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The Trouble with *Ressentiment*

For over a hundred years humanists have been writing about *ressentiment*, following in the footsteps of Friedrich Nietzsche who successfully promoted a 'technical' understanding of the term, albeit with some help from two Maxes: Scheler and Weber. More than a few works on the subject have been written but it would seem that these have not added all that much to the discussion, notwithstanding the fact that their effects have been popularised and the general concept has reached all strata of society. The works of Nietzsche and Co appear convincing insofar as how easily they speak to the imagination, evidently wrapping up all manner of inconvenient occurrences within this package of troublesome feelings. Despite the fact that none of these three famous thinkers presented anything like a detailed description of the nature of this phenomenon, we get a strong feeling that they were all writing about the same thing. Perhaps this is exactly because such a convenient construct, at once complex and simple, seduces the imagination and seems worth remembering. We are well familiar with the entire range of psychological defensive tricks it brings along. Tricks such as rationalisation, which we know through dissection so its kin are not difficult to identify in a crowd of others. And so simply and easily, almost with pleasure, we get to imagine this complex psychological phenomenon. (For how could it be anything other than complex if it consists of several others? Scheler himself already stressed this and listed six 'components' in his famous description, which we will have to quote before too long.) We understand that if we use the complex to explain difficult matters simply, there is little motivation to change this pleasant state of affairs. In this case, however we would suggest that some change or possibly, even progress

may be required. In any event, it appears to us that it might be worth some effort to develop our thinking about this phenomenon.

Peruvian scholars, Ramón León, Cecilia Romero, Joaquín Novara and Enrique Quesada have attempted to force such development by the simplest of means, that is by setting out to create a *ressentiment* diagnostic scale. Someone familiar with the problem might ask if they were not too naïve in trying to fish out *ressentiment* from a multitude of similar psychological phenomena by using questions and statements such as:

> "I would like for people who have rejected my affection to be filled with regret and to ask my forgiveness",
> "If my social status were higher I would have more respect from people who know me",
> "Despite the fact that I'm nicer than other people, I see they have more luck and love and friendship in their lives",
> "I often feel jealous",
> "Sometimes I feel unjustly marginalised by people",
> "Sometimes it pains me that my childhood was not as happy as other people's",
> "I complain, infrequently, about what I have been through and my current situation",
> "I think my dreams are not going to come true due to insufficient chances given to me by others",
> "I usually see all people who are privileged in any way as not nice",
> "My virtues have not been appreciated enough",
> "There are people who have better lives than mine with a lot less effort",
> "Sometimes I think that others own more things than I, though they do not deserve them",
> "It's nice to see that there are others whose family life is happier than mine."[1]

Let us keep this line of questioning: why should questions which probe the fundaments of *ressentiment* (inferiority and jealousy) be aimed to fish out those feelings as much as their opposite (i.e. against the suffering they bring)?[2] After all, the aim of a re-valuation of values is a struggle against pain which comes from a feeling of inferiority and, naturally associated, jealousy. If this re-valuation works (i.e. reaches its goal) then inferiority and jealousy should disappear right along with the pain, that is the original trigger of the *ressentiment* re-valuation process. Hatred could also disappear or even morph into its opposite and promote love,

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[1] R. D. León, C. A. Romero, J. Novara and E. Quesada, „Una escala para medir el resentimiento", p. 121 and foll.

[2] Putting aside other doubts associated with psychometric detection of such complex internal phenomena which are, by nature, difficult to study - especially those whose functioning may be substantially affected by defense mechanisms.

forgiveness, avoidance of jealousy and so on. Following such a shift, feelings which the Lima scholars' scale was designed to capture may be erased from conscious thought and *ressentiment* may manifest itself in their opposites. Such is the power of re-valuation of values. If we ignore this re-valuation we could perhaps build a "hatred detector" though it would probably not detect compensating hatred which is the issue here. This re-valuation (on which compensating hatred is based) lends it a special character and brings a particular set of problems, which are going to be of interest to us here.

