A fourth candidate for the role is perhaps authentic forgiveness, which seems to have a similar effect on resentment as a satisfied desire for revenge. As Scheler puts it:

> The desire for revenge disappears when vengeance has been taken, when the person against whom it was directed has been punished or has punished himself, or when one truly forgives him.[34]

As Bishop Butler already pointed out in his *Sermons*, forgiveness overcomes resentment.[35] Strawson explains that:

> To ask to be forgiven is in part to acknowledge that the attitude displayed in our actions was such as might properly be resented and in part to repudiate that attitude for the future (or at least for the immediate future); and to forgive is to accept the repudiation and to forswear the resentment.[36]

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31 La Caze, 2001, p. 38.

32 Smith, 2013, p. 86.

33 Smith, 2013, p. 91. He claims: "There seems no question that misfortunes happening to others who have severely wronged us appeal to our deep-rooted sense of justice" (Smith, 2013, p. 92).

34 RAM, p. 26.

35 Butler, *Upon Foregiveness and Injuries*.

36 Strawson, 2008, p. 6.

Both resentment and gratitude may be considered opposites. Unlike anger, but like resentment, gratitude endures. The proper objects of resentment and gratitude are persons and their actions; resentment is a response to the perception of ill-will and gratitude a response to the perception of good-will. One remains grateful to someone for what he has done as one continues to resent someone for what he has done. [37] According to Scheler, gratitude is a mode of love, as are kindness, goodwill, friendliness, attachment, and affection.[38] It seems, on the other hand, that resentment can be considered a mode of hate. We shall develop the idea that the man of *ressentiment* is characterised by hatred and its different modes in Section 3.1.

Another element often brought forward to differentiate anger from resentment is the more expressive nature of the former. But is resentment merely an unexpressed emotion?[39] Counter-examples to such a claim are easy to find. I may for example threaten the jury, shout and cry, clench my fists and stamp my feet after a sentencing or a verdict I take to be unreasonable, or my unfair exclusion from university. The resenter can and will sometimes, quite spontaneously, manifest his discontent. And he can, without censuring himself, publicly express either his pain at being wronged or his desire for revenge. In fact, as Griswold remarks: "a person in the grip of resentment often demands that the narrative be heard, and yearns that it be published, so to speak (resentment loves company)".[40] Hence nothing suggests that resentment is merely unexpressed anger. The resenter may express his hostility and suffering publicly; but none of it emerges in a sudden response capable of leading to retaliation. If he is unable to retaliate. This may also add to the bitterness of his experience, turn into obsessive thoughts of revenge, and reinforce his desire to get even. These auxiliary symptoms depend on circumstantial considerations about the advisability of a public display of hostility. Their occurrence remains rather contingent. Yet, resentment always implies a primary inability to retaliate in response to an offence and, as the emotion endures, an incapacity to end or act on a desire for revenge. The resenter dreams of revenge but cannot act accordingly. Scheler describes this characteristic experience as a state where: "the immediate

[37] As Strawson puts it:

> If someone treads on my hand accidentally, while trying to help me, the pain may be no less acute than if he treads on it in contemptuous disregard of my existence or with a malevolent wish to injure me. But I shall generally feel in the second case a kind and degree of resentment that I shall not feel in the first. If someone's actions help me to some benefit I desire, then I am benefited in any case; but if he intended them so to benefit me because of his general goodwill towards me, I shall reasonably feel a gratitude which I should not feel at all if the benefit was an incidental consequence, unintended or even regretted by him, of some plan of action with a different aim (Strawson, 2008, p. 6).

[38] SYMP, p. 174.

[39] "Contrasting resentment with aggressive anger is not meant to imply that the former is free of aggressive desires; the difference is merely in the being expressed or repressed" (Taylor, 2006, p. 85).

[40] Griswold, 2007, p. 30.

reactive impulse, with the accompanying emotions of anger and rage, is temporarily or at least momentarily checked and restrained, and the response is consequently postponed to a later time".[41] Resentment is therefore the experience of a revenge that cannot be fulfilled, of *non-retaliation* rather than *unexpressed* anger.

Resentment's valence, finally, is mixed. An outburst of anger is often felt to be in many ways a positive emotion, to be exhilarating or a way of feeling alive. This is never true of the occurrence of resentment except precisely when it flares up into anger. The bitterness of memories of unremedied offences can turn it into a deeply unpleasant brooding. But Aristotle also remarks that the prospect of revenge is a rather pleasant thought.[42] The resenter certainly relishes his obsessive revenge fantasies. But he is not only taking pleasure in the prospect of revenge; revenge that materialises, either through personal and direct vengeance, through third-party punishment of the wrongdoer, or when misfortune befalls him, are delightful events too.[43]

2.1.2 Resentment, blame, and injustice

The emotion of resentment is based on the belief that some harm has been done to one, that one has been wronged and that such harm is disvaluable, bad, for me. Resentment is hence said to be a retributive, punitive, or moral emotion,[44] the emotional expression of a moral claim,[45] a moral feeling that invokes the principles of right and justice,[46] a *protest* against harm, violation, injury, and viciousness, or the appropriate response to others' undeserved spite, disrespect, contempt or humiliation.[47] The normative dimension of resentment is complex. We shall now try to describe this essential feature in more detail. In order to untangle it, we will here distinguish between something being *a wrong*, in particular a wrong that is the result of the fact that someone has wronged someone, from something being *unjust* or *an injustice*, and then consider the common claim that resentment is a response to breaches of norms. We must also try to understand what is it to blame someone and determine whether resentment necessarily involves blame.

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41 RAM, p. 25.

42 Aristotle, 1378b. Feather and Scherman argue that: "resentment differs from envy by its closer connection to feelings of injustice and to undeserved outcomes and [...] feelings of pleasure in another's misfortune are fuelled by resentment rather than by envy" (Feather & Sherman, 2001, p. 961).

43 Smith, 2013. As Sommer points out, resentment is associated with "pleasure from watching defectors suffer the costs of their transgression – even when they are not the target of the offences" (Sommer, 2007, p. 41).

44 La Caze, 2001; Ben Ze'ev, 2002; Dubreuil, 2010.

45 McLachlan, 2012, pp. 422–425.

46 Rawls, 2003, p. 427.

47 Barbalet, 1998, p. 137.

It is frequently claimed that, unlike anger, the emotion of resentment is a response to the disvalue of injustice (or to the feeling thereof). For example, I may be angry with my wife because she scratched my car while trying to park it. I might even become unreasonably upset with her if we are running late for the opera and she cannot find the car keys. However, none of my responses suggest that I see myself as having been wronged by my wife or apprehend the general situation as an injustice. I may perhaps judge her (say for her lack of diligence and planning), but I am not vengeful and thus my experience is not one of bitterness at an unjust wrongdoing against me that remains unpunished. Ordinary anger never leads an individual to express retaliatory claims and cultivate thoughts of revenge. This of course is very different from the earlier examples of resentment where I necessarily consider myself wronged by someone, feel revengeful, and apprehend my condition as a form of injustice.

The foregoing suggests that resentment is a kind of anger motivated by injustice. Linguistically, however, the latter usage is not always followed. One source of confusion comes from the fact that philosophers sometimes use "anger" to refer to such experiences of injustice as well. Aristotle in particular calls anger an emotion that has all the experiential features we just claimed to be proper to resentment.[48] But as Koch points out, anger *qua* resentment is a peculiarly Aristotelian conception, while the idea of anger as a response to mere frustration is a more recent conception whose roots can be traced back to the Stoic writings of Seneca.[49] Anger in the latter sense is what we called ordinary anger. Some nevertheless continue to refer to resentment as righteous anger.[50] And recently, Prinz and Nichols, in a review of a large corpus of psychological research, even conclude that "anger is elicited by injustice".[51] The latter claims fail to acknowledge a distinction between ordinary anger and resentment.

A second source of confusion arises when anger is considered as a kind of resentment.[52] This practice is common among English and Scottish philosophers of the Enlightenment who made systematic use of two types of resentment.[53] On the one hand, there is a swift and brief response to an injury or a frustration fostering and motivating actions that assure self-defence and self-preservation.[54] On the other, there is a complex response, with richer thoughts, and which implies the concept of blame. Most famously, Butler distinguishes

48 As Aristotle puts it: "If this is a proper definition of anger, it must always be felt towards some particular individual, e.g. Cleon, and not "man" in general" (Aristotle, 1378 a31–34).

49 Koch *in* Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, pp. 97-113.

50 Taylor, 2006, p. 85.

51 Prinz & Nichols *in* Doris, 2010, p. 130.

52 "Resentment is more general than anger, as it refers not merely to blameworthy actions, as anger does, but it also expresses a negative attitude toward the fortunes of other agents" (Ben Ze'ev, 2002, p. 153).

53 EAP, p. 115; Kames, more in line with the current usage, distinguishes resentment from instinctive anger (Kames, 1788, pp. 48-49).

54 Griswold, 2007, p. 22.

accordingly between *sudden* and *deliberate* resentment.[55] The former refers to what we called ordinary anger, i.e. an impulsive reaction caused by frustration of personal plans, projects and desires, while the latter implies the existence of thoughts representing a wrong and the injustice of a state of affairs[56] – that is, our ordinary understanding of resentment so far. Irrespective of whether anger or resentment is considered the more general concept, it seems quite undisputed that some experiences of anger are not grounded in a concern about (in)justice.

We can distinguish these emotions by their formal objects. That of ordinary anger is the disvalue to me of the frustration of my projects. The focus of resentment on the other hand is rather assumed to be the disvalue of a personal wrong. Some overlap between the two emotions exists, especially if the frustration of personal projects is brought upon me by the wrongful actions of someone else. My anger in that case will fade away, but my resentment will endure and continue through a desire for revenge and retaliation as I hold the wrongdoer responsible. Eventually, accumulated resentment may burst out in anger and rage.

Let us now clarify the relation between resentment and the disvalue of injustice. It is very often claimed that the formal object of resentment is the *injustice of a particular action directed against me*. As La Caze puts it: "we resent what we think is unjust, so resentment is an important indicator of the recognition of a response to injustice."[57] Ben Ze'ev stresses that: "regarding its core evaluative concern, resentment may be characterised as an emotional protest against what is perceived as morally unjust".[58] Meltzer and Musolf explain that: "in common usage, 'resentment' refers to a feeling of displeasure induced by being insulted, offended, or deprived. Thus, it is typically a reaction to slights or affronts, to assaults, whether mild or severe, upon one's self"[59] or as Baier puts it, "to wrongs of dispossession, expropriation, oppression and humiliation".[60]

The category that seems to include all resentment-triggers is that of a *wrong*, which comprises, among other things, attacks on one's honour and insults and more serious forms of harm such as an act of torture. Our previous examples, me-being-bullied-by-the-police, me-being-humiliated-at-a-party, or me-being-unfairly-condemned, are thus cases in point as

55 Butler, *Upon Resentment*.

56 Butler: "Anger is frequently raised, not only without any real, but without any apparent reason; that is, without any appearance of injury, as distinct from hurt and pain" (Butler, *Upon Resentment*). He also explains: "It is opposition, sudden hurt, violence, which naturally excites the passion; and the real demerit or fault of him who offers that violence, or is the cause of the opposition or hurt, does not in many cases so much as come into thought" (*ibid.*).

57 La Caze, 2001, p. 39.

58 Ben Ze'ev, 2002, p. 153.

59 Meltzer & Musolf, 2002, p. 241

60 Baier, 2010, p. 155.

they all refer to some unjust *action* on which my resentment focusses.[61] Therefore, according to what we may call the standard definition, the formal object of resentment is the disvalue of *injustice* attached to an action directed against me and to its author, while the action which constitutes the personal wrong and its author is the effective trigger – both the cause and the object proper – of resentment.[62] One says: "I resent you" or "I feel resentment towards you". Also, since I perceive it as an injustice that I am being bullied by the police, humiliated at a cocktail party or mistreated by a judge, resentment appears to be the natural response to what the man in the street refers to as injustices.

However, not all descriptions of resentment agree with the claim that it is the response to a particular positive *action* against me. Some stress a recurrent concern for hurtful *omissions.* The latter are then characterised in the vocabulary of *desert* or *entitlement* concepts.[63] For example, if I think I *deserve*, say, praise for my good results in a difficult maths exam but am denied this kind of recognition by my peers, I may feel resentful. That my achievements get intentionally ignored is experienced as an unjust state of affairs.

Note that resentment triggers do not need to be conspicuous breaches of the law of the land, of positive law. If I feel I deserve a job because I have been a brilliant student, the fact that there are no jobs may make me resentful. No law says that good students ought to be given priority for jobs. But the resenter may then apprehend the situation as the breaching of a norm of justice, as the infringement of a pre-legal right. Ichheiser suggests for example that norms of justice are typically based on norms of success, for: "society is 'in order' and justice is 'done' only when those individuals who actually attain success also 'ought' to attain it according to the norms [of success]."[64] He then identifies two criteria grounding the latter

[61] As Jean Hampton puts it: "the object of resentment is an *action*. When resentment is directed at a person, it is in response to what he did, not who or what he is. Hence we say 'I hate you,' and 'I resent what you *did*' but not 'I resent *you*' (unless 'resent' is used to mean 'envy')" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 60).

[62] Griswold, 2007, p. 26.

[63] Baier, 1980, p. 138. Or for example, as Portmann puts it: "those who believe themselves morally entitled to certain treatment are disposed to resent what they regard as indignities" (Portmann, 2000, p. 35). Note that the 'entitlement' is "reserved for judgements that are based on an external frame of reference that involves quasi-legal prescriptions, rights, social norms, social comparison, and implicit or explicit rules" (Feather & McKee, 2008, p. 957). The difference between desert and entitlement is an important one. On this matter, we follow Feather who says:

> Entitlement implies that there is a set of agreed-upon rules, norms, and principles at the group or societal level that have legal or quasi-legal status and that be called upon to determine whether a person is entitled to or not entitled to a positive or negative outcome. […] The rules and principles refer to the person's right and injustice occurs when these rights are violated...The term deservingness relates more to outcomes that are earned or achieved as products of a person's actions. We usually say that a positive or negative outcome is deserved or undeserved when it can be related to a person's actions (Feather, 1999, p. 25).

[64] Ichheiser, 1943, p. 137.

norms: *competence* and *worthiness*. The success of a person who is not worthy (or believed not to be) or of a person who is incompetent (or believed to be), may hence be met with strong resentment.[65] Similarly, the competent and worthy person who remains unsuccessful may harbour resentment. Yet, no law has been breached.

Apart from the absence of an act transgressing the law, the latter example also suggests that the resenter may be neither the victim of a direct action nor the victim of an omission. In fact, whole contexts where no specific, intentional, action or omission can be isolated seem to trigger resentment too. For example, the mere existence of misfortunes and inequalities in wealth, talent or power are a common source of resentment. And the fact that there are very rich people is not in itself a particular, wrongful, action. However, someone may resent the fact that there are very rich people. The individual would then seem to harbour in the absence of any harmful action or omission against him. But how can, for example, my membership of a particular social class constitute a source of resentment? Such state of affairs must be apprehended as a wrong. The fact that there are richer individuals, the fact that I am less fortunate than my peers, or the fact that, say, I am a foreigner with less social opportunities must be experienced as a personal *wrong someone inflicted upon me*. The latter kind of belief then necessarily implies I consider the author of the wrong to be causally responsible for the harm he inflicted upon me.

A way to describe this latter dimension of resentment is by stressing that the experience of a wrong is manifested in the attitude of blame. Blame and the attribution of responsibility are a key element of resentment; as Strawson famously argued, it seems that we cannot separate the fact of holding someone responsible from having emotional attitudes like resentment, indignation, or guilt that he calls reactive attitudes.[66] Resentment is a blaming attitude that ascribes responsibility[67] and the wrongdoer causing resentment carries some sort of moral responsibility.[68] For our purpose here, we can summarise this feature by saying that resentment, like indignation, is a *blaming* attitude and that *blame* "refers to a class of responses to morally faulty actions".[69] Aside from actions and omissions, whole contexts in which no particular action can be singled out may also trigger resentment. The point here is that blame

65 Ichheiser, 1943.

66 Allais, 2008; Rossi-Keen, 2007; Strawson, 2008.

67 As Darwall puts it:

> Resentment is felt as if in response to a violation of a legitimate claim or expectation, and not simply as directed toward the violator, but as implicitly addressing her. It is a form of 'holding responsible', an address of the other as a person with the capacity and standing to be addressed in this way and charged (Darwall *in* Shafer-Landau, 2007, p. 118).

68 Pritchard, 2008, p. 62; Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 91.

69 Scanlon *in* Coates & Tognazzini, 2013, p. 84.

will always find a culprit, and if necessary invent a wrongdoer where there may be none. I am never resentful just for being poor or less rich than others. I am, however, resentful against some other person or group, which I blame and believe to be the cause of my indigence. The experience of resentment responding to unpleasant social inequalities (of wealth, of talent of rights, etc.) is grounded in my perception of another group (the rich, the politicians, foreigners, etc.) as the cause of my personal condition.

The manifestation of blame shows that resentment can apprehend a social position or a disability as a wrong and as the outcome of actions and omissions intended by others. Resentment, which is never directed at the disability itself, is then grounded in the belief that some entity bears the responsibility for that disability. The resenter may therefore come to blame abstract agents such as God or Destiny. The wretched man may hold God or Life responsible for having destined him to a miserable existence of suffering. Individuals who suffer tragedies often direct their resentment against deities as the ultimate cause of their torment.[70] Some Christian churches recognise for example the concept of "resentment against God"[71] and believers may experience "anger toward God".[72] Leibniz has vividly described the hatred of the damned against the universal harmony of the world in which they may have drawn the shortest straw.[73] Of course, resentment is not a necessary response to the examples just mentioned, that is, to disabilities or the unequal distribution of wealth. Blame however is a necessary feature of resentment. The latter examples illustrate the fact that something needs to be apprehended as a wrong, and someone or some group blamed for it, in order for resentment to arise, which in some cases may lead to false judgement about the intentions and responsibility of other agents. When whole situations rather than a particular action seem to elicit resentment, resentment tends to be directed at the genus – the rich, the poor, the thieves, the criminals.

The apprehension of something as a wrong is essential to resentment, and the standard account mentioned earlier may consider wrongs to be actions and the latter also to bear the disvalue of injustice. Let us consider this claim in more detail. There are in fact different ways we ordinarily relate injustice to resentment; in particular, it seems we ascribe it to different moments of the emotion itself. In Blackburn's terminology, the disvalue of injustice appears to apply both to *inputs* and *outputs* of the ethical agent, to what he originally grasps and that which grounds his resentment, as well as to all the symptoms, gestures, actions and uttered judgements that signal the disvalue of injustice.[74] Resentment, it is often claimed, constitutes

[70] Parrott, 1991; Micel & Castelfranchi, 2013, p. 462; RAM, p. 85.

[71] Schweizer, 2010.

[72] Exeline & Martin *in* Worthington, 2005, pp. 73-88.

[73] Leibniz, 1673.

one of our most basic ways of becoming acquainted with the (dis)value of (in)justice.[75] The resenter is said to undergo a characteristic *feeling of injustice*, with its typical negative valence. But he also ascribes the disvalue of injustice (verbally for example) to actions or situations, and comes to blame persons he believes to be the cause of his troubles. Resentment's ordinarily associated with individuals invoking moral norms and advancing claims of justice. For, not only do I want myself to be tried again – and fairly –, I also want to be avenged and my enemies to be punished, that is, I want *justice to be done*. How can we then make sense of this multifaceted concern for justice? And what is it exactly that bears such disvalue?

Traditional accounts of resentment often use the concept of justice too generally. Let us therefore introduce some important distinctions in the area of the philosophy of justice. First, the value of justice is not determined by what is permitted by the law, nor is injustice limited to infringements of the law. For, clearly, a law can be unjust. There is a pre-legal meaning of justice. Sometimes this is referred to as right or *Recht* (vs wrong, *Unrecht*) in sentences of the form: "It is right that *p*" (vs "It is wrong that *p*"). The latter concept should not to be confused with that of a right nor the concept of it being wrong that *p* with that of *a* wrong. The terms "right" and "wrong" thus express a number of different concepts which are easily confused and are the objects of rival philosophical theories. At the very least, we should distinguish the rights (human, natural, etc.) one has or enjoys, the rightness or wrongness of actions, and claims to the effect that it is right/wrong that *p*. To be distinguished from these are the wrongs we do to others and also suffer. The negative concept of a wrong seems to have no positive counterpart although it is plausible to say that if someone has been wronged that is wrong and that if no one has been wronged that is right. Second, injustice is different from wrongdoing and, analogously, to say of a state of affairs that it is just is different from saying it is right. For example, if a local rule, says that only Protestants are granted free access to the swimming pool, this may be considered unjust, but it is not a wrong. In the same way, if my neighbour grants access to his swimming pool to all the neighbours but me, this may also be considered unjust. On the other hand, if my neighbour bullies my children, I and my children are wronged. In general, one has a right not to be wronged, but one does not have a right to be treated justly. To be wronged supposes the perception of an intentional action directed against me, which damages my dignity or self-respect.

Matters are complicated by the fact that there are two distinct concepts of justice. First, the traditional view holds that justice is a virtue and that injustice is an attribute of persons and

74 "The *input* to the system is a representation, for instance of an action, or a situation, or a character, as being of a certain type, as having certain properties. The *output*, we are saying, is a certain attitude, or a pressure on attitudes, or a favouring of policies, choices and actions" (Blackburn, 1998, p. 5).

75 Solomon, 1994.

their acts and the intended consequences of these acts.[76] Another view holds that justice and injustice may be attributes of social situations, distributions of wealth, opportunities, status, goods, which are not the intended results of actions. The latter conception is often called social justice.[77] One could perhaps argue that my neighbour's omission was an intended exclusion directed against me, say, because I am the only catholic and all my neighbours are protestants, in which case it would qualify as a wrong meant to hurt me. But sometimes, one also refers to states of affairs of a very different kind as "injustices", namely one's condition, where this is the result of natural differences in abilities, talent, and physical strength. I may find it unjust that some of my colleagues get promoted, that my neighbour earns large bonuses, that my friend is musically gifted. But I cannot claim to be wronged by their greater successes, nor can I reasonably assume their actions and achievements are pursued in order to offend me.

So one view is that injustice is the formal object of resentment but that injustice includes two very distinct cases. When justice *qua* property of a person or actions is envisaged as a virtue[78], I have no right to require my neighbour to be just in his dealings with others including me. But I will feel wronged if he fails to be just in this aretaic sense. When justice and injustice are taken to be properties of social situations or natural inequalities, I may resent the fact that I am poor while others are rich, that my colleague gets a promotion or that I am the least talented student in the room. Resentment about one's situation in life involves seeing – perhaps wrongly – this fact as someone's responsibility. In sum, if someone behaves unjustly towards *S* (injustice as vice), *S* has been wronged. If *S* finds himself in a situation which is (socially, impersonally) unjust, *S* will only feel resentment if he assimilates this case to the former, e.g. by thinking that some class or society considered as an agent has wronged him. Common to all these cases of resentment is the fact that one must apprehend oneself as being wronged. A wrong presupposes an intention and a causal influence on the part of a wrongdoer. Inequalities of talent, wealth, luck and intellectual abilities may be considered unjust without one considering it to be constitutive of a wrong. The latter kind of injustice is hence not part of the formal object of resentment.

The reason injustices and wrongs are so often considered the be the same thing is not surprising; for every injustice, one is tempted to attribute some intention and direct agency to a person, a group, or an abstract entity which becomes responsible for the unjust state of affairs. One of Nietzsche's more interesting insights is his analysis of this human tendency to look for someone to blame in response to suffering (see Chapter 3). Common misfortunes, or

[76] Solomon, 1994.

[77] Hayek, 1978; Rawls, 1971.

[78] Solomon, 1994.

inequalities in wealth and power between individuals are convenient illustrations of this mechanism. Liberals – in the American sense of the word – and friends of socialism for example tend to believe in the empirical claim – in very simplified terms – that the poor are poor *because* the rich are rich, or more specifically, that the mere existence of the wealthy prevents the poor from improving their lot. The general form of these claims shows how a direct causal responsibility is attributed to an individual or group for a negative outcome (wealth inequality). Accordingly there is someone to be blamed for an injustice, and thus some state of affairs to be considered a wrong that merits our resentment. Libertarians and Liberals, in the European sense of the word, may, on the other hand, acknowledge that some economic inequalities are an injustice but they do not hold that the poor are wronged by the rich; neither is there an intention on their part to impoverish the least fortunate nor a causal link between poverty and the rich.[79]

2.1.3 The objects of resentment

Philosophers often claim that emotions are intentional; they are about something. In other words, they have objects. However, the exact nature and variety of emotions' objects remains unclear.[80] We will in this section and the next one refine the description of the formal – or improper – object of the emotion of resentment, as well as of its particular – or proper – object. No particular theory of intentionality, that is, a theory about the relation between acts and their proper objects will here be assumed in the analysis. The distinction between formal and proper objects is at the heart of many theories of intentionality of the emotions. Generally speaking, and as de Sousa puts it, an emotion's formal object is: "the property implicitly ascribed by the emotion to its target, focus or propositional object, in virtue of which the emotion can be seen as intelligible".[81] It is the type of object that is shared by all emotions of a certain kind. It is for example what is common to all instances of envy.[82] We will here presuppose the view held by most early phenomenologists that this common property is value.[83] On the other hand, the particular object on an emotion is what individuates instances of a certain kind of emotion. My envy can target different things, my neighbour, the fact that he is so successful, his recent promotion. Particular objects can be events, persons, propositions, state of affairs, etc. Finally, proper objects may instantiate formal objects.[84] My emotion is an episode of envy because it targets an event which exemplifies the common property of enviable objects.

79 Nozick, 1974.

80 De Sousa, 1987, § 5; De Sousa, 2014; Teroni, 2007.

81 De Sousa, 2014.

82 Teroni, 2007.

83 Mulligan, 2017. See also: Mulligan *in* Goldie, 2009.

84 Mulligan, 2017.

Let us now try to identify the objects of resentment. We shall argue that the resenter desires that *wrongs be righted* and that resentment's formal object is *a past, unremedied, wrong by some agent which constitutes an injustice*. The resenter wants the wrongdoer to be punished because he experiences it as an injustice that this is not yet the case. Resentment is a blaming attitude but it not just the perception of an injustice nor is the first stage of the emotion best described as a feeling of injustice. Resentment is triggered by wrongs (or the perception thereof) as we are first painfully struck by the wrongness of an action or situation. The disvalue of injustice only comes to be experienced at a later stage of the emotion.

My *humiliation* at a cocktail party or my *suffering* from the cruelty of a policeman provide resentment with an unpleasant feel. But the experience of these original wrongs and their immediate unpleasantness are episodes that do not last forever. Of course there is an affective reaction, a repressed anger impulse as one gets offended. But resentment, as we have seen, is more durable than mere anger and outlives the episodic nature of the original response. Characteristic wrongs may also greatly differ in intensity, cruelty and significance, and therefore encompass a humiliating joke as well as more serious offences such as an unfair trial or an act of torture. The distinctive phenomenological criterion, however, is that resentment occurs subsequent to these actions. The original injury alone does indeed trigger my resentment. But what is felt to be an injustice is a different object, namely the fact that the wrongdoing has not yet been redressed, that is, although innocent, I am considered guilty, the fact that my tormentors have not yet been caught and punished, the fact that I could not retort to the aristocrat who humiliated me, etc. Améry provides a very good description of this mechanism. Although he had been tortured by the Nazis (original wrong), the real object of his resentment is Germany's post-war emancipation. In Améry's eyes, victims like him have not been properly avenged, since the Germans eluded the past and minimised their guilt;[85] they seemed to get away too easily and naturally with their ancient crimes. It is precisely this latter element that is experienced as a profound and painful injustice.[86] Hence, it is not the original injury (the episode of torture) that constitutes the formal object of his resentment, but the injustice of a still unrighted wrong. If revenge or any kind of reparation does not occur in a satisfactory way, a victim will experience this as an injustice and harbour resentment. Resentment comes with vengefulness and supposes we want the offender to pay the price, in one way or another. The fact that the latter may nevertheless elude punishment is an intolerable thought that haunts victims of torture or sexual abuse for

[85] Assmann, 2003. Brudholm explains: "The cause and the object of the *ressentiment* of which Améry [...] speaks are clearly the policies and attitudes that became dominant during the first two decades after the war" (Brudholm, 2008, p. 98).

[86] As Ferro put it: "It was then [after an encounter with a German businessman in 1958], and then only, that Jean Améry, a Belgian, a member of the Resistance, and a Jew, felt resentment again. Confronted by the arrogance of the new Germany, he felt alone and powerless again" (Ferro, 2010, p. 14).

the rest of their lives.[87] This is a crucial element; originally, a situation, an offence against me, is felt as an unpleasant event. In reaction to that feeling, my resentment – publicly expressed or not – is the experience of a wrong that has not been righted. It is this latter state of affairs, i.e. a-personal-wrong-not-being-righted, that bears the value of injustice. The distinction here is important because I can be wronged and retaliate on the spot; then there would be no resentment, no vengefulness and no feeling of injustice. The emotion presupposes the memory of a past offence that continues to serve as a ground for repeated experiences of injustice – and a continually unfulfilled desire for revenge – that are not redressed.[88]

Definitions of resentment which focus on actions violating norms of justice cannot explain why wronged individuals are often also resentful against the judicial system and its representatives when it fails to administer justice, nor account for the fact that resentment can be experienced in response to an event – such as a public humiliation – which in itself is not an act that transgresses a norm of justice. Resentment's formal object is not that someone wronged me, but the disvalue of the fact *that a wrong done to me is not redressed*. And this disvalue is injustice. This crucial distinction better accounts for the previous examples than the standard definition: once brutalised, I want to punish the wrongdoers or know they have been brought to justice, and once humiliated, I want my offender to be punished, be it by me, someone else or a turn of fate. The principle of justice that is violated is that *wrongs ought to be righted*. Resentment's desire for justice can be seen as the expression of a desire for revenge and retribution; it signals that the offender is perceived as deserving punishment and that such punishment would end the victim's vengefulness. The resenter is not focusing his thoughts on the past event; his thoughts are directed at the revenge; he desires to see the offender being punished and his suffering recognised, for this is what would right the wrong in question and exemplify the positive value of justice.

2.1.4 Resentment *versus* indignation

Now that we have defined resentment, the latter emotion can further be contrasted with indignation.[89] Both emotions are kinds of anger and belong to the category of reactive attitudes.[90] It is often assumed that indignation, like resentment, shares a concern for injustice, which is manifested, on one hand, in the impression that something is unjust and, on the other, in claims for justice formulated by the indignant person. The cause of indignation is

87 Frijda *in* van Goozen, 1994, p. 274.

88 "The reproduction of anger considerably past the event that occasioned it requires not just memory of that event, but a memory that continues to provoke; and the recurring idea, kept alive by the imagination, of the uncorrected 'wrongness' of the event, is a prime candidate for the job" (Griswold, 2007, p. 23).

89 As Dubreuil puts it: "We must distinguish at least two punitive emotions: the relatively cold emotion of indignation and the more visceral emotion of righteous anger" (Dubreuil, 2010, p. 48).

90 Strawson, 1962.

that someone has been wronged, where the wrong, in contrast to resentment, is impersonally disvaluable. Thus Aristotle claims that we feel indignant at the unmerited good fortune of others when it is considered unjust. Elster later distinguishes between *Cartesian* and *Aristotelian indignation.*[91] The former describes the emotion we experience when we witness a wrong inflicted upon a third-party by another person. Aristotelian indignation on the other hand responds to the awareness of another's advantage as unfair. If I read about the sons of dictators getting away with their crimes solely because they are in charge and well connected, I will most likely feel indignant. Indignation is often described in terms very similar to resentment, i.e. as a feeling of injustice, a moral protest, or an experience that invokes the concept of right, etc. What then is the difference between resentment and indignation?

A common account has it that resentment occurs when *I* have been wronged, while indignation is a reaction to the fact that *someone else* is wronged.[92] Our initial examples must therefore be interchangeable. Hence, I would feel indignant if, for example, a court condemns an innocent man, if someone tortures a beggar, if a student is excluded from university for religious reasons, if a colleague gets robbed, if a teenager is bullied by the police, or if an arrogant aristocrat humiliates a waitress at a cocktail party. Reducing indignation to vicarious resentment is rather straightforward and taken for granted by many definitions: resentment is triggered by a wrong directed against me; indignation by someone else being wronged. Accordingly, what makes a wrong personal or impersonal is its victim, that is, me or someone else, respectively.

But attributes of a personal – or impersonal – wrong are subtler than the foregoing suggests. "Resentment" is for example also used to describe the experience of an individual who is *not* directly being wronged. If a teacher gets away with bullying my son, I will react with resentment rather than indignation although I am clearly not the direct victim of her demeaning behaviour. But there is a relation to me. When the victim happens to be an individual or a group with whom I have a special bond (family, colleagues, fellow countrymen, etc.), I will respond with resentment. Adam Smith remarks that "if our friend has been injured, we readily sympathise with his resentment, and grow angry with the very person with whom he is angry".[93] By contrast, indignation is a *cooler* emotion directed towards the wrongdoers of individuals to whom we are less attached and whose well-being is less directly significant to us.[94] But why is this the case in the first place? Resentment is concerned with the self; like

[91] Elster, 2007, pp. 148–149; Elster, 2004, pp. 230–231; "Indignation is pain caused by the sight of undeserved good fortune" (Aristotle, 1386b).

[92] Haber, 1993; Norman, 2002; Rawls, 2003, p. 424. "One who experiences the vicarious analogue of resentment is said to be indignant or disapproving, or morally indignant or disapproving" (Strawson, 2008, p. 15).

[93] TMS, I, 2.

[94] Dubreuil, 2012, p. 37. Taylor rightly says:

shame, guilt, or pride, it is a self-directed emotion. These emotions all suppose a certain feeling of personal worth that depends on my relation to others and to my projects. As a result, the appropriate criterion of a personal wrong is here the way the offence is experienced and not the person – Self or Other – who is being wronged. When an offence is apprehended as challenging my sense of self-worth, be it my pride or my dignity, then (and only then) might the offence trigger my resentment. This explains why we may feel resentful when we have to helplessly stand-by as a family member or a compatriot is suffering an injustice. The historian Greenfeld has shown how national or religious martyrs, and the remembrance of their feats, mobilises strong *resentment* among their followers as opposed to feelings of indignation. As their cause is important for their sense of pride and their identity, past political repressions and martyrdom are experienced as personal wrongs by those followers who survived.[95] Such examples weaken the claim that resentment only gets triggered by a direct offence. It seems therefore possible to be resentful when *someone else* is wronged too. Symmetrically, indignation may also be elicited by wrongdoings against my person – generally assumed to be the criterion proper to resentment. Suppose a friend ruins a rare book I lent him. His negligence is wrong; he has wronged me and I will be indignant. What then makes this case different? His action (or omission) does not threaten my dignity, nor does it hurt my sense of pride.[96] I love rare books. They are intrinsically valuable to me, but their value is not instrumental to my sense of self-worth. To conceive indignation merely as the vicarious image of resentment is therefore unsatisfactory.[97] Resentment's characteristic personal wrong can also be directed against another person than me, namely all "those we are inter-

> The indignant expect the other to give them their due, and any failure to do so on the other's part naturally puts her, the other in the wrong. Treatment which is in their view not 'fitting' to their station is not seen by them as a threat to their self-esteem but as some defect in the other. *Indignation is therefore a more detached feeling than resentment* […]." (Taylor, 2006, pp. 89-90. Emphasis added).

Butler suggests a similar idea:

> It has likewise been observed, that this natural indignation is generally moderate and low enough in mankind, in each particular man, when the injury which excites it doth not affect himself, or one whom he considers as himself. Therefore, the precepts to *forgive*, and to *love our enemies*, do not relate to that general indignation against injury and the authors of it, but to this feeling, or resentment, when raised by private or personal injury. (Sermons, *Upon Forgiveness of Injuries*).

95 Greenfeld, 1994.

96 We here disagree with La Caze: "Resentment is often thought, wrongly, to only apply to harms to oneself. Resentment can be against harms and injuries done to others if we feel empathy or sympathy with them, though it can be distinguished from indignation because indignation is concerned with harms or wrongdoing in general" (La Caze, 2001, p. 33); indignation is not a response to general offences, but a reaction to an offence to my values that does not threaten my sense of self-worth. To be indignant, I need to care about a norm that has been transgressed.

97 MacLachlan, 2010, p. 425.

ested in",[98] those whose flourishing conditions *my* sense of pride and dignity. What is personal about the wrong of resentment is its deep impact on my self-respect. On the other hand, indignation is a cooler reaction to an impersonal wrong that can be directed either against me or someone else. What is impersonal about the wrong of indignation, however, is its lesser effect on my sense of self-worth. This criterion is true for the case of Aristotelian indignation as well. When someone else's advantage is deemed unfair and triggers my resentment instead of my indignation, this seems to weigh on my sense of self-worth in a different and more profound fashion. In particular, the wrongs characteristic of resentment cause a sense of injury that is absent from indignation.

Note that this criterion is not always perfectly clear-cut. 1) It tolerates degrees, i.e. the more I care for the victim or the wronged group, and the more their lives affect my sense of self-worth, the more intense my resentment will be, other things being equal. 2) Although the criterion is intuitive, it mobilises a series of cognate notions such as self-worth, dignity, pride, self-esteem, or self-respect, that are very difficult to define systematically (assuming that there is a *clear* definition for all of them, which is highly doubtful).[99] In fact, we would need a theory of the self in order to clarify all these notions and their differences. But as an illustration, note that Honneth, for example, refers to injuries, humiliations, denigration, etc. as forms of disrespect that he calls *denials of recognition*. He distinguishes three categories according to, on the one hand, the nature of the wrong and, on the other, the specific impact they have on the person. Hence, there are 1) *physical abuses* that injure one's self-confidence, 2) *denials of rights* that harm one's self-respect, and 3) *denigrations of one's social value* that hurt one's self-esteem (directly as an individual or as a member of a despised group).[100] Honneth's theory may here serve as a good example of a way of relating different kinds of wrongs to the different self-regarding attitudes they touch. Considering again our previous examples, it seems that we may be able to distinguish two types of resentment. In the light of Honneth's categories, the denial of a fair trial or the damaging of my property are breaches of some of my fundamental rights that impinge on my sense of self-worth insofar they injure my self-respect. But my humiliation at a cocktail party might not belong to the same category of wrongs since it only diminishes my social value. Indignation hurts neither my self-esteem nor my dignity. All the latter cases however must be grasped as personal wrongs in order to trigger resentment. For now, we shall simply rely on our intuitive understanding of the criterion and the idea that some wrongs have an impact on a person's sense of worth (resentment), whereas others do not (indignation).

98 EAP, p. 115.

99 Blackburn, 2014.

100 Honneth, 1996, Chap. 6.

There is also a behavioural corollary to the idea that indignation and its characteristic impersonal wrongs are cooler and less relevant to the self. A resenter tends to seek personal revenge, while the indignant person wants the offender to be punished, i.e. wants justice to be done and enforced by a third-party. As Smith puts it: "Resentment […] prompts us to desire, not only that [the author of the injury] should be punished, but that he should be punished by our means, and upon account of that particular injury which he had done to us".[101] Scheler distinguishes in that regard between *revenge*, which relates to resentment and the cooler retribution *(Vergeltung*), which is the characteristic demand of indignation. Both are equally founded in the more fundamental experience of what he calls *atonement.* But indignation's characteristic desire for punishment is not based on revenge but in a desire for retribution.[102] Oksenberg-Rorty suggests that, unlike resentment, indignation does not "motivate remedial action".[103] On Elster's view, it is only a matter of intensity as he argues that the action tendency for revenge is *stronger* in the case of anger *qua* resentment than in the case of anger *qua* indignation.[104] La Caze claims the opposite, for: "vengefulness involves the desire to hurt someone in retaliation for a perceived wrong, whereas resentment involves the acknowledgement that a wrong has occurred, without a clearly corresponding desire to punish".[105] But recent empirical results seem to disprove the latter theory.[106] Therefore apart from the nature of the wrong – personal or impersonal –, indignation can be distinguished from resentment because the former motivates demands for third-party punishment, while resentment often implies a desire for direct retaliation. The retribution at which the indignant person aims at is not a form of private justice, but the punishment of the wrongdoer by a third-party. Both emotions have hence different characteristic forms of retaliation: personal revenge is characteristic of resentment, third-party punishment typical of indignation.

A third possible criterion is that indignation, in contrast to resentment, is passive and does not motivate us to action. In reality, though, an indignant person may be quite driven. Indignant puritans are rather zealous and dedicated to enforcing the (harsh) punishment of wrongdoers who do not share their values. The existence, and sometimes the acute nature, of such a drive in the experience of indignation is vividly described in Ranulf's monograph on middle-class indignation.[107]

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101 TMS, II, 1.

102 FORM, pp. 360-363.

103 Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 92.

104 Elster, 2005, p. 202.

105 La Caze, 2001, p. 38.

106 McCullough et al., 2003.

107 Ranulf, 1964.

A fourth, oft-quoted, distinction is based on the fact that indignation constitutes a response to breaches of norms while resentment only seems to respond to wrongs.[108] Accordingly, the experiences differ insofar as resentment is a response to a violation of my interest while indignation is a reaction to someone else's violation of a norm. To support this view, garden varieties of resentment are often depicted as reactions to mere humiliations or insults. To be ridiculed by the wit of an arrogant guest at a party is certainly insulting – and I may feel resentful at him, but I do not experience such a trifle as the breaching of a moral norm. In contrast to resentment, the latter claim entails that indignation responds to an offence – directed at me or at a third-party – which is apprehended as the breaching of a norm. The argument is usually illustrated with "serious" examples such as the killing of homosexuals or the jailing of political opponents for which my indignation, and the breaching of a moral norm of justice, seems hardly disputable. But the transgression of norms should not be conflated with breaches of the law, neither should it be limited to the case of moral norms. Against this view, one may argue that in the case of resentment the norm of justice, *wrongs ought to be righted*, is transgressed. On the other hand, indignation is not only triggered by acts that breach the norms enforced by the judicial systems, neither exclusively by norms of justice, although many examples may suggest this. As a matter of fact, I may as easily feel indignant because teenagers wear skimpy clothes, hippies smoke pot, or Germans enjoy nudism. From an axiological standpoint, if modesty is a personal value, I will feel repelled by such behaviours and believe that, in general, people *ought* to be modest (i.e. not to be indecent).[109] Any attachment to values can be expressed in the form of the acknowledgement of a norm, namely the norm that a given positive (negative) value *ought* (not) to be exemplified or instantiated. Hence, it is wrong if others do not instantiate my values and I feel wronged impersonally by such breaches, but the transgressed norm is not necessarily moral. Despite indignation and resentment being important moral emotions, and the man in the street conceiving of them as responses to actions or events that bear the value of injustice, we shall argue that indignation in particular is *not merely a concern for justice*, but rather signals an attachment to values in general that translates into normative judgements of right or wrong.

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[108] "The offence involved in indignation breaches some larger practice or principle. It is, in other words, not just a personal offence but something more" (Solomon, 1989, p. 365). Also: "If I believe that another has violated my interest, I may feel anger; if I believe that in doing so he has also violated a norm, I feel indignation" (Elster, 1998, p. 48).

[109] The relation between norms and values will be further analysed in Chapter 4. However, no one has described their relation as clearly as Scheler:

> All oughtness must have it foundation in values – i.e., only values ought or ought not to be – and there is the proposition that a positive value ought to be and a negative value ought not to be. […] [T]he being of what (positively) ought to be is right, and the being of what ought not to be is wrong; all non-being of what ought to be is wrong, and all non-being of what ought not to be is right" (FORM, p. 82).

For, given my values, things (persons, actions, states of affairs) ought to instantiate those values (students ought to be punctual, husbands ought to be faithful, beach attendants ought to be modest, trials ought to be fair, art ought to be sublime, expensive food ought to be tasty). It is wrong if they do not; hence my indignation. This emotion is a reaction to the perception that particular things instantiate the opposite of my values (carelessness for students, indecency for (German) beach attendants, unfaithfulness for husbands, unfairness for trials, vulgarity for art, disgust for expensive food); it reveals my values insofar it is a reaction to an instantiation of their opposite or their mere absence.

The transgression of norms seems therefore to be part of the formal object of both indignation and resentment. It is in fact a general aspect of the experience of values, one not limited to the value of justice, nor limited to the emotion of indignation. In some respects, one could argue that resentment is just a special case of indignation. Since resentment signals an attachment to the value of justice, and all values ground some norms (the norm that a positive value *ought* to be instantiated), the breaching of norms is also part of the experience of resentment. The latter emotion, as the previous examples show, constitutes a protest against the people and the actions that fail to instantiate the values I care about. Resentment, on the other hand, occurs when a person specifically wrong me or my kin, and when this state of affairs remains unremedied which constitues an injustice.[110] What then is the norm seen as violated by the resenter? If I am the victim of unfair treatment, a norm that might structure my experience, and later my claims, could be "this wrong ought to be remedied". Such a generic norm covers all examples, from the benign humiliation endured at a social gathering to the grudges and extreme feelings of injustice harboured by holocaust survivors. Justice demands that trials *ought* to be fair, or that administrative procedures *ought* to be impartial, at least of course for anyone who cares about this value. When a state of affairs fails to be just at our expense, we can experience it as the violation of a norm. Often norms are confused with laws. But that is not the point here. The relation between values and norms in the case of resentment will be analysed in much more detail in Chapter 3. The important point here is that indignation cannot be differentiated from resentment on the basis only of the idea that the former is an experience of norms, while resentment cannot be differentiated on the basis of the idea that indignation is passive, while resentment is active. Indignation differs from resentment, first, because it responds to impersonal rather than personal wrongs, and,

[110] Prinz explains:

> Resentment may be specific to the moral domain. We typically resent those who violate moral rules. On the face of it, there may seem to be non-moral instances of resentment. We may resent those who have more than us. But here, resentment can be understood as pertaining to injustice. We resent that there is an inequitable distribution of goods. We resent people for having what they do not deserve, and desert is a moral concept (Prinz, 2007, p. 86).

second, because its associated desire to see wrongs righted calls for the punishment of the wrongdoer by a third-party rather than personal revenge.

2.1.5 Kinds of resentment

We should now briefly consider the applicability of our definition to different cases which seem somewhat to depart from the examples on which we built our definition. The object of resentment, we argue, is a wrong that has not been righted and this state of affairs is experienced as an injustice. We also argued that in the paradigmatic cases of resentment, an action constituted the original wrong the individual responds to. Yet, there are other triggers which are more contextual and where no particular action can be singled out as the trigger of resentment. The common feature however is that, in the latter case too, the individual attributes a causal responsibility – rightly or wrongly – to an agent or an abstract entity. But can resentment-contexts be specified further? Resentment may in reality be triggered by mere social comparison. The emotion is for example often said to be caused by such general social facts as wealth or power inequalities. Elster defines resentment as "an emotion that stems from the perception that one's group is located in an unjust subordinate position on a status hierarchy"[111] and Barbalet as "a feeling experienced by social actors when an external agency denies them opportunities or valued resources (including status) that otherwise would be available to them".[112] Elster suggests that it is rather the experience of a social status, rank or stations that is lowered which is effective in triggering resentment. As he puts it: "resentment is caused by the reversal of a prestige hierarchy, when a formerly inferior group or individual emerges as dominant".[113] When such a change materialises, an individual may feel resentment when comparing himself and his position with those who enjoy a coveted advantage. Solomon defines resentment as a kind of anger directed at higher-status individuals.[114] Social psychologists therefore tend to consider the emotion as a negative reaction to upward comparisons[115], and, more specifically, to "angry feelings resulting from the perception that another's advantage is unfair" and belongs to the family of the "upward contrastive emotions".[116] These characterisations are broad enough to cover the many examples in which a person experiences a disadvantaged social position or sees her prestige reduced. But are such cases any different from the definition we defend? Let us here consider the fact that

111 Elster, 1999, p. 74. Elster grounds his definition on Petersen's work on ethnic violence (see: Petersen, 2002).

112 Barbalet, 1992, p. 153.

113 Elster, 2007, p. 149.

114 Solomon, 1993.

115 Smith, 2000; van de Ven et al., 2009.

116 Smith, 2000, p. 180.

specific social structures can, all by themselves, be a source of resentment.[117] Note first that these kind of social disadvantages persist and cannot be improved on the spot, which explains why we may speak of resentment rather than ordinary anger for example (see Section 2.1.1). Then, one can be depressed by the loss of status or by finding oneself to be mediocre as compared to a more talented group. But in all these cases resentment only occurs when the individual comes to apprehend his disadvantaged position as an undeserved wrong for which some person or group is to be blamed.

Of course, one could still argue that when I feel resentment because, say, I and my family are becoming poorer, there is no one for me to blame directly. But in reality, the individual blames a wrongdoer in these cases too; even in class resentment there is an attribution of responsibility for one's disadvantageous social standing to another group. The sociologist Marshall explains that class resentment "imput[es] to the superior class responsibility for the injustice under which the inferior suffers".[118] Nietzsche, as noted earlier, claims more generally that the unpleasant character of some emotions motivates us to look for someone to blame.[119] Note that for the German philosopher, this causal attribution mechanism – "it's because of the rich that I am poor" – is considered an illusion and a psychological device that allows individuals to find some relief from their suffering. This important claim will be analysed much more thoroughly when we come to discuss *ressentiment*. Note that the fact that resentment may be based on erroneous and self-serving beliefs has no impact on the formal structure of this emotion. And if the individual is cynically only mimicking expressions of resentment – a possibility that will be explored later on – , it still remains a ready-made of resentment with its characteristic claims for justice and a desire to redress a situation he will present as being unjust and resulting from someone's wrongdoings.

One difficulty still remains. Our previous examples build on the fact that there is a temporal difference between, on one hand, the original offence and the individual's incapacity to retaliate against his offender, and, on the other hand, the feeling of injustice that one's offence, humiliation or injury is not righted. When social comparison constitutes resentment's trigger, the offence is continuous and permanent. In fact, the abstract nature of what is taken to be a wrong – one's relative poverty or one's relative lack of talent – makes an immediate retaliation quite impossible. When resentment is elicited by an unpleasant upward comparison, the offence is temporally different from humiliation or wrongdoings and its presumed author can be anything from an individual to a group ("the rich", "foreigners", "politicians", "large multinational corporations", etc.). But the emotional experience in

117 Feather, 1999.

118 Marshall cited by Barbalet, 1992, p. 154.

119 GM, III, 15.

this latter case is also one of injustice, of an unrighted wrong. We shall argue that the experience of injustice focuses on the fact that the situation lasts and does not change, that nothing can be done to remedy a situation which deprives the resenter of coveted goods. A good illustration for this is the form of the resenter's claims: he wants justice to be done, which in effect is to intend that his unfavourable position be improved, perhaps at the expense of those to whom he compares himself.

Finally, resentment is often cited in the scholarly literature about social norms and free-riding. The emotion is claimed to be the response to free-riders, that is, to the persons or groups that profit from a good without bearing the costs of it, for example, someone who dodges taxes. Murphy writes that resentment is a reaction to the fact that "another has taken unfair advantage of one's sacrifices by free riding on a mutually beneficial scheme of reciprocal cooperation".[120] Sinnott-Armostrong seems to share a similar view insofar he thinks that "we can feel resentment when we are disadvantaged unfairly even if we are not harmed, deceived, and so on".[121] Or as André puts it: "le *ressentiment* partage avec la colère ses sources [...] des violations de règles, un non-respect de l'intérêt général : les *malotrus* qui laissent leur chien pisser sur les murs ou chier devant les portes, les petits malins qui resquillent, qui fraudent".[122] Resentment is thus directed against cheaters or non-contributors. More recently, experimental economics and social psychology have provided additional support for this view. In the conclusion of their account of their ground-breaking experiments, Fehr and Gächter say that:

> Questionnaire evidence that elicits subjects' motives and emotions indicates that the deviation from the norm of cooperation causes *resentment* and the impulse to punish.[123]

These experimental findings also show that, despite staying unaffected by cheaters or free-riders, we support their punishment, even when we incur a cost.[124] Other findings suggest that indignation can also motivate irrational retaliations against wrongdoers after which we find ourselves worse off. But is resentment a response to free-riding? The earlier definition makes it a necessary condition for the individual to apprehend himself as being wronged and to resent the fact that the offence is not righted yet. One could perhaps argue that our response to free-riders is of the same form. Some forms of free-riding may be apprehended as a direct insult. For example, when the rich dodge taxes while I have to pay them despite a low income. This may be experienced as a wrong. We shall claim, however, that our response

120 Murphy *in* Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 16.

121 Sinnott-Armstrong, 2007, p. 89.

122 Andre, 2009, p. 141.

123 Fehr & Gächter, 2000, p. 8. Emphasis added. See also: Petit, 2008, p. 17; Arneson, 1982.

124 Heller & Sieberg, 2008, p. 401.

to the free-riding of others is different from resentment. When other people dodge their taxes I am indignant, but *resentful* only, perhaps, about the fact that I am deprived of some advantages and stuck with no power nor money – and hold the rich responsible for it. If we reconsider our previous descriptions, the crucial difference is the fact that free-riding does not challenge my sense of honour, pride or self-worth in the same way the triggers of resentment do. Our reaction against free-riders can be very heated. But their actions are not experienced as personal wrongs. We shall therefore argue that the emotional mechanism that public good experiments unveil is that we respond with *indignation* when others cheat and that we readily punish them even if such measures involve a cost to us.[125]

2.2 Conclusion

What can we conclude from the foregoing? Resentment is an affective response to the fact that a wrong has not been righted, which harms my sense of self-worth directly (I am the victim) or indirectly (someone else is the victim). We also argued that the injustice is *not* a feature of the action (or omission) itself, but of the fact that a wrong remains unremedied. Resentment is a kind of anger, which is marked phenomenologically by the fact that it lasts longer than the affect of anger and that its characteristic impulses cannot be acted on. For resentment to occur one first needs to become the victim of an *offence*, or perceive a state of affairs as a personal wrong, which is a wrong someone inflicts on me or a friend, or by anything perceived as a wrong inflicted upon me or a friend, and against which one cannot retaliate on the spot. Resentment's *formal* object is the disvalue of the fact that the wrong has not yet been righted, the disvalue of injustice. By contrast, the formal object of ordinary anger (*Ärger*) is the disvalue to me of whatever frustrates my projects, including the inanimate world or a wrong that can be righted on the spot. This definition departs from traditional approaches that consider the wrongful act against me to be the bearer of the disvalue of injustice.

Our definition of resentment allows us to understand: 1) resentment's "concern for justice" and "relevance for the self"; 2) the concomitant desire for revenge; and 3) why acts as diverse as a trifling insult (pride-injury), torture or the mere lack of recognition (dignity-injury) may cause resentment. It also explains why 4) the resenter always attributes responsibility for his condition to some entity (person, group, or deity) that is the *proper* object of resentment and 5) the fact that that my sense of pride and dignity can depend on another person's fate. This definition also encompasses cases in which resentment is felt after an offence is inflicted upon someone other than me. The phenomenology of resentment reveals that the individual's painful experience revolves around the fact that a past wrong is still not

[125] Fehr & Gächter, 2000

redressed, and that the wrongdoers get away without being punished for their actions. Finally 6), resentment's *proper* object is the person or group who wronged me or is perceived to have done so. The formal object of resentment – the injustice that a wrong is not righted – is damaging to my sense of self-worth *qua* dignity or self-respect. One can feel resentful if others get wronged only when the offence they suffer is experienced as impinging on me (e.g. wrongful actions against my family, friends, compatriots, etc.). Indignation on the other hand is an emotion triggered when others fail to instantiate my values, which is experienced as an impersonal wrong. I become indignant when those wrongs are not redressed and their authors never punished. This is indignation *qua* response to injustice. But there is also indignation *qua* response to immodesty, cowardice, or laziness, for one can also be indignant when others fail to be modest, courageous or healthy as they are important values to me. All cases of indignation are cooler than resentment as they do not hurt one's self-respect.

Our definitions of resentment and indignation will allow us to untangle the recurrent confusions that persist when they are related or reduced to the phenomenon of *ressentiment* proper. Of course, the lexicographic similarities lead to challenging semantic difficulties, and the fact that both resentment and indignation seem to be part of the experience of *ressentiment* just adds to its complexity. One intuition in particular is regularly advanced: the kind of resentment or indignation harboured by the man of *ressentiment* is not authentic, but propped up, and a mere posture. A theory of *ressentiment* will allow us to understand what lies behind this claim.

3 WHAT IS *RESSENTIMENT*?

We shall now present a theory of *ressentiment*. But before we start, let us briefly review the history and etymology of this rather modern word. "*Ressentiment*" was originally a French expression, which made its way into German in the second half of the 19th century thanks to the controversial writer Eugen Karl Dühring. In the many editions of his book *Der Wert des Lebens* (1865), Dühring develops the idea that all concepts of justice *(Gerechtigkeitsbegriffe)* have an affective grounding in the reactive feeling of *ressentiment*, which belongs to the same family as revenge.[126] Some authors trace Nietzsche's usage of the term back to the French critic and historian Taine, whose writings on the French Revolution were allegedly highly admired by the German philosopher.[127] It has also been argued that Kierkegaard used the expression even earlier and thus anticipated the Nietzschean concept. This, however, is the unfortunate outcome of Theodor Haecker's anachronistic translation (1914) of the Danish word for envy (*misundelse*) as *ressentiment*, which, by then, was already a common philosophical concept.[128] Today, *ressentiment* is still used by Germans as a synonym for holding a grudge.[129] In vernacular French, the word has an older history. Originally, it was used as a synonym for the mere memory of painful experiences, especially when they touch one's pride or self-love.[130] But Sévérac rightly points to another possible meaning, recorded in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), where the word designates the emotional reaction to both good and bad events (or to the memories thereof). The positive meaning (related to good events) has disappeared. Yet the reactive dynamic and the importance of thoughts and memory in the form of a recollection of past bad treatments remain essential to the concept.[131] Only in the 19th century did the French word start to designate a phenomenon

[126] Small, 1997, p. 40-41; Dühring, 1865, p. xviii. In this first edition of his book, the German author explains:

> Das Rechtsgefühl ist wesentlich ein *ressentiment*, eine reaktive Empfindung, d. h. es gehört mit der Rache in dieselbe Gefühlsgattung. Ist nun die bisher stets übersehene Beziehung, in welche wir die Rache und das ganze System aller moralischen und juristischen Rechtsbegriffe setzen, richtig, so folgt mit Notwendigkeit, dass auch die Vorstellungen von einer transzendenten Gerechtigkeit auf dieselbe Quelle, nämlich den Rachetrieb, zurückzuführen sind (Dühring, 1865, p. 219).

[127] Cate, 2002; Meltzer & Musolf, 2002.

[128] Calinescu, 1987, p. 343; Poole, 1993, p. 304; Kaufmann, 1980, p. 125. Later (1940), Alexander Dru followed Theodor Haecker's translation.

[129] Bittner *in* Schacht, 1994, p. 128.

[130] He explains: "Le *ressentiment* est donc un retentissement, le retentissement d'une souffrance, d'un mal causé dans le passé mais qui continue à produire, au présent, ses effets" (Sévérac in Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, p. 115). And later adds: "De Pascal nous pouvons d'abord retenir que le *ressentiment* […] se vit […] comme le retentissement intérieur d'un amour de soi blessé" (*ibid*., p. 130).

[131] Note that Pascal, Leibniz, and Spinoza have all described parts of the mechanism of *ressentiment* as we shall define it later. However, they designate the phenomenon in different terms, namely as anger, hatred, or vengeance. The usage, in French, of "*ressentiment*" proper remains quite rare (Sévérac *in* Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, p. 117).

closer to our modern understanding of resentment as an affective reaction to offences, injustices, or unflattering social comparisons coupled with an intense desire for revenge. In ordinary speech, its closest synonym is "rancour", although the latter lacks any form of intense revengefulness. At the time of the second industrial revolution, the term was used by the French elite to depict and condemn what they perceived to be the secret motivation of revenge behind the proletariat's protests.[132] *Ressentiment* is now also associated with a form of shallowness, or inauthenticity. For example, the expression is often used to criticise grand ideologies or doctrines such as Nazism, feminism, egalitarianism, or communism; *ressentiment*, many authors believe, is the ultimate motive behind these movements and it is different – less admirable – from the motives they profess.[133]

The expression became notorious with Nietzsche's extremely influential *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), which has been subject to many readings.[134] The philosopher aims to give an argument that is largely empirical and offers to unveil the social, historical, and psychological conditions that allowed early Christian morality to gain momentum.[135] Yet Nietzsche's ultimate goal is to assess the value of that same morality,[136] and this can only be achieved – he claims – by gaining a better understanding of morality and its origins, which are rooted in the psychological mechanism of *ressentiment*.[137] Nietzsche of course had a tremendous impact on European philosophy and literature. His psychological insights, and the concept of *ressentiment* in particular were seriously considered by Else Voigtländer, a phenomenologist and student of Theodor Lipps, who discusses the concept as early as 1910.[138] In her book

132 Jarrige *in* Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, pp. 83–85.

133 Angenot, 1997; Jarrige *in* Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, pp. 82–83; Schuman, 1936.

134 For an overview of the reception of *The Genealogy*, see Schacht *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, pp. 323–342.

135 As Nietzsche puts it: "eventually my curiosity and suspicion were bound to fix on the question of *what origin* our terms good and evil actually have" (GM, Preface, 5). Leiter suggests that the Genealogy's ambition is clearly historical and aims at providing a factual account of the origins of (Christian) morality (see: Leiter, 2002; Jaggard *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, p. 348). Note that here we will follow what we believe to be the most plausible line of interpretation of his account of morality, one that strongly departs from the (traditional) postmodern reading by considering Nietzsche to be a philosopher of human nature whose aim is to provide a naturalistic, psychological, and historical set of arguments for his theses (Leiter, 2002; Schacht *in* Gemes and Richardson, 2013, pp. 323–343).

136 As Nietzsche explains:

> [W]e stand in need of a *critique* of moral values, *the value of theses values itself should first of all be called into question*. This requires a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances of their growth, development, and displacement (GM, Preface, 6).

An important distinction to bear in mind is that the reevaluation of values which the philosopher wants to trigger is different from the reevaluation of values characteristic of *ressentiment*.

137 Nietzsche makes this very explicit in EH, when he reviews the aim of GM—which is concerned with "the birth of Christianity out of the spirit of *ressentiment*" (EH, III). He also claims that "morality is just a *sign language of the affects*" (BGE, 187).

138 Schuhmann *in* Poli, 1997, p. 48.

Vom Selbstgefühl, Voigtländer embraces the Nietzschean view and defines the phenomenon as an alteration of values. Her analysis stresses the importance of the feeling of self-worth, and how, more particularly, *ressentiment* is the mark of a wounded self-esteem that tries to find a compensation in a reevaluation.[139] But the most notable reaction to the Nietzschean project comes from a famous colleague of hers, Max Scheler, in his *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen.*[140] In this essay, the then Catholic philosopher argues against Nietzsche, that Christianity, and its concept of love, are completely devoid of *ressentiment*. Interestingly, however, he agrees with Nietzsche on the central role of *ressentiment* in modern ideologies and the bourgeois *ethos*, and embarks on a very detailed description of its many facets, which in some respect builds on Nietzsche's descriptions.[141] Scheler's argumentation, unlike Nietzsche's, has a clearly conceptual part and offers an explicit definition of the phenomenon that he famously associates with a self-poisoning of the mind, as well as a typology in which he discusses, for example, what he takes to be forms of *ressentiment* such as the love of humanity (*Menschenliebe*) or relativism. More recently, the expression has been discussed in the context of transitional justice,[142] in Merton's sociological theory,[143] and of course by Nietzsche exegetes with a renewed interest in his moral philosophy.[144] But in general, "*ressentiment"* is still used only marginally. Under a different name, however, the phenomenon and its variants have had more success, especially in the philosophy of emotions and the philosophy of self-deception. An important example in that respect is Elster's theory of sour grapes.[145]

Perhaps because of this philosophical heritage, and the decision made by most (German) philosophers to keep using the French word, the educated English person now has two different expressions at his disposal: "resentment" and "*ressentiment.*" The latter remains uncommon and primarily restricted to academic jargon. In more recent philosophical literature, resentment and *ressentiment* are regularly used interchangeably, causing much confusion.[146] *Ressentiment* is often thought of as "a particular and especially virulent and pathological form of resentment, amounting to a kind of hatred of others to whom one is in thrall".[147]

139 Voigtländer, 1910, p. 46; Vendrell Ferran, 2008, pp. 227–228.

140 Three revised versions were published between 1912 and 1919. We will use the version of 1915 exclusively.

141 "If we look at European history, we are struck by the enormous effectiveness of *ressentiment* in the formation of moralities. Our task is to determine its role in the formation of Christian morality on one hand, of modern bourgeois morality on the other." (RAM, p. 53).

142 Améry, 1968; Minkkinen, 2007; Brudholm, 2008.

143 Merton, 1997.

144 Leiter, 2002; Poellner, 2007; Wallace, 2006; Reginster, 1997.

145 Elster, 1983; Elster, 2010.

146 The translation of Nietzsche's works into English has not always been consistent in this respect. In the 1918 version of Horace B. Samuel, *ressentiment* is replaced by resentment.

147 Schacht *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, p. 329.

Finding out whether both concepts are truly distinct and, if they are, determining how they are related is an important *desideratum* for any theory of *ressentiment.*

The expression has no adjectival or adverbial form; of an individual experiencing it, we thus have to say that he is a "person of *ressentiment*". We will therefore use the acronym POR (person of *ressentiment*) from time to time, if only in order to avoid too many repetitions.

If "*ressentiment*" denotes a real phenomenon in ordinary life, we should all have some pre-theoretical grasp of it. Let us try to illustrate this grasp with some examples. To start with, we may be familiar with such characteristic figures as the failed artist who condemns fame and praises authenticity and other virtues precisely because the former eludes him; or the self-righteous politician who likes to disparage the rich and famous because he secretly envies them. The religious ascetic who craves sensuality but condemns the morals of our society as depraved. We may also be familiar with the envious man who criticises his successful neighbour and congratulates himself for the virtues of humility and frugality he believes himself to possess. Or the intellectual who struggles with mathematics and logic and as a consequence of his struggles comes to claim that they are less important than the field of rhetoric. Then of course there is the popular fable of the fox and the grapes which represents the frustrated animal who is unable to reach the grapes and eventually comes to pretend they are sour. And then, the less common, but still important, example of the priests in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* who suffer from their weakness in comparison to the rulers, but turn their incapacity into a virtue.

We will begin our inquiry with a description of the experience of *ressentiment* and its different characteristic parts, namely, an original sense of impotence and inferiority, hostile emotions such as envy, revenge, and its typical marker *Schadenfreude*. In response to this, the POR, according to both Scheler and Nietzsche, indulges in a process of reevaluation – an essential mechanism that will be analysed in the second section.

In the following, we will first determine the relation between *ressentiment* and other psychological states such as envy, hatred, malice, anger, resentment, indignation, and a desire for revenge (3.1.1). We shall focus on their respective formal objects, especially when these emotions occur as a part of the broader phenomenon of *ressentiment* (3.1.2). Additionally, we will reconsider two central – and often confused – phenomena: the feeling of inferiority and the feeling of impotence, and contrast them with the experience of frustration and unfulfilled desires. We shall claim that the feeling of inferiority rather than mere frustration or acknowledgement of one's impotence constitutes the initial experience of *ressentiment* (3.1.3). Also, we will suggest a distinction between two families of self-regarding attitudes which greatly clarifies the very nature of the POR's experience compared to genuine episodes of resent-

ment or indignation. We will argue that *ressentiment* expresses a damaged sense of self-esteem rather than self-respect (3.1.4). In conclusion, we should then be able to determine the very nature of *ressentiment*, and delineate it from all other central categories of the philosophy of emotions.

3.1 The experience of *ressentiment*

Our aim is firstly define what the particular phenomenon of *ressentiment* is, which amounts to determining its relations to other psychological categories, and secondly to find out whether or not *ressentiment* constitutes an emotion, a sentiment, a mechanism, or a psychological process of its own. This means that we need to clarify how *ressentiment*'s constitutive parts are experienced, how they are related to one another, their typical intensity, frequency, sequence, whether they are conscious or not, and how deep they are. A phenomenology of *ressentiment* should ultimately establish whether or not this experience has any unity (*Erlebniseinheit*), for example in the form of a characteristic sequence of mental states, something Scheler wonders about in the prefatory remarks of his monograph. The agenda is straightforward. But since the phenomenological method employed here is hard to define and a precise discussion of the methodological aspects of (realist) phenomenology would fall outside the scope of this thesis,[148] we should only stress some of its fundamental characteristics, and outline the assumptions on which we build our analysis. To begin with, we embrace a liberal view of the phenomenological method in agreement with Peter Goldie, who claims that "a satisfactory phenomenology of a kind of experience will be one that anyone who has undergone that kind of experience will, more or less, recognise, and, as they say these days, resonate to".[149]

Secondly, we will rely on the premise that "we are in possession of *a priori* [...] knowledge relating to certain fundamental structures in a wide range of different spheres of objects (for example, colours, tones, values, shapes)".[150] Knowledge about a given matter is gained through the means of an intuitive grasp of an object's essence. Such a grasp should not be grounded in prior assumptions or theoretical pre-conceptions; it should be entirely guided by the facts as they are given in experience.[151] The method, in other words, is non-transcendental but intuitive and aimed at discovering the *a priori* structures of a given object; or as

[148] On this topic, one can consult among others: Brentano, 2014; Spiegelberg, 1971; Mulligan, 2001; Vendrell Ferran, 2008; Clarke, 1932; Eaton, 1930; Ryle et al., 1932; Woodruff Smith & Thomasson, 2005; Glendinning, 2007.

[149] Goldie, 2010, p. 86

[150] Smith *in* Embree, 1987, p. 586.

[151] This is called eidetic reduction and constitutes a central element of realist phenomenology, summarised by the celebrated Husserlian slogan "back to the things themselves", from his ground breaking *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 2001; Vendrell Ferran, 2008).

Zahavi puts it: "to describe the given in as direct, unprejudiced, and pure a manner as possible, thereby allowing for a disclosure of its essence".[152] In this first, phenomenological, part of the analysis of *ressentiment* we do *not* intend, by any means, to provide an *explanation* (in the form, for example, of a set of causal relations between the occurrence of the *ressentiment* and this or that social phenomenon). Our ambition is here only to provide a structured *description* of the phenomenon, as it is given in experience, and with which we are familiar through folk psychology and personal experience.[153] Some will say that this is no more nor less than a conceptual analysis. The outcome is intended to be a careful description of our experience which will unveil the non-contingent, non-causal relations between different phenomena, and for the particular case of *ressentiment*, an account of its essence and relations to other related phenomena, such as envy, indignation, and the feeling of injustice or hatred. It is worth noting that the present approach to the philosophy of *ressentiment* can also be understood in Wittgensteinian terms since both realist phenomenologists and Wittgenstein himself endorse the fundamental distinction between description and explanation. The former take essences seriously and considers them accessible via the introspective phenomenological method. On the other hand, Wittgenstein thinks essence is given by grammar and thus that access to it is provided by the analysis of ordinary language.[154] Finally, our theory of *ressentiment*, and the distinctions and categorisation we propose will be tested against counter-examples and shown to be in accord with our empirical scientific knowledge.[155]

An important preliminary question we should now answer concerns the psychological category to which *ressentiment* belongs. For lack of a better expression, we often say it is a *complex* affective phenomenon. But what makes it complex? What are the constituents of *ressentiment*? How are they related, what is their sequence, and how does *ressentiment* compare with other cognate states? *Ressentiment* is usually depicted using highly metaphorical language that requires reference to several psychological categories (thoughts, feelings, emo-

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152 Zahavi *in* Schrift, 2010, pp. 174-175.

