THE POLEMICS OF
RESSENTIMENT

Variations on Nietzsche

Edited by Sjoerd van Tuinen

The Polemics of *Ressentiment*

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Peter Sloterdijk is one of the best-known and most widely read German philosophers writing today. His 1983 publication *Critique of Cynical Reason* is a landmark in Critical Theory. His trilogy *Spheres* has now become available in English. Sloterdijk became president of the State Academy of Design in Karlsruhe in 2001. He was co-host of a discussion programme, *Das philosophische Quartett*, on German television from 2002 to 2012. Influenced first of all by Friedrich Nietzsche's 'glad tidings', he has written extensively on ressentiment. In his early work, this takes the form of 'kynicism': discursive and nondiscursive performances of parrhesiastic cheekiness that function as immune strategies against omnipresent cynicism, that is, the moralizing split between thinking and doing which puts 'ressentiment' and bad conscience at the core of late capitalist culture. More recently, 'thymos' or 'stout-heartedness' is the basic affect by which Sloterdijk explores alternative modes of valuation and citizenship. Throughout, his aim is a philosophical 'retuning' of today's all-pervasive 'dissimulation of lack', due to which modern emancipation would have degenerated into religious, political and economical routines of compensation.

Sjoerd van Tuinen is currently a visiting research fellow at Princeton University and teaches philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is the editor of numerous books, including *Deleuze and The Fold: A Critical Reader* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), *De nieuwe Franse filosofie* (Boom, 2011), *Speculative Art Histories* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017) and *Art History after Deleuze and Guattari* (Leuven University Press, 2017) and has authored *Sloterdijk: Binnenstebuiten denken* (2004). At his home university he is a co-founder of the Erasmus Institute for Public Knowledge (EIPK), where he is responsible for a project on European politics of debt and austerity.

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Introduction

Sjoerd van Tuinen

Ressentiment, as first characterized by Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), is the feeling of vengefulness. It results from an impotence to 'react', to either change or forget the cause of one's suffering. As compensation, it projects a postponed and imaginary revenge that both obfuscates the original trauma and internalizes it in the form of ongoing suffering.[1] Following Gilles Deleuze's succinct definition, *ressentiment* is a reaction that 'ceases to be acted in order to become something felt (*senti*)'.[2] The traces of previous impressions replace new external stimuli or become indiscernible from them. 'The man of ressentiment', as Nietzsche calls him, is therefore incapable of forgetting; he constantly relives the sad passions of the past at the cost of losing the future. His illness is the archetype of sickness in general: 'You cannot get rid of anything, you cannot cope with anything, you cannot fend anything off – everything hurts you. People and things get intrusively close, experiences affect you too deeply, memory is a festering wound. Being ill is a kind of ressentiment itself.'[3]

Unable to actually affirm its place in the world and doomed to passivity, ressentiment never ceases to legitimate and intensify itself through the negation and blaming of a hostile world that it nonetheless remains dependent upon. For Nietzsche, this relentless brooding and sulking is the local and surreptitious neurosis that constitutes the vital point of view and state of mind of all 'those who came off badly'. Endowed with the 'poisoned eye' or 'green eye on every action',[4] all that's left for them is to temporarily alleviate their suffering by seeking explosive passions such as hatred or pity that can function as narcotic distraction and give it a meaning – in the case of hatred, vengeance, and in the case of pity, atonement.

> For every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit who is receptive to distress, – in short, for a living being upon whom he can release his emotions, actually or in

effigy, on some pretext or other: because the release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntarily longed for narcotic against pain of any kind. In my judgment, we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to *anaesthetize pain through emotion*.[5]

But as the thirst for revenge against others (immediate ressentiment) or oneself (ressentiment mediated by bad conscience) treats only the psychological symptom of trauma and not its physiological cause, it can only worsen the conditions of the men of ressentiment and burn them up. Ultimately, ressentiment as a combination of passivity and negativity leads to a complete denial of reality in which life itself is experienced only as an affront and overburdened with guilt.

Fatefully locked up in their own impotence, the men of ressentiment constantly seek to indemnify themselves by way of slyness and guile. For Nietzsche, a slave is ultimately always the slave of the refinement with which he universalizes and deepens his own condition. His will and passion converge in the servile pursuit of self-preservation despite all:

> While the noble man is confident and frank with himself (gennaios, 'of noble birth', underlines the nuance 'upright' and probably 'naïve' as well), the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and straight with himself. His soul *squints*; his mind loves dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to him as being *his* world, *his* security, *his* comfort; he knows all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing himself. A race of such men of *ressentiment* will inevitably end up *cleverer* than any noble race, and will respect cleverness to a quite different degree as well: namely, as a condition of existence of the first rank.[6]

As the difference between noble and base suggests, Nietzsche introduced his concept of ressentiment in the context of his psychological inquiry into the descent of morality. 'Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess?'[7] Genealogically speaking, these conditions must be evaluated as either high or low, healthy or sick. Contrasting 'slave morality' with 'noble morality', Nietzsche argues that it is the passivity and negativity of the man of ressentiment that have paved the way for the defining event of Western culture, the moment when, due to a paradoxical victory of reactive forces over active forces, '*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values'. The noble simply judges as good what he individually strives for or desires. He certainly has a concept of the bad, but at the same time

he is 'incapable of taking his enemies, his accidents, even his misdeeds seriously for very long'. The slaves, by contrast, cannot create value out of themselves and herd around the value creation of others. Their sole creation is the fiction of the 'evil enemy', in opposition to which the common good then evolves 'as a pendant and afterthought'. This reversal of the perspectival values of good and bad into the universal hierarchy of Evil and Good constitutes the 'slaves' revolt in morality'.[8]

Of course, ressentiment is only the first step in Nietzsche's long and complex account of the history of this slaves' revolt. It does not yet answer the genealogical question par excellence, namely how ressentiment is capable of becoming a global cultural form in its own right, given the slaves' essential impotence to act. Ressentiment is the source of slave morality, but it takes an artistic genius for the fictional reversal of values to bring about real effects.[9] This artist, Nietzsche tells us, is the calculating priest from the Jewish and, especially, the Christian tradition, who derives his power from the legitimation and hermeneutics of suffering and victimhood and ushers in the long history of an imaginary revenge. It is under his hands that ressentiment turns into a global culture of its own in which weakness turns into merit, baseness into humility, passivity into patience, and it is his inclusive culture that would eventually culminate in the egalitarian morality of the modern world.[10]

This, in a nutshell, is Nietzsche's searing critique of Western morality. In one version or another, it has been taken up by thinkers across the social sciences and humanities. Yet as the contributions to this volume reveal, the closer we come to the present, the more contentious his claims turn out to be. Some have argued that the ressentimental need for recrimination and compensation was the main motivation behind the French Revolution and subsequent emancipatory processes. Others argue that ressentiment is precisely the consequence of modern democracies, because the more egalitarian a society becomes in principle, the more its de facto inequality is perceived as an insult. Still others liked to think that egalitarian struggles have ultimately led, despite their secret inauthentic motivation as it were, to a mature, that is, post-historical, post-ideological and post-political, intersubjective symmetry in which all soil on which ressentiment grows has been removed. Except that a pervasive sense of cynicism, the rise of populism, fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism and the whole culture of naming, blaming, shaming and claiming by people who experience themselves as victims despite living in affluent societies challenges us to reconsider the problem. According to Google Trends, searches for 'politics of resentment' exploded right after the most recent American presidential elections.[11] Whereas its conceptualization dates back to the nineteenth century and has gradually

dissolved in the course of twentieth-century emancipatory processes, the concept of ressentiment is now making a comeback in political discourse in a variety of forms and guises.

The aim of this volume is to 'dramatize' this discourse by mapping the divergent senses in which the concept of *ressentiment* is and can be used today. It draws upon a wide variety of authors, methods, ideological contexts and the diversity of interpretations of ressentiment that follow from them. As a whole, this book nonetheless distinguishes itself from the existing literature in three ways.

First, it emphasizes a neglected aspect of ressentiment by redefining it in terms of the problem of *voluntary servitude*. Although first formulated as such by Étienne de la Boétie, it was Spinoza who refined it as a problem of the passions. The free, self-causing will is always embedded in the lived world along the lines of the passions (the beliefs, representations and opinions) that attach us to the world and make up the very material of which our lives are composed. The problem of politics, however, is the 'tyrants' and 'priests' who inspire sad passions, and derive their power from them. Quiet submission is the mode of existence of what Nietzsche called the slave. The more he experiences and endures his suffering as necessary, the smaller the chance of indignation and revolt. It is in precisely this sense that Max Scheler, in *Ressentiment* (1912), sums up Nietzsche's scattered remarks on ressentiment and slave morality by defining it as the 'self-poisoning of the mind … a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects' leading to 'a tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments'[12].

Scheler, however, doesn't merely systematize Nietzsche. He also sets out on a sociological and theological correction of the latter's genealogy of morality. Christian charity would not turn ressentiment into a formative power, but precisely prevent it from becoming so. After all, in Christ we are all equal, or rather we find in him a nobility we can all equally aspire to. Christian love (*agape*) towards others ascends towards the sublime, not towards the flattening of values. Only in modernity, with appropriative morality and humanitarian values, is the patient waiting for the Last Judgment transformed into the impatience of the bourgeois who wants to be compensated for every relative deprivation and every perceived offense here on earth. Whereas vengefulness is supposedly of all ages, Scheler argues, ressentiment could only become a formative power because of egalitarian ideals that constantly confront us with a discrepancy between principle and fact and thus encourage rancour as a universal human right.

> Social *ressentiment*, at least, would be slight in a democracy which is not only political, but also social and tends towards equality of property. But the same would be the case – and *was* the case – in a caste society such as that of India, or in a society with sharply divided classes. *Ressentiment* must therefore be strongest in a society like ours, where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognized, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property, and education. While each has the right to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot do so in fact.[13]

Instead of the progenitor of modernity, as it was for Nietzsche, Scheler thus argues that the culture of ressentiment would be its child.

Unsurprisingly, it is this inverted perspective that lies at the basis of most modern understandings of ressentiment. Ever since Scheler, we have been told that throughout modern history, ressentiment has been the basic affective pathology of ideologies of protest on the left and the right. From Romanticism to Jacobinism, from Marxism to National-Socialism and from feminism to post-colonialism, in each case 'explosions' of envious but impotent anger would explain why utopian struggle unavoidably leads to violent dystopia. Thus it has become a platitude of liberal conservative discourse that we should give up the militant passions of egalitarian struggle and content ourselves with the jaded realism of global capitalism in order to put an end to the dialectical cycle of ressentiment.[14]

But what if the price for this newfound realism is a blindness to the problem that necessitated Nietzsche to invent the concept of ressentiment in the first place, that is, the problem of wilful servitude and of the crucial role played by the priest in the revolt of the slaves as slaves rather than as slaves becoming masters? Doesn't the self-gratification of anti-ressentiment rhetoric stem from a depoliticizing psychologism that is itself laden with ressentiment? Wasn't it Nietzsche's lesson that moral pacification is precisely the way in which the priest changes the outward recriminations of the ressentiment of his herd inwardly, thus organizing and disseminating bad conscience? Indeed, does neoliberalism not cultivate ressentiment as a strategy of control, a tactic fostering of sad passions such as envy, hope, nostalgia, indignation and anxiety in people who, in the name of an exhaustive self-preservation that leaves all utopian critique in its wake, will renounce their own power and give in to secrecy and cowardice, turning their guilt inwards and their hatred outwards?

As Richard Sennett famously argued in *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), an increasingly passive experience of the public realm has condemned isolated and disempowered citizens to the indifference and loss of critical judgement typical of the man of ressentiment. With René Girard (*Mensonge romantique et*

vérité romanesque, 1961) we may add that today's citizens live in a global winner-take-all society that subjects its members to ruthless competition, infecting them with appropriative and mimetic desires that unleash hitherto unseen waves of frustration. More recently, Wendy Brown (*States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, 1995) has shown how disciplinary mechanisms and structures of state and market exclusion more and more premise political struggles for recognition on the 'wounded attachments' of marginalized groups, such that rancour and spite towards one's perceived oppressor go hand in hand with a renunciation of freedom and assumption of one's own powerlessness and victimhood. With Peter Sloterdijk (*Rage and Time*, 2006) we can observe how there has emerged a whole cultural industry that, alternating between sentimentality and cruelty, causes private resignation and public spectacle, victimhood and identity claims to converge.

Rather than judging revolutionary politics by reducing it to its component of self-discrediting ressentiment, then, shouldn't we seek to explain and overcome this subjective identification with impotence as a prison we choose to live in? Pankaj Mishra's recent bestseller *Age of Anger. A History of the Present* (2017) is only the most recent book in a virtually endless series to diagnose the proliferation of envious wrath among the planet's aspiring classes through the lens of nineteenth-century categories, thus throwing together various forms of enthusiasm, fanaticism and consumerism. It is typical, however, that it offers only one alternative to the bleak picture of a world that is destined to collapse under its various egalitarian struggles: the bad conscience of the liberal who realizes that the institutions of the Anglo-American world have lost their global function of moderation and mediation. Doesn't this indicate that perhaps the true political problem of ressentiment is not the alternative of revolutionary hatred and counterrevolutionary remorse, but the genealogical question first raised by Spinoza: Why do we often fight for our own slavery as if it were our beatitude?

Modern critical theory usually answers this question by recourse to the irrationality of our desires (*eros*). Marxism has analysed our servitude in terms of fetishization and false consciousness; psychoanalysis has contributed the concepts of discontent and narcissism. For both, envy plays a key role. The more we compare ourselves with others, the greater the ressentiment we will experience over any perceived inequality. Ressentiment here is understood as the sour-grapes syndrome: since we cannot get what we want, the grapes must be revalued as undesirable. We thus seek compensation in the unconscious affirmation of our inferior position, as we continue to rely

on the conviction as to the superiority of ruling-class expressions or values, which we equally transgress and repudiate. Scheler emphasized the structural affinity of ressentiment and the sour-grape syndrome. For Nietzsche, however, envy was only half the story. Whereas the noble act spontaneously, and out of their own will, it is only the slaves who desire what others desire and suffer from relative deprivation if their desires are frustrated. This suggests not only that ressentiment is more fundamental than envy; as Sloterdijk suggests, it may also be the consequence of another psychological force than desire, for example, pride or rage (*thymos*).

The second way in which this book distinguishes itself is therefore by making *a strict difference between ressentiment and resentment* or the sense of injustice.[15] This difference is as well-known as it tends to be forgotten. Resentment is a kind of moral anger over the ill will or lack of concern of others.[16] At stake are not just our rights or interests but our self-esteem and dignity as well as the norms of coexistence. As a term it was first used by mid-eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers. It features in the work of David Hume or Joseph Butler as an explanation of the justice and opportunity of any cause. Smith defined resentment as an emotional experience related to our capacity to feel indignation, 'which boils up in the breast of the spectator, whenever he thoroughly brings home to himself the case of the sufferer'.[17] As a mechanism of retributive justice, resentment is essentially a social passion. It is where the ethical problem of valuation in terms of good and bad and the political problem of power and interest meet. For Butler, it had been 'one of the common bonds, by which society holds itself',[18] that is, by which it prevents and remedies injuries. But as Smith points out, it is also an intrinsically dangerous and unappealing passion, as it is 'the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind'.[19] On the one hand, 'a person becomes contemptible who tamely sits still, and submits to insults, without attempting either to repel or to revenge them'.[20] On the other hand, the object cannot be vengeance: 'the object, which resentment is chiefly intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel pain in turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner'.[21] For Butler and Smith, then, the passion of resentment is indispensable as a mechanism of retributive justice, but for true justice to exist, revenge should never be more than a means to an end. The challenge of resentment lies in its moderation and its proportionate passage into action. While it tends towards brutality, it is a legitimate passion as long as it is tamed by the moral principles that regulate retribution.

Both this moral uprightness and its *passage a l'act* are missing in ressentiment, or at least they have lost their innocence. Resentment could be reasonable, in the sense that we can recognize the reasons grounding it and evaluate what would be an adequate and proportionate response. Together with indignation, it has often been regarded as the reactive but necessary counterpart to the enthusiasm that formed the impassioned drive of the French Revolution, even though its excessive and irrational tendencies would be responsible for the terror that followed. In the following, more complacent period, however, the term acquired the additional connotation of a suspicion about the prevailing morality of pity and compassion. Could it be that the heyday of bourgeois liberalism, perhaps not unlike our own age of neo-liberal hegemony, hides a more fundamental incapacity to take a moral or political stance? Do not its sentimental values hide a self-interested vindictiveness and suppressed hatred that find their justification in protracted resentment and indignation instead of ever seriously considering fighting for a just cause, and that hold the potential to be infinitely more unforgiving and disproportionate? Doesn't authentic resentment inevitably get corrupted by other passions such as envy and greed?

In *The Present Age* (1846), Søren Kierkegaard already points to the levelling power of ressentiment. By the mid-nineteenth century, modern democracy is perceived to come at the price of a crisis of hierarchy, a specific confusion of equality and inequality whereby mediocrity disqualifies the prevailing moral and political subjectivity. Comparing his own age with the aforegoing 'revolutionary age', he diagnoses a 'passionless, sedentary, reflective age' dominated by 'envy and abstract thought'.[22] Not unlike the reaction that followed May 1968, the earlier struggles for freedom and equality can now only be experienced evasively, through the lens of scepticism and cowardice, as if they were nothing but satire: 'just as in a passionate age enthusiasm is the unifying principle, so envy becomes the negatively unifying principle in a passionless and very reflective age.'[23] Kierkegaard thus anticipates Wendy Brown's observation that ressentiment has become the epistemological spirit and political culture of North America, in which morality tends to replace political argument, just as political freedom is bartered for legal protection. It is here that the sour-grapes phenomenon becomes relevant once more. While it is often confused with resentment, this means that ressentiment is no longer the same emotional experience. At best, it is a frustrated resentment turned inwards; at worst, it is a smouldering envy that was never meant to see the light of day. Either way, once there is ressentiment, the time for authentic resentment is over. Those who cultivate indignation are more and more like

the representatives of a rotten culture, actors in a spectacle without dignity, sustainability or credibility.

Perhaps the moment that resentment could no longer be seen in disconnection from envy also marks the overturning of the classical way moral philosophers evaluated the moral value of resentment. From here on, it seems, the following equation prevails: resentment + envy = ressentiment. Yet isn't there something unsatisfying about this modern conflation of resentment with ressentiment? Isn't there still an alternative of ressentiment, which departs from thymos instead of eros? After all, not all protest movements are driven by envy or ressentiment. To suggest they are can itself be seen as product of a reified notion of the existing order and its established values at the cost of alternative viewpoints and the suppression of unwelcome demands. Does it not still bear too many similarities with the nihilistic spreading of bad conscience and paranoia at the level of desire itself by Christian mass psychology?[24]

Perhaps it is only with Nietzsche that ressentiment comes to be explored in its full scope, meaning that he completes the shift from moral psychology to genealogical critique. Egalitarian thought has to deal with envy, which might well be its main problem. This is not the case from Nietzsche's elitist point of view for whom ressentiment is just base. By shifting the perspective from modern egalitarianism to the hierarchic and differential will to power, he directly polemicized against 'English psychology' or, more generally, Enlightenment psychology. Humans seek justice for all as little as they live in the universal pursuit of 'happiness'. Rather, resentment is the effect of self-affirmation and as such belongs to noble morality. As a felt reaction to suffering, it divests the hurt from its potential to become internalized and effectively dissipates itself: 'When *ressentiment* does occur in the noble man himself, it is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction, and therefore it does not *poison*'.[25] In other words, resentment is like a burst of anger but maybe also like a burst of laughter that distances itself from ressentiment.[26] By contrast, it is precisely this self-affirming expressivity of negative reactions that is unacceptable for the priest's herd pedagogy of suffering and victimhood. Whereas Scheler and Girard would later return to a conception of ressentiment as vengeful passion of envy and withheld justice, the 'untimely' and perhaps 'extra-moral' originality of Nietzsche lies in his emphasis on the necessity of millennia of slow cultural preparation and consolidation. This also means that with him, ressentiment is never criticized as empirical or individual character trait: 'I am far from blaming individuals for the calamity of millennia'.[27] The critical problem is precisely a whole psychology that favours inwardness, that turns resentment into ressentiment and that has led to nihilism at the scale of a whole civilization. It is

therefore this Nietzschean (and untranslatable) concept of ressentiment as basic affective disease of the West and not just the more historically dated notion of resentment and its post-revolutionary perversion in envy that forms the starting point for this book.

The third way in which this volume distinguishes itself from the existing body of literature is through its focus on *the polemical nature of the concept*. Perhaps we should say that the concept of ressentiment has a very strong public life but also a rather limited academic life. For many contemporary authors, ressentiment is the most important factor in the axiological reversals and ideological paralogisms that characterize modern emancipatory politics.[28] It has even become possible to give a retrospective interpretation of revolutionary processes of any type and period from antiquity onwards in the general terms of ressentiment. [29] But this is only in close resonance with the way in which ressentiment functions in general public discourse, where it suffices to reduce any emancipatory movement and any ideological -ism to its base motivation in jealousy, frustration or some other pathological and/or irrational passion in order to disqualify it. Ressentiment is thus a concept that is usually practiced in a polemical fashion, albeit not always explicitly, since it is useful to ignore or deny its contentious efficacy in the name of its intellectual truth. The very latency of its polemical charge makes it all the more hurtful, since the accused stand charged not just with entertaining various ignoble emotions but also with displaying lesser powers of intellectual discernment.[30] Fredric Jameson rightfully identifies the 'unavoidably autoreferential structure'[31] of ressentiment, the resentment of ressentiment, that makes for double standards in diagnostic discourse. As he has pointed out in *The Political Unconscious*, ressentiment tends to function as an 'ideologeme', consolidating a divisiveness beyond ideological commitment.[32] Its preemptive role in establishing conditions of putative discursive reality leaves us with nothing but the futile disgruntlement of the utopian dissident: stop whining and finally become reasonable and do as we say!

The more reflective aim of this volume, by contrast, is to take ressentiment as one of those thorny issues that always threaten to compromise the one who uses it, precisely because it is polemical by nature. In other words, there is no intrinsic good sense or evidence in its practice, but only a polemical sense, and it is precisely this polemical sense that is forgotten when, for example, leftist intellectuals blame right-wing populists for pursuing a vulgar politics of rancour or when the latter blame the traditional leftist elite for defending a nostalgic form of liberation. In

fact, the more we tend to think we have overcome our ressentiment, the more we should wonder whether our own discursive position is not itself infected by the very moralizing ressentiment which we like to think we have acquired the right to dismiss in others. This is an impasse even in Nietzsche to the extent that, as is proven by early-twentieth-century Nietzsche reception, the very idea of the noble as 'blond beast' who is by nature purely active and thus not resentful may well itself be a figment of the most resentful slave. The plausibility of the diagnosis of ressentiment, the real efficacy of its discursive 'truth', therefore has to be proven in another way than merely in the dialectical form of a truth judgement. As Peter Sloterdijk puts it in his essay on cultural struggle (*Kulturkampf*), *Die Verachtung der Massen* (The Contempt of the Masses):

> Nietzsche's theorem of *ressentiment* as flight of the weak into moralizing contempt for the strong … until today has remained the most powerful instrument for the interpretation of the social-psychological relations in mass culture – an instrument of which it is admittedly not easy to say, who could or should wield it. It offers the most plausible description of the behavior of the majorities in modern societies, but also its most polemogenous interpretation – polemogenous, since it reduces the psychic dispositions of individuals who attest themselves morally first-rate motives to reactive and detractive mechanisms of antiverticality at the level of their intimate drives – such that between 'truth' and 'plausibility' a relation of mutual exclusion sets in. It is plausible nonetheless, as it attests to the quasi-omnipresent need for degradation of humiliated self-consciousness which empirically speaking effectively belongs to it.'[33]

As Nietzsche already demonstrated, plausibility is disconnected from truth as soon as truth becomes a moral, that is, universal or absolute aim in itself. For then it is itself already marked by the sign of ressentiment, it is the truth of the slave who denies the irreducible *polemos* between noble and servile standpoints. 'Difference', Nietzsche writes, 'breeds hatred'.[34] Instead, the true genealogical value of the concept of ressentiment depends on an agonal, combative, dramatic or perspectival sensibility: not for the relativity of its truth, but, as Deleuze famously pointed out in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), for the truth of the relational, which takes into account both the affects of the one who wields the concept and those to whom it is said to apply.[35]

If Nietzsche subtitled his *Genealogy* 'a polemic', it is because each attempt to distinguish between high and low ancestry implies a struggle over the legitimacy and origin of this distinction. He therefore asks, Who has the right to wield the concept of ressentiment, this weapon that always risks wounding the one

who wields it? At stake is a difference that has to be made by the genealogist himself. In other words, genealogy comes with the necessity to differentiate high and low applications of the concept of ressentiment, a difference transversal to established values and empirical distributions between the rich and the poor, the elite and the mass, man and woman, white and black and so on.[36]

   This is also the challenge that the contributors to this volume have been asked to take up. With Sloterdijk and Deleuze and despite Jameson, then, this book affirms the relevance and importance of the concept of ressentiment. Whether we like it or not, it seems destined for a great career. But this book is also based on the pervasive intuition that it cannot be taken at face value. The result is a plurality of irreducible and sometimes mutually exclusive approaches to a problematic field that nonetheless seems to have a compelling 'objective' or necessary dialectic – a polemical consistency and coherence – all of its own.

What holds these three emphases in our intervention in the discourse on ressentiment together is that each of them in its own way implies a return to Nietzsche. Each chapter in this volume puts forward its own contemporary version of what ultimately remains a Nietzschean problem. Yet because we are dealing with inflammatory material, not all contributors to this volume agree with one another. This is not a consequence of sloppy editing, but the unavoidable outcome of the way this book is organized. It also explains why this introduction is not a classical introduction, setting out the main arguments of each chapter in the form of a kind of master narrative. Rather, its aim has been to lay out a plane on which the different contributions can appear next to each other without obfuscating their differences, and sometimes contradictions. Michel Foucault once famously, but also somewhat piously, argued that polemics, as opposed to the intersubjective recognition in the form of a dialogue, is 'a parasitic figure on discussion and an obstacle to the search for the truth'.[37] That may be true, but even in a polemic, something collective may nonetheless come to pass. Let's prove him wrong.

Notes

1   Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Essay I, paragraph 10, 20–22.
2   Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 111.
3   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. How to Become What You Are*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, 6, 13.

4 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, 20, 105.

5 Ibid., III, 15, 93.

6 Ibid., I, §10, 21.

7 Ibid., preface, paragraph 3, 5.

8 Ibid., I, 10, 20–22.

9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. H. L. Mencken (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 1999).

10 This argument summarizes the whole of the *Genealogy*. Cf. Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'Physiology versus Psychology. The Priest and the Biopolitics of Ressentiment', in Ann-Cathrin Drews and Kathrin D. Martin (eds.), *Inside. Outside. Other. The Body in the Work of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 265–282.

11 https://www.google.com/trends/explore?cat=16&date=all&q=resentment.

12 Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: Schocken, 1972 [1913]), 45–46.

13 Ibid., 50–51.

14 Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism. On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2009).

15 Extensively discussed in Bernardo Fantini, Dolores Martín Moruno and Javier Moscoso (eds.), *On Resentment: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013). See also Didier Fassin, 'On Resentment and *Ressentiment*. The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions', *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 3 (2013): 249–267.

16 Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Place: Methuan, 1974), 14.

17 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1759]), 92.

18 Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (Cambridge: Hilliard & Brown, 1827 [1726]), viii.

19 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 47.

20 Ibid., 43.

21 Ibid., 115.

22 Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Present Age', in *A Literary Review* (1846). The English translation of the original *misundelse* by Alexander Dru (Harper Perennial, 1962) is 'ressentiment' (51), whereas the later translation by Howard Ong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, then republished by Penguin 2006) says 'envy' (63). I've kept 'envy' here as it is the usual translation of the word, but the way Kierkegaard uses it – a reflection that imprisons the will and prevents it from coming to a decision – is in fact already closer to ressentiment.

23 Kierkegaard, 'The Present Age', 72.

24 Following Jean Baudrillard, Daniel de Zeeuw in his contribution goes even further and wonders if the passive ressentiment is not strictly on the side of the intellectuals and diagnosticians, with the silent majorities taking a much more actively nihilistic stance.

25   Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, 10, 22.

26   Grace Hunt, 'Redeeming Resentment: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ripostes', *American Dialectic* 3, no. 2/3 (2013): 118–147, 143.

27   Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, I, 7, 16.

28   Marc Angenot, *Les ideologies des ressentiment* (Lanzville: XYZ Publishing, 1997).

29   Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge/Boston: Polity, 2010).

30   Karl-Heinz Bohrer and Kurt Scheel (eds.), 'Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur', special issue of *Merkur, Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken*, Heft 665/ 666 (September/October 2004), 743–744.

31   Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), 192–193. Jameson underlines that Nietzsche's genealogical 'myth' of ressentiment served a psychological critique of Victorian moralism and its hypocrisy. For Jameson, however, it is only with its 'secondary adaptations' that the notion acquires 'a more fundamentally political function' in the explanation of mass behaviour: it is used both for a rather 'exoteric' psychological explanation of the destructive envy felt by the have-nots and for the more 'esoteric' explanation of those priests who compensate for their failure as intellectuals with political and revolutionary militancy (ibid., 189).

32   Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 189.

33   Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen. Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 56.

34   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 263.

35   Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'The Drama of Ressentiment: The Philosopher versus the Priest', in Ceciel Meiborg and Sjoerd van Tuinen (eds.), *Deleuze and the Passions* (New York: Punctum Books, 2016), 79–102.

36   Robert J. Antonio, 'Nietzsche's Antisociology: Subjectified Culture and the End of History', *American Journal of Sociology* (July 1995), 1–43, 28.

37   Michel Foucault, 'Polemics, Politics and Problematizations', in trans. Lydia Davis, *Ethics*, volume 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 112.

Part One

Ressentiment as Voluntary Servitude

The Politics of Ressentiment and the Problem of Voluntary Servitude

Saul Newman

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche gives us a diagnosis of ressentiment. This is the condition of rancour born of weakness and impotence; it is a hatred of the weak against the strong, a hatred that poisons the will and infests one's whole being. *Ressentiment* is articulated through the relationship between master morality and slave morality. The slave revolt in morality inverted the noble system of values and began to equate good with the lowly and powerless. This inversion introduced the pernicious spirit of revenge into the creation of values. Therefore morality, as we understand it, has its roots in this vengeful *will to power* of the powerless over the powerful – the revolt of the slave against the master. It was from this imperceptible, subterranean hatred that the values subsequently associated with the good – pity, altruism, meekness and so on – grew: 'the triumph of the weak as weak', as Nietzsche puts it.

Ressentiment is an entirely negative sentiment – the attitude of denying what is life-affirming, saying 'no' to what is different, what is 'outside' or 'other'. Ressentiment is characterized by an orientation to the outside. While the master says, 'I am good', and adds as an afterthought, 'therefore he is bad', the slave says the opposite – 'he (the master) is bad, therefore I am good.' Thus the invention of values comes from a comparison or opposition to that which is outside, other, different. Nietzsche says, 'in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, psychologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act all, – its action is basically a reaction.'[1] This reactive stance, this inability to define anything except in opposition to something else, is the attitude of ressentiment. The weak need the existence of this external enemy to identify themselves as 'good'. Thus the slave takes 'imaginary revenge' upon the master, as he cannot act without the existence of the master to oppose.

Ressentiment is therefore characterized by an inability to affirm oneself, other than in opposition to a hostile external world. One's will to power is turned inwards where it claws away ceaselessly, producing bad conscience, rather than outwards, in the form of self-affirmation. There is a kind of abdication of the will and a turning away from freedom. Freedom is turned into a utopian goal, a dream, a form of wish fulfilment, rather than an active willing to be free. So, for Nietzsche, ressentiment amounts to an abandonment of one's freedom; the instinct for freedom (which for Nietzsche is the same thing as the will to power), characteristic of the master, has been entirely lost: 'This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent … this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what bad conscience is in its beginnings.'[2] Man has been tamed; he has been induced to turn his will to power against himself, and his natural instinct for freedom has become now an instinct for submission. Like an animal that has been domesticated, he has turned himself into the prison house of his own will and has become his own gaoler.

However, this process of taming goes hand in hand with the violent imposition of state power, which is in a sense both cause and effect of the abdication of man's freedom. Nietzsche says,

> the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless population into a firm form was not only instituted by an act of violence but also carried to its logical conclusion by nothing but acts of violence – that the oldest 'state' thus appears as a fearful tyranny, as an oppressive and remorseless machine, and went on working until this raw material was at last not only thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also *formed*.[3]

Yet, what was it that allowed this apparatus of violent capture to be imposed, what was it that allowed the raw material of man to be formed and moulded in this way, other than a kind of *voluntary servitude*, an absence of the will or, to be more precise, an actual will to submit. Perhaps we could say that the state is sustained by, as Nietzsche puts it, a 'dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer'.[4] Perhaps, then, ressentiment can be seen in terms of an active and continuous work of submission, of the continual giving up of freedom and the insistence on one's own domination. Surely, this is how slave morality should be understood – as a form of self-abandonment, which at the same time makes possible and sustains an external system of power.

Ressentiment means, at the same time, the slave's hatred ressentiment means at the same time the slave's hatred of the master as well as the slave's *demand* for the

master – these are two sides of the same coin. We hate the master because we at the same time need and desire him. Moreover, it is the fear and hatred of the other, of what is different from us, what might threaten us – a fear characteristic of ressentiment – that demands the intervention of the protective sovereign master. Our hatred and fear of the other is what invokes the Hobbesian state which immunizes and secures us from risks and dangers. It is our fear, and our miserable clinging to life, which brings Leviathan into being. Moreover, as William E. Connolly points out, our resentment of difference, which comes out of our own entrapment within disciplinary apparatuses, in turn animates the punitive and authoritarian drives to punish and humiliate others.[5] Our own loss of freedom, or rather our own relinquishment of freedom, is a condition which we seek to impose on others; if I cannot be free, then why should others be able to enjoy freedom? If I have to endure a life of work and obedience to the law, if I have to police myself through generalized codes of normality, if I have to suffer, then others should have to suffer and obey as well. As Nietzsche says, 'For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering – in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy.' The man of ressentiment must believe that 'someone or other must be to blame for my feeling ill'.[6]

Furthermore, we look to a master to not only protect and discipline us but to grant us rights and recognition. As Wendy Brown shows, the problem with identity politics and struggles for recognition – which she sees as being susceptible to political ressentiment – is that their claims and demands are addressed to the state, and in granting rights and acceding to certain claims, the state at the same time more thoroughly incorporates and governs these identities. Indeed, the wounded attachments of many marginalized groups to an identity of suffering and victimhood – an identity which is produced for them through disciplinary mechanisms and structures of state and market exclusion – are precisely what produces ressentiment: a rancour and spitefulness towards one's perceived oppressor, which entails at the same time a kind of renunciation of freedom and an affirmation of one's own suffering and powerlessness. She argues that 'a politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it, discursively codifies it. Politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only be entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future – for itself or others – that triumphs over this pain'.[7] It is this attachment to and inability to overcome pain, suffering and powerlessness that entails an abandonment of one's freedom.

Brown asks, then, 'What are the particular constituents … of identity's desire for recognition that seem often to breed a politics of recrimination and rancor, of culturally dispersed paralysis and suffering, a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it?'[8]

Radical political theory, if it does not want to remain caught in the dead end of neoliberal identity politics, must address the problem of ressentiment and find ways of overcoming it. In particular, it must come to terms with what I see as the central aspect of ressentiment – the wilful abandonment of one's own freedom, or, in other words, our *voluntary servitude*. The eternal question of why we obey, even when it is not in our own interests to do so, constitutes one of the greatest enigmas of politics. And it is a problem which, thus far, radical and revolutionary politics – premised on the assumption of man's desire for freedom – has failed to confront. In other words, what if it is the case that rather than desiring freedom, we actually desire our own domination? Of course, we need only point to the historical phenomenon of fascism, which looks like it might be returning to our midst, to see the dangers here – the desire, at times, for authoritarian masters and our propensity to blindly obey and follow the will of tyrannical leaders. However, we must also consider the more generalized and pervasive forms of voluntary servitude that characterize neoliberal societies where, despite, or rather *because of*, the formal ideology of freedom, *we obey like never before* – in particular the financial servitude imposed upon us by regimes of debt (and we should remember that for Nietzsche guilt originates in debt).[9] Maybe the sadness of our times comes from the fact that there is no longer any visible master to obey, who would operate as a kind of veil or excuse for our voluntary servitude; and yet we continue to obey – through rituals of work, consumption and indebtedness – the commands of an invisible master, the Economy, which governs us in the name of our own freedom.

The problem of voluntary servitude: Foucault and La Boétie

I want to investigate the question of ressentiment and its political implications through the problem of our voluntary servitude, the phenomenon whereby, in the words of Spinoza, people 'will fight for their servitude as if they are fighting for their own deliverance, and will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man'.[10]

I want to explore this problem by focusing on two thinkers often not considered together – Michel Foucault and Etienne de la Boétie. Through an investigation of a certain line of thought pursued by both thinkers, I will propose a reading of ressentiment understood as the abdication of freedom. But I will also suggest a way out of this. In other words, the voluntary servitude hypothesis should not be seen as an acceptance of the inevitability of domination. On the contrary, it is a radical affirmation of the ever-present possibilities of freedom – a recognition that all power is essentially fragile and illusory, in so far as it is constituted through the abdication of our will, which means that freedom and the transcendence of power are simply a matter of the reassertion of the will. The other side of voluntary servitude – indeed the other side of ressentiment – is ontological freedom or what I call *voluntary inservitude.*

I consider La Boétie's *Discourse de la Servitude Volontaire*, written in the sixteenth century, as one of the most radical tracts ever penned, because in it La Boétie comes to grips with what is perhaps the most intractable enigmas in politics – *why people freely submit to their own domination.* What I want to suggest here is that the same line of questioning, the same critical impulse, inspires Foucault, specifically, the genealogical investigations of the micro-political relationship between the subject and power, which is never one of simple opposition but rather of mutual constitution and intensification. Foucault, as a Nietzschean philosopher, is concerned after all with that which binds us to power at the level of our subjectivities, and, with the other side of this, how we are able to resist, contest and problematize this attachment, and how we are able to engage in practices of self-constitution which are, for him, nothing if not 'practices of freedom'. Moreover, just as we should not read La Boétie as counselling resignation in the face of power, or as proposing that servitude is our natural condition – on the contrary he wants to empower people by reminding them of what they had long forgotten, their ever-present freedom – so we should read Foucault as affirming the ever-present and undreamt possibilities of freedom. As Foucault put it in an interview, in almost innocent terms, 'My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people they are much freer than they feel … I believe in the freedom of the people.'[11] But to get a better sense of what this 'freedom of the people' might mean, we need to read Foucault in conjunction with La Boétie. Both La Boétie's and Foucault's thought can be read as a profound 'meditation' – and I intend this to invoke something of the spiritual sense of the word – on the possibilities of freedom and on our potential for voluntary *inservitude.*

Foucault's Enlightenment

To trace this extraordinary resonance between these two thinkers, I want to discuss a lecture that Foucault gave at the Sorbonne in May 1978, called 'What Is Critique?' Here Foucault explores the emergence in Western thought, dating roughly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (crucially we should note that this is the time in which La Boétie is writing), of a certain 'critical attitude', which, importantly, predates the Kantian enterprise. For Foucault a way of explaining the emergence of this critical attitude is as a reaction to what he calls the governmentalization of Western European societies during this period: the art of governing which characterized the Christian pastorate, and which during the Middle Ages had been confined to religious and monastic institutions, now becomes the general, ubiquitous rationality of society itself, pervading matters of family, social, economic and political life. As Foucault says, the fundamental question that emerges during this period is, *How to govern*?[12] It is important, then, to look more closely at the Christian pastorate because, as Foucault maintains, this forms the basis of the governmental rationality that persists even into our liberal biopolitical modernity. The key element of the pastorate, which Foucault explores in various places, particularly in his lectures taking place at the same time at the College de France on security (1977–1978), is the notion of obedience: the shepherd-flock relationship is one of absolute obedience.[13]

This relation of obedience and servitude takes place at an individual level; it is a relationship between the shepherd and the individual members of his flock. The shepherd governs each and all, singularly and collectively, 'omnes et singulatim'.[14] Foucault's analysis here of Christian modes of obedience is clearly influenced by Nietzsche. What is cherished in this relationship is obedience as the absence or relinquishment of willpower, particularly of the will over oneself – in Greek, *apatheia*. This is important and I will return to it later, for both Foucault and La Boétie are concerned with the problem of the will.

However, such pastoral relations of obedience are always accompanied by the possibility of disobedience. An example of this might be seen in the religious heresies of the Middle Ages, whereby the governing power of the Church was disrupted by the emergence of divergent, dissonant ideas, doctrines and ways of life. Among these, asceticism is perhaps the most important: it is a discipline to which one subjects oneself so that one cannot be so easily mastered by others, and it is therefore the very opposite of obedience. Foucault invokes here the notion of 'counter-conducts'.[15] If governing pastoral power is the power to conduct the

actions, lives and souls of others in the interests of their salvation, then counter-conducts are practices and ways of life that resist this governing power, that refuse the ways in which one is conducted by others. We might say, then, that if power is the 'conduct of conduct', then counter-conduct is the reversal or disruption of this relationship – a reversal whose potential is ever present and indeed presupposed by any relation of power. If, as Foucault says, where there is power there is also resistance, this means that where there is power there is also freedom, as freedom is the possibility of acting and behaving differently, the ever-present possibility – which haunts any relation of power and governing – of conducting ourselves in ways other than those that have been prescribed for us.

It is precisely this spirit of disobedience which, as Foucault argues, re-emerges in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in response to the explosion of governmental practices and discourses. Thus, alongside the question of how to govern arises the opposing question, 'How not to be governed?' – a question that guides and moves the spirit of critique. But this is a specific problematic: it is how not to be governed in specific ways, in the name of specific rationalities or principles, or through specific methods; 'how not to be governed *like that*'.[16] We see the appearance or re-appearance, then, of a glorious art: *the art of not being governed.*

Foucault then tells us that this impulse to not be governed informs the critical spirit of Kant's Aufklärung, which after all is seen as mankind's escape from a state of immaturity, in which one is governed heteronymously, into adulthood, which is the condition of autonomy. It is in the spirit of this heterodox reading of the Aufklärung that Foucault seeks to inaugurate what he calls in this lecture a 'historicophilosophical' mode of enquiry – perhaps it would be more familiar to us as *genealogy*. It proposes a Nietzschean historicization of ideas, such that a critical reflection on and interrogation of the legitimacy of modern forms of knowledge and truth regimes is made possible; this is through what Foucault terms their 'eventalization' [*événementialisation*],[17] which is a way of unmasking the relationship between power and knowledge, of revealing the multiple coercions involved in a system of knowledge becoming hegemonic. The question that is asked here – and it is a crucial one – is not so much how a system of knowledge is forced on us in an overt sense, but rather, how and under what conditions it becomes acceptable and normalized. In other words, how do we come to accept our subjection to a particular regime of truth and the forms of power that go along with it? What must be investigated, in other words, is the mechanism by which we voluntarily subject ourselves to a specific mode of power. Nietzsche, of course, was concerned with precisely the same

question: our self-subjection to the state. What is being pointed to here is a sort of subjective threshold through which the subject binds himself to various forms of power – and that threshold is a certain regime of truth which we internalize.

Importantly, the fact that a particular regime of power/knowledge/truth becomes acceptable to us does not mean that this process was inevitable, or that it revealed to us some originary right that made it legitimate. On the contrary, its emergence is entirely contingent. As Foucault says, 'Bringing out the conditions of acceptability of a system and following the lines of rupture that mark its emergence are two correlative operations.'[18] It is as if a system of power and knowledge suddenly arises – like Nietzsche's state, which comes out of the blue as it were – and the violence of its imposition is at the same time indistinguishable from our free acceptance of it; they are simply two sides of the same mechanism of subjectification. But this contingent dimension of rupture, and this rejection of the notion of inevitability, means that any system of power/knowledge that emerges is always tenuous, never set in stone. They are merely singularities without an essence, and as such they can always be thought otherwise and undone: 'one has to deal with something whose stability, whose rooting, whose foundation is never such that one cannot in one way or another, if not think its disappearance, at least mark that through which and that from which its disappearance is possible.'[19] Every system of power is always fragile and haunted by the prospect of its own reversal and disappearance. So, we should not think of power in terms of mastery or domination, but rather as an unstable, impermanent set of relations and interactions. To put it quite simply, power has to be thought of as an event rather than as a transcendental reality, and as such, it is an event that can be reversed. Foucault asks, 'And if it is necessary to pose the question of knowledge [*connaissance*] in its relation to domination, it would be first and foremost on the basis of a certain *decisive will not to be governed.*' Therefore, as he puts it, '*Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility.*'[20]

Foucault is saying, essentially, that all systems of power are not only fragile, unstable – they are, as he says, *events* without origin, essence or transcendental unity or legitimacy – but, indeed, can only emerge and become hegemonic through our free acceptance of them. Foucault is not proposing any notion here of ideological false consciousness. What he is saying is that systems of power/ knowledge can only operate through a subjective threshold, in which the violence of its coercion becomes indistinguishable from our voluntary acceptance of it; they are two sides of the same coin. But what does this really mean? It means that

freedom – the ability to think, live and act otherwise – is the ontological basis of all power. We have to be able to hear the murmur of freedom, of a yet unrealized yet always potentially realizable freedom that speaks incessantly through the fissures of power; we have to be attuned to its voice lest it be drowned out by power's cogs and machinery. Rather than power being the secret of freedom, as Foucault has so often been interpreted as saying, *freedom is the secret of power*. This is obvious to anyone who chooses to listen to its insistent murmuring and its joyous impatience. And this startling revelation – the ontological primacy of freedom, whereby every system of power/knowledge depends on our will, our acceptance – means that the undoing and reversal of this system is equally a matter of will, of decision, of free volition. Just as we will our own submission to particular forms of power, so we can will our own release from them. This would be the antidote to ressentiment, that fateful misdirection of the will. That is why Foucault refers to a '*decisive will to not be governed*'. Is this not an affirmation of freedom in its truest form? Not freedom as some abstract goal to be achieved, or as a programme of liberation and social organization to be handed to us (for what would this be after all but another system of domination?), but rather the *freedom that we always already have*. It is simply a matter of recalling this fact, of reminding ourselves that the power that seems to engulf us really depends on our acquiescence, our consent, and that all that is required to overturn this relationship of domination is a refusal of our servitude, a willing of our own freedom, a willing to not be governed. Freedom, then, is simply our voluntary servitude reversed – our *voluntary inservitude*.

La Boétie's problem

Yet, to really appreciate the significance of this notion of freedom as voluntary *inservitude*, we need to understand more precisely the problem of voluntary servitude itself. And this requires an encounter with the figure who forms the enigmatic background to Foucault's thinking, who is silently but reverentially intoned behind the phrases I have recounted.

Etienne de La Boétie, who was born in Sarlat in France in 1530, and who, if it were not for the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (also known as the *Contre'Un* or *Anti-One*) (written probably in 1548 when he was only eighteen) would only be known as the friend and confidant of Michel de Montaigne, introduced us to what is perhaps the greatest mystery of politics by asking a simple, yet scandalous question: *Why do men obey, even when it is not in their interest to do so?*

> For the present I should like merely to understand how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him; who is able to harm them only to the extent to which they have the willingness to bear with him; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to put up with him rather than contradict him.[21]

This willing submission to domination, this voluntary servitude to the will of a tyrant – who is simply a creation of the abandonment of our own will and our own power – constitutes a genuine mystery for La Boétie. He is dumbfounded in the face of it, and struggles to name it. It must not be confused with cowardice, he says, which, while despicable, is in some ways understandable. Here the power imbalance between the masses and the tyrant is so great that cowardice simply cannot account for the former's acquiescence to the latter; the people have the power, they have infinite strength in numbers, and yet they choose, freely, voluntarily, to give it up to one man who lords it over them, and yet who is essentially their creation, and who could be toppled without lifting a finger. How can this be explained? Like a doctor unable to diagnose his patient's condition, La Boétie struggles to identify and account for this moral sickness in the same way that, for Nietzsche, ressentiment was a moral sickness that needed to be properly diagnosed. There must be some sort of misdirection or aberration of the will: people, who normally, naturally desire freedom, for some reason choose to give up this freedom and to will their own servitude.

Freedom is our natural condition; man is a being intended for freedom, and for the enjoyment of the natural bonds of companionship and equality, not the artificial bonds of power. Servitude is so far removed from our nature that even animals resist the slightest constraint on their freedom.[22] We are reminded here of Nietzsche's characterization of modern man as a tamed, indeed, perverted animal, who has lost the will to be free.

To be subjected to power is unnatural, and to will our own subjection to power is even more unaccountable. In this sense, La Boétie might be regarded as the anti-Hobbes. For Hobbes, the freedom that we suffer in the state of nature is unnatural to us in the sense that we cannot live in peace and security, and thus the desire to submit to absolute sovereign power – even though it is a human artifice rather than a natural authority – is itself utterly natural and rational. For La Boétie, this whole rationalization of submission is reversed: we enjoy the freedom and equality, indeed, the plurality and singularity that nature endows us with; and then, for some reason, on account of some misfortune of history – which La Boétie does not or perhaps cannot explain – we give it up, and have

suffered the caprices of power and the torments of servitude ever since. People suddenly switch quite voluntarily from freedom to servitude. But the ontological primacy of freedom over power is the important thing here. One whole century before the shadow of Leviathan loomed up over our horizon, La Boétie had already disturbed its foundations by revealing the freedom that lay behind it, the freedom which Hobbes tried to make us forget.

For La Boétie, our fall into servitude has something to do with apathy; a kind of moral languor comes over us such that we no longer desire freedom and independence. But at the same time, he is eager to stress that our servitude is active rather than passive; our domination is something that we willingly participate in, the cords that bind us we renew and strengthen daily. Just as for Nietzsche, ressentiment is an active willing turned against the self – an active and continuous drive towards suffering and self-abasement – so, for La Boétie, voluntary servitude depends on an active continuity of the will to be dominated.

How does La Boétie attempt to account for what is essentially unaccountable? He proposes, tentatively, three possible factors that might explain this lamentable condition that we find ourselves in. Firstly, he says, people become habituated into servitude such that they forget that they were ever free; obedience and docility become a matter of habit (a 'habituation to subjection', as he puts it): 'Let us therefore admit that all those things to which he is trained and accustomed seem natural to man and that only that is truly native to him which he receives with his primitive, untrained individuality.'[23]

We are not a million miles away here from Foucault's 'docile bodies' – the bodies and behaviours relentlessly trained, moulded and shaped in the disciplinary regimes of modernity. To what extent does this rely on a voluntary servitude, as described by La Boétie, rather than outright violence and coercion? To what extent would disciplinary power be possible without the subjectification of the subject such that she actively desires and willingly participates in her own disciplining and normalization?

Secondly, La Boétie refers to the ways that power distracts us, dazzles us, seduces us with its gaudy show, with its spectacles and rituals.[24] Thirdly, La Boétie shows how power constructs for itself a hierarchy of relations in which the tyrant's place is sustained by intricate networks and relations of dependency. Our submission and obedience are assured – bought cheaply, La Boétie would say – by payoffs that we receive from those immediately above us; we submit to the power of another in return for our own little, miserable place in the great pyramid of power that we ourselves have constructed.[25]

However, La Boétie's explanations for our condition of servitude – and to some extent they are inadequate – are perhaps less important than the implications of his actual diagnosis of the problem of our voluntary servitude, this enigma at the heart of all political domination. But it all depends on what we take from this. If we interpret La Boétie as *simply* saying that man will always, when he gets half the chance, submit to power and cut his own throat, then the notion of voluntary servitude does not get us very far, and may even give rise to a certain conservatism, which says that men are born to submit. But nothing could be further, I would argue, from La Boétie's intentions, especially when he says that freedom rather than servitude is our natural condition. Therefore, the way I propose we read his great work is in an emancipatory sense, as a call to freedom, as a way of waking us up, arousing us from our enfeebled, servile state, our condition of ressentiment, as Nietzsche would say. La Boétie does this by confronting us with a truth so astounding that it has the power, even today – if only we would act upon it – to shake the foundations of political authority to their core. If we have freely chosen servitude, if we willingly participate in our own domination without the need for coercion, then this means that all power – even if it appears to bear down upon us – is essentially an illusion, one of our own making. If, in other words, we have created the tyrant in our act of submission to him, this means that the tyrant has no real power; the power he has over us is only *our* power in an alienated form; the chains that bind us are only possible through an abrogation, a giving up, of our own power over ourselves.[26]

All power is therefore fragile, and is only possible by our continuing submission, the continual offering of ourselves up to power. All we must do is to see through the veils of power, to see its essential weakness, its emptiness and impotence. All we must do if we want to free ourselves from the power of the tyrant is to simply take back our power – or, even more simply, to stop giving ourselves up to him, to stop rendering our power to him. It is not even a question of overthrowing the tyrant, but simply to stop empowering him and instead to empower ourselves, upon which the tyrant will fall of his own accord – thus, the spell of domination will be broken.[27]

So the overcoming of domination has nothing to do with the desire for vengeance that Nietzsche saw as the danger of most forms of revolutionary politics – it is not about seeking violent revenge against the tyrant who has violated our freedom; the tyrannical master is not overthrown by the vengeful and hate-filled hands of slaves, but rather by the slaves becoming masters themselves. The release from voluntary servitude is a kind of spiritual and moral transformation or overcoming of oneself, a kind of rebellion against one's own

condition of subjection and abasement rather than against external powers. It is a rediscovery and reaffirmation of one's own will to power, whereupon the rule of the tyrant simply crumbles. The pedestal of power is one that we have erected through our continual submission; it is very easily pulled away by our refusal to submit. All power depends on our power – this is something we have forgotten. La Boétie wants people to recall their own power, or rather to recognize that they had the power all along, they just didn't know it. La Boétie offers us no revolutionary programmes to follow – none are needed; he simply wants us to emancipate ourselves, to emancipate ourselves from our own servitude. It is merely a matter of the will, volition, of 'willing to be free', as he puts it.

La Boétie's text thus serves to remind us of our own will – how we lost it, and how we can regain it. Is there not a profound connection here with Foucault's 'decisive will not to be governed', which for him is the basis of all critique? The other side of voluntary servitude is therefore *voluntary inservitude*; the other side to power is freedom. La Boétie's *Discours* is, like Foucault's work, and like Nietzsche's, an ethical meditation on freedom and its possibilities. Just as La Boétie considers the power of the tyrant an illusion, Foucault tells us that there is no such thing as Power with a capital *P*, that power has no essence, that it is not a substance but a relation, not a property but an intensity and that, even in the seemingly direst conditions of oppression, there is always the possibility of resistance, and therefore of freedom. To see power in this way – for both thinkers – is to in a sense strip away its abstractions and to reveal the secret of freedom that it founded upon; it is not a negation of freedom but a joyous affirmation of it.

Freedom and discipline

There is nothing anachronistic about La Boétie's text: the classical figures of tyrants are much less important than the subjective mechanism, the strange desire, that binds us to power, and this is all the more pertinent today in our contemporary regimes of neoliberal rationality which, as Foucault has shown, rely on a self-subjection to its norms and codes; we construct ourselves as liberal subjects, as self-entrepreneurs, as citizen-consumers, as *homo economicus*, thus allowing ourselves to be dominated in the name of our own freedom. Of course, unlike La Boétie, Foucault would not trace voluntary servitude to one obscure but fateful historical moment, to a fall from our original state of freedom; rather, there has only been self-subjection in specific ways to specific regimes of power.

Nevertheless, the fundamental insight is the same: that all forms of power, no matter how they are historically constituted, depend at some level on our willing acquiescence. How else could power arise? Voluntary servitude is the secret that underlies all the micro-disciplines and coercions, the institutional discourses, the regimes of surveillance, the vast carceral archipelago charted by Foucault. La Boétie's text is the great key that allows us to unlock the eternal mystery of power; it shows us that power cannot exist without our own subjection to it.

First, I want to explore the way that processes of subjectification – the way that a truth is constructed for us which we identify with and which allows us to be governed – at the same time provides us with the means to resist this power. The subjectified subject – or the subject of ressentiment in Nietzsche's terms – is one who is always capable of resistance, and therefore of freedom; the subjectivity that power creates for us is also the material from which we can resist power and from which we can fashion for ourselves new ways of being. This means that the process of subjectification is always double-sided, unstable, unpredictable and reversible. While we are subjectified by power-truth, we are not determined by it, and there is always this excess, this element of unpredictable freedom, which, while generated by power, is never confined by it, and which always has the potential to refuse, resist and reverse the actual form of our subjectification.

The second, related, point here is to do with the relationship between freedom and discipline. As Richard Flathman argues in his discussion of Foucault and Nietzsche, without discipline, there is no agency and therefore no possibility for freedom. Also, disciplinary limits must be present for freedom to be tested and measured against, agonistically.[28] We have seen how the action of disciplinary power produces the capacities for both subjection but also agency and therefore freedom. But what Foucault, in particular, was interested in, as we can see in his later work on ethics, ascesis and the care of the self, was the ways by which people, in certain historical periods and within specific cultural settings, particularly in Greek and Roman antiquity, have actually sought to discipline themselves, to impose upon themselves through various means, such as meditation, self-denial, ethical interrogation, a kind of discipline that would allow them to be free. Foucault refers then to 'an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being'.[29] Foucault, furthermore, sees this process of self-disciplining, self-fashioning as an ethical practice, which is always related to the practice of freedom: 'for what is ethics if not a practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?'[30] So we have the idea here that freedom is not a permanent state that one achieves, but an ongoing project or series of practices by which one constitutes oneself in

alternative ways. Similarly, Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* talks about giving 'style' to one's character and turning oneself 'into a work of art'.

