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Published in association with the International Adam Smith Society

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The Adam Smith Review, volume 5:

Essays commemorating the  
250th anniversary of The Theory of  
Moral Sentiments

*Edited by Vivienne Brown and*

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# **The Philosophy of Adam Smith**

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 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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# Resentment and moral judgment in Smith and Butler

Alice MacLachlan

How many things are requisite to render the gratification of resentment completely agreeable ... ?

(TMS I.ii.3.8)

## Introduction

Adam Smith expresses a fair amount of ambivalence towards the passion of resentment. In the opening pages of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he cites it as a passion whose expression initially 'excites no sort of sympathy, but ... serve[s] rather to disgust and provoke us' (Smith 1976, TMS I.i.1.6). Even more than in other cases, we must 'bring home' the particularities of the resentful person's circumstances and provocation to ourselves – and, in particular, we must figure out whether we sympathize with his antagonist's motives – before we can possibly 'enter into' his emotional state. Our sympathy with resentment is always indirect and secondary. Indeed, resentment belongs to the class of 'unsocial' passions, alongside hatred and spite: those emotions whose immediate effects are most disagreeable to the spectator (I.ii.3.5). There is thus almost no foreshadowing, in the opening pages of TMS, of the role resentment will come to play in Part II: Of Merit and Demerit. Resentment reappears there as a fully-fledged moral sentiment, whose natural attributes are such that they successfully ground our moral judgments of demerit or blame, just as our natural sentiments of gratitude ground our judgments of merit or praise. Resentment – it would appear – has become *moralized*.

This essay is a discussion of the 'moralization' of resentment. By moralization, I do not refer to the complex process by which resentment is transformed by the machinations of sympathy, but a prior change in how the 'raw material' of the emotion itself is presented. In just over fifty pages, not only Smith's attitude towards the passion of resentment, but also his very conception of the term, appears to shift dramatically. What is an unpleasant, unsocial and relatively amoral passion of anger in general metamorphoses into a morally and psychologically rich account of a cognitively sharpened,

normatively laden attitude, an attitude that contains both the judgment that the injury done to me was unjust and wrongful, and the demand that the offender acknowledge its wrongfulness.<sup>1</sup> Two very different readings of 'Smithian resentment' are thus available from the text. Indeed, the notion of two distinct forms of resentment – an instinctive, amoral version and a rich, rationally appraising attitude – would bring Smith into line with an earlier account of resentment, found in Bishop Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, first published in 1726. Ultimately, I argue, the differences in their theories are to Smith's credit. It is precisely because the 'thin' or generic retaliatory passion described in Part I can be reconciled with the rich, normative attitude in Part II, that Smith is able to accomplish his meta-ethical goal of grounding moral judgments in naturally occurring emotions.

### Resentment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Part I

When resentment makes its first appearance in TMS, it does so as a completely disagreeable emotion, belonging to a class of 'unsocial passions' whose occurrences are unlikely to elicit sympathy from a spectator. Smith offers a couple of reasons for our lack of sympathy with resentment. In the first place, situations of resentment always present two individual interests in conflict: 'our sympathy is divided between the person who feels [it], and the person who is the object of [it]' (I.ii.3.1). As spectators, we therefore necessarily lose a little of our potential passion to an opposing sympathy, at least until we are convinced that the resentment is appropriate given its occasion (provocation) and its intensity is moderate. We can accomplish this only by attempting and failing to sympathize with the motives of the object of resentment (the original offender). Sympathy with resentment always requires some reflection. But not even justified resentment can wholly capture our sympathy; its 'immediate effects are so disagreeable, that even when [it is] most justly provoked, there is still something about [it] which disgusts us' (I.ii.3.5).

Smith concludes in Part I that even warranted, moderate resentment presents something of a challenge to our capacities for imaginative sympathy, and its naturally unsympathetic nature should give us great pause before we endorse any expression of it: 'there is no passion, of which the human mind is capable, concerning whose justness we ought to be so doubtful, concerning whose indulgence we ought so carefully to consult our natural sense of propriety, or so diligently to consult what will be the sentiments of the cool and impartial spectator'. In fact, the passion of resentment is best *simulated*: we should resent more from a 'sense of the propriety of resentment, from a sense that mankind expect and require it of us' than because we *actually experience* the emotion (I.ii.3.8). Appropriate resentment is alienated resentment; rather than a naturally occurring emotion, it is in fact the barest simulacrum of one. Only once resentment has been lowered in pitch, tested in

reflection and expressed more from guarded duty than anything else, can we render it agreeable to a sympathetic spectator.