153 Mulligan, 2012, Chap. 1. As Glendinning puts it:

> What the phenomenologist aims at, then, is not a theory of this or that phenomenon, a theory which would be characterised by its distinctive positions and extractable theses, but an effort to come reflectively to terms with something that is, in some way, already 'evident'. It is in this sense a work of explication, elucidation, explicitation or description of something we, in some way, already understand, or with which we are already, in some way, familiar, but which, for some reason, we cannot get into clear focus for ourselves without more ado (Glendinning, 2007, p. 16).

154 Pouivet *in* Dutant et al., 2014, pp. 449-464. Note that Wittgenstein has influenced the current philosophy of mind much more than the writings of the early phenomenologists, although the realist assumptions of the latter are much more popular today than the anti-realist views of Wittgenstein (Mulligan, 2012; Margalit *in* Glock & Hyman, 2009, pp. 1-26).

155 Smith *in* Floridi, 2008, p. 156.

tions, sentiments, passions or desires). Clearly, it does not consist in feeling just one individual emotion, such as hatred for example, over a short period of time, despite the popularity of this type of reduction.[156] The phenomenon is also often reduced to mere envy or revengefulness; the sociologist Ranulf refers to Scheler's account of *ressentiment* as a theory of envy or more specifically of envy as disguised indignation.[157] Several authors in fact consider *ressentiment* to be nothing but a special manifestation of envy (Rawls, Schoeck, Smith & Kim, Fernández de la Mora). In the academic literature, and particularly in the secondary literature on Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is generally just assumed to be a heterogeneous collection of hatred, vengefulness, envy, spite, and various forms of moral protest, without any sort of binding structure. Another source of confusion is the characterisation of the phenomenon as a particularly intense and consuming way of undergoing hostile emotions.[158] There are certainly pragmatic reasons for us to use one or the other of these elements as an abbreviation for the whole, complex, phenomenon. But this tells us nothing about the relations that tie theses states together.

The most important source of confusion remains the reduction of *ressentiment* to resentment. One cannot begin by excluding the possibility that *ressentiment* is in fact just the scholarly designation for resentment; a loanword providing an erudite connotation that French (and German) words often convey in English. A first possible criterion for the distinction between resentment and *ressentiment* is therefore this: the difference between both states is ultimately grounded on a difference in their triggering objects. Compared to resentment, *ressentiment* feels much worse because it reacts to *very serious, personal, wrongs*. For victims of genocide or torture, for example, the wrong endured is far worse than any of the previously discussed garden varieties of resentment. For Améry, the post-war emancipation of the Germans and their willingness to forget the atrocities of the Holocaust constitute a distressing experience that nurtures his obsessive grudge and vindictiveness.[159] He therefore defends the right to harbour *ressentiment* against the Germans, as opposed to simply resenting them. Reporting his attitude as mere "resentment" would understate it – at least in English. In other words, resentment and *ressentiment* could be distinguished by the distinct intensity of their triggering events and formal objects. A similar idea has been formulated by Fassin, who considers resentment to be a response to an unfavourable but mundane situation, while *ressentiment* describes the moral anguish endured by victims of dramatic events and large-scale human rights abuses.[160] From this latter perspective, the French loanword may be more

156 Wallace, 2006.

157 Ranulf, 1964, Appendix.

158 Wallace, 2006, p. 214; Stopford, 2009, p. 66.

159 Améry, 1980.

160 Fassin writes:

adequate, for it provides a gravitas that the ordinary "resentment" lacks.[161] But this usage, unfortunately, is far from ideal. We shall later argue that even ordinary situations and events can prompt *ressentiment*. A banal but recurrent humiliation may typically feel distressing and lead an individual to develop hostile emotions that he needs to repress. Someone can become a man of *ressentiment*, our account will show, just because he feels bad about his more talented neighbour. Also, Améry's claim that *ressentiment* covers more dramatic events than resentment seems to take into account only some of the connotations purveyed by Nietzsche's aphorisms, and leaves aside most of the psychologically and morally problematic features that this phenomenon involves.[162] We should therefore set this usage aside.

Also, *ressentiment* is clearly a different psychological phenomenon from resentment, they belong to different mental categories. One distinguishes between episodic states and processes such as emotions, moods and feelings and those which endure longer. There is for example an important ontological difference between a sudden bout of anger that fades away (an episode) and my enduring love for my parents (a disposition, a sentiment). Moods have no particular object, while emotions are always directed towards something specific. Peter's anger is directed against someone particular, while his grumpiness is unspecific and colours, while it lasts, all his experience.[163] Feelings and occurrent emotions are all episodic, but some emotions also have a dispositional form. Folk psychology tends to treat emotions as episodic states or processes. But emotions can be understood as dispositions too. Ordinary language in fact often allows for both interpretations: to say that Peter is angry with John can mean that Peter's anger is an episode occurring now but also that Peter tends to feel angry towards John. *Ressentiment* in that regard always seems to be a temporally extended phenomenon while resentment can be either episodic or dispositional. It is episodic, for

> [*R*]*essentiment* is a reaction to historical facts, which generate an anthropological condition: victims of genocide, apartheid, or persecutions experience this condition. It implies not primarily revenge but recognition. It signifies the impossibility to forget and the senselessness to forgive. The man of *ressentiment* may have been directly exposed to oppression and domination, or indirectly, through the narratives of his parents or grandparents, for instance. By contrast, resentment is a reaction to a relational situation, which results from a sociological position: police officers, far right constituents, and long-term unemployed workers may find themselves in such a position. It involves diffuse animosity and tends toward vindictiveness. It shifts its object of discontent from specific actors toward society at large and vulnerable groups in particular, via imaginary projections. The resentful man is not directly or indirectly exposed to oppression and domination, but he expresses discontent about a state of affairs that does not satisfy him (Fassin, 2013, 260).

161 Frings, 1997, p. 53.

162 For Améry, *ressentiment* is not just a psychological disturbance; undergoing it is more serious. Unlike Nietzsche, he holds that (his) *ressentiment* is not morally objectionable because of the weight and magnitude of the wrong he suffered, which outweighs all moral condemnation we might raise against it (see: Améry, 1980).

163 Deonna & Teroni, 2009, p. 361.

example, when the wrong it responds to is redressed quickly. However, it tends to endure as the very nature of its object is the lasting injustice of an unrighted wrong. *Ressentiment* on the other hand is a disposition that manifests itself in different episodes and dispositions. The POR tends to feel envy, to be revengeful, to experience *Schadenfreude* and hatred, to be spiteful and malicious, and eventually to harbour a form of self-righteous indignation or resentment. Such a list suggests that the phenomenon's affective dispositions are multi-track as they concern different emotions.[164] Is *ressentiment* then just the label for a loose bundle of emotional dispositions or for their manifestations? When emotional dispositions are appropriately unified they constitute what is called a sentiment. Sentiments are "deeply rooted dispositions the manifestations of which are emotions".[165] An ascription of *ressentiment* is the attribution of a sentiment, requiring "a specific coherence and stability in the emotions (episodes) a subject is likely to feel".[166] A sentiment is also usually called a motive in the context of the explanation of another's actions.[167] Note that there is a larger variety of sentiments than the emotions that compose them and that the expressions for emotions can sometimes be used to refer to sentiments. But how are sentiments related to other long-lasting states such as moods and character traits? Sentiments endure more than moods but not as long as a personality trait.[168] According to Shand, the system of sentiments, as he calls it, is more general than the system of emotions which is itself less general then the system of character traits.[169] In other words, the sentiment of envy I harbour towards a neighbour will manifest itself in a series of episodes: in my *Schadenfreude* when he gets burgled, in a desire to destroy his property, in my anger at seeing his success, and perhaps in my repeated indignation about his way of life. And if one were to explain my conduct, a sentiment of envy would be mentioned as the motive of my actions; people would say I did this or that *out of* or *from* envy. However, envy only remains a sentiment as long as its characteristic emotional dispositions stay focused on a particular person or group (that is, I am angry, indignant, resentful at my neighbour). When dispositions are non-object specific they constitute a character trait.[170] To have the trait of envy – to be an envious person – is different from the senti-

164 Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 8.

165 Mulligan, 1998, p. 162.

166 Deonna & Teroni, 2009, p. 360.

167 Mulligan, 1998, p. 162.

168 Oatley *in* Sander & Scherer, 2009, p. 360.

169 As Shand explains:

> [...] the function of [the greater systems] is to organise certain of the lesser systems of emotions by imposing on them a common end and subjecting them to a common cause…These higher systems we shall call "sentiments" to distinguish them from the lesser systems of the emotions. All varieties of Love belong to the former class (Shand, 1926, p. 50)

170 Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 8.

ment for it implies that I envy not only my neighbour but show a disposition to feel anger, indignation, revengefulness and resentment (in a specific envious way) towards any potential rival who I see as enjoying superior possessions, achievements or qualities. In virtue of these distinctions, *ressentiment* fits the description of a sentiment whose emotional manifestations we still need to define in more detail.

However, Goldie claims that *ressentiment* starts as a *mood:* "the person who feels anger towards someone in particular can be left in a mood of *ressentiment* through frustrations of his desires".[171] We shall argue, however, that such frustration alone is not distinctive of the early stages of *ressentiment.* Goldie also claims that the mood of anger can solidify into a trait, and the individual become "habitually disposed to have resentful thoughts and feelings towards all sorts of specific persons and things".[172] But would that not be the trait of irascibility or resentfulness then? *Ressentiment* never starts as a mood; it is a sentiment characterised by a series of object-specific dispositions that consolidates into a character trait as the phenomenon progresses. This character trait is then the vice of *ressentiment*, a vice which is opposed to the virtue of gratitude, as the emotion of resentment is opposed to the emotion of gratitude. Scheler refers to such a progression towards traithood when he claims that "the continual reliving of emotions sinks [the emotional response] more deeply into the centre of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression".[173] In support of this description – and this will become much clearer as we describe the different parts of the phenomenon – is the fact that *ressentiment* is typically first triggered by a *particular* object or person and may then progressively come to be triggered by more abstract entities. The POR is eventually responsive to any person or group that exemplifies problematic properties the perception of which grounds typical *ressentiment*-emotions.

An enduring sentiment like *ressentiment* is interrupted by many episodes attached to other sentiments. In the *Prefatory Remarks* of his monograph, as we have already noted, Scheler briefly addresses the difficulty of finding a unity in long-lasting experiences.[174] As a matter of fact, the POR will sleep, eat, experience pain, admire her daughter's first steps, be saddened by a terrorist attack, be indignant about the speech of a presidential candidate, and perhaps fall in love with her piano teacher. These are all common and recurrent emotional episodes or sentiments, but they are not part of the experience of *ressentiment* proper. The ultimate

171 Goldie, 2000, p. 150.

172 Goldie, 2000, p. 150.

173 RAM, p. 20.

174 RAM, p. 19.

goal in this chapter is therefore also to show that a unity nevertheless exists.[175] Let us now describe how the different stages and moments of *ressentiment* unfold.

3.1.1 What does *ressentiment* feels like?

Feelings of impotence and inferiority

The phenomenon begins with the apprehension of one's own inability to realise a state of affairs that has a positive value. The POR, in other words, is pained and distressed by the fact that she remains incapable of doing what is required to get the job, the car, the partner, the status, the talent, the power, the recognition, the beauty, the wealth, or the happiness she dearly values.[176] This distress is often triggered by other persons and their relative successes or believed to be triggered by other persons and their relative successes. Wallace rightly claims that the men of *ressentiment*, because of their impotence, "find themselves in a conceptual situation in which the negative affect that dominates their emotional lives is directed at individuals whom they themselves seem compelled to regard as exemplars of value and worthy of admiration".[177] The experience of *ressentiment* is claimed to be long-lasting, painful, and to have an intensely corrosive effect on our lives.[178] Despite this unpleasantness, the phenomenon is grounded in a positive valuation which is often overlooked. The POR grasps the positive value of a state of affairs which she appears to be incapable of bringing about. Physical infirmities, economic disadvantages, personal shortcomings or social conventions are some of the many obstacles preventing the POR from living up to her own values. Note that all of these obstacles may also just be *imagined,* in which case the POR will only *believe* that she is incapable of doing what is necessary to obtain the coveted good.[179] Certainly, the incapacity to bring about something we value can be a distressing experience, but such a common situation does not necessarily lead to *ressentiment*. Suppose I value living in a beautiful mansion. The fact that I cannot afford one may indeed be depressing, but does it necessarily turn me into a POR? Likewise, I may be fascinated by mathematics, admire the brilliant minds contributing to it, and yet find myself performing poorly in this field without being crushed by a sense of inferiority. In other words, shortcomings or external obstacles can be

[175] RAM, p. 20.

[176] As Wallace puts it: "[*ressentiment*] emerges under conditions in which people find themselves *systematically* deprived of things that they want very much to possess, without any prospects for improvement in this respect" (Wallace, 2006, p. 218). Or Milosz: "First and foremost, a special mechanism had to be constructed in such a way that *at every step*, man stumbles over insurmountable obstacles to the realization of his aspirations, so that his aspirations are continuously impeded" (Milosz, 2005, p. 33. Emphasis added).

[177] Wallace, 2006, p. 220.

[178] Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 58.

[179] Stopford writes: "it is not the fact of inferiority but feelings of inferiority that are decisive to the psychology of *ressentiment*" (Stopford, 2009, p. 66).

acknowledged without much drama. I admire my best friend's talent for mathematics, despite being incapable of competing with him; I value splendid properties and the status they bring with them, despite being unable to afford one. For the POR however, such impotence is fundamentally a distressing experience.

One may wonder what distinguishes ordinary cases of frustration and distress from those that eventually lead to *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* seems to be triggered only when the frustration of a desire weighs on one's sense of self-worth because of the awareness of one's abilities and inabilities. Considering the previous example again. The fact that I cannot afford to buy a mansion can be depressing and damage my self-worth, making me painfully envious of all my friends who can. In the same vein, my inability to understand formal logic can be depressing and trigger an unpleasant feeling of impotence. To say that we cannot always live up to some of our values is a platitude and such inability does not necessarily lead to *ressentiment*. The crucial triggering element for *ressentiment* is that a particular good is experienced as important for one's image of one's self-worth, and as a result its inaccessibility is damaging to one's self-worth. Note that *ressentiment* does not necessarily involve another person, the POR's distress may for example just depend on painful feelings of impotence. But many examples discussed by Nietzsche and Scheler involve another person or a group who possesses desirable goods and traits. In these cases the POR's distress is a feeling of inferiority compared to the person or group who enjoys the goods or virtues she covets. Byrne summarises the point:

> [*Ressentiment*] connotes a particular feeling that is being re-felt, namely impotence. One's own impotence can be experienced in a wide range of concrete circumstances: *whenever one is in the presence of something stronger, more intelligent, more beautiful, more noble, more holy than oneself*.[180]

The first distinguishing feature of *ressentiment* is, therefore, the *enduring* and *unpleasant* experience of one's impotence in bringing about a valued state of affairs or in preventing a negatively valued state of affairs from obtaining (from now on we shall, for simplicity's sake, concentrate on the first type of case). The fox is miffed because he cannot acquire the coveted grapes; I feel distressed because my lack of talent prevents me from fulfilling my ambitions. A second feature is that the positive value must be relevant to the person's sense of self-worth so that the impossibility of realizing this coveted value damages her self-image. In most cases, the POR's impotence is real but it can be imagined and its measure is always relative. My great talent as an acclaimed musician does not prevent me from feeling depressed and envious because a rival is even better.

[180] Byrne, 1993, p. 217. Emphasis added.

Grasping a positive, self-relevant, value and being distressed by a feeling of impotence or inferiority make up the very first stage of *ressentiment.* This departs from some traditional accounts, according to which the phenomenon is mainly associated with the occurrence of particular emotions such as envy, malice, anger, spite, hatred, or a desire for revenge. But these emotions (and desires) can be distinguished from the painful moment in which the superior value of a rival is felt and one's impotence is simultaneously apprehended. Also, the POR, in particular, does not first *come to the conclusion* that he is inferior to a rival in some respect, or that he remains powerless to achieve a valued goal; the initial stage of *ressentiment* is typically an epistemic but non-conceptual contact with values. He is initially struck by his impotence and this typically leads to the thought of one's impotence which, in itself, is a deeply unpleasant experience. This epistemology of values will be described in more detail in Section 3.2.

Ressentiment-emotions

Let us now describe the *emotions* that characterise and reveal the sentiment of *ressentiment*. These emotions respond to the original grasp of value and the awareness of the disvalue of impotence. What are the emotions that react to this initial unpleasant contact with reality? Many have stressed that *ressentiment* is derived from the more familiar emotions or sentiments of hatred and the desire for revenge.[181] Yet, the most commonly cited response to impotence and inferiority are envy and anger.[182] The POR comes to envy her more talented friend or her wealthier neighbour. A suggested common property of *ressentiment*'s typical emotions is that they are *intense* and *consuming.* More than ordinary states, they are passions that drain our energy away. As Nietzsche explains:

> Nothing burns you up more quickly than the affects of *ressentiment*. Annoyance, abnormal vulnerability, inability to take revenge, the desire, the thirst for revenge, every type of poisoning – these are definitely the most harmful ways for exhausted people to react: they inevitably lead to a rapid consumption of nervous energy [...].[183]

Other descriptions refer to the component emotions as negative. This is unclear though, for "negative" can mean unpleasant or hedonically negative, sometimes however it means morally bad, sometimes it just means bad, sometimes it denotes hostility.[184] We should therefore refrain from using it in order to avoid any confusion.

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181 Leiter, 2002, p. 203.

182 Leach *in* Smith, 2008.

183 EH, I, 6.

184 RAM, p. 21; Solomon & Stone, 2002; Solomon, 2007, pp. 170-179.

Apart from being intense, *ressentiment*-emotions also involve several shared characteristic action tendencies, where an action tendency is a "readiness to execute a given kind of action".[185] In particular, they involve tendencies to disparage a rival, criticise them, humiliate them, hurt them, strike back at them or cut them down to size. Australians use the expression "Tall Poppies" to describe this tendency to downgrade the tall and successful individual of a group. The POR tends to try to cut down tall poppies.[186] We will refer to the action tendencies as *hostile attitudes*.[187] The proper objects of the emotional episodes involved in *ressentiment* is either a rival or an obstructing agent (or a person believed to be such) whom one wants to hurt or punish, or see hurt or punished. The POR may also want to take revenge on the individuals she believes are causing her unpleasant state, but these tendencies must nevertheless be distinguished from the hostile attitudes, for hostile emotions do not necessarily involve the attitude of blaming that revenge always presupposes. I may for example be pained by my neighbour's superior achievements and gleefully seek to tarnish his reputation without feeling wronged by him and thus without assuming he bears any responsibility for my suffering. Revenge on the other hand responds to the belief or impression that one has been wronged; it is therefore directed towards an agent who is perceived to be causally responsible for offending one (see Chapter 2). Scheler makes the point that blame is already present in invidious envy when one believes, erroneously, that one has been deliberately deprived of a good by a person or a group who possesses it.[188] This perceived responsibility appears, for example, when one blames the rich for one's own (poor) economic condition. The POR's envy is often marked by her blaming of a group she apprehends as the cause – and locus of responsibility – for her psychological distress. Most notably, the importance of blame explains the presence of revengefulness in addition to mere envy. Envy entails blame when the envier comes to the conclusion that his inferiority is caused by a rival who is thus also a wrongdoer. He eventually comes to hold a person or a group responsible for either causing his suffering ("I feel bad and oppressed by his superior talent") or his impotence ("All routes to success are barred by the rich/the patriarchy/white males/the Jews..."). Nietzsche believes it is a psychological law that *suffering* leads to blame and claims that:

> […] every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a guilty culprit who is receptive to distress, –in short, some living thing upon which he can […] vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects

185 Frijda, 1986, p. 70.

186 Elster, 1996, p. 1387; Feather, 1989; Mandisodza et al., 2006.

187 Not all hostile attitudes are emotions; a desire or thirst for revenge is a conative state, for example.

188 "Our factual inability to acquire a good is wrongly interpreted as a positive action against our desire" (RAM, p. 30).

> represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief.[189]

Poellner points out that "the *ressentiment* subject takes some other agent(s) to be responsible, either by actively causing [some experience of suffering] or passively by providing a focus of invidious comparison".[190] Note that the expression of one's hostility through blame comes with the advantage that the individual's anger and general hostility seem justified as he then just seems to respond to some wrong (e.g. resentment or indignation).

One could argue that hatred is the general sentiment of the man of *ressentiment* and that hostile emotions are the affective episodic expressions of this hatred. Hatred is directed at an individual seen as an enemy[191] as in Nietzsche's master and slaves parable in which the rival becomes an evil enemy. Hatred is also a possible motive; one says it is out of hatred that the POR originally developed deep-rooted dispositions for hostile and retributive emotions which are its characteristic manifestations.[192] But *ressentiment* is a sentiment the manifestations of which are hostile emotions (revenge, envy) *as well as* blaming attitudes (resentment, indignation). The distinction between hatred and all *ressentiment*-emotions is essentially the distinction between a sentiment and the emotions that belong to it. In sum then, *ressentiment's* characteristic emotions are intense, consuming, hostile and sometimes they involve blame. Hatred we shall later argue (Section 4.3) is sometimes seen to alter our valuations in a fundamental way. Hatred may for example be linked to value-blindness as it prevents the person to grasp or to be sensitive to new positive values.

Repression and reliving

Scheler mentions two additional properties of the POR's emotions, namely the fact that they are 1) *relived* and 2) *repressed*. Let us start with the first condition. It is part of Scheler's definition that *ressentiment* is "the *repeated experiencing* and *reliving* of a particular emotional response or reaction against someone else".[193] Or as Byrne puts it, it is: "an inability to let go of that experience; one keeps reliving and rehearsing it, causing it to swell and fester".[194] We have previously argued that the mere frustration of desires does not suffice for the sentiment of *ressentiment*; there must also be self-relevant goods and values that are or seem unreachable, and which are often possessed by a rival compared to whom the POR feels inferior and against whom she turns her hostile emotions. For example, a distressing episode of envy felt after hearing about an old classmate's successful business venture does

189 GM, III, 15.

190 Poellner *in* Dries & Kail, 2015, p. 201.

191 Kolnai, 1998.

192 GM, I, 8.

193 RAM, p. 20. Emphasis added.

194 Byrne, 1993, p. 217.

not trigger my *ressentiment* on its own. However, if I were to be confronted with that person and her successes (say she is my rich neighbour), this would constantly remind me of my shortcomings and repeatedly arouse my envy. Note that the recurrence of the feeling, and my affective responses to it, are not dependent on the recurrence of the triggering event. One single confrontation or humiliation may suffice. What is repeated, if not interactions with the rival? The same hostile emotions may occur in response to repeated *thoughts* and relived feelings about an unpleasant fact, rather than a constantly renewed reaction to actual events. The characteristic thoughts of an affective experience have often been reduced to mere beliefs, and especially to beliefs about the causes of the experience.[195] But this is too reductive since the typical thoughts characterizing an emotion are rather occurrent "plans and fantasies" people have.[196] In *Leutnant Gustl*, Arthur Schnitzler portrays an officer of the honourable Austrian-Hungarian Army, who is incapable of responding on the spot to an embarrassment at the opera caused by a humble baker. Profoundly distressed and frustrated, Gustl enters into an obsessive grudge and ruminates on the event; he re-experiences the incident, revives his humiliation, and fantasises about ways in which he could have redressed the insult.[197] Depressive rumination intensifies and prolongs these sorts of negative moods. The POR dwells on the negative event and engages in counterfactual thinking. So *ressentiment* may also occur just because the individual constantly *remembers* an important and unpleasant event. In fact, such obsessive thoughts of past wrongs or humiliation are an important mark of the phenomenon. Bernstein puts this point as follows:

> Each slight, each abject compromise or moment of cowardice is lived through again and again, and since the sense of injured vanity can never be assuaged, existence itself is experienced as an endless recurrence of humiliations, fresh only in their infinite variety but dreadfully familiar in their affect and structure.[198]

This reliving is the result of "a stubborn memory, impervious to time".[199] The POR's mind "feeds itself on the past, chewing over painful memories of humiliations, insults, and injuries".[200]

For Scheler *ressentiment*'s characteristic thoughts are "not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it 'responded' – [they are] a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling".[201] The phenomenon of re-experiencing emo-

195 Schachter & Singer, 1963.

196 Sabini & Silver, 2005, p. 52.

197 Schnitzler, 2002.

198 Bernstein, 1992, p. 102.

199 Marañón, 1956, p. 10.

200 Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 90.

201 RAM, p. 20.

tions has been the object of extensive empirical investigations in the context of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD).[202] Re-experiencing can be very strong when negative memories pop into the mind unbidden. A PTSD flashback, for example, is a vivid, emotionally laden, and involuntary episode. Similarly, the POR not only remembers past twinges of inferiority, he also re-experiences them.

But what exactly is the POR remembering and reliving? What are the objects of her ruminations? And how do her thoughts and memories relate to the fact of re-experiencing hostile emotions? Reliving or re-experiencing an emotion or any perceptual information associated with a memory is part of the remembering process itself. Memories with more sensory details are more emotionally intense. This re-living of humiliations, and the repeated presentation of one's own impotence and inferiority in thought, is an essential phenomenological characteristic of *ressentiment.* Ruminations on the past are stressed by Nietzsche, who regularly insists on the POR's inability to forget; she understands, he claims, "how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble".[203] And such ruminations are deemed harmful:

> Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. […] *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing is a man or a people or a culture*.[204]

Repetitive thinking is a core feature of emotional disturbance[205]; it tends to intensify the revengefulness and hostility of the individual,[206] and to stiffen the character, rendering forgiveness harder if not impossible.[207] Nietzsche takes it to be axiomatic that: "[…] there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *immediacy*, without forgetfulness".[208] Unpleasant memories are sometimes relived as a destiny (*Schicksal*), nourishing an intense, and repressed, revengefulness.[209] For Scheler, some destinies are particularly potent sources of *ressentiment*-ruminations. Cripples or Jews, he claims, may be obsessed with the thoughts of impotence or the fate of their exclusion and constantly relive it as something that needs to be avenged.[210] A humiliating rank in society – acquired or inherited – may also play this role

202 FOA et al., 1989.

203 GM, I, 10.

204 WPP, II, 60.

205 Watkins, 2008

206 Anestis et al., 2009.

207 Berry et al., 2005; Murphy & Hampton, 1988.

208 GM, II, 1.

209 RAM, p. 28.

210 "First in the discrepancy between the colossal national pride of 'the chosen people' and a contempt and discrimination which weighed on them for centuries like a destiny, and in modern times through the added

when a lower status or caste is imposed on some individuals as a permanent disgrace – a fatality which then triggers typical ruminations and sometimes forms of protest. As the philosopher puts it:

> The more a permanent social pressure is felt to be a "fatality", the less it can free forces for the practical transformation of these conditions, and the more it will lead to indiscriminate criticism without any positive aim.[211]

We shall later show that *ressentiment* stands therefore in sharp contrast to the figure of what Nietzsche calls the noble person (*die vornehme Person*), who lives his life in a happily *forgetful* fashion.[212]

Apart from being relived, the second condition that hostile emotions must satisfy if they are to be part of the experience of *ressentiment* is that they *cannot be discharged*, expressed, or simply acted out.[213] This is necessary because:

> […] there will be no *ressentiment* if he who thirsts for revenge really acts and avenges himself, if he who is consumed by hatred harms his enemy, gives him "a piece of his mind," or even merely vents his spleen in the presence of others. Neither will the envious fall under the dominion of *ressentiment* if he seeks to acquire the envied possession by means of work, barter, crime, or violence.[214]

Situations that call for repression of emotions or hostile intentions, and even cases where we feign some other states of mind in their place, are common.[215] Repression is manifestly a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud remains, unfortunately, rather elusive about its exact definition,[216] and conceptual debates still prevail today, chiefly because he links it to his controversial theory of the unconscious.[217] Freud for example uses repression as a causal explanation for neurosis and thinks of it as a sub-personal phenomenon. But there seems to be a personal level phenomenon of repression. This is already suggested by

discrepancy between formal constitutional equality and factual discrimination" (RAM, p. 29).

211 RAM, p. 29. Scheler claims:

> Criminals have often described the deep satisfaction, the peace and liberation which they felt shortly after committing a deed on which they had pondered for months, again and again repressing their impulses while their minds became progressively more poisoned, peaceless, and "evil" (RAM, p. 69).

212 BGE, IX.

213 Note that its cousin - resentment - *can* be expressed, but the revenge cannot be acted out on the spot.

214 RAM, p. 26.

215 Hochschild, 2012.

216 Freud & Breuer, 2004; Billig, 1999; Grünbaum, 1984; Bittner, 1985; Cavell, 1996; Longeway, 1990; Gardner, 1993.

217 Erdelyi, 2006; Boag, 2007. As Freud puts it: "The theory (*Lehre*) of repression is the corner stone on which the structure (*Gebäude*) of psychoanalysis rests" (Freud, 1987, Vol. 15, p. 73) or "Thus we obtain our concept of the unconscious from the theory of repression. The repressed is the prototype of the unconscious for us" (Freud, *PFL*, Vol. 11, p. 70).

the trivial fact that I can only be conscious of or focus on a single occurrent mental state at a time. Most of my beliefs and attitudes are thus in fact, in this sense, what Freud and Scheler call sub-conscious.[218] As we shall later see, this distinction is particularly relevant for *ressentiment*. The consequence of repression is an activity of concealment that causes significant psychological stress. The POR's emotional repression is often depicted as an embitterment or a poisoning of the soul. As Scheler puts it:

> *Ressentiment* can only arise if these emotions are particularly powerful and yet must be suppressed because they are coupled with the feeling that one is unable to act them out.[219]

The unpleasantness attached to this mechanism should be distinguished from the distress associated with impotence and inferiority. Most notably, repression occurs *after*, or *in response* to the intuited or felt disvalue of a situation.

According to Scheler, some character types, such as the criminal or the noble person are immune to this psychological venom, because both manage to release their hostility on the spot; the former in crime, the second in an immediate act of retaliation.[220] They might also experience hostile emotions, but they usually manage to act on them and thus never need to repress them.[221]

We may distinguish two kinds of repression that are organised in a sequence. The POR may, first, want to repress the mere public *expression* of a hostile emotion such as envy. She will therefore avoid showing verbally or otherwise that she feels envious, and avoid acting upon this emotion (and therefore not, say, try to damage her rival's good). In this case, repression is nothing but the voluntarily refraining from acting on an emotion. And as Scheler puts it: "If the discharge is blocked, the consequence is a process which may best be designated as 'repression'".[222] Quite independently of this case there are also experiences that we want to stop acknowledging altogether, of which we simply do not want to be aware, and this type of repression constitutes a much deeper psychological *tour de force* in which the agent stops grasping some features of his affective experiences. For example, not only does the POR want her envy or revengefulness to be noticed as little as possible by others, she also wants to lose awareness of the fact that she experiences these hostile emotions, and thus pushes them out of the scope of her awareness.

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218 ISK, pp. 83-84; Searle, 1992, pp. 151-165.

219 RAM, p. 27.

220 RAM, p. 39.

221 RAM, p. 39. Nietzsche points out that: "when *ressentiment* does occur in the noble man himself, it is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction, and therefore it does not poison" (GM, I, 10).

222 RAM, p. 42.

Scheler makes another very important point, namely that Freud and his school confuse or fail to distinguish the mechanism of repression from a mere conflict of motives. Pride, shame, duties or fear are reasons for the repression of other emotions or desires, but they do not prevent people from their occurrence. They only prevent the (inner) perception or introspection of these states. Scheler defines the phenomenon of personal level repression as:

> [...] an *instinctual looking away* from the stirrings of imagination, of feeling and longing, of loving and hating, from such stirrings as would result in a negative value judgement if fully perceived (a judgement coming from one's own 'conscience,' or a social judgement based on a code of rules we acknowledge).[223]

Repression will be described in more detail when we consider the concept of self-deception and its application to *ressentiment*. What we can conclude so far is that once states of envy or revengefulness come to the fore, the POR systematically attempts to repress them – in the personal, non-Freudian, sense of the term. We can also conclude that the POR momentarily focuses on the coveted good, is depressed by the awareness of her own impotence, and becomes envious without noticing her envy at all or without apprehending her envy *as* envy. In the first kind of repression, she remains aware of her envy, but she prevents herself expressing it or acting upon it.[224] To speak of repression (*Verdrängung*) proper in the case of *ressentiment* is therefore not entirely correct. The phenomenon favours a description in the terms of the second variant where the individual attempts to remove the experience of an emotion from consciousness, that is, when she tries to *suppress* it, to avoid the inner perception of this emotion and, eventually, even tries not to *feel* it. Yet the two types of conduct – blocking the emotion's discharge and attempting to suppress it altogether – are related. Scheler argues they are part of a sequence. Given a hostile attitude, say envy or hatred, the individual first has to block the expressions and action tendencies characteristic of this emotion. His thoughts, imagination, and fantasies of revenge – his florid ruminations – are the next states to be blocked. This, then, eventually leads to the suppression of the hostile emotions themselves. Full-blown *ressentiment* only appears once the imagination and hostile affects have been suppressed, or when they are not accessible any more through inner perception.

Prudential or moral considerations remain the main motives for such attempted suppression. The POR refrains from satisfying, say, her desire for revenge because, on *reflection*, given her relative impotence and weakness, striking back would be ill-advised and put her at risk.[225] Scheler considers "a feeling of impotence (a pronounced awareness of inability

[223] ISK, p. 83. Emphasis added.

[224] RAM, p. 43.

[225] "This blockage is caused by the *reflection* that an immediate reaction would lead to defeat, and by a concomitant pronounced feeling of 'inability' and 'impotence'" (RAM, p. 25. Emphasis added).

accompanied by intense depression), fear, anxiety, and intimidation" to be further repressive forces.[226] Marañón mentions timidity.[227] Barbour believes that "moral constraints inhibit the expression of negative feelings".[228] This becomes manifest in the case of envy which is repressed because it is a shameful emotion to harbour, for "in all cultures of mankind, says Schoeck, in all proverbs and fairytales, the emotion of envy is condemned. The envious person is universally exhorted to be ashamed of himself".[229] The same shame can even lead to public expressions attempting to show the very contrary of envy. In particular, "when another's superiority is publicly exhibited, the inferior comparer [envier] may put on a show of appreciating the other's positive qualities".[230] A different way to put this point is to say that the POR in this case represses her hostile attitudes *out of pride*, for displaying them would reveal a weakness and a damaged sense of self-worth.[231]

Finally, note that both characteristic modes of the *ressentiment*-emotions – reliving and repression – are considered unhealthy. Nietzsche for example suggests that *repressed* revenge is far more poisonous than revenge which is acted out.

> To have thoughts of revenge and execute them means to be struck with a violent – but temporary – fever. But to have thoughts of revenge without the strength or courage to execute them means to endure a chronic suffering, a poisoning of body and soul.[232]

And as Scheler famously puts it:

> *Ressentiment* is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the

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226 RAM, p. 42.

227 Marañón claims that: "very often resentment goes hand in hand with timidity. The strong man reacts directly and energetically to attack, and so automatically expels affront from his mind, as though it were some foreign body. This saving elasticity does not exist in the resentful man. Many a man who turns the other cheek after a buffet does so, not from virtue, but to cover up his cowardice; and his enforced humility afterwards turns into resentment" (Marañón, 1956, p. 12).

228 Barbour, 1983, p. 266. Scheler suggests: "If I overcome my impulse by active moral energy (*sittliche Tatkraft*), it does not disappear from consciousness; only its expression is checked by a clear moral judgement" (RAM, p. 43).

229 Schoeck, 1987, p. 3; See also: Elster, 2007, p. 158. Nietzsche certainly claims that "envy and jealousy are the most privy parts (*Schamteile*) of the human soul" (HAH, 503).

230 Alicke & Zell *in* Smith, 2008, p. 75.

231 This is suggested by the controversial Swiss psychiatrist Oscar-Louis Forel, who explains: "Telle femme, devenue indésirable, refoulera *par fierté et dignité* le désir de venger la blessure d'amour-propre qui se muera en *ressentiment*. Ceux qui peuvent altérer le caractère et ce seront les Xanthippe, les mégères, les sorcières, toutes ces caricatures et grimaces de la vie passionnelle, la gamme des *ressentiment*s du sexe féminin, l'éternel perdant au jeu de l'amour et de la vie" (Forel, 1948, p. 5. Emphasis added). La Rochefoucauld puts the point as follows: "The very pride that makes us condemn failings from which we think we are exempt leads us to despise good qualities we do not possess" (M462, Elster, 1999, p. 76.).

232 HAH, II, 60.

> *systematic repression of certain emotions and affects*, as such, are normal components of human nature.[233]

It is often believed that repressed feelings, passions or emotions are bad and unhealthy because their forced containment leads to psychological or physiological pathologies.[234] Theodore Dalrymple summarises the view, which he thinks is completely false, as follows:

> […] repression inevitably results in harmful effects later on: for emotion is a fluid that, like all fluids, cannot be compressed, and therefore will make itself manifest in one way or another. For example, those who do not grieve properly for a lost loved one, which is to say who do not express themselves by sobs and tears and wailing, will become seriously depressed a little later in their lives; likely to suffer heart attacks or contract cancer. Unexpressed aggression towards others inevitably turns into aggression towards oneself.[235]

Venting one's feelings, in other words, is salutary and right. Therefore, the POR's envy and revenge are often considered highly problematic and even wrong as they involve a form of bad restraint.[236]

Envy and the desire for revenge

So far, it has been argued that the experience of *ressentiment* involves a painful dynamic whereby the POR repeatedly *relives* hostile emotions she attempts to *repress*. The characteristic *ressentiment*-emotions are intense, hostile, and often involve blaming someone other. Let us now consider concrete examples of the emotions and desires manifested in *ressentiment.* Scheler identifies *envy* and a *desire for revenge* to be the two main sources of *ressentiment.* We shall now examine this claim and more broadly consider envy, vengefulness, hatred and anger in their relation to *ressentiment.* The analysis will start by clarifying the relation between envy, revenge, and *ressentiment*. The relation between moral emotions – resentment and indignation – and the POR's hostile emotions will be discussed separately in Section 3.2.5.

Let us begin with the *desire for revenge*. We have previously seen that the desire for revenge can be fulfilled personally or impersonally. What makes a state of affairs satisfy impulses of revenge varies; it can take the form of an act of personal vengeance, an impersonal punish-

233 RAM, p. 25. Emphasis added.

234 Solomon refers to it, not without irony, as "ventilationism" (Solomon, 1993, p. 226).

235 Dalrymple, 2011, p. 141.

236 Scheler seems to subscribe to this theory (RAM, p. 27). LaCaze holds that: "in relation to the question of the value of feeling envy or other painful emotions, one preliminary point is that the suppression of feelings such as envy and resentment may be unhealthy – it could have unintended neurotic consequences of the rest of one's emotional life" (La Caze, 2001, p. 34). The common view has it that venting and expressing one's feelings is good because it will resolve and end the episode of anger. However, recent findings suggest that, although quite common, such a cathartic conception of anger is false. Venting and retaliating does not lower the level of aggression; it might actually even increase it (Scheff, 2007).

ment of the wrongdoer by the judicial system (third-party punishment), or a turn of fate that badly affects the resentee. The man of *ressentiment* seems to be marked by a strong desire for revenge too. Nietzsche even considers *ressentiment* to be a "cauldron of unassuaged revenge".[237] But what is the relation of revenge to the other parts of *ressentiment* we have distinguished so far? Phenomenologically, the desire for revenge is a response to wrongdoing and it endures for as long as the wrong remains unrighted. It is a checked reaction implying that a weakness, or incapacity, is preventing this desire to be acted out on the spot. Scheler also claims that: "the desire for revenge, which is itself caused by a repression, has powerful repressive tendencies".[238] As such, the existence of intense revengefulness may in itself be the mark of an affective repression.[239] But the main question here is whether there is any difference between the desire for revenge in resentment and the one *ressentiment* involves? Can we, for example, already distinguish these kinds of revenge at a phenomenological level? One essential difference exists. Resentment aims at private revenge. But the desire for revenge that comes with this emotion can also be satisfied with the indirect punishment of the wrongdoer and perhaps even by a turn of fate that hurts him. In the case of *ressentiment*, revenge has different conditions of satisfaction. The POR satisfies her desire for revenge by downgrading a rival's personal value and thus improving her own at the same time. As Scheler explains, the POR wants to restore "[her] damaged feeling of personal value, [her] injured 'honor'".[240] Revenge is then essentially a detraction from a rival that improves the POR's relative status regarding any of the self-relevant values (aesthetic, ethical, or vital, etc.) that are involved by her sense of self-worth. This difference can already be grasped in the fact that *ressentiment* never responds to the injustice of an unrighted personal wrong. For the POR revenge does not require that justice be done – and that wrongs be righted – but that the value of some rival is damaged and her own value improved. This difference is reported by Feodor Dostoevsky's darkest character, who, in the *Notes from Underground*, says:

> Remember I spoke just now of vengeance. […] I said that a man revenges himself because he sees justice in it. Therefore he has found a primary cause, that is, justice. And so he is at rest on all sides, and consequently he carries out his revenge calmly and successfully, being persuaded that he is doing a just and honest thing. But I see no justice

237 GM, I, 11

238 RAM, p. 28.

239 "When someone is unable or otherwise not in a position to respond directly to an attack, retaliatory impulses are not discharged and may be blocked or even repressed. It is checked or repressed retaliation that gives rise to the desire for vengeance. Indeed, we only speak of revenge if initial retaliatory impulses have been blocked in some way, and a grudge is developed and borne" (Darwall, 2010, p. 319).

240 RAM, p. 27.

> in it, I find no sort of virtue in it either, and consequently if I attempt to revenge myself, it is only out of spite.[241]

From a third person perspective, the POR's general attitude may yet appear to be one of protest, revolt, and uprising.[242] In fact, some accounts see *ressentiment* as the expression of a feeling of injustice.[243] This would imply that the formal object of *ressentiment* is the injustice of a situation, action, or event. Such a claim, however, is misleading as it fails to distinguish between *ressentiment* and resentment. The POR, while experiencing no feeling of injustice such as resentment (but feelings of impotence and inferiority), may yet apprehend her attitude as one of resentment, and thus see herself as being wronged. She comes to believe that someone wronged her and that her desire for revenge is simply an expression of resentment rather than, say, envy. The POR, with her typical set of feelings and repressed emotions, acts *as if* what distressed her in a non-moral sense has breached a norm of justice, *as if* only resentment motivates her, or *as if* she has fallen victim to an injustice. As Solomon puts it, *ressentiment* "would like nothing better than to be convinced of the viciousness, even the sinfulness, of those compared to and contrasted with whom it feels humbled".[244] So far, however, it seems that warping revengefulness and envy into a concern for justice is clearly more acceptable and less shameful than expressing a feeling of inferiority. Hence, the POR's desire for revenge is different from that caused by resentment since her revenge involves events and states of affairs that restore her crushed sense of self-worth, rather than those that meet a principle of justice. If the POR suffers from the fact that she is ugly, and her neighbour handsome, revenge to her is seeing him disfigured; when she happens to be troubled by her neighbour's wealth and success, revenge to her is to see him ruined and fallen from grace; if he is musically gifted, revenge to her is to see him lose his talent. A satisfying revenge for the POR is one that pulls the other down so that he exemplifies lower value – less wealth, fame, talent, prestige, or power. Any event that promotes such an outcome is welcomed with glee and *Schadenfreude*.

The second source of *ressentiment* according to Scheler is envy.[245] This fascinating emotion certainly deserves an entire analysis of its own. Here, however, we only intend to clarify its essential properties and determine its relation to *ressentiment*. Envy is said to be pain at the

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241 Dostoevsky, 2008, p.19.

242 Wallace, 2006, p. 222.

243 "A partir du désir de vengeance, il est donc possible de remonter au sentiment premier de l'homme du *ressentiment* qui serait celui de l'injustice" (Zawadzki *in* Ansart, 2002, p. 40). See also: Solomon, 1994, pp. 260–272.

244 Solomon, 2004, p. 44.

245 "The process through which ordinary envy turns into the kind of personal animus involved in *ressentiment* cannot plausibly be traced back to any further emotion or complex of ideas. It seems to me a primitive mechanism, one that can perhaps be understood to reflect our deeply social nature, our nearly obsessive concern for our relative standing within local and less local communities" (Wallace, 2006, p. 219).

good fortune of others (Aristotle)[246], and to arise from comparing our well-being in relative rather than intrinsic terms (Kant).[247] It is, as Adam Smith claims, the emotion "which views with malignant dislike the superiority of those who are really entitled to all the superiority they possess".[248] We shall here assume that the following characteristics are essential to this emotion: (1) it involves the positive evaluation of a good or a person; (2) it presumes that the subject and his envied rival are, in some respect, equal; (3) it comes in two kinds – benign and invidious – of which, we will argue, only one kind is genuine envy; (4) it may be mixed with a feeling of injustice and related to moral emotions such as indignation and resentment; (5) it may involve a form of delusion about the responsibility of a blamed agent; (6) it is marked by *Schadenfreude*; and (7) it never manifests itself as envy, but in a series of characteristic expressions, some of which are moral emotions.[249]

Let us begin with the first claim. Common sense often apprehends envy as a form of longing for a good that someone else possesses. But envy is not merely the unpleasant feeling of frustration; the ground for it is rather our *incapacity* to reach, acquire, or realise some valued state of affairs enjoyed by another person or group we compare ourselves to. Envy is triggered by some form of social comparison. The feeling is unpleasant because our sense of self-worth is damaged by our impotence. Note that the desired object may be a material object, a trait, an achievement, reputation, honour or even good fortune. Therefore, in the case of envy, a positive valuation must be coupled with a form of impotence. As the Belgian socialist Henri de Man notes:

> We always envy what we do not have. This is why we try to be like those we envy because of their dissimilarity and hate because of that envy. This is also why the fight against the interests of the bourgeoisie presupposes that *the workers consider bourgeois existence as desirable*.[250]

The envier's chief concern is a rival who possesses a desirable quality or a coveted good and not the good or quality in itself.[251] Some claim that the object of envy is merely the fact that one lacks a good a perceived rival possesses.[252] An episode of envy involves the positive valuation of the good owned by the rival. The disposition of envy tends to make us desire goods only because a rival owns them.

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246 Aristotle, 1108b1-10.

247 MS, § 459.

248 TMS, III, 4.

249 Smith, 2004.

250 De Man, 1929, p. 72. Personal translation. Emphasis added.

251 "Envy is centrally focused on competition with the rival, the subject [...] would not be bothered if the 'good' had gone to someone else (with whom the subject was not in competition" (D'Arms, 2009)

252 D'Arms & Kerr *in* Smith, 2008, p. 47.

Second, philosophers agree that a formal condition of envy is some degree of equality and comparability between the envier and his rival.[253] I am not envious of somebody that I do not consider equal to me in some respect. Adults are not envious of children for example. Neither do I envy Bill Gates' wealth or Brad Pitt's good looks. As Aristotle famously remarks, when it comes to envy, it is "potter against potter".[254] Closer to our topic, Reginster has shown that, according to Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, *ressentiment* most likely first started among the priests, and no the slaves, because the former consider themselves to be a part of the elite and thus somehow equal to their knightly rivals who they envy.[255] Alexis de Tocqueville in an extraordinarily influential analysis has described the latter condition of equality in great detail in his explanation of the unfolding of the French Revolution as driven by the bourgeoisie's envy of the aristocracy. He even calls envy the *passion for equality*.[256]

A third property of envy is mentioned by both philosophers and psychologists who distinguish two variants of this emotion: *malicious* (or invidious) and *benign* envy.[257] Benign envy fosters a drive to acquire the good or admired quality one lacks. It is predicated in ordinary expressions such as "What great tennis skills, I envy you!" This form of envy is sometimes also colloquially referred to as "jealousy" as the man in the street says: "How lucky you are to spend your holidays in Iceland, I am jealous!" Benign envy is therefore just a form of admiration or longing for a good one desires and a source of motivation to acquire it or emulate it. Malicious envy on the other hand is hostile. Its characteristic action tendencies aim at depriving the rival of his coveted advantage. Benign envy is satisfied by outdoing the rival while malicious envy aims at undoing the rival's advantage.[258] Envy might only be publicly expressed by emulative behaviour and a public motivation to surpass the rival. But this is not surprising, since shame and moral opprobrium are attached to envy's characteristic hostile actions or malicious intentions. As with malicious envy, an individual experiencing benign envy may still find satisfaction when misfortune befalls his rival or when the latter's advantage is undone. We shall assume the view that a form of hostility is always present in envy, albeit not necessarily consciously, and often therefore unexpressed. Scheler rightly points out that envy proper never motivates someone to outdo his rival; in reality, envy depresses and cuts all drive for such action.[259] More recently, D'Arms and Kerr have pointed out that the case for benign envy is difficult to make. Emulation is never a manifestation of envy and

253 D'Arms & Kerr *in* Smith, 2008, p. 44.

254 Aristotle, 1388a

255 Reginster, 1997.

256 Tocqueville, 1981, § 1-20.

257 Polman & Ruttan, 2012, p. 131; van de Ven et al., 2009.

258 D'Arms & Kerr *in* Smith, 2008, p. 48.

259 RAM, p. 42.

"benign envy" is therefore just a figure of speech. This thesis is important as *ressentiment* is sometimes distinguished from envy on the grounds that the former is always more malicious then the latter.[260] But this seems difficult to defend, even in regard to ordinary examples of invidious envy. A further distinction is made by Elster who differentiates malicious envy as either "white" or "black". In the case of "white envy", the individual remains unwilling to incur a cost in order to deprive his rival of an advantage. In the case of "black envy" however, he is ready to sacrifice his welfare in order to see his rival taken down.[261] Both white and black envy can be repressed and thus become part of the sentiment of *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment is often related – if not *reduced* – to malicious envy.[262] Invidious envy often lacks any moral justification – it is evil – nor is it an emotion that someone can usually afford to show – it is shameful. As Solomon puts it, "envy is not just wanting what someone else has. It is wanting it without merit, without any intelligible claim of a right to it, without any real hope of getting it".[263] The view that ordinary envy is benign should therefore be rejected. Emulation is not a kind of envy; even for its most ordinary forms, envy is always experienced as a hostile attitude. Finally, there are some special forms of envy that are closely related to *ressentiment.* The German philosopher of life Klages refers to the phenomenon as *vital envy* or *Lebensneid*. This is a variant of intense envy harboured by the less well off (*Minderbemittelten*) and directed at those who experience life more ardently, more fully.[264] Scheler on the other hand mentions the POR's strong propensity for a particular kind of envy he calls existential envy (*Existenzialneid*) which is directed at the very existence of a rival.[265] As he puts it: "this form of envy strips the opponent of his very existence, for this existence as such is felt to be a 'pressure,' a 'reproach,' and unbearable humiliation".[266]

Fourth, the envier is often portrayed as lacking any merits or virtues, he also seems quite insensitive to the concerns of justice. But social psychologists have recently stressed the importance of injustice, and claims of injustice, in the experience of envy. These claims, we have argued to be characteristic of resentment. What then is the relation between the dis-

260 As Wallace puts it: "[...] envy does not have the quality of intense and focused malice that distinguishes *ressentiment*" (Wallace, 2006, p. 218).

261 Elster, 2009, pp. 62-63.

262 As Wallace explains: "envy does not have the quality of intense and focused malice that distinguishes *ressentiment.* It seems perfectly possible to envy someone their wealth or professional good fortune, say, without wishing them ill or feeling any particularly negative affect toward them personally." (Wallace, 2006, p. 218).

263 Solomon, 2007, p. 101.

264 "Da wir das Leben allein und ausschliesslich durch eigenes Erleben wissen, so sind wir berechtigt, ja verpflichtet, den tiefer, voller, inbrünstiger, glühender, weiter-ausschweifend Erlebenden einen lebensreicheren zu nennen und den darauf gerichteten Neid des Minderbemittelten Lebensneid" (Klages, 1930, p. 120).

265 Vendrell Ferran, 2008.

266 RAM, p. 30.

value of injustice and *ressentiment*? We shall argue that envy may have complex relations to the disvalue of injustice and moral emotions such as resentment and indignation. Smith claims that envy comes with a sense of injustice and that it is thus "flavoured with resentment".[267] This characteristic sense of injustice, he claims, can have different origins; the envier may perceive his rival's advantage as *undeserved,* his eventual downfall as *deserved,* or their impotence and disadvantageous traits or qualities as a profound injustice. But is envy always mixed with resentment? Envy is not a response to unrighted wrongs like resentment. Envy involves a form of focused hostility that is lacking in resentment (see Chapter 2). But as mentioned earlier, the envier may consider his distress to be caused by someone's ill-willed action. If I am pained by my own shortcomings and I believe are caused by others, I will blame the entity I take to be responsible for the disadvantage. If one comes to see another's superior achievements as an injustice, someone must be blamed. Note that the latter rather common case is more likely to establish a close relation between resentment and envy. However, it is not clear how the two are related phenomenologically. That the envier comes to blame and raise claims of injustice is certainly one of the most intriguing characteristics of envy. In fact, the relation between envy and blaming attitudes such as resentment and indignation is an essential property of *ressentiment* that we shall analyse in much more detail throughout the third chapter. The envier's claims of injustice are only a rationalisation, yet they are characteristic ones. We will later argue that the sense of injustice we associate with envy is in fact the envier's attempt to express his emotion *as* indignation or resentment. The normative vocabulary is only invoked by the envier as he attempts to *rationalise* his desire to undo his rival's advantage. Hence envy has a talent for disguise. Its signs and symptoms are to be found in other affective phenomena which are nevertheless experienced in their characteristic modus. The resentment of the envier is not quite the same as the resentment of the victim of an injustice.

One possible account of the complex relation between envy and blaming attitudes – and the fifth characteristic of *ressentiment*'s envy on our list – is the idea that the envier falsely attributes the responsibility of his distress to someone else. According to Scheler for example, the envier's detraction from his rivals follows a delusional pattern: he holds them causally responsible for his misfortune, maintaining an illusion about their rival, who is "falsely considered to be the cause of [his] privation".[268] In these sorts of delusion "our factual inability to acquire a good is wrongly interpreted as a positive action *against* our desire."[269] The philosopher further mentions in a footnote that the envier comes to experience the coveted good

[267] Smith, 2013, p. 130.

[268] RAM, p. 30; Schoeck, 1966, pp. 23–24.

[269] RAM, p. 30.

as *his* good and his incapacity to acquire it is then lived as a deprivation.[270] This causal delusion is also a crucial element of Nietzsche's explanation of the phenomenon of *ressentiment*. As he points out:

> Feeling his existence to be something for which someone is *to blame*, the socialist, the anarchist, the nihilist is thus still the closest relative of the Christian, who also believes his feeling bad and his ill-constitution will be easier to bear if he can find someone to make *responsible* for it.[271]

The POR, he claims, will attempt to alleviate her suffering by finding someone to blame, and blame can typically take the form of resentment.[272] The important point here is that blame in itself seems to have a soothing effect of the envier's psychological distress. Following Scheler and Nietzsche on this crucial matter, we will also argue that the envier's experience of injustice is an illusion and a strategy of self-deception. The claim is in accordance with some of our deep-rooted intuitions about the shallowness of the envier. *Ressentiment* is the very mechanism that transmutes envy into moral emotions such as resentment and indignation (see Section 3.4).

Finally, *Schadenfreude* is often considered the most visible symptom of envy.[273] Envy leads us to take pleasure in the rival's misfortune (*Schadenfreude*); at the same time it motivates us to bring him down a level. The envious man may come to blame his rival and take pleasure in his – personal or impersonal – punishment, as well as in any misfortune that befalls him. If Peter's neighbour loses all his wealth in a stock market crash, the envier would welcome his rival's fate with a gleeful *Schadenfreude*; a form of pleasure he would also experience if he were to undo, personally, his rival's advantage.[274]

We may now ask whether envy and the desire for revenge are the only sources of *ressentiment*? Many descriptions of *ressentiment* in fact borrow heavily from Aesop's fable of *The Fox and the Grapes* which mentions neither envy nor a desire for revenge. Elster's account of sour grapes for example is couched in terms of beliefs and desires and does not invoke the characteristic set of hostile emotions (envy, hatred, etc.), nor any feelings of inferiority and impotence prior to these. The fox does not repress envy or a desire for revenge, but attempts to deal with an unfulfilled desire for sweet grapes. This raises the difficult terminological question of whether we should still refer to this as "*ressentiment*". The literature regularly associates this fable with *ressentiment*, but we need to bear in mind that frustrated desires are of a different phenomenological ilk from repressed, hostile, emotions. A frustrated desire,

[270] RAM, p. 129.

[271] NB, 14[29].

[272] "Someone or other must be to blame that I feel ill" (GM, III, 15).

[273] Smith, 2013.

[274] Smith, 2013.

while clearly unpleasant, is light, ordinary, and episodic, with no significant consequences for the individual's feeling of inferiority, and devoid of hostile emotional responses. The fox may be said to feel impotent, and to feel bad about it, but he is not envious and he does not feel inferior. (There is of course one more reason for thinking of the fox as an example of *ressentiment* – the reevaluation of the grapes). Scheler suggests that *ressentiment* can in fact be inherited or just arise from a habit.[275] Envy and the desire for revenge, as defined so far, are not, then, necessary parts of *ressentiment.* They are nevertheless its most common sources. We shall now argue that a necessary condition for *ressentiment* is that the POR indulges in a characteristic reevaluation.

Reevaluation

The various affective routes that *ressentiment* can take – envy, revenge, frustration, etc. – are united by the fact that the individual experiences a real or imagined incapacity, and by their outcome, which takes the form of an alteration of evaluations. *Ressentiment*, as we mentioned earlier, is a concept often reduced to a hateful desire for revenge. But while a description in these terms is not false, it tends to miss the most important element of the phenomenon: reevaluation. The unpleasant awareness of one's impotence, as well as repressed and relived hostile attitudes – of which we have so far described envy and revenge – have the same characteristic outcome, namely a reevaluation process. The latter, we shall argue, is a necessary part of *ressentiment* and in that regard our definition departs from recent accounts arguing that reevaluation does not essentially belong to *ressentiment*.[276] Reevaluation seems closely related to a very common strategy used by the envier. As Silver and Sabini point out:

> It is natural enough to want to recoup one's losses, but how can this be done? One might strive for an even greater accomplishment, but sometimes because of lack of opportunity, talent, or luck, this possibility is closed. Still, one might try to convince that the other person's accomplishment doesn't really reflect on one's own worth, but this is a rather limited strategy dependent on one's wit and the chance of the moment. *Finally, one might attempt to protect oneself by underplaying the import of the other person's success, or in some other way, devaluing the person*.[277]

The examples discussed earlier all involve such a reevaluation: The fox takes the sweet grapes to be sour, and I take my wealthy neighbour to be selfish, etc. One important consequence of the reevaluation process is its manifestation in a different set of emotions from the hostile ones. More specifically, the reevaluation process tends to have a moral dimension.

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275 RAM, p. 36.

276 Elgat, 2017.

277 Silver & Sabini, 1978, p. 107. Emphasis added.

Therefore, the POR's judgements that her neighbour is evil or her rival's success unjust may serve as the cognitive base for indignation and resentment.

The task ahead is now to define in detail what such reevaluation amounts to. Note that "*ressentiment*" can hence mean both an experience of relived and repressed emotions *and* a reevaluation strategy. The context should always make clear to which one of these dimensions reference is being made.

The reevaluation process – the single most important element of *ressentiment* – will be analysed extensively in Section 3.2. But before we address it, we must here return to certain parts of the early stages of *ressentiment*. The next section discusses the peculiar way *ressentiment* affects the intentionality of its characteristic emotions. Section 3.1.3 will clarify the very nature of the POR's unpleasant experience of impotence and inferiority. And finally, Section 3.1.4 will complete *ressentiment*'s phenomenological portrait from the angle of self-regarding attitudes and the way they are involved in this phenomenon.

3.1.2 The objects of hostile emotions and *ressentiment*

The sentiment of *ressentiment* involves a characteristic set of (hostile) affective dispositions. But hatred, resentment, indignation, envy, and a desire for revenge can all be experienced quite independently from *ressentiment*. What then makes them typical expressions of the phenomenon? Or, in other terms, what unifies these emotions into a set of dispositions characterising the sentiment of *ressentiment*? We distinguish three important properties: (1) the POR seeks ever more occasions to harbour hostile emotions and blame, (2) *ressentiment* tends to "generalise" the object of its underlying emotions, and (3) *ressentiment* has a pleasant aspect. We shall also argue that (3) may provide an explanation for (1), that is, the POR's characteristic eagerness to undergo emotions of blame and hostility.

Let us begin with *ressentiment*'s thirst for hostile affects. The POR's hostility radiates; she first targets the person or group who originally provoked her sense of inferiority, but once the process of systematic reliving and repression has set in, her hostility searches for new objects. *Ressentiment*'s characteristic emotions are also detached from their original object and continue to radiate by seeking other objects against which ill will can be directed. As Scheler puts it: "The vindictive person is always in search of objects, and in fact he attacks – in the belief that he is simply wreaking vengeance".[278] Solomon agrees:

> Granted, [*ressentiment*] always begins with a sort of self-absorption if not outright self-interest as well as a bitter sense of disappointment or humiliation, but it then tends to rationalize and generalize and so

[278] RAM, p. 27.

> project its own impotence outward as a claim – even a theory – about injustice in the world.[279]

As Scheler explains, "the vindictive person is instinctively and without a conscious act of volition drawn toward events which may give rise to vengefulness, or she tends to see injurious intentions in all kinds of perfectly innocent actions and remarks of others",[280] and she "automatically selects those aspects of experience which can justify the factual application of this pattern of feeling".[281] He continues: "The impulse to detract [...] does not arise through specific causes with which it disappears. On the contrary, the affect *seeks* those objects, those aspects of men and things, from which it can draw gratification".[282] And when revengefulness and resentment remain without an object, the POR might as well invent one, or apprehend something neutral as a wrong. For Taylor, it may be the case that "desires for retaliation are without suitable focus, *so that one has to be found or manufactured*".[283]

Second, the objects of the POR's hostility become more and more abstract. There is some disagreement, especially among Nietzsche scholars, as to whether *ressentiment*'s distinctive emotions can also be directed towards concrete objects or remains exclusively tied towards abstract entities, such as "Life", "God", or "Destiny".[284] We shall favour a sequential view. The POR's hostile attitudes initially often targets a particular person or group.[285] The object of these emotions then becomes more abstract and general as *ressentiment* progresses[286], Scheler suggests, under the impulsion of repression. The POR's revenge, envy, hatred, or spite are eventually no longer directed at a particular object, but against groups or abstract entities such as the government, immigrants, the rich, and ethnic or religious groups. The POR goes from envying her wealthy neighbour to envying the rich in general, or from feeling resentful against a politician to loathing politicians, political parties or politics in general. As the libertarian economist von Mises says about the man of *ressentiment*: "his envy and the resentment it engenders are not directed against a living being of flesh and blood, but against pale abstractions like 'management,' 'capital' and 'Wall Street'".[287] Scheler speaks of a vindictiveness directed at "intermediate groups of objects which only share one common

279 Solomon, 1994, p. 261.

280 RAM, p. 27.

281 RAM, p. 47.

282 RAM, p. 26.

283 Taylor, 2006, p. 87. Emphasis added.

284 Bittner *in* Schacht, 1994; Reginster *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2014.

285 Bittner *in* Schacht, 1994; Poellner *in* Leiter & Sinhababu, 2007.

286 Meltzer and Musolf define *ressentiment* as a complex form of resentment, that "tends to be induced by more durable, intense, and, on occasion, abstract sources" (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002, p. 251).

287 Von Mises, 1956, p. 16.

characteristic".[288] In a similar fashion, Scheler claims that the generalising tendency of *ressentiment* not only leads to a change of evaluations, but to a kind of axiological nihilism – a revenge against values – in which all values are levelled down by being turned into merely subjective facts.[289] Marañón remarks that the POR's reaction "is directed not so much against another man who may have done him an injustice, or profited by injustice, as against destiny."[290] Milosz similarly claims that, while *ressentiment* is triggered by wealth inequalities, the POR's discontent is directed against the very structures that make us human:

> The force is impersonal; no one is responsible, and thus the anger, if it awakens in the underprivileged is aimed not so much against those who possess fortunes as against *the very essence of that binding law and morality.*[291]

And finally Sautman argues in her interpretation of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* that the main character – a man of *ressentiment* – uses irony to criticise *indefinite* groups and persons.[292] The generalisation tendency not only manifests itself in attacks against indefinite groups, but also in a form of systematic negativism, which, according to Scheler occurs as:

> […] a sudden, violent, seemingly unsystematic and unfounded rejection of things, situations, or natural objects whose loose connection with the original cause of the hatred can only be discovered by complicated analysis.[293]

Thirdly, another characteristic of the objects of *ressentiment*'s emotions is how eagerly they are sought after by the POR. The latter seems to take pleasure in being envious and revengeful; he passionately searches for opportunities to excite and arouse his hostility and enjoys this. But how does the man of *ressentiment* derive any gratification from emotions that are traditionally seen as negative, unpleasant, and possibly even immoral? Scheler mentions "the growing pleasure afforded by invective and negation".[294] Oksenberg-Rorty suggests that the POR ruminates upon thoughts of revenge "until their very bitterness acquires a savoury

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288 RAM, p. 27.

289 As he puts it:

> […] a feeling and awareness of inferiority in the presence of objective values are what lead to a kind of act of revenge against values in general and culminate in the proposition: 'All' values are 'merely' subjective! What led to the supposed 'subjectivity' of values, or the interpretation of their true objectivity as 'universally valid subjectivity', is a deep-seated and secret experience of impotence – that is, an experience of the inability to realize values and to be somebody through recognizing them – and the subsequent feeling of depression (FORM, p. 320).

290 Marañón, 1956, p. 13.

291 Milosz, 2005, p. 34. Emphasis added.

292 Sautman, 1980; Wood, 2008, pp. 116-118.

293 RAM, p. 43.

294 RAM, p. 29.

taste".[295] A less metaphorical explanation for this phenomenon stresses that, like resentment, *ressentiment* comes with the delightful thought of the revenge or punishment to come. *Schadenfreude* works the same way, for there seems to be pleasure in being self-righteous and considering oneself morally superior to one's rival. Leibniz describes this phenomenon in *Confessio Philosophi*:

> The mind suffers from the frustration of its desires and from the impatience to take revenge, to make those responsible for its misfortune pay; [...] the mind delights in its lament, it loves to feel so lucid in its resentment, it enjoys being then the herald of justice flouted, and undoubtedly it delights also to imagine punishments which should be inflicted on the culprits.[296]

Furthermore, the kind of pleasure taken in others' misfortune can be quite addictive: Scheler uses the word "Scheelsucht"[297] to characterise it. The best illustration of this pleasure is that "'*ressentiment* criticism' is characterised by the fact that improvements in the conditions criticised cause no satisfaction – they merely cause discontent, for they destroy the growing pleasure afforded by invective and negation".[298] We shall later argue that the pleasure taken in detracting from and criticizing a rival in fact counterbalances the pain inflicted by our damaged sense of self-worth and criticizing him morally may at the same time provide a feeling of moral superiority (Section 3.2.4).

3.1.3 Frustration, impotence and inferiority.

Nietzsche wonders: "Who are the only people motivated to lie their way out of reality? People who *suffer* from it".[299] But what is the nature of this *suffering*? *Ressentiment* certainly is unpleasant, but can this quality be explained further? We have so far described the two important stages in the phenomenon of *ressentiment:* the original experience of the exemplification of some disvalue and the consequent repression of hostile emotions. Both are unpleasant episodes. We need here to consider once again the very nature of the former, that is, what happens when the individual grasps the positive value of something that is beyond his reach and feels bad about this. Why is it such an unpleasant experience for the POR? Greater clarity can be gained by distinguishing the elements that compose this early stage of *ressentiment*. For example, the fox's frustration appears to be very different from the sense of inferiority that plagues the Nietzschean priest. It also differs from the feeling of depression

295 Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 90.

296 Sévérac *in* Grandjean & Guénard, 2012, p. 123.

297 "The German *Scheelsucht*, rare in German parlance, refers to an uninterrupted obsession that seeks to detract from positive values in general, even when there is no immediate value-object at hand. […] The German *scheelsüchtig* means to have a continued urge to look askance at someone and disparage him" (Frings, 1997, p. 148).

298 RAM, p. 29.

299 A, 15. Emphbasis added.

Scheler sometimes mentions in relation to *ressentiment*.[300] And yet there is a family resemblance between these phenomena, which starts with the fact that they all have negative valence. Note that the negative valence of the early stages of *ressentiment* naturally suggests a functional *explanation* as to why individuals come to indulge in reevaluation – they do it precisely in order to make their lives more agreeable. An important empirical premise here is that individuals tend to avoid suffering and to find ways to overcome pain.[301] This should be rather uncontroversial as we have a folk-psychological understanding of this pain-avoidance mechanism.[302]

We shall distinguish, phenomenologically, between the following candidates for the characterisation of *ressentiment*'s early stage: 1) cognitive dissonance, 2) ordinary frustration, 3) the feeling of inferiority, and 4) the feeling of impotence. It is important to ask whether we can distinguish between different kinds of *ressentiment* that respond to different kinds of first-stage experiences. Shall we for example distinguish the case of an individual who resolves his *frustration* through reevaluation from an individual who alleviates his *feeling of inferiority* with the same psychological device?

Let us begin with the first item listed above. A prominent view considers *ressentiment*'s characteristic reevaluation to be a *defence mechanism* that is adopted in response to a first order experience referred to as a *cognitive dissonance*.[303] The latter term was introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957 and was later picked up by Elster whose theory uses Aesop's fable as an illustration for a type of cognitive dissonance.[304] The concept itself is defined as the experience of any individual confronted with inconsistent cognitions or "pieces of knowledge".[305] With regard to *ressentiment*, Festinger conceives of sour grapes as a dissonance reduction mechanism, in which an individual overcomes the psychological tension of holding two conflicting "pieces of knowledge". Perhaps this is just an illustration of the canonical form of self-deception where, as the account goes, an individual holds the belief that *p* and, at the same time the belief that *not-p* (see Chapter 4). Because human beings prefer consistency to incon-

300 FORM, p. 320.

301 Crisp, 2006.

302 Smith explains:

> [T]oo painful a condition for most people to bear, for both internal and self-presentational reasons. When made to feel inferior because of an unflattering social comparison, people appear capable of numerous defensive manoeuvres to turn the tables on this conclusion (Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 53).

303 Elster claims: "Sour grapes can be seen as a way of reducing cognitive dissonance" (Elster, 1983, p. 110).

304 Elster, 1983.

305 Festinger's definition is very broad: "elements of cognition correspond for the most part with what the person actually does or feels or with what actually exists in the environment. In the case of opinions, beliefs, and values, the reality may be what others think or do; in other instances the reality may be what is encountered experientially or what others have told him" (Festinger, 1957, p. 11).

sistency – mainly, it is said, on the hedonistic ground that inconsistency is an unpleasant experience – they will be motivated to reduce the dissonance and, further, to avoid any challenging information that could be a source of new inconsistencies.[306] "Cognitive dissonance", however, appears to be a catch-all concept covering a large variety of phenomena. For example, the prosaic case of someone who believes that the day will be sunny but is surprised by an unexpected shower experiences – very briefly – a cognitive dissonance. In the same vein, weakness of the will (*akrasia*) also counts as a type of cognitive dissonance. The smoker who knows smoking to be unhealthy experiences some conflict with his belief that he is still a smoker and desires to be healthy.[307] The individual then essentially has two options for reducing the dissonance: he can either adapt his behaviour by giving up cigarettes, or he can resolve the conflict by changing his beliefs about smoking. He may for example indulge in thinking that it is, after all, not bad for his health.

