

# Grievance Politics and Identities of Resentment

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*Note: this is the penultimate draft, not the final version.*

Lately, talk of grievance politics and the politics of resentment has become widespread.<sup>1</sup> Grievance politics is often defined as a mode of political engagement that draws on and amplifies negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and hostility toward an outgroup. It is contrasted with more traditional forms of political engagement, which focus on promoting positive ideals, such as toleration, mutual respect, and hope. Here is an exemplary quotation:

Grievance politics is defined by the fueling and funneling of negative emotions and various blame-based political strategies which explicitly challenge and confound many of the core principles and values that have traditionally underpinned conventional conceptions of party politics. (Flinders and Hinterleitner 2022: 1)<sup>2</sup>

When we consider politicians like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán, or politicized groups such as White Lives Matters or the Proud Boys, or political commentators like Tucker Carlson, it's easy to be struck by the overwhelming focus on oppositional, negatively oriented values.

But, of course, that's not how the proponents of these views describe themselves. These individuals and groups typically present themselves as defending positive ideals. Trump and Orbán present themselves as champions of sovereignty, cultural identity, security, and prosperity. White Lives Matter activists present themselves as defending the rights of white individuals.<sup>3</sup>

So we have an interesting phenomenon: when we point out the way in which a group promotes negative or oppositional values, this is often interpreted as a mark against the group. And, in order to block this criticism, the group can attempt to defend itself by claiming that its values are properly described as positive.

This can also work in the other direction: a common move in political and moral argument is to reframe *support* for one ideal as *opposition* to an alternative ideal. When Black Lives Matter activists present themselves as arguing against discrimination, racism, and police brutality against black people, some opponents claim that their real motivation was to say that non-black lives don't

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<sup>1</sup> Google's ngram viewer shows an eightfold increase in talk of "grievance politics" between 1980 and 2019 (which is the latest year available).

<sup>2</sup> See also the helpful discussion of grievance politics in Capelos, Salmela, and Krisciunaite (2022).

<sup>3</sup> I discuss this in more detail in Section 1.4. Although the leaders of this movement present it as asserting that white lives matter, it is often classified as a racist hate group that is oriented toward devaluing non-white lives.

matter.<sup>4</sup> When environmental groups present themselves as arguing for protection of the natural world, some opponents claim that they actually oppose development, progress, and freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Implicit in all of these argumentative strategies is the idea that there's something wrong, or at least disagreeable, about individuals or groups whose values are primarily negative or oppositional. In this paper, I ask how we should understand this claim about negative or oppositional values. We can put the claim as follows:

(Negative Orientation) Although you claim to value X, you are more accurately described as devaluing Y.

So, a value that purports to be positive actually conceals, presupposes, or expresses a value that is negative. I will suggest that this Negative Orientation claim is implicated in accounts of grievance politics and the politics of resentment as well as in our intuitive reactions to certain cases. But is it defensible? Is there a distinction between positive and negative orientations?

This essay is an attempt to make sense of that distinction, which turns out to be quite hard to draw. Section One argues that we can't make sense of the positive/negative distinction either in terms of the etiologies, contents, or justificatory status of evaluative judgments. Section Two argues that if we examine the psychology of valuing, and in particular the psychology of hatred and resentment, we can draw the distinction—at least at the level of individual psychology. Section Three then explains how group-level phenomena, such as moralities or ideologies, could generate negative orientations in individuals. With that explanation in place, we can draw the distinction between positive and negative ideologies, political stances, or sets of evaluative judgments. So there is a way of supporting talk of grievance politics or the politics of resentment, but it turns out to be more complex than we would initially suspect.

## 1. Four problems with the idea of grievance politics and negative orientations

Intuitively, there seems to be a difference between values and identities that are negative and those that are positive. How should we make sense of this? To begin, it will help to work with a clear case:

Allen feels underappreciated, gloomy, alone. He has failed in his attempts to spark romantic relationships. At work, he occasionally engages in idle pleasantries, but he has no close friends. He fantasizes about other lives, in which he is appreciated and valued, in which he is loved. He is envious of those who enjoy close romantic and social ties. He feels that his

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<sup>4</sup> For example, on 8/31/15, Bill O'Reilly said that BLM was a "hate group" comparable to the Ku Klux Klan. On the same day, Fox News displayed a banner calling BLM a "murder movement". On 9/1/15, Rush Limbaugh claimed that BLM was a hate group. On 9/2/2015 Geraldo Rivera tweeted "[#blacklivesmatter](#) looking more like a hate group than ever." In 2016, the slogan "All Lives Matter" gained prominence, especially when Donald Trump began using it and accusing BLM protestors of racism.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Donald Trump's 2020 claim that environmental "alarmists" like Greta Thunberg want "to control every aspect of our lives," and his 2012 claim that climate change was "created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive." Similar anti-environmentalist tactics have been deployed by the Koch-funded group Citizens for a Sound Economy, the Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation.

life is in many respects a failure, and this negatively impacts his self-conception: he is unable to think of himself in positive terms. In time, Allen stumbles upon incel websites.<sup>6</sup> Reading the incel ideology, he comes to believe that his plight is not his fault, but is instead traceable to social perversions. Allen finds this ideology extremely congenial. It traces what might otherwise be experienced as personal failings to widespread social problems. And it gives him a target to demean, disparage, resent, and even hate: women and proponents of certain feminist views. For these are the people who he can see as responsible for his plight. Gradually adopting this ideology, Allen comes to devalue women and feminism. And he comes to value a form of imagined patriarchy, in which men like him enjoy unimpeded access to sex and esteem.

It seems right to describe Allen as negatively oriented. Even if he were to claim that he has positive values (such as a right to respect, recognition, or esteem), it would be tempting to say that he is more accurately described as devaluing women and feminism. And this seems to be an important fact about Allen. If an environmentalist or a Black Lives Matter activist were oriented in a way that parallels Allen, this would be concerning.

### ***1.1 The etiologies of evaluative judgments***

If we want to specify why Allen's evaluative outlook is negatively oriented, there's an obvious answer: Allen's values are formed in a hateful, resentful manner. He endorses evaluative judgments such as *women are disvaluable* because doing so assuages his own feelings of impotence and gives an outlet for his aggression. Isn't that enough to show that his evaluative outlook is problematically negative?

