



Ressentiment as a distortion and revaluation of the value system in the psychosocial experience of an individual¹

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Abstract: Ressentiment is a complex psychological phenomenon, manifesting as a relatively permanent emotional and cognitive attitude, arising under conditions of frustration, a sense of injustice, and the individual's experienced powerlessness. Its essence is not limited to the negative experience of emotions but also includes the systematic distortion of the perception of axiological reality and the secondary revaluation of the value system. In the article, resentment is analysed as a compensatory regulatory mechanism that allows an individual to maintain a subjective sense of meaning and coherence at the expense of deforming relational and existential evaluations. Referring to the philosophical approaches of Friedrich Nietzsche *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* from 1887 and Max Scheler *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* from 1912 and to James's contemporary models of emotion regulation Gross (1998, 2003); Gross and Thompson (2023); Roskam, Gross, and Mikolajczak (2023) The article shows resentment as a phenomenon that intensifies in psychosocial conditions, where an excess of stimuli, comparative pressure and chronic exposure are conducive to the perpetuation of negative evaluations and succumbing to recursive loops of affect (Haidt, 2024). Particular emphasis is placed on the role of resentment in the reorganisation of the hierarchy of values: values that were originally unattainable are depreciated, and substitute values are raised to normative status. The article argues that resentment limits the ability to reflectively evaluate, engage in dialogue, and act responsibly because it stabilises non-adaptive forms of emotion and affect regulation over the long term (Gross, 2015; Strakosch, Schulze, Miano, Pruessner, & Barnow, 2024; Westen & Blagov, 2007).

Keywords: psychosocial experience, regulation of emotions, resentment, values

Introduction

The contemporary psychosocial experience of an individual is shaped by the dynamics of acceleration, information overload, constant comparison, and the pressure of exposure. Under such conditions, difficulties with stable valuation, maintaining a coherent identity, and emotional regulation are increasingly observed. One of the key, yet insufficiently conceptualised, phenomena that organises these difficulties is resentment.

Ressentiment is not just a transient emotional state, but a relatively permanent experiential structure in which negative emotions – such as envy, grief, feelings of harm or jealousy – are internalised

and cognitively rationalised. As Max Scheler notes in the book *Ressentiment in the structure of moral systems* (1912/2022), resentment occurs when an individual does not have the opportunity to directly express or discharge emotions, and at the same time experiences systematic frustration with the values that are important to him. As a result, there is a revaluation – not of reality, but of its evaluation. This “falsification does not occur in consciousness, as in a simple lie, but during the path of experience to consciousness, and therefore in the sphere of the way of forming images and feeling values” (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 76).

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/66p_Karb.pdf

To capture the psychological specificity of resentment, it is necessary to take into account contemporary approaches to emotions and their regulation. Emotions – understood functionally – prepare for action, direct attention, organise behaviour and communicate the needs and intentions of the individual to others. However, they can become inadequate, excessively intense, or too long-lasting, thereby hindering functioning and fostering the emergence of entrenched, costly regulatory strategies (Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007; Gross, 1998; Linehan, Bohus, & Lynch, 2007). Typically, attempts to regulate emotions focus on reducing negative emotions, such as sadness and reinforcing positive emotions like happiness. Difficulties in regulating emotions are one of the most important factors contributing to the development of psychopathology (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014), which may make people unable to modify their emotions effectively or try to regulate them at inappropriate times (Preece et al., 2025). The assessment of emotion regulation is therefore of broad societal interest in the clinical and research context. In this sense, resentment can be understood as a particular form of long-term regulatory “setting” in which negative affective states – rather than being extinguished – are perpetuated and embedded in interpretive schemes.

The starting point for such an analysis is the distinction between affect and emotion. Referring to the basic explanation by Klaus Scherer (1984), affect can be treated as a superior category encompassing various states related to quick “good-bad” distinctions, i.e., common attentional processes and valence evaluation. In this view, affect includes both stress reactions, emotions (e.g., aversion, hatred, envy, jealousy), moods (e.g., depression, euphoria), and motivational impulses (e.g., hunger, aggression, pain) (Lazarus, 1993; Parkinson et al., 1996). Resentment is located precisely at the junction of emotions, mood, and cognitive evaluation, and therefore requires the perspective of affect regulation rather than the description of a single emotion (Westen, 1994).

The aim of this article is to show resentment as a mechanism that distorts the individual’s value system and, at the same time, as a specific adaptation strategy with high psychological and social costs.

The analysis will be embedded first in an axiological and then in a psychological perspective, taking into account process models of emotion regulation that capture emotions as a dynamic transaction between person and situation, developing over time and subject to feedback (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Gross, 2007). Such an approach is the starting point for the conceptualisation of resentment as a multidimensional system of emotional and cognitive processes, and finds its operationalisation in the original model of the KRe-Psy Resentment Questionnaire, which includes the following dimensions: temporal, spatial, energetic, and informational.

