

RESENTMENT AND MORALITY

Elijah Weber

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2015

Committee:

Michael Weber, Advisor

Howard C. Cromwell  
Graduate Faculty Representative

Christian Coons

Neal Tognazzini

Sara Worley

## ABSTRACT

Michael Weber, Advisor

Resentment is widely held to be central in moral practice and moral theory, perhaps even the key to understanding concepts like moral wrongness and moral responsibility. Despite this, philosophers pay relatively little attention to resentment itself. For the most part, it is often simply assumed that resentment is a kind of anger, where resentment is differentiated from anger by a belief, judgment, or thought that one has been morally wronged by the object of one's emotional response. However, this assumption gives rise to problematically circular accounts of our moral concepts, since it involves characterizing resentment in terms of the very concepts that moral philosophers were hoping to explain in terms of resentment. And while some philosophers have claimed that the circularity inherent in such accounts is unproblematic, I contend that such accounts are not informative enough to help us understand our moral concepts.

My dissertation explores the implications of the assumption that resentment is simply a moral form of anger, and argues that this account of resentment is both inaccurate and not well-suited to the role that resentment plays in moral philosophy. First, I argue that despite prevailing assumptions to the contrary, resentment should not be thought of simply as a moral version of anger. Instead, I argue for a non-cognitive, adaptive account of resentment as an emotional response to violations of the interpersonal norms of one's social group. This account is both empirically well-grounded and consistent with evolutionary and developmental accounts of emotion. It also avoids the circularity inherent in contemporary characterizations of our moral concepts, when given in terms of resentment. Finally, it allows for a ready-made response to the charge that resentment is an immoral or imprudent emotion that we would be better off without. Resentment, on this account, is an adaptive response with deep biological roots, and it plays a crucial role in the success of human cooperative endeavors.

This project is dedicated to Laura Weber, whose patience, encouragement, and support have been invaluable in helping me to complete it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to all who have helped me in the completion of this project. In particular, I'd like to thank the members of my committee, Michael Weber, Christian Coons, Howard C. Cromwell, Neal Tognazzini, and Sara Worley, all of whom spent countless hours providing helpful feedback on numerous drafts. In addition, I want to especially thank Michael Weber for his outstanding guidance and consistently useful feedback on my work. I also want to thank Christian Coons for pushing me to face the really difficult problems raised by my work, Howard Cromwell for providing outstanding guidance regarding the relevant empirical literature, and Sara Worley for encouraging me to focus on trying to say things that are true. Finally, I want to thank Neal Tognazzini for his enthusiasm, and for helping to convince me that this project was worth tackling. I'd also like to thank Bennett Helm and Angela Smith, who provided feedback on several chapter drafts, and David Schwann for many helpful conversations about my work.

Margy DeLuca and Priscilla Ibarra also deserve special recognition. They consistently provide exemplary, reliable support to everyone in our department, and without them, no dissertation would ever be completed. Thank you for all you've done for me while I've been at Bowling Green, and especially for all the thankless tasks that no one ever notices. I'm sure these in particular are too numerous to count.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Laura Weber, for continuing to support me throughout this long process. I am confident that when I told her I wanted to pursue a PhD in philosophy, she had no idea what she was getting herself into by agreeing to follow me down this road. However, she has never wavered in encouraging me to pursue this goal. Words cannot express my gratitude.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| INTRODUCTION: RESENTMENT AND MORALITY .....             | 1    |
| CHAPTER 1: ANGER, RESENTMENT, AND COOPERATION .....     | 13   |
| ANGER, OFFENSES, AND HARM.....                          | 16   |
| THE OFFENSES ACCOUNT OF RESENTMENT .....                | 25   |
| RESENTMENT AND COOPERATION .....                        | 33   |
| THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ANGER.....                       | 41   |
| RESENTMENT AND MORAL CONCEPTS.....                      | 45   |
| CONCLUSION.....   | 50   |
| CHAPTER 2: RESENTMENT AS NON-COGNITIVE ADAPTATION ..... | 52   |
| PRELIMINARY REMARKS.....                                | 53   |
| WHY A COGNITIVIST ACCOUNT OF RESENTMENT?.....           | 56   |
| GLOBAL COGNITIVISM AND “BEASTS AND BABIES” .....        | 60   |
| GLOBAL COGNITIVISM AND RECALCITRANT EMOTIONS .....      | 63   |
| HYBRID THEORIES AND COGNITIVISM ABOUT RESENTMENT.....   | 74   |
| RESENTMENT AS NON-COGNITIVE ADAPTATION .....            | 86   |
| AGAINST A NON-COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF RESENTMENT .....    | 89   |
| CONCLUSION.....   | 92   |
| CHAPTER 3: IN DEFENSE OF RESENTMENT .....               | 94   |
| PRELIMINARY REMARKS.....                                | 96   |
| MORAL CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT.....                    | 99   |
| PRUDENTIAL CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT.....               | 106  |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| FITTINGNESS CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT..... | 109 |
| IN DEFENSE OF RESENTMENT .....             | 116 |
| CONCLUSION.....                            | 125 |
| REFERENCES .....                           | 127 |

## INTRODUCTION: RESENTMENT AND MORALITY

Two claims about resentment are prominent in moral philosophy. First, it's claimed that resentment itself should be characterized in explicitly moral terms. Resentment, on this view, is a response to moral injury, where resentment necessarily involves a judgment that its object has wronged the subject in a morally significant way. Next, it's claimed that many of our moral concepts can be adequately characterized in terms of resentment's being appropriate, reasonable, or justified.<sup>1</sup> For example, to say that an action is morally wrong, on this sort of view, is to say that resentment is an appropriate, reasonable, or justified response to this action. It's also sometimes claimed, albeit less frequently, that resentment is an emotion that we would be better off without. However, it's difficult to see how all three of these claims could be true. For example, if resentment is itself characterized in explicitly moral terms, it's hard to imagine how it could also be useful for characterizing our moral concepts, since resentment, when characterized in this way, involves the very concepts we were hoping to characterize in terms of this same emotion.<sup>2</sup> And if resentment is so useful for adequately characterizing these concepts, it's difficult to understand why it's also an emotion that we would be better off without. The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine each of these claims, both individual and collectively

---

<sup>1</sup> Gibbard, Allan, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), or Darwall, Stephen, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), for example. Wallace, R. Jay, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) is an example of someone who characterizes the concept of moral responsibility in the terms, though the historical emergence of this sort of account can be traced back to P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1-25.

<sup>2</sup> As I'll discuss in more detail in Chapter 1, Stephen Darwall attempts to explain why this sort of circular explanation is not problematic in Darwall 2006.

(for their consistency). This will further the project of coming to understand the connection between resentment and morality.

Consider, first, the claim that resentment should be characterized in explicitly moral terms.<sup>3</sup> While this view of resentment is often simply taken for granted by those who endorse it, there are at least two reasons that might seem to count in its favor.<sup>4</sup> First, this account of resentment can easily accommodate the plausible view that resentment and anger are closely related, but not identical emotions. Second, this view of resentment might be explained as a consequence of the mid-twentieth century shift toward cognitivist theories of the emotions, which state that all emotions are necessarily constituted by a belief, judgment, or some other propositional attitude. Let's consider each of these reasons in a bit more detail.

The view that resentment and anger are closely related, but not identical emotions is prominently featured in the philosophical writings of two eighteenth century British moral philosophers, Joseph Butler and Adam Smith. Their work on the subject has framed much of the discussion that has followed since. For example, Butler contends that "(r)esentment is of two

---

<sup>3</sup> Jean Hampton and Jeffrie Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Aaron Ben Ze'Ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), Pamela Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2001): 529-555, Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The significance of recalcitrant emotion (or, anti-quasijudgmentalism)" in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 127-145 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Darwall 2006, and Adrienne Martin, "Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology," *Journal of Philosophy* 107 (2010): 534-553, for example.

<sup>4</sup> An additional explanation, that I won't pursue further here, is that the current status of the typical view of resentment is due to the extraordinary influence of P.F. Strawson's 1962 paper, "Freedom and Resentment," wherein Strawson refers to the emotion we experience when we are injured or otherwise treated with indifference by others as resentment, or, in his words, "what I have called resentment."



kinds: hasty and sudden, or settled and deliberate. The former is called anger, and often passion.”<sup>5</sup> Sudden anger, says Butler, is an instinctual response to harm, developed primarily for the purpose of self-defense.<sup>6</sup> Deliberate anger shares these features with sudden anger, but is accompanied by an impression that some injustice has been inflicted upon us, which is not present in the case of sudden anger.<sup>7</sup>

Smith draws a similar distinction between two types of resentment.<sup>8</sup> In Part I of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith describes resentment as an emotion that is “given us by nature for defence, and defence only.”<sup>9</sup> Resentment of this sort, says Smith, is an emotion that is common to most non-human animals, as a response to whatever causes them physical pain.<sup>10</sup> However, in Part II Smith describes resentment as “the safeguard of justice and the security of innocence,” and he puts particular emphasis on resentment as the proper response to the unduly self-interested actions of others. Though they use slightly different terminology, both Smith and

---

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (London: SPCK, 1970): 73.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Alice MacLachlan, “Resentment and moral judgment in Smith and Butler,” *The Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 161-177 discusses the differences between Butler and Smith’s accounts, as well as an account of how one might reconcile Smith’s seemingly disparate comments about resentment into a single, coherent view of this emotion.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976): 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 94.

Butler draw a distinction between an instinctual response to harm, which is intended to aid in self-defense, and a closely related response concerned with explicitly moral injuries.

There's some evidence that there is an instinctual response to harm that is common to most non-human animals, just as Butler and Smith claimed.<sup>11</sup> There is also, it seems, something to the claim that humans experience a more nuanced emotional response to the immoral, unjust, or otherwise improper conduct of others.<sup>12</sup> Thus, there's reason to accept that anger and resentment are closely related emotions, and that because resentment, but not anger, is responsive to a specific kind of interpersonal impropriety, these emotions are importantly different from one another in precisely this respect. A natural explanation for the truth of these claims is that resentment, but not anger, necessarily involves a judgment of moral injury, which is likely why Butler and Smith both wrote as though this must be the case, and why so many others have followed suit.

However, these claims do not entail that resentment necessarily involves a moral judgment. All that these claims establish is that anger and resentment must be differentiated from one another in a way that captures a close relationship between them, as well as a distinguishing feature of each emotion. If there are other ways to account for this sort of relationship, then one can accept both of these claims, without concluding that resentment should be characterized in explicitly moral terms. In Chapter 1, I offer an account of anger and

---

<sup>11</sup> Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Marc Bekoff, *The Smile of a Dolphin: Remarkable Accounts of Animal Emotions* (New York: Discovery Press Books, 2000), for example.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Berkowitz and Eddie Harmon Jones, "Toward an Understanding of the Determinants of Anger," *Emotion* 4 (2004): 107-130 discuss various account of the relevant appraisal for anger, all of which have something to do with evaluating the improper conduct of others.

resentment that captures both of these claims, but where resentment does not necessarily involve a judgment of moral injury. I begin, in much the same way Butler and Smith did, by considering the distinction between anger and resentment. I first argue that we should characterize anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event. To say that an event is harmful or threatening is to say that its occurrence brings about a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad for the subject, that makes the subject worse off than they would have been otherwise, or that makes such a state of affairs appear likely or imminent. Next, I argue that resentment should be characterized in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms. Resentment presents its object, on this view, as “not how *we* treat each other.” I conclude by returning to the claim that our moral concepts can be adequately characterized in terms of resentment’s being appropriate, reasonable, or justified. I argue that while this new account of resentment allows for the possibility of more informative characterizations of our moral concepts than are otherwise available, it also presents proponents of this strategy with several new challenges. The success of this strategy will depend, in the end, on whether its proponents can meet these challenges.

The need to account for widely-held claims about anger and resentment is not the only reason one might give in favor of the view that resentment should be characterized in explicitly moral terms. As noted above, this view of resentment might be explained as a consequence of the mid-twentieth century shift toward cognitivist theories of the emotions, though the connection here is not immediately obvious. Cognitivism is the view that all emotions necessarily involve a judgment, belief, or other propositional attitude. The movement away from “feeling” theories of emotion, where an emotion is characterized by its distinctive phenomenal feel, and toward cognitivist accounts began with the 1963 publication of Anthony Kenny’s *Action, Emotion, and Will*. In general, there are two serious problems with feeling theories of the

emotions, both of which are easily resolved by a cognitivist account. First, feeling theories cannot account for the number of different emotions thought to exist, because it is doubtful that there are enough distinctive phenomenal feels to differentiate the seemingly much larger number of emotions that humans experience. Second, feeling theories are ill-equipped to account for the intentionality of emotions. Emotions almost always have an object, which is to say that they are about, aimed at, or because of something. For example, when one experiences grief following the death of a loved one, one's grief is about the death of their loved one. Feelings, it's thought, do not have this feature. The itching I presently feel in my leg, for example, is not about or aimed at anything in particular. It is simply a phenomenal feel for which my leg is the locus. The intentionality of emotions also accounts for the difference between emotions and moods. While one's "bad mood" may not be about anything in particular, for example, one's anger will always have an intentional object. Cognitivist theories of emotion can easily address both of these problems. Because cognitivism contends that all emotions are necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude, the cognitivist can differentiate emotions from one another according to the propositional attitudes that are unique to each emotion. The cognitivist can also easily account for the intentionality of emotion, because propositional attitudes are themselves intentional states. Historically, the seeming inability to cope with these problems was a strong contributing factor in the movement away from feeling theories, and toward characterizations of the emotions as necessarily involving cognitive states.

Concerns about how to differentiate emotions from one another have led some philosophers to move effortlessly from a cognitivist theory of the emotions to the view that resentment necessarily involves a moral judgment. Jeffrie Murphy offers a nice example of this

reasoning in the following passage, where he focuses on the relative lack of feelings available to account for the wide range of emotions that we experience:

Consider how emotions are differentiated-how we can explain the difference between such emotions as guilt, shame, resentment, jealousy, and fear. These are all simply ways of feeling bad, and thus the differences between them cannot be accounted for totally in terms of how each emotion subjectively feels. What, then, is the difference? Surely it is the belief, the cognitive state, that is the essential identifying part of each emotion-guilt as involving the belief that one has fallen short of some ideal one has of oneself; *resentment, the belief that one has suffered a moral injury*; jealousy, the belief that one may lose a loved object to a rival; and fear the belief that one is in danger.<sup>13</sup>

Murphy here notes one of the standard arguments for a cognitivist theory of the emotions. As we noted above, proponents of cognitivism contend that the only way to differentiate emotion types with similar phenomenal feels is in terms of their being constituted by different propositional attitudes. From this, Murphy concludes that resentment is necessarily constituted by a belief that one has suffered a moral injury.

However, the view that resentment necessarily involves a judgment of moral injury doesn't follow from a commitment to cognitivism. All that a cognitivist theory of the emotions implies is that resentment is constituted by *some* distinctive propositional attitude, which allows one to differentiate resentment from other emotions. Specifying the content of this propositional attitude is a further matter. For example, a cognitivist might claim that resentment is necessarily constituted by the belief that the object of one's resentment has failed to meet an expectation to which the subject holds them.<sup>14</sup> This account of resentment is also consistent with a cognitivist account of the emotions. Thus, the claim that resentment necessarily involves a judgment that

---

<sup>13</sup> Hampton and Murphy 1988, 5. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> See Wallace 1994 for this characterization of resentment.

one has suffered a moral injury, rather than some other propositional attitude, does not follow from a cognitivist account of the emotions. In Chapter 2, I consider several arguments for a cognitivist account of resentment, and explain why we should reject not only the view that resentment necessarily involves a *moral* judgment, as I argue in Chapter 1, but a cognitivist account of resentment more generally. I begin by considering two types of theory of emotion that might lead one to endorse a cognitivist account of resentment, global cognitivism and a hybrid theory, and argue that neither is supportive of a cognitivist view of resentment. Global cognitivism is the view that all emotions are necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude, while hybrid theories, as the name suggests, is the view that some emotions, but not others, are so constituted. While there are good reasons to reject global cognitivism altogether, I argue that hybrid theorists, by their own lights, should be open to a non-cognitive analysis of resentment. While my analysis does not definitively establish that resentment *is* a non-cognitive emotion, it does indicate that the widely-held view that resentment necessarily involves a moral judgment should not be so readily taken for granted.

While many philosophers seem to agree with the claim that resentment should be characterized in explicitly moral terms, some hold a decidedly negative view of resentment itself. They regard resentment as an emotion that we would be better off without, or that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having, to whatever extent this is possible. This view of resentment is also prominent among non-philosophers. It appears in works of literature and film, but it can also be found in numerous self-help books, and in the slogans and sayings of many 12-step programs.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* is often cited as a classic example of the immorality and imprudence of resentment. The need to avoid resentment is also prominent in *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, more commonly known as "The Big Book."

What's more, some proponents of this negative view of resentment also accept the claim that resentment should be characterized in explicitly moral terms.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in many cases the arguments for trying to rid ourselves of resentment are based on concerns about some aspect of the moral judgment that is thought to be necessary for having resentment. For example, it's sometimes claimed that resentment necessarily involves not only a judgment of moral injury, but also a desire that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, seemingly as punishment for the wrongful injury they have inflicted upon the subject.<sup>17</sup> This allegedly immoral thought, it's then argued, gives us reason to try to rid ourselves of having resentment.

The claim that resentment is an emotion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having, on either moral or prudential grounds, is significant for our purposes in a number of respects. First, this claim is relevant to broader normative questions about what we ought to do, how we ought to live our lives, and what sorts of people we ought to try to be. Surely answering these questions will require answering the question of which emotions we ought to avoid, and which ought to be endorsed and cultivated. However, this claim also raises a potential concern for those who seek to characterize our moral concepts in terms of resentment. If resentment is an emotion that we ought to try to entirely rid ourselves of having, it's harder to see how resentment could ever be appropriate, reasonable, or justified, since these concerns suggest that we always have reason not to resent. Some philosophers have argued that moral and prudential reasons are of the wrong kind for determining whether an emotion is appropriate, reasonable, or justified, in

---

<sup>16</sup> Hampton and Murphy 1988, for example.

<sup>17</sup> Butler 1970 and Hampton and Murphy 1988 both characterize resentment as involving this morally problematic desire.

the particular sense that's relevant for characterizing our moral concepts.<sup>18</sup> The notion of appropriateness, reasonableness, or justifiability that's relevant for this purpose, they claim, is the notion of fittingness. A fitting emotion, they contend, is one that accurately depicts its object, such that the object has the property or properties that the emotion presents it as having. Fear is fitting, for example, when its object is, in fact, dangerous. However, not everyone agrees that these sorts of considerations can be so easily set aside.<sup>19</sup> If there are moral and prudential reasons to be rid of resentment altogether, and these can't be so easily dismissed as irrelevant for the task of characterizing our moral concepts, it's harder to explain how one could adequately characterize our moral concepts in terms of resentment's being appropriate, reasonable, or justified.

In Chapter 3, I consider various iterations of the argument that resentment is an emotion that we would be better off without, or that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having, and argue that these arguments are better understood as indicating normative constraints on resentment. These normative constraints, I claim, help us to identify various ways that our resentment can go astray. They tell us how to resent in prudent and morally permissible ways, but they do not support the claim that we ought to be rid of resentment altogether. Thus, we can acknowledge that there is something to many of the moral and prudential concerns that have been raised about resentment, without concluding that resentment is an emotion that we ought to try to entirely rid

---

<sup>18</sup> Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2000): 65-90, Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value," *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 391-423.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Schroeder, "The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons," *Ethics* 122, No. 3 (2012): 457-488, Jonathan Way, "Transmission and the Wrong Kind of Reason," *Ethics* 122 (2012): 489-515, Anti Kauppinen, "Fittingness and Idealization," *Ethics* 124, No. 3 (2014): 572-588.



ourselves of having. I then consider an argument that we ought to be rid of resentment on the grounds that resentment's fittingness conditions can never be satisfied. I argue that while some characterizations of resentment do allow for the possibility that resentment is never fitting, namely the explicitly moral characterization of resentment that is taken for granted by many philosophers, in general there is little support for the claim that we ought to be entirely rid of resentment on grounds of fittingness. I conclude by offering a variety of moral and prudential reasons to both have and express resentment. From this, I conclude that resentment is a valuable emotion that we ought to try to cultivate properly, so that we avoid its immoral or imprudent iterations, rather than an emotion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having altogether.

Though each chapter to follow aims to arrive at a stand-alone conclusion, the result of my overall analysis is a presentation of a novel account of resentment. According to this account, resentment is a non-cognitive, adaptive response to apparent violations of the interpersonal norms of one's social group. Resentment presents its object, I claim, as "not how *we* treat each other." Resentment, on this view, is not simply a "wrongness detector," or a "morality tracker," so to speak. Rather, it is an emotion that allows us to both navigate and sustain our social environment, so that we might avoid its potential pitfalls and reap its benefits. On this account, resentment plays a significant role in our social interactions and exchanges, even where those interactions are not of an overtly moral nature. What's more, by adopting this new account of resentment, we open up the possibility of adequately characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment, without also characterizing resentment in terms of those same concepts. However, resentment is important not only because it may be useful for this sort of theoretical task. Resentment is an important component of our moral and social lives, one that we have

ample reason to foster, cultivate, and encourage. The value of resentment has implications for the way that we live our daily lives, and the way that we interact with our fellow humans.

## CHAPTER 1: ANGER, RESENTMENT, AND COOPERATION

Resentment is widely-held to be an extremely important moral emotion, perhaps even the key to understanding concepts like moral wrongdoing and moral responsibility. Allan Gibbard, for example, characterizes the concept of moral wrongness in terms of resentment, stating that “to think an act wrong is to accept norms for guilt and resentment that, *prima facie*, would sanction guilt and resentment if the act were performed.”<sup>20</sup> Peter Strawson suggests a similar role for resentment in characterizing the concept of being morally responsible.<sup>21</sup> Philosophers who place such importance on resentment, however, are often not particularly careful about specifying its content. For example, Strawson variously characterizes resentment in terms of injuries, offenses, or “ill-will,” while Gibbard describes resentment as involving the feeling that one has been harmed or offended.<sup>22</sup> These ways of talking, however, risk running together the distinction between resentment, which is thought to be a moral emotion, and anger, which is frequently characterized in terms of offenses. If resentment can’t be clearly distinguished from anger, it can’t be the basis for characterizing our moral concepts, because anger can be appropriate, reasonable, or justified even in cases that have nothing to do with moral wrongdoing. Thus, a failure to precisely characterize resentment, as distinct from anger, threatens to undermine the strategy of characterizing concepts like moral wrongdoing or moral responsibility in terms of this emotion.

Consider the following example to clarify the problem here. Suppose you have just scratched off a lottery ticket awarding you the grand prize of \$50,000. Upon arriving home, you

---

<sup>20</sup> Gibbard 1990, 47.

<sup>21</sup> John Martin Fischer, R. Jay Wallace, Gary Watson, and Susan Wolf are just a few of the philosophers who have followed Strawson’s thinking on this issue.

<sup>22</sup> Strawson 1962, Gibbard 1990, 126.

discover that the ticket has been lost. It seems perfectly reasonable for you to be angry that you have lost the ticket. However, there's no sense in which any moral wrongdoing has occurred in this case—you've simply lost the winning ticket, and you are justifiably angry about it. This is a case of appropriate anger without moral wrongdoing.

This sort of case indicates why this approach to characterizing our moral concepts requires an account of resentment that clearly distinguishes it from anger. If the distinction between anger and resentment is not clearly specified, and there are cases of appropriate anger without moral wrongdoing, there's little reason to think that concepts like moral wrongness can be adequately characterized in terms of the appropriateness, reasonableness, or justifiability of resentment, because these characterizations would fail to capture what's distinctive about our moral concepts. A failure to distinguish resentment from anger thus undermines the claim that our moral concepts can be adequately characterized in terms of the appropriateness, reasonableness, or justifiability of resentment.

One might think that this problem admits of an easy solution. It is often claimed that resentment is anger at moral wrongdoing.<sup>23</sup> On this view, we can characterize anger in terms of offenses, and resentment in terms of explicitly moral offenses. However, these moral characterizations of resentment essentially involve the very concepts that proponents of views like Gibbard's and Strawson's were hoping to explain, rendering characterizations of these concepts in terms of resentment circular.<sup>24</sup> For example, suppose one was to characterize

---

<sup>23</sup> Butler 1970, D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, Hampton and Murphy 1988, Smith 1976, and Wallace 1994 all defend some version of this view.

<sup>24</sup> Wallace 1994, 48-9 notes the significance of this circularity problem for Gibbard's view. Some philosophers, most notably Stephen Darwall, have claimed that resentment can be characterized in terms of its place within a network of attitudes, traits, behaviors, and capacities that make up the moral domain, and that this is not problematically circular. I'll discuss this view later in more detail, but for now, see Darwall 2006.

morally wrong actions as the actions to which resentment is an appropriate response to the actor who performs them. If resentment is anger at moral wrongdoing, resentment will be appropriate only when it is a response to a morally wrong action. Thus, to say that an action is morally wrong, on this view, is to say that the actor who performs it performs a morally wrong action, since these are the conditions when resentment is appropriate. Rather than informing our characterization of moral wrongdoing, resentment has completely dropped out of the picture, and what's left is a circular characterization of this concept.