Unfortunately, it's not. To see this, consider a different example:

Alice is a high school student who feels rejected by her peers. The dominant, popular social clique at her school is the jocks, whose life centers around sports, parties, and drinking. Alice isn't at all athletic, is a bit socially awkward, doesn't like to drink, and as a result she is isolated. She feels lonely and disaffected. She responds to this by demeaning athletics. She disparages athletes, seeing them as superficial and posturing; she tells herself that it is better to be alone and authentic than dull and accepted. And she finds something else, something that the popular group ignores: art. She directs her energies there. At first, this is merely reactive and negative: because she can't succeed with the dominant athletic values, she negates them and finds something else, something that her athletic peers view of lesser worth. But over time this becomes her life: as she grows older, and is drawn ever deeper into artistic appreciation and creation, she becomes aware of a new realm of value. She

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<sup>6</sup> Incels (or "involuntary celibates") are men who accept an ideology that blames women and feminism for their lack of social, romantic, and sexual success. Briefly, incel ideology claims that many men are adrift and alone because they are unjustly denied esteem from women. The incel ideology identifies women and feminism as the two main sources of problems in the social world. This ideology represents women as biologically determined to be shallow, superficial, purely interested in physical appearance, wealth, and social status; and to be prone to engage in manipulation and coercion so as to secure these goods. Moreover, women are presented as powerful in that they force men to seek material goods and a certain physique in order to secure sex and esteem. Helpful philosophical work on incels includes Manne 2017; Ging 2017; Baele et al 2023; Alfano and Podosky 2023; Tietjen and Tirkkonen 2023; and Capelos et al 2024.

ceases to care about rejecting an opposed group. What started out as defensive rejection transforms over time into valuing art for its own sake.

Alice begins by valuing art negatively and reactively: her interest in art and engagement with it is explained by her rejection of something else, namely athletic prowess and the in-groups that value it. But something important happens: the originally negative, reactive valuations transform into something more positive. This, I think, is an important transition.

In the cases of Allen and Alice, part of the explanation for the adoption of new values is that these new values enable a vindictory self-conception, alleviating feelings of impotence and disaffection. The values that enable this vindictory self-conception are negatively oriented: they arise from an act of rejection. But despite the similarity in origins—despite the fact that both sets of values are originally adopted in a negative, reactive fashion—there seems to be an important difference between Alice and Allen. Alice starts out negatively and reactively but transitions to something positive. Allen does not. His values, and the ideology in which they're embedded, seem to remain negatively oriented in a way that Alice's aren't.<sup>7</sup>

And notice that the point is not restricted simply to Alice's and Allen's values. We might also think that their *identities* differ in important ways. If we were to characterize Alice's identity, we might say that she starts out as resentful and disaffected but moves toward a positively oriented, appreciative identity. Allen, by contrast, seems mired in resentment, despite any claims that he might make about positive orientation.

So at both the level of *value* and the level of *practical identity*, Alice and Allen seem substantially different.

### ***1.2 Second problem: we can translate positive evaluative judgments into negative ones***

I've suggested that looking at the etiology of the evaluative orientations won't help. But there's another obvious possibility: we could cite the contents of the evaluative judgments. Allen embraces principles such as "women are disvaluable"; Alice embraces principles such as "art is valuable." Allen's principles have contents that involve negating or attributing disvalue to certain groups; Alice's don't. Can we make sense of the difference this way?

Unfortunately, we can't. The same principle can be held negatively or positively. Think again about Alice: the principles that she holds (e.g., "art is valuable") remain constant, but at certain times it seems appropriate to characterize her as negative and reactive, at other times positive and affirmative. The very same principles are originally held in a negative, spiteful way and are later held in a positive, affirmative way.

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<sup>7</sup> There is a complication: Allen persists in his original state of vengeful hatred, whereas Alice's original feelings of disaffection and exclusion are replaced by appreciative reactions. So, rather than focusing on the causal factors that are present in the *initial adoption* of values, we could try to draw the positive/negative distinction by considering the causal factors that are implicated in the *sustaining* of values over time. For example, drawing on Tietjen and Tierkkonen 2023 and Capelos et al 2024, we could argue that incels like Allen sustain their values through resentment; and, drawing on Salmela and Capelos 2021, we could argue that people like Alice manage to sublimate feelings of inefficacy, envy, and so on into different affective states. Accounts of this form are more promising, and I address them in Section 2. Above, my point is simply that an account of the way that the evaluative judgments *originate* will not capture the distinction between Allen and Alice.

We can also see this with Allen. It's true that Allen's evaluative judgments have contents that are stated negatively, such as "feminism is disvaluable." But when evaluative judgments are characterized negatively, we can simply redescribe them as positive orientations toward alternative objects. True, Allen disparages women and feminism. But presumably that isn't how he would describe it: if pressed, he would say that he values autonomy and authenticity, and sees women and feminism as opposing these values. (Of course, he has a number of false beliefs; but set that aside for the moment.)

So, one problem is that descriptions of positive and negative evaluative judgments may be symmetrical. In many cases, we can losslessly redescribe cases of judging X valuable as cases of judging not-X disvaluable, and vice versa. (Of course, not all values have neat opposites, so this redescription won't always be straightforward.)

### ***1.3 Third problem: evaluative judgments commit us to certain kinds of negative reactions***

That's not the only problem with the distinction. Consider an evaluative judgment such as *preserving autonomy is overridingly valuable*. And suppose we add in some associated beliefs, such as *that policy undermines autonomy*. Then it seems that we will be committed to judging the policy disvaluable, precisely because it violates what we take to be of central value. When the autonomy-undermining policy is championed by some group, we will be committed to judging that the group ought to be opposed or resisted, that the group's policies are disvaluable, and so on. In that respect, the positive evaluative judgment will entail negative evaluations. And most evaluative judgments will be like this—most of them will entail negative evaluations toward other objects.

This can happen for several reasons. One reason is that valuing something typically entails wanting it to be preserved or sustained, and hence seems to entail negative orientations toward things that might threaten, destroy, or violate the valued object. But more generally, we can imagine cases in which a person has a value that seems positive—treating other human beings as autonomous, for example—and sees that value as everywhere threatened, undermined, and not realized, sees the world as falling short of the value in multiple ways. Then a negative orientation toward the world seems rationally required in light of the positive value. If the world is bad, negative attitudes are merited. But this doesn't seem to be a fault with the value—rather, it's a fault of the world, at least as the world currently stands.

So the mere fact that a value commits you to an oppositional stance doesn't show that holding the value constitutes having a negative orientation.

### ***1.4 Fourth problem: appeals to the justificatory status of evaluative judgments don't help***

Let's consider one last possibility: we might think that the difference between Allen and Alice lies in the fact that Allen embraces false or reprehensible evaluative judgments, whereas Alice doesn't. Allen's evaluative judgments are oppressive, demeaning; Alice's aren't. It's one thing to hold a true or praiseworthy moral belief and thus be committed to contending with those who oppose it; it's another to accept a false or reprehensible moral belief and oppose people on its basis.

Again, though, I don't think this works. It's possible to hold legitimate, non-reprehensible evaluative judgments in a way that's expressive of hatred or contempt. Alice, early on, is an example of this. But there can be others. I will illustrate this with a real-life example.

Consider the *Black Lives Matter* and *White Lives Matter* groups. Black Lives Matter is a decentralized social movement that emerged in 2013, when George Zimmerman was acquitted after fatally shooting Trayvon Martin. The movement became especially prominent and influential in 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. The movement aims to draw attention to police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people.