But how does this practice of self-disciplining, or self-mastery, intensify freedom, and why should this be seen as an *ethical* practice (as opposed to simply aesthetic)? The various practices associated with what Foucault calls ascesis were intended to achieve some sort of mastery over oneself such that one would not be so susceptible to being disciplined and governed by others: there is the recognition that, as Flathman shows, within oneself, there are tendencies, desires and dependencies that make one more susceptible to the power of others. La Boétie would see this as the tendency towards voluntary servitude. Thus, ascesis involves forms of self-discipline such that these tendencies can be controlled, mastered, in the interests of one's freedom. As Foucault puts it, 'the concern for the self and care of the self were required for right conduct and the proper practice of freedom, in order to know oneself … as well as to form oneself, to surpass oneself, to master the appetites that threaten to overwhelm one.'[31]

For the Greeks, the desire to dominate others, to exert excessive power over them, is actually an indication that one is not master of oneself; one has become intoxicated with one's own appetite for power, an appetite or desire which has taken over all others within the individual. It is a sign of weakness rather than strength, what Nietzsche would recognize as ressentiment – the desire to dominate arising from impotence and the desire for revenge. The desire to dominate others in order to affirm oneself is what is characteristic of the slave; the master, by contrast, does not need to enter this game of power relations in order to affirm his superiority. Moreover, if one desires to dominate others, one is much more likely to be dominated by others. One enters the dangerous game of power only at one's own cost. Did not La Boétie also perceive this essential weakness of the tyrant; and did he not also warn that those who play the game of power, those who allow themselves to enter the tyrant's great pyramid, in the hope of rewards and favours, or so they can exert power over someone below them, put themselves at great risk? So, we have here, with the practices of freedom through self-mastery, also an ethics (and I would say perhaps a politics) of non-domination.

While we cannot of course be blind to the power relationships – over women and slaves – that those men of antiquity who practiced ascesis were involved in, what we should take from this, or rather what this opens up the possibility for thinking about, is the idea of practicing voluntary inservitude through a kind of ethical self-discipline, or as I would put it, a *discipline of indiscipline*. As La Boétie perceived, our susceptibility to the domination of another was a kind of

weakness, a moral sickness, a wayward and inexplicable desire, born of habit or induced through the false promise of riches and favours. Therefore, in order to be free, we must find a way of mastering and controlling such tendencies. We must, he would say, rediscover our will. And this can only be done, as Foucault shows, through these kinds of ethical practices of self-discipline. So we must be disciplined into freedom, not of course in Rousseau's sense of being forced to free – which imposes a rational ideal that coincides with the community will – but rather a kind of self-discipline that one fashions for oneself and freely imposes upon oneself. But this does not confine it to a liberal individualism: as both La Boétie and Foucault recognize, the release from voluntary servitude can only be practiced associatively, each in relation to others. It implies, above all, a micro-politics of relations.

So freedom as a release from our voluntary servitude is a discipline, an art – something that is learnt, that one learns from others and teaches oneself, and something that is fashioned, worked on, patiently elaborated, practiced at the level of the self in its relations with other. It is a work on our limits, both external and perhaps more importantly internal. But freedom is our ever-present possibility and, indeed, as La Boétie and Foucault teach us, our ontological condition, our point of departure. And affirming this is the only possible way out of our condition of ressentiment.

Notes

1   Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals, and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London: Vintage, 1969), 21–22.

2   Ibid., 87.

3   Ibid., 86.

4   Ibid., 87.

5   William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

6   Ibid., 127.

7   Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 74.

8   Ibid., 55.

9   Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

10 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

11   Michel Foucault, 'Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault',
      25 October 1982, in L. H. Martin (ed.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with
      Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988), 9–15.

12   Michel Foucault, 'What Is Critique?' in trans. Kevin Paul Geiman, James Schmidt
      (ed.), *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century
      Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 382–398, 384.

13   Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France
      1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave
      Macmillan, 2007), 177.

14   Michel Foucault, 'Omnes et Singulatim', in trans. Roberty Hurley and Others, James
      Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 298–325.

15   Foucault, *Security*, 201.

16   Foucault, 'What Is Critique?', 384.

17   Ibid., 393.

18   Ibid., 395.

19   Ibid., 397.

20   Ibid., 386.

21   Etienne de La Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience. The Discourse on Voluntary
      Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurtz. Introduced by Murray Rothbard, 1975, 43. https://
      mises.org/library/politics-obedience-discourse-voluntary-servitude.

22   Ibid., 52.

23   Ibid., 60.

24   Ibid., 64.

25   Ibid., 71.

26   Ibid., 48.

27   Ibid., 45.

28   See Richard Flathman, *Freedom and Its Conditions: Discipline, Autonomy, and
      Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

29   Michel Foucault, 'The Ethics of Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', in
      trans. Robert Hurley, Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential
      Works 1954–1984* (London: Penguin 2002), 282.

30   Ibid., 284.

31   Ibid., 285.

Servitude of Pain: Reflections on the Passivity and Activity of Affects in Spinoza's *Ethics*

Marc Rölli

Laetitia directe mala non est, sed bona; Tristitia autem contra directe est mala.
(Spinoza, Ethica, IV, prop. XLI)[1]

In a postcard to Franz Overbeck of 30 July 1881, Nietzsche claims to have discovered in Spinoza a 'precursor' to his own thought. As he writes, 'My solitude [*Einsamkeit*], which, as though I were high up in the mountains, so often left me breathless and set my blood racing, is now at least a togetherness-in-solitude [*Zweisamkeit*] – extraordinary!' Extraordinary or not, it was in this very period that Nietzsche began to develop a 'fundamental idea': the doctrine of the 'return of the same'. In *Ecce Homo* he writes,

> Now I will tell the history of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental idea of the work, *the thought of eternal return*, the highest possible form of affirmation –, belongs to August of the year 1881: it was thrown onto paper with the title '6000 feet beyond people and time'. That day I went through the woods to the lake of Silvaplana; I stopped near Surlei by a huge, pyramidal boulder. That is where this thought came to me.[2]

In the *Nachlass* we can find references to this solitude in the mountains and the fundamental idea of Nietzsche's late philosophy – which in certain respects displays Spinozistic traits.[3] Indeed, the first sketch of the doctrine of eternal return is signed: 'Sils Maria, early August 1881, 6000 feet above sea level and even higher above all that is human!'[4] The thought of eternal return is central to Nietzsche's work from *Zarathustra* onwards, and it is significant that Nietzsche euphorically comes to recognize himself in Spinoza at a point when he is developing the key themes of his late philosophy. In *Zarathustra* we find reflections on life-denying,

enslaving affects, which dovetail with Spinoza's own reflections, as well as key moments in the emergence of the notion of ressentiment that is developed by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*.

What I am interested in considering is the way in which one of the principal motifs of Nietzsche's reflections on ressentiment can be found in Spinoza's *Ethics*, or, in other words, the extent to which *tristitia* constitutes passive affects that cannot in principle be affirmed. Is it possible to determine their quasi-nihilistic quality in a Spinozistic manner, and on the basis of a theory of affects, which from the outset escapes what Nietzsche understands as a *nihilistic* logic? In order to answer this question, in the following I shall first briefly present Nietzsche's notion of ressentiment. It is necessary to elaborate some of its basic features to which the Spinoza reading is able to connect. I shall then turn to the way in which active and passive affects are defined by Spinoza. In the third part of the chapter I shall discuss the affects of pain (*tristitia*), before, in the fourth part, considering their connection with servitude. Finally I will show that passive affects following Spinoza (e.g. pain, but also melancholy) in important aspects feature nihilistic traits caught in a discourse or way of thinking that stipulates their sensual unreasonableness and devaluates them – in the light of so-called higher, idealist reasons. Ignorance and gloom mutually presuppose each other and stabilize a state of bondage.

Ressentiment

Nietzsche's notion of ressentiment refers to an experience of aversion, suffering or pain – to a 'negative sensation' which is (unconsciously or automatically) ascribed to an imaginary, rather than a physiologically determinate, cause, that is, to someone (or something) that is guilty or responsible for it.[5] (We might think of Montaigne here, who calls ressentiment the feeling of being subject to another, such as is experienced by one who has lost in battle and who only survives by the conqueror's mercy.) Nietzsche specifies this general definition in so far as, for him, genuine ressentiment only arises through a (moral or religious) 'change of direction', which sublimates the original aim of numbing the pain by means of an affect.[6] The change of direction follows the ascetic ideal of locating the guilt within, rather than outside, oneself.[7] This is accompanied by the construction of an abstract or transcendent other, which makes it possible to speak of an individual guilt or a sinfulness which, in contrast to a purely divine life, is rooted in earthly, sensible, bodily and transient life.

> The instinct of *ressentiment* said no to everything on earth that represented the *ascending* movement of life: success, power, beauty, self-affirmation; but it could do this only by becoming ingenious and inventing *another* world, a world that viewed *affirmation of life* as evil, as intrinsically reprehensible.[8]

Thus begins the 'slave revolt in morals', that is, the ressentiment of those who do not respond actively to pain, those to whom 'the deed is denied' and who merely say no – no to the noble morality of self-affirmation.[9] '[Their] action is fundamentally reaction', that is, it is at the mercy of passive affects.[10] They slander others (or the Other) as evil and 'find compensation in an imaginary revenge' by numbing their pain through an affect which lifts them out of their suffering, leaving it beneath them in what they call a 'vulgar', not genuinely 'real' and 'pure', existence.[11]

In *Zarathustra*, the ground for the later critique of ressentiment is prepared through the association of the incapacity for self-love with contempt for the body and life, that is, with a 'miserable ease' which obeys divine or human laws or an 'invented heaven' which denies the 'meaning of the earth'.[12] 'It was suffering and impotence – that created all afterworlds [*Hinterwelten*].'[13] Zarathustra, by contrast, teaches a new form of pride: 'No longer to bury the head in the sand of heavenly things, but to carry it freely, an earthly head which creates meaning for the earth!'[14] In what could be an allusion to Spinoza's geometrical method, Nietzsche writes that it is the 'right-angled' body which speaks of the 'meaning of the earth'.[15] The 'great reason' is one with it, but not the 'little reason', which sets itself apart from the body in the conceit of possessing a free will or immortal soul.[16]

These points are elaborated on in many sections in *Zarathustra*. Here I shall limit myself to the section 'Of Joys and Passions', which bears on the Spinozan theme of an affective passivity that is tied to transcendence. Nietzsche speaks of 'bestowing' (*schenkenden*) or 'earthly virtues', which are developed from those passions previously considered as evil.[17] This revaluation of values or regaining of the lost world is accompanied by a becoming-active, which shatters the old tables of values.[18] 'You laid your highest aim in the heart of these passions: then they became your virtues and joys.'[19] At issue here is a metamorphosis (of becoming-active), which consists in perishing by way of the virtues or in a rebirth from out of the death of the old values. 'At last all your passions have become virtues …. Once you had fierce dogs in your cellar: but they changed into birds.'[20] What matters is for each singular body to come to know what is appropriate for it, what does it good and what increases its affective powers. 'It is power, this new virtue', which lies in the affirmation of the passions, through which they are transformed from passive habits into active, self-affirming 'joys'.[21] The heavy and melancholy

spirit *wants* to find life hard and burdensome – whereas 'man is only hard to bear' because he passively allows himself to be burdened, and only suffers because he kneels.[22] 'It sounds pleasant to *their* ears when it is preached: "Nothing is worth while! You shall not Will!"' This is 'a sermon urging slavery' – for though life is 'a fountain of delight', it becomes spoiled by a melancholic outlook.[23]

The activity and passivity of the affects

In the Definitions with which the third book of the *Ethics* 'Concerning the origin and nature of emotions' (*De origine, & natura affectuum*) opens, Spinoza introduces the concepts of activity (*actio*) and passivity (*passio*), which qualify 'emotions' – or 'affects' (my preferred translation of *affectibus*). It is possible to treat Spinoza as a precursor to Nietzsche by relating his definitions of passive affects to Nietzsche's ressentiment. Affects are understood by Spinoza as affections of the body (together with the ideas of these affectations), 'by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished'. In so far as we are the 'adequate cause' of these affects, we act, and in so far as we are the 'partial cause' of what takes place in us, we are passive.[24]

On the basis of these definitions, we can already anticipate one of the results of our analysis: an affective increase in the power of activity or *potentia agendi* is not only always good – as opposed to a reduction, which is always bad – but also corresponds to active affects as opposed to passive affects, in so far as we are the adequate cause of the former and only the inadequate cause of the latter. Bodies are thus affected because they possess a power of activity which can be increased or diminished – and in so far as we are the adequate cause of affects, we act, rather than being passive. This means that affects increase our power of activity in so far as we are their adequate cause. This raises the question of what it can mean for adequate causes of affects to broaden our sphere of activity – and how it is that we come to be these adequate causes.

In the Preface to the third part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza addresses those 'despisers of the body' of a religious and moralist stamp who, according to a traditional schema, ascribe the 'cause of human weakness' to a 'defect in human nature'. This is why they regard affects as something contrary to nature, something that appears not to be subject to the universal laws of nature.[25] The stigmatization of affects goes together with the notion of the mind's absolute power (*potentia*) or dominion (*imperium*) over them, in the form of a freedom of the will which stands outside nature. Spinoza, on the contrary, undertakes to derive the affects

from their natural causes, which means to 'consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, and [geometrical] bodies'.[26]

With his conception of the activity and passivity of affects, Spinoza breaks with the rationalist tradition of statically defining passions that are considered contrary to reason. It is the mind which is sometimes active and sometimes passive – and which thereby runs *parallel* to the body, which is (passively or actively) affected.[27] The degree of activity is proportional to its causal adequacy; yet whatever the precise meaning of the latter may be, it is not to be conceived in terms of a criterion that could be determined independently of the body, in a 'purely mental' form. On the contrary, for Spinoza it is of fundamental importance that we usually have no knowledge of why we act as we do – and that we have become used to operating with concepts which elide or obscure this ignorance. A learning process is thus required in order to find out which affects are good and which are bad – or the conditions under which our power of activity can be enlarged rather than limited. The becoming-active involved in this dynamic process is accompanied by adequate causation. For this reason, the necessity of considering affects *more geometrico* is, for Spinoza, bound up with an insight which constitutes an immanent corrective to the traditional assumption of a 'defect in human nature' standing opposed to a free, abstract mind.

The 'more the mind has inadequate ideas, the more it is subject to passive states (*passionibus*)', that is, in so far as it does not know the things by which it is affected; and it 'is the more active in proportion as it has a greater number of adequate ideas', that is, in so far as it has left the realm of error.[28] The source of error lies in the fact that an affect can result indiscriminately 'from the nature of the affected body together with the nature of the body affecting it' – which is why, for example, it is ideas of external bodies which first indicate the constitution of one's own body.[29] We can only emerge from this state by coming to know the commonalities that exist between affecting and affected bodies.[30] 'Hence it follows that the mind is more capable of perceiving more things adequately in proportion as its body has more things in common with other bodies.'[31] Adequate knowing is not a contemplative looking-on, but rather takes place through the association of bodies that agree with one another. It is not separate or cut off from, but rather involved in, this process. Herein lies the practical dimension of the (ethical) theory, or the theoretically elaborated primacy of praxis. The union of bodies which agree with one another can result in their reciprocally bringing joy to one another, that is, increasing their power of activity. In this regard Spinoza observes that 'among individual things there is nothing more advantageous to man than a man [homo]'.[32] This accords with the well-known definition of 'man' (or better:

human being) as a 'social animal', in the particular sense that it is common to all people to strive for what is most advantageous to them and so to live 'by the guidance of reason' (or virtuously), that is, to increase their power of activity, such as when they 'discover from experience that they can much more easily meet their needs by mutual help and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces'.[33] At this point we can see the political dimension of Spinoza's doctrine of affects come into view, which I shall say more about later.

Before I move on to a discussion of *tristitia* (as affect of pain and passivity), I would like to briefly show what is wrong with the prejudice that forces Spinoza's thinking into the mould of a simple rationalism. It is not at all the case, as might be suggested by such a superficial reading of the *Ethics*, that the process of becoming-active is to be conceived as a process of becoming-mind. Neither is this the case if Spinozan reason is approached at a deeper level from the perspective of a Schellingian or Hegelian idealism, in relation to the philosophy of nature.[34] In truth, Spinoza remodels the traditional dichotomy between activity and passivity from the ground up. Activity in the traditional rationalist sense simply does not exist for him; it is merely the fantasy of spontaneous activity which only arises through ignorance of the conditions of activity (in the form of sufficient reason).[35] Experience teaches us that

> it is on this account only that men [*homines*] believe themselves to be free, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined; and it tells us too that mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the disposition of the body. For everyone's [*unusquisque*] actions are shaped by their affect.[36]

This applies as much to the many passive affects as to the active affects. They differ in their propensity to stimulate the *potentia agendi* (and at the same time the *potentia cogitandi*), which resides in the *affirmation* of the primary affects (of desire and pleasure) – and in the determination of their collective and rational conditions of existence. In line with the methodological foundations of Spinozan parallelism, an increase in the power to affect and to be affected ranges simultaneously over body *and* mind – in so far as both are one and the same being, as modes with respect to various attributes.[37]

Pain (*tristitia*)

If we are to thematize pleasure and pain in Spinoza, we will need to consider the distinction between passive and active affects. In the third part of the *Ethics*

a detailed treatment is first given of the affects of pleasure (*laetitia*) and pain (*tristitia*) as passive incidents, suffering or distress (*passiones*), before, towards the end of the third part, pleasure and desire – though not pain – are considered as activities.[38] Pain of course falls out of the picture here because it only arises when the capacity for action is diminished, that is, when the mind is not active, but passive.[39] As Spinoza succinctly puts it in the definitions of the affects: 'pain is man's [*hominis*] transition from a state of greater perfection to a state of less perfection',[40] and 'pleasure is man's [*hominis*] transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection'.[41] The concept of a transition refers to the process through which the power of activity is diminished or checked – and the power of activity is determined by the 'necessity of the nature of its efficient cause', that is, 'through [its own] nature' (and not by an entity derived from a final cause).[42] That which is advantageous to us or which increases our power of activity is seen as *good*, whereas what prevents us from attaining the good is *bad*.[43] This raises the question of how it is possible for pain to gain the upper hand over us – or why we become mired in passive affects which limit our capacity to act and think.

In addressing this question, we should recall that Spinoza recognizes only three primary affects, on the basis of which all others are composed (through manifold and complex variations): desire (*cupiditas*), pleasure and pain.[44] The ethical criterion which allows us to distinguish between good and bad (relative to a decrease or increase in the *potentia agendi*), and which is exemplified in the distinction between pleasure and pain, thus plays a decisive role in maintaining a balance between the whole range of affects. Desire is for Spinoza a 'basic fact', in so far as it expresses the human striving for self-preservation. This striving (*conatus*) can also be called will (*voluntas*) or appetite (*appetitus*), and is nothing else 'but man's [*hominis*] essence, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that tend to his preservation, and which man [*homo*] is thus determined to perform'.[45] In other words, there is in desire a form of activity, in so far as the mind can only affirm what it is and what it can do, and not what it is not and what it cannot do. Understood as the power 'to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of [one's] own nature', it is a form of virtue.[46] This self-affirmation is accompanied by pleasure, in so far as the mind strives as far as it can 'to think of those things that increase or assist the body's power of activity'.[47] In contrast, pain is caused when the mind is confronted by something which inhibits it from outside (or diminishes its power), in that it 'involv[es a] negation'.[48] In order to clarify the nature of painful passive affects, we need therefore to consider more closely the inhibitions (of desire) that they involve.

It is a universal truth that a human being, as 'part of nature', is subject to changes of which he or she is not the adequate cause.[49] There are affects whose power is so great that they exceed an individual's power of activity. The only way to counter the overwhelming force of an affect arising through an external cause is to meet it with a stronger (and conflicting) affect.[50] For Spinoza, in contrast to most schools of moral thought, the knowledge of good and bad cannot serve to limit an affect – or it can only do so when this knowledge is itself considered (and can be considered) as a (stronger) affect.[51] It is not certain, however, that such an affect will be stronger than another affect which proceeds from an external cause.[52] This is the reason why mere opinions often hold sway over true knowledge.[53]

The power of external causes can be such that the desire for self-preservation, for what is advantageous, and for knowledge in general, is inhibited, limited or inverted. Ultimately every form of life is characterized by the dilemma of being dependent on others for its self-preservation. 'There are many things outside ourselves which are advantageous to us and ought therefore to be sought.'[54] Yet there are also things which are bad for us because they cause pain, in so far as they are opposed to our nature, and have nothing in common with it. People thus only differ when they are subject to passive affects.[55] If they follow reason, however, they agree with one another in nature. A person becomes mired in pain when she is guided by things which are not only external to her but which determine her 'to act in a way required by the general state of external circumstances, not by h[er] own nature considered only in itself'.[56] When passive affects hold sway over us, our power to affect and to be affected is lost, and with it, the capacity for knowledge. Ultimately, our bodily existence itself is annihilated. Pain inhibits the body's power of activity and is for this reason bad, as are all of the passive affects associated with it: hope and fear, pity or self-abasement – affects which all arise from the observation of one's own lack of power.[57] Like pain, melancholy is 'always bad', being defined as a form of pain which permeates the whole body, decreasing its power of activity.[58] Melancholy and pain are as much to be combatted or banished as hunger and thirst. Spinoza vehemently rejects all forms of 'grim and gloomy superstition', which prevent joy:

> The principle which guides me and shapes my attitude to life is this: no deity, nor anyone else but the envious, takes pleasure in my weakness and my misfortune, nor does he take to be a virtue our tears, sobs, fearfulness and other such things that are a mark of a weak spirit [*animi impotentis*]. On the contrary, the more we are affected with pleasure, the more we pass to a state of greater perfection; that is, the more we necessarily participate in the divine nature.[59]

Living in servitude

Those affects that are considered in terms of activity must at the same time be seen as the *foundations of virtue*. Desire constitutes people's essence (*cupiditas est ipsa hominis essentia, hoc est, conatus, quo homo in suo esse perseverare conatur*). In so far as it has its source in pleasure, it is enlarged or increased through this affect; in so far as it originates in pain, however, it is automatically diminished or essentially limited (or turned against itself).[60] For this reason, 'happiness' (*felicitas*) consists in 'a man's being able to preserve his own being'. There is no external goal which motivates or guides this striving; virtue is rather pursued for itself, that is, for the advantageousness and knowledge which accompany an increase in the capacity for activity and affects.[61] After Spinoza, Hobbes is one thinker who leaves the virtuous path of defining affects immanently, in that he conceives the striving for self-preservation in the state of nature not as the foundation of virtue but of vice.[62] Yet if desire (*cupiditas*) and the drive towards self-preservation (*conatus*) are interpreted in this way, in terms of an individual's egoistic pursuit of his interests, affects will accordingly be one-sidedly interpreted as passive and as in competition with one another, and so will need to be *limited* through 'reasonable' measures. This leads, however, to neglecting the potential for increasing our collective power of activity through associative strategies, in so far as the social contract is designed to limit and control individual activities by means of a passive affect, namely the *fear* of the state monopoly on the use of force.[63] 'He who is guided by fear, and does good so as to avoid evil, is not guided by reason.'[64] Here, the good is, as it were, indirectly pursued via the avoidance of evil, which is why evil appears to be a vice or a defect of human nature and the good an ideal of bourgeois freedom that has left the state of nature behind it. As Spinoza remarks in an almost Nietzschean tone,

> [t]he superstitious, who know how to censure vice rather than to teach virtue, and who are eager not to guide men by reason but to restrain them by fear so that they may shun evil rather than love virtue, have no other object than to make others as wretched as themselves.[65]

For Spinoza, there is no virtue in the fear of death, in so far as death is conceived not as the transition to another life, but as the destruction of the body – and thus of an individual's existence as such. To be free is to desire and act out what one recognizes to be most important in life, whereas the slave or servant (*servum*) performs actions 'of which he is completely ignorant', such as those which aim at a 'higher' life (after death).[66] As knowledge of the bad depends on inadequate

ideas (or ideas of pain), slave-like behaviour results from ignorance, whereas one who is free directly desires the good in so far as he acts to preserve his being and increase his advantages.[67] Although everything of which humans are the efficient cause is necessarily good, as part of nature they cannot escape being dependent on external causes, that is, on events that can be 'either good or evil'.[68] It is important then to form ties with one's equals in such a way as to increase the collective's shared capacity for activity and knowledge. 'The man [*homo*] who is guided by reason is more free in a state where he or she lives under a system of law than in solitude where he obeys only himself'.[69] She is not 'guided to obey out of fear', but rather takes account of the good of the community in so far as she strives to live according to the good – that is, to form ties with others who agree with her nature.[70] Human beings are 'guided by reason' to live together, so as to seek adequate knowledge by means of shared concepts, which serve to exclude error from affective relations.[71] The risk inherent in political union is of being chained together through a regime of fear. Political theology is to blame for seeing a form of power incarnated in the sovereign, which, in so far as it is asserted abstractly, takes the form of a transcendent law over things. 'Harmony is also commonly produced by fear, but then it is untrustworthy. Furthermore, fear arises from weakness of spirit'.[72] Here it is again considered more important to 'criticise mankind' – to censure vice and shatter people's spirits – than to teach virtue and strengthen the spirit.[73] Spinoza, on the contrary, advocates 'speak[ing] only sparingly of human weakness' and dwelling more 'on human virtue, or power, and the means to perfect it, so that men [*homines*] may thus endeavour as far as they can to live in accordance with reason's behest, not from fear or dislike, but motivated only by the affect of pleasure'.[74] 'But superstition on the other hand seems to assert that what brings pain is good and what brings pleasure is bad'.[75]

Conclusion

The considerations of Spinoza on affects converge with Nietzsche's notion of ressentiment on several levels. From my point of view, they reinforce the systematic relevance of Nietzsche's thought in a crucial way because they situate the negative affect – like ressentiment – and its change in a social and political context of decrease and increase of the collective capacity to act (*potentia agendi*).

Firstly, it is immediately apparent that Nietzsche's generally designated relation of suffering (*Leiden*) and imaginary cause – which has its meaning in the historical formation of religious and metaphysical morality, discipline and

its internalization in feelings of guilt and a bad conscience – is preformed in Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Secondly, suffering and pain are seemingly justified if they are either (merely physically) defamed or (in the sense of an ascetic ideal) can be transformed. In both cases a theoretical construct is required that has to be qualified as nihilistic because it represents a counter-strategy for life-affirmation. 'Higher' values are thus to Nietzsche philosophical fictions that are necessary to characterize the noble master's 'good' as evil and at the same time devaluate 'lower' modes of existence. (Their loss of reality or credibility in the course of enlightenment and modernization makes the world appear pointless in the end.) In contrast, the fight against the denial of life, or enslavement, can be described as a struggle for turning suffering into joy.

Spinoza distinguishes active from passive affects, and while the former are always good, the latter are always bad. Why? The reason is: they increase or decrease the power to act in so far as we are the adequate cause or the partial cause of these affects. To claim adequacy or to avoid confusion between an affected body and a body affecting it, there is only one way possible: namely, a process of collective activation that guarantees commonalities between associated bodies. This should be an empirical and democratic process that Nietzsche never really understood – probably because of his orientation towards a 'noble culture' even if he knew very well that modern people (or 'half-barbarians' as he called them) have lost close ties to a cultural Apollonian unit.

According to Spinoza, there are at least three strategies of discourse that ensure the permanence and reproduction of passive affects. One relates, as already mentioned, to the asylum of ignorance and states imaginary causes as a set of truths that seem to define conditions of action. These conditions might in fact correspond to the principle of sufficient reason, but at the same time they belong to a realm of contingency: our body is a part of nature, dependant on others that might cause pain. It is nothing but superstition to invent a universal sense to explain the negative of bad situations instead of dealing with them in practice. Gloom enslaves us by restricting possible courses of action in relation to supposedly supernatural entities. A second discourse strategy claims that the affects are basically rooted in spontaneous acts of reason and that is why their material, mortal and physical side collapses into nothing. I have called this strategy 'rationalistic' and have insisted that both body and mind are involved when Spinoza says that all actions are directed affectively. Affects are not *purely* theoretical but also practical to understand. Contrary to the usual assumptions, the dichotomy 'active-passive' is transverse to the mind-body dualism. These two strategies combine with one more

that is related to Hobbes and the enthronement of sovereignty. Like the preachers who keep people under control by instilling fear – blaming the vices rather than stimulating the virtues – so also for Hobbes denial comes first; affirmation is only secondary and restrictive. But the knowledge of evil depends on inadequate ideas. Therefore, it is not enough to identify the bad and then subsequently to demonize it. Rather, one can only really know the bad if one knows what is good at the same time. The bad is, in fact, to not want the good, or to be deterred from its effectuation. This lack of desire for the good is due to ressentiment that is ensnared in pain and cannot really but only seemingly control it.

Notes

1   'Pleasure is not in itself bad but good. On the other hand, pain is in itself bad.' Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) IV, prop. 41.

2   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in trans. Judith Norman, Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman(eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 123, translation slightly modified.

3   Cf. G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe* [KSA] vol. 9, 494ff.

4   Cf. ibid., 494.

5   'For every suffering man instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more precisely, a doer, more definitely, a *guilty* doer, someone capable of suffering – in short, something living on which he can upon any pretext discharge his feelings either in fact or *in effigie*.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105.

6   'The priest *changes the direction of ressentiment*.' Ibid., 105.

7   Cf. ibid., 106.

8   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 20.

9   Cf. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 22.

10   Cf. ibid., 22. On the conceptual pair, 'active – reactive', see Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy [1962], trans. H. Tomlinson (Continuum: London, New York 1986), 39ff. Spinoza's 'passive' affects are in this sense 'reactive' – whereas enjoyment and happiness (and other forms of 'positive passivity' in a phenomenological terminology) have to be defined with Spinoza as 'active'.

11   Cf. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 22.

12   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin: London, 1969), 43, 60.

13 Ibid., 59.

14 Ibid., 60.

15 Cf. ibid., 61, translation modified.

16 Cf. ibid., 61, translation modified.

17 Ibid., 64.

18 Cf. ibid., 51–52: 'Or was it a sermon of death that called holy that which contradicted and opposed all life? – Oh my brothers, shatter, shatter the old law tables!' Ibid., 219. One of these old tables bears this inscription: 'Wisdom makes weary, nothing is worth while; you shall not desire!' Ibid., 223.

19 Ibid., 64.

20 Ibid., 64 'And especially bird-like is that I am enemy to the Spirit of Gravity'. Ibid., 210.

21 Cf. ibid., 101. 'To redeem that past of mankind and to transform every "It was", until the will says: "But I willed it thus! So shall I will it."' Ibid., 216.

22 Ibid., 211, translation modified.

23 Ibid., 223.

24 Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, Def. 1–3, 103.

25 Ibid., III, Preface, 102.

26 Ibid., 103. 'They will doubtless find it surprising that I should attempt to treat of the faults and follies of mankind in the geometric manner, and that I should propose to bring logical reasoning to bear on what they proclaim is opposed to reason, and is vain, absurd and horrifying.' Ibid., 102. Spinoza explicitly turns against Descartes here, who belongs to the conservative tradition under attack, in so far as (in his text on the passions of the soul of 1649) he separates the mind from nature – and as a consequence of this separation (made on the basis of the assumed absolute power of free will) disparages certain mental affects which cannot be accounted for by reason. On this point, see my 'Spinoza gegen Descartes. Oder warum man den Körper nicht ausblenden kann', in Arno Böhler et al. (eds.), *Wir wissen nicht, was ein Körper vermag* (Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2014), 163–183.

27 See for a consistent usage of the word 'parallelism' to interpret Spinoza's ontology Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York 1992: Zone Books), 108–111.

28 Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, prop. 1, Corollary, 104.

29 Ibid., II, 13, Axiom 1, 73–74.

30 'Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole, can be conceived only adequately.' Ibid., II/38, 87.

31 Ibid., II/39, Corollary, 88.

32 Ibid., IV/35, Corollary 1, 172.

33 Ibid., Corollary 2, Scholium, 171. 'But man acts absolutely according to the laws of his own nature when he lives under the guidance of reason, and only to that

extent is he always necessarily in agreement with the nature of another man.' Ibid., Corollary 1, 172.

34 Cf. Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), who in their introduction relate Spinoza research to 'trends in recent scholarship', namely a 'revival of interest in German Idealism' and a 're-emergence of metaphysics as a central area in analytic philosophy'. Ibid., 2.

35 The principle of sufficient reason allows expressing this remodelling – and is not to be confused with idealist assumptions. See on Della Rocca: Samuel Newlands, 'More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza', *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 2 (2011): 109–119.

36 Spinoza, *Ethics*, III/2, Scholium, 106. Translation slightly modified.

37 '... all have experienced the fact that the mind is not always equally apt for concentrating on the same object; the mind is more apt to regard this or that object according as the body is more apt to have arising in it the image of this or that object.' Ibid., III/2, Scholium, 105. It may be appropriate to mention here that Spinoza's discussion of human beings is oriented around this identity of body and mind. He thus evades the classical notion of the *double nature* of human beings and disturbs the anthropological conceptions of philosophical modernity.

38 Cf. ibid., III/11, Scholium, 110 and III/58, 139.

39 Cf. ibid., III/59, Proof, 140.

40 Ibid., III, Definitions of the Affects [Emotions] and III/141.

41 Ibid.

42 Cf. ibid. and ibid., IV, Preface, 153, 154.

43 Cf. ibid., IV, Preface, 153 and Definitions, I, II, 154. Put in extreme terms: 'Knowledge of good and evil is nothing other than the affect [emotion] of pleasure or pain insofar as we are conscious of it.' Ibid., IV/8, 159.

44 Cf. ibid., III/11, Scholium, 110.

45 Ibid., III/9, Scholium, 109. Cf. ibid., III/7, 108, and Definitions of the Affects, I, Explication, 141.

46 Cf. ibid., IV, Definitions, VIII, 155.

47 Ibid., III/12, 111.

48 Cf. ibid., 3, Scholium, 107. In proposition 4 this point is put very generally: 'No thing can be destroyed except by an external cause.' Ibid., III/4, 108. 'This proposition is self-evident, for the definition of anything affirms, and does not negate, the thing's essence.' Ibid., III/4, Proof, 108. Cf. also ibid., III/11, Scholium, 110–111.

49 Cf. ibid., IV/4, Proof, 157. 'The force and increase of any passive affect [emotion] and its persistence in existing is defined not by the power whereby we ourselves endeavour to persist in existing, but by the power of external causes compared with our own power.' Ibid., IV/5, 157.

50 Cf. ibid., IV/7, Proof, 158.

51 Cf. ibid., IV/14, 161. Spinoza here takes up a point from the beginning of the fourth part of the *Ethics*, when he demonstrates that 'nothing positive … can be annulled by the presence of what is true'. Ibid., IV/14, Proof, 161–162 and IV/1, 155.

52 'So desires that arise from affects [emotions] of this kind may be stronger than that desire which arises from the true knowledge of good and evil, and therefore are able to check or extinguish it.' Ibid., IV/15, Proof, 162. It is due to the present significance of strong affects that a desire oriented towards the (distant) future will be accorded a lower status. Cf. ibid., IV/62, Scholium, 189.

53 Cf. ibid., IV/17, Scholium, 163.

54 Ibid., IV/18, Scholium, 165.

55 'Things which are said to agree in nature are understood to agree in respect of their power, not in respect of their weakness or negation, and consequently not in respect of passive affects [emotions].' Ibid., IV/32, Proof, 170.

56 Ibid., IV/37, Scholium I, 174.

57 Cf. ibid., IV/47–53, 181–184.

58 Cf. ibid., IV/41–42, 177–178.

59 Ibid., IV/54, Scholium, 180.

60 Cf. ibid., IV/18, Proof, 163. 'As for desires, they are, of course, good or evil in so far as they arise from good or evil affects [emotions].' Ibid., IV/58, Scholium, 187. Cf. ibid., IV/61, 188.

61 Cf. ibid., IV/18, Scholium, 164.

62 Cf. ibid.

63 Cf. ibid., IV/37, Scholium II, 175–176 and IV/47, 181.

64 Ibid., IV/63, 189.

65 Ibid., IV/63, Scholium, 190. 'The sick man [*aeger*] eats what he dislikes through fear of death. The healthy man [*sanus*] takes pleasure in his food and thus enjoys a better life than if he were to fear death and directly seek to avoid it.' Ibid., IV/63, Corollary, Scholium, p. 190.

66 Cf. ibid., IV/66, Scholium, 191–192.

67 Cf. ibid., IV/67, 192. When the mind has adequate knowledge, it is affected equally by what is present and what is to come, such that it seeks 'a future greater good in preference to a lesser present good.' Ibid. IV/66, 191.

68 Cf. ibid., Appendix III, 196.

69 Ibid., IV/73, 195.

70 Cf. ibid., IV/73, Proof, 195 and IV, Appendix, XII, 197.

71 Ibid., IV, Appendix IX, 197.

72 Cf. ibid., IV, Appendix XVI, 199.

73 Cf. ibid., Appendix XIII, 197. As marks of the ascetic ideal, solitude and renunciation are praised here over and above an enlightened contribution to shared

political life: 'Hence many men [*homines*], over-impatient and with false religious zeal, have chosen to live among beasts rather than among men [*homines*]'. Ibid.

74   Ibid., IV, Appendix XXV, 199.
75   Ibid., IV, Appendix XXXI, 200.

The Artistry of the Priest and the Philosopher: Ressentiment in Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*

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Ressentiment has a central role in Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Not only is it the first principal form of nihilism in which reactive forces triumph over active ones, but Nietzsche identifies nihilism and all its forms with the spirit of revenge. We can therefore identify ressentiment not only as the moment when nihilism begins but also with the reactive life more generally. Deleuze provides a lengthy analysis of ressentiment, the bad conscience (the second principal form of nihilism) and the relation between them, to show how they constitute the essentially reactive nature of humans, knowledge and morality. The ambitious challenge that Deleuze sets himself is to argue that nihilism can be successfully overcome, and he also provides an extensive presentation of a philosophy of affirmation in the Overman, whereas Nietzsche, at best, merely offers us sketches. However, overcoming nihilism comes at a great price, the death of man. Many scholars have questioned whether Deleuze succeeds in overcoming nihilism and also whether the cost is worth it.

Of course, Deleuze is selective in the passages that he uses, and he relies heavily on Nietzsche's unpublished notes. In addition, his reading, at times, pivots on Geneviève Bianquis's translation of Wurzbach's *The Will to Power*,[1] which D'Iorio[2] has shown to contain a number of significant errors that are pivotal to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. However, these concerns need not be fatal for what is intended to be a philosophical and transformative reading that presents a Nietzsche who we can recognize from his works, but who is also distinctly Deleuzian. My aim in this chapter is to examine *Nietzsche and Philosophy* as a study of ressentiment, in terms of both a problem to be overcome and the problem of overcoming it. In the first section, which is necessarily

exegetical, I set out the terms in which Deleuze reads Nietzsche's philosophy. The rest of the chapter is structured according to the different structures of ressentiment presented in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. The second section considers ressentiment in its reactive sense and analyses the role of the priest; the third and fourth sections consider ressentiment from the perspective of the philosopher, whose method and pathos enable him to produce an active sense of ressentiment. The fourth section also examines problems with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, and ends by arguing that Deleuze succeeds in providing a model for overcoming ressentiment, though not necessarily the one that he intended.

From the will to power to ressentiment

Deleuze's Nietzsche is a post-Kantian, whose critical philosophy succeeds in demystifying transcendent illusions such as God, the Self and the World. He presents Nietzsche's thought as the exploration of a transcendental field which, rather than being constellated around an abstract subjectivity, *à la* Kant, generates the concrete subject and the rational and moral coordinates that orient it. As such, like all of Nietzsche's concepts, ressentiment is conceptualized by Deleuze at the level of transcendental forces. According to this dynamic, 'all reality is … quantity of force',[3] and all phenomena are explained in terms of the forces that take possession of them; a body is constituted by forces, and when it acts on another body, we must think of this as a force acting upon another force. Because no two forces are the same, the relations between them are always quantitatively unequal; this quantitative difference grounds a qualitative difference, namely a capacity to affect and be affected by other forces. As a result, Deleuze emphasizes Nietzsche's distinction of active forces, whose capacity to affect renders them superior and dominant, and reactive forces, whose capacity for being affected makes them inferior and dominated. The meeting of these forces is a product of chance, but the nature and outcome of their relationships are determined by the will to power. It is on the basis of the will to power that Deleuze is able to move away from the Kantian model of conditions of possibility to an entirely immanentist conception of the transcendental field, describing it as a genetic principle 'no wider than what it conditions, that changes itself with the conditioned'.[4] The will to power is thus the differential and genetic element of the quantitative and qualitative differences between forces. On this basis, Deleuze identifies the will to power with life, life being 'will' in so far as all living things will or intend, and life being 'power', though not the desire *for* power

(Deleuze rejects all teleology), since it is active, expressing itself aggressively and dynamically, constantly growing and expanding. For Deleuze, this is the way in which active forces express their difference, but life can turn against itself, producing a degenerate form in which reactive forces seek to subject life's innocent self-affirmation to judgement, compelling it to justify itself, to comport itself to transcendent values, in short, to negate or deny the difference that animates it. Thus, just as forces acting upon forces produce the qualities of activity and reactivity, will acting upon will qualifies itself as affirmative or negative (for, despite its multiple and interacting manifestations, there is ultimately but one will, the will to power, or life itself).

Deleuze begins his account of ressentiment with what he calls the 'healthy state', which is made possible by the affinity between the affirmative will to power and active forces. Only in this state can we say that the qualitative difference between forces coincides with the quantitative difference: active forces dominate because they are stronger, and reactive forces are dominated because they are weaker. This figure of domination is redolent of Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[5] but crucially, in Deleuze's presentation of Nietzsche, the obeisance of reactive forces is not the product of the negation of a will to be obeyed, but rather the positive expression of a capacity for obeying. The negative is present, but it does not define the relations between forces because it has no creative power. These qualities of forces are evident in the two kinds of reactions characteristic of a healthy state: on the one hand, the reaction of reactive forces is an expression of weakness because they are dependent on the activity of active forces in order to express themselves, which they do by denying this activity; on the other, the reaction of active forces is an expression of strength: the resistance given by reactive forces is met with a 'quick and precise piece of adjustment', a 'burst of creativity', without diminishing their ability to express themselves and go to the limit of what they can do.[6]

Deleuze draws on Freud's essays on metapsychology to configure his account of ressentiment as an imaginary slave's revolt. One of the reasons he begins his account of ressentiment with the healthy state is to argue that reaction alone does not constitute ressentiment, which he defines as the moment when '*reaction ceases to be acted in order to become something felt*'. Freud's 'topical hypothesis' presents a model in which the unconscious responds to external excitations and creates lasting traces of them, freeing up consciousness to function as a system that receives and responds to new excitations. These two reactive systems are separated by an active force of forgetting; however, this force obtains its energy from reactive structures and, when it fails, memory-traces surge into

consciousness. Reaction is no longer imperceptible because consciousness reacts to the memory-traces rather than to new excitations. The slave's revolt is thus not a matter of reactive forces becoming stronger and overpowering active forces, but rather one of reactive forces becoming weaker and losing their capacity for obeying.

The will to power explains everything, but it does not take the form of a transcendental subject that unites and directs the human drives. If it did, it would be reducible to the plane of psychology. Although Deleuze discusses the origins of ressentiment in psychological terms, he warns us that we will misunderstand ressentiment if we think of it only as psychological: Nietzsche's intention is 'to produce a psychology that is really a typology, to put psychology "on the plane of the subject"'.[7] It is because the will to power explains everything that Nietzsche employs a 'typology' to analyse the structure of different types of willing, which he identifies in specific human traits, tendencies, affects, desires and values, according to types (e.g. the man of ressentiment, the last man, the spirit of revenge). To claim that ressentiment is typological means that it cannot be understood on the basis of an individual's psycho-biography (e.g. a lack of love in childhood, bitterness at failure to achieve a goal). It is not a matter of explaining actions and beliefs by discovering hidden desires. A type is not a person and a person is often composed of different types, their combination being a source of fascination for Nietzsche. Typology is not only psychological but philosophical, a way of classifying different philosophical methods and evaluating different philosophical propositions. Deleuze expands on this, using typology to conflate Nietzsche's ontology with his socio-historical concerns, so that types are not only biological, physiological and psychological but also historical, metaphysical, sociological and political.

In this typology, who is the man of ressentiment? The reflux of memory into consciousness is the topological occasion of ressentiment, but this brings about an entirely different individual: one does not acquire a prodigious memory without being changed by it. Types are composed of a determinate relation between forces and this relation is a mode of being, a way of interpreting forces from the standpoint of their active or reactive quality. In the case of the man of ressentiment, Deleuze claims, 'Whatever the force of the excitation which is received, whatever the total force of the subject itself, the man of ressentiment only uses the latter to invest the trace of the former.'[8] He is the type in which reactive forces revolt against, and triumph over, active forces. Deleuze likens the man of ressentiment to the Freudian anal-sadistic complex; in both cases, an essential link is established between revenge and memory: 'the memory of traces

is full of hatred in itself and by itself.'[9] Unlike the transitory nature of resentment, ressentiment is a long-term, chronic sickness, an impotent desire for revenge that feels everything as an injustice, reliving and re-experiencing attacks, and has an obsessive fixation on a reactive kind of justice. The man of ressentiment does not forget, and so his reaction to traces of excitations is endless, and is therefore an incessant reminder of his inability to act. Unable to forget, the man of ressentiment feels moral indignation and satisfies his suffering by looking outwards, blaming the object of his indignation for being responsible for his own powerlessness and his inability to escape the traces of excitations. Initially, this accusation is directed at the masters, but because anything can remind the slave of his powerlessness to act, the blame can be directed at anything. The man of ressentiment can never become an active type for the same reason that a strong reactive force cannot, by virtue of its strength, become an active force: its genetic element is the negative will to power.

The priest and ressentiment

This self-inflicted perpetual pain would most likely go unnoticed were it not for the priest, in whose hands ressentiment becomes dangerous. The slaves are too weak to wage a war and yet, thanks to the priest, they succeed *because* of their weakness. Nietzsche praises himself in *Ecce Homo* for carrying out the first psychology of the priest,[10] and this is the central concern in Deleuze's study: 'The type of the priest – there is no other problem for Nietzsche.'[11] The priest is a complex figure who is part of the higher caste, but is in essence a slavish type. It is the Judaic priest who identifies ressentiment in the slaves at a point when it is only raw material and not yet a type, who understands its great potential and directs it (initially) at the masters. He understands it because he suffers from it himself. What he does not understand is what the masters are really like: he tells the slaves that the masters are like them, but inferior to them and responsible for their suffering.

The great resource of ressentiment is the element of fiction, which opposes life by depreciating it. Once reactive forces cease to be acted, the priest ignites fiction's potential by creating concepts such as God, essence, the good and truth that provide existential security. The slaves invest in these beliefs because they are fortifying and provide a means of living with their powerlessness and frustration and coping with their suffering, even though they negate this world and do not fix the problem. Reactive forces misunderstand the nature of the transcendental

field and with it their own nature, seeking refuge in the empirical. They do not even think of themselves as forces and promulgate the fiction of an abstract, neutralized image of force that is split into two (into cause and effect) and projected into a subject, separating the actor from the action and introducing the concept of free will. This is not simply a false description of how things are. Rather, an entirely different set of values emerges from the concept of free will: those who oppress others might just as easily not have acted, but instead chose to, and so are evil. Those who do not act (i.e. the powerless) are considered not to act by choice, and this is deemed morally good. Ressentimental morality teaches that everyone is equal and establishes justice on the basis of fairness. The fictions that characterize the empirical are representational concepts such as power, which, in its reactive sense, only comes from recognition by others and is something to be desired, causing slaves to value the majority opinion and promote values that prioritize the herd.

I have concentrated on ressentiment as the first principal form of nihilism, but Deleuze expands on the spirit of revenge (imaginary revenge) by identifying it also with the bad conscience and the ascetic ideal, and therefore with the whole of nihilism itself.[12] The spirit of revenge is the organizing principle of nihilism and so, for Deleuze, the problem of ressentiment is not restricted to the slave's imaginary revolt. The most striking feature of Deleuze's account of nihilism is the evolutionary development of reactive life in which ressentiment precedes, and is completed in, the bad conscience. Ressentiment figures heavily in Deleuze's discussion of the bad conscience, which stresses the parallels between them and the fact that bad conscience takes over the role of ressentiment: 'We should not see bad conscience as a new type: at best we will find the reactive type, the slave type, to be concrete varieties in which *ressentiment* is in almost the pure state; we will find others where bad conscience, reaching its full development, covers *ressentiment* up.'[13] Both of these principal forms of nihilism share the same model, the Hegelian dialectic, because opposition is the genetic element of reactive forces, and the movement of opposition and contradiction operates entirely within the reactive life. Nihilism begins with negative premises, just as ressentimental morality originates in the denial of noble morality, and reaches a pseudo-affirmation only through the negation of negation.

According to Deleuze, the bad conscience is the becoming-reactive of active forces.[14] Again, the priest appears and demonstrates his dangerous artistry. He understands better than anyone the explosive power of ressentiment, which threatens even himself since anything can become a target of the slave's perpetual accusation. As reactive forces are weakened and less stimulated, active

forces are unable to express or discharge themselves and are interiorized as the bad conscience redirects ressentiment inwards. With his creation of the concept of sin, the Christian priest gives suffering a new meaning that holds the man of ressentiment responsible for his own pain. This pain is multiplied as active forces become reactive, and intensified by the energy of these newly reactive forces that now blame the slave himself. The masters are no longer active types but reactive, like the slaves; just as both master and slave need to be recognized by each other in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the difference between master and slave is now positional rather than essential. There is a complicity between them because both are invested in the reactive life and share reactive values.

This is why both Nietzsche and Deleuze are respectful of the priestly type, because only an artist-genius is capable of creating (reactive) concepts that weaken both reactive and active forces. Analysing the different senses of ressentiment by practicing Deleuze's method of dramatization, Sjoerd van Tuinen captures the startling role of the priest: '[He] is the most important type, because without him it is not clear why the whole of life would succumb to passivity. While *ressentiment* is the source of slave morality, it takes an artist capable of giving an adaptive and regulative form to passive matter for the fictional reversal of values to bring about real effects.'[15] The priest is the type capable of organizing the rage of the slaves, seducing the masters and turning the contagious spread of ressentiment inwards, thereby pacifying it.

We must beware the priestly type, for he has a vested interest in ensuring the survival of the reactive life. This is why Deleuze positions Hegel as Nietzsche's adversary, for he sought for the whole of life to become reactive and the healthy to become sick, presenting the master as a successful slave. However, we must also be cautious about those who claim, with good intentions, to overcome ressentimental morality because unwittingly they may still be the priestly type. This is the problem with Kant's critical project, which maintains 'miraculous harmonies between terms that remain external to one another'.[16] Kant's critique is too respectful and conciliatory, being built on compromise:

> Kant merely pushed a very old conception of critique to the limit, a conception which saw critique as a force which should be brought to bear on all claims to knowledge and truth, but not on knowledge and truth themselves; a force which should be brought to bear on all claims to morality, but not on morality itself.[17]

The danger of diagnosing ressentiment is hidden in reason itself, which is reactive: it preserves the terms of the opposition (e.g. master and slave), depends upon objective facts and recognizes established values, in large part so as to

legitimize the diagnosis itself. Because reactive forces deny their nature, they misunderstand becoming and seek refuge in the empirical. The priest can only think in terms of representation and sees only instances of ressentiment; he sees what corresponds to his reactive type and denies everything else. His very method of diagnosing ressentiment is indicative of his own ressentiment.

The philosopher and ressentiment

If this is all Deleuze has to say about ressentiment, then his contribution would be an interesting footnote to the debate. He writes in the preface to the English edition: 'we do not understand Nietzsche if we think of "the Nietzschean "slave" as someone who finds himself dominated by a master, *and deserves to be*.'[18] The aim is not simply to diagnose ressentiment by describing it where we find it but to bring about change. Such a possibility is predicated on a second figure that emerges in the pages of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. No less pivotal than the priest, the philosopher is a physician or symptomatologist who treats all phenomena as symptoms that he interprets in terms of their constituent forces, and also a typologist who interprets forces in terms of their qualities. But to effect real change, the philosopher must also be a genealogist.[19] Genealogical enquiry is necessary because although active forces are both stronger and superior in the healthy state, history charts the ascendance of reactive forces or becomings, which dominate active forces despite being weaker and inferior. The problem with reactive forces is not with the weakness of their desire, because strong reactive forces might very well go to the limit of what they can do, but with the nature of their desire and that what they do originates in negation. The genealogist asks which will determines the relations between forces because he understands that examples of affirmation might actually be negative affirmations of the reactive life (i.e. the negation of negation).

Genealogy is a method that conceptualizes the origin, but also difference at the origin.[20] The philosopher as genealogist is endowed with a pathos of distance that enables him to see both originary differences and the differences we encounter in experience; he understands that the differences we encounter in experience are an inverted form of the originary differences which ground them. Contrast this with the priest, who sees in a way that corresponds to his type, that is, dialectically through antitheses and oppositions, established values and already-existing states of affairs. The philosopher is able to see instances of ressentiment in the priestly way, but he also sees the becomings that constitute

these states of affairs. This, Deleuze argues, is the lesson of the eternal return as a cosmological and physical doctrine, which compels us to think of pure becoming. On his reading of this doctrine, the world is in constant flux and being exists only in the sense that it is said of becoming. Formulating this doctrine in terms of the flow of time, the eternal return shows that time cannot be constituted of successive moments because then the present moment would be unable to pass without some kind of transcendent mediation; for the present to pass without positing the existence of an external being to ground it, it must already be coexistent with the past and future. Being is the incessant returning of the present moment or becoming, which is expressive of difference: 'It is not being that returns rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes.'[21]

To think in terms of becomings means that there is not one truth because anything can have a multiple sense, which depends upon the forces appropriating it. The philosopher employs a method of 'dramatization', which consists in asking not 'what is' something (the true, the good, the beautiful), but rather 'which one' wills it? thereby revealing the intentions behind the phenomena. This is not a passive process; rather, the philosopher's active mode of diagnosing ressentiment is a creative one in which the objects of the affirmative will are produced, rather than recognized. This, as van Tuinen observes, reveals ressentiment's new sense:

> The diagnosis itself must be dramatized in the virtual presence of a superior tenor of life … *Ressentiment* is without a doubt bad, but it is not Evil and this means that, instead of judging over it, we need to expose its contagious effects in such a manner that we give it the opportunity to morph into something else.[22]

The philosopher is thus capable of connecting ressentiment with active forces that give it a new, active sense and it is in this way that ressentiment is overcome. This is achieved in the eternal return.

In his notes written in Lenzer Heide, Nietzsche presents the eternal return as the most extreme form of nihilism.[23] The previous three forms of nihilism can be traced in terms of a change in the relation between reactive forces and the negative will: in the first stage, negative nihilism, there is a great affinity between reactive forces and the will, which results in the creation of higher reactive values such as God and essence; in the second stage, reactive nihilism, reactive forces are driven by a will to deny to turn on these supersensible values and expose them as the fictions which they are, but without replacing them with new values; this depreciates into the third stage, passive nihilism, which is devoid of ressentiment. This is the nihilism of the reactive life without

will, in which dogmatism disappears in every sense but one: '*It is better to fade away passively!*'[24] It is the exhaustion felt by the last man, who lacks the higher values with which he can organize a set of values, and so prefers not to value anything at all and simply waits to die. Deleuze relies on these notes to develop nihilism through to its fourth, and most extreme, form in which nihilism can be overcome. The eternal return makes the nihilistic will complete so that it breaks from reactive forces rather than, as up until this point, preserving them: 'Only the eternal return can complete nihilism *because it makes negation a negation of reactive forces themselves.*'[25] This is the active and affirmative destruction of the man who wants to perish, a destruction of the negative; it is not, however, in the dialectical sense that marks the bad conscience because it proceeds from affirmation.

This logical account of the eternal return is made possible by a double selection: the first selection gives the will a practical rule that reformulates the Kantian categorical imperative: '*whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.*'[26] This vivifying thought removes anything that can be half-willed, such as laziness and baseness, or at the very least exalts them by willing that they be done repeatedly. This is a striking contrast to the activities of the last man, who prefers not to will and so, when he is lazy and base, he does not will his actions. This type does not survive this thought. However, this thought risks reigniting ressentimental inclinations and fervour, and the man of ressentiment might will the ressentimental life to return endlessly. A second selection is therefore needed in which all reactive forces are destroyed. The cosmological and physical doctrine informs us that there is only becoming, and being can only be said of becoming. The second selection is a metaphysical one in which only being survives. Because reactive forces deny their difference and their own nature (i.e. that they are forces), the negative in reaction cannot return because it is non-being; therefore, being cannot be said of them. Only active forces affirm their difference and survive this selection of the eternal return.

