

Gratitude and Resentment: Some Asymmetries

1. A Usefully Opposed Pair?

In “Freedom and Resentment,” P. F. Strawson (2008) invites us to theorize about moral responsibility, not from the detached perspective of abstruse metaphysical speculation, but from the lived perspective of agents who are concerned with the quality of will that others display towards us (and towards others) in their actions. What’s significant for moral responsibility, from this perspective, is the emotional responses to others’ behavior, and to the quality of will that that behavior manifests—a set of responses Strawson calls the “reactive attitudes.” Strawson himself focuses on the titular response of resentment, and on its vicarious and self-regarding analogs: indignation and guilt. But along the way he also mentions a set of positive reactive attitudes. Among these he includes gratitude, esteem, and pride; he also mentions forgiveness and love, and some working in his wake have been quick to include trust as well.¹ But about these positive emotions, Strawson has little to say beyond the simple observation that gratitude and resentment, like praise and blame more generally, constitute “a usefully opposed pair,” (2008, 7).

How useful is this pairing? There are surely some similarities, even deep similarities, between these emotions. Perhaps the most illuminating parallel that we can draw between emotions—one that I’ve hinted at above—is that despite appearances, gratitude isn’t a response to good deeds or benefits another has provided for us, and resentment isn’t a response to the harms others have done us. They aren’t, in other words, emotions that track strict liability. Instead, each of these emotions is narrowly identifying a circumscribed set of benefits and harms and responding to those. In the case of gratitude, it’s beneficence that manifests good will that makes the emotion fitting or deserved. In the case of resentment, it’s harms done with callous indifference or ill will that makes the emotion fitting or deserved. After all, if someone unknowingly or accidentally helps you, then you probably

¹ E.g., Helm (2017).

² In addition to Smith, many others have found these emotions to have some communicative aspect to them: Strawson (2008), Gary Watson (1987), Stephen Darwall (2006), Michael McKenna (2012), and Coleen Macnamara (2013).

³ This betrays the intricacy of Nelkin’s powerful argument. For our purposes, however, it’s enough to see that she’s on the right track.

won't feel grateful to them (nor should you), though perhaps some relief or vague sense of appreciation is fitting. Or if someone unknowingly or accidentally harms you, say, they trod on your foot when the subway jerked awkwardly, you'll feel quite different about that pain than if you see them bring about the pain intentionally. It's not benefits or harms per se that make gratitude and resentment fitting.

A second way in which these two emotions are usefully opposed is that they each seemed to be at least incipiently communicative. This point goes back at least to Adam Smith (1976). In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* he offered the following accounts of gratitude and resentment.

Gratitude

What gratitude chiefly desires, is not only to make the benefactor feel *pleasure* in his turn, but to make him *conscious that he meets with this reward on account of his past conduct*, to make him pleased with that conduct, and to satisfy him that the person upon whom he bestowed his good offices was not unworthy of them.

Resentment

The object ... which resentment is chiefly intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel *pain* in his turn, as to make him *conscious that he feels it upon account of his past conduct*, to make him repent of that conduct, and to make him sensible, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner, (Smith, *TMS*, II.iii.10-11; emphases added).

Notice that Smith's account these emotions don't just seek to cause pleasure and pain in those to whom they are fittingly directed. They also seek to communicate something to that person: that their motives were appreciated (in the case of gratitude) or rejected (in the case of resentment).² So although the content gratitude and resentment aim at communicating are opposed to one another, the fact that each of these emotions aim at expressing our attitudes about the quality of others' attitudes wills is another point of deep similarity.

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Despite these two similarities, however, there are some significant differences in the emotions of gratitude and resentment. And if we acknowledge these differences, then what we'll find is that the role these emotions play in our lives as morally responsible agents is not equal but opposite. Gratitude and resentment are, in fact, asymmetrical in at least three key ways: in their fittingness conditions, in the norms that govern their expression, and in their value for human relationships. An adequate moral psychology of these emotions will therefore require us to move beyond superficial similarities in gratitude and resentment and instead attend to their deep differences.