### Resentment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Part II

Given the vivid picture Smith paints of resentment's disagreeable and fundamentally anti-social nature in Part I, it is surprising that in Part II of TMS, resentment takes on a much more significant role in our moral psychology, and that our sympathy with resentment now becomes absolutely crucial to our ability to form judgments of moral demerit. In Part II Smith adopts a generally more balanced view of resentment, presenting it as potentially sociable in nature, and capable of appearing sympathetic to onlookers. Under the right conditions, we may 'heartily and entirely sympathize with the resentment of the sufferer' (II.i.4.4) so that our 'own animosity entirely corresponds' with her own (II.i.5.8). Smith now acknowledges that a deficiency of resentment may be censured as well as its excess: 'we sometimes complain that a particular person shows too little spirit, and has too little sense of the injuries that have been done to him; and we are as ready to despise him for the defect, as to hate him for the excess of this passion' (II.i.5.8).

Smith is not unaware of the apparent incongruence of these two pictures of resentment, or the common hesitation to grant resentment the status of a moral sentiment. He remarks:

To ascribe in this manner our natural sense of the ill desert of human actions to a sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer, may seem, to the greater part of people, to be a degradation of that sentiment. Resentment is commonly regarded as so odious a passion, that they will be apt to think it impossible that so laudable a principle, as the sense of the ill desert of vice, should in any respect be founded upon it.

(TMS II.i.5.7 note)

Wary of his audience's natural suspicion of resentment, Smith takes great care to develop his account of resentment as a moral sentiment, capable of grounding judgments of demerit, in a series of small steps, and always in parallel with claim that judgments of merit are grounded in natural feelings of gratitude, 'because gratitude ... is regarded as an amiable principle, which can take nothing from the worth of whatever is founded upon it' (II.i.5.7). He accomplishes this task in several stages.

Smith's first step is to note that demerit is the quality of *deserving* punishment. But determining that something deserves punishment is to say no more or less than that we do (or would) approve of its punishment, or rather: that it is an approved or proper object of whatever it is that motivates us to punish. At this point in the text, Smith defines punishment as a kind of 'recompense': 'to return evil for evil that has been done' (II.i.1.4). Punishment is not necessarily a moral reaction to wrongdoing (and it includes revenge), but approved

or deserved punishment is. So the second step is to move from the object of deserved punishment to the object of a motive to punish which we can approve – or, drawing on the materials of Part I – with which we can sympathize.

Here Smith re-introduces resentment. Resentment, he argues, is the only passion that directly motivates us to be the instrument of another's misery (i.e. to render evil) (II.i.1.5). Hatred and dislike might lead us to *wish* misery on someone else, but unless we are exceptionally vicious, we do not also want to be the cause of that misfortune: the 'very thought of voluntarily contributing' to such misery will shock us beyond all measure. Resentment is the only passion to contain, necessarily, the desire that the object of our resentment suffer 'by our means, and upon account of that particular injury which he had done to us' (II.i.1.7). The passion of resentment is what motivates us to punish others, and so the third step of Smith's argument is to conclude that the object of deserved punishment, that is, the object of an approved motive to punish, is also the proper object and thus the appropriate target of our naturally occurring resentment. For this to carry explanatory weight, Smith must presumably draw on the picture of this naturally occurring passion already familiar to the reader from Part I. In the final step of his argument, Smith notes that the proper object of resentment is the object, or target, of proper resentment: that is, of resentment with which 'the heart of every impartial spectator sympathizes ... and every indifferent by-stander entirely enters into, and goes along with' (II.i.2.2).

Thus for Smith, our judgments of demerit are ultimately grounded in our naturally occurring sympathies with resentment: both our own and other people's. This is not a counter-intuitive account of retributive judgments, but it is perhaps a little surprising, given Smith's conclusion in TMS Part I: namely, that resentment is all but utterly unsympathetic and whatever sympathy we do achieve is an indirect consequence of *not* sympathizing.<sup>2</sup> In fact, he remarks, our judgments of demerit are compound sentiments, composed both of our direct *antipathy* to the motives of the perpetrator, and our resulting indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer. One might think that Smith could skip over the problem of sympathizing with resentment altogether, and develop an account of demerit from the impropriety of the perpetrator's motives, deduced by our failure to sympathize with those motives, and an objective assessment of the resultant harm to the victim. Indeed, were Smith to account for judgments of demerit in the manner just sketched, he would have emerged as far more of a proto-utilitarian than he does. But Smith expressly avoids grounding our sense of demerit and injustice in general assessments of social harm or utility in II.ii.3.4–5, focusing instead on 'that consciousness of ill-desert' which 'nature has implanted in the human breast': namely, resentment (II.ii.3.4).

Smith takes resentment to be crucially important to moral judgment – and indeed, to political and legal institutions of punishment. At first, resentment's importance appears to be a matter of utility: 'the natural gratification of this

passion tends, of its own accord, to produce all the political ends of punishment; the correction of the criminal, and the example to the populace (II.i.1.6), but Smith paints a much more vivid picture of the *immediate* propriety of punitive resentment, prior to any considerations of utility, when describing a murder victim:

His blood, we think, calls aloud for vengeance. The very ashes of the dead seem to be disturbed at the thought that his injuries are to pass unrevenged. ... Nature, antecedent to all reflections upon the utility of punishment, has in this manner stamped upon the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, an immediate and instinctive approbation of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation.

