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What are emotional mechanisms?[1]

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Abstract

The article offers an account of emotional mechanisms (EMs). EMs are claimed to be personal, often unconscious, distinctively patterned, mental processes whereby an emotion of a given kind is transmuted into an emotion of a different kind. After preliminary considerations about emotions as felt evaluations, the paper identifies three families of emotional mechanisms. These processes are set in motion when a given emotion (e.g., envy, shame, or anger) generates feelings of inferiority and/or impotence in the subject resulting in a negative sense of self. These feelings prompt an evaluative reappraisal of the emotion's intentional target. Based on the reappraisal, the subject comes to feel a different kind of emotion, which does not generate feelings of inferiority and/or impotence. Importantly, the second emotion entails a psychological disposition to be collectivized: the subject seeks for confirmation of the revised evaluation by sharing the emotion with others. It is argued that these features set EMs apart from other emotion regulatory processes.

Keywords: affective intentionality, feelings of inferiority and impotence, emotional mechanism, emotion regulation, emotions, *Ressentiment*.

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0. Introduction

Our emotional life changes and varies constantly. Sometimes, one emotion is replaced by another because the subject has acquired new information about the world: if a loud and sudden sound scares you, but you then realize that the sound indicates no threat, your fear is replaced by relief. Sometimes, a subject can regulate his or her emotions (Gross 1998): for instance, to mitigate the nervousness caused by the cry of a toddler in the backseat, you redirect the focus of your attention to the beautiful scenery in your destination. In this process, you consciously regulate your original emotion by moving your attention away from its trigger: the tension is now replaced by radiant expectation.

We come back to these relations between emotions, but it is important to highlight already now that they differ from the emotional transmutation investigated in this article. One notorious example of this transmutation is narrated in Aesop's tale "The Fox and The Grapes." After observing a crow eating grapes on the branch of a vine, the fox desires to eat them as well. The fox tries to reach them, but they hang too high. As the fox goes away, it is heard saying: 'Oh, the grapes aren't even ripe yet! I don't need sour grapes. Poor crow, who has to eat them'." Here the fox's envy of the crow is transformed into commiseration (although commiseration is not the only possible outcome of the transformative process involving envy).

One significant trait of the sour grapes scenario is that the transmutation of one emotion (envy) into another (commiseration) is not based on the acquisition of new information. The fox experiences commiseration for the crow not because it has apprehended something new about the grapes. Rather, one emotion is transmuted into another because of an operation of the mind that runs "behind the back" of the subject (Elster 1999: 332). This operation, we claim, is a revision in evaluation: the grapes, originally evaluated as sweet, are later evaluated as sour. This evaluative reconsideration enables the transition from one emotion to the other. Because no new information has been secured

by the fox, commiseration has not simply replaced envy (as relief replaced fear in the example above). Furthermore, this revision is a personal-level process, which—although it may become conscious—is initiated unconsciously, and which must last for an extended period of time to be fully efficacious.[2] Partly also because of these two features, the process does not qualify as a case of emotion regulation (hereafter: "ER") either. As we will see below (subsection 3.3.), ER may be either explicit or implicit (Koole & Rothermund 2011). When explicit, ER is a process that is typically short-lived and consciously controlled (Gross 1998). When implicit, ER still presupposes a conscious onset of reappraisal which may become unconscious only in subsequent steps of the process (Braunstein et al. 2017). But then, what sort of emotional process does the tale capture?

This article aims at providing an account of this peculiar process. For this purpose, we adopt the concept of "emotional mechanism [hereafter: "EMs"]," originally coined by Jon Elster in his *Alchemies of the Mind* (1999) where he seeks to unveil the structure of several emotional mechanisms. While Elster does not offer a unified account of what makes an emotional process a mechanism, we believe that his (earlier) concept of mechanisms can be applied in this context: "A mechanism explains by opening up the black box and showing the cogs and wheels of the internal machinery. A mechanism provides a continuous and contiguous chain of causal or intentional links between the *explanans* and the *explanandum.*" (Elster 1989: 25). This characterisation is consistent with a more recent definition of mechanism, according to which "a mechanism for a phenomenon consists of entities and activities organized in such a way that they are responsible for the phenomenon" (Illari

[2] We distinguish personal from sub-personal processes. While the former processes can be conscious or unconscious, sub-personal processes cannot be brought to conscious awareness.

& Williamson 2010: 120).[3] Accordingly, emotional mechanisms explain transformations of discrete emotions into other specific emotions by showing the process that leads to transformations of this kind; their constituent elements; and their mutual relationship. We suggest that emotional transformations of this kind qualify as mechanisms because there are specific initiating states and end states whose temporal and interpersonal regularity calls for an explanation. This is unlike ER where emotional transformations are open-ended both in terms of their initiating states (five entry points in Gross' 1998 model) and their end states of resulting emotions (more on differences between EM and ER in subsection 3.3).

As we elaborate below, the mechanism is triggered by discrete emotions that, in being fueled by associated feelings of impotence/inferiority, acquire negative hedonic qualities. While, generally, the subject has the possibility to implement avoidance strategies to eliminate or, at least, mitigate the harm inflicted by negative emotions to the self, these strategies are not readily available for the emotions that typically prompt emotional mechanisms (e.g., envy, shame, or anger). These emotions are socially improper (envy, shame) or humiliating when they are inefficacious in achieving a purported change -- possibly emerging from a power difference between the agents -- in other´s behavior (anger) and, usually, they unfold in a social context: on the one hand, avoidance is not possible in many social situations; on the other, the subject cannot express them or act on them because they are socially stigmatizing or their subject feels impotent in the situation.