2. Asymmetrical Responsibility

Theories of moral responsibility often identify the property of being morally responsible with being deserving of praise- and blame-manifesting attitudes like gratitude and resentment. Theories of moral responsibility also tend to treat the conditions under which agents deserve gratitude and resentment as being symmetrical. That is, theories of moral responsibility tend to hold that agents must be connected to their actions in just the same way so as to merit both gratitude and resentment. However, this is a mistake. The agential capacities that underwrite an agent's being deserving of praise-manifesting attitudes like gratitude are distinct from and not symmetrical to the agential capacities that underwrite an agent's being deserving of blame-manifesting attitudes like resentment. That is, the *fittingness* conditions of these two emotions differ in more than in the valence of their representational content.

This idea—that the conditions of moral responsibility are irreducibly asymmetrical—is not new. Susan Wolf's (1980) argument for this *asymmetry thesis* starts with the idea that an agent's status as morally responsible for her conduct is grounded in her ability to recognize and respond to what's "True" and "Good." In the case of a praiseworthy action—one for which an agent would be deserving of gratitude—the agent responds to the True and the Good. And in the case of a blameworthy action—one for which an agent would be deserving of resentment—the agent fails to respond to the True and the Good. Yet, if an agent is genuinely *unable* to respond to the True and the Good, then Wolf argues, her failure to do so does not redound to her in the way that actions must if an agent is to be morally responsible for that action. So in order to be deserving of resentment for transgressing moral norms, Wolf concludes, an agent must be able to do other than she actually does.

To this point, Wolf's story about the way an agent must be involved with her action doesn't look any different than other so-called "leeway" theorists, who also emphasize the ability to do otherwise as being necessary for moral responsibility. However, Wolf points out—rightly I think—that the intuition that agents must be able to do other than they actually do doesn't "stick" quite as hard in the case of praiseworthy action. Nor should it. After all, if an agent acts in a way so as to be deserving of praise-manifesting attitudes like gratitude, then she has *in fact* responded to the True and the Good. The ability to *fail* to do so—i.e., the ability to do otherwise—looks to be, in these circumstances, simply the ability act contrary to the True and the Good, the ability to act *irrationally*. But sure *this* ability—the ability to be irrational—contributes nothing that serves to underwrite an agent's status as being morally responsible. Consequently, Wolf reasons, although the ability to do otherwise is necessary for deserved resentment, it is not a necessary condition on being deserving of gratitude. The conditions under which agents are praise- and blameworthy are thus conceptually distinct.

More recently, Dana K. Nelkin (2011) has also argued for the asymmetry thesis. Like Wolf, Nelkin also thinks that unless an agent is able to do otherwise, she cannot be deserving of blame-manifesting attitudes like resentment. So too, she thinks that this ability is not required for agents to be deserving of attitudes like gratitude. For Nelkin, however, the explanation of the asymmetry is different. Although, she agrees with Wolf that the ability to do otherwise when you're able to get it right doesn't contribute to an agent's status as being morally responsible, she also goes deeper in explaining why this is so. The reason for the asymmetry, according to Nelkin, is connected to the idea that *ought implies can*—the thesis that an agent can't be obligated to perform some action unless she is able to do it. The contrary to this thesis thus holds that if an agent is unable to perform some action, then she is not obligated to do so. From there, it's a quick move to the thought that if an agent cannot perform an action then she cannot be blameworthy for failing to do so. So: if an agent who lacks the ability to do otherwise acts in a morally objectionable way, then she cannot be blameworthy for failing to act in a morally permissible way.

However, there's no similarly quick way to move from *ought implies can* to the idea that agents can be deserving of praise-manifesting attitudes like gratitude only if they are able to do otherwise. The principle *ought implies can* itself can't supply the link. But interestingly, Nelkin argues, none of the principles that *could* do so are independently motivated or

plausible.³ As a result, she concludes that an agent can be deserving of gratitude even if she lacks the ability to do otherwise. So she too arrives at the asymmetry thesis.