Does the concept of cognitive dissonance describe *ressentiment*? Is the POR merely holding two inconsistent beliefs? The original tension in the early stages of *ressentiment* occurs because the individual has the impression that some situation is of value to him *and* acknowledges, painfully, that he is powerless to bring it about. We can therefore argue that the source of the tension is not a matter of inconsistency or incompatible beliefs, but involves, instead, the acquaintance with a value which, as we shall later argue, is non-conceptual. The feeling that something has value *and* the knowledge of my impotence are not inconsistent. The original awareness is often intuitive, immediate and non-conceptual acquaintance with the value of an object or situation rather than the conclusion of a deductive thought process. It is then a feeling, which, as we shall later show, is not fully brought into conscious thought. Of course, one may argue that the fox, who first *believes* that the grapes are *sweet* and then comes to believe that they are *sour*, is effectively in the grip of a type of cognitive dissonance, insofar as it believes both that the grapes are sour *and* that they are sweet. But we shall later argue that his experience of sweetness, or more generally of the positive value of the coveted good, is not typically a matter of belief in the first place. Another difficulty is this: the standard account of cognitive dissonance supposes it is a state of psychological tension. This may as well be true of the POR.

Is the POR then suffering from mere frustration? One may get the impression that the POR's suffering is nothing but a repeated *thwarting* of wants, wishes, desires, and expectations. These conative categories, in fact, are regularly used to describe *ressentiment*, and all illustrations of *ressentiment* seem to be re-writeable in the latter terms. For instance, one may say that when the POR harbours an oppressive feeling of inferiority, she in fact experiences the

306 Festinger, 1957, p. 5.

307 Festinger, 1957, p. 7.

frustration of a *desire* for esteem and superiority. There is nevertheless a conceptual difficulty with such conative reductions. The POR does not primarily desire a bolstered sense of self-worth. Rather, she values objects, persons, and states of affairs she finds herself unable to own, realise or enjoy. As we shall later argue in more detail, Scheler is right to claim that the POR's feeling of inferiority is not a frustrated desire for esteem, but the apprehension of a positive, and unrealisable, value that happens to cast an unpleasant shadow and to challenge her sense of self-worth.

In sum, *ressentiment* is therefore specific, as it "responds precisely to the feeling of impotence or ineffectiveness constitutively involved *in the experience of suffering*".[308] At bottom, it involves neither a form of frustration nor a form of cognitive dissonance. Let us now turn to the feeling of impotence and the feeling of inferiority, respectively, and determine whether they constitute a better account of the POR's suffering. Both concepts are repeatedly associated with *ressentiment* and seem to carry the idea of a damaged sense of self-worth.[309] Nietzsche, for example, points out that:

> The value judgement on the most basic level says: 'I am not worth much' – a purely physiological value judgement, or more clearly still: the feeling of powerlessness, the absence of the great affirming feeling of power (in the muscles, nerves, centres of motion).[310]

Despite the fact that "feeling of impotence" and "feeling of inferiority" are often used interchangeably, it nevertheless seems possible to distinguish them phenomenologically. A feeling of impotence can be experienced without a sense of inferiority. The fox is annoyed by his shortcomings, but he does not feel inferior; his first-stage experience is *not* one of comparing himself to a more successful rival. The experience of impotence is therefore similar to mere frustration. Inabilities come in different kinds and degrees. One can be unable to *do* something, or unable to *get* something. Both are relevant for *ressentiment*. But we should here keep in mind that impotence can be of two kinds; either the inability is rooted in the person, or the inability is due to external obstacles. The type of personal inability often called impotence is here what is central to *ressentiment*. Impotence also often conditions our feeling of inferiority, but the awareness of some inabilities does not necessarily come with a sense of inferiority. For instance, one may be genuinely pleased by the superior talent of a friend or the beauty of an actor. Symmetrically, one may be plagued by a feeling of inferiority that is grounded on no real inability.

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308 Reginster *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2014, p. 708. Emphasis added. See also: Leiter, 2004, p. 95. Leiter describes *ressentiment* as "a feeling that arises in response or as a reaction to some state: it is a feeling that arises in response or as a reaction to some state of affairs […] that is both unpleasant to the affected person and one which he is *powerless* to alter through physical action" (Leiter, 2002, p. 202. Emphasis added).

309 Leach *in* Smith, 2008, pp. 94–116.

310 NB, 14[29].

How do these cases apply to *ressentiment*? We can here usefully contrast three characters to illustrate the different possible cases: the POR, the common man, and what is called in German a "*Streber*" (an inadequate translation of which is "arriviste"). Scheler introduces the figure of the arriviste (*Streber*) as someone who manages to live up to his values, but pursues them only because he is plagued by a feeling of inferiority, and with the sole intent of overcoming it, thereby coming to feel superior to others.[311] The latter figure's sense of self-worth is "built up only through comparing his value with that of another person, i.e., who sees himself as 'valuable' only when he knows himself to be 'of more value than another'".[312] For example, this would be the case if I were only pursuing a musical career because I value the fact of being better at the piano than my peers rather than because I want to realise some aesthetic values through my playing or develop the abilites I was born with. According to Scheler, the feeling of inferiority is here grounded in a form of apprehension of one's self-worth that is typical of the ordinary person. Scheler thinks, like some psychologists, that one can be aware of a relation and one of its terms without having a clear grasp of the second term, as when one notes the similarity of a face one sees with a face one cannot bring to mind. He also distinguishes between finding out about related objects by considering their relations and finding out about them more directly, without any detour via their relations.[313] I grasp the extraordinary pianistic talent of a friend (a positive value), but my sense of self-worth is wounded because I feel relatively inferior to him. Given the structure of the POR's characteristic valuations, *ressentiment* is "connected with a tendency to make comparisons between others and oneself".[314] And clearly, social comparison is a rather trivial phenomenon, since "each of us – noble or vulgar, good or evil – continually compares his value with that of others".[315] The *Streber* overcomes his feeling of inferiority, or never faces it because he is able to realize the desired trait, good or value. The common man – the second figure – only shows *ressentiment* when her sense of self-worth is hurt *and* she feels powerless to improve her condition. In that regard, *ressentiment* implies an important, and specific, pattern of valuation in which our positive self-image heavily depends on comparison and where the feeling of our relative self-worth further shapes our axiological feelings. As Scheler explains:

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311 "[An *arriviste*] merely uses a 'thing' as an indifferent occasion for overcoming the *oppressive feeling of inferiority* which results from his constant comparisons" (RAM, p. 32. Emphasis added).

312 FORM, p. 354.

313 "[T]he comparison of values, the 'measurement' of my own value as against that of another person, is never the constitutive precondition for apprehending either" (RAM, p. 31).

314 RAM, p. 30. Masterson remarks: "He is haunted by an oppressive feeling of inferiority which results from his constant comparisons. Another man's gain is his loss. The worthwhile life is a matter of keeping up with or getting ahead of the Joneses" (Masterson, 1979, p. 160).

315 RAM, p. 30.

> [T]he "common" man [...] clearly perceives only those qualities which constitute possible differences. The noble man experiences value *prior* to any comparison, the common man *in* and *through* a comparison. For the latter, the relation is the selective precondition for apprehending *any* value. Every value is a relative thing, "higher" or "lower", "more" or "less" than his own. He arrives at value judgements by comparing himself to others and others to himself.[316]

How do these three figures stand to each other? Both the man of *ressentiment* and the "arriviste" (*Streber*) are plagued by a feeling of inferiority. But unlike the former, the arriviste overcomes it because he manages to boost his sense of self-worth by living up to a value that leads to a flattering comparison with his rivals. The common man on the other hand may either become an arriviste or a POR. Becoming an arriviste, Scheler claims, is reserved for the energetic variety of common men. Harbouring *ressentiment* on the other hand is reserved to the weak variety of the common man.[317]

In contrast to these three figures (the man of *ressentiment*, the arriviste, and the common man), feelings of inferiority seem always entirely absent from the *noble character*. For many German authors influenced by Nietzsche (Scheler, Simmel, Weber, Sombart, Hartmann), nobility is an important ideal.[318] Nietzsche conceives this figure as a genuinely independent and active character[319], one whom *ressentiment* cannot affect because the hostility "is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction, and therefore it does not poison".[320] The noble man has also no memory for insults, which prevents him from chewing over the past. His apprehension of values sets him therefore apart from the rest:

> The "noble person" has a completely naïve and non-reflective awareness of his own value and of his fullness of being, an obscure conviction which enriches every conscious moment of his existence, as if he were autonomously rooted in the universe. This should not be mistaken for "pride". Quite on the contrary, pride results from an experienced *diminution* of this "naive" self-confidence. It is a way of "holding on" to one's values, of seizing and "preserving" it deliberately.[321]

Unlike the other three figures, his experience of values is never primarily conditioned by an assessment of his self-worth. As Scheler puts it, he "experiences value prior to any comparison"[322]. Hartmann adds: "he is not absorbed in self-respect and self-esteem, his attention is

316 RAM, p. 32.

317 RAM, p. 33.

318 BGE, 257.

319 BGE, 212.

320 GM, I, 10.

321 RAM, p. 31.

322 RAM, p. 32.

not turned upon himself".[323] He can therefore grasp the positive value of something without his relative value being impacted. Nobility is hence not, as Simmel believes, just a trait of someone who never compares himself to others. Such persons are rather fools or snobs.[324] We shall later see (Chapter 5) that the aretaic ideal of nobility is essential for the understanding of the moral value we may attach to this character and the moral disvalue we attach to the character of the man of *ressentiment*.

Scheler's map of the traits involving a sense of inferiority can be completed with an explanation of its possible overcoming. Feeling inferior is painful, feeling superior is highly enjoyable; and we naturally prefer to feel good about ourselves, which can occur when we feel relatively superior to others.[325] *Explaining* the POR's indulging in reevaluation in response to a damaged self-image is a cornerstone of Adler's theory of the inferiority complex and many authors defend or endorse such an explanation.[326] The devaluation of unattainable goods and rivals, Adler explains, is a "psychological process [that] primarily serves the purpose of clinging to the fiction […] of one's own value".[327] According to this very influential Austrian Psychoanalyst, the feeling of inferiority is a central element of human nature, common to us all. It is worth here quoting him in full:

> Inferiority feelings are in some degree common to all of us, since we all find ourselves in positions which we wish to improve. If we have kept our courage, we shall set about ridding ourselves of these feelings by the only direct, realistic and satisfactory means – by improving the situation. No human being bears a feeling of inferiority for long; he will be thrown into a tension which necessitates some kind of action. But suppose an individual is discouraged; suppose he cannot conceive that if he makes realistic efforts he will improve the situation. He will still be unable to bear his feelings of inferiority; he will still struggle to get rid of them; but he will try methods which bring him no farther ahead. His goal is still "to be superior to difficulties", but instead of overcoming obstacles *he will try to hypnotize himself, or autointoxicate himself, into feeling superior*.[328]

The crucial element in this passage is the idea that a feeling of inferiority is overcome by a sense of superiority and that those suffering from inferiority will aim at finding a way to experience superiority over their rival. That affective phenomena such as envy or *Schadenfreude* are grounded on a sense of inferiority and motivated by our pursuit of the highs and delights that come with feelings of superiority is a well-documented fact in psychology[329],

323 Hartmann, 2002, p. 202.

324 RAM, p. 31.

325 Trivers, 2013, p. 15-18.

326 Greenfeld, 1992; Ferro, 2010.

327 Adler, 2011, p. 268.

328 Adler, 2011, p. 257. Emphasis added.

329 Smith, 2013.

for, simply put: "most of us like the idea of being superior to others, and we search for ways to come to this view whenever we can".[330] Adler points out that we are all driven by a tendency to overcome a feeling of inferiority through real or imaginary *compensations*; and *ressentiment,* precisely, is such a compensation. As Brachfeld puts it:

> This tendency to show our worth is not a primordial factor in human nature. It arises as compensation for a painful and sometimes burning feeling of *lack*, of a *minus*, the Feeling of Inferiority, the *Minderwertigkeitsgefühl.*[331]

Such compensation is generally understood as an effort to restore a sense of personal worth and constitutes a mechanism recognised by psychologists too. Silver and Sabini for example explain that envy:

> [O]ccurs when a person recognizes that another's accomplishment make him or her look bad to self and (or) others. In such a case there are many different reactions a person might have, but one of them is to try to undercut the successful person's accomplishment or the other person more generally, *to restore one's relative social standing.*[332]

We shall later use Adler's claim (Section 3.2.4) to show how the very mechanism of reevaluation and its peculiar use of moral values allows the POR to feel superior to her rivals *in some way*. The idea that individuals tend to use illusions about themselves or the world in order to escape the challenges of life has an explicit Nietzschean character.[333] The common trait of all compensations – and *ressentiment*'s reevaluation is the case in point – is the fact that they provide, or attempt to provide, a feeling of superiority.

Sometimes however a different wording is used. Reginster for example suggests that: "*ressentiment* is a response not to the loss of a good or to the violation of a right, but to a lack of power: it bears an essential connection to the 'feeling of impotence'".[334] Or as Byrne puts it:

> [*Ressentiment*] connotes a particular feeling that is being re-felt, namely impotence. One's own impotence can be experienced in a wide range of concrete circumstances: whenever one is in the presence of something stronger, more intelligent, more beautiful, more noble, more holy than oneself.[335]

How exactly does the POR's impotence stand to the feeling of inferiority? Brachfeld suggest that the latter can persist even after the hostile emotions have been expressed:

> In many cases the feeling of inferiority may lead to resentment [read: *ressentiment*], even (though Scheler denies this) when the subject has

330 Smith, 2013, p. 16.

331 Brachfeld, 1951, p. 90.

332 Silver & Sabini, 2005, p. 4. Emphasis added.

333 Lehrer *in* Golomb et al., 1999, pp. 181–204.

334 Reginster *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, p. 708.

335 Byrne, 1993, p. 217.

> been able to abreact towards the cause of his humiliation. And the same thing may happen in favourable cases where the inferiority, real or imaginary, has found compensation. In short, the compensation obtained does not in any way exempt the subject from the possibility of further [*ressentiment*].[336]

The "feeling of impotence", on the other hand, is an expression that refers to the sense of inferiority in combination with the awareness of an insurmountable personal inability. The feeling of inferiority presupposes the impression of real impotence and its associated, but distinct, experience. This is, for example, suggested by Scheler when he puts forward a causal explanation for the popularity of axiological subjectivism as an expression of *ressentiment*:

> [...] a feeling and an awareness of inferiority in the presence of objective values are what lead to a kind of act of revenge against values in general and culminate in the proposition: "All" values are "merely" subjective! What led to the supposed "subjectivity" of values [...] is a deep-seated secret experience of impotence—that is, an experience of the inability to realize values and to be somebody through recognizing them [*unter ihrer Anerkennung etwas zu gelten*]—and the subsequent feeling of depression. [337]

If you are utterly convinced of your worthlessness, you may find value subjectivism brings some relief, suggests Scheler, although he is well aware that the truth of his causal claim is not an argument against subjectivism. The expression "feeling of impotence" is sometimes just a metaphor for the latter combination of impotence *and* inferiority, and sometimes it seems reserved for lighter cases of frustration caused by personal shortcomings and limitations that do not impact negatively on one's sense of self-worth. One element may explain why the experience of *ressentiment* is so often apprehended as a feeling of impotence. Inferiority can have different sources. Scheler, for example, suggests that it grows out of the fundamental axiological orientation of a person. The feeling of inferiority is elicited when a person perceives values through the prism of the relations between her worth and that of others. Values are then given through an act of comparison, and this is quite independent of any of the typical situations of impotence. But for Adler, who, like Freud, was deeply influenced by Nietzsche, there is an important connection between powerlessness and a damaged sense of self-worth too: to see that one is powerless to realise some type of value, quite irrespective of any interpersonal comparison, is enough to negatively affect one's sense of self-worth.

By contrast, the fox feels impotent, but he does not feel inferior because he cannot get the grapes. There is a feeling of impotence and displeasure at one's impotence that is not necessarily social and comparative. The *outcome* of such ordinary disappointments also takes the form of a reevaluation strategy, for example when one comes to change values in response to a frustrated desire (as the fox does).

336 Brachfeld, 1951, p. 243.

337 FORM, p. 320.

We asked at the beginning of this section whether we should distinguish the case of an individual who resolves his frustration with the help of an axiological illusion from that of an individual who alleviates a feeling of inferiority with the same psychological device? They are definitely different experiences, although, from a third person point of view, they might look the same: in both cases, the individual devalues what he cannot get irrespective of whether he does it out of a sense of comparative inferiority or a sense of impotence. The fact that the outcome – reevaluation – is common to both cases, and the fact that a feeling of inferiority is not a necessary first order experience, may provide an explanation for cases like those described in the fable of the fox and the grapes. There is no envy or revenge in Aesop's fable which instead accounts for the feeling of impotence, frustrated desires and their consequent anger. But, like all instances of *ressentiment*, the fable also describes the mechanism of reevaluation.

Ressentiment comes either with a feeling of inferiority, in which case it manifests itself in social emotions such as envy and *as if* resentment, or with a feeling of impotence, in which case *ressentiment* is not a social sentiment but an experience one undergoes when self-relevant value seem out of reach. In both cases the reevaluation provides compensation, some pleasant state of mind, for example by eliciting a *feeling of superiority*. Some passages suggest that this is Nietzsche's view as he stresses the "will of the sick [the man of *ressentiment*] to appear superior in *any* way"[338] and also that of Scheler, who proclaims:

> To relieve the tension, the common man seeks a feeling of superiority or equality, and he retains his purpose by an illusory devaluation of the other man's qualities or by a specific "blindness" to these qualities.[339]

Poellner remarks that "[*ressentiment*] would not occur if it did not enable the subject to deal with her suffering through acquiring a sense of self-worth involving essentially a consciousness of superiority over the object of *ressentiment*".[340] The reevaluation process may also provide relief simply because it leads the POR to forget or repress her thoughts about her impotence. How exactly the mechanism of reevaluation work will be described in detail in Chapter 3.2.

3.1.4 Self-regarding attitudes

The previous section dealt with the role of feelings of inferiority and impotence. These characteristic elements of *ressentiment*'s first-stage experience are often related to another conceptual family, that of self-regarding attitudes. Else Voigtländer, before her mentor Max Scheler, identified the importance of self-regarding attitudes for the understanding of the

338 GM, III, 14.

339 RAM, p. 34. Emphasis added.

340 Poellner, 2004, p. 47.

mechanism of *ressentiment*. She offers an interesting and useful description of *feelings of self-worth* (*Selbstwertgefühle*) and the different ways of apprehending of our own value, two phenomena we have already referred to frequently.[341] In this section we shall first present her view. Following that, we will distinguish between two families of self-regarding attitudes which throw new light on the experience *ressentiment*, and more particularly, allow us to better understand the difference between resentment and *ressentiment*. We have previously argued that resentment, unlike indignation, deeply impacts our sense of self-worth – our dignity and self-respect. *Ressentiment*, as the previous discussion on feelings of inferiority and impotence has shown, can also be said to hurt our self-worth. Yet it affects a very different dimension of our self-worth.

The feeling of self-worth, Voigtländer suggests, can be positive or negative. It colours our experiences, to different degrees, either with depression and contrition or pride and perhaps even haughtiness. Voigtländer rightly points out that the feeling of self-worth is not an emotion. She instead characterises it as a mood (*Stimmung*).[342] She distinguishes between *vital* feelings of self-worth which are unconscious, non-conceptual, primitive, and not related to any particular object or achievement (it is just there – in various degrees), and *conscious* feelings of self-worth which are related to specific objects. A lifted, positive, vital feeling of self-worth is manifest in a person's confidence, strength, pride and health. It is the distinctive trait of the noble (see Chapter 5). On the other hand, what she calls the conscious feeling of self-worth is based on a cognitive state, that is, on a judgement about one's own values and virtues. It is manifest in our response to successes and failures. Now *ressentiment* occurs, Voigtländer claims, when both sorts of feelings of self-worth conflict and lead to a tension. More specifically, the POR suffers from a low and hurt *vital* sense of self-worth, but tries to escape her suffering by talking herself into a positive, *conscious*, feeling of self-worth – not through objective achievements, but through a reevaluation mechanism. As she puts it:

> One's own awareness of values is violated and affected by the perception of foreign virtues because it feels connected with them by the awareness of a corresponding lack; - but this consciousness is deadened and repressed by pretending that the unreachable good is disvaluable (*indem man sich einen Unwert des fremden Gutes vorredet*). The elevation of one's own self-feeling occurs, then, through a living into the false representation of one‘s own higher value.[343]

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341 "Wir bestimmen also das Selbstgefühl als eine gewisse Wertauffassung der eigenen Person" (Voigtländer, 1910, p. 11).

342 Voigtländer, 1910, p. 14. She further explains:

> The emotional apprehension of oneself, as we have characterized self-feeling, can simply be experienced in itself. One experiences mood fluctuations: one is depressed, without knowing why; one has a feeling of joy and strength without knowing where it comes from. They are moods that come from the very nature of one's nature (Voigtländer, 1910, p. 21).

Does such tension apply to resentment as well? Is it for example what distinguishes resentment from indignation? That resentment is of a very different kind than *ressentiment* should now be clear, if only because the two phenomena belong to very different affective categories. Voigtländer describes *ressentiment* as a conflict between a conscious and an unconscious feeling of self-worth. The feelings of inferiority and impotence, and the way they are triggered – sometimes just through the apprehension of a positive, unreachable, value – are non-conceptual. The POR in other words does not come to the conclusion that she is inferior, but she feels it or has this impression without being thematically aware of it. Voigtländer additionally suggests that the compensation mechanism – for example, the feeling of superiority stressed by Adler – is by contrast a conscious, conceptual, mechanism. This claim is very important. It suggests that the reevaluation process we will describe in much greater detail in Section 3.2 is cognitively richer than it may appear to be at first sight, involving beliefs, and emotions based on these beliefs. It is a mechanism through which the POR intentionally props herself up and experiences a compensatory form of superiority in order to overcome some disagreeable and unconscious feelings.

Voigtländer has stressed the importance of the feelings of self-worth in the phenomenon of *ressentiment*. We shall now argue that the POR's sense of self-worth is affected in a different way from the sense of self-worth involved in resentment. More specifically, we shall distinguish between two families of self-regarding attitudes, one that seems relevant for resentment, the other for *ressentiment*. This distinction is an another way of contrasting the two phenomena in addition to the categorial argument (*ressentiment*, unlike resentment, is not an emotion), to the argument from the different natures of revenge in each case (*ressentiment*'s revenge, unlike that of resentment, is the downgrading of a rival), and to the argument from the different ways *ressentiment* alters the intentionality of its emotional expressions.

Ressentiment is the experience of a hurt sense of self-worth, but so is resentment, as opposed to indignation. What then distinguishes the experiences? Generally speaking, self-regarding attitudes come in a great variety of forms: self-image, self-worth, self-esteem, self-respect, *amour-propre*, self-love, pride. La Rochefoucauld, for example, made *self-love (amour-propre)*

[343] As she puts it in German:

> Das eigene Wertbewusstsein wird verletzt und getroffen durch die Wahrnehmung fremder Vorzüge, weil es sich mit ihnen verbunden fühlt durch das Bewusstsein eines entsprechenden Mangels; – aber dieses Bewusstsein wird übertaübt und verdrängt, indem man sich einen Unwert des fremden Gutes vorredet. *Die Erhebung des eigenen Selbstgefühls kommt dann durch hineinleben in die Vorstellung eines vorgelogenen eigenen höherwertes zustande* (Voigtländer, 1910, p. 49. Emphasis added).

the fundamental human motivation and "agrees with the other French moralists", Elster explains, "that civilised life is held together by the desire for esteem or *vanity*, which has the miraculous capacity to mimic virtue".[344] But despite the fact that we regularly employ self-regarding attitudes to explain other people's actions, they remain difficult to define. No consensus exists on their definition, nor is there clarity regarding what kind of phenomenon these attitudes are, or to which category of the mind they belong. It seems nevertheless clear that *self-regarding attitudes such as self-love not emotions.* However, they often serve as a subjective explanation for the occurrence of emotions, desires or sentiments. As Elster remarks more specifically about *self-love (amour-propre)*: "it is not itself an emotion, [but] anything that threatens it can provoke strong emotional reactions. Anything that can bolster it may also induce strong emotions."[345] There is a vast psychological literature on self-regarding attitudes; we should here limit ourselves to what we consider useful distinctions for a comparison between *ressentiment* and other emotional phenomena where self-regarding attitudes are relevant. We will henceforth distinguish between two families of self-regarding attitudes that will later allow us to separate resentment from *ressentiment*, and better understand the latter's relation to moral emotions.

We noted earlier that the experience of resentment has a deeper impact on a person's sense of self-worth than anger proper or indignation which is considered the cooler attitude. I feel pained differently when I am unfairly tried (resentment) than when I feel wronged by my neighbour's lack of tidiness (indignation). But what exactly do we mean here by self-worth? And how do wrongs hurt us when we respond with resentment? Resentment is triggered by a wrong, and wrongs in general are considered damaging to our *dignity*.[346] Murphy and Hampton claim that: "the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is *self-respect*".[347] The inability to feel resentment is thus associated with a deficient sense of self-respect.[348] Walker, on the other hand, claims that "the aim of resentment is to defend and protect *self-esteem*".[349] Solomon even suggests, more generally, that "every emotion is a subjective strategy for the maximization of personal dignity and self-esteem."[350] Things become even more complicated when resentment is said to be motivated by *pride* – another self-regarding attitude –, which is also one of resentment's known sins.[351] In very similar fashion,

344 Elster, 1999, p. 87

345 Elster, 2010, p. 221.

346 Portmann, 2000, p. 35; Dillon, 1997, p. 230.

347 Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 16.

348 La Caze, 2001, p. 38; Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 55.

349 Walker, 2006, p. 119. Emphasis added.

350 Solomon, 1993, p. 222.

351 Butler, *Upon Resentment*.

the phenomenon of *ressentiment* is regularly associated with a damaged sense of self-esteem[352]; and the POR depicted as someone desperately trying to protect it.[353] The historian Greenfeld views *ressentiment* as a reaction to a damaged sense of self-esteem (which she believes is the foundation of Russian nationalism).[354] Nietzsche's portrayal of the POR regularly suggests a sense of inferiority[355], which brings Darwall to the conclusion: "it is the need for self-esteem that, to see one's life as valuable, to be proud rather than ashamed of oneself, that fuels their [the weak] mendacious inversion of the noble/base hierarchy".[356]

Are both the POR and the resenter experiencing a damaged sense of self-worth? And does it feel the same in each case? We have so far assumed that persons possess a sense of their *own* value and called it the sense of *self-worth*. Another premise we assumed to be uncontroversial is that individuals want to feel good about themselves. Psychologists sometime refer to this fact as *self-enhancement*; and to the various illusions and strategies we employ to protect our sense of self-worth as *self-protection* mechanisms.[357] One can analyse our conduct and affective expression in the light of these general principles.

We shall distinguish two conceptual families or kinds of self-worth: self-esteem and self-respect. Folk psychology acknowledges that there are feelings of value about the self that are worth cultivating, and that individuals thus sometimes come to indulge in self-deception and other kinds of illusions in order to protect their pride or self-esteem. One can analyse our conduct and affective expression in the light of these general principles.[358] When the POR disparages her rival's achievements, claiming that he is not that talented or wealthy, or that wealth and talent do not matter to her after all, we apprehend such judgements as strategies protecting her pride, her *self-love (amour-propre)* or what we sometimes colloquially call her "ego". These mechanisms in other words are understood as an attempt to improve the hedonic tone of her experience, to feel better about herself. What about resentment? Does this emotion lead to similar deceptions as well? When treated wrongfully for example, I feel hurt in my dignity, a humiliation wounds my honour and a blatant injustice wounds my sense of self-respect. We have argued that resentment can have different kinds of triggers: an action, the property of another person, or a social hierarchy. All need eventually to be perceived as an offence or more generally as a wrong that one wants to right or seen righted.

352 Darwall, 2013, p. 82.

353 Bauman, 2008, p. 36.

354 Greenfeld, 1990.

355 Metzler & Musolf, 2002, p. 245.

356 Darwall, 2013, p. 82.

357 Alicke & Sedikides, 2009.

358 Taylor, 2006, p. 49. See also: Bortolotti, 2009.

But even in the case of resentment, all wrongs do not necessarily damage our sense of self-worth in the same way or with the same intensity. Honneth puts this as follows:

> Admittedly, all of what is referred to colloquially as 'disrespect' or 'insult' obviously can involve varying degrees of depth in the psychological injury to a subject. *There is a categorial difference between, say, the blatant degradation involved in the denial of basic human right, on the one hand, and the subtle humiliation that accompanies a public allusion to a person's failings, on the other hand*.[359]

But despite all the variety of ways in which our self-worth can be hurt, we shall argue they exhibit a certain unity and are part of the same conceptual family. *Ressentiment* by contrast invokes a different family of self-regarding attitudes. We shall argue that self-respect is central to resentment and self-esteem to *ressentiment*.

Self-esteem remains much debated in psychology and is a popular topic for self-help best-sellers.[360] Two distinct approaches to self-esteem have emerged over the years: one is competence-based and assumes that self-esteem is bolstered when we succeed in fulfilling our aspirations, and is lowered and damaged when we fail in that pursuit. The second approach detaches self-esteem from the success or failure of our actions and considers instead that the feeling of our own worth is something we simply have or lack, and sometimes possess in excess..[361] Recently, some accounts have also considered self-esteem to be grounded on both our competence and the overall positive evaluation of our self. As Mruk puts it: "self-esteem is the lived status of one's competence at dealing with the challenges of living in a worthy way over time".[362] We shall here use "self-esteem" as an umbrella concept for self-regarding attitudes such as pride, vanity or self-love (*amour-propre*).[363]

A more popular notion among philosophers than self-esteem is the concept of self-respect. Some may doubt they differ in any important respect. Rawls, for example, discusses "self-respect" as though it were just self-esteem.[364] We shall here disagree and argue that self-respect refers to the worth we attach to the fact of being a person or as Roland and Foxx put it: "the central tenet of self-respect is the understanding and respect of man's humanity, which then extends to the duty to treat the self and others in a manner that honours that humanity".[365] Kristjánsson, too, apprehends self-respect in terms of our deep-rooted values. As he puts it "your self-respect encompasses your unshakable commitments: the most

359 Honneth, 1995, p. 132. Emphasis added.

360 Schiraldi, 2007.

361 Mruk, 2006; Cast & Burke, 2002

362 Mruk, 2006, p. 28.

363 Schroeder, 1909, p. 173

364 Rawls, 1971, § 61.

365 Roland & Foxx, 2010, p. 269.

important goals you set yourself in life and the moral principles by which you abide".[366] A strong sense of self-respect is attributed to someone who holds many commitments and values. Hence, my sense of self-respect is not damaged when I fail to realise a value I hold dear, but it is damaged when the very capacity to (dis)value things and to be a person is threatened.[367] Self-respect involves our apprehension of the fact that we are worthy of respect simply in virtue of our personhood. Self-esteem involves the apprehension of our shortcomings. Another difference between self-esteem and self-respect is that the kind of worth peculiar to self-respect is moral.[368] Self-respect seems to bear a positive moral value or facilitate emotional disposition that are ethically valuable. Is what self-respect respects one's own moral value ? This is sometimes assumed. Mulligan disagrees: "self-respect presumably should not involve taking oneself to be morally good or valuable, for then it would be Pharisaical".[369] Even if Mulligan is wrong, unlike self-respect, self-esteem relates to particular desires and seems morally indifferent. Self-esteem is a function of our capacity to uphold or realize our values.

Let us illustrate the difference between these two kinds of self-regarding attitudes. Suppose I am arbitrarily excluded from university, say because of my religion, someone or some group is preventing me from realizing the high value I attribute to, say, research, knowledge and the development of my intellectual virtues. And suppose the persons excluding me deny that I have a right to pursue such goals. Contrast this with the case where I am excluded from university because I fail all my exams or do not understand most of the hard topics in mathematics and logic. In the second case, my shortcomings and incapacity to bring about a state of affairs I dearly value (to get a degree, to be a renowned mathematician) is damaging to my *self-esteem*, but not to my *self-respect* for no one or nothing prevented me having the values I have and trying to live up to them. This distinction points towards the fact that the emotion of resentment implies the experience of a damaged self-respect, at least in the paradigmatic case where I become the victim of someone's wrongdoing, A denial of my personhood (e.g. by my arbitrary exclusion from university). But damaged self-esteem linked to personal shortcomings and failures (my failing a mathematics exam) is instead the cause of shame, which occurs because one is incapable of living up to one's values.[370] Note that a damaged

366 Kristjánsson, 2002, p. 94.

367 Chazan, 1998, p. 41; Sachs, 1981.

368 Govier, 2002, p. 53

369 Mulligan *in* Sander & Scherer, 2009, p. 265.

370 Deonna and al. describe this emotions as follows:

> In shame, we take it that we exemplify a specific disvalue that strikes us as an indication of our incapacity to exemplify a self-relevant value even to a minimal degree. This experience of incapacity, although circumscribed to the value undermined in the circumstances, affects the self in a distinctive way. Our identity being constituted by the values to which we are attached, it is shaken

self-esteem can become the psychological ground for other emotions too. For example, in the same context, envy can arise when one feels distressed by the goods and achievements of a more successful rival.

An additional distinction between these self-regarding attitudes is this: resentment-inducing offences, apart from affecting my self-respect, impose constraints, injuries and limitations from outside – someone is hurting me, humiliating me, excluding me. By contrast, self-esteem injuries are correlated with a person's own shortcomings, weaknesses or vices. Unlike self-respect, self-esteem is damaged when personal traits, habits or qualities restrain or prevent us from realising what we value. For example, I feel resentful when I come to believe that the rich are preventing me from improving my economic condition (an external, intentional, constraint). In other words my resentment is not grounded on the perception of my shortcomings; it is by definition a blaming attitude that attributes causal responsibility to some external agent. On the other hand, if I recognise that my neighbour's hard work and talent contributed to his current fame as a pianist, while I miserably failed to do all the necessary hard and disciplined work, I may be hurt in my self-esteem for I see that I will never attain the same command of the piano. That injury may ground shame or envy, but not resentment.

We may therefore associate resentment with a hurt sense of self-worth *qua* self-respect. It is also important to note that the distinction between self-esteem and self-respect and its relation to the distinction between *ressentiment* and resentment finds support in empirical results too. As Smith points out, empirical results show that "[b]eliefs about objective injustice predicted hostility but not discontent, suggesting that the obvious unfairness should create hostility, but should have little connection with seeing oneself as inferior and feeling depressed as a result".[371] A possible challenge to this claim is that resentment may also be triggered by social comparisons and thus involve *self-esteem*. Or is the painful apprehension of personal, relative, shortcomings then also impacting on my self-respect (and not on my self-esteem)? This may presumably occur, but one must then *apprehend* the latter context as the consequence of a *wrong* instead of *a personal defect* or perhaps more commonly, as a personal defect for which someone else is believed to be responsible. The distinctions between the two self-regarding attitudes and correspondingly between internal and external obstacles are therefore important. In particular, they show that one cannot experience resentment just in response to the acknowledgement of one's own – internal – shortcomings. An external cause must be identified in some way or the other. Sometimes one just pretends

> precisely insofar as we experience our inability to honor even minimally the demands that go with this value (Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni, 2012, p. 122).

[371] Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 51

to be resentful, Sometimes one seems to perceive wrongdoers in contexts where there are none. In all cases, however, resentment always involves the apprehension of an external obstacle. The latter phenomenon can also be the manifestation of the fact that one is turning a self-esteem injury into a self-respect injury, where one's distress is related to external causes rather than to the personal failure of living up to one's own values.

Can we say, by contrast, that *ressentiment* only involves a damaged sense of self-worth *qua* self-esteem? This is clearly the case for many of the example we have discussed. The POR painfully acknowledges her inferiority, her shortcomings and her inability to realise values she holds dear. Unlike resentment, *ressentiment* is always first of all the experience of a hurt self-esteem, the restoration of which can take different paths, which we shall now describe. It is one of the characteristic manifestations of *ressentiment* to harbour resentment in response to a distressing social comparison, and thus *to turn damaged self-esteem into damaged self-respect.* The reevaluation strategy the POR then follows is one that may present her injured self-esteem as a damaged self-respect instead. This mechanism will be discussed again in more details in Section 3.2 and Chapter 5.

3.1.5 Conclusion

Before we turn to *ressentiment*'s reevaluation mechanism, let us summarise what we have tried to show thus far. *Ressentiment* is a multi-track sentiment manifested in dispositions such as envy and revengefulnes but also in episodic emotions such as resentment and indignation, that eventually turns into a trait, indeed a vice. It is manifested in several emotions, which progress from focusing on a particular individual or group to being triggered by the presence of the exemplification of some values. The POR first envies her wealthy neighbour but eventually develops the disposition of envy and responds this way to wealth every time she is confronted with it. *Ressentiment* is grounded in the experience of personal impotence and inferiority which must be distinguished from mere frustration or cognitive dissonance. The feeling of inferiority is perhaps the more common origin of *ressentiment*. However, a mere feeling of impotence – when no social comparison is involved – may also lie at the origin of this phenomenon.

The first order experience of *ressentiment* – the feelings of inferiority and impotence – is unpleasant and damages the POR's self-esteem. The early stage of *ressentiment* needs to be distinguished from its characteristic affective responses. We called the latter *hostile attitudes* because they have a common tendency to aim at hurting, slandering, or disparaging a rival. As the emotional parts of *ressentiment*, they also come with some distinctive properties: attitudes such as envy, a desire for revenge or hatred must be *repressed* and *relived*. To say that these affects are repressed means that they are unexpressed and checked, that the person

stops herself from acting upon them, but it also means that, eventually, they are made unavailable to inner perception while remaining part of the POR's experience. To say they are relived means that these emotions are based on repetitive thoughts and memories, the content of which is one's inferiority and impotence. The object of these emotions is altered; they generalise their focus from particular individuals to groups or personifications. The emotions also have a pleasant aspect, which explains why they progressively come to be harboured so eagerly by the POR. An important emotion that needs to be managed in this way by the man of *ressentiment* is envy. Envy is a social emotion directed at a (real or imagined) rival who possesses a coveted trait or value which the envier is unable to make his own. *Ressentiment* however is not necessarily triggered by social comparison, and one can feel depressed and challenged in one's self-esteem by the mere fact of not being able to live up to one's values. The emotion involved in these cases is not envy, yet the experience is still such that it leads to a characteristic reevaluation.

The identification of the feelings of impotence and inferiority as the original experience of *ressentiment*, and the distinction between self-esteem one hand and self-respect on the other, allow us to describe some of the most confusing and difficult features of the phenomenon. Unlike resentment which involves injured self-respect, *ressentiment* entails injured self-esteem. However, one possible outcome of the reevaluation process is that a self-esteem injury is construed as a wrong that has been inflicted on me, as something caused by an external, ill-willed, agent. This is why the POR often harbours moral emotions, and focuses on wrongdoers. Following Voigtländer's suggestion we will later develop the idea that the original experience – feelings of inferiority and impotence – and the hostile emotions responding to it are responses to the POR's non-conceptual feeling of self-worth. The reevaluation process and its outcome on the other hand are experienced conceptually and often constitute a more salient part of the POR's experience. Voigtländer's view provides the basis on which we shall develop our account of *ressentiment*'s self-deception (Chapter 4).

Finally, coming back to our very first question in this chapter, it appears that, despite the various emotional routes *ressentiment* can take, the phenomenon is nevertheless unified by its different stages and the characteristic way that (hostile) emotions are experienced when they are the parts of the more general sentiment of *ressentiment*. Scheler suggests that "there is a progression of feeling, which starts with revenge and runs via rancour, envy, and the impulse to detract all the way to spite, coming close to *ressentiment*".[372] We argued, however, that revenge, like envy, is a response to a more fundamental feeling of inferiority or impotence. The sequence starts with the feelings of inferiority and impotence to which hostile

[372] RAM, p. 25.

emotions respond and then progresses to the reevaluation mechanism and leads eventually to the latter emotion's possible transformation into indignation or resentment.

3.2 *Ressentiment* as a reevaluation mechanism

We have so far described two important stages of a characteristic *ressentiment* sequence: the POR first values something she cannot get which triggers a crushing experience and, in response to this first stage, she harbours hostile emotions directed against her existing or imagined rivals. A feeling of inferiority, although very characteristic, is not necessary; the fox for example is simply frustrated or experiences an unpleasant feeling of impotence. What is common to all cases however, and thus a necessary condition, is that the man of *ressentiment* eventually alters the value of what he cannot get or realise. We call this mechanism the reevaluation process and claim that it is a defining part of *ressentiment*. Most accounts emphasise the fact that *ressentiment* is an alteration of our attitudes towards unrealisable goods, values, and virtues. Scheler claims that the systematic repression of hostile emotions "leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgements".[373] On Nietzsche's account, moral values in particular are all grounded on such reevaluation.[374] Both authors belong to a conservative tradition, a fact that is often held against them when it comes to assessing the reality of *ressentiment*.[375] But, of course, whether or not their examples of *ressentiment* are plausible is one thing, the plausibility of their analyses of the mechanism of *ressentiment* is quite another thing. Despite Nietzsche's highly idiosyncratic style and controversial empirical claims and Scheler's "reactionary" examples, the phenomenon they analyse is itself quite common. It should not be to too controversial to assume that we have a certain familiarity with the figure of, say, a failed writer who despises fame because he is struggling to be published or the passionate progressive who deprecates the rich and famous because he secretly envies them. Folk psychology may describe *ressentiment*'s reevaluation process as a device that allows us to feel better about ourselves by providing relief from an unpleasant experience of impotence, frustration or inferiority. Scheler even considers it a psychological law that "we have a tendency to overcome any strong tension between desire and impotence by depreciating or denying the positive value of the desired object".[376] But how does an individual change his values? What is it to do so? And what exactly is *ressentiment*'s characteristic reevaluation?

[373] RAM, p. 25.

[374] GM, Preface, 3.

[375] Aschheim, 1994, p. 148.

[376] RAM, p. 45. Emphasis added.

We will here introduce a first distinction between weak and strong forms of *ressentiment*. The former is the reevaluation of a particular and inaccessible good or of a partical and unrealisable action. The second kind is an alteration of the relation of height or importance between values. The distinction between weak and strong *ressentiment* corresponds to the distinction between the exemplification or non-exemplification of a particular value, on the one hand, and the relation between a particular value and other values, on the other hand. Weak *ressentiment* occurs for example when I come to devalue my neighbour's prestigious italian sports car (a particular object). Strong *ressentiment* is manifest once I come to deprecate not just my neighbour and his car, but the very values he embodies and therefore any instance of prestige and wealth I may think of or come across. I cease to place the value of wealth and luxury or prestige above that of, say, frugality. In this case, the POR is said to transition from old to new values, to alter his values, or to change his value-hierarchy. In this process he comes to take some values – say, that of social prestige – to be less important than others – say, frugality. We shall discuss weak and strong *ressentiment* in two separate subsections, respectively.

Our descriptions of weak and strong forms of *ressentiment* can be refined further. First, the POR's reevaluation in weak *ressentiment* can either emphasise the new negative value of something inaccessible or emphasise the new positive values of something accessible. This corresponds, and we shall explain why, to the difference between sour grapes and sweet lemons. In the case of strong *ressentiment* the different possibilities are suggested by the different types of relations between values. For example, *ressentiment* can involve a transition from taking something to be a positive value to taking it to be a negative value or vice versa and in each case, the value may be intrinsic or instrumental. For example, the POR who values wealth but who is incapable of becoming rich may come to believe that wealth is a disvalue, perhaps even an evil, and so believe that the rich are evil or that wealth does not lead to happiness. Alternatively, as in the examples given, the POR may simply reverse the positions of two values in his rankings of values.

Given the description of the different forms of *ressentiment*, the next question that needs to be asked is whether the phenomenon is irrational? Here one should avoid any confusion between claims about its doxastic and affective irrationality, on one hand, and practical irrationality on the other. We shall here only focus on the latter and ask whether *ressentiment*'s reevaluation really works. Do I, for example, manage to resolve all the psychological tensions that arise from the comparison with a wealthier neighbour because I come to believe he is evil? One often claims that *ressentiment* is harboured by the POR in order that she feels better about herself. But does she really and durably overcome her psychological tension? Folk psychology sees the failed artist who denigrates others' achievements and praises his own

integrity as employing an easy device which allows him to "feel better about himself". But if *ressentiment* provides any kind of relief, what exactly is its nature? Is it practically rational? Neither Nietzsche nor Scheler, the relevant authors here, have provided a comprehensive theory of the practical rationality of reevaluation. In what follows we shall formulate four claims about *ressentiment*'s possible soothing effect and evaluate them.

In the last section we shall finally describe how the new evaluations are experienced by the POR. This will lead us to consider in more detail the complex relationship between *ressentiment* and moral emotions such as indignation and resentment we defined earlier. Resentment and indignation are parts of the POR's experience in their own right – and hopefully our earlier description of those emotions will help us understand their relation to *ressentiment* and their role in the reevaluation process. We shall argue here that the experience of *ressentiment* turns hostile emotions such as envy or hatred into less objectionable emotions like resentment and indignation. We have previously discussed one aspect of this phenomenon, namely the reinterpretation of injured self-esteem as injured self-respect, the search for a culprit, and the correlated harbouring of resentment in response to unflattering social comparisons. This mechanism has also been described as a "transmutation" or referred to as envy's "protean character".[377] The reevaluation process, we shall argue, provides an interesting example of how self-regarding attitudes, hostile emotions and, finally, moral emotions may be related.

But before we begin the analysis of weak and strong forms of *ressentiment*, we briefly introduce some axiological distinctions and outline the assumptions about the nature of values and preferences – and our knowledge of values and preferences – on which our argument will be based.

3.2.1 Values and the experience of value – some distinctions

Ressentiment, we claim, is a phenomenon in which one comes to change values in order to feel better about oneself. Although the expression "change one's values" is quite common only a very strong version of subjectivism about values would in fact allow one to say that values can be changed. Typically, the expression refers to our impressions of, knowledge of and beliefs about values and our value preferences. Axiological categories play an essential part in our description; we should therefore briefly elucidate the categories we use and the assumptions we rely on. More specifically, we will first consider the consequences – if any – of describing *ressentiment* in axiological rather than exclusively psychological terms, and then list some useful distinctions between values. Note that one very important aim of the analysis is to understand what it means to experience values in general and how the experi-

[377] Tiedens and Leach, 2004.

ence of the POR's new goods and values is different from her experience of the old goods and values. In particular, it is important to understand how feelings of inferiority and impotence are related to hostile and emotions and then to moral emotions. A detailed account of these different experiences will be developed in section 3.4. For now, we shall only say something about what it is to get to know the value of something or to know something about values in the first place.

What, then, is it for a POR to know that something he cannot reach is desirable and damages her self-image? There are many possible epistemologies of value and their relations to the metaphysics or ontology of values is very complex. On one view, emotions may reveal or disclose value. On another type of view, acquaintance with values is prior to emotional reactions. This second type of view is a version of intuitionism. As in the case of other intuitionist epistemologies, intuition may be understood in very different ways. There is the view that our grasp of value is just a type of evaluation, of judgement. There is the view that the relevant type of intuition is non-conceptual. The latter view comes in two variants. There is the view that intuition is an intellectual phenomenon, as in mathematical intuition, and the view that such intuition is affective, albeit not a type of emotion. A further dimension of variation concerns the objects of knowledge of value. As we have seen, it is one thing for objects or situations to exemplify value, positive, negative or comparative. But there are also relations amongst values, the relation of height or importance and the relation of opposition between values. Similarly, in the epistemology of arithmetic, one distinguishes between knowledge of the fact that there are nine books on the table and knowledge that nine is greater than eight. The account presupposed here, one to be found in early phenomenology, is that values are grasped non-conceptually by value-feelings which form a different mental category from cognitions and emotions. The view that the values of objects and situations are grasped non-conceptually is to be found in the writings of realist phenomenologists and Scheler in particular. To grasp the value exemplified by an object, on this view, is to feel or be struck by the value in question.[378] To grasp relations of height between values, on the other hand, requires preferences which are given as being correct. We do of course also have axiological beliefs but in the optimal case these are based on the non-conceptual types of epistemic contact already mentioned. Scheler's account of our knowledge of values, as we shall see, makes possible a distinctive account of the characteristic form of the relation between *ressentiment* and self-deception. More particularly, it accounts for the fact that *ressentiment*, as we shall argue in the next chapter, is a phenomenon where the reevaluation process alters evaluations – judgements and beliefs as well as the emotions which are grounded on them. Does *ressenti-*

[378] Mulligan, 2009c.

ment change what the POR feels to be valuable or disvaluable as well as his axiological preferences, his preferences for one object over another and for one value over another? This question will also be adddressed in the next chapter.

There is probably little disagreement about the reactive nature of *ressentiment* and the fact that it changes the general orientation of our liking and disliking. It is less clear however what psychological concepts best describe that transformation. *Ressentiment* as a matter of fact is said to be a mechanism that changes our values, our desires or our preferences. According to Nietzsche, the phenomenon consists in a reevaluation of values.[379] Others support the idea that it is a change of desires.[380] More recent debates speak of a change of preferences – Elster in particular speaks of adaptive preferences.[381] There is clearly a family resemblance among these categories. The Nietzschean priests in the *Genealogy* are a paradigmatic illustration of *ressentiment*, and we can say that they value political supremacy, fail to secure it and come to devalue all attributes of power, assigning a low value to power itself. But the same mechanism can easily be reformulated, for example by saying that the priests desire to be in charge, or that they prefer to exert power (over any other vocation). Is "value" then just a convenient label for for a variety of psychological responses?[382] If I am sensitive to the values of status and prestige – they are valuable for me – does this wording simply refer to a set of subjective dispositions such as my envy of a successful neighbour, my desire to acquire a fancy car, or my hope to finally get an academic title? Values, desires or preferences in other words just seem to be three different ways of referring to the general attitude of valuing something, positively or negatively. So why is it important to distinguish the way we speak of valuations from the way we speak of preferences and so on? First, to state a platitude, unless the simplest form of value subjectivism (to be valuable is to be liked, preferred, or desired) is true[383], values are neither preferences nor desires, and valuing is not mere desiring because an object can be valued without being desired.[384] In fact, any con-

379 Acampora, 2006, p. 77-92.

380 Gemes & Richardson, 2014, p. 701-726.

381 Elster, 1983.

382 Mackie, 1990.

383 Lewis, 1988; Smith, 1994, Chap. 9.

384 Cf. Scheler:

> In no case is the givenness of a value *dependent* upon conation, either in the sense that a positive value is identical with "to be striven for" and a negative value with "to be striven against," or in the sense that values can be *given* only *in* conation [...] For we are able to *feel* values [...] in the absence of their being striven for or their being immanent to conation. Thus we are able to "prefer" certain values over other ones and to place certain values "after" other ones without simultaneously "choosing" among given conations pertinent to such values. Hence values can be given and preferred *without any* conation. (FORM, pp. 36-37).

ative wording may suggest an ontological reduction, namely that valuing is nothing more than desiring and that for something to have positive value is just for it to be desired. For the same reason valuing[385] is also more general than preferring. Husserl for example uses the verb "to value" (*werten*) as a general term for all emoting and preferring.[386] Contemporary usages of "preferences" is influenced by economics and rational choice theory, according to which a preference is the psychological category used to determine what matters for an individual and which we may colloquially call his values. But Scheler's use of the category is a development of Brentano's philosophy of preference, which in turn derives from Aristotle's account of preference in the *Topics*. The two traditions have a common root, for Brentano's philosophy of preference was incorporated into early Austrian marginal utility theory.[387] The main point here is that to value is neither to prefer, nor to desire. Such a reduction would, for example, exclude the possibility that envy – an emotion – could be a possible response to some positive value and one's impotence to realise it (for example, my neighbour's prestigious car which I cannot afford). For envy in this case is neither a preference nor a desire.

To privilege one or the other of these terminologies may convey the impression that we endorse a metaphysical position about the nature of values. For example, to speak of values rather than psychological attitudes such as valuing, desiring, preferring may imply a commitment to naïve axiological realism, where values are considered to be monadic properties of objects "out there".[388] Nietzsche is often taken to defend an extreme form of axiological subjectivism, where values are mere projections of emotions.[389] Sometimes, he seems to defend an error-theory, claiming that there are no aesthetic or moral facts, that "nature is always valueless".[390] Given such an error theory, it is natural to privilege an explanation of *ressentiment* in terms of a transformation of desires or emotions or preferences. If there are no values, the grapes are sweet or good just because the fox desires them. But once he painfully realises he cannot reach them, he finds a way not to desire them any more, or to repress the experience of that desire from consciousness. *Ressentiment* as a mechanism that merely alters one's desires or preferences (Elster speaks of *adaptive* preferences) combines easily with axiological subjectivism, that is, the view that the desirability of *elegant* women, of being a *wealthy* businessman or *tasty* food is entirely dependent on – or nothing other than –

385 Oddie, 2005.

386 Husserl, 2009; Mulligan *in* Centi & Gigliotti, 2004.

387 Mulligan, 2015b, p. 179.

388 An ambiguity Poellner notices as well when he explains: "the idiom of values and value-properties [...] should of course not be understood as begging the question in favour of a realist metaphysical construal of these properties." (Poellner *in* Leiter & Sinhababu, 2007, p. 228).

389 Hussain *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2014, pp. 389-414.

390 GS, 301. Recent exegesis has argued that the philosopher's views are much more difficult to pin down to a specific meta-axiological position (Leiter, 2002)

the occurrence (or potential occurrence) of a pro-attitude that warrants these predications. The reevaluation involved in *ressentiment* is then just a process that alters some of our episodic states and their dispositional counterparts.

On the other hand, for a naïve axiological realist, *ressentiment*'s characteristic reevaluation of values is an illusion about the exemplification of values or about relations between values. Scheler, like Moore, very much a naive realist, characterises the phenomenon as a kind of value-blindness. If anything, the POR becomes simply insensitive to some values and is subject to deceptive preferences, which make him miss the real and objective importance of some values compared to others. But are values, as Moore and Scheler claim, objective? Or are they mere projections as Nietzsche often suggests? The ontology of values is a complex subject, and it is not possible or necessary to discuss it in detail here. We believe that the theory of *ressentiment* we propose is not dependent on the outcome of this debate. Even a subjectivist about value will be able to make room for *ressentiment* although his account will be rather complicated. In what follows, we shall nevertheless make some minimal assumptions. First, axiological nihilism – the claim that nothing has or could have value – is false. Second, its corollary axiological nominalism, that is, the view that the existence of values is merely linguistic, is false too.[391] This leaves room for many ontological positions. Folk morality is realist in a minimal sense. For instance, we disagree about moral matters and need to attribute some minimal objectivity to values in order to explain why this usually troubles us; "it is only from the point of view of objectivity that errors, deceptions and dissent […] can be explained".[392] But of course there are many rival accounts of what such objectivity might consist in. Finally, although we shall use the language of the naïve realist, which is often also the language of common sense, we leave open the possibility that this language may be interpreted in different ways.

More specifically then, "to value" should be considered a schematic place-holder for various pro-attitudes and con-attitudes, whether affective or conative, and for preferences. Fitting-attitude definitions of values understand values in terms of valuing and naïve axiological realism rejects this. As we have said, we shall remain agnostic on ontological matters. But why then prefer axiological concepts over psychological categories such as desires or preferences? Firstly, the usage of "values", "evaluations" and "valuations" (and its derivatives) appears to furnish the best analytical devices to understand the structure of *ressentiment.* Also, there are some exegetical benefits, as the wording employed by Nietzsche (e.g. *reevaluation of all values*) and Scheler (e.g. *value-blindness*) is clearly axiological. The lexical link between value, valuing, valuation and evaluation is very close to the language used by Nietz-

391 Mackie, 1990.

392 Rinofner-Kreidl *in* Luft & Overgaard, 2012, p. 422.

sche and Scheler, but also to ordinary language and practice. Nietzsche's term *Umwertung*, for example, may refer to a change in the way a value is valued or to a change at the level of explicit conceptual evaluations.

Several further axiological distinctions and theses will be useful for the analysis of *ressentiment*'s reevaluation process. To begin with, we will assume that values are either positive or negative and often expressed by means of polarly opposed predicates (e.g. pleasant/unpleasant, good/bad, (morally) good/evil, ugly/beautiful, just/unjust, courage/cowardice).

A much less trivial thesis is that values ground deontic norms, that is, if something ought to be, then it ought to be because it is a positive value (and, conversely, a negative value ought not to be).[393] Accordingly, there is an important relation between deontic norms and the right-wrong pair. More particularly, what ought to be and is is right and what ought not to be and is is wrong. What ought to be, according to Scheler, is the obtaining of positive values, and the preferring of higher over lower values. A good illustration of our intuitive grasp of this claim can be given in terms of the emotion of indignation. We are indignant because someone fails to instantiate a value to which we attach great importance, for example diligence or frugality. Values that are important to us ground the norm according to which they ought to be exemplified. Someone lacking diligence is apprehended as breaching that norm. And it is essential to values, unlike oughtness, that they come in degrees.[394]

There are different kinds of values which stand in a relation of higher and lower. Values, we will assume, can be ordered by the "higher than" or "more important than" relation. Scheler's axiology distinguishes an order of rank among values (what he calls non-formal or material values): vital values are higher than sensory ones (pleasantness and unpleasantness) and the former lower than spiritual values such as aesthetic values or the value of knowledge.[395] In fact, many ordinary intuitions support the idea that values are related in that way. Our daily experience of the world is characterised by a natural tendency to be repelled by instances of some values and attracted by others. The concept of a rank of values can be used, as it is by Scheler, to define the concept of an e*thos*.[396] Scheler distinguishes between sensory values (pleasant or unpleasant), vital values (health, sickness, vitality), three types of spiritual value

393 FORM, p. 82, p. 206.

394 Tappolet, 2000, pp. 17-19.

395 Hartman claims:

> There is an astonishing infallibility, a strength of conviction in the sense of relative grade which is enough to justify the old belief in a 'moral organ' (Hemsterhuis), an 'order of the heart' or even a 'logic of the heart' (Pascal, Scheler). It is a unique kind of order, with its own laws, which cannot be proved intellectually, but which equally scorns every intellectual argument brought against it' (Hartmann, 2002, p. 189).

396 Davis & Steinbock, 2016.

- aesthetic values (beauty, ugliness, sublime), cognitive values (the value of knowledge and the disvalue of illusions) and the value of right and the disvalue of wrong, and ultimately, religious values (the sacred, holy, or profane).[397] He distinguishes all these values from ethical values (good or evil) and asserts the following relations of height or importance (">")

Vital values > sensory values

Cognitive values > vital values

Religious values > spiritual values

This value hierarchy clearly corresponds, in part, to views found everywhere in traditional Western philosophy and to theist, Christian, views. It also contains one of Nietzsche's central claims, namely that the value of life is superior to that of pleasure.[398] It also disagrees with one of Nietzsche's most characteristic claims, namely that the value of life is higher than that of knowledge and truth.[399] Of course, in what follows we shall not assume either Scheler's hierarchy or that of Nietzsche. The key assumption we require is simply that in order to understand one variety of *ressentiment* it is necessary to presuppose *some* relation of height between values. We shall also assume that individuals have a hierarchy of values that is revealed by their preferences.

Finally, axiological concepts are either formal or material[400], or as Bernard Williams seminal distinction goes, *thin* or *thick*[401] and more or less general. Thin and thick values belong to different levels of abstraction. A *red* fish and a *green* pullover are both *coloured.* In the same way, an *elegant* woman and a *courageous* police officer are both thinly and positively valuable. One speaks of the *goodness* of *being courageous* where good is a thin value and being courageous a positive thick value. In other words, the values that are instantiated and the value of such instantiations are to be distinguished. We shall assume here that exemplifications of thick values bear thin values such as good, bad, wrong, right, etc.[402] There is a correlation between the thick and thin values of things and the pro- and con-attitudes we manifest towards instances of these (dis)values (the *elegant* women we desire, the *wealthy* neighbour we envy, and the *charming* landscapes we admire). The latter distinction helps to clarify Nietzsche's recurrent metaphor of the value of values, and his sceptical interrogations of the value, that is the relative height of, cognitive or moral values.

397 Mulligan *in* Goldie, 2010, p. 477.

398 A, 57

399 BGE, 4.

400 Hurley, 1989, p. 11; Tappolet, 2000, p. 20.

401 Williams, 1985.

402 "Si une chose tombe sous un concept spécifique, elle tombera aussi sous un concept général, de sorte qu'elle sera bonne ou mauvaise" (Tappolet, 2000, p. 20).

We also need to distinguish the act of valuing something from evaluating something. For, "in evaluating something a person is not valuing it but instead is endeavouring to determine its value".[403] To *evaluate* is to judge, but to *value* is not necessarily to judge. Evaluations have conceptual content. On the other, valuations are states of attraction and repulsion, and we will later argue in favour of the Schelerian view that valuations come in the shape of value-feelings and preferences and are *non-conceptual.*

We shall now, briefly, examine in more detail the different ways values can be experienced. This will help us later to describe the kind of self-deception *ressentiment* implies. To say that we value – positively or negatively – other persons, objects and states of affairs is a platitude. To claim that values are given in experience through a variety of affective phenomena and judgements is much more controversial. An old and common thesis has it that we reach moral conclusions through reasoning and deductive thinking.[404] This has been a popular view among philosophers for many centuries. It is however contradicted by recent empirical findings.[405] Several philosophers have argued that we come to grasp values thanks to our emotions. Meinong argues that values are disclosed by emotions that are correct. In this case, the injustice of a situation is revealed by my indignation, or the beauty of a sunset by my aesthetic joy. A third view, that of Scheler, is that knowledge of values (*werterkennen*) occurs in feeling and preferring, which are different acts from emoting or believing. As Mulligan explains: "there is a sense of 'feel' according to which to feel is not to emote nor to feel an emotion or a pain".[406] Also, there is a relation of priority between preferring and valuing, if Scheler is right:

> […] All widening of the value-range (e. g., of an individual) takes place only "in" preferring and placing after. Only those values which are originally "given" in these acts can secondarily be "felt". Hence, the structure of preferring and placing after circumscribes the value-qualities that we feel.[407]

The crucial point here is that value-feelings constitute a non-conceptual, independent and grasp of values. Emotions, on the other hand, are responses to such value-feelings and their

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403 Lemos, 1995, p. 2.

404 As Harman et al. put it:

> The deductive model is characterized by four claims: (1) deductive arguments make people justified in believing the conclusions of those arguments; (2) people's conscious belief in the premises of arguments makes them believe the conclusions of those arguments; (3) the premises in the arguments are independent; (4) the terms in the arguments are classically defined. (Harman et al. *in* Doris, 2010, p. 241)

405 Haidt, 2008; Green & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2001.

406 Mulligan *in* Goldie, 2010, p. 486.

407 FORM, p. 89.

objects, which is very different from the once and still popular view that it is the emotions that acquaint us with values.[408] The view that our knowledge of values is affective but not emotive is prominent among early phenomenologists such as Hildebrand and Scheler. According to Scheler, value scales, too, are given in the affective and non-conceptual act of preferring (and placing after) correctly, which is different from mere choosing.[409] Preferring, like feeling values, is not deliberative.[410] The latter account of value-feelings considers desires and emotions to be responses to what is first grasped by feelings. This view presents one important advantage in regard to the general structure of motivation. For, what motivates an emotion if not the grasp of something as having a certain value? If emotions constitute such knowledge, we arrive at the paradoxical conclusion that an emotion is motivated by one of its objects. the view presupposed here – that values are given by feeling or preferring – avoids this conclusion, since emotions are considered a response to some (apparent) knowledge of value.[411]

So far we have considered a number of important and relatively elementary distinctions within the philosophy of value and the philosophy of mind. But one distinction in the philosophy of value which has not been explicitly considered so far is that between moral and non-moral values and between moral and non-moral emotions or valuings. The distinction between moral and non-moral values is crucial in order to understand Nietzsche's account of *ressentiment* and perhaps crucial in order to understand *ressentiment* in general. In this section we consider how this distinction might be made and how it is understood by Nietzsche and Scheler.

Let us begin by noting that unpleasantness and evil seem to be very different types of value. The former is a sensory disvalue, the latter an ethical or moral disvalue. The latter, but not the former, is necessarily a property of a person. For example, aesthetic values are generally exemplified by both objects and organisms, but moral values are ultimately born by persons and their acts. Even if the (im)moral or right (wrong) thing to do is determined by the consequences an action has for the experience of unpleasantness, evil and unpleasantness are still not the same thing. Similarly, it may be thought, moral emotions like resentment or indignation, are attitudes responding to the disvalues of the wrong and the unjust. These emotions never disclose, signal or respond to aesthetic values such as the sublime, the kitsch, or the beautiful, which are more likely to be the object of aesthetic emotions such as a certain kind of elation and wonder. A highly original distinction between non-moral and moral values is developed by Scheler. According to him, good and evil are brought into being by the

408 Tappolet, 2000.

409 FORM, p. 87.

410 FORM, p. 89.

411 Mulligan, 2009.

realisation of positive and negative non-moral values, on the basis of the preferring of a higher non-moral value over a lower one (moral goodness) or inversely (evil).[412] Nietzsche, on the other hand, sees moral values as an invented category, one that hinders the realisation of vital values. Let us here consider both theories in more detail and assess their importance for *ressentiment*.

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche aims to show that Western morality is neither timeless nor a god-revealed bequest, but a set of value judgements made by a particular type of man – the oppressed, the priests, or the envious – namely the very figures who are in the grip of *ressentiment* and who have managed to impose their values over time. Because it was, historically, invented by such despicable figures, morality is apprehended "as symptom, as mask, as *tartufferie*, as sickness, as mis-understanding".[413] Why moral values, and the kind of individuals supporting them, eventually took precedence over other values, and how they became the essence of Western morality, is subject to some exegetical debate.[414] However, quite irrespective of its outcome, Nietzsche brings up an important idea, namely that our moral judgements are, by large measure, influenced by our emotions, drives and instincts, and more specifically by hostile and repressed ones. He believes that "the origin of moral values is the work of immoral affects and considerations".[415] The philosopher claims that moral values are the product of *ressentiment*. This origin can be traced back to the very moment when men came to value and disvalue objects and human conduct *in a new way that still prevails today*.[416] Hence, the moral worth we attribute today to particular values and virtues such as compassion, pacifism and humility is inherited from our ancestors' valuations. In order to illustrate his point, Nietzsche sets this origin in an ancient society divided into the powerful and high-minded aristocrats on one side and the powerless, the slaves, or common men on the other. He then opposes the slavish to the noble; the more common expression of "master morality" is in reality a "noble morality".[417] This social categorisation is not a system of classes; it rather stands for a fundamental difference in character and psychological make-up of their members.[418] Before *ressentiment*-motivated values appeared, the original determination of goodness and badness is an act of the noble caste:

412 FORM, pp. 23-29; Blosser, 1999.

413 GM, Preface, 6.

414 Migotti, 1998; Leiter, 2002.

415 WPP, 266.

416 In fact, this origin can be either understood as the moment when man started to attribute moral value to things or when man started to value things differently. (In Nietzsche's conception, both movements coincide.)

417 Migotti, 1998, p. 746.

418 As Nietzsche remarks: "the concept of political superiority always resolves itself into the concept of psychological superiority" (GM, I, 6)

> The noble man [...] conceives the basic concept "good" in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of "bad"! This "bad" of noble origin and that "evil" out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred – the former an after-production, a side issue, a contrasting shade, the latter on the contrary the original thing, the beginning, the distinctive *deed* in the conception of a slave morality – how different these words "bad" and "evil" are, although they are both apparently the opposite of the same concept "good." But it is *not* the same concept "good": one should ask rather precisely *who* is "evil" in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The answer, in all strictness, is: *precisely* the "good man" of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man, the ruler, but dyed in another colour, interpreted in another fashion, seen in another way by the venomous eye of *ressentiment.*[419]

The proper meaning of "good" and "bad", before it is supplanted by the pair "(morally) good/evil" is hence initially derived from ostensive definitions performed by the ruling caste, who, among other privileges, holds the "right to give names".[420] Nietzsche explains that "good" refers to the aristocratic and the noble and "bad" to the plebeian and the vulgar.[421] We may here want to distinguish two possible interpretations.

According to the first one, the noble originally valued objects, persons and states of affairs by deeming them good or bad in an *amoral* sense. To consider something good simply requires experiencing a pro-attitude (or a con-attitude if it is seen as bad).[422] However, nothing existed that bore moral values. Aristocratic preferences were also structured, Nietzsche often suggests, around *vital values* which the noble man considered the highest.[423] All other kinds of non-ethical values are therefore measured in terms of their *instrumental value* in bringing about positive vital values. For example, the value of truth is a good thing, as long as it assures human flourishing (a vital value). In contrast to post-modern misinterpretations[424], Nietzsche never denies the value of truth. Instead, he considers vital values more important,

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419 GM, I, 11.

420 GM, I, 2.

421 GM, I, 4-5.

422 As Nietzsche explains:

> [...] the judgment 'good' does not emanate from those to whom goodness is shown! Instead it has been 'the good' themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good, I mean first-rate, in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was from this pathos of distance that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names: usefulness was none of their concern! (GM, I, 2).

423 Vital values are, as Scheler puts it, "all feelings of life (e.g., the feelings of 'quickening' and 'declining' life, the feelings of health and illness, the feeling of aging and oncoming death , the feelings of 'weakness', 'strength', etc.)" (FORM, p. 107). Nietzsche and Guyau are, according to Scheler, the first philosophers ever to discuss and stress the importance of vital values, mostly in reaction against English utilitarianism.

424 Koelb, 1990; Robinson, 1995.

and takes truth to be mostly an obstacle for reaching them.[425] But as we shall see, he also thinks that the value of truth is a superior to other values. The argument presents the origin of values as the acts of the noble, and there is nothing moral about them – good things are simply exemplifications of vital values or exemplifications of values leading to the flourishing of higher men.[426] From this aristocratic point of view, other objects, states of affairs and values stand in a relation of instrumentality to the final value of life, and are therefore judged accordingly.[427] Master morality, in other words, is not morality at all. However, when the man of *ressentiment* comes onto the stage, he embraces another type of axiology, namely slave morality and comes to *disvalue* instances of those same positive values deemed good by the ruling caste. As Nietzsche puts it: "What makes things sick is *good*; whatever comes from fullness, from overfullness, from power is *evil*".[428] The devaluation is here moral; not only are his rivals bad, they are *evil* or morally bad; and he himself is not simply good, but virtuous and good in a moral way.[429] Nietzsche's description of the phenomenon may suggest that the problem with *ressentiment* stems from the fact that the new values are fabricated and invented. The fundamental attitudes and judgements of the POR take on a new colour as she comes to see the world through moral glasses. And this is by no means "a radically new and different mode of evaluation compared to the 'noble' mode of evaluation that preceded it".[430]

The second interpretation has it that both types of valuation are *moral*, but the one endorsed by the POR refers to a different kind of morality. What then distinguishes the morality of the "higher men" from the "lower" ones? Leiter rightly remarks that there is a *genetic* difference between the value concepts "good" and "bad" as they are used by the two castes. For the

425 This argument and the special case of the value of truth is developed by Simon May (May, 1999)

426 This concern that the value of moral values should be assessed according to their contribution to human flourishing is made clear in the Preface of the *Genealogy* where Nietzsche announces his philosophical program:

> Have they [the values good and evil] up to the present advanced human welfare, or rather have the harmed our race? Are they a symptom of distress, impoverishment and degeneration of life? Or conversely, do we find in them an expression of the abundant vitality and vigour of life, its courage, its self-confidence, its future? (GM, Preface, 3)

427 May's interesting exegesis further distinguishes three criteria for something to be instrumental to the highest value of life, namely "power", "sublimation" and "form-creation" (May, 1999).

428 A, 52.

429 Nietzsche rhetorically wonders: "under what conditions did man *invent* the value judgements good and evil?" (GM, Preface, 3. Emphasis added). He also explains:

> [...] the noble one [...] conceives of the basic idea 'good' by himself, in advance and spontaneously, and only then creates a notion of 'bad'! This 'bad' of noble origin and that 'evil' from the cauldron of unassuaged hatred – the first is an afterthought, an aside, a complementary colour, whilst the other is the original, the beginning, the actual deed in the conception of the slave morality" (GM, I, 11).