[3] Yet another concept of mechanism applicable to EMs is the *action-formation mechanism* of Hedström and Swedberg, for whom "this type of mechanism shows how a specific combination of individual desires, beliefs, and action opportunities generate a specific action" (1998: 23). Analogously, the combination of individual states in EMs consists of specific emotions experienced in certain conditions; feelings associated with these emotions; and a reappraisal, that together lead to a transformation of the original emotion into another emotion.

To discard the negative sense of self fostered by these emotions, the subject strives to modify the appraisal at the basis of the emotion (the evaluation of the grapes from sweet to sour). The new evaluation enables the subject to discard the original emotion by replacing it with a new one that does not generate dissonance (commiseration at the crow). In this sense, EMs are also "coping mechanisms": not only do they explain how the initiating emotion is causally linked to the end emotion, but also how the mechanism is a form of defence unconsciously enacted by the subject to preserve their positive sense of self vis-à-vis the threat posed by the given situation.

We consider lack of discussion on EMs to be a gap in emotion research as well as in analytic sociology. We turn to this task in the third and last section of the paper. Before doing so, the first section offers a quick introduction to the understanding of emotions that informs our account. The second section introduces three families of emotional processes. Because these processes are claimed to share the same structural features, they deserve a technical term to distinguish them from the other emotional processes hinted at in this introduction. Finally, the third section identifies four features that all EM's typically share.

1. What are emotions?

If one aims at understanding EMs, one should have some understanding of their building blocks, i.e., of emotions. This section briefly introduces the general theory of emotion that grounds our account of EMs. Although this theory meshes philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories of emotions, we are not claiming to provide an exhaustive account of emotions as we will focus on those aspects of emotions that are particularly important for the understanding of EMs.

First, emotions are mental episodes with an intentional structure.[4] More precisely, they are felt evaluations with a target, a formal object, and a focus (Goldie 2000, Helm 2010). Suppose you face a rabid dog, aggressively barking at you. You come to feel an emotion of fear, which has the dog as its target or intentional object. In addition to targeting the dog, the emotion also evaluates the dog as dangerous, where "being a danger" points to a value property (or to the emotion's formal object, Kenny 2003)[5]. Typically, each emotion type correlates with (or is sensitive to) a specific formal object: fear to danger, pride to excellence, indignation to moral injustice, etc. Finally, your emotion of fear is made intelligible by the fact that you have a concern for your well-being: the focus of concern is the element that, by relating to the target, renders a given emotional episode intelligible. Note that the concern must not necessarily be on the subject of the emotion: if the dog is attacking your child and you feel fear, your emotion is made intelligible by the fact that you have a concern for your child.

Based on these distinctions, it becomes possible to identify a class of emotions, which will play an important role in our account of EMs: the class of self-conscious emotions. For instance, emotions like shame, envy, or pride belong to this class. Their specific feature is that they have a predetermined intentional object, as it were: the emoting self. In shame, the subject evaluates him- or herself negatively, e.g., as deficient or as a failure. In envy, too, the subject evaluates him- or herself

[4] Episodic emotions are just one kind of affective phenomena. We leave open how other affective phenomena (especially, sentiments and moods) should be described and whether they can be accounted for in the same way as episodic emotions.

[5] Occasionally, the paper will make use of an axiological terminology (value properties, values, etc.) to qualify the formal object of emotions. However, we are non-committal about the metaphysical status of these properties and nothing in the following arguments hinges on realism (or anti-realism) about values.

negatively—as inferior vis à vis the owner of a coveted good (Salice & Montes Sánchez 2019). Note that this is not to say that some emotions, which are not self-conscious, cannot be directed towards the self: in certain conditions, you might be afraid of yourself or hate yourself. Yet, fear or hatred are not self-conscious emotions because they do not necessarily target their subject—they do so only contingently.

The idea that emotions are felt evaluations can also be formulated in terms of emotions involving appraisals (e.g. Scherer 2009). Many psychologists argue that emotions have several components: appraisals, changes in ANS (autonomous nervous system) and other physiological changes, action tendencies, and subjective feelings. Appraisals are primary in the sense that they elicit and modulate the other components of emotional response during its unfolding. Thus, appraisals give rise to physiological changes in the autonomic nervous system such as increased heart rate and blood pressure in fear, which prepare the subject to act in a certain manner, such as to escape from the danger in fear. Finally, emotions involve subjective feelings that face both inwards and outwards: their basis is in the physiological and motoric changes that are part of emotion, but they also infuse our intentional representations of particular objects in the world, giving rise to our subjectively experienced "felt evaluations" (Goldie 2000; Salmela 2002).

Finally, emotions are not solipsistic phenomena confined by the physical bodies of subjects. Sociologists have argued that emotions are dynamically related to the subject's environment and, especially, to his or her *social* environment, being regulated in accordance with social and cultural feeling and display rules (Hochschild 1983). For instance, in many cultures, shame is an emotion that should not be expressed because it reveals the subject's negative self-evaluation, which is considered to be as a sign of weakness (see e.g. Markus & Kitayama 1991).

It merits attention that studies on socio-cultural feeling rules have articulated the notion of "emotional dissonance." In this literature, emotional dissonance denotes a discrepancy between the felt and the expressed emotion (being a defining feature of emotional labour; see Hochschild 1983). A classic example of emotional dissonance is an irritated cabin attendant, who smiles when welcoming the passengers on the plane. In this case, the subject experiences a particular emotion or mood, while displaying a different one in public; or experiences no emotion or mood, while displaying one in public. We dwell on this notion because the expression of "emotional dissonance" will figure prominently in our account of EMs. However, it should be emphasized already now that this expression is defined in a different way within this article (see subsection 3.2.). To anticipate, we define emotional dissonance as an hedonically negative phenomenon, which derives from the sense of impotence or powerlessness elicited by the (perceived) inability to (i) act upon the action tendencies of an emotion or (ii) to express the emotion if this is socio-culturally stigmatized.[6]

2. What emotional processes qualify as emotional mechanisms?

In this section, we describe three families of emotional processes. We talk of "families of processes" because some of them tolerate a certain degree of variance within themselves. To put this another way, we will show that it is possible for two processes to be different in some important respect, while still qualifying as members of the same family of EM (provided they fulfill the conditions we highlight below).