According to Deleuze, it is the philosopher as genealogist who is capable of thinking pure difference because he sees becomings and knows that being is said of becoming (rather than thinking of becoming as an accidental state of being). This perspectival approach enables him to see beyond empirical states of affairs and to escape the terms of dialectical opposition that structure reactive, traditional concepts; it thus enables him to effect real change. But at what cost? History, the becoming-reactive of forces, is the perversion of a process that might otherwise culminate in the sovereign individual but instead produces

man, which means that human history is indistinguishable from ressentiment. The man who wants to perish is the type capable of thinking the eternal return, in which all reactive forces are destroyed. Only then is an affirmative philosophy possible, which means that although nihilism can be successfully overcome, it comes at a great price: the death of man. Appearing after the elimination of what is essentially human, the Overman is a post-historical figure whose 'sole content' is 'the purely active and pure affirmation'.[27]

The problem of overcoming ressentiment

For many scholars, Deleuze fails in his Nietzschean project because nihilism always creeps back in, although they have differed on precisely where and why it appears.[28] In addition to this debate, there is a problem in the way that Deleuze interprets the reactive life. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* II.17, 62–63, Nietzsche acknowledges two assumptions in his theory of the bad conscience: the first refers to the change in man when he was confined by social conventions and laws, leading to the interiorization of his conscience. Nietzsche writes that this change 'was not gradual and voluntary and did not represent an organic assimilation into new circumstances, but was a breach, a leap, a compulsion, an inescapable fate that nothing could ward off, which occasioned no struggle, *not even any ressentiment*'.[29] The second assumption is that the shaping of an erstwhile 'unrestrained and shapeless' populace into a 'fixed form' could only have been concluded with acts of violence.[30] These acts of violence kneaded man into a calculable, predictable animal that is capable of making promises and being held accountable for them. But as man's ability to act out his drives is controlled and inhibited, he interiorizes this instinct of freedom, and it is this which creates the bad conscience (although at this early stage bad conscience is 'bad' in the sense of painful and has not yet been moralized by the priest). One of Nietzsche's aims in this aphorism is to avoid attributing bad conscience to the master race that commits acts of violence on the weak. He argues that the master race was 'organized on a war footing and with the power to organize … They do not know what guilt, responsibility, consideration are, these born organizers … *They* are not the ones in whom "bad conscience" grew … but it would not have grown without them'.[31]

Nietzsche's other main aim in this aphorism is to argue that the bad conscience is a leap and breach that did not require a struggle or even ressentiment. Unlike Deleuze, for whom ressentiment figures heavily in his interpretation of the bad

conscience, Nietzsche maintains a separation between them. This prepares the ground for his belief that the bad conscience is an active force. When Nietzsche refers to the '*active* bad conscience',[32] does he mean it in the sense of creating concepts or in an affirmative sense? He later cautions us against thinking disparagingly about the bad conscience because of the pain of internalization and the sight of man lacerating himself: 'Fundamentally, *it is the same active force* as the one that is at work on a grand scale in those artists of violence and organizers'.[33] Bad conscience is 'active' because it is the artistic drive to give form: it is at work in the master race, who use it on a 'grand scale' to build states; and it is at work when man redirects 'this artist's cruelty' on himself.[34] Nietzsche presents both senses of the bad conscience in the same aphorism: at the same time as he identifies the destructive power of the bad conscience and its reactive nature, which leads to concepts such as selflessness and self-sacrifice, he creates the concept anew in an affirmative sense. He praises it as the 'true womb of ideal and imaginative events [which has] brought a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to light, and perhaps for the first time, beauty *itself*'.[35]

None of this is possible in Deleuze's reading of the bad conscience. Keith Ansell-Pearson notes that 'Deleuze appears to identify too quickly ressentiment and bad conscience … missing the challenge of Nietzsche's argument … For Nietzsche, it is a development that is inadequately understood if it is thought in evolutionary terms'.[36] As we have seen, Deleuze argues that ressentiment not only precedes the bad conscience, but the bad conscience is the completion of ressentiment. The genetic element of both is the negative will to power and they are essentially reactive, embodying the spirit of revenge. This means that overcoming the bad conscience requires a different genetic element and must therefore happen *beyond* the bad conscience.

For Nietzsche, the bad conscience is the human fate, '*a catastrophe that we cannot opt either into or out of*',[37] and attempts to think of an Overman cannot lie beyond the bad conscience. Ansell-Pearson contrasts Deleuze's reading with an experiment Nietzsche proposes at the end of *On the Genealogy of Morality* II. Since man has intertwined his natural inclinations with bad conscience for millennia, Nietzsche proposes a reverse experiment, at the very least in principle: 'an intertwining of bad conscience with perverse inclinations, all those other-worldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world'.[38] For Nietzsche, the bad conscience is 'a sickness rather like

pregnancy',[39] and this reverse experiment would achieve the self-destruction of the reactive in man by connecting bad conscience to new becomings, new forms of life. Nietzsche therefore offers a philosophy of affirmation out of negation without this philosophy lying beyond negation. In Deleuze's reading, this is not possible: in his evolutionary account of the reactive life, there is a surfeit of revenge in the topological origins of the bad conscience. Its genetic element is negative and the alliance between the nihilistic will and reactive forces is strong. Deleuze is forced to think of the self-destruction of what is reactive in man as that which takes place *after* the bad conscience, and not out of it.

I would like to conclude by reflecting on Deleuze's complex and subtle analysis of the philosopher. The book is littered with criticisms of numerous philosophers, including Kant, Hegel and Socrates, for expressing the priestly type, and he even goes so far as to oppose the philosopher to the 'Kantian tribunal judge'.[40] Of course, he praises Nietzsche, and also other philosophers such as Lucretius and Spinoza, for their pluralist philosophies. He also addresses the philosopher as a type. Structurally, the book's fundamental dualism is not between the nihilistic types and the Overman, but between the philosopher and the priest. Both are genius-artists who create concepts that affect the nature of the relations between forces; and only the philosopher is capable of destroying the poisonous work of the priest, employing falsehoods to destroy the priest's fictions. The philosopher and the priest are close kin: the philosopher is the most fragile of types because he comes into being by wearing the mask of the contemplative priest and maintaining ascetic practices.

Deleuze interprets Zarathustra's lesson on the friend as a reflection on the philosopher. According to Zarathustra, 'the friend is always the third one' who interrupts the conversation between 'I and Me' in the solitary individual.[41] A solitary existence is not a lonely one; the individual is a multiplicity in need of friendship, not to help share the pains and suffer the blows, but an agonistic friendship that ignites in the individual the desire for self-overcoming. Early in his reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze considers the philosopher to be a friend who appears between 'I and Me', the type that introduces differences into the reactive life and directs the becoming-active of reactive forces.[42] Only the philosopher is capable of releasing the affirmative out of the negative, of thinking difference in a world of indifference. He is neither a realized nor sublimated form of man, nor the Overman. He is an active type who, like the nobles, is endowed with a pathos of difference; however, there the similarity ends. Quoting Nietzsche, Deleuze claims that the philosopher 'is a "relatively superhuman type" (EH IV 5): the

critical type, man *insofar as he wants to be gone beyond, overcome*'.[43] He cannot be trusted, for he must survive by appearing to be the 'friend of wisdom', but he is a friend who invests in 'his anti-wisdom, his immoralism, *his* conception of friendship' who 'makes use of wisdom for new, bizarre and dangerous ends – ends which are, in fact, hardly wise at all'.[44]

A distorted reading of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* reveals another philosophical type, who is not present in the argument but in the way in which Deleuze reads Nietzsche. This offers us a contrasting model in which the philosopher is an active type, but one that has ressentiment; moreover, it is because the philosopher knows the reactive life well and has reactive values that he is better able to operate like a hammer. A philosophy that is untimely, that does not serve the State and sets out to disturb established values, should harm stupidity and sadden; the primary object of philosophy is to expose base thoughts, to demystify, making the philosopher an active type fixated on the reactive life. In this perverted reading of Deleuze's Nietzsche, the philosopher is an active type who coexists with reactive types, the friend who generates in the man of ressentiment the desire to overcome by thinking pure difference.

The philosopher must understand the type of life that is sick, and to do this his own perspective must encompass that of the priest. The philosopher as genealogist has a pathos of difference that allows him to see from different perspectives, so that he can see from the slavish, priestly perspectives, but also affirmatively; he can see phenomena such as ressentiment, but also the becomings that are constitutive of them. The philosopher sees both differences and oppositions and knows exactly what it is he negates in the slave in contrast to the master who sees only other affirmations that seek to negate him. The philosopher understands very well the slave's negation of the affirmation that he creates. Even if we argue that masters can be aware of the slaves *qua* slaves without compromising their superiority, the masters must still remain active types in whom there is no ressentiment. In this distorted reading of the philosopher, however, the coexistence of the active and reactive types (rather than suspending affirmation to a post-historical moment) means that this philosophical type is able to carry out the reverse experiment proposed by Nietzsche which regards the bad conscience to be an active force and connects it to perverse inclinations to create something new and different. A total critique would not be possible because reactive forces are never entirely destroyed and, of course, it is not consistent anyway with Deleuze's closed system of forces. But the ability of this philosophical type to see from the priestly perspective is the greatest chance for the slave's liberation from ressentiment.

Notes

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *La Volonté de puissance*, trans. G. Bianquis and ed. F. Wurzbach (Paris: Gallimard, 1935).

2 Paolo D'Iorio, 'The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation', trans. Frank Chouraqui, *The Agonist* IV, no. 1 (2011): 1–43.

3 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2005 [1962]), 40.

4 Ibid., 50. Quoting his copy of *The Will to Power*, Deleuze claims that the will to power is the 'inner will [that] must be ascribed to [forces]' (ibid., 49).

5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

6 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 111.

7 Ibid., 116.

8 Ibid., 115.

9 Ibid., 116.

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is', in A. Ridley and J. Norman (eds.), trans. J. Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1908]), 136.

11 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 127.

12 See ibid., 34–36.

13 Ibid., 128.

14 Ibid., 64.

15 Sjoerd Van Tuinen, 'The Drama of Ressentiment: The Philosopher versus the Priest', in Ceciel Meiborg and Sjoerd van Tuinen (eds.), *Deleuze and the Passions* (New York: Punctum Books, 2016), 79–202.

16 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 52.

17 Ibid., 89.

18 Ibid., xii, emphasis added.

19 Ibid., 75.

20 Ibid., 2.

21 Ibid., 48.

22 Van Tuinen, 'Drama of Ressentiment'.

23 See Ansell-Pearson, Keith and Large, Duncan (eds.), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 385–389.

24 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 149.

25 Ibid., 70.

26 Ibid., 68.

27 Ibid., xii.

28 For a long time the debate centred on the logic of the dialectic and Deleuze's
    concept of difference. See, for example, Descombes's problematization of an
    incomparable being (the master) in a philosophy of values (Vincent Descombes,
    Modern French Philosophy, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge:
    Cambridge University Press, 1980)); see also Judith Norman's defence of Deleuze
    against Descombes's criticism (Judith Norman, 'Nietzsche Contra *Contra*:
    Difference and Opposition', *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 189–206).
    More recently, scholarship has shifted its focus to the eternal return. For example,
    Ashley Woodward takes issue with the second selection, which ensures the
    destruction of all reactive forces, which are negative evaluated, and the guarantee
    of everything that has value (i.e. active forces) is preserved (Ashley Woodward,
    'Deleuze, Nietzsche, and the Overcoming of Nihilism', *Continental Philosophy
    Review* 46 (2013): 115–147). He argues that this provides a degree of existential
    security, which is expressive of what Nietzsche referred to as 'negative nihilism'.
    Joseph Ward finds the nature of Deleuze's affirmation problematic: Deleuze can
    only affirm existence without the return of reactive forces, making it at best
    'something blandly cheering and optimistic' (Joseph Ward, 'Revisiting Nietzsche
    et la Philosophie', *Angelaki* 15, no. 2 (2010): 101–114). Ward argues (p.106) that
    Deleuze's affirmation is one that Nietzsche would neither recognize nor endorse.
29 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson
    (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62; emphasis added.
30 Ibid., II.17, 62.
31 Ibid., II.17, 63.
32 Ibid., II.18, 64; emphasis added.
33 Ibid., II.18, 63–64; emphasis added.
34 Ibid., II.18, 64.
35 Ibid.
36 Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Overcoming the Weight of Man: Nietzsche, Deleuze, and
    Possibilities of Life', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 61, no. 3 (2007): 245–259.
    See 253.
37 Ibid.
38 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, GM II. 24, 70.
39 Ibid., II.19, 64.
40 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 2.
41 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. G. Parkes (Oxford: Oxford
    University Press, 2005), 'On the Friend', 49.
42 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 6.
43 Ibid., 94.
44 Ibid., 6.

The Irenics of Ressentiment: From Good Sense to Common Sense

Sjoerd van Tuinen

How does the full weight of two centuries of discourse on ressentiment bear on those it pretends to be about, Nietzsche's 'men of ressentiment', and what are the interests of those who wield it today? In this chapter, I will put the consistency and coherence in our use of the concept of ressentiment to the test. If the moderns have always used the concept of ressentiment in a polemical fashion, as a critique of a more common sense based on a more exclusive good sense, my aim is to explore its relevance and irrelevance from an irenic point of view. Following the lead of Isabelle Stengers, whose project of a 'cosmopolitics' is the most profound contemporary legacy of a philosophical diplomatism stemming from Leibniz, I will develop a new conceptual framework for thinking with ressentiment, with special focus on the Leibnizian version of voluntary servitude, the problem of damnation. It is not so much the truth of ressentiment that is in need of revision, but rather the purpose it serves. Its critical truth, I argue, should never be an excuse for neglecting the more speculative care for its potential overcoming. Ultimately, the question is, How to situate our diagnosis of ressentiment in the collective fabrication of a common sense in which ressentiment no longer prevails?

From good sense …

Why do people vote against their economic self-interest? What is the connection between Brexit and Trump? What motivates a suicide bomber? Why do people throw themselves in the arms of authoritarian leaders like lemmings into the abyss? According to the commentariat, political irrationalism thrives like never

before. 'Welcome to the Age of Anger', as Pankaj Mishra exalts in *The Guardian*, one month after the American elections of 2016.[1] While Nobel laureates such as Paul Krugman or Joseph Stiglitz wallow in enlightened incomprehension ('gut feelings', 'demagoguery', 'mass deception', 'hate preachers'), Mishra shows himself to be more emphatic: we should finally accept that people are not guided by economic reason alone. Besides calculating beings, we are also scared, and more importantly, vain and susceptible to pride. Ever since the French and American Revolutions, as Mishra shows with great erudition, we have known that the silent majorities are sensitive to hysteria, scapegoating and fanaticism.

Despite this call for emotional intelligence, however, Mishra's conclusion hardly deviates from Krugman and all those voices that seek to exorcize the growing darkness with psychopathological formulas. Ultimately we are supposedly dealing with 'ressentiment': a toxic brew of hatred, frustration, humiliation, indignation and passivity. More and more, everybody agrees, people feel excluded, unrecognized and impotent, and their suppressed desire for revenge expresses itself in hallucinations of a 'leftist elite' or *Lügenpresse*, but also in fundamentalism, nationalism and populism. The only controversial aspect of this diagnosis is the etiology of all this ressentiment: certain class interests would no longer be heard; the winner-take-all culture provides the 99 per cent with no other self-image other than that of the loser; we have become enfeebled and sentimentalized by our media; modern emancipation has collapsed under its own narcissistic success; technological accelerations leave us feeling orphaned and antiquated. Or perhaps citizens really do feel culturally alienated from their immigrant fellow citizens?

None of these explanations is new. Ever since the nineteenth century it has been common practice to speak of the modern masses in a psychologizing way. Although the concept of ressentiment was first used by inconvenient philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the question of why the masses grumble has belonged to the good sense of the liberal-conservative establishment as much as to leftist intellectuals ever since. But how rational is this mass psychological *bon sens*, now that the interpreters are overtaken more and more by events that they anticipate less and less?

This question has been at the heart of my research on ressentiment. The inherent tension between ressentiment and modern democracy – the more one internalizes de jure equality and meritocratic principles, the more one feels humiliated by de facto inequality qua power, education, status and property – is one of the most worn-out commonplaces of social science. Ressentiment supposedly lies at the basis of emancipatory movements, but at the same time,

threatens the success of these movements as embedded in modern institutions. And yet shouldn't the self-sufficient conformism in the very self-evidence of this 'problem' trigger the suspicion of every philosophical reader of Nietzsche? Isn't the diagnosis of ressentiment a typical case of what Stengers has called the temptation of 'vindictive morality'? 'Its promulgators will always have good reasons for their verdict, but this verdict will be delivered repeatedly, without risk, and situates them in a monotonous landscape littered with similar reasons for disqualification.'[2]

… to common sense

Today there are voices suggesting that our *bon sens*, also known as 'politically correct' thinking, is itself not free from the ressentiment that it detects everywhere. Well-meaning scientists are shamelessly bullied as pedantic moralists and critical publicists are derogated as anachronistic curmudgeons. This, too, is nothing new. As Nietzsche emphasized with the more or less forgotten subtitle of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'A Polemic', ressentiment is a polemical label. Every use of the term has a denigrating aspect. As Hillary Clinton tried to get a grip on the voting behaviour of Trump supporters with a term such as 'deplorables', Trump accused the Democrats of not being able to accept their loss. No matter how self-evident such reproaches may be, it immediately makes the finding of ressentiment much less plausible than it appears. Worse still, the suspicion arises that this kind of denunciative judgement is itself a symptom of a negative pathos that is deeply interwoven into our reason. The pot calling the kettle black.

However, if there is no neutral or objective manner of speaking about ressentiment, then there can also be no question of an intrinsic *bon sens*, a univocal and risk-free use of the concept motivated by a natural affinity with its truth. No more than there is a universal criterion of application, or, again in the words of Stengers, a *sens commun*. Under the concept of ressentiment there hides a whole political drama and whoever claims to surmise its ultimate truth denies the complexity of diverging and conflicting passions that are expressed in it. Such a denial rather feeds the ressentiments that it pretends to transcend and explain. It is, after all, an insult concealed in and legitimated by social-scientific jargon. Worse still, such criticism is never itself entirely free from the dynamics of ressentiment itself. If we really want to speak critically about ressentiment, we will have to return to the field of force (such as class struggle or, in the case of

Stengers, the science wars) under the social debate and from which every verdict and truth about ressentiment derives its 'sense'.

Only, why would we want this at all: speaking 'critically' about ressentiment, if the truth of critique is at odds with its plausibility? The more the notion of ressentiment is used, the more we need to ask ourselves whether the very conditions of its enunciation are not parasitic on the opposition between the established identities it consolidates and from which ressentiment springs. Do we not encounter the limits of an old Enlightenment tradition, namely that of public debate in which polemics plays such an essential, even if usually only implicit, role? Does the criticism of ressentiment not always shoot itself in the foot?

These are questions about the *consistency* between theory and practice in our use of the concept of ressentiment. But what I want to demonstrate here is that their answer depends on another problem, namely the *coherence* of our point of view with those who are said to have ressentiment. Is there a standpoint from which we can recognize that our public sphere is indeed a chaotic field of mutually reinforcing ressentiments, without immediately being seduced into polemics again? Is there, in other words, a cosmopolitical way of relating to the problem of ressentiment?

In 'Risks of Peace' Stengers writes, 'Cosmopolitics defines peace as an ecological production of actual togetherness, where "ecological" means that the aim is not toward a unity beyond differences, which would reduce those difference through a goodwill reference to abstract principles of togetherness, but toward a creation of concrete, interlocked, asymmetrical, and always partial graspings.'[3] Can 'we' think and speak of ressentiment in such a way that, in a world of competition and strife, diverging passions do not necessarily need to converge in a single humanistic-rationalistic project of global citizenship? (Stengers makes clear that the Kantian project of world peace, understood as the hegemony of good sense more than of common sense, is the recipe par excellence for more ressentiment!) This would imply that through our speaking there takes place a sensibilization to the irreducibility of those passions, which at the same time opens the pure speculative possibility – in the form of an 'idiotic' invitation or 'lure'[4] – of their local and spontaneous pacification. Nothing less is at stake than the care for the coherence of the passions of those who have an interest in speaking about ressentiment and the passions of those to whom this speech applies.

I would have preferred to pose this question directly to Stengers. It is a question which I think inspires her entire oeuvre, even if it remains mostly implicit. Much to my delight she initially accepted my invitation to contribute to this book. She even left it to me to write a first abstract that would function as an

enabling constraint for her own writing. My disappointment was all the greater then, when Stengers ultimately withdrew. Was it perhaps because of the same idiotic or Bartlebyan 'I would prefer not to?' that had also led to my own doubts about this project?

This chapter is meant as a processing and *Durcharbeitung* (in the Freudian sense) of a Stengersian 'demoralization', in which the relevance of the concept of ressentiment is itself put in question. For ultimately the justification of my philosophical interest in the problem of ressentiment cannot be found in the conclusions of others. Its reason(s) can only appear immanently, as part of a thought-movement, or as Stengers would put it, in an 'experiment'. The aim of this chapter, then, will be to test whether the obstinate problem of ressentiment can be transformed from an argument of critical or good sense into a problem of care for common sense.

The art of diagnosis

Following in the footsteps of the foremost Nietzschean philosopher of the past century, Gilles Deleuze, I understand critique as the undermining of both *sens commun* and *bon sens*.[5] The notion that criticism is by definition at right angles with common sense is manifested by that kind of criticism, which sees our public sphere as corroded by ressentiment to the extent that it puts into doubt the very existence of the possibility of common sense. Whenever leftist intellectuals blame right-wing populists for perpetrating a politics of rancour, or when Twitter trolls accuse the administrative elite of holding on to privileges inherited from the past, each side claims an exclusive, rational position. No matter how sincere and objective these critical unmaskings of the ressentiment of the other are, however, we have seen that as long as we stubbornly stick to the will to truth, the effective performative pretence of our diagnosis – its polemical 'sense' or affective charge – remains invisible. If every truth judgement relates critically to all whom it concerns, then it is now a matter of subjecting this exclusive *bon sens* itself to a critical investigation. In order to philosophically deal with the problem of ressentiment, following Deleuze and Stengers, thought must radically 'dramatize' itself and thus turn truth into an event: Who speaks of ressentiment? Why is this relevant here and now? Does this manner of speaking ultimately contribute to less or more ressentiment?

If we continue to make use of the concept of ressentiment, then, this is not out of the will to generically judge the hidden grudges of a xenophobic underclass.

We find ressentiment in all layers of society and, as the victory of Trump has shown, not in the least among the middle class that likes to see itself as tolerant, neutral and rational. Moreover, Trump voters from the lower class tend to have much better reasons – from a precarious existence to failing state investments in the infrastructure of rural areas – than the commentariat makes us believe. However, are we not confronted here with a 'real' fear, with shame or with grief? Then why would we still condemn them with the label of ressentiment?

We can speak of ressentiment when the aforementioned reasons and more univocal passions become nestled in an affective fixation: a feeling instead of an acting. As a consequence, my indignation is inauthentic from the moment that it is conditioned by my passivity and only expresses itself in an indirect, self-poisoning way. For Nietzsche this fixation lies at the basis of the Judeo-Christian cultivation of victimhood and pity. In secular times it takes the form of a false egalitarianism coupled with a narcissistic obsession with our emotional life. But let us not forget that Nietzsche never turned directly against the 'men of ressentiment'. With his genealogical polemics, he precisely distanced himself from the 'English psychologists' (utilitarianists such as Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer or his erstwhile friend Paul Rée), for whom the emancipatory motives and modern sense of justice of 'those who came off badly' are only the incensed expression of a supposedly universal egoism that ought to be mediated and kept in check by the Church and the State. They belong to the critical hermeneuticists of ressentiment, the 'priests', who have a lot to gain from its existence and are all too happy to provide for it a meaning or justification (from the 'bad conscience' of the sinner to the Oedipus complex of the envious consumer).[6]

Let us assume that we are still dealing with a culture of ressentiment today, albeit no longer organized by the Church and the State but by a global media spectacle. Other than for the journalist or the 'expert', today's priest figures, the challenge for the philosopher is to find a perspective in which the event of the truth (*sens*) of ressentiment already plausibly points to its possible transformation. This means to go beyond critique. Or as Stengers puts it, following Deleuze, 'A true diagnosis, in the Nietzschean sense, must have the power of a performative. It cannot be commentary, exteriority, but must risk assuming an inventive position that brings into existence, and makes perceptible, the passions and actions associated with the becomings it evokes.'[7] In other words, the diagnosis of ressentiment bears less resemblance to psychology than to a chemical experiment. It cannot begin from mistrust, but is obliged to rely (Stengers speaks of *confiance*) on those passions that can set in motion the very ressentiment that it diagnoses.

Only, the passions and actions evoked by Nietzsche and Deleuze are ultimately of a polemical nature. For does their critical effort not risk letting good sense prevail at the cost of the possible 'becomings' of common sense? After all, Nietzsche too wants to enforce an opposition: he seeks to protect 'the strong' (the few) against 'the weak' (the many). His polemics is of course exclusively directed against the moralists who want to protect 'the weak' against 'the strong' (and even more against themselves), a will he ultimately identifies with nihilism, but his iconoclastic manner of writing does little to avoid the triggering of new ressentiments elsewhere. Worse still, he adds fuel to the fire. For is Nietzsche not the 'modern' or nihilistic philosopher par excellence, that is, someone for whom the polemical truth is more important than its consequences? Doesn't his mode of philosophizing with the hammer reduce the common sense of his time to outdated folklore in the name of a progress of which he himself constitutes the privileged mouthpiece? His very identification of thought with aggression makes it perhaps all too easy for subsequent 'critical' hermeneuticists to turn his concept of ressentiment into a readymade abstraction, an all-too-convenient truth to be used at will.

The Leibnizian constraint

These hyper-reflective questions about the sense and value of critique impose themselves throughout Stengers's writing. Even if she would fiercely deny this, these questions contain an echo of deconstruction. After all, for Derrida, too, it was a matter of suspending judgement. For both, a kind of openness is at stake, rooted in complexification instead of reduction and slowing down instead of acceleration. But while deconstruction is ultimately still heir to the critical tradition, Stengers seeks an alternative that expresses the 'change of the problem': the self-criticism of *bon sens* is important, but only in so far as it serves the care for the *sens commun*. Crucially, moreover, this care should not be understood in the priestly sense of the necessity to guard the herd and protect its members against their own destructive desires.

While she is in many ways a student of Deleuze, Stengers has more confidence in a philosopher about whom Deleuze has written with great admiration, but whom he simultaneously disqualifies as not modern enough: Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, the 'tender-minded' thinker of pre-established harmony. One could say that Stengers relates to Deleuze in the same way that Leibniz did to Spinoza: the mode of betrayal of the diplomat. If Deleuze and Spinoza are modernists who

mobilize the capacity of reason to establish good sense at the cost of common sense, then Stengers and Leibniz maintain a more 'tempered' understanding of rationality, in the sense of the baroque ideal of *wohltemperiert*. They define rationality itself relationally, as a problem of tuning, measurement and mediation ('composition') between an infinite diversity of reasons and passions, and the common.

In *The Invention of Modern Science*, Stengers analyses the belligerent passion that drives the scientific revolution – the passion that demands that nature conform to mathematical laws, that makes us fight the doxa of common sense and that prepares us to die for the Truth, which she finds summarized in Galileo Galilei's stubborn rebuttal: *eppure si muove*! – and its tight complicity with the uprooting tendencies of capitalism. It is here that, for the first time, she introduces 'the Leibnizian constraint'. The philosopher, theologian, mathematician and diplomat Leibniz conceived of philosophy as a *scientia generalis*, an encyclopaedia in which all 'sectarian' forms of knowledge could be included and 'taken further than before'.[8] The only pragmatic condition was his famous declaration that the various ways of thinking should respect 'established sentiments'.[9] This limitation is generally criticized as the irrational or 'abominable and shameful'[10] will to compromise truth and avoid conflict. For Stengers, however, it is a principle of responsibility for the consequences of what one says and does, 'much as a mathematician "respects" the constraints that give meaning and interest to his problem'. Put differently, it is a restraint on good sense:

> The problem designated by the Leibnizian constraint ties together truth and becoming, and assigns to the statement of what one believes to be true the responsibility not to hinder becoming: not to collide with established sentiments, so as to try to open them to what their established identity led them to refuse, combat, misunderstand.[11]

This constraint has nothing to do with the relativism of truth, but everything with the 'truth of the relative'. Common sense remains a part of the grounds on which we think. Moreover, this inseparability of reason and passion is far from an anti-intellectualist or anti-rationalist attitude. Rather, it is generic abstractions that risk stupefying thought, as they can easily make us indifferent to their concrete efficacy as readymade reasons to act or judge. In mathematics, an invention does not destroy past definitions and questions, but conserves them as a particular aspect of a transformed definition leading to new questions. Analogous to a move in a game of chess, in order to prove the relevance of a certain claim, one has to be able to indicate where it will lead all stakeholders. Only in this case, as in that of diplomacy, the aim is not victory. What matters is rather that

the passions are detached from their polemical fixation and thus 'betrayed'. At stake is the possibility of a polite reorientation of established identities, not their confirmation. If our trust in *bon sens* is polemical by definition, Leibniz is recalcitrant precisely because he connects the passion for truth with 'a possible peace, a humour of truth'[12] (*paix possible, humeur de la verité*).

Thus for Stengers, the truth of ressentiment can never acquit us of the responsibility for the becoming of the 'weak'. Neither can we expect that the men of ressentiment will reject or repress their sentiments, since no matter how negative and pathological, it is precisely these sentiments that enable their individual bearer to 'become' and leave behind their fixation. Whenever a social scientist identifies an omnipresent ressentiment, by contrast, this comes down to a blind disqualification of established sentiments. The diagnosis is part of the problem, not its solution. For how can a historical explanation not pin down those it concerns to their own ressentiment in the name of its own rationality? The cynical 'realism' of the commentariat in the rat race for explanations is as irrational as the ressentiment it diagnoses, since for Leibniz only the affective becomings of common sense – the shared world – and not our own good sense constitute sufficient ground for our rationality. Hence the title I proposed for Stengers's chapter in this book, 'Achieving Coherence in the Drama of Ressentiment'. Can we introduce the reasons for our use of the concept of 'ressentiment' in such a way to those it concerns, that our own good sense will only be a part of a slowly advancing composition of a common sense in which ressentiment and polemics are no longer hegemonic, and in which we ourselves are only the effect and partial cause of a collective learning process?

Damnation

How much imagination does it take to develop a concept of ressentiment in which polemics and vindictive moralism no longer define the landscape? Again following Deleuze, Stengers points to Leibniz, who, in his *Confessio Philosophi*, draws up a portrait of 'the damned' that is remarkably similar to that of the man of ressentiment. While the blessed find meaning and joy in actively partaking in the world, the sole and ultimate reason of existence of the damned is their hatred of God and his creation. Their life is thus tormented by a single polemical certainty, blocking their belief in the possibility of a better world that transcends the immediate consequences of their own negativity.

Because their damnation is self-imposed, Leibniz argues that damnation should not be considered a matter of moral guilt. Judas or Beelzebub do not pay retribution for a past action, but rather for the hatred that constitutes their actual becoming. They are as free as the blessed souls, but they damn themselves by the present action that they renew constantly. Judas is not damned because he has betrayed God, but because, having betrayed the ultimate ground of his own existence, he hates him all the more, never ceasing to hate and betray him more. Eventually he dies consumed by his hatred, and even the resurrection will bring him only the same scorn from which he will continue to construct his future presents. The damned, Leibniz concludes, 'are always damnable but never damned'.[13]

Of course, the damned are still part of the common world they hate so much, and as such are exposed to the possibility of other modes of existence. But this possibility is eternally blocked for them by their very negativity. They are tied to the world they hate the most. Incapable of getting rid of their immediate past, they vomit over everything that tends to deflect or dissuade their hatred, in particular the happiness and generosity – the more affirmative or active reasons – of others. Indeed, the very knowledge that they are eternally deprived of the glory of the blessed, their only clear perception, is the ultimate reason for, and thus simultaneously the very origin of, their lamentations. Hence what damns the damned is their narrow-mindedness, due to which they continue to scratch their actual wound over and over again.

As the temporal distance between death and judgement is effectively suspended, existence itself works as a kind of ongoing judgement or ethical test, albeit again physical or chemical rather than moral. The more actively we learn to integrate with the world, the more eternal we become, but if our capacity to actualize the world during our life is exercised exclusively by passive affects, our existence remains abstract and inconsequential. Leibniz takes up the old platonic theorem of immanent justice, according to which sin contains its punishment and virtue its reward in themselves.[14] The duration of the guilt is precisely what causes the duration of the penalty, such that the *poeni damni* take place automatically, without God intervening.[15] There is not even a disproportion between infinite punishment and finite guilt. Voluntary impenitence, that is, the absence of God from the inner life of pain, is the very sin for which man continuously and repetitively damns himself. Consumed with burning regrets, envy and indignation, the damned are the wretched of the earth.[16] They take pleasure in the very things that can only augment their misery and thus they never cease to further blind their capacity for more rational judgement.[17]

Because of his incapacity to forget and his constant self-justification in terms of a deprecation of life and a perpetual accusation of God, the damned is the precursor of the modern nihilist who would rather will nothing than not will at all. His role is taken up again by Nietzsche's 'man of ressentiment' who cultivates reactive forces and the sickening fictions that separate forces from what they can do. Both are equally poor in world. They share the same degenerate type of thinking and existing which turns its back on the becoming of the world by means of a transvaluation of all values based on the fiction of a completely different world that could and should have been realized. In fact, Leibniz agrees with Nietzsche that all our moral narratives of progress towards a transcendent end or distance from a transcendent origin – in other words, all narratives that seek justice in despair, corruption and purity – actually stand in the way of redemption and ultimately betray their base origin. At stake is our concept of time itself as either the infinite potential of the world or the bad infinity of an unanswered complaint. It is the figure of fallenness or evil itself that is life-denying and imprisoning, while redemption can only take place in the here and now.

Yet even if they are the unworthy par excellence, as Leibniz emphasizes, the damned still belong to the same world as the elect, all for 'the best' of the latter. The world's very rationality – 'the best of all possible worlds' – implies a degree of evil. It is the progress of the whole that is to be affirmed, and the parts as partaking in this progress. As Whitehead would later say, evil is always particular. The relation of the damned to the world may be entirely negative, but this relation itself is still a positive fact, with its own relevance to the whole, like a local 'dissonance' adding the necessary 'contrast' for a richer global harmony. It is thus not despite but thanks to their negative or reactive manners that the damned contribute the necessary material to the progress of the totality of the world.[18] Their very inclusion is transformative: not in the Hegelian sense of a dialectical overcoming of the opposition of individuality and totality, but in the sense of a reconciliation of novelty and totality into a world that constantly bleeds into the new.

If the opposition nonetheless persists, then it persists only from the point of view of the damned, because in their case the transformation of negativity never takes place. Theirs is the most miserable becoming imaginable, because they are going nowhere; their repetitiveness is the degree-zero of difference, the narrowest possible affirmation, the naked reproduction or renewal of the same hatred of God. But precisely by being stuck in opposition, they set free all other possible becomings for the blessed and the elect. There is not even a disproportion between the number of the damned and that of the elect.

The number of the damned far exceeds that of the elect, precisely because by condemning themselves, they involuntarily liberate an infinite quantity of possible progress for the happy few.[19]

Surely, this is how Nietzschean slave morality should be understood: as a form of self-abandonment, which at the same time makes possible and sustains an external system of power. There is plenty of room at the bottom. This is also the cruel crux of the Leibnizian care for established sentiments: despite themselves, even the greatest pessimists are material for the becoming of the world. But as a consequence, and here Leibniz goes further than Nietzsche, they also bear within themselves the potential of self-overcoming. Only the damned are too 'lazy' to see this, where laziness refers to that form of narrow-minded good sense which believes it transcends affective processes and which is thus susceptible to the least rational motives. The task of philosophy, instead, is to produce a more integral and intense contrast image.

A speculative gesture

The question is, however, whether Leibniz's speculative proposition that even the damned have a place in the best of all possible worlds is capable of converting the feelings of the damned. Does it not rather enhance those of the blessed at the expense of the damned? While the latter is more probable, this question cannot possibly be answered in a generic or definitive way. We have arrived at the point of what Stengers calls a 'jump': we must take the risk of not being heard (and lose touch with common sense), but also seize the opportunity of really making a difference (and break with good sense).

The first, Stengers warns, happened to Leibniz when – despite himself as it were – he was as naive as to question the most established of all sentiments: the *bon sens*, that is, the passion that measures truth by its polemical vector. If the 'Monadology' was a form of cosmo-politesse, a fantastic metaphysical gesture to reconcile the Aristotelian world view with modern science, this irenic gesture has not helped the credibility of his rationalism. It didn't take much for a sceptic such as Voltaire to ridicule Leibniz's most contra-intuitive propositions, namely that God has created 'the best of all possible worlds' and that this is a world in 'pre-established harmony'. With no less polemical delight, the Hannoverian people of faith are said to have ascribed to Leibniz the moniker that resembled his name, *Lövenix* (*Glaubenichts*), since they discovered that he cunningly saved their convictions but at the cost of depriving them of their power to contradict others.[20]

Yet precisely by refusing to judge the damned, but instead feeling the obligation to think with them as imposed by their very presence, Leibniz placed his bets on the possibility of an event that would convert them. For without an 'idiotic' belief in the world based on the inclusion of evil, there is no chance of the *sens commun* becoming any 'better'. The affirmation of our world as the best of all possible worlds – already a way of relativizing the Good and good sense – just might produce a negentropic effect where nihilism prevails. Precisely because it necessarily triggers resistance, it offers everyone the possibility of re-evaluating their relation to the world. Maybe it was therefore never meant as a pious dogma legitimatizing the status quo, but rather as a speculative proposition[21] that enables us to redefine our world as a constant practical choice between a plurality of possible worlds, and thus between the further enrichment and impoverishment of its composition. It is a speculation neither on another world altogether nor on a world already transformed, but rather on a world containing an infinite reservoir for self-overcoming.

From Leibniz's point of view, the attitude of the damned or the fools is merely the least speculative of all. It excludes the belief in any progress in the world, since temporality itself has ceased for them. But as Leibniz warns us, 'there is no freedom of indifference,'[22] only servitude. For the choice is always between the affirmation of difference or indifference, yet even the latter is a choice, the choice of ressentiment. Possessing a degree-zero of subjectivity, the damned are completely stuck in indignation over their own actuality, the truth of the all-too-probable.[23] Their fate is to be a passive plaything in the world of others, but without themselves ever doing something that they did not know they were capable of.

With Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, we could say that this indifferent self-certainty of the damned returns with the contemporary 'minions' (*petites mains*) who enforce the capitalist status quo by sniggering at those who yearn for, or bet on the presence of, another way of life.[24] Clever enough to think they have escaped the worst, they conspire with the banal scepticism of their priests, the 'guardians' of the neoliberal order for whom only the market is capable of repairing the havoc it wreaks and who thus effectively mark the reign of the worst instead of the best.[25] To be sure, neither the minions nor their guardians are blinded by ideology and false consciousness. The root of their indifference is not to be found in unquestioned belief. On the contrary, as Nietzsche has taught us, it is precisely our will to knowledge that reinforces stupidity, disinterest and exhaustion. Precisely because minions are in the know about capitalism, they fall under its hold and become immobile, servile, insensible and cynical

followers. Their good sense only tells them that they must avoid being 'had' – to already be 'prepared' for the suffering that will and must come. In the name of the preservation of their own miserable selves alone, they will forever reproduce their own impotent hatred to the detriment of all common sense. Thus they fall prey to ressentiment: not only the feeling of revenge that binds them to the past but also that which makes them participate in the destruction of what is more important, the future.

From critique to care

How to make a pragmatic difference vis-à-vis the (self-)hatred of the minion? No doubt one of our most established sentiments today is our feeling of shame – expressed in the poisonous commonplace that 'we are all accomplices' of the world on which we all depend. Thus the challenge is to become able to say that we are not all minions. We must resist what seems to be a very lucid and elevated thought but is in fact the all-too-familiar logic of the priest, namely that you are somehow guilty for what you are nonetheless subjected to. As Stengers never ceases to warn, it is not enough to denounce minions for what they are, as this can still contribute to the further creation of minions. 'Accused of betrayal, the person who confirms the accusation by becoming what we call a minion doesn't reveal his or her "true nature" but has been produced by a "yes" that has something to do with what used to be called "damnation."'[26] Thus naming minions, for Pignarre and Stengers, is not a matter of judgement, but a testing experience. Its pragmatic interest can only lie in its speculation *with* established sentiments, rather than against them. The only way to save the damned from damnation is to compassionately include them in the speculation on the reasons for their damnation. It is a matter of making their contrasting becoming the object of affirmation rather than prolonging the polemics or cynical solidarity to which their presence appears to summon us.

However, to return to the question of what the speculative proposition that 'the best of all possible worlds rises up on the shoulders of the damned'[27] affords us: Isn't Leibniz (and by extension Deleuze) just another prototype of the self-indulgently rational, liberal conservative realist, for whom the mere mention of ressentiment suffices to reduce any emancipatory movement to its base motivation in jealousy, frustration or some other pathological and irrational passion in order to disqualify it? Is not the true cruelty of his speculative belief in the possible consequence that, despite the collective vertigo and permanent

precarity of ordinary life, it invests our attachment to the world with positive desires and anxious expectations that cannot but disappoint us all the more?[28] In other words, isn't Leibniz still another priest in the Nietzschean sense, someone who, in the face of a daily injustice that cries to the heavens, tells the oppressed that punishment and reward are not what they imagine them to be and that their suffering may even be their own fault? And in this way, isn't he at odds with his own dictum never to break with established sentiments, not even those of the 'men of ressentiment'?

The answer to these questions is negative to the extent that the irenic philosopher refuses to take responsibility for the management of ressentiment, but only cares for what may become of it, in other words, for that which ceases to be ressentiment. While the task of the priest is to blame others for their ressentiment and to call for moral laws and mediating apparatuses that are somehow able to manage and repress it, the radical immanence of judgement and selection leads philosophy somewhere else. Crucially, it never suffices to disqualify ressentiment as unreasonable. This is an insight Leibniz shares with Spinoza. Both stick to the rationalist refusal to believe that evil can be desired for evil's sake. The damned themselves constitute the reason of the event that they produce, regardless of their material situation. If their soul squints, if their eyes are poisoned with ressentiment, this is still not unreasonable, since the hatred that fills their entire desire is the very reason or 'motif' of their freedom: 'The foolish, the mistaken, the evildoers use their reason in a sane way but not with an eye on the most important things; they deliberate about everything but happiness.'[29]

This brings us back to the necessity of speculating with established sentiments. Is the diagnosis of ressentiment shareable? The diagnostician belongs to and intervenes in the same common world as those he talks about. Precisely to the extent that this milieu is a common ground, a *terra nullius* that cannot be appropriated, he cannot assume it as already given. Instead, he has to produce some intensity of feeling capable of pervading those he diagnoses with its presence. It is only in the form of an atmospheric perturbation in the conditions and terms of the continuity of a situation, a disruption of present dystopian historicity, that we can reclaim a confidence in common sense and participate in the construction of a collective intelligence that endures for oneself no more and no less than for others. Thus the truth of the diagnosis may be clear, but its relevance and meaning depend on consequences that remain obscure.

Of course, Leibniz himself, too, was in no way convinced that his baroque rationality would actually be capable of converting the damned to the right

path. He tells the story of God demanding from Beelzebub as a condition for his salvation that he would pray for forgiveness. Not only does Beelzebub refuse; God's generosity merely exacerbates his rage and despair.[30] The negativity of ressentiment, Dostoyevsky would show us two and a half centuries later in his *Notes from the Underground*, is total and cannot be rationalized – neither in the sense of *bon sens* (hermeneutics) nor in the sense of the *sens commun* (voluntary pacification). And yet, the message of Leibnizian rationalism is that we must continue to call on the freedom of the man of ressentiment and on his possibility to relate to the world in a less pernicious way. Instead of judging the men of ressentiment, their presence in the world obliges Leibniz to speculate with them and with the reasons that matter for them, no matter how 'irrational' they may seem. Stengers translates this Leibnizian obligation (*calculemus!*) with a quote from Virginia Woolf: *think we must*.

This restless and sometimes almost schizophrenic *Sollen* is what distinguishes care from critique. It is an 'Ought' that is more fundamental than any good sense. We have to think for the possibility of a 'we', of which populists, fundamentalists, social scientists and the polemical commentariat also partake. We have to affirm the way in which the world matters to others. Irreducible to psychology or logic, the overcoming of ressentiment is therefore a cosmopolitical adventure, an ecological drama.[31] Our challenge is to learn to no longer speak out of polemics, but also to no longer speak out of the cynical solidarity which the presence of ressentiment may invoke. In both cases there is too much goodwill, too much *bon sens*. Instead of declaring others or oneself guilty of that which we are subjected to, we must make a pragmatic difference vis-à-vis the (self-)hatred of those who identify with their own ressentiment. The very word 'ressentiment' itself is already a test. Its pragmatic import lies exclusively in the care for the *sens commun*, regardless of its current degeneration. And it remains no more than a gamble, namely that the damned will save themselves from damnation once they become interested in the speculation about the future (rather than the past causes) of the state in which they find themselves.

Whether this gamble has any chance of success remains to be seen. An extremely speculative play with the will to power, the *Übermensch*, and eternal return, enables Nietzsche and Deleuze to affirm the danger of ressentiment and to exclusively reserve the polemical impulse of its concept for all those who claim to possess its truth. However, the power of their critical gesture cannot be separated from the collateral damage to all those who already suffer. The risk of the speculative gesture of Leibniz, Whitehead and Stengers is that they are only talking to themselves. If there is a tension between Leibniz and Nietzsche, it is not

found at the level of their various non-conformist relations to common sense, but at the level of the power of their discourse. Is the latter's rational gesture enough to attract feelings and infect established sentiments with the possibility of their transmutation instead of merely confirming them?

Notes

1 Pankaj Mishra, 'Welcome to the Age of Anger', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/dec/08/welcome-age-anger-brexit -trump.

2 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, trans. R. Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 9.

3 Isabelle Stengers, 'Risks of Peace', in Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell (eds.), *Process and Difference* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 235–256, 248–249.

4 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 129–132.

6 Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'The Philosopher versus the Priest: The Drama of Ressentiment', in Ceciel Meiborg and Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.), *Deleuze and the Passions* (New York: Punctum Booms, 2016), 79–102.

7 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, 12.

8 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New Essays on the Human Understanding*, trans. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 71.

9 '[A] metaphysics should be written with accurate definitions and demonstrations, but nothing should be demonstrated in it apart from that which does not clash too much with established sentiments.' As Leibniz continues in his letter to Count Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels on 12 April 1686, on the consequences of his notion of the individual for original sin:

> For in that way this metaphysics can be accepted; and once it has been approved then, if people examine it more deeply later, they themselves will draw the necessary consequences. … In this metaphysics, it will be useful for there to be added here and there the authoritative utterances of great men, who have reasoned in a similar way; especially when these utterances contain something that seems to have some possible relevance to the illustration of a view. (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923), AK VI.iii, 573–574.)

Besides Leibniz, we also find this pragmatist stance with Whitehead, for whom common sense contains both the 'benumbing repression' (Whitehead, *Process and*

Reality, 9) of deeply engrained but fallacious metaphysical presuppositions and the system of affective becomings that allows for an alliance of imagination, sense, specialized knowledge and creativity: 'It is part of the special sciences to modify common sense. Philosophy is the welding of imagination and common sense into restraint upon specialists, and also into an enlargement of their imagination' (ibid., 17, cf. 39).

10   Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale (London and New York: Continuum, 1990), 116.

11   Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. D. W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 15.

12   Stengers, *Cosmopolitics,* 4.

13   Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, trans. R. Sleigh (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 139. Precisely because this hatred is his only affect, it will never cease to consume even in the afterlife. Leibniz argues, 'there is always in the man who sins, even when he is damned, a freedom which renders him culpable, and a power, albeit remote, of recovering himself, even though it should never pass into action' (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. M. E. Huggard (Lasalle: Open Court, 1985), §269). This explains Judas's misery and damnation:

> I believe it was the state of the dying man, namely his burning hatred of God – the state in which he died and in which consists the nature of despair. Moreover, this suffices for damnation. For since the soul is not open to new external sensations from the moment of death until its body is restored to it, it concentrates its attention only on its last thoughts, so that it does not change but rather extends the state it was in at death. But from hatred of God, that is, of the most happy being, the greatest sadness follows. For just as to love is to be delighted by happiness, similarly to hate is to be saddened by happiness. Therefore the greatest sadness arises from hatred of the greatest happiness. The greatest sadness is misery, or damnation. Hence, he who dies hating God, damns himself. (Leibniz, *Theodicy,* §119, §139)

We find a similar verdict in the Koran, according to which people who commit suicide are doomed to repeat their deaths eternally.

14   Robert Klein traces this idea from the torment of damnations and qualms discussed by Origenes to Johannes Scotus Eriugena's *nihil aliud esse poenis peccatorum, nisi peccata eorum* ('nothing else are the punishments of the sinner than his sins'). The problem of voluntary impenitence has been part of the Theodicy problem since Ficino and is taken up again by Theodor Lessing in 'Leibniz von den ewigen Strafen'. Robert Klein, *Gestalt und Gedanke: Zur Kunst und Theorie der Renaissance*, trans. H. Günther (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1996), 69–70.

15 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 266–268.

16 Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §283.

17 Ibid., §270–271; Leibniz *Confessio philosophi*, 138. The damned, according to Leibniz, are like those who hate arithmetics. They

> have reason to be indignant, or, more exactly, they have reason to complain, but they do not have anything to complain about. They have the anger of a dog against a stone, of the inept gambler against fortune, of the desperate against themselves. … Hence they have anger without an object, sadness without escape, and finally a complaint that they can neither render acceptable to themselves nor put aside – truly remarkable additions to sharpen that frenzied unhappiness by which their damnation will be primarily preserved.

18 The revolts of destructive evil, purely self-regarding, are dismissed into their triviality of merely individual facts; and yet the good they did achieve in individual joy, in individual sorrow, in the introduction of needed contrasts, is yet saved by its relation to the completed whole. The image – and it is but an image – the image under which this operative growth of God's nature is best conceived, is that of a tender care that nothing be lost (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346).

19 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. T. Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 74.

20 Isabelle Stengers, 'Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices', *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183–196, 188.

21 Following Whitehead, we should say that the speculative stance asks for the creation of 'propositions' ('the tales that might be told about particular entities' (*Process and Reality*, 256)) about our actuality that function as 'lures for feeling' (ibid., 184) by adding original contrasts that enrich the way in which we experience and express the world.

22 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi,* 136.

23 In this sense, indignation alone can never be just as it merely relies on 'the sophism of the lazy reason' (ibid., 140), in other words, good sense disconnected from the possibility of a common that exceeds it. By contrast, those who are content with a situation are so because of its potential for future progress: '*it is characteristic of one who loves God to be satisfied with the past and to strive to make the future the best possible.* Only one who is disposed in this way has attained the peace of mind that rigorous philosophers urge, and that resignation of all matters in God that the mystical theologians urge' (ibid., 142).

24 Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, trans. A. Goffey (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 48.

25 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times. Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Andrew Goffey (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 27–34.

26 Ibid., 696.

27 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations. 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 162.

28 From a traditionally criticist point of view, Lauren Berlant defines cruel optimism by the continuity of a form of our attachment despite abundant evidence of the instability, fragility, attrition and cost of its content, for example the assurances and fantasies of meritocracy, fairness, job security, political and social equality and romantic love:

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

29 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 136.

30 Ibid., 99.

31 Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 3, 108.

Part Two

Ressentiment and/or Envy

Envy: Sin of Sins, Painful Birth of Desire: Towards a Metapsychology of Ressentiment

Frank Vande Veire

Ressentiment is an undetermined rancour. The man of ressentiment is bitter; he bears a grudge – but against who or what? That is not clear. Against the world, society, mankind? Ressentiment is unfocused. It mainly focuses on an object, but the choice of object is arbitrary; it could be anything. This object is, of course, not consciously referred to as an object of ressentiment but as a source of evil.

The reason for ressentiment, too, is indeterminate. Why is one resentful? One feels offended, aggrieved, humiliated, debased or dishonoured. One surely feels like a victim, but of what exactly? As in the case of the object, the reason for ressentiment seems random and easily replaceable. This is because the ostensible reason is given in such a way as to conceal the real reason. This immediately explains why the man of ressentiment is unaware of the real reason behind it: *envy*. The man of ressentiment is envious. He has an indeterminate thirst for revenge because he finds that he was denied something, despite being sure he was entitled to it. And his crucial *idée fixe* is that an other is guilty of causing this intolerable situation. This other does not just possess what he lacks, but the other possessing it is the reason he lacks it.

From a reading of several texts of Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan, a plausible argument can be made that envy is the psychic root of ressentiment, that it is moreover present at the heart of the human soul, as the kernel of what Kant calls our 'propensity to evil'. We will try to make this clear by addressing all other 'cardinal sins' as defence mechanisms against envy. It will then become apparent that ressentiment cannot be considered as a sin apart, since it is all-too-transparently rooted in envy.

Melanie Klein: The malicious mother

For psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, essentially no one is free from envy. Everyone has to go through it, since it is, she argues, constitutional.[1] In her *Envy and Gratitude* (1957), Klein traces envy back to the earliest stage of human life. Envy, she claims, 'affects the earliest relation of all, that to the mother'.[2]

The infant does not just feed itself with milk to appease its hunger, but it psychically internalizes the breast. Klein presents things as if this 'introjection', as psychic appropriation of the breast, corresponds to the physical appropriation of the milk. A breast that feeds well becomes automatically, in the psyche of the infant, a reliable 'good breast'. This introjected breast is 'not merely a physical object', and this is because 'the whole of his instinctual desires and his [the infant's] unconscious fantasies imbue the breast with qualities going far beyond the actual nourishment it affords'.[3] According to Klein, 'The infant's longing for an inexhaustible and ever-present breast stems by no means only from a craving for food and from libidinal desires. For the urge, even in the earliest stages, to get constant evidence of the mother's love is fundamentally rooted in anxiety'.[4]

According to Klein, the infant primarily feels anxiety for its own self-destructive impulses, and this is why it does not just expect the breast to feed it, but to protect it against his own death instinct. What Klein calls 'the good breast' embodies the mother's love that protects against all evil. It 'is the prototype of maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity'.[5] The bad breast, on the other hand, not only frustrates the infant's need for food but also attests to a lack of love from the mother. It is even experienced as if it wants to harm the infant. This is because it contains the aggression the infant has projected onto it.

This splitting between the good and the bad breast together with the projection of aggression onto the bad breast are the main defensive strategies (against anxiety) characterizing what in Kleinian theory is known as the 'paranoid-schizoid' position of the first four months.

Although for Klein it is only in the later 'depressive' position that for the infant the mother arises as a 'complete object', her description of the infant's earliest attitude suggests that it is already aware of an agency 'behind' the good and bad breast. From the very start, satisfaction and frustration are not just experienced towards a breast, but towards the mother who has the power to offer it *or not*. There is 'this feeling that the mother is omnipotent and that it is up to her to prevent all pain and evils from internal and external sources'.[6]

Klein now suggests that envy arises with this elevation of the mother into an omnipotent being: 'Envy contributes to the infant's difficulties in building up his good object, for he feels that the gratification of which he was deprived *has been kept for itself by the breast that frustrated him*'.[7]

The infant is not just frustrated by the breast not offering what it wants but also by the mother who is held responsible for that frustration. More exactly, the mother is reproached for *deliberately denying* the infant satisfaction. Given her omnipotence, it cannot be that she is just unsuccessful in giving the desired satisfaction. She must be malicious by avariciously keeping for herself what she has. The infant has the fantasy that the mother enjoys what she denies the infant.

The infant never just desires a breast that feeds him here and now; he claims that the almighty mother should put the breast at his disposal permanently. This claim explains why the infant, out of grievance, may refuse the breast when it is offered, as if it wants to punish it for not always being there.[8] It refuses the needed gift because it cannot dispose of the source of that gift. It is this source that is envied. 'The satisfactory breast', Klein says, 'is also envied [which implies that the satisfaction does not really satisfy]. The very ease with which the milk comes – though the infant feels gratified by it – also gives rise to envy because this gift seems something so unattainable'.[9]

Understood in this way, Klein's concept of envy blurs the difference between the good and the bad breast, the generous and the frustrating one. Even the good breast, just because an omnipotent mother possesses it, is bad. It is envied as being under control of a sovereign instance that gives and denies according to its whim. Whether this instance satisfies me or not, it always satisfies itself.

Klein defines envy as follows: 'Envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it.' Klein elaborates on this lust for revenge: 'Envy not only seeks to rob away, but to put badness, primarily bad excrements and bad parts of the self, into the mother, and first of all into the breast, in order to spoil and destroy her. In the deepest sense this means destroying her creativity'.[10]

The desire to spoil and destroy seems more deeply to reveal the essence of envy than the desire to steal it away. The infant is not just angry because he does not always get what he wants; he cannot stand being dependent on the mother for getting it. Since he hates being the passive receiver who is not in control of the process of giving, he begrudges the mother her very capacity to give and wants to destroy it.[11]

Here we meet what is so malicious about envy. The desired object is secondary. In its envious mood the infant would prefer the mother to not have milk

anymore above receiving it. He is eager to destroy the very source of generosity. This means that to be envious is worse than being selfish.

In her essay, Klein mentions the term 'ressentiment' only one time, saying that envy towards the mother, who, 'had been felt selfish and mean, feeding and loving herself rather than her baby', gives rise to 'bitter ressentiment'.[12]

Klein's theory is remarkably close to that of Max Scheler in his famous study on ressentiment. For Scheler, the envious subject's desire for revenge is paralysed not because of fear, but due to a secret admiration for the envied person. Ressentiment then arises when the subject satisfies its inhibited desire for revenge by devaluing the admired person and the objects he or she possesses. Without using the term 'ressentiment', Klein addresses the same mechanism as one of the possible defensive strategies against envy and the feelings of guilt connected to it. The envious subject's hatred is always coloured with humiliating admiration; the man of ressentiment, by devaluing the envied object, puts an end to this painful ambivalence. 'The object which has been devalued need not be envied anymore.'[13] However, ressentiment remains bitter because it surreptitiously or unconsciously remains coloured with envious admiration.

Jacques Lacan: An unbearable completeness

Regarding envy, Jacques Lacan makes mention of 'an original evil', of 'an absolutely general range'. No less than eight times he refers to or quotes a fragment from Augustine's *Confessions*. It goes as follows: 'I have seen with my own eyes and known very well an infant to be jealous though he could not speak, and already he observed his foster-brother, pale and with an envenomed stare.'

In his eleventh seminar, Lacan refers explicitly to envy:

> *Invidia* comes from *videre*. The most exemplary model of *invidia*, for us analysts, I have for a long time revealed in Augustine, it is the little child that looks at his brother hanging at the breast of his mother, looking at him *amare conspectu*, with a bitter look that tears himself to pieces and has on himself the effect of a poison. … What the little child, or anyone, *envies* is not necessarily what he would like to possess. The child staring at his little brother, who says that he wishes to be at the breast? Everyone knows that envy is always provoked by [the view on] the possession of goods that would be of no use for the one who envies …. Such is true envy. It makes the subject pale before what? Before the image of a completeness closed upon itself.[14]

The gaze the infant casts on his brother is 'poisonous' because, like the mythical evil eye, he would like to poison the other – but all he does is poison himself. In what does this self-poisoning consist? What does he poison himself with? In other words, for what does he exactly envy his brother?

