

THE CONCEPT OF RESENTMENT AS DEVELOPED BY
MAX SCHELER AND ITS OCCURENCE AMONG THE BLACK
MINORITY GROUP

by

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ABSTRACT

The notion of ressentiment, conceptualized by Max Scheler (after an initiation by Friedrich Nietzsche), is of considerable current interest to educators and educational theorists as they are frequently confronted with the occurrence of this emotion, particularly as far as the education of minority groups is concerned.

In order to show how the ressentiment phenomenon may be related to such a minority group, an extensive discussion of Scheler's analysis is presented. At the outset Scheler's cultural environment as far as it was relevant to his essay on ressentiment, is explained. His value theory, maintaining that there is an immutable hierarchy of moral values which must not be disturbed, is analyzed as the transvaluation of this order is presumably one of the major causes of ressentiment. The relation of ressentiment to social conditions, religion and industrial society - all of which are components of Scheler's essay - is explained.

Scheler put particular emphasis on the materialistic orientation of the bourgeoisie and the proletarian "mob" as these groups were - according to him - the main

perpetrators of the evil moral transvaluation that typifies modern society. The aspects and effects of this analysis are investigated.

When applying a concept such as Scheler's ressentiment to America's black minority group, the investigation is greatly facilitated by the realization that this group, like many others, expresses its ressentiment through social movements. Consequently, a sociological discussion of such movements takes place before the ressentiment of the black minority is investigated. The values of black society, its methods of expressing ressentiment and aspects of its social organization are discussed in this context.

Scheler's views on the origins of ressentiment and the role of reform as well as other, relatively minor, points of his theory have at least in part been confirmed by the development and experiences of America's black minority. On the other hand, Scheler seems to have erred in some important respects, e.g. his ethical and religious arguments are seldom or never backed up by any solid evidence. Significantly, he never seemed to realize the positive functions ressentiment can have, a fact that is particularly obvious in the black minority since it has used the ressentiment emotion as the motor towards a better, more humane, social system. Scheler's contribution is thus of only limited value.

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THE PROBLEM, THE PURPOSE, AND A DISCLAIMER

The problem discussed in this paper can be summed up in one sentence: "Can the concept of ressentiment as developed by the German philosopher Max Scheler, be tested by relating it to America's black minority group?"

The purpose of this project is to provide educators with a social and philosophical foundation whenever they are confronted with symptoms of ressentiment in those blacks they are supposed to educate. Significantly enough, more and more contemporary educators are also taking a fresh look at the notion of ressentiment as conceptualized by Scheler or Nietzsche.

All this does not mean that the present author subscribes to all of Scheler's analysis or indeed to Scheler's Weltanschauung. Far from it. But a closer study of Scheler's ressentiment analysis led him to the conclusion that it does contain certain valid elements which should be explored further. The temptation to do so in relation to a major social issue of our times was too great to be resisted, particularly in view of the significance this social phenomenon can have in the educational process.

CHAPTER I

SCHELER'S CONCEPT OF RESSENTIMENT

INTRODUCTION

One can hardly hope to understand Max Scheler (1874-1928) without knowing something about the circumstances under which his essay on ressentiment was produced. For he was a restless spirit living in restless times which were characterized by upheavels that deeply disturbed him. Scheler was often ahead of his time, constantly searching for the new and often the shocking, but as his friend Nicolai Hartmann put it, in fact he was doing nothing more upsetting than rejecting his ideas when they were no longer in tune with the age.¹ And of course many of the ideas which he produced soon agitated society.

In many respects Scheler was a true moralist, and like a thin red thread an almost obsessive interest in ethical values runs through his writings, not the least in

¹ Nicolai Hartmann, "Max Scheler", Kant-Studien, XXXIII, 1-2, Berlin 1928, p. XIV

his essay on ressentiment. Having been disillusioned with bourgeois morality and the liberal democracy with which it was associated in many European countries, Scheler at the time of writing this paper (in 1912) seems to have had some premonition of the disaster that soon was to descend on Europe, but he saw in this more of an opportunity than a disaster.

Since he lived in times of great social and political changes, it seems quite logical that, as a person who was deeply involved in these changes, Scheler frequently changed his intellectual positions, rejecting ideas that he once staunchly defended and accepting others that at other times had horrified him. This instability and restlessness made him suspect among his more sedate colleagues (i.e. among most of them), but it also made him a hero of the younger generations who saw in him an elder who understood their dissatisfaction with the status quo.¹

Although Scheler assimilated a great deal of Husserl's phenomenological teachings, he was hardly an orthodox phenomenologist, if only because his ideas were in a constant flux and seldom lent themselves to a clearly

¹Max Scheler, Ressentiment, Edited with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser, translated by William W. Holdheim. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe). Introduction by L. A. Coser, pp. 6-7.

worked out, consistent, philosophical system (which made Scheler somewhat of an oddity in view of his Germanic cultural background which had produced the monolithic systems of Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, and others. Even so, as we shall see later on, a close relationship to Nietzsche's ideology is unmistakably present in Scheler's writings).

Unlike Husserl who was primarily concerned with logic and consciousness, Scheler's phenomenology concentrated on emotional states, such as hate and love or pain and joy. He put great trust into intuition, which, he thought, operates according to certain laws that are applicable in a realm of eternal values.¹ Moreover, feelings are means of knowledge through which man's position in the universe can be understood. These notions are of particular importance as Scheler accepts them as valid throughout his discussion of ressentiment.

Scheler's general approach to society is understandable when seen against the background from which he wrote.²

¹ Scheler, Ibid., Introduction by L. A. Coser, p. 10.

² John Raphael Staude, Max Scheler 1874-1928 (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 44 ff.

In the Germany of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the middle class - though economically increasingly prosperous - was politically impotent, the feudal aristocracy having monopolized political power positions. Only occasionally did the financially successful member of the bourgeoisie gain entrance into the exclusive aristocratic circles which were the real wielders of power. For the vast majority of the middle class which had high aspirations that could never be fulfilled, life was in many ways very frustrating and thus provided an ideal basis for feelings of ressentiment. These frustrations produced vacillating emotions in the victims, a predictable reaction which manifested itself in ready submission to authority and autocratic behavior forms in the home. Seemingly contradictory emotions were entertained towards the aristocracy which was alternately resented and admired, in each case for the same reason, i.e. because it was the powerholder.

Even though Germany had a parliament, this parliamentary system of government was all but a farce since the Reichstag(the parliament) was politically powerless. In other words, even a legitimate involvement or success in

the existing political process did not open the doors to power positions for the German bourgeoisie.¹

But both classes - the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie - agreed on at least one point. Both were proud of Germany's unity and imperialist might. An aggressive nationalism thus was the one emotional force that transcended all class barriers and united the whole nation. However, this was a poor substitute for meaningful national goals and social values that were so clearly lacking. All in all, ressentiment could not have possibly asked for a better breeding ground.²

However, this does not mean that Scheler showed sympathy for the predicament in which bourgeois society found itself. Far from it. He saw in the German aristocracy the representatives of noble values, and if he had any complaints at all against them, it was their occasional failure to live up to these ideals. Even for these lapses the bourgeoisie was to blame, for the increasing "inter-marriage" between bourgeoisie and aristocracy (Blutmischung) had lowered the latter's moral fibre, and

¹ Staude, Ibid., pp. 44-47.

² Staude, Ibid., pp. 48-50.

thus was responsible for its moral deterioration.¹ Clearly, German society was decadent as far as Scheler was concerned, and like most of his compatriots (though for different reasons) he felt great relief when World War I broke out, for now there was a chance to purge German society of its shameful decadence.²

THE VALUE THEORY

To understand what Scheler meant by ressentiment, one must first of all understand the moral foundations that make a ressentiment-reaction possible. For there is, Scheler argues, a traditional hierarchy of moral values; and it is only when this hierarchy collapses that ressentiment-man comes to the fore. Moreover, values are not subjective as the relativists would have us believe much to Scheler's annoyance; they are independent and universally applicable and they can be grasped by intuition. Intuition,

¹This is somewhat ironical in view of many later developments when Blutmischung was a serious crime in Nazi Germany: as a half-jew (Halbjude) Scheler would have been one of its first victims had he lived long enough to experience Hitler's Third Reich.

²Staupe, op.cit., pp. 50-52.

on its part, being regulated by an indispensable value content which the values possess in reality, even though they are based on emotions.¹ Consequently, these values cannot be empirically proven, and methods of scientific validity are clearly not applicable to them. Scheler believed that if a person surrenders to his intuition he will ipso facto see these values as he (Scheler) does. Since he rejected scientific validation as far as moral values are concerned, Scheler used purely emotional means, such as persuasion or intuition, to make his points.²

The philosophical evidence on which Scheler relied to prove his theory of values can be divided into three major parts:

1) There is the obvious intuition of Being. We feel that we are therefore we are, or else we could not feel that we are. Obviously, Scheler simply modified the Cartesian Cogito, ergo sum.

2) Since there is Being it must be either dependent or independent, which is another way of saying that it must be either absolute or relative. Scheler sees in this

¹ Quentin Lauer, Triumph of Subjectivity; an introduction to transcendental phenomenology (New York: Fordham University Press, 1958), p. 165.

² Lauer, Ibid., pp. 165-166.

point a proof for the absolute for how could there be a relative if there is no absolute? (On the other hand, the absolute presumably does not need a relative in order to exist). Whatever the relatives are, Scheler maintains, they could not exist without a relationship to the absolute by which they can be measured.

3) All that is, all Being, needs two fundamental elements: Essence (Wesen)¹ and Existence (Dasein). The thing that exists is also the thing that is known. Here again Scheler rejects scientific proof for he holds that one either recognizes this or not. To those who do not recognize this, it obviously cannot be shown. To accept these points then is not primarily a question of the intellect but of the will; in other words, this type of knowledge depends on the individual's emotional abilities.²

What then does the person who has these emotional

¹The following is a part of the definition of Wesen as given in the Dictionary of Philosophy, Edited by Dagobert D. Runes. (Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1958), p. 335. "Wesen: (Ger. being, essence, nature) Designates essential being without which a thing has no reality. It has been conceived variously in the history of philosophy, as Ousia or constant being by Aristotle; as essentia, real or nominal, or species, by the Schoolmen; as principle of all that which belongs to the possibility of a thing, by Kant; generally as that which is unconditionally necessary in the concept of a thing..."