[6] Our reason for retaining the expression (but not the concept) of "emotional dissonance" lies in the idea that, just as cognitive dissonance emerges when consistency among cognitive attitudes is disrupted (Festinger 1957), so emotional dissonance emerges when consistency among affective attitudes is disrupted.

Although we focus on three families of emotional processes, we are not claiming that they exhaust the full spectrum of EMs. Quite the contrary: we are open to the possibility that there might be other processes, which fulfil the conditions spelled out in section 3 and which should be qualified as EMs (so, e.g., we will not discuss emotional mechanisms involving guilt, or emotional mechanisms involving collective emotions such as collective shame and pride). The reason why we focus on these three families is that their existence is already supported by a large body of literature. Yet, importantly, this literature, despite its merits in describing the nature of these processes, has not investigated them under the same heading, i.e., from the perspective of what makes them instances of emotional mechanisms (because the literature lacks a solid account of such mechanisms).

One last remark before embarking in the discussion of EMs. We recognise the inherent *sociality* of emotions – i.e., the fact that they do not emerge within the individual as much as they emerge between individuals (Burkitt 2002). Relatedly, we also recognise that, in ordinary social interaction, emotions and their expressions have the function of influencing the behaviors and emotions of others to whom they are targeted (see e.g. Griffiths & Scarantino 2009; an often used example is anger in marital quarrels, where partners readily express their anger to each other in order to influence the behavior of the other). Against this background, it is important to emphasise that our analysis of EMs is premised on the idea that the function of emotions to influence the behaviours and emotions of others is truncated in EMs. This assumption is grounded in the fact that the subject does *not* act out--or even express--the emotion they feel, because the relevant emotional expressions are repressed by the subject. Because the subject keeps the other in the dark about their emotional turmoil, the behavior of the other in EMs is *not* influenced by their emotions. Accordingly, the other's behavior does not change in situations giving rise to EMs as a consequence of the subject's emotional experience.

Emotional Mechanism 1 (EM 1)

The first family of processes has envy as its primer. This family has at least two members insofar as envy can lead to two different emotional outcomes. The following is a general formulation that captures the two processes:

- In *t* person P envies rival R, meaning that P desires a good G owned by R. P's emotion of envy is subsequently (in *t'*) transformed into (**1**) resentment (or indignation) at R, or (**2**) commiseration (or disdain).[7]

First, processes of this kind have been widely investigated in the literature under the label of *ressentiment* (Nietzsche 1889; Scheler 1961; Elster 1999; Demertzis 2020; Aeschbach 2017; Salmela & Capelos 2021). Importantly, this literature acknowledges the possibility of envy leading to different emotional outcomes. So, for instance, Aeschbach focuses on (1), when he writes: "*ressentiment* is the very mechanism that transmutes envy into moral emotions such as resentment and indignation." (Aeschbach 2017, 69). In Scheler, among others, one can find support for (2): "*ressentiment* has brought deliverance from the inner torment of these affects [like envy]. Once the sense of values has shifted and the new judgments have spread, such people cease to be enviable […]. They are unfortunate and to be pitied, for they are beset with 'evils.' Their sight now awakens feelings of gentleness, pity, and commiseration." (Scheler 1961, 26)

[7] Roughly, we consider *envy* to be an emotion where the other is the target of hostility in virtue of a good coveted by the envious subject (see Salice & Montes Sánchez 2019). *Resentment* is a reactive attitude whereby the other is blamed as the author of an unjust deed (often directed towards the subject). And *commiseration* is a participatory attitude where the other is pro-socially attended to in virtue of an injustice inflicted upon them.

Second, Scheler's quote points to the element that accounts for the two different forms of the mechanism (on which we elaborate in the next section): the mechanism necessitates a revision in evaluation and, depending on the target of the re-evaluation, the process can terminate in one or the other emotional outcome. To be more precise: on the one hand, the evaluative revision may concern the rival of envy. If P comes to the idea that R has acquired G in an unjust manner (while valuing G positively), P bestows R with negative moral properties. This grounds the first form of the process whereby envy is transmuted into resentment or indignation. On the other hand, the evaluative revision may concern the good G. To come back to the example in the introduction, P (the fox) deprives G (the grapes) of their positive value, which is what enables envy to be transmuted into commiseration for R (the crow). Finally, it is worth noting that resentment and commiseration may also be different consecutive stages in the same mechanism, where inefficacious resentment (i.e. resentment that cannot be expressed or acted out) subsequently transforms into either commiseration or disdain.

Emotional Mechanism 2 (EM 2)

Many theorists of *ressentiment* highlight envy as the primary trigger of that process. However, they usually do not exclude the possibility for *ressentiment* to be prompted by other emotions. Another candidate primer of *ressentiment* is another self-conscious emotion; shame. (Salmela & von Scheve 2017, Salmela & Capelos 2021).

- In *t* person P feels ashamed but represses this emotion. P's emotion of shame is subsequently (in *t'*) transformed into anger towards (**1**) person R that P blames for shaming him or her or towards (**2**) a group K.[8]

For example, Hejdenberg and Andrews observed that criticism and put-downs of others are "typical triggers of shame, especially if the criticised individual accepts the negative evaluation or if an undesired aspect of the self has been revealed to others" (2011: 1281). An angry response to criticism often is a defence strategy to deflect shame that threatens the social rank and ego of the subject. Just as for the previous mechanism, so here, too, the formulation captures two different forms of the process—one, which operates at the individual level, and another one that involves a group. We suggest that the former is more prevalent when shame is not intensely repressed to the effect that the subject is aware of his or her emotion as well as the situation in which it emerged. This allows the subject to detect an agent who is blamed for—actually or imaginatively—shaming him or her, or for some kind of wrongful action that made the subject fail. This form of the mechanism requires that shame is experienced before blaming the other for shaming the person and that, therefore, the subject consciously acknowledges the emotion.