So far, so good. It looks like Wolf and Nelkin have given us good grounds for denying the symmetry between the conditions under which agents are deserving of gratitude and resentment respectively. But this is perhaps too quick. After all, it's controversial that the ability to do otherwise is *ever* required for morally responsible agency—even in the case of blameworthy agency.⁴ And if this is right, then the fact that Wolf and Nelkin have successfully argued that praise-manifesting attitudes like gratitude don't require the ability to do otherwise does nothing to show that gratitude and resentment aren't symmetrical in their fittingness conditions.⁵ This suggests that Wolf and Nelkin have only provided us with a much weaker argument: *if* the ability to do otherwise is ever required for morally responsible agency, it's only required in the case of blameworthiness. As such the importance of their defense of the asymmetry thesis looks diminished—it's something for "leeway" theorists to worry about, but not germane to the debate more generally.

Perhaps this is right, but it undersells Wolf's and Nelkin's insights. Even if it turns out that they're wrong to think the ability to do otherwise is sometimes required for morally responsible agency, their arguments might nevertheless point to a modified version of the asymmetry thesis that doesn't locate the difference in praise- and blameworthiness in the ability to do otherwise. That is, Wolf and Nelkin might be right about the asymmetry thesis even if they're wrong about what it is in virtue of which the conditions under which an agent is deserving of gratitude differ from the conditions under which an agent is deserving of resentment.

3. The Asymmetry Thesis Refined

The real asymmetry between the conditions under which agents can deserve praise-manifesting attitudes and blame-manifesting attitudes is not grounded in a distinct role that the ability to do otherwise plays in agents' blameworthiness. To discover where exactly it *is* located, consider the following cases of apparently altruistic helping behavior.

³ This betrays the intricacy of Nelkin's powerful argument. For our purposes, however, it's enough to see that she's on the right track.

⁴ See Frankfurt (1969).

⁵ See Fischer and Ravizza (1998).

Broken Glass 1

Rob's thirsty, and he sees a glass across the room. Since she's closer to it than he is, Rob asks Pearl to hand him the glass so that he can pour himself some water. Pearl notices that the glass is broken, so she gets up and gets another glass that isn't broken and takes the unbroken one to Rob instead. Having a functional glass into which he can now pour water, Rob is genuinely grateful to Pearl and expresses his gratitude by telling her that he appreciates her help.

Crying Child 1

In a daycare filled with crying children, Julie sees Maggie crying and inconsolable. She takes Maggie her favorite toy and sits with her, gently touching her and waiting with her until she feels better. Cynthia sees this, and she is very appreciative that Julie took care of Maggie, since she's got two other crying children to deal with. Later, when she gets a free moment, Cynthia makes sure to thank Julie.

In these cases, it seems appropriate for Rob and Cynthia to feel and express gratitude towards Pearl and Julie respectively. No doubt, there is some instrumental reason for this: by expressing their gratitude, Rob and Cynthia make it more likely that they are helped in the future. But I don't think this fully explains why gratitude is the fitting response in this case; independently of whether Rob and Cynthia stand to benefit from Pearl's and Julie's respective help in the future, there seems to be something *intrinsically* good about gratitude in these situations. In particular, it seems that Pearl and Julie *deserve* Rob's and Cynthia's gratitude, and giving people what they deserve is itself a good thing whether or not it leads to better future outcomes. (Of course, this final point leaves open whether or not you *should* all things considered give people what they deserve.) Now, because Pearl and Julie each seem to deserve Rob's and Cynthia's respective gratitude, it seems fair to conclude that they are each morally responsible for their respective action. After all, only morally responsible agents can genuinely deserve praising attitudes like gratitude, appreciation, and esteem. And with no obvious excusing conditions present, barring something that (putatively) undercuts moral

responsibility for all agents (e.g., causal determinism), who could doubt that Pearl and Julie are morally responsible for their action?⁶

Now consider the following two cases of disrespectful harming behavior.