²Lauer, op.cit., pp. 168-169.

abilities see or feel? Fundamentally, he sees that man and society are governed by a hierarchy of four basic, objective, values.^{1, 2}

Pleasure Values. - These are at the bottom of the hierarchical value order that Scheler developed. Pleasure values deal with the pleasant and unpleasant of human experience. E.g., sensory feelings experienced in "love" relations are a typical pleasure value. Physical pleasure then belongs to the lowest form of value that we can experience. Genuine love is too much a noble emotion to be merely a pleasure value, although parts of the latter may be integrated into it. I cannot, for example, "love" a potato because, unlike human beings, it does not have the qualities that make love possible. To be genuine, love must be moral, which means that it must be related to the value a person as such possesses.³ For man has a unique essence, and every person is also a unique being, therefore he cannot legitimately reduce to anything but him-

¹ Staude, op.cit., pp. 32, 33, 35, 124n

² E. Ranly, Scheler's Phenomenology of Community (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1966, 1967), p. 97.

³ Ranly, Ibid., pp. 87, 88.

self.¹ For the same reason, love must be directed to the bearer of values and not to non-values. It has an intrinsic act-essence. To have real love for a person one must see in him the dignity of a person who possesses the highest values; and if we genuinely love him, we will have no difficulty recognizing these values.²

By contrast, purely sexual pleasure, although it is experienced with another human being, can by itself never be anything more than a pleasure value, *ispo facto* it is clearly inferior to all other values. And the same applies of course to all other physical pleasures, such as eating and drinking.

Vital Values. - One step higher on the hierarchical ladder of values are the vital values which correspond to such qualities as vigor, health, nobility, strength, etc. The German aristocracy of pre-World War I days would be a typical representative of vital values. Presumably the same would apply to Germany's war aims during that war.

Here too, we can use sex to make the point. Sexual

¹ Ranly, Ibid., p. 18.

² Ranly, Ibid., p. 89.

love - as opposed to sexual pleasure - signifies a vital value as it represents genuine friendship and a vital union with the total life process.¹ Sexual friendship in its highest form does not only respect the partner's human dignity; it also is a symbol of unity between two human beings, and it is the one act which can create human life. By its very nature it becomes identical with vitality.

We thus can see that, while vital values may be coupled with - or at least related to - the inferior pleasure values, they nevertheless are characterized primarily by qualities that are on a clearly definable higher moral plateau.

Spiritual Values. - Still one step higher in Scheler's value hierarchy are the spiritual values. They are more abstract than the previous two values. Intuition is often needed for their realization. (Here again, Scheler wants us to recognize the superior value of intuition. Presumably everybody, even the lowest brute, can experience pleasure values. This is not true of vital values, but those who can have them are already a limited group, since they automatically exclude those who are capable of ex-

¹Ranly, Ibid., pp.87-88.

periencing only the pleasure values).

A number of notions and experiences belong to the spiritual values. There are beauty, cultural values (e.g., music), love, and so on. In view of their high position within the value hierarchy, spiritual values override pleasure and vital values, both of which must be sacrificed if this is necessary for the realization of spiritual values.¹ They are of course independent of the preceding two lower values.

Religious Values. - At the apex of the hierarchy of value states are the holy values which also have been called religious values. They pertain to the absolute and are also, of course, independent of the other values.^{2, 3} Corresponding feelings are blissfulness, religious joy and similar emotions generated by the appropriate religious cults, sacraments, and so on. Needless to say the realization of religious values is the highest moral and emo-

¹Scheler, op.cit., Introduction by L. A. Coser, p. 11.

²M. S. Frings, Max Scheler (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1965), pp. 117, 120.

³Ranly, op.cit., p. 97.

tional states to which we can aspire.¹ The individual fortunate enough to achieve these states would seem to have a superior capacity for enjoyment.

Value Characteristics. - But these four major values do not exist in a vacuum. They are associated with corresponding hierarchies in human and social types. Thus the pleasure values correspond socially to primitive hordes and individually to the connoisseur. Similarly, the vital values correspond to the organic community (Gemeinschaft) and the hero. Spiritual values produce the atomistic society (Gesellschaft) and the sage. And religious values go with the church and the saint.^{2, 3} This does not mean that every individual or every society falls into only one of these four ranks. Combinations are possible; a man can be a hero and a saint, or a society can be both, a horde and a Gemeinschaft.⁴

¹Ranly, Ibid., pp. 87-88.

²Staude, op.cit., p. 124.

³Ranly, op.cit., p. 98.

⁴Staude, op.cit., p. 124.

Since values are not isolated, their relationships - as well as their natures - are governed by certain laws. E.g., duration is, in the case of values, a qualitative phenomenon, provided it belongs to the essence of the value. This must not be confused with objective time. Love again can illustrate this point. To be meaningful, love must be durable. If it is not, it may have been an illusion or it was perhaps based on inferior values (such as pleasure). But if it is based on blissfulness, then it will outlive all the changes brought about by inferior values; in other words, it will be durable.¹

Moreover, a value is better the less divisible it is. Material goods (such as food, houses) can be divided among a number of people. By contrast, spiritual or religious values are indivisible, as such things as beauty (e.g. of a painting or music) can be shared by everybody without at the same time depriving others of the experience. The fact that I fully enjoy a symphony in no way deprives those who listen with me, of the full experience of beauty.

A value is also higher the less it depends on ano-

¹Frings, op.cit., p. 119.

ther value. The relationship between pleasure and vital values demonstrates this point very well. To enjoy, for example, the physically pleasant, i.e. a pleasure value, I need a certain amount of health (which by itself is a vital value). On the other hand, I do not need to experience physical pleasure in order to be healthy. The vital values, if only because they can exist without the pleasure values, are superior to the latter, while the pleasure values, if only because of their dependence on vital values, are clearly inferior.

Finally, a value is higher the more its mere comprehension yields deep, inner, satisfaction.¹ If no striving is necessary in order fully to experience fulfillment and satisfaction, we are dealing with a value that is superior to those values that need physical or material efforts, or which produce fewer feelings of deep inner experience.

Once we understand this objective, immutable hierarchy of values, we are - according to Scheler - equipped to understand the causes, functions and consequences of ressentiment.

¹Frings, Ibid., p. 120.

RESSENTIMENT

We can hardly start better than by letting Scheler himself, in his own words, explain how he defines ressentiment:

Wir gebrauchen das Wort "Ressentiment" nicht etwa aus einer besonderen Vorliebe fuer die franzoesische Sprache, sondern darum, weil es uns nicht gelang, es ins Deutsche zu uebersetzen. Dazu ist es durch Nietzsche zu einem Terminus technicus gepraegt worden. In der natuerlichen franzoesischen Wortbedeutung finde ich zwei Elemente: Einmal dies dass es sich im Ressentiment um das wiederholte Durch-und Nachleben einer bestimmten emotionalen Antwoertsreaktion gegen einen anderen handelt, durch die jene Emotion-gesteigerte Vertiefung und Einsenkung in das Zentrum der Persoenlichkeit sowie eine damit eingehende Entfernung von der Ausdrucks- und Handlungszone der Person erhaelt. Dieses immerwieder-Durch-und-Nachleben der Emotion ist hierbei von einer bloss intellektuellen Erinnerung an sie und die Vorgaenge auf die sie "antworten", sehr verschieden. Es ist ein Wiederleben der Emotion selbst - ein Nachfuehlen, ein Wiederfuehlen. Sodann enthaelt das Wort, dass die Qualitaet dieser Emotion eine negative ist, d.h. eine Bewegung der Feindlichkeit enthaelt. Vielleicht waere das deutsche Wort "Groll" noch am ehesten geeignet, einen Grundbestandteil der Bedeutung zu decken. Das "Grollen" ist ja solch dunkel durch die Seele wandelndes, Verhalten und von der Aktivitaet des Ich unabhaengiges Zuern das durch wiederholtes Durchleben von Hassintentionen oder anderen feindseeligen Emotionen schliesslich sich bildet und noch keine bestimmte feindliche Absicht enthaelt, wohl aber alle moeglichen Absichten solcher Art in seinem Blute naehrt.¹

¹ Max Scheler, Vom Umsturz der Werte, Abhandlungen und Aufsaezte. Vierte durchgesehene Auflage, herausgegeben von Maria Scheler (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1955), pp. 36-37.

Translated into English, this means the following:

We are using the word ressentiment not because of a preference for the French language, but because we are unable to translate it into German. In addition, through Nietzsche it became a terminus technicus. In the natural French meaning I find two elements: first, ressentiment is the repeated living through and re-living again of a particular emotional reaction against another person; through it the emotionally increased deepening and sinking into the centre of the personality and a corresponding alienation from the person's expressive and activated zones takes place. This constant living through and reliving again of the emotion is very different from the merely intellectual memory of it and the events to which it answers. It is a re-living of the emotion itself - a feeling after and a feeling again. Thus the word comprises a qualitatively negative emotion, i.e. it contains a movement of hostility. Perhaps the German word "Groll" (English "resentment", "grudge", "rancour") is most likely to cover the basic element of the meaning. "Groll" is such a dark, through-the-soul-moving condition and a form of anger independent of the "I" that eventually is formed through a repeated living through of hateful intentions or other hostile emotions; it does not contain definite hostile intentions, but nourishes all kinds of such intentions in its blood.

This definition has three important elements: (1) There is the repeatedly experienced living through and re-living (there is no adequate English word for Nachleben) of a hostile reaction against another individual. (2) This hostile emotion sinks into the inner depths of the personality. (3) At the same time ressentiment-man becomes unable to express himself emotionally.