If one adopts the strategy of characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment, one must provide an account of resentment that distinguishes it from anger, but without claiming that it is simply anger at moral wrongdoing. In what follows, I argue that we can accomplish this task by first characterizing the appropriateness conditions for anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event. To say that an event is harmful or threatening is to say that its occurrence brings about a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad for the subject, that makes the subject worse off than they would have been otherwise, or that makes such a state of affairs appear likely or imminent.<sup>25</sup> The appropriateness conditions for resentment, in turn, should be characterized in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms, where the object of one's resentment is an individual who has committed such a violation. In doing so, we can distinguish resentment from anger, in a way that allows for non-circular characterizations of our moral concepts to be given in terms of resentment.

I first discuss the idea that emotions have a formal object, which provides the conditions for when an emotion is appropriate. The formal object of an emotion is a property implicitly

---

<sup>25</sup> Ben Bradley, "Analyzing Harm," Unpublished Manuscript, 2009 and Ben Bradley, "Doing Away with Harm," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85 (2012): 390-412 provide helpful discussion of these notions of harm.

ascribed by an emotion to its object, which indicates the particular way that the emotion presents or depicts its object. For example, the formal object of fear is generally thought to be something dangerous, since fear presents its object in these terms. I argue that the formal object of anger ought to be characterized in terms of a harmful or threatening event, and then offer a characterization of resentment given in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms. Next, I consider some contemporary empirical data on anger, and argue that characterizing anger and resentment as I've suggested helpfully resolves a terminological dispute within this literature. I conclude by evaluating whether this new account of resentment avoids the circularity problems with which we are primarily concerned, and discussing some of the new challenges that this account of resentment presents for the metaethical strategy in question.

### **ANGER, OFFENSES, AND HARM**

Emotions are usually thought to have a formal object, a way of representing or depicting the object of one's emotion, which allows for the emotion to be evaluated for accuracy in individual cases. This is, in part, what differentiates emotions from moods—moods do not have a formal object, so there is no way in which one's mood can be evaluated for representational accuracy. When an emotion accurately portrays its object, the emotion is described as “fitting,” because the way that the emotion portrays the object “fits” what the object is really like.<sup>26</sup> For example, if one were to come upon a grizzly bear while hiking alone in the mountains, fear is a fitting response to the bear, because fear presents its object as dangerous, and grizzly bears are, in fact, dangerous in such circumstances. Considerations of fittingness are importantly different from moral or prudential reasons for and against some emotional response, since they pertain

---

<sup>26</sup> See D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 for discussion of this notion of fittingness.

specifically to the representational accuracy of the emotion.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it's possible for an emotional response to be immoral, or contrary to one's self-interest, but still be fitting.<sup>28</sup>

Anger's formal object is often characterized in terms of offenses, actions which show a lack of adequate regard for others or treat what is important to others as though it were of no importance. This account of anger reflects certain Aristotelian influences, as Aristotle's characterization of anger is frequently interpreted in these terms.<sup>29</sup> Many other philosophers have followed suit. For example, Robert Solomon characterizes anger as "a judgment of personal offense."<sup>30</sup> Aaron Ben-Ze'Ev similarly claims that "anger is aroused in response to a specific, undeserved offense."<sup>31</sup> In what follows, I will refer to these sorts of characterizations of anger as the offenses account of anger, where offenses are actions that involve a lack of adequate regard for others, or a treating of what is important to others as though it were of no importance.

This account of the formal object of anger helps explain why it's so appealing to characterize resentment as a kind of anger at moral wrongdoing. If anger is a response to offenses, and resentment is closely related to anger, as is often claimed, it's natural to

---

<sup>27</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 refer to the conflation of moral or prudential reasons with reasons of fittingness as the Moralistic fallacy.

<sup>28</sup> Not everyone holds this view. Some contend that an immoral or imprudent emotion is unfitting because it's immoral or imprudent. See D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 for discussion.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, 1325-1451 (New York: Random House, 1961). Most interpretations of Aristotle use the term 'slights,' rather than 'offenses,' though it's clear that these are meant to amount to the same thing.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Solomon, *The Passions* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> See Ben-Ze'Ev 2000.

characterize resentment in terms of explicitly moral offenses.<sup>32</sup> This view captures the notion that resentment is closely related to anger, while also allowing that resentment differs from anger in that it is specifically attuned to moral violations.

The offenses account of anger is also indicative of the need to better differentiate anger from resentment. The notion of offenses as actions that demonstrate a lack of adequate regard for others is nearly indistinguishable from something like Strawson's notion of ill will, the attitude he takes to be characteristic of the sorts of actions to which resentment is an appropriate response. On Strawson's view, resentment is "a reaction to injury or indifference."<sup>33</sup> Actions that express ill-will, according to Strawson, fail to satisfy the "basic demand" for a certain level of regard for others. If anger presents its object in terms of offenses, as is often claimed, and resentment presents its object in terms of ill will, where offenses are just actions that express the lack of interpersonal regard that is characteristic of ill will, it's not at all clear how anger and resentment are different emotions.

However, there's reason to think that we shouldn't characterize the formal object of anger in terms of offenses. Sometimes, we experience anger under circumstances that don't involve an offense. Consider the lottery ticket example given earlier. In that case, one's anger at having lost the winning lottery ticket is a response to a harmful event, the state of affairs where one is no longer able to claim the prize. One is surely worse off than they would have been had this event not occurred. And yet, there is no offense occurring here. Offenses, recall, involve a lack of interpersonal regard for the object of one's anger. And while one might claim that in this sort of case, one's anger is a response to a lack of regard for oneself, one can imagine a scenario where

---

<sup>32</sup> The notion that resentment and anger are closely related is prominent, for example, in Butler 1970 and Smith 1976.

<sup>33</sup> Strawson 1962, 83.



one does not see things this way, and is instead simply angry that the harmful state of affairs obtains. In this case, one's anger is not a response to a real or perceived offense, but rather to a harmful event.

The phenomenon of anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, is not limited to this one case, however. People get angry that they have poor cell phone reception when they need to make an important call, or that they can't find a location where they are expected to be. Competitive athletes sometimes describe feeling angry when they suffer a serious injury, even where the injury was not caused by the actions of any particular individual.<sup>34</sup> Terminally ill persons sometimes express anger because they are sick, where the target of their anger is the fact of their illness.<sup>35</sup> These sorts of events may be perceived as harmful, threatening, or both. For example, suppose one's poor cell phone reception prevented one from making a call regarding a lucrative employment opportunity. This may be perceived as a threat—it is now likely that this opportunity will be lost, or as a harm—one has missed their chance altogether. However, though we sometimes act as though we have been wronged by others in such cases (“this phone company has screwed me again!”), none of these situations need involve either a real or perceived offense. In some cases, anger presents its

---

<sup>34</sup> Aynsely M. Smith, Steven G. Scott, W. Michael O'Fallon, and Mary L. Young, "Emotional responses of athletes to injury," *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 65, no. 1 (1990): 38-50, Nancy Quackenbush and Jane Crossman, "Injured athletes: A study of emotional responses," *Journal of Sport Behavior* 17, No. 3 (1994): 178-187.

<sup>35</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969): 63-5. Kubler-Ross identifies anger as a stage of the dying process that, though it is frequently displaced onto other people, is really a response to the loss of function that is characteristic of the end stages of a terminal illness.

object as a harmful or threatening event, without any notion of a real or perceived offense coming into play.<sup>36</sup>

Cases of anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, can be responded to in several different ways. First, one might simply deny that such cases are genuine instances of anger. For example, a proponent of the offenses account of anger might claim that because anger always presents its object in terms of an offense, instances of apparent anger that lack this object presentation do not count as anger. This option invites at least two problems. First, in some cases, what I am here calling anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, may have the affective, behavioral, and physiological markers for anger. In these cases, one's emotional response may have all the appearances, both inside and out, of anger. A proponent of the offenses account of anger must explain why we should ignore these affective, behavioral, and physiological markers, and conclude that the emotional response occurring in these cases is not genuine anger.<sup>37</sup> What's more, a proponent of the offenses account of anger must offer an explanation of what emotion *is* occurring in these cases, if not anger. This is a significant explanatory burden, and it's not clear how the proponent of the offenses account of anger might meet it.

Alternatively, a proponent of the offenses account of anger might allow that these cases are genuine instances of anger, but insist that because anger presents its object in terms of an

---

<sup>36</sup> One need not accept that all of these examples count as cases of a harmful event where no real or perceived offense is involved. So long as at least one example counts as such, it follows that in some cases, anger is a response to a harmful event, where no real or perceived offense is involved.

<sup>37</sup> This would effectively amount to a theory of emotions whereby the only necessary constituent of a particular emotion type is that it involves certain evaluative content. While many philosophers regard the evaluative content of an emotion as a significant factor in differentiating it from other emotions, few claim that this evaluative content is the only thing that matters in this regard.

offense, anger must be here depicting its object in these same terms, despite claims to the contrary. This second option, however, implies that because these are also cases where no offense has occurred, anger is therefore always unfitting in such cases.

There are two reasons to think that anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, is not always unfitting. First, anger at harmful or threatening events of this sort does not have the appearance of an obvious representational error that is typical of other cases of unfitting emotion. For example, fear at a tiny kitten is unfitting, because fear presents its object as something dangerous, and kittens are not dangerous under any circumstances. Fear at a tiny kitten thus involves a somewhat glaring representational error. Anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, does not involve a glaring representational error of this kind. We might think that certain ways of expressing anger at such events are disproportionate or morally problematic in some way, or that the angry person might be better served by curbing their anger in a particular case, but this doesn't indicate that anger at harmful or threatening events of this sort therefore involves a representational error.<sup>38</sup> Anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, does not have the same appearance of an obvious representational mistake that we see in other cases of unfitting emotion, which counts in favor of the view that anger at these sorts of events is not always unfitting.

A related point about unfitting emotion and representational error can be put in terms of reasons for or against an emotional response. In cases of unfitting emotion, that one's emotion is an inaccurate representation of its object gives us a reason not to have the emotional response.

---

<sup>38</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 describe the taking of moral or prudential reasons not to experience an emotion as reasons against the representational accuracy of that emotion as an instance of the Moralistic Fallacy.

For example, that the tiny kitten is not dangerous gives us a reason not to fear it. For unfitting emotion, the representational inaccuracy involved is a consideration that counts against having the emotion. It's not clear that we have these sorts of reasons in cases of anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved. For example, if I am angry that I am suffering from a terminal illness, reminding me that my condition does not amount to having suffered an offense does not give me a reason not to be angry about it. If an athlete expresses anger at having suffered a serious injury during a competitive event, pointing out that their injury was not due to a lack of interpersonal regard, but was instead simply a "freak" accident, gives them no reason to curb their anger. This is not to say that one has no reasons against anger in such cases. Perhaps anger at having injured oneself during an athletic event shows bad character or a lack of perspective. Anger that one is terminally ill might be imprudent, since anger is surely not conducive to enduring one's treatment regimen. However, that an emotion is unfitting in a particular case gives us a different sort of reason not to have the emotion, and anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, doesn't give rise to these sorts of reasons.

These considerations count against the second option for responding to the above cases of anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved. We should not conclude that these are cases of genuine anger that is always unfitting. Thus, we have reason to reject the first two options for responding to the phenomena of anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved. This leaves us with the third option, accepting that anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved, are genuine instances of appropriate anger, and rejecting the offenses account of anger as a result. This view, but not the offenses account, allows that one can have genuine

anger at a state of affairs that is harmful or threatening to the subject, but where no real or perceived offense has occurred, and that sometimes, this response is fitting.

In addition to avoiding problems with the first two options available, there is also some reason to think that anger at harmful or threatening events, where no real or perceived offense is involved does count as “genuine” anger, and that anger is a fitting emotional response to such circumstances at least some of the time. On this view, anger presents its object as a harmful or threatening event, a state of affairs that is either intrinsically bad for the subject, or that makes the subject worse off than they would have been otherwise, or that makes such a state of affairs appear likely or imminent. This is an accurate depiction of the examples given above. For example, losing the winning lottery ticket is clearly a state of affairs whereby the subject is made worse off than they would have been otherwise. Anger that one is terminally ill accurately depicts a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad for the subject. In general, this account of anger’s object presentation accurately depicts the sorts of cases we are here concerned with capturing.

A critic of this account of anger might agree that we should reject the offenses account of anger, but also reject characterizing anger’s formal object in terms of a harmful or threatening event, on the grounds that this characterization is too general to allow us to evaluate whether anger, as opposed to some other emotion, is fitting in particular cases. For example, the formal object of grief is often characterized as a loss of something valuable. However, the sorts of things we grieve over can also be described in terms of harmful or threatening events. My grief might, for example, be a response to the death of a loved one, where their death makes me worse off than I would have been otherwise (perhaps I relied on the deceased for financial or emotional

support, for instance). In this case, it's not clear which emotion, grief or anger, is the fitting emotional response. If characterizing the formal object of anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event leaves us unable to determine whether anger is fitting in a particular case, then perhaps we ought not to characterize anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event.

To respond to this objection, we need to say a bit more about the way that fittingness evaluations work. For example, if we are trying to determine whether grief is a fitting response to, say, the death of a loved one, we first identify the formal object of grief, and then ask whether the object of one's grief has the property ascribed to it by this emotion. In the case of the death of a loved one, one's grief is fitting if their death is, in fact, a loss of something valuable. But we can also ask whether anger is a fitting response to the same circumstances. Anger presents its object, I've claimed, as a harmful or threatening event. If the object of one's anger is a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad for the subject, that makes the subject worse off than they would have been otherwise, or that makes such a state of affairs appear likely or imminent, then one's anger, according to this characterization of anger's formal object, is fitting. The death of a loved one will sometimes count as a harmful or threatening event, as discussed above, so anger, as I've characterized it here, will sometimes be a fitting response to the death of a loved one. However, the fact that grief may also be a fitting response to the same circumstances does not undermine this claim. Sometimes, there is more than one fitting emotional response to a situation. Further, though anger may not be the only fitting emotion in some situations, this will not always be the case. For example, suppose that the death of a loved one occurs after a long, difficult battle with cancer, which placed significant burdens upon the family of the deceased. Let's take for granted that this situation still involves the loss of something valuable, so grief remains a fitting response. But in this case, suppose one also regards the death of their loved one not as a harmful

event, but rather as a kind of release for themselves, as though they have been freed from the burdens of their loved one's illness. In this sense, the death of a loved one may be a beneficial, rather than a harmful event, since one is here made better off by this state of affairs. In this case, though grief is a fitting emotion, anger is not, because the object of one's anger is not a harmful or threatening event. So while characterizing anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event implies that anger will not be the only fitting emotion in some situations, other times this will not be the case. This indicates that contrary to the critic's concern, characterizing the formal object of anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event does allow us to make the relevant sorts of fittingness evaluations.

At this point, I think we can reasonably reject the offenses account of anger, and characterize anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event instead. Later, I'll discuss some empirical literature on anger that further supports this analysis. But first, let's consider how we might characterize the formal object of resentment, as distinct from anger, and whether this can be done adequately without utilizing moral concepts. If this can be done, we've made significant progress on avoiding the sorts of circularity issues with which we are primarily concerned.

### **THE OFFENSES ACCOUNT OF RESENTMENT**

Though there's reason to think that we ought not characterize anger in terms of offenses, perhaps we ought to characterize resentment in terms of offenses instead. This account of resentment suggests a plausible explanation for why the offenses account of anger has been so widely accepted. If anger presents its object in terms of a harmful or threatening event, and resentment presents its object in terms of offenses, it's easy to see how someone might come to adopt the offenses account of anger, since offenses often involve agents inflicting harm, or the threat of harm, upon others. If the sorts of situations that tend to give rise to resentment count as

a particular type of harmful or threatening event, it's easy to see how someone might adopt the offenses account of anger, without realizing that this account is better suited to resentment.

There are several other reasons one might characterize the formal object of resentment in terms of offenses. First, this account captures the intuition that anger and resentment are closely related emotions, and that resentment is a type of anger. If the formal object of anger is a harmful or threatening event, suffering an offense will nearly always fall under this description as well, since offenses often do involve being made worse off than one would have been otherwise, being subjected to an intrinsically bad state, or making such a state of affairs appear more likely or imminent. On this view, resentment presents its object as a particular type of harmful or threatening event, where the harm or threat is the result of an offense committed by the object of one's resentment.

Characterizing resentment in terms of offenses also captures certain intuitions about when resentment is obviously unfitting. For example, resentment at inanimate objects is not fitting, and an account of resentment given in terms of offenses can explain why. Inanimate objects can't express the lack of adequate regard for others that is characteristic of an offense. At the same time, characterizing anger in terms of harmful or threatening events helps to explain why anger may be fitting in such cases. While it is obviously unfitting to resent my laptop computer for running slowly, since there's no sense in which my laptop computer can treat me with inadequate interpersonal regard, one might think anger is a fitting response when my computer's poor function amounts to a harmful or threatening event. For example, suppose I am attempting to file my income tax return via electronic submission and my computer's poor functioning causes me to miss the filing deadline, so that I will now have to pay a substantial late fee. In this sort of case, my computer's poor functioning has made me worse off than I would



have been otherwise. Responding to an inanimate object as though it were an agent who has failed to show us adequate regard is a pretty clear representational error, so resentment is not a fitting response to this sort of situation. But this is less obviously so when, for example, the poor functioning of an inanimate object causes us significant harm.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these seeming advantages, characterizing resentment in terms of offenses will not resolve the problem of circularity that we are trying to avoid. By characterizing the formal object of resentment in terms of offenses, where offenses are actions that express a lack of adequate regard for others, we remain squarely entrenched in the moral domain, as offenses clearly involve the moral notion of adequate regard for others.<sup>40</sup> If we characterize resentment in terms of offenses, then resentment will be appropriate when it is a response to an action that shows a lack of adequate regard for others. But actions that show a lack of adequate regard for others are the same actions we are likely to identify as morally wrong actions. What makes for a morally wrong action, one might claim, is that it shows a lack of adequate regard for others. If we characterize concepts like moral wrongdoing in terms of the appropriateness conditions for resentment, and resentment in terms of offenses, then to say that an action is morally wrong is

---

<sup>39</sup> Some people will likely disagree that anger is a fitting response to an inanimate object. The point here, however, is simply that if one has these intuitions, characterizing resentment in terms of offenses, and anger in terms of a harmful or threatening event, can explain them. Alternatively, one might accept that resentment is not a fitting response to inanimate objects, and either reject or take no position regarding anger's fittingness in such cases. This can also be accounted for by the offenses account of resentment.

<sup>40</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, Russ, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 5-7. Shafer-Landau takes the claim that we ought to have some degree of consideration for others as an "ethical starting point," a reasonable constraint that allows us to evaluate the adequacy of competing moral theories. One might even think that the notion of adequate regard for others is what distinguishes morality from other codes of personal conduct.

still just to say that the actor who performed it committed a morally wrong action, because resentment is fitting, on this view, only when it is a response to moral wrongdoing.

One might respond here that though characterizing resentment in terms of offenses, and concepts like moral wrongdoing in terms of resentment, does lead to a kind of circularity, this is unavoidable, because there is no other way to adequately characterize these concepts or this emotion. For example, according to Stephen Darwall both the concept of moral wrongdoing and the reactive attitude of resentment are “irreducibly second-personal,” such that neither can be adequately characterized except in terms of other second-personal concepts.<sup>41</sup> Resentment and moral wrongdoing, on this view, are part of a set of concepts, attitudes, traits, actions, behaviors, and dispositions that emerge whenever humans engage in the practice of making and acknowledge claims on one another’s conduct. Darwall refers to the perspective one takes up when one participates in this practice as the “second-person standpoint.”<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, it is claimed, one can informatively characterize the components of the set that make up this practice in terms of one another.<sup>43</sup> Further, on Darwall’s view there is simply no other way to adequately characterize resentment or moral wrongdoing, which are themselves second-personal in nature, except in terms of other concepts that are also, at least implicitly, second-personal.<sup>44</sup>

This approach to characterizing resentment has a number of problematic implications regarding the moral development of children. According to Darwall, reactive attitudes like

---

<sup>41</sup> Darwall 2006, 12, 70-72, and 92-9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

resentment “*invariably* carry presuppositions of second-personal address about the competence and authority of the individuals who are their targets, as well as about those who have them.”<sup>45</sup> In expressing resentment, on this view, the subject presupposes that both they, and their target, are competent moral agents. And yet, as Darwall himself acknowledges, we often respond to the actions of children with resentment, as a means of preparing them for full participation in the moral community. In these cases, claims Darwall, “we seem simultaneously to move on two tracks in the process of inducting them into full second-personal responsibility, sometimes treating them proleptically as though they were apt for second-personal address, while nonetheless realizing that this is an illusion that must be recognized.”<sup>46</sup> First, it’s unclear whether one can express an attitude that presupposes the competence and authority of its target, while simultaneously recognizing that these presuppositions are mistaken.<sup>47</sup> To treat children “as though they were apt for second-personal address,” seems to involve recognizing that they are not, in fact, competent moral agents. Otherwise, it’s not clear what the “as though” in this claim is meant to indicate. However, even if what Darwall is here describing can be done, Darwall’s own analysis implies that promoting the moral development of children is the wrong kind of reason for resentment. According to Darwall, “(t)o be a reason of the right kind, a consideration must justify the relevant attitude in its own terms. It must be *a fact about or feature of some object*, appropriate consideration of which could provide someone’s reason for a

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>47</sup> While I won’t explore this point here, it’s worth noting that if this can be done, then resentment is clearly subject to the phenomenon of recalcitrance. See D’Arms and Jacobson 2003 for discussion.

warranted attitude of that kind toward it.”<sup>48</sup> By Darwall’s own lights, the promotion of moral development is the wrong kind of reason to resent young children. The right kind of reason for resentment, on Darwall’s view, is that the object of one’s resentment is a competent moral agent, such that they are subject to second-personal address at all, and that their action has shown a lack of adequate regard for others, such that they are subject to the reactive attitude of resentment. But as Darwall notes, to treat children in this way is proleptic; we treat children *as if* they were apt for second-personal address, while also realizing that they are not. Darwall’s analysis implies that despite its social importance, the resentment of children for the purpose of promoting their moral development is an unwarranted attitude.

In addition, Darwall’s analysis implies that young children are incapable of resentment, because they are incapable of taking up the second-person standpoint. But it’s not so clear that resentment is an emotion that is entirely ruled out for young children. Consider the following case. When my son was two years old, he enjoyed playing in our basement. One day, he asked my wife for permission to play down there, and she told him that he could. However, he became distracted by some other activity, and never made it to the basement to play. Several days later, he began climbing down the stairs to our basement to play, and became upset when we curtailed his efforts. However, his complaint was not simply that he could not go down to the basement to play, but that my wife had told him that he could, and was now not allowing him to do so (albeit many days later). As he put it, “But *Mommy said* I could play down in the basement!” His complaint seemed to be that we were not, from his perspective, keeping to an earlier agreement with him. On Darwall’s view, this emotional reaction cannot count as resentment, because expressions of resentment presuppose the competence and authority of both its target and the

---

<sup>48</sup> Darwall 2006, 16. Italics added for emphasis.

subject who expresses it. Resentment only occurs, on Darwall's view, between moral agents.<sup>49</sup> And yet, my son's emotional response appears to take the form of a complaint regarding the way another person has treated him. Further, it's not at all uncommon to think that young children experience resentment under a variety of circumstances. Divorce, remarriage, parental illness, having a disabled sibling, and moving to a new neighborhood have all been cited as events that can elicit resentment in children, where their resentment is aimed at their parents and not merely the eliciting state of affairs.<sup>50</sup> One might think that it is the registering of a complaint regarding how one has been treated by others, rather than the more complicated notion of second-personal address, which is common across these cases, and therefore characteristic of resentment.

A proponent of Darwall's view might reply that what children are expressing in these sorts of cases is not full-blown resentment, but a developmental predecessor of it. However, it's not clear that Darwall's analysis allows for this claim. Recall that on his view, resentment is *irreducibly* second-personal, and expressions of resentment *invariably* involve presuppositions about the competence and authority of both subject and object. Since this developmental predecessor would lack both the second-personal character and the presuppositions that are essential to resentment as Darwall characterizes it, we would have no grounds for describing the emotion that's occurring in these sorts of cases as a predecessor of resentment, as opposed to

---

<sup>49</sup> Darwall is not alone in this. Strawson 1962 similarly refers to our interactions with non-members of the moral community as requiring the "objective attitude."