It would be difficult to consider all this without first looking at the mechanism itself. Re-valuation of values is one of the key issues in Nietzsche's work, most often raised in the context of countering nihilism. Since certain values lead to nihilism it is necessary to reject those values and introduce others in their place so as to guard against it. This is what is commonly meant as Nietzsche's idea of re-valuation of values. We will concern ourselves with another kind of re-valuation or alteration of value - ressentiment-based re-valuation which, in our opinion, is at the core of *ressentiment*. This is not evident in the most frequently quoted definition: "*Ressentiment* is spiritual self-poisoning which has rather well established causes and effects. It is a lasting psychological attitude that arises out of regular suppression of the discharge of emotions and reactions which are in themselves normal and part of human nature. It results in a lasting tendency towards certain illusions as to relative value and corresponding value judgements. Emotions and passions which need to be immediately considered here include the desire for and an impulse towards vengeance, hatred, spite, envy, malice."[3] If we take a better definition, this key revaluation becomes more sharply drawn. In Peter Poellner's "Self Deception, Consciousness and Value. The Nietzschean Contribution" we can find a somewhat more precise, as well as more adequate definition of the phenomenon in question: "*Ressentiment* as described by Nietzsche may then schematically be characterized as a mental episode with the following essential constituents (derivatively, one may speak of *ressentiment* disposition as a propensity towards occurrent mental states of this type):

> [1] A discomfort or pain experienced as caused by another subject (the object of *ressentiment*).
> [2] A negative affective response (hatred) towards the object, motivated by [1].
> [3] A desire for mastery or superiority over the object, motivated by [1] and [2].

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[3] M. Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 4.

[4] A commitment to general standards of appraisal (henceforth referred to as *ressentiment* values) permitting an ostensibly impartial negative judgment of the object as violating those norms (blame).

[5] An instrumental intention in adopting the *ressentiment* values, motivated by [3]. They are not being adopted for they 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*.

[6] An act of 'masking' (Maskerade; GM III, 14) or 'mendacious' disavowal (Verlogenheit, Uneingeständlichkeit; Ibidem) of the original motivating emotion ('hatred') and of the actual instrumental intention in adopting the *ressentiment* values, i.e. of [2], [3] and [5].[4]

We should pay particular attention to elements [4], [5] and [6] which contain ressentiment-based re-valuation of values. Values which are difficult to cope with have been swapped ~~out~~ with others, which can be coped with. Let us make this a little clearer, beginning with one of the bases of the theory of *ressentiment* and, possibly, of almost all studies of the psychology of the species homo sapiens. Nietzsche expressed it like this: "powerlessness in the face of people (…) engenders the most desperate bitterness towards being."[5]

Inferiority hurts, everyone wants to escape the pain, to be better than others; such is the banal foundation, variously expressed.[6] If we should prove inferior to others in the pursuit of a goal (realising a value) then a great suffering arises within us and it needs to be combated. This may be done by either targeting inferiority itself and, naturally, its psychological consequences, or by targeting only the feeling of being inferior. By inferiority we mean the particular weakness which has brought on failure, if that was indeed the source of the failure since it may just as well have been brought on by a stroke of coincidence rather than one's own resources coming up short. Naturally we cannot concern ourselves

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⁴ P. Poellner, "Self-Deception, Consciousness and Value. The Nietzschean Contribution", pp. 48-49.

⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Wola mocy. Próba przemiany wszystkich wartości (studia i fragmenty)*, p. 10.

⁶ It is everywhere, while its most complete image can be most often found in the psychology of the self. It is called by many names but it is not difficult to draw out, from beyond all this various terminology, a rudimentary reluctance towards perceiving oneself as worse. A few examples: S. Epstein, "Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory: An Integrative Theory of Personality", C. M. Steele, "The Psychology of Self-Affirmation. Sustaining the Integrity of the Self" and A. Tesser, "Toward a Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model of Social Behavior" (and from the perspective of Abraham Tesser's theory in relation to the phenomena of hatred and jealousy which interest us here: P. Salovey and A. J. Rothman, "Envy and Jealousy: Self and Society"). And finally, an example which relates to the main subject of this article: H. B. Kaplan, *Deviant Behavior in Defense of Self*.

with coincidences here. Neither are we going to be interested in a realistic, that is rooted in reality, form of compensation for our own shortcomings. Instead, we are going to concern ourselves with the assault on feelings of inferiority and the fight against not our weaknesses and failure as such but against the values which, together with the failure itself, serve to expose our weaknesses and engender feelings of inferiority. *Ressentiment* is a weapon in this fight. Our own definition, somewhat less substantive than Poellner's perhaps but we hope no less appropriate (its basic frame in bold) determines **ressentiment as a hatred** (which may be, naturally and usually, though not necessarily always in the same combination, accompanied by related emotions: envy, jealousy, Schadenfreude, desire for retribution, etc.) a hatred **directed towards a certain way of life** or people who live in that way (who identify themselves through this certain system of values), and **arising out of a defensive devaluation** (aiming to combat a feeling of inferiority) **of some activity, desires, goals or values** (or even characteristics of people who share those); a hatred (and accompanying emotions) **whose originator has felt devalued or less valued as a result of being enveloped by this feeling. This devaluation is associated with a correspondingly strong valuing up of such activities, desires, goals, values and so on, as allow him to build up a conviction of his own superiority.** A defensive devaluing of desires, goals and values - this is the name we give to the key issue we will be examining here. Often we also call it a compensating alteration of systems of values since values which most often exist within systems, so too most often change within those systems and through their own alteration force further alteration of other values with which they are associated.