Broken Glass 2

Rob's thirsty, and he sees a glass across the room. Since she's closer to it than he is, Rob asks Pearl to hand him the glass so that he can pour himself some water. Pearl notices that the glass is broken, but she simply doesn't care about that. And although she could have easily gotten a glass that wasn't broken, she just takes him the one he asked for instead. Once he sees that the glass is broken, Rob asks Pearl if she saw that it was broken and if so, why she didn't get him a functional one instead. She replies (bluntly, it seems to Rob) that she did see that it was broken that was the glass he asked for. Rob finds this annoying and is a bit resentful towards Pearl as a result.

Crying Child 2

In a daycare filled with crying children, Julie sees Maggie crying and inconsolable. She takes Maggie her favorite toy, but just as Maggie is about to grab it, Julie pulls it away and tells her that she can't have it. Cynthia sees this, and she is very upset that Julie made Maggie feel even worse. Later, when she gets a free moment, Cynthia makes sure to let Julie know that that kind of behavior is objectionable.

Here again we have two agents performing actions that we ordinarily regard as being blameworthy. In *BG2* and *CC2*, Pearl and Julie act in ways that are apparently disrespectful, and since resentment is a response to interpersonal disrespect, it seems that it's fitting here. It seems, on its face, that Pearl and Julie *deserve* Rob's and Cynthia's respective resentment. This means that to the extent I've described them here, it seems that there is a perfectly symmetrical response that is warranted in each of these two sets of cases.

But suppose now that you discover that Pearl and Julie are just toddlers. "Pearl" is a composite of three years old children discussed in Alia Martin and Kristina R. Olsen's (2013)

⁶ For the most thorough defense of moral responsibility skepticism, see Derk Pereboom (2001). However, despite the powerful nature of Pereboom's account, for the purposes of this paper, I will have to simply take for granted that many human agents are responsible for at least some of their actions.

work in developmental psychology, and “Julie” is a composite of even younger children discussed in Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Hulle, Robinson, and Rhee’s (2008) work. Knowing this, do you still think that Pearl and Julie are morally responsible agents who are praiseworthy for their actions in *BG1* and *CC1* and blameworthy for their actions in *BG2* and *CC2*?

The dominant view is that because Pearl and Julie are young children, they are exempt from moral responsibility and so not deserving of praise-manifesting attitudes in *BG1* or *CC1*. Nor are they deserving of blame-manifesting attitudes in *BG2* or *CC2*. The thought here, which (again) was first articulated by Strawson but which has been embraced widely in the interim, is simply that there is a suite of capacities that agents must possess if they are to be participants in our responsibility practices, and of course, all children lack these capacities. Consequently, they are not “in the ballpark” of morally responsible agency and so they are neither praiseworthy (or blameworthy) for what they do, nor are they genuinely *deserving* of gratitude or its expressions (or resentment and its expressions).

Although it’s clear that Strawson takes youthfulness to be an exempting condition, he does appreciate that this is a complicated issue. He notes, for example, that thinking young children to be exempted from responsibility doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t respond to children’s acts *as if* they were responsible for them. Such responses, he rightly claims, are the basis of their moral development and inculcation in the moral community:

[Parents of young children] are dealing with creatures who are potentially and increasingly capable both of holding, and being objects of, the full range of human and moral attitudes, but are not yet truly capable of either. The treatment of such creatures must therefore represent a kind of compromise, constantly shifting in direction, between objectivity of attitude and developed human attitudes. Rehearsals insensibly modulate towards true performances... In this matter of young children, it is essentially a borderline, penumbral area that we move in, (Strawson 2008, 20-21).

With young children, we rehearse and encourage them to act in this or that fashion as a way of teaching them about others’ demand for good will or reasonable regard. These rehearsals, however, eventually become the “real deal,” and so, from Strawson’s point of view, the general practice of engaging with our children in this way might be ultimately justified. But

although this all seems right, what's especially striking here is that while Strawson is sensitive to the possibility that young children's agency can be "essentially a borderline" case of responsible agency, Strawson nevertheless insists that young children are not capable of being (appropriate) objects of the "human" attitudes (i.e., the reactive attitudes, which is a class of attitudes that includes gratitude, resentment, esteem, indignation, etc.).