<sup>50</sup> Barbara J. Anderson and Helen Kornblum, "The family environment of children with a diabetic parent: Issues for research," *Family Systems Medicine* 2, No. 1 (1984): 17-27, Susan M. McHale and Wendy C. Gamble, "Sibling relationships of children with disabled and nondisabled brothers and sisters," *Developmental Psychology* 25, No. 3 (1989): 421-429, Bonnie Steinbock, "Surrogate motherhood as prenatal adoption," *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 16, No. 1-2 (1988): 44-50.

some other emotion altogether. It's similarly unclear what the relationship might be between this proto-resentment that young children express, and the sort of emotional response that Darwall takes resentment to be.

Further, it's at least as plausible to claim that young children express resentment, and that this emotional response is subsequently incorporated into the practice of making and acknowledging claims on one another in the sense that requires the second-person standpoint. This alternative captures the connection between resentment, the rudimentary claim-making of children, and our subsequent practice of second-personal address. On Darwall's analysis, it's not at all apparent how these components are related, nor how humans go from the practice of rudimentary claim-making to participation in moral communities.

Darwall's account of resentment also suggests a somewhat mysterious account of the emergence of human moral communities. If our moral concepts, as well as reactive attitudes like resentment, are irreducibly second-personal, it's unclear how our evolutionary predecessors came to participate in the practice of making and acknowledging claims on one another, since this practice requires an understanding of concepts that one can only appreciate, according to Darwall, from the perspective one takes up when one is already participating in this very practice. And yet, our evolutionary past tells us that at some point, our ancestors were most likely incapable of second-personal address. Somehow, humankind entered the moral domain, but it's unclear how this could have happened on Darwall's analysis. Alternatively, we might again think that resentment ought to be characterized in terms of something more rudimentary, such as a complaint about the way others have treated the subject. Just as in the individual case, this approach to characterizing resentment allows for a straightforward explanation of how humans might have developed into the sorts of creatures that participate in the practice of

making and acknowledging claims on one another, in the sense that requires taking up the second-person standpoint.

In short, there is reason to conclude that we ought not characterize the formal object of resentment in terms of either an offense, or the sort of claim-making that requires the second-person standpoint. Perhaps what's needed instead is an account that doesn't appeal to moral concepts at all. To see how such an account might work, let's first consider how we might build from the idea that it is the registering of a complaint regarding how another has treated us that is resentment's characteristic feature.

## **RESENTMENT AND COOPERATION**

Human beings, whatever else we may be, are social creatures. Some have even argued that the need to be part of some sort of a community is a fundamental human motivation, and that a failure to form community bonds often leads to observable dysfunction in individual humans.<sup>51</sup> As such, humans tend to organize into social groups. Social groups are sets of individuals who share, among other things, a system of norms that govern their interpersonal interaction with one another. A street gang, for example, shares in a system of interpersonal norms that permit things like using violence to solve disputes, or the use of racial slurs or foul language toward one another. Social groups can be very small, consisting of only a few members, or extremely large. Social groups, however else they may differ, almost always share at least one feature in common. For most social groups, acceptance of the system of

---

<sup>51</sup> Roy Baumeister & Mark R. Leary, "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (1995): 497-529.

interpersonal norms for the group is partially constitutive of membership in that group.<sup>52</sup> One cannot be a member of a religious order, for example, unless one accepts the norms for interpersonal conduct between members of that order. To accept a group's system of interpersonal norms is to believe that one ought to follow them, and to be motivated to do so.

A group's interpersonal norms serve another function beyond maintaining group integrity. Group interpersonal norms allow group members to cooperate with one another.<sup>53</sup> To cooperate is to work with others to bring about a common goal or achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. For example, suppose our street gang is planning to attack a rival gang. The achievement of this goal is made possible by the fact that each member of the gang accepts the same system of interpersonal norms. Group members can reasonably assume that other members of the group will conduct themselves as group norms dictate. Cooperation is possible because group norms for interpersonal interaction allow the group to work cohesively and coordinate their efforts efficiently.

While successful cooperation depends on a shared system of group norms for interpersonal interaction between group members, maintaining this shared system of norms requires a mechanism that serves to correct the behavior of group norm violators, as well as educate new members about the content of these norms. One plausible candidate for such a mechanism is a characteristic emotional response to these sorts of violations. Many emotions are responses to biologically salient scenarios. For example, fear is typically characterized as a response to the presence of danger, while disgust is thought to be a response to contamination. If

---

<sup>52</sup> Marc Bekoff, "Wild justice and fair play: cooperation, forgiveness, and morality in animals," *Biology and Philosophy* 19 (2004): 489-520 indicates that the role of shared norms in maintaining group integrity is not limited to human social groups.

<sup>53</sup> Bekoff 2004, 513.



the need to register the violation of group interpersonal norms is similarly biologically salient, and there's reason to think that it is, then it's reasonable to believe that there is a characteristic emotional response to violations of group interpersonal norms. And given our earlier discussion of the possibility that it is the registering of a complaint about how others have treated us that is characteristic of resentment, we have reason to consider that resentment is this characteristic emotional response. The formal object of resentment, then, ought to be characterized in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms. Resentment presents its object as a violator of one of these norms, and resentment is fitting, on this view, when its object is one who has committed such a violation.

This account does not, however, require that the subject have an articulate concept of these norms, nor an understanding of their role in facilitating cooperative activity. Rather, violations of group norms for interpersonal interaction are seen as “not how we treat each other,” where the “we” in question is the group to which both subject and object belong. Resentment, on this view, presents its object as acting “not how we treat each other,” a violator of the norms that both subject and object accept, and that partially constitutes their membership in a particular group.

There are a number of reasons in favor of this account. First, this account offers all the same benefits that came from characterizing resentment in terms of offenses. It allows for an easy explanation of the relationship between resentment and anger, since violations of group norms for interpersonal interaction will nearly always be describable in terms of harmful or threatening events as well. It also captures the intuition that resentment is fitting only when directed at an actor, and therefore unfitting when directed at an inanimate object.

Characterizing resentment in terms of violations of group norms for interpersonal interaction also avoids some of the problematic implications that emerged from Darwall's analysis. First, this new account of resentment can easily explain why resentment of young children, for the purpose of promoting their moral development, is a warranted attitude. If resentment presents its object as acting in a manner that is contrary to the interpersonal norms of the group, then resenting young children who violate group interpersonal norms is a fitting emotional response.<sup>54</sup> For particularly young children, their social group may not consist of anyone outside their immediate family. But this is consistent with the way children are taught about how to treat others. Toddlers are told that "we don't hit *our* Mommy," or that "we don't pinch in *this* family." One's group need not be particularly large for it to have its own set of interpersonal norms. Further, on this view we need not presuppose that children are competent, or that they have the authority to make claims on others in order to rightly resent their transgressions. Nor does this account require that we "move on two tracks" in inducting children into the moral community. We need only see the transgressions of children as contrary to the way that "we" treat each other. So long as a child's actions are, in fact, contrary to group interpersonal norms, one's resentment is warranted. What's more, though resentment of children who violate group interpersonal norms is a warranted attitude on this view, there may still be other considerations that tell in favor of curbing or tempering one's resentment in such cases. For example, certain ways of expressing resentment may be frightening for children. This consideration counts against certain ways of expressing resentment toward children who violate

---

<sup>54</sup> This also helps to explain why resentment of young children might be fitting when it comes from the child's parents or teachers, but unfitting when it is expressed by a stranger.

group interpersonal norms.<sup>55</sup> However, this consideration is a normative constraint on our expression of resentment, rather than a consideration that counts against resentment's being a warranted attitude in this case.

This account of resentment also allows that young children are sometimes capable of resentment, and that their resentment can sometimes be fitting. In the earlier case of my two-year-old son, this account of resentment allows us to explain why his reaction both counts as resentment, and why it is unfitting in this particular case. In responding as he did, my son saw the denial of access to the basement not merely as a case of not getting what he wanted, but as a betrayal, a failure on our part to keep our agreement with him. From his perspective, not keeping agreements is not how we, his family, treat each other. However, his resentment in this case was unfitting, because he failed to understand that agreements sometimes have an expiration date. Denying him access to the basement was not a violation of the interpersonal norms of our family, and resentment was therefore not a fitting response. However, had this denial occurred immediately after an agreement that he could go down and play, his resentment would have been a fitting response on this view.

Further, this account of resentment resolves a number of questions concerning the relationship between the rudimentary claim-making of children and the subsequent development of those children into moral agents. If resentment is a fitting response to violations of interpersonal norms for one's group, it's easy to see how children might develop into moral agents. Initially, we come to appreciate that we are members of a social group, and that this group has rules regarding how its members are to treat each other. Over time, perhaps we come to appreciate that we are also members of larger social groups, and that there are rules for how

---

<sup>55</sup> Similar sorts of considerations are applicable to individuals who are not children, but who nonetheless lack the requisite capacities for full group membership.

members of this group are to treat each other as well. Eventually, we come to recognize that we are members of an extremely large social group, what we presently think of as the moral community. By accepting the interpersonal norms for that group as well, we finally enter the moral community as full-fledged members, where we participate in the sort of claim-making that requires something like the second-person standpoint. On this account, becoming a moral agent is a matter of coming to see oneself as a member of the moral community, which is, in part, a matter of coming to believe that one is subject to norms that govern the interpersonal interactions of members of this group. Appreciating this fact about oneself, in turn, is a matter of gradually expanding one's understanding of the boundaries of one's social group membership. What begins as an appreciation of something very simple, that one is subject to the norms of one's family group, culminates in the recognition that one is bound by the norms of the moral community.

There are several concerns one might have with characterizing the formal object of resentment in these terms. First, one might think that characterizing resentment in these terms renders the fittingness conditions for resentment unacceptably broad. For example, one might think this account implies that resentment is a fitting response whenever a person violates any group norms. However, resentment seems unfitting when, for example, a member of a street gang wears a hat in a manner that is inconsistent with the gang's norms for hat wearing. On this account, one might worry that resentment seems to be a fitting response to far too many group norm violations.

This objection can be avoided by emphasizing that the formal object of resentment is characterized in terms of violations of interpersonal norms for a particular group, rather than group behavioral norms more generally. Interpersonal norms dictate how individual group

members are to treat one another, rather than how they are to conduct themselves in general.

Thus, while a group's interpersonal norms are a subset of the behavioral norms for that group, it doesn't follow that violations of any group norm renders resentment a fitting response. Rather, resentment is a fitting response to a particular subset of the behavioral norms for one's group, namely the behavioral norms that govern the interpersonal interaction of group members.

One might also be concerned that on this view, resentment is an emotion that is clearly possible for certain kinds of non-human animals. After all, it's well-established that wolves, chimpanzees, and other non-human animals that organize into social groups have behavioral norms that govern behavioral interaction between group members. But it's simply absurd, one might contend, to think that wolves who chase off other wolves that try to "cut the line" when the pack is feeding resent the rule-breakers. Resentment is a uniquely human emotion, one might claim, and any account of resentment that implies otherwise ought to be rejected.

This criticism, though unsurprising, is problematic in a number of ways. First, the claim that resentment is a uniquely human emotion is best supported via some version of the offenses account of resentment, and we've already provided ample reason to favor this new account over the offenses account. Further, it's now widely accepted that some emotions occur in both humans and non-human animals. For example, fleeing from something dangerous is taken to be an instance of fear, irrespective of whether the one fleeing is a human or non-human animal.<sup>56</sup> Insofar as non-human animals demonstrate behavioral responses to conditions that are similar to the emotional responses of humans, they are generally regarded as capable of that emotion. Thus, the fact that an account of resentment implies that at least some non-human animals

---

<sup>56</sup> Further, empirical research on emotions that utilizes non-human animal subjects would tell us nothing about human emotion if we didn't assume that there are significant cross-species similarities. See Panksepp 1998.

experience this emotion is not a consideration that counts against it. Rather, this result simply expands the range of emotions that some non-human animals may experience. Finally, insofar as emotions are biological phenomena, we ought to expect that some emotions will occur across species lines. Overall, the fact that this new account of resentment implies that some non-human animals experience resentment is no reason to reject it.

Finally, one might worry that even if this account of resentment were correct, it wouldn't vindicate the strategy of characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment, because interpersonal norms don't track morality in the way that this strategy suggests. This concern can be put a couple of different ways. One way of putting this point is to claim that some kinds of interpersonal norms are clearly outside the scope of moral wrongdoing. For example, there are norms that govern the interaction between food servers and their customers. This interaction is interpersonal in nature, but we don't think we've entered the moral domain when a server brings the main dish before the customer has finished their salad. So the concern here is that violating group interpersonal norms sometimes falls outside the moral domain, even though resentment would still be a fitting response to such violations. However, there's a similar worry when we put things just the opposite way. One might think that some moral wrongdoing has little to do with violating group interpersonal norms. For example, torturing puppies for fun is clearly a morally wrong action, but it's tough to see how this involves violations of group interpersonal norms. Here the concern is not that interpersonal norms outpace morality, but that morality extends beyond what's required by group interpersonal norms.

These concerns are important, and worth taking seriously, but they do not tell against the characterization of resentment that I've been advocating thus far. Rather, these concerns indicate some of the new challenges that this account of resentment creates for the strategy of

characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment. I'll return to these challenges shortly, but first I want to briefly note one additional consideration in favor of the account of resentment, and anger, that I've been defending.

### **THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ANGER**

Thus far, I've argued that we ought to characterize the formal object of anger in terms of harmful or threatening events, and the formal object of resentment in terms of violations of the interpersonal norms of one's group. Informally, one might think of the object presentation of resentment as "not how *we* treat each other." There are a number of reasons to favor this account over the widely held view of anger as a response to offenses, where resentment is characterized in terms of explicitly moral offenses. However, there is also some evidence in favor of this new distinction to be found in the empirical literature on anger. To see that this is the case, let's consider two theoretical approaches to the empirical study of anger, and see whether the preceding analysis can resolve an apparent disagreement that exists between them.

Appraisal theories are one popular strategy for the empirical study of anger. Appraisals, roughly speaking, are the evaluations that determine what emotion we are experiencing.<sup>57</sup> When we talk about anger in terms of an appraisal theory, we are saying that there is a characteristic evaluation associated with anger, which determines when a particular emotional state counts as anger, as opposed to some other emotion type. Some appraisal theorists contend that anger requires seeing another person as responsible for some action that had negative consequences for

---

<sup>57</sup> Magda Arnold, *Emotion and Personality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), Richard Lazarus, *Emotion and Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). As Arnold 1960 put it, when we appraise something, we see it as affecting us in some way that matters, while Lazarus 1991 describes appraisals as evaluations of how one's relationship to the environment bears on one's well-being.

the appraiser, while others describe anger in terms of blaming others.<sup>58</sup> Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones describe the relevant appraisal for anger more generally, in terms of being kept from an important goal by an external agent's improper action.<sup>59</sup> Still others have contended that the characteristic appraisal for anger involves the thought that one has been treated unfairly. While all of these characterizations of anger differ slightly, they suggest a common approach to studying anger as a response to the improper actions of agents. On this view, then, the formal object of anger is roughly what's suggested by the offenses account of anger we've been discussing.

Other researchers have investigated anger not in terms of an appraisal that one has been injured, wronged, or offended, but rather as an aggression response to aversive conditions or bodily harm. This account of anger is supported by noting the existence of phenomena that look suspiciously like anger, but where appraisals involving concepts like offense seem unlikely. For example, Izard has claimed that infants express certain behaviors usually associated with anger, including certain vocalizations and characteristic facial expressions, in response to pain.<sup>60</sup> Panksepp similarly notes that what looks like anger can be elicited in infants simply by holding

---

<sup>58</sup> P.C. Ellsworth and C.A. Smith, "From appraisal to emotion: Differences among unpleasant feelings," *Motivation and Emotion* 12 (1988): 271-302, A. Ortony, G.L. Clore, and A. Collins, *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Lazarus 1991, K. R. Scherer, "Appraisal theory," in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Tim Dalgleish and Mick Power, 637-663 (Sussex: Wiley, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones 2004. This particular formulation is especially significant, because it is claimed to be indicative of what's common to many different formulations of the relevant appraisal for anger.

<sup>60</sup> C.E. Izard, *The Psychology of Emotions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991).



their arms to their sides, thereby restricting their freedom of movement.<sup>61</sup> We also see behavioral markers typically associated with anger occurring in non-human animals, who are similarly unlikely to be capable of the relevant appraisals for anger. For example, Charles Darwin, citing behavioral markers such as the baring of teeth, distinctive vocalizations, and aggressive behavior toward the object of their response as indicators, included dogs, baboons, porcupines, swans, cassowaries, chameleons, kangaroos, and rattlesnakes as among the types of non-human animals that are capable of anger.<sup>62</sup> Roland Anderson has identified changes in color and water spouting among cephalopods as a possible way of communicating anger when an unwelcome object is placed inside their tank, and Anne Innis Dagg identifies the bellow of a camel forced to rise and continue walking as an expression of anger.<sup>63</sup> Darwin's list is more inclusive than most, but many experts in both affective neuroscience and ethology have attributed anger to non-human animals, on the basis of behavioral responses that are otherwise associated with anger, in response to conditions that seem likely to elicit anger.<sup>64</sup> On this view, anger presents its object as aversive, harmful, or threatening, and anger is fitting when this presentation is accurate.

What we have here are two approaches to the empirical study of anger. Appraisal theory says that anger essentially involves an evaluation of its object as an agent who has treated the

---

<sup>61</sup> Panksepp 2004, 189.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: J. Friedmann, 1979).

<sup>63</sup> Bekoff 2000, 85-7 and 104.

<sup>64</sup> Panksepp 1998, Marc Bekoff, "Animal Passions and Beastly Virtues: Cognitive Ethology as the Unifying Science for Understanding the Subjective, Emotional, Empathic, and Moral Lives of Animals," *Human Ecology Forum* 13 No. 1 (2006): 39-59.

subject improperly in some way, while others have claimed that the behavioral markers for anger are seen in subjects who are incapable of the requisite appraisal, under conditions where the behavior would otherwise be taken as an indicator of anger. If appraisal theorists are correct, infant and non-human animal anger is not really anger, despite involving the right sort of behavior occurring under the right sort of conditions. But if proponents of the alternative to appraisal theory are correct, we still need some way to account for the difference between what's occurring when a cephalopod angrily spits water at a handler, for example, and the emotion experienced by an adult human who sees himself as having been treated improperly by the actions of another agent.

The best way to accommodate all of this data, in my view, is to characterize anger in terms of harmful or threatening events, and resentment in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms. By characterizing anger and resentment in this way, we account for a number of otherwise irreconcilable features of this data set. First, we can account for the plausible notion that non-human animals, perhaps even a substantial number of diverse species, are capable of anger, and that their anger can sometimes be fitting. We also capture the sense in which human and non-human anger can have similar content, which is essential for thinking about anger as an emotion that is shared between humans and non-human animals. But we can also capture what seems right about most appraisal theories of anger. There is, many appraisal theorists rightly contend, an emotion that involves perceiving oneself as not merely having been harmed or threatened, but as having been treated improperly by another individual. In many cases, such circumstances are also harmful or threatening events, so there is something to thinking of the emotional response in these cases as a kind of anger. However, there is also something noticeably different about this kind of emotional response, especially in comparison

to non-human animal or human infant anger.<sup>65</sup> This emotion is aimed at individual actors, in response to something they have done to the subject. In order to mark the difference between this emotion and anger more generally, we might think of the former as resentment, and characterize it in terms of violations of group interpersonal norms. This allows us to resolve the apparent dispute between two competing theoretical approaches to anger, and capture a wide swath of the empirical data from both camps. This result provides an additional reason to adopt our new account of both anger and resentment.

However, our goal was not only to defend a new account of the formal objects of anger and resentment, but to develop an account of resentment that is useful for the strategy of characterizing our moral concepts. I turn now to whether our new account of resentment can meet this need.

## **RESENTMENT AND MORAL CONCEPTS**

Earlier, I claimed that it is problematically circular to characterize our moral concepts in terms of the conditions under which resentment is appropriate, where resentment's fittingness conditions are specified in terms of those same moral concepts. To determine whether this circularity concern has been resolved by our new account of resentment, let's consider it in light of one prominent account of moral wrongdoing with which we began our discussion.

Let's return to Gibbard's characterization of the concept of moral wrongdoing.

According to Gibbard, "to think an act wrong is to accept norms for guilt and resentment that,

---

<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that non-human animals and infants experience anger, while adult humans experience resentment, full stop. Rather, the claim being made here is that while anger is an emotion that is experienced by both humans, from infant to adult, and non-human animals, there is another, anger-like emotion that is experienced by adult humans, but not human infants, and that may or may not be possible for a limited number of non-human animal species.

*prima facie*, would sanction guilt and resentment if the act were performed.”<sup>66</sup> By “accept norms,” Gibbard means to be making a claim about what sorts of responses are rational. As he puts it, “the standards for whether an act is wrong... are the standards such that guilt and resentment are *prima facie* rational.”<sup>67</sup> For Gibbard, to say that an action is morally wrong is to say that it is rational for someone to feel guilty for having done it, and for others to resent the actor who performs it. Further, as Justin D’Arms and Dan Jacobson have recently argued, the notion of rationality at work here is of a particular sort.<sup>68</sup> To say that resentment is a rational response, in the sense that’s relevant to characterizing the concept of moral wrongdoing, is to say that it accurately depicts its object. Ultimately, Gibbard characterizes moral wrongdoing in terms of resentment’s fittingness conditions.

The challenge for this sort of view is to specify precisely when resentment is a fitting emotional response. As we’ve seen, it won’t do to specify these conditions in terms of moral wrongdoing, since this is the very concept that we are hoping to characterize. However, suppose we were to adopt our new account of resentment’s formal object instead. On this view, resentment is fitting when it is a response to violations of group interpersonal norms. Resentment is fitting, on this view, when it’s a response to these sorts of violations. However, this result suggests a serious problem for the strategy of characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment’s fittingness conditions. If resentment is fitting whenever it’s a response to violations of group interpersonal norms, it seems as though the sort of analysis Gibbard is after can’t be correct, since some such violations are clearly not the sort of thing we ought to regard as

---

<sup>66</sup> Gibbard 1990, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” *Ethics* (2000a): 722-748, D’Arms and Jacobson 2000.

morally wrong. If we adopt this new account of resentment, we seem to have ruled out the possibility of characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment's fittingness conditions.

While adopting this new account of resentment does create new challenges for proponents of this strategy in metaethics, it also provides potential resources for addressing them. Sometimes, resentment will be a fitting response to actions that aren't morally wrong. However, whether resentment is fitting in particular cases will depend on the type of action to which it is a response, as well as the group membership status of both subject and object. For example, if you and I are both members of a prestigious social club, our new account of resentment implies that it's fitting for me to resent your failure to greet me with the official club handshake. However, it would not be fitting to resent the same action by a non-member. Whether resentment is fitting in a particular case depends on whether the norm-violating action is committed by someone who is, in fact, subject to that particular norm. Morally wrong actions, then, will be the ones that violate the interpersonal norms for the moral community itself. By limiting the relevant norms to those that apply to members of the moral community, in virtue of their being members of the moral community, perhaps an analysis of the concept of moral wrongdoing can still be given in terms of resentment's fittingness conditions. Whether this can be done is a further question for proponents of this particular strategy in metaethics, but for our purposes, it's plausible to think that such an account might be possible, and that adopting this new account of resentment need not rule out an analysis of the sort that Gibbard is after.

One might worry that even if this problem can be adequately addressed, the possibility of morally wrong actions that don't involve any violation of interpersonal norms presents a far more serious problem. For example, it's not clear that any such norms are violated when someone tortures puppies for fun, but surely this is a morally wrong action if anything is. This

problem is more serious, one might think, since it suggests that at least some of the time, there's no connection whatsoever between moral wrongdoing and interpersonal norm violations. Again, this sort of concern might be addressed by specifying precisely which group's interpersonal norms are pertinent to characterizing the concept of moral wrongdoing. Insofar as non-human animals are members of the group that constitutes the moral community, there are norms that govern how other group members ought to treat them. Thus, torturing puppies for fun would count as a violation of group interpersonal norms. So while it's possible to identify examples of morally wrong actions that don't violate norms for how humans ought to treat each other, it's less clear whether there are any such examples that don't involve violating norms for how non-human members of the moral community ought to be treated.

One might reply that on the account of social group membership given earlier, non-human animals can't count as members of the moral community. Non-human animals don't believe they ought to follow the interpersonal norms of the moral community, and their inclusion in this group doesn't promote group integrity or cooperation. Thus, it's difficult to see how actions like torturing puppies for fun can be violations of norms for how social group members treat each other. Clearly, such actions are norm violations, but the requirements of social group membership seem to rule out the possibility of characterizing them as violations of interpersonal norms.

While accepting a group's interpersonal norms is one way to acquire membership in that group, it's not the only way that something akin to membership status can be achieved. Sometimes, a group might extend a kind of *de facto* membership status to individuals who don't accept their system of interpersonal norms. For example, a street gang may have norms for how the non-affiliated parents or siblings of its members are to be treated. A social group may

similarly extend near-member status to the non-member family of their actual members, and provide them with certain benefits as a result. In such cases, the familial relations of group members are not members of the social group, but they are treated as if they were members in certain respects. They obtain *de facto* member status without actually being members of the social group.