Failure which engenders feelings of inferiority is the starting point for it all. It is difficult to categorically state whether one failure is enough or perhaps many accumulated failures are required. Max Scheler, in his famous description of *ressentiment*, appears to suggest the latter. We suspect that this correlation is highly individual and depends to a large degree on the psycho-axiological make-up of the individual who suffers the failure. This is possibly the weakest component of all the attempts at conceptualisation of *ressentiment* with which we have had opportunity to familiarise ourselves. (Actually, not just those but all such attempts that seek to examine the key impulses which bring on such complex psychological phenomena, especially those which involve strong valuation and stories which support it.) All researchers of *ressentiment* we have come across stop at analysing it in terms of general definitions. No wonder, since to go further one requires case studies. Only through those, it seems, will we be able to leave the enchanted circle of frequently repeated abstract formulae. Without empirical studies we will not be able to crack the issue of stimuli that can bring on *ressenti-*

ment, although the matrix which we would like to present here could be employed in terms of all findings relating to *ressentiment*. Another component of this phenomenon is negative reaction to failure, or failures, and the naturally understandable associated suffering, pain and unhappiness. The answer to ressentiment which arises under such circumstances is speedy, unrealistic compensation. That which in the person's mind is associated with the failure will be de-valued - it must be made unimportant. Once it becomes unimportant, then the failure itself will become unimportant. As in rationalisation, this is probably the simplest and most common defence of the Self. There is nothing particularly interesting in it, so long as it remains incidental; so long as the de-valuation it demands is momentary and, we may say, is quickly forgotten. If its alteration of the Self last for more than just a short while, however, then trouble begins. Trouble with *ressentiment*. The destructiveness of its effects is rooted in this re-valuation[7]. This destructiveness is of course not a definite, merely a possibility, but in time it becomes increasingly probable and may involve particularly interesting phenomena such as fanaticism and terrorism. We will try to clarify this by showing how the re-valuating mechanism works and what troublesome consequences it may bring on. We would like to call on the Master again since something he has written becomes important to us here: "Is there anyone who would like to take a little look down on and under that secret how man fabricates an ideal on earth? Who has the courage for that? . . . Come on, now! Here's an open glimpse into this dark workshop. (...) I see nothing, but I hear all the more. It is a careful, crafty, light rumour-mongering and whispering from every nook and cranny. It seems to me that people are lying; a sugary mildness clings to every sound. Weakness is going to be falsified into something of merit. There's no doubt about it—things are just as you said they were. (...) And powerlessness which does not retaliate is being falsified into 'goodness,' anxious baseness into 'humility,' submission before those one hates to 'obedience' (of course, obedience to the one who, they say, commands this submission—they call him God). The inoffensiveness of the weak man - cowardice itself, in which he is rich, his standing at the door, his inevitable need to wait around — here acquires a good name, like 'patience,' and is called virtue itself. That incapacity for revenge is called the lack of desire for revenge, perhaps even forgiveness. (...) And people are talking about 'love for one's enemies' — and sweating as they say it. (...) They are miserable — there's no doubt about that — all these rumour-mongers and counterfeiters in the

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[7] The re-valuing of values, as wrote Nietzsche, understanding the term "values" so broadly that it may contain everything that is important to people - desires, goals, meanings, etc. This is how we would like to understand it and this is how broadly we take the term "values" - and not only when referring to Nietzsche's concept.

corners, although crouched down beside each other in the warmth — but they are telling me that their misery is God's choice, His sign. One beats the dog one loves the most. Perhaps this misery may be a preparation, a test, an education, perhaps it is even more — something that will one day be rewarded and paid out with huge interest in gold, no, in happiness. (...) Now they are letting me know that they are not only better than the powerful, the masters of the earth, whose spit they have to lick (not out of fear, certainly not out of fear, but because God commands that they honour all those in authority)—they are not only better than these, but they also are 'better off,' or at any rate will one day have it better."[8]

Let us clarify this using the example of powerlessness which is turned into "goodness." According to Nietzsche's attack on Christianity, expressed so well in the text above, "goodness" is understood here to mean repaying evil with good. So we have not "good for good" or "evil for evil" but rather "good for good" and "good for evil." This is what Christians would like and Nietzsche explains how, not capable of "evil for evil", they instead bring to life a perverted quintessence of their value system, i.e. "love" towards enemies. How is such a shift possible? Three values are at play here: power, powerlessness and "goodness." Insufficient power engenders powerlessness which must be perceived as valuable and so is turned into "goodness." Nietzsche believes that everyone desires power and its inherent value is instilled in us by Nature, which is ruled by will to power. Power is everywhere, even in the re-valuation of powerlessness. It is not enough that will to "goodness" simply be substituted for will to power. Such a substitution must be validated and this validation or empowerment of this shift must be fundamentalist.