(II.i.2.)

In tying judgments of demerit so closely to our desire to punish, expressed in the naturally occurring passion of resentment, Smith argues that moral judgments of demerit contain a motivational element, necessarily shared by the person who makes the judgment. Judgments of blame have action-guiding properties, and these explain how we come to have a sense of justice, necessary for social mechanisms of retributive justice.

Furthermore, resentments of any kind, whether proper or improper, contain a desire for *accountability* and *acknowledgement* from the wrongdoer: that she be made to grieve on account of her behaviour towards me, the resenter: 'not only that he should be punished, but that he should be punished by our means, and upon account of that particular injury which he had done to us' (II.i.1.6). Sympathy with that resentment is, at the same time, approval of that demand for acknowledgement. Our judgments of demerit, as implicit gestures of such sympathy, are thus also judgments of respect towards the victim of wrongdoing, as they acknowledge her claims in ways that an alternative, utilitarian route to demerit would not.

### Two Resentments in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*?

The account of moral judgments presented in Part II of the TMS describes us as experiencing, when we resent, a normatively laden, moralized retributive emotion. Smith's description will be familiar to those acquainted with contemporary philosophical discussions of resentment, for example Peter Strawson's description of resentment as a participant reactive attitude (2002), Jeffrie Murphy (2003) and Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton's (1988) definition of resentment as a virtue, and recent treatments by Charles Griswold (2000) and Thomas Brudholm (2008) among others. Not everything we ordinarily describe as resentment, for example, can meet this account: a more technically rarefied definition is required.<sup>3</sup> Does Smith provide such an appropriate technical definition in his initial description of the passion? The answer is both yes and no. In fact, it's possible to read the TMS as presenting two

entirely separate accounts of resentment, only one of which meets the standard demanded by contemporary philosophical treatments of resentment. This is, for example, the reading offered by Stephen Darwall.<sup>4</sup> On this reading, we can understand Smith to use 'resentment' loosely at first, as nothing more than a rough synonym for anger. Later in Part II, when it becomes necessary to explain how certain kinds of angry reactions are capable of grounding fully-fledged moral judgments, he focuses on a richer, more sympathetic, cognitively sharpened, attitude. The second alternative is to argue that Smith uses resentment consistently to describe a single psychological state, but that his discussion in Part II draws out aspects or implications of that state left dormant in Part I. This interpretation requires that we square the rich, normatively laden properties of what I have called Smith's moralized resentment and what Darwall calls 'second-personal resentment' with the thinner, unmoralized account of naturally occurring resentment Smith provides in Part II. While eventually I intend to defend the second alternative, and to argue that a full understanding of the moralized resentment of Part II recognizes it as the culmination of Smith's earlier, non-moral resentment and not as a separate if related psychological state, it is important to establish just how much Smith's presentation of resentment changes.

In the opening sections of the TMS, Smith uses 'resentment' interchangeably with 'anger', 'fury', 'outrage' and 'indignation' (I.i.1.7, I.i.4.6, I.i.5.4). He does not consistently reserve one term for moderate instances of the others, or those instances which an independent third party could recognize as having been justified by (appropriate to) the act that provoked them. Smith notes these are passions we share with children and with 'brutes' (I.ii.1.3), and that they are passions apt to seize hold of and distort our reason, rather than remaining sensitive to it. Sometimes, 'resentment' contains the expressed desire for revenge or retaliation (though the desired act does not appear to be a fully-fledged retributive response, as warranted punishment might be), and at other times it is little more than an instinctive angry reaction. Neither is one anger-term the genus of which others are the species. Much later in the TMS, when criticizing Hutcheson's moral system, Smith alludes in passing to 'emotions of particular *kinds*' whose general features are consistent even while subject to variation, and he mentions anger/resentment as one such generic kind (VII.iii.3.13). The term thus seems to refer to a family of retaliative states.

Clearly, Smith's description of resentment in Part II is much more elaborate. While he continues occasionally to swap the terms 'resentment', 'anger' and 'indignation' (II.ii.2.3, II.iii.1.1), resentment is now that sentiment which not only directly prompts us to punish, but also wishes evil (punishment) to the wrongdoer by our means, on account of our injury, and in such a way that he be made to suffer grief, repentance and regret for that injury (and not simply regret at having experienced the punishment). In other words, the passion of resentment now contains the wish that the perpetrator come to feel towards the original injury in just the same way that we do, that he now share

our attitude. The sufficient conditions for resenting someone have risen dramatically.