This sort of extending of *de facto* membership status is also seen among non-human animals. For example, at the Monkeyland Primate Sanctuary in South Africa, there is a group of Capuchin monkeys that have seemingly extended this sort of *de facto* membership status to a Gibbon, Atlas, who shares their enclosure.<sup>69</sup> Atlas's status is not on par with that of the Capuchin's, as he does not participate in many of the group's social activities. But he is treated as a group member in certain respects, which suggests that a kind of *de facto* membership status has been extended to Atlas by the group's actual members, the Capuchins. If an individual can acquire *de facto* member status within a social group without meeting the conditions for group membership, then it's plausible to claim that non-human animals have the same sort of *de facto* status in the moral community. Although they don't meet the conditions for membership, they are recognized and treated as members, in certain respects, by those who do meet these conditions. If non-human animal membership in the moral community is similar to the *de facto* member status that we see in other social groups, then the mistreatment of non-human animals is a violation of group interpersonal norms, even though non-human animals don't satisfy the conditions for group membership.

---

<sup>69</sup> Atlas's story comes from the documentary film *Nature: Animal Odd Couples*, Educational Broadcasting Company, 2012.

## CONCLUSION

It's frequently claimed that anger ought to be characterized in terms of offenses, while resentment, a moral form of anger, therefore ought to be characterized in terms of explicitly moral offenses. These claims, I've argued, are mistaken. Anger presents its object as a harmful or threatening event, an occurrence that brings about a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad for the subject, that makes the subject worse off than they would have been otherwise, or that makes such a state of affairs appear likely or imminent. This account of anger allows for cases of fitting anger at harmful or threatening events where no real or perceived offense is occurring, a phenomenon that is entirely ruled out by characterizing anger in terms of offenses.

I've also argued for a new account of the formal object of resentment. Resentment presents its object, I've claimed, not as one who has caused a moral offense against the subject, but as a violator of group interpersonal norms. Resentment presents its object, on this view, as "not how *we* treat each other." This account has a number of advantages over an account of resentment given in terms of offenses. First, it captures the highly plausible notion that resentment is responsive to the improper conduct of others, without utilizing explicitly moral concepts to characterize resentment. It also allows us to account for a disagreement between two approaches to the study of anger represented in the empirical literature, and explains what's correct about both approaches. Finally, this account situates resentment within a plausible account of human moral development. And while adopting this new account of resentment does create new challenges for proponents of the strategy of characterizing our moral concepts in terms of resentment, this account also provides potential resources for meeting these challenges. Whether this sort of strategy can ultimately be successful remains to be seen, but in the



meantime, further analysis can now proceed in light of a more accurate characterization of the emotion that is taken to be central to this approach.

## CHAPTER 2: RESENTMENT AS NON-COGNITIVE ADAPTATION

Resentment has a complex role in moral philosophy. It appears in philosophical discussions about blame and forgiveness, as well as conversations about moral responsibility and moral agency. Some see it as an integral part of human relationships, while others regard it as an insidious emotion that ought to be avoided altogether. Despite its prominent role across a range of debates in moral philosophy, very little philosophical work has been done on the nature of resentment itself. Instead, there is a prevailing assumption that resentment is an emotional response to having been wronged by another in a morally significant way. This is usually put in decidedly cognitivist terms, where cognitivism is the view that emotions are necessarily constituted, at least in part, by a belief, judgment, or other propositional attitude.<sup>70</sup> A typical account of resentment, then, usually says that resentment is constituted by a judgment that one has been morally wronged by the object of one's resentment.

There are several theories of emotion that might lead one to endorse a cognitivist account of resentment. First, one might be a global cognitivist about emotions. Global cognitivism contends that all emotions are necessarily constituted, at least in part, by a propositional attitude.<sup>71</sup> A global cognitivist endorses a cognitivist theory of resentment for fairly obvious reasons; resentment is an emotion, and for the global cognitivist, all emotions are necessarily constituted by propositional attitudes. However, a hybrid theory of emotion can also lead one to endorse a cognitivist account of resentment. Hybrid theories take no position on whether

---

<sup>70</sup> Joel Marks, "A Theory of Emotion," *Philosophical Studies* 42 (1982): 227-242 regards emotions as belief-desire pairs. However, most cognitivists describe their view in terms of a belief or judgment. What's more, though some philosophers utilize the term 'belief,' while others prefer 'judgment,' they appear to be referring to the same phenomenon in either case.

<sup>71</sup> Global non-cognitivism claims just the opposite. According to the global non-cognitivist, no emotion ever requires any propositional attitude.

propositional attitudes are necessary constituents of emotion in general. Instead, hybrid theorists treat a small core of emotions as non-cognitive, which is to say that propositional attitudes are not a necessary constituent of these emotions, and emotions that fall outside of this core as cognitive. While all global cognitivists are committed to a cognitivist account of resentment, whether a hybrid theorist endorses a cognitivist account of resentment will depend on whether they regard resentment as among this non-cognitive core.

I argue that the typical, cognitivist account of resentment should not be so readily assumed. I begin by explaining two ways that one might arrive at this sort of view, and argue that neither tells in favor of accepting a cognitivist account of resentment. I then consider the strategies that hybrid theorists employ in determining whether an emotion ought to be subject to a non-cognitive analysis, and argue that by their own lights, hybrid theorists ought to be open to the possibility of a non-cognitive account of resentment. A non-cognitive account of resentment, I claim, is an idea worth pursuing.

### **PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

There are several clarifications that must be made before proceeding any further. First, I should explain exactly what emotion is being here referred to by the term ‘resentment.’ By ‘resentment,’ I mean to refer to a negatively-valenced emotional response to the apparently improper conduct of others, where the subject sees themselves as having been treated improperly by the object of their resentment. This characterization of resentment differs slightly from the typical view of resentment with which I began. However, the typical view is not universally endorsed, and for my purposes here, I wish to adopt a characterization of resentment that is neutral with regard to questions about the specific type of improper conduct to which resentment

is responsive.<sup>72</sup> For my purposes, the relevant question is whether a propositional attitude is a necessary constituent of resentment, irrespective of whether that propositional attitude takes the form of a moral judgment.

Next, I need to clarify precisely what I mean when I describe cognitivism as the view that propositional attitudes are a necessary constituent of emotion. The philosophy of emotions literature is disastrously inconsistent in the way that this terminology, along with terms like ‘judgment,’ and ‘belief,’ are used.<sup>73</sup> By ‘propositional attitude,’ I mean to refer to an attitudinal state that takes a proposition as its object, where a proposition is the referent of a that-clause which can be true or false.<sup>74</sup> For example, the belief that Asia is the largest continent is an attitude of affirming or endorsing-as-true the clause “that Asia is the largest continent.” This example will no doubt leave some epistemologists and philosophers of mind dissatisfied, as there are a number of different ways that one might understand both beliefs and propositions. But for my purposes, this example of a propositional attitude allows us to understand the really crucial difference between cognitivism and non-cognitivism about the emotions. For the cognitivist, all emotions are partially constituted by attitudes directed toward propositions, where a proposition

---

<sup>72</sup> Wallace 1994, for example, explicitly rejects the view that resentment essentially involves a judgment of moral injury to oneself.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Solomon, “Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings: What is a ‘Cognitive Theory’ of Emotions and Does it Neglect Affectivity?” in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 1-18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) provides a helpful discussion of this problem for cognitivist theories of emotion.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew McGrath, "Propositions", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/propositions/> for additional discussion of propositions.

is the referent of a that-clause which can be true or false.<sup>75</sup> For the non-cognitivist, propositional attitudes are not a necessary constituent of emotions. Emotions, according to the non-cognitivist, are constituted by affective states, behaviors, dispositions, physiological responses, etc. In my view, focusing on their disagreement regarding the necessity of propositional attitudes is the best way to cut to the core of what is truly at stake between cognitivists and non-cognitivists about the emotions. In what follows, I will regard this as the crucial difference between these views, and characterize various accounts of the emotions, as either cognitive or non-cognitive, in these terms.

Further, it's important that the distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive theories of emotion not be understood in terms of the way that 'cognitive' is used among psychologists and neuroscientists.<sup>76</sup> While philosophers tend to use this term to talk about things that can be true or false, neuroscientists tend to use this term whenever they are talking about informational processing in the brain. Since informational processing need not involve attitudes directed at propositions, one can endorse this sort of cognitivism about emotions without endorsing cognitivism of the sort being discussed here. For philosophers of emotion, the cognitivism-non-

---

<sup>75</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Solomon 1976 and Nussbaum 2001 are examples of self-identified cognitivists who write in ways that make it seem as though they equate emotion with a propositional attitude, but where further investigation reveals that they do not actually hold this view. Most cognitivists also regard affective states, physiological responses, behaviors, and dispositions as constituents of emotion. However, it is the claim that a propositional attitude is a necessary constituent of emotion which separates the cognitivist from the non-cognitivist.

<sup>76</sup> Howard C. Cromwell and Jaak Panksepp, "Rethinking the cognitive revolution from a neural perspective: how overuse/misuse of the term 'cognition' and the neglect of affective controls in behavioral neuroscience could be delaying progress in understanding the BrainMind," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 35 No. 9 (2011): 2026-2035. Cromwell and Panksepp 2011 provide helpful discussion of the uses of the term 'cognitive' among neuroscientists.

cognitivism debate is about the necessity of propositional attitudes in the constitution of emotion. It is not a debate about the role of informational processing.

### **WHY A COGNITIVIST ACCOUNT OF RESENTMENT?**

If one is already a proponent of global cognitivism, it goes without saying that one would also endorse a cognitivist account of resentment. Cognitivism emerged as a response to feeling theories of emotion, where emotions were regarded as phenomenal states similar to pain, itches, and tickles. Feeling theories attempted to differentiate emotions from one another by their distinctive phenomenal feels. Feeling theories fell out of favor for a number of reasons. First, it quickly became evident that there are not enough distinctive phenomenal feels to differentiate the seemingly much larger number of emotion types that humans experience.<sup>77</sup> It is also difficult for a feeling theory to account for subtle distinctions between similar emotions, since these emotions often feel roughly the same when we experience them. Finally, feeling theories have difficulty explaining how emotions can have intentional objects. It is widely held that emotions are *about* the thing that they are directed toward, and that they represent their object in a particular way. Fear, for example, is about the dangerous object that elicits the fear response. Feelings, where itches and tickles are thought to be paradigmatic, are thought to lack this feature. The itching in my foot is not *about* my foot, for example. Itching also fails to represent my foot in any particular way; it is simply a kind of phenomenal feel for which my foot can be a locus. From these sorts of concerns, it was concluded that emotions could not be feelings, because feelings are not intentional states with representational content. Historically, the seeming

---

<sup>77</sup> Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). LeDoux 1996 and Panksepp 1998 both identify a small number of emotions with distinct bodily profiles, but this number is well below even a conservative estimate of the number of emotions we regard ourselves as capable of experiencing. The idea that there is a distinctive way that each emotion feels is historically associated with William James, who famously claimed that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes.

inability to cope with these problems was a strong contributing factor in the movement away from feeling theories, and toward cognitivist accounts of emotion.<sup>78</sup>

Cognitivist accounts of emotion have frequently taken a judgmentalist form.<sup>79</sup>

Judgmentalism is the view that emotions are necessarily constituted by characteristic beliefs or judgments, and that emotion types can be differentiated from one another by these beliefs or judgments.<sup>80</sup> A judgmentalist view of resentment, then, contends that one's emotion counts as resentment only if one has the relevant judgment characteristic of resentment. Typically, the relevant judgment is that one has been morally wronged by the object of one's resentment. However, recall that we are working with a slightly different characterization of resentment. A judgmentalist version of resentment as I have characterized it would contend that one's emotion counts as resentment only if one believes one has been treated improperly by the object of their resentment. For our purposes, it is the necessity of a distinctive constitutive judgment, rather than the content of that judgment, that is crucial to understanding what a judgmentalist theory of resentment might look like.

This is not to say that all cognitivist accounts of emotion are judgmentalist accounts, or that judgmentalism is the only option for developing a cognitivist account of resentment. For

---

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), Robert Roberts, "What is an Emotion: A Sketch," *The Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 183-209. See Kenny 1963, Marks 1982, and Roberts 1988 for discussion of the "cognitive shift" in philosophy of emotions.

<sup>79</sup> Kenny 1963, for example.

<sup>80</sup> Some judgmentalists refer to the necessary propositional attitude for emotion as a judgment, while others prefer the term 'belief.' Still others use these terms interchangeably. So far as I can tell, this is merely a matter of stylistic preference, and does not indicate a substantive difference between these views.

example, Robert Roberts contends that emotions necessarily involve a construal, a propositional attitude that falls short of a belief or judgment.<sup>81</sup> While most cognitivist accounts of resentment are judgmentalist accounts, it's worth noting that one need not defend a judgmentalist view of resentment in order to defend a cognitivist account of this emotion.

A judgmentalist account of resentment is also frequently adopted by hybrid theorists, who are non-cognitivists about some emotions, but not others.<sup>82</sup> Hybrid theorists begin with the idea that there is a class of more-or-less universal, cross-culturally observable emotional responses that form the basis of our emotional experiences. These emotions are usually referred to as basic emotions.<sup>83</sup> Anger, fear, disgust, happiness, sadness, and surprise are widely accepted as basic emotions, and there is some disagreement about whether there are any others.<sup>84</sup>

According to the hybrid theorist, basic emotions are constituted by a syndrome of behavioral,

---

<sup>81</sup> Later, I'll explain why I think we should reject the claim that Roberts' view counts as a cognitivist position. For now, however, I'll follow the literature in thinking of his view in these terms.

<sup>82</sup> Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of the Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). D'Arms and Jacobson 2003 and Prinz 2004 both defend a hybrid view of this sort.

<sup>83</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson refer to these emotions as the natural emotion kinds, in order to avoid the ongoing debate about which emotions are basic, and in what sense. I'll discuss this issue in a subsequent section.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, "Constants across cultures in the face and emotion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17 (1971): 124–129, Paul Ekman, "Basic Emotions" in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Tim Dalgleish and Mick Power, 45-60 (Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1999). Others have slightly different lists, but most everyone accepts Ekman and Friesen's original six. Ekman 1999 went on to later add amusement, contempt, contentment, embarrassment, guilt, excitement, pride in achievement, satisfaction, sensory pleasure and shame to this list.



dispositional, physiological, and affective responses, or by perceptions of these responses.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, the hybrid theorist regards the basic emotions as non-cognitive, because propositional attitudes are not a necessary constituent of these emotions.

One challenge for the hybrid theorist is to account for the existence of non-basic emotions.<sup>86</sup> This is where judgmentalism becomes appealing even for the hybrid theorist. For example, a hybrid theorist might characterize jealousy as anger combined with a judgment of infidelity.<sup>87</sup> The hybrid theorist can account for non-basic emotions, like jealousy, by allowing that a basic emotion, like anger, can be combined with a judgment to instantiate the non-basic emotion. The judgment, in this case, is necessary for the non-basic emotion, but not the basic emotion. This strategy allows the hybrid theorist to maintain their commitment to non-cognitivism about the basic emotions, while also explaining how there can be other emotions that do not fall into this class.

Hybrid theorists frequently employ this strategy to account for resentment, which is usually regarded as subject to a judgmentalist analysis.<sup>88</sup> For example, the hybrid theorist might characterize resentment as anger, a basic emotion, plus the judgment that one has been treated improperly by the object of one's resentment. By allowing that anger can be combined with one's judgment so as to constitute resentment, the hybrid theorist is able to account for

---

<sup>85</sup> The view of emotions as a syndrome of response is most closely associated with Allan Gibbard, while the perceptual theory of emotions is attributed to William James. James's perceptual approach has recently been re-introduced in an updated form by Jesse Prinz.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See Griffiths 1997 for an account of emotions that affirms the notion that the basic emotions are non-cognitive, but rejects a hybrid theory of emotion.

<sup>87</sup> This view of jealousy is offered in Prinz 2004, 99-100.

<sup>88</sup> See D'Arms and Jacobson 2003.

resentment as a distinct emotion, without undermining their commitment to non-cognitivism about the basic emotions. Thus, even among hybrid theorists, judgmentalism is an attractive account of resentment's constitution.

### **GLOBAL COGNITIVISM AND “BEASTS AND BABIES”**

Despite their initial appeal, cognitivist accounts of emotion face a serious problem-- global cognitivism simply cannot account for the full spectrum of emotional phenomena. This problem is typically raised along two different fronts. The first might be thought of as the “beasts and babies” objection to global cognitivism.<sup>89</sup> Many people believe that at least some emotions are also experienced by non-human animals and very young children, and the basis of this belief is not without substance. Non-human animals and human infants often exhibit behavioral responses that are thought to be indicative of particular emotions when observed in adult humans under similar conditions. For example, infants and non-human animals vocalize and become visibly agitated when exposed to conditions that are harmful or threatening in some way, such as restricting their movements or invading their living space.<sup>90</sup> These sorts of responses to harmful or threatening conditions are usually taken as indicative of anger in adult humans. Some non-human animals will also linger near their dead offspring or parent for extended periods of time, a behavior that is often thought to be indicative of grief when it is exhibited by adult humans.<sup>91</sup> However, if attitudes directed at propositions are a necessary

---

<sup>89</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Deigh 1994.

<sup>90</sup> See Izard 1991 and Panksepp 1998 for examples of this phenomenon in infants. See Bekoff 2000 for examples from the non-human animal kingdom.

<sup>91</sup> Marc Bekoff, “Animal Passions and Beastly Virtues: Cognitive Ethology as the Unifying Science for Understanding the Subjective, Emotional, Empathic, and Moral Lives of Animals,”

constituent of emotions, as the global cognitivist contends, then cognitivism will most likely rule out the very possibility of emotion in these cases, because this view requires capacities, or an acquaintance with certain concepts, that infants and non-human animals do not possess.<sup>92</sup> If infants and non-human animals experience at least some emotions, then global cognitivism cannot be correct. And if global cognitivism is not correct, one cannot endorse a cognitivist account of resentment on the basis of global cognitivism.

Some self-identified cognitivists have responded to the beasts and babies objection by attempting to account for infant and non-human emotion within a cognitivist framework. For example, Martha Nussbaum is a self-identified cognitivist who defines emotions as “judgments of value.”<sup>93</sup> Emotions, on her view, “always involve thought of an object combined with thought of an object’s salience or importance. Emotions require an appraisal of an object as salient for one’s own well-being.”<sup>94</sup> These appraisals, she contends, must involve a predication of salience, urgency or importance to a person or thing. Here Nussbaum’s account seems like a standard judgmentalist view, where emotion is necessarily constituted by a judgment that the object of one’s emotion is important in some way that bears on the subject’s well-being.<sup>95</sup>

---

*Human Ecology Forum* 13 No. 1 (2006): 39-59. See Bekoff 2000 and Bekoff 2006 for discussion of this behavior.

<sup>92</sup> John Deigh, “Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions,” *Ethics* (1994) 104: 824–54. Deigh 1994 similarly argues that cognitivism rules out the possibility of emotion for any being that lacks language.

<sup>93</sup> Nussbaum 2001, 19 and 23.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Further, Nussbaum here seems to suggest that emotion requires certain linguistic capacities. As Deigh 1994 points out, this version of cognitivism makes emotion impossible for infants and non-human animals.

However, Nussbaum is also cognizant of the need for a theory of emotion that leaves room for the phenomenon of infant and non-human animal emotions. She attempts to accommodate this by allowing that in non-human animals, young children, and occasionally among normal adult humans, the appraisals required for emotion involve only a “combination” between a person or thing and one of these “ideas.”<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum tells us little about what this “combination” between person or thing and “idea” involves. However, even if this point were made clear, Nussbaum’s view would still fail to count as a cognitivist response to the beasts and babies objection. Despite self-identifying as a cognitivist, and using overtly cognitivist language to describe her theory of emotion, Nussbaum acknowledges that her account is not a cognitivist view in the sense being discussed here. “By ‘cognitive,’” says Nussbaum, “I mean nothing more than ‘concerned with receiving and processing information.’”<sup>97</sup> Nussbaum’s view, as she herself describes it, is meant to be a cognitivist account only in the sense employed by psychologists and neuroscientists. She is not committed to the claim that emotions are necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude. Even if her account of the emotions of infants and non-human animals were clarified, this would not amount to a cognitivist response to the beasts and babies objection.

Nussbaum’s analysis is indicative of the serious problem that the beasts and babies objection represents for cognitivist theories of emotion. Cognitivists must allow for emotions in infants and non-human animals. However, in attempting to do so, self-identified cognitivists

---

<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum 2001, 127-128. These terms are placed in scare quotes here, because Nussbaum offers no explanation of what she means by them. By ‘normal adult human,’ I mean to refer to an adult human with the range of capacities that are statistically typical of the majority of adult human beings. This should not be taken as an evaluative claim about persons who lack certain of these capacities.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 23.

often end up undermining the very features of their view that qualify it as a cognitivist account.<sup>98</sup>

The beasts and babies objection can be answered, it seems, only at the cost of what's distinctive about cognitivist theories of emotion.

## GLOBAL COGNITIVISM AND RECALCITRANT EMOTIONS

Cognitivists have difficulty accounting for the emotions of human infants and non-human animals, which gives us good reason to reject global cognitivism. However, global cognitivism also struggles to account for the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion. Sometimes, an emotion seems to occur even when the subject either fails to have the associated propositional attitude for that emotion, or where the subject explicitly rejects the propositional attitude that the global cognitivist takes to be required for its occurrence.<sup>99</sup> For example, if one experiences fear when one gets on an airplane, despite not having the belief that flying is dangerous, one's fear is recalcitrant. If recalcitrant emotion is possible, and it seems that it is, then global cognitivism cannot be correct, because recalcitrant emotion is entirely ruled out by global cognitivism. And again, if global cognitivism is not correct, one cannot endorse a cognitivist account of resentment on the basis of global cognitivism.

---

<sup>98</sup> Solomon 2003 is another example of a self-identified cognitivist whose account of emotion allows for emotions in infants and non-human animals, but at the cost of what's distinctive about cognitivism.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). D'Arms and Jacobson 2003 characterize recalcitrant emotion as emotion that is contrary to one's considered judgment about the object of one's emotional response. However, as Stocker 1992 points out, emotion that occurs in the absence of the propositional attitude that the cognitivist takes to be required for the emotion is also a problem for cognitivist accounts of emotion. As these phenomena are closely related and equally problematic for the cognitivist, in what follows I will use the term 'recalcitrant emotion' to refer to both kinds of phenomena.

Some global cognitivists have responded to this problem by abandoning judgmentalism, which identifies belief or judgment as the requisite propositional attitude for emotion, in favor of an alternative view sometimes referred to as quasi-judgmentalism.<sup>100</sup> According to quasi-judgmentalism, emotion involves a propositional attitude that is similar to a belief or judgment, but where the subject does not affirm or endorse the truth of the proposition in question. For example, a quasi-judgmentalist analysis of fear might say that fear requires one “see” the object of their fear as dangerous, but not the belief that the object is dangerous.<sup>101</sup> The propositional attitude involved here is sometimes referred to as a construal, where one perceives the object of emotion in terms of certain concepts, but without affirming a belief or judgment about the object.<sup>102</sup>

Quasi-judgmentalism is thought to account for the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion in the following way. According to the quasi-judgmentalist, one’s fear of flying is partially constituted by a construal of flying as dangerous. However, one can construe flying as dangerous without believing that flying is dangerous (or despite believing that flying is *not* dangerous). In construing flying as dangerous, the subject perceives flying as a dangerous activity, without affirming the proposition “that flying is dangerous.” Thus, it’s thought, quasi-

---

<sup>100</sup> This term is taken from D’Arms and Jacobson 2003. They identify Robert Roberts, Patricia Greenspan, and Robert Solomon as quasi-judgmentalists.

<sup>101</sup> Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reason: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988). Roberts 1988 calls this “seeing as” a construal, while Greenspan 1988 refers to it as an “evaluative thought.” Solomon 2003 offers an account of emotion that seems to count as quasi-judgmentalist, though he insists on describing emotions as judgments.

<sup>102</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions in the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Roberts also discusses this view in detail in Roberts 1988.

judgmentalism can account for recalcitrant emotion without undermining the commitments of cognitivism.

However, quasi-judgmentalism faces a number of serious problems. First, there's a noticeable lack of evidence that construals are a necessary constituent of emotions, beyond the emotional experience itself. As noted by Justin D'Arms and Dan Jacobson, if being afraid of something is sufficient for construing it as dangerous, the claim that fear necessarily involves a construal of danger is a trivial claim.<sup>103</sup> Construing X as  $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is the concept in terms of which the subject construes X, must amount to more than having the emotional response that is characteristic for  $\phi$  objects. Even if we allow that construals are a distinct type of propositional attitude, quasi-judgmentalists must say more about what it means to construe some object in terms of a particular concept.