Let us remember that it is employed in the defence of a particularly important component of the system of the Self, that is positive self-evaluation. Let us assume that Nietzsche is right when he states that will to power is the universal propelling principle or motivating basis of human action. (This is the only aspect of our understanding of the will to power which is of importance in this sketch.)[9] The consequence of man

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[8] I. Johnston, "On the Genealogy of Morals. A Polemical Tract by Friedrich Nietzsche".

[9] Nietzsche assigns a very broad meaning to "the will to power"; far broader than what may be the sum of its constituent meanings including the most common (usually broadest) ones. It includes such forms of being as to which we may not be able to assign any will, and connects to power what we may be given to associate with its opposite. Within the concept of *ressentiment* which interests us here, this idea is used more or less as various kinds of that which may be broadly taken as a need for positivity are used in psychology or sociology (see M. Bilewicz, *Być gorszymi. O reakcjach na zagrożenie statusu grupy własnej*, p. 20). This psychological aspect of the will to power will be of interest to us here. Indeed, an even narrower understanding of the drive to gain an advantage may suffice, one which engenders a positive self-

being equipped with such a desire (for power, advantage, victory, ability to overcome any obstacles) should be a negative reaction to one's own powerlessness. Negatively valued powerlessness (which assumes a positive valuation of its opposite, as explained by the concept of the will to power) needs to become a positively valued goodness ("hidden powerlessness") as a result of resentment-fuelled revaluation. This process requires a devaluation of power (and, simultaneously, of the will to power) and this de-valuation requires validation. Attacking that which the subject desired, but which he is no longer allowed or able to desire (following his failure and, significantly, fearing more failures) is a key element of the process which concerns us here due to the nature of validation. It is easier to validate a condemnation of values which we ourselves never espoused but more difficult to use validation as a weapon against something which has formed us. In such a situation we require stronger validation, coming from somewhere radically outside the subject's own perspective, such as the discovery of a generally applicable and thus incontestable reason for the shift (incontestable due to the apparent power of this broad application.) Such validation can go much further than simply justifying the shift through a metamorphosis of simple wants. Exchanging negative valuation of powerlessness for negative valuation of power and positive valuation of powerlessness cannot be justified by anything that applies solely to the changing subject. Why not? Because it would be quite easy to lose faith in what this alteration brings. (In Nietzsche negative valuation of powerlessness, positive valuation of power and negative valuation of the will to power are all naturally connected. He attempted to express this entire process through the metaphor of exchanging powerlessness for "goodness.")

It is easier to compare the Old Self to the Current Self[10] than ever the Self to an Absolute which orders reality through the imperative of an incomparable status, among others: "nothing can compare with him." Taking any given valuation out of the context of possible comparisons lends it a degree of security. In the case of valuations which serve compensation, security is particularly important since he who must resort to compensation must have experienced some trouble with the security of his Self and is naturally super-sensitive to this issue, as is anyone who has experienced something he wishes not to experience. Absolutist vali-

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evaluation, positive self-image and affirmation of the self. Even such a very narrow understanding of a tiny shred of the will to power (really a minute piece, although perhaps the most important one in terms of the study of human activity) will be enough to grasp the sense of the *ressentiment* theory.

[10] We may expect that this "Old Self" - prior to the re-valuing - will be most often constructed ex-post out of rememberings and imaginings. This happens subsequent to the re-valuing, and is used to justify *ressentiment* values which of course are always in need of an enemy, and are reactive.