1. Distorting and revaluating the value system as a regulatory mechanism of resentment

Distortion and revaluation of the value system are key mechanisms enabling the maintenance of subjective coherence in situations of existential tension, frustration, or powerlessness. From an axiological perspective, it is not only a matter of changing the hierarchy of preferences, but of a profound transformation of the meanings attributed to good, evil, justice or dignity. Analysis of Anna Drabarek’s book, *The Subject of Axiology. Discussions about the nature of moral values*, shows that values are not simple objects of choice, but meaning-making structures that constitute “the identity of the subject is not only based on normative reasons, but also contains acts of will that generate proper decision-making” (2019, p. 138). Richard Moń, in his review of this book, wrote, citing the views of Alain Badiou, “that it is very difficult and difficult to liberate names from the prostitutive ways of using them [...] I think that this sharp statement could be perfectly related to the name/concept *Value*” (2019, p. 205). In this context, their distortion is not only cognitive but also includes emotional and normative dimensions.

For the first time, Friedrich Nietzsche described this process as “a revaluation of all values” (*Umwertung aller Werte*), pointing out that in conditions of weakness, subordination and inability to act directly, the original axiological assessments are

reversed (Schnädelbach, 1992, p. 249). What was an expression of strength, expansion, and creativity is considered morally suspect, while the qualities of powerlessness – such as submission, patience or resignation – are elevated to the rank of virtues. Frederick Nietzsche writes that “a man of resentment is neither sincere nor naïve, nor honest or straightforward. His soul *strabismus*; His ghost loves hiding places, little-known roads, and back doors. Everything that is hidden seems to him to be his world, his safety, his comfort” (Nietzsche, 1887/2022, p. 26). Resentment has a compensatory function here: it allows the individual to maintain a sense of moral superiority and maybe “escape into oneself” with a simultaneous lack of real agency. Revaluation does not consist in the creative establishment of new values, but in the reactive transformation of existing meanings. In the classical view, resentment is a reaction of the weak to the inability to realise their own will to power, “not to take their enemies seriously, their accidents, even their evil deeds – this is a sign of strong, full natures” (Nietzsche, 1887/2022, p. 27). In the psychological dimension, it can be interpreted as a regulatory mechanism that reduces the dissonance between the individual’s aspirations and his real possibilities of action. In a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or agency blockage, the individual does not give up on their values but redefines them in a way that allows them to maintain a positive self-image.

In the context of resentment, this process takes the form of a relatively permanent cognitive-axiological distortion, in which values originally desired but subjectively unavailable (such as success, social recognition, or autonomy) are systematically devalued, while secondary values – related to suffering, withdrawal, criticism, or moral superiority – are overvalued. This approach corresponds to John Dewey’s pragmatic, relational and objectivist concept of values, according to which values are revealed in action and are inextricably linked to the goals set in a specific life situation (Dewey, 1939). In this sense, the objectives are *conditio sine qua non* values – values without goals do not exist, because only the goal gives them practical meaning. At the same time, however, a change in the goal entails a change in the value system, which leads to its functional

relativisation. Dewey assumes that goals are not the result of an autonomous, free decision of the subject, but emerge from the situation and are determined by the current conditions of the body’s operation. As a consequence, there are no overarching or immutable goals, and the values are subject to constant reconfiguration as the context of the action changes (*ibid.*). This perspective is in tension with the axiological realism of Nicolai Hartmann, who argues that values are primary to goals and set the horizon of possible action (1988). However, it is precisely in the light of Dewey’s pragmatic conception that the mechanism of resentment becomes particularly clear: in a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or permanent blockage of agency, the individual does not abandon values as such, but redefines goals, and with them, the system of values, adapting it to the current possibilities of action.

In this sense, resentment, according to Nietzsche’s intuition, can be interpreted as a regulatory mechanism that reduces the dissonance between an individual’s aspirations and his real possibilities of action. The philosopher in question frames this process as a special form of revaluation, in which causative impotence is replaced by a moral judgment and a reinterpretation of the value system. This perspective can be clearly read in the work *Twilight of idols, or how to philosophize with a hammer* (*Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*) in *Sentences and arrowheads* (*Sprüche und Pfeile*), where the well-known phrase “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger” expresses the belief that the experience of adversity and suffering can lead to the development of values such as mental resilience and strength of character (1889/2025, p. 8). At the same time, Nietzsche points out that in the absence of a real possibility of action, this process can take on a reactive form, in which the will to revenge is hidden under the concept of justice. This is evocatively expressed by the statement that “a little revenge is more human than none”, present in the *Thus says Zarathustra* (*Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*) part II. I, *About the bite of the viper* (1883-1885/2022b, p. 66). Revaluation of values does not mean their disappearance but rather an adaptive transformation,

enabling the individual to maintain the coherence of the Self and a positive self-image under conditions of long-term frustration and a sense of unfulfillment.