Here's one of the evaluative claims accepted by BLM: *black lives matter*. During the 2020 protests, conservative politicians and media began to claim that BLM's real motivation was to say that non-Black lives don't matter.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the claim that black lives matter was interpreted as the claim that white lives don't matter, or that black lives matter more than white lives.

I take it as obvious that these interpretations were false: we don't typically take the claim "X matters" to entail that X matters more than anything else, or that non-X's don't matter. But the claim is not unintelligible. It's certainly possible to assert "X matters" in a way that expresses the belief that things other than X don't matter. And a perfect illustration of that is the White Lives Matter movement. It is of course true that white lives matter, but the holding of this value and the participation in associated political movements is often expressive of racism, contempt, and reaction. Consider a few quotations from the co-founder of White Lives Matter, Rebecca Barnette:

"Do not allow our lands to turn into Haiti ... time to shut the savage beasts down. Shut down Black Lives Matter." (July 9, 2016)

"There are ways we as citizens and owners of our fate can take a stand against these plagues on our people promoting white genocide" by opposing "[racially] mixed couples," "homosexuality," "diversity," "illegal immigration," and "tolerance." (White Lives Matter mission statement, issued by Barnette in 2016.

It is time for "the blood of our enemies [to] soak our soil to form new mortar to rebuild our landmasses." (posted on vk.com, a Russian social networking site used by white supremacists)

Barnette, who often poses in front of swastikas, is a clear case of someone who holds what might look like a legitimate or praiseworthy moral judgment ("the lives of white people matter"), but holds it in a way that expresses that value in an oppositional or resentful way.

So here we have two claims, both of which can be legitimate or praiseworthy: *black lives matter*, *white lives matter*. These claims can be held in a way that is expressive of a negative, reactive stance. Or they can be held in a way that is expressive of a positive stance. Merely examining the contents or the justificatory status of these claims will not distinguish these possibilities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For examples, see note 3.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, there are many differences between the Black Lives Matter and the White Lives Matter movements: the latter often involves an endorsement of dehumanization, racism, and spiteful hatred, whereas the former often involves

## 2. The psychology of valuing

So far, we've attempted to make sense of the positive/negative distinction by looking at the etiologies, contents, commitments, and justificatory status of the relevant evaluative judgments. That didn't work. But let's broaden our approach, considering the psychological role that the values play for agents. Perhaps we can locate the distinction there. Perhaps negative ideals play different psychological roles or involve different psychological processes than positive ones.

### 2.1 *Valuing vs. judging valuable*

A number of philosophers have argued that there is a crucial distinction between *believing that an object is valuable* and *valuing that object*. Whereas judging valuable sometimes involves nothing more than having an isolated belief that can be disconnected from attitudes, intentions, and dispositions, valuing involves additional factors: (i) a disposition to experience certain emotions pertaining to the valued item; (ii) a disposition to experience those emotions as merited; and (iii) a disposition to treat certain considerations pertaining to the valued item as reasons for action (Scheffler 2013: 16-17; see also Helm 2001).

The simplest way of putting the point is this: we don't value everything that we judge valuable. Valuing things involves having the various dispositions mentioned above. Judging valuable doesn't. For example: I believe that ballet is a valuable human pursuit. But I don't really have any interest in it. I don't experience any particular set of emotions concerning it; I don't have any intentions pertaining to it; I don't engage with it in any way. By contrast, I value philosophy. I have a host of emotions pertaining to various types or qualities of philosophical work; I experience these emotions as merited; I treat many considerations pertaining to philosophy as reasons for action; and I am committed to engaging with it, for example by reading and writing about it. Philosophy plays a role in my life in a way that ballet doesn't, and this is part of what's involved in saying that I value it.

Suppose we employ this valuing/judging valuable distinction. It's often a matter of indifference whether we characterize evaluative judgments positively or negatively. The judgment *A is valuable* is often translatable without loss into the judgment *not-A is disvaluable*, just as the judgment that *it's true that it's raining* is translatable into the judgment *it's false that it's not raining*. And even when evaluations aren't translatable in that way, we've seen above that positive evaluative judgments about a given object typically entail commitment to negative evaluative judgments about things that oppose, threaten, or violate that object.

But it is *not* a matter of indifference whether we characterize valuing in this way. If I value athletic prowess, this means that I have dispositions to experience certain emotions pertaining to athletic prowess, such as admiration and attraction; that I have a disposition to experience these emotions as merited; that I have a disposition to treat certain considerations pertaining to athletic prowess, such as the fact that I could witness it by attending some event, as a reason for action; and that I am committed to engaging with athletic prowess in various ways. Notice that it does *not* follow from this that I disvalue athletic mediocrity. For disvaluing athletic mediocrity would require having particular emotional responses and emotional vulnerabilities. It's entirely possible—indeed,

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rejection of those stances. I address this in Section 2. Here, I am simply using these two movements to make the point that justificatory status alone can't distinguish negative and positive evaluative orientations.

routine—for people to be emotionally invested in something without being emotionally invested in its negation or its contrary. So valuing and devaluing are not symmetrical; valuing an object does not entail devaluing its contrary.

If this is right—if valuing an object does not entail devaluing things that oppose, threaten, or undermine that object—then we might have a way of drawing the positive/negative distinction. To make the point more forcefully, I want to investigate particular forms of valuing and devaluing.

## ***2.2 Love, hate, and valuing***

Valuing an object is probably going to entail *some* kind of attitude toward that which threatens, opposes, violates, or just falls short of that value. Even if I don't devalue that which threatens my values, I might have to regard it with chagrin, disappointment, dejection. But what if those attitudes differ in significant ways? What if we could draw the distinction between positive and negative moralities not just in terms of whether they entail devaluing, but rather in terms of what *type* of devaluing they involve?

The accounts of valuing in Scheffler and others tend to focus on the positive cases of valuing, the loving or caring relationships to objects. But values can be grounded in hateful, disparaging emotions as well as positive ones. I want to explore the idea that the valuing grounded in a certain form of hate might operate differently than the valuing grounded in forms of love or care.

First, we need to say more about what hate is. Sometimes, we use the term 'hate' to mean 'strongly dislike'. I might say that I hate airports, where this just means that I strongly dislike being in them. But sometimes hatred picks out a more intense state. Consider Jean Hampton's distinctions between two forms of hatred. First, there is "simple hatred," which consists merely in a strong aversion to an object which is "perceived as profoundly unpleasant," and where this aversion is "accompanied by the wish to see the odious thing removed or eliminated" (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 60-61). This is a bit stronger than the colloquial sense of hatred in which I might say that I hate airports—I do dislike being in them, but don't go so far as to want them removed or eliminated. But there are still stronger forms of hatred. Hampton defines "spiteful hatred" as the animosity "one tends to feel towards those who have personally brought harm to one (where that harm may or may not be a moral wrong)" (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 61). Importantly, spiteful hatred does not aim at elimination of the object but rather at *harming* or *exerting power* over the object (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 62). Moreover, Hampton claims that spiteful hatred tends to involve an attempt to restore one's own self-worth (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 62).