dation demolishes any competition: "nothing can compare to the Absolute." Fundamentalist validations must destroy not just the most natural of individual and group validations relating to the Self and its environment; they have in their crosshairs all that is different, all "others." Such fundamentalism is radically expansive since it is fuelled by fear: "enemy is lying in wait everywhere" and "peace can only be brought on by broad offensive." Individual validations confronted by fundamentalist ones mean nothing and comparing them "has no sense." Sensible comparisons, even an ability to compare, are intrinsically dangerous to validation so this danger is done away with through fundamentalism, behind which hides a fear greater than the one connected with weakness when someone weaker confronts someone stronger. This fear stems not from one or two confrontations of weakness against power, which may end up in failure. It is an existential fear which ends up in the collapse of one of the pillars of the system of the Self - self-affirmation. That is why a cannon gets used to shoot a fly, one might say "just in case." In such circumstances of confrontation of Absolute against individual, and of fundamentalist validation against individual ones which do not go beyond that which is their source, i.e. the individual, fundamentalism wins through disproportionate status. Compensatory transformation works. The trouble with *ressentiment* begins with a contest of validations which carry a similar status - when fundamentalisms clash. Disproportionate status no longer offers any protection here, which it so conveniently does in the previous case. Now it is a clash of equals, an Absolute against another Absolute: validations with the highest status. Here it is not possible to leave the context of comparisons quite as easily as before when individual validations ("yes", "I want it", "I need this", etc.) are faced with fundamentalist ones ("this is the wish of the Almighty", "such is the nature of things", etc.). Such a confrontation binds *ressentiment* with fundamentalism, by way of defense of ressentiment-based validations through disproportionate status. When it comes to a confrontation of fundamentalist validations of value, however, it is not possible to prevent a clash by forcing one of the rivals out of his circle of context. When two Absolutes square off, there is no "higher reality" outside of that circle of context. The defense mechanism which lies at the base of compensatory transformation of values - let us call it a "fundamentalisation" of validation of values as a means of compensation - cannot work here since it is not possible to demonstrate any disproportion in status: all validations claim the status of absolute truth.

Where fundamentalism is not able to defend values and their validation there is still a place for fanaticism, for a sharpening of faith in the values and in their validation. Fundamentalism defends ressentiment-based values and their validations against doubt, which might appear as a consequence of a contest of validations. In fact, it defends them

against potential danger. Fanaticism, on the other hand, defends them against actual danger so when it appears it is because actual danger (doubt) has appeared, rather than turning up in case doubt might appear (which is how fundamentalism is expected to work.) Fanaticism is bound to *ressentiment* not by necessity, as is the case with fundamentalism - without which it is difficult to imagine a successful resentiment-based revaluing of values, but rather because of difficulties in maintaining those ressentiment-based values. It is not a coincidence that these two phenomena, fundamentalism and fanaticism, are frequently bound to each-other and difficult to separate. In theory it is easy to separate faith in the capturing of absolute truth from the emotional engagement of spreading that absolute truth. In reality this is far more difficult, not least because fundamentalism contains an imperative of radical engagement. This, we have to agree, is rather natural since fundamentalists' messages are of extreme importance and the gravity of those messages has the effect of propelling them towards stronger faith. So, fanaticism may accompany fundamentalism in good times as well as when nihilism (loss of faith) may be imminent. We are particularly interested here in fanaticism which accompanies fundamentalism in its tough times. It is not difficult to fathom the characteristics of this faith, sharpened as it were in an hour of need. These would include what is most important in *ressentiment*, that is hatred in its most extreme forms. (Unless validations of a ressentiment-based system of values require a renouncement of hatred, as in Nietzsche's most famous example.) When there is trouble with maintaining a ressentiment-based system of values, the compensating hatred which lies at its base may manifest itself more violently. It is now perhaps possible to anticipate where we are heading with this trouble with *ressentiment*, in its most interesting form as it is the most dangerous one. Indeed, we would like to demonstrate how it may generate phenomena commonly considered as particularly dangerous: extremism and, rooted in it, politically engaged violence. Such connections, especially in the context of the Self's defense mechanisms, do not require of us any great powers of imagination, especially as three researchers (Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter) already drew them over a half-century ago. Their research project[11] and the resulting, famous, publication *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study*

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[11] Covert participant observation (more about the methodology: *When Prophecy Fails*, p. 236 and foll.), carried out in order to study the behaviour of members of a small group of fervent believers in the prophecies of Marian Keech (who had foretold the destruction of the World in a massive flood, and whose followers would be saved by a flotilla of flying saucers from the planet Clarion) in the face of the failure of the prophecy to come to pass. Many of them had made substantial sacrifices (Ibidem, pp. 77-84, 109-110).

of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World showed how increased proselytysing activity may be put in the service of reduction of doubt which could be affecting an important element of the system of values - the beliefs which support the valuing, as in the case of the group of the "Chosen" studied by Festinger, Riecken and Schachter. Even considering the criticism of this research[12] it would be difficult to step from the possibility of reduction of cognitive dissonance through action to it being a necessary reality. We do not, however, require such powerful theses and the possibility is quite enough.