430 Leiter, 2002, p. 194.

noblemen, "good" is simply a label for the spontaneous exaltation towards something, for any natural and unconstrained pro-attitude, and "bad" is then understood as the opposite of "good" in that genetic sense. However, for proponents of the new slave morality (the slaves, but also the priests and the common man), the sequence is inverted. They first consider *evil* whoever and whatever is believed to be the cause of their unpleasant experience of impotence and inferiority, and "good" only comes second, referring to all persons and things that are *not* evil.[431] The first, noble, type of valuation is spontaneous, while the second slavish type is *reactive*. As Leiter puts it:

> It is the motivational difference that explains the *chronological* difference: values that are reactive necessarily invent their positive terms *after* their negatives ones because valuation is driven by a desire to negate something external; the opposite holds true for valuation motivated by self-affirmation.[432]

Both interpretations show that *ressentiment* may lead to a moral reevaluation and more importantly attributes ethical values to persons or states of affairs in response to suffering, a psychological mechanism we will explore more in Section 3.2.5. The POR's evaluations are motivated by affects. And according to some interpretation of the *Genealogy*, moral value-predicates are invented by individuals of a certain type.

Although heavily influenced by Nietzsche, Scheler's philosophical position is about as far removed from that of Nietzsche's as it is possible to be: he is a spiritualist, platonizing, value-realist who takes it to be axiomatic that there are values which are "higher" than the vital values which Nietzsche brought to the attention of philosophers, and believes them to be more important than other kinds of values. But as we have seen, Scheler fully accepts the Nietzsche-Guyau view that vital values are higher than sensory values.[433] His account of moral values is very unusual in moral philosophy and only sketched in passing; it draws heavily on his crucial insight that values are structured hierarchically. In fact, he excludes the ethical values of good and evil, and apparently even the thick ethical values corresponding to the different virtues, from his hierarchical system. Moral goodness and evil, he thinks, are of a different ilk to other values. Goodness, as he points out, is a property of our realizing positive values, but also of our preferring higher values over lower ones. As he explains: "the value of "good" […] is the value that appears, by way of essential necessity, on the back of the act of realizing the value which […] is the highest".[434] Hence, to prefer aesthetic values over vital ones is morally good, for the former are higher than the latter. In the same way, evil arises from preferring a lower value over a higher one. Hence, something should – ethically – never be willed just

[431] Leiter, 2002, p. 208.

[432] Leiter, 2002, p. 209.

[433] Fouillèe, 1902.

[434] FORM, p. 25.

because it is morally good but because it is pleasant rather than useful, agreeable, sublime, healthy, courageous or holy, i.e. because it instantiates some non-ethical values. It is solely the preferring or willing, and hence the realization of a higher good that bears a positive *moral* value.

This unusual account of the relation between moral and non-moral value employs a number of traditional ideas about Pharisaism, and stands in a complicated relation to Nietzsche's views about moral *Tartufferie*. We shall return to these connections in Chapter 5. Here it is important only to see that Scheler's unusual account combines with his understanding of the dynamics of *ressentiment* to yield a view of the immorality of the POR. According to Scheler, *ressentiment*'s characteristic mechanism leads, ultimately, to a reevaluation whereby a lower value (or a particular instance thereof) is preferred to a higher value (or a particular instance thereof). This is typically the case when a higher and inaccessible good is disapproved of and a lower but reachable good praised. Thus, the very mechanism of *ressentiment* makes the POR immoral or evil. Reiner, another prominent phenomenologist, objects that *ressentiment* is not sufficient to make someone evil. Only when such inverted preferences also involve the violation of another person's rights or significant interests is the POR evil.[435] Scheler explains that the phenomenon is a deceitful blindness, a way of failing to see either the positive value of something or the higher rank of some values. It is also a transformation that never fully works, since the old values continue to be present and effective in some way (we shall discuss this important aspect in the next chapter on self-deception). For both Scheler and Hartman, *ressentiment* is objectionable and a source of moral evil because it attempts to reverse the objective hierarchy of values. Nietzsche's and Scheler's highly original accounts of moral values, then, are characterised by the fact that they draw on views about the phenomenon of *ressentiment.* The former provides an interesting account of the origin of moral values in specific character types, the latter, a crucial theory of how moral values are entirely dependent on our commerce with non-moral values. In reality, it appears difficult to reconcile Scheler's and Nietzsche's views since their underlying metaphysical assumptions – an objective order rank of values for the former and a kind of axiological subjectivism for the latter – are irreconcilable. On the other hand, each presupposes that some values are higher than others. Each presupposes that in order to understand morality, the fundamental concept is that of value and not that of a deontic norm. Each of them accepts that the cat-

[435] Kolnai, 2008, p. 181. Now the point is as Kolnai notes:

> What is evil is to prefer a lower to a higher value when the situation requires a choice between them: thus Scheler and Hartmann alike, while another phenomenologist, Reiner (who I think is still alive) calls such a preference merely wrong or incorrect (unrichtig), reserving the qualification "evil" for cases in which the preference for the lower value entails a violation of another person's rights or harm done to his significant interests (Kolnai, 2008, p. 217).

egory of vital values has hitherto been overlooked. And, finally, as we shall now see, their respective phenomenological diagnoses share some common features and appear to be critical for the understanding of *ressentiment*.

First, moral values seem to have a *special and a specific function*. They are never really aimed at *per se*, at least by Nietzsche's ideal figure of the noble, but constitute either the response to a psychological tension (Nietzsche) or the property of preferring non-moral values correctly (Scheler). According to Nietzsche, the origin of moral values is nothing more than a strategy for overcoming emotional distress – *ressentiment* and its characteristic envy, hatred and revenge – through the invention and attribution of moral disvalue to the nobles. Such moral condemnation offers relief and compensation to those of a slavish disposition. In other terms, the POR's strategy consists in seeking relief by looking at the world through new, moral glasses. Second, while *ressentiment* originally arises from our commerce with *non-moral values* and their exemplifications, it now appears that its later stage – reevaluation – very often entails the manipulation of *moral values*. In the case of Nietzsche, this is manifest in the POR's characteristic moral devaluation of rivals who embody superior vital (non-moral) values. Scheler however clearly rejects the Nietzschean idea that the POR, as a character type, *creates* moral values (or, at least, a certain kind of moral values) in order to feel better about himself. Moral values are not invented – nor is morality redefined – out of hedonic convenience; they are objective and exemplified when we prefer higher over lower non-moral values.[436] This fact is central for the understanding of the moral status of *ressentiment*, for, as we shall argue, it is mainly the POR's preferences that are the object of moral opprobrium. Thirdly, both Nietzsche and Scheler agree that the POR tends to be an outspoken moralist as suggested by their reference to the figure of the Pharisee, "playing his favourite role of 'righteous indignation'".[437] While the exemplification of moral values, and moral goodness in particular, ought not to be striven for, since they are not directly willable according to Scheler, the Pharisee or Tartuffe aims to directly realise moral values. The POR therefore risks becoming a moral narcissist, a victim of self-deception.[438]

We shall later see that moral Pharisaism provides a plausible explanation as to why an individual comes to indulge in *ressentiment*. For, a Pharisee seeks a feeling of moral superiority which can help him overcome his painful feeling of inferiority that the experience of *ressentiment* brings upon him in the first place.

[436] "A 'morality' is a system of preference between the values themselves, a 'moral constitution' which must be discovered behind the concrete valuations of a nation and an era" (RAM, pp. 51-52).

[437] BGE, 135.

[438] FORM, p. 14, 27, 117 & 121. Blosser, 1987; Blosser 1999.

3.2.2 Weak forms of *ressentiment*

We have noted that according to Scheler it is one thing to change one's mind about whether the grapes are sweet, pleasant and so good, but a very different thing to change one's mind about the relation between sweetness and other values. In this section, we consider the first case and its role in *ressentiment*'s characteristic alteration of values. We call the first case weak *ressentiment*. It consists in a change of evaluations about a particular object's value. The POR comes to believe, for example, that the good she originally believed to be a good and which she cannot bring within her grasp is, after all, undesirable.

The traditional starting point – referred to by Adler, Elster and Scheler - is Aesop's fable of the fox and the grapes, which is repeatedly presented as the emblematic illustration of this mechanism. We too are no exception and start with it. The fable version goes as follows:

> Driven by hunger, a fox tried to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine but was unable to, although he leaped with all his strength. As he went away, the fox remarked, 'Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes.' People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this story to themselves.[439]

Because of the popularity of this fable, the idiom "sour grapes" is sometimes used to designate the fox's reevaluation. Let us formalise this example and introduce some metaphysical jargon to that purpose. We can say of the fox that he values sweet grapes and desires to reach the particular ones he sees hanging in front of him because they seem to him to be good or valuable. He is disposed to act in order to get the fruit, and would seemingly take pleasure in their consumption. However, the grapes are out of reach and, thus, his desire remains unfulfilled. So far, this is nothing but a trivial episode of frustration. In response to it, the fox changes the value of the grapes and comes to believe they are sour. This reevaluation is an essential part of *ressentiment*. There are however many different ways to turn an unreachable good into something undesirable.

In the latter example, a negative value is attributed to the object, and we shall call such attributions *sour grapes* judgements. This form of reevaluation is illustrated by many other cases such as, for example, the Nietzschean priests' devaluation of power (the desired state of affairs)[440] or my own disparagement of my neighbour's achievements, whom I envy. The fable tells us that individuals, confronted with their own impotence, come to hold beliefs and emotions that turn the coveted good into an undesirable object. The fox comes to believe that the grapes are sour, the priests that their rivals are evil, and I may come to believe that my neighbour's sports car is bad.

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439 Aesop, 2002.

440 Reginster, 1997.

The fundamental psychological insight of Aesop's fable, and of all the previous examples, is a theory about how persons deal with frustration, or more generally with the unpleasant experience of not being able to realise a positively-valued state of affairs. The mechanism, it seems, consists in altering our apprehension of the world in such a way that our unfulfilled desires come to be neutralised. For why would one desire to eat or value eating grapes that are not *sweet*? As a result of this mechanism, the POR denies that the *particular* object of her desire instantiates a positive value. She still values grapes and fancy cars *in general*, but she comes to think differently about the particular cases she is confronted with *hic et nunc*. As Scheler puts it:

> Initially, there is only the verbalized assertion that something – a commodity, a man or a situation – does not have the value which seemed to make us desire it. [...] the grapes are not really savoury; indeed, they may be "sour". [...] The fox does not say that sweetness is bad, but that the grapes are sour.[441]

Several kinds of weak *ressentiment* can be distinguished on the basis of the relation between the POR's new and old evaluations. The fox may come to believe that the grapes are neither sweet nor sour (axiological indifference), but he may also invert the value of the unreachable good from sweet to sour. A third variant consists in simply attributing to the object a negative value that is not the disvalue opposed to the original positive value, without denying the original, positive, one. This for example is the case when I come to believe that my neighbour's car is indeed a fancy car but very, very bad (harmful) for the environment, and thus unenviable after all. The car's fanciness is not denied, but its desirability is reduced by the attribution of a negative value (environmental unfriendliness) belonging to a different category of values. A fourth form of reevaluation is the denial of a positive instrumental value. I may perceive the elegance of an Italian sports car, but come to deny that such an item would improve my social status. What is targeted here is the instrumental value a good may have as a means to a valuable end. Or a young scholar, whose articles are constantly rejected, may deny that getting published in prestigious journals is what assures academic success and fame. Formally, he denies that the state of affairs he remains unable to realise (getting published) has any instrumental value for academic success (his final value). The intrinsic value of the good remains intact, but its efficiency in bringing about another, more important value is denied. Reevaluations of this kind are very common and are implicit in colloquial expressions such as "money can't buy happiness". They include, on some views, many fashionable hedonistic reductions, too, where objects or state of affairs are deemed valuable only because of their capacity to bring about a pleasant experience. The associated sour grapes strategy therefore questions the capacity of an unreachable object to produce pleasure. One does not need to be a partisan of hedonism to invoke the same type of argument. Nietzsche

[441] RAM, p. 46.

for example suggests that power or a feeling of power is every living being's highest and ultimate value.[442] *Ressentiment* on this view is what leads the Nietzschean priest to "tell himself that the military superiority of the knights and their physical power do not constitute genuine power".[443] Effective power, according to the priests, is reached through anti-agonistic virtues such as humility, patience, control, sacrifice, and spiritual values. So why would he envy the warrior's traits given that they are not instrumental in bringing about what really counts? In fact, once a person's final value is identified, the corresponding form of *ressentiment* is easy to reconstruct; it may simply be the systematic denigration of the effectiveness of an unreachable good to bring about his values.

The POR, in sum, may come to deny the existence of some natural property (the grapes are not *ripe*),[444] which is a value-maker, deny the exemplification of a positive value (the grapes are not *sweet*),[445] believe in the presence of a disvalue (the grapes are *sour*), or deny the instrumental value of the unreachable good to bring about a preferred state of affairs (these *sweet* grapes will not make me *happy*). The first case, however, is problematic, since denying the apparent exemplification of natural properties seems to be quite a difficult mental operation, one that many have rejected since they take it to involve the error of doxastic voluntarism. As Elster puts it: "purely factual beliefs may be too recalcitrant to be easily modified".[446] Beliefs and perceptions are passive states that are not directly subject to the will. Therefore, a reevaluation strategy that resembles a plain and direct denial of reality may very well constitute a psychiatric condition, or a very serious delusional defence mechanism.[447] Even though some versions of the fable portray the fox walking away with the belief that the grapes are green and not ripe, the belief that the grapes are *sour* is easier to form than a blatantly false belief about the natural properties exemplified in the world. It is difficult to change the content of our perception, but we can alter our evaluations – even if the alteration initially starts with only a verbal assertion. Empirical results suggest that moral reevaluation in particular has a lighter psychological load. As Smith puts it:

> It may be difficult to deny an ability difference, to convince oneself that a self-relevant domain is unimportant, or to do much to close this

[442] For some interpretations it is the exertion of power and the domination on over others; the more charitable ones seeks it as a perfectionist enhancement of the person's potentialities.

[443] Reginster, 1997, p. 290.

[444] Non-axiological properties, but properties that are valufiers and make their bearers have value properties.

[445] "When we cannot obtain a thing, we comfort ourselves with the reassuring thought that it is *not worth nearly as much as we believe*" (RAM, p. 46. Emphasis added).

[446] Elster, 2007, p. 41.

[447] Vaillant, 1977. As Festinger puts it: "The first and foremost source of resistance to change for *any* cognitive element is the responsiveness of such elements to reality. If one sees that the grass is green, it is very difficult to think it is not so" (Festinger, 1957, pp. 25-26).

> difference. But it may be quick and easy to construe the envied person as morally flawed.[448]

Our experience of values is, in this regard, different from the mere perception of colour and shape. More particularly, our axiological beliefs can be motivated by emotional experiences and *ressentiment* seems to have such a power. The devaluing of a coveted good or the detraction of an admired but envied rival provides a specific kind of relief that does not occur in the mere denial of the positive value or a strongly delusional blindness to the object's natural properties. We shall return to these empirical claims in Section 3.2.5.

Let us briefly survey the different sufficient conditions for *ressentiment* we have identified. The simplest case can be characterised formally as the denial of a positive value (intrinsic or instrumental) or the attribution of a negative value (intrinsic or instrumental) to a particular object, person, or states of affairs that is originally experienced as having a positive value. The fox turns sweet grapes into *sour* ones. When the reevaluation takes the form of sour grapes, we can say:

> If *S* takes x to exemplify some positive value *F* but has the impression he cannot stand in the desired relation to x and on this basis comes to deny that x is *F*, then *S* is a POR.

In the case of the fox and the grapes, the desired relation is possession and enjoyment. In a very different illustration of this schema *S* takes another person to be a model of courage or style and the desired relation is imitation or living up to the value exemplified by the model. A more complex schema is:

> If *S* takes x to exemplify some positive value *F* but has the impression he cannot stand in the desired relation to x and on this basis assigns *F* a lower position in his value hierarchy, then *S* is a POR.

This is what happens when the priests convince themselves that humility has a higher value than mere power.

The reevaluation may also target, not the coveted object or trait, but the person enjoying it. That someone possesses an unreachable good or a quality is reason enough for the POR to disparage those who are capable of possessing it. This mechanism is already suggested in La Fontaine's version of the fable where the fox expresses his frustration by grumbling: "Ils sont trop verts [...] et bons pour les *goujats*"[449] thus criticising those who *can* savour the grapes. The POR considers the person enjoying the trait or good she covets as a rival and disparages him. This latter mechanism is quite common and can be seen as an indirect debasement of the unreachable good. For example, I may admire and unsuccessfully desire the house of my

[448] Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 48.

[449] De la Fontaine, III, 11; McLendon, 2013.

neighbour. One possible way to manage my envy is to disparage him as greedy, selfish or arrogant.[450] The latter kind of *ressentiment* can be summarised as follows:

> If *S* takes x to exemplify some positive value *F* but has the impression that, unlike y, he cannot stand in the desired relation to x and on this basis assigns y a negative value, then *S* is a POR.

The simplest illustration of this case is provided by the disparagement of rivals.

The reevaluations of goods, traits and persons presented so far all belong to the family of "sour grapes" judgements because they deny the existence of a positive value or attribute a negative value. However there is a second type of reevaluation, the converse of sour grapes, which by analogy Elster calls "sweet lemons" and Shaw *sweet sloes*.[451] Instead of a devaluation, the latter mechanism is a *positive reevaluation* of what is reachable, achievable or already achieved, but not necessarily valued in the first place. As Shaw puts it: "the fox not only declares that the grapes he cannot get are sour: he also insists that the sloes he can get are sweet".[452] Given two goods A and B, of which A is the inaccessible one, sour grapes aims at devaluing A or the owner of A. Sweet lemons, however, is about coming to believe that B is more valuable than A. I may criticise my neighbour's sports car or disparage him directly (sour grapes), but I may also (and this is the second mechanism) positively value my small car because it is mine. I may come to believe that, unlike my wealthy neighbour's big fancy car, my car, which is small, cheap and unfancy is nevertheless environmentally friendly, discrete and practical. These positive values are stressed in an attempt to compensate for my disappointment. Sweet lemons and sour grapes reevaluations are two independent mechanisms of *ressentiment.* For an individual can readily deal with his frustrated desire only by reassessing and stressing the positive value of a reachable object. The condition, of course, is that the reachable good is deemed superior to the inaccessible one. Only then does the latter object become undesirable.

We have distinguished between sour grapes reevaluations that instrumentally or intrinsically devalue a good, that attribute a new negative value or simply deny its positive value, and that either target the object or its owner. Can such formal distinctions be made in the case of sweet lemons too? In the same way that the fox thinks the grapes are not ripe, in theory, the

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[450] In his essay, Von Mises describes this attitude in the following way:

> [The resentful anti-capitalist] failed because he is honest and law-abiding. His more lucky competitors succeeded on account of their improbity; they resorted to foul tricks which he, conscientious and stainless as he is, would never have thought of. If people only knew how crooked these arrogant upstarts are! Unfortunately their crimes remained hidden and they enjoy an undeserved reputation. But the day of judgement will come. He himself will unmask them and disclose their misdeeds (Mises, 1956, p. 53).

[451] Elster, 1999, p. ix; Kay et al., 2002, p. 1302; Shaw, 1913.

[452] Shaw, 1913, p. 39.

POR might just stress the existence of a natural property – a valifier – that supports a new positive value. I might for example suddenly consider my car to be "much larger than I thought" or "very powerful" and therefore at least as fancy as my neighbour's – when obviously it is not. However this case remains merely theoretical, as it constitutes an extreme denial of reality. The best description of a case of sweet lemons is as a reevaluation that attributes a new positive value to an accessible object because it is accessible or, as Scheler claims, a mechanism whereby the values exemplified by the accessible object is preferred over the one borne by the unrealisable state of affairs. Note that the POR does not need to alter her value-hierarchy to do this. She can instead consider the obtainable or realizable good in the light of what she already considers her values. By contrast, an alteration of the value-hierarchy would be necessary, and the mark of a different phenomenon we call strong *ressentiment*, if the unreachable good bears the highest value on the POR's scale. In this case, she would not be able to identify a value among the traits and objects she already owns and masters that would readily compete with her highest value.

The way *ressentiment*'s psychological tension is handled is an additional difference between sour grapes and sweet lemons. In the former case, the frustrated desire is neutralised by altering a positive value. Sweet lemons cases, on the other hand, involve judgements that leave the positive value of the inaccessible good intact. What gets altered is the relative value of the *accessible* good or trait. Sweet lemons judgements, in other words, attempt to *overwhelm* the original frustration by making something even more desirable the focus of the POR's experience. The tension is resolved by sweetening what originally felt to be sour or axiologically indifferent. Formally, sweet lemons takes the following form:

> If *S* takes *F* to be some positive value, desires that *p* because he thinks the obtaining of the state of affairs that *p* would be *F*, is unable to realise the state of affairs that *p* (or has the impression that he is unable to) and on this basis comes to believe that *q* is preferable to the state of affairs that *p* then *S* is a POR.

Let us consider some examples. *S* desires to write a novel because she attaches great value to being a *famous* writer. However, she fails repeatably and miserably in her enterprise. In order to deal with her disappointment, she comes to believe that her current job in local administration is in fact more valuable for her than being a celebrated novelist, for it is socially more useful and of course, she comes to feel that contributing to the well-being of the community is better or of a higher value than enjoying artistic fame.

Both sour grapes and sweet lemons are reevaluation mechanisms the POR uses in order to alleviate a distressing experience. In many ordinary examples, both kinds of reevaluations are experienced together: a failed artist who cannot become famous may compensate for his frustration by stigmatising his rival's fame as vain and immoral (sour grapes) and value his

modest life of dedication and humility as morally preferable (sweet lemons). A conservative puritan may counterbalance his sexual frustration by accusing liberals of depravity (sour grapes) and consider his way of life to be ascetic and thus superior to mere sensual pleasure (sweet lemons). The shallow leftist overcomes his frustrated craving for wealth and power by disparaging the rich and powerful (sour grapes) while enjoying the idea of the moral superiority of his frugal lifestyle (sweet lemons). Note that weak *ressentiment* also covers cases where the reevaluation responds not to envy of what someone possesses (a good or a particular virtue), but to existential envy, where the POR's impotence is nothing less than not being able to be the envied model (Scheler's *Existenzialneid* and Klages's *Lebensneid*). As long as the POR indulges in a reevaluation of an object – or of a particular person – weak *ressentiment* offers the best description of the mechanism at play.

The account proposed of weak *ressentiment* says that the POR comes to hold new evaluations about the world in order to short-circuit an unpleasant experience. An important objection to this claim refers to the conceptual difficulties we face if we accept doxastic voluntarism. Doxastic voluntarism is the idea that individuals possess the psychological strength to more or less directly alter their beliefs, which seems very much to be one of weak *ressentiment*'s achievements. The POR seems to bring herself to believe that the grapes are sour, and that her neighbour is evil. Doxastic voluntarism however remains very controversial; not only from a psychological point of view, but also from a logical one.[453] Even more intriguing is the fact that the fox changes his beliefs about the grapes "just like that",[454] not using any strategy to put himself into a condition that would force him to believe that they are sour.[455] This seems to be very implausible.

Fortunately any concerns about doxastic voluntarism can easily be dealt with. First, once we consider its rich phenomenology, *ressentiment* clearly appears to be initially less of a willed phenomenon than one that just occurs under the causal influence of other mental states, for examples strong desires and emotions and is then tolerated by the POR.[456] Second, there is a difference between beliefs about natural properties and axiological beliefs or judgements. In fact, it is psychologically easier to devalue the inaccessible object than to deny some of its evident and originally perceived properties. In other words, it is easier to say, more or less sincerely, that my neighbour's red Ferrari is ugly – a value-property – than to believe that it is not a Ferrari, not red, not fast, etc. And it is possible that it is even easier to devalue the holder of the coveted object by just attributing a new negative value to the person or a differ-

453 Doxastic voluntarism has been discussed by Williams, 1973. See also: Bennett, 1990; Booth, 2007; Nottelmann, 2006, Chap. 8.

454 This expression is borrowed from Williams' argument (Williams, 1973).

455 Booth, 2007.

456 Lazar, 1999; Lauria et al., 2016.

ent state of affairs. A POR would typically come to believe that, because her neighbour owns a Ferrari she cannot afford, he is greedy, selfish, and immoral. This is not changing the positive value of the Ferrari, but altering the moral status of the person who possesses one. More generally, weak *ressentiment* shows how our axiological judgements can be motivated by emotions. We shall later claim that among these kinds of judgements one finds many moral ones. For, is it not a very common pattern for the POR to consider her rich neighbour to be evil and selfish precisely because he enjoys a beautiful Italian sports car?

Note that when denying the positive value of some inaccessible good, the POR is not just acquiring a new belief, she may also emote accordingly, that is, the new evaluation may serve as a cognitive basis for a new emotion. And thus, the POR may feel indignant about or disgusted by the object he originally coveted. As Sartre points out:

> The disagreeable tension becomes, in its turn, a motive for seeing another quality in those grapes: their being 'too green', which will resolve the conflict and put an end to the tension. Only, I cannot confer this quality upon the grapes chemically. So I seize upon the tartness of grapes that are too green by putting on the behaviour of disgust [*attitude de dégoût*].[457]

The fact that the fox believes that the grapes are *sour* triggers an emotion of disgust or dislike. If I devalue a good that I covet, or criticise its owner, my attitude is not merely a new set of cold beliefs; I also display new desires and emotions. If I hold the sour grapes belief that my neighbour earned his wealth through immoral means because I covet his lifestyle, I will also feel morally indignant.[458] This, in fact, is a very important element that allows us to understand why moral emotions such as indignation or resentment are considered by some to be suspect, inauthentic, or the symptom of much deeper negative emotions such as envy, hatred, or revengefulness. One explanation that we shall later develop in detail is that the basis of indignation and resentment can be a sour grapes or sweet lemon judgement. The fact that I come to believe that my neighbour is an immoral thief is the cognitive ground from which I can apprehend him with indignation. And the mechanism works for non-moral emotions too. The fact that I come to believe that my old car is better for the environment is not merely a cognitive assessment but an emotional experience of satisfaction, contentment, and even pride. In sum, if *ressentiment* is a strategy for overcoming a state of psychological tension and frustrated desires, it does so by altering our evaluations *and* the emotions based thereon. This is why we have opted for the generic expression *reevaluation*. What we call the

457 Sartre, 2015, pp. 41-42.

458 Formally speaking, in this case I feel indignant at my neighbour because he fails to exemplify a virtue that is important to me, say honesty and integrity in business. The fact that they are values to me means that I believe that all persons ought to instantiate them. Hence, all those who fail to do so are norm transgressors and the object of my indignation.

weak theory should not, therefore, be reduced to a mere cognitive account. *Ressentiment* is here only weak because it changes the value of *particular* objects, but not of value-scales.

3.2.3 Strong forms of *ressentiment*

Scheler raises an interesting question about the viability of weak *ressentiment* as a strategy for dealing with negative emotions: the POR may have to constantly support and renew her reevaluations in the presence of ever more examples of inaccessible goods. Through his work, a young banker regularly meets rich clients who own many different kinds of fancy Italian cars and this renews his envy. An easy strategy here is to change one's preferences for certain values rather than for particular objects. As Scheler puts it: "the systematic perversion and reinterpretation of the values themselves is much more effective than the 'slandering' of persons or the falsification of the world view could ever be".[459] The psychological benefits of this more fundamental kind of reevaluation are also stressed by Elster:

> This value change offers, as it were, a wholesale rather than a retail solution to the problem of *ressentiment*. Rather than having to debunk each instance of superiority by some *ad hoc* explanation, the inferior can now tell himself that he is superior by virtue of the very properties that formerly constituted his inferiority.[460]

What he calls a retail solution corresponds to weak *ressentiment*, while strong *ressentiment* is wholesale. The description so far has it that the POR changes her evaluations about a *particular* value-exemplification, say, a *beautiful* car, a *talented* friend, or a *wealthy* neighbour. The individual's sensitivity and preferences however remain intact; he generally likes beautiful cars, admires musical talent and wishes to be wealthy. Weak *ressentiment* is therefore not, properly speaking, a *change of values* or a *reevaluation of values* as is often assumed, for the POR's values and preferences remain the same. But according to Nietzsche and Scheler, and perhaps according to folk psychology as well, it seems that weak *ressentiment* may easily turn into a more profound transformation that "falsifies the values *themselves*".[461] As Scheler formulates it:

> In this new phase the man of *ressentiment* no longer turns away from the positive values, nor does he wish to destroy the men and things endowed with them. Now the values themselves are inverted; those values which are positive to any normal feeling become negative. The man of *ressentiment* cannot justify or even understand his own existence and sense of life in terms of positive values such as power, health, beauty, freedom and in dependence. Weakness, fear, anxiety and a slavish disposition prevent him from obtaining them. Therefore he

[459] RAM, p. 49.

[460] Elster, 1999, p. 175.

[461] RAM, p. 34. Emphasis added.

> comes to feel that 'all this is vain any way' and that salvation lies in the opposite phenomena: poverty, suffering, illness and death.[462]

An important example of this mechanism is the figure of the Nietzschean priest who comes to "*devalue his own values* because they have become intolerable reminders of his impotence".[463] We shall therefore distinguish weak *ressentiment* from a strong form that "changes values" altogether.

What exactly does it mean to devalue values as opposed to particular objects? And how can such a transformation really take place? In strong *ressentiment* the POR changes the relations of height or importance in which a value originally stood for him. If he initially took the value of power to be higher than that of humility, he comes to think that in fact the latter is more important than the former. We may imagine a fox who is guilty of strong *ressentiment*. In that case, he would come to disvalue not only the inaccessible grapes, but sweetness and so all things sweet, because sweetness itself has changed its position in his value hierarchy.

Scheler speaks of strong *ressentiment* as "lowering all values to the level of one's own factual desire or ability […], construing an illusory hierarchy of values in accordance with the structure of one's personal goals and wishes".[464] It is the mechanism that leads the envious neighbour to consider, say, physical strength, beauty and wealth (the values his neighbour embodies) to rank lower than frugality and humility. This axiological change is very often expressed in affective terms and suggests sometimes a more fundamental change of the person. The man of *ressentiment* is then said, for example, to change what characterises him, namely his desires or preferences. Elster who uses the expression *adaptive preferences* for this phenomenon explains that in this regard the fox, clearly does not just alter his beliefs.[465] scheler describes the same phenomenon as a deception in the sphere of preferring.[466] We will, in Chapter 4, defend a different view and argue that *ressentiment* is essentially an alteration of *evaluations*.

The distinction between sour grapes and sweet lemons reevaluations is applicable in the case of strong *ressentiment* as well. In the former variant, the POR comes to experience a high, positive, thick, value as something bad or as of lower value than previously. In the case of sweet lemons, the POR comes to experience the value attached to something she owns and masters as more important than the unreachable value. Note that this variant may look very similar to sweet lemons in the case of weak *ressentiment*. But in the latter case, the scale of values remains unchanged; the POR simply newly apprehends a particular good she owns as

462 RAM, p. 46.

463 Gemes & Richardson, 2014, p. 709. Emphasis added.

464 RAM, p. 35.

465 Elster, 1983.

466 FORM, p. 88.

an instance of her highest values. By contrast, in the case of strong *ressentiment* sweet lemons reevaluations involve a change in the scale of values. An example of the latter is an individual who originally considered aesthetic values more important than usefulness but, because he turns out to be aesthetically incompetent, comes to place usefulness above aesthetic values.

Our account of strong *ressentiment* also provides one further way of understanding the Nietzschean concept of the "reevaluation of values" (*Umwertung aller Werte*) and the claim that values have a certain value.[467] Nietzsche's *Umwertung* slogan involves both an empirical and a normative claim.[468] On one hand, it is the diagnosis that the moral liking and disliking of non-moral values or virtues is the consequence of an *Umwertung.* To him it is mainly a psychological and historical mechanism which turns self-abasing virtues like pity, self-denial, and self-sacrifice into valuable virtues.[469] But on the other hand, it is also a normative claim: the philosopher thinks we ought to re-evaluate the value of those states of affairs we consider to be morally good.[470] These claims should not be confused, and obviously only the first is relevant in an analysis of the nature of *ressentiment*. The expression *Umwertung aller Werte* is regularly translated as "transvaluation". Large however argues that the mechanism is in reality a reevaluation of values[471]; a mental operation through which the POR lowers the rank of a value she cannot realize. To change "the value of values" is a metaphor for describing the rank assigned or given to a value in a given value hierarchy (of a person at a time, of a person, of a community etc.).

In the case of weak *ressentiment*, we distinguished several types of transition from old to new evaluations. Let us proceed in the same way for strong *ressentiment* and value-preferences. The standard view has it that the two thick values *F* and *G* in a reevaluation are typically polar opposites. If, say, sweetness (pride) is an unreachable or unrealisable value, *F*, the man of *ressentiment* comes to positively value its opposite sourness (humility), *G*. Since *F* and *G* are opposite values, *ressentiment* corresponds to a person flipping her attitude towards values. The Nietzschean priests are here a case in point. Being repeatedly exposed to their weakness and their lack of virtues such as pride, courage, health (a virtue according to Nietzsche) and power, they come to devalue those properties and the persons who possess them

467 Nietzsche wonders: "under what conditions did man invent the value judgements good and evil? *And what value do they themselves have*? Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?" (GM, Preface, 3).

468 Large, 2010, p. 6.

469 GM, Preface, 5.

470 GM, Preface, 6.

471 Large, 2010.

by turning them into vices. At the same time, they positively re-evaluate the absence of such virtues, and sometimes even the opposite vices. This mechanism is vividly described in the following passage:

> It was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic value equation (good=noble=powerful=beautiful=happy=blessed) ventured, with awe-inspiring consistency, to bring about the reversal and held it in the teeth of the most unfathomable hatred (the hatred of the powerless), saying: 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!'[472]

The mechanism described here also has a solid anchoring in folk psychology, whatever one thinks of Nietzsche's idiosyncratic examples. Their form, however, remains important and shows that *ressentiment* can operate through the inversion of opposite values. Recall that praising things that are *G because* they are accessible is a form of sweet lemons reevaluation. This phenomenon is described by Nietzsche in the following terms:

> Man, in whatever situation he may find himself, needs a kind of valuation by means of which he justifies, i.e. *self-glorifies*, his actions, intentions and states towards himself and, especially, towards his surroundings. Every natural morality is the expression of one kind of man's satisfaction with himself: and if one needs praise, one also needs a corresponding table of values according the highest esteem to those actions of which we are most capable, in which our real *strength* expresses itself. Where we are strongest is where we wish to be seen and honoured.[473]

In the case of strong *ressentiment*, reevaluation may also work as indirect sour grapes devaluation. As Scheler explains:

> The formal structure of *ressentiment* expression is always the same: A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the unverbalized intention of denying, devaluating, and denigrating B. A is "played off" against B.[474]

These examples illustrate how and why the endorsement of positive values can, at the same time, constitute a devaluation of all states of affairs that do not instantiate them or which instantiate the opposite values. The POR does not even need to venture into criticizing her rivals directly. The mere endorsement of new values *G*, which are opposed to the unrealisable ones *F*, fulfils this aim. This mechanism is nicely described by Schopenhauer. Speaking of envy, one of the sources of *ressentiment*, he says of the envious man:

[472] GM, I, 7.

[473] NB, 35[17]

[474] RAM, p. 42.

> With great cunning he will completely overlook the man whose brilliant qualities are gnawing his heart, and act as though he were quite an unimportant person; he will take no notice of him, and, on occasion, will have even quite forgotten his existence. But at the same time he will before all things endeavour by secret machination carefully to deprive those advantages of any opportunity of showing themselves and becoming known [...] *No less will he enthusiastically praise unimportant people, or even indifferent or bad performances in the same sphere.*[475]

And Scheler treads in Schopenhauer's footsteps:

> In the same way, in *ressentiment* morality, love for the "small," the "poor," the "weak," and the "oppressed" is really disguised hatred, repressed envy, an impulse to detract, etc., directed against the opposite phenomena: "wealth," "strength," "power," "largesse." When hatred does not dare to come out into the open, it can be easily expressed in the form of ostensible love – love for something which has features that are the opposite of those of the hated object.[476]

All else being equal, if I admire courage, I despise cowardice; if I feel elevated by beauty, I will be repelled by ugliness, and if I revere holy deeds, I will condemn sins. This is in the very nature of opposing values and traits. But does a sweet lemons reevaluation always entail the devaluation of something *F*? Quite obviously, this only holds true as long as *F* and *G* are polar opposites. The same is true for sour grapes: as long as *F* and *G* are opposing values, the devaluation of the unrealisable value *F* is an implicit way of positively evaluating those states of affairs that are *not* instantiations of *F* or that instantiate the polar opposites of *F*. My passionate devaluation of sensory values is an implicit, positive, evaluation of ascetic values. Nietzsche illustrated this implicit, positive, reevaluation in one of his many allegories:

> There is nothing strange about the fact that lambs bear a grudge towards large birds of prey: but that is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs. And if the lambs say to each other, 'These birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey and most like its opposite, a lamb, – is good, isn't it? [477]

The sheep, according to Nietzsche, assert their goodness by stressing the fact they do not instantiate some values (shrewdness, cruelty, etc.) which they re-evaluate as being bad. In other words, good is what fails to instantiate the values *F*. The opposite value G is then necessarily good and those who exemplify it, the sheep claim, ethically good. So they say:

> When the oppressed, the downtrodden, the violated say to each other with the vindictive cunning of the powerless: 'Let us be different from evil people, let us be good! And a good person is anyone who does not rape, does not harm anyone, who does not attack, does not retaliate, who leaves the taking of revenge to God, who keeps hidden as we do,

[475] Schopenhauer, 2007, p. 21. Emphasis added.

[476] RAM, p. 65.

[477] GM, I, 13.

> avoids all evil and asks little from life in general, like us who are patient, humble and upright'[478]

This is how *ressentiment* operates and how "those who had previously been regarded as wretched and bad in fact embody all that is truly good in and about humanity".[479]

Reevaluations driven by *ressentiment* do not require the interchanged values to be polar opposites. For if a POR fails to be proud, strong, and wealthy, she does not necessarily come to value self-abasement, weakness, and being poor. She may simply attribute a positive value to the non-instantiation of *F* – that is, to any lack of pride and courage. In other words, the POR does not necessarily endorse the opposite values, she may simply come to value those states of affairs lacking the unrealisable values.

In reality, there are many examples where one comes to value goods because they are not F but *G*, and where *G* is not the opposite of F. As the historian and sociologist Liah Greenfeld rightly points out, the use of the Nietzschean concept of "transvaluation of values" may be exaggerated and misleading, since: "adopting values directly antithetical to those of another is borrowing with the opposite sign" and further adds that "a society with a well-defined institutional structure and a rich legacy of cultural traditions is not likely to borrow lock, stock and barrel from anywhere".[480] Many ordinary examples of *ressentiment* are therefore of a different structure, and the relation between *F* and *G* is not necessarily one of polar opposition. As we have seen, reevaluation may simply involve switching the order in a relation of axiological height or importance: *F* was more important than *G*, now *G* is more important than *F*. This is what happens when strong *ressentiment* comes in the form of sweet lemons.

An alternative strategy to devaluing power and prestige altogether (sour grapes) consists in coming to evaluate something else as much more important and more valuable, for example the positive value of a harmonious family life. Harmony at home is then played-off against political power and prestige. But this only works because there is an assumed material incompatibility between the two states of affairs; if it is empirically impossible, or at least very difficult, to live up both *F* and *G*, that is, to have a balanced family life and hold a demanding political office. This example captures the essence of many ordinary cases. Another illustration of this form is the popular idea that being wealthy (*F*) always comes at the price of unhappiness (*non-G*). This assumed material incompatibility explains why the POR may come to embrace what he believes to be a full and happy life (*G*) rather than pursue wealth (*F*).

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478 GM, I, 13.

479 Migotti & Mark, 1998, p. 746.

480 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 16.

An important corollary of our analysis of strong *ressentiment* is that the endorsement of the new values naturally leads to a rejection or devaluation of the old ones. The POR cannot hold Christian values and still value Homeric virtues; I cannot come to evaluate humility, pacifism, and self-abasing attitudes as virtues without condemning the opposite traits (pride, bellicosity, and self-confidence). But if *F* and *G* are not polar opposites, it is possible that *ressentiment* instead amounts to the reinforcement of some pro- or con-attitudes. I may still value power and social prestige, but the mechanism of *ressentiment* leads me to prefer other values (a harmonious family life). If *ressentiment* is a process that leads to a change in our axiological attitudes, we may want to understand such a change as a reinforcement of certain attitudes that disfavour those valuations that cause psychological tension. We can define strong *ressentiment* along the following lines.

> A person subject to strong *ressentiment* is one who first takes *F* to be some high, positive value but who is unable to stand in a desired relation to states of affairs that exemplify *F*, and on this basis comes to rank *F* as lower than before or consider *F* to be a negative value.

Perhaps there is neither a formal relation of opposition between the properties *F* and *G*, nor a practical incompatibility between their respective instances. The POR simply comes to value things that are *G* more than things that are *F*. *Ressentiment* then would just be a matter of re-evaluating what is accessible, and considering it more valuable than another unreachable state of affairs. Scheler develops an interesting theory about our relation to the relations between *F* and *G*. He argues, as we have noted, that all values (and thus *F* and *G* as well) are organised hierarchically, that is, there are higher and lower values. This is apprehended through the act of preferring (*vorziehen*) correctly.[481] The POR's reevaluation of values – in what we have called strong *ressentiment* – is in reality a change of preferences, where she comes to prefer the value *G* to a higher value *F*, a preference which presents itself to her as correct, just because the realisations or exemplifications of the former are more accessible.

As mentioned earlier, weak *ressentiment* may be contested on the basis that doxastic voluntarism is false. This difficulty, however, disappears once we consider that cognitions, and the POR's axiological beliefs in particular, are motivated may be motivated by her emotions.[482] In some respect, our analysis of strong *ressentiment* seems even harder to defend; it not only assumes that the POR alters her evaluations, but also considers her to be capable of voluntarily changing her more fundamental valuations. This presupposes that the POR can turn her pro-attitudes into con-attitudes at will, or that she can alter her feelings of values and her preferences at will. So does such a theory involve an equally implausible affective voluntarism? The view we shall develop in the next chapter considers both weak and strong *res-*

[481] FORM, pp. 86–87.

[482] In fact, the integration of this empirical fact has the advantage of solving many of the paradoxes of self-deception that we will discuss in Chapter 4.

sentiment to involve an alteration of evaluations only, and should therefore avoid this conceptual difficulty. In weak *ressentiment*, when the POR takes, say, her neighbour to be greedy, the reevaluation process boils down to a new, characteristic, evaluation of a particular person. In the case of strong *ressentiment*, we shall argue that when the POR takes, for example, aesthetic values to be less important than values of utility, it is also merely an evaluation. Strong *ressentiment*'s reevaluations are axiological judgements about the relative height of values which in turn serve as a base for her emotions (in this example, her indignation at aesthetes and artists because they privilege values she considers unimportant). In other words, one may say of *ressentiment* that it changes the POR's scale of values. However the POR never alters her value-feelings or her preferences – that is, her valuations. Instead, she talks herself into believing that the useful is more important than the beautiful and that what she originally feels and prefers is different. The view also provides an important basis for an account of *ressentiment*'s self-deception. Nevertheless, it is a controversial view especially for those who, like Scheler, consider *ressentiment* to alter our more fundamental acts of valuation and thus associate *ressentiment* with a form of value-blindness.

There is perhaps another argument against the Schelerian view that *ressentiment* is an alteration of our valuations. If we consider the values and preferences of a person to be a distinguishing and characteristic element of personhood, the fact that the POR changes them implies that she alters her personality at the same time. And this, by any measure, is a deep and delicate change which is difficult to conceptually understand. Nietzsche foresaw this consequence and insists on the absence of a self or personhood of the POR, her *Entpersoenlichung* and *Entselbstung,*[483] without providing an explanation of how such a change can occur.

But one also needs to consider how *ressentiment* feels, what it feels like, and one may be led to the conclusion that *ressentiment* does not or cannot work, and that the POR never really grows blind to the values he cannot reach. As we showed in Section 3.1, the POR never finds it easy to hold on to her new evaluations. As Alexander Pfänder (yet another early realist phenomenologist) remarks:

> The merely alleged values and disvalues never stick to the good; they fall off again and again. *A fortiori*, no man, were he to be the most powerful, can make things that are not good, good and make things that are not bad, bad.[484]

The man of *ressentiment* is conflicted; his old values are still part of his experience despite his endorsement of new values. According to Poellner: "it is essential to *ressentiment* that its values are not really internalised by its subjects, who are therefore not motivated by the con-

[483] EH, I, 7.

[484] Pfänder, 1973, p. 131. Personal translation.

tents of those values for their own sake". [485] The challenge of the ideat that *ressentiment* involves a loss of personality only holds if we consider *ressentiment*, or at least its strong variant, to involve an alteration of valuations. We shall reject this view and argue instead that the reevaluation process changes evaluations. As we shall see later, this view both has the advantage of keeping the POR's personality intact and that of accounting for the psychological tension, and thus the practical irrationality, which characterises *ressentiment*. The view that both strong and weak *ressentiment* only alter our evaluations, while leaving our valuations intact, is grounded in the claim that *ressentiment* is practically irrational, something a change of valuation cannot account for. Let us therefore analyse this last claim in more detail

3.2.4 Is *ressentiment* rational?

Ressentiment is a mechanism that makes one's life more agreeable. Both the weak and strong versions of this phenomenon suggest that sweet lemons and sour grapes reevaluations may be successful. By judging the coveted object to be bad, or by changing her preferences, the POR seems to neutralise psychological discomfort. The fox, we are told, comes to believe that the grapes are sour and then, it seems, just walks away. Strong *ressentiment* has an additional advantage. Since the same frustrations may reappear every time the inaccessible good is encountered, changing value-scales is a more efficient answer and provides a "wholesale rather than a retail solution".[486] Both versions seem therefore entirely rational, at least from an instrumental or prudential point of view as they seem to reduce the individual's psychological tension. But do these strategies really produce the expected results? Ordinary examples strongly suggest that the POR is never really at peace. The new values she endorses seem to her fragile and in permanent need of confirmation and vindication. This becomes especially apparent in 1) her thirst (*Sucht*), that is, in her constant searching for new persons and groups to sustain her envy and revengefulness, 2) in the energy she deploys in disparaging her rivals, and 3) in the energy and insistence with which she professes her new values. Is the POR's frustration therefore genuinely overcome? And how does she manage to alleviate her sense of inferiority and impotence? Has she surmounted her distressing feelings without further psychological consequences? Consideration of these questions eventually leads to the further question whether *ressentiment* is or can be a rational strategy. We may ask of each of the many possible responses to emotional distress whether it is rational in terms of costs and benefits.[487]

[485] Poellner *in* May, 2011, p. 128.

[486] Elster, 1999, p. 175.

[487] Elster, 1996, p. 1395.

We can distinguish three possible explanations of the way *ressentiment* makes the POR's life more agreeable. The first (1) is a rather ordinary hedonic account: the POR embraces new values *because* the latter trigger some agreeable states of mind or lead to the disappearance of disagreeable states of mind. The second is a thesis recently rediscovered by several Nietzsche scholars, who claim that *ressentiment* and its characteristic reevaluation has a cathartic function. It comes in three variants. According to the first one (2a), the *distraction account*, *ressentiment* is cathartic because the intense pain and experience associated with some of its characteristic affects distracts the POR from her original feeling of inferiority. The second cathartic variant (2b), the *blame account*, holds that such distraction and discharge of hostility is achieved through the blaming of another agent – a mechanism we encounter already multiple times. According to the third variant of the cathartic view (2c), the *guilt account*, the POR eventually turns her hostility against herself in the form of guilt. The torment she then inflicts herself is another form of emotional discharge, one that allows the POR to make sense of her suffering. The third general account (3), the *moral superiority account*, is in our view the most important. It presents *ressentiment* as a compensation mechanism that induces a feeling of moral superiority. In what follows these three accounts will be reconstructed from the writings of Nietzsche, Scheler, Adler, and Elster, since no one writer proposes a complete theory. We shall try to demonstrate the importance of moral superiority and find support for it in a phenomenological analysis of *ressentiment*. In the final part, we will discuss some of the reasons why *ressentiment* may not be that effective after all; or why, in other words, it is not a *rational* strategy.

As noted previously, *ressentiment* is neither a desire, a belief, nor a single emotion, but a sentiment that eventually turns into a durable character trait (see Section 3.1) or disposition. We therefore need to distinguish the rationality of its constitutive episodes from the rationality of the reevaluation process *per se*. We will here only focus on the phenomenon of *reevaluation* and assess how good a strategy it is to sooth pain and bring relief to the POR. It should however be noted that there are forms of irrationality that are not pain-reducing strategies but rather pleasure-enhancing ones. The foolishness of the vain man for example may aim to make him happier, not to alleviate a feeling of inferiority. *Ressentiment* on the other hand is specifically associated with a form of suffering that the individual tries to overcome. Here the expression "suffering" stands for various experiences ranging from mere frustration (the fox) to an oppressive feeling of inferiority (the envious neighbour), a sense of powerlessness, and the systematic repression of hostile emotions. The meaning we favour is therefore more restrictive and tied to *ressentiment*'s first-stage experience than the meaning Nietzsche gives to the term; it seems, for him, to denote *any* kind of pain.[488]

[488] As Leiter remarks: "Nietzsche, to be sure, does not distinguish between the genuinely existential causes of suffering—e.g., desires, physiological malady, bad conscience—and the contingent, social causes" (Leiter,

The irrational nature of *ressentiment* has been stressed by Scheler who defines it as a *self-poisoning* of the mind, as well as by Nietzsche who compares the phenomenon to a balm that soothes the pain but *poisons* the wound at the same time.[489] Elster also claims that *ressentiment* is irrational and counter-hedonic because it eventually makes the agent *worse off*. The POR, he suggests, cannot avoid disclosing or revealing her *ressentiment*, something which brings with it negative consequences.[490]

Before we turn to the four accounts of the possible irrationality of *ressentiment* mentioned, something should be said about the notion of rationality employed here. "(Ir)rationality" is a very ambiguous term. Many things are said to be rational (and irrational): beliefs, actions, desires, motivations, emotions, persons and thoughts.[491] Also, to qualify a mental state as rational can either refer to the way it arises (is it motivated or not?), to its content (does it represent reality or not?) or to whether or not it transgresses a prudential norm. Actions on the other hand are said to be rational when they carry out the agent's desires efficiently. At the same time, desires can be short-sighted and irrational because they produce more harm than good.

Sometimes rationality is identified with reasonableness. Sometimes they are distinguished. In what follows, we shall distinguish between them in the following ways. Since there are reasons for and against believing, judging, emoting, desiring and acting, we may say that believing, judging, emoting, desiring and acting are reasonable to the extent that they are motivated by good reasons for believing etc. and unreasonable to the extent that this is not the case. Like many others, we shall reserve "rationality" and "irrationality" for the relation between goals and the means required to realise them. The less appropriate the means chosen to realise a goal, the more irrational the subject who employs these means. One may think that to the extent that *ressentiment* involves changes in belief and affect on the basis of no new evidence whatsoever it is a bad thing both intellectually and affectively, that is, unreasonable. Yet one might still think that it is (or is not) a rational strategy, given the desire to avoid unpleasantness. The great charm of understanding rationality in this way is that it does not presuppose any form of objectivism about values. Reasonableness does.

2002, p. 263).

489 GM, III, 15.

490 As Elster puts it:

> We can nevertheless make, I think, a general argument for the claim that downgrading tends to have counterhedonic effects. Whenever Anne's name comes up in conversation, Peter is likely to react with derogatory remarks that have no basis in facts, only in her rejection of him. Others may notice his attitude and suspect its basis and, as a result, come to dislike and avoid him. Indirectly, therefore, Peter's reaction induces a loss of welfare. (Elster, 2010, p. 224).

491 Elster, 1983, Chap. 1.

Reasonableness and rationality both involve relations to norms. We shall here consider intentional states to be rational-irrational or reasonable-unreasonable with respect to four families of norms.[492]

The *first* category comprises the moral norms, which are referred to when certain emotions are said to be morally wrong (for example envy or jealousy). This kind of (moral) unreasonableness, which is often called a form of irrationality, will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The *second* category comprises the prudential and strategic norms we refer to when some emotions are considered ill-advised, counter-productive or detrimental for fulfilling a particular desire. For example, emotional episodes can be irrational because of their harmful social consequences to other people or because of pathological dimensions that reduce the subject's quality of life. Seneca, for example, thinks anger is (in our terms) irrational because it is self-destructive and counter-productive to the point that it actually prevents the agent from efficiently fulfilling his goal of revenge.[493]

The *third* family comprises several norms of *authenticity*. Elster, in particular, argues that the irrationality of *ressentiment* derives from the fact that the POR's desires and preferences are aroused in a non-autonomous way; they are motivated by other states of mind, they are adaptive and not simply just there. For example, he points out that:

> Desires and preferences can be objectionable because of their origin (non-autonomous desires) or because of their content (unethical desires). The most prominent example of non-autonomous preferences discussed in the present work is that of 'sour grapes', i.e. adaptation of preferences to what is seen as possible.[494]

Given our understanding of rationality, one may think that if the desires and preferences of the POR arise in a non-heteronomous way, this does not make them irrational. If rationality

[492] D'Arms & Kerr in Smith, 2008, p. 54; De Sousa, 1987, Chap. 7.

[493] As Seneca puts it: "No passion is more eager for revenge than anger, and for that very reason it is unapt to obtain it: being over hasty and frantic, like almost all desires, it hinders itself in the attainment of its own object, and therefore has never been useful either in peace or war." (*Of Anger*, I, 12).

[494] Elster, 1983, p. 22. This view has been challenged by Sandven who argues that: "it is perfectly reasonable to like what it turns out one functions well in relation to and to lose interest in what one finds out one is not able to master reasonably well" (Sandven, 1999, p. 175). A questionable implication of Elster's sour grapes rationality is the fact that an individual who persists in desiring something that he cannot attain or satisfy still behaves rationally. But "it is rather the failure to change, including changing one's desires, which would appear to us as irrational, suggesting rigidity, fixation, obsession, an inability to let go, or the like". He gives the example of mourning:

> The idea of autonomy presupposed here evidently implies that what one desires, wants, and likes shall come from oneself in a basic sense prior to and independently of the confrontation of the desires with reality. This seems to point back to a conception of the I or the subject as something that is determined independently of the conditions and the relationships within which it exists (Sandven, 1999, p. 174).

concerns only certain relations between goals and means, then the origins of the relevant desires, whether or not they are autonomous, is irrelevant to determining their degree of rationality. Rational choice theory applies in the same way to fully autonomous creatures and to creatures all of whose desires originate in what Girard calls merely mimetic desires.[495]

Finally, there are norms of fittingness or appropriateness or correctness which are organised around the concept of *matching*.[496] Emotions are said to fit or fail to fit their objects. Plato, Aristotle, Brentano and his pupils even distinguish between correct and incorrect emotions.[497] Fear of a dog or toddler which is not dangerous is an emotion which is incorrect, ungrounded, not fitting. Resentment is inappropriate, unfitting or incorrect if it is resentment of an action which is not a wrong, if no moral principle of justice or fairness has been breached. Emotions which do not comply with such norms are sometimes said to be irrational. But given our distinction between rationality and reasonableness, we shall say that they are unreasonable. After all, the axiological facts which make an emotion correct are just non-defeasible reasons for emoting in that way. The fact that a certain situation is unjust is a non-defeasible reason for indignation about that situation and where there is no injustice, indignation is unreasonable or ungrounded.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will only consider the strategic and prudential norms which apply to *ressentiment* and try to determine whether *ressentiment* is rational in durably relieving psychological tension, or suffering as we called it.

Let us begin with *the hedonic account*, a very common account claims that *ressentiment* is harboured by the POR because she wants to feel better about herself, where "better" should be understood in hedonic terms. This account probably constitutes the standard explanation of the phenomenon, at least one that is very popular for the man in the street. Scheler claims that: "the negativistic statement relieves the tension between desire and impotence and reduces our depression". [498] Elster associates it to a "pleasure-seeking mechanism" and remarks that "believing that the world is as you would like it to be provides some kind of immediate *satisfaction*, or at least removes the *discontent* that is produced when beliefs and desires diverge".[499] Some clarifications are needed here. The POR is not adjusting her view of the world to her desires in cultivating, for example, false beliefs about her own capabilities, which is the nature of another mechanism, one we call Bovarysm, nor is *ressentiment* wishful thinking (see Chapter 4). The fox does not change beliefs according to his desires, but in

[495] Girard, 2011.

[496] De Sousa, 1987, p. 173.

[497] Mulligan, 2017.

[498] RAM, p. 46

[499] Elster, 2010, p. 221. Emphasis added.

response to a frustration of his desires and the clear awareness of his impotence. *Ressentiment's* reevaluation mechanism is instead an attempt to sincerely predicate, and eventually experience, new values, their exemplification and relations, in order to get rid of one's dissatisfactions.

Believing that the grapes are *sour*, that my neighbour is *immoral*, or that my successful friend is *vain* are *motivated* beliefs of this kind. The POR is envisaged here as a self-deceiving individual who would rather avoid a negative experience by making new evaluations than hold true beliefs about his real condition and original valuations. When he cannot avoid acknowledging these painful facts, he tries to create or bring about pleasant states of mind. This simple but fundamental reason explains why individuals come to hold such illusions and it also grounds other psychological claims which employ concepts such as "defence mechanisms",[500] or "compensation".[501] Pleasure and the avoidance of pain motivate the POR's reevaluations, who seems to draw some temporary relief from many sources. For example, she enjoys her fantasies of revenge, glows at her righteous attitudes and relishes her obsessive criticisms and associated *Schadenfreude.* Nietzsche sometimes suggests that *ressentiment* achieves its end by tricking the individual into loving humanity and the community which he associates with an "innocent means in the fight against displeasure":[502]

> The ascetic priest's methods that we have been getting to know the total dampening of the awareness of life, mechanical activity, the small pleasure, above all the pleasure of 'loving one's neighbour', herd-organization, the awakening of the communal feeling of power, consequently the individual's dissatisfaction with himself is overridden by his delight at the prosperity of the community.[503]

The structure of such explanations is not different from the previous hedonic account, alas with a different – and unexpected – object (a delight taken in the prosperity of the community). These episodes may counter-balance – at least temporarily – the painful experience of impotence, inferiority, or frustration. Note however that when suffering is identified with mere frustration and impotence, the POR re-evaluates the value of the inaccessible good. When suffering is social and involves a feeling of relative inferiority, the reevaluation must allow for downward comparison. Downgrading a rival or preferring more important values than those he embodies are ways for the POR to bring herself to feel superior.[504] Downward comparison is also an important source of *Schadenfreude* which is itself a pleasant state of mind. The POR's character and actions can therefore be explained from a hedonic stand-

500 Vaillant, 1995.

501 Adler, 1956.

502 GM, III, 19.

503 GM, III, 19.

504 Smith, 2013, pp. 21-32.

point: her responses are attempts to improve and re-establish a positive hedonic balance. However, this account builds on the premise that *ressentiment* is successful and hence perfectly rational to engage in. In some respects, this argument is not a very different from claims held by therapists and self-help gurus according to whom illusions can be beneficial and adaptive in coping with stress and anxiety.[505]

This picture therefore conflicts with our paradigmatic scenarios in which the POR is presented as someone who continues to struggle emotionally over a long period of time and whose new values are in need of continued support and confirmation. Elster, without specifying why he considers such *ressentiment* irrational, puts the point pithily:

> In the long run, of course, one might be very badly off acting on beliefs adopted on hedonic grounds. As a Norwegian proverb has it: pissing in one's pants gives brief warmth.[506]

Why is *ressentiment* hedonically unsuccessful in this latter sense? One possible explanation is Scheler's suggestion that the POR is still in some sense aware of the correctness of the valuings and evaluations prior to his reevaluation. Hence her illusions are never complete and a full hedonic improvement never achievable. More generally, we have reasons to believe that even from a hedonic point of view *ressentiment* is not rational as it only provides a temporary remedy. The change of focus away from her feelings of impotence and inferiority breaks down easily as her valuations and her sensitivity to the unreachable values remains the same. Another possibility may also be the fact that the medicine the POR administers herself through reevaluation leads in fact to even more painful states of mind.

While the hedonic explanation holds that suffering can be fought by arousing pleasant, although perhaps hostile thoughts, emotions, and feelings, there is an alternative view of the relation between *ressentiment* and suffering. We call it the *cathartic view*. Nietzsche has a version of this alternative to the hedonic view. We call it (2a) the *distraction account*. Suffering, he explains, is relived thanks to the *intensity* of the POR's affective responses. The latter property seem to be a general feature of *ressentiment*-emotions (Section 3.1.1). While they might not be directly pleasant, undergoing intense feelings nevertheless *distracts* the agent from his initial distress. As Nietzsche explains in the *Genealogy*, the emblematic *ressentiment*-figure of the priest is "wholly concerned with one thing: *some kind of excess of feeling*, – which is used as the *most effective anaesthetic for dull, crippling, long-drawn-out pain".*[507] Intense emotional experiences therefore provide another kind of medicine. To explain the phenomenon as a distraction from one's painful experience through the discharge of intense emotions that are not necessarily pleasant, allows us to make sense of some of the POR's

505 Taylor, 1983.

506 Elster, 2010, p. 221.

507 GM. III, 15.

actions tendencies, that otherwise seem masochistic and quite irrational at first sight. As Nietzsche puts it:

> The sufferers, one and all, are frighteningly willing and inventive in their pretexts for painful emotions; they even enjoy being mistrustful and dwelling on wrongs and imagined slights: they rummage through the bowels of their past and present for obscure, questionable stories that will allow them to wallow in tortured suspicion, and intoxicate themselves with their own poisonous wickedness – they rip open the oldest wounds and make themselves bleed to death from scars long-since healed, they make evil-doers out of friend, wife, child and anyone else near to them.[508]

This account offers a good description of several traits of *ressentiment*, especially the POR's intense and obsessive attitudes and his reliving of hostile emotions. The permanent quest for new reasons to harbour hostility is a way to intoxicate himself with intense and yet painful emotions. And this may work, because it allows the individual to *shift his focus* away from the distressing acknowledgement of his inferiority and impotence – the original ground for his suffering. Strong emotions, in other words, also have a *narcotic* effect. As Nietzsche explains:

> […] to release his emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other: because the release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntarily longed for narcotic against pain of any kind. In my judgement, we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to *anaesthetize pain through emotion.*[509]

The important element that sets Nietzsche's theory apart from most versions of the hedonic theory is the fact that *painful* but strong experiences are pursued in order to distract from even worse forms of suffering. Also, it is the discharge of these emotions that seem to produce the expected effect. This element is therefore very different from the necessary moments of *ressentiment* where one has to repress hostile emotions. But then what are the excessive emotions which provide such anaesthetic relief? And from what kind of suffering do they provide relief? Is it not paradoxical to envisage unpleasant but excessive emotions as a remedy against another kind of suffering which is in itself already involving the repression of excessive and hostile emotions?

The second variant of the cathartic account, the *blame account* (2b), may provide an answer to these questions. Nietzsche considers the following psychological mechanism to be part of human nature and *ressentiment* in particular: *suffering leads to blaming*. The POR, who deals with her own specific struggles, finds another individual or group to blame, because "'someone or other must be to blame that I feel ill'".[510] Blame is the general attitude attached

[508] GM, III, 15.

[509] GM, III, 15.

[510] GM. III, 15.

to moral emotions such as resentment and indignation.[511] And, as suggested here, it also seems to be our response when we endure, not a genuine wrong, but the painful experience of personal shortcomings and inferiority. Searching for a culprit is a common reaction to displeasure. When a real wrongdoer cannot be found, the man of *ressentiment* will simply rewrite the script in terms that present his rival as a wrongdoer, and himself as the victim of an injustice. But why would blame provide any relief? One possible explanation is this: blaming someone allows us to *express* hostility - the action tendency of envy, revenge and hatred – in an alternative way, rather than having to repress it. Blaming others therefore works as a kind of catharsis, and in order for *ressentiment* to be discharged there must be someone to blame, for otherwise envy and revengefulness accumulate, sometimes to dangerous levels.[512] The dimension of blame avoids somehow the paradox of the distraction account (2a) which seems to suggests that intense, hostile, emotions are both repressed and discharged. The blame account suggests instead the repressed emotions are discharged in a different form. In this context, blame is also said to act as a powerful narcotic, since "blame anaesthetizes despair by conjuring up the even more savage emotion of hatred which, as it were, distracts the sufferer from his pain".[513] The repressed emotions are not usually those that end up being *expressed*. The POR may suffer from her inhibited envy, but she discharges that tension by adopting a self-righteous attitude towards her rival and thus endorses a kind of hostility, such as a desire for him to be punished and taken-down *impersonally.* Resentment and indignation are not envy, but there is an important relation between these emotions that we will describe in greater detail in the next chapter. Some authors (Ranulf for example) even consider the POR's indignation to be nothing other than disguised envy. Blame, in the emotional form of resentment, and indignation provide a way for the POR to discharge accumulated and repressed hostility. Such episodes can be excessive, yet they are not painful in the way that Nietzsche suggests they must be in the case of *ressentiment*.

The last variant of the cathartic view is the *guilt account* (2c). Nietzsche refines this theory in this direction in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, where *ressentiment* is said to change direction and the blame to be *internalised*; a process deemed painful and masochistic. We shall call this third view the *guilt-account*. The POR is told by the ascetic priest "to look for [the cause] within *himself*, in guilt, in a piece of the past, he should understand his suffering as a

511 Coates & Tognazzini, 2013.

512 GM, III, 15. As Leiter puts it:

> So the psychological logic of this phenomenon has two stages and one premise. The two stages are: sufferers want relief from their suffering, hence, sufferers seek someone to blame for their suffering, someone (or thing) upon whom to vent their *ressentiment*. The premise is: the discharge of strong emotions deadens suffering. (Leiter, 2002, pp. 258–259).

513 May, 2007, p. 89.

condition of punishment".[514] Under the impetus of the priests and their ascetic ideals, sufferers blame *themselves* for their own suffering and eventually come to experience the sting of *guilt* at having transgressed the ascetic ideals.[515] Given our understanding of *ressentiment*'s strategy, when the reevaluation mechanism eventually leads individuals to blame themselves, the procedure appears once again to be irrational, as a new source of tension and suffering is experienced in the form of guilt. Scheler makes the following very pertinent suggestion: once in the grip of guilt, the individual "may believe that he can diminish his felt guilt by blaming himself rather harshly and by gazing (vainly) at the goodness of his act of blaming".[516] Nietzsche claims that such strategies clearly make the "sick sicker"[517] and induce new sufferings even as they anaesthetise the earlier pain. As he puts it, the mechanism "brought new suffering with it, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of *guilt*".[518] Yet blaming oneself relieves the individual from what Nietzsche considers to be the greatest problem of all, namely the *senselessness* of suffering. In the context of 19th-century pessimism, and in the wake of Schopenhauer, the senselessness of suffering is thought to conduce humankind to a "suicidal nihilism" and a complete detachment from the world.[519] Nietzsche suggests that by triggering powerful emotions, and relocating the cause of suffering within the agent himself, the strong feeling of guilt numbs the pain and brings the apathetic individual back to life as he starts to feel tied to the world again.[520] Wallace has defended a therapeutic version of the *Genealogy*, claiming that *ressentiment* allows the slaves to make sense of their hatred and relieves them "of a condition of psychic distress".[521]The priest's great achievement is to provide meaning to human suffering by changing the natural direction of blame and providing a powerful narcotic in the shape of guilt.[522] As Simon May sums it up:

514 GM, III, 20.

515 Nietzsche writes:

> 'I suffer: someone or other must be guilty'—and every sick sheep thinks the same. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, says to him, 'Quite right, my sheep!' Somebody must be to blame; but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it, *you yourself alone are to blame for yourself*" (GM, III, 15).

516 FORM, p. 182.

517 GM, III, 20.

518 GM, III, 28.

519 GM. III, 28.

520 Leiter, 2002, pp. 260–263.

521 Wallace, 2006, p. 221.

522 As Nietzsche famously puts it:

> What actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering: but neither for the Christian, who saw in suffering a whole, hidden machinery of salvation, nor for naïve man in ancient times, who saw all suffering in relation to spectators or to instigators of

> [The priest] achieves release from pain in two ways: through a sheer 'orgy of (guilty) feelings' – the latter expressing the terror and rapture of guilt and redemption, sin an punishment; and through the promise of a 'beyond' free of suffering.[523]

Wallace also argues that *ressentiment* and its new evaluative framework allows the POR to make her emotions *appropriate.*[524] The POR otherwise remains in a conceptual situation in which she positively values a trait or an object, and, at the same time, adopts a hostile attitude against that trait, person or object.

The three variants of the cathartic account all mention different plausible mechanisms. Let us sum them up. First, the cathartic account apprehends the POR's actions and behaviour as an attempt to anaesthetise her hurt feelings with other powerful emotions, or simply to change focus and concentrate on other concerns. Second, according to the blaming account, the POR blames others which allows her to vent and discharge emotions that would otherwise be repressed. Third, the guilt account suggests that the latter emotion provides a new meaning for suffering. The man of *ressentiment* becomes the cause of his own suffering and thus the target of his emotional discharge. Are these responses rational? The phenomenon of blame as a response to suffering can certainly be considered a rational response. If excessive moral emotions are the vector by which the POR can vent her hostility and provide some pleasurable states for herself at the same time, then *ressentiment* is rational because it reduces suffering. But we shall here depart from Nietzsche's conception because ultimately it explains these beneficial effects in a counter-intuitive way, for the POR only gains some relief by being distracted by another, greater, pain in the form of guilt. According to our earlier definition of the phenomenon, distraction from suffering only seems to resolve the problem of the POR's repressed emotions, not his first-stage experience of impotence and inferiority. In that respect, none of the strategies mentioned seem to fulfil the original aim. In other words, nothing in Nietzsche's *cathartic*-account or in the *hedonic*-account seems to account for the fact that the POR manages to overcome her damaged sense of self-worth.

A more promising account of the rationality of *ressentiment* is provided by a fourth kind of explanation, *the moral superiority account*, one which we shall now consider in some detail. One common intuition sees individuals as compensating for their damaged sense of self-

> suffering, was there any such senseless suffering. In order to rid the world of concealed, undiscovered, unseen suffering and deny it in all honesty, people were then practically obliged to invent gods and intermediate beings at every level, in short, something that also roamed round in obscurity, which could see in the dark and which would not miss out on an interesting spectacle of pain so easily (GM, II, 7).

523 May, 2007, p. 90.

524 As Wallace puts it: "The emotional orientation of the slaves is vindicated in the relevant sense when it can be experienced by the slaves as one that is uniquely appropriate to its object, insofar as the object is taken to be evil" (Wallace, 2006, p. 236).

worth with a *feeling of superiority*. The Viennese psychoanalyst, Alfred Adler famously formalised this idea, but it can be found elsewhere too. For example, Nietzsche – Adler's main source of influence – imagines the man of *ressentiment* as having a "will [...] to appear superior in any way".[525] The same compensatory mechanism is mentioned by Scheler, who explains that "to relieve the tension, the common man seeks a feeling of superiority or equality, and he attains his purpose in an illusory devaluation of the other man's qualities".[526] More recently, Poellner has developed a similar explanation as he views the mechanism of *ressentiment* as providing a sense of moral superiority.[527] But how does the mechanism of reevaluation lead to such a feeling? Suppose I envy my neighbour because he is a handsome and a wealthy entrepreneur. I may respond to this feeling of envy by devaluing him as *foolish* and *self-interested*. These judgements give me new grounds for a feeling of relative superiority in terms of cognitive values (I am wiser than him) and in terms, say, of Christian or progressive values (I am more empathic and altruistic than him). We have seen all kinds of ways in which the POR's values can be played off against the values of her rival. And clearly there is nothing directly moral in the latter evaluations. The outcome nevertheless remains the same, eventually the man of *ressentiment* comes to believe that he instantiates *higher* values than his rival. This may mean that the POR needs to invent a new kind of value – moral values as suggested by Nietzsche – in the light of which he is superior to his rival. Of course, we could now say that such comparative superiority is pleasurable, in which case we would be falling back on a standard hedonic account. But the latter, by itself, does not consider the specific role of superiority in *ressentiment* which is a concept that involves the sense of self-esteem (Section 3.1.4).