What then causes this state of mind?¹ Fundamentally, ressentiment is a revolt against the allegedly objective value system that Scheler established. Naturally, the man who identifies with the lowest values (such as physical pleasure), i.e. the slave, is most likely to develop a ressentiment attitude. Obviously, he hates and envies those of nobler "quality"; but, because of his own impotence, the slave is unable to act out these emotions. While he may crave higher values (such as the vital or spiritual values), he can not obtain them and, to satisfy his ("deprived") emotions, he therefore attempts to reduce these higher values to his own "low" moral level. Thus one of the most typical symptoms of ressentiment is that it thrives among the alienated and the deprived who find it necessary to twist the natural order of values. Those who serve and not those who rule are the

¹ Various etymological dictionaries trace the origin of the English word "resentment" back to the French ressentiment. The old French sentir (sense) became apparently the medieval French ressentir meaning "to feel back". The prefix (re-) is an important element in the present context as it indicates the moving back of the emotion. Eventually, this became ressentiment in early modern French (1500-1700). The English version "resentment" failed to contain the notion of moving back. See: E. Partridge, Origins (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 604-605. The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 759. Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1937), p. 2118.

victims of ressentiment.¹ Obviously, it is hardly to be found among the aristocracy.²

ELEMENTS OF RESSENTIMENT

Ressentiment-man has been hurt by higher values or by persons who have them, and it is the re-feeling of this clash that causes ressentiment. Since ressentiment is not only a feeling but also a symptom of impotence, it is felt before a practical reaction can take place. At this stage, ressentiment obviously is characterized by a great deal of hostility which not the least has been produced by the accompanying frustration. Once this hostility can be acted out in practice, i.e. once ressentiment results in 'remedial' action, ressentiment will be weakened or it may disappear altogether.

But as long as ressentiment is in a man's heart, he is merely withholding the inner explosion that is building up within himself. This not only makes him weak and inactive, it also determines the distorted value system he acquires, if Scheler is to be believed. For ressentiment-man like everybody else craves for recognition of himself and the corresponding social equality, but since he cannot have it,

¹Frings, op.cit., pp. 96,

²Staupe, op.cit., pp. 50-51.

he has to falsify values in order to live with himself.^{1, 2}

Thus he may place great value on A (which, let us say, could be a pleasure value) not because he sees any intrinsic high quality in it, but because he wants to denigrate B (which might, for example, be a vital value). In an inverted sense ressentiment-man consequently becomes hypocritical and dishonest with himself, for normally he must know that B is of higher value and that he denigrates it only because he cannot have it. However, it would be wrong to see in ressentiment a form of self-defence. To claim that it is self-defence amounts, according to Scheler, to a rationalization and a refusal to recognize the true causes of ressentiment as well as the characteristics of its victims.³

Although all this should be obvious even to him, ressentiment-man is a master of self-deception. For he not only has a "sour grapes" attitude; he also tries to make a virtue out of his falsification of values.⁴ Because

¹Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 44, 48, 52-53.

²Frings, op.cit., pp. 79-82.

³Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp.58-59, 68.

⁴Scheler, Ibid., p. p. 74.

he does not possess enough vital, let alone spiritual, values, he convinces himself that he is a martyr whose suffering (caused by his inferior position) becomes a new, noble value that makes him feel "pure" and thus "superior" to those who possess the higher values. Through ressentiment evil becomes good, and good becomes evil.¹ In this manner, ressentiment-man with his hate, envy and revenge feelings convinces himself that he is "right".²

This dishonesty, typical of Scheler's ressentiment-man, Scheler calls organische Verlogenheit (organic mendacity).³ This is what makes these rationalizations so immoral in his view, for by themselves, rationalizations of this type are not abnormal; they are part of human nature. What makes the ressentiment-subject different in this respect is his immediate and continuous emotional dis-

¹Scheler, Ibid., p. 81.

²Scheler, Ibid., pp. 76-78.

³Frings, op.cit., p. 93.

position to interchange positive with negative values.¹

To be operative then, ressentiment needs three major elements:

1) There must be the refusal of moral overcoming. Scheler's ressentiment-man does not want to overcome his moral inferiority.

2) There must be an absence of practical action. Ressentiment-man does not openly revolt which means that he does not make a practical attempt to rid himself of his vengeful emotions. He keeps them bottled up within himself, and the longer and stronger he does this, the stronger his ressentiment becomes.

3) There must be an actual weakness in the ressentiment-person. He must be either unwilling or unable to overcome ressentiment because of this weakness.² The strong person, i.e. the possessor of the higher values, does not experience such a weakness, and the higher his values are, the less likely he is to develop any form of ressentiment. Obviously, the person who possesses the religious values is

¹Frings, Ibid., p. 92.

²Frings, Ibid., p. 84.

altogether immune to this infliction.

SOCIETAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RESSENTIMENT

Ressentiment has two major social characteristics to which we must pay particular attention. To begin with, it is least likely to occur in a society where the social hierarchy is clearly established and generally accepted. Thus the slave or the child in a well established feudal society are not likely to accumulate feelings of ressentiment due to their inferior social status. They know exactly what their social roles are, they know what is expected of them and what they can realistically expect or achieve. They are therefore not tempted to draw comparisons with their masters for example, for to take the master's place would be a totally unrealistic and inconceivable expectation.¹

Things were different for instance with the German bourgeoisie during Scheler's times.² This social group had a moral and a legal right to aspire to positions of power, and therefore it did compare itself with the existing leadership group, i.e. the aristocracy. Because the bourgeoisie

¹ Frings, Ibid., p. 85.

² Staude, op.cit., pp. 50-51.

was not only tempted to make such a comparison, but because it also fully experienced great frustrations when attempting to realize its rights, it developed feelings of envy, revenge and hate, all of which of course produced ressentiment in their hearts.

But German bourgeoisie did not have a monopoly on playing this ressentiment role. Other social groups would seem to be at least equally destined to possess social characteristics of ressentiment. Women, especially certain types of women, are for example particularly prone to ressentiment. This was especially true in Scheler's Germany. Women were primarily confined to their social role of the three K's (Kueche, Kirche, Kinder)¹ which, when compared to the traditional social role of men, put them into a disadvantageous position. They did not have the economic independence that men possessed, and they were not allowed to go out into the world, and thus experience it as fully as men, though legally they were not necessarily prevented from doing so. Through their relative confinement coupled with the comparisons they could easily make since the hierarchy was not

¹ kitchen, church, children.

all that rigid, women became ressentiment victims.

This was even more so the case with spinsters. At least the married woman could experience - or make society believe that she experienced - sexual gratification and the accompanying joys of womanhood. The spinster, by contrast, could not legitimately make such a claim. She consequently easily developed ressentiment. This usually manifested itself in her denigrating the vital or spiritual values of genuine sexual love and friendship. By attacking these values as inferior or immoral, or by claiming that they are incompatible with sex, the ressentiment-spinster performed a transvaluation that enabled her to feel self-righteous and "pure" vis-à-vis those who experienced the "evil" of sexual gratification and vitality. It is therefore not surprising that spinsters played a leading role in leagues of decency (Sittlichkeitsverein) where they could legitimately indulge in their ressentiment, without however changing in any way their falsified values and without doing anything morally constructive to overcome their ressentiment.^{1, 2}

¹ Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 61-62.

² Frings, op.cit., pp. 88-89.

Similarly, cripples or persecuted minority groups can easily develop ressentiment, primarily by convincing themselves that they are "chosen people" or by falsifying the existing value system in such a way that they feel superior to all those who do not experience their suffering.

CHRISTIANITY, HUMANISM, AND RESSENTIMENT

Since Scheler at various stages of his life was a very religious person, he thoroughly investigated the role of Christian values especially Christian love. We need not concern ourselves here with a theological discussion in depth. Of main interest in the present context is the role Scheler ascribed to ressentiment vis-a-vis Christian ethics. Although Scheler admired and in many respects accepted Nietzsche's transvaluation of values, Christianity was the one area where he took up a position directly opposed to Nietzsche's.¹

Nietzsche saw in Christian love little more than a sickly humanitarianism which protected the weak and inferior from the strong and superior. True Christianity, to

¹Frings, Ibid., pp. 83-93.

him, was therefore an inferior ideology which tried to ensure the dominant position of the inferior herd at the expense of the noble and the aristocratic. As far as he was concerned, it was hardly better than socialism which equally tried to give power to the inferior mob.¹

While Scheler did not object to a denigration of the so-called inferior mob, he did see Christian morality in a completely different light. A true Christian loves the poor not out of pity or ressentiment, Scheler maintained, but because he realizes that every person can have higher types of values. Thus sympathy, if felt in the right way, is not at all symptomatic of weakness and the perpetuation of inferior values as Nietzsche suggested. It is noble, provided it is based on vital and spiritual love.² If however, we merely sympathize (Mitleid) with a person without any feelings of love for him, then we insult his dignity, and we humiliate him. This kind of sympathy could indeed be little more than a symptom of ressentiment as we shall see in a moment.

Humanitarianism, whether we want to call it sympathy

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, Book I, paragraphs 8, 10, 14 (in all editions).

²Ranly, op.cit., p. 90.

or benevolence, is for Scheler a very condescending attitude towards our fellowmen. It can easily have its roots in ressentiment. E.g., a child who has met rejection and thus does not love his parents is likely to develop ressentiment, which he may channel into an abstract "love for mankind". But this type of love is hardly one of Scheler's noble values, for it is nothing more than an expression of ressentiment, socially acceptable though it may be in its outward manifestations. Scheler maintains that much of modern humanitarianism has similar roots which means that it is not a noble and genuine human sentiment. E.g., humanitarianism may be a protest against patriotism or it may be a hostile reaction against the community within which the ressentiment-victim has to live.^{1, 2}

By contrast, if we do have divine Christian love, we possess a genuine and superior human sentiment, according to Scheler. If we genuinely experience this feeling - instead of merely expressing a feeling of ressentiment such as many humanitarians do - then we can easily reproduce it in others, and we can perceive the reality of the subject. We are, in other words, not condescending towards the individual like

¹ Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 116, 124.

² Frings, op.cit., p. 96.

the humanitarian is, but we simply recognize in the individual certain superior values.

A most important point to remember in regard to true Christianity as interpreted by Scheler is that, unlike humanitarianism, it can never be rooted in ressentiment (Nietzsche notwithstanding); for it is based always on the highest values. However, the fact that Christian love is not a form of ressentiment does not mean that it cannot be perverted into ressentiment. A ressentiment person could well pretend to practice the Christian virtues, while in reality he may do little more than express his ressentiment by going through the motions of religiosity. His "Christian love" would be on the same shallow level as the previously mentioned humanitarian "love".

The more we experience merely visible communities or commodities (such as our family, friends, cities and material goods) the more we understand that these are not sufficient for our spiritual needs. They alone cannot satisfy our craving for higher, superior, values. Our hearts ache for a personal-spiritual communion with higher values which social entities or material goods simply cannot give us.