We cannot make sense of this textual shift by insisting that resentment in Part II is simply what Smith intended by 'proper' resentment in Part I; what I have called 'moralized' resentment is not a moderate, appropriately occurring version of 'thin' or generic resentment. In the initial passages on resentment, Smith speaks of proper or sympathetic resentment, not as a moralized version of the general passion, containing an explicitly moral claim about wrongful injury, but rather as a verbally and behaviourally moderate instance of it. Proper resentment is fury held in check (I.ii.3.8). There is little or no allusion to the kind of desire for accountability described in Part II, where to resent someone is, at the same time, to wish to 'bring him back to a more just sense of what is due to other people, to make him sensible of what he owes us, and of the wrong he has done us' (II.iii.1.6). In Part II, the criteria for what qualifies as resentment have not only risen but have also *changed* in nature: to resent is to wish specific things regarding the wrongdoer's attitudes and not simply his (mis)fortunes. Proper resentment, in Part I, is that resentment which is justified and moderate. Resentment in Part II can be both justified and unjustified; we can be wrong about what transpired or who is responsible for our wrongdoing; we can wish a change of attitude on the wrong person, or under the wrong circumstances. Darwall's claim – that Smith appears to be discussing a new psychological state altogether – is far from implausible. Furthermore, in Part II, resentment has been recast as a sociable attitude, in at least two senses: first, we can resent sympathetically with others, or on their behalf, as well as our own. Second, in resenting, we demand something from the perpetrator – a change in her attitudes. Resentment thus represents an ongoing emotional engagement with her: again, a more sociable attitude than is presented in Part I.

### Resentment in Butler's *Fifteen Sermons*

Were Smith to identify resentment as a broad emotional category, containing both moralized and non-moralized versions, he would not be the first. That is exactly the account of resentment offered in Bishop Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1949 [1726]). There is not an extensive literature exploring Butler's influence on Smith's understanding of resentment, although Griswold notes that 'several of the points Smith makes about anger or resentment' including a crucial distinction between moral and non-moral resentment, are anticipated in Butler's *Sermons* (Griswold 1999: 117).<sup>5</sup> D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie limit Butler's influence on Smith to the 'unconscious repetition of phrases' in their introduction to TMS (1976: 11), while a recent paper by James Harris suggests that Smith's affinity and debt to Butler has been generally under-appreciated (Harris 2008: 15).

Resentment presents a slightly different puzzle for Butler than it does for Smith. He opens his sermon on resentment by asking: 'Why had man

implanted in him a principle, which appears the direct contrary to benevolence?' (Butler 1949: 121). On the one hand, resentment can't be written off, since 'no passion God hath endued us with can be in itself evil' (122), but at the same time resentment does not appear to be good, either: its object (the misery of another person) appears directly contrary to the duty of benevolence, and to the Christian precept 'love thine enemies'. He is even prepared to allow that resentment 'is in every instance absolutely an evil in itself, because it implies producing misery' (139). Yet, resentment is a natural passion, and 'natural' for Butler carries normative force, as it implies God-given.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Butler argues for the compatibility of moderate resentment with both benevolence and his admittedly minimalist reading of Christian forgiveness, but it remains in his text a 'painful remedy' to the fact of injury and violence, and is subject to excess and abuse.<sup>7</sup> We need the passion of resentment to correct for what would otherwise be motivational deficiencies: namely, our ability to punish and deter wrongdoing – but it would be better if offenders were brought to justice through the cool considerations of reason and reflection alone (131).

What, according to Butler, do we mean by resentment? According to his sermon on the topic, 'resentment' represents both a genus and a species of emotion – and again, his distinctions are complicated by the fact that he occasionally exchanges the word 'anger' for 'resentment'. He divides generic resentment (generic anger) into two kinds: (1) 'hasty and sudden' anger, also known as passion, and (2) 'settled, deliberate' resentment. Hasty anger is morally indifferent, instinctive and often irrational; Butler compares it to blinking something out of one's eye. It is experienced by infants and animals as well as adults and from this Butler concludes it cannot be the effect of reason, but is excited by 'mere sensation and feeling' (124).<sup>8</sup>

Butler spends a great deal more time tackling the problematic phenomenon of settled, deliberate resentment. Because even rational, reflective people can experience resentment, it must be the effect of reason, he argues, but the only way reason could raise any anger is to represent not just harm, but injustice or injury of some kind. The object of resentment is thus not suffering or harm *per se*, but moral evil (126). The very emotion of (settled, deliberate) resentment always contains the belief that the object of my resentment has behaved unjustly, and has caused an injury of some kind. This is evident, Butler suggests, from the considerations likely to raise or lower our resentment: whether the act was performed by design or was inadvertent, whether the offender yielded to strong temptation or acted without provocation, whether a prior friendship offers evidence of the offender's other redeeming qualities, and so on – that is, moral considerations concerning the wrongdoer's motives and her character (126). Butler concludes that settled resentment is 'plainly connected with a sense of virtue and vice, of moral good and evil' (125): that is, it is always already moralized. In fact, he uses the moralized nature of resentment as evidence against psychological egoism: 'why should men dispute concerning the reality of virtue, and whether it be founded in the nature

of things ... when every man carries about him this passion, which affords him demonstration, that the rules of justice and equity are to be the guide of his actions?' (131).