From the perspective of emotional psychology, resentment serves as a form of long-term affective regulation. Primary emotions are not discharged but are fixed in the cognitive structure, leading to their chronic presence. As indicated by research on the regulation of emotions (Büyüköksüz & Kayaalp-pehlivan, 2025; Haag, Bagrodia, & Bonanno, 2024), this way of processing emotions promotes cognitive rigidity, reduced mental flexibility and loss of the ability to self-reflect.

Max Scheler, in the book *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* [Ressentiment in the structure of systems], (1912/2022), moral, deepens this analysis, showing resentment as a permanent emotional-cognitive attitude that leads to the systematic falsification of the perception of values (2022). In his view, resentment is not a temporary affect, but a long-term psychological and moral process, in which the subject, unable to realise the valued goods, reduces their value or assigns them a negative meaning. He writes that “resentiment is spiritual self-poisoning with fully defined causes and effects. It is a permanent psychic attitude arising as a result of systematic repression, the discharge of certain mind-stirrings and effects which are in themselves normal and fundamental to human nature, and which result in certain permanent attitudes to a certain type of axiological illusions and corresponding judgments about values” (Scheler, 1912/2022, pp. 16–17). By describing this mechanism as false valuation, he emphasises that it does not result from authentic axiological discernment but serves a defensive function for the threatened Self, protecting the individual from the experience of failure, powerlessness or humiliation. This distortion consists in breaking the adequate relationship between the emotional experience of values and their objective order. As a result, the hierarchy of values is subordinated to the need to reduce suffering and tension rather than to axiological truth.

Anna Drabarek’s approach quoted above allows us to place these concepts in the broader context of contemporary axiology. The author points out that axiological chaos, normative confusion and deval-

uation of the concept of “values” are conducive to the processes of their instrumentalisation and relativisation, and that the “lack of filtration gives rise to chaos and danger” (Drabarek, 2019, p. 158). In such conditions, resentment can become the dominant mechanism regulating the moral orientation of an individual and social groups. Revaluation *Values* It is then not reflective or dialogical, but takes the form of a defensive reinterpretation of the world, in which meaning is subordinated to the emotional need for compensation.

From a psychological and axiological perspective, resentment thus reveals itself as a process of distorting the relationship between value and meaning. Values cease to serve as an orientation towards the good, and begin to serve as a justification for passivity, entitlement or a sense of moral superiority over others. Both Nietzsche and Scheler show that such a process leads to the degradation of the moral life, because it eliminates the creative tension between duty and the possibility of its realisation. It can be noted that regaining the meaning of values requires re-rooting them in a coherent axiological order, which does not reduce goodness and justice to usefulness or emotional relief but treats them as real dimensions of human existence (Bombaerts et al., 2023). In a situation of chronic ineffectiveness or agency blockage, the individual does not give up on values – but redefines them in a way that allows them to maintain a positive self-image.

This process becomes clearer when we embed it in the modal model of emotion, in which emotion results from a sequence: “Situation → Attention → Evaluation → Reaction” (Gross, 2024, p. 5). The key here is to understand that emotions arise when an individual assigns a meaning to a situation relevant to their goals and then makes a cognitive assessment that includes, e.g., valence and the situation’s value (Scherer et al., 2022). Resentiment can therefore be seen as a fixed pattern of evaluation, in which the “value meaning” of the social world becomes systematically distorted: situations, persons and institutions are interpreted through the filter of harm, deprivation and comparison, thereby sustaining a certain type of affective reaction and reinforcing long-term axiological reorganisations.

The recursive nature of emotions is also an important element: emotional reactions not only result from a situation but also transform it, triggering successive cycles of evaluation and reaction (Gross, 1998). In resentment, this feedback loop takes the form of a self-reinforcing mechanism: a negative reaction (e.g., hostility, withdrawal, irony) alters social relations, creating new situations that confirm previous evaluations (“the world is hostile”, “others humiliate”) and thus perpetuate the reevaluation.

The process of reevaluation is a form of cognitive distortion: values originally desirable but inaccessible (e.g., success, recognition, autonomy) are devalued, while secondary values (e.g., moral superiority, suffering, criticism, withdrawal) are overvalued. Scheler describes this process as “blindness, and secondly – and this is the main effect of resentment – the result of illusion and falsification of the very *Values*, thanks to which the existence and validity of the possible objects of comparison in general have a positive character of high value”, in which the evaluation does not result from authentic axiological discernment, but from the need to protect the Self from the experience of failure (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 40).