There's a tension here, though. For if we take seriously Strawson's claim that young children are a borderline case, then it would seem plausible to think that even if they were not apt targets for the *full range* of human reactive attitudes, they could be apt targets of (at least) *some* of these attitudes. However, Strawson seems to ignore this possibility, and he just proceeds, despite his cursory acknowledgement of the complexities of these issues, as if being the appropriate object of these human attitudes is an all or nothing matter. This is evident in his subsequent claim that, "the punishment of a child is both like and unlike the punishment of an adult," (Strawson 2008, 20). But again: punishment, along with the punitive attitudes it expresses (e.g., resentment and indignation), is just one (rather extreme) feature of our moral responsibility practices. There is conceptual space, then, for thinking that an agent—yes, even a child—could be the proper (i.e., deserving) object of some of the human attitudes even if she is not deserving of all such attitudes.

This seems clear in the cases at hand. In *BG1* and *CC1*, Pearl and Julie do good things for good reasons, and in so doing they show an incipient appreciation for others' moral significance. These are the very things that make gratitude a fitting response to another agent's behavior. It's true, of course, that as they grow up, Pearl and Julie will develop into much more sophisticated agents—agents who are much better able to recognize and respond to normatively significant considerations. But this doesn't mean that their very rudimentary understanding of what's important in these particular cases isn't a real achievement on their parts.

On the other hand, Pearl's and Julie's respective failures in *BG2* and *CC2* don't seem grounded in a degree of competence that's ordinarily presupposed for blame-manifesting emotions, in either moral or non-moral domains. This is because a full degree of competence in any domain requires more than some rudimentary skill and success in that domain. It requires that the person have the more general capacity to consistently conform their conduct to the standards that are normative within that domain. That is, something approaching full competency is required in order to deserve real blame for failures in a

domain and that requires a general capacity for consistent success within that domain. That's why, for example, we're prepared to praise a random, untrained bystander who saves another person's life at the scene of a car wreck, even though we wouldn't be as prone to blame her if she had failed. On the other hand, if the bystander were a trained doctor, although we'd praise her for any successes she had, we'd also be disposed to blame her if she failed. And this is because we assume that medical professionals have a general capacity to consistently recognize and act in the ways that are required by the medical needs of their patient.

The lesson here is that it's something more basic than the ability to do otherwise that explains the asymmetry in the conditions under which agents can deserve praise- and blame-manifesting emotions, since this asymmetry will arise *even if* we assume that causal determinism is false and that our actions are undetermined by forces outside of our own control. What explains the asymmetry is simply that when one's action manifests an incipient competence in some domain, then one will be deserving of domain-specific forms of praise. In the moral domain, that often (canonically?) takes the form of gratitude. It's for this reason that Pearl and Julie genuinely deserve gratitude in the first set of vignettes. However to deserve domain-specific forms of blame, one must possess *more* than an incipient degree of competence in that domain: you must have a general capacity to recognize and be moved by the considerations that are relevant to that domain in a consistently successful way. Pearl and Julie (and indeed, all toddlers) lack that capacity, and so, they do not deserve moral blame, which typically (canonically) takes the form of resentment.

Wolf and Nelkin had real insight: there is an asymmetry in the conditions of moral responsibility. That asymmetry is explained by different agential facts than the one that they take it to be explained by, but the take-home lesson is the same. The conditions under which agents are deserving of praise-manifesting emotions are not isomorphic to the conditions under which they are deserving of blame-manifesting emotions.

4. An Asymmetry of Moral Standing

It's not just the conditions under which agents deserve gratitude and resentment that differentiates these emotions. They also differ in their normative significance. In particular, the reasons to express gratitude are typically much weightier than the reasons to express resentment. What this means practically is that it will more frequently be true that we *should* express gratitude than that we *should* express resentment. Resentment is, I will argue, more

rationally optional, and as a result, its reasons are more commonly defeated by nondesert-based considerations (e.g., generosity, mercy, etc.).