Unlike Scheler and Klein, Lacan notes explicitly that the child does not seriously want to take his brother's place at the mother's breast. Consciously, he certainly thinks that that is what he wishes. But if that really were his wish, he would not feel poisoned; he would not feel such impetuous bitterness. For that matter, the breast is not at all out of reach for him. He surely has some experience of this kind of satisfaction. And maybe it will eventually be his turn to hang at the breast. His possible impatience cannot explain his paleness, the cool hate in his gaze. The point is that, although he can easily get what his brother has, the sight of his brother getting it is unbearable. Why is this? It must be that, against all common sense, in the child's view, his brother is getting something he will never get – and this by the mere fact that his brother gets it. By getting it he robs it from him. The brother enjoys it at his expense, which is of course a completely irrational idea: his brother's enjoyment is in no way a concrete threat to his potential enjoyment of the same object. So, for the envious subject, real satisfaction is literally exclusive: it is something that only exists as experienced by an other at his expense.

The element of masochism in this scene is unmistakable. From the image of a kind of satisfaction that is easily accessible to him, the child constructs a scene of an inaccessible form of satisfaction before which he feels robbed and humiliated. The 'image of a completeness' is unbearable to him. The brother seems completely satisfied by the mother. And what is, from a Lacanian perspective, of even greater importance, although Lacan does not mention it in this context, is the mother is completely satisfied by the brother. The total image here is that of the mother: the mother with the brother as an object that fulfils her desire. What the child begrudges his brother is that he is the one to make the mother complete. In this picture there is no place for him. That is why his stare at his brother 'tears himself to pieces'.

At this stage – which Lacan calls the imaginary – the infant's identity, his consciousness of being someone, is sustained by his illusion of being the one and only object that fulfils his mother's desire. And now it appears that his brother is that perfect object. He has been knocked off his throne. His brother steals his identity which is sustained by the illusion of being the object that satisfies the mother.

To make this clear, it may be helpful to refer to Lacan's theory of the difference between need and demand. Klein does not make this difference, which comes down to the difference between the breast that feeds well and the breast as 'primal good object'. She considers the latter as an introjected image, a psychic correlate of the first. She argues repeatedly, for instance, that the disturbed assimilation of food undermines the subject's capacity to love and trust in later life. Yet 'good food' and the 'primal good object' are two very different things. Food is the object of a biological need that can be satisfied. The 'primal good object' is the object that would grant the infant's demand for love, what Klein herself calls the 'inexhaustible, ever-present breast'.[15] Lacan's point is rather that the level of pure biological need that searches for satisfaction in 'real', 'natural' objects is always already surpassed. The infant never exists purely in relation to the breast as something that can feed him or not. The breast is always something he *calls* for to be *given*. It is not just needed but *demanded* from an agency, a primordial other that is supposed to have the power to satisfy his need or not. This agency is the mother.

For Klein, the mother as 'total person' only appears in the 'depressive' phase. Lacan adds that this appearance coincides with and is even the effect of the infant's call that the breast would always be at his disposal.[16] The demand does not merely call to the mother for the breast, but for her unconditional willingness to give it – for her 'love'. The infant does not just want food; he wants to be reassured about the *desire* of the mother to feed him. He even demands that this would be her one and only desire. The result is that no concrete offering of a breast can assure the infant of this desire. No breast or other concrete object is ever the one *demanded*, although the infant requires of every object that it be the one and only object.[17]

On the level of demand, the particularity of every object is abolished because it has become a mere *signifier* of the mother's love, and as signifier, it can also signify a *lack* of love. Because of its symbolic nature there is something fundamentally deceptive about every gift.[18] Demand implies the structural absence of the mother, namely a gap between the agency demanded and the signifiers supposed to meet this demand. The signifier that would close this gap, unequivocally attesting to her desire for the infant, is lacking. This is why, so as to compensate for the lack of such a signifier, the infant always fantasizes such a signifier. This may for instance be the mother's gaze, a gaze that in the eyes of the infant proves her total dedication to him. Such a signifier, which Lacan calls the 'object a', is the ultimate object of the infant's desire. It is a signifier that is separated from the mother as a perceptible unity. It, as it were, gives body to the impossible, demanded signifier.

We did not quote Lacan's sentence completely. Envy, he says, makes the subject pale before 'the image of a completeness closed upon itself, and because the small *a*, the separated *a* to which he [the subject] is suspended, can be for another the possession he gratifies himself with, the *Befriedigung*'.[19]

So while staring at his mother feeding his foster-brother, a short-circuit occurs in the mind of the infant: between the fantasized object (*a*) he *desires* and a concrete object of *need*; between a gaze that would speak only of love and a feeding breast. This short-circuit is essential for the level of demand. The ever-evasive object of desire appears as if it could be readily consumed. But of course an additional element is needed for envy to arise: this improbable consumption happens to be the privilege of an *other*.

Lacan situates this level of demand in the imaginary phase wherein the infant for the first time has the experience of being a whole by means of identifying with his image in the mirror. The infant primarily captures himself in the form of an *other*. This other precedes me being an I. It is the sovereign example I appropriate. This means that a theft or usurpation stands at the origin of the subject. In the course of my life, other persons may take the place of the other which my own image is for me. However, this original usurpation can of course only succeed while disavowed and reversed in a 'paranoid' way: the other whose identity I borrow can always be suspected of having stolen mine. He is considered as occupying or attempting to occupy my place. That is why the birth of the subject by imaginary identification lies at the root of aggression. Since the other is experienced as occupying my place, my identification with him is always coloured by the feeling of being wronged, snubbed. Lacan adds that in our contemporary era, this 'ambivalent aggression' is known to us, 'under the dominant species of *ressentiment*, even in its most archaic aspects in the child'. And in the sentence that follows, he does not neglect to refer to the scene described by Augustine as *the* example of 'original aggression'.[20] Without elaborating, Lacan associates with ressentiment the aggression proper to envy. How can we nevertheless conceptualize the difference between the two and their relation?

The envious person begrudges an other his enjoyment because he is convinced that the latter took it away from him, but his grudge remains inactive, since the other is his fascinating model. This fascination for the hated other is what makes envy so self-tormenting. Ressentiment then could be considered as an attempt to free oneself from this self-torment. The man of ressentiment disavows his fascinated admiration for the envied person. Of envy he only retains the indignation that something which is his due has been taken from him. Everywhere he sees forces that threaten his identity, the particular way he enjoys

life. He does not want to know about his identification with the enemy, about his fascination for the latter's sovereign enjoyment. The wrathful anger against the envied person takes on the socially acceptable form of moral indignation. The other is not at all admirable; he is simply despicable.

Far from overcoming envy, ressentiment is a consolidation of it. The man of ressentiment remains haunted by envy, by impotent wrath, because he continues to be obsessed with what he thinks he simply despises.

The cardinal sins as vicissitudes of desire

It is clear that for Klein as well as for Lacan, envy is at the root of ressentiment and this is moreover a fundamental sin that reveals the problematic character of human desire as such. However, the idea that envy is 'the greatest sin of all' (Klein) or 'an original evil' (Lacan) can only be clarified when we consider how envy occupies a kind of privileged place in the list of the seven 'cardinal sins'.[21] Our hypothesis is that it is at the root of all other sins, that it is in a sense the truth about the others – more exactly, that all other sins are nothing but idle, desperate attempts to contain the unbearable, shameful experience envy is for the one who afflicted with it.

All sins can be addressed as desires, as vicissitudes of desire. Since the object of need is from the very start an uncertain sign of love, the child searches in every object for something no object can ever give. That is why the excessiveness of *gluttony* (*gula*), voracity, is never totally avoidable.

In her essay on envy, Klein describes greed as closely related to envy. 'Greed', she says,

> is an impetuous and insatiable craving, exceeding what the subject needs and what the object is able and willing to give. At the unconscious level [at the level of the suppressed revenge fantasy] greed aims primarily at completely scooping out, sucking dry, and devouring the breast: that is to say, its aim is destructive introjection.[22]

It seems, however, that Klein, in trying to define greed, rather defines gluttony. The gluttonous infant does not just drink, but rather desires to eat the breast that provides the milk, the breast as 'prototype of maternal goodness', the 'perfect and inexhaustible breast, always available, always gratifying'.[23] The mother's love is not assured; it is taken as some*thing* – which is impossible – and that is why gluttony is destructive. Lacan explains the excess of gluttony as desperate

overcompensation. By satisfying a biological need, the infant tries to compensate a frustration in the field of love. Being a pretext for claiming love, the satisfaction of the need goes off the rails.[24]

Lacan adds that when need becomes a pretext, when it comes to substitute a claim for love, it is eroticized.[25] Once the pleasure of satisfying a need is pursued for its own sake, disconnected from its biological goal, this pleasure turns into an insatiable *voluptuousness* (*luxuria*).

Klein suggests that in aiming to 'devour' the breast, the infant is motivated by *wrath* (*ira*), another cardinal sin. The infant wants to take revenge on the mother for not being reliable and even maliciously refusing to give the thing that really matters. The infant does not drink to get milk, but in order to empty the mother, to cause the mother to have no more milk to give. The act of drinking becomes a kind of punishment against the mother for not being constantly available. It is as if the infant's message is: since your breast only gives me milk and not love, I will – to use Klein's words – 'scoop [it] out, suck it dry'.

And of course the infant may also desire to appropriate the breast so as to have it forever at his disposal: this we know as *greed* (*avaritia*). The infant wants to appropriate the mother's ability to give. Greed is no less wrathful than gluttony. The infant is not just furious about failing to receive assurance of his satisfaction but moreover for being at the mercy of an instance that may give or refuse him satisfaction according to its whim. Therefore, the infant aims at reversing the relationship. He would like to be the sovereign source of generosity, a kind of despotic figure others depend on, and he cannot manifest his sovereignty better than by *not* giving. The secret message of the greedy subject to the other is something like this: 'I don't need anything from you anymore, but I possess what you don't have.'[26]

While gluttony comes down to blind consumption, a destructive swallowing up of the object, greed refers to the act of raking in the object, fetching, retaining and hoarding it. This is not to say that greed lacks destructiveness. Greed is, as it were, a disciplined, mastered form of gluttony. The object is possessed on condition of its not being consumed. It remains intact within the inner fortress of the subject where the capricious (m)other is no longer in power.

Greed attests to the structural inaccessibility of the desired object. The appropriated object becomes 'a prohibited/untouchable Thing one can only observe, never fully enjoy'.[27] The greedy subject hereby betrays that defeating the other's enjoyment of the object is more important than enjoying it himself. This means that, in spite of his illusion of being independent of (the gift of) others, these gifts haunt him in a negative way.

Greed can always turn into another sin: *pride* (*superbia*), or haughtiness. The proud subject could be considered a miser deciding to exhibit his wealth. He is a sinner in so far as he, so as to conceal his own incapacity to enjoy the object, blinds the other with the image of a fully satisfied subject that needs nothing from anybody. He baits the other with what he presents as the real thing to make the other feel that he is badly in want of it.

The infant already is capable of showing pride. Since he does not have much to brag about, he can only do so in a negative way, that is, by demanding *nothing* anymore. He refuses to drink in order to let the mother know that no food can ever give what love ought to give. It is as if in this proud renunciation of every satisfaction, the abolishment of the particularity of the object (because it comes to symbolize love) is taken literally. Referring to anorexia, Lacan makes mention of a 'declaration of independence', suggesting that this independence unconsciously remains a spectacle to challenge the mother, to make her feel how worthless her gifts are. It is now the mother who is at the mercy of the almighty infant's whims.[28]

Another way of telling the mother that she is unable to give the real thing is *sloth* (*acedia*), laziness. In this case the infant does not refuse to drink, but he drinks, consumes in a disinterested, listless way. He 'just feeds himself'. Sloth is a roundabout, secretly revengeful attempt to incite the (m)other so that she would vainly do all that is possible to give satisfaction.

Envy at the root of all sins

At least four cardinal sins clearly seem to be components of envy, as if envy contains them all. There is no envy without elements of gluttony, voluptuousness, wrath and greed. The envious person is *wrathful* for not getting what he thinks he has a right to; he *gluttonously* and *voluptuously* would want to swallow the desired object, and *greedily* would want to appropriate it. *He would want to …* This is indeed what seems to distinguish envy from these four sins. Thinking about envy, one cannot imagine any correlative action or activity. Whereas one easily associates wrath, gluttony, voluptuousness and greed with some form of action, and hence with a verb: you *take* revenge, you voluptuously *gorge* like a pig and you compulsively *hoard* possessions. But what does the envious subject do?

The only thing he does is *stare*: he *gazes*. Like Augustine's infant he is reduced to being a gaze. He does not make any effort to obtain satisfaction. It is as if he

guzzles his own impotence. Four sins play their part in envy, but it is as if, once under the reign of envy, they are all paralysed. Envy is voluptuous gluttony that only gorges with the eyes, is wrath without revenge, greed without real ambition. In contrast to these sins, we cannot link envy with any kind of satisfaction. The reason why the envious subject does not go beyond passive fascination is not just that the object of envy is impossible, as this applies to all sins. In the case of envy, rather, the object's impossibility is *experienced as such*. The envious subject *is* impossibility. He is nothing but sterile fascination. In that sense envy is the sin that is clearly and immediately its own punishment.

The relationship of envy with these four sins should be understood as dialectical. It is not just that envy is wrath, gluttony, voluptuousness or greed in their secret and inactive form. The point is that envy is the experience *par excellence* of the deadlock that pertains to these sins, all of them being desires. Since all desires turn on an inaccessible object, there is always, as Lacan puts it, something unsatisfactory about the way they are satisfied, and envy would then be the purest experience of this lack of satisfaction. Envy does not give any pleasure, while a certain pleasure is involved with these other sins, including the pleasure of *showing* this pleasure. This may easily be understood when we simply realize we would never envy an envious person. It is not only possible but even very common to envy people indulging in gluttony, voluptuousness, wrath, greed and for that matter in pride or laziness. We envy what, in them, appears to us as sovereign, unscrupulous enjoyment.

We know Nietzsche likes to elevate certain desires, considered by Christianity as sins, into vital, 'aristocratic' virtues, for instance pride, greed and wrath. It is, however, unimaginable that he would ever have praised envy. One cannot imagine a 'free spirit beyond good and evil' feeling good about his envious feelings and proudly displaying them. One cannot imagine envy ever being a manifestation of 'sound selfishness'. We consider someone who displays his envy as having lost all self-esteem, while we easily accept people proudly displaying all their sinful desires, including pride itself. All types of communities are built around these various sins, each with their own rituals and symbols. People shamelessly come together to celebrate how gluttonous (eating and drinking parties), voluptuous (orgies, video clips, pornography, etc.), wrathful (nationalists and fundamentalists), greedy (investor clubs, collectors, our whole civilization worshipping wealth, etc.), proud (people openly enjoying their success) or lazy (cheap entertainment, holidays in the sun, etc.) they are. But a community in which people would bid against each other to show how envious they dare to be? We cannot but associate envy with shame. Envy is unacceptable

and humiliating for the one who experiences it. That is why it is always the *others* who are supposed to be envious.

The deep shame related to envy ensures that the envious person will never try to justify his envy, while the gluttonous person can often easily find a pretext ('I was very hungry'), as can the voluptuousness person ('What is wrong with enjoying?'), or the wrathful person ('I was wronged'), or the miser ('I like to be surrounded with special things'), or the gasbag ('What is wrong with being proud of what I achieved?'), or the sluggard ('Doing nothing has never harmed anybody'). In a way the shame inseparably linked with envy is strange when we realize that, after all, envy as such is the only sin that harms nobody. It is the most inward, lonely, 'uncommunicative' sin. This makes us surmise that envy could be at the root of all 'active' sins.

Essential to all sins is that they fall prey to the naïveté of demand. That is to say: they somehow believe the desired object is an object they can acquire. The gluttonous subject voluptuously and destructively digs in the real object to extract the real gift of love from it. The wrathful subject punishes the other because the latter maliciously refuses this gift. The miser believes his object to be *the* object by holding it out of reach of others, while the proud subject believes this by taunting others with it, or the indolent subject by displaying his indifference to every object. But the envious subject, does he demand anything? In any event, he does not articulate his demand. This is because he *is* pure demand, an inert demand without the desire to take. Naturally, Augustine's infant regards the breast enjoyed by the other as being the real thing. He is trapped in the imaginary delusion that if he were the one to hang at the breast instead of his brother, he would be in heaven. The envious infant certainly thinks that only an empirical hindrance (his brother) separates him from ultimate satisfaction. Yet he does not attack his brother; nor is it even his intention. He just stares. Is it simply because he is a coward or a weakling? No; it is because of a certain *knowledge*.

This is what Lacan seems to suggest when he writes that along with this experience of envy there arises 'the first apprehension of the object as something the subject is deprived of'.[29] In other words, I experience the fundamental, 'transcendental' fact that I am deprived of the object of my desire for the first time as such when that object adopts the form of a concrete object enjoyed by an other. The ultimate lack of an object that would really prove the mother's love adopts the form of the breast that satisfies the foster-brother. And so envy is the first objective experience of the lack that pertains to desire as such.

By doing nothing but staring at the object, by not taking or even wishing to take it, the envious subject seems to acknowledge that the demanded object is

something not to be taken and to be possessed; that it is a *fata morgana*, only existing as delusively embodied in an object enjoyed by an other; that this object would turn out to be a fraud should he snatch it away from the other. The envious person is split between the delusion of actually having his ultimate object of desire in sight and the awareness that it is the other, the rival, that gives this ordinary object its aura; he is split between his vengeful fury concerning an object that was stolen from him and his awareness that this object only exists *as* 'stolen'. This awareness of a structural impossibility radically inhibits, even paralyses, anger about an empirical hindrance. The awareness that it is useless to actually *want* the highly demanded object petrifies the subject and explains why – far from intending to poison the other – he just 'virtually' poisons him: he stares at him with an 'envenomed gaze'.

In other words, although the envious subject is certainly, like all other sinners, a demanding subject, he is already aware of that which in demand is irreducible to need. He is aware that the object he needs so badly cannot be the thing he demands, that the needed object is a mere *symbol* of the demanded object. Lacan points to this when he says, without further explanation, that Augustine's infant has 'a first apprehension of the symbolic order',[30] which means he becomes a subject of *desire*. As we saw, for Lacan the mother as an omnipotent and capricious figure arises as a complete figure when the infant *calls* her to give the breast. Due to his call, the breast is no longer just an object that satisfies a need or not, but is something that is *given* or not. It becomes a symbol of a willingness to give, of 'love'. Even in the event when it is given, as a symbol it is an element of language that is radically separated from the love it symbolizes. On the level of demand this separation is disavowed. For the infant, the breast is the real thing and he might burst out in anger against the supposedly omnipotent mother when he does not get it. This vengeful anger may in turn colour his gluttonous or greedy attempt to appropriate the breast. The *envious* infant, however, although afflicted with the same anger, does not consider attacking the breast. His anger is completely invested in his gaze at his foster-brother. This is because, somewhere, he already acknowledges the separation between the love of the mother and what he can get from it. He is already aware that the breast, and any object the mother can give, is a mere *signifier* of her love. This means it is not an element destined to satisfy him, but to make him *desire*. Once the breast has become an element in the field of language (the Lacanian 'symbolic order'), the mother no longer has power over it. She is no longer a godlike agency maliciously refusing to give what she could easily give. The breast no longer represents her absolute power to give or refuse, but her *lack*.

So it seems that for Lacan there is, after all, something promising about the terrible scene described by Augustine. Envy is the painful, humiliating birth of desire. The envious subject finds himself on the threshold between demand and desire. While it is essential for a signifier to be substitutable by other signifiers (other objects as well as 'mere' words), in the case of envy the subject still adheres to this 'one and only' isolated signifier. That is why Lacan speaks of a '*first* apprehension of the symbolic order'.

Ressentiment as poorly concealed envy

I have argued that gluttony, voluptuousness, greed and wrath are components of envy. They may also be regarded as defence strategies against envy, attempts to counteract it. One tries to dissolve the unbearable tension that arises when the impossible object of desire nonetheless appears to be possible for an other by violently appropriating and/or destroying the other's object. As we know, there is always something idle and desperate about such an attempt because it disavows a fundamental impossibility.

Pride may also be considered as a defence against envy. Without naming it, Klein mentions 'a frequent method of defense against envy': 'to stir up envy in others … thereby reversing the situation in which envy is experienced'.[31] Disavowing the impossibility to possess the desired thing, the proud subject sets itself up as the privileged owner of it, disavowing the fact that his splendid ownership only exists in the fantasized gaze of the others and that his consciousness of independence depends on these others.

In explaining the theories of Klein and Lacan, we already addressed the devaluation of the desired object as a defensive strategy typical for ressentiment. But is all devaluation of the object resentful? A certain type of proud subject does devalue the object as well. He can take on 'the appearance of indifference', as Klein notices. Yet this is a way to conceal from himself the guilt arising from envy and the fact that his glorious indifference towards every object unconsciously 'remains dependent on his internal object', that is to say, on an unconsciously idealized version of the desired object.[32]

Another way of devaluing the object is sloth. The lazy subject does not proudly look down on any object; he does not actively and ostentatiously refuse every object so as to prove his superiority. He remains attracted to objects, but without any ambition to acquire them. This is because he considers them as

mere lifeless remains of the desired object, similar to relics. Sloth has always been linked with melancholy. At first sight, melancholy seems to be the most innocent cardinal sin, not at all related to envy. Yet melancholy can be understood as a drastic remedy against envy. The melancholic desires the impossible: to no longer desire. He mortifies the appeal of every object he could possibly envy, but is not without fascination for these mortified objects. In contrast to the proud subject that counteracts the humiliation envy implies with superior indifference, the melancholic maintains the helpless fascination to which the envious subject is condemned. But while the gaze of the envious subject is bitter, that of the melancholic is gloomy. The latter does not suffer from the image of blissful completeness that was stolen from him, but 'listlessly' contemplates the fragments of a completeness he cannot even imagine. Yet it would be too much of a compliment to the melancholic to argue that he has fully assumed the impossibility of the object. On the contrary, he mourns endlessly for the supreme object; he adheres to it by contemplating his mortified objects as signs of an unfulfilled promise. He is the supreme idealist of desire.

But what about the man of ressentiment? In contrast to pride and melancholy, ressentiment is an all-too-obvious and transparent defence against envy. The man of ressentiment's proclaimed repugnance for the object very poorly conceals his helpless fascination. This must be the reason why envy and ressentiment are so often mentioned in the same breath, or even identified. The proud man succeeds in making his envy invisible with his display of superiority, and the melancholic with his serene, seemingly ascetic contemplation. Neither feels the need to demonstrate or prove their repugnance for the object. The man of ressentiment does so. By his obvious addiction to his repugnance, and by complaining and being indignant over despicable others who enjoy the object, the man of ressentiment blatantly betrays his envy. That is why ressentiment does not deserve to be admitted into the list of cardinal sins. Ressentiment is just *poorly concealed envy* – at least for the observer, though, of course, not for the resentful subject. A shade of consciousness of his envy would open up the space of desire for him. But this he does not allow. He prefers to remain at the level of demand. Frustrated by the lack of a motherly Other (the 'world', 'society', etc.) that would guarantee him full enjoyment of life, he clings to the possibility of such an enjoyment by imagining it as being hindered by malicious agencies. He wrongly imputes a structural, 'transcendental' impossibility to an empirical impediment. This is why his only enjoyment consists in playing the victim, an enjoyment that is secretly parasitic on the excessive enjoyment he ascribes to the despised other.

Notes

1   Melanie Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', in Roger Money-Kyrle (ed.) *The Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume III: Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963* (New York: Hogarth Press, 1975), 176–235; 229.

2   Ibid., 176.

3   Ibid., 180.

4   Ibid., 179.

5   Ibid., 177.

6   Ibid., 185.

7   Ibid., 180 (emphasis added).

8   Ibid., 185. Klein also mentions the expression 'to bite the hand which feeds one' (ibid., 182).

9   Ibid., 183.

10 Ibid., 181.

11 Cf. Klein: 'There are very pertinent psychological reasons why envy ranks among the seven "deadly sins". I would suggest that it is unconsciously felt to be the greatest sin of all, because it spoils and harms the good object which is the source of life' (ibid., 189).

12 Ibid., 205.

13 Ibid., 217.

14 Jacques Lacan, *Seminar Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1978), 116. Klein already refers 'to the etymological root of *envy* in the Latin *invidia*, which comes from the verb *invideo* – to look askance at, to look maliciously or spitefully in, to cast an evil eye upon, to envy or grudge anything' (Klein, 1975: 181).

15 Ibid.

16 Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire, livre IV: La relation d'objet* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 125.

17 Ibid., 125.

18 Ibid., 182.

19 Lacan, *Seminar Book XI*, 116. Klein already refers 'to the etymological root of *envy* in the Latin *invidia*, which comes from the verb *invideo* – to look askance at, to look maliciously or spitefully in, to cast an evil eye upon, to envy or grudge anything' (Klein, 1975: 181).

20 Jacques Lacan, 'L'agressivité en psychanalyse' (1948) in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 114.

21 Also called 'deadly sins' or 'capital vices'. They were first listed in the fourth century by monk Evagrius Ponticus, who called them 'evil thoughts'. In AD 590, Pope Gregory I revised the list, adding *envy*.

22 Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', 181.

23 Ibid., 64.

24 Cf. Lacan, *Séminaire, livre IV*, 175, 183, 185, 188. While in a biological (neo)-Darwinian paradigm it is the opposite: love, as a kind of superstructure, is reduced to need.

25 Ibid., 184.

26 Of course, it is only in the anal phase that the infant really has the power (not) to give.

27 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 42.

28 Cf. Lacan, *Séminaire, livre IV*, 184, 187.

29 *Seminar Book XVI* (unpublished), lesson of February 11.

30 Ibid.

31 Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', 218.

32 Ibid., 219.

Resentment and Ressentiment, Dignity and Honour

A Genealogical Analysis

Guido Vanheeswijck

Introduction

Returning waves of resentment/ressentiment seem as perennial as they are varied.[1] Yet, many voices have claimed that they are particularly endemic to modern Western democracies.[2] During recent decades, right-wing and left-wing political parties alike have proven to be clever exploiters of this underlying wave of discontent in modern Western societies. Their focus is diverse, often even contrary, to each other: whereas left-wing people direct their resentment/ressentiment to the financial banking world, to the affluent rich and powerful people in general, right-wing conservatives point at the alleged laziness of the unemployed, economic refugees and immigrants of all sorts.

In relation to the widespread phenomenon of resentment/ressentiment in modern Western countries, democracy itself seems to have a Janus face. On the one hand, it has been – and still is today – a deep source of empowerment and emancipation; on the other hand, it produces divergent and contagious forms of discontent. Therefore, the central question regarding the status of resentment/ressentiment may be divided into three interrelated questions. First, if resentment/ressentiment, either as an individual or a cultural feeling, is a creative and potentially destructive force alike, how may a genealogy of its origin shed any light on its emotional and moral status? Second, how does it happen that precisely modern Western democracies are likely to foster resentment/ressentiment? Finally, if modern democracies and resentment/ressentiment are

intimately intertwined, how then to overcome resentment/ressentiment, if that is desirable and possible at all?

This chapter tries to provide tentative answers to these three interrelated questions. However, before doing that, a choice has to be made as to the use of either the term 'resentment' or the term 'ressentiment'. Based on a survey of the different conceptions of the nature of resentment and ressentiment respectively and on delineating their conceptual similarities and differences, I opt for the term 'ressentiment' and focus on the concept of ressentiment and its genealogical history in continental philosophy. Put differently, the focus in this chapter will be on the continental use of the term 'ressentiment' and its main protagonists instead of the Anglo-Saxon use of the term 'resentment' and its representatives such as Adam Smith, Joseph Butler, John Rawls and Peter Strawson (section I).

Despite the canonical status of Friedrich Nietzsche's use of the term 'ressentiment' in *On the Genealogy of Morality* and that of Max Scheler's retort in *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* from 1913,[3] in this chapter I would like to focus upon another critic of Nietzsche's genealogy of morality who was indebted to Scheler, namely the French-American anthropologist René Girard, and his interpretation of the concept of ressentiment. On the basis of Nietzsche's and Girard's analysis I *first* show that ressentiment, as the deepest source of what Nietzsche and Girard call nihilism, is both a creative and a destructive force. The most salient difference between their genealogical interpretations is that according to Girard, ressentiment as a creative force is not the father of Christianity, as Nietzsche claimed, but its child (sections II and III).

In answer to the *second* question – why precisely modern Western democracies foster ressentiment – I would like to demonstrate how two basic characteristics of modern Western society, that is, political democracy and market economy, have stimulated the spread of equality and ressentiment alike and have made democracy into a Janus face (section IV). *Finally* I raise the question, mainly inspired by Charles Taylor's and Kwame Anthony Appiah's writings, whether a medicine for ressentiment is available and what kind of 'subtler languages' and 'alternative codes' are needed so as to overcome its potentially destructive force (sections V and VI).

Conceptual differences

The term 'resentment' is a highly ambivalent one. Not only has it often been defined in different ways, at one moment used synonymously with the French

(German, Dutch) term 'ressentiment', while at the next expressing a different emotion and attitude. Since these two terms – 'resentment' and 'ressentiment' – belong to different languages, it may not be surprising that the concepts they refer to belong to different philosophical traditions and have divergent semantic contents as well.

In Anglo-Saxon philosophy, John Rawls's distinction between envy and resentment has attained canonical status from the eighties onwards.[4] Roughly, that distinction boils down to the view that resentment is held to be a moral emotion, whereas envy is not. Moral emotions like resentment embody moral principles and appraisals in the sense that they are related to moral complaints of injustice, exploitation and so on. Envy, by contrast, as not related to a moral complaint, only proves to be detrimental to the subject and the object alike of that emotion. Thus resentment is seen as a positive emotion,[5] equivalent to what I would call indignation.[6]

In the continental tradition, however, resentment is defined in a more negative way. It is used as equivalent to the French term *ressentiment* and has been generally circumscribed as a vengeful feeling of envy that becomes tempered and interiorized because of its incapacity to react. This definition, primarily indebted to Nietzsche's analysis in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, has become more or less canonical in Western continental philosophy mainly due to Max Scheler's critical analysis of the Nietzschean interpretation of ressentiment's role in the construction of Western morality. Despite their disagreements, they share the definition of the phenomenon itself as a vengeful, albeit tempered and interiorized, feeling of envy.[7] Yet ressentiment is not an unambiguous emotion either. Even if it may be considered a poisonous and potentially destructive emotion, throughout Western history it has been related to the creation of moral values as well. In this chapter I will make use of the term 'ressentiment' in all its complex aspects, as defined by Nietzsche-Scheler.[8]

To conclude this (too short) conceptual description of the difference between the terms 'resentment' and 'ressentiment', let me pinpoint the two main differences.[9] Whereas 'resentment' is usually a short-term, transitory reaction to affronts to the self or to another, which may occur in any situation of social, including interpersonal interaction, 'ressentiment' refers to a more durable, intense, protracted and often chronic feeling of affront linked with strong vengeful feelings and in particular with a feeling of powerlessness to take retaliatory action.[10] And while 'resentment' is mostly seen as a reaction to a relational situation, which results from a sociological position, 'ressentiment' is generally considered as a reaction to historical facts, which generate an anthropological condition.[11]

The anthropological condition in contemporary Western culture is the central topic of this chapter. Therefore, I will focus on the genealogy of ressentiment as an anthropological phenomenon, which has proven to be central in Western culture (sections II, III, IV). Subsequently I raise the question whether and how it is possible and desirable to overcome its dominant position (sections V, VI).

Nietzsche's genealogy of ressentiment

> The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who, being denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge.[12]

This fragment, selected from Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*,[13] not only makes a sharp analysis of the poisonous and underground ambition of the feeling that he calls *ressentiment*. It also emphasizes ressentiment's unimaginable creative force and in particular the fact that ressentiment has already been active as a creative force for nearly two thousand years. Nietzsche's purpose was not in the first place to give a psychological analysis of ressentiment; his main intention was clearly to expose Western civilization in general by uncovering the indissoluble relation between ressentiment and the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche exposes Christianity and in particular Christian ethics as the result of a revolt by the masses of slaves who are driven by ressentiment. Since the intense and heroic life is the select way for cultures to reach their full development, ressentiment is an obstacle, impeding the unfolding and explicit manifestation of intense and heroic life as led by the minority of masters. Within the context of heroic life, victory is always gained by the strongest, and the opportunities are only available to the masters who dominate human society until a stronger master turns up. In Nietzsche's perspective, the only refuge for the losers, the weaklings, the slaves is to conceal their feelings of revenge, to interiorize them in the shape of ressentiment and to transform them into the opposite feelings of forgiveness and love. If they don't, they will have to pay for their openness with death.

> not-being-able-to-take-revenge is called not-wanting-to-take-revenge, it might even be forgiveness ('for *they* know not what they do – but we know what *they* are doing!'). They are also talking about 'loving your enemy'… and sweating while they do it. [14]

Nietzsche sees these interiorized, tempered vengeful feelings of the slaves – they always form a majority – as responsible for the invention of Christianity. The slaves, driven by ressentiment, wish to restrain the vehement struggle for power within human culture, a struggle in which they are doomed to get the worst of it. In order to attain that purpose, slave morality puts the weaklings at the level of the strongest by propagating all people's equality by virtue of all being God's children.

Christian morality takes one step further: by favouring the weaklings it raises them even above the strongest. Precisely by reversing all these natural, hierarchical values, it succeeds in revealing the slave as God's favourite. On this creative falsehood of ressentiment, moulded in the shape of interiorized and hidden revenge but transformed into bliss, the Christian ideal of neighbourly love was built. For Nietzsche it is therefore no coincidence that Christian morality found its first adherents among ordinary, illiterate and powerless people.

> They are miserable, without a doubt, all these rumour-mongers and clandestine forgers, even if they do crouch close together for warmth – but they tell me that their misery means they are God's chosen and select, after all, people beat the dogs they love best; perhaps this misery is just a preparation, a test, a training, it might be even more than that – something which will one day be balanced up and paid back with enormous interest in gold, no! in happiness. They call that 'bliss'.[15]

On the Genealogy of Morality appeared in 1887, that is in Nietzsche's last creative period before his final collapse. The close kinship he notices in that period between the Judeo-Christian tradition and ressentiment is strongly related to the sharp contrast he makes in the very same period between Dionysus and Christ. In the second paragraph of *The Will to Power*, under the title 'The Two Types: Dionysus and the Crucified' (paragraph 1052), he succinctly epitomizes the heart of this contrast.

> Dionysus versus the 'Crucified': there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom – it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering – the 'Crucified as the innocent one' – counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation. – One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest

suffering … Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction.

Initially, Nietzsche had defined the Dionysian and the Apollonian as two opposite basic principles of culture. In his later writings, the Apollonian and the Dionysian are no longer equivalent and complementary antipodes. Gradually, the Dionysian comes to the fore as the symbol of a radical confirmation of life in opposition to all forces which prove hostile to it. The original dichotomy between Dionysus and Apollo gives way for the new contrast between Dionysus and Jesus. Whereas the former exemplifies the 'saying yes' of the 'Übermensch' to life, the latter symbolizes the contempt for life of the Christian.

Against this backdrop, the link between Christianity and ressentiment becomes obvious. Nietzsche mockingly referred to Jesus's death as a hidden deed of *ressentiment*. The Christian God of mercy and compassion, who not only recognizes the weakling but even elevates him and utterly rejects the Dionysian sacrifice, gives full play to ressentiment. Since the God of the crucified has burdened revenge and destruction with the odium of guilt, slave morality has dissipated master morality as the dominant ethical factor in Western culture. By depriving the strong and the aristocratic of their right to domination and revenge, ressentiment has become an extremely effective weapon in the hands of the weakling. For Nietzsche, ressentiment is the father of Christianity. Grown out of a destructive source, it has become a major creative cultural force in the shape of Christianity and its offspring.

Girard's genealogy of ressentiment

In the third part of *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* from 1913, Scheler objects to Nietzsche's claim that Christian ethics originated from ressentiment. Instead, his intention is to make it clear that both attitudes – the attitude of the man of ressentiment and the attitude of Jesus's follower – are radically opposed: if ressentiment has anything to do with Christianity, then it is related to a kind of diluted Christianity, the product of a bourgeois society which appeals to Christianity in words but belies it in deeds.[16] Whereas Girard takes Scheler's critique of Nietzsche as a starting point, it is his intention to go one step further.

> Max Scheler did not understand the imitative nature of desire and for this reason never succeeded in distinguishing *ressentiment* from Christian religious feeling. He did not dare to put the two phenomena side by side in order to distinguish

them more clearly and thus remained within the Nietzschean confusion which he was trying to dispel.[17]

This rather cryptic description of Scheler's position asks for further elucidation. What does Girard mean by saying that you first have to put ressentiment and Christian religious feeling side by side so as to distinguish them more clearly and to escape from the Nietzschean confusion? Since Girard has never elaborated a distinct theory of ressentiment and his ideas on the relation between ressentiment and Christianity are spread over his three major books and different articles, we first have to examine the sharp opposition he makes between mythical religion on the one hand and Christianity on the other.

Not unlike Nietzsche, Girard turns to the very first vestiges of human culture in order to understand our contemporary predicament. His starting point is that each culture has a religious origin. He defines culture as a way – using presuppositions, social roles, common ideals, structures, commands and prohibitions, and so on – which enables human beings to exist together without being overcome by chaos, violence and random murder. The twofold genesis of human culture is amply described in his second book, *Violence and the Sacred*.[18]

First of all, culture stems from the disorder, the actual or potential violence experienced by hominids when mimetic desire gets out of hand – the contagious force of rivalry making them resemble each other. These hominids, in the process of becoming human, then make the discovery that convergence upon a victim brings them unanimity and thus relief from violence. Two (or more) people are reconciled at the expense of a third who appears guilty or responsible for whatever disturbs or frightens them. From that moment on, they have one single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them by expelling and destroying it. This victim or scapegoat is carefully elected: preferably, he or she is marginalized (in a negative way as slave, handicapped, criminal, etc. or in a positive way as king, queen, hero, demi-god) so that his or her elimination may break through the vicious circle of bloody revenge.

As soon as the scapegoat has been sacrificed for being the cause of disorder and violence, there occurs – miraculously, as it were – a recovery of order in society. So sacrifice and scapegoat rituals represent, in a camouflaged form, both disorder, resulting in the original violence of expulsion of the victim, and order, stemming from the newly found relief from conflict and violence. In other words, both disorder and order are the upshot of a *double transference* of the original victimization: those involved in the collective violence transfer the disorder to the victim, but they also transfer their newly found peace to the same victim or scapegoat, ascribing to him or her the power of yielding peace. Put differently,

whereas the scapegoat is first held responsible for disorder and disruption in society, he or she is later considered the foundation of a newly found order.

This age-old scapegoat mechanism is, according to Girard, the foundation of all human culture and religion. By miraculously bringing back unanimity, the scapegoat becomes godlike. In short, religious societies, in their efforts to survive, have always made use of the same 'tactics'. They have been *channelling* violence, inherent in mimetic desire, by means of the scapegoat mechanism which, seen as sacred, functions as a *foundational* and *generative* principle. To that end, the sacred God of mythical religion has vindicated even the most appalling forms of cruelty. This type of mythical religion is symbolized by the name 'Dionysus'.

For Girard, Christianity has nothing to do with mythical religion. By contrast, the scapegoat is innocent and the gradual realization of this innocence is due to the (indirect) influence of the Judeo-Christian writings, which Girard analyses in the second part of his most important book, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*.[19] In his view, Jewish religion is to be interpreted as the dawning of and a struggle with a new ethical awareness and a new image of God. On the basis of a comparison between biblical texts, on the one hand, and religious myths from different cultures, on the other, he intends to show the differences, in addition to the similarities, between Judeo-Christian tradition and mythical religions.

Let me give one example of such a comparison. The story of Rome's foundation, not unlike other myths, has a fratricide as its starting point. Now, the Roman myth presents the murder of Remus as an action that perhaps may be regretted, but that was justified by the victim's transgression. Because Remus had not respected the ideal limits traced by Romulus between the inside and outside of the city and thus had broken the rules, Romulus's reaction appeared to be justified. In the Jewish Genesis story, by contrast, Cain appears as a vulgar murderer who is called to account for his deed by God and is not exonerated from guilt. The condemnation of the murder takes precedence over all other considerations. 'Where is your brother Abel?' According to Girard, this change of perspective is of utmost importance.

The title, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, is telling in this context. It is borrowed from Matthew 13:13 ('I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world'), which, in its turn, refers to the second verse of Psalm 78. Girard considers the New Testament as the radicalization of the Old Testament. Inspired by the figure of Jesus, it is a radical break with a way of life based on sacrifice. In the Old Testament God has an ambiguous character:

the old myths are still influential and the prophets have to fight a continuous struggle against a 'mythic-religious' concept of God (see Jeremiah 6:20). In the New Testament, it is Jesus who unmasks the mimetic, violent character typical of human culture.

By means of his words and his attitude, he confronts us with situations which are experienced as paradoxical because they break through prevailing customs. Only those who are without sin may throw the first stone. Struck on one's left cheek, one has to turn the other cheek – contrary to the mimetic motion par excellence. Moreover, although Jesus functions as a scapegoat, he is – in sharp contrast to the mythical interpretation of the scapegoat – presented as completely innocent: his sacrificial death is seen as a glaring injustice. In short, the gospel tries to *unmask* violence, inherent in mimetic desire, by emphasizing the innocence of the godlike scapegoat. This type of unmasking religion is symbolized by the name 'Jesus'.

As already mentioned, Nietzsche considered Christianity the product of a slave morality driven by ressentiment. In his view, Christian morality found its first adherents among the ordinary, illiterate and powerless people, the *majority* of slaves who felt powerless in the face of the *minority* of courageous and heroic masters. Therefore, they transformed their hidden feelings of revenge and ressentiment into the gross falsehood of mercy and love among God's children. Based on his distinction between mythical religions and Christianity, Girard gives a completely different interpretation of the genesis and evolution of the Christian view of God and of Christian morality.

The first Christians, who were inspired by their belief in God's agapeic love, distanced themselves from the scapegoat mechanism. They reacted – as a small *minority* – against a mechanism that had always been used by the large *majority*. Instead of taking revenge on the scapegoat as an antidote to violence, they propagated neighbourly love as a cure for violence and proclaimed the scapegoat's innocence – with Jesus as its exemplary incarnation. They preached the equality of all human beings as children of one loving God. 'Let he *who is without sin cast the first stone*': instead of accusing a scapegoat, they set in motion the process of conversion by gradually becoming aware of their own sinfulness.

True enough, this basic inspiration of Christianity has only partly influenced the history of Western culture. It has never been able to fully define human culture. Admittedly, the sacredness of mythical stories and the efficacy of their sacrificial rituals have been gradually eroded partially due to the impact of Christianity. But that is not to say that the breakdown of a religious view of a

vengeful God and the critique of the violent scapegoat mechanism have led of themselves to the breakthrough of neighbourly love.

In an article from 1984, *Dionysus versus the Crucified*, Girard himself, while attacking Nietzsche's position, defined this ambiguous impact of Christianity on modern culture.

> *Ressentiment* flourishes in a world where real revenge (Dionysus) has been weakened. The Bible and the Gospels have diminished the violence of vengeance and turned it to *ressentiment* not because they originate in the latter but because their real target is vengeance in all its forms, and they have succeeded only in wounding vengeance, not in eliminating it. The Gospels are indirectly responsible; we alone are directly responsible. *Ressentiment* is the manner in which the spirit of vengeance survives the impact of Christianity and turns the Gospels to its own use.[20]

While Nietzsche saw ressentiment as the father of Christianity, for Girard that was certainly not the case. As a cultural movement, Christianity has succeeded in wounding vengeance, but it has not been able to eliminate it. Instead of neighbourly love, ressentiment appeared as the motor of social relations. By weakening vengeance, Christianity inaugurated the gradual evolution from a premodern to a modern culture, from a hierarchically structured society (founded on the violent scapegoat mechanism) to an egalitarian one. Because ressentiment is the creative outcome of that very process of 'interiorizing' weakened vengeance, Girard sees ressentiment not as the father of Christianity, as Nietzsche does, but as the child of Christianity's cultural impact.

Ressentiment as the creative source of modernity

Since the cultural shape of Christianity is only a decoction of its genuine inspiration, it was unjust, according to Girard, to conflate the two – Christian inspiration and its cultural impact – as Nietzsche did. Whoever intends to refute Nietzsche therefore has to clarify the distinctive character of the genuine inspiration of Christianity in comparison to its historical – often unintended – influence. As already mentioned, Girard does not elaborate this theme in a detailed and systematic manner anywhere. In order to elucidate the evolution from premodern to modern culture and particularly Christianity's role in the breakthrough of ressentiment within that process of transformation, we have to return to his first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. There, based on the analysis of five great modern novels, Girard shows how mimetic desire in

Western culture has, since the sixteenth century, gradually been transferred from external mediation as one variant of mimetic desire to internal mediation, as an alternative variant.

Girard speaks of external mediation when the (spiritual) distance is sufficient to eliminate any contact between the two spheres of possibilities of which the mediator and subject occupy the respective centres. Due to the mediator's elevation above the subject, one can speak here of a form of *vertical transcendence*. Conversely, Girard speaks of internal mediation when this (spiritual) distance is sufficiently reduced to allow these two spheres to penetrate each other more or less profoundly. In that case, one can speak of a form of *horizontal transcendence*. Moreover, both kinds of mediation imply an additional difference. The subject of external mediation proclaims aloud the true nature of his desire. He worships his model openly and declares himself his disciple. The subject of internal mediation, however, denies the origin of his desire. In order to hide his imitation, he asserts explicitly that his own desire is prior to that of his rival. So, Girard speaks here – referring to Dostoyevsky – of an *underground desire*.[21]

Obviously, external mediation is typical of mythical-religious cultures. The mediating model is of godlike, fully transcendent origin and thus extended above human beings. Consequently, it does not give rise to jealousy; rather it creates room for feelings like admiration, adoration, submission. Internal mediation, on the contrary, is typical of modern Western culture. Internal mediation and rivalry, along with their accompanying feelings of envy, jealousy and hatred, can only break through if opportunities for equality between subject and model have been created. Girard amply illustrates how more equality is likely to create more feelings of hatred, envy, aggression and frustration and how this paradoxical situation makes for the typical psychological unrest of modern society. The fruits of mimetic desire seem to sour concurrent to the increase of opportunities for equality.[22]

In line with Girard, I have argued so far that regarding the phenomenon of mimetic desire, there are two distinctive variants. Premodern cultures, characterized by outright and consciously acknowledged external mediation, try to *channel* mimetic desire by means of different kinds of rituals, obligations and prohibitions, connected to religious-hierarchical structures, which are all rooted in the scapegoat mechanism. Modern culture, however, characterized by an underground and thus unconscious internal mediation, aims at the *release* of mimetic desire by means of the principle of rivalry; it easily creates envy between people and hence makes for the proliferation of artificial needs. It is a culture unwittingly espousing the poison of ressentiment.

In the first chapter of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, where Girard discusses Scheler's view, he shows that all facets of ressentiment enumerated by Scheler are characteristic of internal mediation.

> All the phenomena explored by Max Scheler in *Ressentiment* are, in our opinion, the result of internal mediation. Furthermore, the word *ressentiment* itself underscores the quality of reaction, of repercussion which characterizes the experience of the subject in this type of mediation. … Jealousy and envy imply a third presence: object, subject, and a third person toward whom the jealousy or envy is directed. … Like all victims of internal mediation, the jealous person easily convinces himself that his desire is spontaneous, in other words, that it is deeply rooted in the object and in this object alone. As a result he always maintains that his desire preceded the intervention of the mediator. … Max Scheler numbers 'envy, jealousy, and rivalry' among the sources of *ressentiment*.[23]

The efficacy of the modern market economy is basically founded on feelings of competition, envy, vanity and greed. All these feelings are the upshot of what Girard calls ressentiment or internal mediation. Everything that was forbidden by premodern morality and that was considered sinful in Dante's medieval world – envy, rivalry, vanity – is registered by seventeenth-century political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes as more or less neutral human characteristics. In *The Fable of the Bees*, Bernard de Mandeville even elevates them to civil virtues, epitomized in the famous slogan 'private vices, public virtues'. Mandeville highlights there the surreptitious and hypocritical way in which these competitive feelings, although indispensable within the basic premises of a market economy, are nevertheless anxiously concealed in social interactions among the inhabitants of modern societies.

> A well-bred Man may be desirous, and even greedy after Praise and the Esteem of Others, but to be prais'd to his Face offends his Modesty: the Reason is this; all Human Creatures, before they are yet polish'd, receive an extraordinary Pleasure in hearing themselves prais'd: this we are all conscious of, and therefore when we see a Man openly enjoy and feast on this Delight, in which we have no share, it rouses our Selfishness, and immediately we begin to Envy and Hate him. For this reason the well-bred Man conceals his Joy, and utterly denies that he feels any, and by this means consulting and soothing our Selfishness, he averts that Envy and Hatred, which otherwise he would have justly to fear.[24]

In later remarks to his fable, Mandeville defines this double attitude towards the private vice of envy as follows:

> Envy is that baseness in our Nature, which makes us grieve and pine at what we conceive to be Happiness in others. I don't believe there is a Human Creature in

his Senses arriv'd to Maturity, that at one time or other has not been carried away by this Passion in good Earnest; and yet I never met with any one that dared own he was guilty of it, but in Jest. That we are so generally ashamed of this Vice, is owing to that strong Habit of Hypocrisy, by the Help of which, we have learned from our Cradle to hide even from our selves the vast Extent of Self-Love, and all its different Branches.[25]

As generally known, it was Adam Smith who moulded Mandeville's insights into his concept of the 'invisible hand'. *Homo economicus*, brought upon the stage by the father of liberalism, is a rationally calculating being who, thinking only of himself but led by an invisible hand, believes he can so foster the general interest of society. Although Smith was clearly aware of the possible negative role of envy and therefore appealed to the emotions of empathy and sympathy[26] as a neutralizing counterbalance, he and Mandeville still valued its role as 'private vice' rather positively since envy induces people to diligence and industry and so stimulates economic growth by artificially creating subjective scarcity.[27] To that end, ressentiment, which is inherent in internal mediation – 'that baseness in our Nature, which makes us grieve' – is seen as the indispensable motor of the modern market economy.

This very feeling of ressentiment is even reinforced by the socio-economical mixture of market economy and political democracy in our contemporary societies. Since the idea of political democracy starts from the premise of formal equality but has to cope with the problem of real inequality, it creates in combination with market economy an 'explosive mixture' by covertly enhancing 'underground' feelings of hatred, envy, competition. Precisely because these feelings operate in an underground way, a democratic society arranged along the principle of economic competition is extremely sensitive to the poisonous consequences of internal mediation and hence of ressentiment. In a market society based on democratic principles people are endlessly invited to compare themselves to others and feel obliged to live up to the ever-changing ideals underlying this competitive paradigm.

Already in the nineteenth century, the prolific products of growing ressentiment in an increasingly competitive society were omnipresent. Nietzsche saw them everywhere. In the rise of democracy, in the illusionary promises of socialism, in positivism's haughtiness, in the hypocritical ressentiment, masked as neighbourly love of Christian believers.

I cannot see anything but I can hear all the better. There is a guarded, malicious little rumour-mongering and whispering from every nook and cranny. I think people are telling lies; a sugary mildness clings to every sound. Lies are turning weakness into an *accomplishment*, no doubt about it.[28]

Every man has a God or an Idol

Whose father, whose child? If there is any plausibility in my account so far, the answer seems to be obvious. Ressentiment is not the father of Christianity, as Nietzsche said; it is the child of Christianity, as Girard showed. But both authors are right in claiming that ressentiment is the father of modernity. In a democratic society, dominated by a market economy, ressentiment seems to be everywhere. Hence, democracy is a 'mixed blessing', creating ressentiment and equality, envy and emancipation alike. How to draw a line?

Before answering that question, let us look at two different genealogical stances towards both the rise of democracy and its value of equality. Depending on what angle is selected to evaluate the Janus face of the widespread phenomenon of ressentiment, its omnipresence in our contemporary culture is not as negative as it seems to be at first sight. From Girard's genealogical stance, a modern society of ressentiment is historically situated between, on the one hand, a premodern society in which violence and vengeance reign, and the Christian utopia of a society of neighbourly love and respect on the other. Even if this Christian utopian view has never been realized in historical reality, it definitely has played a lingering, surreptitious and highly ambivalent role in modern projects of a just and righteous society. Therefore, seen from this genealogical perspective, modern society has made progress in abolishing many forms of violence and creating alternative forms of organizing society: the abolition of the death penalty, the refusal to accept revenge and ritual sacrifices, the explicit condemnation of wars, the declaration of human rights, equality between men and women and so on.

Seen from another angle, however, the position of a society driven by ressentiment is highly precarious. Since our contemporary society is not only different from a society of violence and revenge, which we utterly reject, but also is a long way from a society of love, solidarity and mutual respect, which we explicitly pursue and pay lip-service to, our current situation presents a grave dilemma.

> We could put the matter this way: our age makes higher demands for solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before. Never before have people been asked to stretch out so far, so consistently, so systematically, so as a matter of course, to the stranger outside the gates. A similar point can be made, if we look at the other dimension of the affirmation of ordinary life, that concerned with universal justice. … How do we manage to do it?[29]

Seen from this latter perspective, the demands for solidarity, benevolence and universal justice in a society dominated by ressentiment are yielding either

hypocrisy (Nietzsche) or they are being constantly threatened or jeopardized (Girard). Such a society is balancing between falling back into outbursts of violence on the one hand and a surge of love and universal solidarity on the other.

> It is perhaps not an accident that the history of the twentieth century can be read either in a perspective of progress or in one of mounting horror. Perhaps it is not contingent that it is the century both of Auschwitz and Hiroshima and of Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières.[30]

How to cope with that fragility? Put differently, do we still want to live up to these higher demands of solidarity, benevolence and universal justice and get rid of that ambiguous emotion of ressentiment, and if so, are we able to do that? I suggest that there is a clear and unambiguous answer to the first question, whereas there are several possible answers to the second.

Regarding the first question, psychiatrists and psychologists alike identify ressentiment as one of the main sources of mental diseases that are said to be typical of current Western affluent societies: 'we have never had it so well, we have never felt so bad.' They claim that the omnipresence of ressentiment in contemporary Western society is reigning surreptitiously against the backdrop of our psychological awareness of its devastating impact on the one hand and is intimately related to our inability to live up to the (unconsciously) cherished ideals of neighbourly love and universal solidarity on the other. Accordingly, they confirm Nietzsche's analysis that people driven by ressentiment 'are miserable, even if they crouch close together for warmth'. They wish to be cured, even if they reluctantly admit their misery. At the end of *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor defines Nietzsche's challenge we are facing in terms of a need of deeper sources.

> High standards need strong sources. This is because there is something morally corrupting, even dangerous, in sustaining the demand simply on the feeling of undischarged obligation, on guilt, or its obverse, self-satisfaction. Hypocrisy is not the only negative consequence. Morality as benevolence on demand breeds self-condemnation for those who fall short and a depreciation of the impulses to self-fulfilment, seen as so many obstacles raised by egoism to our meeting the standard. Nietzsche has explored this with sufficient force to make embroidery otiose. And indeed, Nietzsche's challenge is based on a deep insight. If morality can only be powered negatively, where there can be no such thing as beneficence powered by an affirmation of the recipient as a being of value, then pity is destructive to the giver and degrading to the receiver, and the ethic of benevolence may indeed be indefensible. Nietzsche's challenge is on the deepest

level, because he is looking precisely for what can release such an affirmation of being. His unsettling conclusion is that it is the ethic of benevolence which stands in the way of it. *Only if there is such a thing as agape, or one of the secular claimants to its succession, is Nietzsche wrong.* (my italics)[31]

Regarding the second question – how to answer Nietzsche's insightful challenge? – the answer is highly variegated. Paraphrasing Taylor, I would like to describe our contemporary culture as the scene of a three-cornered battle around the search for deeper sources. 'There are secular humanists, there are neo-Nietzscheans, and there are those who acknowledge one way or another some good beyond life.'[32]

Secular humanists who are living within the immanent frame affirm the practical primacy of ordinary life while 'closing the transcendent window'. The practically oriented attention for 'ordinary life' has been manifesting itself since the eighteenth century in the care for the well-being of all people, the importance of personal relations, the demolition of hierarchical structures; this concrete care is taken by the majority of Western people today as being at odds with a care for the spiritual well-being of the soul, which used to be a privilege of the (Christian) happy few. In other words, exclusive humanism, suspicious of the traditional Christian emphasis on transcendence, is intent on dispelling ressentiment by resorting to and stimulating the worth of practical care in daily life.[33]

Neo-Nietzscheans, by contrast, are dissatisfied with simply affirming ordinary life and so they revolt against ressentiment, inherent in the mediocre boredom of (the practical primacy of) ordinary life. Ressentiment is flourishing in the world of the 'last men'. Yet their revolt against ressentiment does not entail an openness to some transcendent good beyond life; instead, they expand the definition of life by adding intensity, heroism, destruction and meaninglessness as integral parts of life to be affirmed. One way or another, Neo-Nietzscheans distance themselves from the mediocre shallowness pertaining to the affirmation of ordinary life by taking recourse to a more 'intense life', an 'abundant life' inspired by Nietzsche's own vision of the 'Dionysian world'.