How then are we to satisfy this craving for superior values? There is only one way to fulfill this desire, Scheler answers, and that is the communion with God. Our personal relation with God, once experienced, represents therefore the highest fulfillment of which human beings are capable, for it is nothing less than the full realization of the highest values. But once we have accomplished that, it becomes very easy for us to practice genuine Christian love towards our fellow-beings. Being possessed by the highest values, we can do little else but practice Christian love. To Scheler, this desire to experience supreme love for God was sufficient proof that God existed, for if He did not exist we would be unable to experience this yearning for Divine Love that we are supposed to have according to Scheler. He called this the sociological proof of the existence of God. The fact that only one nation or only one group of people may understand this domain of values does in no way invalidate this theory, Scheler insists.^{1, 2}

¹ Ranly, op.cit., pp. 90-94.

² Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), p. 147.

RESSENTIMENT IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Since humanitarianism is a protest against society and often nothing but an expression of ressentiment against those who are superior or possessors of noble values, the cry for the equality of the masses is immoral as far as Scheler is concerned. This cry, besides being an attempt to bring noble man down to the lowest values, has also resulted in a perverted form of justice. In "democratic" bourgeois society "justice" has come to mean nothing else than equal treatment for all. In other words, for Scheler, people's different talents, qualifications and moral values are simply ignored. This is hardly just in a meaningful sense because it puts those with inferior values into an advantageous position at the expense of the noble men.¹ For by treating the inferior mob in the same way as its superior masters, we are also tearing down the higher values to the level of the lowest values which then would become the chief moral criteria. Needless to say, if this should happen,

¹Frings, op.cit., p. 98.

divine Christian love, i.e. the highest value, could not develop. We therefore must not reduce the value system to subjective judgments, even if the objective values are often a burden for modern man.¹

This however, Scheler emphasizes, need not prevent us from applying these objective values relative to nations, races, and so on. This, it must be clearly understood, is different from the relativist position which claims that values depend on the environment. By contrast, objective values, even if they are adjusted to a certain social setting, remain basically unchanged and therefore have an immutable validity wherever and however they are applied.²

The main objection to modern industrial society is that it destroys the qualitative value in favor of quantitative values. This attitude has even penetrated present-day religion. The quantitative going to church and mechanical partaking in its activities is generally

¹Frings, Ibid., p. 97.

²Frings, Ibid., pp. 94, 97.

higher valued than the possession of inner qualitative values that usually are not empirically observable, such as true faith and love.¹ Instead of fostering vital and spiritual values which are quite consistent with genuine ascetism, modern society has created a new form of perverted ascetism which not only frowns on pleasures, but which pressures its victims ruthlessly into a work-ethic which is typified by surrogate enjoyments which the hard working man can enjoy only because he has the necessary money for them.

Thus the glitter and tinsel of our big cities does not reflect a society that is capable of a great deal of enjoyment. Rather it signifies a society where people overwork themselves into an early grave so that they can experience very transient and shallow "pleasures" that contribute nothing to the quality of life. A man's work is thus primarily judged by the amount of base, materialistic enjoyments it enables him to have. By deceiving themselves that they have a "good time", the members of

¹Frings, Ibid., p. 100.

such a society deprive themselves of experiencing any genuine joys. In the long run such a morality benefits nobody.¹

Since the successful merchant is the most prestigious member of such a social system, we have created a society where mere material usefulness of the human being is of prime importance. The man who is useful to the existence and perpetuation of this system is the one who is most admired. Those who live by higher values are outcasts and subjected to ridicule.^{2, 3}

For instance, the employee most treasured in the business world is the one who is the most useful to the operation of the business. It is he who gets the first promotion. If he works overtime this will be recorded in his favor. By contrast, the man who refuses to work overtime because he wants to look after his family in the evenings or during weekends, will be the first to be fired since he is of less use to the firm. Yet he is far

¹Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 150, 152-153.

²Scheler, Ibid., p. 155.

³Frings, op.cit., p. 98.

more noble than the man who gladly neglects his family because he wants to make more money which in turn will enable him to experience more surrogate "pleasures".¹

Scheler concluded that the result of such business conditions is likely to be this: the inferior man will get more and more power within his firm and he will increasingly enjoy social respect. But the noble man will either be fired, or he will be under such pressure that he is forced to neglect his family and he thus gradually loses his nobility. If he is willing to degrade himself in this manner, he will in time be promoted and he will increase his social prestige.²

As a matter of fact, in such a setting the employer will develop a great deal of ressentiment against a morally superior employee which logically will cause the latter much suffering. The firing of this employee would be identical with the acting out of the build-up ressentiment which subsequently would disappear, until a corresponding situation reactivates it in the inferior

¹Frings, Ibid., pp. 99-100.

²Frings, Ibid., p. 100.

individual.

Scheler accused "the enemy" of even baser motives. According to him, the untalented mob and the rising business class naturally resent the morally superior man and they do all they can to transvaluate the objective values so that the spiritually superior individual is kept at a low social station and subjected to unnecessary deprivations. This then becomes the symbol of the slave revolt in morality. It being so, an agricultural society, uninfected by the surrogate pleasures and the utility ethic of industrial society, is morally clearly superior for it enables its members to live according to the objective value system. Such a society, close to nature as it is, is much more genuine and unspoiled. If we want to save our souls, Scheler says, a return to agricultural society may be the most effective way to do so.^{1, 2}

ACQUISITION OF SUPERIOR VALUES

Since the acquisition of superior values is so import-

¹ Staude, op.cit., p. 30.

² Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 173-174.

ant and desirable, it is logical to ask how one acquires these values and how indeed one knows that one has them. By way of answering this important question, we have to recall that Scheler's superior values have to be felt. They cannot be physically perceived nor can they be acquired by mere reasoning. Moral conduct must therefore be directed towards an actualization of felt (fuehlbare) acts of love, dignity, etc. This value content comes a priori to any judgments that can be only made after the presence of these values has been felt. The a priori is thus an emotional experience and it pertains to the content of the experience and not to its form. Reason may be a part of this experience if Scheler is to be believed, but it does come after the emotional experience.

We thus prefer our values a priori which is in contrast to our empirical preferences which relate to material objects and not to values, and which therefore always take the morally inferior position. It is because the height of a value rests on its essence (Wesen) that it is a priori preferred. But the essence of the value depends on the immutably established hierarchy of values, though the rules of preferring remain variable. And what does

Scheler see as at least one of the causes of the variability of rules of preference? Obviously, nothing else but human ressentiment.¹

¹Frings, op.cit., p. 102.

CHAPTER II

RESSENTIMENT, BOURGEOISIE AND DIGNITY

As we have seen, to Scheler the bourgeoisie was the moral "enemy" who had performed a transvaluation of objective values that almost justified blaming this social class with being at the root of all evil, at least in Scheler's time.

THE COMING OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The "good old days" then were clearly the times before the bourgeoisie came into its own, particularly the medieval order of Europe. This order was cohesive, all people - regardless of their station in life - knew exactly their place, and there was no nonsense about individualism, "every man for himself", and similarly destructive notions. These were prerogatives of the Enlightenment and the Renaissance whose advocates put a high premium on utilitarian, selfish and materialistic "Values". Naturally, such a perverted value system

appealed to those who possessed only the lower values, and they were precisely the people who came into prominent positions as the stability of the medieval order was gradually destroyed.¹

Not surprisingly, advocates of the Enlightenment and the liberalism which followed it, took up militantly anti-Christian positions. The social and moral conflicts which this produced have yet to be resolved, though the outward forms and symptoms of this struggle have greatly changed over the centuries.

Scheler believed that the conceptual framework supplied by Christianity, besides giving stability and security, also represented a united moral force that enabled every member of society to obtain his human dignity in an appropriate manner. Thus the moral brilliance of superior individuals produced enough light and sparkle to enable the bearers of the baser values to recognize and to understand their dignity in accordance with reality. Therefore, not only was there no struggle between classes and no appeal to falsify lower values into higher

¹ Staude, op.cit., pp. 31-32.

ones; everybody's dignity and self-respect were also guaranteed and kept in an objective position in full accordance with the immutable hierarchy of values.¹ The kind of strife that typified Western society ever since the advent of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, was unknown in medieval times.

As merchants, materialists and skeptics increased their power and influence throughout Europe, materialistic, bourgeois values gained corresponding influence, not only in the formation of the social structure, but also in morality. A new "Bourgeois Ethos" took shape, eventually scoring its greatest and most lasting triumph, the French Revolution. The basest values, i.e. the pleasure values, became now the most sought-after commodity. This "new morality" consisted of an ever crasser materialism and a utilitarianism which looked upon the representatives of the lowest values as a class that was entitled to extraordinary privileges. The lowest brute was told that he had certain, inalienable, rights; worse still, he was encouraged to fight for these "rights" whenever they were legitimately

¹ Staude, Ibid., pp. 33-34.

withheld from him. To whatever social group they belonged or by whatever values they lived, people were told by their misguided leaders to tear down the objective value structure, to destroy the noble, and to put the base in its place.

Since destruction was not only justified but also actively encouraged, the human condition and the fabric of society were drastically changed. A new, un-Christian man dominating an un-Christian society, emerged. Where once was continuity, fellowship and security, now anxiety, greed and insecurity prevailed.¹ Men were no longer content with the role a divine order had assigned to them. They became selfseeking, anxious and servile, depending on whatever they thought best served the satisfaction of the base values they were taught to acquire. The search of security that had been unknown in medieval times became now a constant pre-occupation, though the "security" sought was often empty and meaningless since it consisted in little more than the acquisition of material goods. (By contrast, a search for genuine security would have

¹Staupe, Ibid., p. 37.

manifested itself in the desire to acquire the noble values).

THE COMMON MAN TRANSVALUATES

Since the common man acquired this kind of falsifying moral approach, Scheler concluded not too surprisingly, that he was forced to make comparisons. However, the comparisons he made had little in common with the acquisition of higher values. For the comparisons he made were related to the acquisition of material goods and the realization of a utilitarian ethics.

Seeing others - including, it must be admitted, many representatives of noble values - possessing worldly goods, the common man started to strive for their acquisition and for little else. He measured his own value and success by comparing his material possessions with those of others.¹

By contrast, the noble and morally superior man does not have to make such comparisons. He acquires his values a priori as we have seen. And since the possession of the highest values is the ultimate fulfillment of human existence, the question of making materialistic comparisons simply does not arise.

¹Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 139-140.

The common man, because he does not possess the noble values, and also because the acquisition of material goods is often difficult, develops ressentiment. To overcome his frustrations, he begins to think that hard work will resolve his problems. For what better way - save of committing common crimes - to acquire the goods that give social prestige and admiration? The values of work, its "nobility" then become over-emphasized in bourgeois-materialistic society.