Settled resentment is certainly not morally infallible; Butler provides a long and rather wonderful discussion of its various excesses and abuses, including malice and revenge. In fact, while raised by reason and nominally sensitive to reason's claims, resentment also has 'a certain determination and resolute bent of mind, not to be convinced or set right' (129). We should thus be wary of resentment's ability to latch on and take hold. Butler's cautions regarding resentment resonate with Smith's admonition that we resent more from a distanced sense of its propriety than because we have actually succumbed to its charms (TMS L.ii.3.8). Luckily, though, the abuses of resentment are primarily limited to our own, personal grudges: those resentments arising from injuries to ourselves, or those whom we consider as ourselves (Butler 1949: 126). Impartial resentment or indignation – in other words, a spectator's resentment – is thus an appropriate standard for measuring partial resentment: the victim ought 'to be affected towards the injurious person in the same way any good men, uninterested in the case would be, if they had the same just sense, which we supposed the injured person to have, of the fault' (Butler 1949: 143) – that is, if they are impartial and well-informed.

### Smith vs. Butler on moralizing resentment

Butler outlines two distinct forms of resentment or anger: a thin, instinctive reaction to harm of any kind and a rich, moralized attitude that targets only our perceptions of injustice and injury. The latter is expressly identified as the origin of our motive to punish, and is 'plainly connected' with our 'sense of virtue and vice'. Furthermore, we evaluate the latter emotion with reference to the standard of an impartial bystander.<sup>9</sup> Can we make sense of the apparent inconsistency in Smithian resentment by reading Butler's two kinds of resentment into the text of TMS? If so, the discussion of resentment in Part I could be understood as a discussion of sudden, hasty anger, or, more plausibly, of anger/resentment in general, containing – for the time being – both hasty, sudden anger and settled, deliberate resentment, so that we can better understand our judgments of propriety towards *both* kinds as they naturally occur in everyday life. Part II, on the other hand, focuses on the salient kind, namely settled, deliberate resentment, because it is a discussion of moral judgments of demerit and these judgments are concerned with the proper objects of deliberate resentment: injustice and wrongful injury.

This Butlerian account is a tempting interpretation of Smith, but in the end it is not convincing; moreover, adopting it does not do Smith's moral psychology any favours. There are both textual and philosophical reasons to resist a reading that sharply separates the 'resentments' discussed in Parts I and II. First of all, Butler simply asserts what Smith attempts to demonstrate: that we can trace a path from resentment as we ordinarily experience it to our

cognitively sophisticated judgments of good and evil, merit and demerit. Butler starts out by announcing, 'resentment is of two kinds' (Butler 1949: 123). In doing so, he has both differentiated and connected sudden and deliberate anger. His claim is that among our natural experiences of angry feelings, there is a particular kind that always already contains claims of *moral* wrong. In helping himself to an already moralized attitude, Butler makes the connection between natural resentment and a sense of justice far easier to prove, but perhaps less interesting to contemporary audiences unconvinced that the moral and the natural are so easily reconciled, as a result. If the goal is to demonstrate our essentially moral nature by demonstrating how moral claims are grounded in our natural emotional reactions to the world, then surely the interesting question is whether we can pick out a 'natural' (in the sense of non-moral) sub-class of angry feelings that are also easily distinguished by an overtly moral claim. Picking out just those reactions that can be developed into moral judgments, for no other reason that these are the reactions that can be developed into moral judgments, appears – at least to the observer not already convinced of the thesis – to be worryingly circular.

Furthermore, it seems fairly obvious that we experience more kinds of anger/resentment than instinctive, irrational episodes of lashing out and overtly moralized resentment; we resent individual acts of moral injury, yes, but we may also resent other threats to and burdens on our wellbeing, at least according to everyday understandings of the word. We can resent the demands of a difficult and unrewarding job or a demanding, draining relationship; we can resent feelings of disappointment or vulnerability. We may resent others for failing to live up to our expectations, or for their expectations of us. Griswold gives the example of a painful, persistent disease; over time my reaction to it might at least feel like resentment (2007: 22). Margaret Walker notes that we resent disruptions to a wide variety of social and political norms as well as the overtly moral, and our resentment is sometimes inflected with fear, envy and a variety of anxiety (2006).<sup>10</sup> If Butler meant his distinction to be exhaustive, his taxonomy is startlingly incomplete, and his psychology less compelling as a result. If he is singling out only those instances that are independently, recognizably moral and those that are most obviously *not* moral (an instinctive reaction to harm), then his use of resentment as a passion that comes in moral and non-moral form, as evidence of our moral nature, is suspect.