By contrast, the latter case (anger directed at a group) is more prevalent in situations where the repression of shame is particularly severe, possibly because it is felt in several domains of life. The result is that shame becomes unrecognizable to the subject, and the context(s) in which this emotion was originally felt is lost. This allows the projection of the emerging hostility to any social group that is perceived as having wronged the subject in one way or another. In this form of the mechanism,

[8] Roughly, we consider shame to be a self-conscious emotion revealing to the subject that they have not been able to live up to certain standards (Deonna et al. 2012). Anger, by contrast, is the general label of a broad family of emotions which target the other as the author of a misdeed (of some sort).

shame is repressed before it is fully experienced, whereby the type and context of the emotion remain unrecognized to the subject (Lewis 1971; Scheff 1994).[9] What is felt are negative feelings about the self whose origin is vaguely perceived to be outside of the self. As Scheler (1961, 22) observes: "Repression does not only stretch, change, and shift the original object, it also affects the *emotion itself*. Since the affect cannot outwardly express itself, it becomes active within. Detached from their original objects, the affects melt together into a venomous mass", an intense negative affect whose intentionality is blurred. This negative affect can then be targeted towards various others (generally merged into a group), identified as "enemies" of the self.

The shame-anger mechanism is well known in the literature (although the distinction of two forms thereof is rarely mentioned). For instance, Lewis identified "shame-anger spirals" in marital quarrels (Lewis 1971). This analysis has been applied by Scheff to international conflicts and wars such as the outbreaks of WWI and WWII (Scheff 1994). Similarly, Turner applies psychoanalytic theories of shame-induced anger to genocides and mass killings (Turner 2007). In addition, Tangney & Dearing (2003) discuss their own and others' research on the link between shame and other-directed hostility and, more recently, Hejdenberg & Andrews (2011) found that shame-proneness associates with the tendency to respond with anger to criticism of the self.

[9] These theorists of *unacknowledged shame* do not offer hypotheses on how an emotion that has not been fully experienced can be repressed. However, they establish a link between this type of shame and recurrent situations. We therefore suggest an explanation based on associative learning. If one has felt shame previously in a situation, one learns to anticipate that one will experience shame in similar situations in the future. Therefore, when those situations occur, the emerging shame can be repressed before it is fully experienced.

What do these two forms of the process have in common? Start with the idea that shame is an emotion of the worthless, the paralyzed, the ineffective, whereas anger can be described as an emotion of potency and authority. The transition from shame to anger in both forms of the mechanism relies on a reappraisal of the subject of the emotion: from worthless and impotent to authoritative and potent. This reappraisal impacts the intentional structure of emotion, where a self-conscious emotion (shame) is transformed into a other-directed emotion (anger). The phenomenology of shame involves a heightened awareness of others' (presumed) critical evaluations of the self, which makes it relatively easy to reconfigure the emotion's intentional structure by turning it into a form of blaming others for the pain of shame. Accordingly, anger may develop into an entrenched coping strategy to deal with and avoid shame (see e.g. Thomason 2018).

Emotional Mechanism 3 (EM 3)

Whilst the previous two processes are set in motion by a self-conscious emotion (envy and shame, respectively), the third has anger (which is not a self-conscious emotion) as its trigger. The process can be described as follows:

- Person P reacts in t with anger at a wrongdoing performed by person R against P. P's emotion of anger towards R is subsequently (in *t'*) transformed into hatred towards (**1**) R or (**2**) group K of which R is a member.[10]

[10] We have already offered a characterization of anger in relation to EM 2. We consider hatred to be an hostile emotion which targets the other (aiming at their annihilation) in light of the other's (perceived) evilness.

Several studies have been devoted to the process operating at the group-level. Intractable conflicts, e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have been reported as cases where anger transmutes into hatred (e.g., Halperin 2008). Interestingly, Fischer et al., (2018) argues that, in intractable conflicts, collective narratives are dominated by the memory of past victimization and ongoing intergroup violence (see also Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Vollhardt 2012). This is a plausible reason why collective victimhood can induce sharing one's hatred with similar others (Szanto 2019): hatred is often presented as an emotion that generalizes its target from individuals to social categories and groups of persons who possess the same property (e.g. ethnicity, social status, gender).

Interestingly, it has been claimed that "repeated episodes of anger, in which badness is ascribed to the object on account of culpable misdeeds, may lead to hatred by a kind of accumulation and abstraction: The badness of the object gets distilled from his offenses and acquires the independence and perduration of a personal essence" (Roberts 2003: 251). Partly based on similar considerations, it has been argued that the anger-hate mechanism can occur at the individual level (Salice 2021, Kolnai 2007, Brudholm *forthcoming*), where the other is hated not as member of representative of a group, but as the individual (evil) person he or she is.

Common to both types of hatred seems to be that the transformation of anger into hatred occurs through consecutive instances of anger and this facilitates a change in the appraisal of the target. The target of anger is appraised as someone whose behavior can be influenced and changed, e.g., by criticism or punishment. However, repeated instances of anger that have no effect on the target's unjust or offensive behavior contribute to a change in the appraisal. With this reappraisal, the target is perceived as immoral, malicious, and incapable of change, which is the characteristic formal object of hatred (e.g. Fischer et al. 2018).

In this section, we have reviewed literature concerning three families of emotional processes. We now turn to the question whether all these processes have something in common, which -- if this is the case -- would allow their classification into a well-defined class—the class of emotional mechanisms. The next section claims that these three families of processes do fulfill (at least) four interrelated conditions.