But once human greed has been legitimized and even glorified, there is no stopping the process of value perversion. Soon socialists, suffragettes, social reformers and others make even more outrageous claims on behalf of the "deprived" mob.

To understand this, one must understand that bourgeois society created its own sub-groups, classes and castes. The low-value social system that resulted from the triumph of industrial materialism produced a host of new occupations and social positions. To these belonged the petty bourgeoisie, small officials, skilled and unskilled workers and others, all of whom were new social entities and all of whom, in one way or another, wanted to make the

grade within the bourgeois value system.¹ Needless to add none of these groups show any concern about acquiring higher values or making attempts of moral overcoming. And why should they? They are getting all the encouragement they need to do exactly the opposite.

PROLETARIANIZATION

What in fact happens then is that the proletarianized masses created by materialistic-industrial-bourgeois society, take up positions that are strikingly similar to the postures of the emerging bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the medieval society. The only difference is that the proletarians accept the bourgeois value system as a valid goal for their own aspirations. In other words, unlike the bourgeoisie, they do not have to falsify existing values to make their claims. They simply accept the values of the dominant group.

The proletarians' complaint is thus not that these falsified values are base; their only criticism is that they are not able to realize for themselves the acquisition of these values. They thus acquire a ressentiment that is

¹ Staude, Ibid., p. 52-55.

even baser than the one previously nourished by the bourgeoisie. While the bourgeoisie envied nobler men because they possessed superior values, and while their inability to acquire these values led them into a transvaluation of the objective value system, the proletarian does something even more abject: he accepts the falsified values as valid and his ressentiment is based solely on the fact that he is unable to acquire these values.

But he does not stop here. Greed and other low values having been unleashed to the fullest possible extent, the proletarian finds it easy to go to even greater extremes, not only to acquire more goods, but also in order to nourish his ressentiment: he rejects reforms that would improve his material lot because such reforms would decrease discontent and thus deprive him of the pleasures of ressentiment. Not only that, reforms would also delay the coming of the day when he can set himself up as the supreme member of society whose value-system would be law.¹

For the more discontent there is, the better the chance that the affected masses will revolt; revolt not against the possessors of superior values who by this time will be prac-

¹Staupe, Ibid., pp. 52-54.

tically extinct; but revolt against those remnants of the bourgeoisie who attempt to deprive the proletariat of the acquisition of the utilitarian value-system. The final destruction of the objective value-system, and - somewhat ironically in view of what has just been said - the death knell of bourgeois society would be the coming to power of the proletariat: the bourgeoisisation of the mob, so to speak.

While bourgeois society thus found itself in a dilemma from which there was seemingly no escape, the holders of the noble value system had hardly cause for glee. There was little they could do to save or to transform morally the bourgeoisie which so efficiently carried out its own destruction. Worse still, there was no way to keep the proletarian mob in line, for even reforms were not the answer: carrying out reforms in order to avoid the revolutionary doom, would only increase the appetite of the mob and thus increase their hostility and ressentiment.¹

Far from controlling or lowering ressentiment, reforms could only accelerate its destructiveness. And even if reforms would not increase ressentiment, they would do nothing else than stabilize the existing deprived moral

¹Scheler, Ressentiment, (English edition), p. 51.

order, which in no way would serve the cause of noble values.

The peculiar situation that thus was created was therefore full of paradoxes: the society that lived by noble values had lost in favor of a social system that worshipped the lower values. And while this system carried out its own destruction, its passing in no way served those who believed in the nobler values. On the contrary. It benefitted those whose morals were lower still though basically they were on the same level as the values of the system which destroyed nobility. And any attempt to control this process of moral deterioration led only to the strengthening and perpetuation of the base values. Whichever way Scheler looked, the prospects were depressing.

Did this mean that noble values were forever doomed and that nothing could be done to save human dignity?

DIGNITY THROUGH INTUITION

While noble man may long for the happy days when the problems created by materialistic bourgeois society were unknown, he also must be realistic enough to know that history cannot be turned back. The slave revolt in morals is a fact that cannot be ignored or simply undone. Its existence must be accepted, unpalatable as it may be to

somebody like Scheler. And while this revolt may have improved the material living conditions of the multitudes, and while this in itself is not evil, it is also clear that full stomachs alone do not give people dignity. Liberation from the shackles of utilitarian materialism cannot be accomplished by a reliance on scientific methods or other empirical data with which human beings can be measured. These have their place, to be sure, but they are not relevant where the acquisition of nobility or dignity is concerned.

To acquire these we have to transcend the senses until intuition and emotion show us the answer to our dilemma, if we are to follow Scheler's prescriptions.^{1, 2}

Thus, instead of looking at the material world around him, man will have to re-learn to look inward into his innermost soul, where alone he will find the key that opens the door to the dignity that has been lost. For in his soul man will discover his own divine self which will enable him once more to communicate with God, which alone will make it possible to restore his dignity.³

¹Staupe, op.cit., pp. 17, 149, 168-169.

²Lauer, op.cit., pp. 164-167.

³Staupe, op.cit., pp. 211, 212.

While going through this process or rediscovering objective valuation, man is not alone. For this transformation must be carried through with and through fellowmen. Noble values, as we have noted, do not exist in a vacuum. They can be acquired only via relationships with other human beings. Noble love needs the recognition and acceptance of human dignity in another human being; without it, it cannot express itself.¹

By acknowledging the existence of noble values in others, man can practice true Christian love at the level of the spiritual values. Eventually this superior type of relationship can and should be merged with the spiritual and religious values, such as blissfulness and true Christian joy, that result from a communion with Godliness.^{2, 3}

By thus giving genuine (as opposed to the materialist's surrogate) human dignity to his fellow human beings, man rediscovers his own dignity and nobility. True dignity is therefore something else than the existence of healthy bodies whose possessors are allowed to satisfy their mat-

¹Ranly, op.cit., pp. 89-90.

²Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition) pp. 86-88.

³Frings, op.cit., p. 131.

erial needs and greediness. It is the (re)discovery of the noble Self through the recognition of nobility in others, accomplished through the communication with all-encompassing Divinity.

Since scientists and empiricists are unable to explain or to convey this moral process, man striving for dignity and/or nobility can do no more than to will that his feelings that enable him to accomplish bliss, become fully operative.¹ While doing this, he will not only become a free human being, liberated from the vulgarity of utility and materialism. He also becomes the member of a higher community that perpetuates the highest values, if Scheler is to be believed. While thus the individual develops his inner spiritual resources to the highest possible degree, he also partakes in an all-embracing socializing process. Materialistic and selfish "individualism" thus becomes not only meaningless but also non-existent. And the same is true of the collectivism the proletariat wants to inflict on Man in the name of community "spirit". This way, the enobled man avoids making any concessions to either selfish individualism or depersonalizing

¹Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), I, pp. 248, 252, 253.

collectivism. Both these evils are eliminated in the process of re-evaluation.^{1, 2, 3}

Since, as noted, Scheler realized that nations, societies and races differ from one another in many important respects, he advocated that the objective values be applied in accordance with existing conditions. To do this properly, we have to understand why a society underwent certain social, political and other changes, and how these affected the values, beliefs and principles the society in question lives by.^{4, 5} Only if we fully understand these products of history can we hope to apply or to nourish the objective values in a manner that makes sense. On this basis we then can develop an educational system that is in step not only with existing social and other conditions, but also with the birth or re-birth of noble values.

Man, then has within himself the liberating power

¹ Staude, op.cit., p. 33.

² Frings, op.cit., pp. 98-99.

³ Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), Introduction by L. A. Coser, pp. 22-23.

⁴ Scheler, Ibid., Introduction by L. A. Coser, pp. 15-18.

⁵ Staude, op.cit., p. 156.

that is needed to overcome the evils foisted on him by the destruction of the divine order that existed in ages long past.

Does this mean that all that was done or built since the passing of these times has to be destroyed?

Not necessarily, as even Scheler admits. Man may well accept some of the products of the materialistic age. There is no reason, for example, to approve of hunger in this world, or to accept that people should live in material poverty just because material values are of lower moral quality. These miserable facts of human life can be fought without hesitation; but it must also be fully recognized that such activities are not representative of the higher values. Representative of values - yes, but only of the pleasure or vital values.¹

If he unconditionally accepts divine guidance, man will be able to combine these lower values with the higher values, while never forgetting that the full possession of the highest values is the most moral goal he can possibly have.

¹Frings, op.cit., p. 99.

By taking into consideration all these points, the objective value hierarchy can be made a reality anywhere on earth.^{1, 2}

Since Scheler changed his religious allegiances later in life, we must assume that the central myths of Christianity - i.e. the miraculous birth and death of Jesus - are not necessarily the symbols of human dignity and nobility. Any vital religious myth which strives to obtain the goals set by idealized Christianity, ought to be able to perform the same function. If Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam or any other religion, have such vital myths, these can provide symbols of an equal stature.

By the same token, we also must assume that the hierarchy of values is not necessarily monopolized by the Christian teachings and that therefore this value system transcends narrow religious definitions. It just so happened that true Christianity corresponds to this objective value hierarchy, and Scheler just happened to be

¹Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), pp. 86-88.

²Staupe, op.cit., pp. 33, 211-212.

the man who made this discovery. There is no reason why the same should not be true of the other existing religions. Which, it should be noted, is not a Schelerian guarantee that all existing religions are in conformity with the objective value system.

CHAPTER III

RESSENTIMENT IN THE BLACK RACIAL MINORITY

In order to show what - if any - relevance Scheler's concept of ressentiment has to a contemporary social issue, a brief summary of his conceptual analysis will be given. This will be followed by an analysis of the nature of modern social movements with the subsequent main emphasis directed towards the attitudes the black racial minority in North America displays in connection with ressentiment. Based on this information an attempt will be made to elicit where Scheler erred within the context presented, and where he made some valid points.

SCHELER'S CONCEPT

According to Scheler, moral values are hierarchically organized. Their correct order can be intuitively grasped. Moreover, moral values are independent and universal. Attempts to understand this value system by scientific

means are futile, because scientific methods are not relevant in this area (only intuition is).

