

Democracy and Resentment: Testing Scheler's and Nietzsche's Christian Resentment Theories on the Case of Protestantism

ABSTRACT

The general perspective on the process of democratisation is a positive one, one that transmits progress and evolution. But Tocqueville and Scheler explain that the process of democratisation also has downsides. For instance, increasing equality generates more envy. Furthermore, Scheler explains that envy also lays the basis for resentment. This analysis looks at this interdependence of democracy and resentment within the case of Christianity. It looks at one of the most relevant examples of democratisation within Christianity, Protestantism. Based on Nietzsche's and Scheler's Christian resentment theories, this paper analyses whether Protestantism's proposal of reformation is indeed resentful. In order to do so, it tests both theories on '*The Freedom of a Christian*', a speech by Martin Luther. To which extent can one identify either Scheler's or Nietzsche's understanding of resentment in *The Freedom of a Christian*?

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1. Introduction

In 1831, the French government sent Alexis de Tocqueville to America. Based on his travelling experiences he wrote *Democracy in America* (2003), where he explains America's process of democratisation. In his analysis, he makes great efforts to show both upsides and downsides of democratisation. The most relevant downside he mentions is the correlation between democratisation and envy, because to him increasing democratisation leads to more envy. The reason for this, Tocqueville explains, is that in a state of inequality, such as a feudal state, no peasant would ever be envious of the rights of a king, simply because a peasant could never imagine a scenario in which he/she would enjoy these rights. However, in a democracy one is promised that everyone is equal and enjoys the same rights. Yet, in reality some are richer than others, and this false promise generates envy.

One must not blind oneself to the fact that democratic institutions promote to a very high degree the feeling of envy in the human heart, not so much because they offer each citizen ways of being equal to each other but because these ways continuously prove inadequate for those who use them. Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passion of equality without ever being able to satisfy it entirely. (Tocqueville, 2003, p. 500f.)

This is the reason why Tocqueville concludes that democracy is a more equal, though very envious political system (Riou & Gallagher, 2016). In his work *Ressentiment*²(1994), Scheler arrives at a very similar conclusion. He argues that in a feudal state "[f]rom the King down to the hangman and the prostitute, everyone is "noble" in the sense that he considers himself as irreplaceable. On the contrary, in a "system of free competition", the notions on life's tasks and their value are not fundamental, they are but secondary derivations of the desire of all to surpass all the others" (p. 12). Thus, for Scheler the process of democratisation incentivises individuals to think in terms of aspiration for progress and this inevitably leads to envy. Compared to Tocqueville, who takes a more political/sociological approach, Scheler takes a more psychological approach, saying that envy is inherent to human behaviour (Scheler, 1994, p. 2; p. 5; p. 24).

Scheler takes the envy argument a step further, by linking it to resentment. He argues that envy, and hence processes of democratisation, lay the basis of resentment. But what is resentment? Scheler explains that resentment is a "lasting mental attitude", generated by the "systematic repression of certain emotions" such as "revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the

² Scheler uses the word *Ressentiment* and not *resentment*. He argues that "we do not use the word "ressentiment" because of a special predilection for the French language, but because we did not succeed in translating it into German. Moreover, Nietzsche has made it a terminus technicus" (1994, p. 2). However, in order to avoid any misunderstandings this work will be using the word *resentment* instead. It is only in direct quotes where the word *ressentiment* will appear.

impulse to detract, and spite" (1994, p. 4). In other words, for Scheler resentment is the feeling of anger without a pragmatic purpose. This anger is directed at what one recognizes as the source of one's frustration and one blames this source for the frustration. Scheler gives the example where a fox is unable to reach some very sweet looking grapes. Because he fails to reach them, he claims that the grapes were sour anyway and that he never actually wanted them (pp. 28-29). This is deeply resentful because instead of confronting his own weakness the fox creates new morals and avoids blaming himself, explains Scheler. In other words, these excuses that eventually lead to moral reshaping are proof for resentment. Thus, for Scheler there is a straight relationship between envy and resentment, which he analyses on the case of Christianity.

Scheler is one of the most relevant analysts within the discussion about Christian resentment. His work became especially prominent because it opposes Nietzsche's in several aspects. Scheler develops his analysis based on his interpretation of Nietzsche. Hence, although they never met personally, Scheler dedicated almost his entire *Ressentiment* (1994) to develop his similarities and differences with Nietzsche. Therefore, their academic debate could still flourish despite of their different positions in time. For Nietzsche, Christianity is deeply resentful because of its logic of an afterlife judiciary. This logic incentivises believers to behave strategically, only seeing good in evil or showing love in order to get into heaven, argues Nietzsche. Scheler agrees that many believers do indeed behave this way, but that this is not the way Christianity was intended to be. To him, Christianity is not resentful because true believers only act out of self-fulfilment, out of excess vitality, and not because of strategic reasons (Scheler, 1994, p. 29ff.).

So, who is right? The body of academic literature discussing Nietzsche's and Scheler's discrepancies is surprisingly small (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002; Birns, n. d.; Morelli, n. d.). This is most probably due to the fact that Scheler had already provided an analysis on their main discrepancies in *Ressentiment* (1994). Nevertheless, there is great need for research that does not only compare Nietzsche and Scheler at the theoretical level, but that tests their approaches on an empirical case. Only by testing them on a specific case can one shed some light on whether one approach is more applicable than the other. This is a gap this work aims at addressing by assessing both theories on an empirical case of Christianity. Based on Tocqueville and Scheler, it has been established that processes of democratisation lay the basis of envy and resentment. Hence, if this analysis studies resentment in Christianity, it is important to find a case of Christian democratisation.