Let us return to the downward slope of *ressentiment*. Fundamental-ism supports a collapsing self-affirmation and in turn serves as the base for a revaluing. When fundamentalist validations of ressentiment-based values begin to crumble, fanaticism may come to the rescue (here we may begin to detect mechanisms described by social psychologists whose work we have visited.) When fanaticism itself gets into trouble, when mere psychological activity (a sharpening of faith) is not enough, action may be called in to help, as suggested by Festinger's research. When the strengthening of faith through action is accompanied by the cocktail of emotions which are the subject of our interest here, i.e. when there is an attempt to reduce doubt through action (a particular kind of self-proselytisation) our Ressentiment Man, filled with hatred, jealousy, desire for vengeance, Schadenfreude, and so on, may find that he has cross-bred fanatical faith with sudden, destructive violence. This is the source of much current concern in the context of expressions of aggression associated with "denigrated Islam" and is a phenomenon which has been studied greatly from the perspective of *ressentiment* by researchers of ideologically motivated violence.[13] Much depends on the constituent parts of the particular system of values. If the system con-tains values which "combat" violence, such a dangerous hybrid of faith and destruction may not come to be, as in Nietzsche's "model", in the "dark workshop of counterfeiters of values." We should not, however, take this original description too literally since it could be taken to mean that weakness must be associated with broadly-understood goodness (aimed at reaching all that is inoffensive), since such a weakness / good-ness does not offend anyone and thus does not place the weaker party in difficult circumstances with which he may not be able to cope. This

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[12] Examples: S. Dein, "What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails: The Case of Lubavitch", pp. 384-385; J. R. Stone, "Prophecy and Dissonance: A Reassessment of Research Testing the Festinger Theory", pp. 76-81.

[13] Examples: R. Scruton, „Machina nienawiści. Antropologiczne źródła terrory-zmu", R. Pies, "A Simple Way to End Terrorism", L. Langman and D. Morris, "Islamic Terrorism: From Retrenchment to *Ressentiment* and Beyond", D. Brown and I. D. Wil-son, "Ethnicized Violence in Indonesia: Where Criminals and Fanatics Meet".

is merely a pattern, illustrated with an example which is meant to speak to the imaginations of "the Christian West." The raft of incarnations of this form is so vast that it is not possible to predict the concrete shape which this particular brand of *ressentiment* may take. Particular case conditions are the deciding factors. These include individual predisposition, the nature of the original impulse generating the compensating transformation of values, and many other factors, besides. *Ressentiment* may bind to anything, and while violence inhibitors may be contained within the ressentiment-based system of values, they do not have to be. Love and hatred are equally as likely to be demonstrated (in any form) and *ressentiment* may be the enemy of violence as much as its promoter. (Powerlessness does not imply inability and unwillingness to use violence[14]; *ressentiment* may actively seek vengeance as it collapses.) If it is possible to justify violence in the context of a ressentiment-based system of values, to include it in the circle of validations, (and we should expect it, given humans' enormous creative capacities when it comes to justifying troublesome behaviours) then such justification is most likely in "the hour of need", when fanaticism is no longer sufficient in the defense of ressentiment-based values against the encroaching doubt.

These may, though do not have to be the consequences of collapse of ressentiment-based systems of values. We can take the optimist's view when discussing *ressentiment* although as we consider the likely future intensity of expressions of *ressentiment*, we cannot quite free ourselves of pessimism. If the vision of connections between *ressentiment* and fundamentalism, nihilism and fanaticism which we have drawn in this sketch has any reflection in reality, then given the conditions prevalent in our times, we should expect an escalation of trouble with *ressentiment*. Precisely due to the environment in which we have come to live - an environment which is not kind towards fundamentalist approaches to life. (Those have been described and debated in numerous discussions of so-called post-modernism.) It does not need to be as difficult for the fundamentalists as, say, that which is described in Kenneth Gergen's "The Saturated Self." Multiphrenia, the consequence of advanced processes of saturation of the Self[15], is deadly for fundamentalists. To cause such trouble with *ressentiment* as concerns us here drastic conflicts with

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[14] Perhaps only when we give in to the popular, all-too-simple, attractive pattern of powerlessness - hatred - desire for vengeance - lack of possibilities to fulfill it – "vengeance of the mind". This pattern is often used to sketch out the genealogy of the „rebellion of the slaves." Imagined vengeance offers an imagined revenge taken on the objects of the hatred, one which will never reach beyond the consciousness of the hater. In this version, violence is impossible. Revenge is taken within the imagination not in a real interaction between the hater and the hated. It is a fictional revenge, made impossible by powerlessness.