In general, a feeling of superiority can be associated with any kind of value. I may feel superior or inferior to someone else with regard to aesthetic, cognitive, spiritual or religious values. Even sensory or hedonic values may play a role – as when someone convinces himself that he has a superior capacity for enjoyment and pleasure (*Lebenskünstler*, gourmet). But it is moral values which seem to play a central role in *ressentiment*. As Nietzsche says, "moral judgements and condemnations constitute the favourite revenge of the spiritually limited against those less limited".[528] We shall argue, more specifically, that *ressentiment*'s relief is derived from the belief in one's *moral* superiority and that the reevaluation does not necessarily need to predicate moral (dis)values, in order to arouse a feeling of moral superiority.

Many examples of *ressentiment* turn virtues into vices or other evils (sour grapes) and personal weaknesses into moral virtues (sweet lemons). The POR morally condemns the values

525 GM, III, 14.

526 RAM, p. 34.

527 Poellner in May, 2011, p. 128.

528 BGE, 259.

she cannot realise, and morally praises herself for the values she already embodies. These judgements give rise to the feeling of being better in some respect:

> What do you suppose he [the man of *ressentiment*] finds necessary, absolutely necessary, to give himself in his own eyes the appearance of superiority over more spiritual people and to attain the pleasure of an accomplished revenge at least in his own imagination? *Always morality; you can bet on that. Always big moral words. Always the rub-a-dub of justice, wisdom, holiness, virtue.*[529]

Or, as Solomon explains:

> So where envy sees itself in an inferior position, not having what it really wants and unable to get it, resentment rationalizes this inferiority as unjust *oppression*, and in so doing grants to itself a kind of moral superiority.[530]

And as Poellner conceives the phenomenon:

> When accompanied by a belief that others lack the virtues one believes oneself to possess, this can engender a sense of a particular kind of superiority over those others – call it moral superiority.[531]

The POR's compensation, the feeling of moral superiority, is intimately related to the very structure of *ressentiment*. Failing to live up to her aesthetic, vital, cognitive or spiritual values (all non-moral), the POR's strategy is to *morally* condemn those values (or exemplification thereof) because she feels distressed by her relative inferiority in one of these axiological domains. In other words, the POR attributes moral values to the world in such a way that her self-worth is improved on the particular scale she invokes. And of course, one can invoke such feelings of moral superiority through the direct attribution of a moral disvalue or through a redefinition of the relation between non-moral values. Sour grapes and sweet lemons judgements can work in both ways, by attributing a negative moral value to the coveted good or by affirming the positive moral value of what is already possessed and mastered, but also by playing what is believed to be a higher value against the one that is unreachable.

But the mechanism does not have to be so direct, for the same feeling can be triggered by a reevaluation that is *not moral*. In reality, it is very often the case that *ressentiment* reevalu-

529 GS, 359. Emphasis added.

530 Solomon, 2007, p. 109.

531 Poellner *in* May, 2011, p. 126. Poellner's interpretation of Nietzsche attributes a key role to the feeling of moral superiority:

> The *ressentiment* subject's self-interpretation in terms of those reactively acquired avowed values enables her to overcome her original, hedonically negative, state through a favourable comparative appraisal of her own 'virtue' *vis-à-vis* the moral deficiency of the Other who is the object of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche stresses that this overcoming of suffering through a 'self-affirmation' made possible by the consciousness of a moral superiority over the resented Other is the fundamental purpose served by the dynamic of *ressentiment* (Poellner, 2004, p. 47).

ations attribute non-moral values. How then can it arouse a feeling of moral superiority? The moral dimension of *ressentiment* builds on the fact that the POR feels morally superior because she prefers non-moral values she believes are more important. Quite ordinary examples, as well as folk psychology, support this account. One can pride oneself, morally, for following a healthy and environmentally friendly life style. Preferring the pursuit of riches over a frugal lifestyle becomes, hence, an immoral enterprise. One can derive, in other words, a sense of moral superiority from preferring what is believed to be a positive value over a negative one, or a set of more important values. The POR who opposes her considerate heart and compassion to the ruthlessness and self-interest of wealthy businessmen is not altering her moral preferences *per se*, but derives a sense of moral superiority for preferring values she considers more important and rejecting the traits of the capitalist. Recall that strong *ressentiment* corresponds to a reevaluation of a value-hierarchy. The proper reevaluation is then an alteration of beliefs about the relative importance of two values. Suppose I prefer intellectual accomplishments over pleasure. If I never succeed in the former domain, I may come to question of intellectual achievements and invert this hierarchy.

The fundamental point in all this, however, is Scheler's idea that moral values cannot be preferred directly but ride “on the back” of our preferences for higher non-moral values. If true, this is an important thesis concerning the moral judgement implied by our endorsement of a new ranking of values and it seems in any case to be assumed by some aspects of the everyday psychology of *ressentiment.*

Ressentiment is not just a matter of finding a realm of values in which one excels, and then playing this off against the good or person that causes our initial feeling of inferiority in the hope of drawing some compensatory satisfaction; *ressentiment* does not consist, for example, in simply arousing the strong belief that although I am not a savvy businessman at least I am a thoughtful and intelligent person. Instead, the phenomenon involves a judgement about the moral superiority of the values I have – and come to prefer – versus the values I originally preferred but which are embodied by someone else.

In sum, the reevaluation mechanism can either be directly moral or subtly imply a new hierarchy that places my values higher up and thus makes me feel morally superior. In the first case, the POR compensates for her distressing experience by attributing a negative moral value *to her rival* who becomes, for example, *evil*, *egoist*, probably *dishonest*, and certainly *indifferent* towards environmental issues, since he drives a fancy sports car. In the second case, the POR puts forward new non-moral values that she can live up to and which ought to be preferred, according to her hierarchy. This is why endorsing frugality and cognitive virtues to be superior to ambition and shrewdness – none of which are moral values – makes me a morally better person. The simplest case is illustrated when the characteristic reevalu-

ations explicitly predicate moral values and disvalues. In most ordinary cases however, the POR simply draws a positive value from embodying something she believes to be of higher moral value, either because she attributes some virtue to herself or because her condition contrasts favourably with her rival's, whom she disparages with all kinds of predicates.

When the POR indulges herself by thinking that she bears positive (or neutral) moral values while her rival exemplifies negative moral values, her reevaluations often come with the glow of moral superiority and its associated righteousness. In many respects, the POR thus resembles the Pharisee, who, as Mulligan puts it:

> [...] is a man who not only admires his own generosity or political commitments but admires these because they are morally good. He admires what he takes to be his moral superiority and glows with self-righteousness.[532]

We can conclude, first, that the mechanism of *ressentiment* always transforms an unpleasant experience of non-moral values into a moral response, which can be direct or indirect. Second, this reevaluation allows the POR to alleviate her own suffering by feeling morally superior. As Poellner explains, the new values "are not being adopted for their own sake but because the blame they make possible satisfies the subject's desire for (a kind of) superiority or power over the object. The *ressentiment* values are adopted *for this reason".*[533] This is also why Nietzsche considers moral values to be a "medicine", where value is measured in regard to its efficiency in ending suffering:

> Even if morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value. Thus nobody up to now has examined the value of that most famous of all medicines which is called *morality;* and the first step would be – for once to *question* it. Well then, precisely this is our task.[534]

While the POR's inferiority is relative to any kind of value, she always projects – in a deceitful way, as we shall later see – her superiority into the realm of moral values. She can feel bad for being, say, weak, poor, ugly, or foolish (non-moral disvalues). But in all cases, she comes to re-evaluate being weak, poor, ugly, or foolish as *virtues* (direct) or as being *preferable* to being powerful, wealthy, beautiful, and proud (indirect). The POR hence overcomes "her original, hedonically negative, state through a favourable comparative appraisal of her own 'virtue' […] made possible by the consciousness of a moral superiority over the resented Other".[535] This strategy seems rational to adopt, at least in the way it solves the POR's

[532] Mulligan *in* Sanders & Scherer, 2009, p. 263.

[533] Poellner, 2004, p. 49.

[534] GS, 345.

[535] Poellner, 2004, p. 47. He adds:

> The process [of *ressentiment*] would not occur if it did not enable the subject to deal with her suffering through acquiring a sense of self-worth involving

hedonic problem. Scheler in particular seems to think that strong *ressentiment* may eventually be successful in that sense:

> […] for the impulses of revenge against those who are strong, healthy, rich, or handsome now disappear entirely. *Ressentiment* has brought deliverance from the inner torment of these affects. Once the sense of values has shifted and the new judgments have spread, such people cease to be enviable, hateful, and worthy of revenge. […] There is no more calumny, no more defamation of particular persons or things.[536]

But are Pharisaism and self-righteousness a durable solution? Does a feeling of moral superiority permanently put an end to all of the POR's sufferings? None of the traditional characters of *ressentiment* really seem to be radiant and blooming. If folk psychology can provide any guidance, one may wonder why this is the case. A person of *ressentiment* is always unstable in some way, emotionally speaking, and her newly endorsed values need to be reconfirmed again and again. In fact, the original experience of value in *ressentiment* continues to motivate and guide the man of *ressentiment*: what he cannot achieve has a positive value, and despite his best efforts he cannot avoid acknowledging this fact that he ardently masks and counterfeits.[537] Scheler remarks that the original valuings and evaluations still impose themselves on the person who tries to falsify or change them;[538] the man of *ressentiment* may be "delivered from hatred, from the tormenting desire of an impossible revenge, though deep down his poisonous sense of life and the true values may still shine through the illusory ones".[539] In very similar fashion, Reginster claims that:

> The "man of *ressentiment*" is thus divided between two sets of desires (and values): the apparent desires (and values) which he has as a result of his reevaluation, and the real desires (and values) which are "repressed" but nonetheless covertly motivate his reevaluation.[540]

This is why the POR never completely manages to deceive herself: her evaluations are conflicting with her deep-rooted valuations. The old values, their associated feeling of inferiority and the characteristic hosile emotional responses are therefore still present in her experi-

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> essentially a consciousness of superiority over the object of *ressentiment*" (*idem*). In addition, one of the important symptoms of an apprehension of one's relative value to others is: "a tendency, when directly confronted with instances of the *ressentiment* values, to describe these not with monadic evaluative predicates (as 'just', 'generous', 'compassionate', etc.), but comparatively: as 'more just than x', 'more virtuous than x', and so forth" (p. 62).

536 RAM, p. 48.

537 Poellner, 2004, p. 48.

538 "The *ressentiment* experience is always characterized by this 'transparent' presence of the true and objective values behind the illusory ones – by that obscure awareness that one lives in a *sham world* which one is unable to penetrate" (RAM, p. 46).

539 RAM, p. 49.

540 Reginster, 1997, p. 303.

ence, although she may temporarily repress it and all sorts of distraction manoeuvres (e.g. cathartic account). As Wallace points out:

> The powerless might not be fully aware that they are in the grip of *ressentiment*, but the focused and intense hatred it involves will inevitably colour their experience profoundly, in ways that sit very uneasily with the dominant ethical ideology of good and bad.[541]

Another reason why *ressentiment* is physiologically harmful is related to the profoundly harmful attitudes that accompany it. Despite being a pain-reducing strategy, *ressentiment* causes even greater suffering in the long run by intensifying psychological tensions between valuations and propped-up evaluations. In Christopher Janaway's words:

> The self-hatred and emotional conflictedness promoted by morality are, in Nietzsche's eyes, forms of sickness that produce more suffering than they cure and lead us on a downward path towards nihilism and a total negation of our self-worth.[542]

Indulging in *ressentiment* is therefore irrational because it gives only ineffective and temporary relief. Perhaps is this increased suffering is a result of the characteristic attempt by the POR to repress or suppress her hostile emotions. Nietzsche also argues that bad conscience and ascetic ideals are both the products of repressed instincts.[543] This affective management is not without consequences, as Elster puts it, the "[s]uppression of spontaneous emotional experiences and action tendencies may have a large negative impact on soma and psyche". [544] Scheler remarks that:

> Since all outward expression is blocked, the inner visceral sensations which accompany every affect come to prevail. All these sensations are unpleasant or even painful, so that the result is a decrease in physical well-being. The man in question no longer feels at ease in his body; it is though he moves away from it and views it as an unpleasant object.[545]

In sum, the POR's feeling of moral superiority, which she attempts to nurture through the reevaluation mechanism, is an additional experience of value. It is deceptive and fragile, and seems to compete with the individual's original feelings of value. From the point of view of our limited conception of rationality, *ressentiment* is not rational. It fails to completely erase the painful experience of values that triggers the whole sequence.

3.2.5 From repressed hostility to moral emotions

In this section we will reconsider again the emotion involved in *ressentiment* and focus more particularly on the ones that characterise the reevaluation process. We previously defended

[541] Wallace, 2006, p. 221.

[542] Janaway, 2007, p. 3.

[543] GM, II, 16.

[544] Elster, 1996, p. 1392.

[545] RAM, p. 44.

the view that the POR is someone who is mainly attempting to overcoming her distress with a propped up feeling of moral superiority. But how is this feeling experienced? We will now argue that it is experienced in the form of moral emotions.

To say that the person of *ressentiment* changes her evaluations is a shorthand for what is in fact a much more complex phenomenon. At different stages of this enduring phenomenon, the POR transitions from impressions of value and evaluations and *emoting* based thereon, to different impressions and evaluations and so, too, to different ways of emoting. As Griffiths remarks:

> Emotions are a class of mental processes in which people regain psychic equilibrium by altering their perception of reality rather than altering reality itself [...] people can use emotions to view the world in a light that is psychologically more rewarding to us than other possible interpretations.[546]

The original occurrence of envy, hatred, or revengefulness signals, indirectly, an affective attachment to unreachable goods and unrealisable values. Suppose I envy my neighbour; this might be the case because I find his wealth and good looks desirable while I painfully experience my incapacity to exemplify these qualities myself. A feature of such ordinary episodes is always that I *positively* value these goods in the first place. But then, in *ressentiment* I alter my attachments – by finding, say, the grapes *sour* and power *evil.* Which emotions manifest an attachment to these *new* values? What attitudes exhibit a new commitment to, say, frugality, which is preferred over wealth, or modesty which is favoured over sensuous pleasure? And more generally, how are these new values experienced?

When *ressentiment* grows out of envy and a feeling of inferiority, there is an identifiable set of emotions marking the POR's transition to new value judgements or to a new axiological hierarchy. The characteristic judgements of *ressentiment* involve a *moral* reevaluation of the world. This, as we have argued, can occur *directly*, as when I belittle my neighbour as morally depraved, and praise my standing as morally good; or – as we have seen – *indirectly*, as when I consider my own frugality and humility to be higher non-moral values and come to apprehend myself as morally superior for *preferring* them. We shall now analyse the claim that the POR's *emotional responses* are, in these cases, moral too. The specification here is necessary, for there is a form of *ressentiment* that does not entail that kind of moral reevaluation, for example, Aesop's fox, who turns sweet grapes into sour ones.

Determining the exact relation between indignation, *ressentiment* and the reevaluation process will allow us to fulfil an important *desideratum*, mentioned in the Introduction, which is to determine whether *ressentiment* is truly distinct from resentment and whether or not the kind of resentment harboured by the POR is genuine. From what we already know, resent-

[546] Griffiths *in* Hatzimoysis, 2003, pp. 59-60.

ment is clearly not to be confused with *ressentiment*; the phenomena are of quite different kinds. Yet the POR also comes to feel and harbour resentment, and this is probably why the two concepts are still so often identified. The question, then, is whether there is any difference between the POR's resentment and the familiar emotion I experience in response to wrongdoing. We will address this question from a more general standpoint and consider the relation between moral emotions and *ressentiment.* For resentment is not the only attitude the POR harbours; indignation and a general self-righteous attitude are part of her characteristic responses as well. Resentment in this case has a narrower scope and should be contrasted with other moral emotions such as shame and guilt. Unlike the latter emotions, the relevant states in the case of *ressentiment* are "other-condemning", as opposed to the family of "self-conscious" moral emotions.[547]

We shall argue that both the experience of resentment and indignation provide some relief from the tension caused by the repression of hostile attitudes and the initial experience of inferiority. Both are vectors of her attempt to counterbalance a damaged sense of self-worth with a feeling of moral superiority. But how does this mechanism work and how these emotions related to the POR's evaluations. In particular, let us see whether the very structure of the reevaluation process also warrants such role for indignation and resentment.

Indignation

Let us first consider indignation and its relation to *ressentiment*. Indignation is often bound up with the disvalue of injustice. But we have argued that indignation is not exclusively a response to the disvalue of injustice; the emotion is also directed at the wrong caused by the failure of others to exemplify certain values. If courage and orderliness are important values to me, when someone behaves in a cowardly fashion or makes my flat untidy, I will feel wronged and respond with indignation.

In other words, indignation reveals my attachment to these values even when their non-instantiation by others has no direct consequence on my sense of self-worth (see chapter 2). The values picked out by indignation are important for the individual and the emotion therefore vindicates norms and claims such as "people *ought* to be orderly" or "people *ought* to conduct their business thriftily". An indignant person implicitly raises new claims when she sees that some norm has been violated; a norm that is of the form "value *V* ought to be instantiated" or "value *V* ought to be preferred over value *W*". We have previously assumed that values ground norms. The attachment to, say, the value of justice (very much a hard-wired capacity of our brain[548]) is manifested in the affective support of norms of justice and

[547] Haidt, 2003.

[548] Binmore, 2005.

emotional reactions when such norms are violated. Wealthy businesspeople who dodge their taxes transgress a norm of fairness and cause my moral indignation. Such examples are quite straightforward when indignation is seen to respond to the injustice of an action, but it can have different objects too. A very prosaic case such as a lack of tidiness can arouse indignation, for example. Puritans typically condemn, morally, the absence of such a trait in others. And as a Swiss protestant, I may come to find that my negligent neighbour is breaching essential norms of thriftiness and diligence. Since these are positive, non-moral, values to me, their non-instantiation bears a negative value. Hence, indignation is not exclusively a reaction to injustice; it can also be a response to the non-instantiation of a *different* kind of value, which is experienced as the violation of a norm that wrongs me.

Considering the case of the person of *ressentiment* more specifically, it appears that her newly endorsed evaluations come with various emotional vindications. The POR always apprehends her rival as lacking the values or virtues she considers good, or as preferring lower over higher values. She may regard her own weaknesses as a form of humility, and thus her rival as arrogant. Her new preferences – favouring modesty over pride – are then signalled by bouts of indignation against her rival's alleged lack of humility. The same phenomenon is illustrated in the case of my relation to a rich and successful neighbour. If I try to overcome my suffering and feeling of inferiority by valuing the opposite values of frugality and discretion – a typical sweet-lemon strategy – I will harbour indignation towards anyone who fails to be frugal and discrete. In fact, in order to find out which state of affairs the person of *ressentiment* could be indignant about, one simply needs to observe the content and structure of her reevaluation. If the POR comes to value *B* instead of her original value *A*, she will feel indignant about a perceived deficiency of *B* or the presence of *A* which, by definition, is an attribute of her rival. Indignation makes the indignant condemn.

Indignation is grounded in the POR's reevaluation. If she comes to prefer frugality and humility, clearly the perception of the opposite traits or of any preference for less important values triggers indignation. Since indignation is the affective correlate of the values the POR comes to adopt in the wake of her reevaluation, we should bear in mind that these new values are endorsed in an attempt to obtain relief from the repeated repression of hostile emotions and a damaged sense of self-worth. We may therefore also consider the hypothesis that the POR's indignation is, in reality, simply envy expressed differently. This, of course, should not be understood as a reductionist assertion; the two emotions *are* different. Yet this does not rule out the possibility that indignation constitutes an *expression* of envy, repressed envy in particular.[549] Aristotle already remarked that envy may be thought to be almost the same thing

[549] People experiencing envy might eventually "find additional ways to focus on both the moral baseness of the target of their envy and on the seemingly unfair process through the advantage came about. This process might begin to tip the transmutational process toward indignation and resentment proper together with

as indignation, for they are disturbing pains excited by the prosperity of others, although in envy, there is no consideration of desert.[550] Ranulf claims that "moral indignation (which is the emotion behind the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment) is a kind of disguised envy".[551] The once influential German economic historian Sombart argues that industriousness and thriftiness are important virtues for the lower middle class. They are in fact the condition for their economic survival. However, these traits only become virtues, he claims, because members of this class indulge in sweet-lemon reevaluations; their social and economic condition are deemed morally superior *in response* to their oppressed, and repressed, envy of the upper classes, which they apprehend with indignation.[552] The once influential Erich Fromm also believes that a salient attribute of the bourgeoisie is its propensity to "rationalise envy as moral indignation".[553]

How should these claims be understood? Since the experience of *ressentiment* is marked by the repression of hostile emotions, one way for the POR to discharge, say, her envy is to harbour indignation instead. Apart from allowing her to uphold, in the end, her new values, this transmutation strategy is realised through reevaluation and comes with several benefits. First, it allows the POR to vent her repressed tensions and aggressiveness in the form of a public and moral disapproval of the rival. Second, it provides an alternative to private vengeance or direct attack on the rival which, although desired intensely, cannot be acted out by the impotent person of *ressentiment*. When struck by envy, an individual may want to personally harm his rival or destroy the coveted object; indignation on the other hand comes with a desire to see his rival punished *impersonally.* This has the effect of "lifting the object of *ressentiment* out of the hands of revenge".[554] From the POR's perspective, the expected outcome is similar, since envy motivates potentially harmful actions and indignation supports claims and norms that are detrimental to the rival, who the POR now thinks ought to be pun-

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the possibility of convincing others of the validity of their sense of injustice. And, finally, if people then find a way to gain a degree of increased control, the end state will be righteous indignation and full-blown resentment and the open aggression that this state of affairs can grant" (Smith & Kim, 2007, pp. 56–57).

550 Aristotle, 1386b.

551 Ranulf, 1964, pp. 1-44. Ranulf considers his theory to be identical to Scheler's theory of *ressentiment*, though he disagrees with the latter's methodology. As he puts it:

> [t]he thesis which we have tried to prove is identical with that of Max Scheler […]. But unfortunately we are not able to invoke his argument as additional evidence in support of the result at which we have arrived because the German sociologist has been content to rely on a method which, in our opinion, ought to deprive his essay of any claim to be acknowledged as a contribution to the advancement of science (Ranulf, 1964, p. 199).

552 Sombart, 1930, p. 340.

553 Fromm, 1941, p. 212.

554 GM, II, 11.

ished. This shift from personal vengeance to third-party punishment is crucial and constitutes an important property of *ressentiment.* Victims of this drive, as Darwall suggest, "rather than owning up to their sense of personal grievance, […] take the insult, as it were, impersonally, rather than personally".[555] Indignation, in other words, trades envy's private revenge for third-party punishment, a public revenge. In an important contribution to the sociology of emotions, Ranulf claims that indignation drives the emergence of a *disinterested tendency to inflict punishment*. According to him, this tendency grounds the institutionalisation of third-party punishment that is criminal law and coincides with the rise of the lower middle classes. Puritanism and Protestantism, and in particular Calvinism are, he argues, exemplifications of this phenomenon.[556]

We have argued that the man of *ressentiment* indulges in reevaluation in an attempt to arouse a feeling of moral superiority, in order to counterbalance his damaged sense of self-worth. Righteous indignation might typically be the mark of such a phenomenon. Repeated moral outrage condemns transgressors and raises claims for their punishment. It also gives the POR a moral stance from which she condemns the rival and his deficiencies with regard to certain values. But through that same indignation she shows a preference for what she comes to see as higher values and more important causes. Her actions, traits, and preferences become morally superior because they point to higher values. This is why Scheler believes that some individuals draw a sense of moral superiority from being (very) concerned about values and ideals such as those of humanitarianism.[557] Their indignation signals that *their* values are higher and ought to be preferred. Those who fail to share the same value preferences are thus thought to fail from a moral standpoint. The POR eventually deals with moral values in a Pharisaical way. Her excessive righteousness signals the fact that she directly aims to realise moral values and excellence, as we have seen, if Scheler is to be believed, the exemplification of moral values cannot be willed directly without running the risk of self-righteousness.[558] The person of *ressentiment* comes across as someone who glows with moral superiority – a feeling entirely grounded on her reevaluations. Nietzsche illustrates this specific relation between *ressentiment* and indignation in his portrayal of Eugen Dühring, a crude anti-Semitic moralistic agitator who, as we have noted, also happens

555 Darwall, 2013, p. 3.

556 As Mencken writes, more idiosyncratically:

> There is only one honest impulse at the bottom of Puritanism, and that is the impulse to punish the man with a superior capacity for happiness – to bring him down to the miserable level of 'good' men, i.e., of stupid, cowardly and chronically unhappy men (Mencken, 1982, p. 163).

557 RAM, Chap. 4.

558 Mulligan, 2009; FORM; Blosser, 1999.

to be the father of the expression "*ressentiment*". This figure offers a telling example of what Nietzsche calls *Kranken-Pharisäismus*. As he puts it:

> The hoarse, indignant baying of sick hounds, the vicious mendacity and rage of such 'noble' Pharisees, can be heard right into the hallowed halls of learning (I again remind readers who have ears to hear of that apostle of revenge from Berlin, Eugen Dühring, who makes the most indecent and disgusting use of moral clap-trap of anyone in Germany today: Dühring, today's biggest loudmouth of morality, even amongst his kind, the anti-Semites). These worm-eaten physiological casualties are all men of *ressentiment*.[559]

The POR tends to be excessively indignation; she presents all the traits of what Sunstein calls an "indignation entrepreneur".[560] Repeated moral outrage and a glow experienced in relation to one's derived moral superiority are characteristic of *ressentiment.* This is also discernible in the characteristic trait of *pettiness*, which according to Ossowska is:

> the tendency towards keeping a malicious eye on what other people are doing, *a tendency to be shocked and scandalised by their behaviour, even when this in no way impinges on the interests of those who resent it*.[561]

This disposition is not to be confused with mere irritability; indignation is not an apprehending of another's transgressions as personal offences. To be shocked and scandalised are rather ways to show disapprobation of the fact that some individuals, by their very conduct or simply in the values they personify, transgress norms. This is then experienced as a moral issue and seen as something that ought to be punished. In the case of *ressentiment*, these tendencies become loud and recurrent. As Nietzsche puts it:

> You can look behind every family, every corporate body, every community: everywhere, the struggle of the sick against the healthy – mostly a silent struggle with small doses of poison, pinpricks, spiteful, long-suffering looks, but also interspersed with *the loud gesture of the sick Pharisee playing his favourite role of 'righteous indignation'*.[562]

Or, as Snare puts it:

> Moral indignation represents itself not as personal dislike or hatred, but as hatred of moral evil as such. Again, moral blame represents itself as something other than dislike or striking back at insult.[563]

559 GM, III, 14.

560 "The goal of indignation entrepreneurs is to convince people that indignation is appropriate and that the costs of expressing such indignation are worth incurring"(Sunstein, 2001, p. 351.)

561 Ossowska, 1986, p. 21. Emphasis added.

562 GM, III, 14. Emphasis added.

563 Snare, 1992, p. 126.

Apart from its excessiveness, *ressentiment*'s indignation is also highly contagious.[564] The display of indignation, outrage, and harsh condemnations are powerful tools of persuasion in that regard. The Swiss psychoanalyst Forel explains this very clearly:

> Le *ressentiment* a une tendance à la propension, au prosélytisme dans les rangs des envieux. Alors que les sentiments les plus voisins du *ressentiment*, tels que : amertume, envie, jalousie, bouderie, réaction à des blessures d'amour-propre, de dignité ou de vanité restent, en général, limités l'individu, un *ressentiment* individuel peut se propager, peut soulever les masses, s'étendre à une nation, à tout une race.[565]

According to recent empirical findings, the force behind such contagion seems to be blaming attitudes such as resentment and indignation.[566] Whether the POR consciously and strategically turns into a proselyte in order to "grasp the susceptibility of the masses to this dynamic, and exploit it expressly for the purpose of undermining power"[567] or whether *ressentiment*'s effect on the masses is only the unconscious by-product of its Pharisaical emotions is still an open question at this stage. This question is related to the conscious or unconscious nature of the reevaluation strategy and will be discussed in Chapter 4 on self-deception.

Resentment

Apart from indignation, the POR may also harbour resentment. But how is the latter related to the reevaluation process?

Where Ranulf explicitly sees indignation as a form of transmuted envy, Sombart comes to a similar conclusion with regard to resentment. Sombart thinks that our economic ethos has grown out of the sour-grapes psychology of the middle class, "who looked with jealous eyes upon the conduct of their superiors, damned this conduct as sinful, and taught the wickedness of the seigniorial life, though deep down in their hearts they admired and desired it". [568] Ranulf's reading of Sombart suggests that resentment – along with indignation – is another possible outcome of repressed envy and thus another motive behind the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment.[569] There sometimes occurs a slight confusion about the nature of

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564 Polman & Ruttan, 2012, p. 136. As Scheler puts it, "[t]he spiritual venom of *ressentiment* is extremely contagious" (RAM, p. 27). See also Willmott, 2001. This fact is noted by Wurmser:

> Political leaders owe their power of persuasion often, maybe mostly, to the skilful play on widespread and sometimes contradictory resentments; their own often palpably burning resentment may serve as a magnetically sensitive instrument resonating to the popular and multiply caused sense of resentment. (Wurmser, 2009, p. 386)

565 Forel, 1948, p. 4.

566 Fast & Tiedens, 2009.

567 Wallace, 2006, p. 224.

568 Sombart, 1967, p. 340.

569 Ranulf, 1964, p. 43.

resentment in this context. Snare, for example, treats resentment as if it were a hostile emotion of the same kind as envy.[570] If one reduces resentment to a mere urge for revenge, the confusion is understandable. But resentment is richer and not just a desire (see Chapter 2). Here we will follow our definition and consider the emotion as a response to the injustice of an unrighted wrong, thus classifying it as a moral emotion on a par with indignation.[571] But despite this rather straightforward distinction, several authors have noted similarities between envy and resentment. Some have defended the view that envy, like resentment, is driven by a sense of injustice.[572] Taylor for example explains that "resentment is too closely linked to envy to qualify as a vice on its own. But while vicious envy involves resentment, the resentful need not necessarily be envious".[573] Also, envy sometimes *masquerades* as resentment.[574] Ben Ze'ev explains that:

> [e]nvious people often like to emphasize their concern for moral justice, thus attempting to justify it. *Accordingly, they tend to describe their attitude as resentment rather than envy*. It is clear, however, that this is often a kind of rationalisation of their negative attitude to being inferior.[575]

Rawls has discussed the possibility that envy is sometimes expressed as resentment with great care. In order to distinguish such envious resentment from the genuine version of that emotion, one needs to transpose the individual's case to the general case. If resentment is warranted there too, we can show that circumstances are genuinely unfair and not legitimate advantages that have been distorted by the envy of the observer.[576] Formally, envy is very different from the kind of ordinary resentment we described earlier. Phenomenologically, the POR does not experience a sense of injustice. As Nietzsche suggests, however, she may come to believe in the ill-will and agency of a wrongdoer who is responsible for her ordeal. Scheler thinks that such causal attribution is an essential part of envy. And of course, blaming an individual for a wrong is then very much part of the attitude of resentment. However, this leads one to wonder whether her resentment is *really felt* or is *merely an as-if* resentment. Nietzsche suggests the POR comes to experience her hostile attitudes as mere demands for justice, a mechanism that he sees as her "most mendacious artistic stroke".[577] The authenticity of the POR's moral experience will be treated separately in Chapter 5, as we first need to examine the notion of self-deception in a way that can account for the nature of the illusions

570 Snare, 1992.

571 Ben Ze'ev, 2002.

572 Smith, 2008.

573 Taylor, 2006, p. 88.

574 Rawls, 1971; Nussbaum, 2013, p. 342.

575 Ben Ze'ev, 2000, p. 284. Emphasis added.

576 Rawls, 1971, § 81; Smith *in* Salovey, 1991, p. 81.

577 GM, I, 14; Elgat, 2015, p. 530.

held by the person of *ressentiment*. For now, it is important to note that the POR's resentment plays out in a similar fashion to her indignation: it constitutes the emotional correlate of the reevaluation process and the newly-adopted evaluations. However, the POR does not suddenly consider justice to be a positive value and injustice a negative one, as a result of the reevaluation mechanism. *Ressentiment's* resentment is instead grounded in a re-description of the unrealisable state of affairs as *unjust* (sour grapes) and a presentation of the accessible condition as *just* (sweet lemons). Since the POR's order of preference in respect to the value of justice is not altered, resentment is here limited to cases of *weak ressentiment* whereby a value – injustice – is attributed to something that is otherwise axiologically neutral. It is on this relation between envy and resentment that Nietzsche founds his theory of the origin of justice.[578]

As in the case of indignation, the expression of resentment comes with several benefits for the POR. For example, when I envy my neighbour's character and success, I may want to consider my condition an injustice, which allows me to vent my repressed hostility against him in the form of claims associated with resentment. In other words, my condition is then experienced as something that needs to be righted and my rival is experienced as the cause of it. I then criticise him on the grounds that he has violated norms of justice, I support laws, actions, and policies that are detrimental to him, and call for his (harsh) punishment since this is how justice should be done. As Hume puts it:

> The natural gratification of this passion [resentment] tends, of its own accords, to produce all the political ends of punishment; the correction of the criminal, and the example of the public[579].

Another important characteristic of resentment is the partial or impartial nature of such claims; when emanating from resentment instead of envy, they are *impartial*. Resentment, like indignation, seems to invoke norms of justice. As Snare remarks :

> [T]he negative judgements are couched in the language of impartiality. Slave morality [*ressentiment*] speaks of 'guilt', 'evil', 'sin', 'just punishment'. It represents itself as proceeding from some impartial point of view, from indignation at evil.[580]

And since the latter claims, actions, or policies are all wrapped up in a reference to justice, they are no longer considered private revenges: "Now I can really hear, says Nietzsche, what they have been saying all along: 'We good men – we are the just' – what they desire they call,

[578] Kaufman, 1969, p. 212.

[579] TMS, II, I; p. 84.

[580] Snare, 1992, p. 129. Or: "there is more of a tendency for the judgements of slave morality to presuppose or claim some impersonal or impartial stand-point than is the case in master morality. Slave morality is more ready to speak the language of justice and fairness at the deepest level of concern" (Snare, 1992, p. 127).

not retaliation, but 'the triumph of justice'".[581] But the POR may still desire to see the other taken down, stripped of his advantages and perhaps even harmed. Yet resentment demands that justice be done impersonally. Elster rightly points out that "many transmutations take the form of rewriting the triggering situation as a violation of some impartial standard of fairness, justice, or entitlement."[582] Or, as Snare puts it: "just punishment claims to be quite other than personal revenge or even a just way of handling the thirst for revenge".[583]

Resentment is hence a convenient emotion that does not need to be repressed or concealed by the POR. And the outcome it promotes against the rival/offender is of the same kind as what envy-driven actions would have carried out. This is why resentment is said to *masquerade* as envy:

> Once hostile feelings are legitimized, any residual envy becomes fully transmuted into righteous indignation and resentment proper, giving free license for direct and open actions designed to undermine the advantaged person's position.[584]

The third important feature – after allowing one to vent hostility and giving one the impression of impartiality – is that resentment is a blaming attitude, and blame is what gives the POR some relief, as suffering naturally brings us to look for a culprit and allows us to discharge hostile emotions (see the cathartic account). When we have an emotion such as envy we apprehend the positive value of something inaccessible and respond to distressing feelings of inferiority or impotence. But this is not a *blaming* attitude *per se*. The resenter, on the other hand, sees the offender as a *cause* of suffering and holds her *responsible* for the unjust state of affairs. Nietzsche claims that:

> […] the man who has come off badly seeks the reason not in his 'guilt' (like the Christians) but in society: feeling his existence to be something for which someone is *to blame*, the socialist, the anarchist, the nihilist is thus still the closest relative of the Christian, who also believes his feeling bad and his ill-constitution will be easier to bear if he can find someone to make *responsible* for it.[585]

Note that envy may already come with such a causal belief, for example when its victims believe that they are poor *because* the rich are rich.[586] However, envy alone lacks the dimen-

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581 GM, I, 14. Nietzsche also says: "It causes us no surprise to see [...] attempts often made before [...] to sanctify revenge under the name of justice" (GM, I, 11).

582 Elster, 1999, p. 350.

583 Snare, 1992, p. 126.

584 Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 58. See also Elster: "I can tell myself a story in which the other obtained the envied object by illegitimate and immoral means, and perhaps at my expense, thus transmuting the envy into indignation or anger, in the Aristotelian senses of these terms" (Elster, 1999, p. 98).

585 NB, 14[29]

586 This very common causal delusion that Scheler regards as a criterion of envy is disputed. Oksenberg-Rorty for example explains that:

sions of blame. The envier does not apprehend her rival as someone who intentionally wants to cause harm. By contrast, the POR comes to believe that the rival is the cause of her suffering, that she has been wronged, and that this state of affairs is an offence that ought to be redressed. As Poellner explains:

> [The person of *ressentiment*'s] discomfort or suffering produces in her a resentment of the Other who is taken to be its cause and motivates her to adopt a set of general evaluative norms which permit a negative appraisal of whatever values or desires are manifested in the behaviour and beliefs of the agents responsible for her suffering.[587]

From a different angle, Scruton has recently shown that the blame characteristic of *ressentiment* often takes the form of a zero sum fallacy, that is, the thought that "every loss [is] another's gain. All gains are paid for by the losers".[588] As he puts it:

> When bad things happen, especially when they happen to me, I have a motive to seek the person, group or collective that caused them and on whom they can be blamed. And the zero sum fallacy steps in to suggest that the proof of guilt lies in success.[589]

Such blame only occurs *a posteriori*; it is not an element of the first-stage of *ressentiment* (which is solely a painful acknowledgement of inferiority and impotence), but part of the reevaluation mechanism's outcome. Yet blaming provides psychological relief. It is even one of the phenomenological characteristics of *ressentiment*: namely to find, or invent, someone the POR can blame for her suffering. One of the particularities of such blame in the context of *ressentiment* is that it tends to be directed towards general and abstract entities; even when an offender cannot be found, the POR still rewrites the script in such terms that her rival comes to be seen as a wrongdoer and she as the victim of an injustice.

That *ressentiment* never presents itself as what it really is, namely as repressed hostility and a sense of inferiority and impotence, has been noted by several authors. As Solomon puts it:

> [*Ressentiment*] mocks the appearance and the titles of virtually any other emotion. Puffing itself up with moral armament, it presents itself as indignation, jealousy, and anger. Refusing to acknowledge its marked sense of inferiority, it portrays itself as hatred, or even as scorn or contempt for its superiors.[590]

> whereas the pains and fantasies of the envious resemble those of the resentful, the envious need not attribute the disparities of the natural or social lottery to intentional malevolence or collusive intrigue. They need not even believe that there has been a pattern of unfairness or injustice. (Oksenberg-Rorty, 2000, p. 93)

587 Poellner, 2004, p. 46.

588 Scruton, 2010, p. 80.

589 Scruton, 2010, p. 179.

590 Solomon, 1993, p. 290.

Elster speaks of the *transmutation* of emotions and motivations, which he distinguishes from their mere *transformation*. The former is an unconscious mechanism, an "operation 'behind the back' of the person".[591] The latter is an intentional strategy of concealment and disguise, in which the agent tries to misrepresent his motivations and emotions. Others have referred to this phenomenon as part of the protean nature of emotions.[592] This transmutation is a general mechanism that can also be seen in relation to other states. Shame and guilt are typical emotions that one also wants to conceal and that come to be expressed indirectly.[593] Elster explains that:

> Sometimes [...] the emotion may be so strong that it cannot be ignored. At the same time, it cannot be acknowledged. *The solution to the conflict is that envy is transmuted into indignation, by means of a suitable rewriting of the script*. I can tell myself a story in which the other obtained the envied object by illegitimate and immoral means, and perhaps at my expense, thus transmuting the envy into Aristotelian indignation or anger.[594]

In sum, since hostile emotions cannot be expressed or acted out, *ressentiment* expresses itself as a moral emotion instead: the reevaluation mechanism and the different value-deceptions held by the POR serve as a new ground for *indignation* or *resentment.* The trigger of this phenomenon is "the first-order pain of envy, *a burning feeling of inferiority*".[595] But hostile emotions, in general, lead to a rewriting of the script whereby the attitude is transmuted into another emotion, one that is morally acceptable and probably also pleasant to experience:

> J'observe quelqu'un qui possède un bien que je désire. Cela provoque en moi de l'envie. Or l'envie est une émotion qui me semble déshonorable. La possibilité de me voir animé par l'envie blesse mon amour-propre et déclenche en moi une méta-émotion, la honte. Pour me débarrasser de cette méta-émotion, je commence à m'interroger sur la manière dont la personne a acquis le bien que je convoite. Je trouve une raison de pense qu'elle a plus l'acquérir d'une manière immorale. Cette idée provoque en moi une réaction d'indignation qui remplace rapidement l'envie et restaure mon amour-propre.[596]

The harbouring of blaming attitudes allows one to find a culprit, an external cause for one's distress, to discharge an important psychological tension, to give one's claims an image of impartiality. But as we argued earlier (Section 3.2.4) the strategy is hardly rational, for it

591 Elster, 1999, p. 332.

592 Silver & Sabini, 1978; Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 56.

593 Turner & Stets in Stets & Turner, 2007, p. 564. Pugmire: "One of the reasons for needing to assume a given emotional stance can be the presence of another emotion that rates as unworthy and that is best expressed in disguised form" (Pugmire, 1998, p. 120).

594 Elster, 2007, pp. 158-159. Emphasis added.

595 Elster, 1999, p. 351. Emphasis added.

596 Dubreuil & Nadeau, 2011, p. 56.

does not bring about the strived-for emotional relief. The original hostility, and thus the original values, remain present in the POR's experience.[597] This is why hostile emotions are so difficult to conceal or transmute. "There is something in envy that creates emotional leaks, despite efforts to hide its presence".[598] The POR's moral emotions are derivative emotions of justice, not because they are unimportant, but because they follow (often hot) on the heels of some primary emotion like hatred or envy.[599]

3.3 Conclusion

We have presented our theory of *ressentiment* and described its defining element, namely the mechanism of reevaluation. Our view departs from definitions that reduce *ressentiment* to an emotion, or consider the reevaluation process to be an inessential part of the phenomenon.[600] We started by making an important distinction between *weak* and *strong ressentiment*. The former is a form of reevaluation that only affects the value of a particular object, situation or person, the latter is a kind of reevaluation that affects the position of a given value on some axiological scale. Both weak and strong *ressentiment* come in the form of *sour grapes* (making sweet grapes sour) or *sweet lemons* (making bitter lemons sweet). Sour grapes corresponds to the devaluation of an unreachable good or to the degrading of its acknowledged value to a lower level of a given axiological hierarchy. Sweet lemons corresponds to the positive reevaluation of something that is already mastered and possessed, or to the promotion of its value to a higher and more important spot of a given value-scale. A third refinement considers the way values are manipulated in the reevaluation process. Sour grapes reevaluation can either come in the form of a denial of the intrinsic value of an object or a denial of its positive instrumental value. In the very same fashion, sweet lemons reevaluation can either come in the form of the attribution of a positive value, or an emphasis on the positive instrumental value of some already possessed object or trait.

We then focused on the question of whether the different kinds of *ressentiment* were practically rational, that is, whether the POR, whose reevaluation is a response to a state of affective distress, finds a durable psychological relief from indulging in reevaluation. We considered three different theories. We rejected the first, hedonic, account because it doesn't fit *ressentiment*'s phenomenology. This sentiment may have agreeable aspects, but our ordinary understanding of the reevaluation mechanism classifies it as an unpleasant and psychologically unstable state of self-deception. All of the POR's evaluations and actions can be explained as attempts to improve and re-establish a positive hedonic balance. But, in the end, *ressenti-*

[597] Poellner, 2004, p. 48.

[598] Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 54.

[599] Solomon, 1990, p. 247.

[600] See Elgat, 2017.

ment is unsuccessful. We then reconstructed and evaluated the views found in Nietzsche's writings, some of which Scheler seems to share. The second, cathartic, account insists on the numbing and distracting effect of emotions. Its general form emphasises the role of passions and intense pain in distracting the POR from her suffering and thus providing her with some relief from *ressentiment*'s characteristic sources of distress, namely the feelings of impotence and inferiority, as well as the tension caused by the reliving and repression of hostile emotions. The blame account – a variant of the cathartic theory – suggests that the POR finds some relief in the emotional discharge of her hostility in the form of blaming emotions (resentment and indignation). This view rests on the premise that the individual holds a delusional blaming of wrongdoers. The POR believes the latter are responsible for her shortcomings and suffering, and turns therefore her hostility against them. The last variant of the cathartic view, the guilt account, suggests that the POR finds some relief by turning the blame against herself. On this view, the POR apprehends herself as responsible for her own misery and turns therefore her hostility against herself in the form of the emotion of guilt. Despite its hedonic irrationality, Nietzsche suggests that guilt allows for some relief as it removes the greatest distress of all, namely the *senselessness* of suffering. According to the guilt account, the POR manages to make sense of her suffering once she identifies herself as the culprit. We argued that all variants of the cathartic view fall short as a description of how the unpleasant feelings of inferiority and impotence – the very first stage of *ressentiment* – are effectively overcome. One the one hand, an emotional distraction can only work temporarily and, on the other, the best way to counter a nagging feeling of inferiority is to induce its opposite, namely a feeling of superiority. This is why we argued in favour of a third theory, which presents *ressentiment* as a compensatory mechanism that induces a feeling of moral superiority.

This last theory finds its main expression in the POR's display of moral emotions such as indignation and resentment. We argued that they are the emotional manifestations of the reevaluation process.

Resentment is therefore related to *ressentiment* because the former is a potential emotional expression of the latter phenomenon. Resentment in this case is based on the POR's evaluation that someone is to be blamed for her condition and sufferings, that such a wrong remains unjustly unrighted. Indignation is an outcome of *ressentiment* because the POR comes to apprehend the failure of others to instantiate the values she comes to endorse as a wrong. For example, the diligent, thrifty, but envious craftsman is indignant at the aristocrats because they disregard his newly adopted values of humility, diligence and thriftiness (see Chapter 6). In fact, both indignation and resentment are only the vectors by which the POR attempts to prop-up her feeling of moral superiority. In *ressentiment*, both indignation and

resentment are harboured self-righteously. The POR is not trying to numb the pain via another distressing experience, but trying to feeling better about herself. Indignation is a response to the fact that other fail to instantiate self-relevant values. Self-righteous indignation occurs when one also feels morally superior for preferring what one considers to be higher values.

4 *RESSENTIMENT* AND THE SELF

We have distinguished two forms of *ressentiment* in terms of the different kinds of reevaluation they involve. Weak *ressentiment* leads the fox to take the ripe and so good grapes to be sour and so bad. This is a change in what is taken to exemplify value. In strong *ressentiment*, the POR reverses the ordering of importance between two values or the sign of two opposed values. Both variants entail an alteration of the experience of values. But does the POR wholeheartedly endorse the new values she publicly promotes and endorses? Is she aware that she has re-evaluated the coveted goods? Has she completely changed her mind about what exemplifies what values, or about the relations of importance between values? Is she perhaps dimly aware that the grapes are in fact still sweet, ripe and good or that in philosophy logic is more important than rhetoric? We shall in this chapter try to determine what kind of self-deception is involved in *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment implies a form of self-deception – perhaps even different forms of self-deception – but self-deception does not necessarily entail *ressentiment*. The relation between self-deception and *ressentiment* is noted by Nietzsche, as well as his interpreters, early and late. He makes repeated use of the concept, reminding us, for example, that: "the most common lie is the lie one tells to oneself"[601], that "everything [in the New Testament] is self-deception and closing one's eyes to oneself"[602], and, most famously, that the man of *ressentiment* is: "neither upright nor naive nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul *squints; his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security, his* refreshment".[603] *Ressentiment* is hence apprehended as a form of counterfeiting and the self-deception of powerlessness (*Falschmünzerei und Selbstverlogenheit der Ohnmacht*), a sublime form of self-deception (*Selbstbetrugerei*).[604] Klages devotes an entire chapter to the concept of self-deception in his account of Nietzsche on *ressentiment* and claims that:

> Nietzsche did not develop any theory of self-deception but he applied the tools he found in order to track self-deception in every form so thoroughly, successfully, and forcefully that the researchers who succeeded him had not much else to do in that regard than to haul out the fundamental findings and relate them thematically with one another.[605]

The importance of self-deception for the characterisation of *ressentiment* has been stressed by more recent Nietzsche scholars too. Thus Poellner in particular claims that it is "evidently

601 AC, 55.

602 A, 46.

603 GM, I, 10.

604 GM, I, 13.

605 Klages, 1930, pp. 48-49.

impossible to state Nietzsche's *ressentiment* hypothesis without a concept of self-deception".[606] Reginster claims that "*ressentiment* valuation involves a form of self-deception".[607] Outside Nietzsche scholarship, Dworkin claims that "*ressentiment* is a form of self-deception that is triggered by a combination of fear and impotence"[608], while Elster considers adaptive preferences (sour grapes and sweet lemons judgements) to be self-deceptive.[609] Scheler, whose monograph on *ressentiment* discusses claims from the *Genealogy*, only associates *ressentiment* once to a form of self-delusion (*Selbsttäuschung*) in his essay, but defines it elsewhere as an "illusion concerning 'psychic processes'".[610] As we shall later see, he seems to reserve the expression "self-deception" for illusions of inner-perception. He also distinguishes between *errors* which belong to the sphere of judgement and belief, and *illusions* which belong to the sphere of intuition, perception and immediate cognition. Errors he claims are inaccurate and wrong inferences, judgements and beliefs, all of which belong to the sphere of conceptual representations. Misleading perceptions however are not errors but illusions. The two categories are independent as I can, for example, make true judgements about a hallucination.[611] *Ressentiment*, he thinks, involves, in the first place, a form of illusion rather than error, as it involves an alteration of non-conceptual impressions – valuations – rather than cognitive states such as beliefs and judgements, or evaluations.

In order to understand the nature of *ressentiment*'s characteristic form of self-deception, we shall first (Section 4.1) discuss several standard accounts of the phenomenon and how self-deception needs to be distinguished from cognate forms of irrationality. We then analyse these accounts in the light of the theory of *ressentiment* developed so far. In particular, we will argue that doxastic theories fail to apprehend the nature of the phenomenon and fail to satisfy all desiderata that a theory must be able to fulfil. We shall then (Section 4.2) list and evaluate potential objects of the POR's self-deception. Here, we will argue that only two of the candidates put forward in the literature are viable candidates: either the POR is self-deceived about the (dis)value of an external object and the ranking of values, or the POR is self-deceived about the occurrence of an emotion. The next section (Section 4.3) will then address and criticise two accounts which deny the very possibility that *ressentiment* involves a form of self-deception at all. According to the first account, *ressentiment* is only a form of cynical hypocrisy strategically used by the POR to further her revenge. We shall reject this account on the grounds that either it is contradictory or that it fails to fit with our ordinary

606 Poellner, 2000, p. 229.

607 Reginster, 1997, p. 281.

608 Dworkin, 1996, p. 92.

609 Elster, 2010; Zimmerman, 2003, p. 222.

610 ISK, p. 8.

611 ISK, p. 12.

understanding of the phenomenon as a familiar form of mendacity. According to the second account, *ressentiment* leads to a full internalisation of values: that is, to a durable alteration of our valuations. The POR does not just believe that the grapes are sour or that the useful is more important than truth. She actually feels the new values, and she privileges, through her altered preferences, what is useful over what is true. However, this second account fails to apprehend the POR as a conflicted individual, and fails to treat *ressentiment* as an experience of continued psychological tensions. Our own alternative theory will be developed in the fourth (4.4) and last section of this chapter.

The central tenets of the solution we propose build on the assumption that value-feelings and value-preferences are non-conceptual experiences. They are not judgements or beliefs. Furthermore, they may be experienced although the agent is not aware of them, does not reflect on them or, if he does reflect on them, does not conceptualise them correctly. This holds true for the hostile emotions as well, which, as mentioned earlier, are said to be repressed (Section 3.1.1). The POR in particular fails to notice the exact nature of her feeling, preferring and emoting. She fails to note her envy and revenge, or takes them to be something else, namely indignation and resentment. Self-deception in the case of *ressentiment* is therefore a lack of self-knowledge. It is an illusion of inner perception that keeps the POR unaware of either the content of her value-feelings and preferences, or her occurrent emotions.

4.1 Standard accounts of self-deception

The nature of self-deception remains an open question and is still much debated. Examples of the phenomenon include patients who fail to notice symptoms of a deadly illness (Oksenberg-Rorty)[612] or who believe they have a fifty-fifty chance of surviving the disease (Mclaughlin)[613], men denying they are bald (Davidson)[614], husbands who believe their wives are faithful (Mele)[615], and the large majority of professors and students who believe their competence is above average (Mele).[616] In all of these cases, the individual avoids a belief that would be distressing if it were held fully and consciously. Philosophers have expended a great deal of effort in trying to tackle the conceptual conundrums this puzzling but nonetheless quite ordinary phenomenon involves. We shall now map the major theoretical solutions that have been proposed and try to locate the phenomenon of *ressentiment* on this map. In

612 Oksenberg-Rorty, 1988, p. 11.

613 McLaughlin *in* Oksenberg-Rorty, 1988, p. 29.

614 Davidson, 1986, pp. 79-92.

615 Mele, 2001b, p. 94.

616 Mele, 2001b, p. 3.

this section, we will argue that none of the cognitive accounts of self-deception seems to be able to account for *ressentiment* and the reevaluation process.

Let us first distinguish self-deception from several other forms of irrationality or unreasonableness, namely wishful thinking, evasion and rationalisation.[617] (1) Wishful beliefs are held in spite of the evidence about one's practical constraints, limitations and circumstances. The belief that I will become a great athlete despite my poor condition and lack of endurance is an example of wishful thinking. The POR, by contrast, never fully believes she possesses the traits she covets and always remains aware that her impotence prevents her from fulfilling her desires. The wishful-thinker, then, differs from the POR because he tends to discard the evidence mounting up against the realisability of his desires, something the POR, on the contrary, seems to have great difficulties ignoring. Some stress an additional difference: the wishful-thinker does not *intentionally* come to believe what he desires. Rather he just finds himself in this state. The self-deceiver's beliefs, on the other hand, are held *intentionally* – at least according to intentionalists. (2) Evasion by contrast occurs when attention is turned away from distressing evidence speaking against our beliefs. This is clearly different from believing that our desires are in fact fulfilled. The POR does not think, imagine or act as if her desires were fulfilled (wishful thinking), nor does she come to ignore or fail to acknowledge her shortcomings (evasion). *Ressentiment*, if anything, alters the disvalue associated with the possession of the latter shortcomings and turn them into virtues. (3) Finally, rationalisation occurs when the self-deceiver judges that the distressing evidence is not conclusive. For example, I may rationalise away my wife's frequent trips to Italy as business trips rather than as evidence that she has an Italian lover. Does this occur in the case of *ressentiment*? While (1) and (2) are not applicable to the POR, (3) does indeed sometimes occur in *ressentiment*. We shall later see, for example, that, on Nietzsche's view, the POR deals with the awareness of her impotence by coming to believe that the latter is not conclusive evidence of her inferiority because weakness is a chosen state. We will develop this argument and its relation to self-deception once we have determined the objects and the scope of the sort of self-deception that *ressentiment* seems to possess.

Having distinguished between rationalisation, evasion and wishful thinking, we will now give a brief account of the standard theories of self-deception in order to see what their relations to *ressentiment* are.

The traditional way the phenomenon of self-deception has been described is based on an analogy with interpersonal deception where I, for example, believe that *p* but make someone else believe that *not-p* by asserting in his presence that *not-p. S*elf-deception, according to the analogy, refers thus to the case where I believe *p* and manage to trick myself into believing

[617] Bach, 1981, pp. 357-362.

not-p. I am both the liar and the victim of the lie. Such an approach gives rise to two much-debated paradoxes.

On this view, self-deception is a phenomenon which implies the perplexing fact that I can come to hold contradictory beliefs. This leads to the so-called doxastic or static paradox: holding two contradictory (or contrary) beliefs at the same time is deemed to be an impossible state of mind.[618] The second paradox emerges once we focus on the means by which the new belief is acquired. Consider deception of another person. In other-deception, the deceiver intentionally deceives his or her target. This feature of other-deception tracks an intuition we might have about self-deception, which is that the self-deceiver's beliefs are acquired intentionally.[619] To consider self-deception an intentional phenomenon allows one to distinguish it from mere error and to take account of the fact that we ordinarily consider self-deceivers to be *responsible* for their deception, just as we consider those who deceive others to be responsible for their deception. However, this observation leads to a puzzling state of affairs, for how can I come to believe *not-p* instead of *p* if I know that I brought myself to believe *not-p*? As Elster puts it: "the problem of self-deception is that it appears to be a logically incoherent idea: to hide something for oneself one must first notice it, but once it is noticed one cannot hide it".[620] The self-deceiver must be duped by his own deceitful strategy, for if he is not, the strategy is bound to fail. This is also why we say of him that he is lying to himself or fooling himself.[621] The latter contradiction is referred to in the literature as the *dynamic paradox* or the *strategic problem* of self-deception.

Does self-deception, understood in this way, really belong to *ressentiment*? The characteristic reevaluations of weak *ressentiment* entail that a person holds an erroneous evaluation about particular objects which is formed against weighty evidence to the contrary (the grapes are red and juicy, my neighbour has a collection of sports cars, etc.). They might even hold a belief, true or false, which is formed in spite of evidence to the contrary. This account runs up against the classic paradoxes of self-deception. It seems that the POR believes that the grapes are sweet and good but also believes that they are sour and bad, so not yet a belief that *p* and *not-p* but a belief that two contrary propositions hold; it seems that I can know that my neighbour is wealthy and handsome even as I desperately try to convince myself he is not. The POR's reevaluation, in other words, seems to imply that she both believes that *p* and believes that *not-p*; it also seems to imply that the POR intentionally brings herself to adopt inconsistent beliefs despite her apparent awareness of the strategy she is pursuing.

618 Mele, 1997, p. 92.

619 Bermúdez, 2000; Deweese-Boyd, 2016; Mele, 2001b.

620 Elster, 1999, p. 100. See also: Mele, 1987.

621 Bach, 1981.

The case of strong *ressentiment* is slightly more complex. We argued earlier (Section 3.2.3) that the characteristic reevaluation of strong *ressentiment* entails an alteration in our hierarchy of values (for example, by taking sensory values or aesthetic values to be more important than the cognitive value of correct belief). This kind of reevaluation has also been described as an alteration of value-preferences. But when reevaluation involves taking some value to be more important than another, this can mean two different things. For, strong *ressentiment* is then either an alteration of our evaluation or belief about the relative importance of two different values (say, truth and the pleasant), or it is an alteration of a preference which is a valuation and is non-conceptual.

Do either of these alterations fall prey to either of the two paradoxes of self-deception? If strong *ressentiment* is a genuine alteration of our value-preferences, the phenomenon is entirely affective; it then also falls outside the scope of the kind of self-deception considered so far. But if the POR is instead considered to be one who comes to hold the view or to believe that the pleasant is more important than correct beliefs, self-deception involves the kind of doxastic self-deception under discussion. On this account of strong *ressentiment*, the POR's reevaluation seems to imply that she both believes that, say, value A is more important than value B and that value B is more important than value A.

Let us here consider solutions to both the static and the dynamic paradoxes. The latter can be grouped into intentionalist and non-intentionalist theories, respectively.[622] An intentionalist theory of self-deception holds that the problematic belief is caused by an intention to form that belief; the self-deceiver is thus said to *intentionally* bring himself to hold conflicting beliefs. Intentionalism about self-deception captures an important aspect of our ordinary understanding of the self-deceiver's responsibility. But the phenomenon becomes rather puzzling as soon as we try to understand how the subject can remain unaware of his own deceiving manoeuvre. A possible solution to the dynamic paradox consists in some kind of temporal partitioning. Davidson, for example, stresses the fact that the new, self-deceptive, beliefs only arise at the end of a progressive sequence of actions that support the new belief that *not-p* by redirecting attention away from the evidence supporting the old belief that *p* or seeking and favouring any evidence supporting *not-p*.[623] Some have argued that the self-deceiver loses her belief that *p* which then solves the static puzzle as well, since both beliefs are then not simultaneously held. Temporal partitioning is nevertheless difficult to reconcile with ordinary examples of self-deception, especially given that we usually understand self-

[622] Borge, 2003; Deweese-Boyd, 2016; Barnes, 1997. Important intentionalist theories of self-deception have been developed by Fingarette, 2000; Pears, 1984; Davidson, 1986, Rorty,1988; Scott-Kakures, 1996; Bermúdez, 2000. Non-intentionalist accounts have been developed by Johnston, 1988; Lazar, 1999; and Mele, 2001.

[623] Davidson, 1986, pp. 79-92.

deception as a state of psychological tension which requires that we continually prevent other unwelcome beliefs from recurring.[624] *Ressentiment* in particular seems very much at odds with temporal partitioning models. The POR is incapable of forgetting and is characterised by a constant rumination about the past.

Davidson distinguishes between believing that (*p* and *not-p*), on the one hand, and believing that *p* and believing that *not-p* on the other hand.[625] In the first case, one believes a contradiction. In the second case, one holds contradictory beliefs. While the first case is an impossible state of mind, he also claims that it is possible to hold contradictory beliefs as long as they can be kept apart in the mind. Most intentionalists have therefore opted for a division of the self in which there exists a subsystem that is causally efficient but that is not apparent within reflective awareness.[626] The classic example is of course Freud's theory of repression and the unconscious. The unconscious is a subsystem keeping the distressing belief away from the individual's awareness. For example, I unconsciously believe that my wife is having an affair but I consciously believe in and reflect upon her faithfulness. The mechanism of Freudian repression is what keeps the belief about her unfaithfulness from becoming conscious and causing my distress. In the same vein, the POR unconsciously believes that some unreachable good has a positive value, but comes to believe consciously that the same good has a negative value. Irrespective of the Freudian theory, or any approach positing the existence of a subsystem, such divisions of the self are often seen as *ad-hoc* and rather mysterious.[627] Sartre famously rejects Freud's theory of the unconscious, claiming that it is contradictory. The repressed thought or desire must first be grasped consciously – which is contradictory – in order to be experienced as unpleasant and then repressed into the unconscious at a second stage. Sartre instead favours the notion of "bad faith" – a form of self-deception – that preserves the unity of consciousness but which also allows "lies" to oneself by avoiding all reflection on what is non-conceptually apprehended.[628] Additionally, we may wonder about the consequences of a split-mind solution for *ressentiment*'s self-deception. If an individual is motivated unconsciously by her old evaluations at the same time that she consciously promotes new evaluations, how could she then not become aware of the conflicting and inconsistent behaviour?[629] Bach claims such division of the mind is not necessary, as one can understand the self-deceiver as simply (attempting) not to *think* about

624 Bach, 1981.

625 Davidson, 1986.

626 Davidson, 1986.

627 Lauria et al., 2016.

628 Sartre, 2015, Chap. 2.

629 As Poellner points out: "how can the subject fail to notice, in a topic-specific manner, that some of his behaviour systematically conflicts with other action-dispositions of his and with his conscious convictions" (Poellner, 2004, p. 53).

p. Hence, I may *believe* that my wife is having an affair, but I would then simply avoid *thinking* about it. This conceptual distinction between believing – a state or disposition – and thinking – an episode – suggests that the self-deceiver's redirection of attention aims at avoiding thoughts about uncomfortable beliefs.

Unlike the intentionalist about self-deception, the non-intentionalist understands the phenomenon as a "species of motivationally biased beliefs"[630], triggered by other mental states (typically emotions) of which the individual is dimly aware. Self-deception is a motivated cognition.[631] Strong desires, for example, trigger and sustain several cognitive biases such as the confirmation bias and alter the vividness of the information that is acknowledged by the subject.[632] Self-deception is different from wishful thinking, of course, but this does not imply that a self-deceiver cannot hold biased beliefs. Such biases are manifest in many psychological mechanisms. For example, we tend to focus on relevant data because our interest confers a higher vividness to it, and our belief formation is predominately influenced by available more than relevant data. Also, we tend to pay greater consideration to data which confirm our beliefs over data which contradict it.[633] Self-deception is accordingly the phenomenon of holding a motivated belief against strong evidence to the contrary which is due to the presence and effects of affective states.[634] Unlike intentionalism, non-intentionalism considers self-deception to be a type of bias which does not need to be intentional to be successful.[635] This does not mean that the problematic belief is simply accidental; it is instead motivated by a conative or emotional state of mind. Barnes and Johnston argue that it is *anxiety* which drives an individual to indulge in self-deception;[636] Mele defends the view that self-deceptive beliefs are motivated by desires while Lazar stresses the importance of emotions in triggering self-deceptive beliefs.[637] Folk psychology attributes emotions and desires

630 Deweese-Boyd, 2012.

631 Lauria et al., 2016, p. 120.

632 Elgat, 2015; Mele, 2001.

633 Mele, 1997; Ross & Nisbett, 2011.

634 Lazar, 1999, p. 266. As Elster explains:

> Does a rational belief have to be true: it must only be well grounded in the available information. Beliefs are rational if they are formed by procedures that in the long run tend to produce more true beliefs than any alternative procedure, but on any particular occasion the belief thus formed may not correspond to the facts. This being said, belief formation is vulnerable to distorting influences of various kinds. Some of these are more in the nature of mistakes, as when we get sums wrong in arithmetic. Others, however, belong to the category of motivated irrationality, as when the adding-up errors made by a salesman systematically (although non-intentionally) work out to his favour (Elster, 1994, p. 23).

635 Lauria et al., 2016, p. 123.

636 Barnes, 1997; Johnston, 1988.

637 Lazar, 1999; Mele, 2001.

with the power to influence our thoughts and beliefs. The phenomenon of self-deception may therefore boil down to nothing more but a malfunctioning belief formation process in which the self-deceiver avoids distressing evidence due to emotions (fear, love), moods (anxiety) or desires. Mele illustrates his account with the example of a mother who strongly desires her son not to be a drug taker, for thinking of him as a drug addict would be devastating. He calls his theory "deflationary" because self-deception is neither mysterious nor paradoxical, but merely an illustration of how our beliefs can be biased and motivated by desires and emotions.

As mentioned earlier, garden varieties of self-deception are usually illustrated by bald men who come to believe they have abundant hair; by terminally ill patients who falsely believe their cancer is not fatal; or by worried husbands who come to believe their wives are not having an affair. In these examples, the belief that *p* is or would be distressing, and the affective response to it eventually brings the self-deceiver to believe that *not-p*. In the case of weak *ressentiment* however, we need a combination of distressing beliefs: the belief that *x* is valuable *and* the belief that *x* cannot be realised by the subject. Some non-intentionalists consider that the self-deceiver somehow knows the evidence, but manages to prevent the belief from becoming a *thought* (and occurent belief).[638] On the other hand, proponents of a deflationary account of self-deception claim that awareness of the distressing evidence, that is the belief that *p*, is not necessary; ignorance about *p* and some evidence about *not-p* is sufficient. A major challenge to the deflationary view of self-deception is that it cannot explain why some desires or emotions lead to self-deceptive beliefs and why other do not.[639] Another challenge is that it may become difficult to distinguish between self-deception and wishful thinking if one accepts the deflationary account. Note that intentionalists about self-deception do not deny the causal effect of affective states on our cognitive states. However, they hold that the latter must be accompanied by an intention. Intentionalists do not overlook the fact that self-deceptive beliefs are motivated or biased, but they also claim that the agent, here the POR, forms the intention to deceive herself and takes various steps in order for the deception to materialise. Proponents of the deflationary account simply consider self-deception to "occur on the basis of a biased treatment of evidence, but without any intention to disguise the truth".[640] Note that Elster's account can be viewed as deflationary in this latter sense, for adaptive preferences are a causally induced phenomenon and must be distinguished from what he calls "character planning" which is the "*intentionally* engineered adaptation of preferences to possibilities".[641]

638 Bach, 1981.

639 Bermúdez, 2000.

640 Poellner, 2004, p. 55.

641 Elster, 1983, p. 110.

Elgat has recently argued in favour of a deflationary account of *ressentiment qua* self-deception.[642] The POR's desires trigger various cognitive biases (confirmation, vividness, etc.), and this leads her to avoid the evidence to the contrary. More specifically, it is a strong desire for superiority that lies at the heart of *ressentiment*'s self-deception. The POR comes to hold motivated and false beliefs, and the priests come to believe that their weakness and lack of power is in fact virtuous and a sign of their moral superiority. Nietzsche even suggests that the priests eventually believe that they are better off, or at least will be better off some day.[643] Does a deflationary account of self-deception capture the essence of *ressentiment*? On the latter view, *ressentiment* implies no intention to adhere to new values. In fact, as Elgat explains, "as a result of the working of psychological forces [the POR] knows nothing about and which operate, so to speak, behind her back, comes to endorse the new values and believe in their genuine (intrinsic and instrumental) worth".[644] The desire for moral superiority also alters beliefs about motivations. The POR may, for example, believe that her actions are motivated by a desire for justice rather than by hostile emotions.[645] The difficulties of non-intentionalism in the case of *ressentiment* are twofold. On the one hand, deflationists consider that, because their problematic beliefs are motivated by affective states that are not acknowledged, the POR may in the end be free of all psychological tensions. On the other hand, non-intentionalism cannot account for the responsibility we ordinarily ascribe to self-deceivers. In reality, however, the POR is never portrayed as a victim; she is always as the craftsman of her own mendacity and *Tartufferie*.

Compared to standard accounts, it appears that weak *ressentiment* never really faces the static paradox, for the POR's new and old evaluations are not contradictory. The static paradox occurs if we consider that *ressentiment* brings us to *believe in* both the value and disvalue of some object, such as the grapes' *sourness* and *sweetness*, at the same time, that is, beliefs which are incompatible. Aesop's fable may here provide misleading guidance. In fact, there is an important argument showing that the static paradox does not apply to the self-deception entailed by the POR's reevaluation process. As described earlier in Chapter 3, reevaluation takes many forms. The devaluation of sour grapes judgement is most often just predicating a new value which is not opposed to the initially perceived one. My neighbour may be rich, but he is morally depraved (vice); exerting power may provide prestige, but it does not lead to happiness (instrumental disvalue); Ferraris may be great cars, but they are polluting the environment; the difficulties I encounter in mathematics might show my lack of intellectual skills, but I comfort myself by believing that I am empathetic and good with people (which is

642 Elgat, 2015.

643 GM, I, 14.

644 Elgat, 2015, p. 528.

645 Elgat, 2015; Elgat 2017.

deemed better by the self-deceiver). These examples show that weak *ressentiment*, in fact, never leads to the strong form of the static paradox because the POR's new beliefs have no content that is contradictory compared to the initial distressing apprehension of values.

It cannot be denied that each positive value has a negative contrary. But the reevaluation that takes place in weak *ressentiment* need not cause contrary values to collide. The aesthetic value of a Ferrari is not the contrary of its environmental disvalue. Where values are not contraries there is no problem in taking an object to have both, as there is with believing that *p* and *not-p*. Strong *ressentiment* on the other hand seems to face the static paradox, for the POR *believes* that value A is more important than value B and then comes to *believe* that value A is not more important than value B. Both weak and strong *ressentiment* are here analysed as if they were solely cognitive phenomena. However, this is the very premise that needs to be challenged in the first place, for, according to the epistemology of value that we have argued for, our acquaintance with values is primarily non-conceptual and realised through value-feelings and preferences. The fox has the impression that the grapes are sweet and the Nietzschean priests are struck by the power of the warrior-aristocrats. The POR's grasp of a positive value she cannot live up to is not a belief, but a value-feeling. In the same way, the POR's original preferences are non-conceptual; the fact that she later believes in a different scale of values from the one she initially prefers is surely a form of conflict, but that conflict is not exclusively cognitive as the doxastic accounts of self-deception suggest. We shall later (Section 4.4) develop an alternative view of *ressentiment*'s self-deception which uses the distinction between non-conceptual knowledge of values and inner states on one hand and cognitive, concept-involving, states on the other. The latter view should also avoid the pitfalls of the strategic paradox.