In this regard Protestantism is the most suitable case because it is widely understood as one of the most relevant processes of democratisation in Christianity (Palmer & Colton, 2006, pp. 77-83; Weber, 2005, p. 56). More precisely, the analysis is conducted on the basis of a speech by Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1991). Within Protestantism, Luther has been chosen because he is one of the key actors of the Protestant movement (Palmer & Colton, 2006, p. 79). Furthermore, three arguments justify why *The Freedom of a Christian* is especially suitable to analyse Christian democratisation and resentment. First, this speech was held in Wittenberg in 1520 and was hence positioned in the middle of the political and religious conflict (Palmer & Colton, 2006). Second, the fact that this is a speech accessible to everyone, and not a written text, underlines Luther's democratising intentions. Chapter four shows

how this is also visible in his rhetoric. Third, in this speech Luther directly refers to key Christian democratic values: Christian love, equality and freedom. Nietzsche's and Scheler's scholarly debate is tested on this speech in order to find out whether the logic implied in Protestantism is resentful. Consequently, the research question asks: To which extent can one identify either Scheler's or Nietzsche's understanding of resentment in *The Freedom of a Christian*?

The research question is answered from a qualitative standpoint and in a two-staged approach. The analysis starts with the analytical framework, which compares Nietzsche's and Scheler's perspectives on Christian resentment. Once the two positions have been outlined, they are put to test on the empirical case of *The Freedom of a Christian*. This speech is analysed to find out whether one can find textual references that justify either Nietzsche's or Scheler's argumentation. Different from resentment in politics or economics, the problem in analysing Christian resentment is that it mostly occurs in the solitude of people's minds, and this makes it highly invisible. But this work does not aim at analysing this real-life psychological dimension of Christian resentment, or to examine whether Luther as a person was resentful, or to find out whether Christianity as a whole is resentful. It simply examines if Luther's theoretical proposal of Protestantism contributes to resentment. This is why Scheler's and Nietzsche's discrepancies are tested on the theoretical basis of Martin Luther's speech.

The main aim of this analysis is to provide clarity on Nietzsche's and Scheler's positions on Christian resentment, by finding out which approach is more applicable to the empirical case of Protestantism. By conducting the analysis on the case of Protestantism this analysis also enlarges the academic body on Christian resentment. The existing literature mostly either considers Christianity as a whole (Sloterdijk, 2006) or only focuses on its Judaic roots (Weber, 2011) but disregards Protestantism's specifics. Those who do indeed look at Protestantism fail to focus on the resentment factor (Durkheim, 1897; Weber, 2005). This analysis contributes to the existing academic literature by putting both Protestantism and resentment at the centre of the analysis.

Following the introduction, the second chapter describes the method of analysis and case selection. This chapter goes deeper into explaining why Protestantism can be considered an example of democratisation. Chapter three is dedicated to the analytical framework of this study, the comparison of Scheler's and Nietzsche's perspectives on Christian resentment. The fourth Chapter tests the differences and similarities of both approaches on *The Freedom of a Christian*. Chapter five summarises all main points and discusses the relevance and limitations of the analysis.

2. Methodology and Case selection

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the research method. The topic of this analysis, the correlation of democratisation and resentment, is a very personal phenomenon. Although this analysis will rather focus on the sociological implications, the topic is intrinsically linked to psychology. Therefore, this study focuses on a qualitative approach. The actual analysis is two-staged. In the first step, the analytical framework, Scheler's and Nietzsche's theories on Christian resentment are laid out. This exercise allows identifying the key differences and similarities in their approaches. In the

second step, the empirical part, these key differences are tested on the case study of Protestantism, more specifically Martin Luther's speech *The Freedom of a Christian* (1991). By focusing on a single case study, this study provides an in-depth perspective of the correlation between democratisation and resentment.

But why Scheler' and Nietzsche's theories? And why testing them on Protestantism? First, once having established that this work focuses on resentment in Christianity, these two authors directly come into the spotlight. Apart from being very relevant scholars in the field of Christian resentment, they both became especially well known for their discrepancies. Hence, Nietzsche's and Scheler's antagonism provides a very fertile ground to conduct qualitative research on Christian resentment. It is relevant to note that this analysis focuses on their positions on Christian resentment and not on resentment overall. Second, it is important to make clear why the two aforementioned theories are tested on the case of Protestantism. Tocqueville and Scheler explain that democratisation processes and envy lay the basis of resentment. Hence, because this study focuses on Christianity, it is important to find a case of Christian democratisation. The next paragraph will explain why Protestantism is such a case.

The starting point is that of a "good deal of resentment [...] against Rome" (Palmer & Colton, 2007, p. 8) in northern Europe at the start of the 16th Century. Why? First, there was great dissatisfaction among "common people" because they believed bishops and abbots to be part of the "wealthy and oppressive ruling class", instead of providing social relief (p. 77). This dissatisfaction merged religious ideas with those of social order, fuelling large "peasant rebellions" in the 1520s (p. 77). Second, pseudo-republican city-states wished to administer religious belief autonomously, as they did of almost everything else. Hence, they disliked the catholic hierarchical structure because they believed it to be "too much embedded in a feudal, baronial and monarchical system which they had little in common with" (p. 79). Third, ruling sovereigns wanted to manage their territory independently without being infringed by the Catholic Church in terms of "property, taxes, legal jurisdiction and political influence" (p. 79). All these highly political disapprovals were canalized into "revolutionary" new religious movements. Peasants, city-states and ruling sovereigns alike used new religious movements, such as Protestantism, for their own purposes because these movements held that the "Roman church [...] was wrong in principle" (p. 79).