3. What are emotional mechanisms?

In what follows, we devote a subsection to each of the four conditions that qualify a given emotional process as an EM. The four conditions are: (1) reappraisal, (2) emotional dissonance, (3) change in the emotional response, and (4) disposition of the emotional outcome to be collectivized.

3.1 Reappraisal

As suggested in the previous section, one element shared by all emotional mechanisms is a *reappraisal* of the intentional target of the original emotion. Crucially, this reappraisal is not motivated by new information acquired by the subject before or during the change of emotion. Moreover, the reappraisal typically is implicit and nonconscious as it arises with persistent repression of emotions eliciting feelings of inferiority and/or impotence (as we will argue in more detail below). More precisely, we can detect three kinds of reappraisals.

First, there is a reappraisal of the intentional *target* of emotion in the transmutations of envy into resentment (EM 1) and of anger into hatred (EM 3). In the former case, the rival R is perceived to have acquired the valued good G in an unjust manner, instead of merely possessing it wrongfully (which is typical of envy, Salice & Montes Sánchez 2019). In the latter case, there is a change from

evaluating the target as someone guilty of offensive or unjust behavior, but still responsive to moral criticism or punishment, into evaluating the target as immoral, malicious, and incapable of moral change.

EM 1 is a complex case because the intentional structure of envy is highly sophisticated: envy is not only about the self and the rival, it also is about the good G had by R. In fact, in EM 1 the reappraisal can also concern good G, in which case envy is transmuted into commiseration or disdain. More precisely, the subject devalues an object he or she is incapable of obtaining and instead upgrades an axiologically indifferent or inferior, but attainable object. Aeschbach (2017) characterizes this kind of value change as *weak ressentiment* insofar as it concerns the value of particular objects. Weak *ressentiment* is distinct from *strong ressentiment*, where the subject endorses a new value-hierarchy, which gives the inaccessible value a lower rank in comparison to an accessible value. However, the two forms of *ressentiment* reappraisal are related insofar as a re-evaluation of particular objects (such as particular grapes as "sour") paves way to a revision of one's order of rank between different values (such as "sourness" being better than "sweetness"). Moreover, both weak and strong *ressentiment* are forms of reappraising the value of an inaccessible good belonging to the target of emotion.

Finally, in EM 2 the transmutation of shame into anger relies on a reappraisal of the subject of the emotion, which necessitates a change in the intentional structure (and kind) of the original emotion. Here the intentional directedness of the emotion changes from the self to a particular other or others that are involved in the intentional structure of the original emotion, albeit not in target position. In the first form of EM 2, the other is part of the intentional structure of *acknowledged* shame as a perceived source of authoritative criticism of the self (even though the emotion is primarily about the self). Yet this role of the other allows the subject to construe his or her shame as emerging from the shaming activity of the other who becomes a legitimate target of anger, once the subject has reappraised him- or herself from worthless and impotent into authoritative and potent. An analogous

reappraisal sets in motion the second form of EM 2, where shame is repressed and experienced as negative feelings about the self with vague awareness of their origin outside of the self. Here the reappraisal changes both in the intentionality and the type of the affect from negative feelings about the self into hostility towards others whose identity is specified depending on available targets.

If we cannot explain the reappraisal in EMs with reference to the subject's access to new information that would justify a revised evaluation of the situation, how could we understand these changes in emotion? Elster (2010, 226) conjectures that all "transmutations serve to bolster the *amour-propre* of the agent", a form of self-love that depends on the recognition of others (Salice 2020). Indeed, it seems that all EMs manipulate evaluations with the goal of allowing the subject to feel better about him- or herself.[11] EMs are then psychological strategies to cope with negative emotions about the self. This is also the core feature of *ressentiment* according to Aeschbach, who argues that *ressentiment* "is best understood as a psychological mechanism that manipulates evaluations in a certain way with the goal of feeling better about oneself" (Aeschbach (2017, 10). However, what is it that, in the experience of envy, shame, and inefficacious anger (and possibly other emotions), hurts us so much that it drives us to revise evaluations in order to get rid of those emotions? Here we

[11] While this claim may be evident for EM 1 and EM 2, it could be puzzling in relation to EM 3. Why hating someone instead of being angry at them makes the subject feel better about him- or herself? We suggest two answers to this question, while recognizing that the viability and threshold of EM 3 may depend on cultural emotion norms relating to the appropriateness of hate and forgiveness, respectively. First, hatred boosts and consolidates the subject's sense of moral superiority vis-à-vis its target (the target has not simply done something wrong, as anger signals, the target is evil): hating gives meaning to the self. Second, hatred does not have to be satisfied by actions performed by the hater: any harm occurred to the target (regardless who has inflicted it, how this has been inflicted, etc.) has the power to satisfy the hater (see Salice 2021).

introduce our notion of "emotional dissonance" that—to repeat—differs from the one applied in research on emotional labour.

3.2. Emotional dissonance

By "emotional dissonance" we mean *a hedonically negative state defined as a sense of inferiority or impotence/powerlessness*, *elicited by the subject's (perceived) inability to (i) act upon the inherent action tendencies of the emotion, or (ii) express the emotion if this is socio-culturally stigmatized, or both.* These negative feelings of inferiority and/or impotence give rise to a *negative sense of the self*, and together these motivate reappraisal processes in EMs. We argue that the phenomenology of envy, shame, and inefficacious anger is similar to the extent of giving rise to negative feelings and perceptions of this kind.