As evidence that such an objective value hierarchy actually exists, Scheler cites the intuition a man has of his own being and the fact that there is a relative which could not exist if there were not an absolute, ergo there must be an absolute. Scheler believes that all this can and must be recognized emotionally. Once a person can feel this, he will note that values can be divided into four major categories, they being (from the lowest to the highest): pleasure, vital, spiritual and religious (heilige) values. These values correspond to certain social types.

It is only when this allegedly objective, immutable, hierarchy collapses that Man experiences ressentiment (Groll). Basically, ressentiment is little else than a revolt against the objective value system. Not surprisingly, it thrives among the enslaved, the alienated and the deprived. Conversely, a society which has a strict hierarchical order is not likely to produce ressentiment-laden men, as it does not encourage the inferior social groups to compare themselves with the superior human and social types. Only when

such comparisons appear realistic or are actually encouraged, the ressentiment emotion comes to the fore.

Ressentiment will remain with its victims as long as they refuse to overcome it through remedial action. But the typical ressentiment man is weak and thus unable to overcome this affliction. But once he acts out his inner hostility, ressentiment may disappear. To do this he may, however, have to falsify the objective value system as he cannot conform to its eternal rules. In this case the ressentiment person will glorify his own low values as if they were superior, and he will try to find social acceptance for this moral transvaluation.

For these reasons humanism or the "equality of the masses" are immoral because they are nothing but an attempt to bring the noble man down to the lowest values. The features of value perversion also explain why for example the German bourgeoisie of Scheler's time or spinsters or cripples, nourish ressentiment.

Bourgeois society - which is of main interest in this context - was materialistic, and material usefulness was the main criterion of its ethos. This makes the bourgeois member self-seeking, anxious, servile and greedy. He is devoid of the noblest values, therefore he thinks that

he can acquire them by hard work, for this will enable him to acquire the same material objects he sees the noble men are possessing (he refuses to realize that material possessions and noble values are not necessarily related).

The lowest social class, i.e. the mob, is even baser, as far as Scheler is concerned. They not only want material things, but they also accept the bourgeois falsification of objective values as a valid proposition. They work for the day when their base values will be supreme. For this reason they resent reform for instance, because reform would only delay the coming of this day. Moreover, it would deprive them of the discontent whose manifestations they enjoy.

The higher classes, i.e. primarily the nobility, are however in a real quandry once the lower values have produced social action. If they just stabilize the situation they make unacceptable concessions to the low value system. If they want to deal with the problem through reforms, they not only stabilize the inferior system, they also increase the appetite of the mob who thus will make even more outrageous demands. The only way out of this dilemma that Scheler can suggest is the acceptance of "true Christian-

ity" which to him means the unconditional acceptance of the so-called objective value hierarchy and its application to existing conditions. He never makes it quite clear how this would apply to the "mob", or what reasons the "lower" classes have to accept such an arrangement, if they don't experience his very questionable intuitive cognition.

Scheler elaborated a phenomenology that is based on feeling states, be they pain or joy, sympathy, love or hatred, shame or repentance.¹ These emotions are felt immediately as they are, they being immanent and intuitive experiences.² Thus moral values are felt instantly.³ And since the last is the case, Scheler concludes that the nature of social classes, their relationship to the value hierarchy and their moral functions are recognized directly through phenomenological experiences. Therefore intuition enables us not only to recognize various values and their

¹Scheler, Ressentiment (English edition), Introduction by L.A. Coser, p. 10.

²Frings, op.cit., p. 42.

³Frings, Ibid., p. 111.

hierarchical positions. It also guides us towards the recognition of the role values and the value hierarchy play in the social structure and its formation. To correctly evaluate the nature of society and the related social changes that members of that society may want to bring about, we can rely on phenomenological experiences.

Since ressentiment results from an opposition to the correct value order, attempts to bring about social changes which conflict with such a value order are according to Scheler's line of reasoning evil and thus must be rejected. Movements for social changes can therefore be acceptable only if they attempt to bring about social changes that will strengthen the correct value hierarchy. If they want to destroy it or if they want to bring about transvaluations that are incompatible with this hierarchy, they have to be opposed by all men with a moral conscience. Scheler thus left no doubt how the function and nature of social movements have to be evaluated.

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In order to decide which aspects of Scheler have relevance to the manifestations of ressentiment in the

black minority of North America, we have to take a brief look at the nature of social movements, for they have become the main vehicle for these manifestations. This is primarily an empirical procedure which has been performed by a number of contemporary social scientists.¹

Basically, social movements are, as Blumer put it, "collective enterprises to establish a new order of life";² or, as Toch says, "an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem they feel they have in common."³ They can be religious or secular, revolutionary or react-

¹For good accounts of social movements see: Barry McLaughlin (ed.), Studies in Social Movements (New York: Free Press, 1969). Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements", American Anthropologist, vol. LVIII, April 1956, pp. 264-81. Herbert Blumer, "Social Movements", New Outlines of the Principles of Sociology, A. M. Lee ed. (Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1951), pp. 199-220. Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

²Mc Laughlin (ed.), op.cit., p. 3.

³Toch, op.cit., p. 5.

ionary, cooperative or schismatic, or possibly a combination of all these. Fundamental to all social movements is a shared value system and an orientation towards some definite goals. For the sake of convenience, their development can best be described as consisting of several basic phases and stages:

1) In the early phases, social movements are characterized by groping and uncoordinated efforts. While they move in a general direction, the ultimate aim is often not at all clear, and an organization or an established leadership group are clearly lacking. Guidance and control are minimal; on the whole, the development of the movement is uneven and its goals are ill defined.

2) As the social movement develops, it becomes more organized and less ambiguous. A definite direction, not only in regard to organization, but also in respect to methods and goals, becomes apparent. Dawson and Gettys¹ have made the point that during this phase a social movement usually develops in four stages. These are:

¹C. A. Dawson and W. E. Gettys, Introduction to Sociology (rev.ed.; New York: Ronald Press Co., 1935), ch. 19.

Stage One. Social Unrest. Discontent is exploited by the social movement and channelled into a certain direction. It focuses on particular causes of unrest or discontent.

Stage Two. Popular Excitement. This is a stepped-up variant of Stage One. Discontent manifests itself in more excitable behavior as the objectives obtain a sharper focus. At this stage a charismatic leader is likely to emerge.

Stage Three. Formalization. Once a clearly recognized leadership has emerged, the movement will become more formalized and organized. Rules, tactics and discipline become increasingly important. Unacceptable or deviant behavior will be more severely punished than in the past. The power of the leadership is likely to increase. An ideology is probably taking shape.

Stage Four. Institutionalization. At this point the movement has become institutionalized. It is well structured and has a clearly organized administration which sees to it that the established goals of the movement are fully realized.

To understand social movements fully, it is advisable to consider not only the stages of their development but also to investigate the means and mechanisms that operate

throughout their development. Blumer has suggested a very convincing description of these mechanics:¹

Agitation. - To arouse people in the earliest stages of the movement as described above, skillful agitators are needed. A successful agitator not only arouses people; he also implants new concepts and ideas in their minds; These encourage them to loosen previous attachments and to accept new ways of thinking in a direction that is favorably disposed towards the goals of the movement (nebulous though these may be at first). All this the agitator can do as soon as he has broken down inertia.

Esprit de Corps. - Once a sufficient number of people has been aroused and their modes of thought have been changed, they will develop feelings of closeness and intimacy with like-minded individuals. They will increasingly feel as a select group, and camaraderie will be on the increase. Cooperation rather than competition marks the human relationships within the movement at this stage. In short, it is developing an esprit de corps. It helps the individual to feel that he belongs, which in turn strengthens the solidarity of the movement. Increasingly, outsiders become

¹McLaughlin (ed.), op.cit., pp. 11-12.

"the enemy". Members of the movement are supposedly good, virtuous, altruistic; "the enemy" is evil, selfish and dishonest. He lends himself to the role of scapegoat. The very fact that he exists is of positive value to the movement, for his very existence can only strengthen its solidarity.

Morale. - Out of the esprit de corps grows the morale of the social movement. Because they see themselves as virtuous, members of the movement believe that their success is inevitable, even if this involves a hard struggle. And because it has a "sacred mission to fulfil", the movement looks on reversals and defeats primarily as morale builders. Moreover, morale is strengthened by a saint-cult, a sacred literature and various myths which "prove" the claims of the movement.

Ideology. - Out of all this comes a convincingly developed ideology which also plays a significant part in the maintenance of the movement vis-à-vis its enemies. Doctrines, beliefs, myths, objectives, justifications and tactics are all incorporated in the ideology of the movement.

Tactics. - The tactics a social movement employs

have three major objectives: gaining adherents, holding followers and reaching specific objectives. To evolve appropriate tactics, the peculiarity of the existing situation must be fully understood. Unless the cultural and social setting within which the movement operates is taken into account, tactics are likely to fail.

Finally, mention must be made of the two basic types of social movements. These can best be described as reform and revolution.

The reform movement operates within the existing social structure. By accepting the prevailing mores and social codes, the reform movement aims at merely improving the existing social structure. It does not want to replace it. This gives it respectability, and to a large extent it shields it from attack. Indeed a reform movement often wants nothing more than the actual practice of the accepted mores which, its followers believe, exist only in theory.

By contrast, the revolutionary movement challenges the prevailing mores which it wants to replace with a completely different set of values. Its aim is not only improvement and change, but the replacement of the existing cultural and moral norms with different ones. In short, it

wants a completely new value order operating within different social institutions and patterns. By its very nature, the revolutionary movement is likely to be more violent than the reform movement. As for the organizational life styles of their respective members, the fundamental difference between these two types of social movements is perhaps this: the reform movement wants to improve conditions for the deprived, alienated and oppressed; the revolutionary movement tries to change conditions with these groups. This distinction will be important in our discussion of ressentiment in the black minority group.

Ressentiment itself is an important factor especially in the early stages of a social movement. For ressentiment motivates the members of a deprived social group to seek a new value order. But the determination to bring about such a transvaluation necessitates the formation of a social movement which then becomes the vehicle of social change.-

From this brief account it can be seen that the development of social movements is at times quite different from Scheler's assumptions. The most obvious contradiction would seem to be between Scheler's analysis and evaluation

of the so-called base values and the functions these have in the evolvement of social movements.

What Scheler calls base, pleasure values are normally the motivating force of the future social movement. Scheler's "noble" classes are obviously not going to start a social movement as the existing value order normally does not motivate them towards social or moral change. And indeed, social movements almost always originate in deprived social groups. It is dissatisfaction with the prevailing social order and the value system that is attached to it, that motivates members of these social groups to search for a new moral and social order. This search leads them through the stages of social movements as described above.