One of the spearheads and the first to "successfully defy" (Palmer & Colton, 2007, p. 79) the old order was Martin Luther. This is the reason why this paper has chosen to conduct the analysis on a speech by Martin Luther. Based on a pondering of St. Paul, Romans I,17, Luther constructed a dialectic that turned the established logic upside down and that questioned and democratised the old Catholic order. He never intended to create a new order, but merely wanted to reform Catholicism. On the one hand, he held that a believer could not be justified by his attendance to masses, economic donations or prayers but by "faith alone" (p. 79). In other words, "people did not earn grace by doing good; they did the good because they possessed the grace of God" (p. 80). Hence, for Luther sinners cannot be absolved by a priest but solely by themselves, rendering priests almost functionless. On the other hand, to him believers are equal before the eyes of God, which is why they should read the bible and "freely make their own interpretations according to their own

conscience" (p. 81). The ground-breaking aspect of this thought is that it implied dissolving clerical hierarchy, rejecting the pope, and "prelate's luxury" (p. 81). In order to accomplish this, Luther translated the formerly Latin bible into German so that everyone could read it autonomously. In this respect, he benefitted enormously from the new printing methods developed by Gutenberg. These allowed replicating his message more easily and faster than ever before, making it accessible to everyone. However, most relevant for this analysis is to understand how this dialectic incentivised the democratisation of Christianity. There are three democratising aspects that directly stem from Luther's argumentation, as well as three indirect ones.

First, starting with the direct ones, the clearest example of democratisation is the rejection of clerical institutionalism and of the structure's inherent privileges (Palmer & Colton, 2007, p.79; p. 81). By saying that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, Luther provides believers with the most democratic element, the promise of equality. Second, his translation of the bible gave individuals the chance to be equal (p. 81). It was no longer the case that only the privileged ones, with the sufficient economic means to pay for an education in Latin, or clerical instances, like priests or monks, were the only ones able to read the bible. Instead, he made it accessible to everyone, kings and peasants alike, and this caused a democratisation of social standards. Third, by rejecting sinner's absolution by means of a priest, Luther forced absolution-equality upon all sinners. There was no longer a standard given answer, like a specific number of prayers, to free the sinner from his burden (p. 80). In contrast, all believers must deal with their sins equally and in an independent manner. These three arguments are examples of Christian democratisation that are direct consequences of Luther's dialectic. All three have in common that they imply a democratisation of individuals, either at the institutional or personal level. This increases envy, as Tocqueville and Scheler explain. For example, if before privileges were justified by clerical hierarchy, this was no longer the case because the argumentation was deconstructed. Hence, believers became more envious because of equality, for example disapproving of bishops' richness.

Now that the direct consequences have been addressed, the indirect ones will be considered. They are indirect because they are consequential to Luther's reasoning, but not explicitly mentioned by him. Firstly, his reasoning was used both by sovereigns and peasants for political and economic means. It shaped the argumentation of social revolutions that aimed at a new, more democratic social order, leading to large peasant revolts in Germany in 1524 (Palmer & Colton, 2007, p. 81). Luther's argumentation was also used by new extremist religious variations that started growing and claimed a new social order of complete equality among individuals by, for example, abolishing property (p. 82). Secondly, Luther repudiated luxury and this shaped a form of being that has been named "Protestant asceticism" (Weber, 2005, p. 104; p. 106; p. 108). Regardless of their actual wealth, Protestants embrace Spartan aesthetics, limited consumerism and minimalist interiors. Always giving a non-luxurious impression implies a democratisation of everyday life, making it difficult to identify economic wealth. Thirdly, by challenging Catholicism, Luther raised a very relevant question, namely that of free religious preference. After the long religious wars (1546-1648), the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) stated that rulers could autonomously determine

their reign to be either Lutheran or Roman Catholic, an example of democratisation (Palmer & Colton, 2007).

This chapter has shown that because of all the aforementioned reasons, Protestantism can be considered an example of Christian democratisation. Within Protestantism, this analysis focuses on Martin Luther because he played a key role in the development of Protestantism (Palmer & Colton, 2007, p. 79). Martin Luther's dialectic has caused several direct and indirect democratising consequences. These consequences have democratised both believers and individuals, hence forming a basis for envy. Furthermore, unlike other forms of Protestantism that emerged later, such as Calvinism, Lutheranism is strongly shaped by the perspective of social unrest, making it a very suitable case for the analysis of resentment. This is very visible in *The Freedom of a Christian* because of three reasons: a) Its date of publication (1520), which positions it in the middle of the political and religious democratic disputes, b) the fact that a speech is a medium accessible to all and c) the speech's content, paying special attention to the core democratic values of Christianity: equality, freedom and Christian love. Therefore, Protestantism is a good case to test Scheler's and Nietzsche's discrepancies, which will be done on the basis of a qualitative analysis of *The Freedom of a Christian*.

3. Analytical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse Nietzsche's and Scheler's perspectives on Christian resentment in order to understand their similarities and discrepancies. As mentioned in chapter two, this analysis only focuses on the scholars' perspectives on Christian resentment.