Finally, Butler leaves us with little sense of how our rational 'deliberate' resentment is related to instinctive anger. He certainly doesn't provide a genetic or developmental account of how the moralized passion emerges from the non-moral; rather, it is divinely 'implanted' in us. In contrast, one of the great strengths of TMS is how carefully the moral distinctions and categories of its subsequent parts are built using only the materials of Part I: our natural impulses and emotions, social and unsocial, and the capacity for imaginative sympathy that links us to one another. It is uncharacteristic for Smith to develop the conditions of propriety for one psychological state in Part I, then

switch terms to an entirely different state – and indeed, a normatively laden one – in Part II, without explaining how these states are related, or how the emotion in Part II came to be so readily laden with appropriate normative claims.

Thus, a Butlerian account of resentment is a pitfall that Smith would do well to avoid – and indeed, one that he does avoid. The discussion of resentment in Part II is not just a story of how to derive moral judgments of demerit from a moralized version of natural resentment; it is a story of how resentment lends itself to moralization. In Part II, Section III, when Smith discusses the 'irregularity' of our resentments and our gratitude, he simultaneously takes us through the stages of resentment's shift from initial, instinctive emotional retaliation to cognitively sharpened demands for accountability. This is not only a story of propriety; it reveals how the raw emotion of resentment develops, apart from and prior to any interventions of sympathy,

First, Smith notes that all animals resent any cause of pain, whether the cause is animate or inanimate: 'we are angry, for a moment, even at the stone that hurts us. A child beats it, a dog barks at it, a choleric man is apt to curse it' (TMS II.iii.1.1). For rational creatures, a little reflection corrects this general response, at least in most cases. We realize, Smith notes, that 'before anything can be the proper object of gratitude or resentment, it must not only be the cause of pleasure or pain, it must likewise be capable of feeling them'; and his use of 'before' rather than 'in order' is absolutely crucial, here. This is not a statement about attitudinal propriety grounded in sympathy, but rather a 'precondition' of sorts. The proper objects of resentment must be capable of feeling pain, *so that our resentment can be fully satisfied*, not so others can sympathize with it. The latter is a separate, later question. And so Smith continues. *Animals are better, but not perfect or 'complete' objects of resentment, as there is something missing – or wanting – in our resentment of animals: we cannot demand recognition from them; we cannot bring their attitudes to the original harm in line with our own. In other words, we can't get satisfaction. To be a truly satisfactory object of resentment, our antagonist must have caused our pain, be capable of feeling pain herself, and have caused our pain from design: that is, from the kinds of mental faculties required for us to change her mind about her actions (II.iii.1.4). Only then will we attain what is, Smith argues, the real aim of our resentment: to have the object of our resentment, the offender, experience the same painful attitude towards the injury that we currently feel – and, in so feeling, acknowledge its status as a wrongful injury. The vengeful aspect of resentment desires a particular kind of misery for its object: 'resentment cannot be fully gratified, unless the offender is not only made to grieve in his turn, but to grieve for that particular wrong which we have suffered from him' (II.i.1.7).<sup>11</sup> Smith is able to claim, in Part II, that resentment contains a demand for acknowledgement because that acknowledgement emerges as part of the retributive desire, sketched in Part I.*

What strikes me in this developmental story is that Smith is concerned to identify the shift, not simply from instinctive to *proper* resentment, but also from instinctive to *satisfying* resentment. He is identifying the 'complete' or 'perfect' objects of our resentment – complete *from the standpoint of that resentment*: its internal logic, as it were. In doing so, he paints a picture of how resentment moralizes itself on its own terms – what Griswold calls its propensity to tell a justifying story about itself (2007: 30), rather than merely introducing a moralized version of a naturally amoral sentiment. This developmental story makes Smith's account psychologically more insightful than Butler's, and ultimately allows him to ground genuinely moral claims of merit and demerit into what first seemed to be a decidedly non-moral aspect of our psychologies.

### Conclusions

At first glance, Smith's account of resentment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* seems to suffer from an unfortunate inconsistency, perhaps even an ambiguity, in the referent of the central term. He appears to conflate several emotions under a single heading, failing to appropriately distinguish them, as done in an earlier treatment of resentment by Joseph Butler. In fact, this apparent inconsistency is evidence of a much richer and more nuanced moral psychology of retributive attitudes, which pays significant and much-needed attention to the phenomenology and satisfaction of our resentments, both instinctive and 'moralized'. It is because, and not in spite of, the variation in Smith's description of resentment, that he is able to employ it as the grounding for judgments of demerit and injustice.

I have focused on a key difference in the accounts of resentment provided by Adam Smith and Joseph Butler. While it is tempting to read both philosophers as using a single term 'resentment' to describe two distinct, if related, emotional states, this temptation would be an unfortunate misrepresentation of Smith on resentment. It may appear that Smith presents two entirely different versions of resentment in Parts I and II of the TMS; in fact, the narrower, more overtly normative attitude described in Part II develops naturally out of the natural reactive instinct presented in Part I, according to what I have called resentment's 'internal logic'.