The second paradox – the dynamic or strategic paradox of self-deception – raises more difficult challenges, for how can the POR intentionally form the belief that what she desires is not valuable without seeing through her strategy? How, in other words, can the POR *qua* self-deceiver keep the reevaluation mechanism and its ends hidden from her conscious awareness? Garden varieties of both weak and strong *ressentiment* involve an unpleasant truth that one tries to hide (impotence) and unpleasant feelings one tries to ignore. The student who intentionally embraces rhetoric's superiority to logic because he fails to master the harder topic of logic is not reasoning about his failure. His evaluation is not the result of a deductive or other inferential process. It is certainly a platitude to assume that self-deceivers in general and the POR in particular adjust their values and their relative importance in order to feel better about themselves. The man in the street tends to believe that *ressentiment*, like so many other irrationalities, is not entirely conscious, and that the phenomenon somehow involves a form of lie to oneself.

The difficulty that remains unsolved so far for both weak and strong *ressentiment* is the dynamic paradox, for how can someone indulging in reevaluation not become aware of the very stratagem he uses? A theory of *ressentiment* should therefore account for the POR's recognisable shallowness and mendacity. We need to show *how* the POR fails to be aware of parts of her experience. The account we will develop in the last section (Section 4.4) rests on a distinction between two non-conceptual forms of knowledge: inner perception and the affective knowledge of values. We know that the latter comes in the form of value-feelings or correct preferences. Inner perception on the other hand is our access to inner states and occurrent emotions, and it is often thought to be infallible. But Scheler, in a powerful onslaught on the Cartesian tradition, convincingly shows that inner perception can err and that we may be disconnected from parts of our experiences. On our view, illusions of inner perception account precisely for the POR's characteristic lack of awareness of her hostile emotions and distressing value-feelings. This kind of illusion also provides a solution to the dynamic paradox.

4.2 The possible objects of *ressentiment*'s self-deception

Before we develop a more detailed account of self-deception and *ressentiment*, we first need to ask what it is that the POR is failing to see, to process, and to understand. The strategy we follow here is to identify the object of any distressing attitudes (beliefs or other non-doxastic attitudes) the POR may experience and which she tries to avoid, deny, ignore and repress. In other words, we aim to determine what the objects of the POR's self-deception are.

It appears there are several candidates. More specifically, at least five possible objects of self-deception can be distinguished. 1) The POR can deny the existence of her own shortcomings and impotence by not acknowledging them and also by maintaining the illusion that she possesses traits or goods she manifestly lacks. 2) *Ressentiment* can lead to false beliefs about the action of some external cause and the responsibility of other person(s) for personal misfortunes. Nietzsche in particular makes the point that we look for someone to blame when we are suffering. This phenomenon is a variant of what psychologists call the self-serving bias.[646] 3) Nietzsche also suggests that, apart from blaming others in response to suffering, the POR falsely believes that her choices, preferences and values are embraced freely, without constraints of any kind (either psychological or external). 4) Following the (naïve) realist conceptualisation we have adopted, *ressentiment* is self-deceptive because the POR comes to hold evaluations that are incompatible with her initial impressions of an object's value, and she seems to think herself into such thoughts intentionally. 5) A similar kind of blindness characterises *ressentiment*'s inner perception. As many interpreters have stressed,

[646] Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Heider, 1958.

the POR fails to notice her own hostile emotions and "quite literally, deceives herself about the content of her consciousness".[647] For example, unlike the strategic interpretation of *ressentiment*, the view that the phenomenon is self-deceptive tells us that *ressentiment* leads us to believe that the motives of actions and emotions we think are moral are in fact motivated by hostile emotions such as revenge or envy.

Let us begin with the POR's own inabilities. A person can hold false beliefs about her own abilities, or simply have the illusory impression that she can, say, run a marathon or seduce a woman. As Montesquieu puts it:

> When a man lacks a certain quality that he cannot obtain, vanity comes to his help and makes him imagine that he has it. Thus an ugly woman believes herself to be beautiful, and a foolish man to have wit.[648]

Since *ressentiment* builds on the existence of a recurrent and insurmountable form of impotence, it seems that a quick way to alter this unpleasant experience is to simply deny or avoid awareness of one's powerlessness. A characteristic symptom of this is the systematic shunning of situations where our capability could be tested (and our incapacity revealed), despite the fact that we act as if we were in full possession of the talent, appearance, or strength. To maintain such an illusion, we might therefore deny, ignore, and avoid all evidence that could confront us with our weakness.[649] This form of irrationality is called *escapism* or *evasion* and defined as an attempt to avoid awareness of unpleasant facts, especially when the latter relate to personal traits.[650] The bald man might deny he is bald and avoid all situations that would make his baldness salient.[651] A famous literary example of this bias is Madame Bovary. Jules de Gaultier coined the term "*bovarysm*" to describe what is essential to Flaubert's character, Emma Bovary.[652] The expression refers to the way a person holds an imagined and unrealistic conception of herself, which is of course is more flattering and potent than the real thing. It is within the capacity of some individuals to cope with unsatisfactory situations by imagining themselves to have attributes they do not possess. Flaubert's heroine dreams and convinces herself she is living up to her romantic aspirations. Yet she systematically avoids acknowledging her debts and the dullness of her provincial life as the wife of a poor country doctor. Such evasion is different from mere rationalisation, for Emma Bovary is not trying to explain away the challenges she faces by finding a different cause for them. Nor does she devalue the lifestyle she admires. She instead denies that her life-style faces any

647 Poellner, 2004, p. 45.

648 Montesquieu *in* Elster, 1999, p. 80.

649 Martin considers evading self-acknowledgement as one possible form of self-deception (Martin, 1986, pp. 6-30).

650 Longeway, 1990; Bach, 1981.

651 Davidson, 1986.

652 Palante, 2008.

challenges at all.[653] Another typical mechanism, which Bach calls *jamming*, is displayed in Emma Bovary's acting *as if* she were living the life of a French aristocrat and through her attempts to convince others she is living such a life.[654] Nietzsche sometimes suggests that the priests who are described as weak must deal with the knowledge of their own weakness.[655] But these typical examples of evasion are very different from the POR's self-deception. For Madame Bovary is not trying to repress the consciousness of her incapacity; on the contrary, she invents for herself a life that seems to face no challenges at all. In other words, the POR remains fully aware of her shortcomings; and the *ressentiment* reevaluations are indulged precisely in order to alleviate the pain such awareness causes. In fact, even if the POR's weaknesses seem to constitute an easy object of self-deception, the phenomenology of *ressentiment* reminds us that the individual is always conscious of his disadvantages. Reginster claims that acknowledged powerlessness is therefore the *cause* of the POR's self-deception, but never its object.[656]

A second way to deal with weaknesses and shortcomings is to apprehend them as freely chosen states of affairs. Let us call this account *free embrace* According to Nietzsche, the POR deludes herself about the fact that she freely chooses what may be seen as shortcomings and weaknesses. Reginster explains this idea as follows:

> If the weak do not retaliate against the strong [...], it is not because they are impotent and incapable of it, but because they simply choose not to, and show themselves able to govern their conduct in accordance with their will. The invention of free will allows them to pass off their weakness as power.[657]

Nietzsche explains that the POR "maintain[s] no belief with greater intensity than that the strong may *freely choose to be weak*, and the bird of prey to be a lamb."[658] In particular, the POR may choose to suffer for a reason we have already come across. Conway says men of *ressentiment* "prefer their suffering which they propose as an unassailable index of their goodness. *The slaves could retaliate if they so desired* [...] but they choose instead the righteous path of suffering and self-deprivation."[659] Note, however, that weakness is here chosen only if the path of suffering is first judged to be a valuable state of affairs; in Nietzsche's examples it is considered morally superior. The free-choice interpretation of shortcomings presupposes

653 Bach, 1981, p. 359.

654 Bach, 1981, p. 361.

655 GM, I, 13.

656 Reginster, 1997, p. 291.

657 Reginster in Gemes & Richardson, 2014, p. 713. As Darwall puts it: "the weak cannot stand to see them as the strong see them, to feel the shame of their base condition. So they invent the fantasy that they have chosen to be the way they are and to act as they do because this is actually better" (Darwall, 2013, p. 82).

658 GM, I, 13. Emphasis added.

659 Conway, 2008, p. 46. Emphasis added.

a sweet lemon reevaluation on the part of the subject by which a real, disvaluable, personal condition is turned into something valuable and thus into something that *ought to be chosen* because it is believed to have a positive (or higher) value. Turning weakness into virtue is an example of reevaluation and a form of self-deception; erroneously believing that one's weakness is in fact chosen is another manifestation of self-deception, but one that presupposes the first. Also, it should be noted that the free-choice interpretation of shortcomings is not a necessary part of *ressentiment*, but the reevaluation that presupposes it is.

A third important type of deception is mentioned both by Nietzsche and Scheler. We call it the *blame delusion*. Scheler in particular claims that the POR makes her rival responsible for her painful experience of inferiority and powerlessness. As he points out in the case of envy:

> [The] tension between desire and non-fulfilment does not lead to envy until it flares up into hatred against the owner, *until the latter is falsely considered to be the cause of our privation*. [...] Both the experience of impotence and the causal delusion are essential pre-conditions of true envy.[660]

The act of blaming seems to have a soothing effect and to reduce the original psychological tension. As Scheler remarks, "our factual inability to acquire a good is wrongly interpreted as a positive action against our desire – a delusion which diminishes the original tension"[661]. According to Nietzsche, this delusion is not essentially related to envy, but to suffering in general and becomes manifest when the POR believes that "someone or other must be to blame that I feel ill".[662] That we regularly manifest a tendency to believe and give ill-founded causal explanations is a well documented fact according to social psychology.[663] This mechanism can be found in many ordinary explanations. Russell for example claims that we all have a tendency to "imagine our own good or evil fortune to be the purpose of other people's actions".[664] In Heider's influential, systematic, psychological theory of causal attribution, he shows that individuals function as naïve psychologists when they try to determine the causes of their experience. Attributions explaining positive or negative outcomes can either refer to internal causes (me, my shortcomings, my abilities) or to external ones (good or bad luck, someone else, destiny).[665] Some such attributions are marked by a self-serving bias. We have, in other terms, a tendency to attribute successes to our ability and efforts alone (internal factors) and to diminish or deny our personal responsibility when we commit offences or

660 RAM, p. 30. Emphasis added.

661 RAM, p. 30.

662 GM, III, 15.

663 Ross & Nisbett, 2011, pp. 79-82.

664 Russell, 2009, p. 148.

665 Heider, 1958, pp. 79-124.

face personal failures by invoking external causes.[666] However, the psychological literature remains sparse on the more specific claim that we have a propensity to blame others in response to the suffering associated with impotence and inferiority. The hostile attribution, which refers to the attribution of an external cause for *all* negative outcomes that one faces, is probably the closest the psychological literature comes to a description of *ressentiment*'s characteristic blaming responses.[667] Smith for example claims that envy is "flavoured with resentment"[668], a claim which supports Scheler's view that the unpleasant experience of envy entails holding others responsible for the wrong of making the coveted object inaccessible. This is why envy is said to fuse with episodes of resentment. Since envy is a part of *ressentiment*, it may also explain the presence of resentment in this sentiment too. But we know from previous discussions that the POR's characteristic resentment is incorrect (it does not fit its object) or otherwise unjustified (it is held without any epistemic warrants), and is grounded in the false belief that others – rivals – are ultimately responsible for all the POR's misfortunes and shortcomings. Beliefs that support such causal attribution are self-deceptive, for the POR holds and nurtures them despite the fact that her rivals have no direct causal impact on her condition. This might just be a particular case of the more general fact that *ressentiment* blurs the consciousness we have of our experience of inferiority and repressed hostility. Despite experiencing inferiority in some way, the POR is not aware of indulging in a causal delusion because she needs to believe in the responsibility of her rival in order to turn him into a wrongdoer she can resent (rather than envy).

The fourth object (and certainly the most common one) is simply illustrated by the fact that the POR's evaluations seem erroneous and somehow detached from reality. The wealthy neighbour is said to be greedy, the priests come to believe that their weakness is a sign of virtue and the fox is self-deceived because he thinks the grapes are sour. We argued earlier that, unlike attributions of natural properties, attributions of values are relatively easier to manipulate: the fox does not deny that he sees grapes, not do I deny the existence of my neighbour's mansions and sports cars. Such delusions could only be "sustained despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary".[669] But the POR, by contrast, is self-deceived about her value-attributions to the objects she knows (or about their owner). Of course, the value-properties the POR is deceived about can have any of the forms we distinguished in Section 3.2. For example, instead of altering the intrinsic value of the good he cannot get, the POR may also alter its instrumental value.

666 Zuckermann, 1979; Maruna & Mann, 2006.

667 Harvey & Martinko, 2009.

668 Smith, 2013, p. 130.

669 DSM, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

But why are the POR's axiological judgements self-deceptive? One could first argue, folk-psychologically, that there are good reasons to believe that, say, ripe grapes are sweet and good not sour and bad or that my wealthy neighbours are kind and not morally depraved. In other words, the natural properties of the object or person do not entail the values the POR would like to see attached to them. This route may be easier to accept for the realist than for the value-subjectivist as he considers values to be objective, monadic properties, which are parts of the furniture of the world. The subjectivist on the other hand finds it more difficult to explain why the POR's judgements are self-deceptive, as any value that someone attributes is warranted by the simple fact of attributing it, provided a person's attributions are consistent.

We shall here first argue that subjectivism is at odds with our ordinary intuitions about *ressentiment*. For, if we consider the POR to be self-deceived about values, it is precisely because we apprehend her evaluations – of a particular object or about how values are ranked – to be unwarranted given the evidence, in particular the evidence about different value-makers or valifiers at hand. The grapes are sweet and good and not sour and bad because they are ripe, juicy, and harvest has just begun. If self-deception is the acquisition and maintenance of a false belief in the face of strong evidence to the contrary, the evidence the POR seems to fail to take into account may consist of all the natural properties which are the valifiers of just those values which are opposed to the values she eventually embraces. She fails to see that the properties of the grapes make them good, or that the properties which make actions unjust and clumsy make injustice worse than clumsiness. But in order to make sense of *ressentiment*'s self-deception, we need to account for the inherent psychological tension the alteration of values tries to solve. One important fact about our knowledge of values is the way we grasp and perceive them via value-feelings and correct preferences, which are non-conceptual attitudes and acts. Another important fact about our psychological states is that they are accessible via the fallible faculty of inner perception. The object of *ressentiment*'s self-deception may indeed be said to be values, but, as we shall later argue, not because one fails to apprehend them correctly, but because one fails to acknowledge and reflect on their presence in experience. In other words, the POR is not deluded about the positive values she feels are exemplified by her neighbour. On the contrary, she continues to be impressed – struck – by his courage, wealth and talent. But at the same time, she tries to remove her feelings, preferences and emotional responses from her conscious awareness.

This leads us to the fifth object of self-deception. The POR, it is claimed, is disconnected and self-deceived about her own emotions. On this account, *ressentiment*'s self-deception is reduced to a lack of self-knowledge. The man in the street would readily claim that the POR is somehow denying her envy and revengefulness; thus, the POR on this ordinary account fails to notice the features of the emotions she experiences. The phenomenon of taking emo-

tions to be something different from what they really are is also addressed by Ranulf, who considers indignation to be envy in disguise. And Nietzsche reminds us: "what mendacity to avoid admitting this hatred as hatred!"[670] Blindness to inner processes is a recurrent theme in Nietzsche's writings:

> However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of *drives* which constitute his being. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counterplay among one another, and above all the laws of their *nutriment* [*Ernährung*] remain wholly unknown to him.[671]

Nietzsche categorises what appears to be a lack of self-knowledge as an illustration of self-deception. So, too, does Scheler in his essay on self-deception.[672] Lack of self-knowledge is not self-deception, but the latter entails the former. Some have argued that self-deception can be reduced to a lack of self-knowledge, claiming that "since one can lack knowledge without falling into error, what goes wrong is that we have false beliefs about ourselves".[673] But what is it exactly the POR fails to apprehend on this view? The POR fails to apprehend that her current mental states motivate new axiological beliefs and moral emotions. As Reginster points out, "the priest is not just deceived in failing to recognise the importance he places on political power; he also fails to recognise that his devaluation of power is still motivated by his suppressed but enduring desire for it".[674] The POR fails to acknowledge the psychological mechanism that triggers her value-judgements. Nietzsche formulates this by stressing the fact that the POR fails to see what her real motives are:

> Important as it may be to know the motives from which humanity has acted so far, it might be even more essential to know the *belief* people had in this or that motive, i.e. what humanity has imagined and told itself to be the real lever of its conduct so far. For people's inner happiness and misery has come to them depending on their belief in this or that motive – *not* through the actual motives. The latter are of second-order interest.[675]

Nietzsche, like Scheler, is a realist and fallibilist about inner perception: we can make mistakes about what we feel and about our motives. *Ressentiment*, we shall argue, makes us falsely believe that, say, our responses to injustice are motivated by a love of humanity, while in fact such attitudes may be motivated by revengefulness, envy or hatred. The failed artist avoids acknowledging the fact that he envies his more talented rival, but he also fails to see

670 GM, III, 14.

671 D, 119.

672 ISK, p. 8.

673 Holton, 2001, p. 53.

674 Reginster, 1997, p. 291.

675 GS, 44.

that his righteous disapproval of fame and popularity is motivated by envy and revenge. In the very same fashion, the envious politician fails to notice his repressed envy and believes his righteousness is rather an expression of a deep concern for social justice. She may embrace new values of, say, justice, humility and frugality, but these new beliefs are motivated by repressed envy and vengeance, and expressed instead as resentment or indignation.

To say the POR lacks self-knowledge captures the fact that she is in reality the victim of self-deception about the emotions she tries to repress, the desires she nurtures and the very mechanisms that motivate her conduct. In particular she overlooks the psychological properties of her desires and her emotions which make them disvaluable. Just as the ripeness of the grapes makes them good, so too the psychological features of envy make it bad. Just as one may overlook the valifiers which are the properties of external objects, so too one may overlook the valifiers which are the properties of one's own mental states. Scheler seems to suggest that we can never really be mistaken about the value of inner experiences.[676] We may however fail to correctly apprehend what state of mind bears that (dis)value. The general claim that the POR is disconnected from her emotional life has been recently developed by Poellner who points out that:

> The crucial element distinguishing Nietzschean *ressentiment* from the sorts of case usually discussed in the deflationist literature is that the motivated error is supposed to concern the subject's own current mental state: the subject is supposed falsely to ascribe an occurrent regard for the intrinsic worth of humility, justice or peaceableness to herself, while failing to acknowledge her actual vengeful, detractive, superiority-craving intent in avowing the putative values.[677]

But how different is the latter description of self-deception from the one we have so far been considering? (That is, the form of self-deception on which the POR fails to get the values of external objects right and thus comes to believe, for example, that the grapes are sour, neighbours greedy and power "unethical") If both approaches – self-deception about the value of external objects and self-deception about the value of inner states – described distinct phenomena, one could imagine the POR indulging in one but not the other. But can one really re-evaluate one's neighbour as greedy out of envy while simultaneously being aware that it is envy that drives one's evaluations? In some way, it is conceivable, but it would alter the status of evaluations, for the individual would know them to be unjustified. The wealthy neighbour is, then, not really taken to be greedy, for the characteristic beliefs and evaluations of envy have not someone's greed or unethical behaviour as their object but someone's positive, coveted, but unreachable trait or good. If anything, the envier judges that the rival has to be taken down, dethroned, and disparaged. Of course, he can still just assert that the

676 ISK, p. 17.

677 Poellner, 2004, p. 55.

neighbour is greedy, which is a way of criticising him by predicating a vice. Publicly condemning a neighbour for his greed may hence be a symptom of envy which is expressed as indignation. Some authors consider that, in this example, the POR does not really believe in the value she attributes to her rival, and we shall discuss the view in more detail in the next section. Note that any account which implies a POR who knows she is envious or revengeful is very much at odds with the ordinary picture in which *ressentiment* precisely entails an attempt to *repress* hostile emotions (see Section 3.1.1). There is, in other words, an attempt on the part of the POR to ignore, deny or simply move her focus away from the awareness of some of her affective responses.

Theoretically, the possible objects of *ressentiment* raise some important ontological questions about what states of mind are involved in *ressentiment*'s self-deception. We here need to distinguish again between different elements, some of which were already discussed earlier. To begin with, we must distinguish mere assertions from enduring beliefs and occurrent judgements. One can say something without believing it. We must also distinguish an evaluation, which is the act of attributing a value property, from a valuation, which is the act by which we are (apparently) acquainted with values. Valuations are value-feelings and the act of preferring. Valuation must also be distinguished from emotions, for emotions are responses to valuations and their objects. Finally – and this is the new element – there is a distinction between an emotion and one's inner perception of that emotion. For many philosophers of the Cartesian tradition, this kind of inner perception is infallible, for I always know without possible doubt what I currently experience. But *ressentiment* seems here to support the opposite view. Surely, the fox first takes the grapes to be sweet – and by taking we mean that he feels them to be sweet. But he also eventually comes to believe them to be sour. The account we shall develop in this chapter builds on the assumption that inner perception is a non-conceptual act, it is not any type of judging, and that one may be self-deceived about one's impressions of values and one's occurrent emotions. *Ressentiment*'s self-deception can then be explained as a failing of inner perception, a failure to perceive that one apprehends non-conceptually, say, the talent of a friend, the importance of mathematics, and the beauty of a Ferrari. The POR feels these values and affectively grasps their relations, but her evaluations predicate a different value (my friend is vain) or a different relation of values. The POR may thus both misperceive he is feeling her friend to be talented and misperceive that her envy of him. *Ressentiment*'s self-deception is hence, at bottom, not a matter of conflicting beliefs; it is a matter of illusions about occurrent value-feelings or occurrent emotions. One's inner-perception has gone awry. Self-deception about occurrent value-feelings is

what brings the POR to get the value of external objects wrong, and self-deception about occurrent emotions is what leads the POR to take her emotions to be other than what they really are or to simply overlook them.

In conclusion, of all the objects of self-deception distinguished above, only two can play a role in the view under discussion. First, the POR is self-deceived about the (dis)value of an object, a state of affairs or a person and the object of *ressentiment*'s self-deception is therefore something external. Second, the POR is self-deceived about her occurrent emotional life and the object of *ressentiment*'s self-deception is therefore something internal. We also claim that the other three candidates for the role of the proper objects of the POR's self-deception are not good ones. First, we reject escapism, for the POR is and remains aware of her shortcomings which is *in fine* why she experiences a feeling of impotence and inferiority in the first place. Second, the claim that POR indulges herself by believing she freely chooses her weakness and shortcomings rests in fact on the premise that the latter have a positive value. Any form of self-deception needs first to explain why those vices come to be evaluated positively. Finally, the claim that the POR is self-deceived about the causal responsibility of others for her impotence is a common symptom of *ressentiment*, but it falls outside the scope of reevaluation. If anything, believing in another person's moral responsibility allows us to take hostile emotions (envy, hatred, revenge) for moral ones. In sum, we reject escapism as a possible object of *ressentiment*'s self-deception and consider the illusion about one's autonomy and the causal illusion to be particular cases of a more general type of rationalisation that blurs the awareness the POR has of her own current mental states and the real motivations behind her reevaluations.

In order to refine our theory, we shall now present and evaluate two alternative accounts of *ressentiment* according to which the phenomenon does not involve any form of self-deception.

4.3 Hypocrisy and internalisation

We have so far clarified how traditional accounts approach self-deception and what objects *ressentiment*'s self-deception may take. We shall now attempt to determine in more detail how the phenomenon is structured. The account we shall develop builds on the premise that our awareness of values is non-conceptual, and takes the form of feelings and preferences. The POR's self-deception, we shall argue, is not at all a matter of conflicting beliefs, but a psychological tension that arises when her impressions or feelings of value do not match her evaluations. The POR, in other words, feels the grapes to be sweet but judges them to be sour, or she feels her neighbour to be wealthy and judges him to be evil. The latter judgement, then, is the cognitive base for her moral emotions.

Some theories however privilege a different view. The first one – *ressentiment qua* hypocrisy – denies that the phenomenon entails a form of self-deception at all. The second one – *ressentiment qua* illusion – argues that *ressentiment* leads to a complete internalisation of the new values: that is, not merely an alteration of evaluations and judgements, but also a change of valuations, of value-feelings and preferences. On the former view, the POR professes values which she knows are not hers with the sole aim of furthering her revenge. On the latter view, the POR internalises her newly professed values in such way that she becomes blind and insensitive to the goods and values she originally coveted. We shall reject both accounts: the first one because it does not fit the simplest illustrations of the phenomenon, and the second one because it presupposes that the POR suffers no psychological tensions (something which, as we mentioned earlier, conflicts with the practical irrationality of the phenomenon). Our solution to the puzzle of *ressentiment*'s self-deception will be presented and discussed in Section 4.4.

4.3.1 Hypocrisy

Some consider *ressentiment* to be characterised by axiological judgements the POR comes to hold *intentionally* and *consciously* because she hopes to gain some advantage from the public expression of her evaluations. A consequence of this view is that *ressentiment* entails no form of self-deception at all. The individual always knows what he re-evaluates, that he experiences (say) envy, and that he only pretends to endorse these values because he expects it will bring him some practical advantage. The POR's predications of values are therefore never really experienced as fitting the facts. *Ressentiment* leads one, instead, to try to give the impression that one believes without believing.

This sort of account is popular among Nietzsche scholars. On Wallace's reconstruction of the view, the priests and the slaves only *pretend* to adhere to new values, an action they believe will facilitate the fulfilment of their desire for revenge.[678] Revenge for them may remain unfulfilled, especially if it means overthrowing the aristocratic masters (a risky enterprise for which they are too weak). Nevertheless, the priestly caste hopes to inflict on them a serious blow by *morally* condemning the warrior-aristocrats. The strategy is considered effective because the POR's rivals are weakened by the guilt they start feeling. Their power and superiority, says the other side, is evil. Nietzsche develops this claim about the role of guilt in the third part of the *Genealogy,* explaining for example that men of *ressentiment* "promenade in our midst like living reproaches, like warnings to us, – as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities for which penance, bitter penance will one day be exacted".[679] A second reason why the strategy may be considered effect-

[678] Wallace, 2006, p. 214; Reginster *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, p. 710

[679] GM, III, 14.

ive is that the priests pretend to embrace new values in order to convince and motivate the masses (the common men, the slaves) to nurture hostility and hatred against their opponents (the warrior-aristocrats). *Ressentiment*'s characteristic righteousness and Pharisaism are thus only parts of a show which is put on because the priests believe it is an efficient way to win over the masses and turn them against their hated rival.[680] Wallace calls the reduction of *ressentiment* to such a deliberate undertaking the "strategic interpretation".[681] The individual in other words is fully aware of her hostile emotions and of the guilt-inducing or proselytising purposes of her reevaluations. The envious neighbour is aware of his envy and feelings of revenge and his parade of self-righteousness is guided only by the belief that many others will join him in hatred of his neighbour and support policies with detrimental consequences to his rival.[682] Note that the strategic interpretation gives a functional – or teleological – explanation of the phenomenon: it is a device used with the aim of hurting a rival. The strategic interpretation does not fit many of our earlier examples, for according to these examples the POR seems not to spell out her experience, nor to acknowledge her hatred and envy. Nietzsche nevertheless suggests such a strategic reading on several occasions, most notably when he compares the POR to a *skilful counterfeiter* who intentionally sets up new values to further her revenge.[683] Can this specifically Nietzschean account be generalised?

There are several reasons to reject the strategic interpretation. First, it seems rather unlikely that the mere fact of professing a new axiological system or a set of evaluations will inflict any harm on the rivals of the POR. For how are they threatened, injured or wronged by someone else's expression of new preferences and values? The intended consequences never obtain. As Wallace says, it is unclear how an imagined revenge and a new axiological system would, first, change the POR's circumstances and, second, alleviate her suffering. Perhaps *ressentiment* does not even need to be effective in the latter way – or need not to be believed to possess this efficacity. One could instead imagine that the priests remain aware of the fact that they cannot gain power and yet still attempt to inflict a blow, only pursuing an "imaginary revenge".[684] On the latter account, the POR attempts to undermine her rivals with the only means she fully masters given her impotence, namely judging them to be *evil*, and making this known publicly.[685] *Ressentiment* according to this variant of the strategic interpretation would then only be exemplified by the Nietzschean figure of the priest who consciously

680 Migotti, 1998.

681 Wallace, 2006, p. 214.

682 "The aristocratic priests, I now want to suggest, grasp the susceptibility of the masses to this dynamic, and exploit it expressly for the purpose of undermining the power and position of the warrior class" (Wallace, 2006, p. 224). See also Fingarette, 2000, p. 55.

683 GM, III, 14; GS, 21.

684 GM, I, 10.

685 As Wallace puts it:

and cynically manipulates groups that eventually succumb to the emotional contagion of their righteous attitudes. For those who fall under the influence of the priests, *ressentiment* is however entirely unconscious and unintentional.[686] But the scope of the strategic interpretation is then limited to the idiosyncratic settings of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* or, in a metaphorical reading, to only those social settings where one group (those playing a role like that of the priests) manages to knowingly excite among others – perhaps via affective contagion – resentment against their personal rivals.

Even if we were to accept this rather charitable reading, there is very little empirical support for such an account of *ressentiment*. In fact, from an evolutionary perspective, attempts to deceive others knowingly are much less efficient than carrying out the same task self-deceptively.[687] And the strategic interpretation of *ressentiment* entails a degree of self-awareness that is also difficult to reconcile with our ordinary intuitions of the phenomenon. The failed artist who comes to condemn fame seems not wholly conscious of the mechanism driving his reevaluations. Neither does the moral disapprobation of wealth by the envious appear to be a strategy devised in order to further the ambitions of the envious. As in most illustrations of self-deception, the POR seems to conceal a potentially painful truth, to be biased in his treatment of new information, and to act in order to support his more convenient, but false, beliefs. In short, she seems to be self-deceived.

The difficulty with the strategic view is that it makes it impossible for *ressentiment*-guided reevaluations to be self-deceptive. In fact, according to the strategic interpretation, the POR knows that her axiological assertions are false and makes them only because they are considered as a means to further her revenge. Yet clearly, the POR does not appear to be "ruminating and reasoning as to how best to pursue her [envious] aims undetected".[688] She does respond, and experience, moral emotions, which may or may not be genuine and justified (section 3.2.5). The strategic interpretation erroneously reduces *ressentiment* to nothing more than cynical hypocrisy, which is why we should reject it.

> The slave revolt may then be thought of strategically in relation to this fundamental aim, as an undertaking that is precisely calculated to harm the powerful. The inferior position of the powerless means that they are unable to pursue this goal directly, through actions that are immediately damaging to the interests of the powerful. So they resort to a more indirect strategy, erecting a new table of values as a devious way of undermining the position and advantages of he people they despise (Wallace, 2006, p. 214).

686 Wallace explains: "I have suggested that the members of [the priestly] class should be understood as taking an essentially cynical attitude toward the slave revolt that they foment in the masses" (Wallace, 2006, p. 232).

687 Trivers, 2014.

688 Fingarette, 2000, p. 55.

4.3.2 Internalisation

According to a very different account of *ressentiment*, "to be fully effective, *ressentiment* re-evaluation requires that the agent fully internalises the new values he creates".[689] If this were true, that is, if the POR did indeed manage to remove all traces of the old, unreachable, value-impressions from her experience, then *ressentiment* would involve neither a form of self-deception, nor its associated psychological tension. But what does internalisation here actually mean? Possible candidates are perhaps best described in common parlance as what we *believe in* – the verb Nietzsche uses above – or what we refer to as "our values". Internalisation is the identification with a value, a consistent sensitivity to its obtaining and non-obtaining, and a series of characteristic emotional responses to it. According to some accounts – mostly, in fact, to some passages in Scheler's monograph –, *ressentiment* leads to a complete internalisation of the new values, for example, by altering one's valuations and making one entirely insensitive – in fact even blind – to what originally was grasped as hopelessly desirable, such as, say, the wealth of our neighbour or a talent like the talent of a friend. On this view, the fox apprehends the grapes as sour and simply carries on without any disagreeable consciousness of any kind.

One possibility that early phenomenologists have analysed in their epistemologies of values is that the POR simply grows value-blind. Value-blindness, a relative of *Gestalt* blindness and expression blindness, is understood as the inability to feel values of a certain type.[690] In ordinary language, this is often ascribed by saying someone has no sense of or for, say, grace, injustice, or rudeness. May this also be the case in examples of *ressentiment*? Has the fox really altered his perception of values so that he fails to see that the grapes are sweet? Hildebrand distinguishes two kinds of axiological blindness, one of which is an inability to use the concept of a value-property and apply it correctly, and a second one which refers to the insensibility to certain values, for example to the affective inability to feel aesthetic values.[691] Some are more sensitive to aesthetic values than others, some are more sensitive to the elegant than to the sublime. One possible cause of insensitivity to one type of value is a strong sensitivity to a different category of (dis)values. An obsession with justice may make charity invisible. An obsession with the sacred, as in one whose overriding concern is to do the will of his God, might make all less important values invisible.[692] One plausible, Schelerian, explanation of the POR's alleged blindness might invoke the role of hostile emotions, of which the most extreme is hatred which causes value-blindness.[693] Scheler remarks that

689 Reginster, 2006, p. 258.

690 Mulligan *in* Goldie, 2009, p. 486; Mulligan *in* Merker, 2009, pp. 141-162.

691 Mulligan *in* Goldie, 2009, p. 486; Hartmann, 1963, chap. 16 e),

692 Hartmann, 2002, Vol. I, p. xx.

693 Spader, 2002, pp. 91-100.

the act of hatred makes the ears and eyes of the feeling of value and of value-preference *deaf* and *blind*.[694] Scheler's main argument for this claim seems to be that hatred always involves the detraction of the hated object. If this is true, two cases may be distinguished. The detraction could involve coming to see what originally appeared to have positive value as being axiologically indifferent. Or it could involve coming to see what originally appeared to have positive value as having negative value. It is the latter case that Vendrell Ferran has in mind when she points out that "hatred implies a closing down of possibilities of its object and in this sense it is blinding *for* values, not blind *to* values."[695]

Ressentiment, then, is depicted as making us blind for values and their hierarchy. And, as opposed to cognitive states, value-feelings and preferences are non-conceptual. Their alteration is therefore an illusion, not an error according to Scheler's distinction. On this view, *ressentiment* is a deception of preferring.[696] As Scheler puts it: "when we feel unable to attain certain values, value blindness or value delusion may set in".[697] One could therefore imagine the following:

> Therefore a man who "slanders" the unattainable values which oppress him is by no means completely unaware of their positive character. It is not as if they simply "did not exist" in his experience. In that case we could not speak of a "delusion." Nor can we say that he feels these values, but contradicts his own experience by false judgments—that would be a case of "error" or mendacity. The phenomenal peculiarity of the *ressentiment* delusion can be described as follows: the positive values are still felt as such, but they are overcast by the false values and can shine through only dimly.[698]

The POR is deluded. Her self-deception is an illusion and involves, it seems, a durable and irremediable alteration of her value-feelings and preferences: illusion of value-feelings is at the root of weak *ressentiment* and illusion of correctly preferring is at the root of strong *ressentiment*, since correct preferences reveal the relative importance of values.

Ressentiment's self-deception is therefore a form of blindness because the POR fails to grasp certain values, more particularly the very values (or exemplification thereof) that she denies are exemplified: the *sweetness* of grapes, the *importance* of mathematics, the *prestige* of an

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694 As Scheler puts it:

> Hass […] ist darum *vernichtend* im strengsten Wortsinn, da er (für diese Sphären) faktisch die höheren Werte venichtent und darum auch als Folge die Augen des kognitiven Vorziehens und Fühlens für sie stumpf und blind macht (GW, VII, 156).

695 Vendrell Ferran, forthcoming.

696 FORM, p. 88.

697 RAM, p. 35.

698 RAM, pp. 35-36.

expensive car. And this characteristic blindness allows the POR to feel better about herself as she becomes entirely *insensitive* to the very qualities she originally admired but that made her feel bad about herself.[699] In the absence of those value-feelings and their associated feelings of impotence and inferiority, the hostile emotional responses vanish too. Scheler suggests that strong *ressentiment*, which is a blindness for relations of height and importance between different values, achieves just this, for:

> […] the impulses of revenge against those who are strong, healthy, rich, or handsome now disappear entirely. *Ressentiment* has brought deliverance from the inner torment of these affects. Once the sense of values has shifted and the new judgements have spread, such people cease to be enviable, hateful, and worthy of revenge.[700]

It seems one can distinguish a further phenomenon of the same kind namely the sensitivity to values that are not exemplified. The classic example for the latter kind of blindness is the man in love who sees the world through rose-coloured spectacles. In *ressentiment*, this mechanism may be at play when the individual turns into a Pharisee who sees moral disvalue, "unethical" behaviour, everywhere.

Our two types of *ressentiment* (weak and strong) correspond to two types of blindness: there is the blindness limited to the case where *ressentiment* makes the individual blind to certain values of certain objects (as in weak *ressentiment*), and there is also the blindness to rankings – hierarchies – of values (as in strong *ressentiment*). As Scheler puts it:

> [...] when we feel unable to attain certain values, value blindness or value delusion may set in. Lowering all values to the level of one‟s own factual desire or ability [...], construing an illusory hierarchy of values in accordance with the structure of one‟s personal goals and wishes – that is by no means the way in which a normal and meaningful value consciousness is realized. It is, on the contrary, the chief source of value blindness, of value delusions and illusions.[701]

Our distinction allows for the possibility of a value-blind POR who eventually grows *insensitive* to the prestige of her neighbour's cars, the musical talent of her friend and the power enjoyed by a rival but whose blindness or delusion consists in her coming to take social status, talent and power to be less important values and virtues than, say, the pleasant or the useful. Note that the notion of the relative importance of values, as we have pointed out, may be understood in an absolute fashion or it may be relativised to individuals or societies and it may be understood in subjectivist or objectivist terms. In sum, the view involves the claim that strong *ressentiment* irremediably alters the POR's preferences in the same way weak

699 RAM, p. 34. Spader, 2002, pp. 91-100.

700 RAM, p. 49.

701 RAM, p. 35.

ressentiment affects the POR's value-feelings. In both cases, they become blind or insensitive to the original values.

The central premise of this approach is that the reevaluation mechanism successfully numbs the POR's capacity to feel, prefer, and thus know, the positive values, or the scale of values, which causes her distress. This remedy is not a cognitive change (that is, an alteration of beliefs) nor a change in the emotions based on such belief, but a transformation of the intuition or awareness of values (value-feelings and preferences), which are affective non-conceptual acts and states of mind:

> What is called "falsification of the value tablets," "reinterpretation," or "transvaluation" should not be mistaken for conscious lying. Indeed, it goes beyond the sphere of judging. It is not that the positive value is felt as such and that it is merely declared to be "bad." Beyond all conscious lying and falsifying, there is a deeper "organic mendacity." Here the falsification is not formed in consciousness, but at the same stage of the mental process as the impressions and value feelings themselves: on the road of experience into consciousness.[702]

There is an important corollary to this set of claims. Judgements based on the altered value-feelings, and the emotions based on the latter judgements, are granted a semblance of justification. The fox feels the grapes to be sour, the priests and the envious neighbour feel their humility and moral goodness, and Peter intuits that logic is less important than rhetoric. The axiological judgements and beliefs rooted in these feelings are thus defeasibly justified by the subject's affective appearances. Scheler adds that the POR's judgements are therefore experienced as perfectly sincere and genuine since she really feels the grapes to be sour and her neighbour to be greedy:

> He who is "mendacious" has no need to lie! [...] The value judgement is based on this original "falsification." It is itself entirely "true," "genuine," and "honest," for the value it affirms is really felt to be positive.[703]

Ressentiment qua illusion suggests the new values are internalised on a fundamental and affective level.

But do the coveted positive values completely disappear from the POR's experience? Most examples seem to suggest, on the contrary, that the POR never fully internalises the original values. The fox does not become blind to sweetness, nor do I grow blind to the virtues and achievements of my neighbour. In fact, the POR rather becomes obsessed with these positive, but for him unreachable, values, the experience of which he then tries to repress in some way or the other. One problematic consequence of the application of the concept of value-blindness within the illusion theory is phenomenological. Blindness seems to provide the POR

[702] RAM, p. 49.

[703] RAM, p. 36.

with a complete and durable relief from the psychological tension of *ressentiment*. But this is at odds with our ordinary understanding of the phenomenon which apprehends it as a "poisoned sense of life".[704] *Ressentiment*, even in its later stages, is a practically irrational strategy – a strategy that, as Nietzsche puts it, makes the "sick sicker", that soothes the POR's wounded self-esteem but poisons the wound at the same time. A second issue is that, if the POR's value-feelings were indeed altered entirely, her emotions would be defeasibly justified. The reason for her indignation would be, for example, her apparent knowledge of her neighbour's greed and immorality.

Although Scheler's description conveys the impression that he thinks that *ressentiment* involves a successful internalisation of new values, in other passages, he claims, inconsistently, that such internalisation remains in fact imperfect. The relief which the attempted illusion provides is never complete because the experience of values remains mixed. As he puts it

> […] the positive values are still felt as such, but they are *overcast* by the false values and can shine through only dimly. The *ressentiment* experience is always characterized by this "transparent" presence of the true and objective values behind the illusory ones – by that obscure awareness that one lives in a *sham world* which one is unable to penetrate.[705]

Above we introduced the distinction between valuations and evaluations by noting the analogy between this distinction and the more familiar, but by no means uncontroversial, distinction between the non-conceptual content of perception and the conceptual content of perceptual judgement. But Scheler's claim here entails a disanalogy between the two distinctions. The sensibility to value stands to axiological beliefs and judgements in many respects as seeing to perceptual judgement, but not in all respects. For in perceptual illusion, as when I take the cat to be a dog, there is no background awareness of the cat as a cat. But when the POR takes a good object to be bad there is indeed a background awareness of the object as good. It is because of the experience of such background awareness that *ressentiment* is practically irrational: it does not provide a durable relief and the POR continues to be sensitive to the very values she tries to ignore. It also forces her to continually support the newly acquired values and preferences. Scheler's account may provide an interesting description of cases such as the one where I feel my neighbour to be greedy while, in the background, I still apprehend him as an admirable and courageous entrepreneur. Note however that such an account is hardly conceivable for the rare – and, we argued, mostly theoretical – cases where reevaluation manipulates opposite values, for example by turning sweet grapes into sour ones, or a beautiful car into an ugly one. For, can the perception of something as ugly really

[704] RAM, p. 49.

[705] RAM, p. 36.

coexist with the background awareness that it is beautiful? Perhaps *ressentiment* never really faces such a difficulty, because, as we argued, the reevaluation process does in fact manipulate values of a different domain. Hence, the POR may feel the car is racy and prestigious and come to feel that its owner is greedy. Greed is a disvalue but in no way is it the polar opposite of raciness or prestige. Scheler's account may therefore suggest that *ressentiment* entails a deep rooted change of focus. The non-conceptual grasp of a neighbour's greed is what dominates the POR's experience, but she is still acquainted with the positive values of the car. It is the apprehension of the neighbour as greedy which, in this example, is considered to be an illusion.

This account clearly avoids the pitfalls of doxastic incompatibility since here *ressentiment*'s psychological conflict only involves the alteration of our non-conceptual perception of values. But, at the same time, it assumes that the POR is only the passive victim of a convenient illusion. When the POR comes to take her neighbour to be greedy, the change is quite fundamental and therefore very different from simply coming to believe her neighbour is greedy because she wishes to hold such a belief (wishful thinking) or because her judgements and beliefs – not value-feelings – are biased and motivated by (repressed and relived) episodes of envy. It seems rather difficult to reconcile this view with the fact that value-feelings are only passive and not subject to the will, and somehow still present as the POR continues to show an intense sensitivity to the very values he denies. The difficulty has to do with the fact that *ressentiment* and the reevaluation strategy are ordinarily apprehended as, in some sense, an intentional strategy. The POR is not an admirable character who is the victim of a massive delusion, but someone we consider responsible for her own Pharisaism, Tartufferie, and mendacity - someone who knowingly and intentionally avoids being confronted with experiences of values that make her feel bad. Therefore, we should reject the view that *ressentiment* involves a successful internalisation of new values and a blindness to the original, positive, but distressing values.

4.4 *Ressentiment*

We have so far established some important characteristics of *ressentiment*'s self-deception and argued that none of the doxastic theories of self-deception accounts for its phenomenology. Standard accounts of self-deception consider contradictory or otherwise incompatible beliefs to be the main source of tension. *Ressentiment*'s self-deception however, is more than just a conflict of beliefs: it involves complex relations between beliefs, value-feelings, and emotions which may or may not be apprehended correctly in inner perception or introspection and may or may not be fully conceptualised by the subject. A different account is the strategic interpretation, which we reject because it assumes full awareness, cynicism and

hypocrisy on the part of the POR; a view that remains very much at odds with the phenomenology of *ressentiment*. Finally, there is the alternative claim that the POR genuinely changes her personality by fully internalising the new values. However, this view fails to account for the practical irrationality of *ressentiment*.

How, then, should we understand the relation between self-deception and *ressentiment*? Let us here list again the main desiderata a theory of *ressentiment* should fulfil. To begin with, one needs to account for the fact that the POR attempts to deal with a distressing experience by using the psychological device of *reevaluation*. This process is practically irrational as it eventually fails to provide the desired psychological relief. A theory of self-deception in the context of *ressentiment* should be able to account for *ressentiment*'s characteristic psychological tension. The second element we have to account for is the way the POR indulges in a reevaluation strategy without becoming aware of it. In other words, we should provide a solution to the dynamic paradox of self-deception.

The reevaluation process is not, we have argued in Chapter 3, a change in our fundamental impressions of values; it is rather a change in some of our evaluations and of emotions based thereon. The experience of *ressentiment* is marked both by a sensitivity to the original, positive and unreachable, values and a propped up attachment to other (dis)values or goods. But how can the POR avoid becoming aware of this? The kind of self-deception involved in *ressentiment* is best understood, we shall now argue, as a lack of self-knowledge. The POR's characteristic beliefs, judgements and emotions allow her to reorient her focus and remain unaware of the axiological facts nevertheless grasped by her in her value-feelings and preferences.

As we have already mentioned many times, value-feelings on the one hand and cognitive states such as beliefs and judgements on the other need not be in agreement. As Mulligan formulates the point:

> [...] *in/sensibility to certain values, in general, or in certain situations, need not be in harmony with one's axiological beliefs*. [...] The puritan or moral rigorist who is hostile to elegance or charm is not blind to these qualities but denies that they are really value qualities or that they have any importance. The aesthete who is hostile to cognitive or economic or ethical values denies that they are really value qualities or denies that justice is more important than elegance.[706]

But in one passage of his monograph, Scheler comes to doubt that a discrepancy between feelings and judgements constitutes the distinctive property of *ressentiment*'s reevaluation. In other words, he rejects the view that the POR "feels these values, but contradicts his own

[706] Mulligan, 2018.

experience by false judgements".[707] On his view, *ressentiment* is characterised by an illusion about the (dis)value of an external object. The discrepancy between judgements and value-feelings is nevertheless a phenomenon that he assumes exists, such as when he claims that we sometimes "feel that our enemy possesses a noble moral quality while we stick to our negative judgement of him in the sphere of meanings, so that the appearance of his noble quality passes us by without a change in our intellectual convictions concerning him".[708] This seems to describe *ressentiment* too. Let us again imagine a typical example of a person who feels/grasps/intuits a rival's virtues of nobility and courage. Suppose now *ressentiment* festers. The mechanism of reevaluation leads her then to *judge* him, say, to be greedy and immoral. *Ressentiment* is also manifested in emotions that have the latter judgements as their cognitive bases, such as indignation (see Section 3.2).

Our understanding of *ressentiment* uses the distinction between the role of cognitive, conceptual states and emotions based on these, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, non-conceptual impressions of value and preferences. Reevaluation, it claims, is a process which alters beliefs, judgements, and emotions based on these. But non-conceptual value-feelings may and typically do remain unaltered throughout the process. In other words, the Nietzschean priests never come to feel that power is not valuable; they only come to believe this and judge those possessing it to be evil. This distinction explains many different aspects of *ressentiment*, most notably the shallowness of the POR, whose heart is not entirely aligned with the values she seems to endorse. It also accounts for the psychological tension of this phenomenon which presents different values from the ones that are predicated. The experience of *ressentiment* is unpleasant and remains so even after reevaluation takes its hold because the individual only manages to change her beliefs and prop up some agreeable emotions. He cannot entirely remove from his experience a certain sensitivity, responsiveness and grasp of the very values he tries to deny.

This distinction does not yet provide us with an account of self-deception. How can the POR be said to be self-deceived about values and value-scales if there are no conflicting beliefs? And how can she remain oblivious to her own reevaluation strategy? We shall here follow one of Scheler's other suggestions: *ressentiment* entails an *illusion of inner perception*. The key to the POR's self-deception is a limited or defective awareness of both her value-feelings and her occurrent emotions. The limited awareness of emotions is central to Poellner's analysis of *ressentiment qua* self-deception in the *Genealogy***.** Scheler remarks that not paying attention to our occurrent emotions may already be a constitutive fact of the direct experience of value:

[707] RAM, p. 49.

[708] FORM, p. 166.

> A man's feeling is absolutely directed upon the values which adhere to things [*Sachen*], so much so that, in the presence of the values which he feels in things, he is inclined to overlook his own emotional reaction to the values, his 'joy' over something or his 'grief'.[709]

The claim is analogous to the trivial point that whilst observing an object very carefully one is not aware to the same degree of the fact that one is observing or attending. Self-deception in this case boils down to a lack of self-knowledge. The POR never comes to articulate and consciously hold the correct belief that she does, in reality, value unreachable positive values. No reflection by the POR who predicates these values, and no reasoning by her, includes them. Yet, she is struck by these values and goods. Scheler claims that just as the value of external objects is grasped non-conceptually, so too there is a pre-reflective intuition of the value of inner experiences. The value of these internal states is always clearly present in consciousness, but the bearer of this value and those properties of the bearer which are the valifiers of this value can be overlooked. As he puts it:

> We know that it was something "pleasant" or "painful", something "important" or "indifferent", "sordid" or "noble" [...], but we still do not know *what* it is. Thus the value of experiences are always brightly on display within the compass of our consciousness, while the bearers of these values are not themselves present to us. *We feel an emotion to be "bad", even though we have not yet grasped some definite content at which it is aimed*.[710]

The POR's initial hostile responses to his value-feelings become part of the same scheme. It is even a defining feature of *ressentiment* that it takes hostile emotional reactions – envy, revenge, hatred – for moral emotions such as indignation, resentment (see Chapter 3). This Schelerian distinction between awareness of one's experience and awareness of its value incidentally throws light on many Nietzschean remarks about not apprehending our emotions and drives as what they really are. Nietzsche suggests the POR in fact manifests the very opposite states of mind he actually experiences:

> Masterstroke: to deny and condemn the drive whose expression one is, to display continually, by word and by deed, the antithesis of this drive.[711]

In the POR's *psyché*, there is, in other words, a "failure of the putative emotion to be the particular concern with its object that it purports to be, that is, that an emotion of the kind in question".[712] On Poellner's view, *ressentiment* is precisely self-deceptive in this sense: the POR fails to grasp her emotions for what they are. Poellner distinguishes between "implicit

[709] ISK, p. 61.

[710] ISK, p. 76.

[711] WP, 179.

[712] Pugmire, 1998, p. 112.

conscious contents of experiences" and their conceptualization.[713] The unreachable valuations remain present in her consciousness, although they are unnoticed. He claims that: "an aim can be conscious pursued by the *ressentiment* subjects without their pursuing it being conceptually represented."[714]

The view that *ressentiment*'s self-deception is a lack of self-knowledge also accounts for the fact that the positive value of external objects continues to be grasped by the POR, despite the fact that in her evaluations she predicates different values of these external objects. The POR is non-conceptually and non-thematically, impressed – struck – and motivated by the original values, that is, by the grapes' sweetness, the wealth and high status of her neighbour, the beauty and prestige of a Ferrari, and the importance of mathematics. The reevaluation process is an attempt to shift attention to new values and new value-scales, which prevents the POR from forming the otherwise painful belief or evaluation that the grapes are sweet, the neighbour wealthy and her friend talented, but also that she desires the grapes, and envies both her neighbour and friend. As Poellner puts it:

> What makes the latter a case of intentional self-deception is the fact that the subject adopts a desired self-interpretation on the basis of insufficient or ambiguous evidence as to the real content of his conscious mental state and, further, a conscious *resistance* to imaginative or actual confrontation with disambiguating evidence that would make the actual content of his affective state, and hence the state itself, transparent to him.[715]

This may not even be necessary for *ressentiment*. Suppose the evidence in favour of the grapes being good is only slight. Still, the change to the view that the grapes are bad, on the basis of no new evidence and in order to make life pleasanter, is an example of *ressentiment*. We claim that *ressentiment*'s self-deception is not an intentionally acquired blindness or insensitivity to the value-properties of the world. For in fact, the POR never stops feeling her neighbour to be admirable. What the POR however does intentionally is become oblivious to her experience of values and her emotional response to these. What she tries to repress from consciousness is her envy and the feeling of inferiority attached to her impressions of values. She intentionally manoeuvres in order to remain as unaware as possible about them. The man of *ressentiment* therefore lacks self-knowledge. Fingarette describes the self-deceiver in very similar terms. He is someone who:

> [...] doesn't *perceive* his own fakery, [he] can't *see through* the smokescreen he himself puts up. We also say that in a way he sincerely *believes* the story he tells while "deep inside him" he knows it is not true. He makes it *appear* to himself that something is so.[716]

[713] Poellner, 2011, p. 131.

[714] Poellner, 2011, p. 134.

[715] Poellner *in* Dries & Kail, 2015, p. 205.

This view assumes inner perception can err about the features of what is perceived, and that we can be deluded about the type of emotion we are experiencing by taking, for example, envy to be indignation. But is such blindness about the occurrence of our own feelings and emotions possible? How can the POR fail to notice her envy or the fact that she remains extremely sensitive to the talent of a friend or the wealth of a neighbour (weak *ressentiment*)? Or to the fact that she prefers aesthetic values over sensory (strong *ressentiment*)? Both weak and strong *ressentiment* are characterised by new evaluations that predicate values different from the ones grasped by the POR's valuations. In other words, there is no illusion at the level of value-feelings.

However, the POR is deluded in her inner perception. Inner perception enjoys no more cognitive dignity than external perception. Nietzsche indeed seems to be rather pessimistic about the possibility of gaining self-knowledge. In the case of *ressentiment* in particular, he believes that we remain unaware of the different drives behind actions and judgements. Scheler believes it to be possible to know the inner world with "self-evident and adequate knowledge".[717] But as a realist, he also claims that inner perception is nevertheless fallible. Any perceptual experience is subject to illusions and, as he puts it, "the essence of illusion consists in the fact that something is 'given' in intuition […] which 'is not itself present' (does not exist)".[718] Inner perception gives us access to psychological states but it is itself a mental not a psychological phenomenon.[719] Inner-perception is non-doxastic. When it misses its mark it is therefore not an error, but an illusion. Illusions about inner states come in different kinds. As Vendrell Ferran summarises them[720], the conception of illusion has at least three different meanings in Scheler's sometimes difficult text. There is: (1) the delusionary perception of some psychological state [*Einbildung einer Wahrnehmung von etwas Psychischem*]. I feel sad, because I see and empathise with somebody who is sad. Here, the illusion is mixing up the external and the internal, and the subject feels an emotion by contagion. Then there is (2) the proper illusion about a psychological state [*fehlerhafte Wahrnehmen von etwas Psychischem*], (3) overlooking of a psychological state [*Übersehen eines Psychischen*]. According to Vendrell Ferran, only (2) is a pure case of illusion; (1) instead refers to sham-emotions and (3) to virtual or repressed emotions. All are cases of failure of inner perception, and the POR is the victim an illusion about the very nature of her occurent emotions which she takes to be

716 Fingarette, 2000, p. 33.
717 ISK, p. 4.
718 ISK, p. 5.
719 ISK, p. 30.
720 Vendrell Ferran, 2008, p. 98.

emotions other than envy or revenge. She is also deluded about her value-feelings which qua feelings which she simply overlooks. This overlooking of emotions and feelings was earlier described as a form of sub-personal repression (see Chapter 3).

Generally speaking, we are connected to our experience in different degrees, something which is already illustrated in the fact that sometimes we focus all our attention on a pain or emotion, and sometimes we experience the pain or the emotion without really focusing on it. It is also illustrated by the fact that we may overlook our emotional reactions when our experience is intensely focused on the instantiation of a value. Some argue that emotions might be unconscious and therefore said to be repressed in Freud's sense. Repressed experiences never reach consciousness. The idea that repression is, for example, a conscious and mental fight to control and curb the action-tendency of an emotion or a desire is false, on this view, if someone struggles to control his cravings for food or his deviant sexual desires, he is not repressing them since he is completely aware of the object of his cravings or desires. However, analysing illusions in terms of unconscious mental states that one fails to acknowledge because they are in a deeper, inaccessible level of the mind, just explains away the problem. For Scheler, what inner perception sometimes fails to grasp nevertheless exists in the subconscious strata, which:

> […] is not simply absent from inner intuition or something which can only be inferred [like the unconscious]; rather, its presence or absence, its having this nature or some other, modifies the total content of inner intuition at any one time, even though the person experiencing it cannot straightforwardly specify in words the particular form [*Inhalt*] this modification takes". […] Hence, the subconscious experience is in principle accessible to inner perception, and what makes it subconscious is only that it does not, at a given time, make an impression upon inner sense[721].

There are strata of consciousness: supra-conscious, sub-conscious, unconscious and conscious states. Not all features of an experience are grasped with the same intensity or the same transparency. When driving a car, in some way I perceive my movements even though they are executed automatically. Changing gears is not an unconscious action, because I know, for example, that I want to change gears. At the same time, I might be much more conscious of my current thoughts than of my current driving movements. Scheler suggests a stratification determined by different mental states:

> There are many levels of consciousness in the [phenomenon of inner-perception] as there are levels of existence [*Daseinsstufen*] in external nature, all characterized by the degree to which the perceived object depends on the apprehending subject and his general and individual properties. A feeling of sickness, for example, can be present but removed from the sphere of inner sense, or only from the sphere of noticing [*Bemerkens*]. It can be present in the latter bur removed from

[721] RAM, p. 45.

> the sphere of attention [*Beachtens*]; it can be present there without being brought under observation [*beobachtet*]; and it can be observed without our judging or establishing under what concept it should be subsumed. *What a distance separates what anyone experiences from what he experiences with such knowledge that he can say what it is he is experiencing!*[722]

Repression, on Scheler's view, as already noted, is a looking-away from the disturbances constituted of thoughts/representations, emotions, desires, hate or love. If fully apprehended, these disturbances would lead to a negative judgement.[723]Repression is made possible by the fact that experiences are sometimes felt but not "seen" and this looking-away is not a conscious decision but more an urge. The value-flavour or value-quality of the experience of an emotion or a desire is always noticed. "To repress an experience (*Erlebnis*)" does not stop the experience from obtaining, but it prevents the judgement or the inner-perception getting access to it. The individual reacts to these qualities without his experience being made conscious. As Vendrell Ferran puts it:

> […] unerlebt ist nicht im Sinne von nicht-erlebt gemeint, sondern im Sinne von unter der Schwelle des Bewustseins stehend und insofern, obgleich existierend, nicht wahrgenommen.[724]

Inner perception of one's psychological states goes wrong when, for example, one perceives one's state of envy as a state of disapproval. One may also simply fail to perceive one's own envy. Finally, one may fail to perceive one's feeling of a particular value or take it to be the feeling of a different value. How do these distinctions apply to the formation and functioning of *ressentiment*? Consider Sam. Sam admires Hans, in particular for his good aesthetic taste and style. Hans is an aesthetic model for Sam. Thanks to his inner perceptions, Sam is aware of his admiration and of the fact that he is regularly struck by Hans' impeccable taste and dress sense. But Sam is unable to live up to the standards set by his model. All his acquaintances tell him that he is an aesthetic catastrophe. Then Sam comes across the view, asserted by some of his friends, that Hans's taste is in fact very bad, indeed vulgar. Sam initially rejects this assertion. It is incompatible with his impressions of the values exemplified by Hans, of which he is fully aware. Because of the unpleasantness of Sam's failure to live up to the standards of his model, Sam ceases to be aware of his feelings of the values he still feels that Hans exemplifies; his value-feelings are there but are no longer the objects of his inner per-

722 ISK, pp. 44-45. Emphasis added.

723 As Scheler puts it:

> […] an *instinctual looking away* from the stirrings of imagination, of feeling and longing, of loving and hating, from such stirrings as would result in a negative value judgement if fully perceived (a judgement coming from one's own 'conscience,' or a social judgement based on a code of rules we acknowledge) (ISK, p. 83).

724 Vendrell Ferran, 2008, p. 84.

ception. (As we have seen, this process may be understood in completely intentionalist terms or as a process which begins at the sub-personal level and which Sam then deliberately tolerates). The main obstacle to forming the axiological belief that Hans is, after all, very vulgar, are now removed. The new evaluation and inner perception or reflexive awareness (what Sartre calls non-thetic awareness) of this belief lead to the disappearance of the unpleasantness of Sam's previous failures. Or perhaps the unpleasantness is still being felt by Sam but he is no longer aware in inner perception of his value-feeling of this unpleasantess. The new evaluation and Sam's awareness of this also become the cognitive basis for negative emotions of which Hans is the object, for example scorn and pity.

We have considered at length the extent to which Sam and those like him may be said to be practically rational. But our picture of Sam will only be complete once we have determined what is to be said about the *reasonableness* or non-practical rationality of his emotions. Sam's initial admiration of Hans is not unreasonable and might even be correct. The negative emotions he feels on the basis of his failures to live up to the aesthetic standards exemplified by Hans are also not unreasonable and perhaps correct. His subsequent scorn of and pity for Hans are also not unreasonable to the extent that they are motivated by his new axiological beliefs and his awareness of these. But of course Sam's scorn and pity are not, from the point of view of affective rationality, compatible with his continuing to be struck by Hans' good taste, whether or not he is aware of this valuing. Nor are they compatible with evaluative beliefs to the extent that these have been formed on the basis of no new evidence whatsoever.

Throughout the present work we have referred to the analogy between the perception-perceptual judgment couple and the feeling of value-evaluation couple. It is therefore not without interest to consider what might be the nearest analogue in the sphere of doxastic rationality, to the type of affective irrationality exemplified by the POR. Consider Maria. She sees a real, live duck as a duck and is aware in inner perception of so seeing and comes to believe and judge, on this basis, that what she sees is a duck and looks like a duck. But Maria is pathologically susceptible. Everyone assures her that she is indeed looking at an animal, but an animal which not only is a rabbit but looks like a rabbit. The immediate reaction in Maria is that her inner perception of her seeing and how she sees ceases to function although she continues to see as before. She behaves like a temporary victim of blind-sight. On the authority of those around her, she comes to believe that what she sees is indeed a rabbit. Her belief is, from the point of view of doxastic rationality, incompatible with what and how she sees. But to the extent that she is no longer aware of how things look to her she is

epistemically blameless. She also has a reason for believing that she is looking at a rabbit – the testimony of those around her. But her new belief is incorrect and her pathological susceptibility to suggestion is an epistemic vice.

Our view considers weak and strong *ressentiment*'s reevaluation to impact only evaluations, and given their nature, the POR uses the device of reevaluation to intentionally bring herself into a condition where she overlooks, in inner perception, the values she grasps or prefers, and the emotions that respond to them. The view also shifts the object of self-deception. The POR is not deceived about the value of external goods, persons or state of affairs; these values are still somehow experienced. The POR is instead deceived about her experience, of her impressions of values *qua* feelings and of her occurrent emotions. She fails to conceptually acknowledge the fact that she remains impressed by her neighbour's musical talent and responds with envy. Our definition of *ressentiment*'s self-deception echoes Voigtländer's early account in which the POR is conflicted between her non-conceptual feeling of negative self-worth and her conceptual, propped-up, positive feelings of self-esteem. It also departs from standard doxastic accounts as no contradictory or incompatible beliefs are necessary. On our view, the POR lacks self-knowledge and is deluded about occurrent states of her experience. The tension she experiences is accounted for as it arises from the fact that she comes to evaluate and predicate values that are in disagreement with the one she feels. The POR says/judges/believes her neighbour is evil while nonetheless feeling his achievements are admirable and overlooking – or bringing herself into a state prone to overlook – the fact that she envies him.

4.5 Conclusion

The internalisation account we earlier rejected implies that *ressentiment*'s reevaluation process alters not just evaluations, but our most fundamental acts of valuation, and *in fine* our personality. The view however is in conflict with the fact that *ressentiment* is a state of psychological tension. Scheler, in some passages, slightly amends the view and argues that the old valuations remain in fact present, as the POR despite coming to feel new values keeps a background awareness of the old, coveted, and distressing values. Could this view provide an alternative to the one we have defended that reevaluation alters only evaluations? The view that *ressentiment* involves a background awareness certainly accounts for the POR's psychological tension. We should nevertheless reject it as well. The difficulty with this latter account is related to the fact that strong moral opprobrium is attached to *ressentiment* and that we generally hold the POR responsible for her reevaluations (see Chapter 5). But if her valuations, feelings and impressions of values are considered to change fundamentally, the POR

can only be a victim of *ressentiment*, for valuations, as Scheler reminds us, are not subject to the will. By contrast, evaluations and emotions based on them are more easy to control.[725]

Our view rests on several assumptions. First, there is the premise that there is a non-conceptual grasp of values and axiological relations. Beliefs, judgements, evaluations and the emotions based thereon are conceptual states. The former are uncontrollable while the latter are subject to the will to a certain extent. A second assumption is the well-foundedness of our distinction between valuations of the external world and its axiological properties, and the inner perception of experiences. The POR, we have argued, perceives that her neighbour is admirable, but she fails to grasp that she reacts with envy and that she experiences a value-feeling *qua* feeling that grasps the positive value of her neighbour (see Section 3.1). A third assumption our theory of ressentiment rests on is the idea that some emotions can be propped up. This view relies on empirical claims about the causal influence of cognitive states on emotions surely.[726]

Finally, the view that self-deception is a lack of self-knowledge presents many advantages. First, it accounts for the protean nature of envy. The POR is someone who fails to take her envy for what it is and harbours instead indignation or resentment. Second, it avoids some of the pitfalls of the more traditional doxastic accounts of self-deception which imply a conflict between two opposite values. *Ressentiment* however is mostly characterised by a conflict between valuations, values, and values-properties that belong to different domains. Third, it accounts for the fact that *ressentiment* builds on repressed and relived emotions which the person tries to remove from consciousness. Fourth, it accounts for the fact that the POR never consciously acknowledges her affective states that may continue to motivate her, and the evaluative properties that may remain present in the background. Fifth, it shows why the kind of self-deception involved by *ressentiment* does not face the dynamic paradox. The POR is deluded about his inner mental states, but not about the values he grasps.

[725] Scheler, p. 333.

[726] Lazar, 1999.

5 THE MORAL STATUS OF *RESSENTIMENT* (AND RESENTMENT)

In some passages of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche seems to hold a positive view of *ressentiment* which, he claims, originally made men "interesting".[727] He also asserts that "men of *ressentiment* will inevitably end up cleverer than any noble race"[728]; that their instincts have been "instruments of culture"[729] ; and the latter were, by large measure, a creative force.[730] But most of the time, the POR comes across as the complete opposite of an admirable character. Those harbouring *ressentiment* are marked by despicable passions; they are compared to "cellar rats full of revenge and hatred"[731] or to "sick sheep".[732] Both Scheler and Nietzsche regularly stress the *poisonous* character of *ressentiment*.[733] According to them, the value of the phenomenon is clearly negative – a view that certainly remains very influential. Brudholm, for example, has suggested more recently that there can never really be a defence of *ressentiment*:

> Whereas there is certainly a case to be argued for resentment, it seems nearly absurd to try something similar with regard to *ressentiment* or with regard to the moral standing of its holders.[734]

In the same vein, Améry and his commentators, who explicitly use "*ressentiment*" to describe what is by large measure mere resentment, are pressed to justify their choice and to distance themselves from the negative connotations attributable to the Nietzschean sense of the term.[735] When used in ordinary language, *"ressentiment*" has a rather bad reputation too, and comes across as a questionable state of mind. An accusation of *ressentiment* for example throws a negative light on one's motives, character, and actions; and the POR's moral protests, in particular her indignation and resentment, are seen as shallow, as expressing a sense of inferiority, envy or revenge. We will here try to better understand why *ressentiment* provokes such moral opprobrium.

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727 GM, I, 6.

728 GM, I, 10.

729 GM, I, 11.

730 GM, I, 10.

731 GM, I, 14.

732 GM, III, 15.

733 GM, I, 10; GM, Preface, 6; GM, III, 15.

734 Brudholm, 2008, p. 12.

735 As Améry puts it: "My personal task is to justify a psychic condition that has been condemned by moralists and psychologists alike. The former regard it as a taint, the latter as a kind of sickness" (Améry, 1980, p. 68). As his commentator Zolkos remarks that: "Central to Améry's view of resentment is the restoration of the victim's social status and dignity, the validation of the experience of victimhood; his view therefore contrasts with the Nietzschean derogative view of *ressentiment*" (Zolkos, 2007, p. 23).

The moral disvalue of *ressentiment* cannot be understood without a closer look at the moral status of its cousin, resentment. The latter is often debated and its status has become of crucial importance in, for example, recent discussions about the nature and possibility of forgiveness in transitional justice.[736] In that context, the view that resentment is a bad thing is challenged by those who consider resentment to be an appropriate and honourable response to wrongs.[737] These issues form part of a general trend in moral philosophy that aims to rehabilitate emotions that have been conventionally or historically considered immoral.[738] Butler set an early, famous, example in his *Sermons* by insisting on there being more acceptable sides to resentment, which is an emotion that the Church has always considered evil and that the Stoics considered, like any other affective state, simply irrational. Murphy claims in this regard that retributive emotions like resentment "may be seen in a better light when it is realised that they may be tied to the goods of self-respect and self-defence".[739]

Clearly, resentment is an emotion quite different from the sentiment of *ressentiment*, for the reasons already given. Unfortunately, the most intricate confusions materialise precisely when their value, and more particularly their moral value, is brought under close scrutiny. Etymological similarities of course play their part, but most difficulties arise because, as we have shown earlier, *ressentiment* is phenomenologically related to resentment. For, the very experience of *ressentiment* leads us to harbour resentment that is grounded, for example, in the POR's new evaluations. Hence, given the relation between the two, could it be, that resentment only becomes morally problematic when it is one of the defining dispositions of the more enduring vice of *ressentiment*? It is certainly a common – and we shall later claim, erroneous – view to apprehend *ressentiment* as a bad variant of resentment. But is resentment experienced independently of *ressentiment*, then, always a morally good thing?

In order to answer these questions, we will first focus on claims about the disvalue of resentment (an emotion) and, then, the disvalue of *ressentiment* (a sentiment, eventually a trait), paying particular attention to the *moral* disvalue we sometimes attribute to these affective phenomena. Not all moral philosophies endorse the view that emotions can, along with actions and persons, be the objects of moral predicates.[740] Therefore, we first need to determine what it means to ascribe a moral value to a sentiment or to an emotion. That is the task of the remainder of this introductory section.

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736 Mihai, 2016.

737 Améry, 1968; Minkkinen, 2007; Brudholm, 2008; Ben Ze'ev, 2002.

738 La Caze, 2001; Ben Ze'ev, 2002; Kristjánsson, 2003; Kristjánsson, 2004; Wallace, 1994; Tappolet et al., 2011; Neu, 2008; against this view, see Taylor, 2006.