Finally, there are those who acknowledge some good beyond life. They join the Neo-Nietzscheans in their affirmation of an 'enhanced' or 'abundant' life, but try to achieve this not by a fascination with life, 'beyond good and evil', but through an orientation to some good beyond ordinary life. Even if they take over Nietzsche's analysis of modern culture, they reject what they call his 'philosophical materialism', that is, his rejection of any form of transcendent good. Philosophers such as Luc Ferry and Martha Nussbaum are precisely

searching for new forms of transcendence, without taking recourse to images or concepts derived from orthodox Christianity. Whereas Nussbaum's position is mainly inspired by pre-Christianity, Ferry is in search for a post-Christian terminology and an alternative concept of transcendence, which he calls a humanism of the man-god. Within that perspective, transcendence is no longer vertical, but horizontal.[34]

Even if Taylor's own position is akin to that of Nussbaum and Ferry, he still believes in a kind of vertical transcendence, which does not thwart human flourishing. On the contrary, there remains the possibility of an openness to agapeic transcendence which promotes the very affirmation of ordinary life. He believes that the 'forgotten' reality of 'agapeic transcendence' might become visible again in our current Western culture.

> In Christian terms, if renunciation decentres you in relation with God, God's will is that humans flourish, and so you are taken back to an affirmation of this flourishing, which is biblically called agape.[35]

It is against the backdrop of this four-cornered battle over the deeper sources of human behaviour that the phrase which Girard borrowed from Max Scheler as the opening motto of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* reveals its genuine significance: 'every man has a God or an Idol.' In the second chapter, 'Men Become Gods in the Eyes of Each Other', he, not unlike Taylor, claims that only openness to a transcendent source of agape may thwart the ressentiment of mimetic behaviour, inherent in our contemporary society.

> Denial of God does not eliminate transcendence but diverts it from the *au-delà* to the *en-deçà*. The imitation of Christ becomes the imitation of one's neighbour.[36]

Subtler languages and moral codes

I return to the question formulated earlier: If democracy is a 'mixed blessing', creating ressentiment and equality, envy and emancipation alike, how to draw a line between ressentiment and genuine indignation? Either, as Girard proclaims, the openness to a transcendent source of agape is the only alternative to overcome the ambivalence of political democracy and economic competition, provided that the perspective of exclusive humanism without deeper sources delivers us inevitably to the mimetic pitfalls of ressentiment. Or is there, as Taylor seems to suggest, also a secular claimant of agape available?

Complementary to Taylor's position, who mainly stresses the need of transcendent sources to overcome ressentiment, Kwame Anthony Appiah is in search of a secular claimant of agape, which he relates to the rediscovery of the old virtue of 'honour'. Admittedly, the term seems obsolete at first glance. But whereas Taylor replaces the term 'honour', as intrinsically linked to the social inequalities in the ancient regime sense, by the modern notion of dignity used in a universalist and egalitarian sense,[37] Appiah's aim is to redefine the very notion of 'honour' based on a distinction, made by Stephen Darwall, between appraisal respect and recognition respect.

Appraisal respect involves judging people positively according to some standards (Roger Federer for his tennis skills, Meryl Streep for her acting); recognition respect involves treating people in ways that give appropriate weight to some fact about them (a judge in court or a police officer by treating them warily, a sensitive person by speaking to him gently, a disabled person by assisting him when he asks for help).[38] When recognition respect is believed to owe to each and every person in virtue of him or her being a person, then this universalized recognition respect may become equivalent to that special form of honour, where honour is no longer tied to hierarchical inequality but to the liberal ideal of equal dignity.

> So, honour is no decaying vestige of a premodern order; it is, for us, what it has always been, an engine, fueled by the dialogue between our self-conceptions and the regard of others, that can drive us to take seriously our responsibilities in a world we share. A person with integrity will care that she lives up to her ideals. If she succeeds, we may owe her our respect. But caring to do right is not the same thing as caring to be worthy of respect; it is the concern for respect that connects living well with our place in a social world. Honour takes integrity public.[39]

However, it is not only a matter of finding deeper sources, be they transcendent ones or in terms of a new form of honour, but a matter of finding an appropriate way to also make these deeper sources resonate. Especially Taylor stresses this aspect of personal resonance. He is searching for a 'subtler language' which is capable of 'opening a new space, revealing a new reality, making contact with the hidden or lost'.[40] Since a return to the classical formulation of meaningfulness has been barred and the belief in 'the great Chain of being' has proven untenable, we are, according to Taylor, in need of 'subtler languages' – a term borrowed from the Romantic tradition – so as to combat sickening ressentiment.

At the same time, Taylor is aware of the precariousness of that search. Over and over again, he stresses the fact that we live in what he calls 'a post-

revolutionary climate', where any reference to some transcendent good beyond the man-made world has become taboo. In such a climate which pervades our current culture, 'to speak of aiming beyond life towards a transcendent good is to appear to undermine the supreme concern with life of our humanitarian, "civilized" world. It is to try to reverse the revolution and bring back the bad old order of priorities, in which life and happiness could be sacrificed on the altars of renunciation'.[41]

An analogous challenge applies to Appiah's position. Even if it may be true that honour codes and our sensitivity to what is honourable or dishonourable have a far greater psychological and social impact than rational moral arguments, it remains the case that an honour code which represents the liberal idea of a moral code is not readily available. Even if it may be generally acknowledged that honour is an effective and powerful way of motivating doctors, teachers and volunteers of all sorts to do more than is required of them by their contracts of employment, it is obvious as well that in a society dominated by the premises of the market economy, the consolations of money and the search for financial profits have drastically shouldered out the pleasure of being esteemed and the sense of honour of being worthy of that esteem.

> It is, no doubt, a complex historical question both to what extent there was once a world in which each of these professions was regulated by professional norms sustained by an honour code and how much that honour world has gone. But my suspicion, which is widely shared, is that there really has been a loss here.[42]

I want to end with one concrete example. Appiah's claim that it is not so much moral theories but far more moral codes that may inspire people to moral behaviour is illustrated by the contemporary attitude of the majority of Europeans towards the refugees on their continent. Even if they theoretically comply with the text of the Geneva convention, even if they deliberately subscribe to the European Declaration of Human Rights without any form of hesitation, as long as they do not consider an attitude of respect towards the dignity of the refugees as their moral code, appeals to genuinely respectful attitudes towards the refugees will remain hollow phrases.

Coda

Ressentiment is definitely a dominant factor in our culture. Born out of the Christian attack on violence, it became the father of modern Western society.

Since then, our attitude towards it has always remained ambivalent. If we wish to escape from it, what kind of transcendence do we have in mind? By whose God, by whose Idol will twenty-first-century Western people eventually be mediated so as to overcome the destructive force of ressentiment? And what kind of subtler languages and alternative honour codes are available to rescue them from that ambivalent emotion, in both their inner and outer world?

Alexis de Tocqueville, who depicted in detail the opportunities for ressentiment in rising American democratic society in the nineteenth century already, also hinted at a possible antidote in the shape of a democratic variant of honour. But what that shape exactly consists in remains to be discovered by contemporary and future generations.

> What our fathers called the archetype of honour was, in reality, only one of its forms. They gave a generic name to what was only a species. Honour is to be found therefore in democratic centuries as well as in aristocratic times. But it will not be hard to show that in the former it presents a different face.[43]

Notes

1 Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Peter Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006).

2 Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, 5th edn (Paris: Pagnerre, 2000 [1848]); Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 2004); Robert Young, 'Egalitarianism and Envy', *Philosophical Studies* 52 (1987): 261–276; Sjaak Koenis, 'De januskop van de democratie. Emancipatie en ressentiment in de Nederlandse politiek', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 75 (March 2013): 33–61.

3 Max Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, in Max Scheler, *Vom Umsturz der Werte. Abhandlungen und Aufsätze. Gesammelte Werke. Band 3* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1955), 70–95.

4 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 533.

5 Cf. Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness. A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24. I am grateful to Els Van Peborgh, who drew my attention to this book. Griswold's definition is indebted to Butler's and Smith's definitions of resentment. See Joseph Butler, Sermon VIII, 'Upon Resentment' and Sermon IX, 'Upon Forgiveness of Injuries', in W. E. Gladstone (ed.), *The Works of Joseph Butler*, Vol. 2 (London: Clarendon Press, 1896), 136–167; Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis:

Liberty Press, 1982). See also Peter F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (New York: Methuen, 1980).

6 See Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*.

7 Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 33–147.

8 Cf. Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 45 note 5. Murphy and Hampton are presented by Griswold as the exception to the Anglo-Saxon rule. They bring together resentment and Nietzschean 'ressentiment'. See J. G. Murphy, 'Forgiveness and Resentment', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7 (1982): 503–516; J.G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9 These differences are based on the analysis of respectively Bernard N. Melzer and Gil R. Musolf, 'Resentment and Ressentiment', *Social Inquiry*, 72, no. 2 (2002): 240–255; Didier Fassin, 'On Resentment and Ressentiment: The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 54, no. 3 (2013): 249–267.

10 Melzer and Musolf, 'Resentment and Ressentiment', 243; 251.

11 Fassin, 'On Resentment and Ressentiment', 260–261.

12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality. A Polemic*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21–22.

13 I have selected the same fragment as Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 37–38.

14 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 30.

15 Ibid.

16 Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 70–95.

17 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), 59.

18 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1977).

19 René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

20 René Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified'. Originally published in *Modern Language Notes*, 1984. Later selected in James G. Williams (ed.), *The Girard Reader* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 252.

21 Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 9–11. See for more information on the relation between Dostoevsky and Girard: René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, ed. and trans. James G. Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012).

22 Girard shows this evolution in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* on the basis of the evolution of the modern novel.

23   R. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 11–12. The connection with Scheler's *Ressentiment* was suggested to Girard by Leo Spitzer. See P. Antonello, J. Cezar de Castro Rocha and R. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion. Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 29.

24   Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees. Or Private Vices, Public Benefits*. With a Commentary Critical, Historical, and Explanatory by F. B. Kaye. Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 77–78 [70].

25   Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 134–135 [139–140].

26   Smith even identifies empathy with indignation and resentment with 'illusive sympathy'. Cf. Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 24.

27   See for more information: Hans Achterhuis, *Het rijk van de schaarste. Van Thomas Hobbes tot Michel Foucault* (Baarn: Ambo, 1988), 138–140; 213–214.

28   Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 30.

29   Charles Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?' in *Dilemmas and Connections* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2011), 182.

30   Ibid., 187.

31   Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 516.

32   Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 180.

33   Cf. ibid., 178–180.

34   Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Luc Ferry, *L'homme-Dieu ou le Sens de la vie* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1996); Luc Ferry, *Qu'est-ce qu'une vie réussie?* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2002). For Taylor's references to Nussbaum and Ferry, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007), 625–631; 677–678.

35   Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 174.

36   Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 59.

37   Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 46.

38   Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code. How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: Norton & Company, 2010), 13.

39   Ibid., 179.

40   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 760.

41   Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 176.

42   Appiah, *The Honor Code*, 195.

43   de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Vol. 4, 152–153. Cited in Appiah, *The Honor Code*, 173.

How the Other Becomes Our Beast

Postmodernity's Production of Ressentiment: A mode d'emploi in Six Steps

Robert Pfaller

Ressentiment as a social product: Its historicity

In my contribution I want to take a closer look at our present epoch with regard to ressentiment. What guides me is the suspicion that Nietzsche himself did not make his discoveries only by examining the macro-history of two thousand or more years of cultural transformation (as he claims)[1], but equally by being under the impression of the situation of Germany at his time, that is, the situation of a country after the failure of a bourgeois revolution and with a specific conjuncture of Protestant Christianity on the side of the bourgeoisie and the inheritance of antique pagan elements by the aristocracy (a conjuncture that differs significantly from that of for example the Italian city-states in the Renaissance, with their blossoming bourgeoisie reclaiming the pagan culture against Catholic Christian aristocracy and clergy).

I shall claim that the epoch we live in – postmodernity – is a heyday of ressentiment. First, because of our habit of *complaining*: never have so many people complained about other people and called for the police in order to restrict them.[2] Significant here is the contemporary demonization of the other and the corresponding inability to grant others their presumed happiness, which is one of the features Nietzsche attributes to ressentiment.[3]

But the second constitutive element of ressentiment according to Nietzsche, namely *ascetism*, is not missing either. We have, in postmodernity, developed an amazing hatred against many of our former pleasures. We are, to use

the current newspeak, not only mostly 'sex-negative' but also 'meat-negative', 'fur-negative', 'smoking-negative', 'alcohol-negative', 'politeness-negative', 'perfume-negative', 'adult-language-negative', 'joke-negative' and so on. What until recently used to be our divine pleasures appear now to us as evil forces which prosecute us. To quote the German poet Heinrich Heine (to whom Freud refers in his essay on the Uncanny), our former gods that we ceased to venerate thus have fallen and became our demons – a 'transvaluation' typical for *ressentiment*.[4]

More astonishingly, *we are not even ashamed for this.* This is a third feature which allows us to speak of ressentiment. Ressentiment is namely characterized precisely by the absence of shame for one's demonizing of the other and for one's hatred of pleasure. This is what distinguishes *ressentiment* from envy. To provide a rough formula, we can say that envy relates to *ressentiment* just as, according to Freud, obsessional neurosis relates to religion.[5] What is in one case an individual pathology can in the other case, transposed onto the cultural level, appear as a collective standard, or even a virtue. Due to such displacement, the pathology loses its original contempt. The transvaluation exerted by *ressentiment* is thus successful even with regard to *ressentiment*'s self-assessment.[6]

By regarding *ressentiment* as a matter of collective production, I feel a certain fidelity to Nietzsche's account which, too, conceived of it not just as an individual vice but also as a cultural and a political phenomenon (a 'slaves' revolt in morality'), an effect depending on the existence of social institutions with their functionaries ('priests'). Furthermore, this also entails attributing historicity to it: *ressentiment* is not universal; there are certain privileged epochs, heydays of ressentiment, while in other epochs, it may be absent. We must not forget that this is one of Nietzsche's key discoveries, stemming from his studies of the ancient Greek and Roman culture. Nietzsche shows that ressentiment is not an anthropological constant, an essential feature to be found in every culture, but that a different cultural world has once existed and is therefore possible.

I want to follow Nietzsche also in another respect: I conceive of ressentiment not only as an *affect* but also as a *mode of production of affect* – a specific organization of the psychic apparatus. Here we find an interesting feature typical for ressentiment which distinguishes it from for example guilt or shame. To apply a basic distinction between a capacity and its performance, as for example between Marxian 'labour power' and 'labour', one has to state that the sense of guilt is different from the feeling of guilt. I may not feel guilty at some specific moment for some specific mischief, but this need not imply that I do not have any sense of guilt. The same goes for shame: even if I do not feel

ashamed in a particular situation, I could still claim that I possess a feeling of shame and that therefore, in other situations, I would be able to produce such a feeling. However, this does not appear to be the case with ressentiment. It does not make sense to say that there is a 'sense of ressentiment', without any actual ressentiment present. Just as with jealousy, with ressentiment, too, we have to state that wherever ressentiment can be produced, it is produced. The affect and its mode of production appear to be one and the same. Hence, whereas in the cases of guilt and shame the respective sense has to be examined separately from the actual feelings (since it exists independently from them), in the case of ressentiment the respective sense has to be examined together with the actual feeling (since it does not have any other existence).[7]

Therefore, I feel justified to examine ressentiment not just as an affect but also as a specific social mode of its production,[8] or to say it in a more Marxist, Althusserian language, a specific subject-formation – that is, a specific ideology. The question is, then, Which one? How is this type of subject-formation historically and collectively produced?

By taking this approach, I would like to tackle a crucial question that appears to me unanswered in Nietzsche: *How did ressentiment become predominant?* We have not only to see *how it emerged* (which Nietzsche explains perfectly) but also *how it could become the ruling ideology*. Why did the priests win and how did they make their 'lie' hegemonic? For this is all but evident: if, in a given system of slavery, the slaves (or their priests) develop an interpretation which tells them that they are the superior beings, and if they dream of a heaven or afterlife in which they will become masters, this is normally far from dangerous or infectious for the masters. The masters would instead think to themselves, 'just go on dreaming, and obey, fools'. As long as the lower people dream of higher worlds, they will remain low, Bertolt Brecht remarked. In order to rise up, they have to bother about the low things.[9]

So, could dreaming of higher things actually strengthen the lower people and let them overcome the ruling noble classes? And could their moral story become plausible even for the masters themselves so that they too bought into it, and eventually are weakened and subjected to it? Or was it just that the masters remained in power, but found out that by proclaiming the slaves' morals, they could suppress them even more efficiently? And, finally: With what necessity did this happen? Is the heyday of ressentiment an inevitable outcome of some kind of historical development or a strange 'process of civilization'?[10] Is our postmodern malaise without alternative, or can we conceive of a way out?[11]

Three types of ideology: Belief, faith, paranoia

In order to specify the type of subject-formation, or ideology, that ressentiment belongs to, I want to suggest, a rough three fold distinction.[12] An ideology can exist under the form of (1) a belief, (2) a faith and (3) a paranoiac obsession. To illustrate this, one may think of the different ways in which religious ideologies can exist: they can have (ad 1) the form of belief, or superstition, for example in the behaviour of addicted television observers. Television 'liturgically' structures their time, since they have to follow every sequence of their favourite programme with a certain compulsion – a fact for which they feel contempt.[13] The form of faith (ad 2) we find in typical good Christians who believe in their God as their ideal.[14] This fills the faithful with pride. Of course it also causes them to occasionally doubt if they really are true believers. And finally, paranoiac ideology (ad 3) manifests itself for instance in the case when certain subjects believe themselves to be Jesus, and believe not really with pride, but with absolute certainty – the characteristic mark of paranoia.[15] This type of religious subject-position of course is mostly to be found in psychiatric institutions, but, as I will try to show in the following, not exclusively. This third form of ideology is, as I claim, the form proper to *ressentiment*.

I will come back to this 'ideal-typical' distinction of these three forms of ideology and explain the respective structures. However, at this point I want to mention that contemporary notions of diverse blossoming 'religions', such as a 'religion of health', 'religion of sustainability' or 'religion of security', are entirely justified, but only under one important condition: namely, that it is clarified which type of religion we are speaking of. I argue that these 'religions' belong to the third, paranoiac, type, in my classification. The 'believers' of these religions do not refer to them as superstitions or faiths. Rather, they act in a totally obsessed way, as if they themselves were Jesus. This can be most clearly seen in the 'health religion's' variant of 'self-optimization': this compulsion to optimize oneself is not comparable to the superstitious's avoidance of the impure or the faithful's attempt at moral improvement. Rather, it is the paranoiac construction of an entirely pure ego for which everything good is inside and everything bad is outside (or has to be expelled).[16] This is the point where these ideologies reveal their structure pertaining to the subject-position of paranoia and to the order of ressentiment.

How ressentiment as paranoia emerges from faith's looking at belief

In order to explain how ressentiment emerges, we have to start from the ideological form of *belief*. As Octave Mannoni pointed out,[17] there exists a very peculiar type of illusion: an illusion in which nobody believes. Take for example politeness: as Immanuel Kant remarked, politeness is a deception, even a lie, but it is a legitimate lie, because everybody is in the know that it is not true.[18] I have called this type of ideology 'illusions without owners', or, following Mannoni's terminology, 'beliefs'.[19]

Since everybody knows that they are illusions, these illusions have, as Mannoni points out, the psychoanalytic structure of disavowal: they can be announced in a statement like 'I know well, but all the same…'. With regard to politeness for example, this can be completed as follows: 'I know well that this is just illusionary, polite behaviour, but still it is great to treat each other as if we cared for each other.' With regard to sports results for example, this structure can be read as follows: 'I know well that this is silly and without any real importance to my life, but still it is great to care for sports results as if they were the most important thing in the world.'

This structure of belief is different from that of *faith*. Faith is an illusion that certain people do believe in; it is an illusion with proud owners. People are for example proud to announce that they believe in God, or in human progress, or in the self-regulation of the financial markets. It is therefore their own illusion, and not, as in the case of belief, an illusion without owners. It is significant that Mannoni's formula of disavowal cannot be applied in these cases: no faithful Christian would ever say such a thing as, 'I know quite well that it is silly, but still I have to go to church now.' And no neoliberal economist, not even after the 2008 financial crisis, would say, 'I know quite well that this is an illusion, but still it is great to act as if one believed in the self-regulation of the financial markets.'

As I have argued,[20] belief and faith have two different affective functions. Belief produces *pleasure*. Faith, on the contrary, produces *self-esteem*. As Mannoni pointed out,[21] belief is a structure that can be found in every culture. No culture whatsoever can exist without cultivating certain illusions that nobody believes in. Faith, on the other hand, seems to be a very specific achievement that only belongs to certain cultures. Monotheist religions for example include this type

of owned illusion. This is one of the reasons why they have to be classified as 'secondary religions', as opposed to pagan, 'primary religions' which dealt with a lot of sacred entities and respective beliefs without ever attempting to appropriate any of these beliefs.[22]

Therefore, we can find, according to Mannoni, two basic types of culture: first, cultures of 'belief alone', and second, cultures where belief is superstructed by faith.[23] The latter are never cultures of 'faith alone', even if they always attempt to appear as such. Yet in every culture of faith we also find beliefs – for example in Christian cultures we find 'belief' elements such as Santa Claus, the Christmas tree and the Easter Bunny. A belief culture will happily indulge in its beliefs. On the contrary, a culture in which faith superstructs its beliefs will try to hide away its own beliefs – at least from others; or it will even attempt to destroy these elements. Faith cultures prove to be hostile to beliefs – not only the beliefs of others but even their own beliefs.[24] This is also the reason why faith cultures are surprisingly blind to the belief element of magic within themselves. While belief cultures more or less openly admit that they have magicians and practice magic, faith cultures do not acknowledge that they have them and practice them, too. They just read horoscopes or love advice by Lady Christine,[25] keep their fingers crossed for their sports stars or forward e-mails saying that not forwarding them would bring about great mischief.

This blindness of a faith culture towards its own belief practices leads to a specific illusion – a 'perspective-based illusion'. It occurs when a faith culture is confronted with a belief culture: when looking upon the other's belief, the faithful assume that the other's belief were their faith. What the other does due to his belief, and against his better knowledge, appears then as if it were done faithfully, in accordance with his knowledge. The magic practices of other cultures then appear as proofs of their ignorance. Thus the members of the faith culture succumb to the illusion and start thinking, '*We know better, therefore we do not do it. The others do not know better, therefore they do it.*'[26]

Through this, the faith culture finds a comfortable method of dealing with its own tension between its faith components on the one hand and its belief components on the other. Previously, faith had to deal with the fact that it had faith in some things but still was doing other things in which it did not have faith. Now faith appears to be faith alone, whereas belief and corresponding joyful doing have shifted to the side of the other where they appear as faith. The 'horizontal' split that divided the faithful subject between knowing better and still doing is now transformed into a 'vertical' split that separates the faithful subject that knows from the other who allegedly does not know and therefore

keeps 'doing'. Now, as long as the faithful feel superior to their seemingly ignorant others, they enjoy their feeling of supremacy, and maybe develop some more or less brutal missionary or pedagogic zeal.

However, this feeling of supremacy can quickly turn into its opposite: a paranoiac ressentiment. At some point, the 'knowing', 'not-doing' faithful may start looking enviously at their 'doing', 'not knowing' other. In order to explain this, we have to reformulate this account with regard to its affective dimension. In psychoanalytic terms, 'Not knowing' and 'doing' are other words for a narcissistic ignorance of the reality principle, and full adherence to the pleasure principle – that is, pure enjoyment. When people assume that others do not know and therefore 'do', they assume that these others are enjoying an unlimited narcissistic pleasure. This pleasure is furthermore considered as forever lost for those who know, that is, those who have acknowledged the reality principle. Entering the know thus equals undergoing a 'symbolic castration' that separates one, forever, from narcissistic enjoyment.

The perspective-based illusion that mistakes the other's belief for his faith can thus eventually create the impression of an unlimited enjoyment on the side of the other – an enjoyment that has become impossible for the faithful, due to their 'castrating' better knowledge. The misperception of the other's belief as faith overlooks the other's better knowledge and thus attributes to him a lack of castration and limitless enjoyment.

The fact that the other's position appears as faith, unlimited by any better knowledge, and thus appears to entail unlimited enjoyment, now means something terribly embarrassing and scandalous to the faith culture: *We are deprived of our enjoyment, whereas the other is not.* And if the other has got enjoyment, whereas we do not have any, this can only mean one thing: what the other has got must be what we lack. The other's enjoyment is in fact *our* enjoyment. He must be the '*thief of our enjoyment*'.[27] Therefore, the only way to recuperate our enjoyment is to destroy the other's enjoyment, his lack of castration. In order to 'un-castrate' ourselves, we must castrate the other. And castrating him means to force him to know. This is the reason why we are currently so keen on forcing some others to know – for example those unknown strangers who appear to enjoy by not knowing that smoking can be dangerous. For those savages we spend enormous efforts by placing shock images and warnings on all cigarette boxes. This will certainly make them know and thus castrate them (and un-castrate us).

In order to complete this psychoanalytic argument, we have to add one more point. The hatred of the other's enjoyment is in itself the utmost enjoyment.[28]

Whenever some other appears to enjoy, we become limitless and fanatical in our attempts to destroy this other's enjoyment. The fact for example that politics currently tries to ban smoking from everywhere, not only restaurants but even from public spaces, appears to testify to this limitless fanaticism – the passion of those who have no other passion. This limitless passion, enjoyment, that emerges under the pretext of eradicating some other's scandalous enjoyment is the affective basis of paranoia. Paranoia emerges in a subject that has lost its symbolic castration and is therefore flooded with limitless enjoyment – albeit (since enjoyment is never pleasant, but is always experienced as suffering)[29] in the unpleasant form of being perceived as the enjoyment of some other. Paranoia is an obsession with the enjoyment of the other – an obsession which is in itself that very enjoyment.

The melting away of psychic distance: Postmodernity

Under a 'topographical' viewpoint, that is, with regard to the psychic agencies (in Freud's sense: the ego, the superego (or the ego-ideal) and the id), paranoia can be described as a loss of the distance that, in a non-paranoiac subject, separates these psychic agencies. Due to this loss of distance between them, even the differentiation between the psychic agencies seems to disappear: in paranoia it is as if all of a sudden there were no superego, or no ego, or no difference between them.

Such a 'loss of topicality' occurs for example in love. If in love, as Freud claims, we 'put the other at the place of our ego-ideal',[30] this means that all of a sudden it is as if we had no more ego-ideal on our own. In love, in this sense, we lose the differentiation of our psychic apparatus; we become in a way paranoiac. This may be one of the reasons why Freud even assumed that a homosexual love-bond was to be found at the basis of that jealousy which is typical for paranoia.[31]

This psychoanalytic consideration allows us to explain why postmodernity is a heyday of ressentiment, that is, of a specific kind of paranoia. Postmodernity has developed a specific form of better knowledge – the knowledge that there is no such thing as a better knowledge. Postmodernity has not only taught us but even made us feel that alleged knowledge is just a narrative, and that the epoch of the big narratives is definitely over. Since knowing better had been the mechanism of psychic distance in belief and partly (albeit in a deceptive form) in faith, this cancellation of better knowledge is, on the side of the

subjects of postmodern ideology, a cancellation of psychic distance. '*Knowing*' *that there is no such thing as knowledge means distancing oneself from any psychic distance.* We can briefly illustrate this with regard to the three types of ideology.

In both belief and faith, the positions of ego and superego are separated by a certain distance, and by a kind of 'altitude difference' that posits the superego somewhere higher up than the ego. In belief, the ideological subject takes the position of the superego and looks down, with a benevolent smile, upon the ego. This is the viewpoint of humour, as Freud describes it. This perspective is typical for example for religions whose gods are described as children.[32] In faith, on the contrary, the subject takes the position of the ego and looks up to the superego. This perspective produces respect. It is characteristic for religions which describe their gods as powerful, all-knowing, protective adults. This is the attitude that Freud assessed as particularly 'infantile' within religion.[33]

In paranoia, both forms of distance have disappeared. Ego and superego appear to coincide; at least, they have the same centre. Yet, upon closer scrutiny, the superego still proves to be bigger than the ego, surrounding it and bombarding its sheer facticity with normative injunctions. There is not just an ego that is something; rather, this ego is surrounded by a superego telling it that it should be something – namely itself. 'Be Yourself' is the tyrannical injunction of this surrounding, 'sartorial' superego.[34]

This loss of self-distance and the emergence of self-obsession is typical for postmodernity, precisely due to its abolition of both belief and faith structures of subjectivity. This paranoiac obsession with the own self can be observed not only for example in the current desperate attempts at 'self-optimization' or similar 'health-religious' attitudes. It also manifests itself in strange contemporary political movements, for example animal-rights initiatives. According to them, not only should humans not eat animals anymore but even animals should not eat other animals. The question for cultural analysis is, of course, why do human beings all of a sudden have such a passionate interest in animals not being eaten by anybody? How could exactly this become their utmost priority? The only possible answer appears to be that these human beings have started to *identify themselves with certain tame animals*. In their imagination they have become *household pets*. This contemporary 'pettification' of human beings is of course strongly reminiscent of those tendencies that Nietzsche has already observed in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*.[35] It corresponds to the desire, typical for ressentiment, to posit oneself as limitlessly good, due to one's alleged harmlessness. Being good can here (as often in postmodernity)[36] only be defined *in purely negative terms*:

not harming anybody. The inability to accept that in this world we are unable to not do more harm than benefit (that '*life is robbery*', to quote Whitehead's clear-sighted formula,[37] or, as Nietzsche puts it, that 'life functions essentially in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner')[38], and the inability to accept the slightest wild or (untamed) 'animalistic' sensual desires in oneself, testifies to the paranoiac structure of an ego that is surrounded by its superego and tyrannically forced to ego-conformity.[39]

The same desire was apparent in the obsession, typical for early postmodernity, with child abuse. Despite the fact that actual neglect of children and violence against children are far more dangerous threats to children, the collective imagination was obsessed with the issue of child sexual abuse. This, too, can only be explained by the fact that adults began in postmodernity to experience themselves as children, that they could not cope with their sexuality and that they were unable to account for this uncomfortable intruder otherwise than by telling themselves that this could only have come upon them by external violence. Here, too, a tyrannical superego that lacks any humorous distance cannot allow the ego to indulge in such an ego-nonconformist thing as sexuality. Paranoiac de-sexualization, as it manifests itself in the so-called 'a-sexuality' or 'post-sexuality',[40] is one of the typical symptoms of postmodern ressentiment.

At this point it becomes apparent that Nietzsche's reconstruction of the genesis of ressentiment is possibly wrong on one point. It might not be necessary to have real defeats and real losers in order for ressentiment to emerge. For example the heroic fall of Masada has encouraged people to pride and heroism and not to ressentiment. On the other hand, we currently observe a lot of people caught up with ressentiment who have never been beaten by any means. Again, one should recall here the fundamental insight formulated by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus that what embarrasses people is not the facts but their opinions about the facts.[41] Therefore we have to conclude that we often may have to do with 'rebels without a cause', with losers who never lost. Ressentiment has to be traced back to an imaginary loss, not to a real one. Real effects can be brought about by imaginary causes. This becomes possible through retroactivity: when some contingent development gets after the fact 'cathected' with a certain meaning – for example, when progressing from the pleasure principle to the reality principle is after the fact interpreted as 'castration', as a loss of limitless primordial enjoyment. In order to account for actual resentful losers, we have to theoretically presuppose a loss that never actually took place – just like the killing of the 'primordial father', the 'myth' by which Freud attempted to account for the real effects among civilized 'castrated' human beings.

What to do?

Now let us ask ourselves, what is necessary to build an egalitarian, free and solidary society? What individuals are required for this? Can it be built of proud, strong, dangerous, wild animals, or rather of weak, fearful pets? Our answer would probably not differ much from the one that Nietzsche would have given. This does not mean that free people have to behave like beasts, incessantly attacking each other. Rather it involves behaviour that relies on a certain appearance, a certain 'as if': behave and treat each other as if you were strong, dangerous beings, able not only to cause pain to others but also to bear quite some pain. We need governments that interpellate their citizens with this injunction: 'You are adults. You will not die immediately when you hear some noise, or adult language. So at least act as if you were grown up, even if you may not feel like it.' If governments, on the other hand, treat citizens like totally vulnerable children or pets, as has become usual in recent decades, the only consequence can be that the pets are being put into cages that separate them from the other animals. A state built of pets is a totally repressive state.

Here we can finally answer our initial question of how ressentiment not only emerged but has also become hegemonic: under the rule of neoliberal forces that aim at destroying and privatizing public space, it has been alleged that leftist forces, fascinated by their paranoiac image of the allegedly pure ego that has to be protected by all means, delivered the legitimizations for this destruction and privatization. Interestingly enough, in Western countries in recent decades it has most often been green and social-democratic forces that called for police and bureaucratic regulation. This is the specific overdetermination that allows *ressentiment* to become predominant: in this case an apparent emancipatory group with seemingly progressive aims (protecting the weak, being oneself, freeing oneself from heteronomy) helped to create the most anti-emancipatory effects (destroying public space, blocking democratic discussion, not allowing for dissensus). With the feeling of liberation, they helped to implement restrictive regulations and installed themselves as their bureaucracy, like Nietzsche's 'priests'. The institutional paranoia they produce always calls for immediate action, without deliberation or discussion about the adequacy of means. Often this is accompanied by an overruling of any democratic control, legality and division of power.

This pattern of action has been manifest for example after September 11 with the 'Patriot Act' measures for surveillance by the secret services. It can be observed as well in the all-encompassing smoking bans imposed by a pseudo-

political bureaucracy that blossoms due to the weakness of politics; and it can equally be seen in the totalitarian traits displayed in the concern with students' 'well-being' at universities, or in certain measures for women's protection (as in the Julian Assange case), or in child foster-care measures, for example in Scandinavian countries and in the United Kingdom.[42]

Since adequacy of means is not an issue in paranoia, ressentiment and the corresponding pseudo-politics build the key obstacles against what they themselves claim to pursue. Health-religious politics is an obstacle even against health, as new forms of disease such as 'orthorexia' (a disease caused by the excessive consumption of healthy food) prove. Security-religious politics is an obstacle against security, since it gives excessive power to secret services and creates new danger by enhancing people's feeling of insecurity. The same goes for the relationship between paranoiac passions and their respective highest goods. If envy for example appears to aim at the appropriation of some desired good, it has to be stated that envy is an obstacle against this very appropriation (since it does not aim at oneself having the good but only at the other not having it, as Aristotle has remarked)[43]. The same goes for jealousy and its relation to the beloved person; jealousy is not an expression of love, but a proof that the jealous person has started to prefer his jealous passion to his loving passion (as can nicely be observed in the movie classic *The Appointment)*[44]. Similarly, ressentiment is not a striving for equality, but an obstacle against it. This has been perspicuously pointed out by Nietzsche when he stated, 'Historically speaking, justice on earth represents … the battle, then, *against* reactive sentiment.'[45]

One feels tempted here to turn Nietzsche's insight even against his own hostile and disgusted remarks on equality and democracy: equality and democracy, one could argue, are only bearable for strong, active beings. Only masters are able to be equals, whereas slaves always need a master.[46]

Ethics and politics of a life without *ressentiment*

So how can a society free itself from paranoia and proceed to less fearful forms of subject-formation? What would make us postmoderns less resentful? Let us not forget that certain civilized cultural practices used to train individual in techniques to distance themselves from themselves. Richard Sennett has beautifully described how the divide between the private person and the role played in public, typical for European civilizations from the Renaissance up to the 1970s, has educated individuals to behave as if they were a bit better and a

bit less vulnerable than they actually might be and how it seduced them not to bother others with their true self.[47]

Perhaps it would be a considerable ethical as well as political achievement to defend and re-establish the divide between private person and public role. Maybe some older people still remember a scene that one could still observe some fifteen or twenty years ago. When somebody asked, 'Do you mind if I smoke?' it was quite well possible that other people would answer, 'Oh no, please go ahead! I do not smoke myself, but I like the smell and the fact that it looks so elegant.' Why could people act with such generous benevolence when confronted with something which is today almost exclusively perceived as an obscene, disgusting threat? I suggest that it was the fact that at that time the other was perceived not as a private person, but as performing a public role. Therefore, his smoking was not taken for his private, obscene passion but for his duty with regard to his role in the public space. Due to this distinction, the other was not 'homogenized' into an 'unknowing', obscenely enjoying beast, but was perceived as an equally castrated subject obeying the rules of public space and its requirements of elegance. Training ourselves in this distinction, resisting the superego's injunction to 'Be Yourself!' and thus becoming 'impersonal' in public allow us to perceive the other's pleasure and elegance not as a vice and a threat but as a virtue and as an advantage to ourselves. Distinguishing between public role and personal existence and exercising this distance within oneself as well as in the perception of the other would allow us to experience pleasure not resentfully as a 'theft of enjoyment', but as something that can be shared in solidarity.

Notes

1   See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1887]), 18: 'But you don't understand that? You don't have eyes for something that needed two millennia to achieve victory?'.

2   See for this Robert Hughes, *The Culture of Complaint. The Fraying of America* (New York: Warner, 1993); Pascal Bruckner, *Ich leide, also bin ich. Die Krankheit der Moderne. Eine Streitschrift* (Weinheim, Berlin: Quadriga, 1997).

3   See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 91.

4   See Heinrich Heine, 'Die Götter im Exil' [1853], in *Sämtliche Werke, Bd. I: Vermischte Schriften* (Amsterdam: Binger & Söhne, 1854), 161–196; Freud, Sigmund, 'The Uncanny' [1919] in vol. 17 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete*

Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud [SE] (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956–1974), 235; cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1886]), 69.

5	See Freud, 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' [1907] *SE* vol. 9, 115–127.

6	For the difference between ressentiment's position and the persistence of its values, see Max Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004 [1912]), 17.

7	If the difference between a capacity and its performance is a crucial structure of subjectivity, then ressentiment would be based on a de-subjectivization. This may be a first hint why, as I want to argue in the following, ressentiment has to be related to a *paranoiac* type of subjectivity. Paranoia, as Freud teaches, is an attempt at healing from psychotic de-subjectivization (see Freud, 'Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia' [1911], *SE* vol. 12, 76).

8	This means that not only is ressentiment after the fact 'ennobled' through 'collectivization' of envy but both envy and ressentiment themselves have to be understood as products of specific historical social conditions (just as for example 'attention deficit syndrome' is to be seen as a product of an 'ADS-culture'; see Christoph Türcke, *Hyperaktiv! Kritik der Aufmerksamkeitsdefizitkultur* (Munich: Beck, 2012).

9	Bertolt Brecht, *Die Gedichte von Bertolt Brecht in einem Band* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 633. See for this problem Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London/New York: Verso, 1999), 186:

> Crucial for a successful ideology is the tension *within* its particular content between the themes and motifs that belong to the 'oppressed' and those which belong to the 'oppressors': ruling ideas are *never* directly the ideas of the ruling class. Let us take what is arguably the ultimate example, Christianity – how did it become the ruling ideology? By incorporating a series of motifs and aspirations of the oppressed (truth is on the side of the suffering and humiliated; power corrupts…) and rearticulating them in such a way that they became compatible with the existing relations of domination.

10	In the terms suggested by Octave Mannoni ('I Know Well, But All the Same…', in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. M. A. Rothenberg and D. Foster (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 68–92), I have conceived of this problem as follows: Is there something like a 'dialectic of superstition' that immanently leads it towards faith, and therefore towards the emergence of ascetic ideals? For the discussion of this problem, see Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture. Illusions Without Owners*, trans. Lisa Rosenblatt (London/New York: Verso, 2014), 121ff.

11	Also in this respect Nietzsche's position appears ambiguous and unresolved. Whereas for Spinoza for example the rise of 'sad passions' and corresponding

reactionary masses is a specific, possible but not unavoidable historical result (see Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998); Reinhard Loock, 'Spinozas menschliche Knechtschaft – Nietzsches *Ressentiment*', in Achim Engstler and Robert Schnepf (eds.), *Affekte und Ethik. Spinozas Lehre im Kontext* (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms, 2002), 279–296), Nietzsche sometimes seems to conceive of ascetism almost as a structural necessity: as if the 'priest narrative' were the indispensable 'superstructure' of every form of human life. (See for example Nietzsche 'Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift', in ders., *Werke, Bd. III* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1984), 227: 'Der Gang dieser Vergiftung scheint unaufhaltsam'; in the English translation this is rendered a bit less deterministic: 'undoubtedly this intoxication has *succeeded*', Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 19; 2007: 86: 'It must be a necessity of the first rank which makes this species continually grow and prosper when it is *hostile to life, – life itself must have an interest* in preserving such a self-contradictory type', ibid., 86).) A society without ascetic ideals would, under this perspective, appear as an impossible society without superstructure. The epistemological problem here is that by attempting to resolve the paradox of a life-enhancing hostility against life, theory can fall into the trap of *explaining too much*; to assume an inevitable necessity behind what at first sight appears as a paradox, or even an impossibility.

12 For this distinction, see Robert Pfaller, *Wofuer es sich zu leben lohnt. Elemente materialistischer Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2011) and Pfaller, *Pleasure Principle in Culture*.

13 The fact that watching TV has to be regarded as a type of religious behaviour has rightly been claimed by several authors in the field of religious studies as well as media studies. See, for instance, Horst Albrecht, *Die Religion der Massenmedien* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne: Kohlhammer, 1993); Gunter Gebauer, 'Fernseh- und Stadionfußball als religiöses Phänomen. Idole, Heilige und Ikonen am "Himmel" von Fangemeinden', in Markwart Herzog (ed.), *Fußball als Kulturphänomen. Kunst – Kult – Kommerz* (Stuttgart, 2002 (wie Anm. 1), 305–314); Christian Jochum, *Fernsehen als Religion* (Innsbruck (kath.-theolog. Dipl.-Arb.) 2000); and Günter Thomas, *Medien – Ritual – Religion. Zur religiösen Funktion des Fernsehens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996).

14 It is this form of Christian faith that Slavoj Žižek has defended against postmodern arbitrariness (see Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); 'Passion in the Era of Decaffeinated Belief', http://www.lacan.com/passion.htm, accessed 7 September 2016; and 'I am a Fighting Atheist: Interview with Slavoj Žižek', interview by Doug Henwood, introduction by Charlie Bertsch, in *Bad Subjects*, Issue 59, February 2002, http://eserver.org/bs/59/zizek.html, accessed 7 September 2016).

15 See for this Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 84.

16   For this construction of the 'Lust-Ich', see Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' [1915], SE vol. 14, 134f., footnote 2.

17   Mannoni, 'I Know Well'.

18   See Immanuel Kant, 'Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht', in *Werkausgabe*, vol. XII (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, [1798] 1978), 442 (BA 42).

19   Pfaller, *Pleasure Principle in Culture*; Mannoni, 'I Know Well'.

20   Pfaller, *Pleasure Principle in Culture*.

21   Mannoni, 'I Know Well', 72f.

22   See for this Jan Assmann, *Die mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich: Hanser, 2003), 11. Therefore scholars stemming from monotheist cultures were so astonished by the Greek religion and raised the question whether the Greeks ever really believed in their Gods (for this question, see Pfaller, *Pleasure Principle in Culture*, introduction).

23   In the following I will refer to these cultures, where belief is superstructured by faith, as 'faith cultures'.

24   See for this Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual. A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

25   See Walter Benjamin, 'Kant als Liebesratgeber', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), Vol. IV., 811f.

26   For a more detailed account of the 'perspective illusion' and its criticism provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer, see Pfaller, *Pleasure Principle in Culture*, chapter 2.

27   For this concept, see Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 203.

28   This has been nicely remarked by the Christian author Tertullian: 'What greater pleasure than distaste of pleasure itself' (quoted from http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-09.htm#P1007_409499, accessed 7 September 2016, chapter XXIX; compare with Tertullian [Tertullianus, Quintus Septimius], *De spectaculis. Über die Spiele*, Latin and German, ed. and trans. Karl Wilhelm Weeber, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008, 80ff).

29   See for this Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 184.

30   See Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' [1921c], *SE* vol. 18, 113ff.

31   See Freud, 'Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia', 63ff.

32   See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 58, where he speaks of 'Heraclitus's "great child", call him Zeus or fate'.

33   See for this Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents' [1930], *SE* vol. 21, 73f.

34   For the notion of the 'sartorial' superego, see Joan Copjec, 'The Sartorial Superego', in *Read My Desire. Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,

1994), 65–116. For a historical account of the superego's injunction to 'Be yourself!' becoming popular after 1968, see Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (London/New York: Verso, 2009).

35 See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 24; 42.

36 The aesthetic counterpart to this attitude is the principle of currently blossoming cosmetic surgery: to not embarrass anybody. In this case, beauty is defined in purely negative terms.

37 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 105.

38 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 50.

39 The meaning of the word 'animalistic' itself has completely shifted sides in this contemporary discourse. Here, too, we can observe a 'transvaluation'.

40 For this notion, see for example Irene Berkel (ed.), *Postsexualität. Zur Transformation des Begehrens* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2009).

41 'Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things' (Epictetus 1891: 218).

42 See this, for example: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11949341, accessed 7 September 2016; cf. http://www.haaretz.com/he-impersonated-a -human-1.303359, accessed 7 September 2016. For the foster-care problem, see http://www.tnp.no/norway/panorama/2704-an-unfinished-debate-on-barnevernet, accessed 7 September 2016. (I am grateful to Tereza Kuldova, Oslo, for alerting me of this matter.)

43 See Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann/New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), 243.

44 *The Appointment*, USA 1969, director: Sidney Lumet, actors: Omar Sharif, Anouk Aimée.

45 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 49.

46 Ibid., 20.

47 See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

Failure as Triumph: The Political Anthropology of the Death Drive in Slavoj Žižek

Christoph Narholz

First and second ressentiment

The venture of criticizing the concept of ressentiment – if one wishes, in undertaking it, to avoid the accusation of committing the very same act of ressentiment, only somehow different now from the ressentiment criticized in the first place – first requires the recognition of the concept of ressentiment to the full extent that Nietzsche formulated it, that is, as a polemic synonym for European metaphysics. Since the project of metaphysics criticism – despite all its unavoidable ambiguity – has proven largely successful, it therefore must be possible to find ressentiment-free alternatives to phenomena incriminated as ressentiments. Additionally, the concept must be defined in such a way that the types of ressentiment are clearly distinguishable from one another. After metaphysics, there is not the one ominous form of ressentiment which the critics could accuse one another of and from which, however, curse-like, no one can escape. Rather we have to speak of a coherent and systematically presentable circle of ressentiment figures, which ressentiment criticism, for the sake of its own positions, can avoid.

What is required is a formalized version of the concept of ressentiment, which can easily be shaped from Nietzsche's dispersed remarks. Such a formalized concept of ressentiment might specify three ways in which factual unhappiness is turned into promised happiness. These reversals include the displeasurable, the powerless and the normative, and they are explained in greater detail in the following. The formalized version of the concept of ressentiment assesses, just like Nietzsche's polemic original does, the empirical genealogy for the universal truths of metaphysics; yet with Kant, who alongside Nietzsche is the second

most epochal critic of metaphysics, it retains, for the sought-after ressentiment-free alternatives, an unconditional claim of truth – which nevertheless is still psychologically informed by Nietzsche. Otherwise, Nietzsche's intervention could indeed give the impression that metaphysical ressentiment reappears here in a reversal, this time empirically setting the strong against the weak. On the other hand, according to this logic, Kant's moral concept would then be accused of being an extension of metaphysical ressentiment – exactly that which he previously had destroyed. Both positions are well known and sufficiently represented. The problem with Nietzsche, though, is of special significance for ressentiment theory, because an insufficient concept of ressentiment fails to explain wherein Nietzsche's ressentiment exactly should lie – if ressentiment means metaphysics and Nietzsche's aim clearly and unmistakably was metaphysics criticism. What I now more precisely call the *first* ressentiment of classic European metaphysics therefore must be, in a fundamental first step, supplemented by a no less venomous, contemporary *second* ressentiment. This *second ressentiment* remains subject to the same logic of reversal, yet wants its results to be realized empirically. The formalized version of the ressentiment concept encompasses these and therefore allows a distancing from both.

The formalized concept of ressentiment argues as follows: ressentiments claim that displeasure suffered could be symmetrically transformed into pleasure (the first reversal); they claim that the powerlessness of being subjected to displeasure directly affords the power to effect pleasure (the second reversal); they attribute normative qualities to displeasure and powerlessness, since both reversals are *unconditionally* guaranteed, and thus once again turn the empirical upside down (the third reversal). I won't deal with Nietzsche's emphasis on revenge because it limits ressentiment to psychology. In the symmetry of the first and the immediacy of the second reversal, furthermore, the revenge aspect remains.

Whereas in the first ressentiment all three reversals can be completed by using the fiction of a supernatural world, which has to supply the necessary means for this surreal operation, the second must limit itself, for the same ambition, to the empirical. Indeed through action, displeasure can be empirically transformed into pleasure, powerlessness into power; and both as factual reality, not some otherworldly promise. Yet the claims that any agent asking for justification for his action unavoidably links to these remain unconditioned (*unbedingt*) as long as more than randomness and arbitrariness should be obtained by pleasure and power. A self-confident modernism therefore directs its attention less at the criticism of the first ressentiment, which should be considered essentially

completed and yet a prerequisite, but targets much more the advancement of empirical dogmatisms from the second.[1]

The second ressentiment

I will introduce Slavoj Žižek's political anthropology of the death drive as an attractive case for such a second ressentiment. The death-drive subject recognizes in its outrageous displeasure and powerlessness the deficient nature of humankind; the rebellion against this nature builds the radical patterns of leftist morality. I offer three comments in advance of my analysis.

First, with the death drive subject, Žižek creates a concept of the nature of humankind, but at the same time makes claims about the subsequent revolt of this subject, which, in its unconditioned emphasis on the true act, can at first be accounted for only in *ethics*, although Žižek avoids this ideologically tainted concept. Although he sometimes speaks of ethics after Lacan, by this he does not mean the reflexive theory of morals as in Luhmann, but rather an agitated, 'better' morality free from the bigoted lies of the powerful. Žižek does not differentiate, as Luhmann and also Kant do, between the social systems of law, economy, ethics and politics; he rather understands the agency of the death drive as a model of truth in *all* relevant operations. The refusal to account for cumbersome systematic differentiations in the operative world, in favour of an unconditionally assured limitation to the acting subject's inner perspective of pleasure and reflection, is precisely the dangerous privilege of morals as opposed to Žižek's preferred politics, and thus already presupposes a differentiation of the social systems. That it would actually be quite necessary to take such care is shown most clearly in Žižek's negligence of the concept of freedom, which finds only an obscure place in the death-drive subject, whereas in Kant the practical field is *constituted* through the concept of freedom, yet at the same time the operative world is not already altogether *moralized* by this. Rather, the concept of freedom creates only a systematic site within the practical field, on which the relationship between freedom, pleasure and action can be determined.[2] Žižek's impatience makes it not only more difficult to later concretize the death-drive act but also, right from the start, to form a normative inner perspective, which he likewise needs, and which Kant effectively gave with his fathomless paradox of freedom and the moral law.

I will come back to these questions. The second comment: Žižek's combination of psychoanalysis and German idealism shows the same interest in the

combination of classical systematic philosophy and modern psychology as my formalized concept of ressentiment drawn from Nietzsche and Kant; therefore, the formats must correspond. I neglect Žižek's plentiful cultural criticism in favour of discussing narrow, more fundamental questions concerning the linking of psychology and logic; this focus, however, does not take away from his own understanding of his theory.[3]

From there follows my third comment: my criticism of the death-drive subject precisely will not, as would commonly be suggested subsequent to Nietzsche, serve to discriminate an ethics creatively conceived with displeasure and powerlessness. The formalized concept of ressentiment does not merely allow me to supplement the first ressentiment with the second but can also differentiate *within* the second a *leftist* ressentiment, which involves displeasure and powerlessness in the founding of the action, from a *liberal*. This *liberal* second ressentiment no longer reverses displeasure and powerlessness, but in fact pleasure and power themselves 'into pleasure and power', as it prophylactically heightens through normative claims their random possession against their feared loss. Kant's subject of desire allows this differentiation, because its motivating pleasure can, on the one hand, be understood as *want for pleasure*, consequently displeasure or lack ('leftist'), and, on the other hand, as *fulfilled pleasure* ('liberal'). Both experiences are common to everyone, yet their unconditioned truth is called into question. How a ressentiment-free and, to an equal measure, still unconditional and universal ethics might look can be presented in detail by introducing Nietzsche into a eudemonistical reading of Kant's ethics.[4] As long as the criticism of the death-drive subject is successful, it is at least hinted at by means of the arguments brought into play here.

The death drive, and how it has to fail

Žižek determines the death drive after Lacan as follows:[5] While desire through action realizes 'objects', or, in fact, aims (and therefore not necessarily 'things'), each negatively motivated as placeholders for the lost pleasure-giving 'all-object'(*objet petit a*) (the *Ding an sich* of pleasure and source of all pleasure), the death drive interrupts desire and realizes negation itself as an object. Desire (*desir*) is differentiated from physiological need (*besoin*) and comprises the wish (*demand*) for recognition in the symbolic field of language, yet remains a concept of pleasure – or more exactly, a concept of displeasure – for the desired objects can never fulfil the pleasure, which arises negatively out of their

difference from the pleasure-fulfilling all-object and with which want (lack) of pleasure is meant. Based on this difference, pleasure and power remain in desire principally unconscious and numbed by a constitutive naïveté. The death drive, on the other hand, desires the negative all-object neither directly (in the expressive, self-destructive act of an empirically entangled want for death) nor mediated in other objects as desire does; rather, it 'desires' in the negativity of the all-object the loss of the object, whereby precisely desire, which wants objects, is interrupted.[6]

Žižek outlines in two steps the paradoxes arising thus – the death drive is desire and at the same time non-desire; it determines object negation as object. The first understands the death drive logically, in a sense vaguely borrowing from Kant, as the form of desire. Object negation as object is purely the form of all objects, which only as negatives to the all-object are able to become objects of desire at all; the death drive 'transcendentalizes' these objects.[7] For this, it is not enough to add a desired negative all-object to the empirically existing objects of desire; rather, the constitutive level of objectivity must be reached through object-loss as object. Drive is distinguished from desire for objects as their condition of possibility (*Bedingung der Möglichkeit*).[8]

The manoeuvre is delicate. Freud arrived at the death drive empirically from the observation that subjects do not only follow their pleasure (however unpleasurably distorted by a symptom that may be) but, instead, sometimes stubbornly adhere to the displeasurable repetition of displeasure, which they nevertheless must want because otherwise they would act differently.[9] Along with the numerous life drives, a drive within desire appears alternatively to those: the death drive. Žižek in contrast distinguishes strictly between desire and drive and therefore connects both of Freud's positively distinguished drives into a single figure. One may in fact, with a little imagination, understand Freud this way: if drives want non-excitation ('an urge inherent in the lively organism', thus the excitation 'to restore an earlier condition',[10] thus the disappearance of the excitation), then the death drive at first wants nothing other than the life drives, namely the deletion of the excitation or the want for pleasure. If one understands the deletion of this pleasure not *empirically* as *fulfilled pleasure* (as the life drives do) but instead as the deletion of *pleasure altogether*, thus *non-pleasure*, then that which the death drive wants empirically corresponds logically to the object negation as object, and to desire as non-desire. The cycle of want for pleasure and unfulfilled pleasure in desire empirically remains intact; however, its constitutive form, itself not desire and no object, carried over in a concept, is 'death'.[11] The term 'death drive' for the basis of desire, because the

finitude of life simultaneously *determines* and *itself fights* with it, shows a high degree of dialectical black humour. When one recalls what transcendentalism meant for Kant – the object-constituting self-reference of knowledge and, consequently, an exact observation of function and scope of 'pure' (logical) and empirical concepts – then one can initially accept Žižek's solution: the concept of the death drive is constitutive for empirical desire; the latter is therein self-reflectively liberated of naive pleasure and agency with partial objects and fully aware of its true displeasure and powerlessness.

There are difficulties with the concept nevertheless. Žižek's second step in outlining the death-drive paradoxes brings these to light. Not only is desire formally based on the death drive, but the death drive should be immediately realized materially, as if it were an act itself. Žižek captures its paradoxical constitution here as 'the impetus to directly stage "loss" itself – the gap, the cut, the distance'.[12] What he wants is clear: not desire – 'the all-continuity in which we are embedded', the 'course of things',[13] 'a process of being imprisoned in the idiotic, material reality'[14] – but instead non-desire, the suspension, stopping, fracturing, disruption of desire[15]: 'a pure insistence, which ignores the constraints of reality';[16] an immanent, radical act of unsurpassable, anti-worldly quality. Here too, as in the transcendentalizing first analysis, the level of validity of agency changes with the shift from desire to drive: the twist of will purely onto itself – 'object negation as object' had indeed been its transcendental form – means the jump from oppressive facticity into freedom; the implied normative pressure of this construction suggests moreover a higher, somehow 'idealistic' and consequently 'moral' quality.

This rebellion of the subject of the death drive against desire has to fail: the form 'object negation as object' *logically can* strike at its transcendental function in the constitution of objects of desire by shifting to action itself through the self-defined paradox, yet *empirically it cannot* (otherwise the intervention would be transcendent in a classical sense). The objects do not simply disappear in a negative act, but rather are affirmed by this act; the claim of power of agency *as opposed to* desire only strengthens desire's powerlessness. Moreover, every act, whether what is wanted is the repeated pleasure in the partial object or the interruption of the constitutional displeasure, is motivated by pleasure and therefore does not escape the repeated pleasure of desire (otherwise, it would again be transcendent, in the classical sense, as a unique and final pleasure). In the transcendental function of the death drive for desire, it was already unclear to what extent a logical concept of displeasure (non-desire) at the same time was meant to be a 'drive' (want for something), which, however, was able to

remain hidden in this pleasure's strong tie to desire. As soon as, through the agency of the death drive, an independent concept of pleasure is formed in rising up against the fundamental displeasure in desire, this inconvenience becomes acute.