One clear difference here is that expressions of resentment generally required some kind of “moral standing” that expressions of gratitude do not. For example, if I’ve been late for our coffee meetings several times in the past, then it seems I have a reason to not be upset the one time you’re late even if you have no good excuse for being late. Or, if I convinced you to grab a beer after work instead of going to the store to get the things your partner needed, then it seems I have a reason to not blame you for breaking your promise. In each of these cases, facts about me give me reason to refrain from expressing blame-manifesting emotions even though you apparently deserve that.

In addition to cases in which my own moral turpitude gives me reason to refrain from expressing blame-manifesting emotions, I might sometimes have reason to refrain from expressing those emotions if I’m not suitably related to you, say, in cases in which your transgression is none of my business. Alternately, I might be ignorant of whether you’re really morally responsible for your action. For example, it might be unclear from your action whether you had a bad motive or whether you really knew what you were doing. In such cases, even if unbeknownst to me you were displaying ill will, it seems that I have a reason to refrain from expressing resentment—at the very least, I have reason to gather more information before criticizing or castigating you.⁷

Of course, these reasons might sometimes be outweighed, such that all things considered I should express my resentment towards you. If a lot is at stake in my failing to express my resentment—if, for example, you trust me a great deal, and it’s only my rebuke that will get you mend your ways—then the fact I would be hypocritical in expressing blame-manifesting attitudes is itself outweighed. But these cases, it seems to me, aren’t the standard case. Typically, when the hypocrite refrains from blaming, nothing of value is lost. In fact, I suspect that most of the time, when a hypocrite or someone who’s complicit in wrongdoing refrain from blaming the wrongdoer, things are better off, since such blame frequently engenders a kind of defensiveness on the part of the wrongdoer that immunizes them from the truth of their moral failing. They get so vexed by the source of the criticism that they fail to appreciate its content. Yet even if such cases are more common than I take them to be,

⁷ I argue for this in more detail in Coates (2016).

the more basic point I want to make stands: there are *pro tanto* reasons to refrain from expressing blame-manifesting attitudes in cases of hypocrisy, complicity, ignorance, etc.

Notice that if there are reasons to refrain from expressing gratitude to someone who deserves it, they are not in parallel cases. After all, what exactly would a reverse hypocrite be? Someone who freely benefits you and then turns around and expresses praise-manifesting attitudes towards you when you freely benefit them? *The nerve of some people!* Jokes aside, the fact that someone would be “reverse hypocritical” were they express gratitude towards you is no reason at all for them to refrain from doing so. Indeed, the fact that we don’t even have a name for such a “vice” already suggests that it is no such thing. So too, someone who is complicit in your good deeds has no reason to refrain from expressing gratitude when those good deeds have beneficial consequences for her. Nor do expressions of gratitude seem concerned with “its being your business.”

5. Weighting Gratitude and Resentment

Expressions of gratitude either do not presume special standing in the way that expressions of resentment do, or, if they do presume standing, the scope of that presumption is different in the case of each emotion. The considerations that bear on the expressions of gratitude and resentment are thus distinct from one another.

The considerations that bear on expressions of gratitude are different than the reasons of resentment in another way as well. Imagine that someone has just harmed you and that they’re morally responsible for doing so. In such a case, resentment is deserved. Additionally, this person might also deserve rebuke or criticism, which serve to manifest our resentment. But the fact that they deserve these expressions of resentment isn’t sufficient to guarantee that you *must* rebuke or criticize them—that failing to resent would constitute a bit of wrongdoing on your part. We’ve already considered how lacking the standing to blame might provide you with a reason to *refrain* from blaming that would defeat desert-based reasons to have blame-manifesting emotions. But there might be other reasons to refrain from blame that have nothing to do with your own moral failings, or your lack of a standing relationship to the wrongdoer, or your ignorance. You might simply not be concerned with the harm in question. Or perhaps it leads you to pity the wrongdoer, who is acting from a place of pathetic insecurity. Here, you might decide to refrain from blaming *just because* that’s how you feel. Or you might be tired or distracted or, ... In such cases, one might take a

more objective attitude towards a wrongdoer due to what P. F. Strawson aptly called “the strains of involvement,” (Strawson 2008, 10).