First, in EM 1 envy may be saturated not only by the subject's perceived inability to act upon the action tendencies of the emotion, but also by the inability to express this emotion in social situations. Feelings of inferiority and impotence in comparison to the rival are the most salient aspect of the phenomenology of envy (Salice & Montes Sánchez 2019). These feelings emerge from the rival's possession of a good that the subject of envy feels incapable of either obtaining him- or herself, or destroying, thereby "detracting" it from the rival, to use Scheler's expression. Moreover, the expression of envy is stigmatized, especially, in Western societies (where Christian culture considers it a capital sin): even if we cannot avoid feeling it, we should not express it in public as it conveys an unfavorable impression on us as individuals who covet some goods of others we feel incapable of acquiring. Envy and the associated feelings of inferiority are also sources of shame as Aeschbach (2017, 61) points out.

Second, in EM 2 shame, similarly to envy, has an evaluative focus on the self, accompanied by feelings of inferiority. Shame implies a failure of the self in a fundamental sense in living up to, or even minimally exemplifying, a core personal value that often is shared with others (Deonna et al. 2012; Salmela 2019). Shame associates with feelings of powerlessness as well, for the predicament in which shame is felt is perceived as inescapable, at least in the emotion-eliciting situation. Another source for feelings of powerlessness in shame may be the thwarting of its action tendency to hide away from the critical "look" of others (Sartre 1964). When shame emerges in a social situation, it is often difficult or impossible to hide from others. Finally, shame perhaps even more so than envy is a stigmatized emotion in Western cultures with an independent view of the self (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Accordingly, shame is framed and felt as a deviant, despised, and socially undesirable, and therefore as inexpressible emotion that is associated with weakness, inferiority, low status, and defeat (Lewis 1995; Walker 2014). These negative implications on the self are the main reason why we are motivated to repress shame.

Finally, in EM 3 inefficacious anger is infused by negative feelings about the self, which focus on the subject's powerlessness and impotence in influencing another person's or group's behavior experienced as wrongful or offensive, or in expressing and acting upon this emotion. An angry subject takes himself to occupy a morally higher ground in comparison to the other. Therefore, it is highly frustrating and degrading to express and act out anger towards a perpetrator who does not recognize anything wrong in his or her behavior, or even worse still, does not recognize the status of the other as a moral subject to whom one owes anything (see Salice 2021). Such denial of recognition adds an insult to the injury that inefficacious anger is not capable of remedying or correcting in the first place, thus amounting to a fundamental assault on the self.

As observed above, feelings of inferiority and/or impotence are important in the elicitation of emotional dissonance because they produce and maintain a negative view of the self, another common

feature of envy, shame, and inefficacious anger. Feelings of inferiority, by definition, involve a negative evaluation of the self in comparison to a rival or to one's own ideal self, as is the case in envy and shame, respectively. In inefficacious anger, the degrading (lack of) response of the other may give rise to feelings of inferiority even if such feelings are not part of the emotion itself. Aeschbach argues that there is an important connection between feelings of powerlessness and damaged self-worth: "to see that one is powerless to realise some type of value, quite irrespective of any interpersonal comparison, is enough to negatively affect one's sense of self-worth" (Aeschbach 2017, 82).

Finally, we propose that when the action tendency of *any* emotion is blocked due to feelings of powerlessness or impotence emerging from an anticipation that the action would fail or remain ineffective in improving the agent's situation, this gives rise to a negative view of the self, especially if personal concerns involved are important. At worst, inability to act in an adaptive manner in the emotion-eliciting situation results in a "loss of face" which is very painful to self.

3.3. Change in the emotional response (and how it differs from emotion regulation)

Once emotional dissonance has triggered a revision of the evaluation, the next step in the process of an emotional mechanism is a change in the subject's emotional response. The manipulation of evaluations underlying the new emotional response typically hinges on a change in the emotional evaluation of the target, but sometimes (as we illustrate below in relation to EM 1) it can also rest on a more fundamental change in the subject's long-term concerns with a subsequent change in emotional evaluation.

We can see a re-evaluation of the emotion's target with consequent change in the emotional response in all three examples of emotional mechanisms. In EM 1 with envy, the re-evaluation concerns the

agency of the rival. In envy, the rival is perceived to possess a coveted good G wrongfully, while the focus of the emotion is still on one's own inferiority and impotence in lacking the good G. Because of that re-evaluation, the rival is perceived to have obtained the relevant good by a wrongful action for which he or she is blamed. This allows the subject to feel *resentment* or *indignation* towards the rival instead of envy. If alternatively, or at a later stage, the subject re-evaluates the value of good G as inferior to an axiologically inferior or neutral but attainable good, the resulting emotion is *commiseration* or *disdain*.

One may ask whether envy can transform into disdain or commiseration directly or only through intermediate resentment. We think that both routes are possible. However, there is a problem with resentment emerging from repressed envy that may explain why its further transformation into disdain is often needed. The problem is that resentment is an unstable condition without a change in personal concerns, because it is painful to value an inaccessible good G even if one blames the rival for its wrongful possession or acquisition. Therefore, there is a tendency for the process to continue to the re-evaluation of G on the basis of a new value hierarchy that allows for an emotional change from resentment to commiseration. Only that change would resolve the remaining feelings of impotence and powerlessness in relation to the inaccessible good that are still part of resentment.

A similar dynamic operates in EM 2 with (especially) acknowledged shame where blaming the other for shaming or for one's failing allows the subject to transform the emotion from shame into *anger*. In both cases, blaming the other allows the subject to discharge and express a repressed negative self-conscious emotion in the form of a moral emotion that also counterbalances the subject's damaged sense of self-worth with positive emotions of moral superiority.

EM 3 is different, as anger is a moral emotion that involves a claim to a higher moral standing in comparison to the other. However, the other denies this moral authority in inefficacious anger whose

expression has no effect on the other's behavior. Therefore, the subject can cope with the situation only by changing his or her evaluation of the other into being immoral, malicious, and incapable of change, which is characteristic of *hatred*. Hatred retains the moral superiority of the subject, accounting for the perceived inability to affect the other's behavior.