At this point, the perspective of emotion regulation as a heterogeneous set of processes that can operate at different stages of emotion generation – from situation selection to “reaction modulation” – turns out to be particularly useful (Gross, 2024, p. 15). In this sense, the analysed approach retains high cognitive value, in which resentment can be understood as an attitude formed on the basis of a distorted and generalised perception of reality, leading to an internal, repressed emotional and cognitive reaction directed towards people, situations, or oneself. It ranges from negative affective components such as aversion, jealousy, hatred, and envy to the desire for revenge. These emotions can serve a compensatory function against feelings of powerlessness, injustice or humiliation. Going further, it can also be considered a relatively permanent configuration of strategies, especially those oriented towards antecedents (e.g., selective attention, cognitive change consisting in reinterpreting the world as unfair) and reactionary strategies (e.g., suppression of expression, interpersonal coldness), which in the long run stabilise the negative axiology in the individual’s experience.

1.1. Replacing pro-social values with defensive values

The value system has a regulatory function in the human psyche – it organises goals, directs motivation and gives meaning to life experiences (Smallenbroek, Leijen, Stanciu, Van Herk, & Bardi, 2025). In conditions of relative emotional balance, values serve as stable reference points, enabling an individual’s adaptive functioning in the social world while maintaining certain norms.

Values, defined and psychologically framed by Shalom Schwartz in 1994, as basic motivational cognitive structures, guide life goals, transcend contexts and influence individuals by setting directions of action in different ways, depending on their preferred goals (Elizarov et al., 2024). And in emotional situations, e.g., long-term stress, deprivation, or the experience of injustice, they are disturbed and transformed. Therefore, emotions are complex processes involving a subjective experience component, physiological responses, and a behavioural component, expressed through emotional expression (Frijda, 1988; Mauss & Robinson, 2009). Emotional norms can refer to each of these dimensions, regulating both the way emotions are expressed (e.g., the social expectation to show joy at a wedding or sadness at a funeral) and the experience of them, as well as the belief that in certain situations one “should” feel happiness or sadness. In this sense, emotional norms are different from behavioural norms, such as the principles of reciprocity or cooperation in social interactions, which are primarily concerned with observable acts of action and not necessarily with the inner intentions or affective states of the individual (Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024).

Thus, resentment not only accompanies the violation of important values, gradually leading to their reevaluation, but also negatively affects norms. In this process, pro-social values such as trust, justice, and cooperation can be replaced by defensive and compensatory values, such as domination, control, emotional distance or devaluation of others. This mechanism allows the individual to maintain a subjective sense of mental coherence, but at the expense of deteriorating interpersonal relationships and decreased mental well-being.

At the same time, the regulation of emotions – in accordance with the developmental and cultural approach – is shaped by context, including social norms and values that determine which emotions “should” be shown and how they should be modulated (Vishkin & Tamir, 2023). This means that resentment, as an axiological phenomenon, cannot be explained solely intrapsychically: it is co-constructed within a social matrix in which emotional values and rules are intertwined with norms that are not always congruent or readily read.

1.2. Emotional-cognitive mechanisms of overvaluation

From the perspective of emotion regulation, resentment serves as a “black box placed between the situation and the reaction” as a long-term regulator of affect, in which repressed negative emotions do not find a direct outlet, but are internalised and transformed into permanent interpretive schemes (Gross, 2024, p. 5). This leads to the registration and selective perception of reality, which is conducive to the generalisation of harm and the perpetuation of beliefs about the hostile nature of the social world. Of particular importance here is the focus of attention and cognitive change.

Firstly, focusing attention can take the form of focusing on the emotional features of the situation, and in the extreme variant – rumination – repeated recollection of negative thoughts, emotions and memories, which is a risk factor for the intensification of automatic processes controlled by emotional stimuli (Singh et al., 2025).

In resentment, attention often returns to experiences of harm, comparison, and humiliation, which prolong affect and reinforce generalising conclusions about the social world. This mechanism is consistent with the findings that rumination promotes the persistence and severity of depressive symptoms (Hoebeke et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2025).

Secondly, cognitive change is crucial, understood as modifying the assessment of a situation to change its emotional meaning, including cognitive reinterpretation, as shown in studies (Meyers et al., 2025), which indicate that cognitive reassessment is one of the most

commonly used and effective strategies for regulating emotions. In the adaptive variant, reinterpretation can reduce the intensity of negative emotions and negative emotional reactions (Stover et al., 2024). In resentment, however, cognitive change takes the form not so much of a “revaluation towards healing” as of a “revaluation towards defence”: the individual gives situations a meaning that affirms his own harm and moral superiority, thereby stabilising negative emotions and perpetuating axiological distortion (ibid.).