In none of these cases is it obvious that you’ve acted objectionably at all. A person who systematically fails to resent those who harm her may, of course, be servile, and this is perhaps objectionable. But she might also be generous or graceful, and these qualities are in no way objectionable. This tells us something important about the weight of reasons to resent those who deserve it: they aren’t particularly weighty. Sure, they’re weighty enough that you can’t systemically ignore them on the grounds that you take your own value to be insignificant. So too, they’re plausibly weighty enough that in cases in which you’ve suffered a great injustice, resentment might be best all-things-considered.⁸ But beyond that, particularly in the vast majority of small-scale wrongs done to us (the minor indignities of dealing with bad customer service or a rude colleague or inconsiderate drivers or ...), they don’t seem to be decisive, such that it would be objectionable to refrain from resentment or its expressions. Indifference, boredom, distraction, exhaustion, and virtue might all give one reason to ignore reasons for resentment such that you wouldn’t be subject to rational or moral criticism for failing to resent.

Yet this isn’t true of gratitude. In fact, just the opposite is true: failing to be grateful or express gratitude when it is deserved is almost always a failing on the part of the ungrateful individual. There are, of course, cases in which it’s not essential that one experiences gratitude or that one expresses it, even when gratitude would be deserved, but those cases are the exceptions rather than the rule. In particular, it seems that the “strains of involvement” no longer serve as an excuse or justification for failing to be grateful. A more objective attitude is *permissible* when resentment is deserved because to the extent that incurs harm, you are the one bearing it. However in the typical case of deserved gratitude, taking an objective attitude involves you forcing your benefactor to lose out on what she deserves, and it’s implausible that you, as the benefited party, have the standing to permissibly impact your benefactor in this way. What this means, then, is that reasons for gratitude are typically

⁸ Even here, though, we might want to preserve the possibility that someone could be saint-like in their ability to respond grave injustices done to their person with generosity and grace. It’s not clear to me that we all have reason to emulate such a person (or that we should want to), but neither is it clear to me that such a person is, by virtue of their character open to rational or moral criticism. If not, then even when reasons of resentment are at their weightiest, it’s not clear that they are ever decisive.

weightier than reasons for resentment; they cannot be so easily ignored or outweighed without fault.

It's worth pausing to note here that this point doesn't generalize to other blame-manifesting emotions. If one generally refuses to get indignant in the face of oppression, then the fact that one is tired or distracted or not particularly concerned with the wrongdoing does little to nothing to tell against the weight of reasons for indignation. So too, reasons for guilt are similarly weighty. The explanation for this is simple. It's by and large *my place* to decide how to best respond to wrongs done to me. This isn't always true, but in the case of ordinary wrongs of the sort that commonly occur, we have a great deal of latitude in how we respond. However, in the case of wrongs done to others, either by a third-party or by ourselves, it's not our place to decide how best to respond. In cases in which a victim is present, she might direct us in how to do this. But this isn't generally true. And it seems we have reason to treat indignation and guilt as the default response for wrongs done to others in the absence of clear indication that some other form of response would better serve the situation. This perhaps means that the normative significance of resentment is idiosyncratic in a way that's belied by the vast majority of contemporary theorizing on praise- and blame-manifesting emotions suggests. The ease with which the strains of involvement serve to undercut its reasons' force indicates that we'd do well to shift our focus from it as a paradigm "reactive emotion" and turn instead towards emotions, like gratitude and indignation, that although not such a usefully opposed pair, seem to be the source of weighty reasons.