Before concluding this subsection, we need to come back to the relation between the revision of evaluation in emotional mechanisms and emotion regulation (Gross 1998), which are functionally similar processes. To begin with, we observe that if a person is good at regulating his or her emotions, there will be no emotional dissonance, or it will not last long because a reappraisal – or some other type of garden-variety emotional regulation – will change the type of emotion. Thus, persistent emotional dissonance associates with a compromised emotion regulation capacity.

This indicates that the kind of reappraisal typical of emotional mechanisms differs significantly from the cognitive reappraisal of emotion regulation literature, instead being driven by largely unconscious psychodynamic defenses.[12] Interestingly, recent literature about emotion regulation has distinguished between "explicit" and "implicit" emotion regulation (Koole & Rothermund 2011; Guyrak et al. 2011; Braunstein et al. 2017). Whereas explicit emotion regulation is described as a conscious, deliberative, and resource-demanding process, implicit emotion regulation operates without the need for conscious control or explicit intentions. Accordingly, implicit emotion regulation can be "instigated even when people do not realise that they are engaging in any form of emotion regulation and when people have no conscious intention of regulating their emotions" Koole & Rothermund 2011: 390). One central strategy of emotion regulation and of emotional mechanism is reappraisal. However, there are significant differences between the way in which reappraisal is understood in the emotion regulation research and in our view on emotional mechanisms.

[12] Salmela and Capelos (2021) expand on the psychodynamic defenses involved in *ressentiment*.

Emotion regulation strategies are distributed along a timeline from antecedent-focused (situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change) to response-focused (suppression). This body of research takes reappraisal to be an *antecedent-focused* strategy, changing the type of emotion before the appraisal process has produced a full-blown emotional response (Gross 1998; Guyrak et al. 2011). Furthermore, cognitive reappraisals—even in the case of implicit emotion regulation—are processes whose onset is conscious, although they may turn into implicit with practice and, thus, sediment and become unconscious (Braunstein et al. 2017). Finally, one could hypothesize that the subject, when reappraising the situation in (implicit or explicit) emotion regulation, remains sensitive to new evidence: the subject is disposed to abandon the reappraisal if controverting evidence emerges.[13]

Reappraisals in emotional mechanisms work differently. First, the implicit reappraisals of emotional mechanisms, in contrast to cognitive reappraisal, arise with persistent repression of emotions eliciting feelings of inferiority and/or impotence that lead to the repression of the initial emotions. Reappraisal, in emotional mechanisms, is a *response-focused* emotion regulation strategy to deliver the subject from intolerable torment of emotional pain. This also implies that in ER, suppression is an alternative to reappraisal (if reappraisal has failed or is not available), whereas in EM, suppression comes before reappraisal.

Second, these reappraisals are implicit from their very outset (even if the subject can become aware of them through reflection). The reason is provided by the observation that, if they were explicit and

[13] This is suggested by the fact that, as Braunstein et al. (2017) highlight, implicit emotion regulation operates through such processes as "extinction" and "reinforcer revaluation" both of which depend on acquisition of new information.

controlled, they would embroil the subject in a *teleological paradox*: the subject would be aware of their attempt to reappraise the situation because they are not able to bear the negative feelings. This would reassert the feelings of inferiority (rather than dissolving them). This also indicates that the subject in emotional mechanisms is not disposed to revise the reappraisal based on new evidence: sensitivity to new evidence would make salient to the subject that the reappraisal serves a self-deceiving purpose.

Insofar as implicit reappraisals in emotional mechanisms are successful in changing the type of emotion, this challenges another main finding of existing emotion regulation research, namely the ineffectiveness of suppression in changing emotional response (Gross 1998; Guyrak et al. 2011). This may be the case in short-term suppression, whereas long-term suppression, leading into repression, "turns creative and gives birth to values" as Nietzsche formulated the idea of reappraisal induced by *ressentiment* (Nietzsche 1961, I, 10). This suggests that the unconscious reappraisals of emotional mechanisms constitute a psychological category not known in existing research of emotion regulation.

If the subject is successful in re-evaluating either the intentional target of the original emotion or her long-term concerns, the emotional dissonance that triggered the emotional mechanism dissolves. The expectation is that the newly acquired emotion will not cause feelings of inferiority and/or impotence and a negative view of the self anymore. However, it is doubtful whether such emotional transformation can be entirely successful in fully eliminating emotional dissonance. Two different reasons support this statement.

First, Scheler supports the instability of EMs by appealing to his axiological realism, according to which value-properties exist mind-independently and can be grasped by cognitive states analogue to perception. Thus, he suggests that *ressentiment* may influence our beliefs about values, but it does

not blind our intuitive insight into values and their objective order of rank. He, therefore, characterizes revision of values in *ressentiment* as value "blindness" or "delusion", implying that such revision is based on self-deception in which the old, objectively valid values still "shine through" the new, false ones. This creates a tension between previously and newly endorsed values and the need to reinforce the endorsement of the new values over and again.

Second, a sociological explanation for the incompleteness of emotional transformation, which does not presuppose the existence of mind-independent value-properties, offers itself. This explanation focuses on the fact that people rarely can fully dissociate themselves from social conditions in which emotions involving feelings of inferiority and/or powerlessness emerge. For instance, these emotions may emerge in the context of social identities whose internal values and goals have become more difficult to meet in contemporary market societies where success or even getting along can be achieved only in competition with others. People may try to emotionally distance themselves from precarious social identities of this kind and to emphasize more stable social identities based on ascriptive qualities such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender (Salmela & von Scheve 2017). However, insofar as people are unable to fully dissociate themselves from precarious social identities that give rise to negative self-conscious emotions, the process of emotional transformation may remain incomplete or fragile.