739 Murphy, 2002.

740 For Kantians, it is the will and the person that bears moral (dis)value. For others, only actions are morally good or bad.

To begin with, we shall restrict the scope of an emotion's moral predicates by excluding cases where an emotion is said to be moral only because of the role it plays in our knowledge of a fact or a norm that bears moral (dis)value. Resentment may be said to be a moral emotion in this sense because it is a response to the disvalue of injustice, for example. Resentment may then be considered good because the emotion warrants our "sense of justice [which] emerges as a generalisation and, eventually, a rationalisation of a personal sense of injustice".[741] The experience of such a feeling has positive moral value. But there are also emotions that are non-moral in this epistemic sense, which we still consider morally good or bad. For example, envy is thought to be a morally bad thing while episodes of compassion are considered a morally good thing. However, envy is not considered good or bad because it plays a role in our knowledge of a moral fact or norm.[742] On some accounts compassion or empathy is said to be morally good because of its cognitive role and also independently of this role.

So in what other ways is moral (dis)value ascribed to affective phenomena? Ordinary speech attaches moral predicates to emotions and sentiments for many different reasons. We will here first distinguish two families or models of moral attributions.

According to Model (1), an emotion is said to bear moral value because it is bound, through a logical or non-logical relation, to another object – not an emotion – which bears moral (dis)value. This is how the emotion's proper object, its motive and function, intra- and inter-personal effects, and even its bearer – a person – may all become relevant for its moral status.[743] The moral goodness of an emotion or a sentiment may hence be grounded in the (dis)value of characteristic action tendencies, on the ethical status of the person harbouring the emotion, on the value of the emotion's associated desires, or merely on the state of pleasure that the emotion causes. In other words, the variety of ethical claims about emotions along this first dimension comes from the fact that non-emotional but related elements – an action, a desire, a trait, the person harbouring it – contribute to the emotion's moral (dis)value. This is typically the case when one condemns resentment on the grounds that it triggers harmful behaviours which are unethical.

This is valid for sentiments too, although in this latter case, the moral status of a sentiment may be derived from its emotional parts which, in turn, may inherit their moral status from

741 Solomon, 1990, p. 246. The same author goes on:

> Before we can even attempt to formulate an all-embracing theory of justice, we have to have some sense of justice, but to get that we need a generalised sense sense of injustice, and that depends on those personal experiences of injustice and the antipathetic emotions of injustice – envy, jealousy, resentment, and the urge to revenge (Solomon, 1990, p. 252).

742 Roberts, 1995; Ben Ze'ev, 2002.

743 Mulligan *in* Sander & Scherer, 2009.

their non-affective parts (for example an action tendency). In short, a sentiment can be morally disvaluable because some of its emotional manifestations are immoral. The moral status of *ressentiment,* for example, may be derived from envy – a constitutive part of *ressentiment* – which is bad and disvaluable in turn because envy may lead to anti-social behaviour, which may be considered *intrinsically* bad. Relevant here is the distinction between wholes that are valuable even though they contain parts which are disvaluable, or, inversely, wholes that are disvaluable because they contain parts that bear some moral disvalue, such as the sentiment of *ressentiment,* which contains dispositions of envy, malice, hostility, etc. The status of an emotion or a sentiment may also be disvaluable because it is itself the part of a whole, the person, which has a negative moral status.

The relations in the first model certainly cover many of the different ways we can and do ascribe moral value to emotions, but we shall here argue that there is a second way of attributing moral value to emotions. This second way, described as Model (2), depends on the relation between moral and non-moral values.

On Model (1), an emotion is said to be good or bad because of its intra-psychic or inter-personal effects, its part-whole relations, or because of the value that one considers these effects, parts, and wholes bear intrinsically. However, in our ordinary experience, we rarely attribute moral predicates directly to emotions. We rarely say that jealousy, anger or envy is evil, for instance. We say instead that jealousy is unpleasant, that anger is unreasonable, or that envy is unhealthy and that jealous, angry, envious persons are evil or morally bad, that it is wrong for a person to feel this or that emotion. Model (2) covers cases like these, where an emotion, its effects, parts and wholes are first associated with a non-moral (dis)value, such as unpleasantness, unreasonableness, unhealthiness, or even disagreeableness, hostility, danger, or anti-socialness. The argument we will here develop in detail holds that the exemplification of non-moral values by emotions does in fact contribute to their overall moral status.

Model (2) can be specified further. In particular, we may distinguish three ways non-moral and moral values can be related. 1/ One possible way is a well-known reduction: a dogmatic hedonist consequentialist will claim that the moral rightness and wrongness of actions must be defined in terms of their consequences for the exemplification of the pleasant and the unpleasant. The unpleasant is not a moral value but a sensory one. Moral rightness is here in part defined in terms of a non-moral, sensory value. 2/ A second example of relations between moral and non-moral values is provided by the view that the moral status of an emotion is determined by the non-moral and non-hedonic value of its consequences, either intra- or inter-personal. Thus Smith, Hume and Butler claim that resentment is immoral because of its disruptive social consequences. Murphy and Améry, by contrast, seem to

defend the view that resentment is good only in virtue of its intra-psychological effects. 3/ A third example is provided by the view that the moral value of an emotion is determined by certain properties of the person, in particular her preferences and by the non-moral values and their relations which are the objects of these preferences. We have already referred to this type of view. Emotions, we claimed earlier in Chapter 3, are responses to a more primitive and non-conceptual grasp of values. They therefore reveal and are determined by the preferences and axiological sensitivities of a person. Our third example of a relation between moral and non-moral value simply takes seriously the fact that we morally condemn others for their preferences and the lower non-moral values they seem always to privilege and so too for the emotions based on such preferences.

From the standpoint of the third example in model (2), the POR has a problematic moral status because her reevaluation mechanism makes her prefer lower values or, in the case of Nietzsche, values that are not contributing positively to human flourishing and health, such as truth, compassion and charity. Note that in this case, some of her emotions are the manifestation of morally condemnable preferences. As such, they do not bear moral (dis)value, but reveal the moral (dis)value of the subject.

We shall now analyse the moral (dis)value of resentment and *ressentiment* in light of the previous distinctions. We will first map different theories about the moral disvalue of the emotion of resentment and how they account for it (Section 5.1). The sentiment of *ressentiment* will undergo the same analysis but will be discussed separately in the second section of this chapter (Section 5.2).

5.1 The moral status of resentment

Philosophers have ambivalent views about the moral value of resentment. Recent defences suggest that resentment is ethically valuable because someone who is incapable of feeling it is morally defective.[744] But Adam Smith also claims that: "violent resentment, instead of carrying us along with it, becomes itself the object of our resentment and indignation".[745] In the same vein, Butler acknowledges that resentment prevents injury and warrants the punishment of wickedness,[746] but not without first wondering what could be the good of an emotion that is at odds with the cardinal virtue of benevolence.[747] Two conceptions of the goodness of an emotions are here suggested: either resentment is judged on the basis of its interpersonal effects (e.g. anti-social behaviours) or it is judged on whether or not it stands in harmony with virtues, such as Butler's benevolence.

744 La Caze, 2001.

745 TMS, I, 6.

746 Butler, *Upon Resentment*.

747 Butler, *Upon Resentment*.

Ordinary intuitions about the moral value of resentment are ambivalent, too. The wrong one endures that may give rise to resentment can of course constitute an unfair treatment. Sometimes, however, what the resenter claims to be unfair treatment may just be a fair disadvantage, which in the end does not justify resentment. While we clearly empathise with the victim of an unfair trial or with someone who has genuinely been wronged, we disapprove of resentment when a person harbours it self-righteously. In such cases, some speak of invidious resentment.[748] and like many other emotions, resentment has been the object of moral opprobrium, mainly on the grounds that it constitutes an unwelcome disruption to our rational nature, a disruption that is self-perpetuating and motivates anti-social behaviours. Sometimes it is also condemned because it reveals inappropriate arrogance or pride. More recently, however, it is a lack of resentment that has been viewed as a moral issue.

In order to determine the moral value of resentment, we will distinguish and evaluate the following specific claims: 1) resentment is bad because it is unpleasant, 2) resentment is good because it discloses a healthy self-esteem, 3) resentment is bad because it is excessive and motivates harmful and antisocial actions, and 4) resentment is wrong because it is motivated by bad pride. We shall then discuss how resentment – or its absence – is linked to its potential moral value. Note that all accounts presented and discussed in this section are done so independently of *ressentiment*.

Let us first examine the very common argument that attributes negative value to an emotion like resentment on the sole ground that it has unpleasant intra-psychic effects.[749] Resentment, in this regard, is considered bad because it lacks positive valence. Because the experience is unpleasant, the emotion is bad. A systematic hedonist may even hold that, since most emotions are unpleasant[750], most emotions are bad.

The difficulty with this argument is that the valence of an affective episode is a poor indicator of its moral value. Many emotions, such as grief, regret, or remorse, are negatively valenced experiences, but a life without the experience of them does not fit our intuitive conception of a good life. Never to feel these emotions is in fact closer to a form of insanity.[751] Also, as previously mentioned in Section 2.1, the phenomenology of anger and resentment

[748] "Indignation and feelings of resentment proper arise, by definition, from unfair treatment. Invidious resentment occurs when the advantage is painful but fair."(Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 48.)

[749] Langton, for example, considers resentment a response to viciousness. Endorsing a consequentialist standpoint, she considers two criteria determining its worth: accuracy and consequences. Resentment might be justified – the injury was indeed vicious – and the response adequate. On the other hand, resentment, from a hedonistic point of view, might have bad consequences for me and others (anti-social emotion). Therefore, resentment might be accurate and rational but still bad since it reduces the overall sum of happiness in the world (Langton, 2001, pp. 256–257).

[750] Tappolet et al., 2011, Introduction.

[751] Williams, 1985.

are both more subtle. The hedonic tone of resentment, in particular, is mixed and one can derive pleasure from experiencing it,[752] especially via episodic fantasies of revenge, *Schadenfreude* and the satisfaction of seeing the offender being punished.[753]

Perhaps we could further distinguish between the claim that resentment leads to pleasure and the claim that it has a pleasurable dimension.[754] But either way, one may still want to reject ethical hedonism. Unfortunately, it would take us too far afield to consider the arguments for and against ethical hedonism.[755] Here, we shall simply note that the claim of the hedonist that expresses moral condemnation of resentment because it is unpleasant is phenomenologically inaccurate. In addition, and as the following descriptions will show, our ordinary moral intuitions take resentment to be objectionable for different reasons, whether or not ethical hedonism is true.

In Chapter 3, we argued that one criteria that distinguishes the experience of resentment from the experience of indignation is that the former is a self-regarding attitude whereas the latter is not. This relates to the claim already mentioned, that we shall now evaluate, that the incapacity to readily resent wrongdoers constitutes a part of a low sense of self-respect or self-esteem. According to this claim, resentment is a positive emotion because it is an essential part of a healthy sense of self-worth when it occurs, which is an intrinsically good thing.[756] As Adam Smith remarks:

> A person becomes contemptible who tamely sits still, and submits to insults, without attempting either to repel or to revenge them. [...] Even the mob are enraged to see any man submit patiently to affronts and ill usage. They desire to see this insolence resented, and resented by the person who suffers from it.[757]

Several authors have held this view, which seems to be a well-established doctrine of folk psychology.[758] In a similar fashion, indignation is said to *signal* a healthy sense of self-worth too. As Aristotle puts it: "servile, worthless, unambitious persons are not inclined to indigna-

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752 Thomas puts along the following lines: "The grudge holder delights in taking pleasure in his resentment and wants there to be nothing that would give him a reason to be less resentful" (Thomas *in* Brudholm, 2008, p. 87).

753 Baier summarises Hume's view regarding the hedonistic quality of resentment: "The pleasure of such satisfaction need not be something we recall from previous successful punitive strikes. We know a priori that we will find it good to satisfy resentment as we know that satisfying hunger is a good" (Baier, 2010, p. 153). Or, as Thomas puts it: "The grudge holder delights in taking pleasure in his resentment and wants there to be nothing that would give him a reason to be less resentful" (Thomas, 2003, p. 205).

754 Hazlitt, 2004.

755 Moore, 2013.

756 As Murphy says: "Resentment is a good thing, for it is essentially tied to a non-controversially good thing – self-respect" (Murphy *in* Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 16).

757 TMS, I, 3.

758 La Caze, 2001; Steinem, 1993.

tion, since there is nothing they can believe themselves to deserve".[759] Moreover, Butler mentions the fact that resentment offers a balance to compassion, for there are wrongs and offences, done to us or others, that deserve our moral protest.[760] A person who is too compassionate would show an inappropriate mercy towards her wrongdoers.[761] In an oft-quoted work, Murphy has recently argued that harbouring resentment – or the capacity to do so – *signals* strong self-respect and self-esteem.[762] Barton more specifically explains that:

> It is not that low self-esteem is what always explains lack of resentment, but rather that resentment depends on one's having enough self-esteem to believe that what is resented is unfair to oneself and that it must be resisted for that reason.[763]

On this view, an excessive readiness to forgive is seen as problematic and stands for a lack of self-respect. By contrast, an individual with a well-rounded sense of desert and dignity would naturally recognise an offence as such and would respond with resentment. His resentment also demands revenge, such as the punishment of the offender.[764] Graf Harber summarises the argument in the following way:

> Not to feel resentment when resentment is called for is [...] a sign of servility, insofar as the victim conveys a lack of self-respect. This is because a principle of morality requires of people that they respect themselves. Otherwise put, to the principle of self-respect, there corresponds the virtue of resentment. Consequently, the failure to feel resentment when one has been injured is indicative of a moral defect.[765]

The claim here, however, is very different from saying that resentment is good because it motivates moral conduct or from saying that it is valuable because it warrants the enforcements of beneficial norms. The fundamental premise of the argument is that self-regarding attitudes, such as self-esteem or self-respect, are intrinsically morally good. As a consequence, resentment is seen as a positive emotion because it is the manifestation of a positive and healthy self-respect. But to say that something is not bad and perhaps even good because it is a manifestation of something that is an intrinsic moral good is only to convey

759 Aristotle, 1387b.

760 Butler brings up the example of indignation that fits a wicked crime as a balance to compassion. He does not speak of resentment directly, neither does he explicitly formulate that resentment is the sign of a healthy self-respect or self-esteem (Butler, *Upon Resentment*).

761 As Frazer explains: "The fact that we feel resentment allows us to maintain our natural balance of passions when sympathy might otherwise lead us to excessive mercy for wrongdoers" (Frazer, 2010, p. 38).

762 Murphy *in* Murphy & Hampton, 1988, Chap. 1.

763 Barton, 1999, p. 28.

764 As Murphy puts it: "If it is proper (perhaps even sometimes mandatory) to feel indignation when I see third parties morally wronged, must it not be equally proper (perhaps even sometimes mandatory) to feel resentment when I experience moral wrong done to myself?" (Murphy, 2008, p. 505).

765 Graf Haber, 1991, p. 78.

upon the former the role of a welcome symptom or sign. Resentment in this case neither has intrinsic value nor is it instrumental for self-respect. I do not improve my sense of self-worth because I happen to be resentful. But *if* I am morally well-rounded *then* I will resent wrongs in the appropriate way. If anything, these kinds of defences of resentment are arguing that self-respect is a moral good, or that it is something healthy – a non-moral value – and contributes to the moral goodness of the person. One also wonders whether all self-respect is in fact morally good. For sometimes self-respect is incorrect.

Another claim is that resentment's moral value is derived from its inter-personal effects.[766] Reference to bad consequences is a common way of specifying the negative nature of some emotions,[767] and resentment may in this case be condemned because it brings about hostile and anti-social behaviours.[768]

This argument may at first seem to be in contradiction with our earlier description of resentment in Chapter 2, which seems to assume a passive individual who cannot respond on-the-spot to a wrongdoing. As a response to the fact that a wrong has not yet been righted, this understanding of resentment seems to imply that retaliation or the punishment of the offender has not yet been acted out. However, the emotion as mentioned in the same earlier chapter also comes with a strong *desire* for revenge and reparation, and accumulated resentment can burst out into fits of uncontrolled anger. The resenter therefore presents the risk of violently acting upon his emotion and seeking a personal revenge that tends to be excessive. Indeed, Adam Smith classifies it as an "unsocial" passion, along with hatred.[769] Resentment compromises life in community for it "leads to excessive and violent acts of retribution".[770] The major concern is thus that resentment's desire for revenge leads to the person favouring acts or institutions that are *disproportionately* harmful to the offender, for, as the philosopher explains: "The man of furious resentment, if he were to listen to the dictates of that passion,

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766 Solomon and Stone explain:

> Good and bad can refer to the various consequences of emotion – whether it leads to health or illness, happiness or unhappiness, or (being more broadly considerate) whether it results in good or bad consequences for all concerned. It can also refer to the causes, context, and circumstances of the emotion, which are all too often confused with the emotion itself. (Solomon & Stone, 2002, p. 420)

767 Solomon & Stone, 2002.

768 Deonna et al., 2012, p. 13.

769 TMS, I, 2-3. Frazer, 2010, p. 103.

770 MacLachlan, 2010, p. 426. Van Zetten explains: "If someone bitterly resents the way he is treated, it may happen that he retaliates with total disregard for the consequences. The strength of his feeling creates another kind of blindness, not the blindness of a 'quasi-inertial force' but the blindness brought about by overpowering emotion" (van Zetten, 1997, p. 347).

would perhaps regard the death of his enemy as but a small compensation for a trifling wrong".[771]

A variant of this claim focuses on the intra-psychic consequences of resentment rather than on its inter-personal ones. Resentment is accordingly objectionable because it arouses excessive states of mind. Ordinary occurrences of this emotion show a person's nursing revengefulness, sometimes even hatred, malicious thoughts, and despair. The person of resentment ponders a past offence and the fact that justice has not yet been done. But the emotion can also turn into nursed grudges, malicious revengefulness, and gleeful *Schadenfreude.* Resentment tends to be vehement.[772] As Adam Smith explains, it is an emotion that "must always be brought down to a pitch much lower than that to which undisciplined nature would raise them".[773] But what exactly does this excess consist of?

The desire for revenge, when it is obsessive or risks being carried out too brutally, is morally objectionable. To feel wronged and not to be able to right the offence can typically cause a prolonged and self-obsessed grudge.[774] Resentment, as we showed earlier in Chapter 2, is sometimes associated with lasting and intense ruminations. As Butler points out, this emotion can be "somewhat unreasonable as to the occasion of the passion, or immoderate as to the degree or duration of it".[775] Butler specifies that resentment can turn into a passion, "from whence men take the occasion to run into the dreadful vices of malice and revenge".[776] Despite being a genuine response to injustice, the emotion can thus envenom our existence with excessively malicious thoughts[777] and an uncontrollable desire to harm the offender, to see him punished, or thwarted by a bad turn of luck. And even if the resenter seeks third-party retaliation instead of carrying out her revenge personally, her general attitude can still be coloured with malice and a desire for the severe punishment of her offender. *Schadenfreude* is another symptom showing that, quite apart from the occurrence of punishment, the resenter often takes (great) pleasure in all bad things that happen to his wrongdoer. Dosto-

771 TMS, III, 1.

772 Spencer & Schliesser, 2006, p. 62.

773 TMS, I, 3.

774 On the appropriate duration of anger, see: Aristotle, 1125b30–1126b10 and Brudholm, 2008, p. 87.

775 Butler, *Upon Resentment*, §3.

776 Butler, *Upon Resentment*, §16.

777 Marañón explains: "Resentment is not a sin, but a passion, a passion of the mind; though, to be sure, it may lead to sin, and sometimes to madness or crime" (Marañón, 1956, p. 9). Griswold reduces *ressentiment* to "malice, desire for revenge, envy […] but also anxiety, suspicion, the holding of a grudge, a hatred of whatever or whoever one feels has called one's standing into question, a feeling of powerlessness, a loss of self-respect, and […] a generalised sense that the world is un fair. It suggests frustrated and repressed anger" (Griswold, 2007, p. xx). As Adam Smith puts it: "harsh, jarring, and convulsive, something that tears and distracts the breast, and is altogether destructive of that composure and tranquillity of mind which is so necessary to happiness" (TMS, I, 3).

evsky has given edifying descriptions of gleeful malice and pleasure harboured by humiliated characters who enjoy the misfortune of their offenders without ever taking any effective revenge.[778]

Malice, rumination and revenge are hence the consequences that make resentment condemnable according to the standards and virtues of moderation and benevolence. Harbouring moderate thoughts and affects is a good thing, the occurrence of which resentment may compromise. Harming others is a bad thing, the avoidance of which may be compromised by episodes of resentment. In sum, considered from the point of view of its action tendencies and psychological risks, resentment is considered immoral because it brings about negative, non-moral, consequences. It is unhealthy; it makes the agent less rational and it may, eventually, produce negative social outcomes.

But moral opprobrium is also attached to resentment irrespective of its consequences, intra- or inter-personal. Often the emotion seems simply misplaced and inappropriate. Apart from *excesses*, for instance, Butler claims there are *abuses* of resentment, such as when someone harbours resentment in response to an event that simply does not qualify as a wrong. We shall now consider this idea in more detail.

Resentment of what is in fact not a wrong makes the emotion somehow *inappropriate.* In the philosophical literature, emotions are said to be unfitting, inappropriate, or incorrect or not.[779] The understanding of this set of concepts is guided by the metaphor of matching or fitting and refers to standards of correctness. For example, if I were to be revengeful at a sublime piece of music, my emotion would be inappropriate in the sense that there is nothing in a piece of music that makes my emotional response correct through accurately representing how things are. Revenge does not present or represent something as sublime to me. By contrast, awe at a sublime sunset is an appropriate emotion, it fits its object. Resentment seems, sometimes, to miss its mark too, as when there has not really been some offence and yet the person is resentful. Could we then say, more generally, that what gives resentment its negative moral value is the fact that it is, often or typically unfitting?

In order to better understand the ordinary intuition about *abuses* of resentment, we shall here introduce two important conceptual families: the correctness, fittingness or appropriateness of emotions on one hand, and the justification of emotions on the other. Both families are linked in different ways since, on many accounts, if an emotion is correct, then it is justified, non-defeasibly justified, as we said earlier. But an emotion which is defeasibly justified

778 Dostoevsky, 2008.

779 The notion of the (in)correctness of emotions goes back to Brentano, Aristotle and Plato.

may, for all that, not be correct: if all the experts I know tell me that a certain action is unjust, my indignation is *ceteris paribus* justified. But if it turns out that the experts were wrong, my emotion is incorrect.[780]

When is resentment a justified emotion? And what is the relation between its being justified and its moral status? Developing a complete theory of justification would take us too far afield but we shall nevertheless provide some clarifications.

To start with, emotions are unlike perceptions in that they are not transparent. We can always ask why we undergo them, why someone is angry, indignant or happy. In other words, emotions ask for reasons, for warrants that they have or lack.[781] The simple intuition behind the concept of the justification of emotions in this sense is that there are reasons which speak in favour of and against feeling this or that in a certain context. A person can have bad, good or no reasons for her emotions**.** With this in mind, we can say that resentment is a response to the apparent fact that a wrong has not been righted. But if the emotion is harboured in response to a state of affairs that is not a wrong, the emotion is incorrect. Of course, the individual may still feel or believe he has been wronged, but that very experience may be misleading in the same way that someone with irrational fears is afraid of a situation that is not dangerous. Our impressions of values, to which emotions are responses, may be illusory and render our emotions incorrect.

Failing to experience emotions can also be inappropriate in the same way, as when I do not feel resentment towards someone who humiliates me or when I fail to react with indignation when I see that a helpless person is being robbed. One may always ask for the reasons why I emote as I do. What seems to justify my fear of my neighbour's dog is my apprehension or impression of a salivating dog that clenches its teeth, and runs in my direction. In such a case, the base of my fear only picks out some natural properties of the world (and of the dog). But I may also believe that the dog is dangerous, in which case my fear is defeasibly justified by my evaluative judgement and correct and non-defeasibly justified by a true or correct evaluative judgement. Apart from axiological and non-axiological cognitive bases, emotions can be justified by mere perceptions, that is, non-conceptual apprehension of values.[782] Identifying natural properties provide possible justifications of an emotion that usually end the why-question cycle of why we experience a particular emotion. In other words, mentioning the content of the base of an emotion – representations of values and natural properties – brings my neighbour's wondering to an end.[783] The concept of the justification of an emotion, like

[780] Deonna & Teroni, 2012, pp. 6-7; Tappolet *in* Bagnoli, 2015, pp. 117-134; Chisholm, 1982.

[781] Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 93.

[782] Mulligan, 1998, p. 165.

[783] On the view that evaluative judgements justify emotions see: Mulligan, 2012; Goldie, 2000.

that of a correct emotion, is often thought to be a normative concept. One way of understanding this idea, compatible with the epistemology of values sketched earlier (chapter 3), is to say, for example:

> It *ought* to be that case that (if x fears y, then y is dangerous)
>
> Fear of y is *correct* iff y is *dangerous*
>
> The danger of y makes fear of y *correct*, *non-defeasibly justified* and *appropriate*

and to say similar things about such emotion-value couples as grief-loss, indignation-injustice, awe-sublime, subjective shame-objective shamefulness, subjective guilt-objective guilt, happiness-good luck and so on.

If the concepts of correctness, appropriateness and justification employed here are normative, are they also moral or ethical? It is difficult to see why anyone would want to give an affirmative answer to this question.[784]

But then the moral opprobrium of which incorrect and unjustified resentment is the object is unjustified. And even if resentment were frequently incorrect or unjustified, this would not be a reason for claiming that it is intrinsically a morally bad thing. Indeed one may think that incorrect and unjustified emotions are more of an intrinsically epistemically bad thing than morally bad.

In reality, where resentment is morally inappropriate or bad, this lies, we shall argue, in what motivates an individual to resent what he resents in an unjustified way, in particular, in the vice of bad pride. Here we meet one of the claims distinguished at the beginning of this chapter: resentment is morally wrong when and because it is motivated by bad pride, where bad pride is what makes us apprehend wrongs where there are none. It is, in Butler's terms, what lies behind *abuses* of resentment.

That resentment can miss its object and err, that is to say, be incorrect, has been pointed out by many authors.[785] And resentment – and its many "errancies" – is often said to be bad when it is motivated by bad pride;[786] for it is out of pride that one develops an excessive sense of entitlement and desert. It is thus very easy, too easy, to believe that one has been wronged. Solomon quite intriguingly even claims that "the pathology of pride, even when it is 'true,' is rather the pathology of pride fallen, the pathology of that famously bitter emotion of resentment".[787] The instances of resentment that suffer from a bad reputation seem to

[784] For some relevant discussion, see: D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000.

[785] Butler, *Upon Resentment*; Griswold, 2007, p. 22; TMS I, ii, 3.

[786] As Mulligan explains: "In some languages there is a clear distinction between morally bad pride and a pride which is not morally bad and may be, for one reason or another, morally positive: "orgueil" vs "fierté", "Hochmut" vs "Stolz"" (Mulligan *in* Sander & Scherer, 2009, p. 263).

[787] Solomon, 2004, p. 44.

inherit their disvalue from the more fundamental vices of pride and *amour-propre* (not the same thing as self-love, *Eigenliebe*, if Aristotle, Rousseau and Scheler are to be believed) which lead a person to harbour unfitting resentment.

But how exactly can resentment be motivated by pride and consequently experienced in the absence of any wrong? I feel hurt and diminished when I become the victim of unfair treatment and my offender gets away without being punished. Pride, however, is not what motivates my resentment in this standard case. On the other hand, Schnitzler's character, Gustl, who feels resentful and depressed after a minor social humiliation, seems to indulge in abuses of resentment. As we know from the previous discussion (Chapter 2), there are different ways our sense of self-worth can be impacted on. In one way, the person's self-respect or dignity is challenged by an act that constitutes a real wrong. In the second way, however, the individual merely sees his self-value, self-esteem, or *amour-propre* hurt or threatened. Gustl, who thrives on honour and superiority, is offended by the fact that someone from a lower social class publicly humiliates him. He is much concerned about the importance of his position[788], and, as Taylor explains:

> [...] to be disposed to feel angry and act accordingly is to be inclined to find occasions on which another's behaviour is to be seen as insulting since their superiority does not seem to be acknowledged.[789]

This kind of pride makes us apprehend challenges that do not reinforce our belief in our superiority as an offence or as a wrong. Resentment is then the response to this unjustified feeling or belief in our own superiority. Any felt deprivation of goods, recognition, respect and admiration is apprehended as an offence or as an humiliation that ought to be righted. As Butler explains, the abuse of resentment is then based on pride and "consists in having an unreasonably and too great regard for ourselves in comparison to others".[790] He adds:

> From the numberless partialities which we all have for ourselves, everyone would often think himself injured when he was not: and if most cases would represent an injury as much greater than it really is.[791]

Aquinas says of resentment (or rather of what he calls righteous anger) that, like pride, it is based on the relation between the self and others; sinful resentment is an episode that gets this relation wrong and where "we err in our favour".[792] It is a platitude to say that we all feel entitled to certain rights, that we feel deserving of just treatment, and that we expect others to act accordingly. If someone fails to meet these expectations by treating me unjustly, my

788 Taylor, 2006, p. 84.

789 Taylor, 2006, p. 82.

790 Butler, *Upon Self-Deceit*, §6.

791 Butler, *Upon Forgiveness of Injuries*, §6.

792 Taylor, 2006, p. 85.

dignity is damaged and I naturally respond with resentment. But at the same time, if I take great pride in what I believe are some superior intellectual skills and expect other to admire me for them, their indifference may be felt as an offence and I may experience resentment. With great pride comes great expectations, and as Scheler reminds us: "feelings of revenge are favoured by strong pretensions which remain concealed or by great pride coupled with an inadequate social position".[793] Resentment on this view inherits its moral disvalue from its underlying motivation: bad pride. But what makes bad pride bad?

Someone with excessive pride does not merely derive an immoderate contentment from trivial achievements: he feels exaggeratedly entitled to goods and rewards; he derives satisfaction from others' recognition rather than personal achievements; and he is someone who needs to feel his relative worth in being superior to others, someone who believes he deserves praise when he visibly does not.[794] Bad pride involves "an overestimation of what one did, oneself for doing it, [and] the value, even the moral value, of doing it".[795] And as Stocker puts it:

> It is as easy to see why bad pride is, in itself, bad, as it is to see why lying to oneself or perhaps others is bad. Indeed, part of what makes bad pride bad is the deceptions and lies it involves.[796]

In the vernacular, it is anyone for whom the expression, "who do you think you are?" (and related expressions: "up himself" (Australian), "imbu de lui-même" (French)) fits.[797] His resentment then "consists in either exaggerated or inappropriate claims of moral injury or personal moral development, or excessive or misplaced public moral pronouncements, which may be true or false".[798] When resentment is motivated by bad pride it turns out to be

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793 RAM, p. 28.

794 Nozick proposed an interesting description of this mechanism:

> Why then do contemporary intellectuals feel *entitled* to the highest rewards their society has to offer and *resentful* when they do not receive this? Intellectuals feel they are the most valuable people, the ones with the highest merit, and that society should reward people in accordance with their value and merit. But a capitalist society does not satisfy the principle of distribution "to each according to his merit or value." […] Unsuccessful businessmen and workers do not have the same animus against the capitalist system as do the wordsmith intellectuals. Only the sense of unrecognised superiority, of entitlement betrayed, produces that animus. (Nozick, 1998)

795 Stocker, 1996, p. 171.

796 Stocker, 1996, p. 171.

797 As the Catalan philosopher Vendrell Ferran puts it: "Ist es nicht gewagt, der Ansicht zu sein, man habe das Recht auf den Besitz des Geneideten, ohne dass man es verdient? Ist die Tatsache, dass man die Eigenschaften, Bemühungen und Leistungen des Anderen nur insofern wahrnimmt, als man sich in Bezug auf sie benachteiligt fühlt, nicht der Beweis eines gewissen geistigen Hochmutes?" (Vendrell Ferran, 2006).

798 Bicknell, 2010, p. 477.

inappropriate because the emotion is then harboured without the individual being wronged or, if by chance, it turns out that he really has been wronged, because the resentment is motivated by a bad reason. As Butler puts it, an abuse of resentment occurs when:

> […] from partiality to ourselves, we imagine an injury done us, when there is none: when this partiality represents it to us greater than it really is; when we fall into that extravagant and monstrous kind of resentment, towards one who has innocently been the occasion of evil to us; that is, resentment upon account of pain or inconvenience, without injury […]; when the indignation against injury and injustice rises too high, and is beyond proportion to the particular ill action it is exercised upon: or lastly, when pain or harm of any kind is inflicted merely in consequence of, and to gratify, that resentment, though naturally raised.[799]

Resentment is therefore morally condemnable when it grows out of bad pride, which is caused by the initial misleading grasp or interpretation of something unpleasant as a wrong. The moral disvalue of resentment may also reside in its inter-personal and intra-psychological consequences, but for the case we have considered here, it is ultimately grounded in the more fundamental vice of bad pride. We are thus finally able to explain why we have an ambivalent opinion about resentment and why we condemn resentment when it seems to be shallow. A person's resentment may err – someone presents herself as the victim of wrongs that have never occurred. We claim that, if she takes trifles for offences, it is because excessive pride turns them into a threat to her self-respect and *amour-propre*. This is morally bad because such self-deceptive devices are incompatible with the realisation of other values we normally hold dear, such as health and truth. This last claim, about the importance of values such as health and truth, will now be analysed in greater detail for the more complex case of *ressentiment*.

5.2 The moral status of *ressentiment*

The analysis of *ressentiment*'s moral status requires some preliminary distinctions. As a sentiment, it may inherit its status from its parts. Relevant here are parts that are emotions, such as envy, hatred, or resentment, and parts of a different ontological ilk, such as repression, the feeling of inferiority, or the self-deceptive reevaluation mechanism. Claiming that *ressentiment* is a bad thing just because the POR harbours *envy* – a negative emotion – is different from grounding the same judgement in the assertion that it is an objectionable form of self-deception. In the former case it is bad because, ultimately the effects of envy are morally bad – say, because of anti-social consequences – while self-deception is bad from the point of view of epistemic values. Given the part-whole relation between various emotional episodes and the sentiment of *ressentiment*, one inevitably meets here the same elements already

[799] Butler, *Upon Resentment*, §10.

examined in the case of resentment. The previous section revealed that an emotion's moral status can be derived from its hedonic qualities, from action tendencies and their inter-personal consequences, from physiological and psychological effects, or simply from related character traits that are vices and virtues. Doing the same exercise for *ressentiment* requires another approach, however, because it is a mental state that endures and that is defined by a characteristic reevaluation mechanism that is not an emotion. More particularly, we will have to determine which moral concerns are raised by *ressentiment*'s specific parts, such as the reevaluation mechanism or the primary experience of inferiority and impotence, and determine whether *ressentiment*'s moral status can ultimately be reduced to the disvalue of one of these elements.

In order to structure the analysis, we will distinguish and evaluate the following claims. 1) The moral disvalue of *ressentiment* is ultimately derived from the mode of its defining emotional episodes (envy, resentment, revengefulness, hatred, *Schadenfreude*, etc.), and in particular from the way in which these emotional episodes are experienced, namely as a) *excessive,* b) *unjustified*, and sometimes c) *repressed.* 2) *Ressentiment* is bad because it implies the occurrence of a crucially self-deceptive reevaluation mechanism. The latter mechanism, as we shall argue, constitutes a form of *epistemic cowardice* where the POR prefers her hedonic comfort over a realistic, albeit unflattering, assessment of her shortcomings. For Scheler, she prefers pleasure to truth. Nietzsche and the philosophers of life he influenced (Simmel and Klages) claim that such illusions are unhealthy, life-denying, and hinder human flourishing. The POR, hence, prefers pleasure and the avoidance of pain over the realisation of higher vital values. 3) While the previous two claims focus on the ultimate outcome of *ressentiment*, a different set of claims focuses on the genetic aspect of *ressentiment*, that is, on the psychological mechanism that leads to the POR's deceptive beliefs. Following our earlier description in Section 3.2, we know that the POR's evaluations are the result of a complex emotional mechanism of repression and reevaluation. But this belief-formation process raises a different moral concern: the POR's axiological judgements are not acquired *autonomously*; that is, none of what she claims to be right or wrong seems to conclude from her own rational moral reasoning. Rather, what she claims seems to be the outcome of repressed envy or vengefulness. That moral beliefs have to be acquired autonomously and rationally is an important Kantian theme. Kant argues that moral judgements should not be motivated by anything other than pure good will.[800] So, some condemn the fact that the POR's flawed judgements eventually jeopardise her *integrity* as she attempts to alter her most personable qualities: her values and preferences. And this is morally objectionable. 4) Last, we shall consider the claim that the POR's initial, distressing, experience of value constitutes the ultimate reason

[800] MS, IV, 393.5.

for someone to indulge in a comforting reevaluation in the first place. We will here only focus on the POR's feelings of value, or the very acts by which she likes or dislikes something. Nietzsche, for example, condemns *ressentiment* on the grounds that the POR's valuations are *reactive*; she only comes to grasp the disvalue of something in reaction to her impotence and distress and never out of a spontaneous act. Scheler's view instead focuses on the fact that the positive value of something, especially when it is inaccessible, can challenge our sense of self-worth, and thus triggers a feeling of inferiority that eventually leads to *ressentiment*. The POR is thus someone whose experience of a positive value always involves her sense of self-worth in relation to that value. This is why both Nietzsche and Scheler, and the many authors they influenced, contrast the POR with the ideal figure of the aristocrat or nobleman whose experience of values presents all desired properties. By contrast, the man of *ressentiment* is embodied by the non-noble: according to Nietzsche, it is embodied by the priest and, according to Ortega y Gasset, it is embodied by the mass-man.[801] For Scheler and many German authors of his time, the POR is best represented by the then-rising type of the petty bourgeois. This form of criticism of *ressentiment* will therefore be considered from the point of view of the ideal of nobility, which appears to be the common denominator to all of these versions.

Let us hence start by briefly evaluating the claim that *ressentiment*'s disvalue comes from emotional episodes of which *ressentiment* is constituted, such as envy, resentment, revengefulness, hatred and *Schadenfreude*. According to the first version of this claim, (a), *ressentiment* is a bad state because it implies the experiencing of *negative* emotions such as envy and revenge, but also of indignation or resentment which, as we argued in Section 5.1, can sometimes bear negative value in their own right when they are exaggerated, unfitting or motivated by pride. Vengefulness and envy, on the other hand, have regularly been charged with viciousness and evil and have been condemned for being anti-social.[802] All of these emotions may be bad for different reasons, but as parts of *ressentiment* they all seem to become *excessive*. This is morally objectionable because excess constitutes a vice, signals further vices such as intemperance and malice, and motivates anti-social and bad conduct. It is hence not uncommon for *ressentiment* to be considered the resentment of the bad-tempered, the spiteful grudger, the coward, or the self-righteous who takes offence at every slight. Nietzsche, for instance, speaks of the pathological vulnerability (*krankhafte Verletzlichkeit*) of the man of *ressentiment*.[803] Brudholm even suggests that *ressentiment* is the name for such resentment running amok:

801 Ortega y Gasset, 1993.

802 Schoeck, 1987.

803 EH, I, 6. As Adam Smith puts it, there is nothing "more despicable than that forward and captious humour which takes fire upon every slight occasion of quarrel" (TMS, I, 2).

> The reasons why *ressentiment* has been banned from the company of the moral attitudes are not primarily related to the question of its cause. Indeed, *ressentiment* might have 'begun' as moral resentment based on, for the sake of the argument, as completely appropriate belief that a moral injury has been done. *What accounts for its bad reputation is rather the way in which consciousness of the injury is processed, nursed, and exaggerated.*[804]

This first claim corresponds to the general case where the moral status of an emotion depends on its negative intra-psychic effects. Such arguments presuppose that some dispositions to feel, think, or, more particularly, that some emotions become ethically problematic when they are felt too often and too intensely. Such arguments also presuppose, empirically, that *ressentiment* magnifies the intensity of the experiences of envy, resentment or vengefulness.

But is *affective excessiveness*, in itself, morally problematic? The claim is not very convincing as it seems that such a property only signals other, more problematic, actions or states. Excessive emotional episodes or dispositions are hence either problematic because they impair something positive, such as one's rationality, or because they increase the likelihood of some negative inter-personal consequences, such as anti-social behaviour. *Ressentiment*, more than resentment, may always be excessive. But the latter property fails to explain why *ressentiment* is ethically disvaluable.

Ressentiment and its constituent emotions, in particular resentment and indignation, may be *unjustified*, which is the second version, (b), of the first claim that we shall now consider. Resentment, as Butler notes and as we discussed above, fails to be justified when it is motivated by bad pride. An abuse of resentment occurs when one repeatedly protests against offences although, in reality, there are no wrongs. Does *ressentiment* inherit this problematic mode? Is there, similarly, an abuse of *ressentiment*? The prideful POR who feels depressed by others' mere natural advantages may come to apprehend herself as the victim of wrongdoing. Such episodes are, however, unjustified and unfitting. What makes it morally bad is then its underlying cause, namely a desire to seek *moral* compensation for a damaged sense of pride and self-esteem (see Section 3.2). Could we therefore argue that *ressentiment* is typically manifested through unjustified moral emotions? And is *ressentiment* bad because it distorts moral emotions such as indignation and resentment?

Clearly, *ressentiment* can inherit its disvalue from the fact that it is, in itself, a phenomenon whereby several moral emotions come to err in our favour and are based on feelings or beliefs that fail to be justified. But, as we argued earlier, the ultimate moral disvalue is then borne by the underlying motivator. In this case, the underlying motivator is a characteristic desire to feel morally superior. The POR is moved to compensate, pharisaically, for his dam-

[804] Brudholm, 2008, p. 102. Emphasis added.

aged sense of self-worth by prompting excessive indignation and resentment, which then fail to fit their object because no wrongs exist.

The third mode of objection that makes up the first claim against *ressentiment*, (c), is that the relevant emotions are unhealthy or "against life".[805] Goldie might be right when he claims about *ressentiment* that "we should positively avoid restraining our emotional responses, especially our negative one, for fear that the feelings involved will fester in the soul, ultimately forming permanent scar tissue".[806] The medical or physiological jargon apparent here is not uncommon in descriptions of this phenomenon. *Ressentiment* is associated with illness[807] and sickness, and its characteristic repression of hostility is assumed to cause a "*pathological* deformation of personality".[808] These aspects are vividly portrayed in the figure of the Nietzschean ascetic priest, who is depicted as a particularly weak and unhealthy character who irrationally "prefers what is harmful to [him]".[809]

The claims we are examining here are distinctly Nietzschean, but were a common *topos* in the philosophy of life during the first half of the twentieth century, when several authors engaged in a positive reconsideration of the value of health, notably in reaction to utilitarianism and the centrality of the value of utility.[810] Scheler, for instance, presents a detailed account of vitalism, the origin of which he attributes to Nietzsche, Guyau and Fouillé.[811] On this kind of account, *ressentiment* is bad because it is unhealthy or "against life". But what exactly is it that makes it psychologically and physiologically harmful, and thus disvaluable in the light of a vitalist axiology? Answering this question takes us to the second claim against *ressentiment*, namely the claim that *ressentiment* involves a crucially self-defective reevaluation mechanism.

Defining what may count as criteria for life, health and flourishing is a complex matter. Is lack of pain perhaps the predominant symptom of a good health? Note that condemning moral *ressentiment* on the sole ground that it is painful and disagreeable would bring us back to a hedonistic account. Psychological hedonism and the claim that individuals seek pleasure and avoid pain is criticised by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy*, where he argues in favour of the alternative doctrine of the will to power.[812] Scheler refutes hedonism too, but on the grounds that

805 A, 55.

806 Goldie, 2000, p. 151. This very popular hydraulic view of emotions has recently been criticised by Dalrymple (Dalrymple, 2015b).

807 GM, II, 19.

808 Wallace, 2007, p. 111. Emphasis added.

809 A, 6

810 Verducci, 2007.

811 GW, *Ethik*, Chap. 4.

812 Reginster, 2006.

we do not ultimately strive for pleasure *per se* but for goods and values, the experience of which can indeed be pleasant or not.[813] Further, the empirical claim that all humans seek pleasure is to be distinguished from the claim that *ressentiment* is morally bad because it is painful. However, we have reasons to reject the latter as well. *Ressentiment* in other words is not bad because it is painful. Indeed, and in reality, many of Nietzsche's remarks suggest a rather protestant view, where suffering bears a positive value and becomes an important condition on the path to excellence of character. For Nietzsche, suffering is even necessary for a flourishing life.[814] The relation between excellence and suffering, and hence the limited importance of hedonic values, is also stressed by Ortega y Gasset who distinguishes the excellent – noble – man from the common man, explaining that "the former is the one who makes great demands on himself, and the latter the one who makes no demands on himself, but contents himself with what he is, and is delighted with himself".[815] Such is the man of *ressentiment*: he cannot endure a certain type of suffering and damaged self-image, and therefore indulges in reevaluation strategies in order to overcome them. As Tamsin Shaw points out:

> So the threat to the dignity of humanity derives, for Nietzsche, *from our unwillingness to suffer* or to make others suffer for the sake of great human goals, even as we acknowledge such goals to be what makes the spectacle of human life on this planet something worthwhile and valuable. This is in part, for Nietzsche, a political problem, since secular political ideals, be they liberal, democratic or socialist, seem to him to be exclusively hedonistic; they encourage us to view suffering, he claims, as something that is simply to be abolished.[816]

Ressentiment is life-hindering, but how does this contribute to its moral status? From the perspective of vitalist axiology, the POR stands in complete opposition to the ideal of *the noble,* who embodies positive vital values as well as a certain disdain for sensory values and the value of utility. Nietzsche defines this ideal along the following lines:

> The knightly-aristocratic 'values' are based on a careful cult of the physical, on a flowering, rich, and even effervescing healthiness, that goes considerably beyond what is necessary for maintaining life, on war, adventure, the chase, the dance, the journey – on everything that is contained in strong, free, and joyous action.[817]

The denial of positive vital values (or the endorsement of negative vital values) seems to contribute to *ressentiment*'s moral disvalue. But how can we make sense of this claim? We shall here develop the view that *ressentiment* is morally problematic because, instead of vital

[813] FORM, p. 36.

[814] A, 57; May, 2007, pp. 83–84.

[815] Ortega y Gasset, 1993, p. 63.

[816] Shaw *in* Knoll & Stocker, 2014, p. 347.

[817] GM, I, 7.

value, it makes us prefer lower sensory values. The noble, by contrast, prefers the correct values and goods, and stands therefore in opposition to the character of the POR. Vital values are not only important as a guarantee for the individual's flourishing (an empirical claim), but also because they make a positive contribution to one's ethical status. In order to understand this, we need to consider some of the axiological insights brought to light by realist phenomenologists, such as Scheler and Hartmann, for the fact that non-formal values are organised hierarchically finds here an interesting application. Let us first consider Nietzsche's perspective of the importance of vital values, and see if we can generalise his argument

According to Nietzsche, perhaps the most radical reevaluation occurs when *negative* vital values are turned into desirable virtues. Nietzsche reports on how *ressentiment* transforms the order of preferences of the ascetic priest, who comes to value sickness and "lies are turning weakness into an *accomplishment*".[818] Another form of reevaluation occurs when non-vital values are judged from the perspective of their life-enhancing contribution, and it is considered whether they are *instrumental* for the realisation of vital values. Remember our previous Schelerian definition of moral values, according to which to be moral is to prefer higher over lower values. For Nietzsche, to be moral is more specifically to prefer *vital* values over any other non-ethical values, such as truth, beauty, pleasure or utility, but also to bring about states of affairs that are instrumental for the vital values.

According to Nietzsche, the fact that the POR indulges in reevaluations signals in reality a very strong preference for sensory values. This, however, is morally problematic because the POR prefers pleasure – a lower value – over the higher value of life. Nietzsche illustrates this point in *Zarathustra* through the figure of the *last man* who "only seeks a comfortable life, entertainment, distraction, and an agreeable enough death".[819] The last man is a hedonist, and perhaps an utilitarian too, who ranks the pleasant and the useful above other non-ethical values.[820]

The attempt to assess the moral status of the man of *ressentiment* and his relation to values, and to vital values in particular, reveals a number of different possibilities. *Ressentiment* reevaluation may lead us to prefer what is in fact unhealthy. The individual comes to prefer what is disvaluable, although he may believe erroneously that it is intrinsically good from a moral

818 GM, I, 14.

819 Shaw *in* Knoll & Stocker, 2014, pp. 345–380.

820 As Tamsin Shaw puts it:

> In other words, the last man views suffering always as something that should simply be eradicated, never as something meaningful. This exclusive hedonism, on Nietzsche's view, generates a form of human life that is contemptible. (Shaw *in* Knoll & Stocker, 2014, p. 346.)

perspective. This kind of reevaluation is illustrated by the Nietzschean priest. A second way in which the POR's relation to values may go wrong is by preferring values or objects that are detrimental to realizing vital values. A good example of this latter case is when one privileges the value of truth, failing to see that truth is not contributing to the enhancement and intensification of life, the ultimate value. A third way in which the POR may err occurs when the reevaluation mechanism alters her evaluations in such a way that she comes to privilege lower values or lower goods. The ordinary man and the last man are both figures who embody this vice, as their axiological scales prioritise the inferior values of pleasure and utility over any other non-ethical value.

Let us now generalise what we reconstructed from Nietzsche. *Ressentiment* becomes morally problematic when, given a certain scale of non-ethical values, either 1) the POR comes to prefer a disvalue to a value, or 2) the POR comes to prefer lower values to higher ones. His preferences are then morally disvaluable given our earlier Schelerian account of the relation between non-ethical and ethical values. (To prefer lower non-ethical values to higher ones makes one ethically bad. To act regularly on the basis of such preferences is to be ethically vicious). *Ressentiment* is then morally objectionable when its characteristic reevaluation alters preferences in one of these two ways. For Nietzsche, this is the case when the POR either comes to prefer 1) negative vital values or 2) values that are inferior to vital values.

Irrespective of vital values, moral opprobrium is also attached to *ressentiment* with regards to cognitive values and truth. Nietzsche suggests that someone who experiences *ressentiment* and indulges in reevaluation strategies in order to feel better about himself sacrifices the *truth* of his beliefs and judgements. In other words, he disregards epistemic reasons for his beliefs and attitudes in favour of different, but objectionable, practical reasons. On Nietzsche's scale, truth is less important than life but still more important than the values of the pleasant, the agreeable and the useful. The claim that the POR avoids facing the truth about her prospects, her shortcomings and her real inner experiences, echoes recent accounts of the moral status of self-deception. From this perspective, one could argue that *ressentiment* is morally objectionable because the POR lacks the virtue of *epistemic courage* and comes across as a weak hedonist, incapable of enduring the slightest anxiety in order to see the world as it is. This is the third claim against *ressentiment,* 3), namely the claim that focuses on the psychological mechanism that leads to the POR's deceptive beliefs.

Drawing on Augustine, Johnston explains that "the accusation of self-deception is an accusation of mental cowardice, of flight from anxiety (or angst), a failure to contain one's anxiety, a lack of courage in matters epistemic".[821] Russell in turn recommends that: "no satisfaction based upon self-deception is solid, and however as unpleasant the truth may be, it is better

[821] Johnston *in* McLaughlin & Oksenberg-Rorty, 1988, p. 85.

to face it once for all, to get used to it, and to proceed to build your life in accordance with it."[822] In *ressentiment* we condemn the person who, for reasons of comfort, indulges in self-deceptive strategies such as reevaluation in order to systematically avoid any confrontation with a "hard truth". This ordinary intuition explains why the attitude of the POR may be considered morally objectionable: according to our definition of moral values, she comes to prefer a lower value (the pleasant) over a higher one (truth) in order to indulge in agreeable illusions. To go back to an earlier example: the fox lacks the epistemic courage to acknowledge the fact that the grapes are sweet and ripe. And I lack epistemic courage when I avoid acknowledging my own shortcomings and instead indulge in the belief that others are to be blamed or that my rival, despite his talent, is morally fraught. As Nietzsche puts it very clearly:

> How much truth can a certain mind endure; how much truth can it dare? – these questions became for me ever more and more the actual test of values. Error (the belief in the ideal) is not blindness; *error is cowardice*... Every conquest, every step forward in knowledge, is the outcome of courage, of hardness towards one's self, of cleanliness towards one's self.[823]

The key premise of this claim is that holding true or correct beliefs is something valuable. It is something more valuable than mere pleasure and intentionally coming to believe something false but more agreeable about oneself is bad.

Apart from evaluation of the pleasant as preferable to the value of truth, the POR's commerce with the latter values also shows a certain disregard for their importance. In other words, apart from the lower ranking cognitive values seem to have for the POR, the latter also realises negative cognitive values. It can then be seen as a variety of *foolishness.* As Mulligan puts it:

> The fox in the fable of the sour grapes is also a fool. He knows that the grapes are ripe and so good to eat. He discovers that he is incapable of getting his claws on the grapes and so changes his evaluation of the grapes: they are suddenly no longer ripe and good but sour and bad. Abelard gives a similar example. A young student comes to see that logic is the heart of philosophy and therefore the most valuable part of philosophy. After discovering his inability to do logic, he declares, apparently quite sincerely, that in philosophy rhetoric is more important than logic. The fox and the student are victims of the mechanism of *ressentiment* and to that extent fools.[824]

And a fool, as Mulligan points out, is someone who:

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822 Russell, 1930, p. 124.

823 EH, II, 3. Emphasis added. Gemes explains: "We are for Nietzsche strangers to ourselves for the very good reason that to face who we are is a challenge requiring momentous courage, a challenge that, properly undertaken, should precipitate a shattering struggle" (Gemes *in* Acampora, 2006, p. 192).

824 Mulligan *in* Zaibert, 2016, p. 242.

> [...] desires above all not to know, more precisely, she desires not to know certain things in certain contexts, to avoid questions of justification, confrontations with reality, clarity and distinctness.[825]

But is being an epistemic coward or a fool in itself morally disvaluable? Being an epistemic coward or a fool is not itself immoral but it helps to make one morally bad, it is one of the many different ways our relations to non-moral values contribute to our moral status. How can we understand the relation in this case? Despite the fact that Nietzsche and Scheler disagree completely about the relative importance of vital values, they do agree, as we have shown, that the value of truth and related cognitive values are more important values than sensory ones. *Ressentiment*'s moral disvalue is the result of preferring the values of error and illusion to cognitive values or of placing sensory values above cognitive values. For both philosophers, to take truth to be unimportant and to prefer lower values instead are morally objectionable.

Let us here note one important point about Nietzsche and cognitive values. The claim that Nietzsche considers truth a positive value may seem surprising given that he is interpreted by many as a proponent of radical relativism, which has become the cornerstone of post-modern interpretations. Post-modern interpretations, however, regularly confound two different questions: one has to do with the nature of truth – absolute or relative – while the other has to do with the value of truth.

Nietzsche criticises not the value of truth but rather its alleged unconditional value. Now, taking seriously the idea that the epistemic value of truth and the will to truth are sometimes disagreeable or "hard", as the saying goes, Nietzsche argues that they also have a negative instrumental value from the perspective of life because they hinder excellence and flourishing.[826] More specifically, he questions the *instrumental value* of truth from the perspective of his own axiological hierarchy, in which life is the highest value. As May puts it: "the life-value of a concept is always more important to him [Nietzsche] than its truth-value".[827] Truth is thus evaluated in the same way as the values of good and evil are evaluated, namely from the point of view of their life-enhancing potency. And in that regard, Nietzsche urges us to aim at self-knowledge,[828] for, as Jaggard explains, "there is a link between Nietzsche's valuation of truth and his emphasis on life enhancement. Those who are strong are generally those who are able to cope with reality and be honest with themselves".[829] Antagonistic to this ideal is the man of *ressentiment* who tries to avoid acknowledging the values he cannot live up to and

825 Mulligan *in* Zaibert, 2016, p. 247.

826 May, 1999, p. 152.

827 May, 2007, p. 4.

828 Gemes *in* Gemes & May, 2009

829 Jaggard *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013, p. 346.

tries to compensate for his suffering by altering his experience of values. For Nietzsche, aiming at the truth is a central characteristic of nobility.[830]

The criticisms of *ressentiment* we have looked at so far claim that its self-deceptive reevaluation mechanism is irrational as it attempts to preserve some hedonic comfort but eventually makes things worse by sacrificing some higher values (truth, vital values). Some disagree and argue, as psychologists sometimes do, that self-deception can make one happy. They refer to such deception as "positive self-deception".[831] This is suggested by Vaillant, for example, for whom adaptive defence mechanisms are only *sometimes* pathological processes.[832] There is a common argument in favour of self-deceiving phenomena such as *ressentiment*. Drawing on Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck*, Neu wonders whether illusions could not be an ingredient of happiness as there are persons who seem too weak to confront reality.[833] But then the question becomes: "what sort of weakness is it that calls for illusions?"[834] and he wonders why this would be a contemptible enterprise at all. Barnes' response suggests that we should distinguish between something being admirable and something being morally wrong.[835] Consider the patient suffering from cancer who deceives himself about his health in order to reduce his anxiety. Formally speaking, the normative aspect of the patient's self-deception might here either be, according to Barnes, non-moral (admirable/non-admirable) or moral (right/wrong). The two categories do not necessarily overlap. Meanwhile, neither the epistemic issue of having false beliefs nor being partial in the belief-formation process can be considered admirable. So, the patient is probably not admirable. On the other hand, a person who faces her illness and does not cultivate false beliefs about its fatal ending is considered admirable or heroic, and demonstrates epistemic courage. That the patient indulges in illusions out of anxiety is bad and this normative dimension is illustrated by the fact that we say it is not admirable. But the normative is not only the ethical and it seems far-fetched to conclude from this that not being admirable bears, in itself, moral disvalue, too.

Could we equally say that, for the POR who indulges in *ressentiment*, her lack of courage is in fact just aesthetically disvaluable and ethically neutral? *Ressentiment*, in other terms, is ugly.[836] Barnes claims that, while there is always something that is intrinsically objectionable or non-admirable about self-deception, it does not entail that there is always something

830 Reginster, 1997, p. 298; GM, I, 5.

831 Taylor, 1991; Van Leeuven, 2009. Audi has also argues that self-deception can occasionally be considered a rational phenomenon (Audi, 1985).

832 Vaillant, 1995, p. 9.

833 Neu, 2000, p. 288.

834 Neu, 2000, p. 288.

835 Barnes, 1997.

836 Graf Haber, 1991, p. 84.

intrinsically *prima facie* morally wrong with self-deception.[837] We claim, however, that epistemic cowardice contributes to the moral disvalue of a person and to the ethical status of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* is not an admirable state of mind, neither are persons who indulge in self-deception in order to make their lives more agreeable, at least in general. The essential connection with moral value, however, is the fact that *ressentiment* reveals the POR's preferences for lower non-moral values. This shows that the agreeable is considered more important than truth – an act of preferring that bears moral disvalue.

Ressentiment may also bear some ethical disvalue because of the underlying psychological mechanisms due to the way in which the process in itself threatens a dimension of the person and thus has negative moral value. Let us assume for the sake of argument that *ressentiment* has been effective. The individual has undergone a radical change of values and preferences. This reevaluation process is, however, questionable because, as we shall now argue, it challenges a person's integrity, autonomy, and authenticity. If we consider the latter properties to have some intrinsic moral value, *ressentiment* is bad because it vitiates these fundamental attributes of a person. The POR in other words is criticised because *ressentiment* taints her *integrity* and her *authenticity* which are essential parts of personhood. As Reginster claims:

> *Ressentiment* valuation involves a form of self-deception, that such self-deception is objectionable because it undermines the integrity of the self, and that the lack of such integrity ensnares the agent in a peculiar kind of practical inconsistency.[838]

The relation between person, identity, and value remains a complex matter; our aim here will be modest. For our purposes we will presuppose the claim that persons can be characterised by their commitments, preferences, and desires, and that the values these acts reveal are *stable* features of the person.[839] Folk psychology generally endorses an identity view of integrity. The latter is expressed in slogans such as "to stay true to one's values" and builds on the premise that some of our desires, volitions, and deep commitments confer identity.[840] Our set of values is thus a defining element of our personality. But if who I am is determined by the commitments, values, and preferences that differentiate me from others, trying to deny them or even change them is ultimately an attempt to change my personal identity. Integrity is the property of a person who can still hold conflicting views and desires, but who eventually decides among them by referring back, for example, to a *consistent* set of fundamental and stable second-order desires.[841] Nietzsche often suggests that the typical mark of

[837] Barnes, 1997, p. 155

[838] Reginster, 1997, p. 281.

[839] Williams, 1981, pp. 1-19.

[840] Williams, 1981.

[841] Frankfurt *in* Schoeman, 1988, pp. 27–45; Cox et al., 2017.

nobility is integrity of character or "integrity in matter of the spirit".[842] He often insists on the importance of truth and truthfulness in relation to awareness of our own psychology and conflicting desires. The ideal of nobility stands therefore in complete opposition to *ressentiment* and its effects. The POR's characteristic self-deception of which we will have much more to say later makes her "corrupt".[843] Nietzsche also reports it as a form of *Entselbstung* and *Entpersönlichung*, since changing one's values or valuation is to jeopardise personal integrity.[844]

Criticising *ressentiment* from the perspective of personal integrity is to suppose that the latter is a desirable property of the person. More specifically, the nobleman, as opposed to the man of *ressentiment*, shows integrity because he invents and creates values that fit and serve the flourishing of his being, according to Nietzsche.[845] On the other hand, the common man only reacts to these values, which are not supported self-affirmatively. The man of *ressentiment*, finally, lacks integrity. This is because his evaluations, emotions and beliefs clash with the content of his value-feelings (see Chapter 4). The mere fact that someone comes to detract value from what is beyond one's reach is not relevant here. What is crucial is that the positive values remain somehow present in the POR's experience. The person therefore fails to remain "true to her values". As Nietzsche famously puts it: "the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul *squints*".[846]

It is important to see that personal integrity can fall apart in at least two different ways. First, *ressentiment* may lead to a reevaluation of values that seem never to be complete and fulfilling, and which in fact creates a profound axiological conflict. Second, failing to acknowledge this self-deceptive strategy, for individuals not to "open their eyes to themselves"[847] is for them to breach the standards of self-knowledge and truthfulness that characterise the ideal of the integrity of the nobleman. Of course, what ultimately grounds this criticism of *ressentiment* is the premise that integrity is a morally good thing. Now, one could of course question this and level against it, for example, the fact that the kind of truthfulness that integrity requires is sometimes a harsh and painful exercise. But hedonism, as we have seen, does not support such criticism. In sum, integrity demands self-knowledge and requires a certain axiological harmony between the person's evaluations and her values.

Apart from lacking integrity, *ressentiment* is also said to constitute a threat to *personal autonomy*. The POR comes to hold moral judgements that are acquired *non-autonomously*, for

842 A, 50.

843 EH, IV, 7.

844 BGE, 207.

845 GM, I, 10.

846 GM, I, 10.

847 GM, III, 19.

they are caused by a complex emotional experience of hostile emotions and their subsequent repression over which the POR has no control. To condemn *ressentiment* on the grounds that it threatens a person's autonomy is a normative claim, which evaluates the status of values and judgements from the perspective of their psychological formation. In Kantian terms, the POR's judgement and actions are not *willed* autonomously. Or, as Elster defines it: "autonomous desires are desires that have been deliberately chosen, acquired or modified".[848] This argument exclusively targets the reevaluation process and its outcome. From the standpoint of the reevaluation process, *ressentiment* is bad because it produces attitudes that are flawed. Elster, for example, considers the familiar example of sour grapes to illustrate objectionable reevaluation, not because preference adaptation privileges a lower value (the pleasant), but because the individual's preferences are acquired heteronomously.[849] The individual is thus irrational. Scheler further reminds us that the Kantian meaning of autonomy is limited to conative autonomy; that is, to autonomy of the will. But one can also distinguish the autonomy of moral insight:

We must thus distinguish between two sorts of autonomy: the autonomy of personal insight into good and bad and the autonomy of personal willing of what is given as good and evil. The first kind of autonomy has as its counterpart the heteronomy of *blind* willing without insight; the second, the heteronomy of the *forced* willing that is very distinctly present in kinds of volitional contagion and suggestion.[850]Elster also makes this distinction. In fact he explains that both beliefs and desires can be formed heteronomously, and both kinds of mental states can be caused by either "faulty cognitive processes or to undue influence from some affective drive".[851] As he puts it: "If our desires become adapted to what is possible as a result of our own decision concerning which desires we want to have, this will also typically (but not necessarily) be rational and autonomous."[852] So, on this view, preferences can be adapted without giving up the idea of the autonomy of the person. And it is likely that such conscious adaptation need not be self-deceptive, either. The premise according to which we come to judge autonomously, and thus acquire our beliefs about what is good, right, and evil as a result of moral reasoning, is likely to be empirically false.[853] But before psychologists had started to wrestle with this topic, Nietzsche had already rejected the idea of the moral autonomy of a person on the grounds of a complex psychology of drives – and conflicting drives – that determine an individual's moral view.

848 Elster, 1983, p. 21.

849 Colburn, 2011.

850 FORM, pp. 494–495.

851 Elster, 1983, p. 24.

852 Sandven, 1999, p. 20.

853 Haidt, 2001

Most claims about heteronomy focus on the outcome of *ressentiment*. And, accordingly, it is the status of the judgements, acts, desires, and beliefs that result from the reevaluation mechanism that ultimately bear negative value and explain why the POR's new evaluations are morally wrong. But there is also another, less prominent, claim that stresses elements *preceding* the reevaluation process. Nietzsche, for example, is not only concerned with the life-denying versus life-enhancing property of values, emotions, and institutions, but also with the way in which objects, persons, or states of affairs come to be valued in the first place.[854] In other words, he wonders "whether these values arise in a *sovereign way* or, rather, as a *reaction* to our fear or envy of others".[855] For Nietzsche and Scheler, as well as many writers they influenced, there are properties of the act of valuing that favour the occurrence of *ressentiment.* This, as we shall now discuss, makes up the fourth claim 4) against *ressentiment* as identified at the beginning of this section. This claim focuses on the POR's feelings of value such that she indulges in *ressentiment* in the first place.

The starting point for this claim is probably Nietzsche's proposed opposition between slaves and masters, which he originally uses as a metaphor to illustrate the origin of moral good and evil.[856] These character types are regularly referred to by pairwise expressions such as "slave" versus "master", "base" versus "noble", or "aristocratic" versus "plebeian".[857] Nietzsche further considers this slavish way of valuing to be reactive, and the noble way to be sovereign.[858] The important relation to *ressentiment* here is the fact that only persons whose acts of valuing are "slavish" constitute real candidates for *ressentiment*; those who possess the opposite qualities are noble and never indulge in this psychological mechanism.[859] The question therefore is twofold: what is so different about the way in which the POR values object, persons and states of affairs? And why does it lead to *ressentiment*'s badness? To answer these questions, a common, yet often vague, association is made between *ressentiment* and reactive attitudes. The phenomenon of *ressentiment* is sometimes even defined and reduced to a reactive attitude *par excellence*.[860] The concept of reactive attitude gained popularity after Strawson's extremely influential essay *Freedom and Resentment* (1962), where the expression "reactive attitudes" is used to describe moral emotions such as resentment

854 May, 2007, p. 41.

855 May, 2007, p. 41. Emphasis added.

856 BGE, 260.

857 BGE, 260; GM, I, 1–10; HAH, II, 45.

858 May, 2007, p. 41.

859 The morality of nobility (*Die Moral der Vornehmheit*) is the title of the last chapter of Georg Simmel's *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche. Ein Vortragszyklus*, which was first published in 1907. The latter form of morality appears to be an important ideal that had an immense impact on many, mostly conservative, thinkers in Germany at the turn of the nineteenth Century.

860 As Brudholm claims: "Like resentment and indignation, *ressentiment* is certainly a reactive attitude" (Brudholm, 2008, p. 101).

and indignation. Since we now know them to be part of the phenomenon of *ressentiment*, the same ambiguity may arise again. To untangle the ambiguity, let us recall how Strawson defines reactive attitudes. These are:

> The non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other; of the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries; of such things as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings.[861]

Baier suggests that resentment and indignation are called reactive because they occur *consequently* to a first affective response. As she explains "the root sense of resentment, that it is simply a second feeling about some matter, typically a feeling consequent upon an action prompted by the "first" sentiment, makes it an essentially reactive emotion".[862] Lucy Allais offers a more detailed definition and distinguishes the following four attributes. Reactive attitudes are: 1) feelings with intentional content rather than cognitive states, 2) directed at persons, 3) related to good will (or lack thereof) others manifest, and 4) attitudes more than basic emotions.[863]

One could hence argue that *ressentiment* is reactive because the experience itself encompasses reactive attitudes such as indignation and resentment in its later stages. But "reactive", in this context of reactive attitudes is supposed to depict a way of valuing that is typical of the POR. One could perhaps understand it as a form of passivity, for Scheler explains that the hostile emotions experienced by the POR are never motivational forces, that the envy experienced by the POR is never emulative but depressing,[864] or, like Solomon, that the POR "just sits and sulks, all the while congratulating [herself] on [her] righteousness and abstemiousness, interpreted as virtue".[865] This suggests that *ressentiment* is reactive

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861 Strawson, 2008, p. 5. Prinz proposes the following definition:

> I define reactive moral emotions as emotions that arise when another person (or group) is interpreted as conforming or violating a moral rule. Reactive moral emotions divide into two classes: blame and praise or, in Humean terms, approbation and disapprobation. (Prinz, 2007, p. 69)

862 Baier, 1980, p. 137.

863 Allais, 2008, p. 2.

864 In Scheler's own words:

> Humanitarian love is a *feeling*, and a passive one, which arises primarily by means of contagion when we perceive the outward expression of pain and joy. We suffer when we see pain and rejoice when we see pleasant sensations. In other words, we do not even suffer in sympathy with the other person's suffering as such, but only with our sense perception of his pain. (RAM, p. 81)

865 Solomon, 2007, p. 110.

because it responds to a forced impotence and passivity.[866] In contrast, the noble person can act and live up to her values.