The dichotomous positions that arise from these two thinkers are "[...] in part a function of their methodological approaches and their abiding philosophic interests" (Morelli, n.d.). Therefore, in order to be able to grasp the differences between Scheler and Nietzsche, one must first understand their philosophical approaches and methods. On the one hand, Nietzsche is strongly influenced by his "training in ancient Hellenic texts" which is why he often uses the ancient world "as models with universal anthropological significance" to exemplify contemporary cultural conflicts (Morelli, n.d.). Consequently, it is not surprising that he takes a historical approach on Christian resentment, positioning the birth of his analysis in the Roman-Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, although Scheler was deeply influenced by Nietzsche, his analysis is phenomenological. Thus, whereas Nietzsche takes a historical standpoint to trace the emergence of resentment in Christianity, Scheler's work is historically more restricted. Therefore, in his analysis he mentions examples of resentful behaviour that are distinctive of his time, such as second wave feminist movements (Scheler, 1994, p. 15).

Although both analyses follow a method of conceptual analysis, their differences in historical scope have significant consequences on their works. While Nietzsche's is diachronic, more focused on temporal development, Scheler's is synchronic, historically more restricted. These differences can be explained on the basis of the authors' aims. Scheler does not take a historical focus because he was interested in "grounding an *a priori* axiological ethics through a phenomenological typology of the field of affectivity", which resentment was a part of (Morelli, n.d.). Inevitably, his aim makes his work

very abstract. For instance, while chapter one of *Ressentiment* is an enumeration of pragmatic resentment examples, chapter three fails to provide any of these pragmatic examples for Christian resentment (Scheler, 1994, p. 29ff.). Having in mind that Christian resentment is in itself a rather abstract topic, and although Nietzsche is also very theoretical, it seems easier to link his approach to the real-world scenario than Scheler's because Nietzsche's is more realistic. And this difference in approach determines the core of their discrepancy. Now that the main methodological differences have been laid out, Chapter three continues by explaining the scholars' main arguments.

3.1 Similarities: Of slave moralities and noble man

Interestingly enough, both Scheler and Nietzsche share the same argumentative basis in their approaches, being Hegel's notion of slave morality (Morelli, n.d.). They agree that the underlying logic of what it means to be resentful is an understanding of moral superiority or inferiority. This is what Scheler calls the "noble-" and the "common man" and what Nietzsche determines as "superman" and "slave morality" (Scheler, 1994, p. 10; Nietzsche, 1887, Part I, Section 14). But what makes a slave/common man distinctively different from a superman/nobleman?

Nietzsche explains that "[w]hereas every noble morality springs from a triumphant acceptance and affirmation of oneself, slave morality is in its very essence a negation of everything 'outside' and 'different' of whatever is 'not oneself'" (Scheler, 1994, p. 3f.). This means that the more one is dependent on other people's affirmation of oneself, the more inferior one's morality. Hence, resentment is strongly related to one's necessity of making comparisons between "others and oneself", argues Scheler (1994, p. 10). He explains that everyone has the tendency to make comparisons, but the difference lies in the degree of dependency: "The noble man experiences value prior to any comparison, the common man in and through a comparison" (p. 11). The noble man neither feels envy for other people's accomplishments nor does he have problems in admitting their superiority, instead "he rejoices in their virtues and feels that they make the world more worthy of love". This self-confidence is not directed at achieving anything in particular, but at "his very essence and being" (p. 11). Therefore, noble men need no "justification or proof by achievements or abilities". On the contrary, the common man is highly dependent on comparison because he constructs his value and image according to "differences" (p. 11).

In other words, whereas moral superiority is a non-reflective awareness of one's own value, moral inferiority is a doubtful, insecure and reflective awareness of one's own value. Hence, the starting point of moral inferiority is a context of "weakness, physical or mental, or [...] fear" (Scheler, 1994, p. 6), shaping a deep insecurity. Yet this does not presuppose resentment. However, because of this insecurity, the slave/common man will often not face his weaknesses but will instead reshape his morals accordingly. He will use objective prescript moral values whereas the superman/nobleman will create his moral values independently. And this is the core difference between moral superiority and inferiority.

3.2 Similarities: the resentful birth of Christianity

How does this moral superiority/inferiority affect Christianity? Nietzsche claims that Christianity is intrinsically morally inferior and deeply resentful. This is because he identifies the source of moral inferiority at the birthplace of Christianity, the invasion of the Jewish-Palestinian territory by the Roman Empire (Morelli, n.d.). The problem arises because although Palestinian Jewish rabbis claimed to have intellectual superiority due to their special relation to God, implied in them being a noble class, they were nevertheless surpassed by the physical superiority of the Romans. The Jewish priests did not accept their "inferior social position" because of their "deep sense of self-esteem and pride", which fuelled rage against their conquerors (Morelli, n.d.). "In order to maintain pride and a sense of superiority over their conquerors, the Palestinians both reaffirmed the value of the spiritual, and denied the values of vital might, political prestige and power, and worldly riches" (Morelli, n.d.). By doing so, they reshaped their moral values instead of accepting their physical weakness. This impotence of being challenged and not being able to react is what Nietzsche considers the birth date of Christian resentment. For him, the birth of Christian resentment is in no way implied in the Roman's violence, but in the fact that the Palestinian Jewish rabbis resort to "mendacity and self-deception", reshaping morals to confront their rage (Morelli, n.d.). Scheler agrees with Nietzsche in this regard because he also considers the conquering of the chosen people to be the source of "deep-rooted disturbance of Jewish self-confidence" and a basis for resentment (p. 8).