This distinction—between wanting something eliminated and wanting something harmed—will be important below. Crucially, if we want something to be harmed, we sometimes also want that thing to be preserved—for, if it were eliminated, we could no longer harm it. Spiteful hatred thus carries a motivation to sustain its object, or at least to find substitute objects if the original object is eliminated.

Because spiteful hatred seeks its own perpetuation—because it doesn't seek the elimination of its object, but rather the continuous harming of its object—it tends to broaden, to seek new opportunities for expression. This can involve misrepresenting its objects in a way that makes them appear worthy of hatred; it can also involve detecting new features that are deemed worthy of hatred.



Some desires simply motivate their own satisfaction and extinction. For example, I desire an aspirin to relieve a headache: the desire motivates a course of action which, when successfully pursued, extinguishes the desire. Other desires operate differently, motivating the agent to continually engage in a course of activity. For example, Daniela Dover argues that intellectual curiosity has that feature: intellectual curiosity motivates continued engagement with its object, in a way that prompts deepening and exploration rather than a final satisfaction (Dover 2023). Desires of this kind tend to be self-sustaining rather than self-extinguishing: a successful course of action will sustain the desire rather than eliminate it. And desires of this kind are often (but not always) self-heightening: as we engage in the courses of action that they motivate, we find the desires intensifying or broadening. Consider what it is like to do philosophy: for many of us, I assume, engaging in philosophical inquiry isn't something that satisfies us once and for all, but something that continuously prompts us to explore new areas, new questions, to read new materials, and so on.

Both love and hatred tend to be not only self-sustaining but also self-heightening motivations. Love tends to grow; hatred, too. Love tends to seek out new intricacies of its object, in order to appreciate them; so too with hatred, but to disparage them. Love tends to inflect other emotions toward the object, making the person more positively disposed to the object; so, too, with hatred, but in the opposite way. Love tends to seep outward to things associated with the object: your love for a person might spread to appreciation of her hobbies, her interests, things that remind you of her, symbols associated with her, so that all of these become tinged with a special import. So too with hatred: your hatred of a person or a group might seep outwards to that person's central activities, to things that you associate with the person, and so on.

In sum, then: love and hate both involve an attentive focus, indeed a fixation, on their objects; they motivate resourceful, committed efforts to engage with their objects; and they tend to be self-heightening.<sup>10</sup>

Let's now think about the way in which hating is linked to devaluation. The person gripped by spiteful hatred of (say) women or jocks will experience them as hateful; will see this as warranted; will be disposed to see certain considerations as reasons for harming or disparaging them. So hatred fulfills conditions (i)-(iii).

With this in mind, we can distinguish *devaluing something via hate* and *bearing negative attitudes toward something as a result of loving something else*. Consider an example: one person might hate the pursuit of wealth; another might love devotion to God and take the pursuit of wealth as an impediment, something that distracts from or undermines this worthier goal. Although both people will be averse to the pursuit of wealth, these aversions have completely different psychological roles for the agents. The person who hates the pursuit of wealth will take that as a focal point, with the hatred of wealth seeping out into other, related activities; he will fixate on pursuit of wealth; and he will tend to experience heightening negative emotions toward pursuit of wealth and its associated objects. None of this will be true of the person who loves devotion to God and takes wealth as an impediment. This person might judge the pursuit of wealth devaluable; he might look at pursuits of wealth with chagrin and disappointment; he might be indifferent to opportunities to pursue wealth.

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<sup>10</sup> Other accounts of hatred that emphasize some of these features include Brogaard 2020, Scheler 2008, Schmid 2020, and Szanto 2021.

But these judgments and attitudes can be innocuous and limited, and needn't play a central role in the agent's psychology.

The same point applies to values directed at groups. Consider the difference between (1) someone who hates environmentalists and (2) someone who loves materialistic pursuit of wealth and judges environmentalists disvaluable because they impede or harm materialistic goals. The first case will involve a fixation and focus that may be absent in the second. For, insofar as I hate the environmentalists, I will fixate on them; make resourceful efforts to damage them; and experience a seeping outward and a heightening of these affects. None of that needs to the case in (2), where the negative evaluative judgment might amount to nothing more than a dispassionate opposition to environmentalists or to their effects; or to a mild aversion to them, not coupled with any forms of fixation or hatred.

### **2.3 *Negative orientations analyzed in terms of hate***

If we focus on the way in which certain kinds of valuing—those grounded in love and hate—operate, then we can clarify the idea of positive and negative orientations. Loving and hating unify the agent around central concerns, and the concerns are not substitutable. The agent whose focal orientation is generated by love is different than the agent whose focal orientation is generated by hate. And this shows up in our examples of Alice and Allen: Allen's ideology and personality are rooted in a form of hatred, whereas Alice moves from hatred of a social group to appreciation or love of art, all while holding her evaluative judgments constant.

So we can, in fact, make sense of the idea that certain evaluative orientations are negative and others positive. An evaluative orientation that is centered on spiteful hatred is a negative orientation; an evaluative orientation centered on love is a positive orientation.<sup>11</sup> And, while I lack the space to address this point here, spiteful hatred is just one example. Emotions like contempt and fear share some of the features of hatred: they, too, can unify the agent around central concerns that are non-substitutable; they, too, generate different focal points; they, too, can be self-sustaining and self-heightening.

However, this does raise a further question. I've claimed that positive orientations involve valuations that are grounded in emotions such as love and respect, whereas negative orientations involve valuations that are grounded in emotions such as hatred, fear, and contempt. But, we might ask: what unifies these emotions? What unifies hatred, fear, and contempt, as opposed to love, respect, and so on? I lack the space to defend an account, but I think that the emotions grounding positive valuations involve appreciating or affirming their objects, whereas the emotions grounding negative valuations involve disparaging and damaging their objects. Thus, emotions such as love, respect, awe, and reverence fall into the former category, whereas emotions such as hatred, fear, and contempt fall into the latter.<sup>12</sup>

## **3. The connection between ideologies and individual psychologies**

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<sup>11</sup> Note that this isn't evaluative—I am not saying that the hate-based valuing is bad and the loving ones good. I am simply analyzing the distinction.

<sup>12</sup> Analogous distinctions are defended in Fromm 1956, Helm 2001, Nussbaum 2001, and Scheler 2008.

So far, I've argued that there is a difference between love-based valuing and hate-based valuing; in light of this, we can distinguish positive and negative orientations in individuals. In particular, when the person's central or predominant evaluations are hate-based, this will constitute a negative evaluative orientation. (I'm not claiming that this is the only way to generate a negative evaluative orientation; just that it is a paradigmatic way.)