Note that this interpretation reduces the reactive character of attitudes to one's capacity or incapacity to act. However, there is also something reactive in the way the POR apprehends values in the first place. According to Scheler, for example, humanitarianism – an important manifestation of *ressentiment* – is a feeling of the passive sort. The opposition of passivity and activity, and the idea that such passivity is bad, is discussed when he distinguishes humanitarian love from Christian love, where the former is passive and the latter active. The feeling of universal love for humankind, Scheler explains, lacks "the exuberance of a life that *bestows* blissfully and lovingly, overflowing out of its abundance and inner security".[867] But, more importantly, a person might define her entire self-worth comparatively and only in regard to others and, hence, *reactively.*[868] In his book on Nietzsche's philosophy, Deleuze uses the distinction between active and reactive forces in order to characterise the dynamics of *ressentiment*, which he considers the quintessential form of reactivity.[869] Deleuze's difficult account is best summarised by Schrift, who explains that "whereas the slave moves from the negative premise ('you are other and evil') to the positive judgement ('therefore I am good'), the master works from the positive differentiation of self ('I am good') to the negative corollary ('you are other and bad')".[870] With this interpretation in mind, and given *ressentiment*'s peculiar phenomenology, the original valuation of the POR is in reality always a positive one ("you are other and powerful/handsome/talented"), which at the same time casts a shadow on one's self-worth ("I am worthless"). The POR's reevaluation is therefore a reaction to the experience of a positive valuation, a damaged sense of self-worth, and material impotence. Its characteristic reevaluation ("you are other and evil, therefore I am good") is a response to the original distressing experience of a positive value. But there is already something reactive in the way the POR apprehends positive values too – that is, before any sour-grapes judgements – as these values always seem to impinge negatively on her sense of self-worth. Scheler explains that the common man, who is also a recurrent candidate for *ressentiment*,

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866 In Demertzis' terms:

> [R]esentment is an unpleasant moral sentiment that leads to an active posture. On the contrary, the nietzschean approach of resentment (resentment qua *ressentiment*) is linked to passivity as it captures the morality of weak creatures 'who have been forbidden of the real action'. (Demertzis *in* Nesbitt-Larking et al., 2014, p. 231)

867 RAM, p. 84.

868 Baier, 2010, p. 152.

869 Deleuze, 1962.

870 Schrift *in* Acampora, 2006, p. 246.

"arrives at value judgements by comparing himself to others and others to himself".[871] Or, in Silver and Sabini's words:

> It is often held that if an individual feels diminished by another person's accomplishments, it must be due merely to his or her own idiosyncratic sensitivities; perhaps a 'low self-esteem' [...], *his or her status, evaluated by self or others, is inherently comparative.*[872]

By contrast, the ideal figure of the nobleman apprehends positive values without them casting any shadow on his sense of self-worth. Kolnai describes him along the following lines:

> We mostly connect with the concept of nobleness a notion of spontaneous, effortless, as it were self-evident grace of body, gestures and behaviour we often meet with in the social nobility of old lineage; we attribute it to a certain amount of inbreeding ('noble blood') and to 'good breeding' in the sense of early, organically formative good education mainly through example. It has precious little to do with properly 'vital' values such as health, energy, robustness, well-being and welfare, though something like 'harmonious development of body and mind' may present an actual connecting-link. In fact, nobleness exhibits a certain contrast with the specifically Kantian moral ideas of duty-consciousness and the merit due to moral *effort.*[873]

Voigtländer describes the noble in similar terms:

> The more precise phenomenology of the nobility is, however, very difficult, but so much can be said that it is a mood, a value point of view (*Sichtwerthalten*); a self-feeling that is quite fundamental, and differs in the blood, in the whole life-colour (*Lebenstönung*), from the grossly low self-esteem of ordinary ordinary man.[874]

The ideal of the noble was a common metaphor for an individual attitude towards life, adversity, and values.[875] Historically, it worked as a moral ideal for many conservative writers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Simmel, Ranulf, Scheler, and Sombart, for example, develop similar arguments against the negative and reactive figure of the bourgeois or the (lower) middle class man, whom they all contrast with the higher type of the noble. Nietzsche conceives of the nobleman as a genuinely independent and solitary character.[876] The noble person is free and sovereign; her attitudes are thus distinct from the reactive valuations of the POR. The former never needs *others* to vindicate her self-worth.

This view is present already in Nietzsche's middle period before he outlines the concept of *ressentiment*. There, he reports low and vain character types with a sense of self-esteem that

871 RAM, p. 31.

872 Silver & Sabini, 1978, p. 107. Emphasis added.

873 Kolnai, 1971, p. 216.

874 Voigtländer, 1910, p. 34.

875 Ossowka, 1971; Ossowska, 2007.

876 BGE, 212.

is highly dependent on the opinion of others and which contrasts with the higher types.[877] Scheler vividly contrasts the characteristic act of valuation of the noble with other, more *ressentiment*-prone, figures. More specifically, he first rejects Simmel's claim that the noble man, unlike the envious man, never compares himself to others, for those who never compare their station to others are fools, "originals", or snobs. The noble *does* compare himself, but he assesses the virtues, talents, and positions of others without these damaging his sense of self-worth. Secondly, Scheler remarks that the common man, whose valuation acts are comparative, does not necessarily become a POR. An alternative route for him is the character type of the arriviste or the overachiever (*Streber*). The *Streber*, as we have seen, is the one for whom "being more" or "being worth more" comparative to others is the final aim of his conduct, quite irrespective of the intrinsic value he finds in the activities he pursues. The overachiever, in contrast to more serious candidates for *ressentiment*, is also capable of living up to these positive values. He is therefore not confronted with a feeling of impotence. His experience is thus determined by the shadow of positive and negative valuations: when something is positively valued by him or by others, he wants to realise that value more perfectly than others in order to bring about a feeling of superiority. The latter figure nevertheless errs in the same way that the hedonist does when he seeks and values the pleasure of some activity rather than the activity itself. The overachiever who perpetually needs to see his personal value vindicated is moved by an oppressive feeling of being less worthy. But as opposed to the POR, the arriviste does not fall short of realising the values that will reflect positively on him.

Let us summarise the different ways in which *ressentiment* can be held to be morally objectionable. The first claim 1) we addressed was that the experience of the emotions involved in *ressentiment* were objectionable through being a) excessive, b) unjustified, or c) repressed. We then turned to a second claim 2) that finds *ressentiment* morally objectionable because of the involvement of a self-evaluation mechanism. According to a given hierarchy of values, *ressentiment* can be condemned because the outcome of its characteristic reevaluation is to prefer a lower value over a higher one. In the writings of Scheler and Nietzsche, the moral opprobrium attached to *ressentiment* is linked to the fact that the POR prefers sensory values (pleasure) over truth, (self-)knowledge, or, in the case of Nietzsche and other philosophers of life, over vital values. We then distinguished two further claims. First was the third claim 3) discussed above, that the POR lacks *integrity* in that she comes to alter her values and valuations fundamentally – or at least attempts to do so for inadequate reasons This claim rests upon the premise that integrity is something valuable. If one accepts this, *ressentiment* is morally objectionable. Note that since the POR never manages to completely transform her-

[877] Abbey, 2000, p. 45.

self and still responds to the original values she tries to deny, the lack of integrity can also be used as a descriptive argument explaining why this phenomenon constitutes such an intense psychological conflict. Another important moral axiom and premise of the Kantian and deontological tradition in ethics and the phenomenological tradition assumes that moral judgements can be formed autonomously and thus arrived at through the device of moral reasoning, that is, independently of any other sort of social or affective causes. From this standpoint, the POR's judgements are clearly heteronomous and thus morally wrong, because the POR's complex experience of repressed hostility and feeling of inferiority is the explanation of why she indulges in value illusions and moralising attitudes. Finally, claim 4), we argued that even the original acts of valuation that grasp positive values are distorted among candidates for *ressentiment*. The POR's acts of valuation lack nobility according to several accounts. The outcome of the reevaluation process is the formation of judgements in reaction to a painful experience and never to the naïve or direct perception of value. So, even the POR's positive valuation always involves her own sense of self-worth. This is an important characteristic, says Scheler, of the ordinary man. But only those who cannot realise positive values feel depressed and become candidates for *ressentiment*.

5.3 Conclusion

We started this chapter with a presentation of theories that attribute a negative moral value to an emotion because of the latter's empirical or logical relation to something else – not an emotion – that is intrinsically or instrumentally disvaluable. In Section 5.1, we illustrated how the moral status of emotions, and in particular the moral status of resentment and indignation, is often based on premises related to how non-moral values relate to moral values. The many ways moral opprobrium may be attached to resentment all seem to emphasise its empirical or logical relation to the occurrence of a negative non-moral value, be it *unpleasant* or *anti-social* effects or *unhealthy* states. In other cases, resentment is deemed immoral when it is related to the vice of bad pride.

As we next saw in Section 5.2, *ressentiment,* in turn, may first inherit its moral status from the (dis)value of its underlying emotions, which are good or bad because of their effects, their relation to vices and virtues, or the moral or immoral preferences they entail. One of its characteristic emotions – resentment – is altered when harboured in the context of *ressentiment*. It becomes excessive, repressed and unjustified. Are the latter characteristics alternative determinants *of ressentiment's* moral status? We claim that they are not. Here, again, excessiveness and repression are bad because of their potential health or social effects, which are non-moral disvalues and which are then also the ultimate reasons why *ressentiment* is bad. However, the analysis offered above of when resentment is unjustified suggests

that there is an important link between the emotion and the vice of bad pride, one that is necessarily present in *ressentiment*. In particular, it is out of pride and a desire to feel morally superior that the POR prompts herself into feeling resentful.

Finally, most claims about the value of *ressentiment* are independent from its relation to resentment. Interestingly, however, they all seem to be part of the general idea that *ressentiment* is ethically problematic because it is not noble, neither is the person who harbours it. In fact, the POR seems to embody the exact opposite of the noble. She privileges negative values by attempting to turn them into positive ones; she comes to prefer sensory values and utility over more important values, such as vital or cognitive values; she lacks integrity and autonomy; her valuations are reactive; she is unwilling to face the hard truth; she holds illusions, avoids self-knowledge, and lacks epistemic courage; and, finally, her feelings of value only seem to grasp a positive value in relation to her own sense of self-worth. On the other hand, the noble aims at realising positive and the highest values, shows integrity and autonomy, is always active, willing to face the hard truth, and can appreciate an unrealisable, positive, value without it challenging her self-worth.

6 SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF *RESSENTIMENT*

Scheler explicitly gives to the first Chapter of his monograph the heading "On the phenomenology and *sociology* of *ressentiment*". But what new light can sociology shed on this phenomenon? Here we will examine several sociological uses of *ressentiment*, as well as emotions such as resentment, envy and indignation. To put this chapter into context, note that we have so far essentially dealt with "what" questions, and come up with a description and *definition* of *ressentiment*. A sociological account, on the other hand, attempts to answer "why" questions, thus providing an *explanation* of *ressentiment*, which is typically said to occur *because* of a certain social factors rather than psychological ones. It seems that we all have an intuitive grasp of how *social* explanations work and a capacity to differentiate them from merely economic, psychological or religious ones. Many explanations of this kind tend to see the whole of society as stratified in classes, groups or hierarchies. An example of a sociological explanation of *ressentiment* might claim that *it* occurs because individuals find themselves in lower positions than they used to occupy, and so face a loss of social prestige they are powerless to reverse. There are of course other types of social explanations.

Considering the literature analysing *ressentiment* from a sociological point of view, there is one general distinction we need to make from the very beginning. In some cases, *ressentiment* is the phenomenon to be explained, for example, by presenting the causal impact of a configuration of classes or specific relations of power and influence. Other accounts rather use *ressentiment* as a psychological category that helps them to explain the existence of social phenomena such as nationalism, socialism or revolutions. The same author sometimes provides insights and theories of both kinds. Nietzsche, for example, suggests that *ressentiment* is bound to a social hierarchy in which the POR suffers from a lack of political power. However, he also uses the category of *ressentiment* to explain the origin of our moral ideals and ultimately the dire state of Western culture. In the same way, some roles and social situations, says Scheler, are "charged with *ressentiment*" and may therefore trigger it in certain individuals. But at the end of his monograph, he also ventures to explain the success of popular doctrines or fashions of his time, such as humanitarianism and relativism, in terms of their being the characteristic results of *ressentiment*.

This chapter is organised as follows. For the sake of clarity, we will discuss claims of the two kinds in separate sections. Of the former kind, we need to make an additional distinction, for, when *ressentiment* is considered the explanandum, sociological explanations of *ressentiment* come in two possible forms. First, there are theories claiming that this phenomenon only appears where a formal equality of rights is warranted by institutions and this clashes with the existing inequalities between individuals in matters economical, social, political, etc. We shall characterise such explanations as static. The second kind focuses instead on the dynam-

ics within a social hierarchy, in which case the typical triggering event is downward mobility. The occurrence of *ressentiment* is therefore explained, for example, by referring to macro-economic events that reduce a given group's status or income. We call the latter approaches dynamic explanations of *ressentiment*.

Before we start, we briefly need to address some conceptual difficulties related to sociological approaches to *ressentiment* by more clearly defining what kinds of claims we want to evaluate. Given the variety of sociological theories, providing even a tentative overview of the discipline clearly exceeds the limited scope of our analysis. We nevertheless need to introduce some concepts. The psychological nature of our topic raises some questions as to how emotions can be part of a sociological explanation. As a matter of fact, emotions have not always been very popular within the canon of classic sociology. Some partial exceptions are perhaps Tocqueville's analysis of the democratic passion for equality and its declinations in envy and indignation[878], Taine's use of affective categories to describe the causes of the French Revolution[879], and perhaps Hobbes, who has argued that fear constitutes the ultimate cement of civil society.[880] Emotions are eminently subjective and the fact that, for a long time, they have been difficult to measure and quantify has not favoured their inclusion in sociological theories as explanatory variables. Their problematic status may also be the result of the still-fashionable assumption of constructivism in sociology.[881] . For, when psychological states are considered mere social constructs (that is, when thoughts and beliefs are reduced to ideologies entirely determined by, say, economic factors), a particular emotion can never be the cause of a social fact.[882] At best it can only occupy the role of the explanadum in a claim. As such, it appears that explaining a social phenomenon with a negative emotion can unveil aspects of human nature that some are not ready to accept. Schoeck claims that before him sociological inquiries into conflict or hostile behaviour often tried to explain away the possibility that envy – a negative and shameful emotion – might be causally effective.[883] Finally, classic sociology has traditionally dealt with macro variables such as classes, social mobility and power, and ignored affective categories such as *ressentiment* and its characteristic emotions, which are of a less abstract nature.[884]

878 Tocqueville, 1981; Wilhelm, 2013.

879 Taine, 2011; Elster, 2009b.

880 Blits, 1989; Hampe *in* Landweer & Renz, 2012.

881 Burr, 2003; McCarthy, 1994.

882 McCarthy, 1994, pp. 267-279.

883 Schoeck, 1987, p. 107.

884 Hedström, 2005, p. 1.

Recently however, this recurrent malaise seems to have faded and sociology now shows a vibrant interest in emotions.[885] This may also be due to the emergence of social psychology. The latter discipline now counts many schools and theories; most of them share three important premises, summarised in Ross and Nisbett's seminal research program. More particularly, the authors describe the tenets of a sociological explanation of emotions.[886] On their account, the social psychologist's chief objective is to identify and formulate a sociological explanation for cognitions, attitudes and behaviours. A second premise is that the social situation in which an individual is embedded *explains* his thoughts and conduct. (This principle is sometimes labelled situationism.)[887] And finally, all explanations need to take into account the way that situations are perceived by individuals. This last tenet is referred to as the principle of construal, which refers to the fact that any objective social stimulus has a meaning for the actor that may be idiosyncratic. Therefore, in order to predict behaviour, the actor's construal of the situation must be appreciated.[888] These principles are mostly also endorsed by sociologists focusing on the emotions. But as Turner and Stets point out: "whereas disciplines such as psychology focus on individual processes that bring about emotions, sociology places the emotions in a context and examines how social structures and culture influence the arousal and flow of emotions in individuals".[889] Note that the sociological accounts we will discuss are rarely limited to this kind of analysis. In fact, emotional categories are also often employed to explain further social outcomes. This latter aspect is clearly taken into account in Barbalet's description of the sociological approach to emotions:

> First, emotion arises from or inheres in the structural relations of society. It has been shown that these relations are more complex than class theories assume, and should include not only class inequality but also trade cycle movements and cultural patterns. Second, emotion is the basis or the origin of action, which varies with the nature and the distribution of the emotional pattern. Third, these actions affect the social structure by either reinforcing current outcomes or leading to modifications in the relations between social actors. Thus emotion can be viewed as having both a social ontology and a social efficacy and (through being a source of social action) as linking phases of social structure as they change through time.[890]

885 A good overview of the question is provided by Turner and Stets. The authors distinguish 5 main sociological approaches to emotions or sociological theories that use emotional categories in their explanations of social facts (Turner & Stets, 2006).

886 Ross & Nisbett, 2011.

887 Doris, 2002, pp. 23-26. See also: Bowers, 1973; Ross & Nisbett, 2011; Kamtekar, 2004.

888 Ross & Nisbett, 2011, p. 11.

889 Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 2.

890 Barbalet, 1992, p. 161.

We shall narrow down our search for a sociology of *ressentiment* to the identification of sociological explanations of the phenomenon. In this context, merely identifying a possible cause does not count as an explanation of the occurrence of *ressentiment*; one also needs to unveil the mechanism linking the cause to the phenomenon to be explained.[891] In other words, we need to determine the social mechanisms causing *ressentiment*. Our use of the category of mechanism departs from nomological or so called covering-law explanations.[892] Mechanisms, as Elster defines them, are "frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences. They allow us to explain, but not to predict."[893] A social mechanism, in other words, should be understood as "a constellation of entities and activities that are linked to one another in such a way they regularly bring about a particular type of outcome".[894] Mechanisms are causal and therefore they all explain an event in terms of other events that preceded it.[895] Of course not all plausible explanations of *ressentiment* are exclusively sociological. Some are psychological or aretaic. Scheler illustrates the contrast between different types of explanation. He first seems to suggest that different factors play their part and that *ressentiment* could be hereditary:

> [...] the manner in which *ressentiment* originates in individuals or groups, and the intensity it reaches, is due primarily to hereditary factors and secondarily to social structure. Let us note, however, that the social structure itself is determined by the hereditary character and the value experience of the ruling human type.[896]

But carrying on, he then remarks that:

> [...] in addition to these general preconditions, there are some *types of ressentiment* which are grounded in certain typically recurrent "situations" and whose emergence is therefore largely independent of individual temperament. It would be foolish to assert that every individual in these "situations" is necessarily gripped by *ressentiment*. I do say, however, that by virtue of their *formal character* itself – and quite apart from the character of the individuals concerned – these "situations" are *charged* with the danger of *ressentiment.*[897]

In Chapter 3, we developed a theory based on the distinctive character of individuals whose sense of self-worth is challenged by the mere experience of a rival's positive attribute. We also provided a description of that mechanism and claimed that the POR counterbalances her unpleasant experience with moral emotions that induce a feeling of moral superiority,

891 Elster, 2007, p. 21.

892 Hedström, 2005, p. 15.

893 Elster, 2007, p. 36.

894 Hedström, 2005, p. 11.

895 Elster, 2007, p. 7.

896 RAM, p. 36.

897 RAM, p. 36.

compensating for her distressing feeling of inferiority (see Chapter 3.2.4 & 3.2.5). In these case the ultimate cause of *ressentiment* is assumed to be the particular axiological make-up of the person whose experience of values is tied to her sense of self-worth. In other words, individual dispositions are the causally efficient variables explaining the occurrence of *ressentiment*.

What then is a sociological explanation? Explanations of *ressentiment* may be considered sociological in a minimal sense when non-psychological factors such as class, economic conditions or asymmetric relations of power and prestige are taken into consideration. Since the cause of *ressentiment* is, accordingly, not to be found in a person's character, an identifiable situation should trigger *ressentiment* among anyone, that is, quite irrespective of their personality.[898] Or to put it differently, a sociological explanation picks out the situational factors that "seem to make a difference to the probability of observing the events to be explained".[899] This clearly departs from explaining *ressentiment* functionally, for example by saying that the POR indulges in *ressentiment* because it arouses agreeable feeling of moral superiority. It is also distinct from an explanation by necessitation – or a structural explanation – which apprehends *ressentiment* as the inevitable consequence of a complex background of structural facts such as the individual's impotence, his heredity, or his belonging to a lower social class.[900] On this latter view, the existence of such constraints is the causal factor leading to *ressentiment*. Finally, the kind of knowledge we are seeking by identifying social mechanisms is different from statistical explanations and the identification of correlations between events. In reality, the latter is not an explanation at all, since statistical analysis can only be the "test of an explanation, not the explanation itself".[901]

Let us first provide a description of explanations of *ressentiment* that refer to social events, and predicate sociological categories. We shall further illustrate this approach with an interpretation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, show which sociological explanation of *ressentiment* is implied by the metaphor of the slave revolt, and discuss some of its consequences. The second part of the analysis will focus on theories that use *ressentiment* as a category to explain social events.

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898 Sociologists also frequently argue against such explanations and raise the concern that predicting behaviour on the basis of personality traits scores rather poorly compared to situational factors (Ross & Nisbett, 2011, pp. 1-7).

899 Hedström, 2005, p. 2.

900 Elster explains that there are functional explanation "that simply point to the production of consequences that are beneficial in some respect and then without further argument that these suffice to explain the behaviour that causes them" (Elster, 2007, p. 14).

901 Hedström, 2005, p. 23. The author later adds: "From the mechanism perspective, correlations and constant conjunctions do not explain but require explanation by reference to the entities and activities that brought them into existence" (Hedström, 2005, p. 26).

6.1 *Ressentiment* and social configurations

We may start with a simple question: how does *ressentiment* arise? Scheler, and later Greenfeld, suggest that *ressentiment* occurs in the presence of a specific social configuration, which is characterised by two essential properties. Summarizing what is mostly Scheler's view, Greenfeld explains:

> The first condition [...] is the fundamental comparability between the subject and the object of envy, or rather the belief on the part of the subject in the fundamental equality between them, which makes them in principle interchangeable. The second condition is the actual inequality (perceived as non-fundamental) of such dimensions that it rules out practical achievements of the theoretical existing equality.[902]

In Scheler's own words:

> There follows the important sociological law that this psychological dynamite will spread with the discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power. It is the difference between the two factors which is decisive, not one of them alone.[903]

And, accordingly, the philosopher concludes that:

> *Ressentiment* must [...] be strongest in a society like ours, where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognised, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, prosperity, and education.[904]

Here political democracy is considered a good illustration of a social organization in which these two conditions meet. On one hand, it promises equality of rights but, on the other hand, it fails to secure reasonable equality of opportunity. In his analysis of the French Revolution, Taine, who draws heavily on Tocqueville, mentions the fact that the growing bourgeoisie was systematically barred from recognition and other advantages, despite showing great achievements in business and science. Democracy is perhaps even more of a fertile ground for *ressentiment*, as the formal equality between individuals is recognised by it, but no material equality is ever warranted. Scheler suggests that such material inequalities reside in "factual differences in power, property, and education".[905]The philosopher also mentions Jewish *ressentiment* as an example of a phenomenon caused by the explosive contradiction between formal constitutional equality on the one hand and factual discrimination on the other.[906] But the coincidence of formal equality and real inequality in society is not yet enough for a complete, sociological, explanation of *ressentiment*. When these conditions pre-

902 Greenfeld, 1992, pp. 15-16.

903 RAM, p. 28.

904 RAM, p. 28.

905 RAM, p. 28.

906 RAM, p. 29.

vail, the fundamental process by which *ressentiment* seems to occur is *social comparison*. Without a doubt, "comparisons with others appear to be one of the most fundamental, ubiquitous, and robust human proclivities".[907]Scheler reminds us that the historical change the democratic and capitalistic mind-set has brought upon us is the fact that, nowadays, we each have the right to compare ourselves with everyone else.[908] Contrast this with a very stratified feudal organization or a caste system where one is bound by the range of possibilities, expectations and desires of his guild. In such conditions, the individual's comparisons, as Rawls points out, "are confined to within his own estate or caste, these ranks becoming in effect so many non-comparing groups established independently of human control and sanctioned by religion or theology".[909] The freedom and equality consecrated by Western democracies is therefore a breeding bed for *ressentiment* since any goal, ambition and value can be pursued, but the system provides no guarantee that our pursuit will be successful.

The social situation identified by Scheler (and later illustrated by Greenfeld) presupposes that individuals compare themselves to each other, and that they feel entitled to do so because, in some way, they feel equal to each other. Comparability presumes equality. Equality is hence a very important condition of *ressentiment* as well as being the very condition for the underlying emotion of envy.[910] Aristotle uses the saying "potter against potter" to illustrate the implicit act of social comparison in envy.[911] Wealth inequalities are often seen as a cause of *ressentiment.* However, the mere existence of such inequality is not enough to provide an explanation of ordinary envy or the repressed and relived kind that leads to the phenomenon of reevaluation. The man in the street is not envious of Bill Gates' immense fortune, but envious of his neighbour and the latter's fancy car. The perception of a material inequality where equality is expected can cause envy, which, if it is relived and repressed, can turn into full-blown *ressentiment*. For instance, if there is an inequality in status, prestige, or rights between my neighbour and I, and we share the same socio-economic background, envy is likely. A context charged with *ressentiment* is one where institutions, rights and culture grant a sense of equal consideration to its members, but where some of them are factually incapable of fulfilling their aspirations. The condition of equality also requires that the act of comparing oneself to others is possible and not censored by ideologies or punished by

907 Mussweiler et al. *in* Guimond, 2006, p. 33.

908 RAM, p. 28. See also: Frings, 1997, Chap. 6.

909 Rawls, 1971 chap. 82. Scheler puts it as follows:

> The medieval peasant prior to the 13th century does not compare himself to the feudal lord, nor does the artisan compare himself to the knight. The peasant may make comparisons with respect to the richer more respected peasant, and in the same way everyone confines himself to his own sphere (RAM, pp. 32-33).

910 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 253.

911 Aristotle, 1388a.

religion or politics. What the latter condition therefore means is that social comparison is only consequential "among peers", that is, when some fundamental *equality* is assumed of potentially comparable individuals.[912] But in what domains must individuals, professed as equals, remain unequal in reality? Taine for example mentions that, under the Ancient-Régime, the bourgeois began to compare themselves to the nobles, because, according to the universalistic values of the Enlightenment they came to embrace, men are proclaimed to have equal dignity and rights.[913] Additionally, improved material and social conditions pulled them even closer to the noble rank. As he puts it:

> Meanwhile this class [the bourgeoisie] has climbed up the social ladder, and, through its élite, rejoined those in the highest position. [...] the distance was vast; everything was different - dress, house, habits, characters, points of honour, ideas and language. On the one hand the nobles are drawn nearer to the Third-Estate and, on the other, the Third-Estate is drawn nearer to the nobles, actual equality having preceded equality as a right.[914]

Both Scheler and Taine are heavily indebted to the French author, Tocqueville. The latter claims that improved material conditions and *the reduction of differences* in economic and intellectual opportunities is a powerful trigger of envy among those who still cannot access the privileges and prestige that enjoyed by the artistocrats, in particular the absence of taxes and military obligations. This mechanism is now referred to as the Tocqueville effect:

> The hatred that men bear to privilege increases in proportion as privileges become fewer and less considerable, so that democratic passions would seem to burn most fiercely just when they have least fuel. I have already given the reason for this phenomenon. When all conditions are unequal, no inequality is so great as to offend the eye, whereas the slightest dissimilarity is odious in the midst of general uniformity; the more complete this uniformity is, the more insupportable the sight of such a difference becomes. Hence it is natural that the love of equality should constantly increase together with equality itself, and that it should grow by what it feeds on.[915]

912 Smith *in* Tiedens & Leach, 2004, p. 45.

913 As Taine puts it: "On devine quel sera l'effet de la philosophie nouvelle. Enfermée d'abord dans le réservoir aristocratique, la doctrine a filtré par tous les interstices comme une eau glissante, et se répand insensiblement dans tout l'étage inférieur" (Taine, 2011, p. 234).

914 Taine, 2011, p. 231.

915 Tocqueville, 1955, Chap. 3. Another reformulation of this principle applied to the case of the French Revolution is Faguet's version:

> The lighter a yoke, the more it seems insupportable; what exasperates is not the crushing burden but the impediment; what inspires to revolt is not oppression but humiliation. The French of 1789 were incensed against the nobles because they were *almost* the equals of the nobles; it is the slight difference that can be appreciated, and what can be appreciated that counts. The eighteenth-century middle class was rich, in a position to fill *almost* any employment, *almost* as powerful as the nobility. It was exasperated by this *"almost"*and stimulated by the proximity of its goal; impatience is always provoked by the final strides (Faguet, 1928, p. 93.)

This being said, we understand now why envy is more prone to arise in societies where differences between individuals are small. As Schoeck puts it:

> […] envy is not directly proportional to the absolute value of what is coveted, but very often concentrates upon absurd trifles […]. In other words, overwhelming and astounding inequality, especially when it has an element of the unattainable, arouses far less envy than minimal inequality, which inevitably causes the envious man to think: "I might almost be in his place".[916]

Note that this explanation takes the very opposite stance to Marxist or economic approaches, which claim that revolutions are ultimately caused by the rising inequalities related the deteriorations in economic and social conditions.[917] On Tocqueville's view however, this is incorrect. For, once aristocrats were considered comparable to the bourgeoisie, their unreachable privileges had a powerful triggering effect for envy and *ressentiment*. As Taine puts it:

> Distrust and anger against a government putting all fortunes at risk, rancor and hostility against a nobility barring all roads to popular advancement, are, then, the sentiments developing themselves among the middle class solely due to their advance in wealth and culture .[918]

Or:

> The Third-Estate, considering itself deprived of the place to which it is entitled, finds itself uncomfortable in the place it occupies and, accordingly, suffers through a thousand petty grievances it would not, formerly, have noticed. On discovering that he is a citizen a man is irritated at being treated as a subject, no one accepting an inferior position alongside of one of whom he believes himself the equal. Hence, during a period of twenty years, the ancient régime while attempting to grow easier, appear to be still more burdensome, and its pinpricks exasperate as if they were so many wounds.[919]

Scheler endorse the same view:

> The enormous explosion of *ressentiment* in the French Revolution against the nobility and everything with its way of living, and indeed the very emergence of this *ressentiment*, would have been entirely inconceivable if […] more than 80% of the nobility itself had not been intermingled with bourgeois elements, who acquired names and titles by buying aristocratic estates. Besides, the nobility was racially weakened by money marriages. *The ressentiment of the insurgents was sharpened by the new feeling that they were equal to the ruling class.*[920]

916 Schoeck, 1987, p. 77.

917 Aftalion, 1990.

918 Taine, 2011, p. 234.

919 Taine, 2011, p. 237.

920 RAM, pp. 128 – 129. Emphasis added.

Democratic institutions magnify this mechanism. They favour *ressentiment* because they provide all of us with the legitimacy and the opportunity to compare ourselves to everyone else. In a democracy, Scheler suggests, it is no longer just a matter of the bourgeois envying aristocrats, but of every other individual being a potential rival. Scheler believes that, as well as promoting PORs, such system of free competition promotes the character of the *arriviste* (*Streber*) who pursues values, honours and power only in order to feel better than others and so overcome feelings of inferiority caused by a limitless social comparison (see Chapter 3.1.2).[921] As he puts it:

> In the 'system of free competition', on the other hand, the notions on life's tasks and their value are not fundamental, they are but secondary derivations of the desire of all to surpass all the others. No 'place' is more than a transitory point in this universal chase. The aspirations are intrinsically boundless, for they are no longer tied to any particular object or quality.[922]

The structural conditions – formal equality and material inequality – we identified are first and foremost the social conditions of envy. When Tocqueville refers to the democratic passion, or the passion of equality, he speaks of envy, which is a possible source of *ressentiment*.[923] The process of social comparison, as shaped by democracy, can negatively impact one's sense of self-worth. It pulls all individuals into a boundless rivalry for power, prestige and other values. We thus have all elements for *ressentiment* (and not merely envy) to occur, except for one: this experience of social envy needs to be repressed and relived, and trigger the defining phenomenon of reevaluation. For these conditions to lead to *ressentiment*, envy must be impossible to voice and individuals must be prevented from acting upon it. Shame is probably the greatest censor of envy, but as we have seen earlier, others states such as fear and timidity can block its expression too (see Chapter 3.1.1). Yet, can we see the bourgeois, as Taine and Tocqueville see them, as undergoing *ressentiment*'s characteristic reevaluation? Before we examine some examples, let us distinguish a second type of explanation.

The second type of sociological explanation of *ressentiment* focuses on social changes that weigh on status, especially when the latter is lowered through political or economic evolutions. By contrast to the first, static, explanation, this one belongs to the family of dynamic explanations. In his essay on the psychology of Nazism, Fromm remarks:

> It was not only the economic position of the lower middle class that declined more rapidly after the war, but its social prestige as well. Before the war one could feel himself as something better than a worker. After the revolution the social prestige of the working class

921 RAM, p. 32.

922 RAM, p. 33.

923 Kaledin *in* Guellec, 2005, pp. 47-102.

> rose considerably and in consequence the prestige of the lower middle class fell in relative terms.[924]

One can find a similar explanation in the work of the historian Schuman who uses this mechanism to explain the lower middle class *ressentiment* in German society:

> Millions of middle-class families felt themselves being pushed down to the level of the proletariat. A class occupying a middle position In the social hierarchy usually develops more resentments and aggressions as a result of being depressed to an inferior social status than a class which is already at the bottom of the social scale and is further impoverished by economic adversity. [...] Its members identity themselves with the social elite of the upper bourgeoisie and the nobility and "look down upon" manual wage-earners and farmers[925].

Nozick notes the same mechanism in the downward mobility of intellectuals who excel in academia but find themselves little prepared for later real world successes, a phenomenon that is "especially productive of resentment and animus".[926]

One should be careful here to distinguish claims about resentment from claims about *ressentiment*. If a person experiences her downgraded, lower, position as a wrong, she might as well be responding with genuine resentment and seek to right it. If this is truly the case, there is no linguistic ambiguity in the wording used in the previous quotes: the kind of resentment presented is resentment proper. But there are least two reasons to reconsider such descriptions. The first relates to a difficulty with resentment that we discussed earlier. Resentment is a blaming attitude that holds others (the wrongdoers) responsible and accountable for the wrong in question. But if downward mobility comes in the wake of anonymous, large scale, macro-economic forces (e.g. business cycles, globalisation, etc.), the individual will find it hard to hold a particular group responsible for his plight. He may therefore turn to abstract categories and hold a grudge against "the rich", "the Western World", or "Capitalism". But these sorts of generalization are a typical symptom of *ressentiment*. The second reason *ressentiment* might be triggered by downward mobility is that it is a potent source of envy, which can lead to *ressentiment* and the phenomenon of reevaluation if it is mismanaged in a characteristic way.

Having differentiated between static and dynamic explanations of *ressentiment*, we should analyse, or carry out the exegesis, of one prominent and very influential illustration of the first variant. When Nietzsche coins the famous expression "slave revolt", it seems to imply that *ressentiment* is exclusively harboured by members of the lowest strata of society and only *because* they endure all the struggles related to their social condition.[927] A social group

924 Fromm, 2010, p. 214.

925 Schuman, 1936, p. 105.

926 Nozick, 1998, p. 9.

927 Fossen, 2008.

can be defined in terms of specific attributes of character and personality , which are in turn reinforced by the social conditions of their existence. This is, for example, the approach of the Danish sociologist Ranulf which we should discuss later in more detail. In other words, it is an individual's position in a social hierarchy that ultimately determines if he comes to harbour *ressentiment* and thus indulge the type of axiological delusions we have described. Nietzsche and Scheler regularly describe *ressentiment* as the special appanage of the weak, the powerless, the poor, the unfortunate, the downtrodden, the broken, the sick, the ugly, the crippled or women. The phenomenon is depicted as the attitude members of a humiliated, powerless and deprived *group* hold against the better off. Max Weber uses the category in his sociology of Judaism. As he puts it:

> The factor of resentment (*ressentiment*) […] achieved importance in the Jewish ethical salvation religion, although it had been completely lacking in all magical and caste religions. Resentment is a concomitant of that particular religious ethic of the disprivileged which […] teaches that the unequal distribution of mundane goods is caused by the sinfulness and the illegality of the privileged, and that sooner or later God's wrath will overtake them. In this theodicy of the disprivileged, the moralistic quest serves as a device for compensating a conscious or unconscious desire of vengeance.[928]

The idea that *ressentiment* refers to the general hostility and vindictiveness of social groups sharing the same socio-economic statuses or the same physical weaknesses may have part of its origin in the French usage of the word in the late 19th century. In German, *ressentiment* has the meaning of the (feeling of) revenge of the weak upon the strong (''Rache der Schwachen an den Starken'').[929] In the same vein, Scheler's early reading of Nietzsche suggests that the revolt of slaves is to be found among the masses.[930] The philosopher later points out, rather unambiguously, that: "through its very origin, *ressentiment* is therefore chiefly confined to those who *serve* and are *dominated* at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority".[931] If we examine the premises behind these claims, its seems that there are socio-economic conditions (e.g. to be poor, to serve) or natural conditions (e.g. to be a hunchback) that bring an individual, *regardless of his character*, to experience *ressentiment.* Hence, the phenomenon can be explained by factors such as natural shortcomings or a

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928 Weber, 1978, p. 494.

929 Waibl & Herdina, 1997, p. 236.

930 As Scheler puts it:

> Die Vertauschung des ersten Wertepaares durch das zweite und dessen Überordnung und Herrschaft leitet Nietzsche aus dem Jahrhunderte umfassenden Vorgang ab, den er den »Sklavenaufstand in der Moral« nennt, und den er auf das steigende »*Ressentiment*« der Massen, als der an ursprünglichen Lebenswerten zu kurz Gekommenen zurückführt (SGW I, p. 393).

931 RAM, p. 27.

low socio-economic position, which is different from envisaging the cause of *ressentiment* as someone's dispositions or the special form of his acts of valuation (see Chapter 3).

Let us here examine the famous Nietzschean metaphors of "slave" and "master" to illustrate the phenomenon of *ressentiment* and see if it reads as a tale about the revolt of the weak and poor. Nietzsche's argument is set in early Christian times, in Palestine, when slaves, commoners, the ruling Roman aristocracy and the Jewish priests supposedly cohabited.[932] A sociological explanation stresses that *ressentiment* is the typical response to a particular context (deprivation of power, prestige, etc.) Barbalet further points out that "the structure of class relations themselves tends to determine the emotions that individual class members feel. Although the relationship between class and emotion is not direct or simple, the emotional tone of class members can be explained in terms of the pattern of class relations".[933] The *Genealogy*'s vocabulary presents the wretched, the poor and the weak as tired of being deprived of the exertion of power – something they all seem to value – and shows them disparaging the privileged class and advocating a new table of values. Hence, the primary agents of the reevaluation of values are the slaves.[934] But this popular interpretation has recently been challenged by Nietzsche exegetes, in particular the view that *ressentiment* is triggered simply by socio-economic factors. First, Nietzsche groups individuals into classes which are determined by socio-economic causal factors, but these classes also represent bundles of character traits. The slaves, the priests and the knightly-aristocrats are what they are only *partially* because of their social positions, for someone other than a slave may have a slavish character and someone other than an aristocrat may have noble dispositions. Some even argue that personality traits are the dominant factor, in particular because Nietzsche often uses "slave", or at least the adjective "slavish", to describe the priests, who in reality are equal in rank to the elite and belong to the aristocracy.[935] Second, an accurate reading of the *Genealogy* shows that the origin of *ressentiment* is not found among the slaves, but among the priests. In a seminal paper, Reginster convincingly demonstrates that the original bearers of *ressentiment* are the priests and not the slaves, even if the latter eventually join in and endorse the new morality.[936] Nietzsche explicitly depicts the priests as members of the aristocratic elite and suggests they have are subordinated to the knightly-aristocrats. Attributing

[932] "Roughly, the Roman Empire circa the 1st through 3rd centuries AD" (Leiter, 2002, p. 195.)

[933] Barbalet, 1992, p. 153.

[934] Lanier Anderson *in* May, 2011, p. 26.

[935] Reginster, 1997, p. 285; Leiter, 2002; May, 2011.

[936] Reginster, 1997; May, 2011. Wallace has a slightly different interpretation. While recognizing that *ressentiment* has originally matured among the "Jewish priestly class", he nevertheless considers "the priests to be initiators and facilitators of a process that takes place elsewhere, in the psyches of the slavish [...] This act of creation would not have succeeded in bringing new values into existence unless there were other people in the world who were emotionally primed to internalize the new evaluative vocabulary that the priests had invented" (Wallace, 2007, p. 123).

ressentiment to priests may therefore be contradictory, insofar this experience is normally seen as characteristic of lower social classes (such as slaves) because of their poverty and lack of power. So how can an aristocratic priest possibly be a slave?[937] In reality, individuals at the very bottom of a social hierarchy are the least likely to develop such a disposition; a slave, as Reginster points out, "accepts his masters' high estimation of the noble life and their low estimation of himself, and therefore never even forms the expectation to live the life his masters' value".[938]. Scheler similarly remarks that:

> A slave who has a slavish nature and accepts his status does not desire revenge when he is injured by his master; nor does a servile servant who is reprimanded or a child that is slapped[939].

When translating Nietzsche's parable in the context of our contemporary societies, one may be tempted to see the slaves and their protest as an allegory of the modern proletarian. Marxist readings have explicitly associated the proletariat to the Nietzschean slaves and described their revolt as proletariat-*ressentiment.*[940] But this view is contested by Scheler on the same grounds. He claims that "in present-day society, *ressentiment* is by no means most active in the industrial proletariat (except when it is infected by the *ressentiment* of certain "leader" types), but rather in the disappearing class of artisans, in the petty bourgeoisie and among small officials".[941] Social explanations stress contextual factors that are thought to cause the initial experience. The latter exegetical point shows that someone's low position in a social hierarchy is not a reliable factor in *ressentiment* since members of the elite – the priests – may be at the root of this phenomenon.

However, an important principle can be extracted from these examples: the POR has to consider herself worthy of the good she covets, to deserve them or to have a right to them, for this is the difference between the slave or the proletarian on one hand and the priest or the bourgeois on the other. The deprivation of goods such as power, social prestige and perhaps

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937 Lanier Anderson explains:

> In Nietzsche's own telling of the story […] it is clear that the priests, too, are supposed to play some important role in the "slave revolt." That is why it seems strange that he classifies them as nobles. Since they are heavily involved in the slave revolt, and since they seem to be so much at odds with the noble values that Nietzsche's genealogy is attempting to bring back to the surface […], it seems they should be counted as slaves, instead. Commentators are therefore tempted either to write them out of Nietzsche's first-essay story by focusing on the slaves alone, or to count the priests as slaves outright in this context, or else to argue that Nietzsche's treatment of the priests involves some confused, unstable, or ambiguous hybrid of slave and noble characteristics. (Lanier Anderson *in* May, 2011, p. 26.)

938 Reginster, 1997, p. 288.

939 RAM, p. 28.

940 Weinstein, 1978, p. 24.

941 RAM, p. 40.

even wealth can bring a person to experience *ressentiment* when she expects to be able to have them, or sees herself as having a right to them. The Nietzschean priest craves political power, but seems to lack all the important virtues such as physical strength, courage and good health. Resignation however is not conceivable for a priest, for, as a member of the aristocracy he feels entitled to live the life he values most and to exert political power.[942] Slaves accept their lot, but priests cannot and continue to covet what they are too weak to get. On the account of many readings of Nietzsche, it is a person's social position that determines her disposition for this sentiment. On Nietzsche's own account however, it is ultimately a person's character that makes a her a candidate for *ressentiment.*

Ranulf's analysis of lower middle class indignation offers an alternative to explanations in terms of an individual's position within a social hierarchy. Despite discussing Scheler at the very end of his essay, he never uses the concept of *ressentiment* and only occasionally mentions a theory of resentment he attributes to Sombart. Ranulf's analysis of lower middle class indignation offers an alternative to explanations in terms of an individual's position within a social hierarchy. In fact, Ranulf criticises Scheler's lack of emphasis on social structures and, as we have seen, rejects the phenomenological method as mere "plausible guesses"[943], and wonders why, in some cultures or societies, this tendency seems not to exist. He also makes two other claims. Firstly, criminal law coincides with the generalization of a disinterested tendency to inflict punishment – hence if we see one as a social phenomenon then we ought to see the other as a social phenomenon too. Secondly, the emotion behind a disinterested tendency to inflict punishment is indignation. Interestingly however, one of the discoveries he claims to have made in a previous work, is that the indignation behind the institutionalisation of criminal law is, in fact, nothing but disguised envy.[944] Regardless of the empirical accuracy of his study, we shall preliminarily stress that such a characteristic disguise of hostility (envy) as a moral emotion (indignation) is an essential stage of the *ressentiment* sequence (see Chapter 3.2.5). As we claimed earlier, the unpleasant repression of envy and revenge brings the POR to hold sour grapes or sweet lemons evaluations which, very often, morally condemn the rival. The genesis of a disinterested tendency for punishment can be identified with *ressentiment* as we defined it.[945] Let us now consider the sociological explanation of why envy sometimes takes on the mask of indignation and why its institutional by-product – criminal law – appeared in some societies, but remains absent from others. According to Ranulf's historical research, criminal law and its associated psychological motivation only appeared where the social structure includes a middle-class or a lower

[942] Reginster, 1997.

[943] Ranulf, 1964, p. 1.

[944] Ranulf, 1964, p. 1.

[945] Ranulf, 1964, p. 43.

middle-class. More specifically, its origins are to be found, throughout history, in the behaviour and *affective* disposition of the lower middle class, which is characterised by strong moralising and a righteous concern for other people's wrongs.[946] As he puts it: "moral indignation, links social structure – in the form of class configuration, and social action – to the formation of criminal law"[947]

The historical evidence he collects is meant to show that: "the desire to see anybody punished is generally much more intensive in the lower than in the higher classes, and that it is especially intensive in the lower middle class".[948] This desire is both a condition for criminal law to be instated and an expression of envy acted out as indignation. This can be observed in social groups and societies like: the Nazis, the Protestants and the Puritans. It seems to be lacking among the Aristocrats, the Catholics, the Teutons, the Hindus and the Chinese. Ranulf further considers that the Israelites and the Bolsheviks are mixed instances. The Nazis do manifest a "disposition to inflict severe disinterested punishment"[949], which contrasts with the apparent leniency of criminal law under the Weimar Republic. Drawing heavily on Weber's research, Ranulf further goes on to claim that Protestantism and Calvinism are "characterized by an unusually strong desire to see other people punished for their immorality"; Calvinism in particular "found the bulk of its followers in the lower middle-class".[950] Ranulf claims that the same prevailed among the Jewish and Catholic middle-class. Based on his own reconstruction of the ethos of the Puritans via an analysis of 17th century English sermons, Ranulf finally comes to the conclusion that, there too, a society dominated by the lower-middle class was characterised by a "fundamental, unreasoned desire to see suffering inflicted upon human beings".[951]

But how are these claims related to a sociological explanation of *ressentiment*? Irrespective of his claims about criminal law, Ranulf develops a view of *ressentiment*, mostly influenced by Sombart, according to which the middle-class indulges in sweet lemon reevaluations. The lower middle class makes a virtue of necessity and turns the very constraints and restrictions of its lifestyle into positive values. Indignation may simply arise when other individuals find some personal values such as industriousness or frugality unimportant. *Ressentiment*-indignation more particularly is a transmutation of envy and based on the POR's reevaluations. For, one strategy typically consists in turning one's condition or constraints into virtues that are played off against the rival who, by definition, fails to instantiate them. The

946 Ranulf, 1964, p. 36.

947 Barbalet, 2002, p. 279.

948 Ranulf, 1964, p. 46.

949 Ranulf, 1964, p. 10.

950 Ranulf, 1964, p. 16.

951 Ranulf, 1964, p. 76.

ordinary man envies the wealthy Aristocrat and is indignant when the latter fails to be frugal, diligent or industrious. The former needs such traits – out of economic necessity – but turns them into virtues in order to manage the distressing feeling he faces when he compares his station in life with that of the idle wealthy man. Sombart provides a good illustration of a sociological explanation of *ressentiment* as the phenomenon founding the ethos that allowed capitalism to bloom. His unlikely protagonist Alberti is depicted as envious and indignant, but what makes his attitude a case of *ressentiment* is the fact that he disvalues the attributes of the aristocrats he envies and celebrates the traits he already possess as the most important virtues, which constitute a symptomatic case of sour grapes and sweet lemons.[952]

If *ressentiment*-indignation the main motivator for the harsh punishment of the individuals believed to be wrongdoers, and Ranulf is right, one must conclude that the real motivation here is envy, not indignation. One must also conclude that such indignation rests on a characteristic reevaluation (sweet lemons), and that historically criminal law may have been grounded in hostile emotions rather than moral ones, on genuine envy rather than authentic indignation or resentment. Despite defining his own approach as sociological, Ranulf's monograph is sparse when it comes to the sociological explanations of *ressentiment* as we defined them. The closest he comes to such an explanation is his claim that some cultural patterns (Protestantism, Puritanism and Nazism) seem to favour reevaluation and transmutation of envy into indignation more than others (Catholicism and Aristocracy).

In general, most sociological accounts either seem to focus on the emotional preconditions for *ressentiment*, namely damaged feelings of self-worth and envy, and their social conditions and triggers, or on a characteristic expression of *ressentiment* in the shape of the moral emotions of resentment and indignation. Ranulf links both aspects by claiming that the intense indignation of the lower middle class is in fact disguised envy. But the relation of his claim with *ressentiment* is only indirect. In this regard, Ossowska is right when she claims that:

> Sociologists, it seems, are more agreed on identifying a disinterested inclination towards inflicting punishment in the petty bourgeoisie than on offering any explanation as to why this should be found in this milieu more than in others.[953]

Social hierarchies are considered by sociologists to be the most important trigger for *ressentiment*. One could always argue, as we did, that in the case of Nietzsche's master and slave allegory, these two social categories are actually labels referring to character traits. In fact, Nietzsche, Scheler, and even Ranulf to some extent, ultimately privilege aretaic explanations, claiming that the POR harbours *ressentiment* because he shows a certain kind of dispositions (he is slavish) rather than because he suffers from his social condition. Ranulf suggests that

952 Sombart, 1967.

953 Ossowska, 1986, p. 222.

this disposition may be influenced by cultural patterns, particularly religion. Scheler's explanation, that stresses the potential of democracy to breed *ressentiment* and what he calls a system of free competition, is clearly sociological. His explanation departs from those insisting on the necessary lower or lowered position of the POR, for what counts is formal equality, real inequality and the process of social comparison. When these conditions meet, and when the individual finds himself both free and entitled to compare himself to others, *ressentiment* may then arise from repressed envy.

Note, finally, that dynamic explanations differ only slightly from static ones, and comparing them may illustrate the relative importance of Scheler's criteria. The major difference is the identification of an effective *ressentiment*-trigger in the form of some downgrade. According to the dynamic view, only those who once belonged to a higher rank and find themselves downgraded for, say, economic or ethnic reasons will develop the characteristic affective sequence of *ressentiment*. But the conditions of the mechanism at play in this second variant are already present in the static variant. For, the dynamic variant only provides an additional explanation for the terms and basis on which the POR compares himself to others and why this process is a distressing experience: the POR is simply contrasting his current, disadvantaged status, with the one he enjoyed earlier. This memory is what gives him the opportunity to compare himself to others. Formal equality plays the same role in the static case, for the belief that all individuals are equal gives indivieduals the opportunity to assess their condition and and be confronted with real inequality. As a conclusion, we shall argue that a sociological explanation of *ressentiment* picks out those non-psychological factors that may influence and trigger a distressing social comparison and thus initiate a sequence of repressed and relived envy that ultimately leads to the reevaluation process.

6.2 *Ressentiment* and revolutions

So far we have identified some general social factors that can cause *ressentiment*. But sociologists have also used the concept of *ressentiment* to explain events like revolutions, or the ideologies of nationalism and egalitarianism. We shall now consider approaches that envisage *ressentiment* as the *explanans*, that is, as a cause for the occurrence of a given event or state of affairs. Let us first explore the relation between *ressentiment* and revolutions. Several authors have stressed the importance of *ressentiment* as the motivation behind revolutionary actions. According to this line of thought, *ressentiment* is an explosive force which, eventually, triggers social unrest or revolutions. For example, a common explanation in the social psychology of the French Revolution is that the upheavals were motivated by the intense hatred the bourgeoisie felt towards the aristocracy who enjoyed tax exemptions and were exempted

from military service.[954] This fuelled the *ressentiment* of the non-aristocrats. Historians in particular have often pinpointed the role of *ressentiment* in social change during crises and revolutions. Nietzsche already explains that the French Revolution made France collapse under the "instincts of popular *ressentiment*".[955] Fitzpatrick claims that: "*ressentiment* [...] must always be present in the mix of emotions that lead people to support revolutions and commit acts of revolutionary violence"[956] and illustrates it with the example of the Russian Revolution:

> The forms of expression of *ressentiment* changed over time to some extent. In 1917, bundling unpopular foremen and managers in wheelbarrows and dumping them in the canal were favoured practices of Petrograd workers, while house searches and confiscation of property and forced participation in manual labour were mainstream revolutionary practices, along with more familiar forms of terror such as imprisonment and execution, during the civil war.[957]Greenfeld reports the power of this phenomenon; which "not only makes a nation more aggressive, but represents an unusually powerful stimulant of national sentiment and collective action, which makes it easier to mobilize collectivistic nations for aggressive warfare than to mobilize individualistic nations, in which national commitment is normally dependent on rational calculations."[958] Merton endorses the earlier distinction between strong and weak *ressentiment* – which he calls rebellion and revolution respectively – and claims that only *ressentiment* coincides with a pattern of anomie characteristic of revolutions.[959]

According to Scheler, the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the 13th century, then the Third Estate in France and, finally, political democracy are all expressions of the same phenomenon of *ressentiment* and manifestations of its power. These *ressentiment*-driven revolutions deeply alter the structure of society by changing its values. As he explains:

> This *ressentiment* exploded, its values spread and were victorious. As the merchants and representatives of industry came to dominate, especially in the Western countries, their judgements, tastes, and inclinations became the selective determinants of cultural production even in its intellectual and spiritual aspects. Their symbols and conceptions of the ultimate nature of things, which were necessary results of their activity, came to replace the older religious symbols, and everywhere their type of valuation became the criterion of "morality" as such.[960]

954 Tocqueville, 1955, §10; Elster *in* Welch, 2006, p. 51.

955 GM, I, 16.

956 Fitzpatrick, 2001, p. 580.

957 Fitzpatrick, 2001, p. 582.

958 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 488.

959 Merton, 1996, p. 150.

960 RAM, p. 111.

The historian Marc Ferro analysed several historical manifestations of *ressentiment*, which he believes "arises from a humiliation or a trauma that may be caused by social extraction, by physical weakness […] and more generally, by an inferiority complex".[961] Like Scheler or Merton, he apprehends *ressentiment* as a potent affective cause of social transformations and claims that *ressentiment* is "the precursor of revolt".[962] Ferro argues resentment is the central motivator of all revolutions and their subsequent excesses. As he puts it:

> Resentment against the privileged had given way to an avenging fury against anything that was thought to block complete regeneration. Egalitarianism took priority over the aspiration to freedom, to equity. The supporters of democracy challenged every trace of superiority.[963]

But it appears that Ferro – who writes in French – either has resentment in mind or fails to distinguish the phenomenon of *ressentiment* from resentment. For example, he drawn no conceptual difference between resentment as a response to a repressed feeling of inferiority and envy, and resentment as a form of anger at past offences along with the drive to right it. In his analysis of the French Revolution both peasants and the bourgeoisie seem to be driven by the same emotion. However, the former aim at putting "an end to the offences to their dignity"[964] and therefore only act upon resentment as we defined it (that is, a response to past offences or humiliations that have not been righted). On the other hand, the interesting mechanism of *ressentiment* and its problematic emotional expressions of indignation and resentment is illustrated by the middle-class and the bourgeoisie who envied the nobility and "aped the gentry"[965] – an important argument of both Tocqueville and Taine.

Most of the examples Ferro uses are of offended individuals, wronged groups or dispossessed nations which ruminate about their losses or humiliations, but cannot act until a turn of events finally allows them to explosively vent all their hostility. We have shown earlier that fits of anger can be the expression of accumulated resentment (Chapter 2). Here it seems the expression "*ressentiment*" is used to describe such bouts when they are particularly hostile and violent. There is no mention, however, of the reevaluation process that characterises *ressentiment*, neither of repressed and relived hostile emotions.

A more accurate usage of the concept is made by Liah Greenfeld who shows how *ressentiment* proper shaped the rise of nationalism in Western countries. She claims in her important monograph that, apart from England, all major European nation-states have been created

961 Ferro, 2010, p. 127.

962 Ferro, 2010, p. 128.

963 Ferro, 2010, p. 31.

964 Ferro, 2010, p. 24.

965 Ferro, 2010, p. 25.

under the impulse of a strong *ressentiment* against another rival nation, the most striking example of all being Russia.[966] As she explains:

> Nationality elevated every member of the community which it made sovereign. It guaranteed status. *National identity is, fundamentally, a matter of dignity.* It gives people reasons to be proud[967]. As Greenfeld explains, Russian nationalism has been built around an admiration of the West that started with Peter the Great's ambition to modernize the country. But once the country was put on the cultural map of Europe, Russians rapidly understood their inferiority in reaching these ideals.

Unlike Ferro who seems to mainly associate *ressentiment* with violent outbursts of anger due to accumulated resentment, Greenfeld considers the reevaluation process in much greater detail. In particular, she claims Russian nationalism provide the most striking, historical manifestation of the phenomenon of *ressentiment*. Facing its own inferiority in industrial, scientific and political matters, Russia struggled to overcome this and build up national pride in spite of evident Western superiority. Once the first response of imitating the West failed, the second response simply consisted in showing that the West was an inappropriate model for Russia, mainly because Russia is incomparable and needs to be judged according to different standards. But the response that finally proved the most viable was the devaluation of the West and its values, its depiction as evil.[968] This, in other terms, is a claim about Russian sour grapes evaluations and strong *ressentiment* since what came to be devalued by Russians is not a particular good but the very values that were celebrated in the West.

Russian strong *ressentiment* was not only manifested in ironic and hateful rejections of Western models, but also in sweet lemon reevaluations. In much the same way as the weak priests (Nietzsche) and the industrious but poor craftsmen (Sombart), national vices and shortcomings were turned into virtues and positive values. One putative example of this mechanism is the reevaluation, by the Russians, of reason and intellectual virtues which were admired in the West, particularly in France. As Greenfeld points out: "Reason as a faculty of human mind referred to articulation, precision, delimitation, and reserve – they [the Russians] opposed to it life so full of feeling that one could choke on it, the inexpressible, the unlimited, the hyperbolic".[969]

Historians and sociologists regularly claim that *ressentiment* motivates violent acts of vengeance, it might also constitute the primary drive behind revolutionary upheavals. But if we follow our previous analysis, *ressentiment* is an attempted resolution of the tension arising from feelings of impotence and inferiority and the subsequently repressed episodes of envy

966 Greenfeld, 1992.

967 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 487.

968 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 254.

969 Greenfeld, 1992, p. 256.

and revengefulness. If such strategy were efficient, we might think that the POR's axiological illusions would provide her with some relief . The strategy however is irrational and the original values remain active. In regard to the POR's emotions, envy and the desire for revenge are still her dominant motivational states of mind, even if she tries to disguise them as resentment and indignation. *Ressentiment* is never a long-term remedy to an individual's experience of inferiority and impotence because the old values are still experienced. That said, most sociological accounts that use *ressentiment* as an explanatory variable tend to reduce it to one of its characteristic parts. This is true in particular of the reduction of *ressentiment* to intense hostility and violence. Only Greenfeld's view on the role of *ressentiment* accounts for the process of reevaluation.

6.3 Conclusion

As we have shown, *ressentiment* is related to sociological explanations in two ways. It either constitutes the phenomenon that needs to be explained by reference to a specific social structure, or it forms part of the explanation of social facts, revolutionary actions, and associated evaluations and ideologies. In the first case, we distinguished between static and dynamic explanations. We found that all sociological explanations of *ressentiment* evoked a social structure and a culture that allowed for and favoured a distressing form of social comparison. Democracy, according to Scheler, is a case in point: the formal equality it celebrates clashes with the material inequality of its citizens. This discrepancy between formal right and real discriminations, is a potent source of *ressentiment*. Social comparison, at its root, rests on the shared belief that all individuals are equal and hence also within the scope of social comparability. The dynamic variant of the explanation focuses on downward mobility as *ressentiment*'s social cause. A distressing social comparison is here based on the memory of a better social rank. The existence of such beliefs and the feeling of entitlement to a better status are the drivers of the POR's comparison, of her envy and revengefulness and, ultimately, of her *ressentiment*. Analysis of both kinds of social explanations of *ressentiment* reveals that the key to all of them is not Scheler's suggested contrast between real inequality and formal equality. The latter condition is only one possible social origin of *ressentiment*. The common element is a trigger for a distressing social comparison and the fact that such comparison is not refrained by cultural or political institutions, say for example, by a system of castes. Sometimes, the opportunity for social comparison even seems to be encouraged. This seems to be the case in democratic and capitalist societies, or in what Scheler calls a society of "free competition".[970]

[970] RAM, pp. 32-33.

Most of the discussed sociological views of *ressentiment* only refer to parts of the phenomenon. Most of them claim that specific social arrangements (static) or specific social changes (dynamic) may cause a distressing comparison, and we showed earlier that the latter experience is one possible trigger for *ressentiment*'s fundamental feelings of inferiority and impotence. If anything then, social explanations – as opposed to psychological explanations for example – describe the mechanism for the cases when such triggers are external, and often impersonal. Common to the latter approaches is an identification of the occurrence of some emotional responses, in particular envy and resentment. *Ressentiment*'s central reevaluation process is however less often discussed, Greenfeld being an exception. In fact, it mainly appears in explanations of past or present evaluative practices, typically in the analysis of ideologies which are then considered the outcome of a complex affective phenomenon named *ressentiment*.

7 General Conclusion

The theory of *ressentiment* we have defended in this thesis has several parts that we shall here summarise. We shall in particular provide a survey of their relations and illustrate some of the important theoretical implications the theory has for our understanding of *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment is a sentiment that focuses on a particular, positive, but unreachable or unrealisable good, person, or situation. The first-stage of *ressentiment*, that is, the original non-conceptual acquaintance with a positive value and the non-conceptual grasp of the disvalue of one's inferiority or impotence, has to be distinguished from the hostile emotional responses to these feelings and their object. The first-stage experience of *ressentiment* is marked by feelings of impotence and inferiority. The latter feelings are typically triggered by social comparison, by the apprehension of a positive but inaccessible value, and sometimes by the mere grasp of one's impotence, which can make one feel inferior too (e.g. Aesop's fox). This first-stage impacts negatively on one's self-esteem, as opposed to one's self-respect. A damaged self-respect is, more specifically, the way resentment feels like (Chapter 2).

Ressentiment is characterised by different emotional responses to the feelings making up the first stage of *ressentiment* and their objects. We distinguished in that respect between hostile attitudes – anger, a desire for revenge, hatred or envy – and moral emotions – resentment and indignation. *Ressentiment*'s hostile emotions have several characteristic properties: they are experienced as *relived* and *repressed* emotions, their intentionality tends to "generalise" its object, and they have a pleasant aspect. *Ressentiment*'s moral emotions are "other condemning" and based on the POR's new evaluations which predicate, directly or indirectly, either a personal wrong (the base of resentment) or an impersonal wrong (the base of indignation). The table below summarises the characteristic emotions involved in the phenomenon of *ressentiment*.

	Triggering event	*Formal object*	*Proper object*	*Characteristic action tendencies*
Envy	Social Comparison affecting one's self-esteem	The disvalue of the fact that a rival possesses a good one would prefer her not to have The disvalue of inferiority	A rival	Levelling down the rival ("Tall poppies")
Anger	A wrong that can be immediately redressed The frustration of plans, expectations, and desires	The disvalue of a wrong that can be immediately redressed The disvalue of frustrated plans and desires	An obstacle, an obstructing agent Oneself or others	Striking back, aggressive behaviour Outburst of rage
Resentment	A wrong that cannot be immediately redressed and which damages one's self-respect	The injustice of an unrighted, personal, wrong	A person or group taken to be the author of a *personal* wrong	Revenge Outburst of anger
Indignation	An impersonal wrong that breaches norms and disregards values one is attached to	The disvalue of an impersonal wrong	A person or group taken to be the author of an *impersonal* wrong	Third party punishment Outburst of wrath

Common to the first-stage of *ressentiment* and the emotions responding to it is their unpleasantness. The latter disvalue also explains functionally why the POR indulges in reevaluation: she attempts to overcome an unpleasant and distressing experience by propping up new emotions that make her feel better about herself. The distinction between the first-stage experience of *ressentiment* and the subsequent emotional responses allows us to reject the Nietzschean cathartic account of the phenomenon's rationality and argue instead for the moral superiority account which is a better description of the strategy the POR aims to pursue. All variants of the cathartic account only seem to dampen, through the psychological device of an emotional discharge, the disvalue attached to the *repression* and *reliving* of hostile emotions. Emotional discharges, however, do not relieve the POR's distressing feelings of inferiority and impotence. She attempts to directly overcome these with the help of a feeling of moral superiority. She attempts to induce this moral superiority via a reevaluation process which leads to new evaluations and moral emotions based thereon. The POR's indignation

and resentment are self-righteous and involve condemning rivals and enemies for not supporting the same values or value-scale as the POR. In the end, however, even the quest for moral superiority appears to be practically irrational as it fails to durably solve another psychological tension that results from the reevaluation process itself, namely the disagreement between the positive but unreachable or unrealisable values that the POR continues to be aware of and the values her new evaluations predicate. *Ressentiment* is, in essence, unstable as it leads to a conflicted fox who judges the grapes to be sour while continuing to feel that they are sweet.

The *reevaluation process* is a necessary element of our definition, which therefore differs from other recent definitions that reduce the phenomenon to hostile emotions and to the particular way in which these emotions are experienced.[971] By putting the reevaluation process in the definition it becomes possible to allow for different affective routes each of which may lead to a characteristic "alteration of values" and to *ressentiment*'s typical form of self-deception. One consequence of the definition is that one can be said to harbour *ressentiment* without, for example, experiencing the common emotion of relived and repressed envy. For mere frustration can lead to the reevaluation process too. For example, Aesop's frustrated fox, who does not suffer from the repression of envy, nevertheless indulges in a reevaluation of the grapes. The exclusive importance many accounts give to intense hostility overlooks the fact that *ressentiment* also involves a characteristic form of self-righteousness which is manifested in a different kind of emotions, namely moral emotions.

The reevaluation process takes different forms which determine the different types of *ressentiment*. A first distinction is between weak and strong *ressentiment*. The former is the reevaluation of a particular object. The latter is a change in the relations of height or opposition a value, initially taken to be a high, positive value, stands in. Both weak and strong *ressentiment* can take the form of sour grapes and sweet lemons reevaluations. Sour grapes in the context of weak *ressentiment* is the devaluation (intrinsic or instrumental) of a particular good or of a particular person possessing that good. In the context of strong *ressentiment,* a sour grapes reevaluation corresponds to the endorsement of a new value-hierarchy which gives the inaccessible value a lower rank. Sweet lemons in the context of weak *ressentiment* refers to the upgrading (intrinsic or instrumental) of an axiologically indifferent or inferior, but reachable or realisable object. It is, typically, the process of turning one's shortcomings into virtues. Sweet lemons in the context of strong *ressentiment* is the endorsement of a new value-hierarchy which gives accessible values a higher rank. Despite Nietzsche's many suggestions and claims that *ressentiment* involves an inversion of values, the analysis shows that reevaluation does not necessarily simply switch the sign of a value from positive to negative.

971 Schacht *in* Gemes & Richardson, 2013; Elgat, 2017.

Many reevaluations are alterations of relations of height or importance between values, or simply the attribution of a value that is not opposed to the one initially coveted.

Ressentiment involves a form of self-deception and the reevaluation process is the key to understanding its specific structure. Folk-psychology and our ordinary apprehension of the phenomenon impose two requirements on a theory of self-deception in the context of *ressentiment*. First, *ressentiment* is not merely a form of hypocrisy. In other words, the reevaluation process does not just serve the purpose of giving others the impression that one finds the grapes sour, fame vain, wealth evil and rhetoric more important than logic. The second requirement has it that the POR never really is at peace and that her new evaluations predicate values that are not entirely internalised, with which she does not completely identify. For, if this were the case, there would be no tension and *ressentiment* would be a perfectly rational strategy to pursue. The POR would grow blind and insensitive to the unreachable or unrealisable values that originally caused her distress. Her feelings of impotence and inferiority, and the emotions responding to these, would then simply vanish.

Ressentiment's reevaluation process, we argued, is an alteration of evaluations. According to the epistemology of values we have presupposed, evaluations are conceptual attitudes that predicate values. Valuations, on the other hand, are non-conceptual acquaintances with values and relations of height and importance between values. Emotions are responses to value-feelings and their objects and can also be based on evaluations. Key to our account of self-deception is the fact that the POR's valuations, her impressions of values, her sensitivity to certain values, remain the same. The reevaluation process in other words does not alter valuations. The POR can thus feel indignant about what she believes is her neighbour's greed and vanity and yet continue to be aware of his courage and tenacity, which are virtues she is unable to exemplify. *Ressentiment* involves a form of self-deception because the POR manages to bring herself into a state where she becomes unaware of the disvalue associated with some of the valuations and emotions she experiences. Through the psychological device of reevaluation, the envious neighbour grows oblivious to the fact that he positively values his rival's character traits and does not conceptualise the fact that the unpleasant emotion he experience is envy and that it has a negative value. Instead, he intentionally props up evaluations that condemn his rival for having wronged him and on the basis of which he can apprehend his envy as resentment. The POR needs to repress her hostile emotional responses. What such repression means is that her affects are not allowed to be possible objects of her inner perception. The type of self-deception involved in *ressentiment* is therefore not a case of conflicting beliefs, but a conflict between the values evaluations predicate and the values valuations grasp. *Ressentiment* never really involves the static paradox of self-deception as the POR is not conflicted between old and new evaluations. The dynamic para-

dox is accounted for because the POR is the victim of an illusion of inner perception. Inner perception is not a cognitive state and has non-conceptual content. The fact that the POR fails to grasp her occurrent emotions is not in the first place an error. It is an illusion.

We argued that the moral opprobrium attached to *ressentiment* exhibits a pattern quite different from other cases in which negative moral values are attributed to emotions. *Ressentiment* can inherit its ethical disvalue from its constitutive emotions. The latter are in turn ethically bad for different reasons, for example, because of their anti-social or psychological consequences. *Ressentiment* is a sentiment which may become a trait, and is then the vice that stands in opposition to the character trait, or virtue, of what, for want of a better term, we have called, following Nietzsche and Scheler, nobility, the virtue of the noble.

What, then, is bad about *ressentiment*? The POR privileges negative values by attempting to turn them into positive ones. She comes to evaluate sensory values and utility to be more important values than, say, vital or cognitive values. The POR also lacks integrity and autonomy; unlike the valuations characteristic of the noble, hers are reactive. The POR's experience of a positive, but inaccessible, value is negatively affecting her sense of self-worth. For the noble, the grasp of a positive, but inaccessible, value is never challenging her self-worth. The POR also lacks epistemic courage; she is unwilling to face the hard truth; she holds illusions, avoids self-knowledge. By contrast, the noble aim at realising positive and higher values, show integrity and autonomy, are always active, willing to face the hard truth, and can appreciate an unrealisable, positive, value without this challenging their self-worth.

Let us finally reconsider some of the issues that were raised in the introduction. The first one is the conceptual and linguistic demarcation between resentment and *ressentiment*. We have identified several criteria differentiating both phenomena. Resentment is an emotion, *ressentiment* a sentiment, eventually a trait, that involves a reevaluation process. Resentment challenges our self-respect. On the other hand, *ressentiment* (its initial experience) involves a damaged self-esteem. Revenge for the man of resentment is satisfied by the righting of a wrong. Revenge for the POR is fulfilled by the detraction of her rival and the destruction of the attributes of his superiority. Our theory also accounts for the fact that resentment can be part of the experience of *ressentiment*. The POR may harbour resentment on the basis of her new evaluations and beliefs. In particular, she may come to believe that someone else is responsible for her condition and struggles. She may then come to apprehend him as an evil wrongdoer and her entire condition as a wrong that ought to be righted. The emotion that is based on such a belief is resentment.

The second issue is the relation between hostile emotions and "other condemning" moral emotions. We argued that *ressentiment* and its characteristic reevaluation process precisely

account for its protean nature, the fact that several different emotions and envy in particular, are manifested as indignation or resentment. The reevaluation process is triggered by the distressing experience of inferiority, impotence and the repression of hostile emotions. Indignation and resentment, as we defined it in chapter 2, may here be based on the POR's new evaluations. The transmutation of envy into indignation or resentment presupposes a judgement blaming a rival for personal or impersonal wrongs. The case of resentment has already been described; the wrong the POR wants to see righted is her condition or her inability which she thinks is intentionally caused by her rival (who by then is perceived as a wrongdoer). The case of indignation is very similar in that respect and follows the formal object of indignation. When the reevaluation takes the form of sour grapes for example, the rival is thought to exemplify negative or lower values. The POR, in contrast to her rival, believes she is endorsing positive or higher values. Based on her reevaluations, the POR may then feel indignant because her rival is believed to be, say, greedy (while she thinks of herself to be generous) or self-interested (while she thinks of herself as a true altruist).

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