Finally, when the revaluation is consolidated, the individual can resort to reaction modulation, including expression suppression. Modern research on emotion regulation confirms (Trentini & Dan-Glauser, 2024) that the suppression of emotional expression (*expressive suppression*), although it may reduce the external symptoms of affect, is associated with adaptive costs – including lower experience of positive emotions and adaptive functioning, and an increase in sympathetic activation and stress reactivity (Carmanica et al., 2023). Although the classic research of James Gross and Robert Levenson (1997), recent studies show that suppression does not reduce negative affective states in an adaptive way and is correlated with higher levels of stress and reduced mental well-being. The above considerations lead the author of the article to the conclusion that negative affect – resentment (resentiment, grief, anger, resentment, envy, contempt) is not only a single “emotion”, but a regulatory configuration describable by the time parameters of the affective reaction – including, e.g., latency/rise-time, build-up and amplitude, duration and rate of extinction and return to the baseline level, i.e., affective chronometry. This position is consistent with the concept of Puccetti et al. (2023), as well as by the degree of persistence of emotions over time, such as emotional inertia, which is consistent with the views of Mitchell et al. (2024).

The discussed approach allows us to better understand that resentment, as a revaluation of values, is not a fully conscious process, but is the result of the accumulation of emotional experiences in which the original ideals are replaced by their negative counterparts. Justice gives way to a sense of harm, meaning to existential disappointment, and agency to learned helplessness or passive hostility. This is shown by re-

search Weigelt and Kizilhan (2024), which indicates that the “perceived injustice” trait is associated with various negative affective reactions, such as feelings of helplessness, sadness, or social withdrawal, often occurring in situations in which the individual feels disadvantaged and unfairly treated.

1.3. Socio-cultural determinants of resentment

Contemporary culture – described by Han Byung-Chul and Daniel Stauer in the book *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld* Hannah (2022) as a society of fatigue, exposure and control – it creates conditions conducive to the perpetuation of resentment. Permanent comparability, algorithmic content selection, and visibility pressure reinforce the experience of deficit and relative deprivation. The individual functions in a space where values are constantly subject to evaluation, but the possibilities for their realisation remain unevenly distributed; the pressure of visibility reinforces the experience of deficit and relative deprivation.

From the point of view of emotion regulation, it is important that it is the social and cultural context that determines which forms of expression are considered “adaptive response alternatives” and what response modulation strategies are reinforced in socialisation practices, social rules, cultural scenarios, cultural values, and cultural differences that these concepts point to (Aka, 2023). In modernity, these strategies often reward quick “image management”, self-control, and suppression of weaknesses, which can promote the transition from adaptive affective responses to chronic, internalised resentment attitudes.

Jonathan Haidt (2024) and Jean Twenge (2019) indicate that the young generation is increasingly internalising comparative narratives, which is conducive to the growing sense of injustice and harm. In such a context, resentment becomes a form of adaptation to a world in which meaning and value are measured by external indicators. The individual, unable to meet the norms of success, defensively reconstructs the value system. Resentment becomes a form of “regulation of meaning”: it allows the world to be interpreted as morally bankrupt or hostile, which paradoxically protects the coherence of the Self.

At the same time, however, in accordance with the logic of emotional feedback, such an interpretation increases the likelihood of subsequent emotional cycles based on hostility and harm, thereby reinforcing the axiological deformity. Mikko Salmela and Tereza Capelos in *Ressentiment: A Complex Emotion or an Emotional Mechanism of Psychic Defences?* (2021) presents *ressentiment* as an emotional defence mechanism in society, which transforms the original negative emotions of shame and powerlessness into long-lasting, other-oriented emotions such as resentment, hatred, anger, envy or revenge.

1.4. The impact of resentment on the formation of an individual’s identity

Ressentiment significantly shapes an individual’s identity. Instead of the dynamic narrative of the Self, there is a reactive identity, based on opposition, comparison and moral judgment of others. This mechanism can be described as a fixed “organisation of evaluations” in which the processes of emotion and emotion regulation co-occur and mutually sustain one another (Frijda, 1988). As a consequence, the individual experiences emotions less often as transient signals and more often as “proof” of a permanent structure of the world. People with difficult experiences formulate more complex identity narratives that structure their emotions and self-understanding over time, a process that is crucial for the experience and regulation of emotions in shaping the Self (Carlsson et al., 2025). Therefore, empirical studies indicate that emotion regulation is intrinsically related to identity style: less adaptive regulation is associated with an avoidant style, which corresponds to reactive and negative configurations (Daleandro et al., 2025).

In social relationships, resentment fosters projection, attribution of blame, and perpetuation of hostile cognitive patterns. Other people are not experienced as partners but as a threat to their self-worth. Ann Masten’s research on mental resilience indicates that these types of attitudes significantly reduce adaptability and promote isolation (2018).