There is a great deal more to be said about the affinities between Smith and Butler on resentment than is covered in this essay. Certainly, in praising Smith's developmental story of resentment at Butler's expense, I have not done justice to some of the remarkable strengths of Butler's account. These strengths include Butler's emphasis on the sociability of resentment, that is, our ability to experience vicarious resentment (indignation) on behalf of others and the moral expectations we place on offenders in resenting them. Butler also illustrates how we exercise our capacity for sympathetic, imaginative engagement with the emotional lives of others in navigating our own; we learn to curb our resentment to appropriate levels (and indeed, even to forgive)

by training ourselves to 'be affected towards the injurious person in the same way any good men, uninterested in the case, would be' (Butler 1949: 143). Impartial third parties play a key role in assessing 'proper' resentment in Butler's sermons, as they do in Smith; the wide moral community is thus invoked, even in interpersonal instances of wrongdoing. In fact, Butler anticipates Smith by drawing key connections among resentment, on the one hand, and moral judgment, retributive justice and the defence of moral norms, on the other. And Butler's analysis of resentment extends beyond Smith's in his elaborate discussion of forgiveness alongside resentment. In this manner, Butler indicates how resentment plays a role, not only in retribution, but also in reconciliation.

Furthermore, it might appear that in focusing on the 'raw material' of resentment, I have missed the import of Smith's account. For Smith, the true 'moralization' of any emotion, social or unsocial, takes place through the complex psychological mechanism of sympathy. It is in sympathizing or failing to sympathize with the motives and reactions of others that we develop a sense of their propriety or impropriety. Ultimately, any experience of resentment, whether instinctive or cognitively laden, is judged appropriate or inappropriate according to whether or not an impartial and well-informed spectator would sympathize with it.

Yet Smith is not interested in resentment for matters of emotional propriety alone. In Part II, proper resentment is the natural, affective ground for our moral judgments of demerit. Resentment is one of 'the great safe-guards of the association of mankind, to protect the weak, to curb the violent and to chastise the guilty' (TMS II.ii.3.4). It also represents our 'natural sense of the propriety and fitness of punishment' (II.ii.3.7). Smith is reluctant to grant that justice is a matter of mere utility; rather, our sense of justice is *natural*, grounded in that natural sentiment which animates us to abhor 'fraud, perfidy, and injustice, and to delight to see them punished' (II.ii.3.9). It therefore matters significantly to Smith's project that the normatively laden reactive attitude capable of grounding our retributive judgments and motivations in Part II can be found among the natural passions and emotions described in Part II. The text of TMS reveals a consistent, sophisticated account of the passion of resentment.

Moreover, Smith's analysis is significant for contemporary discussions of resentment. In contemporary philosophical literature on retribution and reconciliation, resentment has come to stand as the retributive reactive attitude *par excellence*.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the story philosophers tell about resentment – its distinctive features, aims, rationality and gratification – will affect the conclusions we draw about which actual angry experiences to take seriously as *resentments*. Contemporary philosophers have typically argued for a narrow, technical account of resentment, in order that this moral attitude can be distinguished from the wide range of angry feelings we may experience in everyday life, few of which can be articulated as anything close to a moral demand. Resentment, they argue, is moralized anger; or just that anger which ought, at least *prima facie*, to be taken seriously.



Yet it is quite possible that limiting the scope of morally significant angers does a further injustice to those with the most reason to feel rage. As feminist scholars like Alison Jaggar have noted, under hierarchical conditions of social inequality in which dominant values will tend to service the interest of dominant groups, those most burdened by the status quo may find themselves experiencing 'outlaw emotions': emotional reactions that are dismissed by others precisely because they cannot be reconstructed as recognizable moral claims, at least according to the framework operating in a particular moral community (2008: 31). The example Jaggar offers of an outlaw emotion is resentment (in this case, resentment at 'kindnesses' which are actually subtle expressions of oppressive power-relationships). In distinguishing sharply between 'moralized' and non-moralized angers, philosophers may hamper themselves from focusing on morally significant angers – in this case, resistance to oppression – that cannot currently be articulated as moral claims.

Smith, on the other hand, is prepared not only to connect our moral judgments of injustice and wrongdoing to our natural emotional reactions of resentment, but also, to allow for the possibility that the moral attitudes grounding these judgments are not so different from many other kinds of anger we typically experience. According to the Smithian 'story' of resentment, our natural passions are subject to the influence of fortune (both individual and social) and are vulnerable to the sympathy – or lack of sympathy – we receive from others around us. These contingent features of our social context may well influence how even our best reflection is able to correct and curb our immediate and instinctive angry reactions to the world. Smith gives us more room, and more reason, to take seriously angers that contemporary philosophical accounts cannot. In refusing to distinguish absolutely between narrow, 'moralized' resentment and a wider range of our instinctive angry reactions – indeed, by illustrating how beautifully the former arises out of the distinctive aims and features of the latter – Adam Smith may well be an important ally for critical scholars wishing to broaden the range of social angers we ought to take seriously.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to James Harris and to Eric Schliesser for their help in putting together this essay, and especially to Samuel Fleischacker and Vivienne Brown, for their insightful editorial assistance.