Self-deception about mind-independent value-properties and the inability to dissociate oneself from social identities that maintain emotional dissonance are just two possible explanations of the fragility of emotional transformation achieved by EMs. Possibly, other factors (and/or a combination of more

factors) can be adduced as additional causes[14]. We leave this point open for future research, for we believe that, regardless of the factors grounding the instability of EMs, there is a common way of reinforcing the transformation. This is the social sharing of the new emotion; the fourth condition of EMs.

3.4. Collectivization of the new emotional response

Social sharing of the transformed emotion is an important way of reinforcing the change of evaluation as sharing provides a sense of warrant to the shared emotion.[15] "Socially shared group emotions, as compared with individual emotions, are likely to be seen as true, objective, and externally driven in a type of social construction of emotional reality that parallels the effects of consensus in the social construction of beliefs" (Smith et al. 2007, 442). For sharing to be possible, the intentional target of the emotion typically has to be generalized. Thus, resentment, anger, or hatred are targeted at groups whose members are perceived to possess common negative characteristics, or they are targeted at

[14] One could conjecture that any attempt to repress value-disclosing emotions (like envy) by re-evaluating their targets is likely to remain incomplete as long as the subject does not undergo conscious *resignation* from the initial, and unattainable, value. As Scheler remarks (1961), resignation allows the subject to focus on attainable goods, while still recognizing the value of unattainable goods. In the absence of resignation, the subject remains committed to the unattainable good, which sustains the psychological need for self-deception. Note that, regardless of Scheler's own view on the matter, the link between self-deception and lack of resignation holds independently of the metaphysical status one ascribes to values.

[15] Sharing is not the only way in which the subject can provide or increase the sense of warrant of the transformed emotion. Sometimes, privately feeding on an emotion with evaluative thoughts and desires coherent with the emotion might have a similar effect.

individuals (such as political leaders or celebrities) associated with such groups. Scheler describes this dynamic in which negative attitudes towards traits and qualities of particular persons are detached from those persons and instead become targets of negative attitudes wherever they are found. The key to this generalization of emotional target is the repression of the original emotion. "When the repression is complete, the result is a general negativism—a sudden, violent, seemingly unsystematic and unfounded rejection of things, situations, or natural objects whose loose connection with the original cause of the hatred can only be discovered by a complicated analysis." (Scheler 1961, 21). Indeed, political and religious leaders with their affective rhetoric, especially in populist right, readily provide targets to collectivized resentment, anger, or hatred such as political and cultural elites, immigrants and refugees, as well as the long-term unemployed (Salmela & von Scheve 2017).[16] Accordingly, social and political movements are viable contexts in which emotions emerging from emotional mechanisms are reinforced through their collectivization.

Turner (2007) observes that the reinforcement of transmuted shared anger in social interaction rituals also gives rise to positive emotions such as joy and pride about social identities of those united in anger. These positive emotions, similarly to shared anger itself, are empowering and provide remedy

[16] There is evidence that political rhetoric may also serve the repression of the original painful emotions. Politicians can tap into those emotions without explicitly mentioning them, which allows for a reinterpretation of those feelings in a politically purposeful manner. For instance, politicians may evoke individual shame by talking about "restoring the dignity" of ordinary people and interpret this emotion as collective cultural shame rather than as individual economic shame. This kind of reinterpretation modifies the context and content of the emotion in a way that facilitates a further reappraisal in which collective shame is transformed into collective anger at outgroups identified as enemies of the traditional culture on the one hand and collective pride in the traditional national identity and culture on the other (Kazlauskaite & Salmela 2021).

to feelings of inferiority and powerlessness elicited by the repressed individual emotions. A similar dynamic applies to hatred emerging from repressed inefficacious anger: the interpretation of hatred as group-based allows its sharing with others. This may explain why hatred tends to generalize to groups even if it would originate from individual-level anger – indeed, collectivization of hatred is so common that several authors have argued it to be the paradigmatic type of hatred (see e.g. Szanto 2019). However, we suggest that this tendency of hatred can be explained by the fact that collectivization allows the overcoming of the remaining feelings of impotence and powerlessness present in individual hatred (Salice 2021). Moreover, shared hatred reinforces shared social identities and the associated feelings of togetherness, which renders the experience of shared hatred if not entirely pleasant, at least predominantly so. In the contemporary world, emotional sharing may occur both offline and online as social media offers several venues – Facebook, Twitter, blogs, chatrooms and discussion forums, etc. – for cultivating both collective anger and hatred as well as positive collective emotions about shared social identities.

4. Conclusions

The paper has developed an account of emotional mechanisms. Roughly, EMs are coping mechanisms the effect of which is to remove or, more likely, to reduce emotional dissonance in a subject, where emotional dissonance has been defined as a state with negative hedonic qualities fueled by feelings of impotence/inferiority that foster a negative sense of self. The effect is achieved through a reappraisal of the target of the dissonance-inducing emotion. Based on the new evaluation, the subject discards the original emotion by replacing it with a new one that does not generate dissonance. To reinforce or stabilize the new emotion, the subject tends to collectivize it.

The theory of emotional mechanisms developed in this article sheds light on an important, yet so far largely overlooked, aspect of emotions. While the idea that humans have the capacity to regulate their

emotions has become one of the pivotal insights in emotion theory, the specificity of emotional mechanisms and their irreducibility to known emotion regulation strategies has not been fully appreciated *bis dato*. This article represents a first step towards a better understanding of emotional mechanisms. Future research is expected to identify other mechanisms and to elaborate the analysis proposed in this article (e.g., by expanding the role of the others in the mechanisms). Another promising path of research, partly explored in Salmela & von Scheve 2017, concerns the impact of these mechanisms on political discourse: because of their intrinsic tendency of the outcome emotion of being collectivised, emotional mechanisms have societal and, by extension, political consequences. Investigating these consequences is part and parcel of the wide open research agenda on emotional mechanisms.

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