Because both authors agree on the aspect of moral inferiority/superiority, and on the resentful beginnings of Christianity, their approaches share a common axis: determinism. This means that both scholars assume that Christian resentment can be determined by causes external to the individual's will (Morelli, n.d.). For example, Christianity's logic of an afterlife judgment can make believers resentful without them even being aware, the scholars agree. However, they disagree on the scope of determinism. Whereas Nietzsche believes that the core essence of Christianity is resentful, and thus all aspects of Christianity are, Scheler thinks that Christianity can be misused for resentment but that true belief is not. Three main points illustrate their discrepancy: afterlife judgment, moral prescription and Christian love.

3.3 Differences: Afterlife Judgment

First, the core divergence between Scheler and Nietzsche concerns the motivations behind being a Christian. For Nietzsche, Christians' main motivation to believe in Christianity is a rational trade-off: believing in a higher instance judiciary, like God, will eventually make justice and revenge sinners. Instead of having to deal with moral questions oneself, one makes a contract where God becomes responsible of revenging sinners and dictating moral values. Hence, for Nietzsche, Christians are dependent on an abstract belief that will eventually resolve all their problems. Christian's revenge is usually not real but condensed into a metaphysical afterlife scenario. Nietzsche explains that because of this logic, Christians generate new moral value judgments that turn their weaknesses into strengths instead of confronting weaknesses directly: "impotence, inability to retaliate, is to become „goodness“; timorous lowliness becomes „humility“; submission to those whom one hates is „obedience“"

(Scheler, 1994, p. 4). And because this logic of moral reshaping is inherent to Christian belief, Nietzsche believes Christianity to be overall resentful.

Scheler, however, argues that this only accounts for the misinterpretation of Christianity (Scheler, 1994, p. 32ff.). Some believers are indeed resentful because they behave according to this rationale, he acknowledges. And yet, he argues that Christianity is not intended to be a rational trade off, a system of threat, in which one behaves in a certain way to get into either heaven or hell. The opposite is true, claims Scheler. Christianity does not reshape moral value judgments out of weakness but out of strength. It is the belief in a higher instance that gives believers the strength to see "goodness" in "impotence" (Scheler, 1994, p. 4). Scheler goes further by explaining that believers are not submissive to God because of God's judiciary power but because of believers' outmost respect towards God. Hence, according to him those believers that act out of self-fulfilment are not resentful.

3.4 Differences: Moral prescription

Second, according to the slave morality logic one can only achieve moral superiority if one autonomously determines one's own morals. Nietzsche believes that Christianity is inevitably resentful because it prescribes believers with an objective set of morals (1887, Part II, section 10-11). But it is this lack of moral independence that makes believers highly static, argues Nietzsche. Because God will eventually take care of revenge, one does not need to actively counteract the source of one's weakness. On the contrary, one embraces one's weaknesses and converts them into positive assets by means of moral reshaping. Nietzsche fears that this behaviour generates a context of static passivity that prevents individuals from being independent. He argues that Christianity's underlying logic, a metaphysical judiciary, prevents sinners from confronting their sins because they will eventually be judged anyway.

Scheler does not agree with this. He explains that some believers may indeed behave this way, but that this is a misinterpretation of Christianity. Simply because some behave wrongly, this does not mean that Christianity as a whole is resentful (Scheler, 1994, p. 32). In his view, Christianity does not prescribe an objective set of morals, it merely provides the belief in God's grace. Hence, it does not prescribe morals, but because believers share God's grace and God's love they will inevitably see beauty in decadence. "This attitude is completely different from that of [...] exposure of social misery, the description of little people, the wallowing in the morbid – a typical resentment phenomenon" (p. 35). It just happens that Christians share moral values because they are all equally touched by a common belief, but are autonomous in their belief. Scheler explains that "when [Jesus] tells us to not worry about eating and drinking, it is not because he is indifferent to life and its preservation, but because he sees also vital weakness in all worrying about the next day, in all concentration on one's own physical well-being" (p. 33). Consequently, because of this self-awareness true Christians are not actually passive but just choose to be so, claims Scheler. And this passive self-awareness makes true believers actively passive. He argues that by remaining passive, one also circumvents the temptations of envy, the basis of resentment (p. 32).

3.5 Differences: Christian Love

Third, the divergences mentioned so far are most visible in the scholars' understanding of Christian Love. For Nietzsche, Christian love is a rational strategy to improve one's chances to be judged positively in the afterlife and to get into heaven. Because of this manipulative behaviour, love loses all its purpose and becomes the "most delicate flower of resentment", writes Nietzsche (Scheler, 1994, p. 29). Hence, for him the love for poverty or misfortune is not a natural behaviour, but a means to better one's own fortune and a product of moral reshaping. Therefore, he strongly opposes all forms of Christian asceticism, such as celibacy (1887, Part III, section 11). For Nietzsche, Christian love is inevitably a sign of resentment because it is intrinsic to the afterlife logic.

Once again, Scheler admits that believers may indeed behave in this way but that this is not the way Christianity is intended to be: "egoism, the concern for oneself and one's interest, and even the instinct of self-preservation are signs of a blocked and weakened life" (Scheler, 1994, p. 33). On the contrary, true Christian love is inspired by "the invincible fullness of one's own life and existence" (p. 33). Whereas a resentful being shows Christian love out of self-interest, a non-resentful being feels the inevitable urge to share his love because of his grandeur: "[...] the clear awareness that one is rich enough to share one's being and possessions. Love, sacrifice, help, the descent to the small and the weak, here spring from a spontaneous overflow of force [...]" (p. 33). Scheler concludes that "the root of Christian love is entirely free of resentment" (p. 32).