Žižek of course sees that, on the one hand, the agency of the death-drive subject simply presents an act motivated in the object world of desire, the higher qualities of which, on the other hand, remain in the dark. In order to solve the problem, he claims for the act of the death drive, in fact an empirical pleasure of its own quality, namely the *pleasure of repetition* against the *repeated pleasure* (respectively displeasure) of desire.[17] One can quickly surmise that this attempt must fail too: A pleasure of repetition must hold that pleasure is repeated, or else the repetition would provide no pleasure; therefore, it cannot be distinguished from the pleasure in desire: repeated pleasure. Moreover, since both structurally signify the same displeasure (want for pleasure that cannot be fulfilled) – in one case: repeated pleasure through desire, empirically concealed ('unconscious'); in the other case: pleasure of repetition through the death drive, logically revealed (in truth or 'excessively')[18] – it remains a mystery how the latter can produce a unique and furthermore true pleasure. This applies even more, because in contrast to the naive pleasures of desire, the pleasure of the death-drive agency is not meant to arise from the endless chain of negative objects but, instead, through 'object negation as object' from the negative origin of the displeasure of desire itself. This is no different from the death-drive subject's claim of power of agency: a pleasure of repetition, if it is meant to be differentiated from repeated pleasure, does not sincerely count on the success, but rather the failure of the pleasure-providing act, and strengthens the powerlessness of desire, in that it remains subdued by the power claim.

The three reversals: Failure as triumph

Žižek may assert a self-enlightenment of desire through the revolting act of the death drive, yet not some kind of higher quality in the agency of the death drive itself. He does it anyway, and because he must directly reverse displeasure and powerlessness into pleasure and power, he takes recourse to the dangerous idea of 'failure as triumph'.[19] Yet displeasure and powerlessness only become a 'triumph' if the construction responsible violently distorts its depressing result under the pressure of the self-defined concepts. The violence stems from the attempt to gain empirical reality directly from the logic of the interruptive act (object

negation as object and non-desire as desire). The attempt is therefore not to 'pin' the interruptive act in the founding function for desire,[20] but to completely cut down with it the depressing displeasure of desire, evidently without allowing that this intervention (which then would be necessary here) be understood as transcendent. Thus, the matter has to be staged with an undiminished claim in the empirical and therefore can do nothing other than become chronic in desire and deceive itself with a presumed 'truth': displeasure as pleasure and powerlessness as power.

I take 'failure as triumph' in its twilight of unfree appeal, shrill pretext and sweetened heroism as the base formula for an anthropologically mis-established, leftist second ressentiment. Its error lies already in the previously defined 'transcendentalizing' of desire through the death drive; thus, it only blossoms in bizarre ways in its autonomous act. In order to understand how it comes to this, one must turn away from the first and second reversals (displeasure into pleasure and powerlessness into power) and look at the third reversal of ressentiment (an empirical datum into an unconditionally valid one), which is active through the 'transcendental' establishment of the act.

There, a materialistic pride refuses any illusions concerning displeasure and powerlessness. Yet it does so *unconditionally* and in doing so reverses, nevertheless.[21] The decisive error likely comes from Lacan, whose renowned 'transcendentalization' of Freud (the unconscious shall be structured like a language) consisted in the simplistic mapping of a randomly conjured sensation (the want for pleasure or lack) onto a one-sidedly misunderstood 'transcendental' nature of concepts (words refer to words and not to things, thus again a lack). The empirical datum is simply duplicated by logic, or more precisely, ennobled to an unconditioned 'thing' – as if the conceptual form of things were a thing in itself, although one negatively withdrawn.

The unabbreviated truth of course lies with Kant: words refer to 'things', however, only by means of words, which at the same time refer to themselves. In this, words themselves no longer become things, and when so (as in metaphysics), again only as words. In fact, through an imperatively presupposed self-reference of words, things present themselves differently than they did in the older ontological or younger empirical tradition, in which they presented themselves *an sich selbst* ('in and of themselves'), yet are neither lost nor inaccessible. It is out of the question to speak of any principal lack (of being or of pleasure) within transcendental logic, although in its self-referentiality, it waives an unconditioned '*Dinghaftigkeit*' (thinghood) or conditionality beyond empirical things, with which metaphysics claimed to guarantee being and pleasure, but

in which it in fact failed. Kant's critique of ressentiment makes the same sharp point in a logical sense as does Nietzsche's psychologically. Žižek sustains Lacan's abbreviation, since the *empirically objectified* understanding of *difference as lack* – even if it occurs 'unobjectively' in the *unconditional* conjunction of a concept and a feeling – is carried along throughout. *Conceptual form*, that is, *negation* ('not the thing itself', regardless which empirically is desired, 'object negation as object'), and *a feeling*, that is, *the lack* (the 'thing' with regard to material sensation), are *logically identified (unconditionally 'la chose')*. This is the essence of the problem, and Žižek – despite the much more refined systematics from which he (contrary to Lacan) can draw due to his intense orientation towards Hegel – never quenched this unholy smouldering core, as without it, the energy of ressentiment in the entire structure would have run out of steam.

Thus, in the death-drive construct, the 'urgency', which 'persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of emergence and transience',[22] fails to open up the difference it claims to make between the biological empirical ('desired objects') and the non-biological conceptual area ('object negation as object'), if the latter – as an 'urgency' and 'persistence' – again is run on the same lack as natural circulation. At this stage it is directly apparent that with Kant freedom must be named in the sense of non-nature from the third antinomy[23] as a condition of the possibility for practical concepts. Freedom is not 'negative' or 'positive' or 'formal' or 'concrete',[24] but instead a conceptual necessity from the failed attempt of the antinomy to set *both* nature (conditionality) *and* freedom (unconditionality in the sense of metaphysics) *unconditionally for themselves* – thus to erase the corresponding excluded other (unconditionality or conditionality). The resulting freedom is *not unconditionality in and of itself* as metaphysics has asserted (the first ressentiment), but rather *unconditionality in relation to the conditionality of nature*. Moreover, there now also can be *no nature unconditionally for itself*, as empiricism wants to claim (second ressentiment). Transcendental freedom is only the mechanical nature-concept of agency, the self-splitting of the logical subject in nature – a productive, itself empty, positively differentiating point of agitation, which Žižek with his 'transcendental' interpretation of the death-drive subject seeks in the wrong place.[25]

The empirical reference to pleasure is undertaken next. Pleasure as well as displeasure are neutral data for Kant, the manifold significance of which is only completed by the concept of freedom. The observation in psychoanalysis, that people mostly want the wrong thing,[26] or paradoxically even want displeasure, their desire being stubbornly distorted by an unconscious *thing* (la chose),[27] lies on a subordinated level and touches on the presupposed concept of freedom

neither constitutively nor morally. It also does not touch on Kant's concept of pleasure, since this includes equally pleasure and displeasure. With regard to the concept of freedom, Kant assures only that the latter stays in relation to the former, yet nowhere is identified with it.[28]

If one accepts freedom and pleasure in this sense, empirically one can then tell different freedom stories about pleasure evolving – be it as psychoanalysis does with Oedipus and the nature-distancing 'symbolic castration', be it with the concept of cooperation in Michael Tomasello or be it in Peter Sloterdijk's story of an original nurturedness. The transcendental concept of freedom remains presupposed in all of these cases.[29] Žižek aims at the fundamental difference between freedom and nature by contrasting drive and instinct,[30] yet with the 'transcendental' death drive describes a structure in which powerlessness unconditionally dictates. The result is therefore nothing but naturalized will, 'the horrible fate of being caught in the endlessly repetitive cycle of the wanderings in guilt and pain'.[31]

Christian materialism: *jouissance* on the cross

The actions of the death-drive subject accordingly cannot escape from the cage of their own making. Here it becomes especially clear that the death drive is the true bastard offspring of the earlier metaphysical first ressentiment apparent in both of its functions, the unconditionedly demanding act to counter the deficiencies of human nature as well as the pseudo-transcendental establishment thereof beforehand. The negative 'all-object'[32] of the second ressentiment is not transcendent as it would be in the first, but rather founds an empirical structure. However, only nature constitutively moralized through the all-object (instead of transcendental freedom as its morally neutral self-reference) can explain why our 'wanderings in pain' should at the same time be wanderings in 'guilt'. The death drive provides desire with an object that it wants to reach, but can only ever fail to reach. Christian first ressentiment therefore promised a transcendent salvation through a satisfying death ('displeasure in life as pleasure thereafter'), the death-drive ressentiment reproduces, in a stiff empiricism, 'the "undead" eternal life itself'[33] and experiences pain as guilt not in relation to God, but rather in relation to its nature alone. Žižek of course at the same time resists this and, with the revolting act of the death-drive subject, attempts a fortuitous disencumberment from guilt without transcendent illusions. The death drive in the end is therefore not called the death drive because it heroically savours

finitude, but because it immanently blasts finitude.[34] Yet here it also holds that only authentic metaphysics could come up with the crazy idea that finite subjects would find their highest pleasure in, of all things, 'death', and that this highest pleasure would additionally have moral quality.[35]

If one asks, in which way the pleasurable disencumberment of this intimate entanglement of 'guilt and pain' should be achieved, one must look again at the empirically re-issued metaphysics implicit within it. The agency of the death-drive subject in Žižek's ethics imitates the redemptive agency of Christ on the cross.[36] Žižek first offers a 'materialistic' interpretation of Christian soteriology inspired by Hegel: it is not a calculating God that sacrifices his son to relieve the guilt of humankind (and therefore the Son does not exchange through the Father his mortal life for human's immortal), but rather a giving God, through a self-supported excess of love, who cancels human guilt voluntarily and unconditionally. With this, he certainly disempowers himself, for in the ultimate devotion on the cross, it is not man in God who dies but God in man, by which the same excess becomes available to humankind for imitation. The agency of the death-drive subject in this sense is an unconditioned disencumbering gift of desire to itself, a pure expenditure, something that goes beyond 'the normal course of things', or 'common biological existence'. Already in his discussion of Christ, Žižek suppresses the fact that either this act, because it empirically requires self-destruction, needs the resurrection (the '*chain of exchange*'[37] would otherwise be unbroken and Jesus is simply another sacrifice for any given master) or the destruction of the individual existence of the person Jesus persists – in the haunted community of his followers – as unredeemed. Exactly at this point the repeating second ressentiment takes action: because it must do without transcendence, yet cannot do without the promise of power and pleasure, the latter is given in a *quasi-resurrection* – the falsified 'triumph' conjured out of sheer nothingness, a triumph which should mean exactly the displeasure and powerlessness into which the death drive had previously, through the moral law of unconditioned expenditure, forced the acting subjects.[38]

Dropping Christ, whose double nature as God and human still allowed the resurrection problem to be speculatively stashed away, one now clearly notices empirically, by the supposedly 'triumphant' pleasure and power, the expressively inhibited violence of the act occurring in the indulgently legitimated 'uncanny *excess*'[39] (jouissance). Neither does the attempt to 'sublate' the demise of the individual through an immanent resurrection in the communal spirit, whether this is understood as political or religious,[40] improve the matter, since there again, the individual is now only collectively and not individually stimulated to

excess, and the dead are dead, and the perished destroyed. The basic error that continues to plague Žižek's construction still remains the previously outlined 'natural' identification of a sensed lack and its conceptual form, respectively displeasure and guilt, instead of its separation by means of a nature that splits itself into freedom first and the synthetic refiguring of the released elements afterwards – as Kant had suggested with freedom transformed into moral law and the material doctrine of postulates. As long as powerless earthly existence, symbolically eclipsed by the unpleasureably palpable presence of the all-object in the will – a presence which no theoretical or practical reflection can shake off or distance itself from – is enough to induce guilt, there is no enlightened ethics.[41] Moral agency itself remains, then, only an excess of natural displeasure and must leave its deviation from desire to an empty promise, because empirically this difference does not exist and can be forced conceptually only at the price of an ugly lie. Ethics should, according to the minimal determination of Kant, look for a communally reconcilable, just or good, consequentially also happy synchronization of manifold pleasures; whether those stem from pleasure or displeasure, want what's right for them or not, is stupidly dazed or astutely disillusioned: the agency of the death drive does not, however, for that purpose give the least clue.[42]

In this unfortunate construction lies the entire ethic of the death drive. It is little more than a reflex in desire, heteronomous in the norm, empty in its determinations and poisoned in its promise. The revolting act of disruption can only be seen as a 'triumph' in a 'magical field' invented deliberately for its destructive moment,[43] a field whose forcibly claimed effect, displeasure as pleasure and powerlessness as power, delivers in advance the emancipatory moment to the undead structure of desire and abandons the actual empirical reality to suffer alone in misery. This describes more correctly what Žižek most clearly seeks as the moral character of the agency of the death drive in its succession of Christ with one last turn: the 'triumph' should be understood contrafactually as an *Eingedenken* (remembrance) of a non-illusory moment in failure,[44] against which no objection can be made if the theory that was meant to do so actually succeeded. Yet the second ressentiment of the agency of the death drive wants *at the same time* the radical moral act *and* the *Eingedenken* of its failure, whereby the latter *must in the first place procure* the ethics of the former; the *Eingedenken* thus only presents the meditation of the insufficiency that it begins with, through which the noble intention naturally collapses. By the way, the *Eingedenken*-version as 'triumph' is also inappropriate in its psychological stylistics.

Kant with Nietzsche

With Kant and Nietzsche the same problem would find a different answer. Unlike Žižek, Kant demands through the concept of freedom a more sharply differentiated systematic of logic and the empirical, which is promoted and supported through Nietzsche's psychology of a this-worldly abundance. The talk of displeasure, powerlessness and failure has an indispensible therapeutic aspect, which can first be brought to bear clinically and politically, after one filters out the distorting undertones of the death-drive anthropology and its hidden and aggressive moralization. An alternative anthropology with Kant and Nietzsche would in this sense still be an ethics, because that is unavoidable (says Kant), but would also mean liberation from ethics, because the first ressentiment types of ethics that were endemic since Christian late antiquity had been unbearable (says Nietzsche). The criticism of the second ressentiment supplements that the production and distribution of such types have not been halted ever since. What that means for a psychologically enlightened understanding of practical reason that is nowhere simply 'pure' is available for further exploration, as long as one re-assesses the areas validly developed at the wellspring of the modern era by Kant and Nietzsche, without, of course, the common biases against both.

Notes

1   This is even more true when considering that classical metaphysics, too, was indebted to a hyperbole of the empirical. Its significant critics, Kant and Nietzsche as well as Heidegger, later identified in comparable ways the error in the *objectification of non-objective areas of knowledge*, although each has systematized this in respectively different ways. The second ressentiment basically does nothing other than the first and is 'enlightened' by metaphysics criticism only in so far as it rather commits the error precisely where 'objects' unquestionably can be hypostatized, namely in the empirical. The critics of metaphysics have also clearly known, each in different ways, that the criticism of 'objectification' must in fact also reach into this empirical area: Kant (empirical things are no *Dinge an sich*) and Nietzsche (empirical things only count as stimulating or beautiful) as well as Heidegger (the 'empirically' existant, against the background of a noncategorically understood being, also empirically resists categoriality). The second ressentiment is no more clever than the first; to a sloppy modernized theory, at first glance, it merely looks better. The completed criticism of ressentiment does not, after the

criticism of the first ressentiment, weaken into the second; but with the better-understood means of this criticism, it goes on to attack the second.

2   I explain the system-differentiating *cognitive* as opposed to *ethical* function of morals in Kant in Christoph Narholz, *Die Politik des Schönen* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, 2012), 164ff. ('Interpretation des Faktums: Freiheit, nicht Moral') and 280ff ('Die kognitive Sorgfaltspflicht der Moral'.)

3   I read Žižek in the way that Paul reads the rumour of Christ (cf. Slavoj Žižek: *Die Puppe und der Zwerg. Das Christentum zwischen Perversion und Subversion* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2003) 12) – without interest in the fables, the miraculous stories and the anecdotes, in short: the *myths*, but rather with a focus on the essential, in Žižek's case: the *concepts*. In the introduction to a new edition of *For They Know What They Do*, Žižek places this book alongside the earlier, better-known *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and emphasizes that the new work was for him 'the greater achievement':

>   For this book presents a theoretical *work*, as opposed to the series of anecdotes and film references in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. The individual readers' reactions presented for me a kind of test: the ones who noted that they were 'disappointed in it, found it a little boring, after all of the fireworks in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*', apparently missed the decisive argument of both books. Still today, my take on it is thus: those, who can't speak about *For They Know What They Do*, must be silent about *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

Slavoj Žižek, *Der Mut, den ersten Stein zu werfen* (Turia & Kant: Vienna, 2008), 9. Because the English and German versions of Žižek's books often differ significantly from each other, in the following all of the citations in English are my own translations from the German.

4   I have done this in my book (cf. note 2). One searches in vain for a Kantian eudaemonia in the literature. When one reads in Kant himself beyond the analyses of the categorical imperative (§§ 1–8 in *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*), the subsequent dialectics and doctrine of postulates (ibid., part one, second book), with its reason-based concept of happiness, deals with exactly that.

5   Slavoj Žižek, *Parallaxe* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 59–65 and 116–118; the same considerations in other books.

6   'In the shift of desire to drive we move from the *lost object* to *loss itself as an object*' (ibid., 60).

7   The 'difference between drive and desire consists precisely in that this break, this fixation to a partial object so to speak *transcendentalizes*, transforms into a placeholder for the void of the *thing*' (ibid., 63).

8   The 'elementary matrix of the drive is … that of "sticking" of libido to a particular object that it is condemned to encircle forever' (ibid.).

9 His concept remains precarious and has changed numerous times; an overview is given in the article 'Death Drives' in Jean Laplanche und Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1973), 494ff.

10 Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. In (ibid.) Studienausgabe, Volume III (Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 246.

11 'The drive is not the endless longing for the *thing* that is fixated to the partial object – the "drive" *is* this fixation itself, in which the "death" dimension of every drive lies' (Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 61f.).

12 Ibid., 60.

13 Ibid., 63.

14 Ibid., 61.

15 I use nouns for Žižek's verbs, ibid., 63.

16 Žižek, *Der Mut, den ersten Stein zu werfen*, 16.

17 The 'endless encircling of the object' would produce 'its own satisfaction' (Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 64); also in Lacan (ibid.): the *goal* of the drive as desire (to achieve pleasure repeatedly) is not the independent death-driving *aim* (a distinct pleasure of the repetition).

18 Ibid., 61.

19 Ibid., 63f.; also 39 and frequently elsewhere.

20 Referring to a concept by Eric Santner: 'stuckness' (ibid., 62).

21 The passage quoted above (cf. note 12) again (my italics): The '*elementary matrix* of the drive is … that of "sticking" of libido to a particular object that it is condemned to encircle *forever*.'

22 Ibid., 61.

23 KrV B 472ff.

24 Slavoj Žižek, *Die gnadenlose Liebe* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 147ff.

25 He is correct when he says that the modern subject must not first be 'deconstructed' or 'decentered', but instead is already that itself (Žižek, *Der Mut, den ersten Stein zu werfen*, 16); also his comments with regard to freedom in Kant often have the correct tendency (here, for example: *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 58f.), yet they assume in the transcendental structure a 'compromise' (the temptation to save an untouched transcendent area), which I don't support. Rather, Kant in principle has indeed already achieved what Hegel seeks and provides in a more fluid systematization (cf. *Parallaxe*, 36f.). Also, Kant himself does *not* see the difference of the *Ding an sich* and the phenomenological thing between these two (and thus does not achieve a *transcendent* thing), but rather places this difference w*ithin the transcendental subject* and only in so far also *between things 'themselves'*, as Žižek claims that Hegel does *in distinction* to Kant (cf. *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 72).

In Kant there is, in fact, *no* 'hard core' of reality, 'which resists the intervention of conceptualizing' (ibid.). Empirical resistance within the concepts indeed remains in Kant and Hegel, precisely *because* the supposed 'idealism' in both cases is *no longer* one in the metaphysical sense.

26 Žižek: *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 25f.

27 Ibid., 73.

28 For the same reason, in this perspective, the multiple confusions of pleasure and displeasure in mascochism or sadism play no role, just as, for example, the 'paradox of courtly love' ('desire holds me at a distance from the desired', cf. Žižek: *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 65) must not seem foreign to a psychology in Kant. Kant would in no way be disinterested in psychoanalysis; he just would continue to understand the difference between pleasure and logic more carefully. Of Kant's great discoveries, the formulation of a neutral pleasure concept was one of the greatest, in a language and systematics, for which, of course, in the late eighteenth century, there could have been no preparation. Therefore, even for Kant himself, it was difficult to leave the shadows of the indeed pleasure-denying categorical imperative. Not least for this reason, Kant's psychological concepts became commonly known only distortedly under the false impression of a quasi-metaphysical, obligatory ethics. Today after Nietzsche, the weight within the Kantian ethics can in fact be shifted.

29 Slavoj Žižek, *Körperlose Organe. Bausteine für eine Begegnung zwischen Deleuze und Lacan* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 112–130. Michael Tomasello, *Warum wir kooperieren* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010). Peter Sloterdijk, *Nicht gerettet. Versuche nach Heidegger* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), 142ff, as well as Sloterdijk, *Sphären III. Schäume* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 748–772. Also the chapter on self-consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the notorious section on the master-slave relationship ('Lordship and Bondage') does not yet speak of class conflict (Kojève) or the battle for recognition through desire (Lacan), but instead develops, following from the chapter on consciousness, where a consciousness stands opposed to 'things', at first merely the elementary concepts of any *practical* subjectivity, in which now two self-conscious subjects stand facing *one another*, among those elementary concepts, above all, the concept of freedom. 'Begierde' plays a role, yet not in the sense of Lacan's desire, but rather as *want for pleasure*, which certainly is mediated intersubjectively, and in so far is conceptually abstract, yet not principally unsatisfiable. Its concept is logical and is related to the sensory datum of pleasure (unsatisfied or satisfied), yet does not mean an absolutely withdrawn pleasure. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Felix Meiner Verlag: Hamburg, 1988), 120ff. (on 'Begierde', 123–136).

30 'Drive in opposition to instinct' (Žižek: *Parallaxe*, 62); the differentiation of desire and drive would affect 'the inner contortion which bends the libidinous space and

thus transforms instinct into drive' (ibid., 63); we become '"humans", when in a self-run cycle, we entangle ourselves in the constant repetition of the same gesture and our satisfaction from it' (ibid., 62).

31 Ibid., 61.

32 See Section 'The death drive, and how it has to fail above'.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 116f.

35 'Now we see why Freud uses the concept of the "death drive". Psychoanalysis teaches us that people are not only alive but are possessed by a strange drive to enjoy life beyond the normal course of things, and death stands simply for that dimension that goes beyond "common" biological life' (Žižek, *Die gnadenlose Liebe*, 137f.). What is meant by 'beyond "common" biological life' can be understood only as two-fold, namely as transcendent (in the sense of the first ressentiment) or moralistic (in the sense of the first and second ressentiments).

36 Žižek, *Die gnadenlose Liebe*, 21–27 and 124–139. Žižek recognizes 'transformation of failure in triumph' (*Parallaxe*, 117) also in the crucifixion.

37 Ibid., 27.

38 Nietzsche saw that priests were primarily responsible for the reversals of ressentiment, that is, Paul or the philosophers, not Jesus or the multitude of the powerless and displeased: these are, for a creative treatment of their misery, generally too miserable and usually already too dead. It remains for the followers and observers to exploit the disaster for their purposes.

39 Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 61.

40 The 'revolutionary collective or the Pauline collective of believers' (Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 347); the 'holy ghost' is what Freud would empirically locate in the death drive (Žižek after Lacan, *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 12); cf. also: *Die gnadenlose Liebe*, 25f. and 125f.

41 Žižek often shows appreciation for the 'violent "psychological force"' of the Christian insinuation 'that a deep flaw is inherent in the existence of man, that a monstrous burden weighs heavily on us, which we could never adequately be relieved of' (ibid., *Die gnadenlose Liebe*, 22). Above all the European subjects of ressentiment feel the discrete charm of this drama. The frisson of our lives in the dizziness of their flaws and failures can also be experienced without such a moralization. The subjects of modern times, just as those in enlightened Antiquity, become guilty through action, not by existence alone. Even the complicated case of the tragic – one acts 'without acting', the act becomes quasi-retrospectively an act and exacts the recognition of responsibility and guilt through the self-inflicted demise of the subject – does not present an exception. In this, the tragic differentiates itself from myth, which keeps action and demise under the dictates of the gods. Hegel thus can observe the first 'modern' form of subjectivity emerge after tragedy, in the formal person of the law (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 316ff.).

The turn that denotes the forgottenness of the law comes of course with Augustine, who in explaining a passage in Paul's Epistle to the Romans – God loves Jacob, yet hates Esau, which applies a priori to *both of the yet unborn in their mother's womb* (Romans 9, 13 and 11) – invents original sin, and for the mere assumption of its existence, sends humankind into condemnation for centuries to come.

42   Žižek knows of this problem, and addresses it on the occasion of a comparable passage in Heidegger, stating that the latter had inserted into his version of the death drive – the formalistically empty 'decisiveness' – the 'legacy of the community'; the contents of the 'authentic possibility of existence are, as he laconically adds, "not however to be taken from death"' (Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 348 according to Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Max Niemeyer Verlag: Tübingen, 2006), § 74). Žižek naturally declines to make reference to a given people, yet proves with his solution of a modernist community, built from reflection alone, that one certainly can 'take from death' the 'content' of a moral act (in so far as the expenditure command can be understood as such). We may recall that for Hegel the trial on the cross does not come to completion in the religious (to say nothing of course of the political) community, but rather with the philosophical concept. Correspondingly, with Kant one will determine the mere transcendental freedom as the foundation of practical concepts. The moral law ('determine the will of your action in an unconditional general way') may be formalistically 'empty', yet it remains through its obligation to freedom inseparable from agency and pleasure and at all times tied to changing social empirics (however politically understood); in this respect it has a 'content' that is in fact not yet unfolded in the negative Analytics (which stands at a distance from all content), but only unfolds synthetically with the Dialectics of the doctrine of postulates (cf. on this, in my book, *Die Politik des Schönen*, chapter V, 208ff.). In no sense is Kant's moral law a further case of the excessivity of the death drive, as Žižek, in accordance with Lacan, tries to present it at every opportunity (randomly chosen, for example here: *Die Puppe und der Zwerg*, 170–173).

43   Žižek, *Parallaxe*, 63.

44   Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Körperlose Organe*, 10 (those 'magical moments of illusory freedom, which to some extent were precisely not purely illusory, as well as the hopes, which were shot down through the return to "normal" reality'); or here: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 27f. He makes similar comments on Benjamin, who lies clearly in the background here, in: Slavoj Žižek, *Der erhabenste aller Hysteriker. Psychoanalyse und die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (Turia & Kant: Vienna and Berlin, 1992), 151ff. especially 159ff.

Part Three

Ressentiment and Democracy

The Return of Ressentiment

Merijn Oudenampsen

A series of editorials and opinion pieces declared 2016 to be the 'Year of the Angry Voter'. In an eponymous op-ed in the *New York Times*, Jennifer Boylan described her estrangement from a country where everybody seemed to be angry, from Bernie Sanders to Donald Trump. Everybody, except Boylan herself. 'I turn on the television, and I see a land where to be a citizen means to specialize in the venting of spleen.' The op-ed proceeds to distinguish between anger as a transformative passion and anger as a form of narcissistic wrath. In contrast to the passion that is instrumental in effecting change, Boylan portrays the present anger in the United States as the latter version: a circuitous loop, lacking a destination – 'apparently it's vitriol itself, rather than any particular strategy for the future, that's propelling the electorate'. In Dante's *Inferno*, Boylan subtly cautions her readers, 'the Angry dwell in the fifth circle in hell. They trash it out in the river Styx.'[1]

The *New York Times* op-ed is illustrative of a larger emotional turn in the public debate. In hindsight, the nineties formed the apex of the belief in the rationality of the citizen. Libraries could be filled with the books written on deliberative democracy. Habermas experienced triumphs with his theory of communicative rationality. That optimism has faded. The electorate appears to have lost confidence in existing political elites, increasingly turning to a protest vote. At the other end, elite distrust in the reasonableness of the ordinary citizen is on the rise, leading to the current emphasis on irrationality and emotion in the public debate. More specifically, the *New York Times* op-ed is illustrative of the wider resurgence of a particular conception of anger that contains striking parallels to the philosophical concept of ressentiment as elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche and the German-Jewish philosopher Max Scheler. They defined ressentiment as a form of political anger that does not seek a clear remedy. It is this particular conception of irremediable political discontent that appears

to resurface in current discussions on the angry voter. Sometimes the notion of ressentiment is mentioned explicitly; more often, it recurs in more implicit and ambiguous forms.

In so doing, the concept of ressentiment seems to have traversed a curious trajectory. Nietzsche and Scheler originally conceived ressentiment as a critique of the striving towards egalitarianism. What is surprising, then, is that at present, the notion of ressentiment is mobilized to explain the rise of right-wing populist movements whose agenda is, in important respects, decidedly inegalitarian. Ressentiment seems to have changed political colour, or at least the movements that the term is applied to. Whether it's the backlash against feminism, the revulsion against welfare dependents or the aversion to minorities and immigrants, these inegalitarian concerns animating right-wing populism are now associated with ressentiment. In this shift from one side of the political spectrum to another, a second important transformation seems to have occurred: a concept that originally referred to a state of simmering, silent passivity is now seen as the psychological key to interpret the explosive, boisterous activity of right-wing populist movements.

In this chapter, I will use the Dutch case as an illustration of this peculiar evolution of the political usage of the term. At the turn of the millennium, the meteoric rise of the charismatic right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn led to a series of concerned reactions from Dutch journalists, intellectuals and academics. To explain the 2002 landslide election victory of Fortuyn's right-wing populist party, the term 'ressentiment' or 'rancour' enjoyed a remarkable revival. It entered the Dutch public debate either in a literal sense or in a more vague and widespread idea of the 'spoilt voter' or 'pampered consumer' who votes out of jealousy and spite. The more general view was that the ideal of equality was at the root of the animosity leading to the populist revolt.

Seeing that there is little empirical basis to support such a claim in the Netherlands, the question emerges why ressentiment has enjoyed such renewed popularity as an analytical tool. Looking through the lens of ressentiment doesn't necessarily make sense of the emergence of right-wing populism, but it does offer us an insight into the elitist political mindset of those that use the term. Here, Frederic Jameson's argument seems to be relevant: that ressentiment should be understood first and foremost in terms of its political purpose rather than its analytical strength or logical consistency. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson argues – in rather polemical fashion – that the use of the term 'ressentiment' after its invention by Nietzsche shows its fundamentally political function.[2] Jameson refers to Hippolyte Taine's writing on the French Revolution

and states that ressentiment functions to explain revolt and revolution in two different ways. First, it accounts for popular mass uprisings through a reductionist psychology rather than material factors, by invoking the destructive envy that the have-nots harbour for the haves. In so doing, the deployment of the term 'ressentiment' tends to delegitimize mass revolt against the established hierarchical order, of which the author in question 'is concerned to demonstrate the essential wholesomeness and organic or communitarian virtue'. Second, *ressentiment* can also account for the behaviour of the leaders of such popular revolts, whose private dissatisfactions lead them to their vocations as political and revolutionary militants. Jameson points to the 'unavoidably autoreferential' structure of the term – there is a circular quality to the argument: the desire for equality leads to ressentiment and ressentiment, through a reversal of values, leads to the desire for equality. Jameson qualifies ressentiment as 'little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation, at the apparently quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat'. The theory of ressentiment, Jameson concludes, 'wherever it appears, will always itself be the production and the expression of ressentiment'.[3]

Following Jameson, my primary interest here does not lie in the original philosophical meaning of the term. The focus will be on the political function of its latter day adaptation, to ward off claims from popular protest movements. Originally, the term 'ressentiment' was employed to express suspicion of the progressive, egalitarian ideals that informed the nineteenth-century movements pushing for emancipation and/or revolution. With the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s, an important change occurred in the usage of the term. German conservatives such as Hermann Rauschning mobilized the work of Nietzsche and Scheler to criticize Nazism from the right. In the Netherlands, the leading essayist and literary critic Menno ter Braak took up this new usage of the term in the 1930s, blaming egalitarianism and democracy for the rise of National Socialism. On closer inspection, this shift in the application of the term 'ressentiment' from the left to the right is analytically dubious, including current debates about right-wing populism. But it certainly seems to confirm Fredric Jameson's suspicions.

Ressentiment and resentment

Before we continue, it is necessary to expand on the distinction between 'ressentiment' and 'resentment'. The two terms are often used interchangeably

in both academic and public debates, leading to a high degree of conceptual confusion and ambiguity. Following Nicolas Demertzis, it seems helpful to distinguish between a 'Nietzschean' and a 'non-Nietzschean' use of these terms, and to associate ressentiment solely with the 'Nietzschean' perspective, and resentment with the 'non-Nietzschean' view.[4] The chief distinction between the two concepts can then be sketched as follows: resentment conceives of anger at injustice as something that could be legitimate and productive. It is conceived as a form of 'righteous indignation', the concept used by Sennett and Cobb in their well-known study of the attitudes of the American working class.[5] Feelings of resentment can inform action. Class resentment, the sociologist Barbalet suggests in illustrative manner, is the motor of class struggle.[6] Ressentiment, in contrast, is a wholly negative perspective on the emotional aversion to inequality. In the eyes of Nietzsche, ressentiment is a self-destructive emotion of the weak, without redeeming features. Scheler defined ressentiment as a 'self-poisoning of the mind' leading to 'value delusions'.[7] For both Nietzsche and Scheler, ressentiment is characterized by passivity and powerlessness. The word 'ressentiment' also has a subtly different charge in everyday usage. As Manfred Frings argues in his introduction to Scheler's study, 'the French word possesses a peculiar strong nuance of a lingering hate that our English word "resentment" does not always carry'.[8] While resentment certainly implies some degree of animosity, ressentiment has an added connotation of a lasting bitterness.

Some scholars have tried to rework the concept of ressentiment, in an attempt to divest it of its overwhelming negativity. Barbalet argues, for instance, that Nietzsche and Scheler have invested ressentiment with a self-destructive form of anger and impotence that are not necessarily empirically present in social reality. The concept of ressentiment may be better understood, Barbalet proposes, as a just and logical reaction to unjust conditions. While this criticism is certainly justified, to want to change the meaning of a concept associated with one of the world's most famous philosophers seems to be a rather fruitless project. Arguably, the more realistic approach is to accept the term as it is and to clearly distinguish ressentiment from resentment.[9]

For Nietzsche, ressentiment was the preserve of the weak and the oppressed who lacked the capability to take meaningful action, and therefore took recourse to an imaginary revenge. They exacted their retaliation first through Christian religion, where weakness is posited as virtue and strength as sin; and later in socialism and other egalitarian or democratic ideals. This, in short, comprises Nietzsche's 'slave revolt in morality'. The ressentiment of slave morality was characterized above all by a reactive attitude, and defined its values negatively in

opposition to noble morality. In contrast, Nietzsche posited that noble morality does not need an outside to define itself against; it 'springs from a triumphant acceptance and affirmation of oneself'. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Scheler followed in Nietzsche's footsteps. While absolving Christianity, Scheler traced democracy, socialism and the life of women to ressentiment. The men that associated themselves with socialists and suffragettes were described by Scheler in no uncertain terms as 'stooping to the small, the lowly, and the common'. Their affected 'social conscience' was nothing but a disguise for resentful self-hatred.[10]

Scheler's polemical treatise became the single most famous and influential exposition of the affliction of ressentiment. In the traditional order, ressentiment had not been a pervasive sentiment. People were confined by their fixed positions in the social hierarchy and did not compare themselves to others so easily. Departing from Nietzsche's reading, not Christianity but the French Revolution is for Scheler the key episode in the emergence of ressentiment as a generalized phenomenon. It is the fruit of modern democracy with its ideals of equality and social mobility. Precisely the gap between the formal equality of citizens in modern democracies and the natural substantive inequalities that remain forms an unrelenting source of ressentiment, since people are unequal by nature.

The theory of ressentiment became so influential because it formed the tail end of a larger nineteenth-century tradition of anxious conservative theorizing concerning the challenge posed from below by emancipatory movements. The participation of broader sections of the population in politics, in particular the lower classes and women, was seen as a challenge to traditional authority. For conservative elites, it was perceived as a threat to both the established hierarchical structures and the value systems that adorned those structures with legitimacy. In his *Democracy in America*, for instance, Alexis De Tocqueville offers a very similar critique of democracy to that contained in Scheler's notion of ressentiment:

> The fact must not be concealed that democratic institutions develop the sentiment of envy in the human heart to a very high degree, not so much because they offer each person the means to become equal to others, but because these means constantly fail those who use them. Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passion for equality without ever being able to satisfy it entirely. Every day, at the moment when people believe they have grasped complete equality, it escapes from their hands and flees, as Pascal says, in an eternal flight. People become heated in search of this good, all the more precious since it is close enough to be known, but far enough away not to be savoured. The chance to

succeed rouses the people; the uncertainty of success irritates them. They get agitated, grow weary, become embittered. Then, everything that is in some way beyond them seems an obstacle to their desires, and there is no superiority, however legitimate, that they do not grow tired of seeing.[11]

In his groundbreaking 1897 study *Suicide*, the sociologist Émile Durkheim described a similar logic. Any society will have a value system in place decreeing the relative standing that is accorded to different societal ranks. Both in a time of deep economic crisis and in a time of an abrupt growth in wealth, the old value system enters into crisis. The late nineteenth century, Durkheim argues, is an example of the latter form of crisis, a time when 'aristocratic prejudices began to lose their old ascendancy', and when increased prosperity and social mobility led to a loosening of restraints on aspirations.

> Some particular class especially favoured by the crisis is no longer resigned to its former lot, and, on the other hand, the example of its greater good fortune arouses all sorts of jealousy below and about it. Appetites, not being controlled by a public opinion become disoriented, no longer recognize the limits proper to them. … With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining.[12]

It is this context of emerging democracy and improperly restrained aspirations that the theory of *ressentiment* seeks to address. At the same time, the work of Nietzsche and Scheler can be seen as an expression of the receding 'aristocratic prejudices' mentioned by Durkheim. It is exactly the sense of aristocratic decline that informs Scheler's work with such a barely veiled feeling of bitterness and aversion towards the lower classes. There is a tension in the theory of *ressentiment*: it has a reactive quality, focusing negatively on the ambitions of others rather than the 'triumphant acceptance and affirmation of oneself' that forms the hallmark of Nietzsche's noble morality. This is what Jameson appears to refer to when he argues that the theory of ressentiment, 'wherever it appears, will always itself be the production and the expression of ressentiment'.[13]

According to Nietzsche and Scheler, the source of ressentiment is a desire for revenge that remains unfulfilled and cannot be expressed, due to the inferiority of the person experiencing ressentiment. The result is an attitude of general negativity and vindictiveness, defined by its opposition to constructive improvements, here described by Scheler:

> This peculiar kind of '*ressentiment* criticism' is characterized by the fact that improvements in the conditions criticized cause no satisfaction – they merely cause discontent, for they destroy the growing pleasure afforded by invective and negation. Many modern political parties will be extremely annoyed by a partial satisfaction of their demands or by the constructive participation of their representatives in public life, for such participation mars the delight of oppositionism. It is peculiar to '*ressentiment* criticism' that it does not seriously desire that its demands be fulfilled. It does not want to cure the evil: the evil is merely a pretext for the criticism.[14]

Ressentiment leads to a reversal of values. The resentful person is like the fox in Aesop's fable *The Fox and the Grapes*, who convinces himself that the grapes are sour since he cannot get hold of them, while they are, in reality, sweet. The logic is as follows: at first, the resentful person admires what he does not possess – prestige, power, beauty, education and so forth – but soon he or she starts to devalue these qualities, turning towards valuing the very opposite. 'In ressentiment morality, love for the "small", the "poor", the "weak", and the "oppressed" is really disguised hatred, repressed envy, an impulse to detract, etc., directed against the opposite phenomena: "wealth", "strength", "power", "largesse".[15] This upside-down morality is not restricted to the individual; it forms a generalized societal dynamic in which the dominant values in a society can become increasingly contested.

The theory of ressentiment and the reversal of values resurfaced in the debates on right-wing populism in the 2000s. Illustrative is the writing of one of the leading scholars of populism, Hans-Georg Betz, who argued that 'populist rhetoric is designed to tap feelings of ressentiment and exploit them politically'. Following the logic posited by Nietzsche and Scheler, populists are claimed to pursue a reversal of values, by negating the values of existing political elites and institutions.[16] In what follows, we will trace the origins of the resurgence of the term 'ressentiment' in the Dutch debate on populism.

Fortuyn and ressentiment

The meteoric rise to political stardom of the charismatic right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn at the turn of the millennium led to a series of concerned reactions from Dutch intellectuals and academics. To explain the 2002 landslide election victory of his right-wing populist party LPF, the term 'ressentiment', or *rancune* (rancour), enjoyed a marked revival. Querying the literature in the years

after Fortuyn's election breakthrough, one finds a chorus of voices centring on ressentiment, a melody that at first is initiated in a staccato stream of newspaper articles, only to be consolidated into the more adagio flow of academic publications and popular scientific books. A crucial reference that emerges in the literature in the year of the populist electoral breakthrough is Menno ter Braak. Inspired by Scheler and Nietzsche, he used the theory of ressentiment or rancour to explain the rise of National Socialism in 1937:

> It is the ideal of equality that, given the biological and sociological impossibility of equality between people, promotes rancour in society to a power of the first degree; those who are not equal to others, but wish to be equal nonetheless, are not being told off with reverence to rank or caste, but are awarded a premium![17]

Some, like the prominent journalists Rob Hartmans and Henk Hofland, literally referred to Ter Braak to explain the electoral revolt.[18] Kees Schuyt, one of the leading Dutch sociologists, also used Ter Braak and Scheler to explain the rising tensions between immigrant youth and the white working class living in the old popular neighbourhoods. In this reading, both groups suffered frustration from the inability to acquire scarce goods and blamed each other. They projected their own dissatisfaction, concealed shame and hidden anger on the other group.[19] Another example is the best-selling polemic *The Eternal Return of Fascism* by the social democrat philosopher Rob Riemen, a study portraying right-wing populism as a form of fascism stemming from the ressentiment and cultural degeneration of the masses, inspired by Ter Braak and Ortega y Gasset.[20] Similarly, one of the country's foremost public intellectuals, Paul Scheffer, warned of the ressentiment of Muslims and pleaded for the government oversight of mosques.[21]

Others used different words to communicate a very similar logic: namely that of the electorate as 'spoilt consumers' who voted out of jealousy or envy. Of course, the enigma that had to be explained is how a popular revolt could occur in a time of considerable economic wealth and rising disposable incomes. Here, the logic of relative deprivation offered a solution. Just as growing equality and democratization lead to ressentiment in the eyes of Ter Braak, here it is the rise in prosperity of the masses that leads to a popular revolt by 'spoilt voters'. Ressentiment is present in the form of a 'jealousy model' or an 'envy system' introduced by the philosopher Bas van Stokkom to describe the petit bourgeois and nouveau riche that have done well, but feel they deserve even better.[22] The influential economist Arnold Heertje and leading political theorist Jos de Beus stated after the 2002 elections that a combination of Alexis de Tocqueville and disposable income could explain 90 per cent of the populist vote. Traditional

rules had already been undermined in the Netherlands by the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the eyes of De Beus, the leftist movements of the 1960s could be reduced to a similar Tocquevillian logic as the right-wing revolt in 2002, since both emerged in a time of increasing prosperity. In addition, the two scholars referred to the work of Émile Durkheim to explain how a rise in affluence, and the resulting uninhibited aspirations, could lead to frustration.

> The prosperous citizen, as a consumer, becomes more and more critical of the service provision of the government. Frustration increases because services are not sufficient, De Beus argues. 'The spoilt voter is born: policy is relatively successful but the voter isn't satisfied.'[23]

There was no lack of similar statements, either from the right or from the left. Hans Dijkstal, the leader of the liberal party, called voters 'spoilt divas'.[24] *The Economist* wrote of the spoilt voter seeking spectacle, excitement and a frequent change of political scenery. Spoilt voters were said to choose Fortuyn out of apolitical motives: merely for his entertainment value.[25] The left-wing economist Jan Pen argued that citizens voted on the basis of a jealousy model: if their neighbours or brother-in-law earned more, they wanted more too. It was jealousy that led to the turn to the private sector, and the dominance of the right. The 'collective sector', or rather the left, had become a dirty word.[26] Philosopher Pieter Pekelharing, associated with the left-wing Dutch green party GroenLinks, argued that 'self-assertion had simply gone too far', resulting in feelings of ressentiment and rancour. 'Everyone has equal opportunities in our present society, and therefore there is no one to blame for one's lack of success, leading those at the bottom to seek recourse to insults.'[27]

This was echoed by a broader array of voices that explained the turnabout as a resentful rebellion against meritocracy. Scheler's argument, echoed by Ter Braak, was that the ideal of equality generated ressentiment, not because of some inherent quality of the egalitarian ideal itself but because true equality simply cannot be realized. This line of argumentation returns in 2002 in the Netherlands, along somewhat different political coordinates, since it no longer refers to equality as such, but to the meritocratic notion of equal opportunities. An oft-recurring name in the literature is that of the British sociologist Michael Young, who wrote the dystopian satire *The Rise of Meritocracy* in 1958. The tale opens in the year 2034, when the fictive narrator looks back on the historical evolution of the perfect meritocratic society. In 2033 and 2034 riots ensue; ultimately the narrator is killed because the masses, driven by ressentiment and rancour, aren't satisfied with their inferior social position. The lesson Dutch

intellectuals draw from this tale by leads in different political directions. For more conservative authors, the problem ought to be solved by some degree of return to the hierarchical institutional infrastructure of pillarization.[28] For centre left authors such as Mark Bovens and Evelien Tonkens, who see meritocratic inequality as a dominant and broadly accepted notion in the Netherlands due to its adoption by Third Way social democracy, more political and socio-economic equality are needed.[29] The main problem, however, is not considered to be inequality as such, but rather the lack of stability that such a meritocratic system entails, due to the ressentiment of the masses.

Large segments of the Dutch intelligentsia sought to explain the right-wing populist election breakthrough by way of ressentiment. The intensity with which the theme has resurged is revealing, above all for the relative lack of empirical evidence supporting such an explanation. Surveying the polls and the available data on the electorate of Fortuyn, political scientists were quick to point out that it was wrong to see the LPF as a party mobilizing solely the lower classes.[30] They noted only a minor overrepresentation of the lower educated and lower incomes, leading to the conclusion that the Fortuyn electorate formed a relatively representative reflection of the Dutch population. The logical conclusion was that 'explanations for the success of Fortuyn that focus on the mobilization of a specific sociologically circumscribed group' were not backed up by the survey data.[31] In terms of voter motivations, nothing could be found suggesting that voters acted irrationally, or were motivated in a qualitatively different way than the rest of the electorate. The primary concerns animating the wave of electoral revolt were crime and safety issues and immigration, suggesting that resentful economic concerns weren't even a direct part of the equation. As Philip van Praag noted soberly, it was the relative absence of economic motivations that explains the predominance of the cultural issues as foregrounded by Fortuyn.

Really, any sensible person could see that these explanations are somewhat curious and contradictory. If the right-wing populist electorate was so concerned about meritocracy and losing the rat race, why would they vote for Fortuyn? He had a clearly neoliberal programme, celebrating the market's allocation mechanism as a form of democracy superior to the state. And why would those jealous of the economic success of their peers not seek to curtail income differences by way of state redistribution? Why, in fact, would they vote for the market and not the collective sector? Why would those who wanted more and better public service vote for someone who likened himself to Thatcher and proposed to dismiss half of all public sector workers? It just doesn't seem to make much sense.

If ressentiment cannot explain the electoral breakthrough of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, what does explain the rise of the term 'ressentiment'? Of course it is normal that some degree of random speculation ensues when seismic shifts occur in the political landscape. However, the sheer quantity and diversity of voices taking up the term 'ressentiment' would suggest that something more is going on here. At this point, it is useful to return to Jameson's thesis that ressentiment should above all be understood in terms of its political function of discrediting protest from below. Jameson writes of 'ressentiment' as an 'ostensible "theory"': the shortcomings of the term as a tool of sociological analysis are clearly visible, and can also be found in Ter Braak's renowned essay on National Socialism, which has served as inspiration for the Dutch intellectual perspective on populism.

National Socialism as a doctrine of *ressentiment*

Menno ter Braak, widely seen as the most important Dutch critic and essayist of the interwar period, published the now famous essay *Het nationaal-socialisme als rancuneleer* (National Socialism as a doctrine of ressentiment) in 1937. Ter Braak's essay is largely inspired by Nietzsche, Scheler and Rauschning, and it uses the terms 'ressentiment' and 'rancour' interchangeably. It was written as part of his activity in the *Comité van Waakzaamheid* (Committee of Vigilance) against National Socialism, a diverse group of intellectuals that had assembled to raise consciousness concerning the dangers of National Socialism. One of their main contributions was to oppose the growing anti-Semitism in the Dutch public discourse. When the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, Ter Braak committed suicide and after the war, his figure continued to loom large in the Dutch intellectual landscape.

National Socialism, according to Ter Braak, is a movement driven by ressentiment. That ressentiment, however, is not unique to National Socialism; it is an essential aspect of our culture. This is because our culture tends to award people equal rights. And when equality is seen as a right, really existent inequality tends to be viewed as injustice. We see here the aforementioned circular logic: Ter Braak, following Nietzsche, argues that ressentiment has led to the idea of equal rights by way of Christianity. He writes of the 'secularization of the Christian idea of the equality of souls before God and that cannot be thought outside of our Christian heritage'.[32] And that idea of equal rights leads in turn to ressentiment.

Ter Braak relies heavily on Scheler. But Scheler wrote his main study on ressentiment in 1912, before the rise of fascism, targeting progressive ideals. And Scheler died in 1928, before the establishment of the Nazi regime. Ter Braak tries to retrace National Socialism to the same *ressentimental origin*. To do so, he has to depict fascism not as it is generally seen, as a deeply hierarchical, antidemocratic and counterrevolutionary ideology, the product of the fusion of radical conservatism and anti-rationalist syndicalism. No, for Ter Braak, National Socialism is an outgrowth of egalitarian ideals, the French Revolution and Rousseau, whom Ter Braak refers to as 'the ideal type of the rancourous man'.[33] 'National Socialism is not the contrary but the fulfilment of democracy and socialism, not the emasculation but the perversion of democracy and socialism'.[34] In other words, National Socialism is an excess of democracy, which should lead us to contain democracy, a project to be pursued after the defeat of National Socialism. In the concluding paragraph, Ter Braak calls for Dutch intellectuals to adopt an 'opportunistic' alliance with democracy against National Socialism.[35]

Of course, the intellectual history of fascism, the work of Robert Paxton or Zeev Sternhell for example, tells a rather different story. Sternhell's argument, developed in *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* and *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, is that fascism is an outgrowth of the intellectual revolt against the Enlightenment, against Rousseau, against egalitarianism, against democracy.[36] And Nietzsche, Sternhell argues, who lent the stamp of genius to anti-rationalism and anti-universalism, was at the core of that anti-egalitarian revolt. The problem for Ter Braak, himself profoundly influenced by Nietzsche, is that Dutch intellectuals who sympathized with fascism did so with an appeal to Nietzsche: 'they write quite calmly about "Nietzsche, Spengler and Hitler", as if one is not obliged to rinse one's mouth before that "and"'.[37] Hitler, at that time, had claimed Nietzsche as his main philosophical inspiration, presenting a wreath ('to a great fighter') at Nietzsche's grave, and posing for a photograph in front of a bust of Nietzsche. Oswald Spengler, whose thinking had been profoundly shaped by Nietzsche, voted for Hitler in the 1932 presidential elections and welcomed the Nazi power grab of 1933 as 'Prussian through and through'.[38] Spengler had long argued that Germany needed war to establish an imperial world order led by the German race.

> A true International is only possible as the victory of the idea of a single race over all the others, and not as the mixture of all separate opinions into one colourless mass. … There is but one end to all the conflict, and that is death – the death of individuals, of peoples, of cultures. … The true International is

imperialism, domination of Faustian civilization, i.e., of the whole earth, by a single formative principle, not by appeasement and compromise but by conquest and annihilation.[39]

The line 'Nietzsche, Spengler and Hitler' – taken as a contingent genealogy rather than a reductionist equation or teleology – is an apt description of historical reality and the role of Germany's radical conservative intellectuals.[40] The solution that Ter Braak proposes, aimed at exonerating Nietzsche and in fact positioning Nietzsche at the very opposite end of National Socialism, is that of ressentiment: it denies the discomforting radical conservative inspirations for National Socialism and shifts the responsibility to the progressive camp of egalitarianism and democracy; the latter is described by Ter Braak as 'the most contestable principle that one can think of'.[41] Writing in a period in which a political threat was present from both the left and the right, Ter Braak uses ressentiment as a way to conflate and contest both, blaming democracy and egalitarianism for the totalitarian threat – a theme that liberal-conservative intellectuals such as Friedrich Hayek and Isaiah Berlin would continue to pursue in the Cold War. Ressentiment thus became the armour of the embattled political centre of liberal conservatism.

To illustrate his assertion that National Socialism was a product of democratic egalitarianism, Ter Braak quotes Scheler extensively on what he describes as 'the critique of ressentiment': 'The critique of ressentiment', Ter Braak quotes Scheler, 'is characterized by the fact that it doesn't really want what it claims to want; it doesn't criticize in order to eradicate the evil, but uses evil as a pretext for a flood of abuse'.[42]

The problem here is that National Socialism did not stick to the script that Scheler had written. If ressentiment according to Ter Braak is 'opposition out of principle; hating to hate'; 'with loud bellowing demanding something one does not want altogether, because fulfilment would only restrict the possibilities to hate' – in other words, if ressentiment is defined by a dissatisfaction that does not seek any constructive or practical remedy – then National Socialism is not a doctrine of ressentiment.[43] There is no question of ressentiment, Scheler argued, when the seeker of revenge really acts and avenges himself, when the person consumed by hatred actually damages his enemy. The painful reality is that National Socialism defined the Jews as the enemy, and subsequently went on 'to eradicate the evil', to use Scheler's words. National Socialism is far too hands-on, too practical, too constructive, so to speak, to fit in Scheler's framework of ressentiment.

The effect of Ter Braak's analysis is to downplay the intellectual inspirations of National Socialism and the prominent involvement of aristocratic conservatives

in the rise of the Nazi regime. In the eyes of someone deeply influenced by Nietzsche, aristocrats simply couldn't be ressentimental. As Ter Braak concluded, 'Not in the feverish realm of its romantic depth, but on its treacherous, unrestrained surface will one get to know National Socialism according to its true nature, because it is the surface that betrays that these aristocrats are perverted democrats.'[44]

Ressentiment as a conservative critique of Nazism

Ter Braak's essay should be seen in the larger framework of the German political and intellectual reality. He was in close contact with the radical conservative Hermann Rauschning, who had joined the Nazi Party but left in protest in 1934. After fleeing Germany, Rauschning became the world's most influential conservative critic of the Nazis. The most prominent of these critiques can be found in his books *Die Revolution des Nihilismus* (Revolution of Nihilism) and *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Hitler Speaks), both translated into Dutch and introduced by Menno ter Braak. Rauschning was a representative of the larger *Konservative Revolution* movement, a current of radical conservative intellectuals comprising figures such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Edgar Jung, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt and Oswald Spengler. This aristocratic conservative current, deeply influenced by Nietzsche, had engaged in an unstable alliance with the Nazis in the Weimar period, described by historians as a fatal 'marriage of convenience'.[45]

This devil's pact, as Rauschning calls it, lasted until the 1933 coup when the Nazis usurped power and could rid themselves of their previous allies. Nazi ideology consisted to an important degree of a vulgarization of the themes developed by the intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution*. The notion of the Third Reich was the central concept in the work of Moeller van den Bruck, who employed it to propose an authoritarian conservative-socialist regime that could unite all classes. Spengler, too, popularized the term; in his *Untergang des Abendlandes*, he referred to the 'Third Reich' as the 'Germanic ideal', 'an eternal morning' that 'every great man from Joachim of Floris to Nietzsche and Ibsen has linked his life to'.[46] The Nazis appropriated the term and in a broader sense used Moeller's book *Das Dritte Reich* (The Third Reich, 1923) and Spenglers's *Preussentum and Socialismus* (Prussianism and Socialism, 1919) as key inspirations for their doctrine of National Socialism. According to intellectual historians, the members of the *Konservative Revolution* (here described as 'neo-conservatives') intellectually facilitated the Nazi regime.

[B]oth movements were counterrevolutionary agents in the Republic and appealed to the worst instincts of the population. The vicious charges of the neo-conservatives against the political parties, the Weimar 'system', or the Western powers, their mere use (with whatever mental reservations) of the new glittering vocabulary – words like 'myth', 'totality', and 'race' – were but grist for the Nazi propaganda mill. That is why the initial alienation of the neo-conservative forces from the Republic was so fatal an event. It paved the way for the Rightist intelligentsia to serve the aims of the Nazi revolution.[47]

As Rauschning observed in *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, it was the conservative revolutionary belief that they could use the Nazi movement for their own ends that set them on the ultimately disastrous path of allying themselves with the Nazi regime: 'Some of the monarchist groups expected themselves to become the new upper class of the National Socialist mass movement, and their anticipation helped in no small degree to bring into existence the "combination" of 1933.'[48] After the 1933 parliamentary coup, the conservative revolutionary movement became increasingly critical of the Nazis, while the Nazis in their turn started to persecute the conservative revolutionary movement. Some members of the *Konservative Revolution* current, such as Rauschning, fled to the United States; others, such as Jung, were persecuted and killed; some went into *Innere Emigration*, such as Spengler, and again others relented and joined the NSDAP.