More importantly, if we decline to grant the assumption that construals are propositional attitudes, and instead simply ask what it means to construe some object X in terms of a concept  $\phi$ , there's some reason to think that quasi-judgmentalism fails to account for recalcitrant emotion in terms that are congenial to cognitivism. For example, if construing some X as dangerous amounts to nothing more than being afraid of X, and being afraid of X is constituted by a distinctive syndrome of affect, behaviors, dispositions, and physiological responses to X, then fear is not necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude, even if it is necessarily constituted by a construal. Not only must the quasi-judgmentalist explain what it means to construe some X in terms of  $\phi$ , they must also rule out the possibility that construals are themselves constituted by non-cognitive components.

---

<sup>103</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, 131.

Further, while construals are usually thought to be propositional attitudes, it's debatable whether proponents of quasi-judgmentalism intend this reading of their view. For example, Robert Roberts describes a construal not as a propositional attitude, but rather as a "conceptual perception," having the "appearance of truth" without being truth-asserting.<sup>104</sup> Roberts offers our perception of Wittgenstein's famous duck-rabbit image as a clarifying example. When we perceive the duck-rabbit, says Roberts, we either perceive it as a duck, or we perceive it as a rabbit, and this perception seems, at the time, to be an accurate representation of the image. Something similar occurs, he claims, for emotion. For example, according to Roberts, a construal of the object of one's fear as dangerous is a necessary constituent of fear. To construe a situation as dangerous, says Roberts, is to perceive it as dangerous, where this perception seems like an accurate representation of its object, but without the subject's assent that the object is, in fact, dangerous. Much like the duck-rabbit is perceived as a duck, where this perception has the appearance, to the perceiving subject, of representational accuracy, the object of one's fear is perceived as dangerous, where this perception similarly has the appearance of representational accuracy.

Roberts's analysis indicates a problem with thinking of quasi-judgmentalism as a cognitivist theory of emotion. If construals are conceptual perceptions, as Roberts claims, then they are, seemingly by definition, not propositional attitudes.<sup>105</sup> Global cognitivism is committed to the view that emotions are necessarily constituted by propositional attitudes. Thus, even if quasi-judgmentalism is the correct theory of emotion, explaining recalcitrant emotion in

---

<sup>104</sup> Roberts 1988, 191 and 188 footnote 12, Roberts 2013, 38-42.

<sup>105</sup> This will, of course, depend on one's understanding of a propositional attitude. However, if we follow the earlier specification of propositional attitudes as attitudinal states that take a proposition as its object, where propositions are the referents of that-clauses which can be true or false, then a conceptual perception would not count as a propositional attitude.



quasi-judgmentalist terms would not vindicate global cognitivism unless construals are propositional attitudes. And from what Roberts says about construals, it's not clear that he would endorse this claim.

One might respond here that the problem is not with quasi-judgmentalism per se, but rather Roberts's formulation of construals as conceptual perceptions. For example, Patricia Greenspan defends an account of emotion that is thought to be both quasi-judgmentalist and cognitivist, but she rejects Roberts's version of quasi-judgmentalism, on the grounds that "a construal is not necessarily either propositional or evaluative."<sup>106</sup> Instead, Greenspan describes emotion as involving both "evaluative thought content and positive or negative affect."<sup>107</sup> However, Greenspan is explicit that the evaluative thought need not take the form of a propositional attitude, and it need not be present as a distinct occurrence in the mind of the subject for emotion to occur.<sup>108</sup> Rather, the evaluative thought involved with emotion must be *specifiable* in propositional terms. For Greenspan, emotion is an affective response with evaluative content that is specifiable propositionally, but that need not take the form of a propositional attitude. So while Greenspan often utilizes the terminology of cognitivism, she

---

<sup>106</sup> Patricia Greenspan, "Emotions, Rationality, and Mind/Body" in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 113-125 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 122 footnote 22. D'Arms and Jacobson 2003 identify Greenspan as a quasi-judgmentalist who is also a cognitivist. Here, Greenspan is following convention in thinking of Roberts as defending the view that construals are propositional attitudes, an interpretation that, as I've noted, I think Roberts himself might reject.

<sup>107</sup> Greenspan 2003, 121-2.

<sup>108</sup> Greenspan speaks openly about "dropping propositional attitudes talk," in order to avoid certain overtones that worry people, and in Greenspan 2003, 122 footnote 22, she is explicit that she does not regard emotions as necessarily constituted by propositional attitudes. One gets the impression that Greenspan is less concerned with the constitution of emotion, and more concerned with the sense in which emotion involves evaluative thinking.

acknowledges that emotion is not necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude. In general, even if quasi-judgmentalism offers a plausible explanation of the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion, it's hard to see how any contemporary version of quasi-judgmentalism counts as a cognitivist theory of emotion.<sup>109</sup>

Contemporary quasi-judgmentalists do a poor job of accounting for recalcitrant emotion in a way that is congenial to a cognitivist theory of emotion. But perhaps this phenomenon can be accounted for in some other way. For example, some philosophers have identified a propositional attitude whose object has the appearance of truth, but which the subject neither affirms nor rejects. This propositional attitude is referred to as a *seeming*.<sup>110</sup> To see what is meant here by 'seeming,' consider the optical illusion that occurs when one positions a stick vertically into a pool of water, so that one end of the stick is partially submerged. The stick seems bent. This is an example of a seeming—the stick seems bent, though we don't believe that the stick is bent. Rather, "that the stick is bent" seems true to us.

Seemings are precisely the sort of propositional attitude that can help the cognitivist explain the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion. Seemings are characterized as propositional attitudes, but they fall short of a belief, in that the attitude one takes toward a proposition is not one of affirming or endorsing the proposition as true. Seemings allow for an easy explanation of the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion. For example, the cognitivist can claim that recalcitrant

---

<sup>109</sup> Solomon 2003 offers yet another quasi-judgmentalist theory of emotion that fails to count as a cognitivist view, despite Solomon's characterization of emotions as "judgments."

<sup>110</sup> George Bealer, "Intuition and the autonomy of philosophy" in *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, edited by Michael DePaul and William Ramsey, 201-239 (Lanhan, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998), William Tolhurst, "Seemings," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): 293-302, Andrew Cullison, "What Are Seemings?" *Ratio* 23 (2010): 260-274.

fear of flying occurs when flying seems dangerous to the subject, but the subject does not believe that flying is dangerous. Recalcitrant emotion, on this account, occurs when  $X$ , the object of one's emotion, seems to have some evaluative property  $\phi$ , but where one does not believe that  $X$  is  $\phi$ . On this view, it is a seeming, rather than a belief or judgment, which is a necessary constituent of emotion. And because seemings are thought to be propositional attitudes, this is an explanation of recalcitrant emotion that a cognitivist can accept, without undermining their cognitivist commitments.

While an appeal to seemings appears more promising as an explanation of recalcitrant emotion that is congenial to cognitivism, this strategy also raises a number of concerns. First, there is still considerable debate about how best to characterize seemings. Seemings have been variously analyzed in terms of beliefs, partial beliefs, and attractions or inclinations to believe, each of which faces problems as a general characterization of seemings.<sup>111</sup> However, analyzing seemings in these sorts of terms also fails to resolve the problem of recalcitrant emotion, since one can simply restate the concern regarding recalcitrant emotion in these same terms. For example, suppose we adopt a view that characterizes seemings in terms of an inclination to believe.<sup>112</sup> On this view, it seems to  $S$  that  $P$  if, and only if,  $S$  is inclined to believe that  $P$ .<sup>113</sup> If we adopt this characterization of seemings, then an explanation of recalcitrant emotion given in terms of seemings would state that recalcitrant emotion occurs when one is inclined to believe that  $X$ , the object of one's emotion, has some evaluative property  $\phi$ , but where one does not believe that  $X$  is  $\phi$ . But one can experience recalcitrant emotion without the inclination to

---

<sup>111</sup> See Cullison 2010 for details.

<sup>112</sup> Cullison 2010 attributes this view of seemings to Ernest Sosa.

<sup>113</sup> Cullison 2010, paraphrasing what he takes to be Sosa's view.

believe that  $X$  is  $\phi$  either. Consider the example of recalcitrant fear of flying. In some cases, one's recalcitrant fear of flying may occur not only in the absence of a belief that flying is dangerous, but also in spite of the belief that flying is not dangerous. In this case, it's not just that one does not have the belief that is thought to be necessary for fear. One also endorses a contradictory belief.<sup>114</sup> In this sort of case, it's hard to see how one's recalcitrant fear of flying could be due to an inclination to believe that flying is dangerous, since this would amount to an inclination to affirm what one has already rejected.<sup>115</sup> In general, it's not clear that appealing to seemings, when seemings are characterized in these sorts of terms, allows the cognitivist to explain the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion, since one can also experience an emotion in the absence of the seeming thought to be required for that emotion.

Some philosophers have responded to concerns about characterizing seemings in terms of beliefs, partial beliefs, or inclinations to believe by adopting the view that seemings are *sui generis* propositional attitudes that are not reducible to any of these notions.<sup>116</sup> This view of seemings might avoid our concern that recalcitrant emotion can occur in the absence of seemings, since it's now more difficult to claim that an emotion can plausibly occur in the absence of the requisite seeming. However, this strategy also raises a number of familiar concerns. First, as we saw in the earlier case of construals, we have very little evidence that

---

<sup>114</sup> Michael S. Brady, "The irrationality of recalcitrant emotion," *Philosophical Studies* 145 (2009): 413-430. Brady 2009 argues that this is precisely the sense in which recalcitrant emotion is irrational.

<sup>115</sup> One might respond by claiming that the mere fact of one's fear of flying is evidence that one is inclined or disposed to believe that flying is dangerous. However, the behavioral, affective, and physiological markers for an emotion would count as evidence that a necessary propositional attitude, in this case a seeming, is occurring only if one had already established that a propositional attitude is a necessary constituent of that emotion.

<sup>116</sup> Bealer 1998, Cullison 2010.

seemings play any role in emotion beyond the emotional experience itself. For example, if it is claimed that fear of some object X is necessarily constituted by a *sui generis* propositional attitude whereby it seems that X is dangerous, the only evidence we have that this propositional attitude is a constituent of fear is the subject's fear response itself. As we saw earlier for construals, even if we allow that seemings are a distinct type of *sui generis* propositional attitude, we have little evidence that seemings are necessary constituents of emotion.<sup>117</sup>

Further, as we also saw in the case of construals, if we decline to grant the assumption that seemings are *sui generis* propositional attitudes and instead simply ask what is occurring when things seem to be a particular way, there's some reason to think that this phenomenon can be adequately explained in non-cognitivist terms. Consider the following examples. We sometimes jump out of our seats while viewing a horror film, or hesitate before walking across a transparent footbridge, despite acknowledging that neither set of circumstances is dangerous.<sup>118</sup> In these cases, we respond as though the circumstances are dangerous, even though we do not believe that they are dangerous. Similarly, when asked to drink liquid from a brand-new bedpan or eat a piece of feces-shaped chocolate, experimental research subjects have consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to perform these actions, despite an affirmed understanding that the bedpan is sterile and the feces-shaped object is made of delicious chocolate.<sup>119</sup> The subjects in these experiments respond as though the bedpan and the feces-shaped chocolate are

---

<sup>117</sup> It's worth noting here that even if some people who experience recalcitrant emotion do have something akin to a seeming as a constituent of their particular emotional experience, this wouldn't establish that seemings are a necessary constituent of emotion.

<sup>118</sup> Tamar Szabó Gendler, "Alief and belief," *The Journal of philosophy* (2008): 634-663.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Rozin, Linda Millman, and Carol Nemeroff, "Operation of the Laws of Systematic Magic in Disgust and Other Domains," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1, No. 4 (1986): 703-12.

contaminated, even though they are explicit that they do not believe either to be contaminated. In these cases, the behavioral responses are plausibly described as responses to the way things seem, where the behavior is at odds with the subject's beliefs about the eliciting circumstances for that behavior. Recalcitrant emotions are instances of the same sort of phenomenon. Recalcitrant emotion is a response to eliciting circumstances that are at odds with one's beliefs about those circumstances. If these sorts of responses can be explained in non-cognitivist terms, a similar sort of explanation might plausibly be extended to recalcitrant emotion.

Tamar Gendler has attempted to explain these sorts of responses by appealing to the notion of an alief.<sup>120</sup> For example, when we experience fear while walking across a transparent footbridge, we may believe that the footbridge is perfectly safe, but our alief has the content “really high up, long way down, not a safe place to be, get off!”<sup>121</sup> Our fear is explained, says Gendler, by our having this alief. Gendler characterizes alief in the following way:

A paradigmatic alief is a mental state with associatively linked content that is representational, affective and behavioral, and that is activated—consciously or nonconsciously—by features of the subject's internal or ambient environment. Aliefs may be either occurrent or dispositional.<sup>122</sup>

Paradigmatic aliefs, continues Gendler, have three components—a representation, an affective response, and the readying of some motor routine.<sup>123</sup> Further, while aliefs have representational content, says Gendler, this content may be propositional or nonpropositional, conceptual or

---

<sup>120</sup> Tamar Szabó Gendler, "Alief in action (and reaction)," *Mind & Language* 23, no. 5 (2008a): 552-585. See Gendler 2008 as well.

<sup>121</sup> Gendler 2008, 635.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 642.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 643.

nonconceptual.<sup>124</sup> While her account of alief is admittedly provisional, she contends that we need an account of something like alief to account for these sorts of cases where belief and behavior are strongly at odds, and to enhance our understanding of mental states that are subject to conscious regulation and deliberate control.<sup>125</sup>

Gendler's notion of alief suggests a plausible alternative explanation of recalcitrant emotion. Recalcitrant fear of flying, for example, might be explained as resulting from an alief with the content "really high up, not safe, get off!," where this alief includes the affective response and action tendencies that are typically associated with fear. On this view, one associates flying with danger and responds accordingly, despite the fact that one either lacks the belief that flying is dangerous, or one believes that flying is not dangerous. And while the representational component of alief may sometimes be propositional, Gendler contends that this is not always the case. Thus, accounting for recalcitrant emotion in terms of alief is not an explanation that is supportive of cognitivism, since the cognitivist contends that all emotions are necessarily constituted by a propositional attitude.

The point here is not to argue that recalcitrant emotion is the result of a disparity between belief and alief, but rather to point out that one need not appeal to a *sui generis* propositional attitude to explain the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion. If recalcitrant emotion is an instance of the more general phenomenon of responses that are discordant with one's beliefs about the circumstances that elicit them, and this phenomenon is best explained by something akin to the notion of alief, as Gendler contends, then we can plausibly explain recalcitrant emotion along similar lines. And because the representational component of alief need not be propositional,

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Gendler 2008a, 553.

appealing to the notion of alief to explain recalcitrant emotion does not vindicate a cognitivist theory of emotion.

While my analysis thus far does not entail that cognitivism cannot account for recalcitrant emotion, it does indicate the serious challenges that the cognitivist faces in doing so. Even if some version of quasi-judgmentalism turns out to be the correct account of this phenomenon, we saw that contemporary versions of quasi-judgmentalism fail to qualify as cognitivist theories of emotion. And while appealing to the notion of seemings might prove more fruitful as a genuinely cognitivist explanation of recalcitrant emotion, only the view that seemings are *sui generis* propositional attitudes avoids the problem raised by this objection. However, if recalcitrant emotion can be adequately explained in terms of something like Gendler's notion of aliefs, there is little reason to conclude that recalcitrant emotion is the result of a *sui generis* propositional attitude.

A theory of emotion must be able to both respond to the beasts and babies objection and explain the phenomenon of recalcitrant emotion. It's questionable whether global cognitivism can do either, and doubtful that it can do both. Thus, we have reason to reject global cognitivism as a theory of emotion. And if we reject global cognitivism, we cannot endorse a cognitivist account of resentment on the basis of our commitment to global cognitivism.

### **HYBRID THEORIES AND COGNITIVISM ABOUT RESENTMENT**

We've seen why a commitment to global cognitivism is not a good reason to endorse a cognitivist account of resentment. The hybrid theorist's reasons for endorsing this account of resentment, however, are less obvious. For the hybrid theorist, there is a core class of emotions that are subject to a non-cognitive analysis, and emotions that fall outside this core are usually characterized in judgmentalist terms. In what follows, I'll identify various reasons that hybrid



theorists might give for regarding resentment as outside of this core class, and explain why none of these reasons establish that resentment ought to be characterized in judgmentalist terms.

One argument for a judgmentalist analysis of resentment comes from two prominent hybrid theorists, Justin D'Arms and Dan Jacobson. According to D'Arms and Jacobson, resentment is not subject to the phenomenon of stable recalcitrance, and is therefore better characterized in judgmentalist terms. To understand this argument, however, we need to first say a bit more about D'Arms and Jacobson's hybrid theory of emotions.

D'Arms and Jacobson, like all hybrid theorists, make a distinction between emotion types that have necessary cognitive content, and emotion types that do not.<sup>126</sup> Natural emotion kinds, on their view, are emotions that are not constituted by any necessary propositional attitude. Cognitive sharpenings are subclasses of the natural emotion kinds, and are characterized by a common cognitive component, such as a unifying belief, judgment, or thought.<sup>127</sup> For example, if awe is a type of joy that involves the belief that one is in the presence of something especially great, then joy is a natural emotion kind and awe is a cognitive sharpening. All instances of awe, on this view, will have this constitutive belief in common.

One might wonder what the connection is between natural emotion kinds and a non-cognitivist view of these emotions. According to D'Arms and Jacobson, the natural emotion kinds are subject to the phenomenon of stable recalcitrance, and stable recalcitrance can only be explained by a non-cognitive account of the natural emotion kinds. Stable recalcitrant emotion is recalcitrant emotion that persists over time, where the emotion is occurring not merely in the

---

<sup>126</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, and Prinz 2004 both defend this distinction in some form, though Prinz describes the role of judgments in terms of modifying the basic emotions, rather than being a constituent of the emotion itself.

<sup>127</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, 137.

absence of the judgment necessary for that emotion to occur, as is often the case with recalcitrant emotion more generally, but rather in persistent conflict with one's settled judgments about its object. Fear of flying is, again, a helpful example. Many people who are afraid of flying retain this response over much of their lives, even where the truth of their judgment that flying is not dangerous is fully vindicated by thorough examination of relevant evidence, and subsequently endorsed by the individual. Such persons, for example, do not purchase exorbitant amounts of insurance to cover them in the event of a plane crash, nor do they discourage their loved ones from flying. And yet, no amount of evidence can shake them from their fear of flying. When one's fear of flying is in persistent conflict with one's settled judgment that flying is not dangerous, one's fear of flying is stably recalcitrant.

D'Arms and Jacobson make two important claims about stable recalcitrance. First, they claim that only the natural emotion kinds are subject to stable recalcitrance. While stable recalcitrant fear is a readily observable phenomenon, they insist that we rarely see an instance of stable recalcitrance for cognitive sharpenings like awe or homesickness. Next, they claim that stable recalcitrance is best explained by a non-cognitive theory of emotion. Since only the natural emotion kinds are subject to stable recalcitrance, and only a non-cognitive account can explain stable recalcitrance, only the natural emotion kinds are subject to a non-cognitive theory of the emotions, or so their argument goes.

D'Arms and Jacobson explain stable recalcitrant emotion in the following way. On their view, the natural emotion kinds are syndromes of behavior, affect, motivation, dispositions, and physiological changes, which prepare the organism for responding to situations that are common to human lives, independently of one's particular cultural and social milieu. The neural mechanisms which govern these syndromes of response, they claim, are non-linguistic, and they

can initiate an emotional response without the involvement of areas of the brain devoted to the formation of judgments and beliefs.<sup>128</sup> Thus, when one sees the snake in the path, or even something which is mistaken to be a snake, the syndrome of response known as fear can be initiated, without the concept of danger being directed at the object that elicited the response. This is a non-cognitive theory of emotion, because the emotion is not constituted by any necessary propositional attitude.

This account of the natural emotions kinds, they continue, offers a ready explanation of the phenomenon of stable recalcitrance. Human beings, they claim, are equipped with at least two distinct evaluative systems, one emotional and the other linguistic.<sup>129</sup> An evaluative system is an information processing system that takes data from an organism's environment as its input, analyzes it, and initiates a response. While our linguistic evaluative system involves the deployment of our conceptual capacities, our emotional evaluative system, they contend, does not. These are discreet modes of evaluation, they continue, so it's possible for these systems to systematically diverge with regard to their evaluative outputs. For one's linguistic evaluative system, this output takes the form of a belief, judgment, or other propositional attitude. For one's emotional evaluative system, this output takes the form of physiological and bodily changes, affect, and behavioral reactions. When someone is subject to stable recalcitrant emotion, such as stably recalcitrant fear of flying, D'Arms and Jacobson claim that this can be explained as an instance of these two evaluative systems diverging with regard to their assessment of a situation. While one's linguistic evaluative system gives rise to the judgment that flying is not dangerous, and thus not something to be afraid of, one's emotional system

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

assesses the situation differently and initiates the fear response. This explains why stable recalcitrant fear often persists even in the face of overwhelming acceptance of evidence that the object of one's fear is not really dangerous.<sup>130</sup>

The distinction between natural emotion kinds and cognitive sharpenings, and their relationship to the phenomenon of stable recalcitrant emotion helps explain why D'Arms and Jacobson defend a cognitivist account of resentment. On their view, stable recalcitrant emotion is a phenomenon that is unique to the natural emotion kinds. Thus, one way to determine whether an emotion type is a natural emotion kind is to establish whether it is subject to stable recalcitrance. D'Arms and Jacobson claim that because resentment cannot be subject to stable recalcitrance, it is not a natural emotion kind, and therefore best explained as a cognitive sharpening.

A crucial premise of D'Arms and Jacobson's argument is the claim that resentment cannot be subject to stable recalcitrance. They support this claim with an example of someone who, after being denied tenure, responds with strong feelings of resentment toward the tenure committee.<sup>131</sup> This person believes that they deserve tenure, and thus take themselves to have been wronged by the committee members. Over time, however, this person comes to see that the committee's decision was fair, and that they have not really suffered any moral injury at the committee's hands. As this person increasingly comes to judge the committee's decision as a fair one, claim D'Arms and Jacobson, it becomes more difficult to understand this person's lingering emotion as resentment, rather than anger. This difficulty, they claim, suggests that

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

resentment is constituted by a belief or judgment that one has suffered a moral injury, and is therefore best understood as a cognitive sharpening.

There are several reasons to reject D'Arms and Jacobson's analysis of the tenure denial case. First, their analysis of this case clearly begs the question, since they are arguing for a cognitivist analysis of resentment by asserting that it's simply implausible to interpret the tenure-denial case any other way. In addition, D'Arms and Jacobson are here relying on an inference from what's necessary to characterize one's emotional experience to the constitutive conditions of the emotion. Elsewhere, they explicitly reject the legitimacy of this inference.<sup>132</sup> To see why, consider the example of fear, which D'Arms and Jacobson identify as a natural emotion kind. Even if the best way to characterize the appraisal required for fear is in terms of danger, they contend, it doesn't follow that one must evaluate the object of one's fear in terms of this concept in order to have the fear response.<sup>133</sup> Characterization is a matter of describing, but it doesn't follow that the concepts one uses to characterize therefore must play a part in an emotion's constitution. According to D'Arms and Jacobson, natural emotion kinds are the product of the emotional evaluative system, a non-linguistic evaluative system that does not involve the deployment of our conceptual capacities. Thus, their view does not allow for inferences about an emotion's constitution based on what's required to best characterize the appraisal that is required for that emotion, because in some cases, the requisite appraisal for an emotion does not involve the concepts that are required to characterize it.<sup>134</sup> And if that's the case, it wouldn't follow that

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> One might respond that this inference is ruled out only for the natural emotion kinds, and is therefore legitimate in the case of resentment. However, this would again beg the question,

resentment requires that we evaluate the object of our resentment in terms of a wrong done to oneself, even if we accept their claim that the best way to characterize the appraisal required for resentment is in terms of this concept. By their own lights, we can accept most of D'Arms and Jacobson's discussion of the tenure denial case, without thinking that it implies anything about resentment's constitution.

There is also a significant problem with using the phenomenon of stable recalcitrance as a marker of the natural emotion kinds. While D'Arms and Jacobson limit their discussion of stable recalcitrant emotion to fear, there is experimental evidence that it also occurs for other emotions, like disgust.<sup>135</sup> However, stable recalcitrance is not readily observed across the natural emotion kinds. In some cases, the phenomenon sounds plausible, and may even seem familiar, as with emotions like shame or guilt. But other natural emotion kinds are less plausible candidates for the phenomenon of stable recalcitrance. Stable recalcitrant pride, for example, would seemingly involve prideful feelings that persist even where one does not believe that they have anything of which to be proud. Stable recalcitrant sorrow would involve persistent feelings of sorrow despite not believing that one has suffered a loss. So while some natural emotion kinds, like fear, perhaps are subject to stable recalcitrance, others are not obviously so, and we frequently lack both intuitions and experimental evidence one way or the other.

In general, we have little reason to think that stable recalcitrance is a reliable marker of the natural emotion kinds. And if stable recalcitrance is not a reliable marker of the natural

---

since the claim that resentment is a cognitive sharpening is precisely what D'Arms and Jacobson are attempting to establish via this example.