However, this argumentation can be problematic. On the one hand, Scheler's approach is based on the separation of true Christian behaviour and the threat-rational of an afterlife judiciary. For him, moral superiority must be segregated from the afterlife logic, otherwise one faces resentment. On the other hand, in order to be morally superior, one needs to be embedded in a "triumphant acceptance and affirmation of oneself" (Scheler, 1994, p. 3f.). Yet, in practice it is often the belief in afterlife's positive judgment that provides believers with the necessary strength and self-acceptance. But this would be resentful because this strength would not stem from self-acceptance. The strong interdependence between self-acceptance and one's afterlife judgment makes it very difficult to draw a straight line between Scheler and Nietzsche.

This chapter has discussed the similarities and discrepancies between Scheler's and Nietzsche's conceptions of Christian resentment. In terms of method, they both take a theoretical approach. But whereas Nietzsche's is more historical, Scheler's is historically more restricted. Both also share the same logical basis: the relationship between moral superiority and inferiority is determined by the degree of self-acceptance (Scheler, 1994, p. 4). Nevertheless, there are three main discrepancies. Firstly, Nietzsche believes that Christianity's notion of afterlife judgment incentivizes believers to act out of self-interest - unlike Scheler, who thinks that this only accounts for a manipulative usage of Christianity because a true Christian only acts out of self-fulfilment. Secondly, Nietzsche accuses Christianity of prescribing objective morals, thus rendering believers passive. Scheler opposes this because he argues that Christianity does not impose morals, but that believers consciously embrace the existence of a higher instance, leading to common morals. Thirdly, Nietzsche claims that all Christian sacrifices like asceticism or Christian love are examples of strategic behaviour to improve one's afterlife judgment, and hence

resentful. Scheler, on the contrary, believes that true Christian love is not resentful because it emerges out of the "fullness of one's own life" (p. 33).

4. Empirical Analysis

Chapter four tests Scheler's and Nietzsche's theories on the case of Protestantism. The aim of this chapter is to find out if Protestantism, as presented by Martin Luther in *The Freedom of a Christian*, justifies either of the two scholars' points of view. It is important to mention that this work does not analyse the resentfulness of neither Luther as a person, nor Christianity as a whole. It also does not empirically evaluate Protestant's real-life behaviour. It simply examines if Luther's theoretical proposal of Protestantism contributes to resentment.

In order to analyse resentment in Luther's argumentation, the first step is to consider Protestantism's historical context. As explained in chapter two, Protestantism is historically framed by great social unease: The educated nobility rejected the power infringement imposed by Catholicism's political elite, peasants demanded fairer distributions of wealth and part of the clergy, such as Luther, opposed some catholic religious practices, like indulgence letters or absolution. Because Protestantism was born out of opposition to Roman Catholic oppression, Protestantism mainly defined itself through comparison: "it must be that Christ, set as a stumbling block and a sign that is spoken against, will be an offense and a cause for the fall and rising of many" (Luther, 1999, p. 3). Hence, Protestantism mostly defines itself through comparison and not through self-acceptance. This, as Scheler and Nietzsche explain (Scheler, 1994, p. 3f.), frames a context of moral weakness.

Comparable to the Roman-Palestinian conflict the moral weakness problem does not lie in Catholic dominance but in Protestantism's reaction. Much like the pariah people, instead of facing one's weakness, Luther defines a new set of moral values that question the established order and claim the superiority of Protestant reformation. For example, Luther opposes catholic institutionalism by democratising belief: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (Luther, 1999, p. 9). He does not only denounce the illegitimacy of catholic institutionalism, but also establishes new morals in which those illegitimate are no longer in the position of power: "those who are proud of their titles, who oppose the truth with all their power and cunning" (p. 3). Because his morals propose the democratisation of belief, he writes his discourse in German so that everyone can understand the word of God and interpret it independently: "this treatise or discourse in German [...] in the hope that my teachings and writings concerning the papacy will not be considered objectionable by anybody" (p. 3). Based on Scheler's and Nietzsche's works, Luther's moral reshaping must stem from weakness because his accusations are highly dependent on comparison. Because Nietzsche and Scheler agree on the existence of moral superiority and inferiority, the fact that Protestantism's birth is defined by "a negation of everything „outside“ and „different“ of whatever is „not oneself“" (Scheler, 1994, p. 4), both theories confirm that Protestantism stems out of moral inferiority. Furthermore, Scheler explains that democratising processes set the

basis for resentment and, by democratising belief, Luther disregards the fact that he plants the seed of envy (pp. 8, 12).

Second, the motivations behind being a Christian will be discussed. Whereas for Nietzsche the motivation is afterlife's salvation, Scheler claims that true motivation only comes from personal fulfilment. How are these belief motivations represented in *The Freedom of a Christian*? Luther's argumentation is based on two pillars: freedom and servitude. He makes great efforts to underline that the main reason to believe is freedom of faith: "Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God" and "faith can rule only in the inner man" (Luther, 1999, p. 10). Hence for him, using faith strategically in order to achieve salvation is not how Christian belief is intended. This aspect clearly speaks in favour of Scheler. However, the problem arises when Luther includes the second pillar of his argumentation, servitude: "Therefore true faith in Christ is a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil [...]: He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (p. 11). The way he uses servitude inevitably incentivises believers to think of faith in two, highly interlinked ways.