[15] K. J. Gergen, *Nasycone Ja*, p. 106.

issues of relativism and "supply of perspectives" described by Gergen are not even necessary. Competition of Absolutes is enough - competition which humanity has been experiencing from the time when Otherness only began to enter stable "face to face" communities[16] and when the average human (focused, as were the rest of his average kin, on "face to face living") had little idea that Otherness would become as commonplace as it has today. This, more or less, is the millennial perspective of the 20th century.[17]

When we place mechanisms of compensating transformation of values in this environment, it becomes easy to explain the sudden recent proliferation of its dangerous consequences - fanaticism, extremism and terrorism. The cause lies in the environment; an environment hostile towards fundamentalism, where relativism is rife not as a competing vision of life but as a natural lifestyle, enforced by the environment in the same way as are all adaptations. In this, environment fundamentalist validations of values fall more readily than at other times. Under these circumstances, defense of the validation of compensating systems of values - as described here - becomes a necessity. It turns out, we are living in a time which is not kind to *ressentiment* and so it is more than a little conducive to the consequences of its poor condition. If there is even a little truth in the concept we have tried to sketch out here, we know how the trouble with *ressentiment* may end, and why. (This may be a useful diagnostic tool. Consideration of phenomena which stem from this condition may increase the likelihood of the kind of hatred that interests us here, the compensating kind, being detected from among all the others. Ignoring what is most important in *ressentiment* - compensating transformation of values, its basis and consequences - gives rise to the doubt which we mentioned while describing Ramón León's *ressentiment* diagnostic tool.) The proliferation of fanaticism, extremism and terrorism is easily

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[16] Ibidem, pp. 93-94.

[17] For obvious reasons this is difficult to assess, however from the perspective of issues which concern us here, this is not important. May we therefore conclude this unimportant matter with a quote from a marginally less unimportant publication whose famous author attempts to clarify issues which, through their connection with *ressentiment*, are important to us. "Until the 19th century, or the middle of the 19th century - depending on the country or continent - so more or less until a moment in the 19th century, the majority of people in the majority of the World were certain of at least three things: where I will spend my life, how I will make my living, and what will happen to me when I die. Only a hundred and fifty years ago, or thereabouts, almost everyone in the World knew that they will spend their lives where they were born or somewhere nearby, perhaps the next village. Everyone knew that they will make a living doing the same work as their parents, r something very similar. And everyone was conscious that, if they lived an honest life, they would enter a better world upon their death. The twentieth century shook, many times demolished, that faith." (A. Oz, *Jak uleczyć fanatyka*, pp. 40-41)

understood from the perspective of ressentiment-based transformation of values during a time of "mass supply of points of view" which do not bode well for fundamentalism. Furthermore, the concept presented here suggests that as number of available perspectives increases at times, we should expect a corresponding increase in the trouble with *ressentiment*. These are not particularly original observations since the same conclusions can be drawn from the works by the researchers of cognitive dissonance mentioned above. The somewhat general character of this concept and its predictions is also troublesome. To get closer to reality we will need more direct contact with it, and this is what we would like to address here, at the end of this sketch, in the context of new perspectives on research of sensitive issues.

Let us assume, therefore, that we know the end of the story of *ressentiment* - that we know how this phenomenon is bound to its probable derivatives. It draws attention to itself and engenders great emotions through the dangers and the compensating hatred which it brings. What is far more important, however, are its beginnings and the key question of whether any regular patterns in its genealogy exist. It is not merely a matter of whether there are any connections between the individual genealogies of this phenomenon since that is clear, at least in terms of the certain cultural circle which defines its own particular axiological distinctions of worth and lack of it in various spheres. That would be an almost rhetorical question and it is not the point here. Instead, everyone who does not wish to stop at simple speculation in his studies of *ressentiment*, would like to ask Scheler a question about the "systematic suppression of release of emotional reactions and desires" which is the basis for *ressentiment* (so as to refer directly to the formulae contained in his famous definition quoted at the beginning of this text.) Naturally, we should not be asking exclusively about the systematic nature of this suppression since that is simply a hypothesis by Scheler. The point here is not so much the content as the form which forces us to go beyond speculation. If we do not, it will be difficult to free ourselves of the ridicule which surrounds eidetic images unsupported by empirical study. Our predecessors in this field may have escaped ridicule but our fate would not be quite as kind, were we to skip such actual research. The "founding question" for deep research of *ressentiment* (one of the natural "founding questions") does not perhaps attract such attention as considerations over the dangerous consequences of compensating transformation of values but it is equally, if not more, as important, at least in the context of countering this phenomenon and its possible derivatives since in that context, to discover the sources means to not compare any further. It would be difficult to imagine that the compensating processes involved in the defence of Self might be somehow reversible. The *clou* of *ressentiment*, the compensating transformation of values, is a