<sup>135</sup> See Gendler 2008, for example.

emotion kinds, then the fact that resentment is not subject to stable recalcitrance, as D'Arms and Jacobson contend, does not tell in favor of (or against) a cognitivist account of resentment.

Stable recalcitrance is not a reliable indicator of whether an emotion ought to be accounted for in cognitive or non-cognitive terms. However, some hybrid theorists rely on a seemingly much simpler criterion for determining whether an emotion is subject to a cognitive or non-cognitive analysis. Hybrid theorists often rely on the distinction between basic and non-basic emotions as a heuristic for determining whether an emotion is cognitive or non-cognitive. On this view, the basic emotions are non-cognitive emotions, while the non-basic emotions are cognitive.<sup>136</sup>

However, there are lots of things that people mean when they describe an emotion as basic, and not all of them support the claim that basic emotions are non-cognitive. For example, sometimes this term is used to refer to emotions that are cross-culturally observable. There is a large body of empirical data from experiments where individuals from one cultural environment are shown photos of individuals from a vastly different cultural environment, and asked to identify the emotion being experienced by the individual in the photo. It has been discovered, and repeatedly confirmed, that for a limited set of emotions, there is a unique facial expression that allows for highly accurate cross-cultural identification of emotions. These cross-culturally identifiable emotions are sometimes referred to as the basic emotions.

This account of the basic emotions does not support the claim that the basic emotions are non-cognitive. Cross-cultural observability does suggest that an emotional response emerged relatively early in human history, and the existence of distinct facial expressions for certain

---

<sup>136</sup> Prinz 2004 defends this sort of framework, as does Griffiths 1997. D'Arms and Jacobson 2003 clearly have something like this in mind, despite eschewing the basic-non-basic terminology.

emotions tells us that these emotions involve physiological and bodily responses, precisely the sorts of things that non-cognitivists take to be constitutive of emotion.<sup>137</sup> However, the fact of cross-cultural observability does not tell us whether these emotions are necessarily constituted by propositional attitudes. For all we know, cross-culturally observable emotions uniformly involve judgments or beliefs regarding circumstances that obtain across the spectrum of human cultures. Cross-cultural observability tells us very little about the necessary constituents of emotion, so we can't infer non-cognitivism about the basic emotions from the mere fact of cross-culturally observability.

Basic emotions are also sometimes characterized as the emotions that are prototypical of a class of emotion types.<sup>138</sup> Grief, for example, is sometimes thought to be prototypical of the class of emotions that includes homesickness, woe, heartache, and melancholy. The thought here is that for this grouping of emotion types, there is a set of features that they have in common, and grief exemplifies these shared features. Prototypical emotions, then, are emotions that exemplify the shared aspects of other emotions within a class of emotion types. Although some theorists prefer to avoid it, we might think of prototypical emotions as the “building blocks” for other emotions. Grief, for example, is a building block for homesickness, woe, heartache, and melancholy. Each of these emotions will involve the constitutive components of grief, plus other components which render each a distinct emotion type. Each of these emotions

---

<sup>137</sup> Paul Ekman, “All Emotions are Basic” in *The Nature of Emotions: Fundamental Questions*, edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson, 15-19 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>138</sup> James R. Averill, “In the Eye of the Beholder” in *The Nature of Emotions: Fundamental Questions*, edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson, 7-14 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 8.



has the grief building block, if you will, in common, which is what makes grief prototypical of this class of emotions.

We cannot infer a non-cognitive view of the basic emotions from this notion of basic emotions either. As we saw in the case of the cross-culturally observable emotions, that an emotion is prototypical of a class of emotion types tells us very little about the constitution of that emotion. Instead, that an emotion is prototypical tells us how it is related to other emotions. The claim that some emotions are basic in the sense of being prototypical is consistent, for example, with a global cognitivist theory of emotion. Thus, we cannot infer non-cognitivism about an emotion from that emotion's being prototypical.

Elsewhere, the basic emotions have been equated to affective responses, core feeling states that arise from distinct neurobiological systems that are thought to be found in all mammalian brains.<sup>139</sup> This notion of basic emotions implies that the number of basic emotions is quite small, as there is a very limited set of emotions that have this feature. On this view, basic emotions are emotions that are shared by both humans and some non-human animals.

This notion of the basic emotions does support the claim that basic emotions are non-cognitive emotions. As we've noted, cognitivist theories of emotion struggle to account for emotions in infants and non-human animals. Thus, any view that characterizes the basic emotions in terms that allow for their occurrence in non-human animals will imply a non-cognitive account of these emotions. Further, the distinct neurobiological systems that have been implicated in various affective responses do not appear to include areas of the brain thought to be devoted to the formation of beliefs or judgments.<sup>140</sup> If we characterize the basic emotions as the

---

<sup>139</sup> Panksepp 1998, Griffiths 1997.

<sup>140</sup> Panksepp 1998.

core affective responses for which there are distinct neurobiological systems, this does support the claim that the basic emotions are non-cognitive emotions, as the hybrid theorist contends.

However, this result would not support the hybrid theorist's tendency to regard only the basic emotions as non-cognitive emotions, and all other emotions as cognitive emotions. For all we know, emotions that are basic in this sense might be just a few of a much larger set of non-cognitive emotions. From this account of the basic emotions, it doesn't follow that only the basic emotions are non-cognitive. Further, most hybrid theorists regard the basic emotions as far more numerous than the number of affective responses thus far identified by affective neuroscientists. So while the hybrid theorist might accept that these affective responses are among the basic emotions, their own analyses indicate that they don't equate the basic emotions with these core affective responses.

Finally, the basic emotions are sometimes characterized as adaptations that serve fundamental evolutionary functions.<sup>141</sup> Emotions that are basic in this sense are referred to as the biologically basic emotions. For example, disgust is a biologically basic emotion because it is responsive to the presence of contaminants within an organism's environment, which is directly relevant to organism survival. The biologically basic emotions are described as adaptations that help humans to deal with what have variously been described as "fundamental life tasks," or "recurrent adaptive situations." The biologically basic emotions are each responsive to some factor in the life of the organism that contributes, whether positively or negatively, to the organism's survival and reproduction.

Non-cognitivism is a highly plausible account of the biologically basic emotions. First, the biologically basic emotions are emotional responses that are clearly available to infants and

---

<sup>141</sup> Ekman 1994, 15.

non-human animals, along with our pre-linguistic human ancestors. There are significant questions about the limited conceptual capacities of all three of these groups. So the first reason to opt for a non-cognitive account of the biologically basic emotions is that this increases the likelihood that infants, non-human animals, and our evolutionary ancestors have or had the requisite capacities for experiencing them.

In addition, while informational processing in the brain tends to be rather quick, generally speaking, the informational processing associated with affect, physiological response, and the other constituents of emotion as identified by the non-cognitivist tends to be measurably faster than the information processing required for judgment or belief formation.<sup>142</sup> Since biologically basic emotions are responses to circumstances that are salient for organism survival and reproduction, it would be advantageous for these responses to be initiated as quickly as possible, and to therefore not require the comparatively slow information processing required for the formation of judgments or beliefs.

Finally, for many of the biologically basic emotions, a propositional attitude seems unnecessary for having the emotion. For example, if fear is constituted by a syndrome of distinct behaviors, dispositions, and affective and physiological responses, there is no apparent reason to claim that this syndrome of response would not count as fear unless one also believed that the object of their fear was dangerous. For the purpose of explaining the phenomena, a cognitivist account of the biologically basic emotions is entirely superfluous.

While the notion of basic emotions can be understood in a number of different ways, the notion of biologically basic emotions best fits the hybrid theorist's heuristic usage of the basic-non-basic distinction. Further, though the connection between being biologically basic and a

---

<sup>142</sup> Kahnman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2011. See D'Arms and Jacobson 2003, Griffiths 1997, and Prinz 2004 for additional discussion.

non-cognitive constitution is not as certain as we might like, there's some reason to think that the biologically basic emotions are also non-cognitive emotions. And while resentment may not be basic in the sense of being cross-culturally identifiable, prototypical, or the product of a distinct neurobiological system, these aren't the notions of a basic emotion that the hybrid theorist ought to treat as relevant for determining whether resentment is cognitive or non-cognitive. The further question, then, is whether resentment is a biologically basic emotion.

### **RESENTMENT AS NON-COGNITIVE ADAPTATION**

The biologically basic emotions are characterized as adaptations that serve fundamental evolutionary functions. They have been variously described as responses to 'fundamental life tasks,' 'universal human predicaments,' or 'recurrent adaptive situations.' These are circumstances that virtually all human organisms have faced, whether presently or in our evolutionary past. The biologically basic emotions are responsive to factors in the lives of human organisms that contribute, whether positively or negatively, to their survival and reproduction.

Let's consider whether resentment might also be describable in these terms. As we noted earlier, it is typically held that resentment is responsive to distinctively moral injuries. One might think that this immediately rules resentment out as a biologically basic emotion, since it's hard to see how responsiveness to moral injury could amount to a "fundamental life task." However, even if resentment, at present and within our own cultural milieu, is usually a response to specifically moral injuries, it doesn't follow that it is therefore not responsive to something that's relevant to organism survival and reproduction. Resentment *qua* response to moral injury might simply be a local manifestation of a response to a more general, biologically significant set of circumstances.

Other biologically basic emotions have local manifestations that don't undermine their status as biologically basic. For example, many people grieve over the loss of a home, a job, or a promising financial opportunity. Grief surely did not evolve to help humans cope with foreclosures or being fired, yet we acknowledge that at least within our own cultural environment, these are perfectly acceptable reasons to grieve. If other basic emotions can have localized manifestations that don't undermine their status as biologically basic, there's no reason that resentment can't be biologically basic despite its local manifestation as a response to moral wrongdoing.

However, there's still the matter of characterizing resentment in terms of a universal human predicament that is biologically salient. This is where our history as social, community-forming organisms becomes significant. Human beings meet their evolutionary goals, in part, by organizing themselves into communities. Communities, roughly, are groups of individuals who live together in accordance with some system of social norms that govern their interaction and behavior. Communities persist, in part, on the basis of the common commitment of their members to this system of social norms. These norms must be teachable, to both newcomers seeking to join the community and to the offspring of current community members. In addition, violations of these norms must be identified as such, in a way that communicates to both the violator and the group that such violations are unwelcome. One way to both teach and reinforce these norms is via a characteristic response to their violation. If we characterize this response as resentment, then it's possible to characterize resentment in terms of a universal human predicament that is relevant to human survival and reproduction. Resentment, on this view, is a response to the universal human problem of maintaining a system of social norms that makes communities possible.

Characterizing resentment in these terms also supports the claim that resentment is a non-cognitive emotion. As noted earlier, there were several reasons to think that the biologically basic emotions are non-cognitive emotions. Those reasons are readily applicable in the case of resentment. First, our pre-linguistic ancestors surely required a means of quickly responding to violations of community norms, in a manner that was both effective and that encouraged future compliance. Due to their limited conceptual capacities, it's more likely that this adaptive function was accomplished by a non-cognitive response. Further, as we noted for the biologically basic emotions more generally, the adaptive function of resentment does not seem to require that it is constituted by a propositional attitude. For example, some canidae and non-human primates respond to group norm violations with aggression responses and characteristic vocalizations, as a means of reinforcing group norm compliance and discouraging non-compliance.<sup>143</sup> This non-cognitive response appears to be entirely adequate for this purpose. If resentment is a response to violations of the norms that govern and maintain communities, one need not have any propositional attitudes in order to express disapproval that one of these rules has been violated. Like many biologically basic emotions, propositional attitudes are unnecessary for the function that resentment evolved to serve.

This does not definitively establish that resentment is, in fact, a non-cognitive emotion. But it does indicate that we ought to continue to think about resentment's essential constitutive elements, and not simply accept the typical account of resentment as obviously correct.

---

<sup>143</sup> Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex Among Apes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), William A. Mason and Sally P. Mendoza, *Primate Social Conflict* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

## **AGAINST A NON-COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF RESENTMENT**

There are at least two serious objections to the claim that resentment is a non-cognitive, adaptive emotion that helps humans deal with violations of community norms. First, one might claim that my analysis succeeds only by redefining what we mean by ‘resentment,’ and thus fails to capture what resentment is really about. Next, one might claim that my analysis suffers from the same problem that dooms all non-cognitive theories of emotion—an inability to account for the intentionality of emotion. Let’s take each of these objections in turn, and explain why they fail to pose a serious problem for a non-cognitive account of resentment.

First, it’s important to bear in mind that one can be a non-cognitivist about resentment, while allowing that some instances of resentment do co-occur with propositional attitudes. For example, a non-cognitivist can allow that in contemporary Western adult humans, resentment is often accompanied by a belief that one has been morally wronged by the object of one’s resentment. What the non-cognitivist about resentment denies is that this propositional attitude is necessary for resentment. Thus, a non-cognitivist can allow that resentment often takes precisely the form that the cognitivist suggests—they simply deny that a propositional attitude is required for resentment to occur.

Further, one can defend an adaptive account of resentment, of the sort offered here, while acknowledging that among a substantial portion of contemporary Western human beings, resentment is mostly concerned with perceived moral wrongdoing. However, on the adaptive view I’ve been defending, this is a localized response to a more general phenomenon. Moral wrongdoing, on this account, is a local manifestation of a biologically salient, universal human predicament—the problem of non-compliance with community norms.

Another serious objection to a non-cognitive account of resentment is that it can't account for how emotions come to represent their object in the particular way that they do, because none of the constituent components of emotion, as the non-cognitivist understands it, have representational content. This is less an objection to the non-cognitive account of resentment offered here, and more a concern about non-cognitivist accounts of emotion in general. So one way to respond to this objection is to claim that it proves too much—surely some emotions are non-cognitive. In fact, we've already given several arguments against a global cognitivist theory of emotion. If global cognitivism is out, the remaining options are either global non-cognitivism or a hybrid theory, both of which acknowledge that at least some emotions are non-cognitive. At this point, the debate is not about whether any emotions are non-cognitive, but rather which emotions are non-cognitive, and which are not. The question of how to account for this feature of emotion in non-cognitivist terms is not really an objection to non-cognitivism, but simply an area of ongoing research within the philosophy of emotions.

One might also take issue with the way that the explanatory task here is typically framed. Cognitivism provides an easy explanation of how emotions come to represent their object in the particular way that they do, and it's frequently thought that the only way to meet this explanatory burden is by appealing to a propositional attitude as a necessary constituent of emotion. This thinking has framed the discussion of this problem ever since the emergence of cognitivist theories of emotion. However, the non-cognitivist has little chance of meeting an explanatory burden framed in these terms. If the non-cognitivist is to have any hope of explaining how emotions come to represent their object in the particular way that they do, we must be open to the possibility that this could be accounted for without appealing to a propositional attitude. To



assume that only a cognitivist account of emotion could explain this feature of emotion is to beg the question against the non-cognitivist.

When considered from a non-question-begging perspective, it turns out that contemporary non-cognitivists have already offered a plausible explanation of how emotions come to represent their objects in the particular terms that they do. One such example is offered by Jesse Prinz, who defends a non-cognitive view of emotions as perceptions of bodily changes. These bodily changes, on Prinz's view, represent core relational themes, "ongoing relationships between persons and their environments" that bear on well-being.<sup>144</sup> For example, the emotion of fear is a perception of "muscles freezing, respiration becoming constricted, and hairs standing on end," which are bodily changes that prepare us to respond to the source of our fear by either fighting or fleeing.<sup>145</sup> According to Prinz, these bodily changes represent danger, the core relational theme for fear.

One might wonder how the emotions can be perceptions of bodily changes, yet represent core relational themes as Prinz claims. Prinz helpfully points out that something can represent a property without describing it. He borrows Fred Dretske's example of a radar detector to explain this claim.<sup>146</sup> The beeps of a radar detector indicate something fairly complex, the presence of police radar, without describing it in any meaningful way. We detect the real content of the beeping, the presence of police radar, by registering the nominal content, the beeping.

Perceptions of bodily states serve as indicators of core relational themes in much the same way.

---

<sup>144</sup> Lazarus 1991, 22. Prinz utilizes Lazarus's conception of a core relational theme in his theory of emotion.

<sup>145</sup> Jesse Prinz, "Précis of Gut Reactions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, No.3 (2008): 708.

<sup>146</sup> Prinz 2004, 67.

When we perceive a threatening object, this causes a change of bodily states. Perception of this bodily change is a registering of the nominal content of fear. At the same time, this perception of bodily change also represents the real content of fear, the core relational theme of danger.<sup>147</sup>

Once we abandon the view that only a propositional attitude could account for the way in which emotions represent their objects, Prinz's analysis here indicates that the non-cognitivist has resources available to explain this feature of emotions. While there is still work to be done on this front, there's little reason to think we should reject the possibility of a non-cognitive analysis of resentment based on these sorts of concerns.

## CONCLUSION

I've argued that there are multiple routes that might lead one to adopt the typical, cognitivist account of resentment. If one is a global cognitivist about emotion, then one will obviously be a cognitivist about resentment as well. But there are compelling reasons not to be a global cognitivist, so we can't establish the typical account of resentment by that route. Some hybrid theorists also adopt a cognitivist account of resentment. However, many of the criteria by which hybrid theorists determine whether an emotion ought to be subject to a cognitive or non-cognitive analysis do not support the typical cognitivist account of resentment. Despite its widespread acceptance, we have little reason to accept the typical account of resentment as necessarily constituted by a belief or judgment that one has been morally injured.

I've also argued that resentment, when characterized as an adaptive response to violations of community norms, is a viable candidate for consideration as a biologically basic emotion. For the hybrid theorist, this is the relevant criterion for determining whether an emotion is subject to a non-cognitive analysis. By their own lights, hybrid theorists ought to regard resentment as a

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 69.

non-cognitive emotion, or at least be open to the possibility of a non-cognitive account of resentment. In short, a non-cognitive, adaptive view of resentment is an idea worth pursuing.

### CHAPTER 3: IN DEFENSE OF RESENTMENT

*“Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”*

-Carrie Fisher

*“Resentment is the number one offender. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease.”*

-The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

*“As smoking is to the lungs, so is resentment to the soul; even one puff is bad for you.”*

-Elizabeth Gilbert

It is often claimed that there are certain emotions, such as jealousy, anger, or envy, that we would be better off without, and that we should try to rid ourselves of having if we can.<sup>148</sup> Resentment is also sometimes viewed this way.<sup>149</sup> This conclusion might be based on moral concerns about resentment. For example, some regard resentment as involving immoral thoughts, such as an undue emphasis on revenge or a desire that those who have wronged us suffer some significant harm or pain.<sup>150</sup> Others raise prudential concerns about resentment. For example, resentment is sometimes regarded as unduly focused on what we are owed by others, to the detriment of our own personal achievements and self-development.<sup>151</sup> From these sorts of concerns, both philosophers and non-philosophers have concluded that resentment is an emotion that we ought to try to be rid of, or that we would be better off without.

---

<sup>148</sup> Robert C. Roberts, “What is Wrong with Wicked Feelings?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1991): 13-24.

<sup>149</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “What is Anger and Why Should We Care?” *Best Ideas Lecture Series*, The University of Chicago Law School, Chicago, 14 January 2014. Lecture. Also, see Solomon 1976.

<sup>150</sup> See Butler 1970 or Nussbaum 2014, for example.

<sup>151</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, 439-602 (New York: The Modern Library, 1968).

There is another sort of criticism that is sometimes aimed at the emotions. The claim that we ought not to have a particular emotion can also be interpreted as a claim about the representational accuracy of the emotion, sometimes referred to as an assessment of the emotion's fittingness.<sup>152</sup> To say that an emotion is unfitting is to claim that the emotion inaccurately depicts its object. For example, fear at a tiny kitten is unfitting because it inaccurately depicts the kitten as dangerous. Thus, we ought not to be afraid of tiny kittens. And while considerations of fittingness are importantly different from the sorts of moral or prudential concerns one might have about an emotion, if an emotion's object presentation were such that the emotion was always unfitting, considerations of fittingness would tell in favor of trying to be rid of that emotion.

It is unlikely that most basic emotions, such as fear, anger, or grief, are always unfitting.<sup>153</sup> However, it's also possible that certain basic emotions do have fittingness conditions that are never satisfied. Consider an emotion like guilt. Guilt is usually thought to present its object as morally responsible for a wrongful act. However, suppose that some version of hard incompatibilism is true, and no one is ever morally responsible for their actions. If this were the case, guilt's object presentation would always be inaccurate, and guilt would therefore always be unfitting. So while most basic emotions are fitting at least some of the time, certain

---

<sup>152</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson 2000.

<sup>153</sup> Basic emotions have very simple object presentations, so their fittingness conditions are easily satisfied. For example, grief presents its object as the loss of something valuable. While grief is sometimes unfitting, in many cases, one's grief is a response to just such a loss, and one's grief accurately depicts its object as such.

basic emotions are such that perhaps we ought to consider ridding ourselves of them, based on considerations of fittingness.<sup>154</sup>

I argue that moral, prudential, and fittingness considerations all fail to support the claim that resentment is an emotion we ought to rid ourselves of having. I begin by discussing some prominent moral and prudential concerns about resentment, and explain why they are better understood as normative constraints on one's resentment, rather than considerations that tell in favor of doing away with resentment altogether. Next, I consider two accounts of resentment's fittingness conditions, and explain why neither implies that we ought to be rid of this emotion. Finally, I argue that there are moral and prudential reasons to both have and express resentment. I conclude that resentment is not an emotion that we ought to be rid of, but rather an emotion that ought to be encouraged on both moral and prudential grounds.

### **PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

Before considering some moral and prudential concerns about resentment, let's briefly make a few preliminary points. First, I should explain exactly what emotion is being here referred to by the term 'resentment.' By "resentment," I mean to refer to a negatively-valenced emotional response to the apparently improper conduct of others, where one sees oneself as having been treated improperly by the object of one's resentment. To say that one's conduct is improper is to say that it is a violation of the interpersonal norms of one's social group, where such norms are applicable to both the subject and object of one's resentment. This characterization of resentment differs slightly from the widely-held view of resentment as essentially involving a judgment of moral injury to oneself, and I'll discuss this characterization

---

<sup>154</sup> One might worry here that fittingness considerations cannot be the basis of this sort of argument, because fittingness considerations are not normative. I'll discuss this concern more later.

of resentment when I consider possible accounts of resentment's fittingness conditions. For now, however, I wish to adopt a characterization of resentment that is neutral with regard to questions about resentment's constitution, and regarding the specific type of improper conduct to which resentment is responsive. This formulation of resentment will allow us to focus specifically on arguments for being rid of resentment, without becoming overburdened by questions that don't directly bear on the task at hand.

Next, I want to briefly respond to a potential criticism of my overall aims. One might claim that emotions are not rightly the subject of moral, prudential, or fittingness evaluations, and that applying these sorts of evaluations to emotions therefore involves some sort of category mistake. Thus, a critic might conclude, an enquiry regarding whether we should do away with resentment, on the basis of these sorts of concerns, is wrong-headed from the start. There are two lines of thinking that might lead one to the claim that emotions are not the sort of thing that can be subject to these sorts of evaluations. First, one might regard emotions as feelings, akin to an itch or a tickle. Since it makes little sense to speak of the moral wrongness, imprudence, or representational inaccuracy of an itch, one might think it similarly nonsensical to conduct moral, prudential, or fittingness evaluations of an emotion. If emotions are just feelings, subjecting the emotions to moral, prudential, or fittingness evaluations would seem to involve a category mistake, since this theory of the emotions suggests that emotions are the wrong sort of target for such assessments.

If emotions were just like itches or tickles, it perhaps would make little sense to regard them as the sort of thing that can be evaluated in these terms. But almost no one holds this theory of the emotions, and for good reason. These "feeling" theories of emotion were largely abandoned in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in response to two serious criticisms. First, it's generally

agreed that emotions involve evaluative presentations of their objects. Emotions depict their object in a particular way. But feelings, of which itches and tickles were thought to be paradigmatic, do not involve an evaluative presentation. Thus, it was concluded that emotions could not be feelings akin to itches or tickles. The other concern that motivated the abandonment of feeling theories was the thought that there are simply not enough distinctive phenomenal “feels” to account for the comparatively large number of emotions that humans experience. For these reasons, feeling theories of the emotions were largely abandoned. Thus, we can set aside any concern that relies on a feeling theory of the emotions.

Alternatively, one might think that subjecting emotions to moral, prudential, or fittingness evaluations involves a category mistake because emotions are not something that we can control, and these evaluations properly apply only to what one can control. This concern doesn't apply to evaluations of fittingness per se, because whether one can control one's emotions has no bearing on whether one's emotion accurately depicts its object. For example, fear is fitting when the object of one's fear is dangerous, irrespective of whether the subject can control their fear. So concerns about a lack of control don't suggest that evaluating the fittingness of emotions involves a category mistake. However, concerns about control are relevant to an argument that we should be rid of resentment based on considerations of fittingness. If we cannot control our resentment, we cannot rid ourselves of it, even if it is always unfitting. Similarly, if emotions are not something we can control, it would make little sense to raise moral or prudential concerns about resentment. It would make little sense, for example, to claim that one has moral reasons not to resent others if one is not able to avoid having resentment. However, there are a number of additional questions that would need to be



answered before we could determine how seriously to take these concerns.<sup>155</sup> Answering these questions here would take us too far afield. For the time being, I'll simply assume that humans have sufficient control over their emotions that it makes sense to subject them to moral, prudential, and fittingness evaluations, and to talk of trying to rid ourselves of some of them, insofar as we can, based on these sorts of considerations.