### Notes

- 1 I borrow the term 'cognitively sharpened' from D'Arms and Jacobson (1993).
- 2 The idea that judgments of demerit (or blame) are grounded in our natural attitudes of resentment has been taken up by a number of contemporary philosophers, most notably in Peter Strawson's 'Freedom and resentment' (2003).
- 3 In everyday life, 'resentment' may describe many different kinds of anger or envy, and may be used interchangeably with indignation, irritation, frustration, begrudgement,

- distress, contempt, hatred, malice, *schadenfreude*, vengefulness, vindication and rage, among others.
- 4 In Stephen Darwall's plenary session at 'The Philosophy of Adam Smith' (Darwall 2009), he describes Smith as 'conflating two psychic states': retaliatory resentment and second-personal resentment. Retaliatory resentment seeks revenge or reciprocal harm only, while second-personal resentment seeks not to get back at the offender but to hold her *answerable*, and thus contains a kind of proper regard for the person who has injured me. Retaliatory resentment is presumably described in Part I of TMS, while second-personal resentment emerges in the discussion of Part II. As I argue in this essay, I am not convinced that the 'resentments' of Parts I and II are as separable as Darwall allows, but I take his point that the focus of Part I is retaliation, while the focus of Part II is recognition, or acknowledgement (Darwall 2006: 178–80).
  - 5 Griswold also alludes to Smith, several times, in his discussion of Butler on resentment and forgiveness (Griswold 2007: 22–8).
  - 6 Austin Duncan-Jones refers to this normative force as Butler's theological teleology (1952: 148).
  - 7 According to Butler, to forgive is to perceive one's wrongdoer and her actions without the distorting effects of partiality and self-love and, as a result, to experience a moderate resentment, no more than what 'any good man, uninterested in the case' would feel (143). We must forswear revenge, but not all our angry feelings, in order to forgive. Forgiveness is compatible with some enduring level of resentment. This definition of forgiveness is at odds with most contemporary philosophical accounts, including those who claim to take Butler as their historical inspiration (Murphy and Hampton 1988; Murphy 2003; Haber 1991; Holmgren 1993; Hieronymi 2001).
  - 8 Griswold notes that Butler divides resentment both by duration, whether sudden or settled, and by its object, that is harm or injury (2007: 22). So, we can experience sudden anger that is instinctive and non-moral, and is occasioned by harm, but we can also experience sudden *moral* anger, that is occasioned by injury. Butler's text does suggest he thinks moral anger (or resentment) can be sudden as well as slow, or deliberate, but it appears that the crucial distinction for him is not duration, but the object and origin of anger (Butler 1949: 124). He wants to distinguish between the kind of anger that comes from instinct and is occasioned by any harm at all, from the kind of anger that comes from reason and understanding, and is occasioned by the idea of injustice or injury: 'I am speaking of the former only so far as it is to be distinguished from the latter. The only way in which our reason and understanding can raise anger is by representing to our mind injustice or injury of some kind or other' (124). Thus, I focus on the distinction that Butler himself takes to be crucial.
  - 9 There is a certain affinity between Smith's image of a mirror, and Butler's suggestion that 'we are in such a peculiar situation, with respect to injuries done to ourselves, that we can scarce any more see them as they really are, than our eye can see itself' (Butler 1949: 144).
  - 10 Walker gives an impressive list of resentments not provoked by personal moral injury: true, she acknowledges, we resent harms and losses, but some people also resent cheaters and free riders (even when we do not suffer as a result), those who engage in exploitation. We resent certain improprieties, as when someone gives themselves 'airs' or authority to which we don't think they are entitled (again, even if we do not suffer), and – in contrast – we resent unjustified demotions or slights to our own status. Finally, resentment is often prompted by victim-less cases of 'rule-breaking, norm-violating, or simply behavior seen as "out of bounds": all seen as unacceptable offences (2006: 123–4). People can prick, react or seethe with resentment when provoked by any of these. Her examples include foreign

accents, urban development and – in an amusing reference borrowed from Alan Gibbard – peculiar haircuts.

- 11 There is a ringing familiarity to any student of philosophy in this description of resentment, of course. It is reminiscent of Nietzsche's famous treatment of existential resentment, or *ressentiment* in Section I of *The Genealogy of Morals* (1967).
- 12 See, for example, Murphy and Hampton (1988), D'Arms and Jacobson (1993), Walker (2006), Griswold (2007), Brudholm (2008).

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