Other research on interpersonal development and regulation shows that the quality of bonds and how the environment responds to emotional expressions

affect long-term depressive responses and promote a reactive, rigid attitude (Hofmann et al., 2016). In this light, resentment can be understood as the effect of long-term, unfavourable feedback: lack of validation, humiliation, the devaluation of emotions, and a lack of space for expression, all of which are conducive to the transition from emotion to attitude. This process weakens the capacity for dialogue, empathy, and authentic relationality, as Peter Fonag and Chloe Campbell show in their analysis (2023). They state that when the mechanisms of mentalization and epistemic trust function properly, the individual is able to understand others' intentions, engage in empathic dialogue, and flexibly update beliefs about himself and the world. On the other hand, their disorder promotes the growth of cognitive-emotional rigidity, as a result of which social reality begins to be interpreted as hostile, unpredictable or unreliable.

From a socio-cultural perspective, resentment fosters a gradual erosion of the hierarchy of values, leading to their instrumentalisation. Contemporary psychological research indicates (Park, 2022; Russo et al., 2022) that in an environment of chronic frustration, social comparisons and weakened agency, values increasingly play a regulatory and defensive role, rather than being a stable reference point for action and meaning. In such an arrangement, values do not disappear, but they are subordinated to the protection of the Self and the reduction of emotional tension, which, in the long run, limits the ability to reflectively value and makes it difficult to rebuild a sense of meaning and agency.

This phenomenon is reinforced by the contemporary cultural context, in which, as Han (2022) notes, the deficit of reflection and experiences of in-depth attention is conducive to a declarative, rather than an experiential, attitude to values. Psychological analyses of culture show (Haidt, 2024; Twenge, 2019) that the pressures of exposure, acceleration, and permanent reactivity are conducive to transforming values into elements of defensive narratives rather than into internally integrated axiological orientations. In this sense, resentment can be understood as

a negative socially reinforced emotional-cognitive configuration (Karbowski, 2026), in which values lose their meaning-making character and become a tool for maintaining the coherence of the Self in conditions of cultural disappointment and the experience of meaning.

2. Ressentiment as a multidimensional system – in the original model of the KRe–Psy Sentiment Questionnaire: time, spatial, energetic, and informational perspectives

In the social sciences and psychology, many concepts have different semantic ranges, arising from different theoretical traditions and levels of analysis. For this reason, it is reasonable to seek systematic methods of description and conceptualisation that enable the organisation of complex constructs and their analysis at different levels of description, adequate to the functions performed by the phenomena under study. This is especially true for phenomena such as resentment, which includes emotional, cognitive, axiological, and regulatory components simultaneously.

In this presentation, in the construction of the author's KRe–Psy Resentiment Questionnaire (Karbowski, 2025), a method of systemic description of objects referred to as pentabase (pentabazis; pentada), understood as a five-dimensional analytical structure, was used. This scheme was developed within the framework of the St. Petersburg School of Psychology by a team of researchers from the University of St. Petersburg under the direction of Volodymyr A. Ganzen (1999; Ronginskaya, 2022). According to this approach, the analysis of objects of diverse character allows us to conclude that their basic properties include temporal (time), spatial (space), information and energy dimensions, all of which are embedded in the substrate of the object, which acts as an integrator and a condition for their coherence (Karbowski, 2025, pp. 94–97)².

2 The questionnaire is available with the method of interpretation in the book Karbowski, M. G. (2025). *Odsłanianie resentymentu. Analiza psychologiczna w wymiarze indywidualnym i społecznym*, Warsaw: ELIPSA Publishing House.

This approach is consistent with the processual understanding of emotions and their regulation, in which regulation can act at multiple stages of emotion generation and co-occur at multiple points in the cycle (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2024). The model assumes four dimensions: temporal, spatial, energetic and informational, which can be treated as different “axes” of the fixed regulation of affect and emotions (Westen, 1994), with a clear link to cognitive assessment and the value of the situation (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Scherer, 1984; Scherer et al., 2022). Each of them describes a different yet complementary aspect of regulating the individual’s experience.

2.1. Resentiment time dimension (constancy – variability)

From a temporal perspective, resentment manifests as a disturbance of temporal elasticity, characterised by the dominance of the tendency toward constancy at the expense of variability. The dichotomy adopted in the KRe–Psy model, *constancy – variability*, reflects the degree of repetition and rigidity in the entity’s functioning over time. This mechanism can be explained through the dynamics of emotions: their duration and the processes that influence how they appear, when they appear, how long they last, and how they are experienced (Thompson, 1988). On the other hand, in neuropsychological terms, emotions are described as internal states that vary over time, whose activation, maintenance, and extinction are conditioned by both situational assessments and mechanisms of neuropsychiatric adaptation (Reitsemá et al., 2023).

The individual remains psychologically anchored in past events, which are not subject to narrative integration, but function as affective engrams, i.e., certain memory traces anchored in time, which cause, as Scheler writes, “falsification of value tables, reinterpretation, and revaluation should not be understood as a conscious lie” (Scheler, 1912/2022, p. 76). As a result, there is a retrospective fixation and a weakening of the prospective orientation – the future ceases to be a space of change, and becomes an extension of the loss suffered.