Let's connect this to the discussion in Section 1. There, I examined four unsuccessful attempts to distinguish positive and negative orientations. These attempts appeal to (1.1) etiology; (1.2) the content of evaluative judgments; (1.3) whether an evaluative judgment entails an oppositional stance; and (1.4) whether the evaluative judgment is justifiable. While these approaches were unsuccessful, my account does allow us to incorporate refined versions of (1.1)-(1.3). Start with (1.1): while etiology alone doesn't render an orientation negative, I've argued that an evaluative orientation that is *sustained* or *constituted* by certain kinds of causal factors, such as spiteful hatred, will be negative. On (1.2): some of the attitudes that render orientations negative do have specific contents. For example, Hampton's definition of spiteful hatred does present it as having a distinctive content (and object): it targets people or groups who have allegedly harmed the agent. But it is not the content alone that renders the hatred-induced orientation negative; after all, we can imagine people holding an attitude with the content *those people have harmed me* in a dispassionate way. Instead, it is the way in which that content is held: spiteful hatred generates a non-substitutable focal point, which unifies the agent's concerns. Similar points apply to (1.3): oppositional stances can be derivative and relatively inconsequential correlates of positive orientations, or they can be the central focus—in which case they are likely to be negative orientations. So refined versions of (1.1)-(1.3) can be preserved. However, (1.4) is a non-starter: it is not the justificatory status of the evaluative judgment that determines negative or positive orientations; it is the psychological role of the relevant valuing.

But this still leaves us with a puzzle: can we make sense of the idea, presupposed in discussions of grievance politics and the politics of resentment, that certain ideologies or evaluative outlooks are negatively oriented? When we speak of an evaluative orientation or ideology, such as that of the incel, we typically pick out a set of evaluative beliefs and judgments rather than a set of valuing. And this distinction is important, because two people who accept the same set of evaluative beliefs can have different valuing. I might believe that ballet is valuable while not valuing it, whereas another person might both believe it valuable and value it. Just so, two people might accept the same ideology (such as the incel ideology) while having different valuing.

And this generates a puzzle. I've been pointing out that Allen's incel values can be construed, at the level of belief or judgment, as positive rather than negative. So why think they're likely to produce negative *valuings*? There's not an obvious connection between any particular evaluative judgment and the positive or negative valuing that it induces. So we need to ask: is there something about certain ideologies or sets of evaluative outlooks that makes them especially likely to produce negative valuing? I will argue that there is—and, moreover, that the relationship between evaluative outlooks and ideologies is reciprocal, involving a feedback loop.

To start, notice that the kinds of ideologies that we find in the incel movement and in grievance politics aren't just inert sets of evaluative judgments. They come with reinterpretations of the world, new perspectives on events and actors, new narratives. They categorize the world differently, rendering different aspects salient, classifying different objects together, drawing different connections, attributing different meanings to events. I explore this in the next section.

### ***3.1 The interpretations offered by ideologies***

Consider the incel example. To put the point very simply, the incel ideology offers a narrative that says *these people are bad* because they *are responsible for your suffering*. *You can be good by opposing them*. What unifies the incel groups “despite their partly diverging ideologies and adversarial relationships, is a set of beliefs according to which women have caused their problems in particular and problems in society more generally” (Tietjen and Tirkkonen 2023: 3). The manifold sufferings of the disaffected man are given an explanation that absolves him of responsibility and gives him a path to recovery (Tietjen and Tirkkonen 2023: 4).<sup>13</sup>

The incel narrative starts with disaffection, dejection, and disappointment. Initially, this need not be experienced as a wrong. Some people are just luckier, more socially skilled, more romantically successful than others. But in the incel narrative, this understanding is transformed: the sexually successful individuals are presented as people who are unjustly benefited by harmful, oppressive, and demeaning social norms. So the incel narrative encourages the unsuccessful men to think of themselves not just as unfortunate but as *wronged*.

This narrative cements the disaffected men together as a group. They have a positive identity, a way of characterizing themselves. They are the good, and they are illegitimately oppressed and subjugated by the bad. So we have formation of a new class which is defined partly in terms of a grievance. But that’s not all: we get a vindictory story. What was formerly experienced as a series of personal failings gets reinterpreted as a social problem, and a solution to the problem is offered. This can involve an imagined or expected overcoming of the outgroup: a strategy, an approach, a vision of salvation. A way of addressing the grievance is provided: the disaffected men will be rewarded, and their opponents punished. And the incels come to manifest a spiteful form of hatred toward their opponents.

### ***3.2 The structure of explanation***

If we focus on that story, we can make some points about the basic structure of explanation:

1. A group of people experience highly aversive states, including first-order sufferings and negative self-conceptions.
2. An interpretation is offered which affects beliefs and emotions in such a way that the aversive states are transformed into neutral or attractive ones, and a positive self-conception is enabled.
3. The interpretation identifies a group that is putatively responsible for one’s plight. This group becomes a target for negative affects. Opposition to the group is seen as a path to restitution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In arguing for this point, Tietjen and Tirkkonen employ the account of resentment developed by Salmela & Capelos (2021). Salmela and Capelos’s account explains how disaffected, disappointed, dejected individuals can be transformed into a social group that sees themselves as wronged, and thus develops a morally righteous sense of victimhood and a spiteful hatred of their putative victimizers.

<sup>14</sup> Versions of points 1-3 are discussed in greater depth by Salmela and Capelos (2021). Salmela and Capelos argue that resentment has four stages: a triggering stage, in which negative emotions such as feelings of inferiority or impotence are experienced as repeated threats to the agent’s self-esteem; an initiating stage, in which the agent adopts defenses against these feelings; an advancing stage, in which the agent’s defense mechanisms lead to new emotions (resentment, indignation, hatred) and a new self-conception; and a consolidating stage, in which these mechanisms are strengthened

Suppose the perceived wrongs are corrected.<sup>15</sup> Then there are two possibilities:

- 4a. The correction of these perceived wrongs alleviates the original first-order sufferings and negative self-conceptions.
- 4b. The correction of these perceived wrongs allows the original first-order sufferings and negative self-conceptions to return.<sup>16</sup>

Let's take these points in turn. With regard to (1) the highly aversive states can involve (but are not limited to) material deprivation, physical suffering, lack of control over one's fate, directionlessness, malaise, and disaffection. There's no need to pick: all of these states are highly aversive and can come in different combinations. Notice that all of them can lead to negative self-conceptions: insofar as I experience myself as unable to correct or move away from these aversive conditions, I am prone to see myself as deficient. I think we can offer a generalization about these states: they are all rooted in or at least accompanied by a feeling of impotence, a feeling that you cannot attain the life or the status that you ardently crave.