This has been impressively demonstrated by the manner in which the black minority in the United States developed its new value order during the past few decades of history. Where Scheler deplored any change that made concessions to the values of the "inferior" social groups, the black minority has used the "inferior" values as an instrument to bring about desired social changes. Thus "base" values have been used as initiators of a new, morally improved, value hierarchy.

THE BLACK MINORITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

While the ressentiment of racial minorities in general is of interest within the confines of this treatise, the frame of reference of the present discussion will be limited to the experience of the American Negroes.¹

Social movements have been known among America's blacks at least since the Civil War over 100 years ago. Many of these movements however never went through all the stages described above. By and large, it can be said that their success was only marginal since none of them succeeded in bringing about massive shifts in the status of the Negro population (which usually made up about 10% of the total American population).

¹ For good accounts of the conditions relevant to the points made here, see: James W. Vander Zanden, "The non-violent Resistance Movement against Segregation", American Journal of Sociology, vol. LXVIII, No.5 (March 1963), pp. 544-550. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power (New York: Random House, 1967). Philip S. Foner (ed.), The Black Panthers Speak (Philadelphia, New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1970). Abraham Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, The Mark of Oppression (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1951). Guy B. Johnson, "Patterns of Race Conflict", Race Relations and the Race Problem, Edgar T. Thompson, ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1939). E. Franklin Frazier, The Black Bourgeoisie (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957). E. U. Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

The major breakthrough occurred with the 1954 Supreme Court decision which declared that racial discrimination was unconstitutional. This was followed by the successes of Martin Luther King's social movement which would seem to have improved the Negro's ability to act out resentment.

King's non-violent resistance movement scored a spectacular success right at the beginning when it launched the now famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Hitherto passive resistance had been seldom tried within the American social structure, hence its potentials had been understood only by a few individuals.

Yet functional divisions of labour in the Southern stratification structure lend themselves to the aims of a non-violent movement constituting a deprived, numerically significant, minority group. By withholding their contributions to the functioning of the existing social structure, the blacks were able to disrupt the operation of essential services. This in turn enabled them to put tremendous pressures on the power structure.

Consequently, the black minority group could extract concessions which it would have never obtained had it relied on moral pleadings or - at the opposite extreme - had it engaged in naked violence (which apart from the human

sacrifices would have only increased the oppressive nature of the dominant social group; moreover, it would not have had the guilt-appeal of non-violent resistance). There were also practical considerations in that it was technically impossible and legally questionable, to imprison all the violators of a non-violent resistance movement.

Until 1954 Negro attitudes towards whites were predominantly marked by outward reverence, and acceptance of the existing power structure. Despite this seemingly pacific accomodation to the status quo, Negroes harbored deep resentment and hostility towards most whites, though these emotions almost never took on overt manifestations. In short, they had what Scheler called ressentiment. This has been well documented.^{1, 2, 3} Since these latent aggressive feelings were hardly overtly manifest, there was a wide spread delusion among whites that "our niggers are happy."

¹ J. Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (3rd ed.; New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1957), p. 252.

² Guy B. Johnson, op.cit.,

³ Bertram P. Karon, The Negro Personality (New York: Springer Publishing Comp., 1958), pp. 165-167.

Contributing to the Negroes' ressentiment was self-hatred. In their desire to conform to the goal orientation of the dominant social group, minority groups often tend to acquire even those values and mores of the dominant group that are directed against the minority.¹ This is not as perverse or masochistic as it may sound.

To begin with, members of minority groups tend to have a greatly deflated self-esteem. This is hardly surprising since any contact outside their clearly defined group structure conveys a negative impression of themselves. These empirical observations combined with their desire to conform to the norms and mores of the dominant group, gives them all the reasons they need for self-hatred.

Out of all this emerges then an emotional turmoil characterized by hatreds towards whites, accomodation to their value order, efforts to conform to their mores and white-inspired self-hatred. To resolve this emotional dilemma the expression of hostility in a morally superior manner would seem to be an ideal solution. And this is precisely what King's techniques accomplished.

¹ Kurt Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts; Selected Papers on Group Dynamics. Gertrud Weiss Lewin, ed. 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1948).

King told his audiences that hostility (in fact, ressentiment) against whites was understandable and justified. He thus transvaluated the socially accepted moral order which legitimized the oppression of Negroes. Yet at the same time King also exhorted the blacks to demonstrate the moral superiority of their cause by "turning the other cheek". Thus they could hate while at the same time they showed their love. This is not contradictory, for the functions of hate and love were defined in such a way that they were complementary within the existing frame of reference. Besides that, this combination was also very successful.

King had found a formula where hostility could be expressed quite legitimately while at the same time he uprooted the social structure within which he was forced to operate. Because it conveyed the image of a very noble cause, King's resistance movement encouraged among its followers a readiness to bring considerable sacrifices. In fact, self-suffering became a very highly regarded virtue: not only did it show moral superiority; it also helped to improve the deplorable social conditions as the Negro's ability to suffer was often not matched by the

oppressors' ability or willingness to inflict suffering (if only because the traditional guilt feelings of their own social group became operational).

In passing it might be mentioned that King's non-violent resistance movement had one advantage in that it was not alone. History was clearly on its side. Not only had World War II shown what the logical consequences of racism can be; it also resulted in the emergence of independent, self-confident and often militant African states, whose people had the same fundamental grievances as America's blacks. To exploit and to degrade blacks ceased to be respectable in the global context. From King's point of view, the self-assertion of Africa had the additional advantage of involving the same race of people. Thus the rapid historical developments of the outside world helped the American blacks to create a completely new, assertive, self-image of themselves in which accommodation with the old social order became more and more difficult.

Such social and cultural developments - often outside the control of otherwise powerful social groups - threw the well established social hierarchy indeed into confusion in much the way Scheler had described. While

"racial equality" had been mouthed as an ideal if not as a social goal of American society, its realization was in every way discouraged. The average Negro had little reason to compare his social and human condition with that of his white bosses. While there was obviously enough hierarchical softness (through the theoretical acknowledgment of "equality for all" regardless of "race, creed or color" which incidentally is an American phrase) to create resentment, the social hierarchy was far too firm to make serious comparisons, resulting in social action, realistic.

This feature of America's hierarchical order changed markedly through World War II developments and the African self-assertion previously mentioned. Now Negroes were encouraged to compare themselves to the ruling social group. King and others showed them how the results of such comparisons could be translated into social action. Thus a social movement was set in motion for which there was no turning back. The old hierarchical order was gradually collapsing.

The emergent consciousness which realized the prevailing differences between the white and black social

groups could only increase resentment. Now that comparisons with the dominant social group and the hierarchical order it had created became legitimate activities, many Negroes not only began to see how inferior their social and cultural status actually was; they also must have been impressed by the realization that it was in their power to change this state of affairs. No longer would it be necessary to let oneself be kicked around because one was a black person. As a matter of fact, blackness was going to be something to be proud of. The transvaluation of values was going to be merciless as far as it affected the old order.

However, as became obvious during the 1960s, Negro resentment ^{* their socio-economic political situation} was too deep seated to be resolved (positively or negatively according to Scheler) by what basically was a reform movement.¹ Moreover, the latter's successes - marginal though they often were - led to hostility within the white power structure which manifested itself in oppressive actions against those blacks who wanted more than

¹ Presumably Scheler would have argued as follows: the white power elite, representing the higher value order, is acting as it ought to against the inferior mob, for otherwise the latter will transvaluate the social order to their own base level.

marginal gains.^{1, 2}

This in turn, produced far more militant social movements under the slogan "Black Power". Eventually the Black Panther Party emerged as the best organized and most conspicuous black social movement. The stages of its development correspond fairly closely to the outline of social movements given above.³

With the formation of the Black Panther Party the black social movement has reached the phase of institutionalization though it may not yet be a mass movement. But its leadership is well structured, morale is highly developed, its agitators have done an efficient job, and its ideology has been worked out in considerable detail. There are of course several other organizations which try to improve the lot of the black man. But none of them have reached the high organizational stage of the Black Power movement, especially as it manifests itself in the Black Panther Party.

¹ See: David L. Lewis, King; a critical Biography (New York: Praeger, 1970).

² See; Coretta King, My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

³ Philip S. Foner, ed., op.cit.

THE VALUE ORDER OF THE BLACK MINORITY

The social movement that is emerging among America's blacks has its roots in the alienation and the subsequent ressentiment which the black man developed. Out of these developments evolved the approaches the black minority is taking towards the transvaluation of the social order.

The Alienation of the Black Man. - The very nature of the social position the Negroes held for generations in the majority culture alienated them from the latter's values, mores and social rules. Negro culture produced its own concepts and interpretations, it worked out its own guidelines.

However, the values of the dominant social group were for generations presented as legitimate goals for the black minority group. To "have it made" the Negro had to accept unconditionally the prevailing white-Anglo-Saxon-protestant value system. This, to be sure, for the great majority of Negroes was an unattainable goal. But for the Negro "elite" it was a realistic aspiration. By accepting and living according to the WASP value system (as applicable to him), the elite Negro could come as close as he could hope to get to white-oriented "equality" (because of his immutably

black skin he never could achieve it totally).

Here we can see some parallels to Scheler. Scheler claimed that by accepting the inferior bourgeois value system, the mob not only hoped to reach the same social status as the bourgeoisie; it also accepted as valid the bourgeois falsification of values. Correspondingly, the Black Power advocate might argue that the "elite" Negro not only strives to achieve the same social and material level as the bourgeois white; he also accepts as valid the white bourgeois value system, which from the Black Power point of view is an invalid, evil system (more on this aspect later).

But once he rejects the white value system, the black man feels of course alienated from it. This alienation - largely forced on him, but partly also nourished by him - can produce strong ressentiment within himself.

Aspects of Black Ressentiment. - Scheler claimed that ressentiment is a completely negative emotion which is symptomatic of an inferior value orientation. Because he was an elitist, he insisted that the bearers of lower values should recognize and accept their correspondingly lower status which, in turn, would make them content and

thus avoid the emergence of ressentiment.

However, the Black Power approach obviously contradicts Scheler's analysis. This approach goes along with Scheler to the extent that it too rejects the existing value order, thus creating ressentiment in the "inferior" group. But its motivations are very different from Scheler's allegations.