Time perspective research shows that flexible transitions among the past, present, and future are key adaptive and protective factors (Jonason et al., 2018; Stolarski et al., 2020). Temporal resentment significantly limits this ability, leading to psychological stagnation. So it can be described as a weakening of emotional dynamics, consisting of excessive constancy and repetition of inadequate affective reactions, which is conducive to the consolidation of experiences of harm and the limitation of adaptive variability, and in accordance with the idea of recursion, makes each emotional reaction become an antecedent to subsequent evaluations and emotional cycles.

2.2. Spatial dimension of resentment (proximity – distance)

The spatial dimension refers to the regulation of an individual’s relationship with the social environment, described in terms of a tendency towards proximity or distance. This dichotomy is not evaluative but functional – it reflects how the Self is balanced against others. In the context of resentment, relational ambivalence, alternating between striving for control and social withdrawal, and difficulties in maintaining stable trust-based relationships can be observed.

Contemporary research on interpersonal regulation of emotions (*Interpersonal Emotion Regulation (IER)*) confirms that emotional expressions and their social consequences initiate social processes that can both support and weaken the development of an individual’s regulatory competences. Review studies show that emotion regulation often takes place in the context of relationships with others, not just within the individual (Niven & López-Pérez, 2025). Empirical results indicate that interpersonal strategies correlate with perceived social support and mental health (Seong et al., 2024), and daily social interactions regulate emotions in natural living conditions (Tran et al., 2023). The spatial dimension of resentment can take the form of instrumental entering into relationships, serving to compensate for the feeling of harm or to take control of the environment. Distance, on the other hand, can result not only from fear or caution, but also from

the need for autonomy, independence or reflective withdrawal. In resentment, however, distance often has a defensive function, leading to social isolation.

From the perspective of attachment theory and interpersonal regulation, it is emphasised that different attachment patterns shape the ability to adjust emotions in relationships adaptively: both anxious and avoidant styles are associated with difficulties in balancing closeness and autonomy, which favours the perpetuation of negative relational patterns and strategic emotional maladjustments (Bowlby, 2022/1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018; Morris et al., 2025). Resentment can therefore be understood as the stabilisation of the unfavourable relational architecture of proximity – distance, in which the environment’s responses perpetuate a hostile style of evaluation in the individual.

2.3. The energetic dimension of resentment (receiving – giving)

The energy dimension describes the processes of exchange between the individual and the environment, including the *receiving – giving* dichotomy. It refers to how psychic energy is allocated and used in relationships and actions. Resentment is characterised by high affective tension, low agency, and the dominance of reactive over proactive energy. Psychic energy is trapped in rumination, projection, or self-aggression instead of being directed toward creative adaptation. The individual is more likely to expect regulation from the outside (*receiving*) than to engage in active co-creation of reality (*giving*).

This phenomenon remains consistent with the classical concepts of self-regulation and ego exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 2007), which are currently being developed towards processual and motivational models of regulation (Inzlicht et al., 2021; Koole, 2009), and with analyses of the culture of excessive pressure, self-exploitation and chronic mental fatigue characteristic of modernity (Han, 2022).

In the energetic dimension, resentment can be understood as a permanent shift in the regulatory balance towards the consumption of mental energy, while reducing its ability to transform and transmit in action (*receiving – giving*). What is new in this

approach is the treatment of resentment not as a simple deficit of energy, but as a low efficiency in its conversion – emotional energy is available, but it circulates in closed rumination and reactive loops, rather than powering the causative processes. From the perspective of modern models of self-regulation, this means a state of chronic regulatory cost (Inzlicht et al., 2021), in which emotional effort does not lead to a change in the state or meaning of the action, thereby reinforcing dependence on external regulation and perpetuating resentment.

2.4. The informational dimension of resentment (differentiation – generalisation)

The informational dimension refers to the style of information processing and perception of reality, captured in the *differentiation – generalisation* dichotomy. It reflects the degree of commensurability among cognitive objects and the way the world’s complexity is reduced. Resentment is dominated by selective perception of information, a tendency to generalise and polarise assessments, and the strengthening of narratives of harm and injustice.

Referring to the classical theory of Robert White (1959), which in its research proved that individuals differ in their basic cognitive and motivational orientation towards the world, related to the sense of competence and agency, it can be indicated that resentment fosters a global, synthetic style of processing, in which differences are eliminated, and reality is assessed in dichotomous categories (*differentiation – generalisation*). Although the analytical style – based on differentiation – is conducive to adaptation and flexibility, in resentment it is limited by affective cognitive filters. Information orientation affects the way we process experiences, react to frustration, and regulate emotions.