6. An Asymmetry of Value

Finally, I want to briefly suggest and consider a way in which the value of gratitude and the value of resentment do not track one another in any neat way. At first this claim might seem surprising, since each of these emotions and their attendant expressions are *instrumentally* valuable. Gratitude and its expressions serve as the stitching that help to keep our social fabric free from rips and tears. Resentment and its expressions can serve to repair the social fabric by enjoining wrongdoers to recognize the badness of their conduct and repudiate the motives that lead them to act in that way. Both of these states of affairs are unquestionably

good for our lives together.⁹ So in this way, it seems like the value of gratitude and the value of resentment track one another fairly closely.

There is, however, an important difference in their value that we can see when we consider the role that these emotions play in relationships of the sort that we find most meaningful, say, close friendships. It's necessary for the possibility of a friendship that the parties to the friendship benefit one another out of genuine good will for the person and their good (and not exclusively because the other is *owed* that benefit). And it's also necessary for the possibility of a friendship that in the wake of such beneficence, a friend will regularly respond with warm gratitude. More simply, it's part of the normative ideal of friendship that we experience and express gratitude regularly with our friends.

This is not true of resentment. Resentment is made fitting by ill will, and while it's plausibly true that if your friend shows you ill will, you'll have reason to respond to her with resentment, there's nothing about the very ideal of friendship itself that involves parties to a friendship treating one another with ill will. It's a sad fact about us that we aren't able to always extend good will and warmth towards those we love, that sometimes we're indifferent towards them, callous, and even in some cases, unconscionably cruel. What this means, however, is that resentment is *only* instrumentally valuable within our most cherished relationships; it's at best a necessary evil that stands at watch in the event that we're not the friends that we could or should be.

But there is a further final value that attaches to gratitude and its expressions. Since gratitude and its expressions are in part constitutive of the ideal of friendship, they are an essential part of an organic unity that itself has a great deal of final value. That is, we ordinarily regard a friendship as something that is not only instrumentally valuable but also as something that has final value. A friendship is a composite of many more basic things. Since gratitude and its expressions are essential members of the composite that serves as the normative ideal of friendship, they share in the value of friendship itself.

Even if this is true, it leaves open that gratitude in isolation is of no more final value than resentment. So to conclude, I'll supply an argument that the final value of gratitude is

⁹ One may, of course, ask whether these two emotions serve these ends equally well. I'm doubtful that they do, since resentment seems to invite defensiveness at least as frequently as it invites contrition. But since these issues are largely empirical, I leave it open that there may be an important symmetry here in the instrumental value of gratitude and resentment.

greater than the final value of resentment. First, let's suppose that A deserves resentment to the same degree that B deserves gratitude. Second, let's assume that there are both instrumental and non-instrumental (final) reasons for resenting A and being grateful to B . Let's also assume that the instrumental value of resenting A is identical to the instrumental value of being grateful to B . If resentment and gratitude have the same final value, then it would follow that, were we to be in a situation in which it was only possible to resent A or be grateful to B (but not both), we could be indifferent about how to respond and choose either option. But this seems implausible. A world with n instrumental goods and the good of being grateful to someone who genuinely deserves gratitude seems *better*—more worthy of actualization—than a world with n instrumental goods and the good of resenting someone who genuinely deserves resentment. Perhaps this is just because gratitude is non-contingently connected to pleasure, which has significant final value and resentment is non-contingently connected to pain, which has significant disvalue. But perhaps it's also because being grateful when gratitude is deserved just is *better* than being resentful when resentment is deserved. In either case, it seems dubious that the final value of resenting someone who deserves it matches the final value of being grateful when gratitude is deserved.

7. Conclusion

The conditions under which gratitude and resentment are deserved are not symmetrical; the considerations that undercut one's standing to resent don't obviously bear on one's standing to be grateful; reasons for being grateful are apparently a much weightier than reasons for resentment; and the final value of gratitude is, at least in part, grounded in considerations that do not apply to resentment. However useful it might be to treat these emotions as a pair in some contexts does not widely generalize. And given these significant asymmetries, I think we'd do well to theorize less programmatically—talking causally about the “reactive attitudes” as a neat set, where the only differences arise at the level of to whom they are responses to. Instead we should consider each of these emotions on its own, even if that means that our preferred theories of responsible agency no longer fit so nicely together.

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