### **MORAL CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT**

Moral concerns about resentment are of three types. One type of moral concern focuses on the sorts of thoughts involved when one resents. Resentment, it is claimed, invariably involves a desire that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, or a belief that the object deserves to suffer.<sup>156</sup> These thoughts are so morally terrible, it is thought, that we ought to avoid resentment altogether. This concern is the basis of the following argument:

1. Resentment invariably involves immoral thoughts.
2. We ought not to have immoral thoughts.
3. Therefore, resentment is an emotion that we ought not to have.<sup>157</sup>

There are several things one might say in response to this sort of argument. First, one might challenge this argument by simply denying that thoughts alone can be immoral. While inflicting suffering on the object of one's resentment may well be immoral, one might contend that merely

---

<sup>155</sup> We would need to know, for example, what is meant here by 'control,' what degree of control is required, if any, for moral and prudential evaluations to make sense, what degree of control humans have over their emotions, etc.

<sup>156</sup> Butler 1970 and Hampton and Murphy 1988 both discuss resentment as invariably involving these sorts of thoughts.

<sup>157</sup> Part of Butler's motivation for the sermon "Upon Resentment" was to respond to this argument, though he also recognized a significant theological aspect to this task, which I've set aside.

desiring that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, or believing that they deserve to suffer is not, itself, immoral. Morality, according to this sort of response, pertains to actions. Thoughts are simply not the sort of thing that can, in themselves, be immoral.

Alternatively, one might allow that resentment sometimes involves immoral thoughts, such as a desire that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, but reject the claim that resentment invariably involves such thoughts. Resentment, recall, is a negatively-valenced emotional response to the apparently improper conduct of others, where the subject sees themselves as having been treated improperly by the object of their resentment. What's required for resentment is that I regard your treatment of me in a particular way.<sup>158</sup> For example, suppose you fail to hold the door open for me when my arms are full. I can resent your lack of consideration towards me in this case, provided I see your failure to hold the door for me as an act of impropriety, without desiring that you suffer some harm or injury for having so acted. Proponents of this argument must explain why resentment invariably involves immoral thoughts. As it stands, there's little reason to think this is the case.

A proponent of this sort of argument might reply that even if resentment does not invariably involve immoral thoughts, it does so frequently enough that we ought to try to be rid of it anyway. Much like smoking does not invariably cause cancer, one might contend, the fact that it frequently does so is sufficient for trying to rid oneself of one's smoking habit. There are at least two reasons this reply is not successful. First, the claim that resentment frequently involves immoral thoughts is an empirical claim that, for the moment, we have little reason to accept. Further, if resentment frequently involves immoral thoughts, but doesn't do so

---

<sup>158</sup> The same can be said if one prefers the view that resentment is a response to moral wrongdoing—what's required for resentment is that I see your action as an instance of moral injury to me.

invariably, then this reply is properly an argument for ridding ourselves of the immoral thoughts that frequently accompany resentment, rather than being rid of resentment itself. So long as one can resent without having immoral thoughts, concerns about the immoral thoughts that frequently accompany resentment are supportive of trying to rid ourselves of these sorts of thoughts, and cultivate a disposition to resent in morally permissible ways instead.<sup>159</sup>

One can also respond to this argument by noting that there may be more than one type of resentment.<sup>160</sup> For example, one might draw a distinction between resentment and retributive resentment, a distinct type of resentment that involves either the desire that the object of their resentment be made to suffer, or a belief that they deserve to suffer. Thus, even if retributive resentment invariably involves immoral thoughts, it wouldn't follow that resentment therefore does so as well.

Finally, one might point out that this sort of argument relies on an ambiguity in the use of the term "suffer." For example, when we speak of a desire that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, we may mean to indicate a desire that the object one's resentment experience a harm or setback that is proportionate to their own impropriety. For example, in resenting your failure to hold the door open for me, I may desire that someone fail to hold the door open for you. A desire that the object of one's resentment be made to suffer, where "suffer" is meant to imply a harm or setback proportionate to the impropriety they've committed, is not an immoral thought. Thus, even if resentment invariably involves this sort of thought, it doesn't follow that

---

<sup>159</sup> This is a noteworthy sense in which the analogy with smoking does not hold. While there are currently no viable alternatives to smoking that don't involve substantial risk to one's health, there is a viable alternative to having resentment that involves immoral thoughts.

<sup>160</sup> This sort of claim is often made, for example, about envy, which is thought to have both a "benign" and an "invidious" manifestation that differs with regard to its constitutive thoughts. See Roberts 1991.

resentment invariably involves an *immoral* thought. However, if by “suffer,” we mean to indicate a desire that the object of one’s resentment experience severe pain or deprivation, then resentment does seem to involve an immoral thought, but it’s difficult to see why resentment would *invariably* involve such immoral thoughts. The above argument is convincing only if one equivocates on the relevant notion of “suffer.”

In general, concerns about immoral thoughts do not support the claim that we ought to be rid of resentment. Rather, the concerns that give rise to this sort of argument indicate certain normative constraints on the sorts of thoughts that our resentment ought to involve. For example, one can acknowledge that it would be immoral to desire that the object of our resentment be made to suffer severe pain or deprivation, without conceding that resentment therefore invariably involves immoral thoughts. Thus, we can allow that there is something to the concern that resentment, or perhaps certain types of resentment, may involve immoral thoughts, without conceding that such concerns support trying to rid ourselves of resentment.

Another type of moral concern about resentment focuses on the allegedly close connection between resentment and certain vicious emotions. For example, Joseph Butler claims that resentment leads to the vices of malice, vengefulness, and hatred, which are, he claims, clearly immoral.<sup>161</sup> This moral concern differs slightly from the previous one, in that it is not resentment itself, but rather the other emotions that it leads to, which make it a target of a moral concern. This sort of concern leads one to the following argument:

1. Resentment leads to other, vicious emotions.
2. We ought not to have vicious emotions.

---

<sup>161</sup> Butler 1970, 73. Nussbaum 2014 also argues for the elimination of resentment based on concerns about the viciousness of revenge.

3. Therefore, resentment is an emotion that we ought not to have.<sup>162</sup>

We can respond to this argument in several ways as well. First, one might point out an ambiguity in the first premise. While resentment may sometimes lead to other, vicious emotions, it surely doesn't do so in every case. The question, then, is whether the fact that resentment sometimes leads to vicious emotions is sufficient to justify trying to rid ourselves of resentment. If vicious emotions were an inevitable, or even a likely consequence of resentment, concerns about vicious emotions perhaps would count in favor of trying to rid ourselves of resentment. However, proponents of this argument owe us an explanation for why we should accept that a sufficiently close connection obtains. Further, while resentment may sometimes lead to other, vicious emotions, resentment itself has several virtuous features. For example, resentment has a self and other-respecting quality that can readily be regarded as virtuous.<sup>163</sup> Further, even if resentment sometimes leads to other, vicious emotions, it sometimes leads to forgiveness and reconciliation as well. These are morally good states of affairs that count in favor of having resentment, even if resentment sometimes leads to vicious emotions instead.<sup>164</sup> The mere possibility of vicious emotions is not sufficient to justify trying to rid ourselves of resentment.

The moral concerns raised by this argument are, as before, better understood as indicating normative constraints on our resentment.<sup>165</sup> In resenting others, perhaps we ought not to have malice, vengefulness, or hatred for the object of our resentment. But it doesn't follow that we

---

<sup>162</sup> While Butler ultimately rejects this argument, Nussbaum seems to think that we ought to rid ourselves of both resentment and anger for precisely this reason.

<sup>163</sup> I'll discuss these features of resentment in more detail in a later section.

<sup>164</sup> It's additionally possible that resentment may lead to vicious emotions AND a morally good state of affairs.

<sup>165</sup> Butler eventually comes to a similar sort of conclusion. See Butler 1970, 74-79.

therefore ought to be rid of resentment. As before, we can allow that there is something to the concern that resentment may lead to other, vicious emotions, without conceding that such concerns support trying to rid ourselves of resentment.

One might also respond to this argument by rejecting the claim that malice, hatred, and vengefulness are vicious emotions. For example, Robert Solomon contends that hatred, though potentially dangerous to both subject and object, also conveys a certain degree of respect for its target. As he puts it, “hatred is an emotion that treats the other on an equal footing. There may even be a trust and intimacy in hatred.”<sup>166</sup> Jean Hampton similarly contends that, at least when one’s hatred is a response to especially egregious moral wrongdoing, hatred displays a degree of respect for its target, acknowledging the other as “an opponent of the cause of morality.”<sup>167</sup> The point here is not to defend either of these views of hatred, but rather to point out that even if resentment leads to hatred, malice, and vengefulness, we’d need some reason to think these are vicious emotions that justify trying to rid ourselves of resentment.<sup>168</sup>

A third type of moral concern about resentment focuses on the judgmental nature of this emotion. By its very nature, resentment requires that one stand in judgment of the conduct of others. However, it’s not just that resentment involves standing in judgment of others, but that resentment seems to ignore the fact that individuals may have reasons, excuses, or explanations for their poor conduct. Resentment, on this view, is an unforgiving emotion, rendering the

---

<sup>166</sup> Solomon 1976, 324.

<sup>167</sup> Hampton and Murphy 1988, 81.

<sup>168</sup> Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Though I won’t pursue it further here, there’s some reason to think that revenge is not uniformly thought of as vicious either. See Williams 1993 for discussion

subject incapable of either understanding or sympathy for its object. An argument based on these sorts of moral concerns takes roughly the following form:

1. Resentment is unforgiving of the improper conduct of others.
2. We ought not to be unforgiving of the improper conduct of others.
3. Therefore, resentment is an emotion that we ought not to have.

This argument also fails. While it's hard to dispute that resentment requires some sort of evaluation of the conduct of others, there's little reason to think that resentment must be unresponsive to excuses, reasons, or explanations for the improper conduct of others, in the sense that the first premise implies. For example, consider the earlier example where I resent your failure to hold the door open for me. Suppose I learn that you failed to notice that I required assistance because you were distracted by thinking about the recent death of a close friend. This fact gives me good reason to withdraw my resentment and forgive your transgression. Though you acted improperly in this case, your actions are understandable given the circumstances. One can resent the improper conduct of others, but remain receptive to their reasons, explanations, or excuses for having acted as they did. What's more, some explanations for one's improper conduct do not give the subject reason to withdraw their resentment. For example, if you failed to hold the door open for me because you believe that someone of my gender or ethnic background is not deserving of such a courtesy, then while I may understand your reasons for acting as you did, this does not give me a reason to withdraw my resentment.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> It may be that genuine understanding of why a person acted as they did is incompatible with continuing to resent, because such understanding will invariably reveal an excusing condition for one's impropriety. What I'm asserting here is the weaker claim that one can be aware of the reasons that explain why someone acted improperly, while continuing to resent them for having so acted.

One might also account for this concern by again allowing that there may be more than one type of resentment. For example, one might draw a distinction between resentment and uncompromising resentment, a distinct type of resentment that is unresponsive to explanations, reasons, or excuses for the improper conduct that gave rise to one's resentment. Thus, even if we ought to be rid of *uncompromising* resentment, it wouldn't follow that we should be rid of resentment as well.

None of the moral concerns typically raised about resentment support the claim that we ought to try to rid ourselves of this emotion. Rather, these concerns indicate certain normative constraints on resentment. They tell us how to resent in morally permissible ways, but they do not indicate that we should be rid of resentment altogether.

#### **PRUDENTIAL CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT**

Moral concerns do not support the conclusion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of resentment. Let's now consider whether prudential concerns fare any better in this regard. Those who raise prudential concerns about resentment usually describe it as an emotion that is unduly focused on the conduct of others, at the expense of one's self-reflection and personal growth.<sup>170</sup> So long as one is focused on what others are doing wrong, it's thought, one will never recognize and improve upon the flaws in one's own character and conduct. Alternatively, it is claimed that in resenting others, we squander what might otherwise have been happy moments in our lives.<sup>171</sup> In resenting others, we forego opportunities to enjoy ourselves. While these criticisms make slightly different points, the general worry here is that resentment is an

---

<sup>170</sup> Solomon 1976, 350-355. Nietzsche 1968 expresses a similar view of *resentiment*.

<sup>171</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition* (New York: A.A. World Services, 2001): 66, Solomon 1976, 350-355.



other-focused emotion that makes the subject worse-off than they would have been otherwise. Thus, for prudential reasons we ought to avoid resentment. We should be rid of resentment, on this view, because it is imprudently other-focused.

Prudential concerns about resentment characterize it not merely as other-focused, however, but as unduly or excessively other-focused. Resentment, according to this sort of prudential concern, is a component of a distinct personality structure where one views the world as a kind of enemy. Resentment, on this view, is the result of a singular focus on reacting to the faults and misdeeds of others.<sup>172</sup> When understood in this way, resentment probably would be an imprudent emotion. But as in the case of some of the moral concerns already discussed, there's little reason to think that resentment invariably, or even frequently, has this feature. One can clearly be responsive to the improper conduct of others without being consumed by one's concern with what others are doing. Prudential concerns are better understood as a call for moderation in one's resentment. We should not allow our resentment to consume us, or to overtake our personality to the point that it inhibits our ability to be positive, self-reflective, and pro-active. As in the moral case, prudential concerns identify normative constraints on our resentment, rather than indicating that we ought to be rid of resentment altogether.

One might respond that even if prudential concerns are better understood as a call for moderation in one's resentment, for most people this will not be possible. Resentment, on this view, is not the sort of emotion that most people can moderate effectively. Thus, though resentment itself is not an imprudent emotion, according to this response we ought to try to rid ourselves of resentment anyway, because most people are not capable of moderating their resentment effectively, and immoderate resentment makes us worse-off than we would have

---

<sup>172</sup> Nietzsche 1968, 472-475, Solomon 1976, 351-355.

been otherwise. According to this argument, prudential concerns, when combined with certain facts about human nature, do support the conclusion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of resentment.

There are several things to say about this response. First, it relies on an empirical claim about human nature that, at first glance, we have reason to think is false. For example, we know that most people do, in fact, resent others who treat them improperly. And yet, many of these same people do not seem to be consumed by their resentment, to the detriment of their own achievements and personal well-being. Some people surely do lack the capacity to moderate their resentment; for them, perhaps prudential considerations are supportive of trying to avoid resentment altogether. But it does not seem to be the case that moderate resentment is an emotion that is ruled out for most people, and the fact that some people are unable to moderate their resentment doesn't imply that generally speaking, resentment is an emotion that we to try to rid ourselves of having.

Further, while resentment may be difficult to moderate effectively, there are also significant prudential benefits to resentment. As I will argue below, having resentment when one is treated improperly by others is a means of standing up for oneself, fostering a positive self-image, and encouraging others to treat us well. In this respect, resentment is like many other emotions. For example, fear is an emotion that can be very difficult for some people to moderate effectively, and immoderate or excessive fear can be quite imprudent for those who experience it. These sorts of concerns don't support the conclusion that fear is an emotion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having, however, because fear is also an emotion with substantial prudential value. Fear mobilizes our "fight or flight" response and aids us in handling dangerous circumstances. We therefore regard fear as a valuable emotion that we ought to try to moderate

effectively, however difficult this may be. The same argument applies to resentment. Concerns about our ability to moderate our resentment effectively, even if legitimate, are not supportive of the claim that resentment is an emotion that we ought to rid ourselves of having. The prudential benefits of resentment, like the benefits of fear, make the challenge of moderating this emotion a worthwhile endeavor.

While there are a variety of moral and prudential concerns about resentment, none indicate that we ought to be rid of resentment. Rather, these concerns indicate both moral and prudential constraints on resentment. Such concerns place limits on how one ought to resent others, but they do not tell against resentment altogether. We ought not “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” so to speak. As is the case with most emotions, we should avoid resentment that is immoral or imprudent, but it doesn’t follow that we should seek to rid ourselves of resentment on either moral or prudential grounds.

### **FITTINGNESS CONCERNS ABOUT RESENTMENT**

We’ve already seen that moral and prudential concerns about resentment do not indicate that we should try to rid ourselves of this emotion. However, as we noted earlier, one might also argue for this sort of claim by appealing to considerations of fittingness. This sort of argument for ridding ourselves of resentment might take the following form:

1. Resentment is always unfitting.
2. We ought not to have unfitting emotions.
3. Therefore, resentment is an emotion that we ought not to have.

Before evaluating the first premise of this argument, let’s briefly mention and respond to a potential objection to the second premise. To say that we ought not to have unfitting emotions

is to treat unfittingness as a normative consideration. This is consistent with the way most philosophers talk about fittingness. To claim that an emotion is fitting, it's usually thought, is to say that one has a reason, of a particular sort, to have that emotion.<sup>173</sup> For example, that the grizzly bear is dangerous makes one's fear of the grizzly bear fitting, and this gives one a reason, it's thought, to fear the bear. However, in some cases, the claim that the fittingness of an emotional response gives one a reason to have it seems clearly mistaken. For example, imagine a trained herpetologist who encounters a rattlesnake while walking in the woods.<sup>174</sup> Because of her extensive training, she is fully prepared to handle this situation. Let's further suppose, plausibly, that rattlesnakes are fearsome creatures. Thus, responding to a rattlesnake with fear is a fitting response, because one's fear accurately depicts the snake as dangerous. But does the herpetologist in this example have a reason to fear the snake, simply because fear is fitting? The answer to this question is not obvious, but if one is inclined to answer in the negative, one might also reject the claim that we ought not to have unfitting emotions. Thus, the second premise of the above argument, one might worry, depends on a claim about the normativity of fittingness that some people may find hard to accept.

However, there is also an apparent asymmetry between the normativity of fittingness and the normativity of unfittingness. While it's sometimes hard to see why the fittingness of an emotional response gives one a reason to have that response, it's not at all difficult to see why an emotion's being unfitting counts against having it. Consider some examples. When someone expresses fear at an object that we know is not dangerous, we typically try to assuage their fear

---

<sup>173</sup> Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "Anthropocentric constraints on human value," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 1 (2006): 99-126. Also see D'Arms and Jacobson 2000 and D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a.

<sup>174</sup> Christian Coons, "If the shoe fits, what kind of reason do I have to wear it?" Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

by pointing this fact out to them. In these cases, we are clearly appealing to considerations of fittingness, in the hope that the absence of danger will be recognized as a reason not to be afraid. Further, in some recent empirical studies of disgust, participants were asked to do things like drink from a brand-new bedpan or eat a feces-shaped piece of chocolate. Many participants readily acknowledged that these objects were not contaminated, and that they therefore should not be disgusted by them (even though they were).<sup>175</sup> For these participants, the unfittingness of their disgust was recognized as a reason not to be disgusted. In general, we tend to both appeal to and acknowledge considerations of unfittingness as reasons not to have an emotion. So even if we were suspicious about the normativity of fittingness, it's difficult to be similarly suspicious about unfittingness. Thus, one can accept the claim that we ought not to have unfitting emotions, even if one is suspicious about the normativity of fittingness.

That said, let's now turn our attention to the first premise. To say that resentment is always unfitting is to claim that resentment's object presentation is such that it never accurately depicts its object. Recall our earlier discussion of the fittingness of guilt. Guilt depicts its object as one who is morally responsible for a wrongful act. But if some version of hard incompatibilism is true, and no one is ever morally responsible for their actions, this object presentation would always be mistaken. And if its object presentation is always inaccurate in this way, guilt is always unfitting. The first premise of this argument makes the same sort of claim about resentment. Resentment presents its object, according to this premise, in terms that are always inaccurate. Thus, resentment has fittingness conditions that can never be satisfied.

In order to determine whether resentment's fittingness conditions can ever be satisfied, we need to first determine when resentment is fitting. This requires that we correctly

---

<sup>175</sup> Gendler 2008.

characterize resentment's object presentation. There are several options available here. Let's begin with the more common characterization of resentment as a response to moral injury to oneself. On this view, resentment depicts its object as having wronged the subject in a morally significant way. While this account seems to support the claim that resentment is sometimes a fitting emotional response, this characterization of resentment also allows for the possibility that resentment is always unfitting, provided that other claims about morality turn out to be true. For example, if moral nihilism is true, this characterization of resentment would imply that resentment is always unfitting. By "moral nihilism," I mean to refer to the view that no action can ever be morally right or morally wrong. If moral nihilism is true, this characterization of resentment will imply that resentment is always unfitting, because it will always depict its object as having inflicted a moral injury, and moral nihilism denies that any action can be morally wrong. So while this characterization of resentment seems to allow that resentment is sometimes a fitting emotion, it also leaves open the possibility that resentment has fittingness conditions that can never be satisfied.

There is another way that this more common characterization of resentment leaves open the possibility that resentment is always unfitting. One might claim that in order to inflict a moral injury, such that one counts as having wronged another in a morally significant way, one must have been able to have done otherwise under the same circumstances.<sup>176</sup> But if determinism is true, and no one is ever able to act differently than they in fact did in a particular case, then no one can ever inflict a moral injury upon others. Thus, resentment's object

---

<sup>176</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy* (1969): 829-839, David Copp, "Defending the principle of alternate possibilities: Blameworthiness and moral responsibility," *Nous* (1997): 441-456. Frankfurt 1969 and Copp 1997 provide an overview of the ongoing debate regarding this claim.

presentation would always be mistaken, because it would inaccurately depict its object as having wronged the subject in a morally significant way, when in fact, such injury is ruled out by the truth of determinism.

This is not the only characterization of resentment that is available, however. Thus far, we've been characterizing resentment as an emotional response to the apparently improper conduct of others, where the subject sees themselves as having been treated improperly by the object of their resentment. This characterization allows that resentment's fittingness conditions are sometimes satisfied, since persons sometimes do, in fact, treat others improperly. What's more, while characterizing resentment in terms of a moral injury to oneself leaves room for the possibility that resentment is always unfitting, characterizing resentment as a response to the improper conduct of others rules out this possibility altogether. Recall, to say that one's conduct is improper is to say that it is a violation of the interpersonal norms of one's social group, where such norms are applicable to both the subject and object of one's resentment. This characterization of resentment does not present its object as having inflicted a *moral* injury, so the truth of moral nihilism would not imply that resentment is always unfitting. What's more, one's conduct can still violate group interpersonal norms, and thus count as the relevant sort of impropriety, even if one could not have done otherwise under the same circumstances. Thus, resentment can still sometimes be fitting if determinism is true. So while both these characterizations of resentment imply that resentment may sometimes be a fitting emotion,

characterizing resentment in terms of the improper conduct of others avoids the possibility that resentment has fittingness condition that can never be satisfied.<sup>177</sup>

However, characterizing resentment in terms of the improper conduct of others allows for another way that resentment's object presentation might be regarded as inaccurate, and therefore always unfitting. By presenting its object as one who has treated the subject improperly, one might claim, resentment leaves out important facts about both its object and the social environment where the interpersonal interactions that elicit resentment actually occur. For example, in most cases, the sorts of situations that elicit resentment will admit of extenuating circumstances, considerations that make one's impropriety understandable to the subject or entitle the actor to some degree of leniency. Further, circumstances are sometimes such that resentment would be mean-spirited, or lacking in sympathy and understanding. Resentment's object presentation, one might say, doesn't seem to take account of these sorts of considerations. Rather, resentment depicts its object in strictly mechanical terms, as though its object were a kind of malfunctioning machine. Resentment is always unfitting, on this view, because its object presentation invariably fails to capture the more nuanced aspects of the situation to which it is a response. It is not that the object of one's resentment lacks the feature or features it is depicted as having, on this view, but rather that resentment's object presentation is inaccurately simplistic.

There are several things to say about this line of argument. First, one might be concerned that this argument commits the Moralistic Fallacy.<sup>178</sup> The Moralistic Fallacy, it is claimed,

---

<sup>177</sup> Though I won't pursue it further here, one might think this is an advantage of the characterization of resentment that I've been working with thus far.



occurs when one makes an inference from moral and prudential reasons not to have an emotion to the conclusion that the emotion is therefore unfitting. Several of the considerations that motivate this line of argument seem to involve this sort of inference. For example, extenuating circumstances may render a person's improper conduct understandable, or support some degree of leniency in one's response. In some cases, these sorts of considerations may give one a reason not to resent at all. But these are moral reasons not to resent. Resentment at understandable impropriety is harsh, unforgiving, and unduly judgmental. Resentment at impropriety that warrants leniency or sympathy is intolerant and unkind. However, these considerations give us moral reasons not to have resentment, and moral reasons, *qua* moral reasons, do not bear on whether resentment is fitting.