How might (2) work? It's a familiar point that interpretations and affects shape one another. Affects shape interpretations: if I hate someone, I'm inclined to interpret him negatively, to dwell on his reprehensible traits, to find his faults. This can involve detecting aspects that would antecedently justify the hatred, but it can also involve distortions or selective interpretations of neutral experiences. I'm more inclined to interpret ambiguous or multivalent events in a way that justifies the hatred. Affects alter experience, often promoting an interpretation of the world that then justifies or supports the very affect that generates it.<sup>17</sup>

But we can also look at this in the other direction—and that's what (2) focuses upon. Interpretations can elicit, shape, and sustain emotions. If certain interpretations or narratives make particular emotions seem sensible, warranted, or appropriate, then they may elicit and sustain these emotions. After all, there's some pressure to align our emotions with our judgments of warrant: there's some pressure to have negative emotions towards things that we evaluate negatively, and positive emotions toward things that we evaluate positively. And that's what we see in the incel account: by portraying the romantically successful people as hateful, the interpretation encourages hate. For that

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and supported through social sharing. See also Salice and Salmela (2022), which discusses emotional mechanisms and their role in identity transformations.

<sup>15</sup> We can also distinguish (a) things that appear to be wrongs prior to the adoption of the new interpretation; and (b) things that appear to be wrongs after the adoption of the new interpretation. For example, imagine someone who comes to embrace an incel ideology. Prior to the adoption of the ideology, the deprivation of romantic relationships will be experienced as unfortunate but not as a wrong; after the adoption of the ideology, it will be experienced as a wrong.

<sup>16</sup> (4a) is more likely when the narrative correctly identifies the causes of suffering/negative-self-conception and offers a stable path to recovery. (4b) is more likely when the narrative is fanciful/misguided, either in terms of identifying the causes or the path to recovery. For a related point, see Salmela and Scheve (2018)'s distinction between the emotional dynamics of left-wing and right-wing political populism: they argue that left-wing populism tends to operate with pro-democratic ideologies and the social sharing of grievances with an aim of rectifying these grievances, whereas right-wing populism tends to be driven by resentment and involves repressing the original grievances and related emotions. If this is right, right-wing populism would tend to involve 4b whereas left-wing populism would tend to involve 4a.

<sup>17</sup> Consider Karen Jones on the way in which affects shape cognition: "Affective attitudes, like emotions more generally, function as biasing devices. They do this by shaping both cognition and motivation and so rearranging action options in a hierarchy of salient possibilities. Emotions are able to shape both cognition and motivation through their effects on what we experience as reasons for action and belief. Emotions have at least the following cognitive roles: they (1) focus attention, (2) direct inquiry, (3) shape interpretation, (4) structure inference and (5) shuffle action options in a hierarchy of perceived salience and desirability" (Jones 2019: 958).

narrative tells us that the happy people are laboring under illusions, are superficial, are demeaning themselves in order to conform to animalistic preferences, and so on.

We could ask questions about how these changes emerge. They have different mechanisms. In some cases, formerly heterogeneous elements will be amalgamated: all the unease, disaffection, and rancor that stems from a set of disjointed factors will be seen as a unified reaction to the acts of the successful people. These amalgamations may promote reinforcement: when formerly disjointed elements are grouped together, they may interact with one another, be seen by the person as central elements of her character rather than as random or heterogeneous occurrences. And in other cases still, the interpretations will generate new focal points: whereas a diffuse set of multiple emotions prompted by different objects may pull the person's attention and motivation in different directions, a unified, complex emotional state may focus her on what she takes to be its singular object.

One especially effective way of doing this is by finding someone to blame. When aversive states are seen as caused by some blameworthy person, fault can be directed at that person rather than at oneself. And that can be attractive. It can be especially attractive given that the states mentioned in (1) are rooted in impotence. If I am bothered by a generalized sense of impotence, a generalized sense that I cannot attain what I seek, I can assuage this by finding someone to blame. Blame reduces impotence in two ways: it presents my failings as the fault of someone else, thereby reducing my responsibility for them; and it gives me a way to vent aggression on that other, at least in disparaging him, thereby giving me an outlet, something that I can feel accomplished in doing.

When (3) is in place, the people gripped by the interpretation may not be disposed to address the root causes of their suffering (which, in the incel case, are more plausibly seen as arising from personal inadequacies, failings, the general character of human life, and social and cultural conditions<sup>18</sup>), but will instead vent their rage on putatively guilty perpetrators.

And that's why we get two possibilities under (4). In cases of type (4b), that the blame needs to persist in order to assuage the problem: if the guilty perpetrators were eliminated, or if they came to be seen as innocent, all the original problems would reemerge. So the aversive states—disaffection, incapacity, and so on—can be sought, dwelt in, rather than opposed or lamented.

There's one type of interpretation that seems tailor made for these kinds of situations: narratives of *resentiment*.

### ***3.3 Narratives of resentment***

Ordinary resentment is typically understood as indignation resulting from the belief that one was wronged. Some philosophers distinguish resentment from *resentiment*, which is either a special case of resentment or a more complex form of resentment.

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<sup>18</sup> For just one example of the way that social and cultural circumstances could produce this form of suffering: Sandel (2020) and Mounk (2017) suggest that the competitive meritocratic ideologies of capitalism strongly incline people to see themselves as failures regardless of their circumstances.

Ressentiment has four key features.<sup>19</sup> First, it involves not just indignation but *hatred* of some person or group, which the agent takes to be wronging him. In particular, it involves *spiteful* hatred: a hatred that aims not at the elimination of its object but at the harming of its object. Second, resentment involves a feeling of impotence: whereas ordinary cases of resentment can occur in contexts that enable immediate response (you step on my foot, I get resentful and shove you off), resentment involves the perception of oneself as unable immediately to respond to the perceived slight. Third, resentment tends to be a persistent feature of one's character, rather than a passing feeling. (You can be indignant at someone just for a moment, but you can't hate someone just for a moment. Hatred persists.) Fourth, whereas ordinary resentment is often interpreted as aiming at the rectification of wrongs, resentment, in manifesting spiteful hateful, aims not at rectification but at harming the wrongdoer.<sup>20</sup> So, in short, resentment is a spiteful form of hatred rooted not just in the belief that you have been wronged, but also in a sense of impotence; and, like all forms of hatred, it persists, tending to spread and grow.

Incel ideology gives resentment an opportunity to be expressed in a particular way; justifies the resentment; and makes it alluring. In so doing, it promotes continued expression of it. And not only that: it makes resentment, which otherwise might be a peripheral and fleeting emotional state, into a central preoccupation.

Crucially, notice that the states of affairs that can give rise to resentment are quite widespread. Everyone experiences certain occasions on which they feel inefficacious, slighted, unable to act, or in doubt about whether their status is being acknowledged.<sup>21</sup> Incel ideology interacts with these tendencies, encouraging them to heighten rather than fade, to find new targets, and to seem justified. So the general point is that an ideology can be attractive to an individual with a certain psychological profile, even when that profile is just tentative, provisional, or inchoate. And it can draw out and exacerbate aspects of a person's psychology.<sup>22</sup>

By encouraging hateful or resentful reactions to a particular group, we transform aversive feelings of impotence and inefficacy into attractive feelings of superiority. But here's the problem: because the hatred is spiteful, the adherent of incel ideology becomes dependent on the hated object. The hated object can't really be eliminated or fully overcome, because its existence is necessary to sustain the expression of the hateful valuing and thereby to assuage the person's feelings of impotence. Were the incel to overcome his initial sexual frustration, for example, the underlying sense of disaffection would return, for the attainment of a sexual partner wouldn't extinguish the causes of suffering.