Research on Information Stress and Cognitive Overload (Ledzińska, 2022; Ledzińska & Postek, 2017) indicates that under conditions of excess stimuli and information, individuals more often rely on simplified interpretive schemes, which weakens the ability to differentiate meanings and promotes the consolidation of rigid affective assessments.

This mechanism promotes the stabilisation of attitudes based on feelings of harm, resentment and envy, characteristic of resentment, which becomes the dominant interpretative framework of reality.

From the perspective of processes (unintentional, habitual), this mechanism remains consistent with the dynamics of concentration and rumination, which reinforce selective information processing and entrenched negative conclusions about the world and other people (Wegner & Bargh, 1998). In the informational dimension of resentment, generalisation has a regulatory function: it simplifies the image of reality in a way that protects the coherence of the Self, but at the same time leads to cognitive impoverishment and the perpetuation of axiological distortions. As a consequence, the individual loses the ability to flexibly differentiate meanings, and resentment becomes the dominant interpretative framework of reality.

2.5. Integration of four dimensions in the KRe–Psy model

The presented theoretical model of the KRe–Psy Model Responsiveness Questionnaire assumes that resentment is revealed as a synergistic arrangement of four regulatory dimensions, and not the sum of independent components:

- the time dimension perpetuates the permanence of the harm,
- the spatial dimension disorganises relationships with others,
- the energy dimension blocks agency,
- The information dimension distorts the perception of reality (Karbowski, 2025).

As a consequence, resentment becomes a relatively (negative) regulatory structure, which – as in the process model of emotion regulation – can involve many strategies at the same time (Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1997).

The capture of resentment in the four-dimensional model of KRe–Psy creates a solid basis for its precise psychometric operationalisation. The model allows you to:

- construction of test positions for each dimension,
- verification of the tool's structure in analyses,
- testing of path models (SEM),
- research on the relationship between resentment and well-being, stress, meaning in life, social functioning, attachment styles, or self-esteem.

Ressentiment, understood in this approach, becomes an indicator of the quality of an individual's adaptation to the conditions of the modern world, rather than merely a descriptive emotional label.

Conclusion

Ressentiment is one of the key distortions of an individual's psychosocial experience. As a regulatory mechanism, it can protect the coherence of the Self for some time, but in the long run it leads to the deformation of the hitherto recognized value system, weakening of relationality and loss of meaning. Incorporating process models of emotions and emotion regulation allows us to more precisely capture how resentment arises and perpetuates: through selective attention, cognitive alteration, recursive feedbacks, and configurations of regulatory strategies operating at different stages of the emotional cycle (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Gross, 1998; Roskam et al., 2023). In social conditions, resentment is not a marginal phenomenon, but a structural one – inscribed in the logic of comparison and exposure. From a psychological perspective, the key challenge is to create conditions for the awareness, symbolisation and transformation of resentment, i.e., the restoration of the ability to reflectively value and more adaptive forms of emotion regulation, in accordance with the context and long-term goals of the individual (Linehan et al., 2007; Ross, Thompson, 1994; Thompson, 1988).

Ressentiment should therefore be seen not only as an emotional phenomenon, but as a process of deep reorganisation of the value system, which, although it has an adaptive function in the short term, leads to the disorganisation of mental functioning in the long run. Its recognition and analysis can be an important starting point, both for empirical

research and for psychoprophylactic and therapeutic impacts, aimed at rebuilding meaning, agency and a more balanced system of values. It should be clearly emphasised that such an approach to resentment deserves special attention due to the persistence of the accompanying emotional states. Resentment is not reactive or short-term, but takes the form of a long-term emotional-cognitive system, fixed over time and resistant to current experiential corrections. In this context, the temporal dimension of resentment becomes crucial, giving it an antisocial character – these emotions do not fade away with the cessation of the stimulus, but accumulate, maintaining attitudes of distance, hostility, and moral delegitimation of others. Long-term functioning in *resentiment structure* is associated with the risk of mood and adaptation disorders and deterioration of social relationships. What is additionally conducive to psychological solipsism (Wilson & Tsang, 2026), which can act as a cognitive mediating mechanism

by narrowing the perspective and egocentric interpretation of events, is the promotion of both the emergence and consolidation of resentment as a compensatory form of emotion regulation. In the light of the presented research on the regulation of emotions and the foundations of theoretical assumptions resentment includes such affective states as aversion, hatred, envy, vindictiveness, desire for revenge, impoliteness, contempt, jealousy or regret, which do not appear all at once, but tend to support each other, creating Recursive Loops of Affect, in which each subsequent emotional reaction reinforces the distorted assessment of the situation and perpetuates the negative interpretation of experiences. As a result, resentment takes the form of a self-perpetuating emotional-cognitive mechanism, a silent destructor of relationships, limiting mental flexibility and the ability to self-reflect, and thus causing distortion and overvaluation of the individual's value system.

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