The Black Power movement opposes the value system of the "superior" group not because it wants to debase "noble" values, whether consciously or unconsciously, or because it wants to bring society down to the lowest common denominator as Scheler had claimed. In opposition to Scheler, its proponents do not see in the WASP social structure a superior moral value system that they would like - but can not - have for themselves. (In view of the way in which "integration" has been made a respectable goal, they could in time achieve most white values with their corresponding implications).

In fact, just the opposite is the case. Far from seeing superior merit in the prevailing social and moral value order, the Black Power advocate sees evil, exploitation and oppression created by that system all around him. He ✓

need not develop new philosophical theories to make his point. He only has to point to reality, to his daily life experience, to supply proof for his claims. ✓

It follows logically that he not only rejects this social system, but that he also wants to replace it with a new value order. To accept the prevailing order, as Scheler wants him to do in view of his (Black Power) "mob" status, amounts to accepting all the misery and suffering that goes with it. "Assimilation" - the cherished goal of all well meaning liberals - is therefore nothing but an insult to the black militant. ✓

Now it obviously could be argued - and argued very convincingly - that Scheler is not quite relevant in this interpretation. Didn't he reject the materialistic bourgeois value system, and isn't the Negro who accepts, or assimilates with, the prevailing social order in fact conforming to an inferior system according to Scheler? Doesn't that amount to nothing else than the bourgeoisisation of the mob, and is it therefore not even more objectionable than the falsified bourgeois value order?

This contention is only partly correct it would seem. According to Scheler one could indeed argue that the American black is right in rejecting the existing bourgeois

value order because it is an inferior, falsified and therefore base, social system. At this point two interjections would clearly seem admissable:

1) The prevailing social value order in America is supposedly based on "true" Christianity. It may have the materialistic obsessions Scheler rejected; nevertheless, in principle, it accepts the Christian ethos. If it differs from Scheler in its applications of this ethos, this may be nothing more serious than a matter of interpretation. !

2) A far more stronger point against the suggestion that Scheler is not quite applicable here is simply this: according to Scheler's way of arguing, the American black would clearly be a socially inferior group - corresponding to Scheler's mob - which tries to transvaluate the existing social order, by presenting its own inferior social and moral status as virtuous, while attempting to bring down what under the circumstances are superior groups, to its own base level (this view corresponds to Scheler's argumentation).

Not only that. The blacks would also seem to do the very thing Scheler objected to in the so-called mob: they claim that their suffering gives them a nobility which

makes them morally superior to those whom society has legitimized as the social nobility.

Like Scheler's mob, the Negro not only nourishes ressentiment against the "superior" social class. He also rejects his "assimilation" within this value system (which according to Scheler's reasoning he must not do as he should gladly accept his inferior social status). In short, to use a colloquial, he wants out.

Thus while Scheler's rejection of bourgeois materialism makes the application of his doctrine only partly applicable in this instance, because bourgeois materialism characterizes the "superior" group, his claims about transvaluation and ressentiment would seem to have some relevance to the social concepts and attitudes of many American blacks. These are clearly a dissident minority which refuses to operate within the social order set up by the majority.

The ressentiment-laden black does not want to destroy a noble value order. He wants to replace a social system that brought largely misery and humiliation to him, with a social order that gives him dignity and self-determination. He strives towards fundamental changes of the social institutions within which he must live and work.

Far from being destructive and negative, for the Negro ressentiment thus becomes a positive social force. ✓

"MOB" AND ELITE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL REFORM

The black man's experience would however suggest that Scheler was also partly right in his claims about social reform. Black - and other - militants may in many cases reject reform simply because it deprives them of the manifestations of discontent. In other words, certain stages of social movements, i.e. agitation, social unrest or popular excitement are looked upon as positive experiences by their participants. But from the point of view of the defenders of the status quo, these manifestations of mass behavior are negative activities, therefore they have to be rejected. One way to decrease the likelihood of their occurrence is of course the initiation of reforms, which may bring about just enough changes to discourage social unrest. ✓

If the "mob", i.e. in this case the Negroes, would reject reform merely for these reasons, Scheler's interpretation would seem to have some validity. To reject reform solely because it deprives one of basically negative behavior manifestations is, it may be argued, tantamount to accepting an inferior value order. Scheler was no doubt also

right in arguing that reforms only increase the appetite of the "mob". (This has been validated by the increased demands black leaders have made after the reforms forced on the social system by Martin Luther King, Jr., yielded some improvements in the Negroes' status).

What Scheler does not seem to grasp is that this aspect of the opposition to reform can be - and in the case of the blacks actually is - only marginal. While the excitable stages of social movements may supply their members with euphoric experiences, their goals clearly go much deeper than that: reform has been identified with respectability and the status quo. But both these concepts are identical with exploitation and oppression to most blacks.

Moreover, reform may give the appearance of improvement where in fact none takes place. To be sure, changes may occur, but they are not necessarily changes for the better. By dulling the most blatant manifestations of oppression, reform can give the impression that oppression has been eliminated. This, in turn, destroys the evidence which the social movement needs in order to get its message across and to function properly.

Where exploitation, oppression and other negative

features of an inferior social status are not clearly visible, the illusion can easily be created that they don't exist. The agitator of the social movement thus finds it far more difficult to gain - and to keep - adherents, which in turn will affect the tactics he wants to pursue. If reforms are skillfully performed they may even deprive a social movement of its raison d'etre and thus leave the problems it seeks to eradicate in fact unattended. From the Black Power point of view, reform can therefore be worse than the obviously objectionable status quo with all its manifestations of exploitation, oppression and other social evils, for these encourage militant social action.

Regarding the social position of America's elite vis-à-vis the black minority, Scheler would seem to have drawn a valid conclusion with his insistence that the "nobility" faces a real dilemma once ressentiment results in "mob action". For precisely this is the dilemma the leading power groups in America are facing today.

If they try to stabilize the current situation with its social unrest among the blacks, they inevitably strengthen ressentiment and thus the motivation for more drastic social action, since the social hierarchy has

proved to be vulnerable. Also, many members of the upper social strata may feel that the blacks already have too much power and privileges, thus the stabilization of the status quo is clearly undesirable as far as this subgroup of the social elite is concerned.

On the other hand, an attempt to return to the past would be even more disastrous since the black social movement is far beyond the stages of groping and uncertainty. It is well organized, confident and ideologically well versed. A turning back of the clock would trigger off a violent reaction among its adherents.

Lastly, ever more generous reforms are also not the answer for the social elite and power holders; such a course of action would, as we have noted, only increase the appetite of the "mob", and therefore hasten the day when it has achieved its goals. Whichever way the social elite groups interested in "keeping the blacks in their place" are looking, they see a bleak picture indeed.

CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS OF RESSENTMENT IN THE BLACK MINORITY

Since Scheler's "objective value order" is based entirely on his personal, subjective, intuition, it has

extremely vulnerable foundations. Proof that could be generally acceptable for his contentions, is never given by Scheler. One either accepts his intuition or one is wrong (this about sums up his "proof"). Among other things, this also implies that one interprets Christianity exactly as he does. Obviously many theologians would disagree with this type of religious arrogance by a layman.

Since Scheler's "immutable" value order with the ressentiment it can subsequently cause, is based in its entirety on his "intuition", he never offers an explanation that would enable lesser mortals to discuss this intuitive process in a meaningful manner. The best he can offer is the demand that one accept this value order in theory as well as in practice. Except for his subjective intuition, it is never made quite clear why one ought to do so. Any person - regardless of his social status - who conforms to Scheler's value order has presumably at least the satisfaction of leading a moral life if not much else. If he has the right intuition he will do so anyway (although Scheler didn't) - if he does not have this unexplainable moral quality, he will have the satisfaction of moral overcoming as long as he conforms

to Scheler's immutable value order.

The fact that Scheler's first premise is extremely weak should not blind us to recognize that he produced some valid arguments later on. But since his whole theory is so rigid and one-sided, he is doomed to produce a number of claims that are only partly valid, or true only in a very limited social context. His "universal" truths and generalizations could not survive even a superficial logical investigation. The best that can be said of them is that they are of very limited value and that they will make intellectual sense only to those who unconditionally share Scheler's biases and dogmatic views. But such people would seem to be very rare.

Implicit in Scheler's attitudes is a total neglect of several related moral issues. Notions such as social justice, oppression or racial discrimination never seem to enter into his dialogue. Yet - as noted - they are extremely important components of ressentiment or its causes and ipso facto of the value order that leads to ressentiment. To ignore these aspects of the problem is to ignore the morality of any value order as well as the functions and causes of ressentiment. It is the existing value order in any given society that causes ressentiment

and it is resentiment against this value order that brings about an improvement. Without the existing discriminatory value order in America, the blacks would not develop resentiment; without resentiment they would not be actively engaged in working for a new - for them: better - value system.

While Scheler made some valid points about the nature of resentiment, his description of its causes would seem to be entirely inadequate. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the case of America's blacks whose resentiment has quite different causes than it ought to have according to Scheler.

Scheler argues that the Christian-based value hierarchy is not only at the beginning of the "correct" social order; it also is at the end of the solution when the falsification of the hierarchy created resentiment. Again, no generally acceptable proof is supplied for this claim. The only logic in it is that if one accepts Scheler's premisses (i.e. his value hierarchy) one logically has to conclude that its falsification can only be rectified by its renewed acceptance. While this hardly proves anything, Scheler could not have said anything else unless he wanted

to be irrational to the extreme. But this is a question-begging form of argument and thus of no validity.

Scheler admits that ressentiment can be gotten rid of by acting out one's hostility (which in many ways is what the Black Power advocates are doing). But in this acting-out process he sees only a threat to the immutable value order, therefore he rejects it as a legitimate solution to the problem. The elimination of ressentiment has in such a case been brought about by a falsification of eternal values which, as far as Scheler is concerned, amounts to a worsening of the prevailing moral order.

But, as shown, the deprived racial minorities need this acting-out ressentiment in order to achieve a more dignified, humane, life. It is only when they keep ressentiment bottled up inside that their exploitation and oppression continues unabated. To them ressentiment is nothing else but the motor of history that carries them towards a better life. ✓

At the end of the road they see a social system in which social ressentiment will be an unknown experience, talked about only by those elders who remember it as a motivating force in their struggles for a new value order. It is this quality of ressentiment that Scheler obviously

was unable to grasp.

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