defense. The consequences of *ressentiment* sketched out above, conse-
quences of the crumbling of the first wall of defence of the Self, also:
in order to reverse these processes, two walls of defense would need
to be breached. The harder it is to believe in the effectiveness of such
actions (we are not able to nor do we wish to say they are unfeasible)
the easier it is to place hope where it all began, but then it is easy to lose
it again once the sources of *ressentiment* are known. This is troubling re-
search, but it is essential. In order to reach useful conclusions it will be
necessary to study, in depth[18], specific individual genealogies of those
difficult emotions. They are difficult in part because they have been axi-
ologically marked out, be it morally, sociologically or aesthetically[19]. In-
depth study of the sensitive issues (qualitative as against quantitative)
means difficulties. We believe this is the biggest problem with research
of *ressentiment* and suspect that it is responsible for our collective fail-
ure to go beyond the speculation by our famous predecessors. All of the
issues which are key to understanding compensating transformation
of values - from its sources to its consequences - are problems of a sensi-
tive nature. Anyone who wishes to seriously take up their in-depth study
will sooner or later have to face this "methodological" problem of the
study of sensitive issues. So far this has been difficult. While theoreti-
cally possible, it has been difficult to carry out depersonalised qualitative
research which would be free of the corset placed upon knowledge by
the persona of the Self, entangled as it is in broadly understood morality,
and limited by natural barriers of self-knowledge which stand in defense
of positive self-assessment.)

The communication revolution of the turn of the last century has
radically changed this situation. The Internet can be used to break down
axiological limitations of personalised communications. Powerfully ano-
nymised communication tools will solve the problem - it will be enough to
press them into the service of research of sensitive issues. Broad research
"beyond good and evil" can be easily carried out today (in the most ba-
nal understanding of immoralism brought on by the idea of anonym-
ity.) The second problem, associated with the deficit of self-knowledge,
may be solved by leveraging scale. All researchers of morally highly
charged issues come up against difficulties in finding subjects able to
cross the boundaries of self-knowledge which have been formed in de-

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[18] It would be difficult to believe in the effectiveness of shallow studies of such
complex phenomena as *ressentiment* which manifest themselves in various ways, in-
cluding contradictory ones.

[19] Today, fundamentalism, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism are especially
marked out as both the root and stem of *ressentiment*, initially by the effective means
of electronic mass media and during the last two decades thanks to the communica-
tion revolution of the internet era.

fense of self-assessment. As the Net allows almost global reach, it may be easier to locate the (likely few) individuals possessing "super-human" systems of values - to come back to Nietzsche with whom we started this piece and with whom begin all intensive thinking about the subject of *ressentiment*. Such individuals may be able to balance the mechanisms of defense of self-assessment through radical valuing of self-knowledge. We are not entirely sure if we may be overestimating Nietzsche, or putting too much hope in his super-human ideal, though. Through the idea of combating mechanisms of defense of the Self we are building on his thoughts in a direction which is important to us but perhaps not to him. This, however, is what "progress" in the research into *ressentiment* has looked like: highly speculative, and still a popular, humanistic collecting of "theoretical idiosyncrasies" of generations of thinkers. There is nothing particularly wrong with this, but there is not much of consequence in it either. "Progress" may be somewhat more concrete these days, thanks to that revolution which has given us depersonalised tools with which to study sensitive issues. It seems that the not too-distant future may thus see much change in the research of *ressentiment*, about which humanists have been writing for over one hundred years - almost without exception treading in the footsteps of famous philosophers and their speculations. Much work which, essentially, has brought little of consequence.

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Summary

The article comprises an attempt to interpret the conception of *ressentiment* created by Friedrich Nietzsche. This interpretation concentrates on the analysis of one of the revaluation of values mechanisms, namely their compensatory transformation. The text tries also to demonstrate in what way this mechanism can lead to connecting *ressentiment* with the phenomena of fundamentalism and fanaticism. The aim of this interpretation of the conception of *ressentiment* is to sketch the conditions in which *ressentiment* could entail violence, what was pointed at many times by researchers studying the phenomenon, including the most famous one of them – Roger Scruton (who sees it as one of the causes of terrorism). The interpretation of the conception of *ressentiment* present in the paper refers not only to philosophical analyses of this phenomenon but also to the research of the socio-psychologists and sociologists, which is essential for this issue. Therefore, in the context of the research on *ressentiment* the proposed interpretation addresses the problems of the methodological-axiological nature, which are

connected with obtaining knowledge on sensitive subjects. The problem of *res-sentiment* is one of such issues.

Keywords

Nietzsche, *ressentiment*, consequences of compensatory transformation of values, touchy issues