The members of the *Konservative Revolution* were in a difficult position. They could not criticize the Nazis for their appeal to myth and irrationality, since they themselves had done so. They could not criticize the Nazis for their rejection of democracy, their celebration of power for power's sake and their anti-intellectual philosophy of the deed, since they themselves had celebrated these very things. They could not criticize the Nazis for being violent revolutionaries or millenarian militarists, since they themselves defended violent revolution and millenarian militarism. An important point of difference is that Moeller, Spengler and Jünger rejected the strictly biological race theories of the Nazis, but again, they themselves had made (more socio-cultural) racial theory mainstream in Germany. In 1933, there wasn't much that they could blame the Nazis for that did not apply to their own ideas. One of the more illuminating lines of criticism by radical conservatives, also employed by Ter Braak, is that the Nazis were '*terrible simplificateurs*', as if pleading for a more nuanced and intellectually accomplished National Socialism.[49]

It is in this context that the theme of ressentiment came to the fore. For radical conservative critics, ressentiment provided a useful means of attacking the Nazis, while setting up a barrier between their own radical conservative

ideas and Nazi ideology. According to Rauschning, National Socialism did not present a path out of nihilism, as the Nazi ideologues stated; to the contrary, it was the ultimate embodiment of nihilist opportunism. Dynamism and mobilization had become means in and of themselves, Rauschning claimed, and National Socialist ideology was merely a masquerade. The Nazi elite did not really believe in concepts such as race, *Volk*, *Lebensraum*, not even in anti-Semitism. He depicted Nazi ideology as a doctrineless revolution determined by ressentiment, while describing Hitler as 'living in a world of ressentiment and vengefulness'.[50] Rauschning's influential analysis served to deny the considerable overlaps between the two currents. His work went on to influence prominent intellectuals such as Menno ter Braak, Leo Strauss and Walter Lippmann. Of course, this line of criticism did not necessarily fit with Nietzsche's and Scheler's work, but scholarly precision was somewhat less of a priority in this period.

Conclusion

The differences between ressentiment and resentment have obvious political implications. The use of the word 'resentment' seems to be coterminous with a generally progressive perspective on the emotional opposition to inequality. In contrast, the term 'ressentiment' stems from a more conservative viewpoint, in which inequality is conceived as a fact of nature and the emotional opposition to perceived injustice is ultimately portrayed as senseless and even harmful. This age-old political dimension of the study of emotions persists in contemporary debates about the angry voter.

As an illustration of this thesis, let's conclude by briefly referring to the different paths that follow from resentment. A series of recent studies has analysed voter discontent in the United States through the lens of resentment.[51] The argument, roughly, is that the resentment stemming from increasingly precarious living and working conditions is actively transposed through political discourse onto the terrain of culture.

> Discourses of resentment encode reactions to a sense of loss, powerlessness, and disenfranchisement; they consolidate feelings of fear, anger, bitterness, and shame. Instead of targeting the institutions, policies and actors at the heart of the economic and social problems, however, discourses of resentment target groups who appear to have risen – including feminists and various other 'minority' groups such as people of colour, immigrants, and lesbians and gays – when others have fallen.

Similarly, in his book *The Politics of Resentment*, Jeremy Engels argues that the explosion of resentment in our present-day politics is nothing new. What is new is that politicians have found an innovative way of leveraging resentment. Whereas the resentment of the masses once made the elites tremble, now politicians actively engage in the cultivation of resentment, turning citizen against citizen. Resentment has become a primary rhetorical instrument for managing democracy and restraining the power of the *demos*, by dividing it against itself.

> These leaders encourage citizens to direct our resentment not at an economic system that benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and numerous, but instead at our civic equals. … Yet this rhetoric never provides the salvation it promises. It frustrates citizens' desires while upholding the very structures that inflame civic resentment in the first place.[52]

Here it is not the feeling of resentment itself that precludes an improvement of conditions. It is the way political elites exploit resentment that channel these feelings in a direction that fails to offer redemption. An analysis based on the Nietzschean and Schelerian theory of ressentiment tends to lead to a qualitatively different outcome, as we have seen in the Dutch case. When using ressentiment, it is not the lack of equality that is seen as the source of anger, but rather the excess thereof.

Some parallels can be drawn with the present. Ter Braak depicts National Socialism as an outgrowth of egalitarianism and democracy, while it is more reasonably described as a reaction against these progressive ideals. Similarly the emergence of the populist radical right in the Netherlands has been explained by some as an outgrowth of the progressive movements of the sixties and seventies, while it is more realistically described as a right-wing reaction to the progressive legacy stemming from those years. In both cases, ressentiment serves to downplay the influence of ideas, and the mechanism of politics is reduced to a crude psychologism. Within the universe of ressentiment, legitimate political claims can only be distinguished from ressentiment by their constructive and practical nature. In fact, if the political, according to a series of thinkers such as Lefort, Rancière, Mouffe, Žižek and Laclau, is that which questions the very parameters of what is politically possible, then the concept of ressentiment is designed to suppress the political. It casts suspicion on any claim that transcends the existing political paradigm, that isn't constructive, realistic or pragmatic. The notion of ressentiment continues to imply distrust of democracy and egalitarianism; it implies the exclusion of the masses, since they are not deemed rational enough to make legitimate political claims, uncontaminated by ressentiment.

Notes

1   Jennifer Boylan, 'The Year of the Angry Voter', *The New York Times*, 10 February 2016. See also: 'The Year of the Angry Voter', *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 2016; 'Electability, Schmelectability: It's the Year of the Angry, Angry Voter', *Reuters*, 10 February 2016. The theme is certainly not limited to the United States. Describing developments in France and the UK, the international edition of the German weekly *Der Spiegel* proclaimed that 'the era of the angry voter is upon us'. 'The Era of the Angry Voter Is Upon Us', *Der Spiegel*, 6 July 2016. Terms such as *Wutbürger* (rage citizen) in Germany and *de boze burger* (the angry citizen) in the Netherlands form the European equivalents of the American 'angry voter'.

2   Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1983), 190–191.

3   Ibid.

4   As Dmertzis shows, in the present literature there is both a 'Nietzschean' and a 'non-Nietzschean' use of the term 'ressentiment.' Nicolas Demertzis, 'Emotions and Populism', in Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson (eds.), *Emotions, Politics and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 103–122.

5   Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).

6   Jack Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure: A Macro-sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.

7   Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994 [1912]).

8   Manfred S. Frings, 'Introduction', Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 5.

9   Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure*.

10   Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 96–97.

11   Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De La Démocratie In Amérique, vol. 2* [trans. James T. Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla] (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010 [1840]), 316.

12   Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1897]).

13   Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 190.

14   Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 51–52.

15   Ibid., 96–97.

16   Hans-Georg Betz, 'Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies', in Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 197–212.

17   Menno ter Braak, *De Draagbare Ter Braak* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992 [1937]), 173 (all quotations from this source are translated by the author).

18   Rob Hartmans, 'Het Fortuynisme als Rancuneleer' (Fortuynism as a Doctrine of Ressentiment), *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 11 May 2002. Warna Oosterbaan, 'Het

Onbehagen Kan Weer Ondergronds' (The Discontent Can Submerge Again), *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 November 2002.

19 Kees Schuyt, *Democratische Deugden: Groepstegenstellingen en Social Integratie (Cleveringa Oratie)* (Democratic Virtues: Group Oppositions and Social Integration) (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006), 46.

20 Rob Riemen, *De Eeuwige Terugkeer van het Fascisme* (The Eternal Return of Fascism) (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2010).

21 Martin Sommer, 'Het Onbehagen van Paul Scheffer'(Paul Scheffer's Discontent), *de Volkskrant*, 17 September 2004.

22 Bas van Stokkom, 'Boze Kiezer Is Zorg van Alle Partijen' (The Angry Voter Is All Parties' Concern), *De Volkskrant*, 13 September 2002.

23 Cees Banning, 'De Verwende Kiezer en het Jaloeziemodel' (The Spoilt Voter and the Jealousy Model), *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 August 2002. (Author's translation.)

24 Cited in Philip van Praag, 'De LPF-Kiezer: Rechts, Cynisch of Modaal?'(The LPF Voter, Right-wing, Cynical, or Standard?), in *Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen, Jaarboek 2001* (Groningen: NDPP, 2003), 96–116, 96.

25 Ibid.

26 Banning, 'Verwende Kiezer'.

27 Oosterbaan, 'Het Onbehagen'.

28 Pillarization refers to the so-called denominational pillars in which the different subcultures of Dutch society – Protestants, Catholics, Social Democrats and Liberals – were organized from roughly 1917 to 1968. It is generally seen as a rather hierarchical social order.

29 Tsjalling Swierstra and Evelien Tonkens (eds.), *De Beste De Baas? Prestatie, Respect en Solidariteit in een Meritocratie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

30 Éric Bélanger and Kees Aarts, 'Explaining the Rise of the LPF: Issues, Discontent, and the 2002 Dutch Election', *Acta Politica* 41 (2006): 4–20. Wouter van der Brug, 'How the LPF Fuelled Discontent: Empirical Tests of Explanations of LPF Support', *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 89–106; Wouter van der Brug, 'Voting for the LPF: Some Clarifications', *Acta Politica* 39 (2004): 84–91.

31 Van Praag, 'De LPF-kiezer'.

32 Ter Braak, *De Draagbare Ter Braak*, 175.

33 Ibid., 176.

34 Ibid., 178.

35 Ibid., 188.

36 Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: from Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

37 Ter Braak, *De Draagbare Ter Braak*, 187.

38 Eliot B. Wheaton, *The Nazi Revolution 1933–35* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 103.

39   Oswald Spengler, *Preussentum und Socialismus* (Munich: Oskar Beck, 1920), 84. (Author's translation).

40   See: Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

41   Cited in Léon Hanssen, *Sterven als een polemist, Menno ter Braak 1930–1940* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2001), 329.

42   Ter Braak, *De Draagbare Ter Braak*, 178–179.

43   Ibid., 179.

44   Ibid., 188.

45   Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, xv.

46   The Third Reich has been erroneously translated in some English editions, as 'the Third Kingdom'. See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles F. Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1926), 363.

47   Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, 197.

48   Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West*, trans. Ernest W. Dickes (New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1939), 29–30.

49   The term stems from the Swiss conservative Jacob Burkhardt, who used it to criticize the French revolutionaries, and was applied with gusto to the Nazis by German radical conservatives. See Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, xv, 8, 197.

50   Rauschning, *Revolution of Nihilism*, 276. (The term 'ressentiment' in the original German version has been mistranslated in the English version as 'resentment'.) Another important study linking Nazism with ressentiment is from Edgar Alexander, a prominent Catholic conservative, who described Nazism as *die Weltanschauung des Ressentiments*. Edgar Alexander, *Der Mythus Hitler* (Munich: Kraus Reprint, 1981 [1937]).

51   Marlia E. Banning, 'The Politics of Resentment', *JAC, Journal of Rhetoric, Culture and Politics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 67–101.

52   Jeremy Engels, *The Politics of Resentment* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2015).

Democracy and Resentment

Sjaak Koenis

Introduction

In one of his comic sketch-like interviews on YouTube, Slavoj Žižek compares democracy with Santa Claus. 'Everybody says: Of course I don't believe in Santa Claus, but I go along because of the children. It is kind of the same with democracy these days. Nobody believes in democracy anymore these days, but everybody plays along.' As a matter of fact, in the case of democracy the situation is slightly more complicated. Most people do believe in the promise of democracy, but they are disappointed in its reality. They believe that democracy makes it possible for people to be in charge of their lives and to fulfil their freedom, to find recognition for their identity and the community they are part of, and that democracy promises equality to others who they compare themselves with. The reality of democracy is that there is disagreement about what values like liberty and equality actually mean; that these and other values like community and solidarity clash with each other; and that while democracy grants recognition for religious or other identity-based communities, it at the same time undermines these communities because it also allows competition between communities and grants individuals the right to leave their communities if they feel entrapped in them. And finally, the reality of democracy is also what Robert Dahl has called the logic of equality that keeps on 'running head on into the brute facts of inequality'.[1] These frictions between the promise and reality of democracy produce all sorts of anger, envy, rancour, discontent and distrust. I use resentment as a general concept covering all these different types of reactions. I argue in this chapter that democracy can best be interpreted as having a Janus face: one face says that democracy makes the emancipation of repressed groups and individuals possible, whereas the other face says that democracy produces

resentment. Because of this Janus-faced nature of democracy, I'm looking for an interpretation of resentment that embraces both John Rawls's interpretation of resentment as justified criticism[2] and 'ressentiment' in the tradition of Nietzsche and Scheler, which as we shall see is primarily defined by powerlessness.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*[3] resentment means 'a sense of grievance; an indignant sense of injury or insult received or perceived; a (feeling of) ill will, bitterness, or anger against a person or thing'. Ever since the rise of populist parties like Pim Fortuyn's LPF (List Pim Fortuyn) and Geert Wilders's PVV (Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands, and similar parties in other countries in Europe such as the Front National in France, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and UKIP (UK Independence Party) in the United Kingdom, resentment in all of its forms has become a dominant factor in contemporary politics. Margaret Canovan has claimed that the populist resentment that we experience in modern democracies must be located in the crack between the promise and reality of democracy.[4] She focuses on the tension between the elite and the people, but apart from this tension, there are two others that can help explain why resentment is not a passing feature of modern representative democracies. I use the case of populism in the Netherlands to look into the nature, causes and consequences of resentment in modern representative democracies.

We hear it all the time: democracy is in crisis. Democracy has lost its legitimacy. This claim about a crisis of representative democracy and the loss of legitimacy resurfaces every now and then, so often that Pippa Norris refers to this frequent claim about the loss of legitimacy as a fact-free hyperbole.[5] Norris shows that part of citizens' discontent with democracy has to do with the rise of their aspirations. A recent Dutch study on the viability of democracy also discusses the presumed crisis and concludes that democracy is still vital and thriving.[6] There is no empirical evidence that the Dutch democracy has a large legitimacy crisis, and the political trust of Dutch citizens in their democracy is still substantial, especially when compared with other European democracies. There are some problems that might be a reason for concern. For one, a substantial minority of Dutch citizens does not trust the parliament and almost 60 per cent indicate that they do not trust political parties. Moreover, weakened support for centre parties (Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and the Conservative Liberals) makes it very difficult to build viable coalitions, as we have seen since the beginning of the new millennium. This has led to great instability in the Dutch political system. Rather than interpreting the recent success of populist parties like the LPF and the PVV as the cause of this instability, it should be interpreted as a manifestation of this instability.

For a few decades now various suggestions for institutional renovation have been proposed, like an elected prime minister, elected mayors, more substantive local democracy and more possibilities for referenda, but this has not led to any substantial changes in the political infrastructure in the Netherlands. Most of these suggestions have never gotten any further than the stage of debate in the media and parliament. And for those who know Dutch political history, it must be said that there is ample room for improvement: Dutch political tradition in the twentieth century is very much defined by the combination of a high-handed and rather closed political elite and a submissive, rather docile, electorate.[7]

Still, this whole discussion about how to improve the democratic system seems to take for granted that political trust of citizens is the default position in democracy, and that as soon as this trust wanes, one immediately has to worry about the legitimacy and even the viability of democracy. These discussions and this research based on opinion polls underestimate the extent to which democracy itself (even when, or particularly when its institutions function properly) produces a certain amount of distrust, discontent, envy and more generally resentment.

This doesn't come as a surprise for those familiar with the work of writers like Alexis de Tocqueville, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Scheler and Peter Sloterdijk, just to mention a few. But I'm not convinced by the general claim that the process of modernization itself, as it unfolds in the democratic era, leads to the development of resentment. This claim is just as unspecific as the recent 'end of history' type of celebration of liberal democracy. The claim that democracy produces resentment is usually expressed by representatives of the right, whereas the left is more inclined to see democracy as the vehicle of emancipation. The right doesn't take the promise of democracy very seriously, but the left only looks at how much democratic reality falls short of this promise. It is more insightful to see democracy as Janus-faced. Emancipation and resentment are a lot more intertwined than most people realize. Democracy will always produce resentment, even in a utopian situation in which all current flaws of democracy would be resolved. This is why we should look more carefully into the different types of resentment and into the various ways in which these are expressed.

Three kinds of resentment

Mature democracies produce three kinds of resentment. The first is the one that Margaret Canovan pointed: it is the result of the tension between the political elite

and the people, which is an integral part of representative democracies. This kind of resentment primarily depends on how political institutions work and how the elite responds to the electorate. I call this form *elite-resentment*. It is usually populist parties from both the left and the right that harvest this resentment.

The second kind of resentment is the result of the tension in democracies between the promise of equality (or equal liberty) and the realities of inequality, caused by differences in talent, income, status and similar factors that make formally equal citizens anxious about their status and also (sometimes) envy other citizens. To differentiate this form from the other forms of resentment, I call this *envy-resentment*. This type of resentment plays a role in debates about status and status-anxiety, about egalitarianism and meritocracy, about greed, bonuses and commercialization. Whereas the first kind of resentment is more conjunctural, depending on the shifting relations between the political elite and the people, envy-resentment is a more permanent factor in modern capitalist-based democracies, at least from the time that equal liberty became a formal feature of modern democracies.

The third kind of resentment that is endemic in modern democracies is related to the demise of the communities in which citizens organize themselves, including the national state perceived as a cultural community, for example in the context of the European Union. On the one hand, democracies offer citizens the opportunity to organize themselves in separate communities on the basis of (religious) identity, ideology and (ethnic) culture. On the other hand, democracy also protects the individual rights of citizens and gives them the opportunity to leave their communities, thus putting these separate communities under pressure. This process of modernization leads to the disenchantment of culture and community, not just of what Avishai Margalit calls encompassing communities within states[8] but also in the case of the European Union, the national state perceived as a cultural community with a specific dominant culture or *Leitkultur*. I call this third form of resentment for lack of a better term *disenchantment-resentment*. It typically comes to the surface in debates about multi- or monoculturalism, where the recognition of national or ethnic culture is at stake, and in debates about nationalism, Europeanization, globalization and the recent migration crisis in Europe.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will look into these three types of resentment, but I start with the second kind, envy-resentment, because it seems to me that the first kind – resentment that results from the tension between the elite and the people – follows from the more fundamental tension between the promise of equality and the reality of inequality in democratic countries.

Envy-resentment

What I refer to as envy-resentment has been discussed most extensively by Alexis de Tocqueville, who uses the word 'envy',[9] and Max Scheler, who in the German edition uses the word 'Ressentiment'.[10] In his *Democracy in America* Tocqueville writes as follows:

> 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.[11]

And later in the book, he says, 'They [the citizens] have abolished the troublesome privileges of a few of their fellow men only to meet the competition of all.'[12] By taking his readers back and forth between the French aristocratic society he knew so well and the burgeoning democratic society he visited in the United States, he shows that the equality of conditions (which should not be confused with the equality of socio-economic conditions) arouses a feeling of envy. In his book *Ressentiment* Max Scheler analyses how feelings such as envy, revenge and anger can develop into what he calls ressentiment, taking his inspiration most of all from Nietzsche's classical analysis of ressentiment.[13] Scheler believes that the greatest potential for ressentiment can be found in democratic societies

> where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognized, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property, and education. While each has the 'right' to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot do so in fact. Quite independently of the characters and experiences of individuals, a potent charge of *ressentiment* is here accumulated by the very *structure of society*.[14]

Scheler's discussion of ressentiment is very illuminating, although there is a tension between ressentiment as an individual phenomenon and ressentiment as a social phenomenon. At the individual level he strictly follows Nietzsche: revenge and envy can only really exist if and as long as the person involved doesn't have the power to do something about whatever caused the feelings of revenge and envy. But when he considers the conditions of ressentiment on a social level, he points to the fact that the greatest potential for ressentiment can be found in democratic societies where publicly recognized equal political and other rights go hand in hand with very substantial differences between actual power, possessions, level of education and so on.

In response to this built-in tension between ressentiment on an individual and a social level, we can take two directions: We can reserve the concept of ressentiment for a limited amount of individual cases where the people involved remain powerless. In these cases, Scheler explains how this ressentiment leads to what he calls the poisoning of people's souls. Or we can choose a broader interpretation of ressentiment. Scheler himself distinguishes between 'ressentiment-criticism' and 'constructive criticism'. The first is the kind of criticism that everybody would recognize as ressentiment: this particular type of 'ressentiment criticism'

> is characterized by the fact that improvements in the conditions criticized cause no satisfaction – they merely cause discontent, for they destroy the growing pleasure afforded by invective and negation. Many modern political parties will be extremely annoyed by a partial satisfaction of their demands or by the constructive participation of their representatives in public life, for such participation mars the delight of oppositionism. It is peculiar to '*ressentiment* criticism' that it does not seriously desire that its demands be fulfilled. It does not want to cure the evil: the evil is merely a pretext for the criticism.[15]

But if we are interested in ressentiment as a social phenomenon we should cast our net a bit wider and include in envy-resentment also more constructive forms of criticism, constructive in the sense that those who feel this ressentiment actually go out and do something about it. Scheler gives some room for this interpretation as he points to important social 'discharge-mechanisms', such as parliament, the media, sport and so on, that can channel feelings of resentment. These discharge-mechanisms that include social movements such as socialism and feminism were not just mechanisms to express powerless anger and resentment, but have also been instrumental in changing the situation that caused this resentment in the first place. This way we can take account of important emancipation movements like socialism and feminism that have tried, at least partially successfully, to mould the resentment of workers and women into a constructive battle to change society. It was Marx himself who knew that the communist movement would profit from the existing resentment against capitalism.

One consequence of this broader definition of 'ressentiment' is that we lose some of the negative connotations of the word. According to Joseph Epstein, who wrote an interesting book about envy, one could claim that the feminist movement is the product of impersonal, generalized envy: women want what men have; it is as simple as that. When women respond that it is not envy that powered the feminist movement, but justified criticism of the ways they

are treated, they are probably right, writes Epstein, but 'I would only add that envy and a sense of injustice are not always that easily distinguished, let alone extricated, one from the other.'[16] For feminists the choice is simple: envy/ resentment or justified criticism. So envy/resentment is always unjustified. A similar kind of choice, but then the other way around, is presented to us by the political philosopher John Rawls, who only wants to take envy seriously if it can be justified from the perspective of his normative theory. So only if people's envy is caused by situations that are unjust according to Rawls's theory of justice can this envy be called resentment. All other forms of envy are either harmless or shouldn't be taken seriously in a normative theory. I think that on a conceptual level it is better not to prejudge whether or not certain forms of envy and resentment are justified: envy-resentment can, but doesn't have to, be justified. So for example the criticism of feminists and that of those politicians (in the earlier quote of Scheler) should both be seen as forms of resentment. Whether or not it is justified depends on our political views.

The crucial (empirical) question then becomes what people actually do with their anger, discontent and envy: Do they try to find ways to 'discharge' these feelings in constructive action, by voicing their anger on the street and in parliament, by organizing counter-power, by trying to overthrow the social structures that are deemed responsible for their anger? Or do they revert to the kind of ressentiment that Scheler called 'ressentiment-criticism'? This criticism is not really aimed at actually doing something about the problem, perhaps partly because that is utterly impossible, or because change is not the purpose of those who express this anger.

The advantage of this way of looking at resentment is that a more empirical study of resentment is possible. Take for instance the populist parties of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders, which have caught the attention of citizens and scholars in the Netherlands. Initially they were rejected as pure ressentiment movements in the sense of merely profiting from and also feeding on powerless anger. Commentators compared these populist parties with the Dutch National Socialist Party, which had some followers in the 1930s and during the war.[17] I think it is more insightful to see these populist movements not as pure resentment movements, but as 'mixed' movements: displaying partly 'ressentiment-criticism', maybe a lot of this, but partly also more constructive criticism. The case of Pim Fortuyn is interesting because whatever else he represented, he also represented the voice of some angry citizens who felt ignored by the ruling political elite. By interpreting this populist movement (which was short-lived because Fortuyn was assassinated before he could really make a success of his party) in this way

as 'mixed', as displaying a complicated mix of elements of emancipation and of resentment, it is possible to make a more balanced assessment of contemporary populism. As a matter of fact, a comparable mix of emancipation and resentment can also be found in the classical emancipation movements of socialism and feminism.

As far as status-anxiety and envy in modern democracies are concerned, right-wing philosophers such as Robert Nozick[18] and sociologists such as Helmut Schoeck[19] are wrong to assume that social efforts to work towards a more egalitarian society are the result of envy and hence don't need to be taken seriously. But they are right when they point to the fact that envy/resentment is a lot more common than many people assume it to be. In our societies in which competition becomes ever more important, there seems to be a taboo on envy, which is unfortunate. We should take what I want to call 'emulative envy' more seriously, by which I mean the kind of envy which stimulates people to do better. If we would follow Scheler strictly, such an emulative envy cannot exist, because according to Scheler 'envy does not strengthen the acquisitive urge; it weakens it'.[20]

Elite-resentment

The next kind of resentment, elite-resentment, is also the product of the egalitarian impulse of democracy, of comparing on the basis of the democratic ideal of equality. But this time those who feel this resentment don't compare themselves with *other citizens* they envy for some or other reason, but with *their rulers*. And the basis for comparing is not what others have or are able to do that they don't have or cannot do. The basis is the claim on the basis of which the elite rules. In a democracy it is the people that (should) rule, whereas in fact it of course never does, at least not from the time that democracies came of age in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Canovan analysed this source of resentment[21] although she doesn't focus on the anger and resentment. The two faces of democracy she discusses in this article are the redemptive and the pragmatic. The redemptive face looks at the promise that is inscribed in democracy. It is not just that people are equal but more than that: democracy promises salvation to the common people through politics. The pragmatic face looks at democracy as a way to peacefully deal with conflicting interests and views. 'When too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining ideal of democracy renewed' (1999: 11).

In recent Dutch political history there have been two moments when the gap between promise and reality turned out to be too wide, resulting in a phase of more or less populist anti-institutionalism. The first moment was the 'revolt' of the 1960s, when there was a massive outcry for democratization in a struggle against the established political elite of the pillarized Dutch society. During the larger part of the last century, Dutch society was organized in the so-called pillars, separate communities based on both religious (e.g. Catholic) and ideological (e.g. Socialist) identity. The revolt against this system came from the left and was successful to the extent that within a few years this political system had lost most of its legitimacy. This political crisis, which was primarily a crisis of authority not only in politics but also in family and other social relations, was successfully absorbed by a new political elite, who very swiftly incorporated many proposals for renewal in the political system.[22] The second moment occurred at the end of the 1990s, when the sudden rise of Pim Fortuyn started a populist revolt, which the political system is still trying to absorb. Whereas in the 1960s, the old political elite of the pillarized political system was challenged, at the end of the 1990s it was the then ruling Purple Coalition of social democrats and liberals that was dethroned. As the publicist Paul Scheffer wrote, Pim (Fortuyn) was the product of Wim (Kok) – the successful leader of this Purple Coalition. It was the 'grubby business of politics' of this coalition which created (the short-lived success of) the LPF.[23]

To conclude this part: envy-resentment and elite-resentment have different causes, but in both cases a similar ('Schelerian') analysis is possible: either people wallow in their powerlessness ('ressentiment-criticism') or try to do something about it. An example of the first attitude is the facile way in which some populists refer to politicians as profiteers (except, of course, when politicians actually are corrupt), whereas there are also more constructive ways to do something about the perceived gap between the people and the political elite: think of all kinds of projects to involve citizens more in local politics, like David van Reybrouck's G1000 project in which 1,000 Belgian citizens together discussed the future of Belgium.

Disenchantment-resentment

The last kind of resentment, *disenchantment-resentment*, is not so much the product of democracy's egalitarian impulse, but of its built-in pluralism, which gives citizens the equal right to differ, to organize themselves in separate communities based on religion or other forms of identification, but also the right

and the possibilities to leave such groups behind. This is a common theme in modernization theory. This time, resentment is a response to the demise of what people perceive as their encompassing communities. These communities refer to identification groups, groups with a shared (national) culture. An example of this process is the demise of religious and ideological communities which characterized Dutch society during the larger part of the last century. The confrontations between these communities have for a long time determined the vitality of Dutch politics, but in the end these confrontations have also undermined the bases of these communities. They have been responsible for the disenchantment of these communities. On an international level a similar process is taking place in the EU, where in and through the cooperation and confrontation between national communities, the idea of national identity as a cultural unity is disenchanted. This doesn't mean that national communities are going to disappear, or on a local level that religious communities, for example disappear (although secularization in the Netherlands has undermined these communities substantially). It does mean that the religious community or the nation loses its function as the sole source of moral and sometimes ethnic identification. This loss of what one could call 'monumentality' can be the source of resentment, for instance when in response to the process of Europeanization in several countries the nation's *Leitkultur* is embraced and propagated. In the case of the Netherlands I have studied this process of the disenchantment of Dutch national culture.[24]

In this case, too, resentment can take many forms. An almost unqualified 'no' against Europe, the way the Dutch PVV of Geert Wilders, in many ways the more radical successor of Pim Fortuyn, and his European brothers and sisters in arms propose, would fit the bill of ressentiment-criticism. They project in different ways a 'heartland', as Paul Taggart calls it,[25] which not only never existed but if realized would certainly not be very hospitable to all those citizens whose identity is not congruent with that of the projected heartland. This kind of ressentiment-criticism can also take other forms, such as singling out certain groups, Muslims for instance, as scapegoats, or embracing violent forms of religious fundamentalism. But it can also resort to the embrace of a *Leitkultur*, as we have seen in many European countries.

Conclusion

If it is true that the process of democratization that Tocqueville highlighted in his *Democracy in America*, which Nietzsche commented on in *On the Genealogy*

of Morals, unfolds in the age of resentment, then it is worthwhile, maybe even important, to find out how different aspects of democratization are related to different kinds of responses, different kinds of resentment. I think it can be useful for analytical reasons to open up the black box of resentment, even though it may very well be the case that some of these forms merge together in everyday politics. Populists for instance are masters in gluing together forms of elite- and disenchantment-resentment. But because of the prominence of resentment, it might also be uplifting to accept my proposal and view it more positively, if only for the simple reason that full equality will never be attained (I think here of Georg Simmel's wonderful tale about the 'Roses', in which he shows that every form of equality creates the desire for new forms of equality)[26], that (complex) democracy can never be a true 'demos-cracy' and the process of disenchantment is probably irreversible.

So, democracy will always produce both equality and inequality; it will inspire individuals and groups to fight for emancipation, but it will also create resentment, some but not all of it put to constructive use. The question whether this resentment will develop into 'ressentiment-criticism' or into something more constructive depends on how people respond to this inequality.

Notes

1 Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 23.

2 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 530–541.

3 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Also available at http://www.oed.com/

4 Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies* XLVII (1999): 2–16.

5 Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

6 Jacques Thomassen, Carolien van Ham and Rudy Andeweg, *De wankele democratie* [The Shaky Democracy] (Amsterdam: Prometheus/ Bert Bakker, 2014).

7 Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, 2nd ed., rev. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

8 Margalit cites religious communities as an example of encompassing communities. Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 135–140.

9   Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans.
     Gerald E. Bevan, with an introduction and notes by Isaac Kramnick (London:
     Penguin Books, 2003 [1835 and 1840]).

10   Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Louis A. Coser (Milwaukee: Marquette University
     Press, 2003 [1913]), 19–20.

11   Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 230.

12   Ibid., 625.

13   Scheler, *Ressentiment*. Scheler analyses the passage in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the
     Genealogy of Morals* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003, 19).

14   Ibid., 29.

15   Ibid.

16   Joseph Epstein, *Envy; The Seven Deadly Sins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
     2003), 26.

17   Cf. Sybe Schaap, *Het rancuneuze gif; de opmars van het onbehagen* [The rancorous
     poison; on the rise of discontent] (Budel: Damon, 2012).

18   Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Basic Books, 1974).

19   Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behaviour* (New York: Harcourt, Brace &
     World, 1969).

20   Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 35.

21   Canovan, 'Trust the People!'.

22   James Carleton Kennedy, *Building New Babylon: Cultural Change in the Netherlands
     During the 1960s* (PhD dissertation: University of Iowa, 1995).

23   Paul Scheffer, 'De verloren jaren van Kok' [The lost years of Kok], NRC
     Handelsblad, 2 March 2012.

24   In Sjaak Koenis, *Voices of the People; Pluralism in Dutch Politics (1994–2014)*
     (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2014).

25   Paul Taggart, 'Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe',
     Journal of Political Ideologies 9, no. 3 (2004): 269–288.

26   Georg Simmel, 'Rosen. Eine Soziale Hypothese' [Roses. A Social Hypothesis], in
     H.-J. Dahme and O. Rammstedt (eds.), *Georg Simmel. Schriften zur Soziologie. Eine
     Auswahl* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983 [1897]), 169–172.

The Revenge of Baudrillard's Silent Majorities:
Ressentiment or *amor fati*?

Daniël de Zeeuw

1

Reading Baudrillard – the eminent ventriloquist of mediatic globalization – I picture him sitting in a worn but comfortable armchair in a dimly lit French living room, as epileptic TV commercials are reflected in his large glasses through a haze of cigarette smoke, while monstrous simulacra emulate pataphysical universes in his cerebral cortex. Watching television until dawn, he makes himself into the evil twin of the spectacular media machines, whose seductive powers he aims to decipher, becoming, in this process of transubstantiation, the couch potato he cannot but feel a strange and involuntary sympathy with, as the latter invokes a blissful image of suicide.

With regard to the consumer masses that emerged from the debris of the two world wars as a collective insurance against nuclear destruction, to which the couch potato very much attests, Baudrillard offers an overtly obscene and heterodox thesis. More than the structural effect of various apparatuses of ideology, war, capital and labour, spectacle or knowledge/power acting upon the masses from the outside, which renders these 'silent majorities' passive, blind and alienated victims of their own existence, the masses' fascination with their own mediatic enchantment, combined with their apparent indifference to their own enlightenment, must be understood as an altogether active, ironic and fatal strategy on the part of the masses themselves, in which they carelessly assert another principle of what makes life liveable, in sovereign defiance of the void that life is. Thus, far from a sign of passivity the majorities' silence is as deep as a cry in the darkest hour, just as it can still be heard in the cacophony of 'interactive' or 'participatory' media today.

This active passivity or 'loud silence', Baudrillard argues, constitutes a kind of revenge on the class of intellectuals, politicians, judges, teachers, social workers, urban planners and police, for whom the masses always only appear as a *matter of concern*, to be statistically measured, understood, represented, administered, convicted, transformed, instructed, bettered and so on. It is with the violent heritage of this 'will to know' that Baudrillard plays his cruel pataphysical games, challenging us to come to terms with the unthinkable and blatantly absurd idea that the masses are precisely where they want to be, in a state of spectral and perpetual unreality beyond the Enlightenment ideal of the Subject, in a way that necessarily escapes us.

The present chapter brings this challenge further into focus by approaching it through the lens of the Nietzschean opposition between ressentiment and *amor fati*. It takes on what I consider two quite reasonable yet ultimately incommensurable readings of Baudrillard's writings on the masses. On the one hand, speaking of the consumer and media publics as taking their revenge on the class of experts, philosopher-priests and politicians seem to favour a reading in terms of ressentiment. By doing so, Baudrillard would remain within the Nietzschean hermeneutics of the masses as intrinsically tied up with the spirit of ressentiment. Poisoned by a structural feeling of powerlessness, the masses project the cause of their own passivity and suffering onto an external factor: intellectuals and artists, politicians, men in power and so on. In this they can only ever be *reactive*, cultivating the hatred of all that is affirmative in life. Following this narrative, the modern masses are but the most recent expression of a much more encompassing history of the slave's disruptive cunning that slowly but inevitably imposes a new global culture in which suffering and weakness become 'good', as more instinctive and affirmative forms of joyful cruelty are deemed 'evil'. However, this reading is displaced by Baudrillard's understanding of the masses' behaviour as part of a 'fatal strategy'. The reference to fatality here deploys a language closer to what for Nietzsche is the antidote to ressentiment, namely a love of fate, or *amor fati*.

In what follows, the point discussed is not that Baudrillard's notion of a fatal strategy is the same as Nietzsche's *amor fati*. Rather, their reference to a love of fate as opposed to the various emancipatory discourses of the Enlightenment, which share an essentially pastoral relation to the masses, provides an opportunity to rethink the genealogy of critical theory in relation to the masses. What interests me is how Baudrillard's reading of the masses in terms of a love of fate exploits and thwarts the Nietzschean *mise-en-scène* of the masses on which the critiques of ressentiment typically remain premised. Although offering a dire and at times

catastrophic view on the uneasy tryst between the masses and the vicissitudes of late capitalism, this reading discerns in the masses not (only) the echo of an external or immanent manipulation but (also) a principle of playful obstinacy, which as such poses a challenge to the kind of ressentiment that captures the masses in a regime of moralizing individualizations. In the latter case, the masses are forever declared guilty of not knowing and living up to their own standards, effectively failing their innermost historical destiny. For Baudrillard, rather than being interpellated into responsible citizenship, the masses procure their place in the antagonistic and ironic play of things by consuming themselves irresponsibly, in what for Bataille would perhaps signify a 'useless expenditure' of cosmic proportions.

Understanding the full critical use and scope of this thesis, which in my reading posits that the masses have always already passed beyond ressentiment into the accelerationist realm of fatality, ultimately requires situating Baudrillard's internal dialogue with the intellectual and political landscape of post-war France as a centre of radical left-wing politics and theory leading up to and in the aftermath of May 1968. Sensing the aporias that haunted the left when confronted with the hypertelic media logic of late capitalism, Baudrillard tried to write his way out of this discourse on the masses as permanently suspended between alienation and emancipation, often resulting in cynical pessimism or a counterfactual confidence in the potentials of a multitude to come. Given that these aporias are still ours to bear, Baudrillard offers us a radically external perspective beyond the problem of the social, from which to interrogate the hidden premises of the discourses we are still invested in.

2

In June 2016, 52 per cent of the British people voted in favour of leaving the EU, proving once more that the 'art of politics' today primarily consists in mediating between the supposed needs of the people and the interests of transnational finance capital – a Brexit being 'irrational' from the latter's perspective. We could easily imagine a high-finance instruction manual leaked by an anonymous whistleblower, listing the people as one variable in a complex and volatile environment of factors, noting how it 'may appear to behave somewhat irrationally from the perspective of the market, its future course being difficult to statistically ascertain'. We may also imagine politicians and media eagerly catering to the popular outrage triggered by this scandalous reduction

of the people to a mere variable. In the case of Brexit, the ruling conservatives in particular are split between a cynical commitment to the vicissitudes of xenophobic nationalism and the economic imperatives of global commerce. For this mediation to succeed, both people and capital must be subjected to permanent statistical scrutiny, recording and analysing the effects of different temporalities, paying attention to slow structural fluctuations in relation to disruptive events such as terror attacks, as these produce unpredictable echoes in the media and public opinion. Parliaments burdened with setting the basic parameters of the neoliberal game are reshuffled every so many years on the basis of the public sentiment ruling at the time of the general elections – a collective, tele-ritualized exorcism of the very non-democratic procedures that permeate everyday life, but which thereby nevertheless allow this very life to be representatively captured as part of a 'free, democratic order'.

So who are these people whose jobs, welfare, security and stability the financial and governmental institutions pledge to protect? Having surreptitiously moved from *the* to *these* people, the question arises: Why do *they* act contrary to what statistics prove and experts know is in their best interest, that is, to stay in the EU? What do they *really* want? Do they themselves actually know what they really want? In an item on Brexit[1] several British leave-voters admit to regretting their decision, made only the evening before, because they did not fully realize that their vote would have a real effect, that it would in fact issue in Britain leaving the EU: 'I voted out … I don't … really … think … that we should have, really.' A typical case of Baudrillardian irony, what this shows is that democracy has come to function as a necessary illusion; that, at present, democracy becomes phantasmagoric and unreal precisely when it becomes most tangible and concrete, when people can actually express their opinion and vote. Conversely, to be *really real*, democracy should actually remain this abstract, untouchable sun that bathes the grey reality of biopolitical governance in its illusory light. However, the same sun also casts a shadow – no Nietzschean midday here.

For Baudrillard, this shadow *is* the masses, the void around which all politics gravitates, the social Bermuda triangle in which all politics suffers its own illusion. The masses are above all 'real' in Philip K. Dick's sense, as that which, when you stop believing in it, still refuses to disappear. The masses are what remain when all is said and done, and still nobody knows what 'they' want. More than the raw material from which the social is woven, the masses transcend the statistical ontology that birthed them. More than communism, they are the spectre that haunts the modern political imaginary as either a threat to or a promise of emancipation. When we move from The People united-as-one to

these people, we have slipped into the domain of the masses, in which the social and the political engage in their double-helixed dance of dim estimations and solemn adjustments. The masses are not the people: they are what remain when the latter are stripped of the thin ideological veil cast over them by those who speak in their name, who condemn the masses for their apathy, but always – and this is fundamental – *for their own sake.*

Wherever the masses appear in discourse, as they appear as a crowd in urban space, it is as an object of concern, not (only) with maintaining some existing power equilibrium or social hygiene but with the masses' own well-being. Following the logic of what Foucault dubbed biopower, the masses are simultaneously that *against* which and *for the sake of which* some ameliorating intervention is continuously required. Entangled with the debilitating double binds of this pastoral power/knowledge, the left's relation to the masses has proven ambiguous and troubled because, freed from the ideological veil of The People united-as-one, the masses carry the burden of being doubled and then split into the real but alienated masses of the present (the 'against') and the ideal but emancipated masses of the future (the 'for the sake of'). Ideal, because it is precisely this, their own desire, from which the masses are always separated, but which they, when finally rejoined with, will properly recognize as their own.

The masses are both responsible and not responsible for this. On the one hand, a variety of external systemic factors is held accountable: the commodity form, wage labour, urban life, the State, the mass media, advertising, fascism, Hollywood, racism, homophobia, biopolitics, neoliberalism and so on. On the other hand, it is only the masses that can finally take up this challenge by responding to it in a progressive fashion. This serves to show the extent to which the category of the masses has no existence independent of its status as a *problematic* around which various scientific disciplines and bureaucratic apparatuses revolve. It is in this precise sense that the left's understanding of the masses, by maintaining a pedagogical and therapeutic relation to 'the social', stays within the biopolitical horizon of modernity.

In Nietzsche's take on ressentiment, the pedagogical or 'pastoral' nature of biopolitical modernity is allegorized through the figures of the priest as a shepherd tending his herd. Famously, for Nietzsche the social-democratic and plebeian sentiments that rule the masses and their priestly demagogues are merely the secularized manifestation of an older slave morality whose most profound religious expression is Christianity: a toxic 'herd mentality' that promotes the hatred of all things high and, by doing so, erases all distinction in culture. It is to this destructive dynamic that Nietzsche opposes what he

considers the absolute negation of ressentiment: the affirmation of everything that has existed, now exists and will ever exist, including the unconditional will that it be so, for ever and ever, or: *amor fati*. In this sovereignly giving oneself over to life, including all suffering and pain, the explosive and destructive stuff of life is consumed in an affirmative yes before it can be curbed into a brooding ressentiment. The person who loves fate is 'able to will its own will as a will to power and emancipate itself from the spirit of resentment by embracing the radically contingent and finite nature of its existence'.

In this metanarrative, the relation between herd and priest is at the centre of this poisonous atmosphere opposed to all that is virile, self-assertive and creative in life. As 'doctors and nurses who are themselves ill', the class of ascetic priests has become 'healer, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd'.[2] In this capacity they represent the larger class of life's moral therapists, including politicians and philosophers (and we could add: social workers, psychoanalysts, opinion-makers, etc.). The priest *manages* the herd 'in which that most dangerous explosive stuff and blasting material, ressentiment, is constantly piling and piling up'.[3] He prevents the external discharge of the herd's ressentiment by directing it inwards, such that each individual becomes 'interpellatable' as a responsible and guilty subject in a self-amplifying cycle of aggression turned back onto itself, a process that issues in 'bad conscience'. In Deleuzian *parlance*, we could say that the priest's essential function is to deterritorialize an already attached ressentiment from its external object, and reterritorializing or recoding its flow to the idiotic space of psychic interiority. However, whenever this affective economy is interrupted, ressentiment once again turned outwards returns with a vengeance: psychic interiority is the breeding ground of even viler ressentiment. This is the fundamental priestly wager: the ressentiment invested in the masses may at any time turn on him, in so far as he occupies a position in the structure of authority amenable to ressentimentful object-attachments.

By failing to successfully direct the masses' ressentiment inwards, the priest would fall prey to those on whose ressentiment his authority is premised (the plebs, the masses, the working classes). It is perhaps here – at the point where ressentiment turns against itself – that it acquires a fatal quality that implodes the spiral of interrupted nihilism in which it would otherwise remained caught. For it is above all from itself that ressentiment must be saved: in order not to consume itself and become something else, it must always remain suspended before its final conclusion, which would be its end. As always in Nietzsche's pharmacological analyses, the antidote – *amor fati* – is not so much the dialectical opposite of ressentiment but its extreme limit point, the final self-consummation

at which it must arrive to be overcome. This explains the structural ambiguity of Nietzsche's relation to nihilism, as simultaneously the poison and the cure. '*Amor fati* is not at all a principle of inertia and of passivity. "Fatal strategies" consist as much in pushing the old world towards its destruction (à sa perte), to push that which wants to fall, said Nietzsche'.[4] Ressentiment, however, is nevertheless also still that which prevents this final self-consummation, leaving it suspended in a sacrifice of life for the sake of life, which is ultimately only a life of death.

3

In *Fatal Strategies*, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*[5] (2007) and elsewhere, Baudrillard attempts to account for the aberrant failure to enlighten the masses, to explain the fact that idiocy, banality and indifference still reign supreme, but in a way that does not secretly presuppose the truth of (in)voluntary servitude or alienation theses. The latter typically explain this failure in terms of a manipulating power external to and beyond the masses' own innermost interests. For Baudrillard this narrative remains within the pastoral cycle of ressentiment that makes the masses bear the weight of their own liberation. With this he asserts the thesis that the lethargy, indifference and stupidity of the masses are 'the result of a secret strategy … a secret form of the refusal of will, of an in-voluntary challenge to everything which was demanded of the subject by philosophy – that is to say, to all rationality of choice and to all exercise of will, of knowledge, and of liberty'.[6]

Alienation hypotheses have a hard time explaining why the masses can be manipulated into a mode of existence opposite to what this hypothesis nevertheless considers its true interest and inner telos. Baudrillard[7] takes up a comment by Hegel on the French *philosophes* to show how untenable this way of thinking about the masses ultimately is: 'When the question is asked if it is allowable to deceive a people, one must reply that the question is worthless, because it is impossible to deceive a people about itself.'[8] Instead, Hegel argues, the philosopher tends to mistake his own alienation *from* the masses for the alienation *of* the masses from themselves.

In opposition to various iterations of the alienation hypothesis, including those that cast the masses as suffering from a poisonous ressentiment, Baudrillard takes seriously the possibility that the above mentioned failure of emancipation is part of an active and altogether original strategy of the masses themselves: 'the brute fact of a collective retaliation and of a refusal to participate in the recommended ideals'.[9] For Baudrillard, this revenge cannot be modelled

after the transgressive subject, because the masses play with being an object to the other, who inhabits the subject position. Yet it is unclear if and how an object can be said to play: 'The masses are not a subject. They are not an object either.' He hesitates considering what other option is left, and concludes, 'They are a strange object.' How should we think about this entity, the 'strange object', which is neither subject nor object? 'They're a kind of … in fact I don't know what … a convector of everything.'[10] Rather than voluntary servitude, the masses play on a kind of involuntary inservitude, of what remains 'object-ive', opaque and obstinate in yet despite themselves. Through the masses, the object takes its revenge on the subject. This is not the object of Hegelian or Marxist dialectics, that is, the object destined to become his own subject through self-alienation. The object Baudrillard speaks of escapes all that: it was there before the grand dialectics of desire, just as it will survive its perishing – and this is its revenge, holding nothing back, passing beyond any moralizing ressentiment.

In developing this thesis, Baudrillard rejects and even reverses his earlier conclusion in *Requiem for the Media*,[11] which still saw the masses' silence and passivity as the alienating effect of an obscene and deadening system of simulation and information, to which a genuine response and symbolic challenge was still possible. Now, on the contrary, he understands this inert passivity and indifference as the very site of an original seductive strategy and symbolic challenge by the masses. This means that the somewhat romanticizing view of this more authentic, symbolic 'scene of the other' is no longer feasible and provides no alternative. But neither is it pessimistic, since there is no longer an alternative or potential that can as such remain unrealized: instead, reversibility is now a possibility of the system itself. Pessimism is overcome by an appreciation of the unconscious humour in the fatal tryst between masses and consumer-oriented systems of simulation that leaves the realm of will and representation deserted, in a way that reveals the latter to be a dream like projection of the class of professionalized, self-appointed educators who only centuries before had treated the masses as plebs, that is, as objects easily discarded. When the masses acquire a fatal quality, they enact this ingrained memory of having been an object for so long. In this they respond to the irony that in the preceding decades the masses have been increasingly stimulated to speak out and participate, to become subjects: in democratic politics, in the media, in consumer products and so on. To *this* demand, Baudrillard suggests, they respond with object-like conformity and indifference.

This revenge of the object through the medium of the masses manifests itself in quotidian practices of hyperconformity, indifference, inertia, spontaneity,

disappearance, in a way that joyfully and sovereignly relegates responsibility to others. The masses engage in a 'strategy of ironic investment in the other, in the others, a strategy not of appropriation but, on the contrary, of expulsion toward others, philosophers and men in power, an expulsion of the obligation of being responsible, of enduring philosophical, moral, and political categories'.[12] This strategy is said to flow from the masses' ironic unconscious whose deepest drive is said to be 'the symbolic murder of the political class'.[13] The 'original strategy' Baudrillard speaks of would be part of an attempt to cope with and exploit the fundamental double bind to which biopolitics has always condemned the masses by addressing them simultaneously as subject and object. Having always been the object of power, the plebs are now called to become their own subject, the paradox being that they play no role in the decision to do so, or in deciding on the value of that value – *being subjects* – as such. The masses secretly know this: they play a game, much more duplicitous and intelligent than their opponents, around this question/request/imperative to bear the weight of their own desire and self-knowledge. Perhaps destiny for them always already also means something else: an irresponsible giving-oneself-over-to, a sovereign expulsion of accountability?

To the impossible demand – be autonomous; know yourself! Be responsible! – the masses *escalate* one of the poles of the double bind, which is the only way out, given that, in Bateson's account, to fail the double bind is precisely to pass it.[14] By overconforming to the literal demand, they stay deaf to the deeper, unspoken demand, disrupting what was designed as a fragile but metastable compromise. Baudrillard speaks of a 'lack of desire to become either an object or a subject' as an attempt to cope with 'the contradiction of having to be both'. To underscore this, he refers to the relationship between parent and child, in which the child responds in a way similar to the masses when confronted with a double bind. To the demand to be an object ('Just sit still'), the child opposes all the practices of disobedience, revolt, liberation – in short, a total claim to subjecthood. To the demand to be a subject ('*You* decide now'), he or she opposes just as stubbornly an object's resistance, that is to say, in exactly the opposite manner: infantilism, hyperconformism, a total dependence, passivity, idiocy.[15]

With respect to the difference between subject and object strategies, Baudrillard's larger point is that, despite structural changes in the authoritative makeup of capitalism from obedience to participation, in critical theory 'the strategy of the subject is [still] universally valorized'. To counter this, he traces a form of mass-action that is non-subjective, that does not demand recognition but acts in object-like conformity with everything addressed to it and absorbs

what is fed into it: advertising, elections, scientific surveys, news and so on. On the other side of the whole drama of recognition, it absorbs everything and refracts it in different directions, like a crystal.[16] In this it is never responsible, only fascinated and distracted; it wants spectacle. But it wants it too much, to the point of breach, a disequilibrium in the system that threatens and potentially reverses its course. In this it gives up the belief in its own truth or in the truth of the other: it recognizes only the desire of the subject-other, but without ever becoming a subject: everything is immediately consumed. This fatal game is the stone on which the wave of ressentiment breaks: the self-sustaining cycle of interiorized guilt that recruits individuals as responsible moral subjects.

Andy Warhol is perhaps the ultimate personification of this ironic ruse of the object. In 1985, Warhol participated in an Amiga Commodore product launch.[17] As a celebrity artist, he was asked to colour in a digital photo-frame of Deborah Harry (Blondie) on the computer before a large audience. The host of the event starts with a question ('You found it to be very spontaneous …') when Warhol immediately interrupts him ('Yeah, it's great, it's such a great thing'). This has an immediate comical effect on both crowd and host, while Warhol remains utterly stoic. In response, the host turns towards the audience and shouts, somewhat uncomfortably, 'Well, what more can you say!', to which Warhol mumbles, 'Well … I could say a lot of things.' To the next question, whether there is something he does not like about the Commodore, he responds, 'No, no, I love the machine.' Increasingly confused and unsure how to respond, the host tries again: 'What computers have you worked on before?', to which Andy responds, 'Oh I haven't worked on anything, I waited for this one', after which the crowd again bursts into laughter and the host screams, almost hysterically, 'Really?'.

Why did audience and host respond in this manner? Wasn't Warhol *supposed*, even contractually *obliged*, to praise this particular product? So what did he do wrong? The problem of course is that he conformed *too* perfectly – he responded to what was asked of him in such a seamless and literal manner – that the intended effect was precisely *not* reached. Rather, the opposite effect was: instead of producing a smooth socio-communicative phantasm in which the audience's suspension of disbelief (they all know that Warhol is there to pretend to like the product, and that it's not a serious review or an honest opinion) is upheld, his hyperconformity breaks and 'hystericizes' this flow, disallowing the audience any comfortable illusion and bad faith that what they are witnessing is both real *and* not real. This interruption induces the kind of laughter associated with an experience of the uncanny.

Likewise, in interviews the question 'What would you like to talk about?' was often greeted with indifference by the artist ('Oh, I don't know'). Before an interview, Warhol once told an assistant to 'just tell me the words [the interviewer] wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because I'm so empty I just can't think of anything to say.' The point is that this behaviour raises suspicion – one can never quite discard the eerie feeling that Warhol is tricking us, that he is not all that naive, indifferent or spontaneous. Or, what is perhaps even worse, that he *really is* naive, that he really *does* 'love' the Amiga, in a way that we cannot. This gnawing feeling on the part of the subject-who-wants-to-know is precisely what Baudrillard considers to be the revenge of the object, its supreme power and advantage over subject-strategies. Setting a trap for the subject, like Warhol 'the masses are very snobbish; they … sovereignly delegate the faculty of choice to someone else, in a sort of game of irresponsibility, ironic challenge, sovereign lack of will, or secret ruse'.[18]

4

In an interview, Baudrillard casts Nietzsche as 'the author beneath whose broad shadow I moved, though involuntarily, and without even really knowing I was doing so'.[19] The phrasing is ambiguous. Moving beneath someone's shadow connotes influence, perhaps even affiliation, but an uneasy one at that. That is, the affiliation might turn out to be a burden and a curse. A shadow is typically something that you try but ultimately fail to escape in search of something beyond, something that prevents you from becoming who you are, but which has shaped you and that you cannot fail to sympathize or even identify with.

Perhaps, indeed, Baudrillard tried to wrestle himself from the involuntarily Nietzschean current that enveloped him, a fate he never quite learned to love, but which he used as a place of refuge and attack against the Marxist and post-structuralist discourses dominating the French intellectual scene, in which he always remained somewhat out of place. These discourses perhaps constitute the principal target of most of Baudrillard's writings. To 'the whole culture based on the philosophical subject'[20] in which these modern emancipatory discourses continue to participate, he opposes the object, which exists outside of and interrupts all dialectics of the subject, historical or metaphysical (e.g. the critique of alienation, reification and ideology, the struggle for recognition, human and civil rights, identity politics). For Baudrillard, these discourses remain trapped

within the same productivist and pastoral paradigm of the social. Having no desire to speak in the masses' name or for their sake, Baudrillard makes himself into the subversive medium for the poetic yet catastrophic justification of their defiant obstinacy to all attempts at emancipation. By doing so he opens up his own thought to the un- or underthought, to what I call the plebeian, as that which animates the masses in the shadow of their socialization. As the site of an *involuntary inservitude*, the plebeian cannot be attributed to any subject, not even a potential one; rather, the *object* is its fundamental locus. The fact that this 'strange object' nevertheless *acts* can no longer pass unnoticed, lest critique becomes illusory.

For Baudrillard, it is the revenge of the object that involuntarily manifests itself and speaks through the masses, and *through* Baudrillard, as his own discourse takes on a plebeian and fatal quality. Consider Foucault's fleeting observation on the mode of existence of the plebeian:

> The plebs is no doubt not a real sociological entity. But there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge. There is certainly no such thing as "the" plebs; rather there is, as it were, a certain plebeian quality or aspect (*de la plèbe*). There is plebs in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement.[21]

Like Foucault's plebs, Baudrillard's masses have no sociological reality either. The masses are not reducible to the social; instead, they haunt it. Yet Foucault, like Deleuze, ultimately fails to fully transcend the emancipatory rhetoric of subjectifying resistances premised on a historicist positivism of the dispositif as a form of desiring-production.[22] Rather than a centrifugal power or counter-stroke, the masses form the implosive heart of power, its very own ironic echo and destiny. This is why we should 'forget' Foucault.

In 2012, a girl from Haren (The Netherlands) accidentally set her Facebook sweet-sixteen party event to public. As a consequence, it quickly went viral; later, it was picked up by the media as a gimmick, leading to wild speculations, with police, media and political experts all pitching in. This of course had the effect of 'hyping' the event even more. In the end, three to five thousand people turned up to this 'non-existent party', surrounded by what seemed like even more riot

police and journalists eager to contain and broadcast the event. As darkness fell and alcohol levels rose, what began as a party did indeed turn ugly, as if not to disappoint both police and media. During the night, various members of the riot police were attacked, stores looted and private property damaged. Afterwards, a well-respected ex-politician of the Dutch Labor Party (Job Cohen) was asked to lead a commission investigating the affair and write a report, concluding that the event, besides resulting in up to a million euros in damages, 'severely impacted the feeling of safety of the local inhabitants'.[23] This despite the many preparations by the authorities, who, close to sealing off the village from the world altogether, decided to create an elaborate safety plan, using 'scripts' to deal with emergent 'scenarios', initiating the highest *Coordinated Regional Incident-Control Procedure*, or 'GRIP 3'. From the commission's perspective, these youngsters did not respond well to the novel potential of social media for participation. It's fine to participate, to express yourself: but in the proper place, at the right time and, most of all, individually. But didn't they? The implicit demand to participate and share was taken literally and therefore irresponsibly, with disturbing results. An *ecstasy* of the social for which no one and everyone was responsible, these youths merely complied with the imperatives inherent in media systems.