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<sup>19</sup> Helpful work on resentment includes Scheler 1994, Salmela and Scheve 2018, Reginster 2021, Huddleston 2021, Salmela and Capelos 2021, and Capelos et al 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Resentment may involve additional features. For example, Salmela and Capelos 2021 discuss the way in which it transforms the person's self-conception: "the self is transmuted in resentment" (2021: 194) in a way that involves "ego-fragmentation" (2021: 198): the person is split into two "selves," one impotent and hidden, the other valorized and typically sustained by social interactions with like-minded peers. Reginster 2021 claims that it necessarily involves a feeling of diminished self-worth. Nietzsche seems to claim that it necessarily involves a feeling of impotence (see Katsafanas forthcoming). Scheler 1994 claims that it involves a desire to retaliate. I do not aim to defend a full-fledged account of resentment, but simply to list some of its central features.

<sup>21</sup> See Salmela and Capelos 2021, who argue that resentment transforms feelings such as shame, envy, inefficacious anger, powerlessness, and inferiority into a morally righteous sense of victimhood.

<sup>22</sup> These tendencies may be quite widespread. For example, Wendy Brown 1995 argues that they are pervasive in modern culture.

We can distinguish this from an interpretation that merely elicits ordinary hatred. Traditional sexual morality will periodically elicit those kinds of feelings. We can imagine a jilted lover who comes to hate his partner because of her infidelity. But that form of hatred, the hatred of someone who wrongs you, can culminate in restitution: this could involve forgiveness, dissolution of the relationship, or other outcomes. There need be no attempt to preserve the wound, to dwell on the damage, to forestall restitution.

The resentment-fueling interpretation, on the other hand, generates a different kind of attachment. Call interpretations of this form *narratives of resentment*. Narratives of resentment have the functional role of stoking resentment. They identify a generalized (and often diffuse or inchoate) aversive condition and offer an interpretation of it that renders it attractive. By rendering that state attractive, they also heighten it, making it a central preoccupation. So they take an initially diffuse, peripheral, or ambiguous state and encourage the agent to experience it more often and more centrally, for it to become a fixation or preoccupation.

Resentment narratives tend to become all encompassing, for they treat the central failings of one's life as traceable to some singular root cause. One's identity is seen as fundamentally damaged or wounded by some other. The injury, damage, or wound is not just some past causal factor which is eventually overcome; it provides a central, continuous focal point. So the process of expressing resentment becomes central to the person's life. One's identity becomes bound up with the expression of resentment toward some object; one defines oneself partly in this way. And this makes it hard to escape or change. To the extent that one's perspective on the world is in this way all-encompassing and fixated, breaking out of it requires not just local adjustments but abandoning classifications, distinctions, and beliefs that create larger upheavals in the perspective.

In short: through resentment narratives, fear, suffering, insecurity, and anxiety are transformed into other-directed spiteful hatred; and identities that promote an impotent sense of self are transformed into identities that enable a vindictory self-conception.<sup>23</sup>

In a peculiar way, then, resentment narratives make the *object* of hatred less important than the *expression* of hatred. The object is relatively fungible: it can be a particular woman ("Stacies"), women in general ("femoids"), men ("chads"), widespread social norms (people who are "bluepilled"), even incels who manage to attain sexual relationships (men who "ascend").<sup>24</sup> Or consider extremist news organizations, which continuously find new objects for scorn and hatred: immigrants, trans rights, covid precautions, environmental regulations, and the list goes on. New objects can be substituted for old ones, for what's really assuaging anxieties about impotence, what's really doing the work, is the ability to manifest a vengeful orientation.

Because there are always new occasions for thwarted willing, for suffering, for powerlessness, a narrative that assuages these anxieties by focusing the agent on one particular object is less

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<sup>23</sup> While I am not committed to the details of their account, I thus agree with Salmela and Capelos 2021, who understand resentment as an affective mechanism that transforms the values and identity of a person.

<sup>24</sup> Incels use the terminology noted above. A *Stacy* is a conventionally attractive woman who (accordingly to incels) exploits this attractiveness in order to manipulate men. A *femoid* is a derogatory term, a shortened version of "female humanoid," that typically carries connotations of women being less than fully human. A *chad* is a conventionally attractive, sexually successful man; the term is typically used in ways that express either derision or envy. To be *bluepilled* is to accept conventional beliefs and live in ignorance of the incel revelations. To *ascend* is to end one's involuntary celibacy by having sex with someone.



sustainable than a more open-ended narrative with fungible objects. One enemy or one object can be dealt with, at least in principle; and if it is, the coping mechanism is no longer available. But resentment, being rooted in spiteful hatred, persists. If one object is eliminated, it looks for new ones. So, perhaps surprisingly, there's a strong motivation to maintain the sense of grievance rather than rectifying it.

With that in mind, I think we can distinguish three forms of aggrivement. Suppose we distinguish identities that are formed and sustained through a sense of victimhood; those that are formed and sustained through ordinary hatred; and those that are formed and sustained through resentment or spiteful hatred. It's possible, and in some cases perfectly appropriate, to see oneself primarily as a victim of some injustice. For example, we can imagine oppressed individuals correctly perceiving themselves as oppressed, feeling victimized by this, and accordingly incorporating this into their self-conceptions. It's also possible, and in some cases perfectly appropriate, to form an identity rooted in hated: an oppressed person, victimized by his society, might be justified in hating either the social structures that preserve the oppression or the people who, deliberately or through indifference, maintain these social structures.<sup>25</sup> But in both of these cases we can at least imagine a path to restitution: the identity can be (though it needn't be) rooted in some ideal that doesn't depend on the maintenance of these forms of damage. It can be rooted, for example, in ideals such as equality, freedom, or mutual respect. But an identity rooted in resentment or spiteful hatred would be different. Insofar as the identity is not just accidentally but essentially tethered to the activity of damaging, harming, or condemning, the elimination of one target will require the agent to find some new target.<sup>26</sup>

This is clearest when the putative wrongs are wholly imaginary. Contemporary examples include certain hate groups, such as the incel movement.<sup>27</sup> The prototypical member of the incel movement