On the one hand, one should be faithful because of the benefits of salvation: "To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching" (Luther, 1999, p. 10). Indeed, the sentence starts out by highlighting the self-fulfilment achieved through belief. However, by adding the word "save", he inevitably implies salvation in afterlife's judgment. This and the use of sentences like the "benefit of faith" is that one profits from Christ's fullness of "grace, life, and salvation" (p. 13) inevitably presuppose a logic of strategic pragmatism, the opposite of what Luther first claimed. This is most visible with regard to one's dependency on belief to be relieved of sin:

"Since all have sinned, and fall short of the Glory of God" and "None is righteous, no, not one ... all have turned aside together they have gone wrong" (Rom 3:10-12). When you have learned this you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose for you so that, if you believe in him, you may through this faith become a new man in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone. (Luther, 1999, p. 10)

On the other hand, Luther argues for faithful behaviour by threatening with punishment. For example, he claims that "[t]here is no more terrible disaster with which the wrath of God can afflict men than a famine of the hearing of his Word" (Luther, 1999, p. 10). Luther starts by talking about the fulfilment of true faith, which argues in favour of Scheler's non-resentment perspective. However, he also justifies faith by means of afterlife's salvation and by threatening, which incentivises believers to believe in faith because of strategic reasons. This strongly speaks in favour of Nietzsche, making this a resentful argument. Hence, Luther's argumentation is based on the contradiction of both resentful and non-resentful arguments.

Third, the matter of moral prescription needs to be tackled. Nietzsche is of the opinion that Christianity prescribes objective morals, thus stealing believers' autonomy. And by believing in afterlife's judgment, Christians are

rendered to passivity because they do not have to actively confront their weaknesses. Scheler counterargues that Christians share common morals because of believers' shared self-fulfilment, and not because the church imposes morals. Additionally, Christians consciously decide to not be affected by everyday quarrels. Hence, passivity is not a consequence of Christianity but a conscious choice. Again, it is difficult to clearly define Luther's position on this matter. He starts arguing in favour of Scheler, stating that faith "unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh" (Luther, 1999, p. 13). Hence, once the bond of faith is created believers are autonomous but share morals because they build one common faith. Luther also explains that "if [the soul] has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing" (p. 9). In other words, the believer is not in need of objective morals because the fulfilment of God is enough to shape common morals, such as the aforementioned. However, that same sentence also enumerates all things that will follow from fulfilment. This is similarly reflected in Luther's statement about God that "reigns in heavenly and spiritual things and consecrates them—things such as righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, etc. [...] things on earth and in hell are [...] also subject to him" (p. 14). Luther predetermines all the righteous values of true fulfilment, not allowing believers to find out for themselves. This contradicts the first part of his argumentation. He starts out by arguing according to Scheler's non-resentment point of view, saying that Christian morals spring from true fulfilment. Again, he includes a posteriori elements in his argumentation that provide the basis for resentment. Because of enumerations like the ones aforementioned, it cannot be claimed that Protestantism's moral prescription is not resentful, arguing in favour of Nietzsche.

Fourth is the aspect of Christian love. While Nietzsche thinks that Christian love is a means to better one's chances in afterlife's judgment, Scheler believes that true love happens because of true self-fulfilment. With regards to this argument, Luther strictly takes Scheler's point of view. He is fully convinced that Christian love can only emanate from true belief (Luther, 1999, pp. 9-13). In other words, only if one fully experiences the grace and fulfilment of God can one show Christian love. He goes further by saying that one does not require deeds and that belief alone is enough to be a good Christian. For him, believers should not force the temptation of asceticism, sacrifices or good deeds because these could resolve in not being able to understand real grace. Therefore, Christian love can only be the consequence of grace, and not its cause (p. 17). Like Scheler, Luther fears that many Christians often behave love-like to improve their afterlife's judgment: "they may not lose faith and become defiled by the false estimate of the value of works and think that they must be justified by works. Unless faith is at the same time constantly taught, this happens easily and defiles a great many, as has been done until now through the pestilent, impious, soul-destroying traditions of our popes and the opinions of our theologians" (p. 26). Based on *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther's perspective on Christian Love is completely free of resentment because it does not portray love as strategic self-improvement. Unfortunately, this can only account for Protestantism's theoretical basis and not believer's real behaviour.

However, in order to provide a thorough analysis, one must not neglect the historical context that shaped this speech. Luther prepared his speech in a

context of criticism towards Catholicism, wanting to reform it. Because Christian love stands for the true basis of Christianity, Luther opens his speech by talking about Christian love and makes it the main axis of his speech, in order to make listeners understand the relevance of coming back to the roots of Christianity, disregarded by Catholicism (Luther, 1999, p. 2; p. 26). In other words, Luther is being strategic because he replaces indulgence letters with Christian Love, thus using Christian Love strategically to convince people of Protestantism. Having this in mind, one cannot help but understand that Luther actually uses Christian love to underline his accusations. Nevertheless, this strategic behaviour is completely different from the resentful strategies Nietzsche and Scheler talk about.