Further, resentment's object presentation, whether resentment is characterized in terms of impropriety or moral wrongdoing, does not depict its object in the rudimentary terms that this argument suggests. Resentment presents its object not merely as a malfunctioning machine, but as one who has acted contrary to the interpersonal norms of one's social group, where such norms are applicable to both the subject and object of one's resentment. Resentment presents its object as having acted contrary to "how *we* treat each other." This implies far more than mere mechanical malfunction. What's more, if resentment did present its object as a kind of malfunctioning machine, as this response contends, there would be no mistake in resenting our computer when it runs slowly, or our car when it fails to start. But such responses are clearly mistaken, precisely because they depict their object in terms that are inaccurate as representations of mere malfunctioning machines.

Finally, it's worth reiterating here the earlier point that there may be more than one type of resentment, and while some types of resentment may have fittingness conditions that are never satisfied, it doesn't follow that resentment is always unfitting. For example, uncompromising resentment was earlier identified as a distinct type of resentment that is unresponsive to explanations, reasons, or excuses for the improper conduct that gave rise to one's resentment. We earlier noted that there may be moral reasons to rid ourselves of uncompromising resentment, and considerations of fittingness may also support ridding ourselves of this type of resentment. However, even if both moral *and* fittingness considerations support ridding ourselves of uncompromising resentment, it doesn't follow that we ought to rid ourselves of resentment on similar grounds.

While it's possible to construct an argument for trying to rid ourselves of resentment based on considerations of fittingness, there is little reason to regard any such argument as definitive. If resentment is characterized in terms of moral injury to oneself, it's possible that resentment is always unfitting, but only if other, controversial claims about morality are true. Further, by characterizing resentment in terms of the improper conduct of others, rather than moral injury to oneself, we avoid this possibility altogether. In general, considerations of fittingness do not support the conclusion that we ought to try to be rid of resentment.

### **IN DEFENSE OF RESENTMENT**

Thus far, I have argued that moral and prudential concerns, as well as considerations of fittingness, fail to support the claim that resentment is an emotion that we ought to try to rid ourselves of having. While there are normative constraints on the way that we resent others, and perhaps certain types of resentment that are imprudent, immoral, or always unfitting, resentment is not an emotion that is immoral, imprudent, or always unfitting. However, there are also moral

and prudential reasons that tell in favor of resentment. Not only is resentment *not* an emotion that we ought to rid ourselves of having, it is an emotion that we have reason to encourage.

In speaking of reasons to resent others, I mean to invoke a conception of a reason as simply a “consideration that counts in favor” of something.<sup>179</sup> Thus, to say that there are moral and prudential reasons to resent others is to say that there are moral and prudential considerations that count in favor of doing so. We should also be careful to distinguish between two ways of understanding the notion of a reason to resent others. Some reasons to resent others are reasons to have resentment, irrespective of whether we express our resentment. Reasons to have resentment obtain, for example, even if one is alone, the object of one’s resentment is deceased, etc. Reasons to have resentment are reasons in favor of having a particular emotional response. Other reasons to resent others are reasons to express resentment. These reasons follow from resentment’s communicative aspects. In what follows, I will discuss each kind of reason to resent in turn.<sup>180</sup>

Resentment has a number of features that tell in favor of our having this emotion. First, resentment has a self-respecting quality. Resentment involves regarding oneself as entitled to certain treatment by others. In resenting others, one recognizes that one ought to be a factor in the rational deliberations of others, and that others ought to constrain their conduct in certain

---

<sup>179</sup> T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998): 17.

<sup>180</sup> This should not be taken as an exhaustive account of the moral and prudential reasons to resent others, but merely a first pass at defending the claim that there are moral and prudential reasons to resent.

ways in light of this fact.<sup>181</sup> Acknowledging oneself as having this sort of status is a type of self-regard that is constitutive of self-respect.

Resentment's self-respecting quality gives rise to both moral and prudential reasons to resent. First, insofar as one has a moral duty of self-respect, a claim that is widely accepted, one thereby also has a moral reason to resent.<sup>182</sup> Respect for oneself also tends to make us feel good about ourselves and supports a positive self-image. This is directly beneficial for us, since having respect for oneself is a more enjoyable state than failing to regard oneself in these terms. Self-respect may also lead to other prudential goods, like being well-treated by others or having confidence in one's personal and professional pursuits. Thus, the self-respecting quality of resentment also gives rise to prudential reasons to resent.

In addition to its self-respecting quality, resentment also involves respect for the object of one's resentment. In resenting others, we acknowledge that they are subject to certain standards of interpersonal conduct. To respect others, in this sense, is to acknowledge their equal standing within the community of human interpersonal relationships. This thought is clearly articulated by P.F. Strawson, who describes our interaction with individuals for whom this status is denied as a matter of adopting the "objective attitude." As he put it,

---

<sup>181</sup> Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* (1977): 36–49, Robin S. Dillon, "Respect", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/respect/>. This notion of self-respect is similar to Darwall 1977's notion of recognition respect. See Dillon 2014 for discussion of this and other types of self-respect. Hieronymi 2001 makes a similar point about resentment.

<sup>182</sup> Allen Wood, "Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others" in *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, edited by Thomas E. Hill, Jr., 229-252 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009). Wood 2009 offers a more explicitly Kantian conception of self-respect as a moral duty to oneself. As Dillon 2014 notes, though there is disagreement about precisely what self-respect involves and requires, it's generally held that self-respect is both a moral duty and a prudentially valuable attitude to take toward oneself.

(t)o adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of cases, might be called treatment; as something to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships. If your attitude toward someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel, or to reason, with him.<sup>183</sup>

To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to deny them a certain kind of interpersonal status, to hold them to a lower expectation of interpersonal conduct than that to which we hold ourselves, and to regard them as external to the community of interpersonal human relationships as a result. In adopting the objective attitude toward another human being, we regard them as our interpersonal inferior. To resent others, in contrast, is to affirm their equal interpersonal status, and thereby grant them the same respect we have for ourselves.<sup>184</sup> Insofar as we have moral reason to respect others, we also have moral reason to resent them when they treat us improperly, because resentment involves respect for the object of one's resentment.

It's worth noting here that resentment can involve respect for both self and others, of the sort being discussed here, even if it is not characterized as a response to explicitly moral injuries. In resenting others, we recognize that we, as well as the object of our resentment, ought to be a factor in the rational deliberations of others, and that others ought to constrain their conduct in

---

<sup>183</sup> Strawson 1962, 79. As an aside, direct quotation of Strawson should not here be taken as an endorsement of his exclusive use of masculine pronouns to describe human interpersonal relations.

<sup>184</sup> Again, one might regard this level of respect as what Darwall 1977 describes as recognition respect, though he takes recognition respect to involve acknowledgement of an explicitly moral status.

certain ways in light of this fact. However, resentment need not present its object as having inflicted a *moral* injury for this sort of acknowledgement of interpersonal status to take place. For example, suppose you invite me to a housewarming party commemorating the purchase of your first home, and I arrive with an extremely inexpensive bottle of wine for the party, one that is known to be sold exclusively at gas stations and low-end liquor stores. It's hard to see how I've inflicted a moral injury upon you in this case. There is no moral duty, for example, to always bring nice, high-end bottles of wine to housewarming parties. However, there's a relevant sense in which I have treated you improperly here.<sup>185</sup> My actions in this case display a lack of consideration for you, a failure to adequately consider what might be important to you and constrain my conduct accordingly. By resenting my lack of consideration in this case, you respect yourself, insofar as you affirm your status as one who ought to have been a factor in my rational deliberations. Your resentment is also an instance of other-respect, however, since resenting my lack of consideration involves affirming my interpersonal status. So resentment can involve respect of the sort I've been discussing, for both self and others, even if it is characterized as a response to the improper conduct of others. The way that we characterize resentment bears on resentment's fittingness conditions, and thus affects when a particular instance of resentment is fitting, but this has no bearing on the self or other-respecting qualities of resentment.

In addition to moral and prudential reasons to *have* resentment, there are also moral and prudential reasons to *express* resentment. These reasons follow from

---

<sup>185</sup> What's more, the impropriety here is not merely a matter of poor etiquette.

resentment's communicative aspects.<sup>186</sup> To say that resentment is communicative is to say that it conveys information between individuals. Communication, roughly speaking, requires a sender, a message, and a recipient. In the case of resentment, the sender is the subject who expresses resentment, the message is that the subject takes themselves to have been treated improperly by the object of their resentment, and the recipient is the individual that they resent. By expressing resentment, one communicates that they take themselves to have been treated improperly by the object of their resentment.<sup>187</sup>

Resentment's communicative aspects are morally significant in a number of different ways. First, in expressing our resentment, we communicate a demand to be treated as our interpersonal status dictates we should.<sup>188</sup> Thus, expressions of resentment communicate a message of self-respect, an issuing of the demand that we be treated as our interpersonal status dictates we ought to be treated. Expressing our resentment is a means of defending our status as beings that ought to be respected by others.

Expressing resentment also communicates a message of respect for the object of our resentment. As we noted earlier, to resent others is to affirm their equal interpersonal status. Thus, in expressing resentment, we communicate to others that we regard the object of our

---

<sup>186</sup> Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The claim that resentment is a communicative emotion is articulated by Strawson 1962, but see Wallace 1994 and Watson 2004 as well.

<sup>187</sup> Coleen Macnamara, "Reactive attitudes as communicative entities," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2013): doi: 10.1111/phpr.12075. Macnamara 2013 argues that resentment is communicative even when it is a privately held emotion. However, my concern here is with the communicative aspects of resentment that is not private, so I'll set aside the possibility that private resentment might also be communicative.

<sup>188</sup> This point is sometimes put in terms of expressing a demand that we be treated in a particular way by others. See Strawson 1962 or Watson 2004, 221-231, for example.

resentment as an equal, and that we are prepared to treat them as such. To resent the improper conduct of others is to not only have respect, but also to convey respect for the object of our resentment.

The communicative aspects of resentment also give rise to prudential reasons to express resentment. First, expressing resentment is a means of defending oneself against improper treatment by others. This can serve, among other things, as a protective measure against being unduly victimized by others. Expressing resentment when we are treated improperly by others is a means of communicating, to both the object of our resentment and the community, that such treatment is unwelcome and will be resisted. By conveying this message to others, we provide ourselves a measure of protection against the more predatory members of our social group.

Resentment's communicative aspects may also play a role in promoting the stability of social groups. By expressing resentment when others treat us improperly, we support and enforce group interpersonal norms. Social groups that conform to a shared system of interpersonal norms are usually more stable, with a more settled social hierarchy and fewer instances of serious interpersonal conflict.<sup>189</sup> Further, when social groups are more stable, individual group members can more reliably predict what other group members are going to do in particular situations, which makes group members better able to effectively work together toward a common goal. By expressing resentment at the improper conduct of others, we help facilitate the success of our social group as a stable cooperative entity. This cooperative success, in turn, is beneficial for us, since individual group members often benefit from the cooperative success of their group. By expressing resentment at the improper conduct of others, we afford ourselves the individual benefits of cooperation.

---

<sup>189</sup> Bekoff 2004.



One might respond here that even if resentment facilitates the success of one's social group as a stable, cooperative entity, the individual benefits one accrues from this do not give one a prudential reason to have and express resentment, but rather to encourage others to do so.<sup>190</sup> What's best for oneself, on this view, is to forego resentment, while continuing to reap the benefits of group cooperative success made possible by the resentment of others. This way, it might be claimed, one avoids the potential negative effects of resentment for oneself, while retaining its social benefits.

This response fails in several ways. First, it overstates the significance of resentment's prudential drawbacks. As we noted earlier, prudential concerns about resentment indicate the need to moderate one's resentment effectively, rather than be rid of resentment altogether, and there is little reason to think that most people cannot moderate their resentment in this way. Further, this response fails to account for the other prudential benefits of resentment. As we discussed earlier, resentment's self-respecting quality provides significant prudential benefits for the individual. Respect for oneself tends to make us feel good about ourselves, supports a positive self-image, and may lead to being well-treated by others. Resentment also serves as a protective measure, since it communicates to others that improper treatment will not be tolerated. These benefits counter-balance any concerns about the imprudent nature of immoderate resentment. What's best for oneself is to continue to participate in the practice of resenting others who treat us improperly, in order that we might reap all the prudential benefits of resentment.

---

<sup>190</sup> The point here is similar to that made by Thrasymachus in Book I of Plato's *Republic*, wherein he claims that injustice, rather than justice, is advantageous for oneself. Thus, the individual has no reason to act justly herself.

Further, one might worry that by opting out of resentment at improper interpersonal conduct, one is effectively opting-out of the social group itself, such that one is no longer afforded the benefits of group cooperative success.<sup>191</sup> Whether one can forego resentment, while continuing to benefit from group cooperative success, will depend on whether one can retain access to such benefits without participating in the social practices that make such benefits possible. Even if it turns out that we would be better off reaping the benefits of group cooperative success while foregoing resentment ourselves, it's not altogether clear that this course of action is available to us.

This is not to say that, all-things-considered, we should always express resentment toward others who treat us improperly. Sometimes, there will also be reasons not to express our resentment. For example, perhaps one's relationship with another person is such that they will not regard one's resentment as conveying a message of respect, but instead regard it as an instance of a degrading personal insult. In this case, though one's resentment is intended to communicate a message of respect, it will be received as a message of disrespect. There may be strong moral reasons not to express resentment in this case. Prudential considerations may also tell against resentment in a particular case. For example, perhaps one's resentment, when directed at someone with a bullying personality, will not serve as a means of self-protection, but instead act as a catalyst for further improper treatment from this person. In this case, one may have prudential reasons not to express resentment. In general, while there are moral and

---

<sup>191</sup> David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). This is similar to Gauthier's argument that complying with the demands of morality gives rise to benefits that are unavailable if one declines to participate. As Gauthier notes, one's unwillingness to comply with the demands of morality make it likely that one will eventually struggle to find willing partners for one's cooperative endeavors, and thereby be unable to reap the benefits of such activities.

prudential reasons to express resentment when one is treated improperly, there will sometimes be moral and prudential reasons not to do so as well. Whether, all-things-considered, one ought to express resentment in a particular case will depend on the weightiness of all the reasons involved.

## **CONCLUSION**

Resentment is often regarded as an emotion that we ought to be rid of, or that we would be better off without. However, a variety of different arguments for this claim all fail to establish its veracity. Moral and prudential concerns about resentment, I've argued, are better thought of as normative constraints on one's resentment, rather than being supportive of trying to rid ourselves of resentment. One's resentment can sometimes be immoral or imprudent, but it doesn't follow that resentment is an emotion that we therefore ought to rid ourselves of having. Fittingness considerations also fail to establish that resentment is an emotion we ought not to have. While some types of resentment may have fittingness conditions that can never be satisfied, it doesn't follow that resentment is always unfitting. Moral, prudential, and fittingness considerations all fail to support the claim that resentment is an emotion we ought to try to rid ourselves of having.

There are also moral and prudential reasons in favor of resenting others. These reasons are of two kinds. Moral and prudential reasons to have resentment follow from the self and other-respecting qualities of resentment, while reasons to express resentment follow from resentment's communicative aspects. In most cases where we are treated improperly by others, there are moral and prudential reasons to both have and express resentment. This is not to say that all-things-considered, we should always have and express resentment when others treat us

improperly. However, there is usually a great deal to be said in favor of both having and expressing resentment in such cases.

These conclusions also have implications for the popular sentiments regarding resentment with which we began. Contrary to these popular sentiments, resentment is not “the number one offender,” nor is it “like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die,” though our analysis of various arguments for being rid of resentment is perhaps helpful for understanding why some have made these sorts of claims about resentment. Resentment, when properly regulated by the relevant normative constraints, is a self and other-respecting emotion that fosters a positive individual self-image, promotes group stability, and facilitates cooperation. While we should be mindful of problematic types of resentment, as well as the normative constraints on this emotion, resentment is an emotion that we should be less concerned to rid ourselves of having, and more concerned to cultivate and encourage.

## REFERENCES

- Alcoholics Anonymous. *Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition*. New York: A.A. World Services, 2001.
- Anderson, Barbara J., and Helen Kornblum. "The family environment of children with a diabetic parent: Issues for research." *Family Systems Medicine* 2, No. 1 (1984): 17-27.
- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, 1325-1451. New York: Random House, 1961.
- Arnold, Magda. *Emotion and Personality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Averill, James R. "In the Eye of the Beholder" in *The Nature of Emotions: Fundamental Questions*, edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson, 7-14. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Baumeister, Roy and Mark R. Leary. "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (1995): 497-529.
- Bealer, George. "Intuition and the autonomy of philosophy" in *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, edited by Michael DePaul and William Ramsey, 201-239. Lanhan, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998.
- Bealer, George. "Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance" in *Conceivability and Possibility*, edited by Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne, 71-126. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Bekoff, Marc. *The Smile of a Dolphin: Remarkable Accounts of Animal Emotions*. New York: Discovery Press Books, 2000.
- Bekoff, Marc. "Wild justice and fair play: cooperation, forgiveness, and morality in animals." *Biology and Philosophy* 19 (2004): 489-520.
- Bekoff, Marc. "The Question of Animal Emotions: An Ethological Perspective" in *Mental Health and Well-Being in Animals*, edited by F.D. McMillan, Chapter 2. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

- Bekoff, Marc. "Animal Passions and Bestly Virtues: Cognitive Ethology as the Unifying Science for Understanding the Subjective, Emotional, Empathic, and Moral Lives of Animals." *Human Ecology Forum* 13 No. 1 (2006): 39-59.
- Bekoff, Marc and Jessica Pierce. *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Ben Ze'Ev, Aaron. *The Subtlety of Emotions*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.
- Berkowitz, Leonard and Eddie Harmon Jones. "Toward an Understanding of the Determinants of Anger." *Emotion* 4 (2004): 107-130.
- Brady, Michael S. "The irrationality of recalcitrant emotion." *Philosophical Studies* 145 (2009): 413-430.
- Bradley, Ben. "Analyzing Harm." Unpublished Manuscript, 2009.
- Bradley, Ben. "Doing Away with Harm." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85 (2012): 390-412.
- Butler, Joseph. *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*. London: SPCK, 1970.
- Cassileth, Barrie R., Robert V. Zupkis, Katherine Sutton-Smith, and Vicki March. "Information and participation preferences among cancer patients." *Annals of internal medicine* 92, no. 6 (1980): 832-836.
- Coons, Christian. "If the shoe fits, what kind of reason do I have to wear it?" Unpublished manuscript, 2012.
- Copp, David. "Defending the principle of alternate possibilities: Blameworthiness and moral responsibility." *Nous* (1997): 441-456.
- Cromwell, H.C. and J. Panksepp. "Rethinking the cognitive revolution from a neural perspective: how overuse/misuse of the term 'cognition' and the neglect of affective controls in behavioral neuroscience could be delaying progress in understanding the BrainMind." *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 35 No. 9 (2011): 2026-2035.
- Cullison, Andrew. "What Are Seemings?" *Ratio* 23 (2010): 260-274.
- D'Arms, Justin and Daniel Jacobson. "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2000): 65-90.

D'Arms, Justin and Daniel Jacobson. "Sentiment and Value." *Ethics* (2000a): 722-748.

D'Arms, Justin and Daniel Jacobson. "The significance of recalcitrant emotion (or, anti-quasijudgmentalism)" in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 127-145. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

D'Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "Anthropocentric constraints on human value." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 1 (2006): 99-126.

Darwall, Stephen. "Two Kinds of Respect." *Ethics* (1977): 36–49

Darwall, Stephen. *The Second-Person Standpoint*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Darwin, Charles. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. London: J. Friedmann, 1979.

Deigh, John, "Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions." *Ethics* 104 (1994): 824–54.

de Waal, Frans. *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex Among Apes*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Dillon, Robin S., "Respect", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/respect/>.

Ekman, Paul and Friesen, Wallace V. "Constants across cultures in the face and emotion." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17 (1971): 124–129.

Ekman, Paul. "Facial Expression and Emotion." *American Psychologist* 48 No. 4 (1993): 376-379.

Ekman, Paul. "All Emotions are Basic" in *The Nature of Emotions: Fundamental Questions*, edited by Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson, 15-19. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Ekman, Paul. "Basic Emotions" in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Tim Dalgleish and Mick Power, 45-60. Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1999.

Elliot, A.J., and P.G. Devine. "On the Motivational Nature of Cognitive Dissonance: Dissonance as Psychological Discomfort." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67 No. 3 (1994): 382-394.

Ellsworth, P.C. and C.A. Smith. "From appraisal to emotion: Differences among unpleasant feelings." *Motivation and Emotion* 12 (1988): 271-302.

Fischer, John Martin. *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Fischer, John Martin and Mark Ravizza. *Responsibility and Control*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Frankfurt, Harry G. "Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility." *The Journal of Philosophy* (1969): 829-839.

Gauthier, David. *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Gendler, Tamar Szabó. "Alief and belief." *The Journal of philosophy* (2008): 634-663.

Gendler, Tamar Szabó. "Alief in action (and reaction)." *Mind & Language* 23, no. 5 (2008a): 552-585.

Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Greenspan, Patricia. *Emotions and Reason: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988.

Greenspan, Patricia. "Emotions, Rationality, and Mind/Body" in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 113-125. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Griffiths, Paul. *What Emotions Really Are*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Hampton, Jean and Jeffrie Murphy. *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Hieronymi, Pamela. "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2001): 529-555.

Izard, C.E. *The Psychology of Emotions*. New York: Plenum Press, 1991.



- Kahnman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2011
- Kauppinen, Antti. "Fittingness and Idealization." *Ethics* 124, No. 3 (2014): 572-588.
- Kenny, Anthony. *Action, Emotion, and Will*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.
- Lazarus, Richard. *Emotion and Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- LeDoux, Joseph. *The Emotional Brain*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Macnamara, Coleen. "Reactive attitudes as communicative entities." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2013): doi: 10.1111/phpr.12075.
- Marks, Joel. "A Theory of Emotion." *Philosophical Studies* 42 (1982): 227-242.
- Martin, Adrienne. "Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology." *Journal of Philosophy* 107 (2010): 534-553
- Mason, William A. and Sally P. Mendoza. *Primate Social Conflict*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- MacLachlan, Alice. "Resentment and moral judgment in Smith and Butler." *The Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010): 161-177.
- McClement, Susan E., and Harvey Max Chochinov. "Hope in advanced cancer patients." *European Journal of Cancer* 44, no. 8 (2008): 1169-1174.
- McGrath, Matthew, "Propositions", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/propositions/>.
- McHale, Susan M., and Wendy C. Gamble. "Sibling relationships of children with disabled and nondisabled brothers and sisters." *Developmental Psychology* 25, No. 3 (1989): 421-429.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals in Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, 439-602. New York: The Modern Library, 1968.

- Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "What is Anger and Why Should We Care?" *Best Ideas Lecture Series*. The University of Chicago Law School. Chicago. 14 January 2014. Lecture.
- Ortony, A., G.L. Clore, and A. Collins. *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Panksepp, Jaak. *Affective Neuroscience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Prinz, Jesse. *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of the Emotions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Prinz, Jesse. "Précis of Gut Reactions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, No.3 (2008): 708.
- Quackenbush, Nancy, and Jane Crossman. "Injured athletes: A study of emotional responses." *Journal of Sport Behavior* 17, No. 3 (1994): 178-187.
- Roberts, Robert. "What is an Emotion: A Sketch." *The Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 183-209.
- Roberts, Robert C. "What is Wrong with Wicked Feelings?" *American Philosophical Quarterly*. (1991): 13-24.
- Roberts, Robert C. *Emotions in the Moral Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Rozin, Paul, Linda Millman, and Carol Nemeroff. "Operation of the Laws of Systematic Magic in Disgust and Other Domains." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1, No. 4 (1986): 703-12.
- Scanlon, T.M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Scherer, K.R. "Appraisal theory," in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Tim Dalgleish and Mick Power, 637-663. New York: Wiley, 1993.
- Schroeder, Mark. "The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons." *Ethics* 122, No. 3 (2012): 457-488.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Smith, Aynsley M., Steven G. Scott, W. Michael O'Fallon, and Mary L. Young. "Emotional responses of athletes to injury." *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 65, no. 1 (1990): 38-50.
- Solomon, Robert. *The Passions*. Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976.
- Solomon, Robert. "On Emotions as Judgments," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 183-191.
- Solomon, Robert. "Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings: What is a 'Cognitive Theory' of Emotions and Does it Neglect Affectivity?" in *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimoysis, 1-18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Steinbock, Bonnie. "Surrogate motherhood as prenatal adoption." *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 16, No. 1-2 (1988): 44-50.
- Stocker, Michael and Elizabeth Hegeman. *Valuing Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Strawson, P.F. "Freedom and Resentment." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1-25.
- Tolhurst, William. "Seemings." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): 293-302.
- Wallace, R. Jay. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Watson, Gary. *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Way, Jonathan. "Transmission and the Wrong Kind of Reason." *Ethics* 122 (2012): 489-515.
- Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen. "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value." *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 391-423.
- Wood, Allen. "Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others" in *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, edited by Thomas E. Hill, Jr., 229-252. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.