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<sup>25</sup> There are important differences in the formal objects of anger and hatred. On some accounts, anger transforms into hatred when the target is perceived as immoral, malicious, or unwilling to change their offensive behavior. See, for example, Fischer et al 2018; Szanto 2018; Salice and Salmela 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Wendy Brown argues that oppressed groups are at risk of defining their identities solely in terms of oppression (Brown 1995). A "wounded attachment," to use her term, is a conception of oneself that is founded on a sense of victimhood. Your identity is understood as having been created by wounding, by oppression, or by other forms of harm that cuts you off from attaining the ideal; but, insofar as the wound or oppression is seen as an *essential* ingredient of your identity, your identity can only exist insofar as you are wounded. This creates an incentive to maintain the injury rather than to seek genuine ways of alleviating it (Brown 1995: 70). Brown's argument might seem to give us a way of marking out negative orientations: why not just equate negative orientations with wounded attachments? There are three reasons for resisting this move. First, my account of negative orientations is broader than Brown's account of wounded attachments: while feelings of oppression can catalyze the movement toward negative orientations, so too can any kind of dissatisfaction or disaffection. Second, while I agree with Brown that some people become invested in their own impotence or subjugation, the processes that I described above are far broader than this. Some of these mechanisms generate real, rather than only imagined, power. For example, incels might, and in some communities do, become dominant and thereby enjoy actual power. Yet they will still be motivated to find outlets for their spiteful hatred. What motivates the continual expression of spiteful hatred need not be an investment in a wounded identity or an investment in maintaining a sense of oneself as oppressed. It can be, instead, an identity rooted in spiteful hatred. And that brings us to the third point of disagreement: what's crucial is the continuous expression of spiteful hatred, which can become detached from any feelings of impotence and can persist even in the most powerful.

<sup>27</sup> Do extremist and fanatical movements always involve negative orientations? This is a complex question and I lack the space to address it in depth. However, I note that the answer turns, in part, on how we analyze the concepts of extremism and fanaticism. For example, Cassam 2022 allows for extremism (but not fanaticism) to be positively

is the disaffected, alienated, socially frustrated white male. Imagine an isolated young man who has experienced social rejection, who has failed at his pursuits, who is anxious and alone. And imagine he encounters the incel terminology and narrative, which presents his plight not as his own fault, but as the fault of those who illegitimately deprive him of sex, social status, and esteem. Latching on to this narrative corrects his plight, enabling him to think of himself as the victim of unjust social norms; it excuses his faults, projecting them outward, onto those he can resent. But notice that even if some of these putative wrongs are corrected—let’s suppose he receives some measure of social esteem from his incel peers, for example, or finds some sexual partner—there’s a tendency to find new ways in which he’s being wronged. For if these wrongs were completely addressed, the compensatory mechanism of transmuting disaffection into spiteful hatred would be blocked.

A second example is what is sometimes called the *politics of resentment* or *grievance politics*, which is exemplified by political commentators like Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carlson. Take Carlson: he hosted a Fox News show from 2016 to 2023 and, after being fired, created a new show on Twitter. Carlson’s programs have a standard format: present real America as under threat by an assortment of enemies, which varies week by week but includes immigrants, covid vaccines, environmental regulations, trans people, feminism, women, voting machines, liberal elites, wokeness, communism, BLM, Ukraine supporters, and so on. Carlson uses apocalyptic rhetoric, presenting traditional American values as under dire threat. He frequently endorses conspiracy theories and suggests that those with contrary political views are malicious or evil. By manufacturing a sense of aggrieved outrage, Carlson promotes and sustains resentment in his followers.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

I began by examining the claim that certain individuals and certain political ideologies can be seen as primarily negative, whereas others can be seen as primarily positive. I argued that it’s difficult to make sense of that claim if we focus merely on the etiologies or the contents of evaluative judgments. However, if we examine the psychological role of valuing, things become clearer. While all valuing induce some negative stances toward things that threaten, oppose, or undermine the valued object, there is a difference between valuing that are grounded in a form of hatred and those that are grounded in a form of love. Hate and love have many things in common but are not symmetrical: loving something does not commit you to hating that which opposes it or is contrary to it; hating something does not commit you to loving its contrary. Moreover, in a particular kind of hatred (as in a particular kind of love), the hateful stance becomes more important than the hated

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oriented; Battaly 2023 allows some types of fanaticism to be positively oriented; and Katsafanas 2022 and 2024 makes fanaticism negatively oriented.

<sup>28</sup> A few examples: On September 22, 2021, he claimed that Biden’s immigration policy is a “great replacement” (which refers to a right-wing, ethno-nationalist conspiracy theory) and is comparable to “eugenics.” In May 2021, he claimed that covid-19 vaccination was “the single deadliest mass vaccination event in modern history.” On September 20, 2021 he claimed that vaccine requirements in the US Military were designed to “identify the sincere Christians in the ranks, the free thinkers, the men with high testosterone levels, and anybody else who doesn’t love Joe Biden and make them leave immediately.” On March 6, 2023 he claimed that the insurrectionists who stormed the US Capitol “were orderly and meek. They were not insurrectionists. They were sightseers.” (This fit uneasily with his three part series entitled Patriot Purge, in which he claimed that the January 6 riot and insurrection was a “false flag” operation designed to undermine the Republican agenda.) On March 29, 2023 he claimed that trans people hate Christians; on October 4, 2023 his program claimed that trans people are “demented,” that gender-affirming care is comparable to “human sacrifice,” that the US “officially engages” in “female genital mutilation,” and so on.

object. Insofar as the hateful stance plays a crucial role in the formation of the agent's identity, the hateful stance will tend to sustain itself, independently of changes in its original object.

But these are points at the level of individual psychology. How do they relate to group dynamics? How would the acceptance of an ideology, political stance, or narrative encourage one of these reactions? In the third section, I explored the way in which ideologies—understood not just as sets of discrete evaluative judgments but as also involving interpretations or narratives with several key features—can elicit, foster, and encourage certain emotions and self-conceptions while suppressing or impeding others.<sup>29</sup> One such narrative, embedded in incel ideology, is a resentment narrative. When resentment narratives are accepted, they generate a spiteful form of hatred that is to some extent detached from its object, and which primarily motivates the continuous expression of the hateful or resentful state. We then have an identity of resentment.

With all of this in place, we can answer our original question. Ideologies (and individual psychologies) are negatively oriented when their central focus is on *damaging* some object, typically a group, that is seen as reprehensible. This propensity to damage is often rooted in a compensatory mechanism that transforms diffuse feelings of powerlessness and suffering into spiteful hatred, and thereby enables the person to feel powerful and excuses her from any responsibility for her own plight. Ideologies (and individual psychologies) are positive when their central focus is on revering or loving some object, so that the typical mode of interaction is one not of damage but of esteem, protection, sustenance, aspiration, and so on. These positive ideologies may involve bearing negative attitudes toward various things, but these negative attitudes needn't become central focal points and, even if they do, needn't manifest spiteful hatred.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, the relationship between ideologies and emotions likely involves feedback loops: just as ideologies encourage certain emotions and self-conceptions, so too emotions and self-conceptions are likely to encourage the acceptance of certain ideologies.

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