In a brilliant article, William Merrin discusses another example of this type of ironic effect. In 2004 a fountain in memoriam of Princess Diana was opened to the public. But rather than 'an icon that they can look at', as so many memorials are, the architect designed the place such that people could participate in it. Soon, however, the place became a health hazard, with people injured, littering, destroying the grass and the drainage and allowing their dogs to paddle in the water. In response, a seven-foot barrier was erected, visitor numbers restricted, attendants increased and clear rules of behaviour introduced.[24] In other words, the problem, as Charles Spencer (Diana's brother) correctly saw it, was how to *balance* the memorial's popular accessibility with its function as a moralizing site of contemplative remembrance. The same with Brexit: fed with spectacular sights and surrounded by manipulations and professionalized cynicism, the masses, burdened with the task of voting responsibly, respond in the only way they see fit: with the same unknowing spectacle that envelops them in its derealizing mania.

What these examples show is that, rather than a symptom of populist ressentiment or alienation, the object-like obstinacy of the masses through forms of hyper-conformity to the rules of the global consumerist game escapes the trap of ressentiment, acquiring a fatal, implosive speed that reaches the limit-

point that is *amor fati*: the love of circulation, growth without finality, the will to a return of the same. Short of dialectically negating the other, it accelerates the existing, pushing it into cancerous growth to the point of reversibility. In this it is not a reactive but an active force. The American phenomenon of obesity offers a prototype for such a fatal strategy, an ironic mirroring of a socio-economic system likewise addicted to circulation and hypertelic growth, reminiscent of Alfred Jarry's King Ubu, a vulgar and destructive creature, or what Merrin calls ubesity. If for Baudrillard there is ressentiment, it is to be found not in the masses but in the class of politicians, philosophers, teachers and other experts that try to understand and better them, to help them discover their own will and representation, to improve their living conditions, their economic chances and so on. It is as a *strategic response* to this that the masses sovereignly delegate all responsibility, will, liberty and power to 'apparatuses either political or intellectual, either technical or operational, to whom has devolved the duty of taking care of all of these things'.[25]

Given an ever-aging population stuck in retirement homes incapable of providing even the minimal hygienic and entertainment services; given an insatiable thirst for maintaining and extending life indefinitely, enabled by cosmetic surgery, organ transplants and obsessive self-monitoring, perhaps the greatest retaliation of the masses lies in their fatal embrace of life itself as an intrinsic value, in which there is no such thing as a valueless life but no life is more valuable than any other. The idea that life as such is worth living is perhaps the most dangerous thought. The tautology – life lived for the sake of living – is so destructive that it threatens to undermine the very basic conditions of life as such.

How much irony can you bear? Does the condition Baudrillard describe signal nihilism's final consummation, but indefinitely postponed? Can we, following Baudrillard, really make ourselves assent to the idea that the masses display this ecstatic love of fate that rejoices in society's entropic death-drive towards economic, ecological and human catastrophe, while maintaining the belief in its reversibility and the return of play? Does this mean thinking beyond emancipation altogether, or can we imagine *another* kind of emancipation, unworthy of the name perhaps, that of the object? If we cannot, then, and only then, might we glimpse a sense of our fundamental values, and their despair. If there is truth, it is to be found here, negatively, in the awareness that we cannot assent to the truth of this or that proposition, that is, the truth of the other. What Baudrillard claims is false, in a descriptive and moral sense. But might the other's falsity perhaps constitute our truth?

Notes

1   *The Daily Show*, 27 June 2016.

2   Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemical Tract*, trans. Ian C. Johnston (Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, (2009 [1887]), 104.

3   Ibid., 105.

4   Jean Baudrillard and Mike Gane, *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 209.

5   Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008), and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, or, the End of the Social* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2007).

6   Jean Baudrillard, trans. Marie Maclean, 'The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media', *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985): 585.

7   Ibid.

8   G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952 [1807]), 391–392.

9   Baudrillard, *Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 14.

10 Roger Célestin, 'Interview with Jean Baudrillard: From Popular Culture to Mass Culture', *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies* 1, no. 1 (1997): 11.

11 Jean Baudrillard, *Requiem for the Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

12 Baudrillard, 'The Masses', 585.

13 Ibid., 581.

14 Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley and John Weakland, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 1 (1956): 251–264.

15 Baudrillard, *Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 107.

16 Baudrillard and Gane, *Baudrillard Live*, 50–66.

17 http://youtu.be/3oqUd8utr14 (accessed 5 July 2016).

18 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 127.

19 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

20 Ibid., 3.

21 Michel Foucault, 'Powers and Strategies', in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 137–138.

22 Baudrillard, *Shadow of the Silent Majorities*.

23 http://www.eenvandaag.nl/uploads/doc/Commissie-CohenHoofdrapport_1.pdf (accessed 5 July 2016).

24 William Merrin, 'Floral Tributes, Binge-Drinking and the Ikea Riot Considered as an Up-hill Bicycle Race', in David B. Clarke et al. (eds.), *Jean Baudrillard: Fatal Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 73.

25 Baudrillard, 'The Masses', 585.

The Power of Ambivalence: A Conversation with Peter Sloterdijk

Van Tuinen: There are at least two threads that run through your work and converge in the issue of ressentiment: the project of a general therapeutics or immunology and the focus on the field of psychopolitics. You once wrote about the issue of ressentiment that it offers the most plausible description of the behaviour of majorities in modern societies.[1] The term, however, dates back to the nineteenth century, the heyday of mass psychology, a discipline that is almost forgotten today. Let's start with the general aspects: What significance does the concept of ressentiment have in your work, and where do you see its current implications?

Peter Sloterdijk: Ressentiment is a concept I use primarily in my research about the psychopolitical foundations of society. I think that what Sigmund Freud called the feeling of discontent in civilization could be translated into the language of a theory of ressentiment, mostly because the so-called renunciation of drives goes hand in hand with submission to a given prohibition. This submission, if it isn't complete, produces a nuclear reserve of energies that are directed against the law to which one has reluctantly submitted oneself. Ressentiment is first of all a phenomenon of reluctance – of the coerced will that could not be forced to identify completely with the law and therefore harbours an unrestrained reserve of reluctance, rejection and resistance. These three elementary negativities always remain in the game whenever complete subjugation has failed.

Van Tuinen: In the second essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche famously describes how the ressentimental basis for the rise of bad conscience is laid when the instinct for freedom is forced into latency, that is, when it is 'forced back, repressed, incarcerated within itself and finally able to discharge and unleash itself only against itself'.[2] What happens when this subjugation has been successfully completed?

Sloterdijk: Wherever subjugation isn't completely successful, an ambivalence comes into being. Where it has succeeded fully, a persecutive projection

arises, because those who have completely submitted to the law have an instinct for the modus vivendi of those who exist in the mode of semi-submission. They know full well that the others aren't true believers, and then they develop ressentiment against the ambivalence of the others. This is a matrix within which we may already describe a great deal of what is going on in monotheistic religions, because they involve a class struggle that develops between those who submit completely and the rank-and-file populace, the ambivalent believers. And that's how one arrives at the priest type. It is no coincidence that Nietzsche discovered his providential adversary in the figure of the priest. After all, a priest is someone who leads his life committed to complete submission. In the Catholic Church –that is, the original Christian Church – priests were ordained in a ritual where the priest-to-be lay headfirst on the floor. This is a way to psychosomatically stage his complete resignation from independent impulses. It is in the act of lying on the floor, in being crushed by the will of another, that one turns over one's own will.

Van Tuinen: The priest is the master of latency, which is why he has such an acute sense of the semi-latency of others?

Sloterdijk: The priest, as a type, is one who has an assured sense of the rebellious residues in the souls of others. He knows that they can neither really kneel nor really lie down on the floor. He attempts to exchange his empirical ego for a transcendental Self. This is a basic figure that can be observed well into the age of German idealism: a transcendent ego moves into the place where currently the empirical self exists. The space of one's own soul is evacuated: the mortal ego is sacrificed and a higher Self is to materialize in its place. Christianity is a thoroughly mediumistic religion, even if it is not usually associated with possession phenomena. According to Christian thought, possession only occurs in primitive religions, not in Christianity itself. This has to do with the fact that Christian belief operates like a gentle possession – a eutonic possession, so to speak, which does not have the normal characteristics of a full-fledged possession. Usually, those affected are possessed by demons or the devil, whereas Christian possession is called faith or enthusiasm …

Van Tuinen: … or fanaticism in the ones who have fully embraced the escape into faith. How would you characterize the link between fanaticism and ressentiment?

Sloterdijk: I believe that authentic enthusiasm, this Pentecostal exuberance, is an experience that goes hand in hand with a communicative sort of euphoria. This, by the way, is an experience that was relatively widespread in the twentieth century. People who explored group therapy in the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps later still – they all know this. At a certain point after

everyone has had his or her catharsis, there is a sort of private Pentecost that occurs within the group, where a collective erotic enthusiasm is developed. It may just be one part of the group that is affected. One half is already up on cloud nine, while the other doesn't even know what's happening.

Van Tuinen: At the time, however, group therapy was also aimed at overcoming ressentiment precisely by way of setting free energies that are structured in a non-nuclear way.

Sloterdijk: Definitely. Because enthusiasm is linked to the discovery of generosity. We all become enthusiastic when we realize we can partake in some kind of communal energy. This is a wonderful discovery. And it's still happening today: young people in the Taizé Community describe such experiences. Sometimes it happens during special church celebrations or papal visits. In rare cases, it may even happen when a new political party is founded. Maybe Emmanuel Macron on some occasions generated such euphoria in the assembly halls in France when he founded En Marche, because his own enthusiastic mood was so infectious.

Van Tuinen: Yet it is exactly these excesses of feeling aroused and organized by the priest that Nietzsche evaluates as the wrong medicine against ressentiment, because, he argues, in this way one merely treats symptoms, which is to say one merely reinforces a servile passivity.[3] In fact, it is precisely from such healing frenzy that the priest derives his power over his flock.

Sloterdijk: Well, this evaluation presupposes something that may not be correct. After all, Nietzsche sociologically miscategorized Christianity by identifying it as a slave religion. The truth is that Christianity has had a powerful impact on all social strata. Through the more recent works of Peter Brown, we now know that this tendency towards euergetism had its origins in the Greek tradition; Paul Veyne also wrote about it in *Bread and Circuses. Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (1976). Early Christendom profited materially from the contributions of wealthy people fairly soon. In no way has it always just been this slave religion Nietzsche wanted to see in it. You can see this in different parts of the world today, by the way. Christianity is remarkably successful among the nouveau riche in China, who would prefer to belong to the neo-religious elite and are converting – some in secret, some openly – from Confucianism to Christianity. Christianity has a certain charm, which is particularly effective on the rich and powerful, precisely because the wealthy gain a second programme, namely the transcendence of ambitions. That's the way it was in our ancient times as well. In the Roman Empire, the wealthy transferred the habitus of euergetic practices onto this still minor religious phenomenon of Christians. This, of course, relativizes certain basic assumptions of

Nietzsche's diagnosis of Christianity. What remains untouched by this, however, is his basic formula that Christianity is Platonism for the masses. I think this is quite definitive. Nobody said that the rich don't also form part of a public that is susceptible to the Platonism of the masses. But I also believe, conversely, that Nietzsche wasn't sensitive enough in his approach to the experience of solidarity in early communities. They developed a generous sense of solidarity that forged strong interpersonal bonds. If you look at it this way, Christianity is something like a charitable anticipation of the welfare state with private means, which is part of the attraction of some mosques, or even the Muslim Brotherhood, today. In some countries, they were the only institutions that cared about the lives of poor people in the past eighty, ninety years.

Van Tuinen: Allow me to return to my question: Can they do it without mobilizing the ressentiment of the populace?

Sloterdijk: That is indeed the great question. One might have to undertake some detailed investigation. As for myself, I am not familiar enough with the material to offer an adequate assessment. My suspicion is that good deeds are also exploited to seduce people, that these weren't purely Samaritan acts but also served to accrue power.

Van Tuinen: Is this also why, in *Die Verachtung der Massen* (Contempt for the Masses), you consider the suspicion of ressentiment as essential to our modern democratic societies and welfare states?

Sloterdijk: People in general are unable to bear the thought of other people who are better off than they are. Let's start with this very basic statement. Humans are animals that love comparisons. When people are clever or when they possess something like collective wisdom, they try to compare themselves as little as possible. One great example of a psychopolitical structure for avoiding negative comparisons is the constant stratification of society in medieval Europe. The social classes were considered something like social species, each of which issued like a separate creature from the hands of God. This dynamic is portrayed so well in Calderón de la Barca's wonderful play *The Great Theatre of the World*, whose brilliant anti-ressentiment plot is based on the idea of avoiding comparisons with those who are better off.

Van Tuinen: This is in fact a classic diagnosis, also made by Max Scheler and René Girard, that the end of class society will also do away with the prohibition of comparisons. What surprises me about this analysis, however, is that it is very difficult to link it to Nietzsche's more differential take, as only the man of ressentiment, the slave, feels envy. The nobleman, by contrast, feels no envy, precisely because he does not need to compare himself to others, because he acts spontaneously. In other words, it is

only in slave culture, where, under the hands of the priest, everything is contaminated with ressentiment. Only here could envy become so dominant in the first place, even if, of course, it is at the same time strictly forbidden. Perhaps modernity is no longer a priest culture, precisely because envy has finally been liberated. But that doesn't change the fact that, in principle, envy cannot possibly be the reason, the original ground of ressentiment.

Sloterdijk: Envy or wrath capable of expression does not accumulate in such a way that ressentiment can emerge. After all, ressentiment is always a phenomenon that is premised on the suppression of an expression. Envy is always fresh, and ressentiment is habitual; it is therefore old poison. Generally, it emerges from the psychology of the beaten dog. And here we arrive at Nietzsche's slave psychology. For him, a slave is the kind of person who is per se condemned to feel ressentiment, because he remembers, in one way or another, that there has been a time before oppression.

Van Tuinen: Even if he cannot conceive of this time in a positive way but only as a sort of primordial trauma.

Sloterdijk: I believe that a considerable part of the psychoanalytic movement of the twentieth century had to do with the ressentiment issue crossing over into therapy, where it was treated in a way that wasn't directly compatible with the instruments of Nietzschean ressentiment analysis. When this transition occurs, ressentiment analysis is translated into a theory of neuroses, which makes a considerable part of the problem disappear. Nietzsche himself, however, laid out everything in purely psychopolitical terms. His slave psychology only makes sense against the background of a master psychology. And his entire ethics is based on a distinction that is no longer allowed in contemporary ethics: the distinction between noble and common impulses. No psychologist and no ethics scholar after Nietzsche ever used this distinction affirmatively. This is a very significant observation, that there is no longer a vocabulary for impulses like nobility, generosity and so on. Only Maslow's hierarchy of human motivations features a layer fairly high up where such values as benevolence and generosity exist.

Van Tuinen: But the fact that these values are so highly ranked in Maslow's hierarchy indicates that to him, too, envy is the more fundamental feeling. According to his model, there is a broad base where people play the 'greedy pig'. Actually, this is true for all twentieth-century ressentiment theoreticians – they all proceed from the assumption of a 'greedy-pig' anthropology. Nietzsche might say that they lack what you once called a 'noble anthropology'[4] or what I would call, paraphrasing Nietzsche, the lordly right (*Herrenrecht*) to actually use or decide over the label of ressentiment.

Sloterdijk: I believe that this gets very close to the heart of the problem. Nietzsche was the last great theoretician of thymotic impulses, because

he detected an aristocratic potential in the human soul itself. And he was adept at connecting this with the classical tradition. There is a passage in the *Republic* where Socrates says something like, What nonsense when I say I am superior to myself! This would mean I am at once above and below. Then he reconsiders his argument, saying, perhaps this nonsense is in fact quite sensible, because I must actually distinguish between above and below in myself. I do have an active demos within me, a barbaric mob, but also a small, noble faction whom I put in power, if all goes well – in the sense of an analogy between state and soul – so that we are also able to transform the soul into an aristocratic regime, preferably, of course, into a monarchy of wisdom. As long as we keep the state-soul analogy alive, all concepts of political science can also be used psychologically. We end up with a noble and merciful monarchy, a merely noble aristocracy, and then it slowly goes downhill from there. We get a democracy of the soul – which is already quite uncomfortable, since it is a soul and a form of government in which good and evil mingle in a rather non-transparent way. And things deteriorate even further, from plutocracy into tyranny. The tyrant, according to Plato, is the unhappiest and the most unfortunate of all people, and at the same time, tyranny is the worst of all possible ways to organize the polity. But the problem of ressentiment would, in this model, indeed begin with the democratic stage. Under democracy, ambivalence is always in power, since the inferior always mingles with the superior.

Van Tuinen: But in adding this thymotic position – in contrast to the universalism of the erotic analysis of ressentiment as we find it in Girard's writings, for instance – what are the insights that we might gain for the power of ambivalence in modern democracy? Girard had no thymotics-based perspective; for him, thymotics always derived from eroticism. The will to power was itself a fable full of ressentiment.[5]

Sloterdijk: The big problem with René Girard's psychological analyses is that he did not account for primordial impulses, that he didn't begin with the theory of drives. Instead, for him everything started with mimesis. This would mean that there is no first, neither in the field of eros nor in the field of *thymos*. Everything would be connected in triangular relationships, which is simply not true. Isn't it striking that he applied his theory of triangulation to everything with the tenacity of a fixed idea, as if he were afraid to observe phenomena that would relativize his theory? He made history, in any case, and effected a significant restructuring of the humanities and its vocabulary. Yet it is very strange that he wasn't sufficiently interested – as Freud was – to formulate a theory of primordial emotions.

Van Tuinen: I think Nietzsche would consider him the pastoral thinker
par excellence, precisely because he rules out the very possibility of a
spontaneous or noble composition of the will and allows only for a logic of
contagion and mediation of base drives. His very rejection of modernity is
based on a morality of sin and redemption that is deeply Catholic.

Sloterdijk: That may be. I mean, every child is equipped with instincts, and
whenever he or she is hungry and has to be fed, he or she is in a state where
the primary drives are in power. A child doesn't observe another baby first
and then make the decision to take the other breast. Maybe in twins, but
there is a broad field of first emotions that are not triggered by mimetic
rivalry. This rivalry can later latch onto the desire of others, but there are
primary emotions and there is a kind of emotional capacity for first strike
that isn't calibrated to trigger jealousy in another person. There is, in
Girard, a strange element: that in complete triangulation, there is always
a provocateur. He tried to use Shakespeare's earliest work, *The Rape of
Lucrece*, as an example by demonstrating how Lucrece's husband, Collatine,
induces some kind of jealous curiosity in Sextus Tarquinius, the king's son,
by praising his wife so much that the latter can't help but to conceive the
idea that a subordinate figure is prohibited from greater erotic happiness
than his own. And then of course the thought occurs to him that in order to
adjust this imbalance he will need to rape Lucrece. The problem is, however,
that Collatine had fallen for Lucrece much earlier, long before making
Sextus Tarquinius jealous. Girard's system omits this whole dimension
– unless, of course, one also interprets the person's choice of object as an
oedipal, triangular mechanism, which means that one is always already
trapped.

Van Tuinen: Is a thymotician, a noble anthropologist, immune to such traps?

Sloterdijk: He should be. *Thymos* describes the group of psychological
impulses that enable a person to show what he possesses, what he can do
and what he can give. Erotic impulses, on the other hand, are the ones
with which the person manifests what he lacks. In the psychological space,
therefore, a give-and-take between these poles is pre-programmed. *Thymos*
isn't seen in a positive light in contemporary scholarship, because having
something to give is generally something that is intentionally excluded
from our anthropology. When I researched the subject, I always operated
with the distinction between the anthropology of human wealth and the
anthropology of human poverty. When one assumes that human beings
are by nature poor and deprived, one must completely imprison them in
an erotology. When one assumes, however, that human beings by nature
possess surpluses and are at least potentially wealthy creatures, one cannot
identify them solely with eros, which is to say, with greed.

Van Tuinen: Nietzsche called his genealogy a polemic. You once said that ressentiment is a polemogenous concept, as truth and plausibility actually cancel each other out in their application. Could you explain what you mean? And would you agree with me that this polemic quality has been lost among social scientists and anthropologists, who think it suffices to tell the truth about ressentiment? Or at least that this polemic function has become implicit?

Sloterdijk: The genealogy of morality is a polemic first and foremost because it questions the self-interpretation of morality. Nietzsche's genealogical programme derives the governing morality from baser motives. In this sense, it is difficult to expect the people who are the subject of this analysis to enthusiastically accept that they have been defeated by their baser motives. Nobody likes to admit to having baser motives. You see this in so many court cases. Even murderers usually claim either that they had no choice or that they were merely the agent of circumstances, didn't mean to do it or, in the worst case, exacted justice, because the victim deserved to die – a sentiment that may even be shared by the public, by the way. There have been many killers with whom the public sympathized, because it regarded them as Robin Hood-like figures.

Van Tuinen: Nietzsche polemicized mainly against the dialectic philosophers of history, the utilitarians, the evolutionary psychologists – particularly Paul Rée – as they all represented the position of morality and its self-legitimization. As such, they always played the part of the priest figure.

Sloterdijk: Well, the priest is the one who implants the inhibition of a strong expression in a person's psyche. But on this issue, Nietzsche is himself under the influence of an ambivalence, because he doesn't entirely approve of his own good manners and education, his scholastic training. We shouldn't forget that. His conception of education is quite melodramatic. And he knows that one's development into a complete human being begins with a phase of oppression and pressure. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* starts with this image of three transformations: camel, lion, child. One has to mature into a child, according to Nietzsche. The child, to him, ranks higher than the aristocrat. The aristocrat is associated with the lion but also had to be a slave first. Nietzsche's writings feature strong elements of German idealism in a transmuted form. He was a quintessential thinker of an educational process. *Bildung* starts with one's enslavement, with the affirmation of heavy burdens. The camel, of course, is also a heroic animal. It exhibits a kind of heroic masochism that must be undergone as a preparation for divine freedom. And all this is dedicated to the idea of 'you shall'. Aristocracy, in its lion state, is rebellious and is dedicated to the idea of 'I will'. And the

child becomes a first movement, a self-rolling wheel, like the Aristotelian unmoved mover; it is Christian in its incarnation, albeit not incarnate as Christ, but as a divine child.

Van Tuinen: What does this tell us about the relevance of the Nietzschean diagnosis of the power of ambivalence or slave morality for our time?

Sloterdijk: Today the problem of slave morality is different. It is no longer that we are dealing with an oppressed class, be it in the shape of a working class, be it in the shape of serfdom. We mustn't forget, of course, that Nietzsche was seventeen when serfdom was abolished in Russia, in 1861. This tradition was still quite present. Even France was an agricultural society at the time, populated by peasants and their typical prejudices and their typical ressentiments. Essentially, the Golden Age of ressentiment begins only after the French Revolution, because the reestablishment of ties with the res publica invited people to believe in their equality. In this equality, everyone compares himself or herself to others, directly and unprotected, and every poor soul is seduced by mass media to compare himself or herself to the most intelligent, the wealthiest, the happiest and the most gifted individuals. These comparisons are always unfavourable to the self, giving rise to a ressentiment against everything above us. In contemporary society, healthy self-awareness can only really be generated by autohypnosis. If one were to compare oneself directly with people who are better off, one would soon emerge a cosmic loser.

Van Tuinen: I recently read a short essay I'm sure you're familiar with: 'Der Holländer' (The Dutchman), in Hermann Hesse's *Kurgast* (A Guest at the Spa, 1925). After a detailed description of his ressentiment against his Dutch neighbour in the sanitarium he is visiting, he narrates the spiritual exercises in empathy by which he overcomes his ressentiment up to the point of complete identification with the Dutchman. Somehow this autohypnotic exercise seems highly implausible to me as a cure for ressentiment, especially since, as Nietzsche says, the man of ressentiment can never fully acknowledge his own ressentiment: his soul squints.[6]

Sloterdijk: It is, of course, a humorous text, but I wouldn't put it past Hermann Hesse. Since you've mentioned it, I incidentally gave a talk at Sils Maria a few years ago entitled 'The Guest at the Spa and his Brothers', citing examples from antiquity, and from Montaigne to Nietzsche, Hesse, Cioran, Thomas Mann, giving a brief phenomenology of spa culture, of the person concerned with healing – that's why I know this story quite well. Musil once described the object of this kind of ressentiment quite beautifully as 'the red cheeks of life': the things a Dutch cheese trader does so that the neurasthenic intellectual subject is immediately thrown into some sort of vital envy and wants to punch the guy.

Van Tuinen: Following the Platonic analogy of the soul and the state, let us
translate this into politics: you've always said that you are really searching
for the conditions that would enable a Left free of ressentiment. This
means that we need collective strategies that eliminate ressentiment as the
mainspring of emancipatory processes and replace it with something else.

Sloterdijk: Yes. I think an important step in this direction would be to describe
the achievements of wealthy people and of entrepreneurial categories
in society in an adequate way. After all, ressentiment also includes this
completely warped perception that has spread throughout the Western
world since the nineteenth century, transferring the pattern of an
exploitative aristocracy and the exploited poor population to the relationship
between entrepreneurs and workers almost without modification. But this
transfer is not legitimate, because enterprises produce an added value that
cannot simply be described with the vocabulary of exploitation. A large
redistribution spiral is created as soon as the modern state intervenes. One
can see this particularly well in old Europe. In 1960, collective labour had
developed to the point where an uneducated worker was able to afford a
family, a home and a small car. This notion of the necessity of redistribution
is lost today, and new ressentiment focuses first on the elites, who cannot
prevent this loss, and second, on fellow sufferers: Chinese, Indian,
Indonesian, Brazilian labourers who do the same work for lower wages. This
has caused an entire part of what one might call the civilizational dividend
(*Zivilisationsrente*) in the national economy to disappear. The civilizational
dividend is what one gets when one is lucky enough to have been born in
Europe at a time when the inequality with other countries was so great
that one was a rich person even if one was poor. This difference is being
levelled today. Today we are talking about a ressentiment that could and
should be combated with two measures, both of them cognitive in nature.
First, a left free of ressentiment would be facilitated by a convincing theory
of globalization that explains why certain geographical privileges related
to existential matters both in Europe and the USA can no longer readily be
claimed. Trump voters don't understand this, voters for the German left don't
understand it and Wilders supporters in the Netherlands don't understand
it either. So, one should formulate a calm theory of macroeconomic
relationships that portrays part of the ressentiment in terms of international
solidarity relations. Second, one should show people in wealthy nations
that – in contrast to common assumptions – there really aren't all that many
reasons to be angry with the rich or the high-performance class, because
they contribute the lion's share of the general budget by paying their income
tax and their sales tax. The top 20 per cent pay 80 per cent of the taxes. This
is the classic Pareto distribution. Wherever this twenty-to-eighty ratio pops

up, we can assume a relatively secure foundation. It occurs in many contexts, and I once asked entrepreneurs whether it was true that 80 per cent of their turnover is from 20 per cent of their clients. They confirmed this 100 per cent. And this is also the case with income tax and sales tax. In Germany, the latter is 19 per cent, in Austria, 20 per cent. And while everyone pays it, one part of the population spends the bulk of their income on groceries, on which there is a lower tax. Left-wing theories that are free from ressentiment of course all work from the assumption 'too good to be true'. I mean, the scholars of the left who know their Spinoza or their Nietzsche – they know that they are serving a ressentiment movement, unless of course they take care to present the motives for their own actions in a more positive light. Today, one speaks of justice rather than of utopia. 'Justice' is the trigger word for all that has remained of the left. This is to say an egalitarian pathos still exists, but hidden within this pathos of course is all the old ressentiment. This is a big problem.

Van Tuinen: I doubt that cognition suffices to overcome ressentiment. But when one speaks of justice in terms of a commonwealth – of a 'common', as Negri does, for instance – doesn't this already alter things?

Sloterdijk: But in this regard, I actually always agreed with Negri. I recall a very memorable discussion we had. He was still locked up at Rebibbia prison near Rome, where he served part of his sentence. His image was broadcast in the amphitheatre of the Centre Pompidou, and we were of the same mind when it came to our postulate of a left beyond ressentiment. He subscribed to this notion 100 per cent and appropriated the hypothesis, recognizing it in his own writings and appreciating my demand as a gesture that confirmed his own concerns. Well, that was twenty years ago now, and I don't think much has happened regarding the evolution of a left free from ressentiment. On the contrary, you see examples of the opposite taking place in France: a sham left has been in power; with Hollande, all projects have failed. At the end of his five-year term, there are 600,000 more unemployed than in 2012. He failed on all fronts, although much of what he did was what German politicians probably would have done in his stead as well. Macron will now reap the harvest of Hollande's political decisions. In all likelihood, France will now experience a considerable upswing.

Van Tuinen: Do you see Macron as the leader of an entrepreneurial movement?

Sloterdijk: Yes, this might be a thymotic movement. His wager is his attempt to explain to the citizens of France that entrepreneurs are not bad people. He dreams of a people's front with a liberal flavour. This is new. He wants the left. He also wants to convince discontented voters that they can only win if they give up their sterile opposition to wealth-generating mechanisms.

Notes

1 Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen. Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 56.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Book II par 17, p. 59.

3 Nietzsche speaks of the *Gefühlsausschweifungen* (excesses of feeling) that enable a momentary relief of suffering but inevitably poison the soul still more. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, 19.

4 Peter Sloterdijk, *Weltfremdheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), 25–46.

5 René Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', *MLN* 99, no. 4 (1984): 816–835.

6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, 10.

The Circulation of Resentment in *The Merchant of Venice*: A Commentary Inspired by Peter Sloterdijk

Efrain Kristal

Shylock, the most memorable and unsettling character of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, asks himself why he has suffered so many abuses at the hands of Antonio, the most successful and admired merchant of Venice. Antonio has insulted Shylock for being a Jew, has spit on his beard and on his Jewish garments, has beat him in public and has made efforts to ruin his business and his friendships. This is the context of the play's most famous speech in which Shylock insists on the shared humanity of Jews and Christians ('Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?'). The other exalted speech in the play, spoken by Portia, is the one on the superiority of mercy over power, and even over justice ('The quality of mercy is not strained/And earthly power doth then show likest God's/ When mercy seasons justice.'). It is ironic that Shylock and Portia, the characters who express the loftiest thoughts in the play, are also the play's cruellest characters. Shylock has a keen sense of justice, but that sense is conflated with his deep resentments; and Portia becomes cruel and forgets her own exhortations towards mercy when she suffers humiliations for the first time in her life.

Shylock is involved in a web of economic relationships in which the money he lends circulates around the world, in all the known trade routes in Shakespeare's time. Shylock has suffered indignities and humiliations by Christian citizens of Venice, and his demand for the pound of flesh taken from Antonio's body, the collateral for a loan he had initially requested 'in merry jest', is a perverse act of

cruelty, one in which his resentment and desire for revenge play as significant a role as his sense of justice.[1]

When the play opens, Shylock already hates Antonio, and it would be difficult to untangle his personal experience of resentment from the experiences of other Jews in anti-Semitic milieus. As William Hazlitt puts it, 'the constant apprehension of being burned alive, plundered, banished, reviled, and trampled on, might be supposed to sour the most forbearing nature, and to take something from that "milk of human kindness", with which his prosecutors contemplated his indignities.'[2]

The play offers instructive insights into the nature and origin of Shylock's resentment in the character of Portia, one of Shylock's 'prosecutors'. Portia is the newly wed wife of Antonio's dearest friend, Bassanio, the man for whom Antonio borrowed money from Shylock, so he could woo his bride; but she comes to Venice dressed as a male lawyer given license by the Duke of Venice to adjudicate Shylock's claim for the pound of Antonio's flesh. In the very process of the trial, Portia's generous spirit, as she initially seeks mercy for Antonio, is transformed into cruel intent against Shylock, and her shift offers insights into how Shylock's own resentment and cruelty may have emerged in the first place.

In this chapter, I explore Shylock's and Portia's resentments in the context in which they are expressed, which is the world of maritime commerce towards the end of the sixteenth century, relying on some seminal ideas by Peter Sloterdijk on psychology and on the circulation of money.

The circulation of money, and resentment in Sloterdijk's philosophy

'Circulation' and 'coexistence' have played central roles in Peter Sloterdijk's philosophy: in his meditations on the movement of people, goods, money and information around the globe; in his ideas about the corrosive effect resentment can have in human affairs; and in a view that is emerging in his recent writings – including an important interview with Sjoerd van Tuinen in *Giving and Taking*, a book whose title is particularly relevant to this chapter – according to which the economy of exchange has not superseded or eliminated the economy of generosity inspired by empathy or solidarity.[3] Sloterdijk has argued that 'involuntary poverty' is a scandal, and he shares Max Scheler's position that the accumulation of money for its own sake is a perverse reversal in which means

become ends when underscoring 'the stupidity of accumulation without purpose or goal'.[4] In his book on ressentiment in which he corrects Nietzsche's powerful use of the term away from a critique of religion to a critique of modern utilitarian societies,[5] Scheler argues that the stage is set for ressentiment when utility is the driving force of human affairs and money is transformed from a means to an end (from an object of exchange to an object of accumulation) and Sloterdijk has written eloquently against reckless consumption without considering the sustainability of human life on earth.[6]

To understand the psychological impulses that can motivate or detract from the kind of cooperation that can promote the sustainability of human life, Sloterdijk has explored the dynamic between *eros* and *thymos*, two Greek concepts that correspond to taking and giving – acts that correspond to the satisfaction of our needs on the one hand, and to the affirmation of life on the other: 'Eros is oriented towards taking, towards acquisition and possessions. Today eros is the god of mass culture, in which everything revolves around the satisfaction of needs.'[7] Thymos, on the other hand – as Plato investigates the notion in the *Republic* – is oriented towards self-affirmation, pride, dignity, justice and honour. It is a source of generous impulses, and of the will to participate in life. Thymos can also be the source of indignation, resentment and rage, when it is thwarted. Plato speaks of thymos as 'the principle of high spirit,' a positive, necessary life force, which can, nonetheless, generate anger, destruction and suffering.[8] In *Rage and Time* Sloterdijk notes that the notion of rage generated by the humiliation of thymotic energies informs the opening lines of the Western literary tradition in the *Iliad*, when Achilles's pride has been wounded by his sense that Agamemnon has treated him unfairly, unleashing his resentment and disruptive anger: 'Sing, Muse, of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus, that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans to countless agonies and pains.'[9]

Eros is a central notion in many psychological discussions, but Sloterdijk regrets the confusion that can occur when thinkers subsume thymotic energies under erotic ones in their psychological investigations. For Sloterdijk, eros and thymos, the need to take and the need to give, are forces that can be equally powerful in the human psyche. The rage of Achilles, for Sloterdijk, comes from his ambition, his desire for prestige and his injured pride, and he thinks that our reading of Homer's epic would be considerably impoverished if we were to reduce Achilles's outrage to mere narcissism.[10] Sloterdijk's analysis of the *Iliad* is the starting point of his suggestion that we should broaden contemporary discussions about psychological dispositions by returning

to the basic conception of philosophical psychology found in ancient Greek philosophy according to which the soul does not just manifest itself in Eros because it opens itself equally to the impulses of Thymos. While eroticism addresses those 'objects' that we lack and whose presence or possession makes us feel complete, Thymos discloses ways for human beings to affirm what they possess, to come to terms with what we are able to do, and to affirm what we would like to be.[11]

When the pride of a person or a community is harmed, violated or humiliated, feelings of resentment can emerge, which can be stored for a long time. These feelings can be contagious: they can be transmitted, through cultural expression, as if they were capital in the bank, and they can even be transferred from one generation to another, in cultural and intellectual traditions in which a desire for vengeance against others may be inherited.[12]

In the dynamics of eros and thymos, as Sloterdijk would have it, money plays a privileged role in the modern era. Money is an instrument – circulating around the world – with which any number of needs and desires can be satisfied, but it can also be an instrument for thymotic expressions such as generosity or cruelty.

The Merchant of Venice

Shakespeare's play abounds with characters whose generosity is expressed in their desire to give and characters whose contempt for others is expressed in their desire to take. The greatest act of generosity in the play is by Antonio, who is willing to offer all of his possessions and to risk his life for the sake of a friend; and the greatest act of contempt is by Shylock, who is willing to take the life of another as vengeance for the public abuse and humiliation he suffered under Christians he had wanted to think of as his equals, and particularly under Antonio.

Both of these acts are premised on the unexpected failure of Antonio's sound risk management strategy, which Sloterdijk has discussed in his books on globalization: 'In business undertakings, unlike everlasting philosophy, someone who bets everything on one outcome is a fool. The wise man thinks far ahead and relies, like every good bourgeois who can count, on diversification.'[13] In *Selected Exaggerations* Sloterdijk makes the historical point that Shakespeare wrote the play when 'the field of risk management was taking shape,'[14] and his observation is instructive for an analysis of a play set when the period of world exploration had ended, when the major maritime trade routes and mechanisms for lending money had been established but before an insurance system that

could have protected Shakespeare's merchant's investments was in place, as it was beginning to take shape in Shakespeare's England when the play was conceived, although not fully established until well into the seventeenth century.[15] The play is premised on Antonio's need to borrow a substantial amount of money from a Jewish moneylender he has often disparaged, while the bulk of his capital is tied up on several maritime investments, and on his failure to pay back the loan in time, as news arrives that every single one of his ships has wrecked.

When Antonio asks for the loan, Shylock's initial impulse is to calculate the interest he would charge his borrower:

> Three thousand ducats – 'tis a good sum.
>> Three months from twelve, then. Let me see. The rate –

The impatient and impolite Antonio interrupts Shylock to ask him if he will indeed lend him the money. The interruption takes Shylock aback, and his sense of resentment begins to trump his instincts to enter into a profitable arrangement, so he asks Antonio why he should come to his assistance when the merchant has disparaged him for his lending practices.

Antonio is hardly reassuring when he rejoins that he will likely continue to denigrate him, even if Shylock agrees to lend him the money:

> I am as like …
>> To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too.
>> If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
>> As to thy friends …
>> But lend it rather to thine enemy.

In response to Antonio's humiliating retort, Shylock comes up with a proposal for an agreement that could affirm his dignity regardless of Antonio's actions: he offers to lend Antonio the money he needs without any interest, as a Jew might lend to a Jew, or a Christian to a Christian:

> I would be friends with you and have your love,
>> Forget the shames that you have stained me with,
>> Supply your present wants and take no [interest] for my moneys.

But he adds the disturbing term of a 'pound of flesh' as collateral for his interest-free loan: 'an equal pound/ Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken/ In what part of your body pleaseth me.' Shylock calls the pound of flesh as collateral a joke ('a merry sport') and insists that their agreement is premised on friendship ('To buy his favor I extend this friendship. /If he will take it, so. If not adieu'), but it is difficult to ignore the perverse nature of his proposal, even in jest.

In a perverse way, Shylock is affirming his thymos and protecting his dignity in his negotiation with Antonio: if Antonio pays back the loan, he will have – for the first time – treated Shylock as an equal; but if he does not pay back the loan, Shylock has the legal right to take his life.[16] Either way Shylock intends to satisfy his wounded pride by engaging in a relationship with Antonio based on psychological rather than a financial benefit. But rather than healing his wounded pride, the results of the arrangements will be humiliating and disastrous to his dignity. In the trial in which Shylock demands the pound of flesh, he will lose all of his possessions[17] and will be sentenced to death unless he converts to Christianity, thus renouncing his Judaism, precisely what he had wanted to affirm by offering Antonio a loan without interest, as if a Jew and a Christian could be equals.

From Dante's Ulysses to Shakespeare's Merchant

The Merchant of Venice was performed in 1598, and it mentions events in the history of European shipping that took place in 1596; so Shakespeare had intended his play to feel current, when the period of discovery of the New World is clearly in the past, when trade routes to America had been firmly established, and it is no coincidence that Shakespeare's merchant has important investments in all known corners of the world, and that faraway Mexico is mentioned several times in the play.

Peter Sloterdijk has argued that the most important fact in the modern era is the circulation of money around the globe.[18] As Sloterdijk points out, globalization in the modern era began with the establishment of maritime routes, and it still depends on them since in our time most goods and merchandise travel by sea, even if the transactions are now supported by electronic means of communication, which – like maritime transport – can connect points located anywhere on the globe. The language of economics related to investment maintains a maritime vocabulary when the profit of an investment is called a 'return': this idea comes from the return of ships that transported capital in one direction and goods in the other. In the origin of the age of transportation of merchandise, the risks were considerable, in part because shipwrecks were commonplace.

A great difference between Ulysses's voyage beyond the straits of Gibraltar in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno* as a risky and audacious act and Christopher Columbus's real voyage to America from a Spanish port is that Dante's Ulysses

travels with the purpose of searching for new experiences, whereas Columbus travels with the purpose of looking for benefits. Columbus begins a process where voyages to uncharted territories represent the hopes of profit by entrepreneurs who have invested their own money, or who have received support or credit by others, to realize their financial objectives. According to Sloterdijk, Columbus is a pioneer of the multiplicity of 'entrepreneurs and bearers of risk who envisage the wealth of tomorrow in the shores of other worlds'.[19]

Antonio is not a seafarer himself; he is a stay-at-home merchant who relies on other traveling merchants who work with him to deliver goods in one direction and money in the other, but all of his projects depend on seafaring from his headquarters in Venice.[20] Antonio is an heir to Dante's Ulysses and Columbus in that some of his most important investments follow the same westerly direction of sea navigation beyond the straits of Gibraltar. Unlike his predecessors, however, he is no longer exploring uncharted territories, but his ventures are risky, and no insurance company or government entity is available to protect him from his risks if his ventures fail, diversified as they are. Shakespeare's play is one of the most famous and significant works of literature to address the circulation of money around the world in the first stages of fully globalized maritime commerce.

When the play begins, a number of Antonio's acquaintances notice that he is sad, and they speculate that he must be sad because all of his merchandise is on ships, and he must be worried about his possessions. Salerio, another merchant, expresses his anxious sadness at the prospect of his potential loses when any one of his own ships leaves harbour:

My wind cooling my broth
   Would blow me to an ague when I thought
   What harm a wind too great at sea might do.
   But I should think of shallows and of flats
   And see my wealthy Andrew docked in sand,
   Vailing her high top lower than her ribs
   To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
   And see the holy edifice of stone
   And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
   Which touching but my gentle vessel's side,
   Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
   Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
   And, in a word, but even now worth this,
   And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought

> To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
> That such a think bechanced would make me sad?
> But tell not me. I know Antonio
> Is sad to think upon his merchandise.

Antonio explains to Salerio that his melancholy cannot be explained on account of his financial ventures because he has diversified his investments around the globe and has a reserve of money:

> Believe me, no. I thank my fortune for it –
>   My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
>   Nor to one place, nor is my whole estate
>   Upon the fortune of this present year.
>   Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.

Shakespeare invites the public to think about the connections between the world of investments and the world of simple and more complex human emotions when he creates an opposition between Salerio, for whom happiness and sadness depend on the outcome of his investments, and Antonio, who thinks he has protected himself through diversification from the more elementary of concerns that consume Salerio, so he can focus his attention on the vicissitudes of his affections and disaffections with other human beings. His wealth is a source of disinhibition because it allows him, without qualms, to express his public contempt for those he hates, like Shylock, or his affection for those he loves, like his friend, Bassanio.

Antonio's melancholy involves his friendship with Bassanio, his charming, opportunistic friend who lives a life of idle luxury financed with borrowed money he might not ever be in a position to pay back. Antonio thinks he took the necessary precautions to shield his commercial ventures, but his precautions were insufficient to address the risks of his emotional attachment to Bassanio.

Antonio is the literary prototype of the entrepreneur in a world that is becoming globalized: he has boats en route around the world: to Mexico, Morocco, England, Lisbon and India – in short, to all the continents of the known world. He is in possession of some capital as he awaits the return of his ships and the profits from his investments, but he had not anticipated that his reserves would be insufficient to lend Bassanio the money his friend needs for another type of investment, which, incidentally, represents the kind of investment Sloterdijk finds most distasteful, based on speculation and deceit by selfish opportunists. Bassanio needs an extraordinary amount of money to present himself – under false pretences – as someone he is not, to Portia, a young wealthy orphaned

woman he has not formally met, when he decides to pursue her, because of her extraordinary wealth.

Portia has pledged to marry according to a mechanism devised by her late father before he died to protect her from her own unchecked desires and from opportunists who might pursue her primarily for her wealth and property.

When Portia's suitors forswear to woo another woman, they are allowed to choose between three caskets, each of which contains an indication: while the gold and silver caskets appear to promise to give something to the man who chooses it, the lead casket is offered to the man who 'must give and hazard all he hath', and this is the winning choice that will grant Portia's hand in marriage. One of the supreme ironies of the play is that Bassanio, who has nothing to give or hazard but debt, will become inordinately rich by risking the capital and the lives of both Antonio and Shylock.[21]

In Shakespeare's play Antonio is to his maritime investments what Bassanio is to his matrimonial investments. Their ventures depend on capital deployment, loans and risks, but all of the risks fall on Antonio. The merchant does not hesitate to leave as collateral the promise of a pound of his own flesh to help his friend Bassanio, because he thinks that the anticipated profits from his maritime investments will be more than enough to cover his debt. That being said, the highly improbable takes place when none of his ships return when the loan is due, and he runs the risk of losing his life when Shylock, full of resentment, insists that the courts of Venice acknowledge his right to the pound of flesh. Shylock's initial resentment has turned to rage when his daughter Jessika elopes with Lorenzo, a Christian who woos her and takes her away from her father after she steals a container with precious objects from Shylock. To add insult to injury, Shylock learns that Jessika and Lorenzo were protected by Bassanio, who took them both on a rented ship to Portia's estate, which means that Shylock's loan to Antonio was instrumental in his daughter's betrayal.

Jessika is not particularly kind to her father: she excoriates him when she is among Christians, and she even sells Shylock's most prized possession, a ring that belonged to Shylock's wife, her own mother, for a trifle. Shylock learns about the heartbreaking sale from his friend Tubal, who was able to track the sale of Shylock's goods stolen by his daughter. When he insists on the pound of flesh and claims he is no longer interested in his principal, Shylock's old resentments against Antonio before they agreed on the terms of the loan have been compounded by new ones.

To understand the dynamics of resentment in *The Merchant of Venice*, the most important scene of the play is the trial scene, in which Portia, dressed as

a man, adjudicates on Shylock's claim to the pound of flesh. For her, the sums involved are trivial, and it is worth noting that the Venetian world of merchants and moneylenders is far beneath her social standing. Indeed, when she first sets eyes on Antonio and Shylock, she does not seem to be able to identify who is the merchant and who is the Jew. This is precisely the world from which her father had intended to shield her by setting her up in a protected estate away from the hustle and bustle of commercial activity and by contriving a mechanism to ensure she would gain a wealthy and loving husband.

When the trial begins, Shylock insists that he is no longer interested in his principal and that he has only come to claim his pound of flesh. Portia counters by exhorting Shylock to forgive Antonio from the terms of the contract as an act of mercy, but at a crucial point in her exchanges with Shylock, she turns against him in a most devastating way. Portia's change from a generous to a cruel disposition takes place after Bassanio and Shylock inadvertently hurt and humiliate her. Without realizing that Portia is dressed as a male lawyer, Bassanio publicly declares to Antonio that he values his life more than hers:

> Life itself, my wife, and all the world
>> Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
>> I would lose all – ay, sacrifice them all
>> Here to this devil – to deliver you.

To which Portia says in pained surprise:

> Your wife would give you little thanks for that
>> If she were by to hear you make the offer.

When Bassanio affirms his willingness to sacrifice his newly-wed wife to save Antonio, he undermines Portia's dignity in front of his fellow citizens, and (without realizing it) in front of her. Portia is now powerless to change her fate, because she has already married Bassanio, who is consequently the master of her body and her fortunes; and she no longer has a father to protect her interests. Indeed, the night before the trial she handed herself and her possessions over to Bassanio: 'Myself and what is mine to you and yours/ is now converted.' Her only request is that he take a ring from her as a pledge of his love to her: 'This house, these servants, and this same myself/ Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,/ Which when you part from, lose or giveaway, /Let is presage the ruin of your love.'

Shylock adds unintended insult to Portia's injury by saying, 'These be Christian husbands.' After this, Portia turns cruelly on Shylock, who I would argue has become the victim and scapegoat of Portia's resentment against her

own husband. In response to Shylock's insult against Christian husbands, which affects Portia in ways the audience can appreciate, but Bassanio cannot, she ceases her attempts to persuade Shylock to forgive Antonio from his obligation and pronounces her judgement: 'A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine. The court awards it, and the law doth give it.' Echoing the 'Christian' epithet, which Shylock had just used to refer to Christian husbands, and which she uses for the first time in the trial, she adds, 'But in the cutting it, if though dost shed / One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods / Are by the laws of Venice confiscate.' As she continues to speak, her punishment against Shylock becomes harsher and harsher with arguments she could have used from the outset of the trial,[22] but which she deploys only after hearing that Bassanio would be willing to sacrifice her life for Antonio's sake, followed by Shylock's biting insult, which underscores what Antonio and the audience already know, namely that the whole scheme of the loan was intended to woo her under false pretences.

In wooing Portia, Bassanio never had anything personal to give up other than the wealth and lives of others, and he does not seem worthy of trust or true to his word. Bassanio has already defaulted on loans, and he will break his only solemn oath to Portia, which was to keep the ring she has given him as a sign of his love for her: 'But when this ring / Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence.'

Just as Bassanio undermined the intentions of Portia's father to protect her from an attractive opportunist like himself, Portia undermines Shylock's intentions because his perverse bargain with Antonio was intended to affirm rather than undermine his own dignity. But nothing happens as Shylock had expected, and rather than affirming his dignity, he is profoundly humiliated: he will be sentenced to death unless he renounces his religion, and he will no longer have control of his own property.

Shylock was resentful before the beginning of the play, and his resentment makes him cruel; likewise, in the trial scene the audience witnesses the birth of Portia's resentment, and her turn to cruelty. In the trial scene, the two are aligned in their resentment and in their cruelty, and in the play, they are also aligned in the irony that their beautiful speeches (Portia's speech about mercy, and Shylock's famous speech about the shared humanity of Jews and Christians) are undermined by their cruelty.

According to Sloterdijk's frame (inspired by Plato's notion of thymos), resentment and rage emerge when one's sense of dignity is humiliated: and this is what happens to Portia in the trial scene when she is humiliated by her husband (and by Shylock with his 'all Christian husbands' comment), and her disposition to mercy for Antonio is transformed into a disposition to cruelty

against Shylock. Her shift from mercy to cruelty provides clues into how Shylock's own resentment must have originated for the hurt and humiliations he suffered under anti-Semites like Antonio.

After the trial ends Bassanio would like to offer Portia a gift or a monetary reward, which she initially refuses. In a sense, the only gift Bassanio can give is the money that belonged to her. As if to redeem himself from the humiliation of his public declaration about his willingness to sacrifice her life, Portia asks him for the ring he is wearing. Her request is ironic because she is hoping Bassanio will refuse her request: his refusal would be an affirmation of his love for her, and of his propensity to keep his promises. His initial refusal to part with the ring gives Portia a measure of satisfaction. But when she leaves Bassanio and Antonio, Antonio persuades Bassanio to give her the ring with an argument that discounts Portia and Bassanio's promise to his wife. Antonio asks Bassanio to give up the ring for the lawyer's good services, but also for the sake of Antonio's love for Bassanio, both of which are, according to Antonio, worth more than the promise he made to his wife: 'My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued against your wife's commandment.'[23] They send a messenger to Portia with the ring, and this is another blow for Portia. The only character in the trial scene who is cognizant of Portia's humiliation is Nerissa (Portia's handmaid), and she is also humiliated by her new husband Gratiano (Bassanio's servant), who says he would also give up his wife if that would help his master (and subsequently also gives away the ring Nerissa had given him and he swore never to give up).

The final act of the play begins with a dialogue between Lorenzo and Jessika, in which they recall several tragic love stories from the Classical tradition (Dido and Aeneas, Medea and Jason, Pyramus and Thysbe), and they align those stories with their own relationship. The happy ending of the play in which the various couples appear to reconcile is belied by the significance and foreboding of these evocations, and by the opportunism, theft, false pretense, and promises betrayed that united them in the first place. And Shylock's devastating humiliation remains in the background of the fraught uneasiness with which the play comes to an end.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's play can be read as a meditation on the risks and debts inherent in the circulation of money in a globalized world, and in the process through which investments were diversified and the systems of credits and insurance were established. The play depends on a dynamic of giving and taking, and

this dynamic is fuelled by a network of human passions, which undermine cooperation, forgiveness or generosity that is not self-interested.

To conclude, I would like to quote a text from Sloterdijk that vindicates the thought of Marcel Mauss, and his book about the gift, not as a contribution to the study of archaic cultures, but as an insight that may be fundamental to understanding our present moment:

> It is with good reason that the modern world has been described as an age in which exchange – more precisely, money-mediated exchange – has replaced its other version, gift exchange. According to this interpretation, the introduction of money has led to the disappearance of the gift. The truth is, though, that only one half of the relations of exchange could be integrated into the world of money; the other half still depends on an alternative mode of circulation. … Mauss is the first and only thinker to date who understood that the gift includes both an element of voluntariness and an element of obligation. Mauss was a socialist who in his own way tried to think a society of generosity, which is to say a socialism without resentment. Unfortunately, the idea of giving the left an ethical injection that would liberate it from a politics of resentment and move it to a politics of generosity is a highly desirable idea, but it remains a dream.[24]

In *The Merchant of Venice* the politics of resentment trumps the politics of generosity. The sadness, dilemmas, suffering and disappointments Shakespeare explores in the play are elements of an era that would deserve to be in our past, rather than informing concerns of the present, as they unfortunately are.

Notes

1   As William Hazlitt suggests in his influential interpretation, '[In Shylock] there is a deep sense of justice mixed up with the gall and bitterness of his resentment'. William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Everyman's Library, 1969), 320.

2   Ibid.

3   Peter Sloterdijk, *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 48.

4   Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 32.

5   'The most profound perversion of the hierarchy of values is the subordination of vital values to utility values, which gains force as modern morality develops. Since the victory of the industrial and commercial spirit, this principle has been

penetrating ever more deeply.' Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 110. In this chapter, I follow Sjoerd van Tuinen's distinction – in the introduction to this volume – that resentment can be related to a sense of justice, while ressentiment as used by Nietzsche and Max Scheler is a false or inauthentic sense of justice. I will focus on a particular phenomenon whereby resentment, generated by a genuine sense of injury or betrayal, can then morph into ressentiment and cruelty.

6   [Hans Jonas] demonstrated the possibility of a forward-looking philosophy for our times: 'Act in such a way that the effects of your actions can be reconciled with the permanence of true human life on earth.' Because it addresses everyone personally, I must relate its appeal to myself as if I were its only addressee. At every moment, I am to estimate the effects of my actions on the ecology of the global society.

Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 448.

7   Sloterdijk, *Die nehmende Hand*, 48.

8   'When a man believes himself to be wronged does not his spirit in that case seethe and grow fierce?' Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, *The Republic*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Paul Shorey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 682.

9   Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Ian Johnston (Arlington, VA: Richer Resources Publications, 2007), 7.

10   Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, 25.

11   Ibid., 15–16.

12   It is instructive to note that for Max Scheler, 'the spiritual venom of ressentiment is extremely contagious'. *Ressentiment*, 27.

13   Peter Sloterdijk, *Globes*, *Spheres II*, trans. William Hoban (Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014), 844.

14   Peter Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations: Conversations and Interviews 1993–2012*, trans. Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 301.

15   There is no mention in the play of a mechanism to protect any of the merchants from their potential loses. Antonio's strategy to protect himself is described by Florence Edler de Roover in her essay on the practices of stay-at-home merchants such as Antonio, who entrust traveling merchants to look after their ships, goods and capital: '[the stay-at-home merchant] could avoid heavy losses by entrusting his money to different merchants traveling on different ships. … If the goods were lost but the traveling merchant was saved, the latter had no residual obligations toward the partner who had supplied the funds. Both partners shared in the profits

and in all the risks of the venture'. Florence Edler de Roover, 'Early Examples of Marine Insurance', *The Journal of Economic History* 5, no. 2 (November 1945): 176.

16 As John Kerrigan puts it in his fascinating reconstruction of the legal context of Shakespeare's world, Shylock 'either gets credit for being a gentle Jew if he is repaid, or the ultimate payback, which is his revenge, if he is not'. Kerrigan, *Shakespeare's Binding Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 155.

17 By the mercy of the court, Shylock will, in the end, retain some of his possessions, provided that they are passed on to his estranged daughter when he dies.

18 Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital. For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. William Hoban (Cambridge: Polity press, 2013), 46.

19 Ibid., 66.

20 His specific arrangement with those who must travel with his merchandise and bring back the profits is not specified in the play, but it is clear that he is fully responsible for the risks involved in any shipwreck or other unhappy circumstances before his ships return to Venice.

21 Indeed, Bassanio is using money from Antonio's other creditors, and even from Tubal, Shylock's Jewish friend, as Shylock himself needs to borrow money to come up with the 3,000 ducats Antonio has asked for.

22 Portia could have deployed her two main arguments, namely that Shylock can have the flesh, but not the blood, or that an attempt on a Christian's life is punishable by death, at the beginning of the proceedings, when she chose rather to allow Shylock to show his mercy, which was also the Duke's hope: 'Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,/ That … thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange/ Than is thy strange apparent cruelty/ … We all expect a gentle answer, Jew.'

23 It is worth noting that the solemn pledges of love by Bassanio and Portia signified by the ring become Portia's 'commandment' in Antonio's account, which diminishes her.

24 Peter Sloterdijk, 'What Does a Human Have That He Can Give Away', in Joke Brouwer and Sjoerd van Tuinen (eds.), *Giving and Taking. Antidotes to a Culture of Greed* (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2014), 10–11.

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