Based on *The Freedom of a Christian*, this chapter has firstly shown that the historical context surrounding Luther positions Protestantism in a situation of moral inferiority. The tendency to make comparisons in order to describe Protestantism proves that its starting point is one of weakness. Secondly, Luther tries to highlight the importance of believing in God because of self-fulfilment and rejects belief purely based on strategic salvation. However, he still acknowledges the argument of afterlife's judgment, and actively threatens with the silence of God. This two-sided argumentation makes it impossible to argue for resentment's inexistence. Thirdly, Luther claims that Christian morals stem out of a shared belief and are not predetermined. Again, he attributes specific morals to God's exemplary behaviour, which are proof of how he resentfully prescribes morals. Fourthly, Luther makes great efforts to underline that Christian love stems out of true grace and not out of good deeds. In this case, it can truly be said that Protestantism is not resentful. However, in his argumentation, Luther consciously replaces catholic practices he dislikes with Christian love to convince people of the need of protestant reformation. Hence, he does use Christian love for a strategic purpose, but this purpose is very different from Nietzsche's resentment argument.

5. Conclusion

This analysis has tested Scheler's and Nietzsche's understandings of Christian resentment on the case of Protestantism. Chapter one has introduced the correlation between democratisation, envy and resentment, as explained by Tocqueville and Scheler. When looking at this correlation on the case of Christianity, Scheler and Nietzsche emerge as two key figures within the academic debate. Their importance is due to both their academic relevance and their approaches' discrepancies. This work has taken up the task to shed some light on these discrepancies, by testing them on an empirical case. Chapter three has shown how Protestantism challenges the religious and political social order, democratising believers, and is hence an example of Christian democratisation. This is why Protestantism is a suitable case to analyse Nietzsche's and Scheler's discrepancies. Once having shown that Protestantism, and consequently Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*, are a relevant case to test Scheler's and Nietzsche's discrepancies, Chapter four has outlined the two scholars' main arguments. The analytical framework has shown that both authors start from a shared theoretical basis, the dialectic of moral inferiority and superiority. However, regardless of that common basis, they arrive at

different conclusions. Mainly, Nietzsche argues that Christianity is resentful because its system of metaphysical judiciary incentivises believers to behave out of self-interest. This system removes believers' autonomy, prescribes objective morals and makes individuals morally weak, all symptoms of resentment. Therefore, believers show Christian love out of self-interest to get into heaven, unlike true Christian love. Scheler counterargues that although many believers do indeed behave like this, true fulfilment is all the opposite. Believers' shared self-acceptance generates common morals so that believers willingly subjugate to the grace of God, generating moral strength.

When testing these perspectives on *The Freedom of a Christian*, the analysis has shown that it is difficult to determine a clear-cut image of Protestantism's resentment. First, because Protestantism mostly identifies itself through opposition towards Catholicism and not through self-acceptance, its starting point is one of moral weakness. This moral weakness provides a basis for resentment. When discussing the motivations behind believing in Christianity, and the objectivity of Christianity's morals, Luther provides a two-sided argumentation. On the one hand, Luther makes great efforts to not argue by means of threat or to be prescriptive, hence not being resentful. On the other hand, he always ends up including, directly or indirectly, those elements that indicate resentment: he either enumerates ideal morals or threatens with being disregarded by God. Nonetheless, with regards to Christian love, his notion of true love is not resentful. He explains that true love stems out of grace and can only be the consequence of one's fulfilment, never a strategic purpose. This does not stop him from using Christian love for his own strategic purposes, though different from resentment.

Overall it can be concluded that Luther pays great attention to make believers understand that fulfilment and grace are the beginning of all true belief, hence opposing resentment. Luther's dialectic reshapes Catholicism by giving believers almost complete Freedom and autonomy. Hence, Protestants can no longer blame God because this freedom makes them responsible for their own actions. This all speaks very much in favour of Scheler. Yet, because Protestantism defines itself through comparison, it cannot be neglected that Protestantism stems out of a context of moral weakness. Therefore, it is not surprising that despite all of Luther's efforts, he always ends up including elements that indicate resentful behaviour, proof of Nietzsche's point of view. Overall it cannot be concluded that Scheler's argumentation has stood the test of Protestantism and if one were to pick sides, it would be easier to argue for Nietzsche. But it is this split perspective, using both resentful and not-resentful arguments, that is the most interesting aspect of Luther's argumentation. When considering Luther's historical context, it becomes clear that *The Freedom of a Christian* is framed by the will to reform Catholicism. On the one hand, Luther opposes Catholicism by highlighting the non-resentful roots of Christianity, the values of equality, freedom and Christian love, and makes them the antithesis to Catholicism's indulgence letters and absolution. On the other hand, as has been shown, Luther often resorts to resentful elements like threat to make his point. This analysis has started with the assumption that Luther's democratisation would lay a strong basis for resentment, and it partially does. However, it was unexpected that the same urge for democratisation also incentivised Luther to highlight the relevance of true, non-resentful basics of Christianity. Hence, it is one and the same reason that makes Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* both resentful and resent-free. The real value in Luther's

reasoning is this dichotomous relationship between resentful and non-resentful arguments, both carefully outbalanced to reform Catholicism.

This analysis has circumvented a purely theoretical analysis by testing Scheler's and Nietzsche's approaches on an empirical case. Only by applying these approaches on Protestantism has this analysis been able to shed some light on the two scholars' discrepancies, for example showing that the true value of analysing Protestant resentment lies in the combination of both resentful and non-resentful arguments, showing this is the main contribution of this study. Nevertheless, the conclusions derived from this analysis can neither be generalized for all of Luther's texts, because it is based on a single source, nor for Protestantism as a whole. Unlike other forms of Protestantism, Lutheranism is strongly embedded in the religious and political conflict, which affects resentment. That is why it would be very interesting to conduct further empirical research on less politicised examples of Protestantism, such as Calvinism.